

## Army must be kept above politics

**Top politicians' arrest taints an otherwise welcomed drive against criminals**

THIS paper along with most others and the public in general welcomed the army drive against criminals. We were so fed up with the lack of safety of our everyday existence and we had lost so much faith in the normal system of security that we all felt that some new and dramatic measures were called for. Army's coming on the scene fulfilled our wishes. However we had warned from the outset that our welcome is conditional on the fact that the drive against criminals be just that, only against criminals and not in anyway be used for harassing political opponents. To the government's credit for the first few days the army's drive netted criminals irrespective of their party affiliations. In fact more BNP cadres were arrested than from the opposition. It was rightly so because in our political culture criminals use the ruling party's protection to carry on their crime.

However the airport arrest of Saber Hossain Chowdhury, former MP, chairman of the cricket control board and deputy minister and currently political secretary to the AL chief has significantly tainted the non-political nature of the army's drive. In addition, the arrest of Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim MP, chief of AL's youth front Juba League and former minister and the raids in the houses of former minister Amir Hossain Amu and former Mayor Md. Hanif have raised questions in the public mind as to whether or not the drive against criminals is now taking a political turn. Is Saber a criminal of the type the army is assigned to look for? He is an established businessman and comes from an equally established and respected business family. During his short political career he made a name for himself as a sober and dignified politician quite averse to the verbal vulgarity that so many others on both sides are so good at. He is known for his anti-hartal stance within the party and for AL's continued participation in the parliament -- both postures we think are positive for the growth of responsible politics in Bangladesh. After his interrogation by the army he had been put under police remand on suspicion of planning to create disturbances in Dhaka city. How is disturbance defined? Any programme of political agitation can be termed as such. If the army is used to catch politicians who are planning political agitation then how can army remain above the criticism that it is carrying out the political agenda of the ruling party?

We would like to reiterate our support behind the army's drive to catch the criminals. We point out here that army raid against Haji Mockbul and his kind has been and will be welcome. There are other known criminals or *santrashis* in the AL. Raids against them will not be protested but welcomed by the public. But when other types of political leaders are arrested then the questions will legitimately be raised greatly eroding the credibility of the army's drive. Let us point out clearly that we cannot allow the army's drive to fail. Because if it does, then what. So it must succeed. But for it to succeed, it must be used non-politically.

## US envoy's reaction to Time magazine report

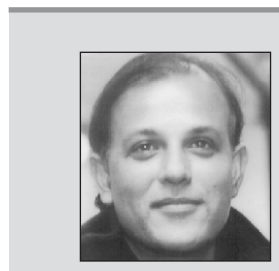
**A welcome confirmation of truth**

THE United States Ambassador Mary Ann Peters has, in so many words, made it clear that her government rejects the views expressed in a recent Time magazine report to the effect that Bangladesh has become a "hotbed of radical Islam". The US embassy, she said, follows terrorism issues closely and has no evidence as regards allegations that the country is "a haven for hundreds of jihadis on the lam". Ms Peters nailed the report saying it contained "numerous unsubstantiated allegations". The rejection of the unfounded and baseless story is a confirmation of truth by no less a person than the resident US ambassador.

The Time report, *Deadly Cargo*, and the Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER) cover story in April, Beware of Bangladesh, have been travesties of truth dished out from a level of journalism that was totally unexpected. The US ambassador's statement will help strengthen Bangladesh's credibility as a liberal Muslim state and "a staunch member of the international coalition against terrorism". Both the FEER cover story and the Time magazine report are prime examples of irresponsible and sensational journalism. Neither Bertil Lintner nor Alex Perry has cared to verify their facts before publishing such damning report on our struggling democracy.

We are a liberal society with deep-rooted democratic values and constantly on the watch for any aberration to take guard against it. In fact, this paper carried out its own probe following the Time report and found no basis for its allegations. Let's hope there is no repetition of any unsubstantiated report from the Western media.

