

## RAJUK's 'secret' dealings

Halt plunder of prime land

THE allotment of public land by RAJUK continues to be overshadowed by allegations of dubious, underhand and politically motivated dealings. Not for the first time, allegations have surfaced that RAJUK has been secretly allotting prime property, this time in the Gulshan-Banani-Baridhara lake areas. In order to conceal the deal which would benefit vested parties, RAJUK officials have been delaying implementation of a Tk120 crore lake development project that was sanctioned some eight months ago. Nepotism is leading not only to misappropriation of land, but also obstructing environmentally crucial development.

We demand an explanation from RAJUK. The delay on the lake project must be accounted for and allegations of misconduct must be investigated. People have a right to know what is being done with public land.

This lakeside scam is not an isolated case. RAJUK's dealings have acquired a notoriety that cannot be overstated. A nexus between political and vested interests, together with connivance from corrupt officials have deprived legitimate and non-partisan candidates, without connections or monetary resources, of even making it to the waiting list. Those who manage to get allotments are then kept hanging, mired either in red tape or tied up in complications that arise because of a network of unauthorised allotments. Legitimate recipients are forced to contend with a host of obstacles, including dubious make-shift constructions on their land that are aimed at extorting compensation for eviction.

All this is happening under the aegis of RAJUK officials who, instead of focusing on implementation of the master plan, are preoccupied with brokering land deals, at greater personal benefit to themselves, at the expense of legitimate applicants and aspirants and by endangering the environment and habitat of the populace.

RAJUK has been enjoying an immunity from accountability that has made it virtually a 'state within a state'. We urge parliamentary intervention, either through an existing committee or a specially convened one, with the express aim of eliminating corruption and nepotism, ensuring transparency and accountability in RAJUK's dealings. The untrammelled plunder of prime land must be brought to a halt.

## BCL highhandedness at DU

It's time the ruling party reined in its colts

NOW comes the revelation that residents of different dormitories at the Dhaka University are forced, by different repressive measures, into taking part in various BCL and AL programmes. The BCL leaders of different halls, as reported in a front-page news of this daily item (Resident students of DU at mercy of BCL activists, May 12), station themselves at the main entrance so that no one can get out prior to a procession or a rally. At the same time, cadres visit each and every room to 'goad' general students into joining the programme. Those who dare refuse are more often than not roughed up.

While officially denying 'such allegations', some BCL leaders explained why they do what they do, off the records, of course. "We always try to stage big processions to gain political recognition from central leaders," said one. "We know this is not ethical, but we are doing this for the sake of campus politics," one hall unit president of the BCL argued. Quite compelling arguments, aren't they? The bottom line is, whether admit it or not, campus-centred acts of violence and hooliganism are their own creation. Even if we rule out, quite naively that is, their direct involvement, these activities regularly take place for their "political recognition".

We are not surprised that the victims do not dare lodge complaints with the hall authorities for fear of "further reprisal." We are even less surprised that the hall provosts hardly apply their discretionary authority to expel a resident student guilty of misconduct for up to six months despite the galore of violence and hooliganism "because of the influence of the ruling party or its students wing".

In our view, the rot has been created by the politicians and, therefore, should be cleared by them. Easier said than done. We have no doubt about it. However, there has to be a start right away, unless, of course, they want Dhaka University and all other major seats of learning to become 'den of criminals'.

## Strategic significance of Chinese PM's visit to Pakistan

HARUN UR RASHID writes from Canberra, Australia

CHINA'S Prime Minister Zhu Rongji has been undertaking a five-day visit to Pakistan from May 11. The visit is important in many ways, especially in an environment of uncertainty of relationship between China and the US.

China and Pakistan have been traditional allies for a long time. The Sino-Pakistani "umbilical cord" has stood up in the past to contain India's supremacy in the sub-continent. India, on the other hand, has been engaged in building up a strategy to tie down China in the north of the Himalayas.

Both China and Pakistan fought wars with India for different reasons. The depiction of China and Pakistan by India as "aggressors" persisted without interruption. Strategists argued that India had not been complacent in the face of Pakistan's rapidly developing missile programme or China's growing military influence in the region. The nuclear tests conducted by India in May 1998 provided reassurance to the people of India that their national security were paramount and would be protected at all costs.

The visit added importance in the light of China's recent stand-off with the US over its possession of a "spy

plane" on Hainan island. The event has inadvertently determined a new course for the international community. Washington realised that it could no longer expect a free ride in the Asia Pacific. It appears that China is prepared to take more risks to confront the US as a means of exerting its power in the Asia Pacific. Such assertion of power appears to heighten respect for China in the

dom while the Soviet Union was the "evil empire". The US does not require to fight the "evil empire" any more. Some argue that under the new Bush administration, the US is in a mood of confrontation with Asia's giant.

