

Law enforcers as law breakers

Police, BDR, SB and DB must be made accountable to the public

RECENTLY we have been witnessing a frightening development in Bangladesh. On occasions our law enforcers have been acting as law breakers, and all in the name of upholding rule of law. In a desperate move to contain the rising incidents of crimes throughout the country, the government introduced the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) to assist the police. This paramilitary force, mostly used to patrol our borders, have wrought havoc in some places where they were deployed. They rampaged through villages, shanties and even invaded people's houses in search of culprits violating most of the fundamental rights of our people. In one tragic case in Dhaka a small fish trader, named Soheli, was picked up by the BDR on a recent evening as a possible suspect. When he was handed over to the police next morning he was so brutally tortured that he died by the time the police could take him to hospital. In a shameful example of disregard for truth and respect for the public the BDR claimed that the victim had injured himself when he jumped out of a second storey window in an escape attempt. Preliminary autopsy report found torture marks all over the victim's body and said both of his legs were broken.

In another instance the Detective Branch (DB) of Narayanganj picked up a butcher named Badal. His family was asked to pay money in exchange for his freedom. When the transaction did not materialise Badal was administered electric shock, reportedly in front of his family members. Later he died and his mother was forced to withdraw the case she had lodged. We can easily guess from where the threat had come.

To this we can easily add five custodial deaths in which the victims bore clear marks of torture and which occurred in the last 45 days. Our simple question: who is responsible for these deaths? To add insult to injury the government has not bothered to give any explanation to the people for these deaths, as if nobody is responsible. How can people accept this role of the law enforcing agencies? How can people feel safe when these institutions do whatever they please and no action is taken against them? Is there no accountability of these bodies and individuals?

We demand an investigation of all custodial deaths including the recent two mentioned above. We also demand that a set of guidelines must be fixed as to how these agencies should operate when dealing with citizens and this guideline should be made public through the press, radio and TV.

Not just skirt the 90-day formality

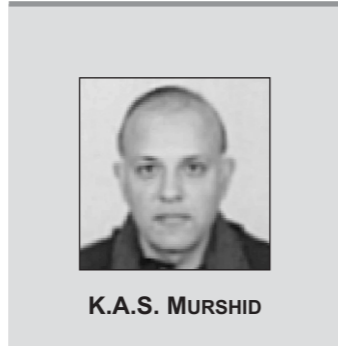
Opposition should join the Parliament to stay

WE keep our antenna high and sensitive to catch any intimation in the air of an approaching Opposition participation in the budget session of the Parliament. What bore testimony to this yesterday was the front-page item we carried under the title *Hasina hints at joining JS 'in people's interest'*. We have written for the umpteenth time on the subject and would like to do it once more; frankly, in our desperate bid to seek an end to the tremendous betrayal of public trust owing to the AL's continual refusal to sit in the parliament.

But how much do we read into this dropping of a hint by AL chief to end the eight-month-old parliamentary boycott of the opposition? Perhaps it sounds more credible than before for the following reasons: first, this may have to do with a Vicarian pleasure the opposition leader might have derived from seeing the ruling party dipping its toes in the duck of misgovernance early in the day. So, the opposition's bristling intolerance of the ruling party may have been worked off somewhat. But Hasina's real compulsion to change the stance lies in the 90-day continuous absence clause which is nearing the application stage to threaten wholesale loss of the AL's parliamentary membership. This is a prospect that the BNP had taken fright of when overly stretching its JS boycott during the AL rule. BNP MPs then attended the critical sitting of the 7th parliament to circumvent the technicality and stay on as JS members. If the AL, like the BNP in the past, should now join the parliament merely as a formality and then relapse into the stand-off, wrong parliamentary precedents will be created twice over dealing another body-blow to the parliamentary system. The AL's concomitant responsibility, therefore, not to weaken the system is that much greater, the party with a long history and tradition cannot overlook the fact. The opposition should join the parliament, stay in it and play its constitutionally allotted role.

They must not make it appear as if they are joining the parliament to do the nation a favour; on the contrary, the electorate has done them a favour by making them MPs especially when they are not proving up to their job. They are morally, legally and constitutionally bound to serve their constituents from inside the parliament so as to remain entitled to their privileged position.

