

How Could This Happen?

THIS is an instance of horrendous child play with Prime Minister's security. One shudders to think what would have happened if the 75 kg time bomb planted near PM's rostrum and powerful enough to blow a couple of kilometers on impact had really gone off? If anything, this close shave with disaster in terms of PM's personal life and stability of the country's polity is a veritable eye-opener to our going blase over state security matters.

Fifth columnists and conspirators are there waiting in the wings and weaving all sorts of plots to destabilise the country at any opportune moment — one knows this hidden danger all too well to be trifling with it. They pounce on a target at the slightest hint of laxity in the surveillance and pre-emption system. And the prime minister's security arrangement this time was far too flawed and inviting for the saboteurs not to have attempted to take advantage of it. We wonder how could a 75 kg high explosive device be fitted at a spot said to be within 50 feet from the rostrum Sheikh Hasina was to have used to address the scheduled public rally at Kotalipara without being noticed? Wasn't the SSF supposed to secure the place? Furthermore, what gets our hackles up is the report that it was a tea stall boy who first detected some wires protruding from the ground wholly by accident and reported it to others for the whole series of retrieval actions that followed. The impending danger was not revealed through any routine check, yet another security lapse if one were to recall the first one about the place being not ringed around by a protective cordon well in time to avert the planting of the bomb. How vulnerable must everyone feel because of such gaping holes in the system!

The episode gives rise to a plethora of questions, not the least of which concerns the availability of such a powerful explosive device in the country, let alone the fact that it was targeted at the PM herself. We want a thorough investigation into the whole affair and the sharing of information with the public when the mystery is cracked open.

Elen's Complaints Need to be Addressed

ELEN Bhutto, the independent candidate for Jhalakati-2 by-election, has brought up charges of intimidation, coercion and use of government machinery against food minister Amir Hossain Amu who is the ruling party contestant there. She spoke to the press on Friday to air her complaints. She has even asked for the resignation of her opponent without which she thought fair election was not possible.

Elen alleges that her workers cannot canvass freely fearing backlash from Amu's workers and they are afraid of police and local administration charging them under Public Safety Act (PSA). These are pretty serious complaints she has chosen to make public so that these need to be gone into. It is however interesting to note that the late husband of Elen Bhutto was a member of the JP faction led by Mizan-Manju which is a part of the government of consensus led by Sheikh Hasina. There has hardly been any backing from the Mizan-Manju leadership for Elen Bhutto so far as their silence indicates. Be that as it may, we have got to hear the other side of the story. So far Amu has not come out with his version of the story, nor has he refuted the charges levelled by his opponent. With nine days left for the by-election we can expect a reply from Amir Hossain Amu sooner than later.

Even if a part of the allegations by Elen Bhutto proves to be true then it will create a bad precedent for future by-elections. If an independent candidate has so many allegations to make against the ruling party candidate then what it might be like when opposition candidates fight by-elections? The newly appointed Chief Election Commissioner has his job cut out. We request him to take up the allegations of Elen Bhutto seriously and settle the issues as early as possible to the satisfaction of both parties. This may sound a little difficult but then the job of the CEC has never been easy in Bangladesh.

Doesn't Go Far Enough

THE latest round of talks between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat at the Camp David US presidential retreat in Maryland, Philadelphia, has been topsy-turvy, to say the least. What started on a surprisingly positive note almost fell through a couple of days back. An impasse over the future of Jerusalem almost stalled negotiations between the two leaders. Although Bill Clinton's persuasion had revived the moribund dialogue process, the US president himself didn't sound much confident of any positive result. His departure for the Group of Eight Summit in Okinawa, scheduled though, had also been interpreted as virtual end to effective negotiations. Given the grim background, not to speak of the quintessential bitterness on the issue itself, Israel's nod to a US proposal to share sovereignty over certain parts of the occupied East Jerusalem was but a small step out of the mire.

Palestine's rejection of Israel's proposal to divide East Jerusalem into three sectors — one under full Israeli control, another under Palestinian control but without sovereignty and a third where Palestinians will have civilian authority but Israel's military control — chimes in with their demand that Jerusalem "be returned to their Palestinian owners."

