

Remembering Zia

We mourn the loss of a freedom fighter and nation builder

ONE of the many tragedies of Bangladesh is that the right party has to be in power to give honour to some particular leaders. So our heroes change with the changing political wind. Thus we saw that it took the Awami League to get elected so that Bangabandhu could get his due honour, for which the founder of the State of Bangladesh had to wait for good 21 years. Similarly during the last government we could hardly realise that there was a figure called Ziaur Rahman who deserved to be remembered by us. With the return to power of the party that Ziaur Rahman founded we see the return of this valiant freedom fighter back on the centre stage of national celebration. We are happy that Ziaur Rahman is being remembered for his contribution to our nation, but can we expect that it will not be at the cost of others who deserve our respect?

We have, regardless of the political wind, regularly paid our tribute to President Ziaur Rahman for three specific contributions. First he destroyed the fascist BKSAL, the universally condemned one-party system that Bangabandhu had tragically introduced in early 1975, and restored multi-party politics. Second, and for this we in the press feel particularly gratified, he withdrew state monopoly from the print media and allowed private newspapers that were banned under BKSAL to resume publication. The third contribution he made was to restore chain of command in the army that was severely compromised by successive coups.

Prior to his entering the political scene Ziaur Rahman was remembered by a grateful nation for his role in our Liberation War. As a sector commander and as the organiser of the "Z" force he played a pivotal role in our freedom struggle. There was, and still is, a special place in our hearts for him for his radio announcement on March 27, 1971 in which he, in Bangabandhu's name, declared our independence.

Ziaur Rahman's tragic assassination deprived the nation of a leader who was able to restart our development process and renew our national reconstruction efforts. We pray for his eternal peace.

Chittagong Port strike may cripple the economy

It's part of an overall crisis of mismanagement

BANGLADESH is about to experience a major problem as the Chittagong Port workers try to enforce a strike in protest against the permission to stevedore agencies to hire workers from outside in case of need. The workers unions are protesting on the ground that this goes against their interest and will lead to entry of outsiders. Negotiations have broken down and an indefinite strike is on.

Port is probably the most critical non-industrial unit in a country and every time they go on a strike this hits the export industry and the importing market. Since Bangladesh has only one worthy port with Mongla moribund for long, the situation is all the more critical. There are other factors as well which have greatly caused concern in many quarters regarding the port. The speculation that a port terminal is going to be leased out to a foreign country or given far more access than normal has fuelled words that Bangladesh itself is going to lose control over it. Currently there is a court stay order on this. Even so, a strike causes greater anxiety.

But the perplexing issue is that of a port strike which is allowed to happen when everyone knows that the country can't afford one. In times of political crisis, the port workers' strike bodes greater ill for the economy as stoppage of export and import automatically makes it quite sluggish.

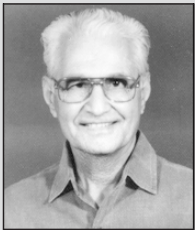
That may have been the reason to allow agencies to hire workers in case of strikes from outside. So this may well be a security move also and not just a matter of conflict arising out of wage increase dispute. Given the politicised atmosphere of the day this may soon become a crisis.

But that the Chittagong port will be a point of constant attention and instigation of all sorts is certain. The entire system of port management has been largely based on underhand dealings and corruption and many such practices have now reached a point whereby the port is not properly functional anymore.

What we are observing is the systemic breakdown of the infrastructure management system and this is reflected in all sections. As the tariff protected era comes to an end, we seem set to display our inability to adjust with it in terms of efficiency and capacity. The crisis at the Chittagong port is part of that. It can't be solved in parts but requires the attention of all parties concerned in ensuring economic efficiency.

Unless that is done, there is worse news to follow.

The evil they are



M B NAQVI
writes from Karachi

NUCLEAR weapons in South Asia are at least four years old. Both India and Pakistan provided the world with audio-visual aid by detonating 11 nuclear devices in Rajasthan and Balochistan deserts in May 1998 — without consulting their people, of course. It is time to review what the two countries have achieved thereby.

