

## Why Not Haul Them up?

IT has been common enough knowledge that only a handful of hardened criminals are making a minced meat of law and order in the metropolis. And it also appears patently unsurprising to us that the police have shortlisted the so-called dreaded terrorists to a clutch of 15 only adding that they are at the root of all the trouble and torment. It is also pretty much imaginable that these supremos have strongholds manned by their own armed cadres, their networks going beyond their immediate orbits and their caches of arms and ammunition tucked away into their not-so-hidden underworld. The terrible fifteen thrive on extortion, blackmail, tendering for work, land-grabbing, drug business and even gold smuggling. They work on hire as well extracting high fees. Their *modus operandi* includes using hijacked transports as well as frequently changing their place of residence to avoid being tracked down. In public, they put an innocuous face forward claiming they are 'contractors'.

Much that the police might yell 'Eureka' at every revelation they make we believe that it is in the line of their duty that they have learnt all these things about the terrorists. The question is: what have they been able to do with their stock of knowledge about the terrorists? How do these known criminals numbering so few keep escaping the arm of law? To our mind, there are three reasons why all this is happening: one, they enjoy the protection of their mentors in a political party; two, some policemen might have been 'neutralised' by them; and three, most of these infamous fifteen have had 15 to 20 cases hanging against them including accusations of murder, but they could not be brought to justice at all. Hardened criminals get bail largely because of prosecution weaknesses.

We endorse the view expressed in an intelligence report submitted before the government to the effect that if the latest spate in the incidence of murder is to be contained then there is no alternative to putting the 15 terrorists behind the bar. All we need to do is to cut off their political support base from under their feet with the police doing their job professionally.

## Keep an eye on Fertiliser Plants

INTENSE ammoniac release from Jamuna fertiliser factory in Jamalpur on Friday that left some five hundred people in the adjacent areas seriously ill seems more frightful than what the managing director of the plant would like us to believe. The minister of religious affairs who happened to be in the area at the time the accident occurred, was relieved and grateful that none had died, while the managing director of the plant tried to brush it aside as a functional hazard. Their version on the damage wrought by the mishap appears carefully crafted and, needless to say, a convenient understatement of what had transpired at the factory.

In our view, if the incident is ignored and not seriously looked into, it could lead to a major disaster. Some serious slips in overhauling procedure could well have resulted in the ammoniac release. The authorities, reportedly ordered by the minister to launch a probe into the incident, should also take into consideration gross negligence and mechanical failure as probable reasons for the accident.

The ammoniac release from the Jamuna factory once again highlights the need for instituting a central monitoring cell for all the fertiliser plants across the country. Not long time back, this paper front-paged a report on the environment degradation brought about by effluent discharge from two fertiliser plants in Ghorashal. Even though it may not trigger immediate fatalities, toxic release from fertiliser plants could have long-lasting impact on the people and the environment within the radius of a few miles. As found in several similar cases, toxic discharge can induce respiratory, renal and cardiac failure besides affecting reproductive health of the people exposed. Human health aside, it can bring about depletion of greenery and aquatic population in the surrounding areas.

We demand, therefore, that the authorities go beyond instituting inquisition for the sake of it and seriously look into the matter with a long range view. Other fertiliser plants, with or without track records of similar failure, should be brought under a regular monitoring and maintenance cycle lest there should be recurrence of toxic release or any other mishaps. At the same time, there should be an immediate stock-taking of the damage done by Jamuna incident and the affected should be properly treated and recompensed for their hardship.

