

They Burn Bright

TWENTY-four years ago, November 3 marked the climax of a high treason and treachery blitz that had its origins in August 15 that year with the brutal assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family.

However, what they had failed to understand was the fact that ideals, goals and achievements of our Liberation War would not be wiped out with the death of our leaders.

Unfortunately, we seem to have failed to appreciate their sacrifice for the country. Our indifference has allowed the Jail Killing Day to become a mere ritual.

We ask our politicians, do they have among themselves leaders as dedicated and patriotic as Tajuddin Ahmed, Syed Nazrul Islam, Captain Mansur Ali and Kamruzzaman?

Corruption Chemistry

HOW a certain corruption alchemy is working to perpetuate poverty in South Asia comes incisively home through the third human development report for South Asia.

That is not the sole way the massive fraud is enacted on people. While an ill-run democracy could fall into military hands seeking to justify usurpation of power in a self-anointed messianic deference to the cause of the poor, even a 'functional democracy' might prove counter-productive in associating the public and the civil society at large with the decision-making processes once the voters' role is relegated into the background after a general election.

As an advocate of transparency this paper straightaway endorses the recommendations contained in the report for disclosure of assets by all public representatives and officials, immunity to informers and open-bidding procurement procedures.

Corruption is endemic in South Asia but each of the individual countries of the region needs to adopt it as a national agenda. A government being the involved party in corruption it is the civil society including the media that has to take a leading role in bringing the issues of transparency and accountability to the forefront of national concerns.

Doctors' Strike in Chittagong

THE BCS cadre doctors have started a 5-hour daily strike from Tuesday last at Chittagong Medical College Hospital. They have further threatened to shut down medical service from the 9th of this month if their arrears salaries are not paid by that date.

As a result of the strike patients are going through tremendous hardship. Only extreme cases of emergency are being attended to. The frustration of the doctors has reached such a point that they even locked up the office of the hospital.

We understand what sort of plight they are in having to go without salaries and allowances for the last four months in these days of high living costs. But at the same time we urge the doctors to empathise with the sufferings of poor patients who come to the hospital desperately hoping to get some medical attention.

We strongly criticise the callous attitude of the ministry concerned. Why should the regular employees of the government go without salary even for a month? We hope the ministry and the minister concerned should be up and doing and pay the striking doctors before the situation deteriorates any further.

GENERAL Pervez Musharraf, the Chief Executive of the military regime in Pakistan, deposed Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on 12 October and installed an extra-constitutional government.

A Ministerial level Commonwealth delegation led by the Canadian Foreign Minister visited Pakistan last week and met with General Pervez. Their purpose was to obtain an approximate time table for the restoration of democratic government and to meet with the deposed Prime Minister Mr. Nawaz Sharif.

On 29th October, at a meeting with the visiting Commonwealth Ministerial delegation led by the Canadian Foreign Minister, General Pervez could give no assurance when democracy would return to Pakistan because he had set many objectives for his government which he would wish to implement.

The delegation, however, was allowed to speak by telephone to the deposed Prime Minister and when the Canadian Foreign Minister was asked as to why he was unable to contact Mr. Sharif by telephone, he said that he was told by the authorities that Mr.

Why the Commonwealth Delegation was Not Allowed to Meet with Nawaz Sharif?

by Harun ur Rashid

The reasons for the coup could be true but the fact that the Commonwealth delegation was not allowed to meet with Mr. Sharif has given rise to many a suspicion that the military regime may not have spoken the whole story behind the coup. To eliminate such misgivings, it appears that Mr. Sharif may be given an opportunity to tell his story either to the media or to a third party.

Sharif would not speak to him by telephone.

None of the aims of the visit of the Commonwealth delegation is expected to submit a report to the Commonwealth Heads of State/Government who are scheduled to meet on 12th November in Durban, South Africa and a final decision on the suspension will be taken during the meeting.

A view prevails that the motive of the coup appears to be put in doubt when the Commonwealth delegation was refused to meet with Mr. Sharif who had been detained by the military since 12th October.

