

JU teacher's death deeply saddening

Holding traffic to ransom unacceptable, Police action needs probing

WE are shocked beyond measure by the death of Professor Kausar Hossain of Jahangirnagar University in a terrible highway accident in the prime of his life on Friday morning. Only 39 years of age and already highly regarded as a teacher of English literature and a writer, he was first hit by a coach speeding in from the wrong side as he was standing with his bicycle beside him to cross the road. Knocked off, he lay prostrate on the highway and it was then that he was run over in a split second by the same vehicle. The emergency treatment got off to a wrong start without an ambulance.

Even though we are as outraged as the students were by the circumstances of the professor's death, we find no justification whatsoever for the day-long siege on the highway bringing traffic to a grinding halt as thousands of innocent commuters suffered. In the rumpus, vehicles were bashed, too. Their sentiments were understandable but not their action. It amounted to taking their hard feelings out on people who must have been themselves hurt when they heard of the professor's death. Did they deserve the hardship?

However, what the students eventually did could have been the thrust of their reaction from the beginning making for some peaceful demonstrations in the end. For they have put forward a list of demands which must receive utmost attention of the authorities: widening the road, putting a proper road divider in place and having speed breakers facing the four gates of the JU campus.

That said, we must unambiguously express our outrage over the police excesses committed within and outside the campus which seemed eminently avoidable. When talks were in progress at 6 pm at the VC's office attended by deputy commissioner, police superintendent, vice chancellor, teachers, transport operators and student leaders to end the blockade, the police swung into action on the street without any provocation. They lathi-charged the students and hurled rubber bullets and tear gas canisters at them. Then the police enter the campus and resort to indiscriminate beating of students.

The application of force by the police needs to be investigated and the personnel found responsible for any excess committed brought to book, so that it is not repeated in similar circumstances in the future. But what's equally, if not more, important is we ferret the driver out and bring him to justice.

We would also urge compensation paid to the professor's bereaved family knowing well their loss is irreparable. Our heart-felt condolences to them.

Brutal jails harden criminal not reform them

Post-colonial attitude towards penal reform needed

JAILS become famous only when famous people go to jail. Otherwise, it remains invisible. We want to forget how people live and what people do there. Like the insane, the disabled and the starving we want to deny them space in our mind. There has been a report in our paper where the situation has been exposed to the public world showing that life inside is incredibly difficult. What makes the horror even less palatable is the fact that there are many children in jail.

Penitentiaries have been part of society since laws came into existence. It's also an indicator of the state of that society. Prisons reflect public attitude regarding how people actually wish to see them managed. Thus the dismal state of the jails means that once inside, everyone would much rather forget the inmates and also not know what is happening inside.

This situation is the cruelest when it comes to children because the jail is no place for them and by law. Yet we know that there are many of them inside, many unaware why they have been arrested. It's particularly cruel for the undertrial child prisoners because they will have had an extremely cruel experience which by law is forbidden.

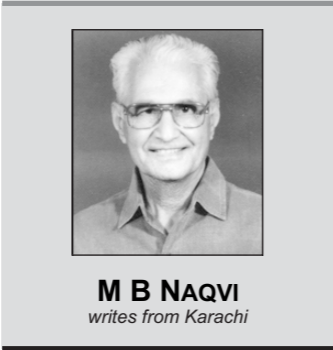
But it's the same system, which puts adults into jail, keeping them inside for years and forcing them to become brutal "enemies of society" as the normative penal culture forces most into extreme ends of negation. Instead of reform they become hardened criminals. The jail forgives none although the law may do so.

The problem is that our jail administration as we know it was installed by the colonial rulers which had the specific task of isolation in mind. These were meant to keep people inside away from society while our jails should have been managed with reform in mind.

With crime rates soaring, this is a growth sector in all its sarcastic sense. Growing crime rates are here to stay and that means the queue will get longer. Whether we like it or not, improving life within jails is essential because brutalised men and children will go out only to return as quickly as possible and we can't afford that many prisoners.