While Palestinians want corrected a wrong committed years back, the Israelis seem equally apprehensive that a concession on Jerusalem might endanger their existence. The Middle East War of 1967 has definitely left deeper scars than the Westerners, especially the Americans, realise. Thirty-three years of hostility would not disappear overnight.

Surely, renewal of enmity does not hold the answer. The solution can only come out of negotiations. Therefore, it is essential that both sides sincerely undertake measures for mutual confidence building. Otherwise, US persuasion and international pressure may lead to an agreement but peace would remain elusive in the Middle East as ever.

Ganges Treaty, 1996 and National Water Policy, 1999

Are We being Served Right?

by Syed Muhammad Hussain

While National Water Policy states, "Water is central to the way of life in Bangladesh", we perhaps tend to ignore the fact that the same is equally true in case of the lands and the peoples inhabiting advantageously along the upper reaches of all the major rivers. Hence, the competition for survival and wellbeing is highly likely to become increasingly intense and sharp with no holds barred and possibly no goodwill, neighbourly or otherwise, shown.

The issue of river basin management and the 1996 Treaty on Sharing of the Ganges Waters, the policy says, "Basin planning provides the most rational basis of development of water resources under the influence of one or more major rivers. International river basins, however, such as the Ganges basin, the Brahmaputra basin and the Meghna basin present special problems. Due to its location as the lower-most riparian, Bangladesh has no control over the rivers entering through its borders. The adverse effects of this are the floods and water scarcity, which occur frequently. It needs to be noted that Bangladesh considers GBM as three separate basins, whereas India generally treats the three as one with three sub-systems. However, the National Water Policy makes a fairly straightforward observation on the treaty. Given the fact that it came about two years following the signing of the treaty, this could be taken as an authentic reaction of the government of the lower riparian state.

"Although the 1995 Treaty on Sharing of the Ganges waters with India has brought some relief to the drought-prone area of the south-west, the water shortage problem during the dry season is likely to aggravate in the Ganges and other basins with rising demands of the increasing populations (p 4)".

A historic treaty that "added a new dimension to the water management strategy and related to a river on which the wellbeing of more than 40 million people in the south-western region is entirely dependent", as assessed in the Plan, within two years of bringing in

only "some relief to drought-prone area of the south-west" and on top the water shortage problem during the dry season "is likely to aggravate in the Ganges and other basins," so claims the National Water Policy in January, 1999. Please note that the Treaty of sharing Ganges waters is to last for 30 years — another 26 long years to go.

If within four years the water shortage aggravates, what would be the scenario after a quarter century or so. This thought was echoed at the 33rd Annual Conference of Water and Power Engineers' Society. A BSS report, carried in The Daily Star, 17 July 2000, said that speakers at a conference had laid emphasis on concerted efforts of water management. "World leaders and experts have started to ponder over water issues, likely to emerge as a major problem in the world in the next 25 years," they added according to the news agency. This problem obviously shall have global as well as regional and national dimensions.

Despite difficulty in obtaining reliable data on monthly average discharge flow level at Farakka (below Farakka Barrage in the Feeder Canal and at the Navigation Lock) as well as at the Hardinge Bridge since the signing of the Treaty, one can easily discern ominous signs of an inescapable process of gradually reduced flow of waters in the upper reaches of the Ganges.

The Ganges may have enormous quantum of waters in the upper reaches, but the flow relevant for us in terms of the Treaty is whatever reaches the Farakka barrage. The Treaty does not bind the upper riparian

to protect the flows reaching Farakka barrage, apart from a general statement of making every effort. It must be highlighted here that the "administrative jurisdiction and legal authority of state governments (Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Bihar) on water resources is guaranteed by the Constitution of India (UC Chaudhary, *Multilevel Model of an International River Basin*, 1996). Hence, even if Bangladesh has a treaty with the federal government of India, state governments themselves, being stakeholders in the Ganges waters can, and certainly will, be reluctant, if not downright unwilling, to part with the increasingly scarce flow of waters.