Although the US has been the only superpower in today's world, Russia and China are not prepared to accept the "policeman" role of the

Furthermore two developments have cast a dark shadow on the political and security scene in the sub-continent. One is the policy of the US on China and the other is the proposed US-India military co-operation. Both these developments are seen as being fundamentally hostile to China and Pakistan.

The new US administration has been giving mixed signals to China.

continent. China, India and Pakistan are the three wheels on which the balance of strategic interests of the sub-continent rests. If China acquires modern weapons, India will respond to match China and Pakistan in turn will keep symmetry with India. It is the linkages among China-India-Pakistan that create complexity in security scene in the sub-continent.

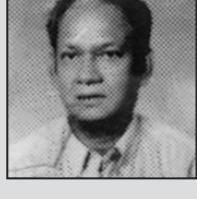
Washington in April, the two countries are expected to set the pace of military co-operation. This seems to be confirmed by the statement of US Secretary of State Colin Powell during the visit of India's foreign minister: "We keep moving this relationship in a very positive and powerful direction" with India.

The US-India military co-operation will not go unnoticed by China and Pakistan. Pakistan and China may evolve a common strategy to contain the US-India supremacy in Asia. Although China and Pakistan alliance is no match for US-India militarily, it will render more difficult for US-India to achieve the objectives.

Besides economic co-operation, the leaders of China and Pakistan will have a hard look at the changing security landscape in Asia Pacific. Pakistan and China are bound together in complex and interdependent relationship and will attempt to meet the new challenge. It seems that a new cold war is in prospect and the focus of the Bush administration shifts decisively from Europe to Asia. China and Pakistan are ready to play their part and from this perspective the visit is strategically weighty.

Harun ur Rashid, a Barrister, is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

## Justice is done



ARSHAD-UZ ZAMAN

THE assassination of the founder President of Bangladesh Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman along with his entire family and close relations on the black night of 15 August 1975 is an event whose parallel is difficult to find in history.

In all nearly 30 people perished that terrible night. Among those assassinated were Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, his wife Begum Mujib, his two sons and their newly wedded wives, his brother and a host of near relatives who lived in houses nearby. The assassin included a pregnant woman of the family.

It was a carefully crafted plot and tanks rolled on the streets of Dhaka.

The leaders of the group of assassins were Col Faruq Rahman and Col Rashid, both related by marriage. They had brainwashed some members of the tank regiment to carry out their heinous plot at the dead of night.

They carried out their assassination plot methodically. Once they had executed their plot, according to plan they installed Khondaker Mushtaque Ahmed as President.

His dubious role in Calcutta, during the Liberation War of 1971, is well known. He is reported to have attempted to sabotage the War of Independence by trying to establish links with Pakistan. No wonder he quickly succeeded Bangabandhu and did not delay in denouncing the Father of the Nation.

One of the first targets of the assassins was to sow terror throughout Bangladesh. In the beginning they were successful.

For some members of Bangabandhu's cabinet joined the Government of Khondaker Mushtaque. The assassins camped at the grounds of Bangabandhu and power flowed through the barrels of their guns.

In less than three month's time a

counter coup was staged by Brig Khaled Musharraf. This was short lived and Brig Musharraf was killed.

Realising that the assassins had failed to establish their rule, they fled

Asia Pacific regional countries. Japan and South Korea, allies of the US, seem to distance themselves from tough policies of the Bush administration on China and North Korea.

The visit of the Chinese Premier is taking place at a time when evidence of new re-alignment of forces in Asia has been emerging. With the collapse of the former Soviet Union, the US suddenly finds a vacuum. Once there was a clear demarcation, based on ideology. Put simply, the US was the "champion" of free-

US globally. New forms of alliance are developing to contain each other's threat to security. President Putin of Russia seems to be inclined to align with the European Union (EU) as there are significant policy divergences between the EU and the US over trade, security and environment. The EU appears to go ahead with ratification of 1997 Kyoto Protocol on reduction of emission of green gas without the US. As for China, it wants to forge a new alignment of forces to counter the influence of the US.

While China is important for US

commercial interests, its emerging military power is perceived as a "threat" to the interests of the US in the Asia Pacific. The days of "engagement" with China have gone and in its place a new strategy to "contain" China has surfaced under the Bush administration. Added to this is the desire of the US to go ahead with the missile defence shield system that China suspects to be targeted against China.

China cannot be ignored from the geo-political situation of the sub-

The adversarial relationship between the US and China will have impact on the countries of the sub-continent in one way or another. Each power will attempt to bring the countries of the sub-continent within its sphere of influence. Naturally China wants to consolidate its relation with its old ally Pakistan to safeguard China's strategic interests in the region.

