DHAKA WEDNESDAY MAY 1, 2002

Death of a priest outraeous beyond measure

Punish the culprit without fail

N the span of a week, two men of religion -- a Buddhist monk and a Hindu priest -- have been murdered in the Chittagong region, in almost identical manners and under similar circumstances. The motive was criminal in both cases rather than communal. Both Ganojyoti Mohasthobir, head of the Hoara Puyan Buddha Bihar, a monastery-cum-orphanage at Raozan in Chittagong, and Madan Gopal Goswami, priest of the Radha Madan Ashram at Manikchhari in the Khagrachhari hill district, met with grisly death for their refusal to give in to extortion. In both cases, the killers got away with valuables that belonged to the Monastery and the temple

The murder of two clergymen of the country's religious minority communities is thoroughly deplorable. However, it would be even more deplorable, if these are blown out of proportion and deliberately misconstrued as examples of communal intolerance. Such sinister possibilities make it imperative that the local administration in Chittagong and Khagrachhari resolve the cases as quickly as possible.

Meanwhile, the murders have brought to the fore a crucial issue. It seems the places of worship are becoming easy targets for the people in crime. Some of these religious centres with some property holdings are being wistfully eyed on by criminals elements. Such places cannot afford their own security system on the one hand and police have not so far felt any compulsion to station their men there on the other. But taking note of the two latest incidents police would do well to extend surveillance to churches, mosques, monasteries and temples. We have so far been inclined to believing that criminals would in no way attack religious centres but their extortionist appetite seems to know no bounds. At least the places of worship that have precious images of deities and other valuable items of religious importance aside from landed property need to be given a security cover.

While expressing our severest condemnation of the crimes we want the perpetrators of the heinous acts tracked down, brought to justice and given a punishment that proves potently

May Day beams respect for labour

Productivity key to progress

N May Day today we remember the martyrs of the Chicago Hay Market who were mowed down by the bullets of the state before they could establish their right to humane working hours. The anti-enslavement legacy lives on, except for some near-extinct vestigial remnants of bonded labour one comes by once in a while.

In the western world, the day is subsumed into the cultural mainstream but the working class has improved tremendously there. In fact, they are so integrated that in a curious way, the workers of the western world are a party to the maintenance of a global system where only the West is claiming a right to pros-

The memories of May Day are particularly significant in the context of the developing world where the skill and professionalism of the working classes hold the key to leaping into the 21s century. But if the life of the western worker improved, that of his eastern counterpart has not. Political independence from colonial rule did not bring about any improvement in their way of life. Recent international developments have encouraged economic growth in place of equity and the rights of the workers are neither politically nor economically taken as seriously as these should have been. Whatever may be the position elsewhere, the most deprived person is the worker in the developing world and certainly the agricultural wage labour leads the pack of the denied.

In our country, workers even of the organised sector, let alone the unorganised or informal ones, struggle under unacceptable conditions and with a wage and social security package that fall far short of required standards. However, our society has reached a point where we have learnt not to totally gnore their plight. Nevertheless, the idea that labour is cheap is possibly getting the better of many employers' best judgement in terms of offering better terms and conditions to work-

On the other hand, the virulently self-serving trade unionism has eroded work ethics mostly in the public sector corporations and industries. Thus the better interests of the employees which would have been well-served through higher output leading to greater benefits for them have been in jeopardy.

The agri-labourer keeping the nation afloat has all but disappeared from national imagination as they are too poor to be assertive and have no lobby to speak on their behalf. Ignoring them is easy.

By observing the May Day, we highlight the need for improving the working conditions of the labour force as a whole and the state of their lives. At the same time, we commit ourselves afresh to the dignity of labour, labour of all kinds, that can keep the nation vibrant and moving

So, what now?



K.A.S. MURSHID

HY is it so difficult to behave normally? Is there something congenital amongst humans (especially of the South Asian variety) that compel them to chart out a shortsighted, self-defeating and suicidal path? How else can we explain the fact that while our leaders promise us all the right and sensible things when they are out of power they promptly develop mass amnesia once in government? And then again, why on earth do we insist on falling for their lies and tricks despite a long and painful history of ineptitude, incompetence and sheer dishonesty? We often hear the pat refrain that 'every nation deserves its leaders' or words to that effect. So is it then our collective guilt at play that our leaders are no better than they

I have tried to find out the original source of this quotation (may well be a misquotation) in an effort to establish the context in which it was uttered or written -- without success. One thing however is quite certain in my mind. We do not deserve this kind of leadership. And the fact that

we have not been able to produce a more credible, competent and honest one does not mean there aren't any good and competent people among us. It only means that they have all been driven underground, forced to write poetry or whatever it is that good people do these days

