

Ivy Rahman's death

A blow to the democratic polity

THE news of her death did not come as a bolt from the blue, as it was evident since last Saturday night that the veteran Awami League leader was fighting a losing battle against death. She had sustained lethal wounds. The grenade throwers had made sure that Ivy Rahman would not return to those boisterous political rallies again. Still, it is difficult to come to terms with a death as unfortunate as hers.

We don't know how to console her family and countless admirers who must have been numbed by the unbearable agony of losing her. It is one of those deaths that gives rise to many questions.

We are not sure whether there is any point in merely condemning the beastly elements that could perpetrate such a crime. It is really unbelievable that humans could be so ruthless as to drop powerful grenades on unsuspecting innocent fellow beings. That said, we must survive as a nation and the only way to achieve that goal is to wipe out the terrorists having an agenda of their own.

Ivy Rahman had a long political career and she actively took part in all the movements that her party organised over the last four decades or so. She was associated with the glorious students' movement of the 1960's and moulded herself as a politician having great faith in democracy and the rights of people. The nation has lost a crusader of democracy.

The message that she has left behind must not be missed. We have to realise that such deaths only bring disgrace to a nation and erode people's confidence in the existing law enforcing system

Routine condemnation of the crime is not enough to set things right. The government must ensure that the killers are brought to justice and also that eminent politicians, irrespective of their party affiliations, never come under such attacks in future. Any lapse in this respect will further push us towards the abyss of political uncertainty.

Attack on opposition processions

Govt must avoid repressive measures

WE strongly condemn the highhanded approach by the police while tackling the strike called to protest a series of bomb attacks last Saturday on the main opposition Awami League's rally. We are outraged at the way police charged batons on the peaceful procession of CPB seriously injuring its general secretary, Mujahidul Islam Selim, on Tuesday morning. We also deplore the manhandling of women activists and leaders including Matia Chowdhury by police during the strike. On one hand the government has been calling on the opposition to forge united front in order to resist 'subversive activities', on the other it is using repressive measures against the opposition.

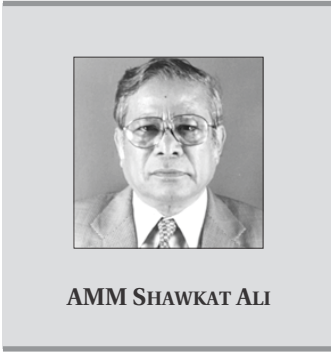
We also condemn the attack on the procession of Awami League in support of the strikes at Gulistan area by the ruling BNP activists on Monday. And that especially at a time when the whole nation is reeling under the shock and horror of last Saturday's bomb attacks. It was only natural for the police to act swiftly when the supporters of the strikes, according to eyewitnesses, went berserk smashing cars and damaging buildings in the area. But acts like pouncing on them with the aid of the police and also bringing out an anti-strike procession by the ruling party activists should also have been avoided by all means.

Were they not aware that such irresponsible behaviour would only spread more panic among the citizens and inflame the already tense situation? Is attacking opposition processions and bringing out one of its own to counter that any indication of compliance to government's rhetoric? Instead of taking efforts to calm the situation, they did exactly the opposite. The ruling BNP leadership must now instruct all of its wings to refrain from acts that are likely to deteriorate the situation further.

At the same time, we would also like to appeal to the opposition party activists not to take law into their own hands. We understand the emotion of fury and rage that they have been going through ever since Saturday's attacks. It's a feeling the whole nation shares with them, but the manner to express that emotion should also be restrained. We have always been in support of freedom of expression; all sections of the society must be allowed to express their feelings freely. But damaging public property and hence creating panic and anxiety among the common people are not acceptable either.

We had appealed for calm and restraint by all sides as soon as the news of the vicious attacks broke; we renew our appeal.

Pay Commission: New wine in old bottle



AMM SHAWKAT ALI

SINCE the birth of Bangladesh in 1997, five pay commissions were constituted by the governments of different periods. The recommendations of the first pay commission were made effective from July 1, 1973. At that time the entire public sector structure was organised into ten grades applicable across the sector. The second pay commission's recommendations were given effect from July 1, 1977, followed by June 1, 1985, and July 1, 1991, and the last one was from July 1, 1997. In all cases there was a rise in pay. In the case of the second pay commission, the grades were doubled to 20 from ten fixed in 1973. This has remained unchanged since then.

M. Mujibul Huq, a former cabinet secretary, is now heading the sixth pay commission constituted by the alliance government. In this context, it is relevant to mention that Huq will be the chairperson of a pay commission for the second time, a rare distinction he can take pride in.