El Dorado and the end of innocence



K.A.S. MURSHID

El Dorado is of course that mythical country that exists only as an ideal -- a kind of quasi-Marxist or social-democratic-liberal utopia where there is no poverty and disease, where inequalities are irrelevant and where every child, woman and man is able to realise his or her full mental and physical potential. We however do not talk of El Dorado anymore because even as an ideal it has become unfashionable and archaic. We have replaced it with other gods: (competitive) markets, East Asia, the USA, globalization, foreign investment and so on. You do see where I am going don't you? We have now set ourselves a hugely watered down ideal where we take it for granted that the best that we can do leaves a lot to be desired. And yet, country after country is poised to follow this half-

baked ideal at the behest of nouveau ideologues who themselves scarcely believe in their own mantras.

Once upon a time there used to be certain beliefs and assumptions that one took for granted. Not any more. There was a time when uniqueness was valued. As undergraduates we took it as self-evident truth that each country had to find its own way forward based on its own

another group of people who have benefited enormously -- the development jet-set, who find themselves in a different country every other day, spouting jargon and moving at pace with the latest fad. They no longer need to worry about which country they are currently in. They have suddenly found that their analysis is equally valid e.g. for Bangladesh and Vietnam, Botswana and Brazil. All they have to do

simple story to tell. This whiz-kid whose fingers were slightly burnt while trying to restore (establish?) the market economy in Russia thought that one's geographical and perhaps cultural proximity to the West or the developed world (essentially the USA) would determine success for the Bantustans and the Bongolands in the context of globalization. Thus we have here a clear basis for a new world hierarchy

which has not yet been declared illegal (although all the free gifts I win on the internet seem to be reserved for legal residents of the USA). There is however a significant language barrier involved in cyber space that will take years to overcome, by which time new barriers will inevitably come into force. There will undoubtedly be cries of 'American cyber space for America' and new fears of illegal

the women to exchange their sarees and shalwar for East Asian/Western outfits and launch a new marketing strategy to sell this new idea of Bangladesh. This line of action is more likely to persuade the emancipated Western (male) mind from travelling to, investing and even settling in Bangladesh than any other thing I can think of. Now, that would close some of the gap.

Even non-mullahs can sometimes cause immense trouble. I understand all the clubs and bars were closed down by Hun Sen in Cambodia, much to the chagrin of both locals and expatriates. Apparently his daughter complained to her dad that her husband was spending far too much time in karaoke bars. These have now been permitted to reopen under the guise of restaurants. Hopefully the son-in-law now spends more time at home.

Essentially however the best that we can do under the new rules of global engagement is to follow and never, ever hope to lead; to imitate and never, ever innovate and to endlessly produce cheap, labour-intensive goods and services for rich foreigners in an ever more unstable world market that will continue to be controlled by a few nations or companies.

Dr K A S Murshid is an economist and Research Director, BIDS.

BETWEEN YOURSELF AND ME

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unique conditions. (I guess we all believed that each of us -- individuals, societies, countries were indeed unique). Now we understand that we are not unique at all and policies relevant for country A are just as relevant for countries B, C and D. There is now only one *mantra* irrespective of whether you are in Africa, Asia or Latin America. Ah, the grandeur of simplification! I have sometimes wondered who have benefited or stand to benefit the most from this change. I know *who* you are thinking of. And you are absolutely right. There is however

is to remember to change the name of the country from their drafts reports or seminar papers. You would have thought that in the days of the word processor that is a simple task, and it is. But you would be surprised how often even this is not thoroughly done.

Yes, so what is the nature of the new, glorious vision ahead for all of us in the third and fourth worlds? A well-known Harvard economist made no bones about it at all. The answer was simple: you are either with us or against us (or at least behind). Professor Sachs had a

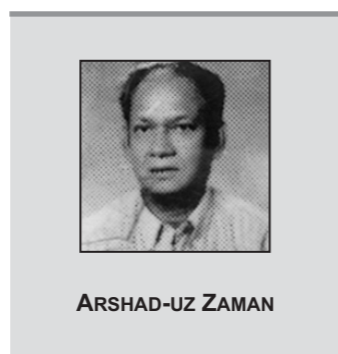
based on proximity (of space, culture, language and habit). Thus those of us who are neither close physically nor culturally are therefore in huge huge trouble. What should we do?

