

## Why Khosru had to go?

There more to it than meets the eye

THE so-called cabinet changes are a whimper, instead of a roar these jolly well could be. A clearly prevalent public demand lately echoed by Young Turks in the BNP parliamentary meeting for weeding out certain corrupt and inefficient ministers was there to cash in on.

At the very first opportunity of being given the outlet for free speech, some BNP MPs had named certain ministers whose back they wanted to see as the former 'brought slur' on the ruling party. At least they were speaking for their constituencies thereby reflecting the wider public mood for downsizing the government which looked pre-eminently feasible by the manifest inefficiency on the part of some ministers. So, by one broad stroke felling the failed ministers, the ruling party leadership could endear itself both to the outspoken MPs and the people at large.

The person whose exit from the cabinet was most vociferously in demand -- namely, ex-home minister Altaf Hossain -- has been moved to his new position as commerce minister. Who can blame him for feeling 'promoted' when the government itself has pooh-phooed his failure as home minister. Isn't his removal from the home ministry a recognition of the public criticism that he has failed in his previous position? Then, such an active ministry like that of home affairs is being placed under a state minister. Granted, the prime minister has taken it over for the time being, but with her onerous responsibility as the country's chief executive, it's a portfolio she would need to be unburdened of at the earliest.

Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury has had to resign his commerce ministership reportedly because of the price spiral and row over the Taiwanese trade outfit in Dhaka. We believe the real reasons are different. If improving the performance of the commerce ministry was the real reason then how could the portfolio be given to someone whose singular failure in his previous post is not only well known but also acknowledged by all. Similarly we wonder what purpose is being served by redesignating state minister for foreign affairs Reaz Rahman as advisor to the same ministry.

What is the rationale behind the 'flash in the pan'? What message the government wishes to signal through the move? If the purpose was to ease off non-performing ministers, the most infamous one has been given a new lease of life; and besides, there are so many other inefficient ministers who should have been seen off.

The so-called reshuffle is more a product of rivalry within the cabinet than the outcome of a well-thought-out corrective process. Patently, fringing-touching and cosmetic, it reflects the same strand of ad-hoc thinking that has become the hallmark of governance. There is no pattern, no sense of direction that one can discern in the otherwise dramatic move. It is a gimmick; it's thoroughly disappointing.

## Theft at Shantiniketan

The priceless articles must be recovered

IT is sad news that some rare manuscripts together with the Nobel medal awarded to poet Rabindranath Tagore have been stolen from Shantiniketan. We feel that the sanctity of Tagore's heritage has been vandalised through this act of criminality.

The articles spirited away are prized possessions of not only the Bengalees, but also the people of the subcontinent as a whole. They are priceless mementos to be unflinchingly preserved for the glory, inspiration and enlightenment of the posterity.

That the debased operators allowed their crass monetary instincts to hurt the finer sentiments of Tagore heritage lovers is a shock that we will have great difficulty living down. It is not known under what circumstances the invaluable things were stolen, but there is reason to believe, if we go by the press account of the incident, that security lapses made the task of the burglars rather easy. Millions in this part of the world revere Tagore and are emotionally attached to what he left for his admirers. They are really shocked. Some of Tagore's great treasures have slipped off the hands of their custodians. It is agonizing to think that the medal and manuscripts have fallen into the hands of some criminals totally ignorant of their aesthetic and heritage value.

We hope that the West Bengal government's drive to track down the criminals and recover the priceless possessions of Tagore will be successful sooner than later. The drive has the blessings of the countless fans of the late Nobel laureate, who is still the prime source of inspiration in the fields of literature and arts to people in this region.

# Quo Vadis Middle East?

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

BRITISH daily Financial Times described Israeli assassination of Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin as an extremely stupid action. Even the Telegraph a steadfast supporter of Israel felt that the assassination looks like a serious mistake. Berlin-based Die Welt wrote that the Sheikh's violent death forced moderate Palestinians into false solidarity with the Hamas while a Munich-based paper called it a politically stupid action. Cologne's Stadt Anzeiger wrote that any one that uses the state-of-the-art weapons technology to kill a paralysed wheel chair bound man on an open street can no longer claim that this is legitimate self-defence against terrorists. New York Times failed to see how the martyrdom of Sheikh Yassin would make Israel any safer. The paper feared that the killing would redouble the efforts of Hamas to avenge Sheikh Yassin's death, and that the US war on terror may suffer as moderate Arab states would feel compelled to distance themselves from the US.

