

The Daily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali
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Involved DB men must be punished

WE wonder whether it is reserved for a haughty set of the Detective Branch (DB) policemen to interminably administer outrage upon people and leave them in a state of stony indignation. What happened at the small hours of night preceding Wednesday at Shyampur was a measure of their unlearning the lessons of Rubel and overhead tank murders in record short time. Now it is Sumon, 23, a resident of Karimullah Bagh under Shyampur thana who has been shot dead while his elder brother and niece received bullet injuries in a police raid against a 'top terror' which itself ended up being an act of terrorism.

Several questions arise from the dastardly incident begging appropriate answers without fudging any factual detail. The DB men barged into the house without any warrant of arrest on a 'tip-off' to apprehend terrorist named Asif who was allegedly sheltered there. Rather than conceiving the operation as a stealthy action they dinned into the night a blitzkrieg betraying thick-headed insensitivity towards the civic right to sleep on top of this having led to a mayhem.

The most pertinent question to ask is: why in a police raid, even assuming that they were on a tip-off would masked outsiders, carrying arms and otherwise recognisable to the household members, be included in the raiding party? It is alleged that Sumon, whom one of the accompanying mastans caught by the scruff of his neck was to be later dragged out of a toilet he had fled into only to be shot at and killed. The chase they gave Sumon, who was evidently not Asif they were looking for, is hard to explain except on grounds of vendetta. A DB man allegedly rebuked Haji Mohd. who had asked the reason for police firing saying, "we will start an arms case against you." Indeed, they took him into custody only to let him off the hook in the afternoon whereupon he told his story to newsmen. Even the transport that was carrying the injured was 'fired upon' indicating either (a) previous animus or (b) the frustration over the chase drawing a blank.

It is incredible how such a 'raid' like that could be planned by the DB personnel without taking the officer-in-charge of the local thana into confidence. He was apparently kept in the dark throughout the raid.

The DB side, of course, has given its version claiming that the death and injuries occurred from a clash with the terrorist party they were after. This completes the theoretical picture for a scooping investigation to ensue.

We condemn this police action and demand exemplary punishment of the DB persons involved. Specifically, we put forward the following demands before the government: (a) make a public statement on the whole incident; (b) show you are as outraged as the public by denouncing the DB men's manifest excesses through that statement; and (c) catch the culprits and punish them deterrently. Otherwise it would be difficult to restore the credibility of the police even though a segment of it went awry, albeit one time too many. We see a justification for our opposition to the introduction of the Public Safety Act in all this. With that kind of an instrument in hand abuse of police power would know no bound. Finally, the door-bell rings once again for police reform.

Grey Areas in Indo-US Relations

The proposed visit of the US President has aroused many hopes. One is that America will now become friendly with India and that it will appreciate the problem of Kashmir and not pressure New Delhi on it or on the CTBT. Were Clinton's speeches in India to reflect the sensitivity, the visit would go down well. Otherwise, the same suspicions and fears will take over. In the past there have been many occasions when America could have been a little more understanding of India's pronouncements. For some reasons those opportunities were wasted. India too has to realise that the attitude of self-righteousness may go down well in the field of religion and piety but not international affairs.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

population deserves. Washington's preference for Beijing has never been understood by New Delhi. Even before we clashed with the Chinese in 1962, America was not our friend. President Kennedy offered to help us against the Chinese aggression but the moment the guns were silent on the India-China border, America stopped what was even in the pipeline. There was large economic assistance to Europe under the Marshall plan after the war. But no US President has ever presented a separate proposal to lend aid to India or for that matter, the countries in South Asia. For a poor country, with all types of pressures, it was difficult to stay democratic. Still it did. Maybe, Washington punished India for not riding the

US bandwagon during the cold war, which raged till the Soviet Union collapsed in 1990. Maybe, the socialistic pattern of society which Nehru preached was not to the liking of America. Maybe, our leadership of the non-aligned world was suspect. Whatever the reason, the fact of distance between Washington and New Delhi cannot be denied. More recently, the anxiety to keep parity between India and Pakistan has been too apparent to go unnoticed. America should

have known from its experience that this policy has created more problems than it has solved.

Against this backdrop, Clinton's visit to India becomes important. That America has and should have close relations with Pakistan is not a point of dispute. In fact, the more leverage Washington has in Islamabad, the better it is for New Delhi in the long run. What America has to decide is whether it is ready — and willing — to treat India indepen-

dently and not tag it to either Pakistan or China.