I guess it would be difficult to do anything about our geographical location. One effective solution would be to migrate *en masse* to the nearest developed country we can find. Perhaps Mr. Sachs can have a word with President Bush about this (I mean we wouldn't mind going to Alaska even). The other possibility is to travel through cyber space

cyber immigrants 'flooding our lily white (blue?) shores'.

There are other things that can be done as well. Why not imitate e.g. Thailand or Cambodia? Set up hundreds of English language schools that teach you to converse in simple, pidgin English to various categories of tourists; open up bars and night-clubs (well at least legalise the ones that already exist); banish all the *mullahs* to the Andamans (with perhaps some help from the Seventh Fleet) so that they cannot create any trouble (i.e. protest these worthy moves); get

Indo-Pak stand-off takes a hopeful turn



ARSHAD-UZ ZAMAN

ALTHOUGH the Indo-Pak gordian knot could not be cut in Almaty, the capital of Kazakhstan, the situation is apparently taking a hopeful turn of late. India has allowed overflight of Pakistani airliner and is awaiting a response. Pakistan President also earlier committed to check infiltration of militants into Kashmir valley. All this is happening after the visit of US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage to the two countries. More de-escalation in their (India, Pakistan) stance is thus expected following the visit of Donald Rumsfeld.

India and Pakistan are not on talking terms for several months. On the contrary they have been eyeball to eyeball. Nearly a million troops from India and Pakistan are facing each other across the border. India has not only moved her troops but has repeatedly reminded Pakistan that she had to deliver on her promise to halt cross border terrorism. India says for many years Pakistani guerrillas have been crossing the Line of Control (LOC) into Indian part of Kashmir and causing death

and damage on a large scale. This has continued for more than a decade now and the dead are in the thousands. India has been telling Pakistan through international intermediaries that she had come to the end of her patience. Pakistan on the other hand has been promising that she would stop cross border incursions and has been declaring that she has reined in strong fundamentalist anti-Indian outfit on her

catastrophe a war between India and Pakistan would be, superpower US has been fully engaged in attempting to find a solution. She has been completely supported by her close ally Great Britain. Lately Russia, who has a long and traditional friendship with India and maintains friendly relations with Pakistan, has also entered the field. The name of China, a close friend of Pakistan has also been mentioned.

Another bigger one is Kazakhstan.

Unlike in 1965, India and Pakistan have not fought a war but they have come perilously close to it. There is firing across the border in Kashmir on a daily basis and there are casualties. The reason India has mounted such a gigantic move in men and material against Pakistan is because of a series of incidents notably attack on the Indian Parliament in December last and the

cially the Al Qaida network of Osama Bin Laden.

"Will Vladimir Putin be able to bring about the kind of spectacular result that was achieved in the days of superpower USSR?" was a common question asked by everyone concerned prior to Almaty meet. In his first attempt Putin operated from Kazakhstan, now foreign territory, although since the collapse of the Soviet Union, successor

along the Caspian, who are straining at the leash of the Russian rule. In order to keep her outlying region pacified, no price appears too high for Russia.

So if Russia could succeed in bringing about a *modus vivendi* between India and Pakistan, her international standing would receive a decisive boost.

However, from the march of events it is now clear that superpower US has upstaged Russia and has taken a decisive stand in order to lower the tension between India and Pakistan. From President George Bush down they have orchestrated a chorus calling upon Gen. Pervez Musharraf to halt cross border terrorism. Since the Pakistani leader has been on the defensive all along, he has readily agreed. The talk of nuclear strike has stopped and the two parties are attempting to bring down the tension to an acceptable level.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, who is also a poet, has talked about clear blue skies over the subcontinent, although he has mentioned about the possibility of a lightning strike. From his latest pronouncements it would appear that he, too, does not believe lightning hitting the subcontinent. The great mass of humanity living within the subcontinent, and that of course includes Bangladesh, will no doubt have a great sigh of relief with the stand-off taking a hopeful turn.

