

Manik Saha murder sequel

Other journalists threatened, need protection

THE suspension of the officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station in Khulna for allegedly neglecting investigations into the brutal murder of journalist Manik Saha could have occurred for good reasons. Yet, it cannot but make us worry about the delay being entailed in solving the case. The investigation officer couldn't make any headway even almost four weeks after the killing, let alone arrest any prime suspect. He apparently failed to provide any satisfactory explanation to the higher police authority for the fiasco. It sounds unbelievable that no progress was made in the investigation pertaining to a crime that took place in broad daylight in a busy street.

It is remindful of the fate that befell other murder cases of assault on or murder of journalists. We have seen investigations getting off to a wrong start; then on the failure of certain individuals, changing hands and even departments with no positive outcome in the end. The whole investigation processes seemingly drifted into oblivion.

We sincerely hope that that's not going to happen with the murder case concerning Manik Saha. Granted, the temporary suspension of the official was unavoidable, but we would also like to see what corrective steps the government takes to ensure speedy justice.

It is the fundamental duty of a democratic government to provide protection to media persons who have been constantly working under threats in that region of the country. We are naturally anxious about their security, especially after the latest death threats issued to some eleven journalists in Rajshahi by an outlawed group. They had issued similar death warrants to journalists in Sathkira last week. We want them to be caught as soon as possible; we urge the authorities not to take these threats lightly and provide full protection to the journalists at risk. We have already lost many a brave and fearless scribe; we don't want to lose any more.

Piracy at Ctg Port

Question of goodwill

LAST year there were 35 reported incidents of buccaneering in and around Chittagong Port, the country's premier entrepot. Barely into the second month of the current year, there have been five cases of piracy already. The latest spate in the incidence has been particularly horrifying. A Mongolian flag carrier, imported for scrapping and waiting in the outer anchorage, was pillaged at the wee hours of Saturday. When the gang swooped on the ship, two brave watchmen tried to resist them as the freebooters were plundering goods from the vessel. They made good their escape leaving behind the 'injured' security men, who according to an official version, were rescued by a tugboat and sent on to Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH).

Strangely, as the Prothom Alo put it, the watchmen bore no visible wound-marks and yet they died. The hospital sources said the two ill-fated young guards Shahidul Islam and Mofazzul Huq were brought dead, so that the former had to send the corpses for autopsy. The mystery needs to be solved.

Such a high incidence of piracy at the outer anchorage can only undermine the credibility of the port which has already been on the line for other reasons that need hardly any elaboration. Unrest, wildcat strikes, slow-down in operations, high demurrage etc had earned a bad name for the port. While we have come out of some of these problems, piracy is posing a threat to the competitiveness of the port. Already, the IMO has put us next to Indonesia in terms of incidence of piracy in our sea waters. The image can definitely be changed by energetic surveillance at sea. We must be able to provide whatever equipment and manpower are needed to beef up security in and around the port area, outer anchorage, continental shelf and our economic zone.

The question of settling issues, not the scores



M ABDUL HAFIZ

“THERE is a vacant throne,” Mussolini, the fascists’ redoubtable guru had said once, “in every country in Europe waiting for a capable man to fill it.” Bangladesh however has seldom a throne vacant but a vulnerable citadel of power to myriad aspirants. Even as it looks that the grabbers are free to swoop on it, the question remains if that can be done. Even if a power equation fits in it is bound to elicit at least a stormy debate.

True, Bangladesh today is an ideal case for any aspirant to grab power from a useless lot and try to deliver, notwithstanding the consequence. For it is equally immoral to watch in silence the country going haywire. But the problems are with regards to the ground rules that do not exist. How those capable are to, after all, replace how many of those incapable? How does that transfer take place in a democratic polity like Bangladesh? There are many more connected problem to be resolved before any new dispensation is to be in place.

Yet, few disagree that the country lacks governance -- let alone the question of what kind of it. Indeed there seems to be none in charge. Seldom before have things appeared so bleak in this country. The problem is not only of not hav-

ing a credible government, the society is in fact withering away and the country is adrift with no order in force. In a country that can set no moral standard the musclemán rule the roost and the criminals have their field day.

Even at a belated stage the people with compunction and gumption have started raising their finger -- however inadequate the steps may be. But equally inadequate are the right direction and correct gestures. While most of them are smeared with political motives the political crass of our political class is indeed obvious. Some have opted for issuing ultimatum which is by itself fascist in manner in fighting fascism -- and thus unworkable.

