

Not the way to bury differences

The two must stop trading charges

WHILE the prime minister's call for infusing a new culture in national politics by burying the past differences is welcome, we are dismayed at the pronouncements of her senior party members made at the recent BNP rally, hurling all manner of allegations against the Awami League. This was against the spirit of her wish.

One notices, not without a little consternation, the government's attempt to point an accusing finger at the main opposition party for the 21 August incident. This was more than evident in the speeches of the senior BNP members at the said rally. The government must understand that, if casting accusation against its main opponent is meant as a political ploy, ulterior motives apart, it is a devious one by any count. Given the current state of things, and the gravity of the occurrence of 21 August, to breed unsubstantiated allegations, more so by the party in power that is supposed to be privy to accurate information, is fraught with danger.

By the same token we cannot condone the allegations made against the ruling BNP by the leader of the opposition, linking it to the dastardly event of the 21 August. While one can understand the charged emotion and the psychological stress under which those remarks were made, we feel that such utterances do not behove our national leaders. It is counterproductive and damaging in the long run, to say the least.

We speak for all when we say that our political leaders must desist from trading in rumours, since rumours have an uncanny knack of self-generation and convolution in the process of propagation. The practice of trading accusations must stop also because not only does it vitiate the political atmosphere, it seriously influences the process of objective investigation of the cases, particularly when that emanates from the government.

Unless trading of charges and accusations are purged from our political culture, the desire to inculcate a new culture in our politics will remain a pious hope only.

Saifur critical of CAG

But focus of his ire unclear

FINANCE and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman's criticism of the office of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) at a conference on Monday has left us a little confused as to the exact reason of his displeasure. While we can readily agree with the assessment of the finance minister that CAG has underperformed, we are not so sure that we are in agreement with the nature of this underperformance or the minister's prescription for future success.

The finance minister lambasted the office of the CAG for producing detailed audit reports on what he termed insignificant issues that have the effect of harming the country's image. It is unclear to us what the minister means by "insignificant issues" and on what basis he deems an issue to be significant or not. Nor can we sympathise with the government's now predictable lament that the image of the country is being harmed when wrong-doing is brought to light.

It seems to us that the fact that CAG is issuing audit reports is a matter for congratulation and not for condemnation. It may be true that CAG needs to focus more on audit reports that address "significant issues," whatever the finance minister means by that, but we feel that such a focus should be in addition to its current output, not in place of it.

Furthermore, while there is no doubt that CAG could do a better job, it must also be admitted that many of the road-blocks to performing its duties do not come from within the agency, but have to do with impediments from outside.

For instance, one of the main problems facing CAG is that its hands are often tied due to political considerations which keep it from pursuing targets who enjoy protection from influential quarters. If we want CAG to do a better job, the first thing to do is to remove the constraints under which it must operate, and give it the authority and power to go after big-ticket targets, regardless of political affiliation. Another obstacle is that too often there is no follow up made on CAG reports.

Certainly, there is much room for improvement in the office of the CAG, but what it needs to fix things is a specific blueprint for what to do and the authority to accomplish this, rather than unspecified criticism that it is harming the country's image.

Managers and massacres



ABDUL BAYES

IVY Rahman -- also known as the "lady with the lamp" in a society shrouded with darkness -- has been laid to eternal rest. Thousands of mourners paraded the streets to the point of cemetery at Banani with the coffin on shoulders. It was then raining in torrents as if Nature herself was shocked at her death and shedding tears. It may be mentioned here that Ivy Rahman was one of the victims of the grenade operations of August 21 believably perpetrated with a view to wiping out the opposition leader, Sheikh Hasina, and her party pillars and activists. Twenty people are reported to have been killed and hundreds are suffering in hospital beds.

It was, in one sense, an attempted "massacre" of a kind that Bangladesh witnessed on August 15, 1975. It was again a continuation of the process to eliminate the remaining family of the great Sheikh

-- the father of the nation. Unfortunately, the successive governments did very little to protect this family. The last Awami League government initiated national security system for the family. The current government, however, rejected the rules and softened Sheikh Hasina's security fences. Very recently, she received death threats on telephone while she was in Turkey. The government brushed aside the allegation and, rather, mocked the leader of the

First, such havoc could only happen when the whole system of security in the society fails. Needless to mention, it was the failures of the top organs of the government e.g. police, intelligence, administration, etc. We were surprised to see that none of the top brass was sacked for having failed and for tarnishing the image of the government. We are confident that even in a more underdeveloped society than ours, such negligence of duties

India enjoys state protection and special security system. The ardent opponent of the Congress, BJP, maintained that while in power. Thus, both from the point of precedence and perilous state of security, the leader of the opposition should have been given due protection.

