tige and friends". Earlier more than

fifty British ambassadors sent a

similar letter of censure to Prime

Minister Blair criticising his blind

LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA SUNDAY MAY 9, 2004

### We condemn it

### The killers must not go unpunished

HE murder of AL lawmaker Ahsanullah Master has come as a rude shock to the nation. This dastardly crime, committed in broad daylight at a public place in Tongi, has further shaken the fledgling foundation of law and order in the country.

The mayhem was widespread. Many people sustained injuries and groaned in pain as a stray bullet killed a schoolboy and a young man died in police firing later on.

The nationwide shock at the killing of Ahsanullah Master bore testimony to his standing with the people. He rose from the ranks to become a front-ranking labour leader and legislator who commanded respect across the board. We strongly condemn the killing and express our sympathy for the members of the slain leader's family.

The premeditated heinous attack on him speaks of the free rein the dark forces are allowed to have in our politics today. The hit men strike at the place and time of their choosing.

The government has promptly issued a press note holding internal feud in the AL responsible for the murder, while the AL chief and the party's general secretary have dubbed it as part of the ruling alliance's 'conspiracy' or 'plan' to liquidate AL leaders. Such a guick attribution on the part of the government leads us to think that the administration is certain who the murderers are? If that be the case, more information should be shared with the public; otherwise it is likely to be misconstrued as part of the blame game we see.

When a murder of such diabolical proportions is committed, what automatically surges on to the forefront is the supreme need for a truly professional investigation to be conducted into it. Any kind of knee-jerk reaction translated into instant finger-pointing at perceived 'killers' must be regarded as a distraction at best, and a move prejudicial to inquest at worst. Truth can't be a matter of recriminatory conjectures; it has to be one of substantiation.

The killing of the MP created highly chaotic scenes in Tongi and Gazipur. The offices of the BNP and its front organisations were set on fire and the angry mob tried to uproot railway tracks after they had set railway compartments ablaze. They also swooped on at least 50 vehicles. The road link between Tongi and Gazipur remained cut off for several hours. The reaction to the killing was frenzied, to say the least. Far from being respectful of the deceased, such an instance of wreaking havoc on public property and life cannot be condoned whatever the pretext.

It is indeed a matter of concern that political killing is taking place more frequently than ever. This might be construed as the result of the sharp slide in law and order. The government cannot evade the responsibility of having failed to contain the lawlessness. It has set up speedy trial courts, but the courts are dealing by and large with nonpolitical cases. The recent political killings should awaken the government to the need for speedy disposal of political murder cases. We want Ahsanullah Master's killers to be identified and brought to justice without any delay.

### Rumsfeld's 'apology' without regrets

It raises more questions than solves

HE credibility of the US was already in tatters long before the graphic pictures of the abuse and humiliation of detainees at Abu Ghraib that shocked the world were revealed. But the revelation that detainees were routinely abused in order to soften them up for interrogation, and that such abuse was widespread and systemic, has compromised the US position in Iraq, perhaps irrevo-

The atrocities that occurred at Abu Ghraib were either part of a strategy devised to break down resistance and collect intelligence or were the result of poor training, negligence, and oversight on the part of the US military top

Either way, the responsibility for the horrors that were perpetrated at Abu Ghraib lies with the Secretary of Defense. Ironically, while Rumsfeld has called it a 'wrong' done, and admitted that the ultimate responsibility was his, he has refused to resign his post in the same breath.

He seems to believe that as long as he is capable of doing his job effectively, he should stay. But this misses the point. The point is that if he was at fault, then he should

President Clinton's first Secretary of Defense Les Aspin resigned in 1993 after the US lost eighteen soldiers in a fire-fight in Mogadishu, a failure that pales in comparison with the current crisis.

President Bush has said -- albeit belatedly -- that he is sorry for the abuse at Abu Ghraib, as has Rumsfeld. But the US leadership needs to do more than that to demonstrate that it really is sorry and that it takes what happened seriously. If President Bush permits Secretary Rumsfeld to remain in his position, it will be just the latest in a long line of administration missteps in Iraq. Moreover, those who meted out ignoble mistreatment to the helpless Iraqi detainees should be tried and punished in an exemplary fashion.

