

The day of deep mourning

Let's take a vow for excellence

EVERY nation has some days to remember but very few have anything approximating a martyred intellectuals' day to observe like we do. Our being unique in the observance of such a day is obviously ascribable to the unprecedented nature of the viciousness and barbarity we were subjected to 33 years ago.

It was worse than 'parch earth' policy that marauding forces administer out of a dark motivation to deny the conquering side of communication links, a running economy and food supply. For what the high command of the surrendering Pakistani forces did in cohort with the Razakars, Al-Badr and Al-Shams lackeys of theirs was to follow a 'scorch intellect' policy, an ugly new addition to the vocabulary of parting atrocities and barbarities.

Just two days before the dawn of freedom and with defeat staring them in their faces, the Pak occupation forces and their local collaborators kidnapped leading Bengali intellectuals from their residences and massacred them at Rayerbazar in Mirpur. They were murdered so brutally as to be mangled beyond recognition. The late night swoop by the beleaguered forces at the listed addresses of the intellectuals graphically depicted the height of sacrifice we had undergone and the heavy price we had to pay for the attainment of freedom. Indeed, national independence was achieved the hardest way conceivable and unless we have that sense of history to value it, the day's true significance will be lost on us.

They were academics, doctors, engineers, journalists, creative people and other renowned personalities in the prime of their lives. They were men of courage, conviction and principle besides being highly successful in their professional careers. They advanced the cause of freedom, they were the guardian angels of our struggle for national independence. Both ideologically and professionally they were the cream of Bangladesh society -- high-minded, progressive and public-spirited.

More than 200 such men of character and accomplishment were done to death -- the sheer magnitude of the loss speaks of the incalculable harm done to a nascent country.

The denial was on two levels. It saddens us the most that those who aspired after and worked for national independence were denied the taste of freedom. Simultaneously, the nation was deprived of their services at a time when they could set the right tenor for national development efforts.

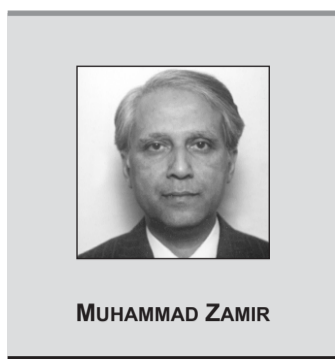
There are many who believe that the trend towards declining professional standards set in closely on the heels of independence was due to loss of that 'brain trust'. The values they believed in and the guidance they were capable of giving could have made a difference in the early days of Bangladesh.

The essential thing to realise is they have not been truly replaced as yet, the void was too great to fill in even during more than three decades since independence. From that point of view, the ulterior motive of the Pakistani marauding forces and their collaborators stands somewhat fulfilled.

There are two ways in which we can repay our debts to them: first, by measuring up to their love for the people and country and the supreme sacrifice they made for both and secondly, by living up to the legacy of their excellence. We will be failing in our duties towards them so long as we cannot build a Bangladesh of their vision where rule of law, justice and fairplay will prevail. Finally, the best homage we can pay to them is by striving for excellence they stood for in their respective professions -- and the greater arena of life.

While acknowledging their signal contributions to the making of Bangladesh, we take the opportunity of sharing those fond memories with their surviving near and dear ones.

The European Union: A grand experiment



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

ALTHOUGH the First World War witnessed unparalleled devastation and genocide in Europe, nevertheless, in between wars, the continent also toyed with the idea of cooperation. The Belgo-Luxembourg Economic Union Convention signed in 1921 signalled that friendship was fashionable once again. This positive trend was however rudely interrupted with the rise of Hitler in the following years and the outbreak of the Second Great War. The prospect of an Allied victory and winds of change that started blowing across Europe from 1944 raised hopes again.