Third, the government should have set up an International Enquiry Commission to probe into the August 21 massacre. The government, instead, chose the traditional

It is not surprising that people would blame the government for the blasts. If a government is hailed for good things, then why should it not be hated for bad things? If it takes credit for the construction of a bridge, why should it not be discredited for the destruction of human lives? Leaving aside people's perceptions on the villains behind the August 21 massacre, we think, the government should have immediately taken steps to protect itself from the so-called "pernicious" propaganda.

opposition's concerns. On the heels of such naivety and negligence, the massacre took place with security for the leaders reaching a perilous point.

The Prime Minister, however, wanted to see the leader of the opposition. For reasons quite known, the attempt failed. We are not going to argue for or against such a move. Rather, allow us to submit some of the duties on the part of the government that the nation expected most immediately after the massacre.

on the part of the government organs would have invited exemplary punishment. But we are far from that. Is it because digging earthworms would show up the snakes?

Second, immediately after the incident, the government should have taken it as a signal of the grievous state of law and order situation in the country. Paripassu, it was then rational to immediately revive the security system for the Sheikh family. The Gandhi family in

line of proceeding with enquiry by setting up a one-man commission headed by a current Justice. This attitude shows two things: (a) the government treated the incident as similar to those that occurred earlier, and (b) the concerns expressed by the head of the state and as well as by the government this time are nothing serious, almost as if shedding crocodile tears. Setting up a one-man commission means, as past records tend to show, the report would never see the light of day, or, allegedly, would be influenced by

the government. There is another point in the air. In today's Bangladesh, unfortunately, appointment of judges is said to be politicised, some of them even alleged to be corrupt. Therefore, when the credibility of the judges has been reduced to suspicion, an incident of August 21 type demanded something more serious, and insightful for eking out the truth from the turmoil. A government that denounces such heinous operations and claims to be no-

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Take the blame of the blasts or not, there seems to be little doubt that Bangladesh is gradually drifting towards the brink of ruin. Gradually it has been assuming a situation where economic and non-economic freedoms are at a stake. Is it gradually becoming a "haven" for anti-liberation forces and a "hell" for those fought and fighting for it? Is it the country we dreamt of and our martyrs sacrificed their lives for?

We think the time has come for waging a war against the forces of evil. Rising above narrow partisan politics, all progressive parties need to be on their feet to fight. This is our motherland and we cannot afford to witness this kind of mayhems. Only pro-liberation forces can protect this country from marooning in massacres.

Professor Abdul Bayes is a Professor of Economics at Jahangirnagar University.

Fom ancient Athens to modern Athens, the changing face of the Olympics

DR. FAKHRUDDIN AHMED

THE Olympics returned home to Athens, Greece eight years too late. It would have been more appropriate if the centennial of the modern Olympics, 1996, was celebrated at Athens, the home of the Olympics, rather than Atlanta, the home of Coca Cola. The modern Olympics were renewed in Athens in 1896 at the Panathinaiko Stadium, the location of the first ancient Olympics in 776 B.C., and the site of this Olympics' two marathon finishes. Very few nations participated in the 1896 Olympics; America was represented primarily by "gentlemen" from Princeton and Harvard universities, and Britain was likewise represented predominantly by the students from Oxford and Cambridge universities.

Ancient Olympians would not recognise the modern version. The Olympics were meant to be about track and field. Now it is mostly about swimming; the first week anyway. Scandalously, there are as many events in swimming, originally a non-Olympic sport, as in track and field. People walk and run every day; they do not swim or do the "back," "breast," or "butterfly" stroke every day! Why don't they include 1000-meter, 3000-meter, 3200-meter runs for men and women -- distances that are either run internationally or in high schools and colleges in the US -- and add 20,000-meter run, which is close to a half-marathon and can be run on the track in the Olympic stadium? Instead, silly events like synchronised swimming and diving, and rhythmic gymnastic have been added in the Olympics!