Clinton has himself said more than once that India would be an economic giant one day. Then why does he not help it to traverse the path towards that stage of development quickly? On its own, the economic growth rate will be six to seven per cent. But with America's help it can be 10 to 12 per cent. True, the bureaucratic way in which we function is frustrating for foreign investors. But all of them are making more money than they are in China with the same investment. We have to think how to save our industry.

India's main problem is unemployment. It is assuming dimensions which may be dangerous to a democratic and open society. A bigger and

quicker growth rate can avert the eruption of the volcano. Why can't America think of helping a democratic country in a mammoth way? There are reports from America that it is trying to persuade Bangladesh and Nepal to develop economically along with India as a region. Their suspicion against New Delhi can lessen if Washington takes closer interest in economic collaborations. Pakistan should also be goaded into the South Asian economic development because political issues will find solution only when the countries have overcome the scourge of poverty.

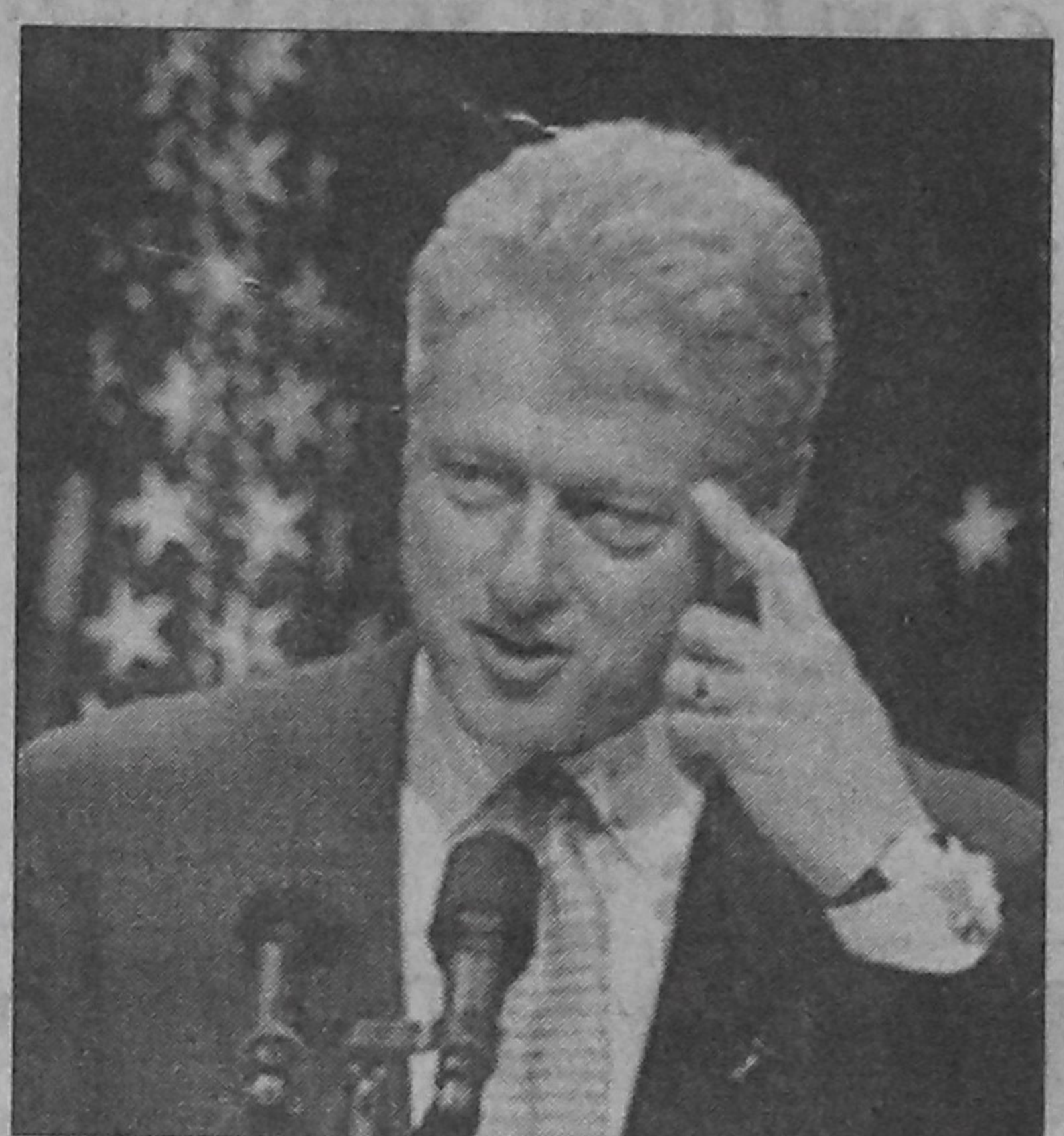
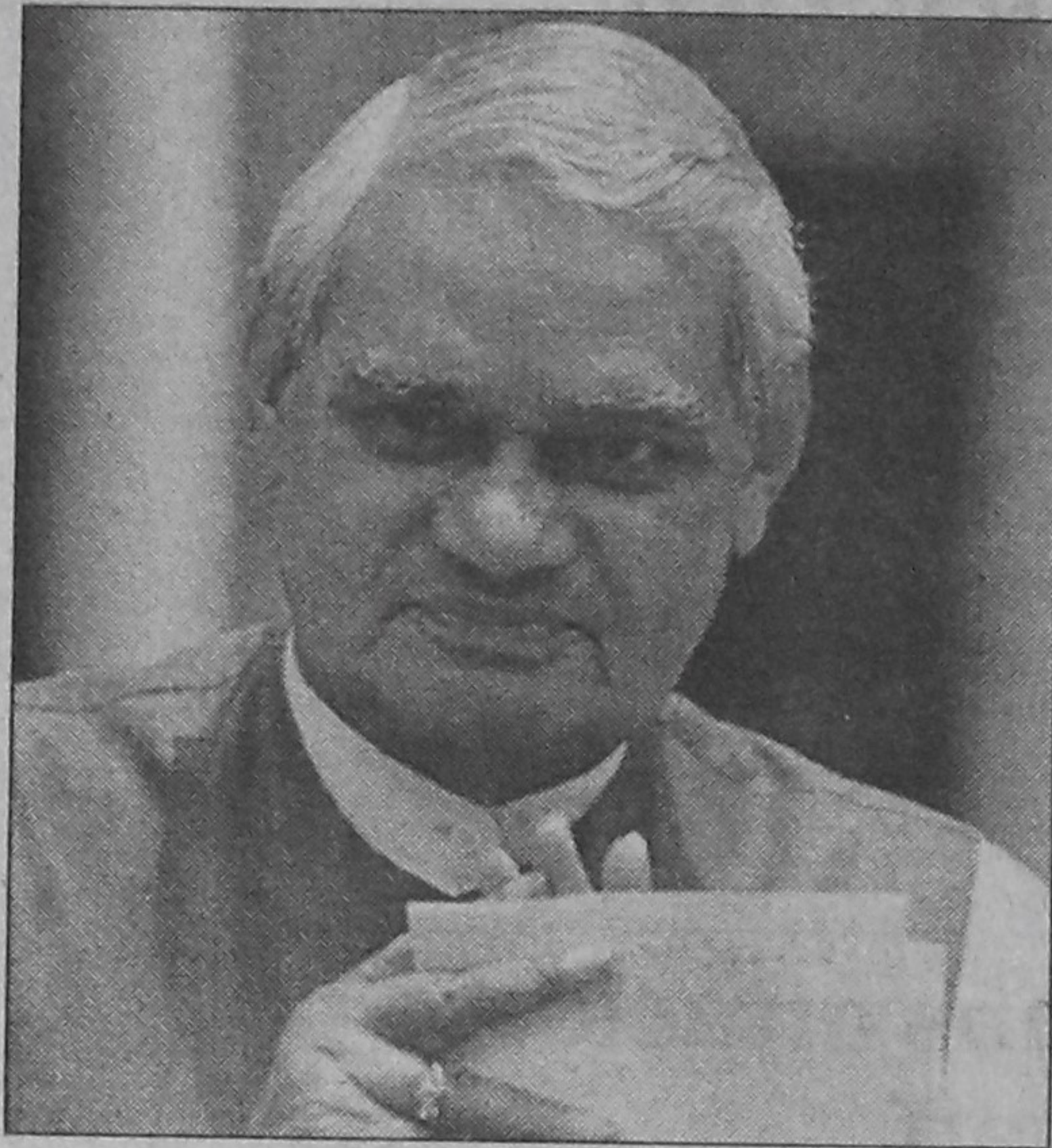
India's foreign policy is bound to differ from that of America. The latter is a developed country and a super power. New Delhi is yet engrossed in protecting its borders and tackling the law and order problems arising within. Moscow is still its most dependable source of arms. Washington does not have to see all this from either white or black point of view. There is a grey area also.