Since we can't ignore them even if we want to, we are under a compulsion to improve the state of our jails.

Musharraf's 'real' democracy parameters



M B NAQVI
writes from Karachi

GIVEN the slight easing of the border crisis, the military regime has turned to its domestic politics. The CE and President General Pervez Musharraf has reiterated his earlier promise that come October, there will be elections. He has even started talking of democracy's beauties. He wants to restore 'real' democracy, not a sham one. In order to make it real, he is going to fine tune it, as he calls it. What are its parameters?

A crucially important part of what he has been saying for over a year is that although he would hold the election and there will be an elected National Assembly, he would remain the President. Commentators took it to mean that substance of power will stay with him, the elected Parliament and government responsible to it notwithstanding. There was another of his political insistence that all those who have looted the nation will not be allowed to take part in the elections. Although many have come under this accountability dragnet, it is primarily aimed at two persons: former PM Mian Nawaz Sharif and President of the larger faction of the Pakistan Muslim League and PPP Chairperson Benazir Bhutto. He remains determined to keeping these two top

politicians --- and top vote catchers --- out of the election. The CE has called his third major parameter on Thursday to be the fine tuning of democracy he intends restoring and some of its other characteristics. One particular substantive change in the Constitution he wants is to introduce a system of checks and balances. While to the world, democracy is nothing but a system of checks and balances in which the Parliament acts as a great check on

ters in the space of eight years, making Pakistan a laughing stock. Those supporters of Army rule argue that why Gen. Musharraf had to takeover was that the President was deprived of the power to sack the PM and the Parliament. Apart from implying that the previous sackings were at the instance of the Army Chief of the day, Musharraf should have Zia-like powers of sacking the elected PM, and if necessary the Parliament.

would remain the President makes the election suspect: it would be so tailored or rigged or hedged with rules and regulations that its results will ensure that the new Assembly's majority will comprise his supporters. Would these election be free and fair? Who in the rest of the world will trust it. Special rules can only mean that the playing field is made more amenable for some and less for others. Would it not devalue and discredit the elections?

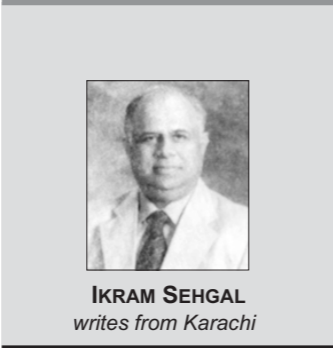
the Generals, getting a particular kind of Parliament from an election in which there will be no obvious coercion of the voters and procedures correct, may not be easy. Doubtless the regime has been vigorously politicking. It is still uniting the half a dozen factions of the Muslim League, more or less vainly. But PML is anyhow an army of generals with few foot soldiers. Minus Nawaz Sharif, the vote pulling power of the various PML luminaries

cell of the Army would be savvy enough to know that the top generals need the support of Benazir, if not also of Nawaz Sharif. It is logical. She has been making brave statements about democracy and about inadvisability of the Army participating in politics. Yet everyone knows that she was trying hard to make a deal with Gen. Musharraf which will permit her to participate in the general election for becoming the Prime Minister a third time. In exchange she was prepared to concede President Musharraf with the powers desired to be written into the Constitution. Since the General has abused Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto as utterly corrupt and otherwise incompetent for so long, he finds it hard to eat all those many words. It remains to be seen whether in the latest stage of behind-the-scenes struggle between Benazir and Gen. Musharraf will have to accept her as the possible PM if indeed she can win.

One has not mentioned the people of Pakistan. Not that they have ever mattered. But living conditions of the common people unemployment is widespread. Poverty is growing rapidly. Law and order even under the military rule continues to worsen. Crime graphs everywhere are going up. Ordinarily it should create restiveness and should radicalise people. The government thinks that old certainties have remained largely intact. Old political families, usually big land-holders, will send their children in the new Assemblies. And they will be malleable material for the generals to remake into political shapes they want. Are the generals right? Who knows.