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THE HORIZON THIS WEEK

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soil like Jaish-i-Mohammad.

In order to demonstrate her resolve to fight back if attacked Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf has made high profile visit to his troops, has launched three missiles, which are capable of carrying nuclear warheads. In other words both the Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and his Pakistani counterpart have raised tensions along the border to a very dangerous point. Analysts have speculated that the only reason that war has not broken out is because of the nuclear deterrent.

As the alarm bells have been ringing in the world chancelleries since everybody realizes what a

It was interesting to make a comparison between Almaty of 2002 and Tashkent of 1966. An inconclusive war was fought between India and Pakistan in 1965. Those were the days when Soviet Union was a mighty superpower at par with the US. A cease fire was arranged thanks to the intervention of the Soviet leadership led by Leonid Brezhnev. In 1966 a cease fire agreement was signed between Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri and Pakistan President Field Marshal Ayub Khan. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, more than half a dozen independent states on the south and east of the former Soviet Union have emerged and Uzbekistan is one of them.

killing by infiltrators of more than thirty Indians, members of families of Indian armed forces. India wants nothing short of proof on the ground that Pakistan sponsored attacks on India and Indian side of Kashmir has been halted. The US and the British intermediaries appear to have joined the chorus. For defusing tension Pakistan will have to provide proof on the ground that she indeed has taken a decisive step to halt cross border terrorism. Since the whole world is shouting against terrorism, India seems to be on a solid wicket. If Pakistan still is able to handle the situation, it is because she has turned out to be such a useful ally of the US, in her campaign to eradicate terrorism, spe-

Russia has been trying to build up privileged relationship with her former states. Since the events in Afghanistan, US has made forceful entry into the area. Her large oil and gas companies had already entered the vast region. Arrival of US troops is a novel phenomenon.

Since her loss of superpower status Russia has been inching forward to regain her lost glory. Very recently she has virtually joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), in a Summit in Rome. Russia has eagerly joined the US bandwagon on the campaign against terrorism because she is locked in bitter conflict in Chechnya. There are other minority groups

The budget and the next agenda

MD ASADUL ISLAM

ON 6th June the finance minister M. Saifur Rahman has proposed the FY 2002-03 budget before the parliament. Among other things, the proposed ADP allocation in the coming fiscal year has been a subject of intense controversy. The ADP has been blown up to Tk 19,200 crore, almost 20 per cent jump from the current fiscal's revised of Tk 16,000 crore. It is the finance minister who argued against the huge chunk of ADP of the current fiscal, which was proposed by his predecessor Shah AMS Kibria. Although Mr. Saifur Rahman criticized the immediate past Awami League government for taking up many political and low-priority projects in the ADP, the next year's ADP is not fully out of malaise. The finance minister is now talking about the increment in ADP for the interest of growth and poverty alleviation of the country. What prompted him to change his mind, or was the argument against the current inflated ADP by the Finance minister merely criticizing the AL?

The government has estimated

an unprecedented revenue growth rate of 20 percent, which has never been achieved in the past, except the year 1991 when the introduction of VAT had driven to increase the revenue growth of about 21 percent. Although the finance minister has projected a massive restructuring in the taxation system and a wide casting of the tax net in next fiscal's budget presented, it would be hard to reach the targeted revenue collection without efficiency and the law of monetary and fiscal supervision by the principles of accountability and intelligibility. If he does not succeed to collect the projected amount of revenue, the government will have to obligate taking more loans, either from the domestic or external sources, to run the government.

There is a major concern over the issue of fiscal deficit -- how it can be retained to about 4 percent of GDP. The overall budget deficit was 6.9 per cent in the current fiscal and has been targeted at 6.2 per cent for the coming fiscal. In order to bring the fiscal deficit down to about four percent, the government needs to resort to reduced expenditure and/or increased earning. But in the

recent past, we rarely observe that expenditure has been curtailed and/or financing from foreign sources has been improving. The next financial year is going to experience an increase in government expenditure of about 5.5 percent. This indicates that the government will have to arrange more funds from internal sources that require accelerated domestic resource mobilization, faster the growth rate of revenue surplus to contain the budget deficit within the four percent, as has been envisaged at the finance minister's budget speech.

