DHAKA SUNDAY JUNE 3, 2001

We mourn

Lost is a promoter of peace, harmony

E may never come to know what actually transpired at the royal palace in the Nepalese capital Kathmandu laté Friday night. Over the next few days the media would surely splash the gory details of regicide, patricide, matricide and fratricide committed by the heir to the throne, Prince Dipendra, before he shot himself. However, would the deluge of news and views arrest the fleeting moment of madness that led to the mass killing of royalty, the worst since Lenin ordered execution of the Romanovs in 1918 during the Russian civil war? It would not. In fact, years from now, people around the world would still wonder whether the dispute over the marriage of the heir apparent had been the sole reason behind the tragic deaths of King Birendra, Queen Aishwariya, Prince Nirajan, Princess Shruti

The fact of the matter, as is apparent thus far, remains that the queen's opposition to his son's choice of a bride, daughter of a former government minister who is a member of the aristocratic Rana family, which until 1990 ruled Nepal, led to the multiple murders. And, for the Himalayan kingdom, it could prove too high a price to pay. Home to the world's tallest peak, Mount Everest, the landlocked country, squeezed between China and India, is one of the world's poorest with a per capita income of only 213 US dollars. Although on the path of democracy since a popular movement in 1990 saw Birendra stripped of monarchial authority and become a constitutional king, Nepal has struggled with a fractured parliament, a frail economy and a long-running Maoist insurgency. Political environment has been the murkiest in recent times with the opposition parties pressing for the resignation of Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala for the government's alleged role in a bribery scam and for not tackling Maoist militancy. At this crucial juncture, when the Nepalese desperately needed their king, extremely popular even after the political metamorphosis, as a guiding and soothing force to see them through the turmoil, he is no more.

Prince Gyanendra, the king's younger brother and probable successor to the throne, would indeed find King Birendra's shoes too big to fill in. The monarch was a man revered at home and in South Asia for the role he played to promote political and economic co-operation in the region. He was one of the founder members of the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC). It is ironical that just when the regional forum looks set to be rejuvenated after India's change of policy as regards the Pakistani military leader, he had to die. In the slain king, the region has no doubt lost a promoter of regional peace and prosperity.

Our condolences to the Nepalese people and government at their hour of profound sorrow.

Watery grave again

Neglect of river transport must end

HRONIC neglect by the authorities to the river transport network has resulted in yet another tragedy. The FV Mahfuz, carrying at least 200 passengers capsized on its way to Sandwip from Sitakunda in Chittagong. Although described as a 'trawler', the vessel was little more than a country boat with a makeshift motor of dubious horsepower attached to it. Such converted vessels can barely stay afloat, leave alone navigate on choppy and unpredictable routes with a load far in excess of the safety limit. The death toll from this mishap has been climbing and is feared to rise further because rescue operations are hampered by seasonal high waves.

This incident adds another dark chapter to a history of river mishaps, most of which could have been avoided if the authorities had brought river vessels within a minimum safety and regulatory ambit. But the BIWTC and all other concerned public bodies continue to turn a blind eye to the proliferation of so-called 'trawlers' and other ill-equipped and precarious vessels. There are an estimated 120,000 to 150,000 country boats that have been converted into motorised vessels on our waters but the astounding fact is that a majority do not subscribe to any minimum safety standards. Vessels of any weight or dimension fit outboard motors of untested strength and ply the rivers, hauling cargo and passengers without being questioned by the authorities.

Why have the authorities allowed this breakdown in river safety to become entrenched? It is estimated that nearly two-thirds of the population still uses the river as a mode of travel. How can they overlook the critical lapses in river transport knowing full well that thousands of lives are being placed at risk? The public bodies responsible for river safety must be mobilised, using the state's adminstrative machinery right down to the lowest tier of governance and with sustained supervision from the very top. A national initiative to restore sanity on our rivers must become a priority.

Muslims are yet to adjust to the new world

M. ASGHAR KHAN

HILE agreeing generally with the thrust of the conference on the evils of communal politics. I have travelled here mainly to share a thought, that Muslims in general, have a special problem. They have not fully understood the modern world, and therefore have not reconciled with it. Modern world, can be said to have begun with the renaissance as a movement in Europe, that promoted rationalism and scientific thinking, in place of rigid thought-control by the Churches. Its political effect was the spread of the democratic idea, that all men are equal in rights and obligations. Industrialization in Europe, was the result of the spread of ideas that resulted from this awareness. Europe then expanded out, produced more wealth, distributed it better than before, but quite unequally, and went out to dominate the rest of the world. This process was completed in the 19th century. Muslims were largely at the receiving end, in Europe, Asia and Africa. This process caused trauma, social decay and all-round backwardness in the entire Muslim World.