Another more direct impact on Pakistan is the US-India proposed military co-operation. Following the India's foreign minister's visit to

Bangladesh.

Through the brutal assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the group of assassins attempted to destabilise the state and succeeded to some extent to change the course of the state. Mercifully the state is returning to its original moorings. The judgement of the High Court has rid the nation of its shame to live with the aftermath of the assassination.

## THE HORIZON THIS WEEK

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the country although the airport was officially closed. These are grey areas of the coups. The assassins before fleeing the country in November 1975, entered the jail where four leaders of the Awami League, who would normally succeed in Bangabandhu, were murdered in cold blood.

It was not a simple assassination. The assassins wanted to sow terror within the country and the population. For a time the people of Bangladesh were numb by grief. It was a political assassination. The target was to kill Sheikh Mujib, his entire family, relations and finishing off the second echelon of leadership. It was not only the elimination of the founding father but finishing off the Awami League party, which had given leadership during the War of Liberation of 1971.

After a brief period Gen Ziaur Rahman took over power in Bangladesh. The assassins were comfortably lodged in Libya.

The group of assassins were rewarded with diplomatic assignments by the Government of the day. Questions, such as who were pulling the strings behind the assassins, what was the source of their power, remained unanswered to this day.

Minus the two top assassins namely Col Faruq and Col Rashid, virtually all the others were sent to embassies with suitable diplomatic assignments. During my time as Ambassador I had two such 'diplomats' in my mission.

Meanwhile the authorities in Dhaka were busy 'protecting' the group of assassins by giving them legal cover. Thus the infamous indemnity bill was passed even when the assassins were in Dhaka.

This illegal bill which was incorporated by the Government of Gen Ziaur Rahman through a constitutional amendment, allowed the assassins total immunity against any legal proceedings. This single act has tarnished the image of Gen Zia at no act.

The trial has lasted for nearly five years. A lower court passed the death sentence to all 15 of the group of assassins.

The assassins appealed against the verdict in the High Court. After long deliberation the High Court pronounced a split verdict through which one judge upheld the verdict of the lower court whereas the second judge sentenced 10 convicts and spared five.

The matter was referred to a single judge who has sentenced two of the five to death. This final verdict of sentencing to death of 12 assassins sent in euphoric demonstrations among the people. It is highly likely that the sentence of the High Court will be appealed before the Supreme Court and probably a mercy petition will be filed before the President of the Republic Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed.

The most remarkable aspect of

the trial is that is civilized and legal, the Government of Sheikh Hasina has followed the dictates of law totally and uncompromisingly. No special court has been set up although people would willingly accept such a move. The courts have moved patiently and meticulously and pronounced their final verdict.

A dramatic turn around came when Sheikh Hasina, one of the miraculously surviving daughters of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman took over power following the elections of 1996. One of her first deeds was to do away with the illegal Indemnity Act and remove it from the books. The road was now clear for starting the trial of the killers.

A personal assistant of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, witness to the gruesome assassination on 15 August 1975, filed a complaint with the police. This led to the arrest of three of the assassins, including the ring leader Col Faruq Rahman. A fourth member of the group of assassins Maj Bazlul Huda has since been extradited from Bangkok and is in jail with three of his colleagues. Eleven other members of the group are fugitives in various countries including two in the USA. The Government of Bangladesh is trying to bring them back home and face trial.

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The most remarkable aspect of the trial is its transparency. Whereas the assassins trampled under feet

all that is civilized and legal, the Government of Sheikh Hasina has followed the dictates of law totally and uncompromisingly. No special court has been set up although people would willingly accept such a move. The courts have moved patiently and meticulously and pronounced their final verdict.

