# The Baily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali Dhaka, Sunday, April 16, 2000

## Ashura for Peace

THE Tenth of Muharram has some weighty messages for the humanity at large. The day takes us back in time to the bank of the river Euphrates where occurred one of the blackest episodes of cruelty and treachery in human history. There on the desert the evil forces of Yazid perpetrated cruelty on Hazrat Imam Hussain (R) and his family by denying them water, the sustainer of life. Whereas the meanest form of brutality remains the darkest patch in history, it is the ultimate sacrifice made by Imam Hussain and his family that continues to be an inexhaustible source of inspiration for all men and women in the world engaged in their own struggle for righteous cause.

Emotions well up into a spate of universal mourning while the entire Muslim world recalls the sacrifices made by Imam Hussain and his family in the early years of Islam. The Shiites all over the world own up and feel penitent for the sin Yazid and his men committed. Every year they lead Tajia processions and beat their chests mercilessly in symbolic atonement for Yazid's sin. In this regard, Mir Mosharraf Hossain's immortal epic Bishad Sindhu has to be given credit for its indelible imprint of the tragedy on the bank of the Euphrates on the minds of Bengali Sunni Muslims in this part of the world.

Ashura signifies the triumph of virtue over evil for Muslims all over the world. Also, it inspires us to engage in an all-out effort to establish the principles of peace, justice and fair-play in the society, and turn our grief into resolve, tears into a resolute will to make the world a better place to live in.

## Commercialised Politics

THE Independent Review of Bangladesh, pre-I pared by the Centre for Policy Dialogue, has aptly summed up the popular perception of the national politics these days. Over the years, the political culture has undergone a metamorphosis, commercial consideration overtaking, and undermining, ideological interest. As more money has started pouring in, often from dubious sources, politics by and large has become a platform for protection and promotion of vested interest, not public welfare as it is supposed to be. Sadly, albeit inevitably, domination of money motive has resulted in increased, and alarmingly increasing, involvement of political leaders and activists in business deals, tenders and whatnot. With the consequent question of control, injection of mastaans into politics has followed. Basically, therefore, in the name of politics, what we have today is a power game, dominated by money and mastaans. Politicians have become, and unfortunately so, the patrons to dishonest and manipulative businessmen, and criminal elements. Ultimately, in the resultant mis-governance, it is the people who have always suffered. Worse still, there is no indication of any improvement in the situation; on the contrary, politics appears headed for the worse.

The key element here is money, plenty of it, in absence of any system that requires audit of funds of the political parties. The one system that we have on putting a limit to electoral expenditure is violated more often than not. The first step towards cleansing of the national politics of vice elements could be enactment of a legal provision that obliges each and every party to be transparent and accountable in political and electoral, as is the case in the United States and other developed countries. Once put in place and abided by, the law would effectively eliminate possibilities of underhand deals, putting tabs on grafts, kickbacks, manipulations, etc. In a chain reaction, it could lead to severing of relationship between the politicians and the mastaans as the former would find it difficult to explain the expenditure incurred for the lat-

However, the ideal situation that we envisage would never come about unless the leadership in both parties feels the need for and is willing to bring about a positive change. Unfortunately, they are busy bickering over issues that have little bearing on public interest. The CPD could be right in concluding, "The corrosive link between politics and money is too deep to be fully broken by innovative action.

#### We Back the IGP

TO sooner had the truck drivers' 72-hour strike I ended than the Bangladesh Road Transport Workers Federation called for an indefinite strike to protest the comments of the Inspector General of Police, making the situation untenable in this vital sector. The federation has threatened to go on strike from tomorrow (Monday) until the IGP withdrew his comment and "apologised to transport workers." The IGP told a Bangla newspaper Wednesday that the government would no longer abide by the compromise agreement that barred police from filing cases against 'killer drivers' under Section 302 of CrPC that has death as maximum punishment instead of Section 304 (Kha) CrPC with a maximum punishment of three years in prison.

In recent times the number of road accidents in the country has increased to a great extent resulting in loss of human lives. Much of these have occurred due to faulty vehicles as well as untrained drivers holding fake licence. These licences are alleged to have been issued by the authority on payment of illegal gratification and this is known to everybody in the administration. By doing so the licensing authority is practically letting lose an army of licenced killers on the roads. The Federation, on the other hand, are trying to protect them by resorting to strike.