It is sad but true, that the political retreat and the defeat of Muslims, has not yet come to an end. Basically Muslims have not adjusted to the new world shaped by Europe, which spread ideas of human liberty, equality and fraternity, represented by western civilization. It actually enshrined man to a position of eminence, displacing churches and priestly classes of all kinds. though even in Europe compromises continued to be made. For example Queen Elizabeth is the head of the Church, as well as Queen of the United Kingdom and also of the Commonwealth. But the

against rationalism and liberalism. They represent today forces and tendencies that have kept Muslims weak, divided and backward. They actually operate as a priestly class, that demands special privileges.

Another specific issue is the place of Islam in Muslim countries. A new goal of setting up a pure Islamic state, quite unique in itself and also quite distinct from an ordinary democratic one, has become a political ideal which powerful mili-

nology. In reality, the head of that Islamic State would remain all powerful, and would combine all powers in himself, in the name of Islam, like Mullah Mohammad Umar in Afghanistan. This is the basic nature of various Taliban-like movements: the F.I.S in Algeria, Muslim Brotherhood, and its more violent allies in Egypt, and various others in different parts of the world including Hamas in Palestine, and Hizbullah in Lebanon. They all seek to estab-

lishing a uniquely Islamic society a universal concept, restricted to a particular nation state leads you nowhere; it only results in bloodshed, in which innocent people are killed while the state remains under the remote control of former colonia powers through various economic and diplomatic means that people do not fully understand. In Muslim countries everywhere in Afghanistan, Palestine and various other places like Indonesia and Pakistan

different political forces are trying to

assert themselves. The armed

forces and the militant religious

organizations are often able to

render ineffective the corrupt and

opportunistic political forces that

appear to be in a state of moral and

political decay. Everywhere, lack of

serious commitment to democratic

ideals in these countries is the

cause. Unless Muslims learn the

simple principle of not allowing

individuals, whether Mullahs or

General, to use religion for their own

We have to allow the people to

benefit, trouble will continue.

worship the God they want to and the way they want to. Allow no political authority to interfere with anyone's faith and give equal rights to all manners of people. All minorities need to be protected fully and given equal rights. In that lies that salvation for Muslims everywhere. I have underlined the need for change. If the will is there the basic idea and the method of change are

not hard to find One more word. There is a lot of learned discussion of what are western value and what are eastern norms. Europe and the west have no proprietary rights over ideas like equality, liberty and fraternity or social justice. They belong to the whole world and underpin the modern civilization, not so much western as modern. This belongs to all of us. Human values and rights are universal and are our own. An idea is not a geographical entity. No matter where it was born, it belongs

The author was an Air Martial, retired as Pakistan's Air Chief in the '70s, and joined politics. He came to Dhaka to participate in the South Asian Communalism that ended here vesterday The above is his speech delivered on the occasion

We have to allow the people to worship the God they want to and the way they want to. Allow no political authority to interfere with anyone's faith and give equal rights to all manners of people. All minorities need to be protected fully and given equal rights. In that lies that salvation for Muslims everywhere.

reality in UK and the Commonwealth is quite different. Democratic ideas have traveled far and now dominate all the main developed countries and where this is not so. the countries are technologically backward, given to all manner of endless quarrels and politically under somebody else's domination.

The simple idea of human liberty and settling issues by rational means, employing scientific mode of thinking, has escaped Muslims. Unless this deficiency is removed. there can be no hope for their progress. Orthodox Ulema preach

tant organizations are promoting.

This idea is a very recent development. Until the end of the 19th century, Islamic scholars belonging to different sectarian groups, were at ease in all the various political systems that existed in the Islamic world, usually under the guidance and control of colonial powers. Islam did not conflict with any authoritarian rule of a king or dictator anywhere, no matter how cruel or wicked he was. The idea of a true Islamic state, actually clothes the authoritarian rule of an individual with ideological and religious termi-

lish a sort of Kingdom of God on earth, the reality of which will be the dictatorial rule, of one person calling himself Amir-ul-Momineen. All will be required to obey his wishes that will be treated as if they were divine dictates of Islam. This is what happened in Iran with the emergence of Avatollah Khomeini and the rule of the clergy that he established. The same sort of thing will happen, where such movement succeed. They will only displace one kind of

The overview of the Islamic world show that the movement of estab-

vision, he has shown no signs of it.

