DHAKA SATURDAY OCTOBER 26, 2002

Seven deaths too many

Army's probe is welcome but not enough

HE operation "Clean Heart" is causing too many 'heart attacks' for our comfort. Of the seven who died following army arrest, five have been termed to have died of heart attacks. Many of those arrested have been sent to hospitals following severe injury on their bodies. After more than a week in operation more and more questions are being raised about the army's method of operation. We think the seven deaths have given rise to serious concerns of public safety in the minds of the general people. We find the 'heart attack' explanation not acceptable. There are too many unanswered questions and too many opaque moves. Perfectly healthy people suddenly die of 'heart attack' once the army picks them up, and that happening on so many occasions is a bit too much for us to swallow. Then again why aren't the bodies being handed over to the family on time? In several cases there were considerable delays in that process. And when the families finally did get the bodies all of them said that the bodies bore marks of physical abuse and torture.

We are happy that the army has set in motion its own probe . Internal investigations are underway against commanders of specific units under whom seven persons have died in different places. As a disciplined force it was expected that a probe of some kind would be constituted following the deaths of civilians in their hands. Reportedly instructions have been sent out that better treatment is to be meted out to those taken in army custody. As reactive steps these are all in the right direction, but hardly enough to fulfil the requirements of law. First of all under what law were the victims arrested and what was done to ensure their rights. What transpired once these people were in army custody? Under what circumstances interrogation was carried out. Obviously they were put under extreme physical condition for them

As it appears now there is some kind of list prepared by God only knows whom. The army is picking up people following that list. When, how and who prepared this list is still unclear to us. Has the authenticity of that list been verified? If yes, by whom? Have those in the list been classified according to the gravity of their crimes or common thieves have been put together with murderers? Some may find these points to be too detailed to be considered in an operation as vast as this. We beg to differ. Because the joint army drive is to re-establish the supremacy of the rule of law, there cannot be any violation of fundamental laws of the land in that process.

The probe that the army high command has set up must do its work expeditiously and make the results public. Mistake should not be made in thinking that these deaths are internal matters of an army operation and therefore whatever the probe reveals and whatever the army disciplinary bodies decide to do can be kept away from the public. Such a move will be self-defeating. First of all we are not in any war situation. Secondly the operation was in the civilian domain. Thirdly it is very important that public should not have any misgivings about the army's role. For all the above reasons army must make its probe findings public and must do so in the shortest possible time.

We would like to reiterate that after being significantly discredited during the Ershad regime the army, over the last 12 years has regained its place in the heart of the people as an efficient, non-political and professional force. Through its coming to public's assistance during natural disasters and its work in the international arena our army has made us proud. Nothing should be done to tarnish that image. Seven deaths and many injuries of those arrested have already soured an otherwise welcome move. Arrest of political leaders with reputation of integrity and political sophistication has brought forth the question of making political use of army. As we said earlier army operation must succeed, for failure will mean disaster. But for its success we cannot do away with the main objective -- the rule of law and supremacy of the Constitution and all rights guaranteed by it.

Pakistan elections: An observer's observation



M. M. REZAUL KARIM

AKISTAN held its Presidential and Provincial Assembly Elections on 10 October 2002. It was conducted under the military government of General Pervez Musharraf. The Supreme Court, while legitimising the military takeover under the doctrine of "state necessity", had ordered to hold election and transfer power to the civilian rule within three years. The election took place as a sequel to that order.

How credible was the election? The government claimed it was free, fair and transparent. The opposition -- of which the most vocal being Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party -- complained it was rigged. The mixed reaction of the people in general, however, tilted more towards a favourable view. They were happy that at least a semblance of democracy had been introduced in the country within a relatively short period of time. They were also relieved at the lack of usual violence during the election. The United States' reaction to the election was positive. India's reaction, which is also highly important, was lukewarm, if not negative. Among the foreign observers the European Union gave a negative assessment and did not consider democracy would flourish in Pakistan. The SAARC observers' report is not in hand. The Commonwealth Group of which I was a member submitted its report to the Commonwealth Secretary General for circulation among Commonwealth governments and for publication. The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group is due to meet on 1 November to deliberate on the report and decide about

membership of the Commonwealth. It may be recalled that suspension had been ordered following military takeover and was to be restored following return to civilian rule.

There was, however, widespread allegation of pre-election rigging by the government. These largely took form of what was considered unconstitutional and undemocratic measures taken by the government before the election. These constituted issuance of ordinances and

own internal election and submission of statement of accounts would have disqualified many political parties. The government defended as having acted in accordance with laws and for intake of better quality of law-givers in the parliament.

