

Mahima's death is a slap on the national face

Govt. must prove it wants to act

ALTHOUGH the authorities have shown publicly displayed interest, the Mahima rape and suicide case is yet to show substantial progress. It appears to be at the public relations stage and the Home Minister himself has made the regulation visit and promised the usual. While a few peripheral accused have been taken in the main culprit roams free. The general feeling is that much more can be done. Given the unfortunate track record this government has picked up in this area, this charge needs to be taken very seriously. The government has now come under scrutiny. Has BNP ushered in a situation where women are less safe and rape can be committed and got away with than ever before?

Mahima's dreadful story is all the more devastating because this is the second recorded case of suicide under compulsion. If Simi's suicide shook us all, Mahima's must be considered even more terrifying because it shows a trend of oppression of women that is creeping into society. We have still to see Simi's killers inside and on trial and this despite all the media attention and the Home Minister's personal intervention. Since then, little progress is reported.

In case of Mahima, we are seeing the same pattern evolving. In response to media coverage, the authorities are visiting the scene of the crime and making promises but people feel unsure about the outcome.

The matter in respect of the Mahima rape and suicide case is also about the involvement of ruling party BNP activists including the principal accused. No matter what is stated, the political hue over the incident and the colour of the criminals' shirt can't be denied. That is why the responsibility of the government is more. Unfortunately, one isn't sure whether that matters to the law and order establishment or not. Apart from hobnobbing with top notch criminals, its leaders are more at ease with Opposition bashing and cataloguing their past misdeeds. What they aren't noticing is that today's failure is being notched up as tomorrow's misdeeds, which could be read out, aloud by another party.

Why the party, despite a massive mandate and public support, is becoming an example of failing to improve the law and order situation is puzzling and unacceptable. Such deeds never disappear from the public mind and translate into public disenchantment, which takes many routes. It seems that this government feels that they don't have to care. But others have felt like this before and have paid steep prices for such indifference.

It's time to wake up to national responsibility. BNP may do what it wants with its party but as a government it must discharge its duty. Arrest the killers and the rapists and ensure their trial. This is a test of its ability to rule. We all hope it will pass.

Murder evidence on trees

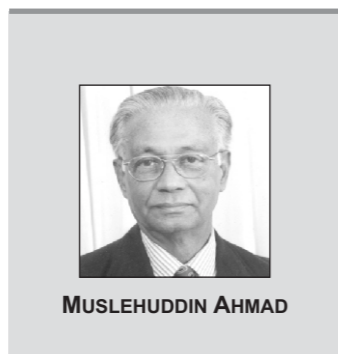
Build 'alamat' storage facility immediately

BELIEVE it or not, in our beloved country murder evidence can be found on trees. We have not yet mastered the art of actually growing them on trees but given time we will. Why not? Since justice does not matter, whether a murderer escapes punishment is not our concern and upholding the law is not our priority, then growing evidence on trees should not really matter. But for the moment we will have to be content with just finding them there. If our readers have noticed our main picture in yesterday's issue it shows that evidence of murders and related crimes are collected by police and put into polythene bags and then hung -- we repeat hung, on tree branches for storage. The reason being the police have run out of proper storage space.

There are many incredible things we have heard about in Bangladesh and there are many absurd things we live with. But this must really take the cake. Do the police really think this is a way of storing evidence? Can it be serious? Can we ever expect to convict a criminal with evidence exposed to the elements? Then again we can prevent tampering or even substituting evidence under these circumstances. On Thursday our sister publication *Prothom Alo* carried a story about false evidence being presented to the court in the case of a bomb blast at the Chhayanaut function last year. We have no idea how many miscarriages of justice could have occurred because of the "evidence on the trees".

We have written many times, and we repeat today, that we need to increase our investment in law enforcement. The budgetary allocation for our police is highly inadequate in every aspect. Starting from pay to working condition and logistical support our police and our law enforcement bodies are starved of funds which has, on the one hand, incapacitated them and on the other, made them corrupt. The government must immediately examine the issue of adequate finance for our police and related bodies. We are convinced that given the priority to contain crimes such a step has become imperative. As an immediate step we urge the authorities to allocate money for a modern and computerised evidence storage facility. While that is being built find some temporary space for the so-called 'alamat' (evidence) for the sake of justice.

