

## Thoroughly Disgusting

FROM the evening well into last Thursday night, a people of Mohakhali, Gulshan, Banani and Badda wondered whose hands they have put their lives into - the government, police or the youth gone berserk? In fact, the violent backlash of the death by gunshot of BCL general secretary, Dhaka (North) unit and vice president, Titumir College Students Union, Akkasur Rahman Ankhil by his rivals within the same student wing gives rise to a number of questions. First and foremost, why must the life and living of ordinary citizens be allowed to be disrupted for hours on account of a death traced to internal conflict between rival BCL groups coming to a head over control of some club premises at Badda? After Ankhil had been shot to death his followers turned the streets into a war-field with road blockades and car-bashing but they were not obviously fighting their killer adversaries. On the contrary, their destructive activities were directed against public or private property, as if those symbolised their rival ghosts!

The overriding thing to note is that whenever any trouble occurs arms and ammunition start pouring out with terrorists brandishing them in a tell-tale confirmation of the story that the weapons and their users were harboured all the time.

The government's customary reaction to things going wrong has been to link those to an opposition hand. However, since Thursday's mayhem could not be blamed out on the opposition quarters, even in a remote sense, it is expected that the government would have learnt its lesson from it truly and squarely. The home ministry had been apparently told by Ankhil that his rivals were up to finishing him off, yet the latter did not take any pre-emptive move to head off the violent eruption, which was intriguing to say the least.

Many people suspect that the ruling party leaders, barring notable exceptions, are not just giving indulgence to feuding in their student wing BCL but also turning a blind eye to any crisis inflaming their passions to a point of violent eruption. We do not mind their passion so long they can hold it within themselves without endangering public safety and civic life. But increasingly it is the feuding BCL elements who are wreaking havoc on the citizens' life. The government must take responsibility for it and neutralise them immediately, or accept the punishment, in the coming elections, for misgovernance.

## Deregulate BTTB

INDEED the government decision to allow more cellular telephone companies to do business in the country promises cheaper rate and better service for the subscribers. However, the post and telecommunications ministry must realise that until it makes more land-based lines available to the mobile phone operators, the subscribers' access to the telecom network would be limited to the extent of being inconsequential. A huge majority of cell phone users do not have access to BTTB network and thereby to such emergency services as the police, fire brigade, ambulance, etc. Virtually, therefore, their phones are no more than mere toys in times of emergency. Before the decision to award WorldTel a deal to install and maintain 300,000 land-based new connections in three years on a build, own and operate (BOO) basis, the government had been somewhat loathe to entertain the idea of giving private entrepreneurs access to the telecom sector. Even when the cellular phone companies started operations for the first time, the BTTB was accused of step-motherly responses.

Encouragingly, however, the scenario has started changing for the better. In the span of two or three weeks, there have been a couple of positive changes in the shape of the WorldTel deal and the decision to let more cell operators in. Again, the new-found enthusiasm over private sector access could very well lead to saturation and over-subscription which could get us back to the scratches. The quality of service may embark on a plunge to abysmal depth. The point we are trying to make here is, the positive policy shifts taken so far have to be followed up by effective implementation.

As we understand, on satisfactory completion of 300,000-line deal, WorldTel might get another contract to install 200,000 more connections. The outstanding demand, we are sure, is much higher than half a million lines. Why not allow more private companies access to development of telecom infrastructure on BOO basis?

If the policy is right, there is no telling how flooded we shall get from foreign investment in this sector.

## Good Tiding

IT is good to know that Oman Airlines and Biman Bangladesh Airlines have paid Jarina Khatun Tk 90,000 in compensation money. This is to enable her to cover the loss she incurred during her flight from Abu Dhabi to Dhaka. Earlier, after investigation, the Biman authority had suspended six employees from work for their alleged involvement in the incident concerning pilferage from Jarina Khatun's luggage.