America's men's and women's 4x100 meter relay teams are the ultimate underachievers. Three times, most recently in 1960 and 1988 (which deprived Carl Lewis of his 10th Olympic gold) the men were disqualified for out-of-zone-baton exchange. American men in this event spend more time showboating than practicing baton exchange. Faulty baton exchange resulted in American men shockingly finishing second to the unheralded British, and Marion Jones's failure to hand over the baton to Lauryn Williams within the pass zone resulted in the women's team's disqualification. Typically and pompously, both the relay teams, the men through Maurice Greene

and the women through Marion Jones, had predicted gold medals in world record times!

Four years ago, the writer had captioned his review of the Sydney Olympics for The Daily Star as "The Marion Jones Olympics." At Sydney, Jones won an unprecedented five track and field medals, three gold and two bronze. This Olympics, she won none! Jones looked awkward and clumsy in the long jump where she finished 5th, just ahead of India's Anju Bobby George. Like Carl Lewis (six foot one inch) Marion Jones (five foot ten inches) is tall and 100-meter gold medalist. Whereas Carl Lewis had the best long jump technique among top athletes, Marion Jones has the worst. Why she does not train under Lewis's coach Tom Tellez is beyond me. Jones's problems may lie elsewhere. At the risk of sound-

ing unchivalrous I have to note that Jones's downfall started after she had an out of wedlock baby with world 100-meter record holder Tim Montgomery two years ago. Character matters even in track and field! America had a more pleasant experience with the gold medal winning men's and women's 4x400 meter relay teams (India finished 7th in the women's). The real revelation of these games was the 400 meters champion, 20-year old Jeremy Wariner of Baylor University, Texas. As the writer was in Bangladesh during the US Olympics trials in July, he missed seeing Wariner run and shine. Tutored by Baylor alumnus, the great Michael Johnson (record holder and winner of 400-meter golds at Atlanta and Sydney) and coached by Johnson's Baylor coach Clyde Hart, Wariner easily won the 400-meters in a sensational 44.00 seconds and added a second gold as a member of US 4x400 meter relay team.

Wariner is white, who are not "supposed" to be good sprinters. I have always believed such stereotyping to be absolute nonsense. White European track and field stars continue to excel and win gold medals at the Olympics. I disagree with Sir Roger Bannister, the first man to break the 4-minute mile barrier, that blacks have an advantage over whites in sprints because

Africans. Wariner also wants to run 200 meters in which his idol Michael Johnson holds the world record (an unbelievable 19.32 seconds at the Atlanta Olympics!) I have no doubt that the incredibly talented Wariner can better that, as well as break the world record in the 800 meters!

Perusing American press coverage of the Olympics one gets the impression that Afghan and Iraqi women at the Athens Olympics are the first Muslim women to do so. Let us educate ourselves. Two Muslim women, Nawal el-Moutawakel of Morocco and Hassiba Boulmarka of Algeria have already won Olympic gold medals in track and field competition. Nawal el-Moutawakel, a top executive of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) since 1998, currently the director of the committee that will decide which city hosts the 2012 Olympics (among London, Madrid, Moscow, New York, and Paris) won the gold medal in the women's 400 meters hurdles in the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics. Hassiba Boulmarka of Algeria won the prestigious women's 1500 meters gold medal at the Barcelona Olympics in 1992. At the just concluded Athens Olympics, el-Moutawakel's compatriot and coreligionist Morocco's Hasna Benhassi won the silver medal in women's 800 meters final. When Nawal el-Moutawakel, then a stu-

dent Bruno Grandi and hand over the gold to the Korean. The Greek spectators were right to hold up the competition for eleven minutes and boo the gymnastics judges who gave the magnificent Russian gymnast on the parallel bars atrocious points. Otherwise marvelous hosts, the Greek spectators were atrocious themselves when they held up the start of the men's 200-meter final by chanting "Hellas, Hellas" (Greece, Greece) as they lamented the absence of their national hero, the winner of the men's 200-meters at Sydney, Kostas Kenteris. Kenteris (and Katerina Thanou) withdrew from the Olympics after failing to appear for drug tests (which casts doubt on his Sydney gold) and faking an accident. The crowd implied that it was somehow the fault of the American sprinters that Kenteris was absent! Just as they had done in men's 400 meters final, when the race finally started the Americans responded coolly by finishing 1-2-3 in the men's 200-meter final!