The strongest criticism levelled against the government was concentration of supreme powers in the hands of one individual. The President, besides having the power of amending the constitution through

The question, therefore, arises as to why major political parties of Pakistan agreed to participate in the election under a system where the President retained some of the supreme powers, which should otherwise have been assumed by a sovereign parliament under a parliamentary form of government. The reasons appeared to be twofold. In the absence of crowd-

inspiring leaders of the two major

political parties, it was uncertain if a

tion were estimated to be around 40 per cent. We witnessed less and that of women voters lesser still. In 10 Federally Administered Tribal Areas, the writs of tribal chiefs ran supreme. In some of these areas, women were barred from voting by mutual agreement among the political parties and candidates. But no complaints were stated to have been received.

The parliament is due to be convened on 1 November. The total

number of seats directly elected is

272 in addition to another 10 seats

Baluchistan where Islamic sentiadditional factor of the growing anti-American sentiments. People of these regions being on the borders with Afghanistan endured the severe most impacts of war in and refugees from Afghanistan.

The Commonwealth Group of Observers worked within the framework of definite terms of reference. The group was to observe the election within the framework of existing laws, ordinances, rules and regulations of the country. It was not the responsibility of the group to evaluate quality of these existing laws and governmental measures. The elections on 10 October, as it was witnessed by our observer team, appeared to be relatively peaceful, orderly, free and transparent. Nothing that we saw hindered free access and caused intimidation to voters. But whether it has attained the cherished goal of democracy in absolute terms in Pakistan is a moot question. With so much of powers vested in one individual, the President, sovereignty of parliament would be curbed. The election in Pakistan, in fact, appears to be one of sharing of powers between the military and the civilian authorities where the former sheds law making and some other functions to the elected representatives of the people in parliament. The election, therefore, has set in the first yet significant stage in the

It is difficult, however, to surmise at this stage as to who and which coalition partners would form the government. Horse-trading is going on in full swing. But it is clear that the future political stability, prosperity and democracy in Pakistan will be determined not only by the nature and composition of the government itself but by the future interaction and co-operation between the President and the newly-elected Parliament.

transition to democracy in Pakistan.

M.M.Rezaul Karim, a former Ambassador, is a

CURRENTS AND CROSSCURRENTS

It is difficult, however, to surmise at this stage as to who and which coalition partners would form the government. Horse-trading is going on in full swing. But it is clear that the future political stability, prosperity and democracy in Pakistan will be determined not only by the nature and composition of the government itself but by the future interaction and co-operation between the President and the newly-

framing of rules and regulations by the government which were viewed contrary to the provisions of the constitution, existing laws and general norms of democracy. The Legal Framework Order and Election Orders, among others, came under fire. The provision of prohibiting holding of the post of Prime Minister and Chief Minister in provinces more than twice were clearly directed against former two-time Prime Ministers, Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif. One may recall that Benazir Bhutto has been living abroad following declaration by court as an absconder from various cases of corruption and other crimes. Nawaz Sharif, on the other hand, was sent to Saudi Arabia in exile for 10 years as a result of a compromise brokered by the Saudi authorities with the military government following the coup in October 1999. The criteria of graduation as a qualification for candidature and disqualification for defaulters of loans and utility bills were also alleged to be an attempt to deliberately bar a number of potential antigovernment candidates. The Chief Election Commissioner admitted that strict compliance with the order

the Security Council, has the authority to dismiss the Prime Minister and dissolve the Parliament. The political parties and their leaders generally condemned these provisions and vowed to amend them in the newly elected parliament. Though indications were given by some Ministers that some such provisions, including the Security Council, would be subject to review, this issue, nevertheless, has the potential of bitter confrontation between the President and the newly elected parliament and of shaping the future of democratic process in Pakistan. President Musharraf had already secured his position as President through a referendum in April this year. He may aspire to legitimise his position further by securing endorsement of the National Assembly, Senate and Provincial Assemblies constituting the electoral college for Presidency. But the President continues to hold the additional powerful post of the Chief of Army Staff. Though he is expected to shun this post along with that of the Chief Executive, people still wonder whether under these circumstances even a credible election would return the popular movement against such an election could be successfully organised. Secondly, a large number of defections to the parties willing to contest election would further legitimise and strengthen administration without real opposition in the parliament