However, had it not been for the media pressure, luck wouldn't have perhaps smiled on her. This is not to take away credit from the airlines but to underline the need for spontaneous grant of compensation in all such cases. There has to be a proper system to take cognizance of grievances or losses of passengers and redress them as early as possible. The basic services must be ensured to live up to the expectations of the passengers. There should be a cell at the Zia International Airport to deal with these cases in association with different airlines.

Alongside, we reiterate our request to the authorities concerned to make Zia International Airport hassle-free for incoming and outgoing passengers. After all, Dhaka has a long way to go in assuming the proportion of an international airport in the true sense of the term. The Jarina Khatun incident should serve as an eye-opener as far as lack of supervision within the airport compound is concerned. The airport authority should go all out to plug every hole in its security system.

WHEN in 1993 a Middle East Peace Agreement was secretly hammered out at Oslo the eyebrows were raised among the neutral observers who felt flabbergasted at its usefulness and urgency. Because, the formula for peace in the region already existed in the UN Security Council resolution number 242 which, according to President Bush, had to be the very foundation of the post-Gulf war Middle East peace. James Baker, the Secretary of State, specifically cited 242 when he invited Arab and Israeli leaders to the Madrid Summit in 1991. Unlike Oslo Agreement the contents of 242 were simple yet comprehensive and free from ambiguity. It emphasised "the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war and the need to work for a just and lasting peace in which every state in the area can live in security" and demanded "the withdrawal of Israel's armed forces from the territory occupied in the recent conflict".

The resolution clearly guaranteed the security of Israel like that for the Arab States provided the former withdrew from the land occupied in 1967 Middle East war: the occupied West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Golan Heights and Arab East Jerusalem. The land for peace inherent in 242 had catered for the security and recognition needs of Israel which the Arabs had refused to concede since its creation in 1947. In exchange the Arabs would regain the lands lost in 1967 but not those lost in the earlier conflicts. Both sides, thus, had something to gain by 1967 UNSC resolution 242. Why was then another peace formula devised in secrecy at Oslo?

The answer partly lay in the "new historic realities" brought about by the West's conquest of cold war. The West led by the

**The spontaneous eruption triggered by Sharon's visit of Al-Quds on 28 September has been a watershed in the peace process. The process was rent asunder when Ehud Barak, in his attempt to co-opt surging emotions in Israel, moved swiftly by rolling out the armour and air power. After more than 100 Palestinians are martyred can the pieces of the peace process be put together? The summit in Sharm-el-Sheikh could not ensure it. Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary General, also returned disappointed.**

United States was now left with no rivals to oppose its schemes of things in world politics. With the disintegration of the Soviet Union there was neither any support for the Palestinians from a counter-vailing force. Iraq, the new centre of Arab resistance was thrashed in the battlefield. The Palestinians' fortune reached its nadir with the PLO HQ now shifted to far-off Tunis where they squabbled over leadership with the rise of several rival groups. In the meantime the Palestinian *Intifada* was on the wane in the absence of a political direction. They also lost their Arab financial backers for choosing 'wrong' side in the Gulf War. The Arabs in general, were overwhelmed with the rapidity and enormity of changes which all went in their disfavour. The 'new historic realities' could not be more conducive for Israel's patrons to complete their unfinished task of establishing the bonafide of Israel in a hostile Arab heartland.

For Israel the status quo over the occupation of Arab lands proved costly, outright annexation seemed fraught with grave risk and a Palestinian state as demanded by the Palestinians was out of question. The worst she could bargain was the question of autonomy for the Palestinians. All these alternatives for the resolution of Arab-Israeli conflict were already under consideration of Israel and her allies when the emerging realities provided there new opportunities for resolving the crisis at a much lesser price.

But of greater interest for them was the prospect of getting Israel at long last recognised by her Arab adversaries including the PLO itself. With that, they knew, Israel's last legal battle would be over almost at no cost. Hence was a game plan in the name of a peace process to trick the Palestinians in its mortal trap.

