

Speaker's Accountability

AS far as running of the affairs of the State was concerned late President Zia used to say 'money is no problem'. Our Honourable Speaker seems to be of the same view as far as running up the bill of our legislative branch is concerned. In the latest instance we the taxpayers will have to pay Tk. 50 lakh (nearly 100,000 US dollars) extra to fund his profligate nature for a trip which was fully paid for by the Commonwealth Parliament Association (CPA) in the first place.

Bangladesh was invited to send a five-member delegation, all expenses paid, to the ten-day CPA meeting in the UK which included the Speaker, his Deputy, the Chief Whip and two others. The CPA officials, of course, had no idea about the 'stature' of our leaders and they dared to send tickets without including the hangers on. So eight extras were added at public expense. These include secretary, assistant secretary and the public relations officer of the Speaker among others. That's not all. Our Hon. Speaker cannot travel but in the business class. The story hardly ends there. The hotel suites had to be upgraded because those provided for by the hosts were not good enough. These will cost Tk. 30,000 per night.

For God's sake can anybody explain what can justify such mindless and shameless expense when we are suffering from resource constraints everywhere? The seriousness of the trip is amply borne out by the fact that the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker are travelling with their wives and children, though at own expense. We raise serious questions about the propriety of this trip and the extra expenses to the tune of Tk. 50 lakh that is being put upon the poor taxpayers of this country. Last year the Speaker travelled 20 times each time with bigger than necessary entourage. Following his example the secretary of the parliament travelled 21 times in one year. Allegations are rife about fund wastage of a UNDP-funded project to improve the workings of the parliament. A move by this Speaker to build an official house for himself in the Sangsad premises was thwarted when the press exposed it.

For the sake of the dignity and prestige of the parliament we demand that financial disclosure be made of the expenses of the office of the Speaker, the Deputy Speaker and the members of the parliamentary secretariat. We think it will be befitting the public expectation of the sense of self-respect of a person holding the high office of the Speaker that he should himself initiate this process. Can we expect such exemplary behaviour from our Speaker, the Deputy Speaker and the secretary to the parliament?

When will it be Enough?

LATE last month, on August 29 to be precise, police recovered three decomposed bodies from a residential apartment at Khilgaon. Just over two weeks later on Saturday came the recovery of the decapitated corpse of two young men from a sewer line in Sutrapur. Next day there were six murders within a span of 16 hours at various parts of the capital city. What could be more poignant an evidence of a complete law and order failure in the metropolis? In the Sutrapur precinct alone, there have been as many as 30 killings over the last nine months. While killers are on a rampage, the police have played an infuriatingly inert role. In the Sutrapur double murder case, the officer-in-charge of the local police station allegedly made no move despite being repeatedly requested by the relatives of the slaughtered teens. Infuriatingly still, according to media reports, in many murder cases, the police stations concerned refused to initiate first information report (FIR) and advised complainants to lodge general diary (GD) instead. Obviously, question arises whose side are the police actually on, innocent people or criminals?

Whenever faced with the issue of alarming law and order downside, the government tries to pass the buck on, higher judiciary being the latest victim of its indiscriminate finger pointing. The Prime Minister has repeatedly criticised the judiciary in public for granting bail to criminals and thus encouraging rise of crime and terrorist activities. One would surely want to know from the government whether the perpetrators of murders mentioned above were granted bail by any court of law. Punitive measures taken against negligent police officers from time to time often prove inconsequential, for these bring about no tangible change either to police behaviour or the quality of its service. Where would people go when law enforcers themselves, knowingly or unknowingly, side with the killers? Who would they turn to when the police refuse to entertain their complaints? These are some basic questions the authority must answer now.

Parliamentary Inquiry into Magurchhara Mishap

THE government, it seems, is a firm believer of the adage *better late than never*. Otherwise, how would it explain institution of a parliamentary inquiry into the Magurchhara incident more than three years after an Occidental drill had unexpectedly hit a gas pocket, induced a huge blast and sparked off a blaze of infernal proportions? Meanwhile, a lot of changes have taken place, Occidental has rolled back its operations here, selling all its concerns to another US oil company Unocal. Interestingly, then too, the government kept silent over the Tk 612-crore compensation claim. Worse still, despite an unofficial Petrobangla calculation that put the damage in the tune of 200 million US dollars, the government did not initiate any assessment of the toll the Magurchhara blow-out had taken on the sub-soil. Starting from the signing of the production-sharing contract (PSC) with the Occidental to the Magurchhara mishap to the damage calculation and compensation, the government has miserably failed to play its due role. The belated parliamentary inquiry into the incident now reflects another facet of its failure.