hard-working of all our Prime Minis-

ters. Few of them had time for such

tasteless pursuits as watching "Kaun

Banega Crorepati" or reading medi-

Mr Vaipavee doesn't lead from

dictator with another

However. Mr Advani is only half an alternative to Mr Vaipavee. Although committed to a more

Mr Advani will operate sideways, through incremental moves. He will build his own coterie. This will produce

incoherence and chaos in the NDA. The BJP's allies aren't very comfortable with Mr Advani unlike with the pleasantly

the front. He is the least active and muscular Hindutva, he has been

totally complicit in Mr Vajpayee's market-fundamentalist policies and pro-US bent. So he can't easily occupy a radical or patriotic-

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In any case, a virtual duopoly cannot last in the NDA. It won't even survive the body blow that awaits the BJP in UP. The Man from Karachi won't bolster the NDA any more than the Man from Bateshwar.

The NDA's Manipur shock: Government in dire trouble to surface. They are doing so now unpopular, NDA looks extremely the small, dusty, non-descript, sounding platform Bundelkhand town has a larger vulnerable in the next round of

PRAFUL BIDWAI writes from New Delhi

ODAY, it is Manipur. Tomorrow, it could be Haryana, Jharkhand, even Uttar Pradesh. The BJP's friction with its allies has never been more acute. It is getting into tense confrontations with "friendly" parties on whom it could earlier count for unstinted support, e.g. Mr George Fernandes' Samata

Mr Fernandes is the NDA's Convener, main trouble-shooter, and the BJP's "secular" legitimiser. He could become its nemesis.

The BJP's vote against the Samata chief minister in Manipur has driven a wedge between the two, whose effects will be felt nationally. The BJP is causing, not healing. schisms. It has antagonised the HVP, JMM, BJD, Akali Dal and other

One way of looking at this is to note the BJP's tactless deal-making. There was no "need" to engineer defections and sour relations with the Samata which ran its sole state government, in Manipur Nor should the BJP have tried to

induct ace-defector Aiit Singh into the Cabinet without anticipating an adverse reaction from his Jat-belt competitor Chautala. Even less edifying was Mr L.K. Advani's boorish reprimanding of Mr Koijam for harbouring "secessionists."

The tactlessness speaks poorly of a leadership which was considby its critics. Are BJP leaders losing their "touch"?

A second way is to see friction within the rag-tag NDA as endemic and aggravated by the BJP's declining political weight. There are castebased tensions between the BJP and its regional allies. They resent the BJP's "poaching."

Bloated ambitions clash too: the Samata-BJP conflict is less about Manipur than about Mr Fernandes's hurry to return to the Cabinet. This may lead to a subversion of the Venkataswami commission a heavy casualty for democracy.

The NDA's tensions were bound

because the BJP is delivering less and less: it is divided as never before; and its stock is falling every-

Whatever one's view of the merits

of NDA policies, they are divisive.

This is as true of privatisation.

labour, and agriculture, as of educa-

tion. Kashmir or deliberate sabotage

of the Babri prosecution of top lead-

The policy impact is worsening

just as the economy slows down and

the drought spreads, leading to

starvation deaths, mass migration

and closure of a record 85,000

factories within a month. Mr

Vaipavee has further compounded

the offence by declaring such poli-

narrow business interests and

foreign capital alone. Even the RSS

and Swadeshi Jagran Manch are

wild. The normally-sober Bharatiya

Mazdoor Sangh calls the Finance

The misgoverning NDA is becom-

ing a liability. Parties like the Akali

Dal Biju Janata Dal and Telugu

Desam are pressing their own

agendasin agriculture, food and

Chandrababu nominates the Cabi-

net Secretary, forces the Eleventh

Finance Commission to change its

"final" report, and extracts Rs 1.000-

had the NDA not been shaken by the

exit of Trinamool, PMK, etc., in the

shadow of the Tehelka expose, and

had the BJP itself not done disas-

trously in the latest Assembly elec-

tions. Once a winner, the BJP has

become a big loser. It has dragged

down its allies in West Bengal, Tamil

A Tehelka-tainted, increasingly

This wouldn't have happened

entral appointments

Minister a "criminal"

crore concessions.

Nadu and Assam.

The NDA regime now serves

cies to be worthy and irreversible!

ers including Mr Advani.

vague, perennially half-focused Mr Vajpayee.

Delhi and Kashmir

Assembly and local elections in Uttar

Pradesh, Puniab, Maharashtra,

BJP leaders literally shiver at the UP prospect: the party will be lucky to get even 100 seats (present strength, 165) in the 403-strong Assembly, A rout in UP could mean the virtual demise of the NDA.