The Oslo Agreement precisely enabled Israel to renegotiate 242; henceforth Israel decides from which 'territories' occupied in

The *Intifada*'s veterans constituted the leadership of this vibrant generation and were most authentic to speak on its behalf. The peace brokers consciously sidetracked the Palestinian nationalists and, instead, pitch forked an old decrepit Yasser Arafat from his remote Tunis base. When the peace brokers bent upon using both his celebrity and fading image catapulted Arafat to the centre-stage of peace-making, he no more repre-

farce of a peace process spanning long seven years yielded the 'municipal control' of only 20 per cent of the occupied land to so-called Palestinian Authority.

In the meantime the Americans who claimed to be the 'honest broker' in the negotiation between their closest ally in the Middle East and a forgiven 'terrorist' Arafat, went along with Israel's ambitions openly. And when at last after the predictable collapse of Camp David where Arafat was cooped up by the Americans with Israeli premier Barak and pressurised to accept 'civic control' of the holy sites of East Jerusalem under Israeli sovereignty, President Clinton appeared on Israeli Television to threaten Arafat into submission, warning that the US embassy might be moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem if he (Arafat) did not fall in line adding that Arafat was to blame for the Camp David debacle in July last.

Now that the Oslo Accord has come a cropper, amidst a new wave of violence, Arafat is on his knees begging the Americans for intervention. But his distress call has been of no avail because by transforming PLO from a liberation organisation to a government-in-waiting he is neither here nor there. Arafat already played his triumph card in 1993 by recognising Israel while he does not any longer have the option of returning to the battlefield. As a result Arafat has now nowhere to go, no cards to lay and



## PERSPECTIVES

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

1967 conflict' it would withdraw and which occupied area she would choose not to withdraw. The massive Jewish settlement, built illegally on Arab land would not be abandoned. The frontier of occupied Palestinian land would remain in Israel hand. And so would Arab East Jerusalem with its Islamic sites. It already declared Jerusalem as its 'eternal and unified capital'.

Even as the Oslo process was devised after the cold war a radical generation of Palestinian nationalists and Muslim fundamentalists emerged in the occupied territories to violently oppose the process. They demanded the destruction of Israel proper and end to land for peace diplomacy something PLO once stood for.

sented the new Palestinian generation and was commonly despised both by the Hamas and nationalists.

The new generation of Palestinians was never convinced of Arafat's wisdom of abandoning the goal of 'revolution till victory'. It considered PLO's strategic shift a sell out. As a matter of fact, the moment Arafat put his signature on the document called 'Declaration of Principles' at the White House on September 13, 1993, renounced 'violence' and recognised Israel's right to exist both his fate and that of PLO was sealed. And the Palestinians were made to traverse a new course of history. Now a chastised Arafat could be arm-twisted to make a series of compromises while the

no room to manoeuvre'. Perhaps nothing can, under present circumstances, save him and his so-called Palestinian Authority from the looming disaster.

Ariel Sharon of hardline Likud Party the butcher of Sabra and Shatilla only ignited the pent-up anger of the Palestinians who wanted an end to the farce in the name of peace process. They were apprehensive of the sort of final status settlement when Israelis are not prepared to surrender Jerusalem, abandon Jewish settlement in Palestinian territory or even allow the Palestinian refugees to return home while the key question of sovereignty to be enjoyed by the Palestinians is uncertain. By all indications its quantum will be to make the Palestinians living like a colony or a client state.

The spontaneous eruption triggered by Sharon's visit of Al-Quds on 28 September has been a watershed in the peace process. The process was rent asunder when Ehud Barak, in his attempt to co-opt surging emotions in Israel, moved swiftly by rolling out the armour and air power. After more than 100 Palestinians are martyred can the pieces of the peace process be put together? The summit in Sharm-el-Sheikh could not ensure it. Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary General, also returned disappointed. Madeline Albright called Arafat to Paris to 'soften' him up and once again tried to wrestle him into signing his 'death warrant'. When he refused she chased him and had the US embassy's gate closed. What a crude mediation! This week another attempt will be made in Washington besieged with the transition of power to put the process back on track. But most observers are already convinced that the Oslo process is dead and only awaiting its formal burial.