We would like to make it absolutely clear that we support the view expressed by the IGP and insist that existing laws must be applicable to offenders without fear or favour and the government should not succumb to the undue pressure by the Federation. We don't want killers to get back on the roads after only three years in jail.

PM's Visit to US: Was it Necessary?

by Mansoor Mamoon

While the PM was enjoying her leisure in the United States the South-South Conference was being organised in nearby Cuba. The Prime Minister could have very easily participated in it considering its importance and relevance for Bangladesh. Once Bangladesh played the role of a vanguard and was elected chairman of the group for its forceful upholding of the interests of the developing and the least developed countries.

N the present-day globalised world, characterised by Lintense competitions among nations for economic edge, it is no harm on the part of a leader from a developing country like Bangladesh to hop around in the international arena if it is in the larger interests of boosting trade, attracting foreign direct investment and above all, for bolstering the image of the country. For, in the final analysis, an efficient leader is essentially an aggressive salesman (woman) for his or her country. But, if the visits are meant more for personal image building than for finding a strong niche for the country, the question of their justification is bound to be raised by the tually took no notice of her people, particularly under a democratic dispensation. Gone out and frontpaged and headare the days of Ziaur Rahman or H M Ershad when international credibility and acceptability of the military regimes prompted stately visits abroad off and on. But how far justified it is on the part of a popularly elected head of the government to embark on frequent foreign trips if these are for receiving honorary doctorate degrees and some little known prizes, talking party politics before the expatriates and lecturing on campuses? The Prime Minister's current two-week sojourn in the United States has thus raised questions in public minds The travel-happy Prime Minisabout its necessity, efficacy and ter is scheduled to pay an offilogic. The visit is a private one cial visit to the United States and her itinerary shows that again in October at the invitashe will not have any meeting tion of President Clinton, who with the functionaries of Clin- made a twelve-hour stop-over ton administration which in Dhaka on March 20 as part could contribute in some way of his recent trip to South Asia. towards strengthening bilateral (There is no instance of a return ties. Nor has she any schedule visit within a fortnight unless to meet the US press or business there is a situation having beargroup to project the country.

During her unusually long between the countries constay the PM has opened the cerned). The Prime Minister country's chancery building in could have easily tagged the

programmes of her current visit dare-devil dacoity in the shop with her October trip and that would have better served the purpose. Will there be a flicker in the subconscious mind of the Prime Minister that President Clinton could not afford to stay in Bangladesh for more than twelve hours due to what has been so vociferously described as security reasons while she is spending more than fourteen days in Clinton's country without any concern for security?

Why is this anomaly and who is to be blamed for this difference ? Does not the Prime Minister feel the slighest prick of conscience that even with the imposition of a virtual curfew like situation and red alert security by posting of thousands of law enforcers and members of paramilitary forces her government could not properly ensure the security of the US Presbacked villages ? Is there any such security arrangement for her in the United States?

Bangladesh during her stay in horrific picture of total law-

of a ruling party MP and looting of taka fifteen lac in a busy commercial centre of the capital city and the trate MP's retaliation by forcibly closing down all shops and roads in protest against police inaction, the truck workers' rule of terror and stopping of vehicular movements as a mark of protest against nabbing of their leaders, the Home Ministry's con-

tinuing slum demolition drive in violation of the directive from PM's Office (as reported in the press). LGED's wheat allotment scam, clash in Chittagong Medical College, gory details of gruesome serial killings by a known mastaan in the city.

continuing incidences of mug-

gery, extortion, rape, so on and so forth. How could the PM be oblivious of the urgency of her presence in the country to conident, who did not feel safe to trol the rising anarchic situastay overnight nor to visit the tion which none of her senior Martyrs' Memorial at Savar ministers is in a position to and visit some typical NGO- control? Leaving a boiling situation back home can the chief executive of a country afford to undertake such a long visit and that too not so very important Is the Prime Minister aware in nature? Does the opening of a of what is happening back in chancery building require the presence of the head of the govthe United States? The news- ernment (the job could have papers belonging to all shades been very well done by the Forof opinions are portraying a eign Secretary or at best by the State Minister for Foreign Aflessness and anarchy despite fairs? What benefit the country the passage of the controversial derived from an insignificant deftly made to further draconian Public Safety Act. A prize by a small women's col- marginalise the countries in

lege of a federated US state or a mundane speech elaborating the contributions of a dynastic rule and polemics against the opposition before a motley gathering of teachers and students of a university? What impact all these are likely to have bilaterally or multilaterally for Bangladesh?

