

Ignominy for Clinton

The impeachment of President Bill Clinton by the United States House of Representatives on Saturday shocked many, but surprised few. The House voted to impeach Clinton on two counts, namely perjury in front of a Grand Jury and obstruction of justice. It is noteworthy that the impeachment process had little to do with Clinton's affair with Monica Lewinsky. Clinton's attempts to deny the truth under oath and his alleged efforts to prevent others from telling the truth formed the basis of impeachment. This runs parallel to the Watergate scandal which brought down Richard Nixon in 1974. Nixon was not threatened with impeachment because he had ordered the burglary of the Democratic Party headquarters, but because he had attempted to subvert justice by trying to cover it up.

The impeachment of Clinton, the first time a US president has been handed down such an ignominy by lawmakers for over a century, has demonstrated the power of the law, supremacy of the Constitution and strength of American institutions of governance. This has been an extraordinary demonstration of what is really meant by the word 'accountability', which has made the most powerful political office in the world look so humble. What the House vote has proved, is that no one is above the law, no matter how popular he is. The question is, what next for Clinton?

The Clinton camp is hoping that the requisite two-thirds majority would not be forthcoming when the matter goes to trial in the Senate. Clinton believes that he was most unfairly hounded by his opponents, and that the American people are firmly behind his leadership. This has created the ground for his repeated refusal to consider resignation. However, it is doubtful whether the US president should read so much into public opinion polls. The real damage has already been done. Clinton now holds the dubious distinction of being only the second president in 222 years of US history to have been impeached. His personal authority and the prestige of the office of the president now lie in tatters. He may continue in office for the next two years, but it would be a hollow, rather than hallowed, office that he would hold. It now remains to be seen whether Clinton can rise above personal ego, and place the interest of the office of the president above himself.

Welcome Ramadan

Comes again the holy month of Ramadan with its message of restraint and self-control for the Muslims of the world in particular and people of this planet in general. The rituals of Ramadan consisting of fasting from sunrise to sunset for a month and saying prayers, abstaining from taking food and drinks, practising self-restraint, controlling ill-manners and temper are all designed to make human beings the best creation of Allah and this world a better place to live in peace and happiness. Ramadan is also the important month of the Islamic lunar calendar because in this month the Holy Quran was revealed. Muslims have very few religious occasions to rejoice and Ramadan is one of them. Pious Muslims love to fast and at the end of the day break it with a variety of delicious dishes prepared from pulses, vegetables, onions and fruits. The result is a strong demand for these items in the market. Prices of these essentials are already on the rise and the machinations of unscrupulous traders may trigger a price spiral that can make the holy month sour to many citizens. We strongly urge the administration to maintain a close vigil on the price situation in the wholesale and retail markets. Let it not be said that in the name of free economy people are subjected to unnecessary suffering resulting from spiralling prices.

We also fervently request our political leadership to set examples of restraint and reconciliation for the politics-battered people of Bangladesh. Let the two major political parties seize this opportunity and show the nation that they are willing to lead the people by example and not by rhetoric alone. Let political peace also prevail not only during this holy month, but all through the whole year.

Community Policing

Postponement of Saturday's citizens' rally in Chittagong, designed to encourage people's participation in the crusade against crime, in the face of vehement opposition from the ward commissioners and some political leaders was due to, in our view, a lack of co-ordination among people who matter. The police commissioner, who is also the chairman of the Chattogram Metropolitan Community Policing Porichalana Parishad (CMCPPP) and was to address the rally as chief guest, related the ward commissioners' opposition to ignorance about the concept of community policing. On the other hand, the police official was accused of acting against the "interests and activities of the government." What comes out of this bickering, however, is the fact that neither the police nor the politicians felt the need to talk to each other on the issue.

The police commissioner was certainly wrong in assuming that the ward commissioners should know what the rally was all about. Shouldn't he have talked to them in the first place and make them understand the community police is a concept conceived and nurtured by the government itself? Similarly, while we respect the ward commissioners' view that the police commissioner, as a government official, cannot address a public rally, we also believe that they should have arranged the rally so that a regular citizen knows what the police is doing, or planning to do, to curb crimes.

There was report of intervention from a minister and the inspector general of police and stipulating that the intervention was timely, we expect them to not just stop there but work towards ensuring better co-ordination among the police, politicians and public.

We believe that the concept of community policing, if realised, would go a long way in curbing the alarmingly deteriorating law and order situation in the country. We hope the rift among politicians and police in Chittagong would soon disappear, and both will do what they are expected to do — serve the people.