The three governments-in-exile of Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg agreed and entered into a customs union treaty in London in 1944. This led to the establishment of the Benelux Customs Union on 1 January, 1948. The word 'Benelux' was in fact invented in 1947 by F M Asplagh, the Belgian correspondent of *The Economist*, who first thought of using 'Nebelux' to describe the idea, but then subsequently settled on 'Benelux' because it 'sounded much better'. The rest is history. Cooperation moved at a faster pace in the coming years and decades. First came the European Coal and Steel Community, then the European Economic Community and subsequently the European Community with the Maastricht Treaty.

It would be worthwhile to mention here however that the phrase 'European Union' is not to be found in any of the original Treaties. The commitment to a European Union was first formally made at the October 1972 Paris Summit, at which the heads of government of the member states confined their intention of 'convert-

ing their entire relationship into a European Union before the end of this decade'. This was reaffirmed at the Copenhagen Summit the following year. In fact, it was not until the 1991 Maastricht Treaty, the formal title of which is the Treaty on European Union, that a European Union was brought into existence.

The European Union is a remarkable experiment that is slowly moving forward. Intangible common aspirations are being brought together to forge a common identity. The road that is being traversed is not easy and potholes are quite

scene, there are still areas of divergence amid all the efforts to convergence.

There appears to be general agreement in the EU that the threat of armed conflict has receded with the end of the Cold War. There is also general consensus that other less tangible threats have taken its place: rapid economic growth in the Far East, Islamic fundamentalism and poverty on the southern shore of the Mediterranean, and the political uncertainty engendered in the former Soviet Union by the painful transition to a market econ-

lot of attention right now is the European Commission's proposals for a stronger executive that is pitting the Commission against Europe's most powerful member states. It has arisen out of the belief by the Brussels-based executive that it should be the 'centre of gravity' in foreign policy, the representative of the euro zone to the outside world, and Europe's agenda-setter on issues such as immigration and asylum. Adding urgency to the debate is the countdown to enlargement: up to 10 new member states will join the EU in 2004. That same year the EU is due to agree on a new

ment. It is the most complex of the institutions, and the one that has changed the most over the past four decades in terms of its composition and its powers. Even its location is far from straightforward. It also happens to be the most controversial of the institutions. Analysts have pointed out in particular that though the Parliament has substantial powers with respect to the budget, yet they are circumscribed in several ways, and that relations with the Council have often been bad as a consequence of disputes in the course of the budgetary procedure. This is so because the Parliament

is nearer to its goal of evolving into a significant organ. Its recent interest in monitoring human rights and fundamental freedoms in countries with whom the EU is involved in developmental cooperation, or in the observance of democratic principles and accountability in countries receiving EU assistance is giving it added importance. In this context its watchdog profile is slowly assuming a higher profile.

Yet the greatest success of the EU has been the emergence over the years of a common commercial policy which provides for negotiation of changes in tariff rates, conclusion of tariff and trade agreements, achievement of uniformity in measures of liberalization, export policy and measures to protect trade such as those to be taken in the event of dumping and subsidies etc. The European Commission plays an extremely important role in this regard, particularly with regard to negotiations in the services sector, on the protection of intellectual property and on foreign direct investment. In the recent past we have seen the crucial role it has played in arranging substantial benefits for the Least Developed Countries in the area of trade. These steps have in turn had spillover effects with other developed countries.

To the outsider, the European Union may be thought to move with 'glacier-like slowness'. However, such an observation will be quickly found to be false if one goes deeper into its activities. As the last Bangladesh Permanent Representative to the European Community, I believe that the EU is a success story as far as regional cooperation is concerned. We, in our part of the world have a lot to learn from their experience. The Euro since its circulation has been welcomed. It is now part of the European psyche. The whole idea, the vision of having one Europe, a single monetary union has created its own dynamics of peace and prosperity for its members.

It has been a good experiment till now. All the wrinkles have not yet been ironed out, but the very fact that other countries are interested in joining the EU indicates its acceptability.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

POST BREAKFAST
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common. However, impediments as they surface are being tackled with scrutiny and analysis. Common goals are being established and efforts made to reach them.