## A sense of the absurd



K.A.S. MURSHID

JUST a few days ago I woke up in the middle of the night to a heavy noise emanating from the direction of the street overlooking my bedroom. I was annoyed, wondering what on earth was going on at such an unearthly hour. I walked over to the balcony to find a truck loaded with bamboo being unloaded -- I never knew falling bamboo poles could make such a ruckus. "Land grabbers", I thought to myself (I had seen lots of attempts over the past one year aimed at grabbing this piece of luscious, low-lying lake side land -- and had it not been for a few alert and well-connected individuals in the neighbourhood, there would undoubtedly be yet another monstrosity with a pretentious Greek-sounding name, blotting out the landscape). Just as I was about to shout "Thief! Robber!" and generally try to wake up the neighbourhood with a valiant battle-cry (kidding! I was quietly going off to find my earplugs before hitting my bed again, with my tail firmly tucked between my legs) when I chanced to notice the word 'decorator' inscribed

on the side of the vehicle. Someone had hired the decorators for a party! What a relief -- and strangely, the noise did not bother me any longer. I was a little late returning home from work the next day. As I entered my street, I found it a choc full of cars and people. A huge marquee was erected on the rooftop of one of the buildings across my house and the party was well underway -- the occasion was the marriage anniversary of a Ward Commissioner. I was told -- living in this neighbourhood

unbearable and the party seemed to peter out well before midnight. The Ward Commissioner's marriage anniversary would not normally be the subject of intellectual discourse except for the events that soon followed close on its heels. Within 48 hours of the anniversary party, the Army was called out and a massive operation was launched to nab 'listed' criminals, terrorists and hopefully, unlisted and non-listed criminals as well. We have all welcomed the move, hop-

surely a small price to pay in exchange for more peaceful nights and less gory newspaper headlines? And imagine the 'peace dividend' that could be reaped. For one thing we would not have to endure lengthy lectures on the need to improve law and order from every semi-dignitary who chooses to pass through our land. Nor would we be able to blame the *mastans* for all the evils that beset us, from falling foreign investments to poor industrial performance and faltering

ently in a house to house (or should I say flat to flat) search of the complex in the vain attempt to ferret out the Listed One. I believe that in the process a few kicks and punches were delivered -- the brunt of which were borne by the guards, drivers, house servants and the *shalas* of the wanted man. The main thing was that Mr. WC could not be apprehended -- he managed to flush himself out quietly, perhaps down the drain. But hang on a minute! Let's get

it the case that the Army had information that the Police did not? Or that there were separate lists, one for each agency?

I guess we shall never know, and I need to conclude this article. So what is the moral of my story? I am not entirely sure, but perhaps this quotation that someone thoughtfully sent me might be appropriate: 'If the only tool you have is a hammer, then every problem you face tends to resemble a nail'. As we ponder deep our strategy to hammer crime and nail the criminals, let this quotation speak for itself -- at least until better equipment becomes available.

*Post Script*  
The crackdown began well and appeared to be even handed, thereby getting broad popular (and political) support. NOTHING should be done to erode that support. NOTHING should be done to make the Army appear less than impartial. I hope therefore that the arrest of Sheikh Selim and Saber Choudhury has nothing to do with their politics.

One other thing worries me -- those unsolved bomb blasts, and the possibility that fanatical fringe elements may be plotting more of the same. There is little doubt that they will strike again unless stopped well in advance. I hope the Army will be taking a keen interest in them as well?

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

## BETWEEN YOURSELF AND ME

**Is it the case that the Army had information that the Police did not? Or that there were separate lists, one for each agency? I guess we shall never know...So what is the moral of my story? I am not entirely sure, but perhaps this quotation that someone thoughtfully sent me might be appropriate: 'If the only tool you have is a hammer, then every problem you face tends to resemble a nail'. As we ponder deep our strategy to hammer crime and nail the criminals, let this quotation speak for itself -- at least until better equipment becomes available.**