## Probing the Failure

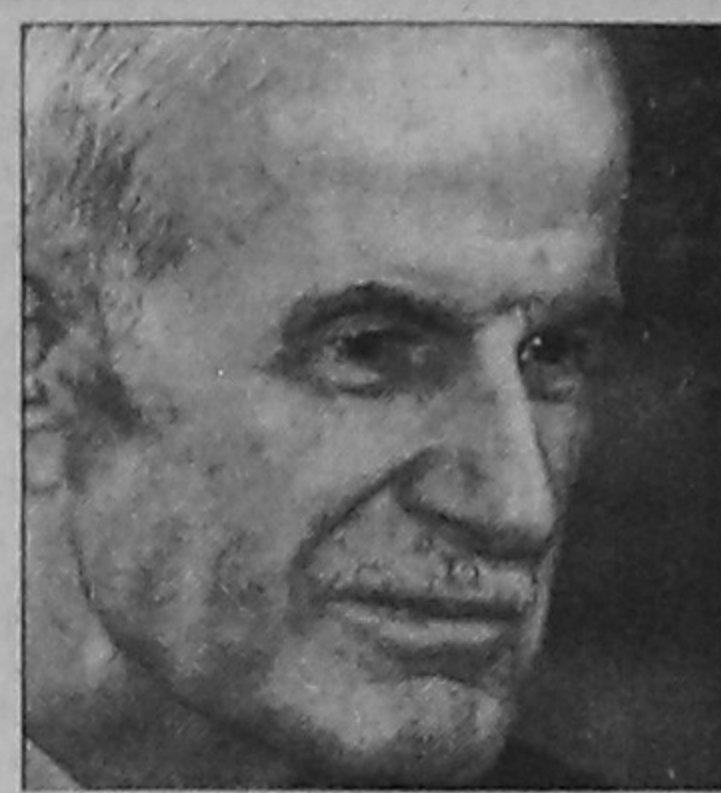
IT is encouraging to note that the education ministry is constituting an experts' committee to find out the reasons behind the massive failure of students at the SSC examinations this year. A report in *The Daily Star* on Tuesday stated that education minister A S H K Sadique disclosed this while expressing his concern over such a performance debacle. The pass percentage of the five boards combined being the lowest in the last five years at 40.36, it has triggered shock waves among people.

The committee will not rest content by merely finding the reasons behind the failure but will also suggest remedies for improvement in the methods of teaching and supervision. The minister has himself talked about two important causes of failure of so many students: one, question papers were not similar to those given in the guide books; and two, massive vigilance that prevented students from widespread cheating at the examination centres. There were other important reasons also. An increasing number of students were not attending classes on the one hand, while on the other, standard of teaching left room for improvement. The number of hours the students are taught in a year has to be increased and unnecessary long vacations have to be shortened. The school administrations have to be answerable for the quality of teaching imparted and results obtained therefrom. For this a modern mechanism of supervision and monitoring has to be devised and put into motion to achieve an overall improvement in the situation. It is a move in the right direction to have launched a project with the assistance of the Asian Development Bank in this behalf. We feel that rewards for good teachers and schools should be in place as punishment for bad teachers and schools will not be out of place in the crusade for good education at the SSC level.

# Death of Lion of Damascus: Its Possible Implications

by Harun ur Rashid

**Bashar is one of the emerging young rulers in the Arab world and may have a vision of his country similar to those of King Abdullah of Jordan and King Mohammad of Morocco. They are all in their 30s and have not personally experienced turbulent period in the region. Bashar is reported to be close to them and these younger rulers have already shown that they are different from their fathers in their approach to the issues of the day.**



mid-70s made President Assad a crucial player in the region. He maintained close relations with former Soviet Union and then with Russia. Although his country was isolated from the West, he surprised the West by supporting them against Iraq, an Arab country, in the 1990 Gulf War. Since then the West was less critical of him.

The succession appears to be smooth and his 34-year-old son Bashar al-Assad has been nominated as the commander in chief of the army and the Ba'ath party confirmed his presidency. It seems that all the institutions of the state including the military backed him. The position has yet to be confirmed by the Parliament followed by a referendum.

Meanwhile Bashar has been acting as a *de facto* President of Syria and took telephone calls from the foreign heads of state and governments. At the time of writing, the only objection to Bashar's succession came from his uncle Rifat al-Assad who fell out with his brother and has been living abroad.

The question is: what are the implications of Bashar's succession in the region? President Assad's death has changed profoundly the political landscape in the Middle East. It was reported that President Clinton's demeanor looked grim when he read the

note containing the news while he was to speak at a university function. It was reported that he had read the note a few times and he knew that during his presidency the comprehensive peace in the Middle East he had hoped for slipped from his grasp because time was against him. The new young Syrian leader is expected to take his time to consolidate his power prior to engaging himself in a peace deal with Israel.