Now that the three-member JS body has been formed, we would like to see it address some specific issues related to the case. First, it should seek a complete status report from relevant ministries and departments on the disbursement of compensation money to the affected. Second, it must have a closer look at the progress of reforestation around the Magurchhara gas field. Finally, and most importantly, hush-hush over the whole incident must end. The public has every right to know how much damage was actually wrought by the inferno and how much have the Occidental and later Unocal paid so far as compensation.

Can Bangladesh Bury its Past?

If Bangladesh forgets its past nothing will remain of its glorious heritage and tradition. But that does not, however, mean that Bangladesh prefers to remain inside the cocoon of the past. With its present solidified and concretised by its past it looks forward to the future with confidence. It will be rather for Pakistan to recall its past and for the sake of equanimity formally apologise for what it did in 1971 and for the shabby treatment during the long 23 years.

around the world. Military takeovers are detested universally for the very reason that they trample constitutional polity and are viewed as gross negation of fundamental rights of the citizens. Bangladesh was under a long spell of military and quasi-military rule during which the people had their quota full of miseries. After a protracted struggle spanning one and a half decade the people of Bangladesh finally succeeded in restoring their rights of choosing the leadership through free and fair elections conducted by non-partisan caretaker governments. Hence taking a stand against forcible usurpation of power by military rulers is clearly a ventilation of the feelings and sentiments of the people of Bangladesh as well as those of other countries having similar bitter experiences of army takeovers. Sheikh Hasina made it subsequently clear at a press conference in Dhaka on her return from participating at the Millennium Summit of the United Nations that her speech was not directed against the Pakistani Chief Executive, but it was a general condemnation of all illegal capture of power by the army. General Pervez Musharraf took exception to it, which is quite natural on his part. The General himself had grabbed state power in his country by ousting the elected government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in October last year. He has not been mandated by the people of Pakistan to oust a civilian government at gun-points, to dictate what type of government they will have, nor to wage a crusade against the top politician by putting them behind the bar and summarily disqualifying them from participating in polls for long years apparently to make it easier for him to cling to power like his predecessors in the army Ayub Khan and Ziaul Haq.

What he is doing is by sheer force and with the backing from the armed forces, General Pervez Musharraf, therefore, became extra-sensitive and arrogantly backed out from his meeting with the Bangladesh Prime Minister for her speaking against army rule and for imploring the world community not to accord recognition to such extra-constitutional means for the change of governments.



HEART OF THE MATTER
Mansoor Mamoon

Bangladesh claimed that the incident would have no effect on their bilateral relations, it certainly has already soured their ties. Otherwise, why General Pervez Musharraf would say when situation would improve he himself will like to travel to Dhaka for a meeting with the Bangladesh Prime Minister? Pakistan's military Chief Executive has advised Bangladesh "to bury its past and instead look towards the future". The advice was uncalled for and contrary to recognised diplomatic niceties. He was probably referring to Bangladesh's request for supplying the full text of the report of Hamoodur Rahman Commission, the leaking out of a portion of it in an Indian weekly has created quite a stir in Bangladesh for the atrocities committed by the Pakistani occupation army in 1971 and the demand being increasingly voiced by all segments including the Prime Minister for the trial of war criminals identified in the report. Like all previous governments, Musharraf's administration also

refused to hand over to Dhaka the report claiming that it was a classified document. Not only this, the military ruler has rather disdainfully asked Bangladesh not to dig out the past and let bygones be bygones?

This, indeed, is too much. Can Bangladesh forget the 23-year long unfair and unjust treatment it received from the Pakistani rulers? Can it forget how its occupation army back in 1971 perpetrated one of the worst genocides

fought for and is soaked with blood of the martyrs. So advising Bangladesh to bury its past is like telling it to forget all its nobler achievements, including the unforgettable struggle for protecting and preserving our cultural and linguistic entity from the encroachment and aggression of alien ruling elite? If Bangladesh forgets its past nothing will remain of its glorious heritage and tradition.