## Sadism at Abu Ghraib

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

HE New Yorker( issue of 10th May 2004) and CBS' news programme 60 minutes have done a world of good by putting on graphs of abuse of Iraqi prisoners at the hands of the US and British occupation forces. The abhorrent dehumanisation of the Iraqi detainees by the Anglo-American troops in the midst of the coalition forces' campaign for winning the hearts and minds of the Iraqis can only invite revolting derision from the international community who are being constantly sermonised to emulate western values. Admittedly both President Bush

and Prime Minister Blair have not only strongly condemned the alleged "the sadistic, blatant and wanton criminal abuses" by soldiers and their civilian cohorts but have vowed punishment to the guilty. Both have been at pains to convince a stunned world community that the criminally delinquent behaviour of the few do not reflect the "the finest traditions" of the Anglo-US armies. But given the fact that the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Richard Myers (The New York Times May 3rd) asked CBS to delay broadcast of the photographs and the conflicting answers he gave to Sunday talk shows appear to indicate that the incidents at Abu Ghraib prison, infamous since Saddam days, were systemic in detention centres throughout Irag. Seymour Hersh in his exhaustive piece in the New Yorker mentioned some of the incidents of abuse detailed in the fifty three pages corrosive internal report prepared by Major General Antonio Teguba completed in late February. Teguba study containing stunning evidence supporting the allegations was sharply critical of the rogue elements and found a virtual collapse of command structure at Abu Ġhraib prison.

General Teguba found it particularly disturbing that Reserve Brigadier General Janis Karpinski in charge of military prisons in Iraq was unwilling to either understand or accept that many of the problems inherent in the troops under her command "were caused or exacerbated by poor leadership and the refusal of her command to both

establish and enforce basic standards and principles among its soldiers". Samuel Hersh found in the Teguba report a tale of unsparing study of collective wrong doing and the failure of the Army leadership at the highest level. At Abu Ghraib both the US army regulations and Geneva Conventions were routinely violated. Additionally Human Rights Watch's complaint to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld that Iraqi civilians remained in custody for months with out charges being brought against

As it is escalating violence in Iraq is disquieting. An Arab analyst of Middle Eastern affairs feels that Iraq is disintegrating and the Iraqis are no better off today than they were under Saddam Hussein. Qatar Foreign Minister finds the current developments in Iraq as "alarming" and fears that Iraq is facing a civil war like what had happened in Afghanistan and Lebanon, Distinct possibility exists of Abu Ghraib incidents further inflaming Iraqi resistance on top of Falluja massacre of civilian population by the US

the Europeans and the Americans endowed with sparkling brilliance and with experiences of centuries of conflicts and having been principal architects of the construction of international laws have suddenly become ignorant of the very laws they helped to create. What is it then which impels a portion of the collective intellect of the west to consider itself as a society claiming, in the words of Vincent Tucker (The myth of development: a critique of Eurocentric discourse), "universal desirability while turning its back on

others from which it is convinced it

has nothing to learn" and thus

promoting cultural elitism to cultural

racism? Or can it be that the "impe-

rial" mentality of Berlin Conference

(1884-85) where in some nations

were given the charge to "educate

the natives and to each them to

understand and appreciate the

benefits of civilisation" or the of

article 22 of the League of Nations

Covenant giving the "advanced"

nations the responsibility for these

"people not vet able to stand by

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mainland and that the growth of Muslim population in Europe and the US has made Islam the second largest religion in Germany and France and the third largest in Britain and the United States