The stumbling block in the peace deal is the withdrawal of Israel from the Golan Heights as it stood prior to 1967 war. During the March meeting with President Clinton in Geneva, President Assad insisted on Israel's complete withdrawal from the territory of the Golan Heights. Israel wants exclusive

access a strip of territory, several hundred metres wide, on the shore of Lake Kinneret at the foot of Heights. The Lake is the Israel's main water reservoir and in return Israel offers Syria land elsewhere. President Assad refused to give in although he reportedly waived any demand to pump water from the lake. He stood firm on his principle that all lands taken by Israel during the war should be returned.

A view prevails that Bashar is expected to freeze peace negotiations for at least several months while he attempts to shore up his own position as Syria's leader. Second, it will be difficult for him to give concessions to Israel that his father did not. It is expected that he would insist on the return of every inch of Arab land from Israel.

The other view appears to be that the new leader, Bashar al-Assad has a different upbringing than that of his father. He has been exposed to the West and speaks French and English fluently. He is not a military person but an ophthalmologist and went to Britain for two years for higher training. After his elder brother's death in 1994, he was enrolled in a military college at the request of his father and was made a Colonel. He is known to be a soft spoken person having congenial man-

ners. He has demonstrated a passion for information technology gadgets and wants Syria to be more open and modern.

In recent months Bashar has pursued vigorously against the corrupt high officials and he wants to satisfy the social and economic demands of the young generations in the country. As a chairman of the Syrian Computer Society he wants the Syrians to have access to the Internet.

If Syria is to be integrated in the global economy it needs foreign investment and technology from the West, particularly from the US. A view prevails that he has no personal emotional link with the Golan Heights. He did not fight wars with Israel. His approach to the peace negotiations could be different and more flexible. He may broker a peace deal in exchange for US investments in Syria.

Israel's former Prime Minister Shimon Peres said: "If the successor does not adapt to the new realities, Syria will remain a poor and isolated country. He therefore does not have a real alternative, even it takes some time for him to recognise it."

Political analysts maintain that a new reality began to sink in for the millions of Arabs from the Persian Gulf to the Atlantic Ocean. The Arab World

in the '90s is relatively much calmer. No revolutions, no assassinations and no civil wars worth except in Algeria took place. They argue that the new rulers will gradually adjust the course of events in the light of their personal experiences and in the context of the end of the cold war. They will redefine their policies, their bounds and their alliances to find a new equilibrium in the region. The role of the rulers could be comparable to that of a lock-keeper who seeing the dam about to burst may decide to open the flood gates to let the water flow, to avoid a much worse catastrophe.

Bashar is one of the emerging young rulers in the Arab world and may have a vision of his country similar to those of King Abdullah of Jordan and King Mohammad of Morocco. They are all in their 30s and have not personally experienced turbulent period in the region. Bashar is reported to be close to them and these younger rulers have already shown that they are different from their fathers in their approach to the issues of the day. The physical and psychological barriers are likely to be less brutal in the region under the new rulers.

Another incidental ramification from Bashar's succession could be that the leadership of many countries in the Arab world could pass from father to their sons. Of the 21 Arab States, 13 are Republics including Iraq, Egypt, Yemen and Libya. All these countries have able presidential sons and one view is that they could succeed to their fathers in due course of time. Bashar's succession may have set a precedent for other non-monarchical Arab countries.

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

## New Israel in a Revitalised Middle East

by Pundit Putro

**It is not altogether a far cry to expect a more vitalized Middle-East, where vigorous social and political changes under a propitious climate of mutual tolerance, cooperation, and peace can change the fortunes of the people at large. It is from this collective fortune that Israel must prepare to reap benefits if it is to thrive as a viable political entity endorsed and supported by all its neighbours.**

tors and compulsions and one hopes these may help to eventually usher in a new era in the Middle-East.