Nothing, save a miracle or preelection alliance with the Bahujan Samaj Party could change that fate. It seems highly unlikely that the BSP will oblige the "loser" BJP.

As if this wasn't bad enough, the BJP is wracked by an internal power from the Vajpayee-loyal "governmentalists" towards pro-Advani "organisationalists" close to RSS pracharaks

Several recent developments reinforce this assessment: expression of hostility to Mr Vajpayee by RSS, SJM, BMS and VHP heavyweights; emergence of Mr H.V. Seshadri as the key liaison-person: the Vajpavee-Advani luncheon meeting in early May; legal sabotage of Babri proceedings against Advani & Co; and Mr Vajpayee's fadeout from many critical decision-areas.

It's no coincidence that M Vaipavee opted for a Mussoorie holiday soon after the Malavsia trip and then scheduled his knee surgery for early June

As Mr Vajpayee "switches off", Mr Advani asserts. A new informal alliance is emerging between him and Mr Jaswant Singh. Both want to cut Mr Brajesh Mishra down to size on Kashmir, national security and foreign policy.

Mr Advani is a more focused and energetic leader than Mr Vaipavee who is laid back and increasingly uninterested in governance. If Mr Vajpayee, the Man from Bateshwar

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.



Eating dust

Anyone unfortunate enough to be crossing the Dholaikhal Road in a rickshaw, auto-rickshaw or on foot is forced to 'eat'

dust and debris. This road has been left untended although thousands use it daily. We have drawn the attention of the authorities to this road and the harsh conditions that ordinary people are being subjected to as they commute over it. It is high time the DCC opened its eyes and made amends for its callous neglect!

EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Inhalers for asthma

The plight of bronchitis patients beggars description. During the attacks using ventolin inhalers becomes absolutely necessary to provide relief. But, recently the price of ventolin inhalers has soared skyhigh. While the MRP is set at 168.36, they are selling for Tk 350 per inhaler or even more. The other problem is these

inhalers have vanished from the market. The reason given by the sellers at drugstores is that two local companies who produce these inhalers are trying to get a ban imposed on imported inhalers.

This is outrageous! Meanwhile fake ventolin inhalers and some which claim to have been produced in India and Pakistan have flooded the market posing a serious threat to public health.

I earnestly request the concerned authority to look into the matter. At the same time. I ask for the attention of the media to foil the ulterior motives of vested quarters. Taiyabah

Call out the army

I have been robbed several times in different parts of Dhaka city. Recently, two men called Sukkur Ali and Tajuddin who were travelling in a rickshaw through Tipu Sultan Road in the old part of Dhaka were attacked by two young muggers. Keeping his wits about him, Sukkur

Ali fired at the muggers with his licensed pistol, killing one of them and fatally injuring another

This tit-for-tat world that is emerging in Bangladesh shows there is no law and order. Even if one reports a crime to the police, there is little support from them. Consequently, criminals have a field

No part of Dhaka is safe for ordinary citizens. It seems that we are returning back to the barbaric ages, when there was no law and human beings lived like savages, using every method of self defence

May we, the tax paying citizens of the country, request the government to bring out the army for all time duty to curb crimes until we revert back to a civilised state? The army must be deployed to control crime, just as it has been deployed to control the wild traffic! An Aggrieved Citizen

Failure to govern

The Daily Star report (May 16) on the evil empires prevailing in Karwan Bazar area points to one focus area: the utter ineptitude of DCC and RAJUK in 'governing' this overcrowded metropolis, where every square feet is a plot of gold. Add corrupt practices, misuse of political and official power and influence; and it looks like a zamindari for a vested few. This is political looting, plain and simple, as the politicians run the

The whole structure of RAJUK and the municipal corporations have to be changed and modernised. These key agencies simply cannot work in this outmoded way.

country

If a comparison is made between the current regime and the preceding one, it is difficult to see how this regime scores more marks; and that too, just before the elections. The country is being looted by the political cadres and godfathers. This is not surprising, as the global trend focuses on corrupt practices at the highest levels in many countries.

Internal cleansing cannot be generated from outside. Do we have any genuine leaders in the different sectors of the society? The elections will not change the dirty environment. What is the alternative? Resident for 60 years in Dhaka.

Security for Sheikh Hasina

There has been increasing concern at the efforts of security officials of the government to tighten the security ring around the prime minister. When a child's glass marble has the window pain of the PM's office, or a car tyre has burst on the road near the PM's house, security measures have become even more tight. In the process,

people in the vicinity are have been given a taste of security measures in action. The other day when a bomb was found under the car of war commissioner Mizan, passers-by at the PM's residence witnessed the army moving about the facility, a very unusual sight.