This country has a tradition of getting over bigger crises and often with success. True, a non-responsive establishment needs to be shaken up with the momentum of stiff mass-movement but only to educate and perhaps build up public opinion to be applied at the appropriate time, but certainly not as a tool for the transfer of authority. But, as things appear the main political party/parties opposing the government are doing exactly the same. Nevertheless we will have to

address the issues and questions confronting the nation at that level. And while doing so we will have to settle the issues and not score points. But for over last three decades we scored points but settled none of the issues existing between the parties or social cleavages.

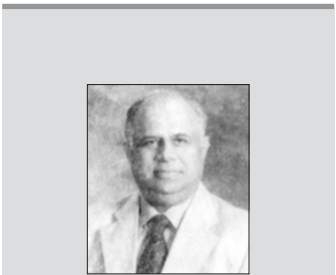
A nation that can achieve independence almost bare-handed can certainly remove the stigma of incapability whether in governance, crushing terror, setting order or bringing propriety in the society. The only pre-requisite is perhaps to be able to bury the hatchet over the pettiness dividing and weakening us. We will, of course, fight terror, corruption and other social evils, as far as possible, from a national platform to make the whole nation beneficiary of it. Fascism is not much of a doctrine. It is more of a method. The method has perhaps been brutally used by the establishment to vandalise or repress the political opponents in this country. But in an exercise where the goal is national catharsis let the method be humane to derive all of its benefit.

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PERSPECTIVES

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Nuclear fallout



IKRAM SEHGAL
writes from Karachi

PAKISTAN has had a bad week, one can only hope that the “damage control” being attempted by the Government will be successful. It was a mortifying sight to see Dr Abdul Qadeer Khan (AQK), father of Pakistan’s nuclear programme, requesting for clemency in a vintage 1960s-style Soviet-type confession. AQK confirmed that he was involved in “unauthorised” nuclear proliferation, that he had not only passed out nuclear secrets but also supplied critical equipment in the manufacture of nuclear weapons to Iran, Libya and North Korea. For those of us who have always taken him to be a national hero, his statement that whatever he did was in “good faith” was a non-starter, at best a fig leaf of a cover-up that will not satisfy the hounds of various ilk that are baying at Pakistan’s door.

A man with a super-ego, AQK occupied dominant stage within the country, he had many pursuits other than nuclear energy, being afflicted with the recurring diseases rampant among our ruling elite, a constant need for media exposure and a penchant to acquire vast amount of real estate. Obviously there was talk, this was muted given the superhero status of the man we revered for giving us an effective “alternative solution” to shore up our conventional defence deterrent. A nuclear

device is a nuclear device but is of no consequence without a delivery system. We do not have to make any apologies for the underworld apparatus AQK set up, it gave us invaluable military goodies that were denied to us by sanction or otherwise, more importantly a potential missile capability, no better demonstration of this combined non-conventional deterrent than during the military stand-off with India during the better part of 2002.

corporate entity) for his role in helping the clandestine operations to acquire nuclear equipment. There is invariably compounded risk in consummating a relationship taking place over an extended period of time with the underworld, those in contact start to acquire the attributes and tastes of those they come into contact with.

Given the absolute authority AQK wielded for a programme critical to Pakistan, the “no questions asked”

Our democracy: A charge to keep

ESAM SOHAIL

THE well founded rumours that the country will witness an even more rigorous round of political confrontation after Eid gives one pause for concern. The street politics of agitation, rooted in intolerance and branching into destruction, have been an unending ritual in our post-1990 democratic dispensation. Being acutely detrimental to the survival of our democracy, such politics of confrontation are not at all helpful in keeping a very important trust of our own people and those abroad.

Our democracy is a trust to oversee on behalf of our people. It is also a charge to keep on behalf of many others like ourselves who are watching. For long it has been argued, and not just by Westerners, that liberal democracy is a privilege suited to the colder climes inhabited by Caucasians only. In other words - this thinking goes -- millions inhabiting the developing world, specially the Muslim part thereof, are better off ruled by diktat or fiat. Most studies, then and now, tend to support the argument. In 2002 the democracy think-tank Freedom House specifically authored a report titled *Islam's Democracy Deficit*, pointing out the lack of representative governments in the Islamic world. And yet there is Bangladesh.