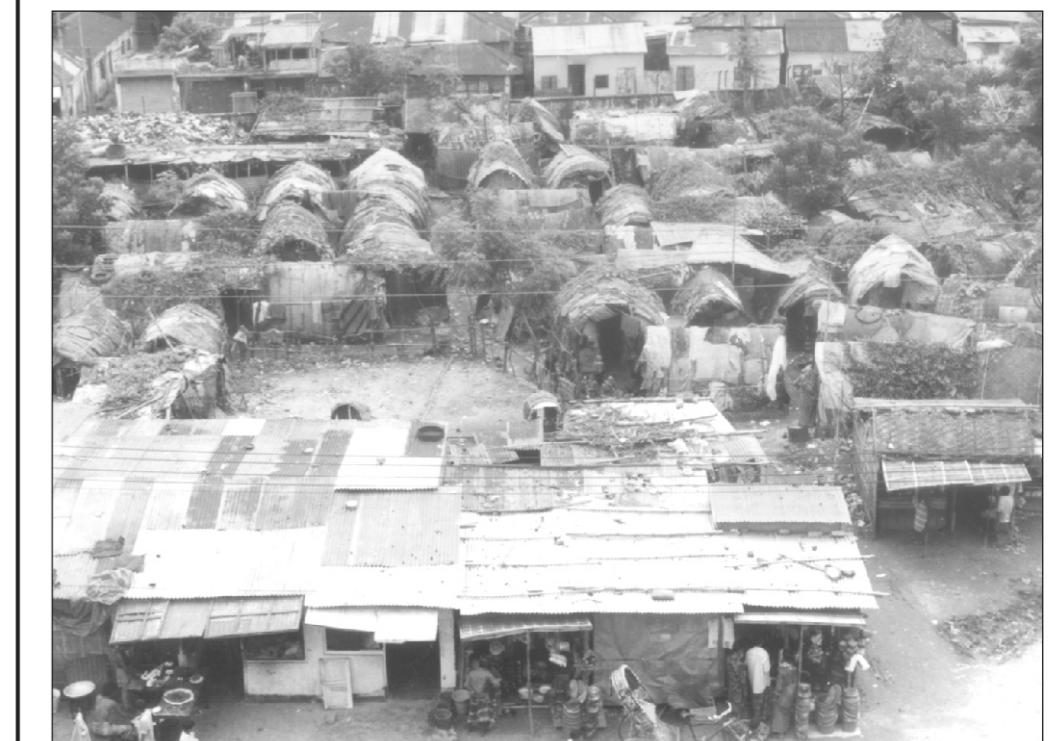
It is due to this aspect of respect shown to due process of law that there is no dissent and people have accepted the verdict calmly. In the annals of the judiciary it will remain

as a landmark judgement.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman gave leadership to the people of Bangladesh and finally galvanized them to fight the War of Liberation. His life is intertwined with the freedom struggle of the Bangalees. He rose to dizzying heights and the entire War of Liberation was fought in his name, under his inspiration. The place of Bangabandhu is permanently secured in the hearts and minds of

## PHOTORIAL

Readers are invited to send in exclusive pictures, colour or black and white, of editorial value, with all relevant information including date, place and significance of subject matter. Pictures received will not be returned.



Rented out

The government plot inside the Cancer Institute, Mahakali, has been rented out and turned into a slum. Who has rented it out and who enjoys the rent money is a mystery. The authorities often demolish other make-shift slum areas, rendering dwellers homeless. But slums that have mushroomed on their own land seem to enjoy an immunity, for dubious reasons.

STAR PHOTO: AKM MOHSIN

## TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

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## We are not ungrateful

The letter "Ungrateful nation?" (May 7) by an Indian Bengali is a disgraceful slur on our national character and at the same time a blatant character assassination of Bangladesh as a nation. The writer made certain unwarranted remarks such as Hindu cleansing in Bangladesh. This is absolutely false and motivated to arouse communal frenzy. A chain of communal riots and blood letting of Muslims in Kashmir, accompanied by rape and plunder are characteristics of India.

If someone's hearth and home is attacked, even an animal shall defend it. If the writer expected that we would welcome Indian aggressors and remain mute observers to their acts, he must be daydreaming. Only the other day the Indians drove away Pakistani intruders from Kargil and they became heroes and now when we Bangladeshis do the same thing we become an ungrateful

people. The Indian's help during our liberation war is appreciated. But they helped us in their own interest to dismember Pakistan and also to create a market for Indian goods in our country. We have never surren-

dered to any sort of aggression and never will.

Al-Haj S. M. Khalid Chowdhury

I am dismayed in prime minister Sheikh Hasina's remarks that the border crisis was resolved without any co-operation from the opposition. The present government was elected to lead and it should be their exclusive role. Resolving a dispute or a crisis with another country should be their priority. This is not a time for consensus and extended discussion, this is a time for leadership. Leadership by Sheikh Hasina and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This is what they were elected for.

It was not then, when the crisis began, nor is it now a time to hear such political rambling from Sheikh Hasina as "Usually in such national crisis all get united voluntarily, but I did not get any co-operation from her (leader of the opposition)." Please, lead without the rhetoric.

The prime minister added that since the Awami League is in power, it could solve the problem speedily and peacefully. Had there been any

other party in government, they would have messed up the matter. Perhaps I have missed some part of the story but it appears that something was messed up resulting in the current border crisis, even with the Awami League in power.

Lest any one think I am favouring one party over the other, I am not. I would say the same thing if former Prime Minister Begum Zia or former President Ershad made the same statements while their parties were in the majority and running the government.

M. M. Haque  
Gulshan, Dhaka

## A stony silence