The antecedents

There is no established machinery such as a permanent pay commission for determining civil service pay. The determination of pay in the civil service remains technically complex and politically sensitive. The practice has been that depending on the demands

made by the civil service unions at various levels, the government would first respond to the demand by providing dearness allowance based on considerations of inflationary trends. Sometimes, the government would give ad hoc increase in percentage terms, which would be related to the basic pay drawn by a civil servant. Finally, government would establish temporary pay commissions and revision of pay would be made based

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retrenchment proposal is sure to become a political issue, which no government can afford to resort to. However, under pressures from the donors, retrenchment had taken place in some of the public statutory bodies.

Finance minister's guidance

Even before the newly constituted pay commission could start functioning, the finance minister made a preemptive statement. It is said that there will

WORTH A LOOK

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on the recommendations of the commission and the availability of the funds. The government has thus to balance the demand for increase in pay and the capacity of the government to meet such demand.

What should be fair pay

What should be the fair pay for a civil servant has remained an elusive question over the years. The general consensus, however, is that in spite of periodic upward revision, the pay given to civil servants is considered to be not a living wage. Studies conducted in 1993 and 1996 have drawn attention to this issue (World Bank, 1996). The study of 1996 has shown that in terms of 1962 salary level, the 1994 salaries of secretaries, joint secretaries, and deputy secretaries suffered a sharp decline in real terms. It has concluded that such decline emanated from "the government's long standing policy of expanding employment while eroding salary."

The study has also pointed out that the private sector salaries are much higher than those of the public sector at the management level. It has also argued that the salaries of civil servants cannot be identical with those in the private sector because the former has a more secure job. At the same time, scales of pay should bear a reasonably uniform relationship to them and should not get too far out of line.

One of the ways to increase salary of the top management level suggested by the study is the retrenchment of low-level functionaries. In BCS, the officer-staff ratio is very high, an issue that will be taken up later. In 1998, the total number of officers and staff in the government and statutory bodies was 932,050, of which 64 percent belonged to Class III category and 22 percent to Class IV. Together they constitute 86 percent of the total number employed in the public sector. There is evidently good logic in this approach but it is more easily said than done. The

not be any separate pay structure for police and bankers. This was the guidance given by the finance minister when the commission met him. In respect of bank employees, however, the minister is reported to have said that the bank employees might get some additional incentives. For the police personnel, the minister did not say anything. It is reported, however, that two more members would be added, one representing the banking community and the other from the police. The intention evidently is to allow these entities to press home their points. The minister is said to have further asserted that the previous twenty grades will remain unchanged.

Payment of income tax by public sector employees

An important issue which is included in the guidance given to the commission relates to the question of payment of income tax. According to the minister, about 100,000 employees of the

government do not pay any tax although they earn enough to be under the tax net. It is not clear what exactly is meant by this. None is exempted from payment of taxes. The tax assessed on the amount of salary drawn is, in theory to be paid by the government. Over and above the amount, there can be other legitimate source of income, which must be taxable and paid not by the government, but by the relevant official. If, on the other hand, it means

taxes on amounts drawn as salary have to be paid by the official himself, there will be erosion of salaries. This aspect needs to be looked into by the pay commission.

Examples from other South Asian countries

The chairperson of the commission is reported to have said that it would review the pay structures of India and Pakistan, and would try to come up with a balanced report acceptable to the government and the employees. This indeed will be a difficult task. Will it be possible to match the level of pay that is there in either India or Pakistan? How far the Indian example will be relevant for Bangladesh remains an open question. This is because the cadre system in India is not structured into unified grading system, which exists in Bangladesh. The cadre system in India is grouped into All India Services (AIS), and the state services, and other central services grouped

into A and B categories. In category A are included postal, audit and accounts, customs, income tax, railway accounts, central trade etc. The maximum pay in such cadre is Rs. 24,500.00 while in AIS it is Rs. 26,000.00, perks excluded. The Indian cabinet secretary gets Rs. 30,000.00 as against Tk. 15,500.00 for Bangladesh.

It is said that in case of India, if perks are added, a secretary's pay would be Rs. 61,000.00 and that of cabinet secretary Rs. 65,000.00. Some in India plead in favour of a flexible system of compensation package for IAS and IPS officers and make it closer to what the market would pay such officers with similar experience. The World Bank study (1996) spoke more or less in similar vein but admitted that it would not be possible unless there was a downsizing of government.