Insofar as India is concerned, its motives remain a mystery. Some think atomic weapons are the currency of power and a status symbol. Others saw it as the pursuit of national greatness, conceived as amassing overwhelming military strength. Since atomic weapons seemed to fulfil this quest for power, it chose to go nuclear. Others had laid emphasis on its desire for a big league membership, with an application for the permanent membership of the UN Security Council pending. These theories are valid, though it leaves some dissatisfaction. Although Indian publicists claim Pakistan was not in the rickety BJP government's mind in April 1998, a suspicion survives that the immediate context was Pakistan's Kashmir policy. New Delhi perhaps wanted to demonstrate overwhelming strength to overawe Islamabad. Anyway, has India achieved the aims it had thereby?

Before examining India's achievements, Pakistan's motivation has a relevance. Pakistan's sole objective was to deter India. Paki-

stan Army had assessed that India was a radical threat to its national security. Given half a chance, India will somehow swallow Pakistan. It felt nuclear weapons would help in defying India's power vis-à-vis Kashmir. Some in Pakistan's military might be credited with an unwavering desire for eventually getting even with India; the defeat in 1971 war rankled. Anyway, the raison d'être of Pakistan's nuclearisation is deterring India

moted with gusto, despite India's superiority in conventional armaments and in its larger nuclear capability. There was no noticeable increase in India's stature abroad because of its nuclear status, while the rest of the world habitually brackets India with Pakistan despite all inequalities.

Giving a hard look at Pakistan shows its stature too have actually deteriorated; nobody was impressed with Pakistan's new-

Pakistan have gone from one crisis to another ever since. Military tensions have continuously been rising. Kargil operations and their sequel have said it all. While initially the Kargil operations underlined Pakistan's insouciance, its sequel demonstrated a dramatic and humbling climbdown, literally and figuratively. While Pakistan remains perky behind the atomic shield, the going has gotten too rough as India massed its entire armed forces in an

destabilising. Exposing the myths that surround these mass destruction weapons is now a necessity. There were many Bomb lovers in India and Pakistan — otherwise hardliners and quite anti-Pakistan or anti-India in domestic contexts — who promoted the fib that nuclear weapons, by their sheer destructiveness, would guarantee peace; neither side will dare go to war and both will stay deterred. All the two needed was to negotiate a nuclear

forward and nor can any go back. For six months the armies' forces of the two are confronting each other, eyeball-to-eyeball. No one knows what to do next, while the sane common advice by all foreigners is somehow not accepted. The point emerges: so long as Indians and Pakistanis do not break out of the present vicious cycle of chauvinistic politics and stop relying on nuclear weapons, there may be no future for the Subcontinent.

New Delhi and Islamabad are unlikely to be rid of their fascination for the bogus doctrine of deterrence — that has never worked for anyone at anytime. As Praful Bidwai maintains, both have to break out of the thrall of catchy slogans like Minimum Nuclear Deterrent. The fact is that it is neither minimum nor has it deterred anyone in both cases, such illusions make nuclear arms race unstoppable. Even the talk of a nuclear detente is nonsense. With four minutes flying time of missiles between the two countries, what CBMs and what understandings can work? In short, no one can be trusted with a mass destruction weapons. Period.

To escape from this stultification it is vital to reorient politics. It would seem politics is too serious a business to be left to governments alone or to the political classes that play musical chairs. The common people have to stand up for their rights and assert the need for their desires' fulfillment — that require peace and a radically reoriented economic effort. Only then will the Subcontinent have a future. The master formula is a people-to-people reconciliation between India and Pakistan by way of a start. It has to be a region-wide people-to-people reconciliation, friendship and cooperation. Peace comprises these things and it is not simply the absence of war.