While the PM was enjoying her leisure in the United States the South-South Conference (also called the Conference of the group of 77, though its membership is much more than the number suffixed) was being organised in nearby Cuba. The Prime Minister could have very easily participated in it considering its importance and relevance for Bangladesh. Once Bangladesh played the role of a vanguard and was elected chairman of the group for its forceful upholding of the interests of the developing and the least developed countries.

Minister decided to skip it and instead sent her ageing Foreign Minister to represent the country at the moot which was convened to safeguard the interests of the developing countries, particularly the LDCs among which Bangladesh is one, in the wake of adverse situation posed by the so-called globalisation. It is known to all and sundry that in the name of globalisation a subtle attempt is being

the group of 77 by the rich countries of the Group of 7 (OECD) countries) with the United States at its head. Three hundred and forty multi-nationals and transnational companies of the Group of 7, most of which are US based, now account for 40 per cent of the global trade. OECD countries with twenty per cent of world population monopolise 80 per cent of the world's resources while with 80 per cent of the world's population the Group of 77 has access to the rest twenty per cent of the resources. The capitalist globalisation has opened up further opportunities before the OECD to fleece the countries in the

Countries like Bangladesh bracketed as the Least Developed Countries where dwell twenty per cent of the world population receive only 0.2 of global commercial credit, one per cent of World Trade and 2.7 per cent of global foreign private investment.

The Conference, therefore, aims at evolving a collective approach and strategy by the countries in the south pole to counter the all-pervasive onslaught of the Group of 7 or developed countries of the northern hemisphere in the new eco-But ironically the Prime nomic colonialist arrangement globalisation.

Bangladesh's future is intimately linked with the success of the moot and the presence of the Prime Minister would have definitely added extra- weightage for the country. But unfortunately for Bangladesh its Prime Minister preferred to place her personal image building over that of the country's greater interest. Or, was it intended not to displease the OECD member countries, particularly the United States?

## Indo-Pak Ties after President Clinton's Visit

Many analysts believe that Indo-Pak relations have not shown anything in the positive direction TS PRESIDENT Bill Clinton's visit to India since the visit of Mr. Clinton because the sentiments in both sides are too bitter to disappear and Pakistan appears to overnight. Still, continuing US interest on the issue may have a sobering effect. have failed to bring about any improvement in the traditionally bitter Indo-Pak relations. However, some kind visit as much of the dust raised of upswing in the New Delhi-Isby the atomic explosions settled lamabad relations following down despite the fact that two his visit could still be expected

Washington, received from a

state women's college a prize

named after a Nobel laureate

lady novelist (Pearl S Buck) and

Harvard University. The rest of

the time she is spending with

her family members residing in

the United States. The US ad-

ministration or the media vir-

presence. Whatever is dished

lined in both the print and

electronic media about her visit

here is essentially for home

consumption. Yet she has pre-

ferred to take with her a num-

ber of important functionaries

along with representatives

from different media. Democ-

racy entails transparency

which in its turn demands jus-

tification for any action of pub-

lic interest by the leaders and

officials as with such a visit of

virtually no importance, the

expenses of which are to be

borne by the state exchequer.

ing on the bilateral relations

attended a speech session at the

countries are still bearing the visit. since the leader of the most brunt of the explosions. Then powerful nation in the world again, his visit ran into trouble exhorted upon both to shed because of the internal situahostility as far as possible and tion in Pakistan following the seek to normalise the relationmilitary take-over. Evidently, ship. A visit from the highest President Clinton found it diflevel of the United States to ficult to visit a country where South Asia is indeed a rare an undemocratic government is phenomenon. His itinerary in power. But strategic imporalso covered Bangladesh, maktance and other considerations ing him the first American led him to come to Pakistan as president to visit the country. well, albeit for a brief period Mr. Clinton's trip to South compared to his long stay in In-