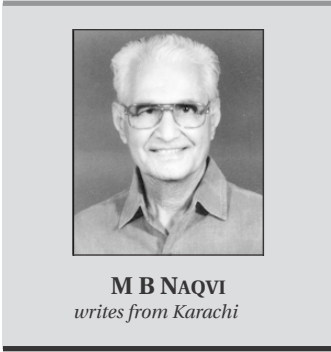
In case of India, the Fifth Pay Commission recommended an increase in salary to be linked to a cut in the number of employees on the government rolls. The United Front government accepted the wage-hike part but not the downsizing.

Past experience

If past experiences are any guide, there will be some pay hike but the monolithic unified grading system will continue as already indicated by the finance minister. Besides, for political as well as social reasons, the government is unlikely to accept the logic of downsizing. It may be argued that downsizing as a cost cutting measure is one of the options. Other options include, but are not necessarily limited to, cutting down other costs arising out of uncontrolled and unnecessary expenditures to which the Public Expenditure Review Commission has drawn attention.

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Geo-strategic efforts toward trade



M B NAQVI
writes from Karachi

INDIA'S Minister for Petroleum and Natural Resources Manishankar Aiyer has urged his own PM Manmohan Singh and the government to virtually hurry up and finalise the deal about the oil and gas pipeline from Iran to India via Pakistan. His main argument is that the alternative to the overland pipeline, viz. underwater pipelines, is ten times more expensive; thus it will be uneconomic for the users. Moreover, cost of the project will continue to rise with the delays; the costs now are expected to be Rupees three billion. The argument is entirely among the Indians who are the only party that is still undecided. Iran is understandably enthusiastic while Pakistan goes on providing any security guarantees that India may require.

It is important to keep the reasons for India's indecisiveness in focus. The matter has been mixed up with the thinking of India's national security wallahs. A bit of background is necessary too. These security wallahs do not trust Pakistan and think that India will have given a hostage to an unreliable Pakistan. Moreover, India has been running a cold war with Pakistan. In recent decades its strategy has been to isolate Pakistan and that has determined India's course of action, particu-

larly in Afghanistan and Central Asia. India has diligently cultivated Iran. That process has been facilitated by Pakistanis own unwise obsession with Taliban. India supported the Northern Alliance during the second civil war in Afghanistan in 1990s. By stretching a little, India's cultivation of China too can be put in this box.

There is little that anyone in Pakistan can usefully say or do about Indian strategic thinking, though one finds making a remark or two irresist-

adversary will bring to bear all its capability which has to be countered to the delight of vested interests. The phenomenon remains recognisable in all climes and places.

Politically it is anyhow necessary for New Delhi and Islamabad to sort out the pipelines issue thoroughly. They can either remain caught up in the old cobwebs, spun over 57 years, by cold war thinking or they can break out of pettifoggery and produce a common vision that would benefit the actual

would want to undo it somehow. One reference to reality should dispel these illusions and delusions: the kind of developments that have taken place in India as well as in Pakistan preclude the possibility of a political reunion between Pakistan and India, such as was in the mind of Akhand Bharat Wallahs at one time. There are as powerful vested interests in Pakistan that will keep it a separate state, and a militarist one at that, indefinitely. In India the Hindutva brigade has

PLAIN WORDS

To put crudely the two countries should happily give high value hostages to each other: India's investment in mega projects in Pakistan and Pakistan's investments in some big Indian projects will go a long way in creating mutual trust. With that the future of SAARC will brighten up. There will be then real hope for South Asia's poor. The region can then put itself on the road to rapid progress.

ible. The trouble with militaristic strategy-making is that emotionally determined enemy is supposed to have all the characteristics of a demon; his generously estimated capabilities become, for their purposes, equal to his intentions; it leaves no ground or scope for possible reconciliation, friendship or enlightened self-interest. The national interest always comprises a crude mix of what might be barely possible or even conceivable by way of military build up. It does uncommonly look like the small mind trying to think big and projecting its own deductions as doctrines. In any case, it has come to be a respected science, if also rather esoteric; this thinking is always guided by the interests of the local variant of Industrial Military Complex. It allows no enlightened discussion: one's side has to stretch out its own capabilities and resources on the assumption that the

peoples of India and Pakistan. The silly idea of keeping all the options open is not wise. Keeping all the options open all the time means doing nothing remarkable or good.

What is needed is a vision of Indo-Pakistan relations that should become a model for the region as a whole which can extend into regional integration for making progress economically, socially and culturally, with a modicum of political harmony. There is also a sub text here. Some Indians had at one time toyed with the notion that appealing to pre-independence unity of all the peoples, building on linguistic and cultural commonalities, including religions, and more trade would make Pakistan relaxed and become the kind of friend that India would be happy to live with. That is dated.