Sharon should give up buffer zone idea and accept Saudi Crown Prince's peace plan



MUSLEHUDDIN AHMAD

HAVING been in the rough sea of violence for over sixteen months that resulted in the loss of over 265 Israelis against some 850 Palestinians, Prime Minister Sharon has now turned to the already failed system of buffer zone which was responsible for deaths of hundreds of Israeli security forces and civilians in the security zone that existed between Israel and Lebanon for over 15 years. It was indeed an agonising experience for Israel and it had to unilaterally withdraw from the security zone on May, 2000. But again Israel is deciding to go for the buffer zones with probably a width of maximum half a mile whereas between Israel and Lebanon it was a buffer zone of about 15-mile deep. Unfortunately, people do not learn from history and, of course, the world cannot expect anything different from a person like Ariel Sharon.

Though no details were given on how he proposes to have the buffer zone, it was, however, clear that the proposed buffer zone would be around Israel proper and Sharon would make all efforts to include East Jerusalem too. The proposed buffer zones may exclude the settlements as Sharon mentioned nothing about the settlements. This has already enraged the settlers.

Sharon tried practically all repressive methods against Palestinians but did not succeed in bringing his promised security to the Israelis. It is obvious that those who are determined to give their lives for a right cause -- their fight against occupation -- then no weapon can

stop them. Indeed, 'the Palestinians [suicide bombers] make themselves weapons' as put by Farrakhhan of Nation of Islam 'and blow themselves up to kill others'. Against such determined people, no barrier can work; they will always find their way and kill those who are responsible for occupation. Unfortunately, the ordinary Israeli civilians also become targets. None can condone killing of ordinary civilians, but policies of Israeli authorities make the civilians also the targets.

having a difficult time -- I am having a difficult time," while explaining the concern of Israelis about where the country was headed [NY Times Feb 22, 2002]. The very use of these words reflected his utter frustration to deal with violence and indeed reflected his concern about the future of the Israeli state itself. Earlier in reply to the statements of some Likud leaders including Benjamin Netanyahu, Sharon said, "I will not accept detrimental advice to start an all-out war, bringing down

as this has strengthened Arafat's political position within the Palestinian territories and indeed increased Arafat's popularity even among extremist Palestinians. So Sharon's move to find alternative leadership among the Palestinians failed. Now as it shows, he sees Arafat as the only address.

The United States had shown supportive reaction on Arafat's confinement in Ramallah though the reactions of the EU was negative. But the US was apparently

many parts of the world. As the only superpower militarily, economically as well as in many other areas of human need where it is already providing leadership, it should have earned genuine respect all over the world, but unfortunately it hasn't not. Indeed, superpower leadership calls for humbleness and not phrases like -- we stand tall, we shall prevail. A superpower is undoubtedly "tall" and should prevail; it does not have to say

tively to this offer. The latest report shows that Israel has already extended invitation to Crown Prince Abdullah to visit Israel to discuss the plan. The president of Israel Moché Katzav declared that he was ready to visit Saudi Arabia to pursue the offer. The US has shown interest and that might have induced the Israelis to respond positively.

Colin Powell already spoke to several Arab leaders including Prince Abdullah, Ariel Sharon and Yasser Arafat on the matter. Powell after his talks in Washington with Joseph Pique of Spain said, "I think it's an important step that we have welcomed and I wanted to share that with the crown prince, our reaction to his idea, and hope that in the weeks ahead it will be fleshed out in greater detail." The UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, while meeting Tony Blair in London, said that Prince Abdullah's plan was an "important" example of the "new thinking on the Middle East. What is most important is that the US should pursue this with all earnestness and ask Israel not to miss this opportunity. Crown Prince Abdullah's offer opens up the sure way for the establishment of two states for the distant cousins -- the Arabs (Palestinians) and the Israelis -- with the good possibility of their living together side by side hopefully in reasonable peace. Let Crown Prince also move fast and put the kingdom's weight behind his good proposal with a view to finding a lasting solution that could save the region from disaster. It will certainly have the support of not only all of the Arabs but also of the entire world.