# Massacre of J&K Sikhs: In the Name of Whose Nation?

Praful Bidwai writes from New Delhi

**Far too many sins against people have been committed by "patriots" in the name of "the nation". This must stop if we are to build a nation that is responsive to its people. We can't combat the jihadis by becoming counter-jehadis.**

IT couldn't have been a more intriguing whodunit. On March 20, as an American President's first Indian visit in 22 years begins, 35 Sikhs in Chittisinghpura are gunned down by terrorists wearing army battle fatigues. This is the first attack on Kashmiri Sikhs.

New Delhi is quick to blame 'Pakistan-backed' Hizbul Mujahideen and Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT). But no militant group claims credit. Islamabad vehemently denies involvement.

The massacre shocks the world. It radically changes the complexion of Mr Bill Clinton's interaction with India's leaders. There is blame for Pakistan, and genuine sympathy for India. Mr Vajpayee finally gets a one-to-one audience with Mr Clinton.

Questions are raised. Is the massacre Islamabad's devilish way of underscoring in blood Mr Clinton's description of South Asia as "the world's most dangerous place"? Would any militant group commit such a disgusting act just when Kashmiri separatism needs all the international goodwill it can get? How come some of the "terrorists" were drinking rum? Could they have been mere mercenaries?

Some issues apparently settle down five days later when five terrorists are liquidated by the

Indian army in an "encounter" at Pathribal. They are identified as part of the group who committed the massacre. Security forces win rewards running into lakhs.

However, soon the "encounter" story starts coming unstuck. Five men in Anantnag villages go missing. None is connected with any militant outfit. Their relatives search high and low for them. Soon they start organising protests demanding that the bodies of the "terrorists" killed in Pathribal be exhumed and identified.

A big movement builds up. Eyewitnesses say that seven Rashtriya Rifles soldiers rounded them up and asked them to help bury some bodies on March 25. Some of them are Gujjars, a semi-nomadic, largely illiterate and poor community.

On April 3, the Special Operations Group of the J&K Police and Central Reserve Police open fire upon demonstrators at Brackpora. Nine civilians are killed. When the bodies of the Pathribal "terrorists" are exhumed, their relatives identify

them as those who went missing on the day of the "encounter".

The J&K chief minister orders an inquiry into the firing by Justice S.R. Pandian, a retired Supreme Court judge.

On October 31, Justice Pandian pronounces the firing to be unprovoked and unjustified. Seven officers are to be tried for murder. Gen Mukherjee too finds the Amarnath pilgrim firing unjustified. Dr Farooq Abdullah takes the next step; judicial inquiry into Pathribal and Chittisinghpura.

Meanwhile, different stories emerge about Chittisinghpura. In some versions, the killers are not HM or Lashkar men, but Ikhwanis or "surrendered" militants, many of whom have been recruited into the SOG over the years and are a law unto themselves.

Some Ikhwanis are freely available on hire as killers. Were they involved in Chittisinghpura? Who hired, them? Is it true that some military-paramilitary officers have built links with them to share intelligence on common

enemies? Do Ikhwanis work for Pakistan's ISI despite having "surrendered"?

Novelist-journalist Pankaj Mishra has stirred up a hornet's nest by discussing the three incidents in *The Hindu* (August 27, Sept 3 and 10). Some of what he reports is chilling. According to some versions, the Chittisinghpura killers were Ikhwanis hired with links to the security forces. Some of them had been seen in the village many times. Some had even played volleyball with local boys.

These versions have become part of the "dark secrets" that high officials whisper into your ears. The people openly discuss them.

On a visit to Anantnag in July, I too heard the same stories. For want of proof, I held back. But in all honesty, I believe that the emerging evidence needs to be scrupulously collated, scrutinised and analysed. However painful, the truth must be established.

