

Araihazar mayhem

A strong case for police reform

LET us try to reconstruct Thursday's incident between police and people of nine villages in Araihazar, an upazila of Narayanganj, as it has been reported in different national news dailies. It all began in the morning when police swooped on the residents of Narayandi to rescue four of their men, detained for suspected involvement in a robbery the night before. As police resorted to baton charge, people of nine villages joined hands in resistance. During the ensuing clashes, police opened fire on the villagers, leaving three people killed and several others injured. Overall, more than 200 people, including 40 policemen, were injured in the daylong mayhem.

Many suggest that Thursday's incident was an outburst of collective displeasure over sustained police failure to curb theft, robbery and other criminal activities in the area. Such a reign of thieves, robbers and other criminal elements naturally led rise to the suspicion that police must have had some stake in it. It is hard to determine whether the four policemen were detained for their alleged involvement in robbery or their failure to prevent the criminal act. However, that villagers of the Araihazar upazila have completely lost faith in police does not require anymore elaboration than the daylong mayhem on Thursday.

Justified or not, in public perception, police are no longer on the right side of law. Even if there is no apparent evidence to incriminate police, people tend to find an invisible link between the law-enforcers and the law-breakers, and the protectors and the predators. Unfortunately, there have not been too many instances where a thorough investigation -- departmental, judicial or otherwise -- has proved the police clean. Even if for incompetence, such failures are construed as typical cases of sweeping the dirt beneath the rug.

At the same time, corruption runs deep within the department and here again no effective measures have been taken to redress the ill. The civil society and the media have cried their lungs out for drastic reform measures in police, obviously to no avail. Rampant corruption naturally leads to break in chain of command, and at Araihazar, it was evident in the fact that a habildar had overturned a command from the superintendent of police.

The Araihazar incident comes as yet another reminder for the authorities to carry out comprehensive reforms in the country's law enforcement mechanism. Successive governments have turned a deaf ear to such reminders but we hope this government would not, for its own sake.

What was the need for this heavy-handed attitude?

We protest his arrest and demand his release

THE trend that is indicated by the arrest of litterateur and activist Shahriar Kabir is very disturbing. One is afraid that the stiff hand of the state has come down very heavily on an individual for an act, which has little in consonance with establishing the principles of democracy as promised by the leaders of the present government. It militates against the principles of free expression of thought.

Shahriar Kabir was in India to collect information on a proposed video on the attack on the minorities. While there, he gave interviews on this issue to the press, local and international. One may disagree even strongly with his views but to arrest him on arrival is against the basic principles of democracy and freedom.

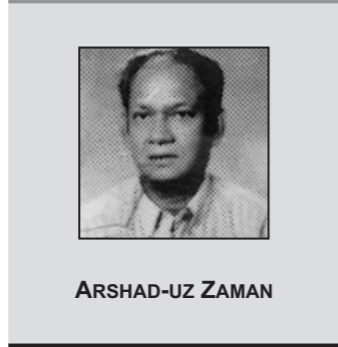
Whatever Shahriar Kabir has said were public statements and there is nothing, which suggests anti-state activities. We say this because the statements coming from the official word almost sounds like he has been found guilty even before his trial. But to most people, he is being punished for his strong position taken on the issue of the minorities. The method in which he was detained since Thursday evening and the fact that no official version about him was available until Friday afternoon were anachronistic to a democratic dispensation.

Shahriar Kabir has been active in Bangladesh for over 30 years in the cultural and political world. He opposed Awami League, especially when one party BKSAL rule was established, helped organize the Nirmul Committee and continues to fight for the cause of 1971 martyrs. He was close to the Awami League recently, but he wasn't accused by anyone of working against Bangladesh.

This rather wide definition of what constitutes "anti-state" activities has always been a tool for managing dissent in our history. It acts against freedom of expression and that of the free press. Every government that has come to power has used laws and methods to silence voices, never recognizing that history is replete with examples of their failure. Closer at hand, we would like the government to realize that this will hurt and harm them more than they think today. In this day and time, any government that deals with dissent by using arrest is carrying a deadly cargo in its hold.

We again advise moderation, tolerance and a wider vision of what democracy stands for. Nobody gains from the application of draconian rules.