While the Arab and the Muslim world have understandably voiced strong condemnation of the murder of Sheikh Yassin seen as a continuation of Israeli policy to decapitate the Palestinian leadership and to terrorise the Palestinian population saner Western leaders have also condemned Israeli act of murder. British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw condemning the assassination found the act unacceptable, unjustified and unlikely to achieve its objective. UNSG Kofi Anan strongly condemned the killing and reiterated that extrajudicial killings were against international law and would not help the search for a peaceful resolution of the Middle East crisis. The Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary and arbitrary executions of the UN

Human Rights was aghast at the planned and deliberate extrajudicial execution of Sheikh Yassin. She expressed her deepest concerns over the use of brute force which would lead to escalating violence and urged the Israeli government not to resort to targeted shootings against civilian population. UNSC's open debate on the assassination brought to the fore once again the Bush administration's bias in favour of Israel.

Europe and the US once again appear divided on the question of

assassination as treacherous murder. Hague Convention IV described treachery as feigning a desire to negotiate a truce and then resorting to murder. Hugo Grotius, the father of international law, abhorred assassination by treacherous means. It is now common knowledge that President Reagan had codified President Ford's executive order prohibiting any person employed or acting on behalf of the US government to engage in or conspire to engage in assassination. Perhaps till Clinton administration such restriction was

such dichotomous contrasts. According to the noted writer Ziauddin Sardar (*Development and the Locations of Eurocentrism*) the real powers of the West are not located in its economic muscle or technological might; rather in its power to define, for example, freedom progress and civil behaviour, law, tradition and community, what is real and what it means to be human. The non-Western civilization, adds Ziauddin Sardar, have simply to accept these definitions or be defined out of existence. Sardar's assertion is rele-

As a result of Sheikh Yassin's assassination Palestinian Authority will find it almost impossible to dissuade the Hamas from taking revenge. Moderate Arab states, already jittery from Bush administration's missionary zeal to democratise the Arab world, will be hesitant to embrace the American approach because the Arabs, in particular the youth, find American blind support to Israel as a betrayal of their loyalty to the US.

The Western calculation that Iran's clerical problem will solve itself due to the demographic pressure of sixty percent youth population who owe little allegiance to the clerical supremacy may prove to be wrong when young Iranians see such flagrant violation of a most basic human right to live go unpunished. Is the so-called security of Israel (possessing undeclared number of nuclear weapons) being threatened by Arab states (who have already assured Israel its right to exist and can do nothing to undo it anyway) be so important to the West that it should refuse to recognise the widening gulf between the Islamic and the Christian worlds?

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terrorism .US ambassador Negroponte's refusal to vote for the Algerian resolution in the UNSC denouncing Israel for the murder of Sheikh Yassin unless his role as Hamas spiritual leader and thereby describing him as a terrorist was mentioned in the draft resolution was to force the Council members to lend a sort of credibility to the Israeli policy of assassination. Negroponte's description of Sheikh Yassin as a preacher of hatred, glorifier of suicide bombers, and as a saboteur of two state solution of the Palestine issue evades the basic question as to why a paralysed wheel chair bound old man could command the respect and loyalty of so many Palestinians. It has been alleged that Israel could not have pursued its genocidal policy in Palestine without the logistical support of the US military and intelligence and political support of the American political and media establishments. Washington Post (in August 2001) ran op-

It is interesting to note that ever since the six days war Israel has been trying to solve the dilemma as to how to keep both the occupied lands and their resources without taking any responsibility for the governance of the people living in the occupied lands. Particularly after the collapse of the Camp David negotiations at the fag end of the Clinton administration Israel has been pursuing a course of military aggression and provocation calculated to arouse Palestinian retaliation which is then used as a pretext for the assassination of Palestinian leaders. Even a cursory glance at the lives of Menachem Begin, Ehud Barak and Ariel Sharon would suffice to establish the premise that political assassination has long been an established policy of successive Israeli governments.

At this point one may wish to enquire into the legality of assassination as a tool of state craft. Emmerich de Vattel described

respected. It is not known whether as a result of nine-eleven terrorist attacks US policy on assassination of foreign leaders had changed. One can, however, argue that terrorists and non-state actors who fall under the category of illegal combatants are denied the benefits granted to legal combatants under the Geneva Convention on War. It appears from the discussions of the on-going deliberations of the National Commission investigating the September 11 attacks that assassination of Osama bin Laden was considered. Here one must make a distinction between bin Laden and Sheikh Yassin. The war against al-Qaeda (and terror) of which bin Laden is a part and parcel has been sanctioned by the world. But the assassination of Sheikh Yassin is not morally or legally defensible. Nelson Mandela and Jomo Kenyatta were once branded as terrorists but later garlanded as saviour of their people. History is replete with

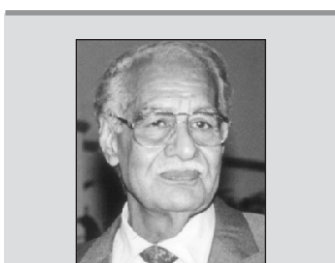
example of the BJP is before us. In the ruling NDA, it has practically all the key portfolios -- Home, External Affairs, Finance, Industry and Communications.