One can perhaps outline two options. First, a prolonged, stretched-out regime of consultations (we are quite familiar with the long history of water negotiations) that will lead to nowhere. Second, a virtual reality situation of a drought-stricken land facing imminent process of irreversible desertification will compel acceptance of an augmentation plan through link canal from the Brahmaputra (an option Bangladesh had totally rejected earlier on a number of valid grounds).

On the basis of one's somewhat dated knowledge of elaborate exercises that India is conducting with Nepal and those India herself has for her several states in utilising the waters in the upper reaches of the Ganges, one could make a bold but logical prediction of having zero water availability at Farakka. This implies that actual avail-

ability at Farakka after the combined withdrawals at the upper reaches of Ganges could indeed become fairly negligible forcing the issue of augmentation. Whether this will happen before our 1996 Treaty expires in 2026 or after is, of course, anyone's guess at this stage. One needs to recognise the danger signals to prepare well for an almost certain difficult future, unless, of course, in the meanwhile by some miracle the milk of human kindness starts flowing in abundance, in bilateral terms and dare we hope, in multilateral, regional context as well.

The National Water Policy (NWP) sums up the current thinking of the government in this exceedingly vital, multi-dimensional sector. We find a mention of "severe constraints, such as the lack of control over rivers, originating outside the country's borders." Should we not have had the satisfaction of gaining some control over one of the most important rivers after signing the Treaty more than three and a half years back? Should we not review rationally our position as regards preserving, protecting and proclaiming our own national interests in the water sector?

It is most intriguing that the National Water Policy, neither in its declaration nor in its statement of objectives, mentions the need for seeking bilateral and multilateral understanding and arrangements on all international rivers/ all major trans-boundary water flows to ensure a permanent protection of Bangladesh's historic claims and interests as the lower riparian state; and develop and manage a regional,

co-operative regime of utilisation of the waters in the three basins in all forms for the benefit of the peoples in the co-riparian states.

The NWP appears to have been prepared under a basic presumption that our water needs could be fully met with water resources available within the territorial bounds of the country. Even in this context, serious problems of unauthorised, and as yet unexplained, encroachment of water bodies like the Buringanga and the Turag has not been taken note of *suo moto* by WARPO and National Water Resources Council (NWRC). The most vital and substantial flows of external inputs do not have much of mention and unless our NWP has this exceedingly crucial elements as a cornerstone, our seriousness to strive at all cost to protect the historic rights guaranteed under all relevant international laws and conventions will not be taken due note of. But then the knowledgeable experts in and outside the government can hardly be accused of being that naive, but the question remains as to why and how did this major and significant lapse could come about in the first place.

It is our firm belief that the points made above, and, perhaps in other forums, will be accepted as contributions towards improving the contents of the relevant policies and strategies and fine-tuning the national position and approach in this vital sector of water resources. While National Water Policy states "Water is central to the way of life in Bangladesh", we perhaps tend to ignore the fact that the same is equally true in case of the lands and the peoples inhabiting advantageously along the upper reaches of all the major rivers. Hence, the competition for survival and wellbeing is highly likely to become increasingly intense and sharp with no holds barred and possibly no goodwill, neighbourly or otherwise, shown.

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Will Kulsoom Nawaz be a Threat to Musharraf's Rule?

Two women in Pakistan face difficult task ahead and are obviously relying on time since they believe the regime is losing the impact it created in the name of clearing the Aegean stables left by the democratic rulers. Moreover, General Musharraf is charting his course cautiously. The road ahead for Benazir and Kulsoom is rocky but is not insurmountable since they enjoy the natural advantage of the flourishing democratic principle — corrupt politicians must pay but not the system.

A new element has been introduced in Pakistan's topsy-turvy political scenario. There are signs that Kulsoom Nawaz, wife of deposed Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, may enter the political arena to carry on Nawaz Sharif's mantle. Since General Pervez Musharraf ousted the civilian government through a military take-over on October 12 last year, she has refused to remain confined as a mere housewife, giving vent to her feelings about her husband's ouster on a political note. Although eloquent, hers had been more or less an apolitical presence for several months. The situation, however, appears to have changed. Her planned car procession early this month to protest the military rule was a strong indicator of her political aspirations.

