

Isn't it rin santrashi?

BB caving in to pressure

THE latest decision by the Bangladesh Bank regarding downpayment for rescheduling of default loans has caused further concern that life has once again been made easy for the loan defaulters. It needs hardly any explaining that the move to reduce the downpayment slab for rescheduling from 10 per cent of the total term loan to 10% of the installment due is an incredible advantage given to the defaulter. But this was only to be expected from a society that has over the years become hell-bent to become pro-wealthy.

It's a well-known fact that most people don't actually take loans and even if they do, they don't default. They are scared of the banks and the rumbles that rise from the financial establishment are enough to scare ordinary loan seekers away. Only the rich take loans and that's because they know the state is on their side.

BB will certainly have argument for their decision and has also said that there are opportunities for misuse; but isn't the system providing protection to the super rich? And bigger the loan larger is the leverage of the default with the lending bank.

Why this issue has not been ever considered a serious matter is however still asked? Is it because most political leaders worth naming is part of the loan default club and the parliament has been made a safe place for not legislating against them because most members are also extremely wealthy? Since this club is under the total control of the wealthy, one can never expect them to act as the final resort. They can afford some of the best lawyers to defend them in court and we are no stranger to the practice of slurring over deeds of some lawbreakers by a section of the media. In any case, the decision to make it easier for the rich can be understood as part of the traditional governance process.

While the rich need not fear any arms of the law, we could reduce our hypocrisy level by calling for financial reform in one sector and using technical jargon to further damage the banking sector.

It's impossible for the authorities to recognize that they are dealing with public deposits and that they have no right to play with them. But the notion of accountability expired long before even these loans were granted and now seeking return of monies is as dangerous as seeking a loan from a santrashi.

Maybe it's better to call them rin santrashi in line with their economic muscle?

Murder at monastery

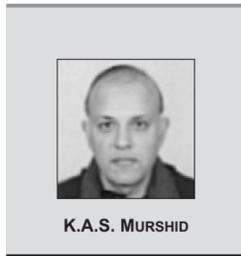
We strongly condemn this heinous act

GANOJYOTI Mahasthobir died in the early hours on Monday. As he was preparing to go to bed, in came 22 armed men, led by a notorious criminal of the Raozan area in Chittagong, who tied and blindfolded the monk and indiscriminately stabbed him before slitting his throat. Horrendous, we find no word strong enough to deprecate this outrageous act. The motive behind the murder is suspected to range from extortion to possession of some two acres of land where the monastery, home to nearly 100 orphan boys and girls and run with financial assistance from some foreign countries, including Japan and the Netherlands, stands. Some people say that the monk had enraged the thugs by asking them not to while away their time in the monastery compound every evening.

Whatever the motive may have been - and we firmly believe that it was criminal rather than communal - we now have a murder at monastery to deal with which could very well send wrong signals to the outside world. The killing of the monk could be passed off as an instance of communal intolerance by interested quarters. Such a claim, if and when made, might sound credible given some similar incidents in the recent past. After all, some stray assaults on church and temple have not done the country's image overseas any good. Then there was the Far Eastern Economic Review cover story on Bangladesh, a prime example of bad journalism that attempted to put a blot on the religious equanimity we, as a nation, take so much pride in.

The government, therefore, needs to handle the case with extra caution. There is a suggestion that the notorious criminal who executed the killing enjoys the blessing of a local ruling party lawmaker. This makes it imperative that the administration gets to the bottom of the shameful incident and punish the culprit. Given the sensitivity of the matter, the government cannot afford to fail.

Ring-a-ring a roses...



K.A.S. MURSHID

WE are of course adults and cannot run around in silly circles, although the same cannot be said about talking around in circles. Actually, I do like seminars and conferences -- what better way to imbibe the findings of important, path-breaking research than to simply sit-in on one. And if you happen to be sitting next to a pretty lady or better yet, a foreigner, you might even be on television. Only last week I attended three seminars and sorely regretted missing another two. In one of them I even found myself sitting next to a foreigner, and sure enough I was told the following day that I was seen on TV. Great stuff, these occasions!