I still believe that to break the Olympics medal drought, Bangladesh must concentrate on finesse events such as archery, diving, and shooting. As Australia, the Netherlands, and Germany took the three medals, the best the sub continentals could do in field hockey was finish fifth (Pakistan). After 108

athletes, along with Namibia's outstanding sprinter Frankie Fredricks and a Muslim women medalist in Hijab to stand on the podium with IOC President Jacques Rogge and Athens 2004 president GiannaAngelopoulos-Daskalaki. Nineteen year old American swimmer Michael Phelps from Baltimore tied a record with 8 medals in one Olympics, although he failed to match Mark Spitz's Munich Olympic tally of seven swimming golds. One must sympathise with the winner of men's all round gymnastics American Paul Hamm. It was not his mistake that gave him the gold. But it was a mistake, nevertheless, by the judges that cost the real winner, Korean gymnast Yang Tae Young the gold medal. Hamm should respond to the letter sent to him by the International Gymnastic Federation Presi-

years, the marathon lived up to its name and was run from Marathon to Athens. Legend has it that in 490 B.C. Pheidippides ran from Marathon to Athens bringing the news of the Greeks' triumph over the Persians in the Battle of Marathon before collapsing and dying of exhaustion. The race "marathon" commemorates his run. While Briton Kelly Holmes (800 and 1500 meters), like Hicham El-Guerrouj, became a rare double gold medalist in track, Britain's more celebrated medal hope, Paula Radcliffe, scored a double of different sort -- she dropped out of both the marathon and the 10,000 meters! Therefore, instead of celebrating a blonde national hero, Britain had to settle for a black one!

No world record was broken in men's track and field. The only world record to fall in the women's events was in pole vault, a recent event in which records are broken several times a year. In the men's 110-meter hurdles, China's Liu Xiang tied the world record (12.91 seconds), demonstrating that to set or tie a world record one has to run a perfect race, as he did. The winning times and distances in the track and field events at Athens were in some cases 12 to 13 per cent slower/shorter than the world records, especially in the strength events (shot-put, discus, hammer, and javelin). This contrasts with swimming, which has cleaned up its act, where several world and Olympic records fell. It is almost certain that some track and field records set in the 1980s are drug-tainted. After the establishment of The World Anti-Doping Agency after the Sydney Olympics in 2000, with authority to test any athlete for drugs anytime, suddenly many athletes are not performing at the level they used to! Twenty-five drug cheaters were caught and punished this Olympics. With gold medals in events ranging from canoeing through nine diving medals and golds in men's 110-meter hurdles and women's 10,000 China gave warning that it will be a major force to be reckoned with as the host of the Beijing Olympics in the summer of 2008.

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

It is surprising to see a section of people acting as apologists for the 21/8 carnage inflicted upon a peaceful political meeting. This group of people is trying to portray that violence is not Bangladesh-specific and indeed have occurred in many developed countries let alone many developing ones. Such a statement is incontestable but misses the essence of the existential differences between political violence at home and abroad. Warren Commission Report that was exhaustive and accepted as the final word by the American people followed John Kennedy's assassination. Conspiracy theory relating to Kennedy assassination abounds and will continue to exist, as many people still believe that Elvis Presley is still alive. Swedish Foreign Minister Anna Lindt's murderer has been captured and is now on trial for murder. Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's killer gave himself up immediately after the shooting. Every one knows the name of the assassin of Mahatma Gandhi -- Nathuram Godse -- and the

demented motive that led to the extinction of one of the greatest and saintly lives of the modern era. In the case of the Nepalese royal family tragedy the facts surrounding the event and the hand that pulled the lethal weapon causing the death of the King and the Queen, among others, is well known. Marcos' involvement in the Aquino murder was so apparent that Aquino's widow was swept to the Presidency as a result. Indira Gandhi's assassins were hanged, as were those of Rajiv Gandhi.

From Lincoln to Kennedy brothers to attempt on the life of Ronald Reagan to those in South and South East Asia -- in each case the perpetrators were caught and punished. To bring in the questions relating to unstable politico-security situation in Afghanistan, the Tamil-Singhalese conflict, Indo-Pak tension, and militancy in Myanmar as a backdrop of the 21/8 terrorist act is simply not understandable. Bangladesh does not have ethnic divide as in Sri Lanka. Regarding Myanmar still under military rule for decades the multi-ethnic conflict with the majority Burmans has no

similarity with the Bangladesh situation. It is asinine to draw upon the tragedies of the West where the guilty is invariably apprehended and punished.