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

With enemies like Advani



IKRAM SEHGAL
writes from Karachi

BELIEVE it or not, it is increasingly becoming a fact that India's Home Minister L K Advani is Pakistan's biggest asset in the struggle to counter India's motivated propaganda to declare Pakistan "a terrorist State". His place on this pedestal would be a dead heat with George Fernandes but Fernandes is a Christian and despite his best efforts to sound like a Hindu revivalist, he lacks the venom that Advani generates inherently due to the basic character quirk in the conservative Hindu psyche bedeviling Hindu-Muslim relationship in the South Asian sub-continent. It is no coincidence that Sindhvi Advani feels that his ancestors let the side down by allowing Muhammad Bin Qasim establish a foothold for Islam in the sub-continent in the first place. He has made eradication of muslim rule anywhere in the regional hemisphere his personal war to wage, there being no comparable word in the Hindu religion for "Jehad" or "crusade".

According to Advani's daughter-in-law, Gaura Advani, his Special Assistant for two years before she married his son, Jayant, Advani is not the devout Hindu we see in public. Her affidavit asserts that having won only a couple of Lok Sabha (Indian Parliament) seats in

the 80s, Advani (and the inner circle of BJP) decided in 1990 that the only way to come to power was to stoke Hindu nationalism. As the political arm of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Singh (RSS), the Bharitya Janata Party (BJP) follows closely the dictates of the Hindu nationalist movement and their policies are hardly secular. In fact no sect in Islam is more fundamentalist than the militant Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) or the Shiv Sina. They do not spare any religion, Islam,

apologies to India's secular trappings. The already weakened, virtually leaderless Indian Congress Party, was virtually destroyed. Regional parties, many having antipathy to religious affiliations, came into power in their respective States but looked to the strongest Party in the Centre. The BJP-led coalition is a contradiction of sorts, almost all the regional parties without exception do not subscribe to the extreme religious ideology practised by their BJP partner as

stan and the resolution of the Kashmir issue was possible only if a BJP government (as distinct from a BJP-led coalition) came to power in New Delhi.

While para 3 of Advani's statement is debatable given the BJP's anti-muslim thrust, paras 1 and 2 are remarkable from Pakistan's point of view. For the first time in recent memory a very senior Indian leader acknowledges publicly that (1) gauging the aspirations of the Kashmiri people through plebiscite

is in fact a homegrown indigenous liberation struggle against Indian occupation. India is prepared to risk nuclear war to maintain its "unity".

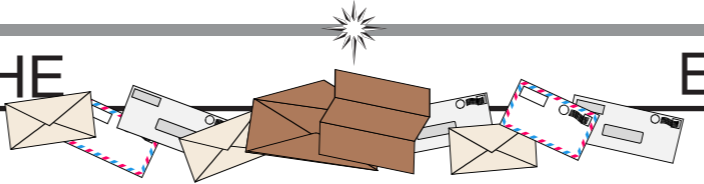
There is a conspiracy of silence in the international media about the horror in Kashmir. The UN Security Council resolution is unambiguous that the dispute in Kashmir between India and Pakistan can only be resolved by ascertaining the wishes of the Kashmiri people. Over the last decade as much as 75000 Kashmiris have lost their lives in

persecution of muslims, not so apparent in the urban areas, but a way of life in the urban-rural and rural areas. The silver lining in all this is the rise of regional parties in India. Unlike Advani's assertion of lasting peace with Pakistan if BJP is itself in power (more of a "final solution"), the real insurance for Pakistan are BJP's regional coalition parties-and in a future Congress-led government alongwith regional allies.As their driving force, regional parties have poverty, hunger, disease, lack of education, etc. On the other hand, the two major parties see India as an emerging power on the world stage and Pakistan as the main stumbling block, BJP being the more virulent of the two.