On this side too, there are decades of the old suspicion: The Indians have not accepted Pakistan at heart and

marched so far that they will have to invent a Pakistan if there was none; they need a political demon to frighten the Indians with.

The options before both countries are stark: they can use, indeed misuse, emotive language to please the galleries about making serious efforts at agreement-making - and here one is talking all agreements all along the line over eight disputed subjects - without necessarily conceding anything from their maximal positions. The bureaucracy particularly and the politicians in general like muddling along without making any difficult decisions. The other alternative is that somehow the two states produce enough statesmanship to work for a vision of peace and rapid progress by resolving the disputes and agreeing to uninhibited cultural, political and economic relations with as free a trade as possible. Insofar as Pakistan is concerned,

There is no reason why the two countries cannot have an agreement for opening up the two-way transit trade for all: for Pakistani goods can travel by Indian railways to Bangladesh and beyond while Bangladesh and India can make big profits by exporting by land route through Pakistan to Afghanistan and Central Asia. Pakistan can certainly compete with India in Afghanistan, Central Asia and wherever depending upon the price and quality of its goods. Such a free transit trade will provide welcome incentives to Pakistanis to improve their productivity.

There are international schemes of linking Far East and Southeast Asia with Europe by at least two land routes running roughly parallel; one through the northern parts of Asia and the other is intended to pass through southern parts. Japanese, South East Asian and South Asian goods can travel to Europe

through South Asia and vice versa. The benefits to the two countries would be immense, including some unearned royalties.

There are myriad possibilities of progress inherent in Indo-Pakistan economic cooperation, especially in conjunction with free as well as preferential bilateral trade. To put crudely the two countries should happily give high value hostages to each other: India's investment in mega projects in Pakistan and Pakistan's investments in some big Indian projects will go a long way in creating mutual trust. With that the future of SAARC will brighten up. There will be then real hope for South Asia's poor. The region can then put itself on the road to rapid progress.

The master reason why Pakistan should reverse its traditional standoffishness is that the old ideas are no longer applicable; they were centred around a possible war with India on Kashmir that was always round the corner. After the two countries have gone nuclear, the idea of another war is simply foolish; neither side can afford to go to war over Kashmir or indeed anything else. If that basic presumption of war is knocked out, all the policies that were predicated on the likelihood of war get knocked out too. Once the dimensions of this huge change are assimilated, there would be compulsion to go over to the antipodal positions. And that would be logical, too. Pakistan was denying itself all the benefits of economic cooperation with India and the rest of the region for the sake of Kashmir. Now if that militaristic road to Kashmir is closed, there is no reason why to go on denying oneself what is only all too possible.

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Let us put our act together, here and now

SHAMSHER CHOWDHURY

SANITY, decency, and moderation seem to have been stricken from the political culture of our present day politicians. The recent spate of bombings and the carnage that took place at the opposition political meeting on Saturday bear testimony to that fact. Admittedly, this was an act of some criminals who may not have any political affiliations, or, for that matter, any human values, the fact however remains, but for the licentious and complacent behaviour on the part of the ruling class, such dastardly actions by a group of criminals could have been avoided. The Leader of the Opposition had been telling the government about beefing up her security arrangements for quite sometime, which apparently fell on the deaf years of the ruling class.

I am simply appalled that the Leader of the House merely issued a routine statement. To me, she should and could have done better. Look at it from whatever angle, you may choose to, just consider the fact that one of the first ones to express his concern and sympathies was none other than the Prime Minister of India, Manmohan Singh. The telephone call was

followed by visits of such individuals like the US Ambassador and the High Commissioner of India.

To my mind, if anything, this is reflective of the kind of human values we represent. I find it hard to believe that such moves have not been made as a matter of the ruling class's political strategy and tactics. If this is the case, politics or no politics, it is indeed reflective of poor taste. As I proceed with this brief commentary I am reminded of that famous incident when Field Marshall Ayub Khan shouldered the coffin of his arch enemy, the then Prime Minister of India Lal Bahadur Shastri in Moscow in 1965. The two were on a mission to bring about a ceasefire under the mediation of Soviet Union where Mr. Shastri died of a heart failure. The ruling class would do well to remember that they are not here to stay forever and as the famous saying goes: "Beware of the day when the hunted becomes the hunter."

I was first informed of the incident by one of my sisters who lived in another part of the city, away from mine. I then immediately tuned in to BTV where to my horror the lead news was something relating to the President calling the Parliament into session. I then tuned in to Channel I, where the details of the incident were being broadcast. I kept

telling myself, how could this be? I could not believe my eyes. Has this government lost all humanity and respect for human life? Just consider the way the LGRD Minister reacted to the incident on being asked by a member of the media.