Both Colin Powell and Donald Rumsfeld are falling backwards to convince an angry world that the viscerally criminal acts of a few renegades should not be allowed to put blight on the benevolent acts in Irag by the occupation forces who with Jesuit like discipline is trying to bring democracy to a country whose

modern history is replete with mur-

der of a king, a president and filled

with killing fields during Saddam

regime. One can not but agree with

Donald Rumsfeld that it is indeed a

most difficult task. Yet Bush admin-

istration's ex-post facto damage

control measures to salvage Ameri-

can reputation among the Arabs

after Abu Ghraib incidents appears

to be too little too late. The Arabs

who by and large did not have great

affection for Saddam Hussein never

accepted Anglo-US invasion of Iraq

without UNSC approval. Then there

is the pervasive belief among the

Arabs and the Muslims that the US

can never play the role of an honest

broker in the Arab-Israeli conflict, a

belief further cemented by the

recent Bush endorsement of

Sharon plan drawn up unilaterally

and rejected by Ariel Sharon's own

Likud Party involving unilateral

withdrawal from some parts of Gaza

and denying right of return to the

Wall-like-barrier, its harsh military

Sharon's unilateral plans are cost-

ing our country its credibility, pres-

support of Bush Middle East policy. Earlier this month Amnesty

International had warned that Abu Ghraib incidents were only tip of the ice berg and that AI has uncovered wide spread torture by the US forces. It has now been revealed that two Iraq prisoners were murdered by the Americans and twenty three more deaths in Iraq and Afghanistan are now being investigated. These revelations incensed lawmakers from both parties on the Capitol Hill. Senate Majority leader Bill Frist found the abuses "so disgusting, so degrading that I think humanity has been hurt badly" and he felt the incidents could undercut US efforts to bring democracy in Iraq Abu Ghraib could not have come

at a worse time for President Bush. If this proves to be a systemic failure involving higher echelons then Democratic Presidential nominee to-be Senator John Kerry could portray President Bush as an inept commander-in-chief who should relinquish his command. Its effects on efforts to stabilise and eradicate violence in Iraq will be devastating. The Greater Middle East Initiative could face a premature death. Finally terrorism could get a boost. In an op-ed The New York Times (May 3, 2004) commented: "Terrorists like Osama bin Laden have always intended to use their violence to prod the United States and its allies into demonstrating that their worst anti-American propaganda was true .Abu Ghraib was an enormous victory for them, and it is unlikely that any response by the Bush administration will wipe its stains from the minds of the Arabs. The invasion of Iraq which has already begun to seem like a bad dream in so many ways can not get much more nightmarish than this". One could not agree more with the opinion expressed in the op-ed but at the same time one can not but wonder whether deep down, albeit condemned now in harshest language by the western leaders, the Abu Ghraib incidents do not represent an overt expression of the civilisational conflict between Islam and Chris-

consider itself as a society claiming, in the words of Vincent Tucker (The myth of development: a critique of Euro-centric discourse), "universal desirability while turning its back on others from which it is convinced it has nothing to learn" and thus promoting cultural elitism to cultural racism? them remained unresponded. Unfettered and uncircumscribed villainy encouraged through lack of supervision or acquiescence of the higher ups turned Abu Ghraib effectively into another Guantanamo where al-Qaida

detainees are interred. Arabs, indeed the entire thinking world free from the contagion of bigotry, are inflamed at the sight of the savagery committed by those allied to the powers who threw international law to the wind and reduced the UN to an insignificant debating club in order to "liberate' the Iraqis from the clutches of Saddam Hussein. One wonders at the naiveté of the western powers, exuberant from their victory over the Talibans armed with eighteenth century guns and Second World War discarded tanks who were pulverised by high precision bombing and state of the art armaments never seen before in the history of mankind, equating western libertarian values with those of conservative Islam while planning the invasion of Iraq. Regardless of the fact that dehumanisation is unacceptable in any culture, the occupying powers should have known that homosexuality is against Islamic laws and forced nudity in front of