Those who are not with you are against you — that was the cold war dictum. America should have some regard for it because there is no Soviet Union to challenge it. Still the Pentagon is dominated by the people whose guru was John Foster Dulles. Clinton needs to curb them.

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Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh gives a feeling of a loner, happy while surrounded with bureaucrats. His contact with public men in India and abroad will help him shed the complex that the bureaucrats can bring India and America nearer to each other. This is like Clinton depending on his foreign service. The reason why America is more successful in foreign affairs is the use it makes of people outside the government.



A Homily on Family

by Mohammad Badrul Ahsan

The society is violent because families are volatile, and families are volatile because politics is vicious. Families are discursive where politics is intrusive where the abuse is recursive. The biggest challenge ahead of us is to turn around that dysgenic process and let families once again prevail over politics.

WHO could tell that a popular teacher of Dhaka University, who was recently elected general secretary of its Teachers' Association, had such family life? Who could think that an academic man, who was well-liked by his colleagues and students alike, had a bad marriage and a horrendous conjugal life? To invoke Leo Tolstoy's words from *Anna Karenina*, "All happy families resemble one another, but each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." The octogenarian man was unhappy in his own way and had fled his yasnaya home one night to escape the sordid sufferings in the hands of his wife. He caught chill and lay ill at a little railway station for several days where he died refusing to the very last minute to see his wife.

Some may claim that the Dhaka University teacher landed in jail for his political association, while wife-beating change the fact that he had one hell of an unhappy family life where suspicion and hatred simmered underneath the surface of conjugal intimacy? Then again, the man should have known better how to behave within the parameters of his position. There is no honour in bullying one's wife even if one is immensely powerful and one's wife is patently disgusting. I know of a former minister who, during family rows, reminded his wife that she was talking to a minister who was close to the Prime Minister of Bangladesh. An English novelist and poet named Thomas Love Peacock, *Jest* in *Nightmare* asked, "Sir, I have

quarreled with my wife; and a man who has quarreled with his wife is absolved from all duty to his country." If a man, who is a minister or a general secretary of DUTA, fails to control himself during a conjugal crisis, he ought to be absolved from all duty to his country. In the fifth-century Athens, a man chosen for polis, or social responsibility, actually had to prove that had been responsible with oikos, or family.

These days families have turned into depositories of conflicting aspirations where conjugal contentions clash over clamouring covetousness. In case of the Dhaka University teacher, we know that the scholar man had so unbecomingly treated his wife because she was unfaithful and disobedient. But what possibly could have led that privileged woman in Uttara, who was blessed with all the trappings of success, to drive that bullet into her head and end her life? A family often tumbles its ugly secrets into the fathomless gorges of privacy where they stay hidden forever. However curious others may be, the beauty of family lies in shielding its members from, amongst other things, the humiliation of exposure.

Marriage is defined as an institution for regulation of sexual life guided by its solemn code of conduct. Fidelity happens to be the central tenet of that code in modern marriage, but it perhaps also has the most difficult chemistry of all. It postulates loyalty at a higher level than that of a dog to its master. A master need not reciprocate the loyalty of his dog, but reciprocity is the dorsal column of conjugal love.

But deviation from this loyalty can have its many aberrations. In Alberto Moravia's *The Voyageur*, there is the most bizarre example of that aberration. An ex-left-wing militant turned professor of French wakes up at thirty-five to know that his wife was cheating on him while having an affair with his own exhibitionist father. The idealistic son was always intrigued by the mystery of how a seed disappeared when the plant had grown. He was aghast when that mystery reversed in his life and the seed overshadowed the plant.

More than two decades after Moravia wrote his novel, George C. Roche, president of Hillsdale College in Michigan, a campus patriarch and truculent moralist who loudly denounced Bill Clinton during the Monica Lewinsky affair, resigned from

his job after his daughter-in-law Lissa Roche committed suicide. George C. Roche IV, 44, a lecturer in history and exercise physiology at the same college, accused his father of having an affair with his wife for 19 of the 21 years of their marriage.

Fidelity has varied from time to time, society to society. For example, in Asia, East Africa, India and Polynesia, wife-lending was a common form of hospitality. In Australia a wife may be allotted temporarily as a *pirrauru* to another man; and the Eskimo men making long journeys often arranged wife-exchange with a friend. In certain societies, for example Tibet, Eskimos and south India one woman was entitled to have several lawful husbands.