Afghanistan: Farewell to Taleban



ARSHAD-UZ ZAMAN

HERE is high drama going on in Afghanistan. The curtain is about to fall on the Taleban.

It all started on a crisp autumn morning of 11 September. The power house of the only superpower in the world was hit. The WTC Twin Towers of New York were hit by two jet planes, which had been hijacked by terrorists. The massive buildings caught fire and collapsed like a house of cards, the casualty anywhere around six thousand. Within another forty-five minutes another hijacked jet plane hit the Pentagon building in Washington, DC and nearly 400 employees died and part of the building turned into rubble.

If the intention was to shake the superpower, the method could not have been better chosen. For the first time in her history US was attacked on her own soil and a massive blow was administered. Naturally the US took some time to digest the blow but decided on a response commensurate with the blow that she received.

Suddenly terrorism became the number one enemy and the US zeroed in on Osama Bin Laden, whom they declared as the top

terrorist of the world. The US has been after Osama Bin Laden for long because specially of his terrorist activities on US interests in Africa. The US started a massive man hunt and she could place her finger on Afghanistan, which country harboured Bin Laden. An ultimatum was given to the current rulers of Afghanistan the Taleban led by Mullah Omar.

Since there was no hope that the regime in Afghanistan would hand over Bin Laden to the US, like in the Gulf War a decade ago by the father of the present President of

the British Empire. Though her Taleban she tried to play an important role but has severely burnt her fingers. Indeed since the setting up of the Taleban regime, the only recognition of the Taleban Government that Pakistan had been able to obtain was of Saudi Arabia and the Emirates. These two have broken relations with Afghanistan when US bombs started raining on that country. And the newest and the greatest player is the USA.

The US military strategy has worked to perfection. Since Vietnam the US suffers from the syndrome of

the Northern Alliance to enter Kabul as a conqueror.

The pleadings of President Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan, requesting the US to hold back Northern Alliance from entering Kabul fell on deaf ears. Burhanuddin Rabbani was the last President of Afghanistan before his ouster by Taleban. Quite naturally he is behaving as the lawful President of Afghanistan. The UN wants to play a role. The chances are, however, that the UN will play the kind of role that President Rabbani and his team will allow them to play.

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by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, was dethroned by British prompting. The Afghans have their Loi Jirga system and will find a solution suitable to their needs and temperament. The fact remains, however, that the President and his team are in the driver's seat and are expected to remain in charge.

The great loser in this misadventure has been Pakistan. The internal fallout may be severe. Will Pervez Musharraf be picked up as the scapegoat? Time will tell.

Bangladesh has maintained an Embassy of Afghanistan in Dhaka during all these years. The Embassy is headed by a Charge D' Affaires. In a recent interview with the local media, he has compared the Taleban with our Razakars of 1971. The CDA is a representative of President Burhanuddin Rabbani. The Government of Begum Khaleida Zia made a warm gesture already by offering assistance in cash and kind to the Afghans.

The whole world is rushing to Kabul. The Iranians have opened their Consulate, the British troops have landed at the airport adjoining Kabul, the French troops are supposed to take up position in Mazar-i-Sharif. The Russians are so deeply involved in the Northern Alliance, that they are expected to open their Embassy very shortly.

Given the traditional warm relations between Afghanistan and Bangladesh (it was the Afghan authorities, who offered safe passage to many of our senior civil servants, who escaped from Pakistan to Bangladesh in 1972), it would be in the fitness of things that Begum Zia sends a personal envoy to President Burhanuddin Rabbani. The Government of Bangladesh must act now.

THE HORIZON THIS WEEK

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the US, George Bush decided in building a world wide coalition in order to bomb Afghanistan to submission. Britain of Tony Blair was more than a willing partner and so were the members of the European Union (EU). In order to placate Islamic opinion since a Muslim country was going to be bombed, the Bush administration bent over backwards to find a solution to the Palestine-Israel conflict.