If one looks back over the last thirty years, and at the huge suffering, the pain, the sacrifice and the

perhaps even the most important cause, of our moribund political leadership has to do with the problem of succession. We have inherited our two top leaders -- they were not really democratically elected leaders in the accepted sense of the word. They did not rise through the ranks, putting in hard labour and competing against rivals. Leadership was handed to them on a golden platter, a platter that rule (their rule!). This has led to the over-use of debased symbols and derelict ideologies in an effort to wring out the few last drops of utility that may still exist there. In the meantime, there are more immediate concerns -- of political survival for one House and credibility for the other. I believe that a socio-political analysis of our current political quagmire must necessarily begin from the above premise -- i.e. the

clear that while she reigns, she doesn't seem to rule? We have seen the first 100 days pass off quietly. I can bet you that many hundred days will pass off as well -- all equally

What next?

If it were Pakistan, the prognosis would be quite straightforward. Another strong man would take over, say the right things, remain publicly clean, promise a return to

At this stage, I am almost tempted to cop out using the timehonoured practice of the academic: 'This is beyond the scope of my paper' or 'Space in this column does not allow me to dwell at length on this subject, as I have already exhausted 963 words out of my allotted 1000', etc.

First of all, we need to change some laws. First, the law should debar anyone from seeking reelection to the post of Prime Minister more than twice in a lifetime (with retrospective effect). Secondly, the legal framework within which political parties and associations operate must be modified to ensure that parties strictly follow democratic norms and practices. Lastly, the public coffers should be used to finance political parties according to some formula (I remember Dr. Kamal Hussain talking about this at length some years ago -- I am sure the mechanisms will not be difficult to establish), while at the same time electoral expenses must be strictly monitored and held accountable. Of course these things will not happen automatically. The time has come for our Civil Society to close rank, forget narrow political differences (or agree to disagree) and exert all the pressure under our collective control to effect these changes. Here I am in Islamabad, on a pleasant Sunday, not far from the Church that was bombed recently -- and using the occasion to sermonise at a safe distance! Actually, I simply had to get this thing out of my system. Thanks for your attention.

K.A.S. Murshid, an economist, is Research

BETWEEN YOURSELF AND ME

First of all, we need to change some laws. First, the law should debar anyone from seeking re-election to the post of Prime Minister more than twice in a lifetime (with retrospective effect). Secondly, the legal framework within which political parties and associations operate must be modified to ensure that parties strictly follow democratic norms and practices. Lastly, the public coffers should be used to finance political parties according to some formula while at the same time electoral expenses must be strictly monitored and held accountable

loss of life that has gone into our political process one cannot but be appalled. And everyday that passes brings with it news of further insults to injury -- the last straw that still awaits a suitable back must be, that wanted criminals are competing in our municipal elections. What pray will come next? How long will it now take for a 'Wanted Mayor' or even a similar Minister. Mastanistan, here I

There is little point in beating around the bush. At any rate whatever bush we have had is dwindling fast so that it is best that we try and get out of this time-honoured Bengali trait of excessive prevarication and circumlocution. It is clear as daylight that a principal cause.

seemed rich, tempting and irresistible. They went straight to the top of their respective party leadership painlessly, effortlessly, and simply because of their family ties -- riding on a wave of popular sympathy following the assassination of Bangabandhu and President Zia. Such things can only happen in South Asia, where the mind-set remains feudal and where 'bloodties' are deemed to be a legitimate source of power. Thus, we now have two Royal Houses, each with its own trappings (courtiers, sycophants, followers-on, court-jesters, knights, hatchet-men and kitchen-cabinets). The primary concern of each House is to ensure succession along the bloodline and to retain continuity of

Bengal. If this were not true then what reason could there possibly be for either of the leaders to hang on to their positions despite setback after setback and debacle after debacle Shouldn't Sheikh Hasina now resign after leading her great party into unprecedented failure in the last elections? Shouldn't there now be a new leadership who can start afresh and perhaps even produce some new ideas and strategies? By the same token, shouldn't the Prime Minister have decided to call it a day a long time ago to allow new blood into the upper echelons of her party? 'She's won a great victory', I hear you say. But wasn't that simply because the AL lost? Isn't it also

emergence of the Royal Houses of

endum, float a political party ... why am I saying all this anyway -- just ask Poet H.M. Ershad, he has the original blue-print. Bangladesh is not Pakistan

democracy 'as soon as possible.

and definitely within 90 days', stay

around for a few years, hold a refer-

(thank God). We have held successful, 'free and fair' elections thrice, have institutionalised the Caretaker Government, and most importantly, evolved a fundamental change in our mindset: no matter what our politics, we will not accept the Army back into power, ever again (Amen). We therefore have to figure out some other way of getting out of the chaos, anarchy and misrule. So, what now?