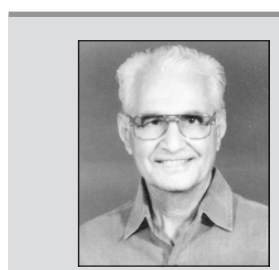
rather than in his own constituency in another part of town. Clearly, important people were about (including one understands, the Mayor himself) appropriately secured by a variety of law enforcement personnel. Apart from uniformed policemen there were also a large number of young armed men in civilian clothes loitering here and there, somewhat lost and looking slightly ridiculous with their long guns hanging out of their sides. I braced myself for a long and noisy evening ahead, but I needn't have worried. Fortunately, the noise level was not

ing against hope that THIS time the operation would prove somewhat more successful. We have felt reassured in the first couple of days when raids were carried out across the country to haul up criminals, irrespective of their nominal party affiliations. We noted without protest the fact that a few people died in the process, accidentally, of course, perhaps because of a pre-existing heart condition. At any rate, when we are involved in a massive life and death struggle against organised and institutionalised crime, a few 'accidents' cannot be ruled out --

OK, but let's again go back to our hero, the Ward Commissioner. As I returned home from work a couple of days ago, once again I noticed a lot of activity on our normally quiet street. This time there were four Army vehicles of various sizes and a large number of uniformed men all over the place: on rooftops, balconies, front and rear gates and so on, effectively surrounding the entire building complex in which our Commissioner is a resident. The men were there for the best part of six or seven hours, engaged appar-

this straight then: here was this WC who just a few days ago laid out a grand feast attended by some very important people in government; he and his guests were given full police protection at substantial cost to the tax payer -- and hardly a few days later, we are told that he is actually a listed man urgently wanted by the Army for questioning. Doesn't this seem a little confusing, even absurd? I mean if this man was on the list, why wasn't he arrested before, e.g. from the party? The police couldn't certainly claim that they didn't know where he was! Or is

## The two kinds of politics



M B NAQVI  
writes from Karachi

THERE are two types of politicians in Pakistan. The first comprises those who are broadly satisfied with the way Pakistan's polity and economy are organised. This group also includes those who are unhappy with one particular detail -- the way the Army generals intrude, overthrow civilian governments and begin recasting political institutions for longer life to the dictator of the day -- despite being adequately satisfied, or unconcerned, with the social structures work. But a majority is too opportunistic to question the generals' right to rule; they all seek to share power with the military.

There are other kinds of politicians and intellectuals who are deeply distressed by the results that the polity and economy are delivering. They want a radical enough change in both politics and economy. They want to reinvent these to achieve results that add to the rights and privileges of the people. They aim to end today's unsatisfactory conditions. The criteria these people use must be explained. They do not recognise anyone's right to rule over the state without obtaining freely given consent by the people and that applies to all assorted despots, generals included. Many of them are thoroughgoing democrats who want to go as far as humanly possible to have a participatory system in which the common voter plays an increasing role in decision making and in the execution of policies.

A word more about this category. Their primary value is human being and his freedoms -- to become what he wants to, to do what he wishes to

and speak and act the way he thinks necessary. Human rights presuppose that no human being can be left to starve; his right to gainful employment -- failing which some social security assistance -- must be accepted as a legal responsibility by the state, without any abridgement of all other human rights. This has nothing to do with the old debate between socialism and capitalism. The latter ensures this right even in smaller countries like Denmark,

PCO, are unlikely to uphold the other position. One's reason is different. These questions go to the heart of the political system: if you want a basic change in the current political set up -- given by a General on the strength of the Army -- it is the job of an elected Parliament to do the right thing. The courts have no locus standi.

Politicians do need to be flexible -- and even pragmatic. But pragmatism needs to be distinguished from

broken. It has to be made to transfer power to the elected people.

There is no use going on about the electoral malpractices. No election, other than that of 1970, has been free from the ministrations of intelligence agencies. So long as Army sits at the top of the social structure, it will manipulate elections -- to ensure victory of opportunists, toadies and turncoats. An election has been held so recently. We have to make do with the results that have

know how would the Americans react. That could be a 1971-like situation also; the possibilities are not pleasant to contemplate.