In the US scheme of things Pakistan had a very important role to play. Pakistan guarded the gate to Afghanistan with whom she had the longest border. Pakistan or more particularly the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) had played a crucial role in setting up the Taleban Govern-

ment in Kabul following the humiliating withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Afghanistan. In creating the Taleban a veneer had been given of extreme religious fanaticism like closing women inside the homes and forcing them to wear Burkha and men had to sport a beard whose length was measured by a coca-cola bottle. The Taleban fighters came from mostly Pakistan, but also Arabs and some Chechen. They managed to extend their rule in the better part of Afghanistan. Ahmed Shah Masood, who had fought with exemplary bravery against Soviet

occupation forces, continued to fight against the Taleban. Thus was born the Northern Alliance composed mainly of Tajiks and Uzbeks, their kith and kin across the border in what former Soviet Union.

In a way this was the Great Game of the nineteenth century, only with some new players. There was no longer the Czar of Russia but there was Russia alright. There was no longer the Ottoman Empire but there was modern Turkey. There was Iran as always. There was Britain minus her Empire. But the gusto with which Tony Blair has involved himself in the new version of the Great Game, one wonders if the British Empire lives on. There is Pakistan, who has inherited a part of

using land forces and prefers to strike from the sky, where her mastery is complete. The Northern Alliance has been steadily pushing forward while US bombers went on pounding mercilessly on Taleban targets. The first important prize was Mazar-i-Sharif in the north and daily pounding by US B-52 bombers totally numbed the Taleban fighters. Since Afghanistan is a mainly hilly country made mostly of inhospitable rocks, the capture of Mazar-i-Sharif opened the door to Kabul. Interestingly Mullah Omar had left the capital long before and set up headquarters in Kandahar in the south in order to make a last ditch stand. Therefore, it became too simple for President Burhanuddin Rabbani of

Burhanuddin Rabbani and his men are battle hardened and in any case the Afghans are a hard fighting lot. The war goes on and the fall of the last stronghold, namely Kandahar, held by Mullah Omar is only a matter of short time. In his daily press briefing Defence Secretary of the US could hardly conceal his smile.

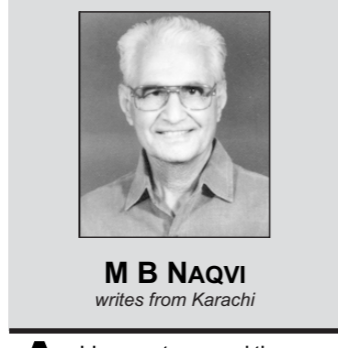
It would be foolish to imagine that the Tajiks and the Uzbeks will alone rule the future Afghanistan. The Pashtuns are the majority in Afghanistan and not all of them are Taleban. In fact the debacle of Taleban recalls the misadventure of Baccha Sako in the early twentieth century, who had ousted King Amanullah who was greatly influenced by the modernising of Turkey

But there are not even semi-secular forces inside Afghanistan. Moreover, since chronic instability leads to anarchy, keeping Afghanistan united ought to be everybody's aim, including America's. But how? would be the next query. Willy nilly, UN has to be relied upon. Although no one learns from experience, it is necessary to remind that foreign-made governments will not work. Adherence to hoary tradition has not worked either; that finally broke down 28 years ago. Religious leadership has been tried for a decade and has only splintered Afghans. Whether western Afghanistan experts and Afghans themselves -- all firm believers in the Loya Jirga mythology -- like it or not, the possibility of convening a Loya Jirga that will sit and be able to produce a commonly accepted government and constitution can be discounted. There are far too many armed groups with ambitions and foreign connection.

If only there is political will with adequate funds, UN's takeover of Afghanistan for a number of years is indicated to preserve its unity and for giving it an international neutral administration, with no political purposes of its own, to keep law and order and revive the economy by rebuilding its infrastructure. After a few years a free election can be held based on a census. The experts will surely express doubts over the ability of common Afghans to be sophisticated enough to democratically vote a new Afghanistan in and run it. But the democratic methodology, even yes in Afghanistan, will have to be tried for want of alternatives. If it does not succeed, well, too bad.