Muslehuddin Ahmad is a former Secretary and Ambassador and founder president of North South University

SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

Crown Prince Abdullah's offer opens up the sure way for the establishment of two states for the distant cousins -- the Arabs (Palestinians) and the Israelis -- with the good possibility of their living together side by side hopefully in reasonable peace.

Whether one calls them terrorists or martyrs, they carry out their missions causing deaths to the civilians too. Recently, there were some positive reactions among the Palestinians; some felt that they should not target civilians within Israel proper. This meant that they should target the military and the settlers as the settlers have become the legitimate targets because of their direct occupation of Palestinian land.

Indeed, with the death of six members of Israeli security forces last week including blowing up of a modern Israeli tank by a Palestinian bomb, Israeli strategy to confront the Palestinians changed and led Sharon and his rightist cabinet to go for separation of Israelis from Palestinians by establishing protective buffer zones. This shows the total ineffectiveness of Israeli repressive measures to contain violence instead of dealing with this politically. Ariel Sharon could see the danger ahead. While addressing the Israelis over Israeli TV network, which had extensive coverage in the USA and probably elsewhere too, Sharon said, "The state of Israel is not collapsing. And it will not collapse." He also said, "We are

the PA, and recapture West Bank cities." He also changed his earlier stand on Arafat and added, "Arafat will remain our address." [Jerusalem Post Feb 21].

There is already a decision to allow Arafat to travel within Ramallah but for going out of Ramallah, he has to ask for Israeli Prime Minister Sharon's permission. There was an effort to lift restrictions on Arafat's movement but Israeli rightist cabinet members totally opposed such a move. In the final voting three ministers apparently belonging to Labour abstained and none voted against. This shows that Shimon Peres is still not in a position to take Labour out of the coalition. Sharon was quite happy to have maintained his coalition government. Though Israeli tanks have left the areas of Arafat's headquarters at Ramallah, the restrictions, though loosened somewhat, continues. This further angered the Palestinians. The present relaxation has apparently been the result of the arrest by the PA of three Palestinians who are suspected by Israel to be the killer of Israeli Tourism Minister. In any case, the confinement of Arafat has really backfired

"puzzled" by the idea of buffer zones which was not discussed with the US earlier. The US reaction was considered negative. It said, "If you're living cheek by jowl, it's hard to induce too much separation. They work together, rely on each other, supply each other. The only way to do this is to reconcile their interests, and find ways of living together." This shows the correct realization of the situation and the relationship between Palestinians and the Israelis, but unfortunately the existence of such interrelationship in terms of co-existence of these two feuding parties -- indeed the distant cousins - do not appear to influence the US's policy decisions in the matter. It has generally been one-sided only supporting Israel at the cost of peace in the region. Had the US worked as a real neutral party, there would have been peace in the area long ago and probably there would not have been any 9/11 nor any need for any war against terror which is costing the US politically and in terms of men and materials.

The US has to think very seriously why the lives of the US citizens are under threat today in

this. Saying only irritates others who are less powerful and less fortunate. The world would expect the US to change its stand in the UNSC on many issues and particularly on those relating to Israel. Once this is done, there would be definite changes in the level of terrorism as one of the major causes would then be eliminated. It has to be understood very clearly that terrorism cannot be eliminated by military means. Israeli tactics against the Palestinians have proved this beyond doubt. The causes are to be removed. This has to be understood and pursued with all determinations.