The EU today plays a wide-ranging and significant role on the world stage, particularly in terms of economic relations where it has the power to conduct a common commercial policy and to conclude different kinds of agreements with individual countries, with groups of countries or at a multilateral level. The EU also has special responsibility for economic assistance, development cooperation and humanitarian aid, where it conducts a coherent single policy towards the outside world, though to varying degrees.

While such cooperation between the member states takes place on a regular basis, there still remains many unresolved areas. This is particularly evident in the traditional areas of foreign policy making and issues of defence and security. These aspects, despite special effort, continue to be generally guided by national or intergovernmental interests. As such while the EU has a potentially complex and significant political role in the world

remains to be seen whether or not these challenges can act as a motivating force towards European integration, and whether or not the Union will show itself capable of rising to them.

In this regard, the EU institutions still face some latent problems. Amongst the few things that the Union has in common with other international or supranational bodies is the great difficulty in attracting public interest. The debates conducted at Union level, however fascinating to insiders, tend to impinge upon the public consciousness only if they become mixed up with national politics -- and the mixture normally results in the arguments themselves becoming distorted or confused by virtue of having been articulated in a national context. Timothy Bainbridge, a European analyst, has commented correctly on this scenario. He says, "One day, the distinction between European politics and national politics may become clearer, but until then, the curiously hybrid nature of what currently passes for European political debate will continue to stand in the way of a clear understanding of the issues."

A crucial area that is attracting a

treaty pertaining to the division of power between the Commission and the member states. The issue is complicated as smaller states of the EU and a section of the European Parliament feel that there is a case for a stronger central executive given the fear of EU being dominated by four or five bigger member states. One thing is however accepted by everyone, that the EU must be fundamentally reformed if it is to expand. Analysts all over Europe quite often point out that the decision making procedures originally designed for six member states are already creaking under the strain of 15 separate national interests.

Another problem that confronts the EU is the multiplicity of official languages. Consequently, a controversial idea sometimes becomes still more controversial in translation, and in unforeseen ways. This aspect will in all probability be further compounded with the forthcoming enlargement. It will definitely impact on the facility with which integration will be taking place.

Another element that still has not developed into the European consciousness is the European Parlia-

ment. It has almost no say in revenue-raising and as such denied those opportunities (of which most national parliaments have at some time in their history taken advantage) of gaining power by withholding supply. Second, the classification of expenditure into compulsory and non-compulsory and the exclusion of certain types of expenditure (such as the European Development Fund) from the budget have denied the Parliament an opportunity to examine and amend the budget as a whole. Another area is the less than satisfactory and marginal involvement in the new pillars of the Maastricht Treaty, the Common Foreign and Security Policy and Justice and Home Affairs. The parliament has the right to be consulted and kept informed in both areas and may make recommendations, ask questions and hold debates, but it has no right to examine and amend proposals in either field, still less to exercise a right of veto. However, like everything else in the infrastructure of the EU, rules and regulations regarding the Parliament are also evolving. The institution has undertaken a journey to an unknown destination, but each step that it is taking is bringing it

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Evaluating celebrities

MEGASTHENEIS

HENRY Kissinger once dryly observed that the "nice thing about being a celebrity is that when you bore people, they think it is their fault". There is, to be sure, a certain public fascination for celebrity -- the high and the mighty, the good, the great and the successful and perhaps also the "illustrious obscure". Is there any sure recipe for achieving celebrity or success? The conventional answer that suggests itself would be effort and application, laced with a liberal dose of luck. Biographies of great people could provide added insights. In terms of readership or sales, I would doubt though whether even the most titillating or topical of biographies would cause Grisham, Stephen King, or J.K. Rowling to lose too much sleep. Lives and times and deeds of those holding high public office, the movers and shakers, who shape events and lives, their places in history, will, however, continue to fascinate, even after best-selling authors of a particular time make way for others.