DURING the 1960s the post colonial anxieties set the trends of current politics in the Southeast Asian countries. At the height of the cold war the region was then in the boil with Vietnam War being fought in full fury in the vicinity and communist insurgency raging in its jungles. Paradoxically, the people were poor and backward in the resource rich countries of Southeast Asia while only next door the East Asian countries made giant leap towards prosperity. Wrecked by enormous internal conflicts and tired of confrontational relations with the neighbours the nations of the region craved for the well being of a sort — from their leaders. It was the leadership of the generation of 60s which grasped the prevailing mood and responded by opting for a stable internal order and co-operation with the neighbours as well as non-interference in their domestic affairs. The regional club — the Association for Southeast Asian Nations was founded by them in 1967 as a staunchly prowestern plank to benefit from the West's liberal economic assistance. Defying the socialist propensity of the day they also adopted the Bretton Wood prescription of economic conduct although the region continued to have an assorted systems of governance from monarchy to outlandish model of democracy. For them the keyword remained to be 'political stability' which was paramount but nobody else's business how would that be achieved.

The politics worked and yielded results. Within a short period there was a measure of prosperity also in Southeast Asian countries. The cubs of the region closely trailed the progress of mother tigers. The success provided ballast to the long years of righting rule in the region. But it could not be without certain cost. The im-

posed stability in the region bred corruption, cronyism and also authoritarian trends. With the voice of protest choked those were multiplied over the years allowing hardly any benefit of the prosperity to trickle down to the poor. The consequent turmoil in the South Asian countries is, in a way, the result of the success of the economic policies pursued by them — at least until recent times. A new middle class — educated and assertive — is no longer willing to believe what the governments tell it. And a basic sense of justice has been offended. The feelings are pervasive that it is denied of its dues. Moreover the policies of the international financial institutions did not always produce desired results in the existing political systems of the South-east Asian countries. Yet the old guards of the region like Suharto's Indonesia, Mahathir's Malaysia as well as new ASEAN members Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam remained obsessed with stability at any cost while expecting the best of the free economy.

All those who belong to Southeast Asia's political establishments of the 60s or the conservative camp of the region despised unbridled western influence although some of them practised democracy in their own way or at least professed it. Out of them Dr Mahathir had been a staunch critic of West's liberalism and Human Rights standard and together with Singapore's Lee Yan Ku consistently upheld a homegrown 'Asian way' in defiance of West's

package of its value system. With the end of Suharto era, Mahathir's views might soon lose the support of Indonesia which is already in transition and halfway between liberalism and a hang over of the past. There are dissent also elsewhere. But the biggest crack in the monolith of the old guard appears to be in Malaysia itself which tenaciously guarded the right of its own choice as regard its dealing with IMF and has been able to go it alone by imposing stiff exchange controls and isolating her economy

from external speculative pressures. With the proliferation of new ideas and outlook some of the ASEAN partners have already started what they call 'straight talks' because according to them the internal policies of one country could affect all. This is apparently going to breach the Southeast Asia's hallowed principle of 'non-interference' in neighbours' affairs and give a new twist to the region's politics. The situation turned ominous when in wake of Anwar Ibrahim's arrest President Estrada of the Philippines showed reluctance to visit Malaysia so long his friend Anwar was behind bars, presi-

dent Habibie of Indonesia called off his planned visit to Kuala Lumpur and Vice President Al-Gore of the USA called on Anwar's family in Kuala Lumpur in a bizarre display of his country's solidarity with Anwar's cause. A large number of intellectuals, politicians and officials of the region chagrined over Anwar's ordeal contacted the family.

The emerging debate in Southeast Asia is not new. But it heated up when Anwar Ibrahim, the Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia — an in-

Muhammad, the Prime Minister, is more than just clash of personalities and in fact emblematic of a broader struggle across the region. The old order established in the 1960s is fading and the forces of reform are battling those of reaction. The 'reformists' clamoured by the new brand of the region's leaders encompasses a drive against corruption and change to a more responsive, pluralistic political system.