A fully participatory electoral democracy, Bangladesh's record in the Muslim world is perhaps matched only by the West African nation of Mali. Even that draw of a record is questionable: in large tracts of Mali, gripped by a low level ethnic conflict since the 1980s, 'democracy' is measured by whether the loitering militias of the darker skinned Shongyars or lighter hued Touaregs have more guns on a given day. Beyond Bangladesh and Mali, are the more or less functioning democratic structures in the Muslim lands of Turkey, Indonesia

Intolerance bordering on hatred is the singularly most evident feeling between the two camps that have alternated in democratic power. That intolerance has been exploited by politically sheltered gangsters and criminals who have turned parts of the country into havens of violence and dens of corruption. If the common person on the street is not entirely thrilled by the lofty notions of a pluralist democracy that presides over unchecked criminality, can we blame him or her?

and Malaysia. None of them qualify for the 'democratic' appellation in the strictest term since the Turks and Pakistanis have a very involved military that can veto many key policies and the two Southeast Asian neighbours have yet to see a peaceful transition of power through general elections. That leaves Bangladesh standing alone as the closest thing to a participatory, pluralist, liberal democracy in the Muslim world.

We can count our blessings. After the 1991 changeover, the military has left for the barracks and the politicians are in full charge of politics. Unlike Indonesia and Malaysia we have not witnessed the corrosive effects of a quarter-century long 'democratic dictatorship' where the person in power somehow never lost ostensibly open elections. In contrast to Pakistan and Mali, we do not have a long history of widespread low intensity ethnic or sectarian conflict which has now been basically reduced to armed gangsters roaming the country paths and city streets to kill anyone considered the 'enemy'. In even sharper contrast to all those countries, Bangladesh boasts an overwhelmingly homogenous ethnic makeup.

Yet all those blessings we have seemingly let slide. Intolerance bordering on hatred is the singularly most evident feeling between the two camps that have alternated in democratic power. That intolerance has been exploited by politically sheltered gangsters and criminals who have turned parts of the country into havens of violence and dens of corruption. If the common person on the street is not entirely thrilled by the lofty notions of a pluralist democracy that presides over unchecked criminality, can we blame him or her? This then is the fundamental problem of faith we face. Our faith in our democracy is *incredible* but politicians should not automatically assume that it is *infinite*. Their intramural intolerance and the resultant constant aura of violence can bring us perilously close someday to questioning the efficacy of our democratic system.

That day we would have lost more than just our faith. We would have failed to keep the charge of that noble example to the Islamic world that history had entrusted us with in 1991.

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AS I SEE IT

"Authorising" nuclear exports may be an exercise in bad judgement but because Pakistan has long been accused of nuclear proliferation for the last two decades, nobody can claim ignorance. The personal profit made ignored the deadly fallout on the nation...Unless all those in the supply chain are taken to task we are no better than old South/Latin American "banana republics" of yesteryear.

Our dilemma was how to give the world its pound of flesh while cutting our hero down to size for this damaging compromise of our national security? Whatever the future may hold for AQK and his fellow nuclear proliferators, the man had a major role in preserving the sovereign integrity of Pakistan. AQK's achievements were a prime consideration in treating him with kidgloves in giving him a pardon.

Governments cannot have relationships with the underworld without paying a steep price. When the US used the mafia during the Sicilian (and later the Italian) campaign during World War 2, it had to give out pardons to many ruthless mafia "dons", among them "Lucky" Luciano. This was a US Presidential discretion because of utmost national security considerations in the waging of war. One of the major known Pakistani smugglers of the 60s and 70s became a major society figure (and a successful

mode made the "untouchable" status a double-edged weapon, the consequences of which Pakistan will certainly reap and which has become something of a bad precedent. The gray area was how these nuclear scientists could get away with it under the noses of our intelligence agencies. The blind eye of an official sanction made for a ready opportunity for exploitation for personal gain. Our intelligence apparatus became bloated during the 80s Afghan war, the sheer volume of logistics giving an opportunity for proliferation of rampant corruption through the broad spectrum of the system. Leaving aside the private sales of military goodies, what about the CIA cash that was meant to be doled out for the Afghan "Mujahideen"? How much was skimmed off into private accounts? In a society that worships money but turns a blind eye to how it was made, accountability is not only extremely selective but very

wares. Pakistan's credibility can be somewhat restored by having AQK outline the whole structure he dealt with in this "export-oriented" nuclear racket, how he will do this while protecting our "import" conduit is a mind-boggling Catch-22! The surfacing of names of various middlemen from other countries could also help deflect international cynosure presently firmly focused on Pakistan out of motivated interest of hiding their own weaknesses in the system. Information given by us may help other governments to uncover some of their security deficiencies.

