

## 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 has 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 anymore.

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.**

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 casting error by bombing, intimidation and obstruction, 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 Sayed 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 intimidation 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

Violations of the election code, use of influence of government officials, promises and pledges conditional upon support of the candidate of the ruling party, acts of intimidation and enticement and such other irregularities had been pre-planned and well executed mostly before the election day. Those observers, both domestic and foreign, who went to the constituency to monitor only on the day of election and neither could cover all centres nor stay for the entire duration at

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 donned the latter hat 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 immediate

ate action on the complaints lodged by the BNP on the day of election left the latter with no choice other than demanding his resignation. They suggested that a Supreme Court Judge should be appointed in his place.

The observers sent by diplomatic missions in Bangladesh as well as most domestic groups of observers had the understandable shortcomings of limited time and personnel at their disposal for adequately monitoring election and pre-election scenario. Their efforts were directed to make a general assessment of the situation on the basis of sample surveys and are generally acceptable under normal conditions. Unfortunately, the conditions there were far from normal, as the critics contend that violations and irregularities were committed by supporters of the ruling party when such observers were not present on the scene. However, the charged atmosphere as well as omnipresence of government party activists, in contrast to opposition workers, did not escape notice of the observers. The latter must have also noted the relative low turnout of women voters, who are generally supportive of the BNP. Even the 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.



## 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

# 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.**

TWO 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.

It is tempting to belittle what happened on Monday, but it wasn't all that long ago that the US and Israel refused to meet, much less negotiate in good faith, with Yasser Arafat and other Palestinian leaders, describing the PLO as merely a terrorist group.

Although the Palestinians came to terms with Israel's existence many years ago, their formal acceptance of the fact was a decision of historic importance that required considerable courage, given the harsh anti-Palestinian attitude of the Netanyahu government. The decision probably would not have been made had Clinton not been personally involved last October at the Wye River negotiations.

Originally, Clinton's trip to Jerusalem and the Palestinian territory was seen as a celebration of the Wye accord. But developments in recent days turned the trip into a salvage operation. The trip could not have come at a worst time for many of the participants. Not only is an impeachment chal-

lenge against Clinton moving forward in Washington, Benjamin Netanyahu's political future is also hanging precariously in Israel. Some of Netanyahu's critics, supported by his governing coalition partners, have brought a vote of no-confidence against him in the Israeli Knesset. It will be debated and voted upon next week. To survive the no-confidence vote, Netanyahu is balking at complying with his own obligations to cede control of further land to Palestinians on the occupied West Bank.

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



## 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

Republican leadership, wary that the censure resolution may gain majority votes in the House and thus the impeachment resolution would fail, is not allowing the introduction of such a resolution.

It 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.

Despite the final outcome of the proceedings, Clinton's act cannot be condoned. He deserves some form of punishment. Even he concedes that he should pay a price for his action. The question is, what should it be?

For the last several months, American public had been urging the Congress to follow the process and quickly clean up the mess Clinton has made of the presidency.

At 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.

He has lied under oath, and should pay a heavy price. He has directed a cover-up. And he should pay a price. He should 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 provided 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.

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.

(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 illogically abolished. It is rather vindictive.

It is informed that the bill for re-establishing the Upazila 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 demand for electing all members again is not a very strong one.

As for continuing the name "Thana Parishad" (as demanded by the BNP) must be the least of our concerns. I must disagree because most of us — the general public are, evidently, not culprits that we are to live under a "Thana" (police station) created by the colonial rulers. So the person demanding "Thana Parishad" instead of most logical and beautiful

name "Upazila Parishad" will be taken by the public as having rather colonial mentality.

M A S Molla  
Member, BAAS, Dhaka

### AIDS prevention

Sir, Like all other countries around the globe, we too have observed the World Aids Day this year. In order to create general awareness amongst the public about the dangers of AIDS, various rallies and TV programmes were organised. The newspapers published special supplements. All these, no doubt, are admirable efforts, but will they create any real awareness whatsoever in the true sense amongst those who are the most vulnerable, i.e. the poor, the illiterate, the slum dwellers and the equally illiterate members of the sex trade?