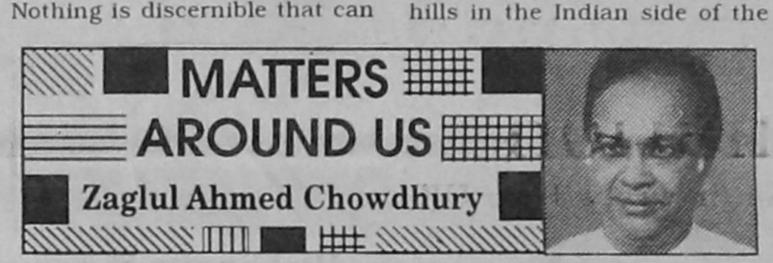
Asia took place at a time when the Indo-Pak relations were Clinton urged the leaders in once again at a low for an array both India and Pakistan to try of reasons. In fact, his visit to to resolve their differences the region has been delayed bethrough a spirit of reconciliacause of rivalries between the tion and dialogue. The United two hostile neighbours. The States officially says that that president was to come here the wellbeing of the vast multimuch earlier but the scheduled tude in South Asia depends on trip was called off as both India peace and stability which reand Pakistan exploded nuclear volves around the relationship devices in early 1998. Since between the two countries. The Washington is against further proliferation of atomic power. US president forcefully echoed similar sentiment during his its president, not surprisingly, talks with those at the helm in postponed the visit to South New Delhi and Islamabad. Asia, disapproving detonation Washington is known to be enof nuclear devices by the two. joying considerable clout over Subsequently, it took quite a

the two countries and as such was expected on their ties following American president's

But has any improvement taken place? Is there any sign? What are the prospects of any positive development?

The answer is a simple 'no'.

Pakistan. Although the latter is General Musharraf as rabidly some kind of sobering effect an internal matter of Pakistan, it has adversely affected bilateral ties to a magnitude more than anticipated. India views that the new military strongman General Pervez Musharraf as the mastermind of the Kargil operations where Pakistanbacked outsiders seized several



suggest any kind of reversal in line of control (LOC) in the disprogressive deterioration of the puted Kashmir region. Eventu- some kind of forward move-New Delhi-Islamabad ties. ally. Islamabad had to call ment -- however small it may be Their relationship took a bad them off following pressures -- would have been a logical turn from a position of good promise brought about by the landmark Lahore Declaration between Indian Prime Minister army understandably blamed Atal Bihari Vajpayee and now- the government of Nawaz deposed Pakistan Prime Minis- Sharif for capitulation. This ter Nawaz Sahrif. Ties wors- rift between the army and the ened, first as a fall-out of the civilian government eventually Kargil conflict and followed by led to the ouster of the elected that Islamabad should apolo-

from the United States. The development was seen as a setback for Pakistan where the

anti-Indian while also questioning the legitimacy of his regime. For Pakistan, the new regime has to demonstrate tough postures against India compared to Sharif government against a background of an impression that Pakistan lost the Kargil war. The hijacking of an Indian Airlines passenger plane from Kathmandu to Kandahar by Kashmiri militants further queered the pitch of the relationship. Mr. Clinton's vish itself worked as a factor contributing to the downslide since India obviously did not want the US president to make a stopover in Pakistan.

Anyway, once the visit to both countries has taken place, corollary to it. But this has not taken place. On the contrary, dialogue and resumption of the talks seems as difficult as it did before Mr. Clinton's visit. India has not accepted a formal Pakistan proposal for fresh talks. It has also attached a condition the change of the government in authority. New Delhi considers gise for violating the agreement highly unlikely.

on the sanctity of the LOC along Kashmir. On the other hand, Pakistan wants useful and serious talks on Kashmir and also stresses an East Timor-like referendum in Kashmir. Obviously, all these make the situation quite complex. Against such a background, one can conclude that early Indo-Pakistan talks aimed at normalising the relations is remote. However, some optimist can still see some silver lining in the cloud. Mr. Rajmohan Gandhi, the grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, feels that the stand-off cannot continue for too long. Mr. Gandhi, himself a prominent historian and a former member of Indian parliament, feels that the animosity will subside giving way to signs of reconciliation although this may not be in the

offing soon. There are others who believe that Indo-Pak relations have not shown anything in the positive direction since the visit of ments in both sides are too bitter to disappear overnight. Still, continuing US interest on the issue may have a sobering effect. The core issue is Kashmir and both sides are adamant on their respective positions: that is the problem. This condition may eventually change, but, at this point in time, it looks