I must however confess to experiencing a slight sense of unease once in a while: Why does it all sound so repetitive? Is there really anything new being said? Where is it all going any-

way? Is this just hot air or does it actually lead to some policy changes? The mind-set needs to be changed, we are told. How do we do that? Is it not a historical-evolutionary process? And whose mind-set? Law and order needs to be set right, we hear. Infrastructure, electricity supply and ports need to be efficient, goes the refrain. If all other prescriptions run dry we can always bring in the question of economic

presented; there is equally, an acute dearth of high-quality policy studies. Thus what we end up with much of the time falls in the category of being 'neither here nor there', perpetually asking the questions and being satisfied with 'preliminary findings' of an 'exploratory study'.

The agenda is firmly set by donors: whether it is going to be health and education this year or local government and agro-

question of value-addition assumes critical importance. There is no value-addition because there is no basic research that is being carried out in the country. Not just in economics or in the field of development but in any field. We spend a paltry amount per capita on R&D, not just in comparison to developed countries but also compared to developing countries in the region. We simply do not believe

rising and you are able to sit more comfortably in Paris. Wouldn't it be nice if we could tell those people, 'Look here, our studies show that it is better to deploy our scarce resources in doing X rather than Y, and these are the reasons..?' When was the last time we were able to say that?

All Fall Down? Under the circumstances our active seminar scene is indeed praiseworthy. Never have so

BETWEEN YOURSELF AND ME

There is no awareness and even less commitment. Throw some money at basic research and you will find that your donor dependence is lessening, your self-confidence is rising and you are able to sit more comfortably in Paris. Wouldn't it be nice if we could tell those people, 'Look here, our studies show that it is better to deploy our scarce resources in doing X rather than Y, and these are the reasons..?' When was the last time we were able to say that?

reforms. Well, fair enough but haven't we been saying just these for many, many years? Shouldn't the debate now move on? Or is it that nobody has noticed? Incidentally, who sets the agenda? Who drives the action/inaction?

I have tried to put my finger on the reasons behind my sense of unease: (a) lack of value-addition figures prominently on my list, which in turn leads to (b) a deep sense of futility, and (c) a growing apathy towards the talking classes. Very rarely do we get to go to a seminar these days where a serious academic paper is

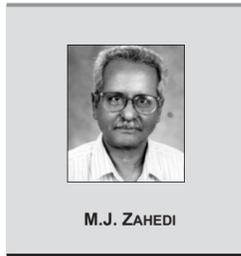
processing next year; whether we have had enough of micro finance and should we now move on to small-scale industries, etc. are crucial decisions in which the government has a marginal role. There is no point blaming anyone because nature abhors a vacuum. If the government had the capacity and the courage to set its own agenda and the wisdom of allocating some resources to pursuing those with seriousness, I am willing to bet that all other stakeholders (including donors) would fall in line.

It is in this context that the

deep in our hearts that putting money into research is of any real value. We do not appreciate the fact that the value of research is not immediate and predictable, and that it has its own dynamics. We do not understand that basic research is what creates value, ideas, innovation and leads to progress. These are just words that one utters when a suitable occasion arises. There is no awareness and even less commitment. Throw some money at basic research and you will find that your donor dependence is lessening, your self-confidence is

many people been able to talk so much about so little! The much maligned donor-community must be given some credit: they fund these talk opportunities as well as the background or 'key-note' papers. They do so because they have reasons -- agenda setting being the principal one. The development community is small and good researchers are few and far between, so that those who are good are stretched wide and thin, and all they can do despite their best efforts is to write exploratory papers and provide preliminary findings. I am

Of referendum and beyond



M.J. ZAHEDI

THESE days the newspapers, of all hues, are full of news and commentaries on the forthcoming referendum. Every day they are carrying news about and commentaries on the referendum scheduled for April 30. On that day, General Pervez Musharraf, presently Pakistan's President following an army coup in 1997 that toppled Nawaz Sharif's government, will have become the elected president of Pakistan. There is no doubt about it, particularly as Musharraf is the only candidate seeking people's approval. The opposition has decided to boycott the referendum. After that date, Gen. Musharraf will be occupying the presidential palace in Islamabad as the occupant chosen by the people.

Some commentators have asked the question: how will Pakistanis, especially those who are aware, view the new regime that will come after April 30? That, to a large extent, will depend on what the regime does. The people's problems, naturally, are

foremost. Of these, one is most important. It is poverty. The General too talks about it, almost always. And he has been doing so in his speeches at the public meetings that he has been holding at various places (by one report, 20 such meetings have been planned, of which only a few have been held so far).