This place. This occurred while General Musharraf was returning from Sri Lanka to Pakistan. The plane in which the General was travelling was asked to find a new landfall outside Pakistan. When it was advised that the plane had no fuel to land outside Pakistan, it was allowed to land in Nawab Shah and on arrival General Musharraf was to be arrested.

The questions that arise are: why did not the military regime allow the delegation to meet Mr. Nawaz Sharif? Is it that Mr. Sharif could have provided the circumstances of the coup? Is there anything which Mr. Sharif might have disclosed that could embarrass the military regime?

There is a view that the reason for refusing the delegation to meet with Mr. Sharif could be that the military staged a coup as a deliberate act of policy and their story was assembled to justify and sell the coup as a 'last resort' to prevent further destabilisation to the people of Pakistan and to some

extent the international community. After all, the military regime is no more fashionable in today's world, in particular after the end of the cold war. The US has no desire or requirement to prop up a military regime as a counter weight to the expansion of communism.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Kulsum Sharif, wife of the deposed Prime Minister, was reported to have said that the military wanted Mr. Sharif and his family out of the country and that he should quit politics. She said that they refused to do so because they were Pakistanis by birth (incidentally General Pervez was born in India).

Ending Corruption and Cruelty

by A.B.S. Jafri

What the new administration has begun to do is an exceedingly daunting and demanding self-assignment. Gen Musharraf has on his hand perhaps the most awesome task ever undertaken by any individual in this country. Corruption is not a Pakistani copyright. But governments in this country have turned it into one of the most weird of the black arts.

Nobody is to the rescue of the politician with principles — an almost extinct species. Even heavens fail to protect the honest government servant. For both, survival demands falling in line or assuming sudden death or anything slow and silent withering away.

Interesting though it might be for the academic social scientist, it is not of much use at the moment to engage in the egg-chicken debate who came first, the characterless politician or the shameless bureaucrat. Both are a squalid and devastating fact of our life.

Among the most devastating problems are those that now hang as dead weight round the neck of national economy. By all standards, Pakistan is a country nature had meant to be rich and beautiful. Yet it is awfully poor and unlovely today.

The cash that has been taken

out and stashed abroad belongs to the people. It is variously estimated to be at least 40-plus billion dollars. It could well be over a hundred billion. In a recent well-informed report on present-day Pakistan the Washington Post estimated Pakistan's total foreign debt to be in the region of 32 billion dollars.

Get back to Pakistan the nation's wealth plundered in Pakistan and stolen out of the country. There is no end to hair-raising scandals of how systematically Pakistan has been robbed to the bone marrow by people in successive governments. It will not be humanly possible to weave a net wide enough or fine enough to catch every predatory beast.

Do not forget that the politicians could never have committed the robberies without assistance from those sitting on top of the cash heaps in the banks' vaults. The collaborators within the bank cloisters who played that role are partners in the plunder. Every big crime has to be an organized enterprise on the basis of sharing the spoils.

Scratch a nationalized commercial bank (NCB), a development finance institution (DFI), any government-controlled organization in the field of economy (e.g. Pakistan International Airlines, the National Shipping Corporation,

the Pakistan Steel, the trading corporations, the Export Promotion Bureau, etc.) and you are bound to chance upon evidence of titanic pilferage, fraud and misappropriation. This is the handiwork of the insiders. Once the arch criminals are brought to book, the lesser ones will be within the reach and grasp of any government that means to do the needful.

Visualize a situation in which a substantial part of the defaulted banks' loans and advances by other financial institutions is recovered. That would mean, say, 200 billion rupees more in the bank vaults. This process should rescue every nationalized commercial bank from the red where it is mired today. This would amount to a significant contribution to the credibility of Pakistan's economy.

The first direct result of such an eventuality would be that we should be saving more than 70 per cent of our national budget that now goes into servicing those foreign loans. That would add to the resources to be ploughed back into the economy to finance development and social welfare activity. At

present Pakistan makes just about the bottom of the list of countries sparing the least for education, health, women development and welfare of the girl child. We have the same wretched rating in protection of our own environment. All that is a crying shame.