The change of attitude even among the Arabs can be well discerned. Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia has reportedly proposed recognition and indeed normalisation of relation with Israel if Israel withdraws totally from the territories occupied in 1967 war and signs a peace agreement with the Palestinians. From the comments of Foreign Minister Shimon Peres it appears that Israel has welcomed the proposal. Israeli Justice Minister Sheerit has also asked Prime Minister Sharon to respond posi-

The coming war on Iraq: Protest, don't grovel

PRAFUL BIDWAI *Writes from New Delhi*

THE United States is about to invade Iraq as part of its "global war on terrorism". According to reports, it plans to topple President Saddam Hussein through a ground-invasion with 200,000 troops. Its Central Command's "forward" components have moved to the Gulf. Characteristically, America's military plans are more advanced than political ones. It is still confused about which ethnic group should replace Mr Hussein: Kurds or Shias (a majority in Sunni-ruled Iraq). The Kurdish option could create trouble in NATO ally Turkey. Supporting Shias risks strengthening Iran, part of America's "Axis of Evil". However, two things are clear. Iraq will make the Afghan war--with its 4,000-plus innocent civilian deaths, aggravated starvation of 5.5 million, and inhuman detention of prisoners--look like a picnic.

In Afghanistan, US warplanes ran out of high-value targets within three days. In semi-developed Iraq, the fighting will be more intense, with high civilian deaths. Secondly, the US' unjust war will inflict incalculable harm upon global peace and security. The Saddam regime is autocratic and brutal. But it is not in serious breach of any international law or treaty. It has not, unlike in 1990, invaded a neighbouring state. It does not, unlike the Taliban, support a widespread terrorist network.

Baghdad three years ago threw out United Nations inspectors. But the inspections were, arguably, excessive and unlimited in space and time. Inspectors could invade government offices, factories, even private bedrooms--on mere suspicion, without warning. Some inspections turned up evidence and material pertaining to

cine). For former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, this terrible misery was "worth the price". Iraq's suffering was typical of US military interventions everywhere--some 120 in the past half-century. The coming war is being waged in a new global post-Cold War situation, in which the US is not just the world's sole superpower. It is a *Hyperpower*,

military bases--to deploy troops in far-flung battlefields. No one matches America's awe-inspiring arsenal of mass-destruction weapons.

US economic might too is unequalled, thanks to superiority in information technology and biotechnology, and to the recent relative decline of Europe and Japan.

India and Pakistan will tow the US line. There has been no public comment from India on the "Hate of the Union", or on inhuman treatment of Afghan POWs. New Delhi has completed its U-turn on autonomous policy-making. It is endorsing Mr Bush's use of military force as the preferred instrument in international relations. This cowboy-style militarism is unbecoming of a civilised state. Instead of protesting, the Indian government is grovelling.

Iraq's (very primitive) nuclear programme and (its more advanced) chemical weapons acquisition. But this happened between 1991 and 1994. The materials were destroyed. There was little justification for continuing with the inspections after this.

America's vengeful attitude towards Iraq on inspections is all the more bizarre because it itself opposes a biological-weapons verification protocol as the inspections would violate "industrial secrets". Sanctions inflicted terrible suffering on non-combatant Iraqis. According to conservative estimates, 350,000 children under 5 died. (This excludes children over 5, or adults who died for want of food or medi-

wielding far more force than any nation in history. America's dominance is unalloyed and unchallenged. It is enforced less through consensus than brute force. America has rarely practised any diplomacy other than the gunboat variety.

America's gargantuan military budget equals the defence spending of the next 15 highest countries--combined.

The US alone has mastered a combination of military technologies: precision-guided missiles and bombs deliverable from "safe" distances; Special Operations groups with night-vision equipment; sophisticated, secure communications; and the logistical ability--large transport aircraft and 200-plus

America's might is built on great inequalities of wealth and income, and poor social security. It has ecologically disastrous effects, including global warming, deforestation, and oceanic pollution.

The combination of military and economic clout allows the US to take an arrogant, imperious, unbalanced, unilateralist stand, and treat the world as its global empire. US ideologue and former National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski sums up today's dominant vision: The world must consist of only two categories of states, America's "vassals" and "tributaries".

The US must be free to pursue its interests without hindrance. It

should brook no restraint, respect no authority. It can abuse, manipulate, bypass or simply ignore the United Nations, as it likes. US policy is driven not by this or that interest, but by the overarching goal of world domination. America's response to September 11 was to declare war, not on a particular state, but on "global terrorism".

mass-destruction weapons--a dangerous new counter-proliferation doctrine.

