

This Should Have Been Avoided

THE opposition chief Khaleda Zia was prevented from visiting the flood-hit Kolaroa by police and the BDR. The reason given is PM's security. As the PM was scheduled to visit the same area at 2 p.m. the BNP chief's convoy was stopped around 11 a.m. at Jhaudanga on the Jessore-Satkhira road. This incident is likely to further deteriorate the relationship (if that were at all possible) between the government and the opposition.

There are three parties involved here — the government, the opposition and the general public who were caught unawares in the traffic jam that ensued and suffered endless hours of delay without food or water.

Our first point deals with the last category — the ordinary people. What concern did the government show for them? It obviously knew that the road would be blocked and that thousands of innocent people would suffer. Didn't the civil authority feel any responsibility towards the ordinary people on whose tax money they live? Couldn't it have warned the public not to use that road between the hours it was planning to block the road? Obviously it did not, and that is the tragedy of our democracy. Public have no rights.

Then come the ruling and the opposition parties. They both claim to speak for the people or represent public interest. The ruling party is especially responsible, as it knew what was going to happen. On the other hand the opposition knew that even if the government did not obstruct its passage, the large number of party cars would create its own traffic jam, which would result into the suffering of the general public. Did they make any provision to warn or help the latter? Our second point is that why was the opposition chief's motorcade not informed earlier about the government's intention so that it would not have to be stuck up on the road? A simple courtesy from the appropriate agency — may be the local DC's office — informing Khaleda Zia that she will have to wait till PM's visit is over to make her own trip, and that meanwhile she could wait at a convenient place, anywhere but on the road. Was the BNP chief officially informed and requested to accommodate the PM's visit?

Our third point is addressed to the opposition. Why did they schedule Khaleda Zia's visit around the same time as that of the PM's. Doesn't BNP know the sensitivity of the two sides about each other? Was it too unexpected that Khaleda Zia's entourage would be stopped? For any converging programmes protocol gives PM the priority of place and time. The exact treatment would have been meted out to Sheikh Hasina if she were the opposition leader and Khaleda the PM.

If attending to the flood victims is the real intention then please don't play these publicity games with us and especially with the destitute.

Festering Feuds in AL

EVENTUALLY, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had to intervene in the squabbles within the ruling party's Sunamganj unit. Conflict between two Dhaka-based senior leaders and their followers there had reached such a pass that one would even refuse to be in the same room in another's presence, let alone on the same dais. With the general elections drawing near and focus being on power than pelf, tension between the rival camps has quite predictably heightened.

Already there had been several rounds of clashes at the thana headquarters as well as in the district headquarters that left one Jubo League activist killed and many injured. Along with ground-level scuffles, both leaders also made a point to regularly feed information to the party chief on the other's follies. Apparently, both their schemes failed as the AL president declared dissolution of all the party units in the district and instructed formation of new committees. However, her decision did not even touch the fringe of the problem.

Factional feuds have become a regular feature in AL affairs these days. Most of the killings in the recent past had been occasioned by fierce intra-party rivalry. Each of these murders had direct or indirect link to monetary or material aspirations, with ideological considerations obviously into the oblivion. Sensational murder of Murgi Milon on the court premises on September 28 reportedly came as a sequel to conflict between two factions of the ruling party-backed Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL). On October 2, fierce gunfight between two rival AL groups at Charkewar Union in Munsiganj left two killed and some one hundred injured. The list could go on and on.

Whether the central leadership admits it or not, there prevails sheer disorder in the ruling party fold. With parliamentary elections just round the corner, blind pursuit of vengeance could very well lead to more blood and gore. Unfortunately, the party stalwarts themselves appear low on moral authority; for sons and relatives of some of them have provided extremely unsavoury precedents of highhandedness in recent times. Therefore, the onus ultimately falls on the Prime Minister to rein in the troublemakers in her party with an iron leash. Unless top-down disciplinary measures are adopted right-away, wild hunt for power and pelf by the leaders and activists at all levels could land Awami League in deeper lurch than it can find of.