Director, BIDS

training and cost of operation of a

The war goes on



writes from Karachi

HE war in Afghanistan has entered its six month, the concerted air offensive giving way to occasional airstrikes but mostly ground battles against suspected Al Qaeda/Taliban strongholds. As "Operation Anaconda" has shown, the claws may have been blunted, the sting still remains And so it will, for some time to come.

The US ran the war according to what was their actual primary mission, to topple the Taliban from power and thus deny terrorism in the form of Osama led Al-Qaeda a firm base to operate from. For the record the war on terrorism was primarily meant to bring Osama Bin Laden to justice, however Mullah Umar and Laden continue to evade capture. Bin Laden's No.2 in Al-Qaeda Abu Zubayda, was hauled up recently during raids on urban hideouts in Faisalabad city. On the premise that the tougher they seem the softer they are, he should be a mine of useful information to the US. for whom every bit of knowledge about Al-Qaeda's intention is necessary in their plans to counter effectively in their "Homeland Defence"

According to US military sources, a group of Al-Qaeda fighters who ultimately were estimated to be

about a 1000 were spotted gathering in cave complexes east of Khost near the Pakistan border. The battle that developed forced reinforcements by more US troops into the fray than earlier anticipated, it also underscored the fact that the Al-Qaeda/Taliban were now regrouping in small units, with the ability of coming together very rapidly when faced with an air/ground assault. "Anaconda" was a major test in the US resolve.

armoured unit was resented in the Pashtun area but it remained a resentment only because they were not employed. US spokesmen claimed that 800 of the approximately 1000 guerilla fighters had been killed, this could not be verified as very few bodies, less than two dozen, were actually discovered. The intense air activity must have resulted in high casualties but it seems that the bulk of enemy forces slipped through the net that had help. What Pakistan has paid in social disintegration and economic devastation thereof as a cost of such help can only be estimated.

The induction of British Marine Commandos into Afghanistan will ease the pressure of US forces now carrying the brunt of the fighting. As the snows melt from the high mountain passes, many more routes will open up during the summer for easy cross movement of guerillas, nearly all of whom would be of Pashtun

ing that the religious parties make no mention anymore about their 'Foreign Legion". An obvious solution would be to give Coalition forces right of hot pursuit but that would not be palatable to the population in the frontier and by extension the masses of Pakistan, Stationing of Pakistani troops in proximity of the border would be the ideal solution but does Pakistan have the necessary resources in both heli-

friend and foe alike. It is very reveal-

Pakistan heliborne division that would ensure that militants have no sanctuary this side of the border. This airmobile division, equipped with helicopter gunships and troopcarrying helicopters would be for more cost lethal in operation than any comparable western force. Moreover Pakistan is not averse to taking casualties as is the west, particularly the US. The force would be far more effective in closing in for combat with the querillas. This is the only long-term solution possible to put down terrorism in its crucible. Hamid Karzai recently presided

over the induction of the first batch of the new Afghan Army. When today the ethnic division between the majority Pashtuns in East/South East and everyone else i.e. the Taiiks, the Uzbeks and the Hazaras in North/South West makes for a divided Afghanistan with no hope of unity, over the years a constant ISAF presence may bring about homogeneity. A united Afghan Armed Forces is far further down the road. However as Afghans have shown over the centuries, their soldiering, of whatever ethnicity answer to the paymasters' call. You keep paying them their salaries and you will keep their lovalty, on that premise and given that there are very few other employment opportunities available, a national army is quite possible. But this is in the doubtful future, in the meantime the querillas seem to have learnt their lessons and are operating as querillas should, almost never get involved in pitched battle against superior forces. Now one can only

Hamid Karzai recently presided over the induction of the first batch of the new Afghan Army. When today the ethnic division between the majority Pashtuns in East/South East and everyone else i.e. the Tajiks, the Uzbeks and the Hazaras in North/South West makes for a divided Afghanistan with no hope of unity... a united Afghan Armed Forces is far further down the road. However as Afghans have shown over the centuries, their soldiering, of whatever ethnicity, answer to the paymasters' call...on that premise and given that there are very few other employment opportunities available, a national army is quite possible. But this is in the doubtful future... Now one can only say "war without end continues".