innocent men, women and children as collateral damages of war would be a travesty of justice. The Anglo-American authorities can not escape their responsibilities under Hague Convention (IV), Fourth Geneva Convention (1949) and Rules of Customary International Law as occupying powers. One of the basic rules of belligerent occupation is to enable the inhabitants of the occupied territories to pursue as "normal" a way of life as possible. The Fourth Geneva Convention specifically mentions that the right of respect for a person must be understood in its widest sense: it covers all the rights of an individual which are inseparable from a human being by the very fact of his existence, in particular the right to physical, moral and intellectual integrity an essential attribute of the human person. The laws on occupation will still apply if a new civilian authority is set up from among the nationals of the occupied territories to run the day to day affairs. Article 78 of the Fourth Geneva Convention will immediately apply to the detainees at Abu Ghraib prison, for example which was totally disregarded by the US authorities through their reprehensi-

army. To dismiss the murder of

There is no reason to believe that

themselves the strenuous conditions of modern world" can still possibly exist in the western mind? Should one then subscribe to Ziauddin Sardar's views that "colonisation" later known as "westernisation" and now going under the rubric of "globalisation" transforming the world into a global village is actually to shape the world in the image of a single culture and civilisation? Despite the East-West divide caused by poverty and prosperity it is difficult to believe that Hitlerian concept of a superior Aryan race destined to rule the world is lying dormant in the cerebrum of the western world given the facts that Samuel Huntington is now obsessed with the Spanish speaking people overwhelming the English speaking people in the US

Palestinian refugees. Interestingly more than fifty US diplomats have harshly criticised President Bush for his "unabashed support of Sharon's extra-judicial killings, Israel's Berlin-

measures in occupied territories The author is a former Secretary and ambassador. and now your endorsement of

# The race for Indian premiership



ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY

OUR of the staggered fivephase national elections in India have already taken place and the final round is due on May 10.44ith this the 20-day voting in the largest democracy will come to an end and the post-election scenario is now the cynosure of all eyes. The results will be known within three/four days of the closing of the balloting and with only one phase of the voting left discussions currently are revolving round the main issue - which party or alliance would come to power and who would become the next prime minister of the country. Definitely, this is the paramount subject of intense interest and curiosity all over and it is more so because of the fact that indications are growing strongly that the verdict can be fractured without any clear victory in the polls.

When the elections were announced a few months ago advancing the hustings by several months, the clear impression was that the ruling national democratic alliance(NDA) led by a charismatic premier would romp home easily and will retain power with a greater majority. The NDA, which had a comfortable majority in the lower house of parliament (Loksabha) was bristling with confidence based on several factors like the personal popularity of Atal Bihari Vajpayee, a good economy, bumper harvest and normalising ties with arch foe Pakistan. Besides, unexpectedly satisfactory performance by the

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the main partner of the 22-party rainbow coalition, in the last of the assembly elections particularly in the Madhya Pradesh and Raisthan had come as a shot in the arms of the NDA. It wanted to cash in on the favourable public mood and polls scheduled for October were advanced and this was certainly a measure of confidence for the ruling alliance. No wonder, coalition policy makers said they may end up with more than 300 seats in the 546-member Loksabha.

slice of the cake that would enormously benefit them. NDA in such an event would seek to lure some narties like the Mulayam Singh Yadav's Samajwadi Party or Ms. Mayawati's Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in its quest to install a government. Both the parties are restricted in the vast Uttar Pradesh state but are expected to gain considerable number of seats of the total 80 that comes from this state. But the bargaining can be tough as both Yadav and Mayawati are known to

Congress of heavyweight Sharad Pawar in Maharastra, Laloo Prasad Yadav in Bihar and K. Karunanidhi in the southern Tamil Nadu. Together, they may finish closely behind the NDA but the leftists like the CPM and CPI in West Bengal, Kerala and other states as well as the centrist secular parties would be inclined to support the Congress-led government in preference to the NDA, whose main constituent BJP is widely seen as communal. Their chance of forming a government event of a non-NDA government but the effort may fall flat because of opposition by some parties with whom it may seek to form the government. In such a fluid situation. the Congress may opt for helping a government to be formed without directly sharing power in order to keep the BJP-led NDA away from South Bloc. Smaller parties will emerge as power broker in such a flux and "Dark horses" may emerge as prime ministerial hopefuls for wider acceptance.