But that does not, however, mean that Bangladesh prefers to remain inside the cocoon of the past. With its present solidified and concretised by its past it looks forward to the future with confidence. It will be rather for Pakistan to recall its past and for the sake of equanimity formally apologise for what it did in 1971 and for the shabby treatment during the long 23 years. Japan, traditionally a proud and conservative nation, had to yield in course of time and apologised to China and other Asian nations for the brutalities its troops committed during World War II. So will also Pakistan when the time will come for realising the barbarity committed on the people of Pakistan in 1971 at the behest of its rulers.

Trial of war criminals, both internal and external, is a universally recognised practice. There was the famous Nuremberg Trial. Trials are also being held at the Hague. Bangladesh should raise the issue at the international plank. During the time of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, 190 plus Pakistani war criminals were identified for trial. Sheikh Mujib had himself admitted that this commitment to the nation he failed to keep. Will his daughter Sheikh Hasina, now wearing his mantle, would come forward and complete the unfinished task? Will she also take steps for putting on the dock the quislings or the

collaborators, who actively took part in abetting in the crimes committed by the marauding occupation troops?

What is so astounding is that there is no word from the mainstream opposition the Bangladesh Nationalist Party about either the Hamoodur Rahman Commission's Report nor about the advice of General Musharraf to forget the past. Whatever may be its differences with the ruling party, on a vital issue of national urgency and dignity it should come up clearly with its stand against Pakistan for disdaining Bangladesh. Or has BNP preferred to keep mum because of its alleged alignment with 'anti-liberation forces'? Such an expediency is neither good for the country nor for the party. This is also not good politics which essentially stems from keeping national interest above all other considerations.

Sheikh Hasina has spoken against military take-over in the supreme body of the United Nations. But has she cared to delve into the background of what prompts failure of democracy? Why even in the dawn of the new millennium fledgling democracies are proving to be fragile and in about half a dozen countries the army have recaptured power? Rather than imploring international intervention one should look at one's own house and mend one's own ways. If again past be any guide, it can be deduced that when foundations or pillars of democracies like parliament, judiciary, election commission, constitutional process, rule of law, accommodation and toleration of opposition's views etc are weakened in a planned manner and when there is bitter acrimony over the major contenders of power, these invariably present a situation akin to a happy breeding ground for the illegal capture of power. Democracy cannot long be sustained by external help. It should emanate from the soil through practice and culture.

The Report

The release of this Report is highly motivated, it has only one target, the Pakistan Army. Asking to go public is not out of any great ideal or altruistic purpose, those who leaked the Report know that most of the officers targeted for trial are dead and gone, they really want to put the Pakistan Army on public trial.

Cantonment all options were of Catech-22 nature. Militarily speaking, the surgical operation accomplished its objectives with far lesser casualties than envisaged but in the political sense it could only lead to the blood cycle that ensued. Someone needed to be crucified among the 'East Pakistan 1971 war alumni' for tarring and feathering; was any General other than Maj Gen Rahim Khan available in 1973 despite Gen Niazi clearly stating that he fell back from Chandpur to Dhaka on his orders. Similarly Maj Gen Ghulam Umar, an honourable man of great ability, commitment and integrity is targeted needlessly. A 'club' of armchair warriors excel in creating myths about people they like and horror stories about those they dislike, no question of a fair hearing and/or even the benefit of doubt. Different standards for different people apply. Imbibing alcohol and going after women are eulogised as 'manly' (mard aadmi hai), and if we do not 'belong' as 'drunkards' and 'womanizers'. Entire sections of our military history have been changed to suit myths about favourites. To quote Count Ciano, 'Victory has a thousand fathers, defeat is an orphan'. Gen A M Yahya Khan did a most honourable thing, as the nation's leader during this catastrophe, he accepted full responsibility (and demanded punishment thereof); why was his request to be put on trial in public turned down at that time? Could it be that others more culpable had a profound stake in keeping him silent?

Is it fair to stand in judgement relying only on misinformation and distorted facts about events three decades ago? Samuel Butler said, 'God cannot alter the past but historians can'. We have more things to worry about than trying to exorcise the faded ghosts of 1971. The Report's sudden appearance is a well-

AS I SEE IT Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

timed Indian strategy; one has only to read 'The Kautilya Arthashastra' (Books 11 to 14) as translated from Sanskrit by R.P. Kangale and the requirements of a 'Vijigishu' (would-be world conqueror). Five thousand years later the same principles apply. To quote Chinese Philosopher and Strategist Sun Tse Tzu, 'winning a war without bloodying swords is the clear objective here. The Indians may be laughing themselves sick at our becoming a 'tool of their game'.