People in general, whom we interviewed in streets, shops and common places, told us that they had been frustrated with the past role of political leaders, who took little care about people's welfare but more to augment their own material interests. They particularly cited Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif both of whom had twice served as Prime Minister and failed to deliver, except to themselves and their lackeys. Of course, many others, who had been their diehard supporters and beneficiaries, would contest the claim. In any way, success of some new political parties, like the 6-party alliance of religious parties, MMA, debacle of Nawaz Sharif's PML(N) bagging only 14 seats and the routing of NWFP's ruling Wali Khan's party ANC, manifested people's desire to support new faces and new parties to be given a chance in administra-

reserved for minorities. Besides, reserved women seats were increased to 60 which are allocated to parties on the basis of proportional representation. As no political parties won single majority status in the parliament, vigorous negotiations had started immediately after the election between the various successful political parties and individual candidates for the formation of a coalition government. The pro-regime PML (QA) winning 77 seats became the single largest party in the parliament. Opposition claimed this new party had been composed largely of defected aspirants from other political parties either through intimidation or enticement. But the party did not fare as well as it had been conceived. The second largest is Benazir's PPP with 63 seats. The third party MMA having won 45 seats surprised many with its success. This coalition of Islamic parties with clear majority of seats in the provincial NWFP Assembly is sure to form government there. No other political party will enjoy this privilege. The success of the MMA, whose stronghold being NWFP and

ember of BNP's Advisory Council.

become the first Nobel Laureate to

Beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder

MEGASTHENES

HERE are reasons enough why the late Nirad C. Chaudhuri will not be easily forgotten. He was certainly not a forgettable man. Few people wrote with such exquisite and equal felicity and ease in English and Bangla. He was the archetypical nonconformist: an unabashed Anglophile, who attributed "all that was good and living within us" to British rule. There was a prickly and piquant charm to him and he was recognized as something of a polymath. And not the least, he lived to be a centenarian: retaining in full till the end his zest and considerable mental faculties -- an astonishing feat even in these times of phenomenal strides in medicine and medical

When I met him for the first time at this cosy Oxford residence, he was a sprightly nonagenarian, mentally sharp as a tack and physically agile. It was an experience to talk, or more accurately to listen, to him, then and on subsequent occasions, as he held forth animatedly on a host of subjects, with emphasis on his two great passions, books and music. Not that one had to agree with all that he said; one simply did not arque --Êit was so much more stimulating to just listen and to pose the occasional question. I was persuaded to the extent -- perhaps I always tended to the view -- that if we had to be a colony of a big power, Britain afforded the best option! He



A survey by the Columbia University Press bulletin, The Pleasures of Publishing, in 1950 afforded a glimpse of the relationship between popular perceptions or tastes and serious literature. Readers were invited to choose fifteen most boring classics of all time. Among books that made this dubious list were Remembrance of Things Past, Moby Dick, Paradise Lost, Ivanhoe, Faerie Queen, Don Quixote, Vanity Fair, Faust, and War and Peace. Truly beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder!



Nirad C. Chaudhuri: Not a forgettable man

would often recall with relish an interview with a local paper. He had remarked in response to a question that he missed a particular brand of claret as it was priced somewhat beyond his means. Soon after the interview was published, someone anonymously sent him a case of that wine. Gestures such as this meant a

Opinions may well differ about Nirad Chaudhuri's standing as a serious literary figure -- the taste for things literary can be subjective. some scholars though would rate highly his two autobiographical volumes in particular.

The subjective element in literary appreciation is underscored in the two lists of eminent writers given List A: Sully Prudhomme,

Bjornson, Eucken, Carducci, Bunin, Echegaray, Laxness, E. Johnson. Seferis, Jensen, H. E. Martinson, Mommsen, Boll, Hauptmann, Pontoppidan, Gjellerup.

List B: Tolstoy, Chekhov, Ibsen, Hardy, Conrad, Mark Twain, Gorky, Bertolt Brecht, Proust, Zola, H. G. Wells, Paul Valery, James Joyce, Maugham, Graham Greene.

From the Bangladesh or even sub-continental perspective it would be fair to say that List A consists of names that are less familiar. List B includes very eminent authors whose works are read in this part of

the world. The essential difference between the two lists is, of course, the fact that List A consists of only Nobel Laureates in literature while names in List B achieved that ultimate accolade. Surely there are in List B individuals who were deserving of that honour. Tolstov for example should figure in most people's choice of ten or fifteen greatest novelists of all time. His War and Peace likewise would find a place in any list of great novels. And yet the great Russian did not win the Nobel.