That Kulsoom would be barred from going ahead with the anti-government demonstration was predictable. The way she had been treated was not. The car she was in was towed away, a treatment many found extremely unpleasant. They felt that as the wife of a former head of government, Kulsoom should have been treated better. It hinged on brutality to many.

Will Kulsoom, who is yet to establish her credentials as a politician, be able to mount an effective resistance against the military government? It is all the more pertinent when there is little likelihood, especially at



Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury

this point in time, that Sharif will be out of prison soon. It is also doubtful that whether Benazir Bhutto, now in self-exile, would be able to play an effective role towards restoring democracy in the country. Definitely, focus will now be on these two ladies although somewhat differently and it is a coincidence that two leading political figures in Pakistan are likely to be women as in the case of Bangladesh. In our country, the two lady politicians have swapped their positions as head of the government and leader of the opposition but remained firmly entrenched in the political scenario. In India,

it is now a matter between Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and opposition leader Sonia Gandhi. Evidently, in Pakistan, it is still the jailed Nawaz Sharif and his principal political rival Benazir Bhutto, who is abroad for a pretty long time. But with Sharif likely to remain behind the bar for a considerably long time unless the higher courts reverse the verdict of a Karachi court that handed him life sentences for terrorism,

Kulsoom seems set to play a role in the opposition politics. Nawaz is also facing charges on corruption and a verdict on this count is expected by the time this column is published. How far Benazir and Kulsoom can go towards toppling General Pervez Musharraf and thereby expediting restoration of democracy? True, there was little love lost between the people and Sharif's government when the army seized power on October 12 last year, citing its economic mismanagement and corruption. Likewise, very few had shed tears for Benazir Bhutto when her government was toppled by the executive power of an otherwise ceremonial president. Corruption was once again the bane. Lust for wealth has often sent politicians plunging into abyssal depths of unpopularity. Their family members made enormous fortunes. Nawaz was overthrown even though his government had enjoyed more than two-thirds majority in the National Assembly.

While expressing concerns and interests for dismissal of the elected government and restoration of the same, there is no point to sweep under the carpet unpopular activities of the civilian governments which in a way help undemocratic authorities to step in even though in principle seldom such a governance is welcomed. Unfortunately for the masses, corrupt politicians seldom take lessons! People want to be governed by their representatives but are often betrayed morally.

The latest of the army ruler in Pakistan, General Musharraf seized the opportunity created by the elected government by committing excesses in running the country and even had trampled the independence of judiciary. However, he was also favoured by the undercurrent of discord between the army and the Nawaz government over the Kargil conflict in which the government was seen as capitulating to arch-rival India and this had emboldened the prospects of the military to seize power. But all said and done, military rule cannot be an alternative for long to democratic governance. General Musharraf has not imposed martial law in Pakistan and as such is not the chief martial law administrator. He has suspended the constitution and parliament. In effect, it is a military government and in Pakistan such authorities last long — eleven years both in cases of General Ayub Khan from 1958 to 69 and then General Ziaul Haq from 1977 to 88. The new military strongman often speaks about giving back

"real democracy" but is unwilling to give a timeframe for reviving democratic governance. The Supreme court in last May in a momentous judgement set three years from the seizing of power for the new authority for restoration of the democratic government. The political parties were dismayed by the ruling of the Supreme Court that validated the army take-over but found a ray of hopes in the otherwise dark cloud on the timing of the civilian government.

Nawaz's Muslim League and Benazir's People's Party crossed swords as politics as two main organisations but came nearer on matters of restoration of democracy. This is good sign for them as long as they work together for ending undemocratic government. General Musharraf's crusade against corruption was welcomed by general masses who did not mind seeing several politicians going to jail on this account. But a few citizens these days like to be seen as governed by military or quasi-military regimes. Besides, the new government in Pakistan during the last nine months could not succeed in bringing back discipline and buoyancy in the much-talked economic front. As such, the euphoria against the politicians is lost to at least some extent.