Highhandedness with a Photo-journalist

HYE Swapna, a photojournalist of the daily Manabhanjan was reportedly assaulted in front of Gonobhaban on Wednesday last. He was taking snaps of some demonstrating members of the Awami League branch of Sunamganj who reportedly came to Dhaka on invitation by the Prime Minister and AL chief Sheikh Hasina. An on-duty police official, according to the report in the Prothom Alo, dodged his responsibility as he balked at the thought of enraging Hye's tormentor who had seemingly popped out of Gonobhaban precincts. This is an outrageous piece of news. However, this is not for the first time that a member of the press has been harassed while performing his duty. We have been observing with concern and disquiet that journalists are being frequently exposed to ruthlessness — ranging from death threats to murder — by hoodlums. This impinges on the professional rights of journalists, which is the same thing as violating the principle of freedom of press. Let's not create an atmosphere of fear in which the right to disseminate information is hindered.

The post-liberation period should have provided an atmosphere for the press people to carry out their obligations to the people without fear or favour. Wednesday's hostility against a journalist makes us recall the IGP's assurance a year or so ago that any maltreatment against pressmen would be avoided in future. Let that pledge be acted upon.

Ariel Sharon's Deadly Visit to Haram Al Sharif

Apparent calm prevails now in the troubled areas. After 75 unnecessary deaths— mostly Palestinians — even if the cease-fire holds, serious damage has been inflicted on the peace process and the confidence that started building up between the two sides has suffered setback that would take time to restore.

ISRAEL'S right wing leader Ariel Sharon who is generally known to the Palestinians as a "murderer, a criminal and worse," visited Al Haram Al Sharif (to the Jews it's Temple Mount) on Thursday, September 28, 2000 accompanied by over 1000 Israeli riot police. The visit, reportedly first of its kind, as he could not give the date or year of any earlier visit, was pre-planned obviously with the idea of reasserting Jewish claim of sovereignty over the Temple Mount which was captured by Israel in 1967 war. He is the one who earlier accused Prime Minister Barak of giving away Jerusalem with the Temple Mount, the site sacred to the Jews, to the Palestinians, when Ehud Barak reportedly supported the US plan of shared sovereignty which, however, did not include the Haram Al Shaif or the Walled City.

Ariel Sharon who as the Israeli Defense Minister led Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and was 'indirectly responsible' for the massacre of hundreds of unarmed Palestinians and also led an Israeli commando squad to blow up 45 Palestinian houses in Qibya, has been dead against any peace deal with the Palestinians. Known as a "butcher" his visit to the holy site sparked off protests after the Friday prayer in the Al Haram Al Sharif and also in several areas of West Bank and Gaza. Israeli security forces used bullets and tear gas within the compound of the Dome of the Rock.

The violence spread over most of the towns and villages of West Bank and Gaza and also in the Arab areas within Israel. It appears that initially the protests were confined to mainly stone throwing by Palestinian youths, but when Israeli security forces started using live ammunitions instead of rubber bullets resulting in the first death and scores of injuries, serious violence erupted all over the places. More Israeli security forces were brought in. Apparently Palestinian police forces also joined the battle and forces of both sides started to

shoot at each other. Street battles were on. It was an "all out war" as reportedly stated by the Secretary General of the UN. Israeli forces were not only using live ammunitions but also tanks appeared in the "war zone." Surprisingly, Israelis started using "excessive forces" like helicopter gunships against the Palestinian positions. It was a battle of two unequal forces one stone throwing crowd briefly supported by Palestinian police forces with age-old rifles and the other highly trained armed forces with most modern equipment including tanks and helicopter gunships etc.

As it seems, Prime Minister Barak did not exercise enough control over Israeli security forces. Under no circumstances, Israeli forces should have been allowed to use live ammunition against the stone throwing youths that led to the first death and spiral effects continued and the situation quickly went out of control. Seven days of violence caused over 70 deaths mostly Palestinians. This was totally unnecessary and the undoubtedly the situation was handled very badly by the Israeli side. Apparently President Arafat also did not take any initiative to talk

sides with a view to formulating a strategy for keeping the stone throwing crowd under control, though allowing them vent their anger as Barak unfortunately allowed Sharon's visit that triggered off Palestinian anger.

Knowing Ariel Sharon so well though as he does, Prime Minister Barak did not stop Sharon's visit because of domestic reasons. Barak is already heading a minority government and he faces a hostile Knesset on October 29 when it resumes session after a long break. Obviously Sharon's visit was deliberate, ominous and indeed turned out to be deadly. He knew that he was not a welcome visitor to the sites holy to the Muslims and hence such a high protection force of about 1000 Israeli riot police with him. It would have probably been prudent for Barak to stop Sharon's visit. This would have undoubtedly angered Sharon's supporters, but enormous damage done to the peace process could have been avoided. This was more important for Barak as he is in trouble at home any way because of his somewhat positive attitude towards finding a solution to the basic issue of sovereignty of East Jerusalem.