Israel, a state created out of the womb of World War II, which has since thrived on the legacies of the holocaust, was financed by the powerful Jewish organisations and their lobby in the US Congress. The US has, so far, acted as the sole guarantor of security and survivability of the new state, providing it with military intelligence, expertise, the state of the art weapons and armaments and flushing its war entangled economy with hard cash. Riding the American jets, firing their tanks and missiles, and thriving on massive grants and loans from the US exchequer, Israel became the virtual US policeman in the Middle-East, employed playfully and mindlessly, to punish the recalcitrant leaders in the region. The Israeli military had violated territories of most Arab states, often on flimsy grounds, and it continued to occupy large chunks of Syrian and Lebanese territories and engulfed entirely what was previously a thriving Palestine state. It enjoyed a sense of comparative impunity because of the massive support from the US and its Western allies.

But the geopolitical realities in the Middle-East elsewhere is beginning to change substantially. As the US enters the new millennium, the powerful lobby of the orthodox Jews in the country is beginning to wane as the new generation Jews identify themselves more as American rather than Jews. The older identity is no longer

as sanctimonious as it was to their parents. The US, now increasingly concerned with strategic supplies, particularly after the estrangement of Iran and Iraq, is apparently left with only Saudi Arabia and Kuwait as its friends in the Middle-East.

But ever if the rulers in these countries may like to court the US as warmly as possible yet their population remains skeptical about the US role in the Middle-East. It has now become obvious that many US policies in the Middle-East are riddled with contradictions. Its ill-conceived support for the Shah of Iran and Saddam Hussein during the Iraq-Iran War backfired and eventually proved self-defeating. Its slogans for democracy, human rights and freedom of press come to a grinding halt in the sand of the Arab countries and in the land of their hawkish neighbour, Israel.

However, President Clinton's US policy in the Middle-East, initially unsure and hesitant, is showing significant signs of direction and dynamism. While Germany, France and the UK had reservations about the expansionist policy of Israel, the US had, under the sway of the Jewish lobby in the past, backed all the Israeli adventures and misadventures. The last Israeli government, however, tasted the limits of the US support as the US refused to go along with the hawkish policies of creating new Jewish settlements in the Palestinian territories, engineered by its conservative leader Netanyahu. The new Prime Minister, Yehud Barak,

capitalising the war-wrong domestic mood of the voters, wants to woo the US by reducing the extended deployment of the Israeli soldiers and wooing Syria into peace dialogues.

One obvious rationale for the recent Israeli reconciliatory policy is its war torn domestic economy which is creaking as the generous US funds are beginning to dry up due to unending spates of violence and atrocities against the Lebanese and the Palestinians. Palestine Authority, under the leadership of charismatic Yassir Arafat, has displayed its ability to run a modern polity with vigilance and adroit administrative skills. The US might have conceded, and even patronised the perpetration of violence against the Palestinians without causing adequate uproar either from the domestic population or from the Sheikhs and Emirs in the Middle-East, but the mood, euphoria and context are fast changing. Arab leaders, even the ones enjoying intimate support and security guarantees from the US, have expressed their dismay and frustrations over the lopsided US policy towards the Middle-East. The access to nuclear weapons by Israel and its dogged refusal to sign the NPT is another bone of contention which dilutes the US stand elsewhere against countries like North Korea, Pakistan and India. Domestically, although the US

Senate, now under the sway of the Republicans, continues to back up Israeli stances, many Congressmen see the underlying strategic blunders and diplomatic opaqueness that inevitably go along with the blanket support for Israel, at an expensive cost of alienating the oil-rich Arab World.

Shredded of the outright and guaranteed US support, Israeli policies are bound to be inward looking and less ambitious. How long would the West continue to fund an economy that concentrates on war and human rights violations? How long can Israel maintain splendid isolation with its neighbours and scud into the East and North America for its economic survival and political legitimacy? Although Israel has recently cultivated good relations with some African countries and with India, its total isolation from the region continues to give it the demeanor of parash state rejected and challenged by its neighbours.