However, the task is daunting for the two major political parties whose leadership is effectively at present entrusted with two women. Benazir is the recognised leader while Kulsoom Nawaz is not officially conducting anything but virtually seen as the real force by hardcore party activists and Nawaz loyalists. Two of her key supporters Tehmina Daulatana and Javed Hashmi were taken into custody the other day apparently on corruption charges. But the real objective seems to be weaning away the hard-liners from the main force of the Muslim League. Benazir is less keen to return home fearing actions against corruption scandals for which her husband Asif Zardari is already in jail. She is not also confident about being received well by the people against the present regime. Kulsoom is inexperienced and may run into trouble with some leaders of the Muslim League over the approach to the government. She has already expressed ignorance over a meeting of a top party leader with General Musharraf, who is meeting politicians.

Two women in Pakistan face difficult task ahead and are obviously relying on time since they believe the regime is losing the impact it created in the name of clearing the Aegean stables left by the democratic rulers. Moreover, General Musharraf is charting his course cautiously. The road ahead for Benazir and Kulsoom is rocky but is not insurmountable since they enjoy the natural advantage of the flourishing democratic principle — corrupt politicians must pay but not the system.

Lest We Forget

Tajuddin Ahmed: A Tribute

by Navine Murshid

T AJUDDIN Ahmed, the first Prime Minister of independent Bangladesh. The name that stands right after Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, for his contribution to our independence; for his leadership during a critical period in our history. It is his 75th birthday today.

Tajuddin Ahmed's involvement in politics roots back to his student days. His patriotism, his intellect, his ability to understand people were assets that helped him in his political career.

In 1943 he became a member of Muslim League's more progressive section. He was elected

National Assembly without notice, AL's non-cooperation movement began. Under Bangabandhu's supervision, Tajuddin Ahmed formulated the administrative directives for the people and the country during this time.

When Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was arrested and the war of liberation began, Tajuddin Ahmed took charge in his absence. It was perhaps at this time he rose to his height as a leader and an organiser and brought the liberation war to a successful conclusion defying all odds. When the government was formed on April 10, 1971, he was elected the Prime Minister. Within a very short



a councillor of Bengal Muslim League in 1944. In 1947, after partition, he worked for language rights, economic freedom and against communalism. On January 4, 1948, East Pakistan Chhatra League (today's Bangladesh Chhatra League) was formed and Tajuddin Ahmed was one of its founders.

A year later, on June 23 he helped to form the Awami League. During the period of 1953 to 1957, he was General Secretary of Dhaka District Awami League. He became a member of the Provincial Assembly by defeating the Muslim League's General Secretary. Then he was appointed Cultural and Social Welfare Secretary of the Awami League. In 1962, he took a significant part in the movement against military rule in order to revive democracy in the country. In 1964, when the AL was restructured, he was made its organisational secretary. The period from 1966 was very important, for him and for the AL. He attended the opposition parties' conference in Lahore. It is there where Bangabandhu announced AL's six-point demand. In connection with the six-point demand, Tajuddin Ahmed was jailed. However, he had to be released early the next year following a mass uprising. And this was the time when Tajuddin Ahmed and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman became very close.

In 1970, he was elected member of the National Assembly. When Yahya Khan postponed the meeting of the

time, he effectively organised the freedom fighters and integrated the military and political aspects of the war efforts. It was at this time, when people began to actually understand the role of this leader. Until the time when Bangabandhu returned as the free leader of the Bengali nation from Pakistan's prison, on January 10, 1972, Tajuddin Ahmed held fort.

On Bangabandhu's return, he became the Minister of Finance of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. He vowed to bring in economic and political stability, to reconstruct the economy and to ensure economic development and progress. However, he left his ministerial office in 1974.

The separation of these two great leaders is a dark story in our history whose consequences were terrible for the nation. As is well-known, both Bangabandhu and Tajuddin met their tragic end at the hands of anti-liberation forces. In politics, he is a symbol of integrity, idealism, hard work and devotion to his people. One of his major contributions, which was perhaps also one of the reasons for his death, was to ensure sovereignty by unearthing and destroying Khondokar Moshtak Ahmed's conspiracy.

On the 75th birthday of the person without whom the independence of our country would have been uncertain, we recall his resplendent achievements, and, we offer our heartfelt homage to him.