

A probe is good but not enough

Read the public mood and act accordingly

THE midnight raid on Shamsunahar hall has become a symbol of an order or politics and a system where violence against women at midnight does find a space. The government has ordered a probe headed by a Judge and newspapers have reported that the PM herself is unhappy over the incident but it will not be easy to convince the people that the government wasn't responsible for what has happened. If the government is not guilty by commission, it seems guilty by omission by failing to prevent such actions that have affronted national sensibilities. In this society of acute gender violence, the government seems to be a party to it.

The police has now become the most brutal face of the state which doesn't distinguish between men and women. It has happened under Khaleda Zia's regime which has traditionally been supported by women. Now this will be a political problem that will take huge efforts to manage. Just as the Dhaka University authorities have tarnished their image, the opposition has already started to take advantage of the situation and can't be blamed as public feeling is running high against the actions.

One is thankful that a probe body has been set up under a Judge but this time it isn't enough. The probe body must provide an independent report and secondly, convincing action must be taken as well. If it ends up suspending a few constables, the government is dangerously mistaken in reading the public mood. It has to be a serious and comprehensive act addressing the decision making process which led to this national shaming act.

By beating up women in the middle of the night, the party in power has bought more bad publicity than all that the Awami League has heaped since the last elections. In many ways, this police action has been a heavy handedness displayed to manage a minor issue.

Should the ruling party be serious about its image it must take the matter more seriously than displayed till date. The people are unhappy and angry.

Mob violence back again

Act before it becomes endemic

THE problem may well be rooted in the high level of extortion and mugging that the trading community of old Dhaka has to put up with. They had in fact resorted to a spontaneous closure of all business establishments a couple of days back but the police and the authorities took a dim view at that. Protesting traders were lathi charged and as a result public sentiment against the police was running high. Thus when the police caught a few muggers, crowd violence took over and resulted in at least two deaths. There is an air of inevitability about all this but as usual this gets ignored till too late.

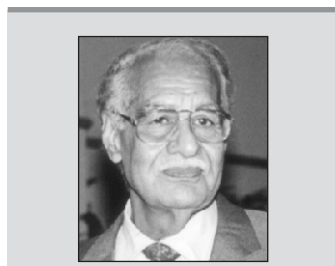
Reports say that the muggers were actually snatched away by the mob from the police and were about to be torched when the police managed to rescue the already near dead muggers. Before that, in a desperate move to escape, the muggers had blasted a few bombs but it appears that public wrath was rising so high that a few bombs would not be able to control the situation.

The muggers and extortionists have been getting away for long and it's no secret that they are protected by godfathers. Many are actually partners in crime that has now become a nearly socially acceptable form of economic activity. As a result, legitimate economic activities are impossible to carry on which the traders had manifested through their protest. By ignoring that, we have seen what happens when such issues are allowed to lie safely and not addressed.

We should have the moral courage to state that what is at work is cause and effect. Mob violence won't stop unless violence against the individuals in the mob also stops. If that doesn't happen, history doesn't record the end of such brutal acts of murders. And such is the character of the mob that nobody feels guilty because everyone is involved thus creating a platform for more.

It doesn't look as if the authorities are taking the law and order situation as seriously as it should be. That mob taking law into its own hand is reprehensible and yet it is happening. The overall problem goes far deeper where people are not feeling safe neither at home nor in the street. To stop mob violence, stop violence against the individual.

Martyrs don't matter



KULDIP NAYYAR
writes from New Delhi

A BBC broadcaster from London interviewed me the other day to find out why there was a spate of films on the revolutionary who was hanged by the British some 72 years ago. He was referring to Bhagat Singh. He wondered whether the renewed interest in the revolutionary reflected a mood of frustration or desperation in India.

There is something in his observation. Indeed, people are seething with discontent on one count or another. No remedy is forthcoming. Violence is in the air as if that is the way out. Old values are crumbling and the dictum of survival of the fittest is becoming the order of the day in an area where renunciation was once applauded. Rulers are intoxicated by power or dazzled by money. This is as much true of India as of Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal. The common man's fate has not changed.

Bhagat Singh is relevant today because he had said that no change was possible without the destruction of the antiquated system. He told his mother that there would be no change after the departure of the British. "Ma, there is no doubt that my country will be one day free. But I am afraid that the brown sahibs are

going to sit on the chairs the white sahibs will vacate." How prophetic he has proved to be when his life was snuffed out in March 1931 at the age of 23!