coalition are BJP's deputy prime minister L K Advani and Samta Party's defence minister George Fernandes. In the Congress, important figures after Sonia include former senior ministers Monomohan Singh and Pranab Mukherjee. Sonia's son Rahul is expected to become an MP from his slain father Rajiv Gandhi's Amethi constituency but still may have to go a long way to take up the mantle of leadership of the party and govern-President A P J Abdul Kalam may

choice for premiership and it is the

election pledge of the alliance. Two

other strongmen after him in the

find himself in complex circumstances in the event of a hung parliament since his role becomes critically important in the formation of a new government. However, he is expected to first invite the largest single party or group to form the government if none is clear winner but contending parties have to convince the president of the support of at least 273 members for a new government.

The president is expected to explore all possibilities for a new government if the elections produce a fractured verdict. The post-election scenario in India may be interesting unlike the last elections when the NDA won direct mandate by securing absolute majority. However, the previous NDA government had to quit office midway through its term as it lost majority. Vajpayee was premier of both the NDA governments but his first stint as prime minister for a BJP government was only for 12 days when he failed to prove majority on the floor of the House after he had formed the government. In all probability, none would want or relish such a situation.

# MATTERS AROUND US

...Coalition policy makers said they may end up with more than 300 seats in the 546-member Loksabha, at least 27 more than required to form a government. But the hopes are getting belied as voting reaches the final stage and impression is gaining ground that the ruling coalition might fall much short of "magic number" 273, let alone a comfortable majority. However, the NDA still is the forerunner to secure the single majority while an absolute majority appears eluding the coalition. Main opposition Congress and other anti-NDA parties are believed to be narrowing down the gap but are likely to end up only after the 22-party alliance.

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If the NDA somehow manages to secure absolute majority which is at least 273, there will be no confusion for its return to power and Vajpayee remains premier for the fourth time in India. But if it fails to make it -which is not unlikely -- the NDA will have to look for new partners to form a government. In such a situation, smaller parties willing to extend support will obviously like to have a be harbouring high ambitions like the premiership or the deputy prime ministership. Yadav is the chief minister of UP while the latter is the former chief minister and their parties -- a force to reckon with in the state -- are fighting the polls by themselves maintaining distance from both NDA and the Congress. Two leaders are expected to play their cards only after the election results depending on their strength in the new Loksabha but both are expected to be wooed by NDA and Congress should there be a hung parliament. As such, Yadav and Mayawati may emerge as key factors in the formation of new government.

Congress had 109 seats in the dissolved Loksabha but is expected to improve its tally. However, it is unlikely to come even near the "magic number" by its own strength. Congress has forged electoral alliance with some powerful regional parties like the nationalist

would come only after the single largest party or group fails to muster the support of an absolute majority But here too manifold complications may surface since Pawar, Yadav and Karunanidhi -- all former chief ministers of their respective states -may throw their hats for premiership even though their parties are smaller compared to the Congress and lack the national character. Congress president Sonia Gandhi's "foreign" origin will play an important role that since these leaders despite having electoral alliance with the Congress are not necessarily favouraby desposed to Sonia's becoming head of the government in the country. Pawar is especially known for his aversion to seeing Sonia as the Indian prime minister and it is precisely on this issue that he parted ways with the Congress and set up his own nationalist Con-Congress, on its part, will strive to

make Sonia prime minister in the

Relatively unknown H D Deve Gowda of the Janata Dal from Karnataka had unexpectedly become prime minister of such a non-NDA Congress supported United Front government. West Bengal's veteran communist leader Jyoti Basu was the initial choice but his CPM party disapproved sharing power while supporting the formation of a non-NDA government. Haryana's Lokdal leader Om Prakash Chautala or NDA ally in Tamil Nadu Jayaram Jayalalitha or Chandrababu Naidu in Andhra Pradesh are likely to have important say in the formation of the new government should the NDA or the Congress fail to form a government. Some individuals commanding respect and less controversy may also emerge as consensus candidate for the likeminded parties if the process of forming a new government becomes somewhat intractable. But in case the NDA forms the government, Vajpayee is their only

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury is Senior Special

### TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE



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.