The government and MMA constituents know each other rather well after having cooperated all these many years. MMA leadership comprises politicians that possess much this-worldly savvy. The Yankies are also no strangers to the MMA heavyweights. All of us will be watching how they and President

settled for them on Aug 21. Only MQM remains. On the question of engaging in power struggle it is second to none. But its Chief has been articulating a politics that cannot permit participation in any likely government. But the more knowledgeable say that its leadership knows the art and craft of making two qualitatively different ends meet and indeed co-exist. The otherwise anxious PML(QA) leaders appear to be sure that NA parties, MQM, SDA, PML(F) and a few others will join them in making a government with MMA -- a so-called national government that might even include PPPP. Issues be damned.

One more word about MMA. Administrative force majeure to keep them out, with or without foreign advice, will -- apart from being arbitrary and unwise -- open floodgates to subversion and multifarious trouble. Democracy sustained by rule of law is nothing if not a broad-based club where pluralism rules supreme. Democratic norms demand that whoever has been declared elected shall get what his numbers entitle him to. Some extremists and some Americans are sure to tar MMA with the brush of extremism and terror supporters. Antidote to terrorism and extremism is not what Bush and Ashcroft in their panic are doing in the US: it is more genuine democratic freedoms. These are to be supported by good and efficient policing within the four walls of law. If democracy cannot defend itself democratically, it loses its right to survive. Violating democratic precepts and practices will be disastrous. That should be in nobody's mind.

National government idea has been conceived as a means of fudging the "issues" and being ready to take one's (infinitesimal) share of power from the all powerful President, behind whom looms the Army, though he has yet to get the Americans off his hair.

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## PLAIN WORDS

**Democratic norms demand that whoever has been declared elected shall get what his numbers entitle him to. Some extremists and some Americans are sure to tar MMA with the brush of extremism and terror supporters. Antidote to terrorism and extremism is not what Bush and Ashcroft in their panic are doing in the US: it is more genuine democratic freedoms. These are to be supported by good and efficient policing within the four walls of law. If democracy cannot defend itself democratically, it loses its right to survive. Violating democratic precepts and practices will be disastrous. That should be in nobody's mind.**

Norway, Sweden or Netherlands, let alone the larger ones. It is time that Pakistani capitalism, in its democratic version, should do the same. This paradigm shift is now overdue.

But one look at the newly elected mob in Islamabad and one's heart sinks. Most of them are extraordinarily quiet about any issue that might need discussion or consultation with the people. With exemplary single-mindedness they are looking for what they can get in the quest for power. The only people who have mentioned any issues being involved are MMA and Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan (ARD) of current concern. MMA is no mean player in the power grabbing game, though. But one credit cannot be denied them that they have raised questions regarding the oath, constitutional amendments, the President's election and the need to abolish NSC.

One endorses Pakistan Bar Council's view that politician should not go to the courts on these issues. One says so not because the Judges, who have taken oath on

opportunism. Those who belong to elite classes and are fully satisfied with the way the society renders unto them both cash and respect, can be left alone to remain engaged in the struggle for power and be happy with the crumbs that fall from Gen. Musharraf's table. Their highest aim can only be to share power without disturbing any major institution or policies.

People of goodwill need to engage themselves with those who (i) may be socially conservative but desire political institutions of a formal parliamentary democracy and (ii) are radical enough democrats who believe in human rights as an ideal or as the primary value and who are prepared to go some way in adding economic and social rights to political ones with the aim of intellectual enlightenment and cultural enrichment. If necessary they have to reorder their priorities and to perceive that no progress is possible in extending and deepening democracy or taking democratic precepts to the economic sphere until the Army's hold on the society is

been handed down. One shall deal with the larger significance of MMA's rise separately. Right now there is one large question: what to do about these results? In practice, the groups that participated have already tacitly, and many have explicitly, accepted them. The purist idea of rejecting them was never even considered. So all of us have to see what is possible.