A thriving Palestinian state, alongside friendly and supportive Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon and a reformed Syria would have a much greater potential for growth and development than a remotely funded Israel. However, ambitious defence projects of Israel would have to thrive on the continuity and escalation of international violence whereby Israel can sell its weapons for cash. Given its

poor resource base, Israel will remain liability to the Western powers for a long time and their irritation with this deviant country is becoming domestically pronounced and visible in most patron states of Israel. The best bet for Israel is to cultivate a very different image than it has so far concentrated on: to develop an image of peaceful neighbour of Arab countries, ready to share their weals and woes and become partner in their march toward socio-economic development. That alone can secure flow of Western fund for this tiny country once gripped by a psyche of megalomania with its overdeveloped military muscle.

In the long run, Israel must settle down to the reality that it can only be an appendage, perhaps a potent and vibrant one, to the rich culture, history and heritage that the Middle-East abounds in. Judaism is, historically, a significant part of the religious heritage of the region. Even a sit holes on the Jewish banner, Israel should identify itself more with the Middle-East than with its current patrons who are cautiously cultivating diplomatic distance from it and its archaic policies. In the process, Israel may find itself to be a country with lot of war heroes and military boys, but little economic and diplomatic steam. It is not altogether a far cry to expect a more vitalized Middle-East, where vigorous social and political changes under a propitious climate of mutual tolerance, cooperation, and peace can change the fortunes of the people at large. It is from this collective fortune that Israel must prepare to reap benefits from if it thrives as a viable political entity endorsed and supported by all its neighbours.

## OPINION

## Of Political Leadership and Administration

Alif Zabr

Politicians are generally inefficient management heads in the emerging countries, even after decades, due to social environmental handicaps beyond their control.

First, there is the continued political instability due to inexperienced, and jockeying for power (taste it), in the process of nurturing of establishment of the democratic institutions (inexperienced political baby-sitting, if the term is not inoffensive to the political pundits).

Secondly, working in a have-not society has its pitfalls, as most find it difficult to resist luring, lurking and baited temptations; and resort to short-cuts in achieving subjective ends, egged on by birds of feather who flock together. The adolescent political traits take more than one generation to subdue — complete eradication is neither possible nor expected, due to enslavement to the genetic codes (man is not an angel). Poverty is a trail of patience and tolerance; and self-deliverance is not possible without tugs from dedicated leadership. The core objective of 'public service' has gone with the winds of change.

Even in the world's largest democracy (across the border), the political image in New Delhi is in shambles, after half a century of trials and tribulations, with more and more parties trying to form greater and more unwieldy coalitions (a big committee recommends why something cannot be done).

Pakistan and Bangladesh are not faring any better. Sri Lanka is drowning in civil war for more than a decade; and in the African nations the situation is

worse.

The positive conditioning factor of poverty is low; and the exposure to acceptable standards of governance is a severe test even for the dedicated leaders. The latter are soon surrounded by sycophants, who start underhand manipulations which the lone leader at the top cannot successfully counter (too many variables to control, akin to weather prediction). The political workers at the lower rungs of a political party are not super humans, hence lapses continue to multiply and the people and the critics start grumbling and criticising. The blame is transferred to outside factors and agencies, and the merry (and vicious) wheel continues to revolve, regime after regime, waiting for the deliverance from the cycles of karma (as some religions interpret).

As a solution it has been proposed tentatively that the tenure of a regime be reduced from five years. Then the undesirable practices would be carried out at an accelerated pace, which will go against public interest.

Thus the presence and duration of periods of instability is more or less fixed, and has to be accepted, before redemption is expected. This is the long-term cost of freedom, which looks so cosy on paper, and through the loudspeakers. The gift of the gab motivates, not delivers. Plan it, do it, and show it. Administration is not a bed of roses!

Long-term planning is difficult in the LDCs, and more difficult to implement, because the changing regimes are more

ambitious, and are keen to demonstrate that they can do better (the competitive spirit laced with ego and ambition, and charisma). But nepotism and corruption cling to the skirt or coat tail, and bring some sobriety to black ambitions. A single evil does not last long, but goes on changing face (mutations) — the bug is the multiplier effect. In nature, there is order in disorder or chaos; while in civilisation it is the other way round. That makes life interesting, because life is a struggle against vices.

