

We Condemn This Attack

In a most arrogant and unthinking display of power the US and the UK launched a missile attack on Iraq. Why? The long-term reason is to stop Iraq from producing weapons of mass destruction. The immediate reason is Iraq's alleged non-cooperation with the UN weapons inspectors. Let us look at the second reason first. These weapons inspectors have gone through almost every possible suspected site. The latest was their wanting to visit the ruling party headquarters. Earlier they wanted to visit the presidential living quarters of Saddam himself. The list kept growing longer as Iraq opened more and more doors.

The main issue to Iraq is the lifting of sanctions, which the UN Security Council had promised to review once cooperation resumed between the weapons inspectors and Iraq. There was a natural expectation on the former's side to see some signs of lifting of sanctions as the inspectors saw more and more sites. When no such signs were visible, Iraq started renegeing on its promised cooperation. So we agree that there were breach of promise by Iraq. But by the same count there were deliberate let down by the Security Council of what we think to be, reasonable expectations of Iraq. Therefore this military action against a sovereign state is in no way justified.

As for stopping Saddam from producing weapons of mass destruction, we think the UN inspectors have successfully dealt with this possibility so far. By their work, the UN weapons inspectors have by now destroyed Iraq's capabilities for such a course of action. This 'dog' has been whipped too many times. We are no longer ready to sanction military action on the Iraqi people under this pretext.

Now clearly the US and the UK agenda seem to be removal of Saddam, though they are not admitting it. The international community will not, and cannot, permit such a course of action which constitutes the most blatant interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign country.

We also echo the sentiment expressed indirectly by many US Congressmen that the timing of this attack on Iraq had more to do with the impeachment proceedings against President Clinton than the report of the weapons inspectors.

We think Clinton has made a serious mistake by using the attack to divert the attention of the US Congress. This shows how desperate he is to save his Presidency. We think this action will greatly damage the public goodwill he has so far enjoyed, and strengthen the position of his opponents.

We condemn this attack in the name of international law, the UN Charter and civility.

Strange Bedfellows

Politics makes strange bedfellows, so goes the saying. And it has been proved right so many times in the contemporary politics of major parties in the country. Arch rival Jamaat-e-Islami had a comfortable cushion from the Awami League in their bid to unseat BNP in 1995-96. And now Jatiya Party boss Ershad has expressed his support for the mainstream opposition led by BNP — the party that has been most antagonistic to him so far.

The about-turn of the Jatiya Party needs close scrutiny, specially at a time when threats of putting 'renegade' Ershad in 'proper place' by AL leaders are appearing in the press. But why should BNP accept the support of a man whose party not only backed AL to form government in 1996 but toppled the elected government of President Sattar in 1982 at the gun-point? The nation demands an explanation, and a solid one from Gen. Ershad for his anti-democracy and anti-people action at that time. It can be said he was responsible for killing whatever semblance of democracy this country had and perpetrated his misrule for long nine years with the help of some big political parties. Also, it is not understandable why the BNP did not put Ershad on trial for toppling an elected government by proclaiming martial law? BNP should also come forward with its explanation of the inaction against a former dictator during its tenure of office.

The JP's latest seeming bid to align with the mainstream opposition needs thorough screening. So far a peripheral player in national politics, Ershad's role could be made light of, but now that he is aspiring after a key role with an eye to the next general elections scheduled for 2001 he should be taken seriously. This may be his last chance at the power-game. One has to take stock of the political legacy he has left in his nine-year rule of the country. With a party divided within itself — a section supporting the government, another sitting on the fence and a faction raring to team up with the opposition, JP can hardly pose any threat to the government or inspire the opposition in any significant manner.

Trade in Human Misery

The United Nations Development Fund for Women report on the 'trade in human misery' not only translates into numbers the magnitude of abuse women and children of South Asia are subjected to, but also, in a subtle way, condemns our failure to do something to contain it. That India has become a major hub in this illegal trade is not quite a rocking revelation, in the sense that it has been an issue of major concern among the SAARC nations and measures have been contemplated at the regional level to stop this human trafficking. But the UN report clearly shows the SAARC initiative has been either not properly put to effect or is inadequate.

At the national level, too, we don't seem to have been able to come up with an effective measure. The astounding number of our children at different Indian brothels should come as a rude awakening for the people who matter. The government functionaries should immediately sit with their Indian counterparts to have the hapless thousands repatriated. And they must devise an extensive programme for their rehabilitation. Besides, the border security personnel should make sure that no more women and children get smuggled out by the traffickers.