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

The salvation mantra



M B NAQVI
writes from Karachi

ALL repeat one and the same mantra as the salvation for Afghanistan, though each foreign office means a different thing by the formula. Islamabad's current formulation is generally accepted: a 'broad-based, multi-ethnic government, made by Afghans themselves that is representative and acceptable to all Afghans'. The fact is that it is a mirage; it has been chased ever since the Russian soldiers left Afghanistan in 1989. The formula then was called an 'interim Islamic government', though all of today's qualifications were implied. Pakistan, being the lead player then, experimented with two governments with much mutual friction until the Taleban appeared from their madrassas and conquered 90 per cent of Afghanistan. That was the journey's end for Pakistan and it recognised them and lived happily for almost six years, despite some disagreements with Mullah Omar.

After Sept 11 attacks, the US undertook to evict Taleban because they were hosting Osama and Al Qaeda and had refused to hand him over. From the thick fog of international diplomacy, one fact stands out that South Asians should heed. During his first visit to South Asia

after the war began, the US Secretary of State Colin Powell, just before touching down in Islamabad, had declared that the US would not give a veto right to either India or Pakistan about what should follow after Taleban had been smoked out. This needed better appreciation.

It was a statement of intent. The US reserved the right to nominate the next Afghan regime and no one else's wishes or interests were to be treated as decisive. This however did not exclude the possibility of the

it turns out, is not much of an alliance. Its factional rivalries can repeat some of what happened in earlier 1990s while the local commanders might also begin militarily jousting for ruling their own areas. Insofar as Pakistan's formula is concerned, it is a collection of meaningless words: 'broad-based and multi-ethnic' group can comprise just about any set of individuals from major ethnic groups that seems pliable to whoever nominates those individuals. By the word 'represent-

to prefer one over the other. Northern Alliance has already secured one major objective of the US: Kabul freed of Taleban. As for other purposes, the internal dissensions in the alliance has made it useless; it might have no utility for political ends, if its components begin to fight over who gets what.

Whatever the Americans do, end results are unlikely to be too different from what the Russians achieved. They would be quite akin to what Pakistan got. It is true that

southern parts, with Pushtoon majority, would be left to a college of non-Taliban Pushtoon commanders while the north would be a separate area -- largely in deference to Russians, Uzbeks, Tajiks and Indians. But a closer look shows that the area under Northern Alliance is actually divided into many ethnicities that do not love one another. Once the unity of Afghanistan ends, northern areas will have to split into small pieces, whether or not feasible. Insofar as the Pushtoon south is

PLAIN WORDS

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Americans themselves keeping others sensitivities in mind. It is to this extent that the Indian and Pakistani 'demands' can matter. Afghanistan has in fact reverted to the time when Russians troops left in 1989, except for the new US resolve to mastermind the transition to a stable Afghanistan to be made by American experts. The Americans had supported Northern Alliance to break Taleban's back. Once the Taleban defences collapsed in northern areas, the Northern Alliance entered Kabul and eventually UN-recognised President Burhanuddin Rabbani also did. He is now angling to form a broad-based Afghan government under himself.

In other areas vacated by Taleban, scores of local commanders are staking their claim to local governance. The Northern Alliance,

tative', Islamabad obviously means representation of all (major) ethnicities -- not of all Afghans of all ethnicities. Since many interested governments have their favourites jousting among these interested parties to influence American judgement. Which are these interested governments? The first is of course Pakistan; it was recognised by America as one that would decide who rules Afghanistan. It played that role for a decade. Now that the Americans have chosen to be the deciding power, they might yet accord residual weight to Pakistani favourites while weighing interests of other neighbours and India.

Northern Alliance may or may not be America's favourite. Its leadership includes religious bigots nearly as rigid and fanatical as Taleban. Their human rights record may be worse than that of Taleban. It is hard

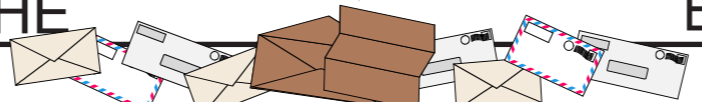
Afghans don't like foreigners. They love to remain independent. But this love is mainly negative. Theoretically they listen to their tribal elders only or someone from their own ethnicity who has the power to make them toe his line. Although the idea of being an Afghan exists and it does reach across ethnicities, a national government has never actually ruled them. Traditionally, the government in Kabul always left tribes and communities to govern themselves as they had done from time immemorial. And yet times change. Despite Afghanistan's encrusted traditions, a question has become insistent: Should Afghanistan remain united or should ethnicities divide it. Initially there was a suspicion the Americans visualise a north-south division: the central and

concerned, some Pakistani influence would remain, though it may still not provide a coherent and progressive leadership capable of keeping even the area united -- unless of course all Pakistani Pushtoon areas are united with Afghanistan's to produce a quasi secular leadership.