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

PLAIN WORDS

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from possible aggression. Nukes are seen as a shield behind which Pakistan can safely keep India on the hop in Kashmir and were an insurance policy for Pakistan's national security. Four years on, a similar question arises: have the atomic weapons, with their Shaheen and Ghauri vehicles, done the job of safeguarding national security?

For India, the first result of Pakistan's counter explosions was that India degraded itself to Pakistan's level; both have stayed equated ever since. Despite much international massaging of Indian ego verbally, it is still not in the big league. The permanent seat in the UN SC is still up in the air and depends almost solely on a problematical consensus among the Big Five. Pakistanis were not overawed by India demonstrating its nuclear muscle; Pakistan could counter it. Pakistan's policy did not change one whit vis-à-vis Kashmir and India. Indeed Jihad in Kashmir was pro-

found greatness. It invited horror at the combination of nuclear muscle with mass poverty, political instability and economic backwardness. Pakistan defaulted in its external debt liabilities in the year it gate-crashed into the nuclear club. Its economy remains precarious with IMF and World Bank administering help. Later 9/11 bestowed on it considerable largesse. The economy however remains in doldrums and the debt burden is still too high. Relief through rescheduling of debt payments has been a shot in the arm — but only for the next few years. Pakistan was a pariah nation before that event. It is only marginally better; even the Chinese, their staunchest ally, are now wary of Pakistan's resumed special relationship with the US. The value of US friendship remains to be realistically assessed.

One aspect of Subcontinent's nuclear weapons is clear. Except for the brief interval of bus diplomacy and Lahore process, India and

attacking mode on Pakistan's borders, though happily, it has not had the courage to clinch the issue. Pakistan, despite membership of anti-Terror Coalition and resumed friendship with the US, remains in a *qui de sac*, with no options.

Atomic capability has failed to sustain four key Pakistan policies: (i) the Taliban regime had to be left in the lurch; (ii) Islamabad has 'to do more' to stop infiltration into Indian-held Kashmir; (iii) it is strongly discouraging Islamic zealots domestically; and (iv) regime is going further in letting Americans pursue Al-Qaeda and Taliban inside Pakistan's FATA. Nuclear weapons have not saved these policies that were largely predicated on them. If India seems to have done relatively better, the reasons for that is not the panoply of its nuclear deterrent but India's own size, importance and others' needs. When, what or whom will the Bomb help?

The conclusion is irresistible that the nuclear weapons are inherently

é tente. Peace will reign. Well, nothing of the kind has happened.

Amidst near-total sundering of relations, the two countries remain engaged in a ruinous arms race — in both nuclear and conventional fields. Look at the latest Pakistani missile tests; they cost a pretty penny. Whatever may happen to India's economy Pakistan economy cannot sustain such a growing burden, because nuclear weapons too need to be up-dated and increased in number along with their delivery mechanisms, whenever the adversary does so. Who can ignore that this armament race is relentless and unavoidable so long as the two believe in deterrence. Moreover, a new conventional arms build up is unavoidable after some nuclear deterrence has been achieved. This is the experience of all nuclear powers.

This huge delusion of deterrence has boxed both India and Pakistan in a no go situation. Neither can go

OPINION

Special drive to nab the criminals

Bane or boon for whom?

A K FAEZUL HUQ

THE government has finally admitted, or shall we say, has been constrained to admit that "the law and order scenario is at its worst today". Life indeed seems to have reverted to the Hobbsian era of the 17th century and has been rendered "nasty, brutish and short." The reality has been so naked and stark that even the champion sycophants within and without the government have admitted the necessity of a concentrated effort at all levels to combat the unprecedented crimes. After much thinking and hours of deliberations, perhaps the outcome of some fertile brain was the formation of the 'RAF' or the Rapid Action Force, which was hastily put under the command of Assistant Commissioners of Police to control, guide and oversee its functions. What the RAF will finally achieve could be anybody's guess, but no sooner was it launched, the innocents as usual became the targets and the criminals fled with utmost ease.

