

## Shocked and Outraged

We find no words adequate to express our anguish and outrage at the dastardly killing of valiant freedom fighter and top JSD leader Kazi Aref and five of his party colleagues on the rostrum of a public meeting. The brush-fire assassination swipe enacted in broad daylight under the widest public gaze conceivable has added a dreadful dimension to the lexicon of political gangsterism in the country. Never before a public meeting has been the scene of such derring-do armed violence spilling blood on the podium of a political rally, only crackers and bombs having been blasted to disrupt public meetings in the past. The feeling that the barrier could be broken after all to perpetrate such an act of dare-devilry makes us apprehensive that it might recur unless gangsterism is dealt with an iron hand.

There may be speculations aplenty on what caused the killings, ranging from an attribution to old conflicts in the *Ganobahini* to conjectures about intra- and inter-group feudings. A probe needs to be instituted to uncover the truth.

Armed gangs under revolutionary guises have ruled the roost despite the occasional bombing operations that could not even touch the fringes of their existence. They have thrived on trafficked and collected arms and an extortionist life-style. Political terrorism has been on the rise in the south-western and southern parts of Bangladesh for some time. In a democracy no party or group can expect to be outlawed unless it chooses to put on that label by going underground and engaging themselves in clandestine activities. Often they have conflicts over territorial tutelage and booty distribution. But somehow because criminals have got an upperhand under successive governments their survivability has never appeared to be in any serious doubt.

The Home Minister has promised 'stern action' against the culprits and a non-recurrence of such a heinous incident in future. If such dastardly killings do not move the government into action, what else will? After ordering a probe the government must stay focused on the job at hand to ferret out the criminals and have them punished with a deterrent effect. The government is also required to provide adequate protection to public meetings of political parties without being too selective about it.

This paper reiterates its condemnation of all forms of political terrorism and expresses its heart-felt condolences to the members of the bereaved families.

## Caring for the Displaced

Time is running out to care for the displaced. Concern for this issue distinctly came up during a two-day conference, arranged by a Dhaka University-based organisation Refugee and Migratory Movement Research Unit (RMMRU), which ended Tuesday last. Participants rightly felt that movement of people, a massive influx of displaced persons, put roadblocks to development projects. Pressure of population and unemployment being the principal reasons for migration of people from the countryside to urban areas and degradation of the environment associated with lopsided urbanisation, we have to develop epicentres of growth all over the country to strike the problems at their roots. River bank erosion is a big problem that needs to be solved through dredging and embankment.

For rehabilitating the internally displaced persons (IDPs), our local government system should be harnessed. Alongside, the local government can, and should, come forward with its own plans to care for the vulnerable groups with government assistance and locally generated funds. Scopes for employment opportunities and housing will have to be created. This will certainly lessen migration from rural areas to urban ones. Rehabilitating the migrants would also help in accelerating the country's economic development. And when it comes to national economy, there should not be any second thought to get the act together.

At the regional level, a co-ordinated inter-territorial approach, under the SAARC umbrella, must be taken up. This will also reduce the malaise of human trafficking across the border. The pending repatriation of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh to Myanmar needs to be completed through inter-state cooperation.

## Rotting Vegetables

There has been a bumper production of winter vegetables in the country. This has been possible because of timely availability of seeds, insecticides and other implements and of course, the back-breaking toil of the farmers after the recession of flood waters. Assistance from donor countries helped. The sedimentation that accompanied the floodwaters increased the fertility of the soil that came in handy for bumper production of these vegetables. In a penetrating report an important Bangla daily revealed Wednesday that the country had produced a million tons of winter vegetables this year compared to 8 lakh tons last year. Together with summer and monsoonal output the country would have produced more than 16 lakh tons this year. This figure falls far short of per head consumption of the people of this country, according to international standards, claims the report.

Whatever it is the saddest part of the story is that about 25 to 30 per cent of the products are rotting in the absence of adequate storage facility. During the first six months of current fiscal Bangladesh has exported vegetables worth Tk 45.45 crore. Our vegetables have a good market in the Middle East, and if the wastage could be checked we would have earned more foreign exchange and at the grower's level the prices would have reached a point that could provide financial support to the producer.

As it is prices in mofussil areas have fallen so low that farmers are hard-pressed even to earn the transportation cost. Though this is the situation in the kitchen markets retailers are having a field-day at Dhaka. They are buying at a very nominal price from the wholesalers and making almost 100 per cent profit from the public. It hurts both the growers and the consumers. We would strongly urge upon the ministry concerned to immediately look into the problems of storage and supply. It will be a colossal waste if swift decisions are not taken to stem the rot.

# Impeachment: The Stigma Hard to Shake off

*Bill Clinton has two more years in office. Unfortunately for him he will never be able to shake off the stigma of being the second President in US history of facing impeachment trials. Yet every US President wants to leave his stamp on history. This is more so since his will be the last presidency of the twentieth century.*

THE impeachment trial of President William Jefferson Clinton has ended. The president has been exonerated of the charges brought against him.