The conclusion is important; a division of Afghanistan implies dark forebodings for Pakistan's own unity. A final break up of Afghanistan would release vicious eddies of destabilization that may reach God knows where.

The tasks of keeping Afghanistan united is now, after so much experience, beyond any orthodox Islamic religious leadership. The latter is too splintered to act as one and too intolerant to avoid gross human rights violations.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



Attack on journalists

Immediately after the general elections, two journalists separately at the Dhaka University and the Jahangirnagar University campuses were severely beaten up by a group of Chhata Dal workers. The culprits committing the crime should take lesson from the UNB reporter Tipu Sultan who was also beaten up very badly by Feni's godfather Jonyal Hazari's men due to his write-up against Hazari's crime, but nothing could daunt him from his position. These terrorist activities on journalists have left indelible marks on free press. This is of course not a democratic practice resorting to the terrorism, and the continuation of which will undermine the image of the party. We urge the newly elected government's lawmakers and concern quarters to bring the marked culprits to book in order to set an example.

What is the truth?

Is it true the AL had been voted by majority which led to the formation of Awami League government? Is it not true that BNP could have formed the last government if only JP and Jaamat-e-Islam had lent their support?

Presently AL is saying a lot involving Jaamat-e-Islam forgetting that its government included that party and though its support helped AL, it chose to stay in the opposition. We wish to hear and read the truth -- the real truth.

Mujibul Haque Sobhanbag-Dhaka

Mineral resources

The vital question at the moment is whether to export gas or not. But gas is not the only mineral resource in the country. There are other valuable resources like solid minerals, Zircon, Ilmenite, Rutile, Garnet, Magnetite etc, lying on the coastal region between Cox's Bazar and Teknaf. The quantity of heavy minerals is about 43 lakh tones. The major parts of the heavy minerals contain costly Titanium. In the purest form, Zircon is very expensive as well.

According to the geologists, if a country possess at least one of these minerals and can utilise them properly, the country will no longer remain poor. Through utilisation of minerals, many countries have become rich and powerful.

From 1991 to 1994, I have written many articles on these valuable minerals. The then Prime Minister Begum Khaleida Zia took interest in utilisation of the minerals. Two committees on national level were also formed and the Atomic Energy Commission was given the responsibility to utilise the minerals. However, I was surprised to see

a news item in the Bangladesh Observer of January 17, 2001 that an agreement between the Bangladesh government and the Australian Titanium Resources company has been signed and the company will explore and collect 15 types of heavy minerals from 15000 hectares of sea beach.

People of this country would be interested to know the details of this agreement and the reason behind signing the contract with a foreign company when these valuable minerals could be utilised at national level by which the nation could be benefited immensely.

Prof Lutfor Rahman Dhaka

Please pay bills

It is a regret that the telephone bills of previous MPs are unpaid. The lawmakers are defaulters in a country where millions of people shed blood for independence. The word independence doesn't mean violating other peoples' right, cheating in the exam halls, destroying public property.

I have a suggestion to the new Prime Minister to give the defaulter MPs six month's notice for the unpaid bills. If the arrears are not settled even after that, they will be given thirty days as final notice, upon expiry of that deadline, their parliament membership should be terminated.

Mahmudur Rahman Student, Bhuiyan Academy Be sincere

People have rejected the Awami League for their misuse, violence in all forms committed by their activists, nepotism and so on. They have elected BNP and 4-party alliance to save the nation from the terrifying condition and to find peace. But it is a matter of great concern that news of misdeeds committed by the ruling party activists are reaching us at regular intervals.

According to reports published in different newspapers, miscreants under the banner of BNP are terrorising the minorities, acting violently with the opposition activists, taking control of bus terminals and other establishments and in general behaving deplorably. The government must investigate about these reports and take necessary steps as early as possible. We loathe these sorts of incidents and it must be stopped immediately.