It won't do to label those who interrogate the Indian state as

"unpatriotic" or dismiss what the local people say. Nor will it do to speculate, as Prem Shankar Jha does in *Outlook*, on the motives of the Indian and Pakistani governments and then make all kinds of deductions.

Only a fair, impartial and brutally honest inquiry can establish the truth. That's why Dr Abdullah's move must be welcomed. It was a terrible incongruity that a third-order derivative incident (Brackpora) was investigated, while the second-order episode (Pathribal) and the "mother" event (Chittisinghpura) were left out.

Dr Abdullah's step belatedly corrects this anomaly. It is irrelevant whether his motive is to win minority goodwill. It also doesn't matter whether he decided on the inquiry because an LET militant was recently caught with a version similar to the official one.

However, the inquiry must be fair and thorough. More than 30,000 lives have been lost in Kashmir. It won't do to pretend that the Indian state has behaved

there with restraint. All evidence points to repeated, mindless and routine violations of human rights in the "national interest".

The argument that "there is war out there", and therefore unlimited state violence is justified, is misguided. The state's war is against terrorism, not against its own people. Even wars must be fought justly without disproportionate force and cruel or inhuman methods.

Contrary to what is believed by many, there are legally enforceable conventions on wars, sieges, blockades, and treatment of civilians and prisoners. Even terrorists have human rights.

Far too many sins against people have been committed by "patriots" in the name of "the nation". This must stop if we are to build a nation that is responsive to its people. We can't combat the jihadis by becoming counter-jehadis.

Yet, counter-jihadism is widespread. Take Uttar Pradesh. There Chief Minister Rajnath Singh is telling the police they should kill four criminals for each policeman killed. This is a recipe for lawlessness, insensate violence, abuse of power/ultimately, barbarism. It will only perpetuate more Chittisinghpuras.

## To the Editor ...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

### ZIA bedevilled

Sir, The story of Zarina Khatun, the widow from Murad Nagar, whose savings and valuables were stolen from ZIA, had shaken the conscience of everyone. Though she has been compensated, the incident very much revealed how naked the scandal at ZIA has become. Zarina's incident is no way an isolated one. This is the general situation at ZIA. We all remember what happened to a BBC correspondent at this international airport of ours, not so long ago.

The situation at the cargo terminal is even worse. Pilferage of imported items is an everyday affair. Even pharmaceutical raw materials vanish in drum full. People's health is thus put into jeopardy.

Complaints to the MD of Biman and to the highest level of the Ministry of Civil Aviation also do not work. Even series of representations by various chambers of commerce and trade organisations have not worked. The thugs are so powerful.

It is high time the government take notice of this malpractice and take immediate steps to return sanity at ZIA.

AKM Shamsuddin  
Managing Director  
Aventis Pharma  
Rhone-Poulenc Rorer Bangladesh Limited

### The rise and fall of political parties

Sir, The rise and fall of political parties in this sub-continent was well brought out in the commentary of Kuldeep Nayar writing from Delhi (DS, November 1). The arguments sound familiar to the ears of Bangladeshi readers, hence our politicians may ponder over it.

A political party cannot last forever, but must face phases of rise and fall as per historical patterns so well documented by the historians. When the time comes, third fronts have to emerge to sustain a nation. Other dedicated citizens have the right to contribute.

Bangladesh is passing through a changing phase in politics, and what is expected from the politicians is flexibility, and not stubbornness which goes against national interest, either short-term or long-term. A dedicated mission in life in the case of an individual or party is for a limited period, and the change in tides have to be respected in a spirit of tolerance.

The latter attitude is unfortunately lacking in Dhaka today, perhaps due to the long political vacuum created with the intrusion of autocratic regimes.

The need of the moment is matchless leadership and statesmanship, rising above the downward pulls and tugs of the party

workers and supporters. This is the right time to analyse and plan, as the general elections are round the corner and the voters have to be offered clear and clean choices. It does not matter who run the country, so long it is run well.