In the meantime, the supports of the present administration [government] and those who are habitually against [more on political grounds than anything else], were found singing songs of the same tune, blaming the same police force whom they had extensively exploited, whenever they got a chance, during their own reign[s]. And that is quite interesting. For never before in the history of this country did the opposition and those in position ever sang a melan-

choly and depressing song with such identical notations! Perhaps that is what we call the irony of events.

On the other hand, if a frank confession is made, then it has to be admitted that the present abysmal law and order situation is certainly not the creation of the present alliance government, not by any means — it is rather inherited. But ironically, what was inherited from the immediate past Awami League government has certainly been surpassed without any iota of doubt and totally eclipsed by the addition of widespread crimes of multiple dimensions; thanks to plethora of 'cabs' driven by drivers of dubious nature and unlimited cell phones which the criminals extensively use today with great care and impunity. Mohammed Nasim, the immediate past Home Minister, undoubtedly, must be a very happy man, relishing all those adverse newspaper reports which now blame his successor, more than they blamed him when he was in-charge of the most sensitive ministry. And obviously the most depressed person must be the Prime Minister himself, who had pinned so much hope on the retired Air Vice-Marshal. The widespread rumours of a substantive cabinet reshuffle along with a change of guard in the Home Ministry itself is therefore quite imminent. But there is a widespread feeling also that mere change of guards can hardly bring in the desired results when the whole system has rotten beyond comprehension, with a weird policy of too many cooks preparing the broth!

However, there is another school of thought which believes, and very rightly so, that the police alone cannot be blamed for all the present mess, the incredible rise in criminal activities or the deteriorating law and order situation itself. And there are many good reasons to defend the forces as are widespread allegations of excesses and omissions, which can be or could be avoided, including nabbing of the real criminals without delay or lapses. And one of the characteristic omissions of our police force allegedly is to record or forward a defective FIR purposely [or tamper it subsequently in lieu of doles] leaving no scope for the Hon'ble judges to detain even the hardened criminals. And then, a section of our politicians take the judges and the judiciary to task! What a shame indeed. One of the arguments however, in favour of the police is, that they are never allowed, from the top to the bottom of the ladder, to function without fear or favour. There is always a hidden, invisible force which has the last say and which effectively pulls the strings from nowhere. An officer-in-charge [O/C] of any given police station therefore cannot proceed independently; simply because his telephone would invariably start ringing in favour of a listed criminal just rounded up, even before he [i.e. the O/C] decides as to what he should do with that creature! And unfortunately the same applies to the SPs and the DIGs, who are mostly at their wit's end and in sheer embarrassment at times, whenever the invisible forces send out their orders to be carried out without

deviation!

Over the years, therefore, the police force has been totally demoralized and destroyed beyond imagination and repair. All successive governments, in the last thirty years or so, have taken them for a ride and have systematically squeezed out as much as they could without giving them anything concrete in return. Their [police] record of corruption and inefficiency, no wonder therefore, beats all other existing records taken together and therefore renders them almost ineffectual. But why has the situation come to such a pass at all? The answer fortunately is not very difficult to find out either.

What can one expect from a lowly paid police officer whose monthly salary plus other official perks do not last even for seven days while he finds his innumerable colleagues in other departments to be quite well off through clandestine dealings, which he could resort to as well, since as a police officer, he has better access to various clandestine channels which are at his disposal to add and augment his income from different sources. The short-cut route to money making, therefore, is easily available to him when compared to his friends in other agencies, simply because of certain extra and inherent powers that he enjoys. It becomes well nigh impossible therefore, for the young recruits, to stay long on the right track and control their nerves under trying circumstances; more so when there is almost no accountability and/or exemplary punishment for amassing ill-gotten wealth.