Not the first time that a military dictator has legitimized his rule

reforms. Besides, Musharraf himself has said that the projected referendum will not be an election, but only endorsement (of the reforms he has brought about and the amendments he will have brought about). The constitution, of course, provides for a referendum on a matter of national importance, not for electing the president of the country. But those objecting to general Musharraf's

because when he took over the presidency the legal position was not any different.

Many political observers therefore feel that without bothering about the legality or otherwise of the referendum, people should focus their attention on issues, which are more important. They should be concerned about possible changes in the constitution. For example, they should be more

Although the army has hardly remained neutral in the game of politics in Pakistan, some people sense danger in assigning a permanent role to the army in the politics of the country. They feel the same about a permanent National Security Council. They feel that such amendments may take away the sovereignty from the people and vest it in the army.

As far as amending the consti-

ground.

In the present case, the chief executive's power to amend the constitution would be fettered by many limitations, all based on the doctrine of necessity. The constitution could therefore be amended in case of extreme necessity like if parliament was not in existence. About Gen. Musharraf's continuing in power without resigning his post as the chief of the army staff, observers hope that he will avoid any temptation to bring about changes in the constitution that could have far-reaching consequences or which could alter its basic character. Many people feel that any amendment in the constitution to extend the army rule may also be seen as tantamount to violation of the Supreme Court judgement. Besides they feel that any amendment to prolong army rule may also be seen as tantamount to violation of the Supreme Court judgment, both by the people of Pakistan and the outside world. The constitution no doubt needs amending to take note of certain developments. But these must be made by the future parliament, people feel. The chief executive is only obliged to restore democracy in accordance with the verdict of the Supreme Court.

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LETTER FROM KARACHI

Many political observers feel that without bothering about the legality or otherwise of the referendum, people should focus their attention on issues, which are more important. They should be concerned about possible changes in the constitution. They should also examine Musharraf idea of introducing a national security council to maintain a balance between the three main holders of power. Although the army has hardly remained neutral in the game of politics in Pakistan, some people sense danger in assigning a permanent role to the army in the politics of the country.

and started a 'new' democracy'. Ayub Khan did it and introduced 'basic' democracy; Yahya Khan brought 'parliamentary' democracy and Ziaul Huq 'Nizam-islam'. Yahya Khan's experiment did not succeed but Ayub and Zia both stayed in power for over ten years each. Now, Musharraf, who is set to 'reform' governance through amendments in the constitution, too, can look forward to a decade of power, not much diluted. Under Musharraf's democracy, the prime minister will not dare to tamper with his

referendum should appreciate that he is not seeking election. He is seeking the people's opinion whether he should carry on as President to fully implement his reforms. A positive result in the referendum would provide him a moral ground to continue in the office for another five years. And Musharraf must have taken appropriate legal advice before announcing the referendum. Besides, some lawyers say that it makes no difference to him if he decides whether he follows the constitution to extend his tenure

concerned with Musharraf's idea of introducing the chief of the army staff as a third element in the hierarchy of power in the country, besides the president and the prime minister. They should also examine his idea of introducing a national security council to maintain a balance between the three main holders of power. With his proposal to amend the constitution, these will, according to him, help resolve any future political crisis without having to resort to dissolving the assemblies or dismissing the government.

tution, the Supreme Court empowered the chief executive which General Musharraf was to amend the constitution. However its essential features were to be left intact. Even Gen. Ziaul Huq was initially permitted by the Supreme Court to amend the constitution. On the strength of that, he introduced the Eighth Amendment, which gave him power to dissolve the National Assembly and to dismiss the prime Minister. Even when nature intervened to cut short Zia's rule, the army remained in the back-

Two Semitic cousins on suicidal course

M.SHAFIULLAH

THE pound of flesh which I demand of him! Is dearly bought, / 'tis mine, and I will have it. / If you deny me, fie upon your law! Shylock demanded the decree in his favour. Paying no heed to the quality of mercy, he retorted, / "By my soul I swear, / There is no power in the tongue of man, / To alter me. I stay here on my bond." Those who had not read *The Merchant of Venice* would ask who was Shylock?. And could a man be so cruel and determined as to cut by own hand a pound of flesh closest to the bosom of Antonio, the merchant who could not pay in time according to the bond but offered ten times more the money he borrowed? Shylock, was a rich Jew. William Shakespeare created Shylock in 1594 which like all of his other human characters stood the test of time.