One of the names on the list was that of Brig (Retd) Muhammad Taj S.J.B. Bar. Lt Col Taj was CO 44 Punjab (now 4 Sindh) during the 1971 war. Just consider only the events leading up to battle. As my company gave a canopy of machine gun fire over a train burning from end to end carrying Guides Cav tanks at Daharki Railway Station on 10 December 1971, he stood defiantly on the road only 200 yards away, arms akimbo, flatly refusing to take cover till the Indian aircraft had been driven away and the cavalrymen ran to their tanks shackled on the MBFRs and started the engines, making a sharp right swivel to break the chains, letting the tanks fall sideways down the dusty embankment and putting out the fire. Now that I call courage! 'Don't be late', Taj growled with pride at the bravery of Guides Cavalry. 'Tell Ayub (the Guides Cav CO) we have an appointment with the Indians you better not miss!' Or pummeling Sep Yaquub (now a PIA Security Guard in Karachi) and giving him a bear

embrace for shooting down an SU-7 which crashed and exploded only a few hundred yards away a mile or so short of Umkerot. Try and recapture the elation he would instill in the sub-units of 45 Punjab and 46 Baluch as they fanned out left and right of us. 'Good hunting, tell the Indians Taj is here'. Quite dramatic, unabashed showmanship perhaps, but invaluable in raising the morale of troops on the receiving end of continuous Indian air attacks.

And on Sanohi Ridge, the guns of 26 Field and 40 Field on the reverse slope booming away, exhorting 44 Punjab to take 199r and 200r, two sandy dunes occupied by the Indians in the proximity of Chor. 'Is there a better day to be Shaheed than today, is there a better way to be Shaheed than with a bullet in your chest?' he would ask anyone who would listen. And during the O (Orders) Group with Maj Gen Naseer, GOC 33 Div, sitting with his knee cap shot up and Lt Gen K.M. Azhar, Governor NWFP, also wounded looking on. 'Hamud (we were assembled in the Gun Position of a Battery of 40 Field) will give us something to eat, we won't become Shaheed on an empty stomach!' Maj (later Lt Gen) Hamid Niaz gave us a banquet of 'Sukhi Roti and Dal', a very hot mug of (gunner's) tea and sent us off with a tearful embrace into the darkness to what he thought was certain death.

Lt Col Taj was decorated with Sitara-e-Jurat for bravery in 1965 and then again in 1971. One cannot recapture in one

article Taj's actual war exploits, only how we were deeply motivated, individually, as a unit and even as a formation, during desperate times by this man's presence, how he lifted our spirits in an environment only someone who has been in a battle situation can empathize with. Now those who have never smelt cordite would have this man court martialled? This Army and this country owes a debt of gratitude to the Tajs of Pakistan, a hundred, maybe a thousand Tajs were seen up and down the line thus exhorting their sub-units, units and formations from Kashmir to Kutch throughout the war. They blunted the brunt of the enemy's threat, asked for no quarter and gave none. As someone who prides himself in having

served under one such Taj I take issue with any Report that disparages this brave man's conduct during war, be it 1965 or 1971. 44 Punjab (now 4 Sindh) may be forgiven for being prejudiced, why not ask the others (including some Generals today serving in other units of 60 Bde and 33 Div) what Taj symbolized during war? During peace, every loudmouth with a booming voice who has not heard a shot being fired in anger becomes a hero.

The release of this Report is highly motivated, it has only one target, the Pakistan Army. Asking to go public is not out of any great ideal or altruistic purpose, those who leaked the Report know that most of the officers targeted for trial are dead and gone, they really want to put the Pakistan Army on public trial. To quote Paul-Emile Borduas, 'the past must no longer be used as an anvil for beating out the present and the future'. Leave the Army alone.

OPINION

Bangladesh and Pakistan

Ahsan Ahmed

In Mr Rezaul Karim's article on Democracy in The Daily Star of September 16, I really do not see why Mr Karim has to take it on himself to become an apologist for military rule in general and for the military in Pakistan in particular. We have all heard and read about those theories put out by the apologists according to which only the developed north is fit for democracy and the developing south, because of higher levels of corruption and political instability, must go through cycles of military rule and democratic governance.