In recent days, as the crime wave started swelling, the government finally woke up from its deep slumber and decided to go for a full-fledged drive against the criminals. Accordingly the RAF was formed for the metropolis itself with 29 separate check posts, as has been mentioned at the very outset. Instructions were also sent out to the forces at all other levels to nab or catch hold of as many 'criminals' as possible. Mind you, the instructions were for netting the criminals and not the innocent passer-by public. But what do we see and find. To our utter surprise and chagrin, we find that the list of innocents arrested in recent days is 100 times more than the criminals themselves! As usual, and this is certainly not the first time, that our police is simply after the innocents, because they know pretty well that they can never get hold of the real criminals unless and until they change their own attitudes, techniques and mode of approach, readjusting their frequencies for positive results and not eye washes.

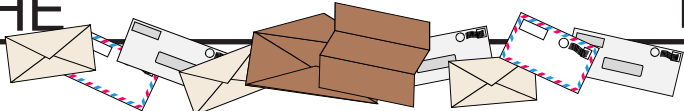
The first reaction of a constable or a lowly paid officer who is called upon to launch the special drive is therefore that of a sheer delight! Because, combing operations or special drives invariably means you can hook the innocents on any plea whatsoever and inflate your pockets without any explanation! There has been widespread complaints in almost all the newspapers of police excesses during this period, but then who is going to listen to the cries of the innocents? After all it is a special drive, isn't it? That sums

up the story of the so-called special drive, Sir! And to top it, the traffic police has been entrusted to check, search and take appropriate action against the criminals, if and when found. Imagine, the same traffic police which cannot even perform its own specified duties properly, is given additional powers to carry on further!

Sometimes incidents, more abrasive and even crueler than one can visualize, do happen in our society. I can cite at least fifty such instance of excesses, but due to paucity of time and space we have to forego that exercise. What is urgently needed is a solid briefing session for the forces, who are supposed to be so close to the public, as the civil armed forces, specifying to them the limits and the realm of excess that they should not cross at any given time; the politeness that they should endure, and the guts that they should exhibit at all times to get hold of the real criminals. This is very important, including a clear warning that excesses of any nature or wrongful detention/arrests, could invite severe punishment for the officer, indulging in such careless or wilful acts of negligence. And last but not the least, the political control of the police in any form should be removed once for all and without any delay in order to bring back the dwindling confidence in all minds. And this is possibly the minimum that we can do or are expected to do as a civilized nation.

AK Faezul Huq is a lawyer by profession.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE



EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Zia death anniversary

I see that the BNP Secretary General has asked for his party members and fellow travellers to abstain from extortion on the occasion of President Zia's death anniversary. Last year we had to pay out in spades to commemorate Bangabandhu's one.

How much do you want to bet that no one will listen to him?

As the head of the Law and Order Committee he hasn't been able to improve either law or order. And now you expect me to believe I'll be spared from extortion?

Fat chance. I'll give you the names of the various parties who come and nothing will be done.

Your paper on May 24 printed a letter about the extortionists under the guise of the Agrani Sangsad. Nothing has happened to them either.

Tristram
Dhaka

"Islamic terrorist"

Western media, controlled by vested (?) media giants are very

happy to use the word 'Islamic terrorist'. When the name of one of the greatest religions is being portrayed in the west as a terrorist religion, I am shocked (my 11 years old son burst in to tears) but not surprised.

I am shocked, surprised and humiliated when I see, newspapers like yours, use the same terminology to define any violent action taken by freedom loving people in Kashmir or in Palestine. Have you forgotten the word freedom fighters? Please do not try to play ignorant when a very cruel and far-reaching conspiracy is going on the world over.

Mohammad Aye Khan
Ottawa, Canada

Right decision?

This is in response to Mr. Mohammad Rahman (May 22)

Mr. Rahman, I do not think the sweeping manner with which you delivered your opinions will be considered objective argument. You claim that our religious culture is being undermined by cable TV. If

this religious culture happens to be the Fatwa culture then so be it.

You claim Islam is the greatest religion. One billion Christians claim theirs to be so too. So does a near one billion Hindus. Which one should we accept?

