

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 combing 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. Schemes 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 is 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 character assassination. He found a willing tool — Monica Lewinsky, a White House intern, with whom the President was involved in some indiscretions.

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 a 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 the President and 45 against. In other words 10 Republican 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-



The Horizon This Week

Arshad-uz Zaman

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

would see the demise of Bill Clinton and his Democrats. The Republican adversaries of Clinton watched in amazement that the Democrats had emerged victorious. That must be considered the beginning of the end of the vast plot against Bill Clinton. For it must never be forgotten that leaving all the semantics on fine legalities aside the US President is truly the representative of his people and stays in office so long he enjoys their confidence. The November 1998 Congressional elections thus became a veritable referendum in favour of Bill Clinton.

As the curtain fell on the

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.

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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 world wide 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.

Singhandedly, 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 Premier 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 in resuming the peace process is evident from the fact that President Hafez al-Assad of Syria has talked to President Clinton during his 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 wrapping 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 by the Serbian government on the Albanian people in Kosovo. The Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic, along with his government, has continued the aggression towards Albanians in Kosovo.

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 Serbians 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-provoked 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 Kosovo 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, slaving no mercy even to the women, children and elderly of Kosovo.

This has sent over 350,000 Kosovars fleeing for their lives. Currently, they are dispersed throughout forests, untains and into neighboring countries as refugees, and can only hope of returning home.

Some concerned Muslims in USA

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 has 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-

paigning 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 force 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 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 variables 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.

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

Experience of Hartal

Sir, This is just to inform the readers how I feel about hartal in Bangladesh. I visited Bangladesh last year and witnessed many hartals and disruption to the normal activity.

Many people expressed dissatisfaction to the hartal especially the low earning subjects. Many, I personally witnessed, suffer a lot because they could not work during the hartal period. They had very difficult time in maintaining their family when there was hartal. They even started to beg for food and money.

The well-off citizens of Bangladesh and the foreigners also suffered significantly. I also experienced very difficulty bringing my relative to the Sylhet Osman International Airport for a flight at 10.10 am due to the hartal being scheduled on the flight day. I negotiated with a driver on the previous day and prepared to pay him three times the normal fare. Unfortunately, he did not turn up on times and caused lot of inconvenience.

Dr A Rob
United Kingdom

Extortion at SNP

Sir, Extortion at Shalna National Park in Gazipur has increased alarmingly. It was unveiled some days ago when some students and teachers of Accounting Department of Dhaka University were attacked by some local extortion-

ists. They were then forced to leave the place.

The racketeers demanded Tk. 1000 for per bus to enter into the Park. Some students protested and they were assaulted — even teachers weren't spared. The gangsters also damaged a bus and broke glasses of some buses. The panic-stricken female students were screaming in fear. There were no police to control the situation. The hooligans were well-equipped with arms.

Such incidents threaten the tourism industry and vilify national image and also expose stark ineptitude and delinquency of law enforcing agencies.

Md Abdur Rahim
Journalism Dept.
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Can anybody reply?

Sir, The DS on 25th January reported that the Prime Minister responding to opposition demand of withdrawing 'false' cases said 'the present govt did not arrest any body on political motives, it only arrested terrorists'. Not a single political worker 'as head of govt I cannot release them, law will take its own course as the judiciary is totally independent'.

The DS on 26th January under the caption 'PM asks Home Minister to look into pre-'96 'false' cases against AL men' reported 'Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday instructed the home minister to look into the cases filed against Awami League workers during the 'pro-democracy movement' prior to the June 1996 general elections. Mentionably, the major opposition party BNP has long been demanding withdrawal of 'false cases' against party workers, lodged during the tenure of the present government'.

If both the news are true can anybody please reply why 6 lives were lost during the 3 days of hartal? PM could also instruct the Home Minister to look into any 'false' cases during her regime thereby fulfilling one of the demands of the opposition.

Qazi S Huq
Magh Bazar, Dhaka.

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. And 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.

M Mahmudul Hasan
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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 one's 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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OPINION

There is No Politics in Bangladesh!

Who says there is a lot of frenzied political activity in Bangladesh? Nothing of the kind. What is seen is not politics, but the bitter fight-to-death of the two major political parties; or vendetta by two publicly sworn enemies based on clash of personalities or the virus of charismatic leadership, past or present (Q for the sociologists: why we seem to prefer dynastic rule?).

Each party is out to annihilate and completely wipe out the other by hook or by crook — the code of politics be hanged! Ironically, in love and war, there is no law and justice, and the outcome of the battle is the final judgement, accept it or not (what can we do about human frailty?).

It is not an original statement — it means history repeats itself, and man clones himself in the future generations; it does not matter it is the genetic code working, or the code of conduct not working, or made unwelcome.

This elimination mania is not going to pay dividends, because it is impossible to wipe out one party completely. The size and the shine may be depreciated, on the basis of the curse theme in history, on the rise and fall of civilisations, nations, and political parties.

The people are one solid block! What are the theoretical options available, before the

Alif Zabr

practical chances are calculated? a) Live and let live (political and human tolerance); and, b) both fade out fighting fatally, and yield place to a new or third force which will fill in the partial vacuum thus created.