Jews are unfamiliar faces in this part of the world. The next question may be "Who are Jews and from where they come from?" According to legend Abraham, [Ibrahim] had two sons: Issac and Ishmael. Issac was the father of Jacob who was known as Israel -- the forefather of the Jews.

Ishmael was the ancestor of the Arabs. The Islamic practice of sacrifice of animal on the day of Eid-ul-Azha is in accordance with the ancient ritual of Prophet Ibrahim who was ordained by Almighty to sacrifice his son Ishmael to prove unflinching loyalty to God. In the absence of recorded history it was believed that Abraham, head of a small tribe,

migrated from Syria to the hill country of Palestine sometime after 2000 B.C. During a time of famine he lived in Egypt and on a later occasion moved to northern Negev where he buried his wife Sarah in a cave. But during another severe famine Issac's son Israel [Jacob] moved to Egypt with whole tribe. Their descendants settled in Egypt for over 400 years. Moses [Musa] an infant Jew by freak of fate raised as Prince in Pharaoh's palace delivered twelve Jewish tribe from the tyranny of the god-emperor. Water of the Red Sea was divided by Divine miracle to facilitate the escape. After crossing the sea Jews betrayed the savior who had gone to Mount Tur to receive Ten Commandments from God. Jews wondered for forty years in the Sinai Desert as a cursed people.

Somewhere around 1280 BC Joshua led them across the River Jordan. The tribes came under control of the neighboring peoples like the Philistines. Saul, regarded as the first king [1050/1011 BC], rallied many of the tribes in an attempt to push back the Philistines who occupied most of the coastal plain and controlled the hill country. His son King David [1011/971 BC] was successful to break the power of the Philistines.

During the reign of his son King Solomon [about 971/931 BC] power of the kingdom extended further than any other period in its history. After his death in 931 BC two separate kingdoms came into being -- the northern with capital in Samaria and the southern in Jerusalem. The growing power of Assyria overran

Samaria in 722 BC and a large number of population was deported to be replaced by immigrants from other conquered territories.

Those who settled in Samaria adopted the religion of the Israelites but were despised by the people of Judah in the south because of their mixed ancestry and their religion was no longer considered to be pure. The deported Israelites were settled in different parts of the Assyrian

temple was built in honor of Jupiter and the Jews were forbidden to enter Jerusalem on pain of death.

The crucifixion of Jesus by Jewish community became a cornerstone of all Christian theology with the implication that in the eyes of God Jews were forever accursed people. The Bishop of Rome in 4th century became the master of souls of Europe, put the mark of perjury on the name and title of every Jew in his realm. And this blot he willed should remain

The court of Venice awarded Shylock "This bond doth give thee here no jot of blood: The words expressly are 'a pound of flesh.'" Shylock's successors won flesh, bone and blood to become master of life and limb of their Palestinian Arab cousins who in no way were responsible for anti-Semitism in the West or the Holocaust of the Jews in Europe. A Shakespearean message to America, "To do a great right do a little wrong, And curb this cruel devil of his will".

empire -- Syria, Turkey and in Iran, considered a deliberate policy to lose their identity for assimilation with local population. The Babylonian army in 586 BC destroyed the city of Jerusalem and forced many into exile. The Persian king Cyrus captured Babylon in 539 BC and under reversed policy many groups of the exiles returned but never regained the authority previously enjoyed. So from 597 BC onwards the Jewish community in Palestine lived under control of one foreign power after another.

After the Persians, Greek ruled Palestine until 63 BC when the Romans captured Jerusalem. Jewish resistance was crushed and a large number of Jews were slaughtered. Jerusalem was turned into a Roman colony. A

upon children of House of Israel. Because of this stigma for fifteen hundred years Christians looked down upon the Jews as Judai monstra sunt [Jews are monsters]. The Bishop of Rome in 13th century directed that the blot which was placed upon the Jews should also be carried on their clothing, visible to all.