I remember the imam in the mosque of our neighbourhood. His 'khubta' consisted solely of the fact that none of the woes of the Muslim world is our fault. The Christians, Jews and Hindus are to blame for everything! And now he probably added the Buddhists to that list too. He claimed that if you are a non-Muslim then you automatically go to Hell and the list includes Mother Teresa!

You probably are suffering from archaic cultural myopia. Here lies the difference between you and me: I would listen to you and respect your right to free expression; you would probably have me stoned to death for heresy.

Yahya
USA

Remove those con-

crete slabs

I would like to draw the attention of the new Mayor of Dhaka City Corporation to the foot-over bridge at Moghbazar Chowrasta. Two bridges have already collapsed due to faulty construction and three people have died. Under such circumstances, the government has already instructed to remove all the concrete slabs of these bridges.

But this was not applicable to the foot over-bridge of Moghbazar as the concrete slabs remain unmoved due to unknown reasons. The people of the adjacent areas have to pass under this bridge everyday and the number will be at least fifty thousands people. I feel scared when I pass under the bridge and I'm sure I'm not the only one.

Would the new Mayor please remove those slabs of this foot-over bridge before another accident occurs?

Shameer Sheikh
Central Bashabo, Dhaka

PM's knee

I see that the PM is recovering well

and I'm glad.

Now, when she comes home, will she admit that the best hospitals and doctors in Bangladesh were not good enough for her? At the very least she could promise to try and improve healthcare in Bangladesh. Maybe even give assistance to set up private hospitals.

I still don't know how much her treatment cost the taxpayers. I think I have a right to know. I promise not to make too much of a fuss about the bill, since I already know it must have cost about a thousand times more than Vaipayee's knee. But then again the Prime Minister of India got his surgery done, against the request of some of his advisors, in India and at a civilian public hospital at that.

Pan
Dhaka

Wanted newspaper

daily Bangladesh has to be able to publish a couple of daily newspapers each day of the year, without any break, regardless of the number of

official holidays, as is prevalent in the developed countries.

Our newspapers are developing in a static manner! Make it more mobile and dynamic. Why close the shutters when the readers are willing to read (not free of charge)? It is a question of demand and supply. It is not a big challenge, as all our essential public services are never closed and run round the clock throughout the year (water, electricity, communications, health services, etc).

It is a lame excuse that the distribution of the papers is adversely affected simply because the hawkers like to go home. The newspapers (limited edition) may be delivered at the distribution points in the city in different localities, and the readers will go and buy their copies. Now even the websites are not updated on closed holidays, as there is no holiday shift on duty at different points during the production process.

Some pilot project may be tried. Glancing at the paper first thing in the morning with the first cup of tea is a traditional habit, which is cer-

tainly not a vice. Please get together and work out a trial scheme.

A Reader
Dhaka

Till something is done

My nine year old daughter went to visit Dhaka from Canada for a few week and she was so turned off by everything there that now she doesn't ever want to return again.

California has the fifth largest economy in the world and it generates billions of dollars from tourism, the Japanese alone spend five billion dollar each year. The problem with Bangladesh is that the people-running things have no idea what the hell they are supposed to do. So, it's your responsibility to educate them, keep writing about these things until something is done. People like you are the only hope for Bangladesh, as politicians don't know anything and they don't care either.

Ahmed
California, USA

Murky millionaire

I really appreciate the report published in *The Daily Star* regarding the most worthy son of Titas—Mahbub, the millionaire meter reader. But we do apprehend that these criminals have strong liaison with the high-ups, for which they never care for such reports.

Some powerful politicians in the ruling party is reported to have asked the authorities concerned not to rock the boat so much. Besides, there are so many Mahbubs in the Titas and Petro Bangla, PDB, WDB and so on, all of whom have close touch with the leaders and powerful hands. They do make their fortune in all regimes irrespective of BNP and AL. They can change their colour with the change of any government.

Would the authority please meet out exemplary punishment to these criminals, whoever he may be so that corruption can be checked a little bit in the society?

S. R. Hussain
Gulshan, Dhaka