Insofar as MMA is concerned, well, it is a fact of life; it is going to control NWFP and Baluchistan provinces. It has been elected mainly on an anti-American vote. It does not like the way the current campaign against al-Qaida and top Taliban leaders is being conducted. Either MMA will pipe down and it shall agree to serve under the Musharraf Presidency after all concerned have sorted out the issues MMA has raised. Or, a crisis might be caused in both Pakistan-American relations over the question of inducting a civilian government that might demand true transfer of power from the Army and end of American bases. We do not yet

sort out political and foreign policy issues. MMA ought not to preempt our attention from the main issues.

PPP appears to be talking with two voices: there is a faction that does talk of issues and echoes what the Nawabzada says. But the other luminaries are more narrowly fixated on a share, any share, in power-certain personal questions. PML(N) does come through as being genuinely concerned with issues. But then, its numbers are so few that a big role is not possible for them to play; they can play a far more useful role on the opposition benches if only PPP's leaders do not fall for a small share in power, if at all.

If the PML(QA) can rough-hew an alliance with MMA -- and the "issues" do not intrude -- President Musharraf can then look forward to long innings. Needless to say the power struggle among half a dozen PMs-to-be can scarcely be settled without a Presidential wink and nod for one of them. Small parties -- PTI, PAT, TI and Millat Party -- pose no problem; the "issues" had been

## Lest we forget

# Azimur Rahman (Harun) as I knew him

ALIM-UR-RAHMAN KHAN

ANY who will read this article must have known Mr. Azimur Rahman, better known as Harun, but I doubt, if, besides his immediate family members, any one else knew him for as long a time as I did. I shall therefore limit my account to the years between 1946 and 1952. My father and his father were friends but I never met his father since he had died earlier i.e. before I met Azimur Rahman. That is how I discovered him during the first three years of our acquaintance. We were both kids of about 12 years old. I found him in school at St. Xavier's in Calcutta in the fifth standard when I shifted from section B to section A.

He was a thin boy. He remained thin, I mean very thin, till we were in the college so much so that a few of us, who were very close to him, used to call him "Patlu". He was friendly in his own way with a certain amount of reservation but never too much of it.

When I joined standard V A in 1946, Harun was one of the five Muslim boys in a class of about 30. Four of us were from Bengali Muslim families. All these boys did very well in life except for myself. I have this incredible ability to run into trouble in all fields of life. I accept this as normal. I like to believe that my gains were and are always in the invisible or the intangible areas. In the tangible areas I am generally on the losing side, that includes the side I back in field sport.

Harun's house and mine were about a mile away. One could walk through the back streets in

Calcutta; hence from very early age I was allowed to visit his house. This I did more than he came to my place. The reasons are several. He had two elder sisters (the brother was too old for me and belonged to the group of my uncle). The sisters were just a bit older than I was and they were quite fond of me and that also meant getting food, especially sweets with which I still have a partiality. Both Moina apa and Bulbul apa (the youngest sister was very young then) and their mother, (once she knew whose son I was), would feed me, talk with me etc. I found it comfortable because I had no sisters. I was then a single child (my brother being born when I was almost 13). The next reason was that I just got permission from my 11th year to go out alone provided I stayed within a short distance of the house and said where I was going; so it was quite thrilling to go out alone to meet my friend. It gave me a sense of maturity. Another reason was that the shop of the "Ghuddiwala" was on the road to Harun's house. I could by kites on my way back. It looks so far away now that I have almost forgotten the topics we discussed. Possibly we discussed about the "Phoochkawala" at the back of the school, or the "Pattiswala" who had a monopoly from the days of my uncle for selling patties at the school. We could be discussing school hockey or lessons.

It went on like this till 1948, when they moved to Dhaka. I was still at Calcutta. The other Bengali boys had also migrated to East Pakistan and so had the Punjabi boy. I was the last to come and join the first batch of English Medium boys at St. Gregory's High School. Harun and Enamul

Karim were already in that class. This was towards the end of 1948. Funny enough, in the confusion of those days I was attending classes at Dhaka when I was here and at Calcutta when I would be there. How? I do not know.