The government already has done detailed interrogation of the nuclear scientists and their immediate security and administrative staff. While one cannot condone what AQK and his scientist colleagues have done for personal benefit, their punishment can be "plea-bargained", at the very least including confiscation of all assets

obtained illegally. The fact that they had developed the nuclear potential for Pakistan makes a case for mitigating their punishment. In contrast the administrative and security staff must face double jeopardy, their job was not only to protect the scientists but also Pakistan's nuclear assets and secrets, their personal greed in allowing 'exports' far transcended their services for which they drew salaries. A detailed multi-faceted

enquiry must purge the establishment of those who have obtained personal benefit from the "nuclear exports" by helping directly and indirectly in this illegal activity, whether the person is from the government or from the private sector.

The chain of security command must also be cleared of wrongdoing, i.e. if anyone was involved in "authorising" these shipments and whether such individuals were in on the "grave train". There should be no sacred cows whether in the military executive or in our intelligence agencies, ignoring corruption because of national security considerations will create a bad precedent. "Authorising" nuclear exports may be an exercise in bad judgement but because Pakistan has long been accused of nuclear proliferation for the last two decades, nobody can claim ignorance. The personal profit made ignored the deadly fallout on

the nation. Not least important are the private bankers who opened (and managed) the accounts for illegal money, whether in Pakistan or abroad. The private businessmen who took part in the transaction knew the consequences of seeking profit incentive.

Unless all those in the supply chain are taken to task we are no better than old South/Latin American "banana republics" of yesteryear. The media was paid to build up a favourable image of AQK, why not list the names of those in the fourth estate paid to embellish his reputation? In the final analysis a deliberate campaign was launched to mislead the public and evoke emotions in the streets, almost successfully inciting a political crisis that was headed off by the President, something from which we have not yet fully extricated ourselves. "Patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel", these media persons have to be exposed to the public so that their grandiose plans of "strategic defiance" are shown to be smoke meant to camouflage their own misdeemeanors.

To stop further damage to national security, there must be a swift closure by decisive punitive action against those found culpable on this grave national security issue. Presently the situation is fluid, a cover-up will open a Pandora's Box for an inimical western media waiting to exploit our weaknesses. While understanding the concern for national security, no individual is more important than the State and the State is presently under open-ended threat. Only by making the guilty accountable will we restore credibility among the comity of nations.

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OPINION

Consensus to check energy system loss

MD. ZIAUL ISLAM

THE people of Bangladesh are blessed with natural gas energy resource. Implementing pragmatic future policy regarding better utilisation of natural gas can play a vital role in our sustainable growth in the energy sector. The advantage of using versatile natural gas such as methane as a fuel is that when methane is burnt in presence of air, the combustible by-product is free from oxides of nitrogen and sulphur, and also contains negligible amount of particulate matters. Oxides of nitrogen and sulphur as well as particulate matters increasing day by day in the atmosphere can pose vulnerable health hazard in the long run. If we do not take positive steps to control misuse of our natural gas reserve in this volatile international energy market then the country may face serious consequences in the future.

For better understanding of this problem, let us at first take into account the electricity supply system loss. The people of Bangladesh are envisaging about 30 percent system loss problem in electricity supply system. This system loss is mainly due to the following facts

(1) The government management is facing difficulty in tracing or tracking down undocumented electricity connections taken from the main source lines by some miscreants who are pilfering the supply.

(2) Millions of dollars pending electricity bills the government management is having

difficulty to collect.

(3) Some negligent and dishonest meter reading inspectors linked with some corrupt officials working in electricity supply companies are playing their part in this system loss issue.

Modernised preventive government management and policy should be introduced to subdue corruption loss. Electronic card system such as debit card or some other advanced computer based electronic device to track down illegal electric connection lines may help mitigate this system loss.

Now let us consider the system loss of natural gas supply through pipelines for domestic purposes in houses, restaurants, hotels and hospitals. System loss in natural gas sector is much higher than electricity because of the following reasons--

(1) The consumers are deliberately or carelessly misusing natural gas. It is noticed that some consumers are keeping the gas burners or ovens on even at time when they are not cooking. Some consumers are misusing natural gas in drying up wet clothes or trying to keep their rooms warm during the winter.

(2) Indifference and lack of awareness towards usefulness of natural gas is a prevailing practice among the consumers.

(3) The government management and policy makers are facing difficulty to trace or detect undocumented gas connection lines.

(4) The government management is having difficulty to control corruption in the natural gas sector.

(5) Pipeline leakage loss is usually not repaired in time.