Among the Tibetans, the husbands are usually brothers, the eldest brother being the husband in chief. The peculiar polyandry of the Nayars of the Malabar coast is a carefully regulated form of group marriage, where the man who pays the expenses of the delivery of the child is its acknowledged father.

To get back to where we started, the father of the university teacher has recently claimed that his daughter-in-

law did not have moral "discipline" and had spent two days in an undisclosed place under other words, he basically minced words to tell that his daughter-in-law was not faithful to his son. Thus fidelity has been the critical issue in this unfortunate family drama, when the husband ended in jail and the wife has asked for divorce. Not to say that the father could not be right in his accusation, but he sadly showed more bad taste than his daughter-in-law and son. He broke the code of family silence as a patriarch and kicked dirt on his family's face.

In our society, like most modern societies, infidelity is unacceptable. That is fine. But should hard-earned honour give way to ribald laughter just because an angry husband got carried away and battered his misbehaving wife? Or should a wife deserve beatings and bruises if she has not been faithful? Marriage concerns two individuals, a man and a woman who live together, rear their children and constitute the unit of society. If a unit of society is not workable, the best way to deal with it is divorce not blows. If we are not good at raising a family, we should not at least try to razz its values.

Unfortunately, most of the time it comes to blows because we live in a violent society. And the society is violent because families are volatile, and families are volatile because politics is vicious. Families are discursive where politics is intrusive where the abuse is recursive. The biggest challenge ahead of us is to turn around that dysgenic process and let families once again prevail over politics.

Friday Mailbox

PSA and the terrorists

Sir, We, as a country, have become independent at the cost of millions of lives. One of the main demands of the people was 'democracy'. We want democracy because there is no alternative to it. So the bill — the so-called 'Public Safety Act' 2000 — which, I think, will practically protect the terrorists of one party and will punish, again, the terrorists of another party.

So, I request President Shahabuddin Ahmed not to sign the bill. If this bill is passed, all the terrorists will join the ruling party for their 'safety'.

I am very sorry to say that after our independence every government provided shelter to terrorists and the present government is no exception to this. Therefore, the Public Safety Act in many ways can be termed as 'Terrorist Safety Act'.

Dr. Mahboob Hossain
19, Zigatola, Dhaka-1209

Might is right

Sir, The lawlessness seems to have gripped the country. I think we are now living in a society which is called for *jar muluk tar* (might is right). It is the politicians who have led us towards this situation. Those who assaulted the lady at TSC on 31st night were involved in student politics. Who knows, one day they may become leaders of the country. It is possible if one looks at the trend.

I believe those who assaulted the lady actually assaulted their mothers, their sisters, their daughters and wives. You cannot blame the victim. Like others, he went there to see how people enjoy the new century. Every woman has the right, like men, to move freely in the society. Day by day we are going back ward when all other countries are moving forward. What an unfortunate nation we are!

I think the roots of all the woes of our people are today's politics. If one thinks very deeply s/he will see that negative politics is the only barrier for our development — no vision, no commitment and no honesty.

Sheikh Mujib
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USA

Schools, indeed!

Sir, Very few people are aware of what is going on in some of the English medium schools. The government is unable to provide better education facilities to the growing population in the city. As a result, some English medium schools are doing good business which can only be called extortionism. In the name of providing quality education, these schools are charging the parents exorbitant amounts of money in the name of Admission Fees, Annual Fees, Development Charges, Tuition Fees, and many other type of charges.

At the end of the year, it is seen that these schools end up taking about Tk 50,000 to Tk 100,000 per student. I think those who own these schools are devoid of human values and thrive on the weakness and miseries of the parents who are lured to educate their children in better institutions.

It would be in the interest of the public to have a media investigation in some of the schools. If the government means welfare for the people then let the administration do what is expected of it carrying out an investigation in these schools.

Affected Parents
Dhaka

"Black Polythene Bags"

Sir, I am a regular reader of *The Daily Star*. I thank you for your editorial on "Black Polythene Bags". I also thank the Prime Minister and the Environment Minister for their timely action they have taken in this regard.

We would like to mention here all that polythene bags and plastic containers irrespective of colour and quality creates health hazards as well pollute the environment. Let me tell you more about plastic containers which are used specially in our oil industry as oil containers. The TPMC (Thermoplastic moulding compound) which are used to produce these containers are low quality and cheap. To my knowledge, the TPMCs which are used here are totally banned in many countries like USA, Europe, Australia and New Zealand. These type of low-grade plastic container contaminate our consumer oil and other food stuff. Even the consumers are affected by disease.