The illegal trafficking of women and children and forcing them into prostitution are violations of human rights of the highest order. The report shows more than two million children are abused and globally trafficked every year, with Southeast and South Asia remaining at the top of the list. Besides prostitution, the main purpose of illegal trafficking, other areas the women and children get exploited include the carpet, garment, fishing and brick industries.

The culprits who expose the hapless lot to such abuse and exploitation should be put in the dock and behind bars. To ensure that the UN has to do more than just preach against violations. Otherwise the Universal Declaration of Human Rights continue to be nothing but empty rhetoric.

Pabna-2 By-election : A Preliminary Evaluation

On-the-spot estimate of the Chief Election Commissioner on the day of election to be about 50 per cent of voters casting votes was miraculously increased to 76 per cent. Over a dozen centres where BNP candidate was cast only 3 per cent to 5 per cent of the votes bagged by the Awami League candidate, inter alia, would naturally raise one's eyebrow and evidently question fairness of this election.

THE Pabna-2 by-election to the vacant seat of the parliament took place, as scheduled, on the 10th December. The Awami League candidate, Air Vice Marshal A. K. Khondaker, was declared elected by a big margin of over 20,000 votes in a constituency of 188,000 voters. Attendance of women voters at the polling was relatively smaller in many of the centres.

Electoral to this constituency was taken seriously by the two major political parties, the ruling Awami League and the principal opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party. The former took it as their legitimate seat, since the vacancy was created by the death of their seating member. Retaining this seat with a margin wider than a little over 1000 votes majority at the 1996 election, as they did, would be, for the Awami League, an evidence of increasing popularity. In order to accomplish this, in the absence of a suitable local candidate, they brought in the reluctant Air Marshal, who had lost in both 1991 and 1996 elections, from a neighbouring constituency with the assurance that campaigning and all other necessary arrangements for winning would be undertaken by the Party.

The BNP, on the other hand, took up election to this constituency, which they had won in a 20,000 plus majority votes, as a serious challenge to the ruling party and held that its outcome would measure the extent of unpopularity of the Awami League for their gross misrule and failure in social and economic sectors, provided that the election be free and fair. But, after the election the BNP accused the government party of massive rigging, rejected the

unofficial declaration of the outcome of the election and demanded re-polling.

The BNP's allegations of rigging and irregularities included various and scattered incidents of Awami League workers causing terror by bombing, intimidation and obstructions put on the way to voting centres, preventing BNP polling agents from taking up their posts or carrying out their job, and use of officials to allow manipulation of voting, casting false votes, stuffing of ballot boxes and the like. Besides, the ruling party had already committed a number of gross violations of the code of election conduct much before the day of election. They had sent Ministers and other influential leaders to make necessary arrangements for their candidate by undue use of government facilities, personnel and power.

As a part of the blue plan, the opposition contended, two senior Awami League leaders, Minister Mohammad Nasim and State Minister Prof. Abu Sayeed had set up camps in the constituency weeks before the election in order to implement the plan. They worked towards winning support of BNP leaders there through enticement and succeeded in securing defection of three BNP Union chairmen and one ex-chairman. Till the election day, ranging from the leader of the district down to field level workers, about 200 BNP sup-

porters were arrested in a bid to cripple their campaign.

All the actions of Ministers may not be illegal but it is obvious that the government servants, in order to please or evade wrath, had to yield to the whims and caprices of the visiting Ministers, notwithstanding assertions, if any, the latter might have made that they were not on Ministerial duty. The Ministers and other Awami League leaders of substance were reported to have provided and promised material gains

 **Currents and Crosscurrents**

by M M Rezaul Karim

and rewards to the people concerned. Besides, government facilities, transport, authority and protocol have been evidently been in use for the Ministers. These were unlawful and constituted gross violation of the election code, rules and regulations. I recall having intervened with one of the Ministers using government transport on the day of the 1994 parliamentary election in Sri Lanka where I went as an international observer, and he showed me a receipt as evidence of his private use of the government vehicle.

the centres visited will not be in a position of making a fair assessment of the extent of rigging and irregularities that have allegedly taken place, simply because of the fact that these malpractices take place cautiously only when such observers are not present at the centres.