In 1962, Professor Arthur M. Schlesinger Sr. of Harvard, chaired a group of 75 eminent scholars of the US Presidency; the object being to evaluate past Presidents and place them in categories ranging from "great" to "failure". Excluded from consideration were the incumbent Presidents and two others who had served too briefly for any meaningful assessment. After Professor Schlesinger Sr., his equally illustrious historian son, carried out periodic such surveys, as did other institutions also. Professor Schlesinger Jr. had an added advantage for such an exercise,

having served in a senior capacity on the staff of President Kennedy, an experience which surely afforded an insider's perspective of the Presidency.

In an article, written years later, Schlesinger recalled that Kennedy had once wondered how anyone, who had never occupied the Oval Office, could hope to appreciate the pulls, pressures and priorities of the Presidency. Kennedy perhaps had a point but I do not see

the original Schlesinger Sr. list of evaluation of 1962, compared to subsequent such evaluations, showed consistencies and a few changes as well as more names were added for consideration and study. At the apex of all Presidents, in the category of "great" were invariably "the big three", Lincoln, Washington, and Franklin Roosevelt. After them came, though not always in the same relative order, Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt and

made available for use by scholars. Those near the bottom of the lists have remained largely unchanged, Harding, Grant, Buchanan and somewhat surprisingly -- in the light of his foreign policy initiatives and successes -- Nixon.

In any evaluation exercise, it would appear that apart from innate merit or ability, there are also variables or imponderables to allow for. Opportunities must be available for anyone to show one's mettle and, of

did not have the Civil War to prove his sterling Presidential qualities. If did not die when or as he did -- a martyr to his cause and convictions -- how would he have handled a Congress bent upon vengeful policies towards the defeated South? Much better, I should think, than his successor, but how much better? Would his post-war reconstruction have matched his wartime leadership, if he had survived Booth? This is where the imponderable

imminent, he was prepared to don his uniform and once again command the army in battle. John Quincy Adams was elected to the House of Representatives and served with distinction. Andrew Johnson returned to the Senate shortly before his death. Theodore Roosevelt went off to Africa to shoot lions, rhino and buffalo, before opting once more for the hurly-burly of politics. Some of his trophies and collection of guns can be seen at his Oyster Bay residence, now a museum to his memory. Most former Presidents were satisfied, however, to be elder statesmen, write their memoirs and to deliver the occasional lecture before select audiences.

If former Presidents, as distinct from Presidents, are ever evaluated, I should be very surprised if pride of place did not go to Jimmy Carter. His Presidency may have been blighted, possibly by factors beyond his control, but here is a man of great decency, of transcendent integrity, known and respected for his "unprejudiced acceptance of people", who has continued to strive for peace even after he left office over two decades back. By awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to him this year, the Norwegian Committee has honoured itself as much as the man.

LIGHTEN UP
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scholars and academics abdicating what they perceive as a responsibility -- and a stimulating exercise also -- to appraise past Presidents and Presidencies. There is in effect no alternative means for such an exercise, as there would be insuperable difficulties if former Presidents, only, were to evaluate their predecessors. Could a former President dispassionately assess someone who may have been a political rival? More relevant even is the fact that the club or fraternity of former Presidents is too small or exclusive and biological laws will inevitably apply to ensure that it remains so. At the present time it comprises Presidents Ford 89, Carter 78, Reagan 91, Bush 78, and Clinton 56.

Woodrow Wilson. They were placed in the "great" or "near great" category, different in different evaluations. Following them closely are Andrew Jackson, Harry Truman, John Adams and Polk, in the "above average" or "near great" class.