These theories might have been palatable 20 or 30 years ago, but are no longer tenable, particularly in the South Asian context where the populace at large has been exposed to democratic practices and where a free and open press operates. In Pakistan, just because the street demonstrations in favour of General Musharraf were larger than those in favour of Nawaz Sharif, it does not mean that repeated bouts of military rule are in Pakistan's long term national interest or that a majority of Pakistanis prefer military rule.

In fact, and as expected, the gloss on Musharraf's rule is already wearing thin and the Supreme Court has given a ruling for an early return to democratic governance. Besides, no matter how allegedly corrupt Nawaz Sharif was, his future should have been decided by the people of Pakistan at the ballot box, and not by the men in uniform in their plush and cosy cantonments. Military rule has been disastrous for Pakistan, as any student of history and politics will testify.

The Bangladesh Prime Minister's speech at the UN needs to be seen in this context. The contents of her speech should

be welcomed by any democrat no matter how hard it may be for autocrats the world over to swallow. It could be that the timing was puzzling and unfortunate, in that it came in the wake of Sheikh Hasina's efforts to broker a peace deal between India and Pakistan. However, it is very unlikely that Hasina's effort was going to come to anything in any case, given the present state of India-Pakistan relations.

Nevertheless, I cannot understand why some people in Bangladesh should criticise that Musharraf has been offended by Sheikh Hasina's speech at the UN. If the General decided that he does not want to meet Hasina in New York, well, Bangladeshis should consider that as his loss and not ours. Rather than accusing the Bangladesh PM of interfering in Pakistan's internal affairs, perhaps the General might want to rebut and explain away the allegation that Pakistan's ISI has been actively interfering in independent Bangladesh's internal affairs for the last 30 years.

It is high time also for the Pakistani Generals and senior bureaucrats to address the long outstanding issues between Bangladesh and Pakistan such as an apology for their unwarrented violence against the people of Bangladesh in 1971, a fair division of pre-1971 assets and the repatriation to Pakistan of all those in Bangladesh who consider themselves Pakistani. There are many, many people in Pakistan who also want these issues addressed and also want certain of their Generals tried for what they did to their country in 1971. The Hamoodur Rahman report is very clear on this. Unfortunately, the power of the armed forces in Pakistan is such that many a rational voice is stifled and not permitted to speak out openly and frankly.

To the Editor ...

Bangladesh facing hostage menace

Sir, The one-man hostage drama at the DC office in CHT is something new in this country, in that it is not the usual demand for money as ransom, by local goondas turned terrorists to get something for nothing.

In this case senior government officials were held at gun point for specific administrative and political demands. Unless the movement is nipped in the bud, this experimental coup staged in remote CHT might reveal further operations to be staged later.

The hostage-taking operations are not a new idea, having been practised long in the airlines high above in the sky, and the latest spotlight is on Philippines where the Muslim insurgents are fighting for autonomy for many years; and Pili is fresh in the minds.

This is a disturbing trend in Bangladesh before the next general elections. Many now doubt, in view of the deteriorating law and order situation, if the polls could be held on time, or at all. The ruling regime's action plans do not foretell peaceful existence, as confrontational stances are becoming more frequent.

The regime has to look outwards, and not remain cooped up in its own survival strategies. Governance is different from party politics, but our politicians seem to confuse the two, and cannot keep these two sectors separate. This is obviously due to lack of practice in sitting in chairs and working indoors, away from street demonstrations and violent agitation. Creating chaos cannot lead to solutions, only prolong the problems. It is also due to poor leadership, and amateurish advice by the surrounding sycophants. We have the human resources, but badly lack good leadership.

A Voter
Dhaka

Night rickshaw drive and DCC

Sir, We have written several times about road accidents and sufferings of the people caused due to night rickshaw drive without any light/lamp fitted in the vehicle, but all in vain.

It is really very frustrating that in the face of our law enforcing authority thousands of rickshaws ply at night without any light/lamp fitted in the vehicles causing innumerable road accidents and inflicting injuries to the people. But it appears that DCC

and DMP are absolutely apathetic about it.

These days due to frequent electricity failure and load-shedding, many public roads, streets, lanes and by-lanes in the city remain dark after sunset. In the stark darkness, the movement and whereabouts of the rickshaw on the public thoroughfares is hardly visible or traceable. As a result, road accidents and sufferings of the people have increased manifold at night.

We would once again like to request DCC and DMP to enforce fitting of light/lamp in the rickshaw at night for its proper identification, signal and movement for the safety and security of road traffic and protection of the members of public.

O.H. Kabir
Wari, Dhaka