Mr Bush's martial oration has drawn widespread criticism. *The New York Times* said: "the application of power and intimidation has returned to the forefront of American foreign policy." *The Guardian* called it the "Hate of the Union" address.

Many governments have condemned it as unbalanced for reducing "all the world's problems to terrorism". The European Union's Chris Patten said it was "profoundly misguided". France's Lionel Jospin was equally scathing.

However, when push comes to shove, European governments may not actively oppose the US' military plans. They are likely to be ambiguous.

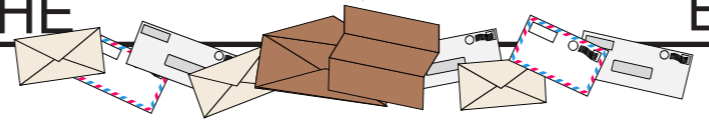
India and Pakistan won't even be ambiguous. They will tow the US line. There has been no public comment from India on the "Hate of the Union", or on inhuman treatment of Afghan POWs.

New Delhi has completed its U-turn on autonomous policy-making. It is endorsing Mr Bush's use of military force as the preferred instrument in international relations.

This cowboy-style militarism is unbecoming of a civilised state. Instead of protesting, the Indian government is grovelling.

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

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



BNP and BDR: The raid against terrorism

This is a response to the condemnation of the BDR raids in several parts of Dhaka. I would like to congratulate the government for making it very apparent that they are really serious about eradicating terrorism and extortion. This is the first time in the history of Bangladesh where a ruling government is taking stringent measures against its own activists.

It is no secret that many politicians belonging to various political parties manipulate people with their power and harbour terrorists. Some corrupt police officers always keep contact with the terrorists and their godfathers. We understand it is rather hard to confront such adversaries? It needs tremendous determination, courage and efficiency and the honourable Prime Minister just proved that she possesses all such qualities.

People complain about the state of law and order, but when one tries to make a difference is it a violation of human rights. So what is terrorism, extortion, rape and murder? Is it not our fundamental right to live a life of freedom, without torture and oppression. I can only assume that the political leaders who are

annoyed by the raid are associated with the criminals.

Everyday we read about raids and the result is simply zero. The only logical conclusion is information is conveyed to the criminals before the raid is executed. This is only possible in two ways. Either they receive the information from the police, or from the MP's or Government officials who harbour them. Thus by disconnecting mobile networks and not informing other ministers and MP's, the activists were caught off guard. Which has resulted in a successful drive. This is the only effective means of conducting a raid in the present situation.

The government has the full support of its people in its war against terrorism. Public frustration is clearly apparent from the recent lynching incidents. So what do people want, stern government action or public lynching? The ruling government has taken the appropriate route and if they continue with their efforts, it is inevitable that results will be good. I congratulate them and hope they will stay on their current course.

R. Haque
BPP Law School U.K.
Bangla Computer Code

Good reporting by The Daily Star (Feb 21) informing the public that after the declaration of the International Mother Language Day, the authorities in Dhaka were sleeping over the processing to get the Bangla Computer Code adopted and introduced at international level (as done in the cases other languages).

We are harping on the development of the IT industry in Bangladesh, but the players were not pushing the government for having the Bangla Code adopted officially at the international level. A high-level subcommittee may immediately prepare the necessary documents co-ordinated by BCS and the Ministry concerned. (IT Div).

A Mawaz
Dhaka.

Anti-Bangladeshi demolition squad

As a discontented citizen, I am not surprised at the outburst of a government minister in Dhaka describing the local leader of the opposition as a one-person demolition squad, working against the motherland, to spite the opponents who are in power in Dhaka. Most of our political leaders seem to have armoured themselves with hippo skin so that they can ignore public remarks fully

and properly.

The basic issue looks simple enough to the citizens, but the crafty politicians cannot and do not see straight: the country first, dirty politics later.