Well, I found my two friends from Calcutta, at the school. I remember my first question to Harun: "How are the other kids in their studies" and his reply, I still remember clearly, was... "It is alright for you but just keep an eye on Bari (Abdul Bari, our ex-ambassador to Nepal etc. and who is also no more with us). He is quite good in English."

I was involved in some physical exercises in those days, which included boxing, weight lifting, and wrestling (Indian style). I tried to convince Harun to take up weights and succeeded partially. He would come to my house three days a week for working with weights. He gave it up later perhaps because the final examination (matriculation) was coming near. Something funny happened at that time. Some of us used to study in a sort of a batch i.e. comparing notes and hours of study etc. Harun, Bari, Karim, Ataul Huq and myself were certainly together; may be there were one or two others, I cannot remember now. Often I used to go Harun's house at Purana Paltan to sit and study and inevitably I found him sleeping. It was like a disease over several months. Thereafter he started putting on weight. I was as if a caterpillar was in a cocoon and was transforming itself into a butterfly. Personally I was quite amazed but then I am still very impressionable like a child. Was it the exercise or was it



Late Azimur Rahman

an age around which we boys undergo a sort of change? I don't know.

We found ourselves together in the same class i.e. Intermediate Science at Dhaka College. Couple of other boys from the same class were there but Harun was roll no. 145 and I was no. 147 so we used to sit close together also and get involved in pranks. Once I remember in a chemistry class, I was peeling off plaster from the wall at

the back end of the room and targeting it on the students in the front row. Harun kept on trying to stop me from indulging in this sport. Unfortunately one went and hit the test tube in front of the teacher. It was not difficult to trace it back to me. Further, to humiliate me, the teacher asked me questions about what he was teaching. It was "valency". It was on the black-board. Luckily, I had already studied the chapter well at home so I could answer. The teacher (Prof. Karim) was a bit surprised but being smarter than me he kept on asking more questions and I kept on answering. I was already in the area, which was not yet taught, but then it was too late. The long and short of what followed was that I had to sit away from my friends from then onwards and a chair was placed for me with the teacher on the platform at the chemistry class. I still remember this "chemical" parting from Harun.

I owned a .22 rifle in those days and we also had a Blue Austin car. My father was dead a couple of years earlier and I was almost the only child, my younger brother was only 5 or 6 yrs. old. The car was often with me and we used to go out on picnics. Once, on one such occasion, inside what is Sher-e-Bangla Nagar now, we went out to shoot doves. I was holding the rifle and Harun slipped on me and the shot went off. Thank God I was trained, before I could shoot, how to hold a gun or a rifle to avoid accidents. The habit and training was of use, otherwise I would have perhaps looked like an Afghan veteran with one foot blown off by a land mine.

Around this time Harun disappeared to go to Ceylon (Sri Lanka) on some scout delegation I think. He returned with a stock of Ceylonese songs and a lovely jacket, which fitted me better than it fitted him. I remember borrowing it from him once to appear at an interview at the DPI office for being sent to America. I was not selected but it did give me the chance to wear the coat and look smart. I was chosen for going to America at students' camp but that was the year after. As far the Ceylonese songs go, I still sing them to my grand-children and if Harun has not taught these to his grand-children, I think it is left on me to teach those to his grand-children. A legacy, which I am holding back from Harun and must pass these on to the kids.

After passing out from the college in 1952, we parted our ways for many years till he left his job in the tea-gardens and I returned from Pakistan in 1973. But then there were many others who knew Harun well by that time. He was on his way to being a well-established and respected businessman. We met from time to time but always felt very close to each other. Friendship like love tends to mature along the time-line. It is now time for us also to leave this world. At times I feel like a passenger waiting at the lounge at an airport for the flight to depart. I hope I can leave half as many friends and well-wishers as Harun.

May God be with him in that other life, and may God be with his family and his children and grand-children in this life. Amin.