Having had relatively an easy time been laid for them in high mountain extraction, with the odd Al-Qaeda copter gunships and troop carrying Afghanistan, the US had only the recent Tora Bora experience to go by with respect to fighting a counterquerilla war in Afghanistan. In Tora Bora, while the fighting was intense, most of the firepower was directed from the air and quite a lot of the guerillas had managed to escape because the mercenary militias employed by the US failed to come to grips with the enemy.

During "Operation Anaconda", a better quality of Afghan soldiery was clearly in existence with the result that greater firefights took place between combatants on the ground. The induction of a Panjsheeri Tajik

evicting the Taliban from the cities of passes and narrow valleys. Obvi- foreign members, mostly Arab, ously the route was into Pakistan across the border where they would get shelter from sympathetic elements. However this help would only be a temporary transit permit, not as a permanent base to carry out cross-border attacks. This is an important point. While there will be sympathy for them and their grievous travails at the hands of Coalition Forces it will be far diminished than the earlier enthusiasm because of the treatment that the Pakistanis got at the hands of Afghans within Afghanistan. Even if an enemy turns up at your gate and asks for help, Pashtun honour cannot refuse that

thrown in. The area of counterguerilla operations will be limited to the areas adjacent to the Pakistan border on a Northwest-Southeast axis. Obviously the guerillas will attempt using Pakistani border locations as a sanctuary, if not as base for operations. This puts Pakistan in double jeopardy as armed militants will need financial and logistical support and the obvious source will be Pakistani religious parties who have since recovered from their double debacle, both in the streets of Pakistan and in the killing fields of Afghanistan where their "volunteers" were set upon by helicopter, particularly given that hostile India has parked most of its Armed Forces all along Pakistan's borders in clearly an offensive posture? On the other hand Pakistan cannot afford to let armed militants roam freely in and out of its western borders. Remember how the Palestinians took over most of Jordan, and then later a larger part of Lebanon, before being expelled? As it is, Pakistan has a religious extremism problem, it cannot afford not to exterminate the germs of militancy operating in Afghanistan from our side of the border

The best solution would be for the Coalition to pay for equipping,

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

say "war without end continues".

The message of May Day

M ARSHAD ALI

ODAY the voice that you are choking, a day will come when this voice will be more bold and vibrant, Augustus Spice declared just before his execution by hanging on 11th November. 1887 known as 'Black Friday' while the Sheriff of the city Matson was present with more than 200 persons witnessing the tragic scene. What a bold assertion of one's conviction! Conviction is stronger than strength. Stronger did it prove in case of Augustus Spice, one of the heroes who sacrificed their lives to establish the rights of the working people all over the globe. Augustus Spice was sentenced to death by hanging because of his and some of his friends' leading the labour movement that demanded the fixation of 8-hour working day, end of inhuman torture on the workers and of the subhuman conditions of work places. Augustus' voice did not guiver at the torment of imminent death, he was rather bold laughing and saying the words stated above. His was a 'spontaneous outburst of powerful feelings' of conviction in his mission. He was a 'seer', he proved prophetic. The optimism that emboldened him to face the premature death by judgement was realised literally. The day which, he foresaw, would declare more boldly

and vibrantly the voice that was then being choked, really dawned as the May Day proclaims most boldly and vibrantly the rights of the working people the world over.

Great are the achievements that

follow trials and tribulations, tortures and torments, suppressions and subjugations, struggles and sufferings. The May in 1886 saw the culmination of all these pains and pitfalls engineered against the workers by the American employers who were propped up by the government of the day. Whatever the designs of false-hood and however calculating and diabolical its machination are, truth triumphs ultimately and so was it in the case of the American workers movement as it centred round a true cause the cause of putting an end to whimsical and irrational treatment of the employees by the employers, to establish set rules governing the conditions of service, to guarantee social security of the workers and to create safe healthy and congenial working environment.

May 1886 in which six workers and a few policemen perished was the follow-up of a strike held on the 1st of May by 3,80,000 workers with the demand primarily for an 8-hour workday. This barbarous act was condemned by the celebrated English litterateur George Bernard Show, Leonard Sweat, an associ-

The Hay Market incident on 3rd

not directly involved always. It is the government that is the prime mover in establishing law and order, fostering the growth of honest trade unionism, creating peaceful industrial relations, stultifying default loan culture, and above all in effecting transparency and accountability in the administration, management and leadership of the industrial units. stood for, among others, the create of President Abraham Lincoln along with many American lawyers and a few members of the French Parliament. The Paris Conference

of International Labour, 1989 unanimously resolved to observe the 1st of May every year as 'Workers' Solidarity Day' by the working class all over the world. The observance of the May Day began since then With the passage of time it has not only been an international event as was planned by the sponsors but has taken a universal character as the participants in the observance consist of all three sharers in the production process -- the employees, employers and government who involve within their fold all the people everywhere in the world.