People resent not only brown sahibs but also their arrogance. They find that governance means merely manipulation of power and how to sustain it. Since no government has delivered the goods, neither in the economic field nor in the law and order sphere, there is a

We talk of the good of society. Is this something apart from and transcending the good of the individuals constituting it? If they are to be sacrificed for what is considered the good of society, is that the right objective to have? And who decides what is good for the society?

Mahatma Gandhi warned us that political freedom would mean nothing without economic reforms. What would be the purpose of freedom if the poor remained poor? Bhagat

come to constitute the system. And they run it for their own benefit.

Bhagat Singh believed that an alien rule could not be ended by ordinary means. The British must fear India. Mahatma Gandhi was a kind-hearted person. But it was not philanthropy that was required. Bhagat Singh's attitude was dictated by the enslavement of the country. He would have accepted democratic methods in a free India.

The recent movies on Bhagat

but had turned into enemies overnight. It was strange that they participated in the movement yet remained strangers. They never fought as Indians, not even as human beings. Religious, political or personal considerations brought them together. But at heart, they remained biased and bigoted, only Hindus and Muslims.

Still what do we do about the system? Much depends on the rulers. Walter Lippman, the famous

citizens.

When the rulers are engaged in pushing their undemocratic agenda they do not know how to honour the icons of the people. This was the case when the unveiling of Jayaprakash Narayan's statue ceremony took place in the courtyard of parliament the other day. The programme was shoddy. The central hall of parliament where the invitees sat was not even half full. None of them, not even Chandra Sekhar, JP's close follower, was asked to speak. Nor did the President, who unveiled the statue, say anything. The programme that the Doodarshan put across was without any thought. Halfway through it the lights went off.

George Fernandes, who masquerades as a follower of JP, was absent and so were Laloo Prasad Yadav and Mulayam Singh Yadav, who have benefited from the JP movement. I was intrigued over the absence of Congress president Sonia Gandhi. True, she is very touchy about the dynasty. But the Nehru family and JP had remained close even after Mrs Indra Gandhi detained him without trials for some 15 months. Most conspicuous was the absence of Pramod Mahajan, minister for parliamentary affairs. I know he has a passion for Maharashtra politics but he should at least attend such functions in parliament where a person like JP was being remembered.

Bhagat Singh was arrested when he tried to bomb the Central Assembly Hall, today's parliament. And, believe it or not, there is no statute of Bhagat Singh on the premises of parliament house.

Kuldip Nayyar is an eminent Indian columnist.

BETWEEN THE LINES

What do we do about the system? Much depends on the rulers. Walter Lippman, the famous US columnist of the forties and the fifties, put it thus: "They are custodians of a nation's ideals, of the beliefs it cherishes, its permanent hopes, of the faith which makes the nation out of a mere aggregation of individuals. They are unfaithful to their trust when by word and example they

brooding sense of pessimism about the future.

Bhagat Singh would say that no system would work unless the lower half was brought to the fore. Its stake is the maximum. One status quo cannot be substituted by another status quo. Bhagat Singh gave the call of 'Inquilab zindabad' (long live revolution) so that people would rebel. The national movement itself was essentially a struggle for political and economic improvement. Freedom would provide an opportunity to do so was the belief. The question that we should ask ourselves is: why the system has not been able to bring about what we all cherish. Democracy and socialism are good concepts. But they are means to an end, not the end itself.

Singh asked. But is the economic well being of the common man possible in a system where the sole purpose is to earn money by selling even the household silver or by stopping the subsidy which makes the life of the common man a bit more bearable? In an administration where even the expenditure on health and education is considered uneconomic, there is something basically wrong. Its priorities have gone away. Are economic reforms more important than the beneficiaries?

The fact is that the rulers have pushed national interest into the background so as to take up their own agenda. They are mostly power grabbers. Still the bigger tragedy is the enmeshing of politicians, criminals and bureaucrats. They have

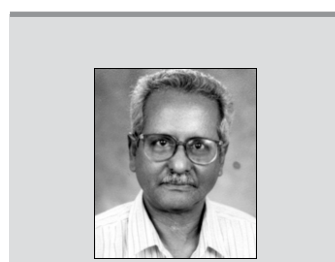
Singh have made Mahatma Gandhi a weak character. This is not true. Nor is the allegation made in the movies that he allowed the revolutionaries to die without any effort to have their death sentence commuted to life imprisonment. Gandhi did not want to identify himself with the revolutionaries because that would negate his whole stand. But he did not want them to be hanged.