Not only the polythene bags alone create disastrous impact on the environment but also the plastic containers. So we need to eliminate polythene bags as well as plastic container by phasing it out.

We can use jute-made bags and tin container instead of polythene bags and plastic containers which are environment-friendly. This idea has already been implemented in other developed countries but we are still using the harmful polythene bags. We must think today otherwise these TPMC products will ruin us.

Sadequ A. Khan
41/6, Siddeswari Road,
Dhaka-1217.

More Z crossing and underpass needed

Sir, With the introduction of one-way traffic system on some of the important and busy roads, the movement and speed of different types of vehicles have been accelerated and raised. As a result, it has become very difficult, time-consuming and dangerous for the pedestrians to cross these busy roads amidst fast-moving vehicles.

We would therefore request the authorities concerned to set up more zebra crossings and to construct underground passes for the convenience and security of the pedestrians. It would not be irrelevant to mention that the construction of foot over-bridges in the city has proved to be a total wastage of public money as people do not like to use those due to specific reasons. Hence instead of over-bridges, the need of more zebra crossings and underground passes cannot be over emphasised.

O H Kabir
6 Hare Street
Wari, Dhaka-1203

Beautiful country!

Sir, I have lived in Bangladesh for two years and I believe that it is a truly beautiful country. Since I come from West Bengal, I speak Bengali and therefore, am able to communicate with the local community. I'm sure that Bangladesh would become a country of international importance within a few years. Knowing this country, one can easily understand that it has enough recourse to flourish in the 21st century.

Debashish Shaw
English 8c
AIS/D

OPINION

Political Repression in the CHT

by Utpal Kanti Khisha

In spite of the accord signed between the Awami League government and the Jana Samiti Samiti (JSS) on December 2, 1997, the overall situation in the Chittagong Hill Tracts has not improved significantly. Reports published in the national dailies suffice to prove this assertion. But regrettably, although the newspapers now focus considerable attention on the CHT issue, most of the incidents occurred in the area either go unreported or are published often in a distorted and twisted manner. And the newspapers only try to give the news of the incidents and do not go into the depth of the matters. That is why we hardly find any analysis as to why such undesirable things are still happening in the area in spite of the CHT accord signed more than two years ago.

Now with the euphoria about the accord has evaporated, the bitter truth has revealed itself. Even JSS supreme Santu accord, had to acknowledge that except for the end of war that raged at a low scale between the two sides, nothing has changed. He further said that peace could not be established, unless autonomy was granted for the CHT region. This is just what the UPDF had said in opposing the accord. We live in a society where dissent voices are not tolerated. Here democracy does not mean mutual accommodation and tolerance, but is considered a right to do anything by sheer force of majority secured through elections. This is the very culture that prevented the government to listen to those who opposed the accord. Instead, it pursued a policy, which brooked no opposition and sought to suppress diverse opinions.

Since the signing of the said accord, more than one hundred UPDF members and supporters were arrested and put into jail, although most of them were released on bail. The party, which

1998 in the backdrop of the surrender of the JSS, was also denied fundamental rights enshrined in our Constitution. Its public meetings and rallies are disrupted and attacked, and the participants are harassed and lathi-charged. Both the government and JSS are responsible for such undemocratic practices. A few examples can be cited here.

On April 22, 1999, police opened fire indiscriminately on the crowds of UPDF members and supporters in Khagrachhari and killed two innocent people on the spot. This unprovoked police attack was meant to prevent the Hill People's Council and Hill Women's Federation — two front organisations of the UPDF, from holding their joint conference, a ritual event for any organisation. Again on August 22, 1999, UPDF could not hold its previously announced public meeting in Khagrachhari as the local administration imposed section 144 following the

JSS-backed students at the same venue and at the same time. The most recent incident of political repression on the UPDF is the one in Chittagong in which police cracked down on the members and supporters of the party to prevent it from holding its first founding anniversary. This happened on December 26, 1999. Forty-five people were arrested during the attack.

These are gross violations of fundamental rights of the citizens enshrined in the Constitution. The Bangladesh constitution guarantees freedom of speech and assembly. Article 37 declares that "every citizen shall have the right to assemble and to participate in public meetings and processions peacefully and without arms, subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interest of public order or public health".

The post-accord situation gives us a picture, which is very