This more than a year-long drama virtually paralysed Washington DC the capital of the only superpower of the world. With the Senate vote announced by Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, William Rehnquist, there was a near audible sigh of relief from the USA head around the world.

There are tell tale signs that a vast plot had been spun around President Bill Clinton with the sole objective to oust him from the White House. There have been attempts at character assassination even when he was Governor of Arkansas. This effort was expanded with corruption charges trying to implicate him and his wife in the Whitewater land deal.

After his near landslide victory for a second term in office that his adversaries went seriously to work. Kenneth Starr, the 'independent' counsel took up the issue in right earnest. He acted like a zealot. His aim — no less than destroying the President. The chosen theme was assassination. There were attempts to find a negotiated settlement between the Democrats and the Republicans. After much haggling the stage was set for vote on the two counts of impeachment.

This was a time to involve the media. For the media it became a big story. The global media the CNN played a devastating role in order to destroy the President. The print media was not lagging far behind. Indeed at the height of the attack

by the media against President Clinton former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl exclaimed he felt like 'throwing up' every time he read about these scandals.

The matter then came before the House of Representatives. The behaviour of the House was an example of indiscretion and irresponsibility that defies description. The House with its Republican majority decided to exhibit all the lurid details of US President Bill Clinton's sex escapades to the whole world through the Internet.

Then came the time for vote. Impeachment articles were drawn up. President Bill Clinton was impeached on two counts. The Republican majority gleefully voted to impeach the President.

The findings of the House of Representatives were forwarded to the Senate for final disposal of the case against President Clinton. It is here that the matter started unravelling. There were attempts to find a negotiated settlement between the Democrats and the Republicans. After much haggling the stage was set for vote on the two counts of impeachment.

On the first charge of lying under oath regarding his sexual escapades with Monica Lewinsky the Senate turned down the accusations with a vote of 55 in favour of Bill Clinton and 45 against. In other words 10 Republicans crossed floor to sup-

port Bill Clinton. On the second charge of obstruction of justice the Senate was evenly divided. On this Chief Justice Rehnquist announced that President Bill Clinton had been found 'not guilty'.

As the year-long drama unfolded what was the role of President Clinton? The savage nature of the blows left the President reeling. Indeed he went repeatedly before the American public to offer his re-

grets. He went to the extent of expressing sorrow to Monica Lewinsky for the pain he may have caused her.

He urged the members of the Congress to get on with the business at hand for which the voters had chosen them. He exhorted his countrymen to devote their energies to fruitful pursuits. He succeeded to keep the ship of state in good order and the US economy continued to show excellent signs of health.

During this year long drama Hillary Clinton, the First Lady behaved in an exemplary fashion. She opened her mouth rarely and that only to state

how much she admired her husband. She never left his side and often took their daughter Chelsea along. She never allowed for a moment any shadow come over an honourable first family.

The American people have administered a lesson in democracy to their chosen leaders, which they should do well to learn by heart. Through the media a great build up was accomplished that the November 1998 Congressional elections

drama Bill Clinton very rightly has gone before his people and expressed his sorrow for the trauma his affair with Monica Lewinsky has caused. And like a statesman he has called for reconciliation.

Bill Clinton has two more years in office. Unfortunately for him he will never be able to shake off the stigma of being the second President in US history of facing impeachment trials. Yet every US President wants to leave his stamp on history. This is more so since his will be the last presidency of the twentieth century.

President of the US William Jefferson Clinton will be leaving the US in robust health. Internally the country is at peace with itself with a booming economy. The US power worldwide is unmatched. There is not a rival in sight on earth and the moon and the stars.

I should venture to suggest that the proper field for devoting his energies would be the Middle East. President Clinton has already given much time and attention in trying to move the peace process forward. Indeed great progress has been registered. The Oslo Peace Accord nearly five years ago had set the stage for a settlement of the long standing Palestinian Problem.

It is well-known that any settlement of the Middle East problem must start with the solving of the Palestinian prob-

lem. Since the signing of the Oslo accord much progress was registered until the arrival of Benjamin Netanyahu as Prime Minister of Israel nearly three years ago.

Singlehandedly, he nearly succeeded in derailing the peace process. When President Bill Clinton was deeply embroiled in his impeachment trial, in order to give the peace process a big thrust he convened a meeting of Palestine Chairman Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the Wye river near Washington DC and got an accord signed.

President Clinton will have to devote all his energies so that peace process is not derailed. That the parties are interested is evident from the fact that President Hafez al-Assad of Syria has talked to President Clinton during their recent meeting in Amman in connection with the funeral of King Hussein. President Clinton will have to deal with Jerusalem as well, the holy city for three large monotheistic faiths — Islam, Judaism and Christianity.

Should Bill Clinton succeed in bringing up the Middle East Peace Process, he will leave his name in history as the President of the only superpower, who remained undeterred by personal afflictions but moved the world one step nearer peace.