Any solution acceptable to both sides leading to peace with Palestinians would have, as it appears, earned support of the majority of the people of Israel regardless of the selfish and negative attitude of the right wing and religious Israeli leaders. Indeed, if domestic political problems with those political parties lead to fresh election, Barak could probably face that quite successfully as majority of Israeli people now appear to be in favour of peace with Palestinians. They know that they can't continue their fight with the Palestinian neighbours for all time to come.

Any such escalation of violence led to international condemnation and personal telephone calls from President Clinton to both President Arafat and Prime Minister Barak all urging for stopping the violence. Both sides were asked to attend an immediate meeting at Paris.

The meeting took place on Wednesday, October 4, where President Chirac, US Secretary Albright, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan were present. But despite all the bilateral meetings separately with President Arafat and Prime Minister Barak and then the full meeting with all present could not produce any written agreement as Barak apparently supported by the US was not prepared to agree to an International Commission to investigate the violence. Any way, it was agreed by both parties that the violence had to be stopped.

In the meantime President Hosni Mubarak as usual took the initiative and invited both the parties to join a meeting at Sharm-el-Sheikh on Thursday, October 5. Prime Minister Barak initially was reluctant to join but ultimately joined the meeting where Secretary Albright again worked hard to bring the two sides together and ultimately both agreed to take appropriate measures to stop the violence. One has to wait and see what happens on the ground. Apparent calm prevails now in the troubled areas. After 75 unnecessary deaths mostly Palestinians — even if the cease-fire holds, serious damage has been inflicted on the peace process and the confidence that started building up between the two sides has suffered setback that would take time to restore.

These two distant cousins have been fighting for centuries and may continue the same in some form even if some form of peace is achieved, but President Clinton, as it seems, suffered the real loss due to this unfortunate episode, as it might not be possible for him to clinch the peace deal while in office. He may have to continue to guide the peace process later which he is expected to do. He might find it easier if Al Gore returns to the White House, but somewhat less easy with George Bush Junior there.



Spotlight on Middle East
Muslehuddin Ahmad



Israeli forces using live ammunition against stone-pelting demonstrators

Reopening the War Crime Issue

by A R Shamsul Islam

Crimes are never too old to be tried. War-crimes being severer their trial tenability period is longer. That is why even octogenarians, when captured for their alleged involvement in the Nazi holocaust, are not spared from being put in the dock. The Japanese had to apologize to the Koreans and the Chinese for invading those peoples once.

THE war of 1971 was limited by terms of reference. The commission was asked to find out the causes of the humiliating defeat of Pakistan army in the war. The vital issue of genocide in Bangladesh was not incorporated in the terms of reference. However a part of the atrocities committed on the people of the then East Pakistan had automatically come up in the Report.

Sheikh Hasina's Millennium Summit speech offended Pakistan's Chief Executive Pervez Musharraf so much that he discarded his scheduled talk with her on the sidelines of the summit ignoring all diplomatic norms and decorum.

Why did Hasina deliver such a speech? There may be many causes. First, she had personal experience of affliction in the hand of the army. Her father President Sheikh Mujib, mother, brothers, other near relatives were brutally shot dead by the army. Second, she might have wanted to send out signals to the army not to try to seize power in Bangladesh in future. Third, she might have tried to carve out an importance for her among the world powers. What could be more suitable than the Millennium Summit to pursue that object? Of course, there might be other kinds of causes.

Hasina's speech might not have targeted Musharraf. Why did Musharraf take it on his own shoulder? Even if it was intended to attack him, he could have rather ignored it sitting tight

giving an air of unconcern and innocence. Musharraf so ardently justifies his takeover on the ground of saving the country from being bogged down by massive corruption, foreign policy pusillanimity of Nawaz Sharif's government. He vaunts that people heralded his emergence on the state mantle by cheering on the streets. Why couldn't he wear the same confident look in the event of Hasina's speech that didn't identify him by name, designation or any other direct reference? The speech was general in nature and launched against the community of military usurpers.

Of course there might not be any other plenipotentiary of Musharraf's feather in the Summit. Probably this fact might have given Musharraf a lively affront. It is not known if Hasina could foresee the bearing of her speech on the mind of Musharraf.