How could a senior Minister of the government declare in a public meeting on the eve of the election that government funds for development and other facilities would be provided to the people of the area only if they elected his candidate and also that these funds would be denied

if the opposition candidate was elected. Is this not a gross violation of the election code? The same Minister asserted that he, though a Minister, was also the Organising Secretary of the Awami League and having denoted the latter had he had every right to campaign. The Hon'ble Minister, however, did not wish to realise that he was also simultaneously wearing the Ministerial hat, which, specially the Ministerial perquisites, should have been cast aside formally, if he were to be true to his assertion.

The CEC 'advised' the Hon'ble Prime Minister not to allow such Ministerial visits as also for their words and deeds in blatant violation of the election code. But, the advice was not heeded. The Chief Election Commissioner told me that he had no legal authority nor practical support to ensure compliance of the Ministers. The BNP argues that the Chief Election Commissioner had the requisite authority, both legal or moral, for the Ministerial compliance which he did not exercise. As the CEC was obviously convinced that the election code had been violated by Ministers, and he found no redress despite intervention with the Head of Government, he had two appropriate and alternative courses of action open to him. Either he could postpone the election or could decide to resign the post. Failure to do either as well as his reluctance to take immedi-

The Palestinian Trip and Clinton's Troubles at Home

The threat of impeachment has obviously eroded Clinton's strength at home, but it is just as obvious that he remains an important player in the Mid-East peace process. The future of peace there requires that he continue to play a role in its evolving diplomacy.

WO events have dominated world news in the last few days (prior to missile and air strikes on Baghdad): Clinton's visit to Palestine and his impeachment proceedings at home. Though there is no direct relationship between these two events, but the outcome of one could greatly influence the outcome of the other.

Clinton is the first US president to set foot on the Palestinian territory. In his presence, the Palestinian National Council (PNC) on Monday voted to reaffirm the removal of clauses from the PLO charter that call for the destruction of Israel. The PNC meeting was one of the requirements of the Wye River peace accord that Clinton helped negotiate.

The enormous symbolism attached to Clinton's visit cannot be denied. Even a decade ago, it was inconceivable that a US President would visit, let alone speak before the PNC, which many Palestinians see as the embodiment of their aspirations. Clinton's trip has helped Palestinian legitimacy to take a giant step forward. The acceptance of the Palestinians as an equal partner by the Western world demonstrates the righteousness of their cause. Permanent peace in that region can only come with the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital. Though symbolic, Clinton's visit has moved the Palestinian cause closer to their ultimate goal.

Clinton is not only the first US President to set foot in Palestine, he is also the first US President to face the prospect of impeachment since the First World War. The 37-member Judiciary Committee of the US House of Representatives (21 Republicans and 16 Democrats) voted last week to approve four articles of impeachment

against him. The committee passed the articles of impeachment, along largely partisan lines, capping weeks of intermittent hearings and days of sometimes elevated and sometimes contentious debate.

A short time before the impeachment vote, President Clinton went on national television to say that he was ready to accept rebuke and censure from Congress for his act. However, his address had no impact on the Republican members of the House Judiciary Committee. The committee's actions

did, but they are not yet willing to impeach him. To provide them with a cover for their vote, they want Clinton to admit that he lied under oath during his testimony to the grand jury. But Clinton, obviously, wouldn't do it because that would make him vulnerable to a criminal indictment by Kenneth Starr.

In order to gain the support of these undecided Republicans, the Democrats are trying to introduce a censure resolution which would rebuke and punish Clinton for his act but stop short of impeaching him. The

same time, however, it is clear from weeks of hearings before the politically polarised House Judiciary Committee that Clinton's conduct, as tawdry as it has been in the Monica Lewinsky matter, simply isn't what the framers of the American constitution had in mind when they created the machinery for the removal of a president.

However, that machinery has still served its purpose in Clinton's case. Whatever the final outcome of this drama, Clinton will never outlive the shame he has brought on the office of the president — a shame that even the most partisan Democrats concede is Clinton's alone.

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 **Connecting the Dots**

Dr. A. R. Choudhury

started the clock ticking down to a vote on impeachment by the 435 members of the House, which could come as early as Thursday of this week.

A majority vote of 218 members on any of the four articles of impeachment would send it to the US Senate, where it would take a two-thirds majority to remove President Clinton from office, a step without precedent in American history.