It does not matter how many political parties fade out, and new ones emerge (it has to). It is surprising to note that the poor standard of political leadership is showing no sign of any development. The two major parties are messing up everything for the last decade. Negative mindset is worse than zero-development.

The 130 million citizens wish to get out of this vicious trap. Let the political pundits find the way out, because it is their internal problem. The nation is being held hostage to political vendetta. The politicians have no such rights, and the citizens should not allow such licentious activities by political coteries.

Elections bring no change in the political and governance atmosphere. The climate has to be changed, and only the people can impose it on the rulers, as it is their right.

Self-respect resides with the incumbent individual, not on past references. Why the recalcitrant leaders on crutches should not be persuaded to retire honourably? Leave the citizens in peace, even

with this zero percent growth rate. This rate will jump to seven to eight percent if the political terrorists are eliminated, and corruption made a one-way traffic by a neutral administration. Start with just these two remedies, and miracles will return to sonar Bangla. We can take-off (we missed the mid-'90s target), but are not being allowed. Catch the culprits, regardless of name and fame.

Abd Dhaka.

"Our Next Eid Prayer"

My brief response to the letter of Mr. Faruque Hasan published in your daily 'Allaah helps those who help themselves' February 21, 2002. I understand that without the sacrifices of our language movement some 50 years ago we would be speaking a foreign tongue!

So, instead of waiting for a divine intervention, let's do something about our present situation first. Every individual has responsibilities towards himself, his kin and last but not least, his motherland. We cannot blame our politicians for all our miseries. Because we might have elected them but we have not surrendered our conscience to them. So let's be strong and resolute in our hearts to stop the decay that is eating away the fabric of our society.

Eid Mubarak!
Shabbir A. Bashir.
San Jose, California, USA

BNP brings order

I would be grateful if you publish this letter in your daily and thus help me to convey how deeply I appreciate the Government's firm determination to improve the quality of administration. I admire the Prime Minister in particular and the law enforcement authorities in general for arresting Nasiruddin Pintoo. This will go a long way and establish the rule of law in the Bangladesh. Let there be no fear or favour in establishing good governance.

Sobhan Abdus
Atlanta, USA

AL propaganda list

As a voter for four decades, I have gone through the full-page Awami League advertisement (DS, Feb 11), containing a list of more than 50 items of grievances. I am not impressed. It is easy to prepare such lists.

I have one simple question (which is asked by millions of voters): well, come and raise these in the parliament. AL will get more publicity, and everything would be officially recorded. The voters did not vote for the party to remain out of

the House, and indulge in smear campaigns. The style of politics has changed. The voters are more aware now, and they have given the verdict on the party during the October elections. The party won't accept it. The independent and neutral observers are not accepting AL's version.

How politicians respect the voters? There is no peer level communication. There are two categories of communication: virtual and actual. Therefore the communication gap between the politicians and the voters is very high (generally speaking). It remains us of the old feudal zamindari system of one-way communication.

The style of politicking is not changing. That is what the voters want -- from all parties. The present regime is also under critical observation by the voters. The opposition is out of tune with the voters, in this respect. Synchronise, and do not be out of step. This is the malady with Awami League; out of sync, and too arrogant. Stop the finger-pointing stance. What has gone wrong with constructive criticism? If the leaders do not show the way, who will?

There is lack of transparency of the cultivation of democratic practices inside the party (in the other parties also, and the party chiefs keep mum over this sensitive issue).

AL wants to eat the cake and have it too. Its continuous fault-finding attitude is irritating. The present regime has lasted only a few months. After two to three years, its performance may be examined more critically. BNP had run the government twice before, so it is not as naive as AL thinks.

AL had no governance experience after 1975 till it took over in 1996. It bungled the reorientation process of changing over from the street agitation culture, and went kite-flying when in power. Today it is back, as usual, to the streets, for the second time. It demands many goodies, but is not willing to participate. The voters won't humour any party. This is not the age for political tantrums.

Instead of changing and improving the political culture, AL is indulging in low-level propaganda tactics, some harmful to the country. Now it has to revamp the party after the election debacle.

lizzy
Dhaka