Pakistan is a country that has vainly run after impossibilities and illogicalities over and over. More unfortunate is that it has never tried to learn from its mistakes. Of the many such instances one or two are given here. Pakistan sucked the then East Pakistan from head to foot but when the latter cried out in pain and learnt to protest Pakistan was taken aback; Pakistan spoke loud of the need of integration among the people of the two wings of the country but denied minimum justice and fairplay to the eastern wing oblivious of the truth that "national integration is the end product of justice"; it

preached and posed to be an 'equal' to India in the index of powers of South Asia but kept on pursuing highly discriminatory domestic policies alienating viable seats of the nation rendering the country weak and incoherent: Pakistan initiated the Kargil war having fancied that it would call forth the intervention of world powers in matter of resolve of 53-year-old Kashmir problem but naively failed to appreciate that her one-time friends the USA and China might not align with her because of a remarkably changed global political landscape following the end of the cold war.

Pakistan held India responsible for the War of 1971 and accused the Muslims of the then East Pakistan of being misled by Indian 'guiles and guises' but it failed to study why they turned to India in 1971. Did Pakistan ever notice that when war broke out between India and Pakistan in 1965 the people of East Pakistan were fully united and ready to sacrifice their lives for defending Pakistan and again when there was a war between the two countries in 1971 the same people were united and ready to sacrifice their lives but this time for achieving independence. Did the military leadership ever try to delve into the causes of this change of mind of the people of this wing, now Bangladesh?

Crimes are never too old to be tried. War-crimes being severer their trial tenability period is longer. That is why even octoge-

narians, when captured for their alleged involvement in the Nazi holocaust, are not spared from being put in the dock. The Japanese had to apologize to the Koreans and the Chinese for invading those peoples once.

Far from being apologetic Pervez Musharraf has advised us to forget 1971 and go ahead. For a moderate answer to this sordid counselling the adviser himself may please go through what a Pakistani author Irfan Husain has said: "Had Bengali troops carried out a similar carnage in West Pakistan, I wonder how

many of us would have been prepared to forgive and forget" as General Musharraf has advised the Bangladesh Prime Minister to do? (DS, 27.9.2000)

That "to forgive is divine" is wholly true. But to be forgiving to a person who adamantly gets away from tendering a simple 'sorry' for the worst genocide of history perpetrated by his predecessors may not be conforming to any element of divinity.

To advise the wronged to forget the past and himself being the wrong-doer not to forget to refrain from apologizing in false vanity epitomizes the gross inner contradiction that the military rulers of Pakistan have immeasurably suffered to the great peril of the nation.

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OPINION

Crime and Criminals: Let's All Bell the Cat

Saiful Alam Lytton

Deteriorating law and order situation is the talk of the town. There is no effective effort in sight to improve it in near future. Nobody appears to be bothered to go into the depth of the problem and review it as a whole taking cognizance of opposing ideas. Rather accusations and counter accusations by the parties concerned who are supposed to take initiative in this regard tend to digress the attention from the core issues. It means either they are actually ignorant of the solutions or they intentionally feign to be ignorant as effective remedies could hamper their respective interests. Which is why whenever there is any effort for revamping the existing laws dealing with crimes and criminals those interested groups start quarrelling often with each other hindering the cause itself.

The practice in vogue is to make some new laws by the party in power, which are always claimed by the opponents as black laws. For obvious reasons the idea does not yield any worthwhile results. It is apparent from the fact that none of the special laws enacted so far for dealing with crime and criminals has been able to serve its avowed objectives to any mentionable extent.

The problem does not involve any particular group. If it were so then elimination of that particular group would solve the problem. As a matter of fact there are many visible and invisible parties and factors related to the problem. So it is no easy job for any one party to overcome it. The complexity of the problem can to some extent be gauged from the startling revelations from horrifying stories of making and unmaking of criminals published almost every day in the mass media that attract anybody's attention in no time. It is frightening to learn from these revelations how criminals are made, trained and used by the godfathers to serve their purposes in various ways. The more intriguing is the entire network of grooming and pro-

tecting hoodlums, which is too well devised to trace its origin. Which is way it is seen that after committing serious crime a criminal easily gets through his ordeals.