Bangladesh, a member of the UNO and a signatory to the ILO Conventions, observes the May Day every year with fervour and festivity rededicating itself to the ideals of the May Day. The ideals ation of congenial atmosphere in mills and factories and all other workplaces for workers, better conditions of service with security of iob. safety of health and better standard of living, in a nutshell. The creation, sanction, guarantee and maintenance of all these, however. hinge on increased production. The production process is, therefore, to be strengthened. Painful is the grim fact that our production process is almost on the verge of collapse because of its being a victim to a variety of ills, the prominent among them being terrorism, extortion, default loan culture, dishonest trade unionism, and bureaucratic hindrance and interference, ulterior political motives, social withdrawal, blurring vision of governance etc, some of them acting jointly in cohorts while others severally. The message of the May Day is an unfaltering and immediate doing

away with all these evils, root and branch, from the production pro-

The May Day has realised its

The May Day, we know, originated from industrial activities and by following suit of its glorious tradition

it brings for us Bangladeshis the message that industrialisation that is harbinger of benefits to the

entire nation should be attained without fail. So the message is for all the three partners of industrial

production -- the workers, the management and the government with the third predominating though

prime demand - the right of 8-hour work a day - everywhere in the world. But right, we know, implies duty; otherwise, it degenerates into licence which amounts to regression of civilisation. Licence has engulfed our production process over head and ears. The exchange of the right to respite for the rest of the day spreading over 16 hours implies that the worker has to devote his eight hours without relent and respite to production so that the factory or industry he works becomes economically viable enough to support the employees, the employer and the government. The worker's level of efficiency is at the lowest in Bangladesh whereas an average Bangladeshi demonstrates a skill that compares well the international standard

while he works abroad. What makes this difference that is causing loss to the industries and eventually to the national exchequer aggravating the misery of the teemina millions?

The efficiency level in Bangla desh is comparatively low primarily because of the failure of the management and government. They have failed to create conditions and contrive situations where the worker can do his best to reach the maximum level of his efficiency. Peaceful and congenial, not chaotic and inimical, is the environment that harnesses the energy and skill of the workers. Unfortunately enough, the sense of belonging that propels the worker to contribute his mite to his work is perhaps missing in our industries. He is not imbibed with the spirit of commitment that stimulates his Japanese or German counterpart with the avowed motto 'Produce or Perish' strict adherence

to which has glorified these two countries by achieving the enviable position of the most industrialised nations out of the rubbles of the World War II.

The trade unions that are purpose-built as watchdogs of the right of the workers have degenerated into instrument of achieving the petty personal motives of the fake abour leaders. To the neglect of their avowed objects of creating enabling environment for the workers in the interest of both increased production and welfare of the employees they oftener than not create chaos and confusion to disrupt peace and tranquility in the industries with a view to fishing in the troubled water. These leaders play stooge to the self-seeking politicians at the corridor of power to gain their mutual selfish ends at the cost of production reducing the otherwise profitable factories into losing concerns throwing cold water on the enthusiastic new entrepreneurs from home and collaboration from abroad as well as on the flow of foreign capital that are of paramount important for industrialisation of the country with all the concomitant benefits of new employment for the ever growing number of people, increase of per capital income, improvement in the standard of living of all citizens including the workers and earning a position of respect in the comity of nations by getting rid of the stigma

of 'bottomless basket'. The May Day, we know, originated from industrial activities and by following suit of its glorious tradition it brings for us Bangladeshis the message that industrialisation that is harbinger of the aforesaid and other benefits to the entire nation should be attained without fail. So the message is for all the three partners of industrial production -- the workers, the management and the government with the third predominating though not directly involved always. It is the government that is the prime mover in establishing law and order, fostering the growth of honest trade unionism, creating peaceful industrial relations, stultifying default loan culture, and above all in effecting transparency and accountability in the administration, management and leadership of the industrial units. Our government is pledgebound to the electorate -- the people of the country who have reposed their sacred trust in it -- to achieve these objectives during its stewardship of the nation. Now it is time to deliver in response to the message delivered by the May Day.

M Arshad Ali is Inspector of Colleges (Offg) University of Dhaka.