The most important thing that the govt. should ensure is the quality and efficiency of expenditure to different sectors and projects. If the priority of the project is given merely on political consideration, then it is certain that the future generation is going to shoulder an increasing rate of debt burden. Though the Finance Minister said priority had been given to projects aimed at achieving faster economic growth and poverty alleviation in the proposed ADP, it is learned from newspaper that the govt. is going to carry out several projects just for political interests,

such as Ziaur Rahman Memorial Complex at Kalurghat and Chittagong Zia Krira Complex at Chokoria, Cox's Bazar. So, it would contradict the govt. envision of so called growth inducing and poverty alleviation policy.

It is true that expansionary fiscal policy or budget deficit is not necessarily bad. But when government adopts expansionary fiscal policy, it has to borrow fund from the domestic and international market unless there is a corresponding increase in revenue earnings. From the 1970s to still now, developed country like Canada, Australia have been running into external deficit. But these countries have been able to pay back their debt in proper time. They have been able to maintain a constant debt-GDP ratio. But we are pushing more money into unproductive sector, and it can be said that, with the current trend of spurring the allocation of money to different projects in the name of development and poverty alleviation, it would be increasingly difficult to maintain the constant debt-GDP ratio. For a constant debt-GDP ratio, it is necessary for a country to pay out the

excess of interest rate over the growth rate. So, if the growth rate were equal to the interest rate then Bangladesh would be able to maintain the constant debt-GDP ratio and if higher, then we would be able to reduce the debt-GDP ratio. Otherwise, it would be a development dilemma to pursue the expansionary policy as has been taken in the past.

Unfortunately, what we have been experiencing is that we need to pay out more for borrowing as interest and principal owed each year than the growth of GDP, which indicates that in the near future, this burden will be cumulated and there will be greater likelihood that the debt become unsustainable. If, however, our lenders think that the political and legal institutions are strong enough to ensure compliance with a higher debt obligation, we will be able to borrow from the international credit markets. So, we need a restructuring of our political, economic and social organization and building up a modern infrastructure to be able to retain the debt burden under a sustainable level. The finance minister has already

formed a Public Expenditure Commission and has made progress of forming Revenue Earning Review Commission. The mid-term review of the budget, as promised by the finance minister, would also be crucial. The government also reiterated its effort to form an independent anti-corruption bureau, appointment of ombudsmen, and an independent human rights commission, but seems not serious to implement. The performance of the economy in the next fiscal and in the years to come will hinge crucially on these aspects and how quickly they have been enacted and executed. Our donor, international organizations, other lenders and investors who look for security of their money will push more resources into the Bangladesh economy considering the satisfactory implementation of those commitment made by the government before and after election.

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OPINION

Death of innocence at BUET

OMAR KHASRU

IT was like a battlefield. One faction of the student wing of the ruling party positioned itself on the terrace of Titumir Hall. The antagonists belonging to the rival faction of the party were stationed across the street. The road separating the two groups of armed hoodlums was the de facto line of control. BUET, the last bastion of serious pursuit of higher study and largely free from destructive student politics, had seen nothing like this in recent memory. A faculty member, looking out from his fourth floor office window, had the bird's eye view of the whole combat. It seemed like a movie scene from a Hollywood battle. In the torrent of bullets, an innocent passer by, Sadequunnahar Sony, a second year student in the Chemical Engineering Department died in crossfire. Police arrived after the rival bands of armed bandits had bid hasty retreats. The newly elected

Mayor and a cluster of Ministers from among the squad of 60 Ministers arrived at the scene. They expressed usual indignation and sanctimonious outrage. The value of these empty and pretentious utterances have long been discounted and rendered insignificant in the collective conscience and consideration of the people. The fervent hope and expectation have long been laid to rest by the extremely disappointing, disheartening, disgraceful and disillusioning performance of the ruling coterie in controlling the spiraling out of control and deteriorating law and order situation. The continuous patronage of the criminal and terrorist armed goons by powerful and influential members of the ruling party is a bane to all the tall talks and high sounding rhetoric. For the common people, this is not living; this is merely surviving under the potent threat of terror and onslaught.