In the 15th century the Bishop of Rome ordered that the marked people be confined to ghettos so that they might not soil the Christians around them. In 632 AD two years after the death of Prophet Muhammad [sm] the Arab army captured Jerusalem, the site of Al-Aksa Mosque. Palestine became part of Muslim empire for the 450 years. The Arabs did neither expel people of the land nor convert them

into Islam. The local remained as Christians or Jews. Gradually, however, the population began to convert into Islam since that was the route to social advancement. Thus Arabic became the most widely spoken language.

In 1099 the Crusaders, Christian Knights from western Europe, recaptured Jerusalem from the Muslims and massacred the entire population both Muslims and Jews. The Crusaders were expelled from their Kingdom of Palestine by

Muslim hero Saladin in 1187 AD. Palestine remained under Muslim rule until its conquest by the Ottoman Turks in 1516. Then the number of Jews were only 30 communities. In 1880 out of 4,80,000 population 4,56,000 were Arabs and the Jews were 24,000 constituting five per cent. The first Aliyah [return of Jews] took place in 1881 to escape the growing menace of anti-Semitism in Europe and the number was gradually increased during the First World War. The number rose to 60,000 making 11 per cent of the total population in 1914.

It is a strange irony of history that although both the Arabs and the Jews are Semitic cousins, anti-Semitism was exclusively used against the Jewish people. Insecu-

arity felt due to racial and religious hostility was known as anti-Semitism including discrimination, persecution and even massacre. According to Theodor Herzl, founder of the Zionist movement, the Jews were regarded "as a foreign body among the different nations". A Hungarian Jew Theodor in 1894 reported the trial of Alfred Dreyfus, the French Jew who was condemned on the basis of false evidence. This experience drove him to organize the Zionist Con-

gress in Basle in August 1897 to find a homeland to mitigate eighteenth centuries of Jewish suffering.

Following Turkish defeat in the First World War the Ottoman Empire was dismembered. The British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour on 2nd November 1917 in a communication to Lord Rothschild, a prominent English Jew conveyed HMG's favour in "establishment in Palestine of a national homeland for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this objective, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of the existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country."

Chaim Weizmann, a Russian Jew who in 1916 working in the Admiralty under supervision of Lord Balfour impressed the British officials of importance of a Jewish National Home to the strategic position of the British Empire, is considered one of the main architects of the Balfour Declaration.

In making the declaration the British hoped to encourage Jews in America and Russia to support Allies in the war against Germany. It was also at back of the British mind that a Jewish state established in Palestine would protect the Suez Canal and thus safeguard British interest in India and the East. Another motive was to avoid a large influx of Jewish refugees into Britain. Balfour supported Aliens Act which was intended to restrict Jewish immigration into Britain. Jewish community in majority preferred Palestine to Argentina that was under debate at the beginning of the Zionist movement.

In the Peace Conference of Versailles in 1919 Britain was mandated to rule Palestine. In 1936 the Arabs rose in revolt against the British in protest of the continued Jewish immigration. The revolt was put down. During the Second World War and the Holocaust in Europe, America and Britain did not accept Jewish immigrants. Consequently the Palestinian territory was swamped with Jewish immigrants which further polarized the two communities.

In 1947 Britain handed over the Palestine problem to the United Nations who recommended two

separate states: [a] A Jewish state to include 52 percent of land with 4,98,000 Jews and 4,97,000 Arabs; [b] An Arab state on 48 per cent land with 7,25,000 Arabs and 10,000 Jews; [c] Jerusalem to become an international zone. The UN General Assembly approved the Partition Plan largely at the influence of the USA. Jews of Palestine accepted the Plan. The Arabs rejected it outright.

On 14th May 1948 Dr. Chaim Weizmann raised the flag of David and proclaimed the new state of Israel. In the 1948 and 1967 wars Israel occupied the entire Palestine territory, Sinai and Gaza from Egypt and Golan Heights of Syria. United Nations awarded 52 per cent of territory to the new state in 1947. The court of Venice awarded Shylock "This bond doth give thee here no jot of blood: The words expressly are 'a pound of flesh.'" Shylock's successors won flesh, bone and blood to become master of life and limb of their Palestinian Arab cousins who in no way were responsible for anti-Semitism in the West or the Holocaust of the Jews in Europe. A Shakespearean message to America, "To do a great right do a little wrong, And curb this cruel devil of his will".

M. Shafiullah was Ambassador to the State of Palestine, Libya, Tunisia and Malta in 1995-2000.