At this time, three Democrat House members have indicated that they would vote for impeachment, meaning that about 15 of the 228 Republicans in the House must oppose impeachment for it to be defeated. About twenty Republican Congressmen are still said to be undecided. They would like to see Clinton punished for what he

is possible that at least one article of impeachment, specifically the article on perjury, may pass the House. In that case, the Senate will have a trial. Barring some unforeseen changes in the near future, it is unlikely that the proponents of impeachment could gather 67 votes in the Senate for the resolution to pass. At this time, it is safe to say that the impeachment resolution, even if it is approved by the House of Representatives, will fail in the Senate and Clinton will not be removed from office.

Clinton is not the only one who has lied under oath, and should pay a heavy price. He has directed a cover-up. And he should pay a price. He should not be let off the hook. Indeed, that is why censure — but censure with teeth and a sense of outrage — now becomes appealing.

While Clinton's offences are abhorrent, they simply don't justify the extreme sanction proposed by the American constitution. This drastic punishment should be reserved for

those who have committed crimes against the state.

To make this distinction is hardly to exonerate Clinton. A toughly worded resolution of censure and condemnation would satisfy the urgent political and moral requirement to punish the president for a pattern of behaviour that has disgraced him and the office he holds.

Clinton has, for the short term at least, changed the office of the American presidency, for better or worse. For the better, if the American body politic holds its future presidents to higher standards; for worse, if the aberration of a president who actually gains in popularity as his failings are illuminated becomes the norm.

The House Judiciary Committee has rejected the motion of censure, proposed by the Democrats, along partisan lines. But it's a different story on the House floor, where moderate Republicans can hasten the punishment Clinton deserves. The US Congress can censure him, fine him, require an admission that he lied under oath and make him sign a resolution of censure before the entire world. It is still the best way to deal with a president whose conduct is deplorable, but not impeachable.

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The article was written before US-UK missile and air strike on Baghdad and consequent postponement of Clinton's impeachment proceedings.

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Upazila system

Sir, I am very glad to know that the government will soon reintroduce the 'Upazila System' introduced in 1983-84 by Ershad government but logically and rather later vindictively abolished.

It is informed that the bill for re-establishing the Upazila system has been submitted in the Jatiya Sangsad recently. The draft of the rules for establishing the same was published in a section of the press few days back. The proposed rules were said to contain the provision for direct election of the chairman of the Upazila Parishad, but other members will be ex-officio and be taken from the elected chairpersons of the constituent Union Parishads. The provisions for ex-officio membership has both advantages and disadvantages. The main advantage is the minimising of election costs, while the principal disadvantage lies in the fact that the ex-officio members are not elected by the public for the present purpose (though they were elected by the people of the respective Union Parishad). Thus the logic behind the system is that the ex-officio members are hard put to meet the educational expenses of their wards. As a result, their children are facing uncertainties in their educational career.

It is interesting to note that the government concerned would take any notice of my writing, I still take the privilege of writing about the examination fees fixed every year by the educational boards for the SSC and the HSC examinees. It is needless to say that in these days of hardship, most of the government servants are hard put to meet the educational expenses of their wards. As a result, their children are facing uncertainties in their educational career.

Such schools and colleges charge a yearly fee for these.

However, after having complied with all the formalities the parents of the SSC and the HSC candidates face an impossible task of paying nearly fifteen hundred taka or more. The lion's share of this money reportedly goes to the educational boards.

We think it is quite unjustified since the government has always been giving topmost priority to the education sector.

Should then there be any provision for SSC and HSC examination fees at all?

Mujibul Haque
Mirpur, Dhaka.

"Marubeni favoured..."

Sir, Referring to the above captioned report in the Dec 07, 1998 issue of the DS pertaining to the Meghnagar power plant agreement deal, exposing the callous manipulation by minister concerned — a high powered investment committee under 4 secretaries — under the Prime Minister's, energy ministry! Favouring the Japanese conglomerate Marubeni.

This is in spite of the fact that PDB has been negotiating with the US company as for the past 15 months and are now holding final negotiations as the lowest bidder \$US cents 2.79 per uniting Marubeni's as for US cents 3.37 per unit.

Obviously this deal was "verbally ordered" to be put up at the cabinet meeting, which can be conveniently ignored by the energy ministry unless it is also beneficiary to rent-seeking. Such "verbal" orders must be nipped in the bud at this nascent stage otherwise, such contagious orders can snowball into a blood-sucking frankenstein.

The DS deserves appreciation for such excellent investigative journalism. And I hope that the DS will follow-up as

matters develop from time to time keeping the nation posted.

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Anti-hartal bill

Sir, I read with interest a recent article in DS proposing a bill to be passed in the parliament to