In the 1962 list, Eisenhower was rated average and placed at No.22 out of 31 Presidents. In a survey of 49 Presidential scholars in 1982, he had moved up to 9th position. In 1991 about 500 scholars were polled. The results placed Ike at No.11. His overall rating had gone up in both polls to "above average". The change may not be unrelated to the fact that with the passage of years, more and more of his State Papers were no doubt de-classified and

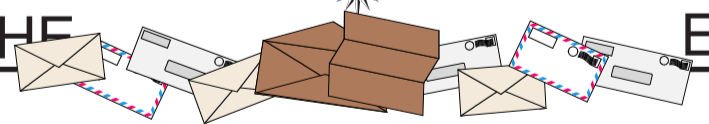
course, the element of luck is always a factor. It is not a coincidence that the top three were all "crisis Presidents", who were severely tested and acquitted themselves admirably. Great people are usually those with grand and clear visions; "a helm to grasp, a course to chart and a port to seek". Lincoln preserved the Union, Washington was the principal architect of the Union he preserved, while Franklin Roosevelt rallied the nation during the trauma of the Great Depression and provided farsighted and bold leadership during the Second World War.

One wonders though if Lincoln would have been placed at the pinnacle among Presidents, if he

factor comes in.

To rate and evaluate those who have held high public office is a very American intellectual exercise, stimulating, educative and also pleasurable. I am not aware if the attempt has ever been made to rate former Presidents. Or in other words, roles and activities of Presidents after they have relinquished office. Is there life after the apogee of the Presidency? Or must everything that comes or happens after the White House be something of an anti-climax? George Washington was content to retire to the life of a gentleman farmer in his beloved Mount Vernon. However, when war with France seemed probable if not

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



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

"Screaming for human rights"

In reply to Mr. Nazmul Ahsan (December 11), I agree with the points you have raised. However, I object to one thing you said in your letter: of having no compassion towards alleged "criminals" who died in custody. I believe this attitude exemplifies what is wrong with our society. Extra-judicial killings can never be justified. Human life is precious and to condone the demise of any life under torture is barbaric. I can understand your feelings. My subconscious mind also wants to see AC Akram, Sweden Aslam and Ershad Shikdar meet the same fate as their victims did but I also know the society will lose its moral edge over these individuals. We have courts of law with powers to sentence a convicted person to death. Only the Judiciary should have the prerogative to determine whether society can condemn someone to death or not. Torturing someone to death is a crime and remember, to punish a crime, you cannot resort to another crime. Two wrongs do not make a right. **Yahya**

Arsenic contamination

Contamination of tubewell water by geologically-derived arsenic poses a serious threat to health in Bangladesh. Estimation of arsenic exposure is difficult. The total concentration of arsenic in drinking water is generally used as an exposure index. However, this method does not include exposure through sources other than water. In Bangladesh, rice and curry are usually cooked with a substantial amount of water which is sometimes contaminated with arsenic. Water that is not absorbed during rice cooking is discarded by inverting the cooking pan. Thus the actual amount of arsenic in cooked rice could not be either used, by chelating the arsenic in water by binding on rice grains, or decreased if water-soluble arsenic is released from rice into the water to be discarded. Since an adult Bangladeshi man consume an average 1500 gram of cooked rice per day, which contain at least one litre of drinking water, water intake through cooked rice would add substantially to the amount of

arsenic ingested. Cooked rice and curry could be an important source of arsenic if it is boiled in arsenic contaminated water.

Recently a research group reported that the amount of arsenic in cooked rice was 10 to 35 per cent higher than predicted, suggesting either that arsenic in the water is chelated by rice grains, or that the arsenic become concentrated during cooking process, because of evaporation. Furthermore, it would be raise concerns about the amount of arsenic retained in curry, the most popular dish, which is cooked with a large amount of water and simmered for a long time. It may be better to use less water for cooking foods. Also, people must use surface water (pond, lake, river water) for cooking and drinking purposes. Because heating kills all dangerous germs during cooking/boiling. Arsenic could not be removed or inactivated by heating/boiling. Rain water is a very good source of safe water. Surface water is comparatively free from arsenic contamination. Social workers/NGOs and teachers should teach the general people to overcome the severe arsenic problem in

Bangladesh. **Dr. Jahangir Alam and Khurshida Begum**
Kayama University, Japan

City of shopping malls

Gradually Dhaka is not only becoming the city of pollution and traffic jam but it is also becoming the city of shopping malls. Shopping malls are sprouting up in any free space available along the main roads. Sometimes, I wonder how many people of this city can really afford to shop in those huge expensive malls, when more than half of the people living here are poor beyond the poverty line! Walking down the street makes one feel like there are more fancy shopping malls in this city compared to customers. The money the rich businessmen are utilising for propagating their business by building huge shopping complexes could have made a lot of people of this poor country live above the poverty line.