Whatever the alliances may cost to the BJP or the Congress, they are good for the strength of Indian democracy. No party can go autocratic. Regional aspirations will get represented at the centre. Even the BJP which once thrived on its slogan of one culture and one party has changed into a firm believer of the coalition politics. Vajpayee's main point of campaign is that he has successfully run the 24-party government for the full five-year term.

Vote-wise, both the BJP and the Congress manipulate caste and other identities. They find that caste factor counts not only in Bihar but also in UP and other Hindi-speaking states. It is, however, the failure of communists and liberals who have not been able to retrieve people from poverty and backwardness that has given rise to narrow considerations... It is a pity that regional parties are not being respected for the tremendous job they have done to sustain India's pluralism.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is a former Secretary and ambassador

# Regional parties hold trumps



KULDIP NAYYAR  
writes from New Delhi

THAT no political party will win a majority at the next polls in the Lok Sabha, the lower house, is pretty certain. Parties themselves know this. What they do not seem to realise is that the one-party era has ended for many years to come. In fact, it ended with the Congress split in 1969. By then, the party's prestige for having won freedom had also been worn out.

True, the Congress won three general elections even after the split. But all of them -- two under the leadership of Indira Gandhi and one under Rajiv Gandhi -- indicated more of people's wrath against those who were in power than of hope in the party they returned. It was a negative vote. Even then, the Congress did not learn any lesson.

The last few years have been really bad for the party. It has lost its moorings. It seems as if it has no fire left. The old spirit of service and dedication has been taken over by power politics. Even the party's strong point -- secularism -- has been reduced to a mere slogan, evoking less and less conviction. Congress president Sonia Gandhi looks personally committed to secularism. But this cannot be said about the other leaders of the

party. The tactics some of them adopted during the state elections, especially in Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, reflected soft saffronisation as if they were trying to ride two horses at the same time.

Fears expressed by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) are genuine. It has rightly pointed out that people had expected from the Congress "a firm defence of secularism and democratic values." Instead, they had found the Congress "vacillating and compromis-

ing." Still the Left parties have announced their support to the Congress if and when it forms the government. This makes up for the party's weakness elsewhere.

The Congress has also lost the grassroots contact which distinguished it from other parties. The RSS appears to have occupied the space which the Congress has vacated. This has been seen during the state elections in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh. It looks as if the RSS cadre has spread all over the countryside in the north, particularly in tribal areas. It has opened schools, hospitals and health centers to offer basic facilities. This has earned it goodwill. The RSS has, however,

has a substantial population of Muslims. But they look like staying with the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) of Laloo Prasad Yadav who has not allowed any communal riot to break out in the state in the last decade. The Congress will have the Muslim vote on its side because of its alliance with the RJD. But the Congress has only a few seats in Bihar. Its best bet is still UP. Yet, however big the Congress chunk, it cannot push up its present strength of 112 to the magic figure of 273 in the 545-member Lok Sabha.

The induction of Rahul Gandhi in the Congress may not make much difference. His sister Priyanka may have. But then like

strength of 182. In 1977, the party miraculously increased its number from nine to 90. But that was because it had given up its separate entity -- the Jana Sangh as it was then called -- and merged into the Janta Party which enjoyed at that time the spotlight because of the movement led by Jayaprakash Narayan, a Gandhian, against Indira Gandhi's autocratic rule.

Both the Congress and the BJP, the two main parties, should have known by this time that their base is not countrywide. The BJP has very little following outside the Hindi-speaking states and the Congress in the Hindi-speaking states. Both are trying to ride on the shoulders of regional parties.

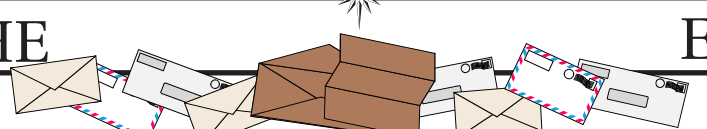
sonal attack against Sonia Gandhi. The manner in which Advani and other party leaders are concentrating on their foreign origin shows nervousness on the part of the Sangh parivar. Using a BJP-inclined TV network for this purpose gives out all.

I do not see the BJP and the Congress together winning more than 300 seats. Anyone who can command the support of the rest of 245 seats has every chance to become the Prime Minister. Atal Behari Vajpayee is not a foregone conclusion as the BJP makes out. In any case both the BJP and the Congress while forming the next government will see to it that real power stayed with them. The

What is unfortunate is the per-

Kuldip Nayyar is an eminent Indian columnist.