Man makes religion, religion does not make man, Bhagat Singh would quote Karl Marx. What disappointed him was the ferocity with which members of the two communities - Hindu and Muslim - jumped at each other's throats after sharing the same platforms, the same campaigns and even the same jails. Here were thousands of people, who agitated side by side for days

US columnist of the forties and the fifties, put it thus: "They are custodians of a nation's ideals, of the beliefs it cherishes, its permanent hopes, of the faith which makes the nation out of a mere aggregation of individuals. They are unfaithful to their trust when by word and example they promote a spirit that is complacent and acquisitive."

The BJP has also introduced the spirit of parochialism. A country, which has known tolerance and a sense of accommodation, is sought to be divided with two kinds of citizens, Hindu and non-Hindu, a situation intolerable in a democracy. In Gujarat, a long period of rule by a party imbued with the philosophy of Hindu nationalism, has led to a situation where the minority is seen as the enemy, almost as non-

Failures in politics



M.J. ZAHEDI

RETIRED Air Marshal Mohammad Asghar Khan who has ventured into politics during the last few years, is still considered as an unusually honest, though not a very successful, politician.

He mostly demonstrates his political propensities through articles in local newspapers, although his son had gone into practical politics and became a federal minister (unfortunately he died recently, killed by some unknown elements).

In a recent article in an English-language daily, Asghar Khan wrote that recently he was invited to address the Lahore High Court Bar Association. At the start of the meeting, a lawyer among the audience said that why should the people listen to him as he was 'a failure in politics'. In reply, Asghar Khan asked his audience to ask themselves the question 'which Pakistan politician has been a success'. Replying to this question

himself, Asghar Khan said that they would possibly name Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto as successful. But narrating the performance and the ultimate fates of both, he commented, 'I am glad that I am not one of them'.

He is very frank about Bhutto who, according to him, had told him

feature of 'our political life'. The 1970's elections were the only elections in which the well known methods of rigging the polls were not used. But 'unusual' methods were used and Asghar Khan mentions one particular incident. He said during the election campaign he was hospitalised with a slipped disc, in Rawalpindi. Agha

elections. Asghar Khan filed a suit against such politicians which, he says, is still pending in the Supreme Court since 1996. 'Had the Supreme Court had the time to deal with this case the country could have been purged of the army of corrupt politicians who have, over the years, made a mockery of democracy in Pakistan', the former Air chief wrote.

felt the orders I had been given were illegal and improper. I knew that I was duty bound to obey only lawful commands'. The General's order was not a lawful command, he said. He refers to this incident and said, throughout my political career during Bhutto's regime, he (Asghar Khan) reminded the police to obey only

release from jail a few days later, they were treated like heroes". This incident will probably rank as the worst example of imbecility ever displayed by the government of any country that claims to be democratic, Asghar Khan comments. He also mentions (without naming of course) a prime minister who, he says, was in business bending the rules and changing them frequently to ensure that his business benefited. He concludes, "in a country where such traditions have taken root, to remain honest in politics is no mean achievement." Those who do not, are considered, as the Lahore lawyer said, 'failures in politics'.

A reader in a local newspaper's letters to the editor column has reminded other readers that every take-over by a military general in Pakistan, 'willingly or unwillingly', was on a Tuesday.
* Filed Marshal Muhammad Ayub Khan, October 7, 1958, Tuesday
* General Agha Muhammad Yahya Khan, March 25, 1968, Tuesday
* General Muhammad Ziaul Huq, July 5, 1997, Tuesday
* General Pervez Musharraf, October 12, 1999, Tuesday

M.J. Zahedi is an eminent columnist in Pakistan and formerly the Editor of the *Khateez Times*.

LETTER FROM KARACHI

The retired Air Force chief says that the government's role in the rigging of elections has also been a feature of 'our political life'. The 1970's elections were the only elections in which the well known methods of rigging the polls were not used. But 'unusual' methods were used and Asghar Khan mentions one particular incident. He said during the election campaign he was hospitalised with a slipped disc, in Rawalpindi. Agha Mohammad Ali, Yahya Khan's brother,

that 'my programme is to fool the people. They are fools and I know how to make a fool of them. Join me and we will rule for twenty years, no one will be able to remove us.'

Asghar Khan, as he himself says, 'was an idealist then'. It was a shocking approach to politics and 'I would oppose him (Bhutto) from that day.... I opposed him in the 1970 elections and continued to oppose him after he assumed power'. 'I continued my crusade until five years later the people realised that they had been fooled', Asghar Khan writes.