I would like to humbly ask our honourable Minister of Works, Mr Abbas, "why do these multimillionaire businessmen get permission to build expensive shopping malls within every twenty feet along the

main road in residential areas like Dhanmondi, Gulshan etc?" **Zobaida Mirza**
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Grading system

The grading system was first introduced in 2001. I was a student of the first batch of this system. I remember that the grading system was announced just 3/4 days before the exams. And the announcement caused a great deal of confusion among the students. Nobody knew clearly what was happening. And the examinees had to sit for the exams without having a proper idea of the newly applied grading system.

Now as we're preparing ourselves for the HSC 2003, the Government has introduced grading system for HSC as well. And we, the examinees are once again as confused as we were during our SSC exam. **MD Ashiqur Rahman**
Notredame College, Dhaka

Who will save the Iraqi people?

Except for Pol Pot in Cambodia, Saddam Hussein is the only tyrant

who has used weapons of mass destruction (WMD) against his own people. Though Pol Pot had no WMD, he killed more people through his weapons of mass execution, i.e. torture and starvation. The UN did nothing to stop Pol Pot, only Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia put a stop to it. But Saddam has used most sophisticated weapons against his own people, killing 5,000 Kurds and maiming thousands more through chemical attacks. Kurds' only crime was to ask for autonomy for their region. Still we frequently hear this question: "Why is Iraq singled out when India, Pakistan and Israel have nuclear weapons?" The answer to this question is: Saddam Hussein. Here is a brutal leader as megalomaniac as Hitler, but lacks Hitler's conventional military might. He is trying to compensate for his lack of conventional military capability through developing weapons of mass destruction and he is likely to use them again against the Kurds if he is allowed to do so. The United States worries about Saddam's using the WPD against his neighbours, but the real concern should be about his using the WMD against Iraqi Kurds, who

might face total annihilation if the Americans abandon them once again. As long as Saddam Hussein is in power, Iraq's Kurdish minority and Shia majority will always face a great danger. As Prof. Salim Mansur, professor of political science at the University of Western Ontario, recently wrote in *The Toronto Sun*: "Saddam's compliance with the security Council Resolution 1441 will ensure his survival, and liberal democracies will proclaim this to be a victory of UN multilateral diplomacy. It will be, however, a hollow victory purchased by confining Iraqis once again to the silence of their gulag." Who will save Saddam's Iraqi victims? **Mahmood Elahi**
Ontario, Canada

US on Iraq

On the one hand the USA preaches human rights, liberty and peace and on the other hand repeatedly threatens to invade Iraq on the pretext of destroying alleged weapons of mass destruction. Compared to Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction which

are yet to be proven, USA is so solid, practical and confirmed owner and possess highest quality and quantity of chemical, biological weapons and nuclear bombs. The USA propaganda weapon is also most powerful and matchless.

Washington says it is afraid and apprehensive of Iraqi attack on the USA and so Iraq must be destroyed. Is it not ridiculous, silly and fantastic to think that a poor and small country like Iraq would attack USA?

Following the US sponsored UNSC resolution it appears that Darwin's theory of 'Survival of the fittest' is dead and a new theory of US President George Bush 'Survival of the mightiest' has surfaced in the world.

We however appreciate the statesmanship of President Saddam Hussein as he accepted the UNSC resolution in the interest of world peace. We would request the UNSC to fix a time and date for the completion of inspection report of the UN weapons inspectors and to withdraw the UN economic sanctions on Iraq. **O. H. Kabir, Wari, Dhaka**