#### Poverty and basic health services

The above report on chronic poverty (05-05-04, The Daily Star) by Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) really touched our conscience! While the Economic and Social Commission for Asia & Pacific (escap) of the United Nations has put the GDP growth of Bangladesh at 5.7%. instead of the expected 5.5% (07-05-04, The Daily Star); why so much negligence to our rural poor? Does not it prove that a small section of our citizens is getting all financial benefits? Can we become a Developing Country by 2015?

According to the report, about 25

to 30 million rural people are facing chronic poverty in the form of low food consumption, under nutrition, lack of access to basic health services, illiteracy and other deprivations! Being a doctor and having 10

years' experience of working under the Directorate of Family Planning, with experience of conducting sterilisation at Family Welfare Centres (FWC) and attending satellite clinics; being aware of the last Health Nutrition & Population Sector Programme (HNPSP extending from July 2003 to June 2006; and close perusal of newspaper reports have made me concerned about Health & Family Planning Services in our country.

The news about Community Clinics (CC) had attracted my attention! It has been reported that constructed CCs are not working at all, despite having 17 types of medicine supply such as antibiotics, antiseptics, painkillers, digestive pills, ant worm tablets and cough syrups. An amount of Tk 50,000 is allocated for the medicines.

I came to know a few months ago that about 80,000 Family Welfare Workers, who are almost entirely women, had lost their jobs. Along with donors, our government was convinced that Community Clinic service would be enough to provide health service in rural areas. From my experience, I admire the role of

Family Welfare Workers. They can play a great role in improvement of family planning service and utilisation of Community Clinic (CC). They are very good in motivation

Therefore, service provision in Community Clinic (CC) by ultimate motivation could provide health service to our rural poor! Hence, the government should provide the salary of FWW to ensure door to door service.

I am unable to suggest any effective strategy for other problems, such as low-food-consumption. hunger, under nutrition and illiteracy. Dr. Lailun Nahar

#### Attitude towards private universities

This is in reference to the letter "Attitude towards private universities" (7-5-2004) by Hasna Hasan of the Department of English, Leading University. Dhaka. The writer has called for a positive attitude towards the private universities, which have become an integral part of our globalised' higher education system. I guess there was a mismatch of 'public' and 'private' in the very first paragraph

The 'prosperity' in monetary terms to the entrepreneurs 'of some private universities' has triggered a race against time to establish new private universities in Bangladesh. Now a foreign private university opened a campus in Bangladesh and claims that it needs no UGC recognition. There are new exotic breeds in the pipeline. There is one private university in Farmgate which operates at noon. Interestingly, the same venue is used for other purposes in the morning. I am really shocked and awed' at my ignorance about all those 'common practice all over the world'. Nobody,x to the best of my knowledge, has any reservation about the 'borrowed knowledge' of the private university students. The bad thing is that the teachers of public universities are running a tight schedule to get some extra bucks

from the private universities, which is resulting in a poorer class performance on the part of the teachers in both public and private universities.

EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Indeed, private universities in our country have many new teachers who have completed higher education with good results from different local and foreign universities. But there are allegations that people with forged certificates of foreign degree of some imaginary university (in America and UK) became teachers of some private universities. (ref-Sapthahik 2000) The authorities concerned did not feel the need to verify the authenticity of the certificates. Some of "academicians", who are members of the manage ment boards, had their degrees from

foreign countries, may be from America or Britain. How come the "academi cians" had no clue about the forged certificates of fictitious universities? Maybe, the writer does not mind

paving the outrageous amount of fees charged by the private universities. am sure a lot of private university students find it too much. As for myself I can say I enjoy all the facilities and even more than those, despite being a public university student. I hope that equal opportunity in its true

sense will prevail in both private and public universities.

Dhaka