Any change is traumatic. More so, when it is as a result of the clash of the titans involving their philosophies of life and their convictions. Anwar Ibrahim is no ordinary person. He seemed trusted by his mentor Mahathir who had chosen him as his eventual successor. Yet he was different enough in outlook to clash with his benefactor. He held out promises to bring about changes the new generation craves for. Mr Anwar had also, through his Institute for Policy Research, close intellectual link with academic community in Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand where the 'friends of Anwar' seem to thrive both in the governments and outside. Not only that, he is also the favourite of the World Bank, IMF and American Treasury and as a former Finance Minister had been a 'respected member of the international financial community'. On the other hand, notwithstanding the terror caused by Mr Anwar's arrest and repercussions abroad, Dr Mahathir holds all the cards politically at least for the moment. He can still ensure himself a convinc-

ing victory in a general election whenever it is held and so retain his leadership of the party and his prime ministership. After all he is the architect of a modern industrialised Malaysia asserting the nation's own value system. Even now Mahathir's instincts are animated by an anticolonial trudge and he believes the foreigners to be responsible for his country's problems. One of the insinuations against Mr Anwar is that he has been the tool of those foreign 'conspirators'.

Their formidable credentials apart, both stand for causes lofty and noble. Equally committed to globalisation both recognise that the slump as a consequence of the economic consequences of the globalisation are already being suffered by millions of Asians with their jobs lost and rations cut. They are however poles apart on political reforms. One is for patriotic, nationalistic and pragmatic regime even if it is repressive while another is for honest, outward looking, more liberal and, of course, pragmatic regime even if it would compromise many of the country's free choices.

The economic turmoil has already wrought one fundamental change in the politics of Southeast Asia — the fall of 32-year old Suharto regime. The tumult has also resulted in political changes elsewhere. In Thailand it brought in a new government last year. It has helped persuade Fidel Ramos not to try for another term in presidency. The political ferment in South Asia still bubbles. More elections are likely to be held in Malaysia and Thailand by the end of the millennium with the prospect of more radical changes. The process has started where the old guards are going to eventually give way to a new generation of leaders in Southeast Asia.

Southeast Asia

The Old Order Changeth

The economic turmoil has already wrought one fundamental change in the politics of Southeast Asia — the fall of 32-year old Suharto regime. The tumult has also resulted in political changes elsewhere. In Thailand it brought in a new government last year. It has helped persuade Fidel Ramos not to try for another term in presidency.



PERSPECTIVES

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

tellectual in his own right — wrote an article recently urging the ASEAN to start considering 'constructive interventions' in its members' affairs because 'all of us in the region are our brothers' keepers' bound by core humanitarian values'. It is this vision which is contested by the ASEAN's old guard now led by Dr Mahathir. Anwar Ibrahim represents the ideal of a new generation of leaders — clean, cultivated and liberal. He is patriotic but outward looking — ready to introduce all political and economic reforms prescribed by the IMF irrespective of its consequence for the country's stability. So his tussle with his former boss Mahathir

was behind bars, presi-

Governor's Rule in Sindh

The First Few Weeks

The turf battles between the PM's circle of advisors on Sindh over power apportionment must stop and the Governor allowed to get on with it. We are fighting against time more than anything else, presently we are losing the battle. We have the means to solve our problems, in the face of vested interest, do we have the will?

AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

be lacking in people who have no real roots in the area. One must agree with the concept of the police being non-political and even-handed. At this time they are mis-used mainly for political purposes and in their turn revel in nepotism, favouritism and corruption. Their credibility has been eroded in a vicious cycle that they cannot seem to break out of.

It is moot point, however, to have the Metropolitan Police idea function in the absence of a city government. Unless a powerful central executive, preferably elected by adult franchise, is running the city the net result is likely to be erosion of the Metropolitan Police idea itself. At the moment too many mafias operate in the electricity, gas, water, telephone, garbage cleaning, education and health as well as disciplines like construction mafia, the land grabbers, sand mafia, water tanker mafia etc., of all whom have vested interests in operating independently, not excluding the Employees Social Institutions and the Old-age Benefit Institutions.

The vital issue therefore is power to the people and that can only be effected through Local Bodies Elections. This will ensure that in every locality there

is an elected representative of grassroots level to whom the people of the locality can turn for resolving various issues that they are facing in day-to-day life. Therefore, Local Bodies Elections up to the District Level is a must, it being the only effective way to contain the mafia influence in various sectors.

The Governor would do well to have Central Control Room (CCR) manned round the clock which will obtain real time information from the Divisions, Districts and Sub-divisions on various matters so that the information is available to the Governor and executive authority in the bureaucracy can be prodded to take remedial measures. The CCR must function as a clearing house for information and executive action, acting specially to resolve major issues. Swift action by the Governor will ensure credibility of governance which is so sadly lacking at all levels of civilian executive authority in Pakistan.