As the senior ideologue of BJP (other than being its President during the destruction of Babri Masjid), L K Advani should be taken seriously and his views disseminated "as is" to the world. As the largest democracy in the world, India should be able to explain to the world why it is keeping majority population of other religions in many States in bondage. In some states of democratic India, foreigners are not allowed, the few permitted occasionally cannot travel freely. The world today being media-sensitive, we must invite their attention to Advani's recent statements. Commemorating the "murder of RSS volunteers at the hands of "communists", the BJP may care to count how many more communists it has killed over the years, if not the multiple more muslims in every State of the Union in Hindu-Muslim riots inspired by RSS and other extreme Hindu organizations? Pakistan should encourage international media focus on the likes of Advani, Thackeray and party. With enemies like

Ikram Sehgal, a former Major of Pakistan Army, is a political analyst and columnist.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE



EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Mob violence

The news of the mob burning three alleged muggers to death is horrifying and quiet disturbing. One can clearly visualize the typical Bangladeshis on the street, cheering and participating in an act so cruel. We need to stop and ponder on the question whether the ones burnt to death were indeed criminals and if they were, whether the punishment fit the crime.

True, we are getting increasingly frustrated by the deteriorating law and order situation. True, we are increasingly losing faith in our police and hardly expect any protection from them. True, we have grown to be cynical about criminals being punished as so many of them are both used and protected by all the major political parties. True, our situation is the perfect breeding ground for vigilant behaviour. True, it may be a desperate hope that this growing trend of "instant justice" could serve as a deterrent in crimes like mugging.

But we cannot afford to lose faith in the judicial system, because it is better to let a criminal go free than to kill a person who could potentially be an innocent victim of mistaken identity. First, without a fair trial, there is no way to be reasonably certain of someone's guilt. We would never know if all three of the mob-victims were indeed responsible for the crimes they were killed for.

Second, being burned to death is definitely not a suitable punishment for mugging. As bad as this prevalent crime is, as fearful as we are about being on the street, and as much as we would like these criminals pay for their crimes, mugging certainly does not call for capital punishment. There needs to be widespread media initiative to bring these two points home to the public. May I suggest television dramas and motion pictures to address these issues in form of fiction as well as public service advertisements in the media?

Obviously this sort of mob-violence is more a symptom than a reason for the disease that currently prevails in Bangladesh. To cure the symptom, we need the public to be aware of the dark side of this "certain, swift, and severe justice." And to cure the actual disease, we need the police organization to be restructured and re-trained and given the opportunity to serve the people, rather than serving the powerful few. We need the public prosecutors to be relentless in their pursuit of justice. We need the government and the opposition to prove that they mean what they say about their willingness to establish law and order in the country.

A concerned citizen
Dallas, U.S.A
Is terrorism against

Muslims kosher?

India is crossing all borders of terrorism with US issued password -'War against terrorism'.

Five more Kashmiris were murdered by Indian troops in recent acts of violence in Indian-occupied Kashmir. Kashmir Media Service (KMS), quoting local witnesses, says five victims of Indian state terrorism were arrested from various places in Kashmir, taken to areas close to the Line of Control in Rajouri district and shot dead in a fake encounter.

India has miserably failed to suppress the 54 years old freedom movement.

All the civilized countries should send their observers for fact finding. They will see these fast expanding grave yards and judge themselves that these are graves of local martyrs died fighting against oppression and not of any terrorists.

India's refusal to allow international media or observers is a proof of being guilty of human rights violations by its security forces. Ironically, this terrorism is hidden from President Bush's eyes so it could not be on the agenda of US declared "War against Terrorism". Does this mean that terrorism against Muslims is 'kosher' (halal)?