# 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.

## Executive positions of the NU

The intermediate courses (now the HSC) offered by the colleges were under the jurisdiction of public universities up to the sixties of the last century. Towards 1960/1961, as far as we could gather, the intermediate courses were separated from the jurisdiction of the public universities and left under the jurisdiction of the Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education. And for separating the intermediate courses from the operational jurisdiction of the public universities, no university teacher was needed to be posted as Chairman, Secretary and Controller of the Education Boards. Any college that intends to offer intermediate courses in Arts, Science and Business Studies requires to obtain affiliation from the respective Education Board. The separation of the

intermediate courses from the jurisdiction of the Public Universities was done mainly to relieve their load and give them the wider scope of giving more attention to higher studies and research works befitting the institutions called the public universities. In the same way the National University was established in 1992 for lightening the pressure of the Degree (pass), Honours and Masters courses offered by the colleges affiliated with the public universities. Dhaka, Rajshahi and Chittagong. The Education Boards that control the secondary and Higher Secondary courses and examinations are not found to be headed by any teacher chosen from any public university. The executive heads of all the Education Boards are chosen from college teachers. After separating the Degree (pass), Honours and Masters courses (offered by the col-

leges) from the jurisdiction of the public universities, the teachers of PUs have no causal attachment with the affairs of the colleges affiliated under National University. Being in the advantageous position in all respects, they are not expected to realise the problems and limitations of the government and non-govt. colleges. They are not supposed to do justice (as paper-setters, script examiners etc) to the students of affiliated degree colleges who pursue their studies under immeasurable shortcomings and drawbacks, for which neither the colleges nor the students can be held liable exclusively. In a Public University a department with hardly one thousand students has not less than 25 (twenty-five) regular teachers; but a degree college with 10 (ten) thousand students in a subject has to remain satisfied with only 5 (five) regular teachers due to the limi-

tations imposed by the government regarding the recruitment and posting of teachers on monetary excuse. The VC, Pro-VCs, Treasurer, Registrar and Deans of the National University are basically chosen from the public universities on political considerations. The top executives of the NU being from public universities, the assignment of the jobs having financial advantages are mostly delegated to the PU teachers who have hot lines with the men at the helm of affairs.

The chairs of VCs, Pro-VCs, Treasurers, Registrars and Deans of the Universities are dignified ones and there are power and privileges attached to these chairs. These positions have now become mere rewards for political affiliations and not for administrative sagacity, professional integrity and academic excellence. Public university teachers who have active participation in and affilia-

tion with any political party desire/deserve some reward from the party when it is in power; but this reward should not be awarded by sheer misplacement of an individual which may cause damage to the well-being and reputation of an organisation called an alma-mater. The unusual delay in the publication of results of public examinations held under NU has been due to the attitude of some of the public university teachers. Whereas the Education Boards are able to publish their results of a huge number of students in 90 days, the NU cannot publish results of some hundreds of examinees in even a year. The main reason attributable to such unusual delay in publication of results and unsatisfactory management is the holding of top positions by the public university teachers. It is therefore most earnestly hoped that the authorities concerned would kindly con-

sider the issue judiciously and review the placement of public university teachers as VCs, Pro-VCs, Treasurers, Registrars and Deans of NU and choose suitable persons from government and non-government colleges for the above positions in the greater public interest.

**M Sadeq**  
Chairman, Dept. of management, Tejgaon College, Dhaka

## Dr. B versus government

I just cannot accept the fact that the ruling alliance has started a crusade against Dr. B Chowdhury and his 'alternative stream'. I was a staunch follower of Ziaur Rahman and well-wisher of the BNP headed by Begum Khaleda Zia, but cannot support the way the party is reacting to the opposition. I do not see anything wrong with Dr. B, an

eminent and honest citizen of the country (forgetting for a while that he is a former president of also), having an alternative thinking and deciding to float his own platform. If we claim that human rights and freedom of speech exist in our country, why do we try to quash someone's right to express his ideas? Can't I support or belong to any party of my free choice? Why shouldn't I be allowed to express my feelings or allegiance with dignity?

I also fail to understand under what norm the BNP-led government could (reportedly) decide not to allow Dr. B Chowdhury to undertake any political activity under the banner of the alternative stream! How would any sensible person take the reported directive to police to foil any programme of the alternative forum?

**AF Rahman**  
On e-mail

## Moving backwards?

What is happening in Bangladesh in the name of political activities seems to me that it will take the country 200 years backwards.

The BNP-Jamaat coalition government is now attacking the people of their own party who are conscious and protesting the misdeeds of the government.

Dr. B Chowdhury, a veteran doctor and an honourable politician, was attacked by a BNP ward-commissioner along with his political hoodlums. A shame for the government!

**Kazi Firoz**  
Bratislava, Slovakia