## To the Imam Values were More Valuable

by Kazi Aulad Hossain

Finding no other alternative Imam decided to fight to the last and while fighting valiantly he fell down when a spear from the enemy side pierced his body on the day of Ashura, that is, on the 10th day of the holy month of Muharram. Thus, passed away the greatest man of that age some 1300 years ago while fighting for a just cause.

put to a severe test for he was

came out of this test with flying is why the great Imam had to sacrifice his life? I may, therefore, state a few words about the genesis of the Imam's martyrdom and the tragic events that took place on the day of Ashura at a desert place known as Karbala on the bank of river Euphrates some thirteen hundred years ago. Accession of Muawiya in the year 676 CE to caliphate did not augur well of the future of the nascent Islamic state founded by our dear holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (peace be on him) and subsequently guided and administered by first four pious Caliphs (Khulafa-e-rashideen) for Muawiya's unilateral decision to nominate his son Yazid during his life-time as the next family members, for a just caliph was not only in clear vi- indicated above, Muawiya nom- the stay of Hazrat Imam dren and a very small number cause. It was an acid test and he olation of an agreement entered inated his ineligible and un- Husayn and his party in Kufa. of soldiers who accompanied

into between him and Imam scrupulous son Yazid as the sec-Husayn, Muawiya's accession Now the pertinent question turned the caliphate into kingship. The said agreement envisaged that after Muawiya's death Hazrat Imam Hysayn would be the next caliph of the Islamic state. But Muawiya as indicated above, violated the agreement.

It may be mentioned here that Muawiya was the first caliph of the Umayyad period and contrary to the usual practice of choosing a caliph through election followed during the period of first four pious caliphs all successors of All-Hore and as a result he (the Mnawiya were nominated and Imam) was obliged to change this practice of nomination his route and encamped with continued for nearly ninety his small party at a place years (661-750 CE) till the known as Karbala on the bank downfull of the Umayyad dv- of river Euphrates.

nasty and rise of the Abbasides.

ond caliph of the Umayyad dynasty and during his (Yasid's) period the people of Kufa sent a message to Hazrat Imam Husayn being oppressed by the governor of Kufa. The kindhearted and noble Imam, therefore, made up his mind to proceed towards Kufa with a small party consisting of his family members and some soldiers ignoring the advice of his well wishers with a view to helping the people of Kufa. The Imam's onward march towards Kufa was intercepted by a tribal chief

The governor of Kufa Oaidul-So, dear readers, as has been lah-bin-Sad did not also like

He immediately despatched 4,000 cavalry soldiers under the command of Umar-bin-Sad with instruction to lay a siege to the encamped party of the Imam so that no one from his party could have any access to the water of the river Euphrates flowing nearby. It was 10th of October 680 CE the unequal fight between Hazrat Imam Husayn's small party and the enemy horde (4000 cavalry soldiers) led by Umar-bin-Sad began at Karbala some 1300 years ago. The revered Imam was encircled on all sides b enemy soldiers and totally cut off from river water. He was not only a victim of circumstances, he was also a victim of an well-laid heinous conspiracy. The Imam in consideration of the helpless condition of his family members including women and chil-

him requested the cavalry commander to allow him to go the place wherefrom he came or proceed to Damascus to discuss the whole matter with Yazid to find out a just solution of the matter failing shich he could be alloyed to fight in an open field while leading the loyal soldiers of the caliph. The audacious cavalry commander rejected straightway all the reasonable requests of the Imam. So, finding no other alternative he decided to fight to the last and while fighting valiantly he fell down when a spear from the enemy side pierced his body on the day of Ashura, that is, on the 10th day of the holy month of Muharram. Thus, dear readers, passed away the greatest man of that age some 1300 years ago while fighting for a just cause.

He could, as has been indicated above, lead a so-called happy life if he simply accepted allegiance to unscrupulous Yazid. To him values were more valuable than his own life, values preached and propounded by his grand father and first four pious caliphs (khulafa-e-

## To the Editor ...

#### We must cooperate with the Home Minister

OME five thousand years

Imonth of Zilhadj that

Hazrat Ibrahim Khalilullah

(Friend of Allah) one of the few

great Prophets Benign Allah

has graciously been pleased to

send down to this world, was

commanded by Almighty Allah

to sacrifice his dearest thing in

the name of Allah and we all

know that the dearest thing was

his own young son Hazrat Is-

mail (AS). We are also aware

that Hazrat Ibrahim (AS) came

out of this test successfully.