Nur Jahan Chittagong

Dishonest politicians

What's the use of doing politics if it does not come to the welfare of the nation? What's the use of holding elections each five-year if the same class of corrupt politicians come to power replacing other corrupt politicians? What's the use of giving lectures on democracy and claiming oneself to be an ardent believer in democracy when one does not even seem to have the mentality to accept the realities in democracy? Politicians are supposed to be those honest and dedicated people who devote their life for the well

being of their country. But what we see here in Bangladesh is a totally different scenario. Upon judging the prevalent situation I strongly feel that dishonest and corrupt people should be barred from doing politics in order to salvage our country from the clutches of evil. Otherwise I don't see any possibility that democracy would bring us any better result than an autocratic regime.

Hameem Muhammad Dhaka

Evict illegal occupants

The front of Shamsher Nager Government Girls School roadside of Shamsher Nager to Sreemongal road of Shamsher Nager in Moulvibazar district has been illegally occupied. One pucca shop has already been built very close to the main road, just two feet away from the road and many are planning to occupy the space.

We bring attention to the concern authorities to evict the illegal occupants and to discourage others from occupying the space.

Jauid On behalf of the people of Shamsher Nager Bazar

The image of a political party

The newly elected regime of BNP and alliance are busy implementing the 100-day programme of good governance for the initial three-

month period of settling down in office. This political leadership had enough time, while in the opposition, to contemplate on its mistakes and weaknesses, pitted against a ruthlessly powerful opponent party which preferred to live on borrowed time on proxy exploitation in past brand-names. The latter's strategy did not click at the general elections last October, and its dream-castle was shattered.

There are two main sides in the game, the technical side of politics (operation and maintenance), and the human side of transparent political leadership. The latter should not be willing to compromise with internal lapses and weaknesses within the party.

The nation suffers through compromises at the top political level, and Bangladesh is a victim for three decades. Now the position has changed from the previous historical stance. Now the political parties are fighting amongst themselves; and the general elections since 1990 had not indicated any shift towards improvement of the nascent political culture, which is more negative than positive.

A Mawaz Dhaka

People's mandate must be respected

People in the just concluded elec-

tion have expressed their resentment against corruption, nepotism and terrorism. People want change and they have given their judgement accordingly. It is not a defeat for the AL or a massive victory for the BNP. In real sense, there is no permanent victory and defeat in democracy. After the World War II the then most popular Prime Minister of Great Britain Winston Churchill was defeated and he gladly accepted the people's verdict. It is the essence of democracy.

What is the subject of politics? Surely main subject of politics is people. In democracy all power belongs to people. In other words, people are the source of all power. So people's choice must be respected. Disregarding the people's verdict would be a great mistake. Our political leaders must re-examine the matter.

M.H. Bari Khulna

"To the Average American"

Many thanks to Ms Durdana Ghias for her correct evaluation of the "Average Americans" for their hypocritical character. I would like to add the following:

You can boast of using the first atom bombs on civilians. You guys killed the Red Indian and the Negroes in thousands for your selfish interest. You killed the people in Panama, Nicaragua, Argentina, Guatemala, Honduras, Cuba Granada in thousands directly or indirectly. You guys killed

millions in Vietnam both civil and military by using Napalm and chemical bombs and even burnt the crop field without any provocation on your country. Your CIA has killed thousands directly or indirectly in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

The total killing by your soldiers in the world would probably surpass the total killing by the Nazis in World War II. There is hardly any difference between state terrorism and terrorism by a group of individuals. The objectives are the same in both the cases. The only difference is one is powerful and the other is weak.

A. Matin Shyamoli, Dhaka

The need of the day

Today what we need most is a spirit of patriotism and love for the country. In politics the art of knowing the bitter truth is the art of knowing what to do for taking proper action in time for the common good. There is no dearth of wise and honest people in our society. Love, war, and politics make things complicated with conceit that should not be allowed to grow to cripple the green minds of our students. Let us hope that The Daily Star may play a vital role in enlightening the minds of people in power and those in opposition for the nation's security in future. We search for the best in every aspect of national life.