Therefore the top leadership has to maintain a clearance distance (a term used by architects technically) for insulation from evil side effects of the followers and party workers. Hunger (of all categories) has a nagging effect, and throw off negative radiations and garbage, which become a burden on the society, already suffering from a shortage of moral scavengers (the situation in Dhaka metropolis is familiar).

The greatest test for a leader is to rise above the circumstantial evidence, and start a filtration process, which will not clog down, and stop the straining. Most leaders fail (product of the same society). It is a fact that real great leaders are few (in a century). If a leadership can be purchased or exchanged, it is not the genuine stuff. The question of principle and philosophy comes in, and very few pass the test.

Coming back to political administration, how to develop a Code of Transparency? The question is topical, with the general elections round the corner.

## To the Editor ....

### Monsoon and Greenhouse Effect

Sir, I have been watching throughout my lifetime (more than half a century) that the monsoon in this part of the world (Bengal delta area) is still arriving in time, namely, by the end of the first week of June.

Then what is the long-term effect of the much-touted Western discovery of the Greenhouse Effect (GE) on the monsoon, a mighty natural phenomenon every year? Why some changing pattern has not been noticed? This year also it is arriving rather punctually (DS June 5); as the Statement (Calcutta) used to predict it in the 1940s.

What is the ratio of scientific-political hoax in the GH hypothesis as propagated by the North (against the South)? The scientists in the Third World may like to come out clearly on this inconsistency, for satisfying public curiosity.

Andaz  
Dhaka

### New approach to power solutions

Sir, The change of leadership at the Bangladesh Power development Board (PDB) is welcome. The new incumbent has a good track record, and the citizens have high expectations.

In this regard, the government may go in for massive programme of solar power units in the isolated areas, based on the Narsingdi plot project evaluation. But the industrialised countries are chary of cooperating, as these are micro projects. A local assembly plant

(CKD, SKD) may also be set up with technical collaboration in the private sector, and small household units may be made sold on HP system, taking advantage of the vast NGO network.

Abul M Ahmad  
Dhaka

### Don't relent, please

Sir, Much has been said about the deteriorating law and order situation of the country. And we all seem to be hostage in the hands of toll-collectors, extortionists, goons etc. Mostly these elements perpetrate crimes with impunity under the patronage of ruling party that be. Against this backdrop the recent role of the Home Minister is courageous and offers a glimmer of hope and relief to the citizenry busy toiling for livelihood. We have been used to hollow rhetoric of leaders in all spheres of national life, but nothing has improved so far. There is no gain saying that economic development of a country largely hinges on strict adherence to law and heavy handed punishment to the culprits. As a citizen with no political affiliation and as a voter may I remind the Home Minister following cases which although attract mischief of PSA, 2000, have been swept under the carpet.

1. Last year a ruling party MP allegedly shot dead a young man in front of the Science Lab, Dharmaditya area; the former has also been grabbing the Sitakhiya river (well published in national dailies) gravely violating environment. An elected leader should serve people, not plunder national resources to

satiated greed.

2. Setting up barricade on the Ctg-Dhaka highway — the lifeline of the country, another MP of the ruling party blocked traffic for six long hours causing immense suffering to the travelling public and hindering movement of goods and merchandise to and from Chittagong port. How do we tell a terrorist from an elected leader?

3. One of BCL (student-front of AL) leaders has been unleashing a reign of terror in and around Dhaka University Campus for a long time. His criminal activities involving toll collection from businessmen, contractors were published in newspapers including the Daily Star. Without going into the controversy of usefulness or otherwise of student-fronts in educational institutions I dare say the like of the said student leader does not promote the image of a political party.

4. In his judicial confession crime-baron Ershad Sikdar mentioned that he despatched sophisticated illegal weapons to some leaders of the ruling party, he also named police officials who were on his payroll (published in different dailies). We have yet to learn the follow-up action, if any, taken by the government. Inaction of this kind sends a wrong signal across the peace-loving people.

People are watching activities of all the major political parties, they are closely watching Awami League, in as much as they are in the driving seat.

Mahbub Alam  
Dharmaditya, Dhaka