Again some thirteen hundred

years ago, it was, in the lunar

month of Muharram, that is, on

the day of Ashura (10th day of

Muharram) another great man

of history, son of Hazrat Ali

(RA) and grandson of our dear

holy Prophet Hazrat Muham-

mad (Peace be on him), Hazrat

Imam Husayn was put to an-

other kind of severe test— he

was to decide whether he would

live a so-called happy, prosper-

ous, easy and peaceful life or

sacrifice his own life along with

his companions; including his

ago it was in the lunar

Sir, Your editorial, "Home Minister's Welcome Directive" (DS-Apr-10) supporting the latest decision of the Home Minister's (HM), -" Directive to remove sheds along road ... by 11 April", is praise worthy. And I feel that we should cooperate with the government on such effort.

Most of us are generally scared to report extortion launched from such wayside unauthorised sheds, for possible wrath from hoodlums, as Police often takes neutral role referring to the hoodlum's link with some influential party. Since the government itself has sternly directed the police, we can expect a welcoming result. Besides creating obstructions to traffic movement, these way-

'chandabazi' (toll collection). The Home Minister should ensure that police, the main executioner of his directive, would elements immediately to prove dence and to deter others. that his directives have been carried in toto. This should not AR Choudhury be allowed to die down the police-public (including media) cooperation, only for the police's lethargy in action and plagued by favouritism /corrupt practice/ partisan role. I hope the Home Minister understands, a failure in this undertaking would mean extent of his sincerity towards the nation.

Regarding the unauthorised wayside structures, a letter side unauthorised structures "Whose responsibility is it,

lic safety as well. Hoodlums lished in this column which these schools. In these instituwaylay here, planting inform- narrated about the wayside tions those holding Masters' ers who in turn assist the gang sheds extended next to the Ut- degree in Physics are teaching in committing crime and in es- tara Police Station. Now about English. The Economics caping from the scene. Most of ten-days' after that letter pub- teacher is also unable to explain these structures are used for lished and after the HM's direc- relevant concepts in English. training new recruits and for tive to police, to my dismay, the which is a necessity in this said structures are still having education system. However the police favours. In fact, the glossy the exterior of these inpolice should have uprooted the stitutions may be, the standard unauthorised sheds next to the move fast to uproot these bad PS first, to gain public confi-

Uttara, Dhaka

### English medium education

Sir, The number of English same cannot be said about their servations are in order. standard. This is owing to the fact that sub-standard teachers cal leaders is at the lowest ebb.

are a continuous threat to pub- anyway"(April 01) was pub- are being appointed to teach in of education, the vital thing, is indeed poor.

> Arbab Quadri, House No 92/A, Road 7/A. Dhanmondi

## Political dialogues

Sir. The peoples' reaction on political dialogue between the two major political parties of medium schools in our country the country (DS. Jan 26) was are increasing rapidly but the interesting. However, some ob-

The image of the local politi-

for which the politicians themselves are responsible. In a situation where the benefit of the doubt cannot be bestowed, the question of entering a dialogue does not arise, as it would be premature. Where the credibility rating is low, standard methods will not work.

It is ironical, but it looks like that, the politicians have to go back for some homework. before eagerly offering their services for public welfare. The pears that this time is looking public cannot undertake this ahead. The politicians must tutorial; the politicians have to read the writing on the wall, if come back with the minimum they care for their useful exisqualifications. Unfortunately, tence and patronisation. People here, the politicians do not are not interested in the ALseem to learn quickly from ex- BNP feud (as the rickshawpuller perience; due to subjective approach to public affairs.

Rust can be removed by cleaning and oiling. The local political lubrication index at this point of time is low. Politics is not being conducted at AZ normal operating condition. Dhaka

and the maintenance side is abysmally poor. Then from where the vote of confidence will come? It appears that the nation cannot depend on evolutionary politics, as too much time has been wasted. Time is the essence, and it will wait for

One of the parties cannot finish off the other, only the public can downsize both. It apjointed out)--it is a pain in others' necks. Politicians should not use yokes; those who used it

know the consequences.