Now a word about revenue management. Recent years have seen a steady and unstoppage decline in revenue collection. The outgoing Nawaz Sharif government would appear to be a deliberate promoter/beneficiary of tax evasion. There has been a shortfall in collection of all taxes down the line. Reluctantly, Nawaz Sharif proposed a modest, almost negligible tax on farm incomes. It remains a sour dream.

Every political party and government in recent years has spoken about 'declaration of personal assets'. Maybe, it is already a requirement of law to be observed by all those in, or aspiring for, representative public office. Once upon a time, this formality was expected to be observed by public servants also. In the rare cases where Ms Benazir Bhutto and Mr Nawaz Sharif have thought of this obligation, the results have been ridiculous if not outrageous. Income tax returns filed by both of these former prime ministers have only drawn public scorn. Both of them pretended not to notice public ridicule.

the coup and its reasons for intervention. The date came and it was executed neatly.

There could be many reasons for the coup. One of the reasons appeared to be the widening disagreement between the armed forces and the former Prime Minister on his decision last July to withdraw from the Islamic militants from Kargil side of the Indian Line of Control. To many, his actions amounted to 'national humiliation'. Another reason could be the increasing presence of an autocratic and dictatorial government in which the civil society was looking a change. The armed forces seem to have captured the mood of frustration and helplessness of the people in Pakistan and it struck at the right time. The coup therefore met no opposition from the people.

There is a view that the army's story for imposing military rule will remain in question unless and until Mr. Sharif is allowed to tell his side of the story. The reasons for the coup could be true but the fact that the Commonwealth delegation was not allowed to meet with Mr. Sharif has given rise to many a suspicion that the military regime may not have spoken the whole story behind the coup. To eliminate such misgivings, it appears that Mr. Sharif may be given an opportunity to tell his story either to the media or to a third party.

The author, a barrister, is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

The Chief Executive Gen Pervez Musharraf has offered to make public a declaration of his assets. He is setting an example of voluntary accountability that should be made mandatory in the case of all those who hold or aspire for representative public office. Also for those who hold high positions in public administration. If an yearly declaration of this nature is made obligatory under the law, it may help diminish accumulation of tainted wealth which is the source of so many of social evils and of degradation of moral values in our society.

What the new administration has begun to do is an exceedingly daunting and demanding self-assignment. Gen Musharraf has on his hand perhaps the most awesome task ever undertaken by any individual in this country. Corruption is not a Pakistani copyright. But governments in this country have turned it into one of the most weird of the black arts. The curse has spread to the very core of our national life. Curing it is going to be a titanic exercise. Those engaged in it would need the support and goodwill of every decent Pakistani citizen. Nothing short of it.

Of the other curse, cruelty, let it be said for the moment that it is fearfully real and is destroying the very soul of this nation. Our record on human rights could hardly be more wretched. As a matter of daily and almost normal occurrence, people are picked up without warrant, held in unlawful detention, tyrannized, pauperized and subjected to inhuman brutality.

There is a strong case to insist that corruption and cruelty call for simultaneous and equally relentless and persistent, too.

Courtesy: 'The Dawn' of Pakistan

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.

Democracy

Sir, Democracy cannot flourish and grow properly if the political leaders of that country follow the policy of tit-for-tat, go for witch hunting and also if their politics revolves around hatred, jealousy, vengeance and mistrust.

Democratically elected government may sometimes become despotic. So holding elections under a caretaker government where the people cast their votes according to their choice does not mean full democracy is prevailing there.

It is only a part of democracy. Iqbal Ahmed Dhaka - 1000

Moderation vs polarisation

Sir, Moderation prevailed over polarisation in Indonesia's dramatic election of the President. Habibie had to withdraw after two hours' impassioned speech to continue in power; and magnetic Megawati has to wait. The religious leader Abdur Rahman Wahid triumphed without effort or tribulation, (he is reputed to be a king maker), to fill in the vacuum. He is a respected figure, and believes in human dignity, regardless of religious affiliation (after all, religion is a container, and not the content, according to a school of thought).