AMA  
Dhaka

### Women as peace-makers

Sir, It is a matter of great pleasure that after 55 years, the UN Security Council adopted its first ever resolution in recognising the importance of putting women in decision-making positions at every level of peace-making and peace-building. The world body has finally realised that peace can neither be achieved nor maintained without the participation of women. From time immemorial, women and children have been the worst victims of war. Thus, gender inequality threaten international peace and security. Without international intervention, women have no security of any kind.

Hopefully the UN resolution would pave the way for women to play their due role in solving conflict and rebuilding peace. We, the women in Bangladesh hail the Council's decision of including women in all peace-related activities.

Dr Nasima Zaman  
Dept. Of Political Science  
Rajshahi University

### Let there be flowers

Sir, Let there be 'flowers' instead of 'gun salute' when we receive state guest visiting Bangladesh. In fact, this practice

should be introduced in other countries' protocol system as well. I feel receiving a state guest with gun salute very much recognise arms and undermine democracy and human rights.

I would, therefore, like to request the government of Bangladesh to introduce the system of receiving state guest with 'flowers' and stop receiving them with 'gun salute'.

M Hassanul Alam  
15, Green Road  
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

### Alarming but who cares?

Sir, We are very much frightened and shocked at the news item of Dainik Azadi (September 10) which informs us about the importance of putting women in decision-making positions at every level of peace-making and peace-building. The world body has finally realised that peace can neither be achieved nor maintained without the participation of women. From time immemorial, women and children have been the worst victims of war. Thus, gender inequality threaten international peace and security. Without international intervention, women have no security of any kind.

Hopefully the UN resolution would pave the way for women to play their due role in solving conflict and rebuilding peace. We, the women in Bangladesh hail the Council's decision of including women in all peace-related activities.

Nur-Jahan  
Chittagong

### Retail prices credibility gap

Sir, The district news page of The Daily Star is full of exciting news about cheap consumer and agricultural products such as fruits (oranges from CHI), farm chicken, fish, sunflower oil, honey, etc; but most of these items are not available in the Dhaka market around the prices mentioned in the news despatches.

On the other hand, the local retail shops are very keen to advertise that the fruits they sell are foreign, and charge abnormally high rates. Small apples (never owned as a local product) are selling at Tk 60 per kg, formerly available at Tk 22. How is it that a large number of items are smuggled or brought in illegally, when there is no dearth of foreign goods in the market?

It appears that the physical infrastructure links between the rural and urban areas are still poor in different parts of the country, and the agricultural extension marketing services (not new) at the output or finished-product end are not making the right impact on supply and retail prices. Besides, the farmers have no organisation to publicise their products, and have a say in the pricing. The communication gap between the farmers and the consumers have to be reduced. At present, the farmers have some good inputs from the government field agencies. The Farmer PR has to be revitalized. This is seen to some extent in the electronic media, but is absent at the market place. The farmers need tech-

nical marketing set-ups which can interact with the public.

On the other hand the middlemen and the wholesalers and distributors monopolise the situation with cartels and are loath to allow penetration by survey teams and monitors. This grey area has to be reduced and made more transparent, with public monitoring services working in close liaison with private agencies.

In the process the consumers are left out, and do not have an effective platform to have their say, and pressurise the suppliers to toe the line of transparency. There is no direct interaction between the farmers and the retail consumers through proper cooperative, through PR campaigns. This communication gap has to be reduced through projects approved by the Planning Commission.

There are many stray government mini and micro projects without interactive coordination and feedback to provide an integrated perspective of what is happening in a sector. This is alleged to be due to heavy centralisation of the civil service; which means that everything runs from Dhaka (the PARC Recommendations come in, vide DS report Nov 4). The politicians are too busy looking after politics, to bother seriously about good governance, specially facing a dormant parliament. The question is: depend on the political governors or the bureaucrats? It is always back to square one!

A Mawaz  
Dhaka