Tagore remains the only Bangla writer to have won the literature prize. The story of how he won provides interesting insights. One of the judges Von Heidenstam was an orientalist and had read the English translation of Gitanjali, the only work of Tagore to have been translated at that time. He was enthralled and urged on his colleagues Tagore's claim over that of French literary historian Emile Faguet, who was the favourite to win that year. A Swedish

EDITOR TO

strongly endorsed Tagore and even urged other judges to learn Bangla so that they could savour Tagore in the original. The judges tried but gave up on learning Bangla; they found the alphabets too long and complex. Instead the Professor was asked to translate Gitanjali into Swedish. Once this was done Tagore was the easy winner. He thus won for only one slim volume of poetry and not for the "entire corpus. as Eliot put it when he won the prize years later. Decades after Tagore, Pasternak also was awarded the literature prize for one book only. Dr Zhivago. This was seen as much as a political as a literary award. Pasternak was a poet of some merit and distinction and if he had been recognized for his entire literary output, he might not have been

Professor, who knew Bangla, also

I wonder if Tagore's works had been translated after 1913, the year he won the prize, over the next twenty years, he might not have

obliged to decline the honour.

win twice in the same category. Especially so, as the range and scope of his literary works far transcended the "lyric poetry" of Gitaniali. Some scholars are even of the view that Gitanjali does not represent the best of Tagore. Only Bardeen has won the prize twice for the same subject, for Physics in 1956 and 1972. Indeed I should think that if the works of some of the other leading Bangla writers had been widely translated, one or two more would have won higher international recognition and fame. Von Heidenstam went on to win the prize himself in 1916. Surely he deserved it; not only for whatever contribution he made to the world of literature but also for being instrumental in presenting Tagore to the world.

Incidentally a survey by the Columbia University Press bulletin, The Pleasures of Publishing, in 1950 afforded a glimpse of the relationship between popular perceptions or tastes and serious literature. Readers were invited to choose fifteen most boring classics of all time. Among books that made this dubious list were Remembrance of Things Past, Moby Dick, Paradise Lost, Ivanhoe, Faerie Queen. Don Quixote. Vanity Fair. Faust, and War and Peace. Truly beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder!

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Army crackdown

The army has been clinical in its approach. They are given a list and even if the list has mistakes, it will not be concerned. They will go about their duty. That is where the influential people in the government are likely to take advantage.

The army operation is something I do not support. This sort of crackdown puts the nation in an exposed position. Murders and rapes have scantily gone down a bit, but after the raids are over, normal service will resume.

Haji Mohammad Isam Dhanmondi, Dhaka

"Operation Clean Heart"

I am at present a resident in Canada and what I have read through The Daily Star Internet edition on the law and order situation in our beloved country is very heart breaking for all Bangladeshi's residing here.

I have read with interest various letters "Operation Clean Heart". I totally agree with the views expressed by Akku Chowdhury on this issue and the views expressed in your Editorial of October 23. I am of the view that no civilised society will allow such deterioration of law and order to go unchecked even if this requires harsh measures by

calling army to rectify the situation. I had the opportunity to visit my beloved country in February last and I could see for myself the lack of respect for law of the land.

I hope through this operation by the army the country will become more peaceful and it will carry on with its development work to get rid of poverty, hunger, unemployment, corruption etc. Our community here would like to wish everyone involved in this development work in our beloved country all the best wishes on their effort for a better

Nothing makes us happier than hearing a good news from our beloved country

Shamim Chaudhury Mississauga, Canada

Cheering the army

We do not have to like it, but the fact remains that we all feel safer now that the army has taken to the streets to curb crime. I for one choose not to dwell on the moral, human rights or constitutional implications of this action, simply because the acts of crime and terrorism impacting us directly or indirectly is a violation of these very

The nay-sayers should not be focusing on the legality of having the army on the streets, but on why we have come to this shameful state where there is little respect for life, law and property; so much so that only drastic measures can correct the plague. The governments decision should not be viewed as coming from a position of "failure", but as an acknowledgement that the problem is real and out of control, and only this form of

Of course, using this pretext to harass the opposition is most distasteful. We would have a lot more respect for the Prime Minister if she trained her sights on the criminal and corrupt elements within the bureaucracy and purged the system in one fell swoop. One can only

strong action can restore order in

Vox Populus

the short term.

Army vs democratic norms

This is in response to the letters of A Concerned citizen, Anxious and Another Citizen (October 23). They talked about constitutional rights and fundamental rights of the people who are being arrested by the army. Aren't all these people listed criminals, who can kill innocent people without any hesitation and

deprive them of the very basic right to live their lives? Do these criminals have the rights to take the lives of the people they kill, just for money or some advantage?

