

## 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 tormentation. 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 Chorashal. 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 compensated 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.

THE death of Syria's President Hafez al-Assad (his name in Arabic means Lion) on 10 June has shocked Syrians and thousands of Syrian men and women took to the street to grieve for the President. The members of the Parliament wept openly when the news was announced in the Parliament. Although President Assad (born in 1930) was ill for his heart ailments for a long time the Syrians did not expect his death so soon.

Prior to 1970 the country was frequently rocked by military coups. He ruled the country with an iron fist. He brought stability, nationalism and Arab pride for the people of the country. For the last 30 years, the younger generations in Syria have not known any leader other than President Assad. His departure is a great vacuum for his people.

He was an airforce pilot, trained in Russia and was the chief of air force during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. He saw before his eyes how Syria lost the Golan Heights to Israel in the war and blamed his commander in chief of the armed forces Salal al-Jadid for the defeat. Within three years he took over the political power in a bloodless coup in 1970.

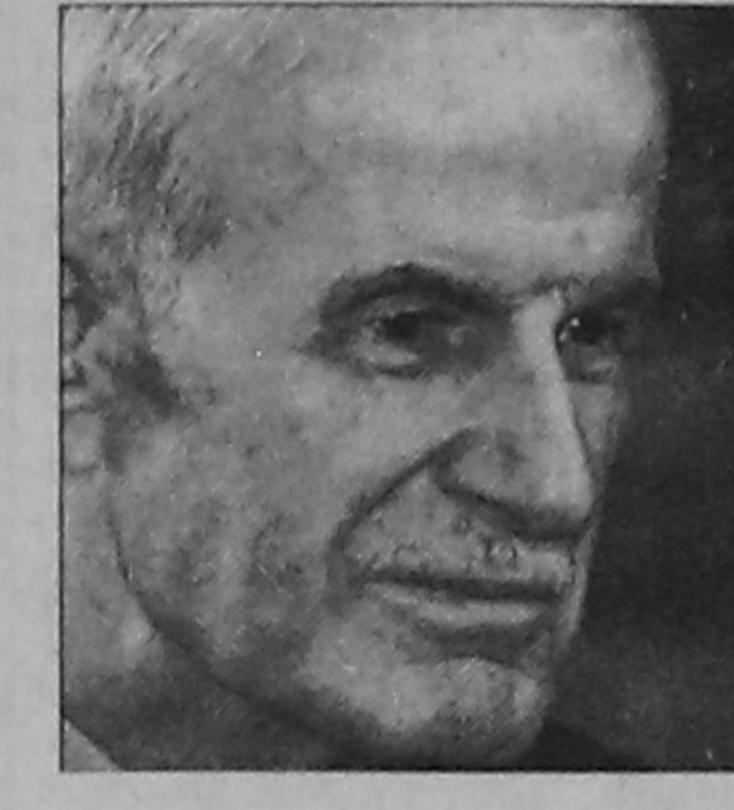
He was a strong leader of Ba'ath party and the party's political stance has stood for social and economic reform, greater Arab unity through a form of pan-Arabism and the recognition of relationship between Islam and Arabism and promotion of religious tolerance. Syria under President Assad, has been a secular country.

Much of Syria's recent history has been shaped by its opposition to Israel. It participated in the 1948 and 1967 Arab-Israeli wars. Syria's involvement in Lebanon since

# 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 congenital 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 be 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 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.

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.

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## 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.*

MIDDLE-EAST is witness to many cataclysmic changes and transformation in the wake of vigorous diplomacy in the area. It is a land that has seen many prophets and holy emissaries, but peace is yet to dawn to the wretched soil sullied by crusades, holy wars and the outreach of superpowers rivalry with their accompanying ideological divides. During the last century, it has seen World Wars, break up of great empires, and patronised reigns of kings of fiefs enjoying the grease and spoils of flourishing oil economies. Middle-East during the last century, has endured much. Oil gave the rulers easy money, but not the political and diplomatic skill to use it to their best advantage. The divides between haves and have-nots in the Middle-East have widened disproportionately. Many fratricidal wars often waged by one group or the other, has been the cause of mayhem and wanton massacre. The West has cashed on the intricate web of suspicion and hostility of the Arab neighbours and craftily played one side against the other, always selling their weapons and expertise to the ever eager antagonists in the region. Many protest movements, some turned bloody and vicious, waged by organised groups like the Al Fida, PLO, Hizbullah, FIS, Islamic Brotherhood and so on, have battled enemies in the neighbourhood as well as within their own societies to establish a socio-political order that they deem to be in the best interest of the people of the region.

Arab-Israeli War, Operation Desert Storm, senseless sanctions against Iraq, Iran and Libya, have all left deep impressions in the minds of the people of Middle-East. The region has seen more traumas and turmoil than any other part of the world and, hopefully, its leaders have learned a lot in the process. The latest peace initiatives by the US are propelled by many fac-

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 guns 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 even 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 might have done.

But the hawkish policies of creating new Jewish settlements in the Palestinian territories, engineered by its conservative leader Netanyahu, the new Prime Minister, Yitzhak Barak.

## 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 not some change? 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

### 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 a massive programme of solar power units in the isolated areas, based on the Narsingdi plot project evaluation. But the industrialised countries are wary of cooperating, as these are micro projects. A local assembly plant

is 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.

Israel, 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

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.

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. Historically, a significant part of the religious heritage of the region. Even a sit holds 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 ardent 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 if it thrives as a viable political entity endorsed and supported by all its neighbours.

## OPINION

### Of Political Leadership and Administration

Alif Zabir

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 inexperience 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).

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.