General Westmoreland, Commander of the US Forces in

Vietnam in the 1960s, once made the derisive remark that the Asians do not value life the way the Westerners do. This was in response to a CBS Television interview question on the validity and ethical rationale of carpet-bombing, wholesale destruction of villages and resultant civilian casualties. There was a huge furor over this insensitive and boorish comment. The insulting Westmoreland remark is validated everyday in Bangladesh. Everyday you read and hear about acts of crime, savagery and terrorism, rape, mayhem and murder of innocent victims usually by armed gangs affiliated with and patronized by the ruling party. There are few governments in the world with such callous disregard and such incredibly uncaring and insensitive attitude to the people. Abraham Lincoln defined democracy as "the government of the people, by the people and for the people." If you look at the misrule, crude and anti-people dispositions

of the two succeeding regimes, you would have to redefine our brand of democracy as "the government of the privileged clique, by the special interest groups and for the party hoodlums." All the soothing, sweet, honeydew pronouncements, repeated ad nauseam, will not wash away the contemptible criminal acts committed by the ruling party sponsored gangs with impunity and the shameful and abominable equivocation by the party leaders. The result sometime is the tragic death of innocent, promising and budding young students like Sony. How will the family and friends rationalize this senseless killing? How will anyone console them? The heartfelt sympathy of a whole nation will not bring solace to the grieving family. Apart from empty pledges of redress and severe punishment to the killers, disingenuous sympathy to the bereaved family, the government will do precious little. Will they reign in their student wing, will they nab the known godfathers, will they punish

the criminal elements interwoven in the party fabric, and will they stop the outside gangsters from incursion into the institutions of higher learning? Not likely.

Khaleda Zia during her earlier rule proudly proclaimed that Chhatra Dal was good enough, potent and robust enough as her mainstay power base. Why does the party need the backing of all liability and zero asset student wing now? The government alliance has over two third majority in the parliament. The need for strong student support is superfluous.

The esteem for student politics has hit rock bottom during the successive regimes. There is so much gratuitous politics and hooliganism and so little routine student traits in the currently practiced student politics. The primary purpose and the main function appears to drive away members of rival student groups from campus, occupying residential halls by affiliated armed cadres, toll collection, extortion,

capturing tenders by flexing muscles and committing savage acts of crime such as killing innocent bystanders and passers by like Sony. This in short is the unsavory nature of student politics in the country, sponsored, patronized and supported by major political parties. What good is this doing to the country? What good is it doing to the people, other than causing misery, suffering and outrage, a feeling of utter helplessness, and victimization of crime and avarice? Student politics is the most despised notion, perhaps next only to politics in general. When will the ruling party seek the truth and heed to the true feelings of the electorate and put a moratorium on such destructive and unsavory practice, if not clamp an outright ban on the abhorrent and despicable student politics? It is unlikely that the prudent advice will get through to the ruling clique, intoxicated with power and authority, taking people for granted, underestimating their intelligence and under-

mining their feeling of rage, revulsion, horror and helplessness. Student parties, like their parent organizations, have become ruthless criminal undertakings, willing and able to perform acts of abominable crime with no care for education or student matters.

Sony, like many before her, is a tragic victim of barbarism, greed and inexcusable criminal act. This sort of unnatural and senseless death is uncommon in civilized world. But we have long banished civilized behavior, humane attributes, altruistic nature, and innocent and inquisitive attitudes from our student institutions, thanks to political overlords using students as pawns in their nefarious designs. Significant portions of our powerful and influential political clique and their student surrogates have resigned from the human race. The sad part is the perpetrators with the active patronage of political godfathers get away with impunity as they did after killing Ahmedullah, a BUET student, in

1995. The ruling coalition has become oblivious to the fact that the main reason people elected them was to control the law and order situation and put a leash on terrorism. This was a negative vote against Awami League, whose members were thought to have been main sponsors of terror and crime. But more things change, more they remain the same. Life in this country is meandering along under empty pledges, unfulfilled promises, despairing existence and unspeakable acts of crime such as the inexplicable killing of young, promising and innocent Sadequunnahar Sony.

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