Indonesia, the world's

largest Muslim majority nation of 200 million (and 1400 islands), is passing through a critical test, in a political environment of the separation of East Timor as per referendum. There is more than politics involved in the compromise acceptance of Abdur Rahman Wahid, a moderator, preaching the benevolent philosophy of 'live and let live'.

In times of stress, passions are roused and barriers are erected or broken. After the storm, comes the sunshine. A great experiment is going on in Indonesia, and there might be lessons for many nations.

AZ Dhaka.

Diversify NGO work

Sir, The thousands of NGOs working in Bangladesh have developed a splendid network which is worth replicating in other LDCs. But the focus is almost exclusively on poverty alleviation and the enhancement of the human resources at the rural level. It is time to diversify into other sectors.

Now Bangladesh's SME (small and medium enterprises) sector is making itself visible in more ways than one, with innovative products and services. This trend will continue till we reach the initial stage of mass production culture (depending on the purchasing power of the mass consumers). But there are few agencies to

'Militant democracy'

Sir, Pakistan is at the receiving end of what I would term as 'militant democracy' — militant stance by the civilians who are elected politicians and are supposed to be the custodians of the so-called democracy so happily working in the industrialised and materialistic societies. These politicians are supposed to run the wheel of democracy, but, in most cases, they are found sitting over it, not only in Pakistan, but in many Third World countries where democracy is supposed to be practised. The weaknesses of the western type of democracy are never explained to the four billion deprived population of the world.

The media, whether in the West or in the East, provide hardly any time or space to the problems arising out of practising democracy after this holy concept is taken out of the books and applied in countries where half the voters are illiterate and live below the poverty line, and the custodians in power (the have-nots in the upper crust of the society) cannot resist the temptation to fill their coffers through shady deals. Money and corruption go together, and the books on democracy have not devoted enough chapters on combating these evils, to level the playing field. The UN system is allowed to talk on democracy, but not practice it neutrally.

What is neutral democracy? The democracy imposed by the west has to be analysed more carefully by the experts in the Third World. Like transfer of technology, the transfer of democracy has technical and other hurdles. The chapters on the teething troubles have to be revised and expanded and made more LDC-friendly (if that is the correct term to use). The western media is blindly

Md Eradatullah Commissioner of Taxes (Rtd) Tejknipara Dhaka

Political football

Sir, 'Football dies another death' is the screaming headline in the Daily Star of Oct 27. Another line may be added: 'Due to political interference'. Our politicians seem to be too ambitious, playing games outside the rules, and are never satisfied with their booty; although with boots on, they cannot play squarely the round football. Perhaps they can fare better with the hockey stick without the ball. They never seem to understand a simple sentence like 'Mind your own business', although we citizens have been surrounding to them for three decades.

What is their next target? There is hardly anything left, except perhaps excess garbage, for dumping at others' doors! Abdul M Ahmad Dhaka

Going backward

Sir, When I was returning home in the evening before the November 1 hartal, I came to know about the hartal only when I saw the torch-procession by the pro-hartal activists. Hartal is a word that makes me afraid these days. Because, I am about to finish my institutional education and looking for a timely completion. After that, I will have to support my father. But the current confrontational politics makes me anxious whether I can finish my university degree in due time.

Hartal is a talked-about word in every-day life. When it is time to go ahead to compete with the world, people here anxiously wait for another hartal if there is any scheduled opposition programme. Thus we are going only backward.

We request both opposition and the government to shun the path of confrontation. Opposition parties should care for the citizens and the government should be more patient.

Enayetur Raheem Dhaka.

Death of a policeman

Sir, On the evening of Friday, 29th October, an outstanding policeman Ahd Parvez laid down his life, in the call of duty.

This is a shining example of public service in a society of eroding values. It is our wish that the widow and the two-year-old son of Ahd are adequately provided financially. This is the least we can do to honour the heroism of Ahd Parvez.

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