If I am not a terrorist then I will definitely not carry a weapon, so I should not feel harassed if the army searches me while I am walking by. know I am not a criminal and I'll let them do their job. It should be the terrorists who should be cautious now, not the army.

A sensible citizen

Commending The Daily Star

I'm a young university student from the UK; I was born, brought up and live in Scotland. I first set foot in Bangladesh when I was seven, and have visited very frequently ever since. However on my last visit this summer, I started reading The Daily Star thoroughly every morning. am now writing from the UK as continued reading this daily over the Internet, and I have felt compelled to commend The Daily Star on

several points First, and most importantly, it is extremely diverse in its content and as politically balanced as I have ever seen in a media in its duty to convey international news. Incidentally. I feel international news is broadcast very well by not restricting to the western world as British newspapers tend to do most of the

Secondly, I must praise The Daily Star for honesty. The newspaper has promoted expressing opinions, and honest portrayals of situations.

Lastly, I am overwhelmed by the richness of characters adopted to write regular articles; from the graphically amusing stories of Mr Badrul Ahsan to the hard-line political and social opinions of those writing from abroad. In particular, I feel Dr. Murshid displays very rare characteristics of realism without cynicism, sarcasm without contempt, ardency without partiality, and balance of outlook without diplomacy, and I would be honoured to ever meet a human being like

Aliah Chowdhury Scotland, UK

Blood donation

Some ardent appeals are often noticed in the national dailies for blood. It is very heart rendering that a patient will die for want of blood. It is such a dire need that it cannot be substituted by any means accept blood. The source of blood is also human. So human folk should come forward to help each other in case of blood requirement. Annual demand of blood in the country is unknown yet it is presumed that the annual demand of blood in the country is about 2 Lac 50 thousand bags. These demands are usually filled by the government blood bank. Professional blood donors are the source of these blood banks whereas bloods of the professional donors are found risky and unsafe due to

contamination of virus. On the other hand those who donate blood voluntarily are found safe. Volunteer organisations like Shandhani, Bandana, Quantum foundation. Bandladesh Red Crescent Society, Rotary International and Lions International etc are collecting blood from the donors. These organisation collects nearly about 60 thousand bags of blood per vear.

To give a momentum of voluntarily blood donation campaign a strategic publicity is very essential. Radio, television and national dailies may chalk out a special drive in this respect.

"Unilateral US strike

will be disastrous"

Reference editorial: "Unilateral US strike will be disastrous," (October

Before the Gulf War in 1991. Saddam Hussein promised a 'mother of all battles" if Americans ried to oust his forces from Kuwait He promised to send thousands of Americans in body backs. Even many U.S. analysts and commentators warned of dire consequences. Chris Mathews, then a columnist with The San Fransico Examiner, now a commentator at NBC, wrote "The casualties will strike at the heart of the country." Barbara Boxer, then a Democratic Congresswomen, said that 3-4,000 dead was "the best-case scenario. Robert Novak, CNN's pepetual right-wing voice, predicted that there would be minimum of 20,000 casualties. A ground assault on Kuwait would mean "ten of thousands of U.S. dead," warned Pat Buchanan, another rightwinger and later a presidential candidate. Sen. Paul Walstone went even further "We stand on the brink of catastro-

The Cassandras proved to be pathetically wrong in 1991. Saddam Hussein faced "the mother of all defeats," and the huge Iraqi army was virtually exterminated with fewer than 150 American combat

casualties. There is no accountability for wrong punditry, otherwise the pessimists would have faced severe punishment for their mis-

TO THE EDITOR

guided prognosis Now again the pessimists are predicting dire consequences if the nited States decided to take a military action to remove Saddam from power. They are now ignoring the fact that the Iraqi army is only a fraction of what it was and the American forces are now far more technologically advanvced and combat capable. The massive display of American air power, that broke the back of the brutal Taliban regime in Afghanistan and helped the Northern Alliance liberate their country, clearly shows what the outcome will be in the coming war against Saddam's forces. Moreover, President George W. Bush is far more popular than his father was in the run-up to the last war. The public, steeled by last year's terrorist attacks, is more supportive of action against Saddam than it was then.

It is clear that any military action

this time will be far more quick and

surgical than it was in 1991. It will be a true liberation of Irag. Mahmood Elahi

Ottawa, Ontario, Canada