Now we read in the newspapers that even after relinquishing the office, the prime minister will continue to receive the same security that she enjoyed while representing the people. Additionally, her present family members and that of her sister, Rehana along with her family, will also be beneficiaries of a new law that is being prepared. The security people will then have a very big job in hand. A precedence will be set, giving two persons the same status of the head of government. One by virtual of being the real head of the government while the other would enjoy the same without any constitutional role to play. When they floated the world's largest luxury liner, way back in April 1912, the builders of the Titanic claimed it was unsinkable.

But the ship sank after hitting an iceberg. Afterwards experts concluded that in spite of all precautionary measures taken by the builders. the liner sank because her hull had a couple of nuts made of low quality metal that could not withstand the impact of the collision with the iceberg.

What does the prime minister think of the adage Rakhe Khoda Maray Kay? Syed Waliullah Mohammadpur, Dhaka

Mirpur transport problem

Transport is a big problem in Dhaka From the morning every office going person experiences a tough situation to go to work. But the people who are residing in Mirpur area have the worst deal. There is no direct transport from Mirpur to Motilheel except the maxi service. This maxi is no better than the temp, because inside the vehicle there is no circulation and passengers are cramped for space. The maxi fare is not reasonable either. For example, from Mirpur-01 to Motijheel it costs Tk 12 but from Mirpur-12 to Motijheel, which is a longer distance, it costs Tk. 10.

Maxi fares are fixed by the operators themselves, not by a public body. A few years ago, a premium bus service was introduced in Mirpur, but within a months it was discontinued. Though every road of Dhaka has either BRTC or a premium bus service or both, unfortunately on Mirpur Road we have no other transport facility.

It has been rumoured that vested quarters have resisted efforts to introduce quality service on this road. They apparently pay a huge amount on a yearly basis to the concerned authority to attain their

My question is, how long will we continue to suffer these anarchic conditions in Mirpur?

Mirpur, on e-mail.

Pedestrian hazard

It is several months since the steel footbridge at the crossing of Dainik Bangla was dismantled. But the landing on the footpath at the foot of the stair case of the footbridge was left as it was in a raised condition, causing much inconvenience to the pedestrians, and the vehicular

Because of the landing and the sorry state of the footpath, pedestrians are forced on to the road, endangering their life. At the same time, they force vehicles to make room for them at this most congested crossing. The Municipal Corporation which erected the footbridge and dismantled it should not have left the footpath as it is now They should immediately see to it that the footpath is restored to its former state

C. M. Dahr Motiiheel. Dhaka on e-mail

Securities law

I would like to draw you attention to your news item "SEC boosts market watch...3 cos punished for noncompliance with securities law" on the Business (May 25). The suppression of the dividend decided upon and on buying shares for three days by the chairman of South East Bank Yusuf Abdullah Harun is definitely not non-compliance. This activity is clearly an offence under Section 17 of the Securities & Exchange Ordinance 1961.

Setting aside such a serious matter with a nominal fine can only be construed to be done with an intention of keeping the offenders shielded from the securities law This particular case is a mockery of the law. Officials of SEC seem to be doing just this, over and over again. There is no consideration for the investors cheated in the process.

SFC should reverse the trade and take back all the profits made by the chairman, Yusuf Abdullah Harun, the managing director and other insiders as required under the law and should commence criminal proceedings as per Section 17. The money should be returned to the investors.

We pray to you to pursue the matter and protect the investor. Let SEC not be the protector of any manipulator by evading the law. Lal Mian, on e-mail

Prevent denaue

Last year 25,000 people suffered from dengue, of which 3000 were of hemorrhagic type and at least 300 people died of it.

Last year experts had warned that if proper steps are not taken this year, dengue will again attack and that too in an epidemic form and take a heavy toll. Dengue infection has already started and unofficially, at least 15 people have been hospitalised (May 16).

We are deeply upset and frightened by this information and outraged by the government's total lack of responsibility. The government has done nothing for the prevention of this disease. The crores of eggs laid by the Aedas mosquitoes in the previous year will this year turn into larvae. And if those are not destroyed we are doomed.

We urge our intellectuals to come forward and do their utmost. They have saved the 11,000 trees of the Osmany Uddyan, they have staged programmes to save Lalon's Akhra (shrine) and we hope they will not hesitate to compel the government to take required steps immediately and also create awareness among people about dengue.

We have heard that the president of EL Salvador declared emergency when 17 persons died from dengue in that country. Then why is our government so reluctant to take necessary steps against the disease? Do they think it will harm their image? But has the government been able to uphold the image of our

Chittagong