It is impossible to imagine any corporate entity having large amount of manpower and various job specifications that does not have executive functioning 24 hrs a day. This arrangement also functions as a Crisis Control Centre so that

immediate decisions can be taken as and when necessary. The Central Control Room (CCR) concept is nothing new or unique, why anyone does not implement in a country where such a mechanism is absolutely vital is difficult to imagine.

One of the reasons of the present peace and tranquility in the city is the formation of military courts under Article 245 to try cases of terrorism, etc. The only negative factor is that we cannot make time finite for delivering justice. Where justice delayed is justice denied, in the same manner justice hurried may result in injustice, the prosecution in its enthusiasm to get the accused convicted may over-step its parameters of integrity of evidence. Two or three military courts must be put up immediately dedicated to trying cases of false evidence, the punishment awarded being the same punishment that would have been awarded to an accused if the false evidence was successful in convicting the accused.

This step will go a long way in establishing the even-handedness and credibility of justice rendered by military courts. Normally the officers in a unit of favour of the Commanding Officer (CO) are sent on ERE (Extra Regimental Employment) and the net result is that Martial Laws (or even IS duties) usually have manpower at the bottom rung of the ladder as far

as the quality of officers are concerned. This time it is very noticeable that the COAS has picked out the very best officers of the rank of Lt Col and Majors to head and be part of the Court. Courts thus constituted are the best since 1947. If they do not deliver justice then we are really in serious trouble.

The Governor must not get bogged in micro issues. He must have a good team and then decentralise authority. He must also select people he calls for advice with care and in smaller groups. Some of the people who rendered advice freely on the occasion, like Mr. Z.A. Nizami, former DG, KDA, have themselves been the source of problems for Karachi. We cannot expect to have anything good from such people. This man was responsible for the construction mafia and the 'plot scam' as well as the concretisation of Karachi. While he may be brilliant, he used that brilliance sparingly for the city of Karachi but more effectively for his own personal reasons. Similarly there were windbags who had nothing concrete to say except listening to the sound of their own voices. It must be said though that most of those who attended the Governor's tele-tete were upright, honourable persons with sincere motivation behind their advice proffered.

Things have been moving at too small a pace except on the law and order front. The turf battles between the PM's circle of advisors on Sindh over power apportionment must stop and the Governor allowed to get on with it. We are fighting against time more than anything else, presently we are losing the battle. We have the means to solve our problems, in the face of vested interest, do we have the will?

OPINION

Attack on Iraq

Abu Imran

The US attack on Iraq without provocation on Thursday (18.12.98) was an act of naked aggression. This is nothing but mere show of strength and not befitting the status of a superpower like the USA and, of course, is not committed to uphold the cause of peace the world over. USA's responsibility to safeguard the world peace has increased manifold in the changed context (unipolar world). But it is regrettable that she has miserably failed in this behalf. She has launched the attack to cover up the ill done by president Bill Clinton. Even the US Republicans have accused President Clinton of ordering strikes to divert attention from impeachment vote against him over the Monica Lewinsky scandal.

It may be pointed out here that a few months back President Clinton did the same thing by ordering bombing on Sudan and Afghanistan on lame excuse of punishing the so called terrorist Ben Laden. But he could kill only the innocent civilians who had nothing to do with terrorism. And that did not help him either. It was proved beyond reasonable doubt that he had illegal sex with Monica which he earlier lied about and used the terminology 'inappropriate relationship' to confuse people. That followed impeachment action. And now afraid of being impeached, he resorted to attack Iraq. But this also does not help him. For he can deceive people but not Allah. And Allah will punish him on double counts — for his (1) proven sin and (2) act of killing. Earlier he had some chance of escape since extra-marital relations at least in the West is not a serious offence, so some people there were of opin-

ion to let him off by awarding 'censure' and not impeachment. But now, after committing acts of murder nothing short of impeachment is there! Only condemnation though is not the answer, yet it's the demand of the day that all the states in the world and people should condemn USA so that she refrains from repeating such criminal activities.

In the meantime, the Muslim world under the umbrella of the OIC, should take effective measure to combat the menace let loose by Bill Clinton and put pressure on him to stop raids on Iraq on the pain of waging economic sanctions against the USA. Muslim nations are rich in oil and resources (money). They can stop supply and withdraw deposits from the States. If they do so, it is hoped that American economy would fill the pinch and she will agree to behave if not by option but by compulsion. This is not a wishful or an ambitious thinking. It is based on the observation of an economic analysts who recently visited Bangladesh from the UK. He narrated a small story that earlier as a researcher he came across a study which missed a particular month's comparative figure of American Federal Reserve. He became inquisitive about that and brought that to the knowledge of his seniors in the bureau. The chief there explained that the commission of error was deliberate. In that particular month a certain Muslim country had withdrawn a substantial fund which if revealed would have created concern in the money market both locally and internationally. That being so, if money and oil are sure to matter most,

To the Editor...