What happened on 21/8 at Dhaka was an attempt to wipe out the entire leadership of the Awami League by a band of assassins determined to destroy the democratic fibre of the nation. If they had succeeded in their nefarious aim Bangladesh could have been classified as a failed state meeting William Olson's definition as a state facing serious "internal problems that threaten continued coherence" or "significant internal challenge to their political order". That the world today, particularly after 9/11, is passing through a critical stage involving possible civilizational conflict is to state the obvious. President Clinton's Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's recent apportionment of blame to Bush administration for dissipating US goodwill which had existed in the world for decades and replacing it with fear and hatred of American might and her earlier observation of tectonic shift in the US foreign and defense policies after Bush admin-

istration had taken over power -- such a shift never seen in the American history -- are indicative of civilizational conflict currently raging in the world.

But then it is difficult to draw a casual relationship between the conflictual situation reigning in the world with that of 21/8 carnage unless one were to give serious credence to the claim by Hikmatul Jihad that they were responsible for the attack on Awami League leadership on that fateful day. It can be argued that this outfit's (reportedly a terrorist Islamic outfit) rage against Awami League is because of the party's advocacy of secularism and its fight against repression of Hindu minority community. If Hikmatul Jihad has transnational connection then the attack of 21/8 dons a more sinister apparition. Otherwise to connect the terrorism of 21/8 with the prevailing unstable situation in some parts of the world appears to be a deliberate attempt at obfuscation and may mislead both the people and the international community from the real motive behind the planning and execution of the carnage and the investigators from apprehending the

murderers. The apologists should look at our neighborhood where political leadership is not targeted for assassination and serial bombing incidents (from Udichi to Ramnabatamul), murders/assault on journalists (Manik Saha and others), bomb blasts at Sylhet and at cinema halls, attack on Awami League and Communist Party meetings do not occur as a matter of course. Even in Pakistan such violence is not endemic despite assassination attempts on President Musharraf and Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz that are believed to be the handiwork of al-Qaedaist elements. Assassination attempt on President Kumaratunga was clearly a Tamil separatist operation. The apologists would be well advised not to confuse the global instability with graduated murderous assault on Awami League leadership and activists.

The demand for international investigation into the 21/8 events reflects the total lack of trust of the victims in the integrity and ability of the government to conduct an impartial inquiry. Such distrust is a result of serial failure of the authorities to

adhere to the concept of politics and power. Max Weber defined the state as "the rule of men over men based on the means of legitimate, that is allegedly legitimate, violence". And politics is the art of gaining power. But if the path to power goes through the infected garden of violence then the Frankensteinian boomerang effect of violence substituting state power may become a distinct possibility.

German political scientist Hannah Arendt expressed her fear that nowhere is the self-defeating factor in the victory of violence over power more evident than in the use of terror to maintain domination. Terror, she adds, is not the same as violence; it is rather the form of government that comes into being when violence having destroyed all power, does not abdicate but, on the contrary remains in full control. Every kind of opposition must disappear before full force of terror is let loose. Rationale of this strand of reasoning demands utmost commitment on the part of our authorities to unveil the planners and executors of 21/8 carnage. Superficial nalmacy displayed through deployment of law enforcing agents like the Pakistani occupation army

did in then East Pakistan may not arrest the collapse of domestic governing authority, civil strife and economic breakdown. Peace will automatically come when people get back good governance from their elected representatives and not live under constant fear for life and property.

European Union has already called upon the government to promptly investigate the attack in a fair and transparent manner and has warned that failure to prevent and satisfactorily resolve these attacks will contribute to a climate of impunity for such acts. There can be no apology for violence and lawlessness. If the Marxian interpretation of the state as an instrument of violence in the command of the ruling class has lost global currency due to the end of the Cold War, inter-faith divide appears to be widening. Sociologist Peter Berger's contention that the world today is massively religious and is anything but secularised that had been predicted by many authors of modernity is noteworthy. If intra-state violence is caused by intolerance of inter-faith divide due to grotesque interpretation of religious belief then

apologists should pause and redirect their action towards finding a correct conclusion of the violent act instead of becoming complicit in the act itself through Houdinitic interpretation of terrorism.

This is no time to play hide and seek. It becomes the incumbent duty of all Bangladeshis to demand of the authorities for a fair account of the discharge of their responsibilities, a quick and transparent enquiry into the 21/8 carnage and others preceding it. It is equally incumbent upon all of us to ensure that the apologists are denied space to muddle water to provide escape route for those trying to destroy the democratic foundation of Bangladesh.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is a former Secretary and Ambassador.