There is also much to be said about the police. May I humbly ask as to why the Inspector General of Police failed to appear at the scene of the carnage shortly after? Will someone also give some satisfactory answer as to why the police refused to register the cases when the leaders of the opposition approached the concerned police station? It is indeed outrageous to find that so many similar incidents have taken place and the police are yet to provide the people with half a clue as to who are behind all this. I believe the actions of the police are also "deliberate" and they are "hand in glove" with the establishment.

One of my closest relations was the Inspector General of Police during those troubled days of 1975. I called on him to help me out with a case of robbery, which took place in the house of a colleague of mine, a British national. Every piece of valuables in the house was looted including the jewelry. Lo and behold, each of the items was recovered in just 72 hours. As I went to

thank him along with my colleague he made a parting remark, which I remember to this day: "Look here my friends, the police knows about all the criminals all the time and thus it was no problem." Does the police really know everything?

I would also like to say a few words about us "the people." As soon as I heard the news over television I said to myself, "This is it." There would now be an all out people's agitation and protest marches throughout the country. I was disappointed; instead what I witnessed was nothing but sudden outburst of sheer vandalism, rage, anger, and frustration leading to massive destruction of both private and state properties. Where have all our venerable members of civil society and the intellectual community gone? Are they scared, still hiding in the comforts of their homes and basking the glories of their superior intellectual pursuits? I have often this feeling that we as people perhaps do not deserve any better political leadership.

We better put our act together fast or else there will be others who will do it for us, like they did in Somalia and elsewhere.

Clueless in Dhaka?

A REHMAN

TELEVISION news on Monday as well as The Daily Star of Tuesday reported that so far detectives have found no "clues" about the grenade attack on the Awami League meeting. I found this strange. Weren't the unexploded grenades themselves clues? I also found it strange that the army team detonated the unexploded grenades at the site of the attack. I am not an expert on this matter, but couldn't some way have been found of disabling the unexploded grenades and handing them over to the police as evidence or clues? The other grenades found in Dhaka Central Jail and the Railway Hawkers' Market premises have presumably not been detonated. Hopefully, these are available for investigation into the attack.

Newspapers and TV both reported that (and viewers saw on TV) the grenades were marked "ARGES" along with numbers (presumably arms codes). I found it strange that neither print nor TV journalists offered us further information about them. One TV reporter said that the grenades were of Chinese origin and are used in the armed forces of a number of countries in the subcontinent.

However, a simple internet search reveals that ARGES is the acronym of Armaturen

Gesellschaft m. b. H., an Austrian company. ARGES, in fact, manufactures a number of different types of grenades. The company's website shows pictures of their grenades that are exactly the same as the pictures of the unexploded grenades in Bangabandhu Avenue and in Dhaka Central Jail. The company's website has, among other things, the following description of itself and its products:

"ARGES can look back on a very long tradition in manufacturing hand grenades and components and is the leading company for producing cost-effective hand grenades with pre-formed fragments. ARGES fragmentation hand grenades show excellent fragment distribution and fragment density by using pre-formed fragments. The ARGES hand grenades product range includes:

SplHG 86 small fragmentation hand grenade for fighting in urban areas.

SplHG 85 medium fragmentation hand grenade.

SplHG 90 big fragmentation hand grenade."

The fragment distribution and fragment density on August 21 at Bangabandhu Avenue lived up to its manufacturer's promises, judging from the number of casualties. More than two hundred injured and nineteen killed in other

words, more than two entire companies (one-fourth of a battalion) of innocent civilians put out of commission.

An internet search also shows that ARGES grenades were the kind that were used by the militants who staged the attack on the Indian parliament last year. At that time, though the Indian authorities properly identified the grenades, they could not trace the transmission from the manufacturers to the terrorists. However, they did say that this type of grenade is verifiably in the hands of many of the Kashmiri militant groups. ARGES grenades have also been used in terrorist attacks in Pakistan. In fact, one type of ARGES grenade is manufactured, under licence, by the Pakistan Ordnance Factory at Wah and is used by the Pakistan Army.

Since the Kashmiri militants are overarmed by Pakistan it is very likely that they would use these grenades. That being the case, could the grenades that caused such havoc in Bangabandhu Avenue have Kashmir as their origin? And if this is so, could not our investigators look for militant factions here in Bangladesh that have links to Kashmiri separatists? Is this not a clue, or at least a basis for the beginnings of an investigation?