The retired Air Force chief says that the government's role in the rigging of elections has also been a

Mohammad Ali, Yahya Khan's brother, visited him. "When he left, I noticed that he had left a small suitcase. It was full of currency notes". He telephoned Agha Mohammad Ali and asked him to come to the hospital. When he did come, Asghar Khan told him about the suitcase full of currency notes. He was told that this was gift from the President for him as he would need this in the elections. Asghar Khan asked Yahya Khan's brother to take it away and tell the President that 'I would do without this help'. But, Asghar Khan said, the 1970s elections were generally free and fair. But since 1988 money has been used blatantly to buy politicians in all

Almost three-columns in length, the article says that corruption includes those sections of an individual which are improper, though they may not include the use of money. Giving an example from his own life, he mentions of an incident that happened in 1942. Sind was then under martial law to suppress Hur disturbances. He was ordered to destroy a convoy proceeding with the Pir of Pagara, about ten miles from Sanghar. But when he saw the target, he found that it did not appear to be armed. So he returned without hunting the target. This angered his superior. Luckily the squadron was moved from there. 'My reaction to the General's orders was correct as I

lawful commandsof their superior officers. This is intellectual honesty, he said.

Asghar Khan also refers to the charge of the Supreme Court by Muslim League supporters. When the matter was finally dealt with in the Court, it had held that no proof had been provided to justify a conviction. 'This was in spite of the fact that the judges of the bench were themselves witness to the whole episode. Later, of course after considerable public criticism, an appeal was heard and some of the miscreants, amongst them parliamentarians of the ruling party, were given light sentences. 'On their

OPINION

Visit of Pervez Musharraf: Opportunity for improving relations

ABMS ZAHUR

THE creation of Pakistan was perhaps the only option for the Muslims of India in the years prior to the partition of India in 1947. However, immediately after partition people of the then East Pakistan started realising that simply religious sentiment was not enough for a sound foundation of a state. With the cooling down of the religious sentiment, absence of democracy and the foolish handling of highly sensitive political issues by the then ruling military junta mis-guided ultimately by a highly selfish politician (Zulfikar Ali Bhutto) crazy about power led to the dismemberment of Pakistan. Born out of a dictatorial regime Bhutto successfully convinced the majority of the then West Pakistanis that he was the true patriot and Sheikh Mujib who fought throughout his life for establishing democracy and people's

rights) a traitor. It took quite a long time for the much less politically conscious (compared to the Bangladeshis) West Pakistanis that it was the sheer greed for power of Bhutto and the icy indifference of the ruling elite of the then West Pakistan to the grievances of the then East Pakistanis which resulted in the creation of Bangladesh. When they started realising this harsh and bitter truth Pakistan was at the stage of a "sinking" state.

Though Pervez Musharraf released Hamoodur Rahman report, though he desired to discuss bilateral issues with Bangladesh in the past for a better relationship we may not be oblivious of the fact that he usurped power by dislodging a democratically elected government. He is a soldier, a General. To him, supposedly, democracy is subservient to military power. With support from USA due to his anti-Taliban role he has developed the courage to

almost ignore the public sentiment in Pakistan. His handling of Kashmir crisis, his consent to allow the US hunting of Taliban supporters inside Pakistan could not increase his popularity. To foreigners Pakistan is no longer considered a safe state. Foreign investment is thus bound to suffer. He wants to give national election in October this year. He is perhaps with the idea of tinkering the constitution of Pakistan to keep himself in power. He has not been successful in controlling Kashmiri militants inside Pakistani part of Kashmir or the Islamic fundamentalists. His formula of "real democracy" may not be acceptable to the Pakistanis in general. With increasing hostility against the foreigners and with no sign of improvement in political instability it is difficult to forecast the future of politics in Pakistan. The only development somewhat clear is that there may not be any Indo-Pak war in near future.

Whatever may be the state of affairs under Pervez Musharraf we may not ignore the following facts about Pakistan:

a) The whole of Pakistani nation cannot be blamed for the atrocities committed in the then East Pakistan by the Pakistan Army in 1971;

b) There is good prospect of developing trade relationship with Pakistan;

c) Pakistan is a member of the SAARC;

d) Pakistan is a member of OIC; and

e) Pakistan and Bangladesh must act positively about the stranded Biharis in Bangladesh.

Pakistanis are vigorously discussing as to what system of governance is most suitable for them these days. Musharraf is trying to sell the concept of keeping democracy virtually under the control of the military. Whatever may be outcome of the election (supposed to be held

on October, 10) it is almost certain that Musharraf will be in power for sometime more. From the events seen during the last four decades it appears that Pakistan's low consciousness about democratic rights will enable Musharraf to enjoy power till Kashmir crisis dies down to normal situation.