Call it revolution or evolution, but change cannot be stopped by any means, sooner or later. We wish to change some theories, or rule our poor country in a humble way? Can we practice what we profess? And do we all believe what we practise? In this delta region, our beliefs are tidal in nature.

The longer the no-change period, the greater are the teething troubles and instability subsequently. Watch Jordan, Malaysia, and note what happened to Soekarno and Suharto in Indonesia, Hitler in Germany, and the never — ending regimes in the African states! There may be a shake-up in the monarchy styles in the Middle East. The stronger and older the communist regimes, the surer and more sudden were the final fall. Capitalism needs the third of the coin: money is round and made to roll.

Bangladesh is going to witness the end of the charismatic politics, because the petrol tank is almost empty, and the journey is long. The affair cannot last forever. There has to be a

change of style, and the time appears to have come, although the modality of the change might be unpredictable.

The greater the hold, the weaker becomes the grasp. The greater the rise, the greater is the fall. So the political (super) leaders in Bangladesh are not being original in any way. It is all variations of a theme.

The problem with the people is that this sort of in-fighting at the top level create fall outs on the energyless (not powerless) people, who have to build up the leadership cadre, level by level, all over again. The country's governance had to be entrusted to military leaders for 16 years, leaving the politicians out of field practice — no muscle-conditioning due to lack of exercise; followed by rusty administration after return to the gaddi (throne) (the reconditioned cars have a huge market in Dhaka!).

Looks like the people are going to be given a similar mandate once again within 30 years of nirvana asceticism (jaki) of the economic kind, trying for a different kind of powerlessness or sunnival. Scrap iron has to be heated and reheated to be made pliable for reshaping — our future destiny. The politicians' rendezvous with Des-tiny missed the first syllable of the potent word.

Who will be the next Pied Piper of sonar Bangla? Get the sonar baanshee.

Nation-maturation Process

Abu Shahab-ud-Din

home, something like a joint-family (*lekannobori poribar*) and the traditional Indian society.

The most visible and logical advantage of such a system is that the cost of living goes down considerably by staying in the same premises and using the same security devices. Common marketing and distribution system, identical education, entertainment and health care facilities, etc., etc., all these collective enterprises reduce the hassle and the overall cost of running the whole establishment. The central planning, organizing, controlling and handling by an authoritarian head is temperamentally quite acceptable to most of the people inhabiting this sub-continent.

The ancient Vedic culture traditionally and historically pre-conditioned individual members to accept an authoritative system, a symbiotic unity, be it in a joint-family or in a joint national union. It then became a part of the overall mindset and temperament of a very large group of people. Politically, their common liberation struggles and survival strategies, identical martyrs and heroes, similar legends of sufferings and stories of sacrifices — all these closenesses mentally forged them into, and kept them as one super-large country and one composite union of nations.

But if we look at the Arabs, we see an entirely different picture. They are fiercely divided, and yet enthusiastically developing as small separate units (Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Oman, Bahrain, Emirates, etc.), rather than large groups or clusters, although they have all the linguistic, religious and cultural prerequisites to form strong, big union.

The Soviets tried to tie up many disjointed nationalities into a large family through the common teachings of Karl Marx. But as soon as Marxism proved flawed, and its premature application by the leaders (who actually were radical nationalists cloaked in a Marxist garb) ended catastrophically, all the member nations fell apart to go their own separate way.

Two disparate portions of the Indian sub-continent managed to jump out of the Indian joint-family ship (with the help of Jinnah's two-nation formula), to reach shore and survive separately, thus proving to the world that the alternative

way of separate existence and development may be possible. Yugoslavia recently broke up into four nations, and Czechoslovakia into two, after progressing as single nations for several decades. It is a matter of preference and choice about how a group of people wants to develop — in the warmth of a joint-family, or in the peace and seclusion of a self-ruling country.

The two Bengali nations, through a miracle of history, chose to develop separately — one as a composite part of a joint Indian family, and the other with the undaunted proposition of an independent nation-state. Their fast changing mentality and the economic and cultural growth pattern in the coming decades may be measured and analysed to make a definitive conclusion as to which way a large homogenous group of people develops and grows better. Independently? Or remaining in a commonwealth of allied ethnic groups.

A similar comparison of the Bangladeshis can be made with the Kashmiris, under the above-mentioned two alternative courses. Both being large, Muslim concentrations on the sub-continent, who are showing the signs of more vibrancy and dynamism, better and more original national progress? It is evident that the Bangladeshis are showing glaringly the added benefits from being a free nation.

The joint-family system has undoubtedly some conveniences and advantages. But what we need to determine here, is whether such a collective and federative system good at the beginning, before the nation-maturation process, as it is being done in India, or is it even better at the end of a requisite phase of spontaneous national growth, after the full natural blossoming of the processes as it is happening in the European continent right now.

And the second, more important, question is, doesn't the joint-family style system, in essence, nip in the bud, unrecognized or strangle the individual and original creative capabilities of a good many aspiring ethnic groups and curtail or deprive them of their potentials to make own specific contributions to the future world civilisation? Aren't these aspirant nationalities preyed upon and unduly exposed to the risk of being assimilated or annihilated by bigger, more powerful, neighbours?