It is, therefore, for the government to take urgent necessary steps to arrest the scourge with all available means. AIDS is an incurable disease. Whatever discoveries have been made so far by the medical science are only palliatives and do no more than extending the lives of victims by barely a few years. Besides, the cost of these palliatives are far beyond the reach of even the well-off middle classes. In a country like ours, the best way to prevent the spread of AIDS would, perhaps, be to adopt some stringent and drastic measures in this regard.

For instance, by a notification, the government should make it mandatory for all doctors, clinics, laboratories and hospitals, both in the public

and the private sectors, to immediately report to the nearest police station whenever any case of HIV infection is detected and the police should immediately remove the victim to an isolated accommodation to be specially provided by the government in all districts. Thereafter, the health ministry should arrange for the victims, if males, to compulsorily undergo vasectomy and, if females, to be compulsorily sterilised and also pay for their maintenance and treatment. The government should also take urgent steps to screen all members engaged in the sex trade throughout the country, say, every 6 months and take similar action.

A Quayyum  
Gulshan, Dhaka

### Free-of-fee education

Sir, Though I have doubts if the authorities 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.

It is interesting to note that the government-run schools and colleges charge much less in terms of the monthly tuition fees, admission fees etc., than the so-called private schools and colleges all over the country. It is worthwhile to note that these schools and colleges receive a substantial amount from the government as grants. There are many schools and colleges, both government and private, which have got no library or any facilities for sports as well as extra-curricular activities. Oddly enough, all

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 five 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 the highest priority to the education sector. Should 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 Meghnaghat 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 was the lowest bidder @US cents 2.79 per uniting Marubeni's bid was 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 a 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.

Pinky Jamal,  
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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 ban hartal. While I support the merit of the bill wholeheartedly, I would like to add the following provisions in the bill in order to make it more effective:

1) The tenure of the bill should be twenty-five years so that regardless of which party is in power, they should be able to enjoy hartal-free atmosphere.

2) It should cover any work stoppage — whatever it is called — hartal, bandh, strike etc.

(3) Any party, individual or business that suffers economic loss because of a hartal should be able to claim quick compensation from the sponsors of the hartal making them liable for their irresponsible action — this ought to be the heart of the bill.

I also would like to request the president that he should call an all-party conference to discuss such measures and such bill ought to be passed through consensus among all the political parties.

K P Murshed  
Mirpur, Dhaka.

### Musical madness

Sir, I have serious complaint against 'band music'. It often causes horrible disorder in youthful assembly. We must not forget the stalling of the two youths during a band concert in Mirpur indoor stadium a few weeks back. We must not initiate or continue that type of musical shows which instigate us to engage in unnecessary brawls.

The mishap of Mirpur sta-

dium convinces me that only the madly presentation of 'so-called' band music deviates our youths to 'ruthless line' making them absurd and completely crazy. Is this the purpose of music?

Wearing indecent beard and abnormal hair cut seem to be the only object of the band-fans. Even the females don't hesitate to cross the marginal line of decency. This kind of 'blind imitation' is not only derogatory to our culture but also the cause of so many unwanted happenings.

So musical madness should be controlled or it should be banned by enforcing strict law.

Arun Kumar Biswas  
Dept of English, DU

### Punctuality at Jatiya Sangsad

Sir, It is alleged and observed that some MPs of treasury and opposition benches are not regular and punctual in attending Jatiya Sangsad sessions. Due to lack of quorum the Sangsad session cannot be held as scheduled which results in wastage of time, energy and public money. The BTV and Radio also cannot maintain their scheduled programme, millions of people and audience of our country who are interested in watching the performances of the MPs and listening to their speeches, arguments and counter-arguments also feel disappointed and exasperated due to late attendance and lack of punctuality of their representatives in the JS.

We would humbly request all the respectable MPs and also the honourable Speaker of the Jatiya Sangsad to kindly attend, ensure and enforce punctuality in our Jatiya Sangsad sessions consistent with the popular demand of the people.

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