In developing political relationship with Pakistan let us not forget the following points:

a) Pakistan is a state under strong influence of Islamic fundamentalists and Bangladesh has earned the reputation of a moderate Islamic state;

b) Bangladesh has fairly advanced toward establishing western type of democracy in the country;

c) Pakistan is not just a member of the SAARC or OIC, it is the only country in which the image of Bangladesh can be depicted with least

difficulty. Better relation can be developed perhaps at all levels, with minimum effort. Relationship may be closer in areas such as trade, industry, telecommunication, agriculture etc. All the leading industrialists of Pakistan are fully conversant about Bangladesh. This will help in establishing joint ventures. Pakistani textile experts may help in filling the gaps in the technical areas of our growing textile industry. The problem of rehabilitation of Biharis (stranded Pakistanis) can be solved with sincere efforts of Pakistan. This human problem must not be diluted with politics. As Pervez Musharraf is himself an ex-refugee from India he would appreciate better the woes and sufferings of stranded families. Let us extend an open-hearted welcome to Pervez Musharraf and wish his three-day visit a success.

ABMS Zahur is a retired Joint Secretary.

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

Kemal Ataturk

It's unfortunate that a very lively and academic discussion on Kemal Ataturk has turned into an ugly controversy. The Turkish Embassy had to step in to protest some of the comments made by some of the letter writers.

I would like to emphasise that Kemal Ataturk is a very respected and honoured hero of the Turkish people and also to others as well who judge a man by virtue of his actions not his very personal life. The vested religious reactionaries had ample reasons to dislike Kemal because he hit at them to save his nation.

We must accept that religion

should never be the barometer to judge a person. Kemal Ataturk shines in the hearts of the millions of people as a nationalistic hero, whose bravery and patriotism was amazing.

Akbar Hussain
Toronto, Canada

Zero turnout in Sandwip election

We are stunned at what happened in the municipal polls in Sandwip. The government and the Election Commission in no way ignore their failure in holding a peaceful election. What took the Election Commission such a long time to hold a meeting and take decision

regarding the incident?
Islam
Tangail

Rajuk plot size at Purbachal

Rajuk has invited applications from the interested buyers for allocating their 3, 5, 7 1/2 and 10 katha plot at Purbachal.

I have collected a prospectus of the same. Surprisingly, there is no price indication for each katha of land in the prospectus. Price is a factor when someone decides on the size of the land he/she would intend to buy. Like many others I am also in an uncertainty what size of plot I would be able to afford.

Would Rajuk please come forward for help?
Masum H. Khan
Dhaka

Libraries in political web

The report 'Libraries in Political Web' (July 19) caught my attention. It is very unfortunate for the people of Bangladesh that even the libraries are not left alone from being politicised. We don't even have the right to choose what we want to read. Awami League made us read almost 50 books on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Sheikh Hasina and now we are forced to read 52 books on late

President Ziaur Rahman and Khaleda Zia, whether we like it or not.

It is understandable that every government would like to promote their leaders. But what shocked me is the inclusion of books written by people like Jamaat-Islami MP Delwar Hussein Sayeedi. We all know Mr. Sayeedi's version of Islam. Islam is a glorious religion. It is modern, scientific and most logical. There are a lot of very good research work done on Islam, its history and its ideology. Not only Muslims, people of any other religion can learn a lot from these books. If the government really wants us to know about Islamic ideology then include these books

for our libraries, not those preaching political propaganda.
Kamal Haq
TX, USA

Selling the MIGs

It was a great news to learn that Begum Zia decided to sell off the MIGs costing 100 Million US \$ per annum to maintain them. I was asked by a friend who knows the condition of sub-continent well as to the need for such weaponry which in his opinion like new frigates acquired in the recent past are only big show pieces and can never act even as a deterrent against any possible attack by enemy in the context so far as Bangladesh is

concerned. According to him this news of curtailing defence cost could herald the dawn of sanity on the part of sub-continent leaderships like the idea of the SAARC. But will it ever happen?

All my arguments in favour of minimum defence requirements would be of no avail when I was asked to ponder why most of our people still live without safe drinking water and basic hygiene? CNN, BBC and many more satellite TV program displaying the appalling slum life of our region do no good for the image and wisdom of our politicians. It is time the leaders of our region started leading like Lee Quen Yeuw/Mohathir Mohammed and follow the example of Khaleda Zia and start to

scrap all defence arsenals gradually. The sovereign countries of the South Asia in this way can be a joint mighty economic force without borders as they have done in Europe after a long period of conflict, and after two World Wars.

We all know this is a wishful thinking may take a long time to come true but it is the only way for the salvation of the people of the region from the abject poverty.

Z. Rahman
Texas, USA