The whole process of releasing a terrorist from justice is brought about in such a meticulous manoeuvring that it is very difficult to point finger at any one of the three most important organs of the state — legislature, judiciary and executive. Rather, by and large, it appears that all three organs are more or less responsible for failing to bring the culprits to book. Legislature is responsible for not playing its due role to enact laws suited to the need of the hour, judiciary is responsible for lingering justice and giving almost indiscriminate bail and executive is responsible for influencing verdict. Without the help of people of any of these three organs supposedly a criminal shall never get scot-free. As such it is essential that there be coordinated efforts from these three organs while dealing with crimes and criminals.

But the irony is that all three organs of our state have always been at loggerheads. They have always been accusing each other of failure in arresting crimes and criminals in the society. Recently the accusation has got new dimension with Prime Minister's direct attack on judiciary in this regard. In turn the Prime Minister was accused of contempt of court by different quarters. However, the bottomline is that without complete restructuring of these three organs any piecemeal effort shall prove futile.

It is easier said than done, as the whole matter is very old and complex. Our existing laws relating to crimes and criminals date back to British colonial era. It is sheer nonsense to expect to run an independent country by those laws in modern age. It is high time all concerned came forward to bell the cat. Else time is perhaps not too far when there will be more godfathers than fathers in our society.

To the Editor ...

PM's US visit

Sir, The Daily Star (3 October) news item "PM to pay one-day visit to US" raises more questions than answers. The most obvious one is the non-serious, almost casual nature of the visit as the Foreign Ministry confirms that "an interesting programme has been chalked out for the visit." Not a substantive, but an 'interesting programme' awaits the PM. Since she will meet Madeline Albright and Janet Reno before the meeting with President Clinton, the latter event could only be a brief courtesy call. It is also apparent that the PM's personal agenda overwhelms all national interests and hence questions of enhanced US assistance and investment issues relating to RMG, gas, IT and so on are placed on the back burner.

The main point, perhaps, the only point of interest appears to be the extradition of the killers of Bangabandhu from the US. It has been learnt that the meeting with Attorney General Janet Reno has been scheduled excluding other more crucial engagements. However, it has to be realised that emotional appeal is not what the Attorney General will be impressed by, but all legal requirements need to be met and the procedural formalities complied with before any extradition move is made. These ought to be dealt with at the diplomatic and official level. There should not be any personal element brought in a state-to-state legal relation.

Save the diplomatic areas

Sir, Recently, traffic congestion in Gulshan, Banani and Baridhara has increased manifold. This problem has now reached to such an alarming state that most of the residents have become totally fed up and are striving to find a solution. In most cities of the world one will find that there is a separate place for shops, which are far away from residential areas. One will certainly not find garments factories in residential areas as there are strict rules governing where factories can be built and conduct their business.

However, in Dhaka particularly in Gulshan, Banani and Baridhara areas all these rules seem to have been completely

disobeyed as people are building shops and outlets that are quite illegal. But there comes a time when people must realise that money is not everything. There are other things to consider like pollution, traffic congestion and so forth.

Once Gulshan used to be a very nice place to live in. It was a diplomatic area, which was considered the pride of Dhaka. Now with all the shops and factories, a totally different class of people are coming to this area. The crime rate has really gone up, as people are being stabbed, robbed and murdered. Kidnapping of children is also not unknown. Many slums are being built to shelter all these new people that are flooding into the area. With these slums come diseases, crime and pollution. The Banani Bridge now always remains jammed as hundreds of cars try to cross this small bridge that was built for a few cars to cross. The problem would have been alleviated if new bridges and roads were built but this is not happening while the traffic flow is increasing daily.

If Bangladesh wishes to maintain some kind of international standard where people will want to come back and invest their money in different projects then it has to provide the right facilities to live and work in. This can be easily achieved by relocating the shops and factories of the diplomatic areas to the vacant marshland near Moakhali.

Bushandhara and Tejgaon. There are lot of unused land in these areas, which could easily be developed by Bangladeshi construction firms to build shopping complexes and proper planned roads.

I hope that some initiative would be taken soon so that the foreigners will want to come back to this country and invest rather than pull out, which many are now deciding to do.

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Towards democracy

Sir, I have read with much interest the articles "Practice of Democracy in Bangladesh" and "Making Democracy Work in Bangladesh" by Mr Anwar Hashim, a former Ambassador, published in The Daily Star on September 21 and 28 respectively. Both the articles are analytical and comprehensive. The writer has shown a high degree of balance and neutrality. His approach is positive and suggestions are constructive. Through this column, I would like to convey my compliments to the writer and join him in urging the government and the opposition to seek accommodation and understanding for achieving the goal of building a truly democratic polity in Bangladesh.

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