Good work, BTW

Sir, Personality-wise, very few people rise to the height of national stature, fewer of them are recognised and they are a rarity. Late Dr Abdullah Al-Muty Sharafuddin was one such personality.

But not so unexpectedly BTW cared less about Dr Sharafuddin's contribution in disseminating modern science to the young and the old. No one can blame BTW for not highlighting him after his death. BTW did in fact show Dr Sharafuddin on its screen as he was lying on his deathbed when the honourable minister was offering him an award.

Vive BTW.

Syed Walutullah
Mohammadpur, Dhaka

Hate campaign will hit back!

Sir, Our Sonar Bangla people of poetry and sweet music, flowing sweet waters and overflowing sentiment have started thinking (seriously) about Nelson Mandela and his infinite virtues, and pine for what is not. In some of the feedbacks appearing in the local dailies, there is a distant and unrealistic(?) dream visualising the presence of Mandela-like hate-free personalities in our top leadership. Advance peace, not hatred. Bury poisoned thinking and use of violence.

Present in Dhaka the political leadership of most of the parties are overtly godfathering (let us invent new words to suit the abnormal times) the indiscreet cult of using force and violence at the lower levels of party workers and at the upper levels

unleash the obscene showmanship of non-stop hatred campaigns and ceaseless flow of poisoned darts, sparing none. What are we teaching the younger generation? Neither God nor the nature's law will condone hatred — it will rebound and like a boomerang, destroy the originators of hatred (both sides rest assured!).

The country and the people are paying heavily for this unpardonable lapse of the es-jeemed leaders who believe in hatred and violence. There is no peaceful co-existence in this country since independence three decades ago.

We have to choose between cult and tolerance, peace and violence, benevolence and hatred, before we can identify our religious beliefs. Who have given the mandate to the politicians to indulge in violence? Let us round-up this question squarely.

A. Husnain
Dhaka

'What's wrong in BD?'

Sir, Thanks to Mr Mahmud (DS letter, 14-12-98) for realising that there is something wrong in Bangladesh. In fact, there is nothing wrong in the country but there is obviously something wrong in the minds of some people living in this country. His analysis about the Father of the Nation is perfect. In fact there cannot be any question about Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as the Father of the Nation. But if the liberation war-time is recalled, then we will see that there was a section opposing the liberation, which you will not find in case

of India and Pakistan.

In fact they never fought a liberation war. It is regrettable to observe that these forces who were against the liberation, were brought in the realm of power and were given the opportunity to do politics and finally we can find that some of them who helped and lived with the occupation army, against whom we fought our liberation war.

That is what is wrong.

M Alam
9/C, Mithelhye C/A, Dhaka

Advantages of Mishuk

Sir, The three-wheelers are said to be the culprits of roads because they emit more pollutants than any other motorised vehicles. The passengers themselves know well that of the three-wheelers the tempos are the most notorious ones and the Mishuks are the least.

Actually the Mishuks require almost no mobil that emits air-polluting substances. Besides, these are the lone motorised, three-wheelers that are made in Bangladesh. Thus Mishuk-making may be a good industry (presently going on by the Atlas at Tongi, Gazipur) if the foreign-made scooters (babbies) and tempos are phased out.

M A S Molla
Member, BAAS Dhaka.

Railway time table

Sir, During British and Pakistani regimes, our railway used to publish a yearly detailed railway time-table containing about 60-70 pages which cost

about only fifty paise per book for the information of the members of the public and passengers for timely and efficient service of the railway.

The standard of service of Bangladesh Railway is decaying day by day. The absence of publication of railway time-table for the last several years is one of the deteriorating, poor and inefficient service of our railway.

We would request our Communication Minister to kindly let us know the reason why our railway is not bringing out the much needed yearly publication and we request him to arrange the publication and supply Bangladesh Railway Time Table at a nominal price at least once a year.

O. H. Kabir
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Post office on BAI campus

Sir, A huge number of students, teachers, staff and their family members reside on the campus of Bangladesh Agricultural Institute (BAI), Dhaka. In addition to academic and official mails, the inmates of the BAI campus send letters and other postal materials to different destinations at home and abroad.

So, the BAI campus needs a post office. May I request the Postal Authority to please take necessary steps in this connection.

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