A final footnote. I have written on the question of President Bill Clinton's trials and tribulations for long. I have always maintained that he was the victim of a vast plot that could not succeed because he had the unstinted support of his people. I take satisfaction at the fact I stand vindicated.

## 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.*

### Kosovo burns

Sir, As humanitarians and as Muslims, we are outraged by yet another attempt of genocide on the Albanian people in Kosova. The Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic, along with his government, has continued the aggression towards Albanians in Kosova.

The atrocities are severe. With no means of defence, the Albanians are killed and tortured. They are taken from their homes only to be jailed without evidence of wrongdoing and held without sentencing. The Serbian government has dismissed over eighty percent of the 145,000 Albanians in the work force. This included all Albanian doctors, leaving Serbs free to conduct unimaginable crimes on Albanian patients. They have also closed courts, expelling Albanian judges of high stature.

This continues to cause unfair trials in which aggression against Albanians have avoided the trial process, no trials in defence of Albanian victims whatsoever, and no evidence against claimed acts of Albanian terrorism besides the torture-voiced confessions. The media in the Albanian language have been shut down. Students have been poisoned, beaten and arrested. Schools in all educational levels have been suspended.

The Serbs have deployed hundreds of thousands of police and army units in Kosova only to perform heinous crimes. Villages have been destroyed and tens of thousands of Albanian homes have been burned and burglarized or given to other Serbs. Harvests have been destroyed and livestock killed. Families have been tortured and murdered, showing no mercy even to the women, children and elderly of Kosova. This has sent over 350,000 Kosovars fleeing for their lives. Currently, they are dispersed throughout forests, tunnels and into neighboring countries as refugees, and can only hope of returning home.

Two principles are at stake: the credibility of the operators, and the fool-proof system of the mechanism. I am unable to go into details as I am not an expert in this line.

*Abul M Ahmad  
Dhaka*

### CEC and grey areas

Sir, I have been following in the newspapers the campaign against CEC's transparency, and arguments for an against, by the politicians and the rest of the citizens. I tried to draft a system diagram of flow chart of the whole voting process. There are certain points which are not being clearly brought up in the press for the information and clarification of the readers, who are not actively interested in politics. The parties involved cannot be the judges; they only promote their own versions of their arguments.

On time scale, there are three distinct areas of operation: before the voting, during the voting, and after the voting. The Election Commission has certain procedures to ensure transparency in all the three areas. Assuming that the CEC had taken all reasonable steps to ensure fair voting, still there are other groups who can and do influence these three areas in certain ways, which may be called the grey areas.

Despite all the check-and-balance operation procedures, certain irregularities and malpractices are attempted, and some of these are successful to a certain extent, not only in Bangladesh, but in other countries also differing in kind or degree. Question: The present agitation involves core issues, or are confined to marginal issues? This point has to be clearly brought out before cam-

paigned for the removal of the CEC. What the new CEC can and would do with a corrupted or imperfect system? What is the first priority: improve the system, or replace the CEC?

Such manipulations by alleged vested groups (the political parties with their workers, and the vast and intricate bureaucratic network, and covert manipulations inside the Election office/s) are indirect and subtle, as direct and open methods would be noticeable and detected. Is it possible to for the EC to control all the permutations and combinations, leaving a marginal percentage of acceptable irregularity?

The second question is how far the EC could be blamed for operations outside its control and jurisdiction (the direct and indirect aspects also come in)? Are the latter operations clearly defined for fixation of responsibility? If it is so, then what are the points at dispute for the removal of the CEC?

The government machinery cannot be isolated during an election. As a voter has the freedom to vote or not to vote: is it easy to establish whether he had been coerced or bribed to vote or not to vote; or his ballot paper had been faked or tampered with at some stage?

Two other grey areas are the genuineness of the ultimate ballot paper, and later, the counting process (all the papers counted are genuine?). There may be loopholes in the transportation process before, during, and after voting.

Thus there are many variabilities and permutations and combinations. Even after the introduction of the neutral caretaker government during the general election period, 100 per cent of the politicians are not satisfied in stray or random cases, which have come to the notice of the public.

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*Qazi Shug  
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### The VCs

Sir, It is a matter of great concern that the academic atmosphere of most of the public universities is being spoilt by immoral activities. The so-called free-mixing culture is, in fact, contaminating the environment of our educational institutions. The concentration of the students on their study is being distracted by some other moral ills.

The recent happening in the JU is a clear indication of the moral degradation prevailing in the academic atmosphere of the universities. In fact, evil goes on and on when it is not checked strictly. The JU incident is enough to stir our sense of responsibility to keep the moral health of the educational institutions intact.

In this respect, I would like to request the VCs to maintain an eagle's eye over the moral health universities.

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### Not guilty

Sir, Why was the spoken word alone taken as direct evidence against Bill Clinton when it is only a partial expression of ones mind? There should have been psychological experts to interpret the body language of the witnesses and point out when something was being concealed or distorted by the witnesses. Abundant proof would have emerged in this way to prove Clinton guilty without a reasonable doubt.

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