Mohsin Meer
Lahore, Pakistan
Some questions on

student politics

How long will the depraved politicians of our country continue to use the public universities as battlefields? Who will compensate for the loss incurred by the general students due to meaningless squabbles between the so-called student leaders?

Why do we call it student politics when most of the people involved are not students and are in fact too old to claim themselves as students? Why do our politicians make false promises about banning student politics when it is quite obvious that they will continue to use this weapon for their selfish motives?

Why is it that the people who call themselves student leaders never even pretend to be interested in matters relating to the welfare of students and improvement of academic facilities? If our political parties are not concerned about the future of our country, must they display their indifference so shamelessly?

Why don't the student leaders and their patrons practice their dirty politics somewhere else and let the universities conduct their academic activities regularly and peacefully?

A frustrated university student
Dhaka
"Sheikh Hasina's

errors?"

This is in reference to Ariful Islam's letter "Sheikh Hasina's errors?" (January 30). By advising the court in his 'expectation', hasn't Mr. Ariful Islam tried to influence the court on the Contempt case against Sheikh Hasina and also underestimate the wisdom of the court in giving importance to the case?

Isn't it an offence under our law to give unsolicited comments on a case pending before a court? If there is no interference or possibility of interference by the executive bench, why has the Judiciary bench been struggling long for its separation from the executive bench and why have the successive governments been avoiding or delaying this separation on one pretext or another?

People who are conscious are well aware of the state of the prevailing Judiciary System in Bangladesh and discuss both of its good and bad points publicly as well as privately. Even after its separation from the executive bench, the Judiciary bench will not be above public scrutiny and assessment, simply because the judges too are human beings.

Habibur Rahman
Mohakhali, Dhaka
For whom the

columns/letters scroll?

The columnists and "hapless" readers of different newspapers and magazines are writing a lot. But, are these to be considered as just for the sake of writing or a way to vent their frustrations? Something useful should come out. The new ideas and genuine prob-



The lonely scribe...

lems should reach the leadership of our country. The government should have a panel of "professional" readers who will make a gist of things being written and pass to the concerned Ministries the matters/problems deserving attention/solutions.

A Distressed Observer

Chittagong

FM's comments RMG industry

Finance Minister's (FM) recent comments on the RMG industry betray an appalling lack of decency and common-sense mandatory for the high status of his office (they are all "tailors", etc.). His belittling statements do no justice to the thousands of hardworking garment workers driving the number one export engine of the country. They deserve better. They deserve to be treated with respect by the entire nation.

FM's comments also fall far short of the bare minimum grasp of facts required on his part. Bangladesh with a 60 per cent illiteracy rate and its education system in absolute shambles is not likely going to be the next big destination for foreign high-tech investment any time soon. While the goal to achieve some measures of success in high-end manufacturing and service sector is commendable, the effort to do so should not come at the expense of the real priorities. We may bury our heads in the sand but the world knows Bangladesh as a country of abject poverty and of all other abominations that come with it. Here, we must be patient and continue to build on one little success at a time.

In our irrational urge, we must not upset the whole thing by hitching the

cart before the bullocks. If we cannot take care of a relatively simple business as "tailoring" how can we convince our business partners that we will be up to par for something more challenging than "tailoring".

RMG industry is playing a crucial role in providing much-needed jobs to thousands of people that the economy could not otherwise gainfully employ. Granted that the good citizens of this industry need to do a better job of policing themselves, but that apparent shortcoming does not justify the wholesale condemnation of the entire industry for the corrupt ways of a few. Before some one in the administration in their self-righteous indignation get in a tizzy over corruption in the RMG industry, they may look themselves in the mirror and see what the rest of the world sees. The enormity of corruption in Bangladesh is systematic and all pervasive which starts with the government bureaucracy. It would behoove us to remember that RMG needs compassionate mentoring not sarcastic comments to realize its full potentials. With the right leadership (public as well as private), RMG can indeed serve as a vehicle for social change.

Mashuk Chowdhury
Amarillo, Texas, USA