Under these circumstances if gas meters are introduced then gas misuse may be reduced to a certain extent, however it is not significant enough to prevent major system loss. We know that some reputed companies are doing monopoly business by supplying compressed natural gas (CNG) and liquid petrol gas (LPG) in portable cylinders. If the government makes the market more competitive by encouraging many other companies to come forward supplying gas by cylinder then the price of gas in cylinder can also be reduced significantly that will certainly have positive influence on our economy. Mandatory gradual change of gas supply system from pipeline to cylinder can significantly reduce the system loss in the natural gas sector. For the sake of national interest, the domestic consumers enjoying natural gas supply facility via pipeline system need to take initiative and comply with the cylinder gas system guided by their own conscience.

The quality of gas cylinder and its accessories must meet the present international safety standards to avoid contingency mishap. Each gas cylinder is quite heavy to carry by any individual person. Each company needs to have meticulous plan for supplying gas cylinders to different grocery shops in the residential and commercial areas so that the consumers never feel shortage of supply. The grocery shops

qualifying to sell gas cylinders must have well planned facilities for delivering the products to their respective customers' destination. The consumers can assist in bearing the expenditure of the gas cylinder and its accessories so that this issue does not become a financial encumbrance to the government.

In the case of industrial purpose, it is convenient to supply natural gas via pipelines with three gas meters installed at each pipeline connection to prevent system loss. The government agency, the supplier and the consumer each should install their own gas meters to monitor system loss.

If we can prevent system loss in the natural gas sector then gradually we will be able to proliferate our capability of supplying gas throughout the whole country. We need to make constructive decision. Confidence building motivational strategy in the energy sector can be conducive to economic growth. God helps those who help themselves. Many countries are helping themselves conserving fuel energy by using gas cylinder instead of gas pipeline system. The government in power may feel the risk of becoming unpopular trying to implement this project. Therefore, the government in power and the opposition parties need to settle their differences and work together to make it successful.

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Expansion of parliament

MASUD RANA SARKER

THE government of Bangladesh has decided to expand the parliament to 450 seats without negotiating with the opposition parties. The opposition on the other hand has not been able to oppose the government's decision with reason and rationality. They have shown the conventional opposition to this decision just for the sake of opposition. This is very sad that there is no constructive opposition and co-operation between the government and the opposition. Expansion of parliament may look, on the surface, as greater decentralisation of power. But deep down, it is not to serve any purpose for the good of people of Bangladesh. It will have the same effect as the creation of Upazila Administration by General Ershad had on the politics and people of Bangladesh. General Ershad created Upazila in the name of decentralisation of politics. But this upazila system created some mini-leaders and deputy mini-leaders at thana level who were mainly started as brokers between administration, police stations and the people. It became rather a professional livelihood than a means to get involved in the process of democracy.

In every upazila , there sprang up a political coterie around the chairman. These coterie were no other persons than muggers, toll collectors, smug-

glers in disguise who were nothing but a social burden. This system increased corruption. This coterie controlled the power to transfer the local level officials to the convenience of their interest. Therefore the public officials often had to bribe them lest they should have been transferred to the most inconvenient work stations. This system basically decentralised corruption. The more Upazila chairmen we created, the more coterie grew up and the more gangsters and vandals sprang up, destroying the whole texture of society.

But if we think deeply, the idea of Upazila system or the decentralisation of government or the idea of local government is not bad in itself. If the upazilas were created with at least two thanas together, it would have meant less coterie around the upazila chairman thereby maintaining the check and balance between the bureaucracy and the local government. Decentralisation of government does not mean that the tools of government have to be moved to each and every family of Bangladesh. If our system of governance cannot put check and balance on operation, it is meaningless. So a new way of Upazila system has to be worked out.

Now the BNP-led government has decided to increase the number of parliament members by 150. This is too

much, given the fact that ours is a very poor country and it will cost a lot of money for the national exchequer. On the other hand it will create more and more coterie and parasites and eat into our society. Since the 1990s, terrorism and vandalism have increased to an intolerable extent. The rural people were safer before but now political terrorism has been ruralised too. The expansion of parliament will for now may help to reduce the scuffle for nominations for the next election. But in order for the political parties to implement their political agenda, we the public cannot let the country fall in the hands of hoodlams more than ever before by supporting this stance of parliament expansion. There has been no provision for direct election to the women's seats in the parliament. This is not showing any respect to women either. Women do not need sympathy, they need equality. The indirect selective procedure for MPs will always leave the door open for vested interest. The women thus becoming MPs may be biologically women but will never represent the political and social women. Let the nation get rid of this hypocrisy for good.

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