

Murder in Mirpur

Brazen killing mock's anti-crime drive

THE execution-style killing of a local businessman and shooting of his son in broad daylight as they emerged from Friday prayers in Mirpur cannot be considered anything but the most heinous of crimes. That the killers thought nothing of carrying out the brutal murder in public and of violating the sanctity of the local mosque to do so speaks volumes of the mentality behind the killings. This was reportedly the fifth killing of a businessman by extortionists in the past month and a half.

These kinds of crimes were supposed to be things of the past. First we had Operation Cleanheart which was launched ostensibly to clear the streets of the criminals who had been patronised by the recently uneated AL government. Then came Rab. The tacit admission made by the government in forming Rab and apparently granting it plenary powers to execute alleged criminals without trial is that the police and judiciary were corrupted beyond repair and that this was the only way to restore law and order.

What we are now seeing is that apart from the moral hazards of such a policy, that it has not even been effective in making the public safer from criminals. It seems to us that since Rab came into being that the known criminals have gone into retreat and their places appear to have been taken by newer ones. One conclusion that can be drawn from this is that perhaps many of the real criminals are somehow managing to evade the Rab dragnet.

However one looks at it, Friday's tragedy points to the hollowness of the government's crime fighting approach. The government has neither respected the rule of law nor made the public safe. The government's drive for law and order has been in both moral and practical terms a failure.

What is needed is serious reform of intelligence gathering and policing, and more importantly, the delinking of organised crime from organised politics. It is the culture of impunity which allows criminals to continue to terrorise the public and this culture of impunity stems from the political connections of the criminals or those who patronise them.

Until the government takes the hard steps to initiate serious reform in the law enforcement mechanism, then killings such as the shooting of Shahidullah in Mirpur will continue to haunt us no matter how many alleged criminals Rab executes without benefit of trial.

Violent end of Kadirgamar

The fall-out looks grimmer

THE assassination of Sri Lanka's foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar and the post-haste declaration of emergency by President Kumaratunga have pushed the embattled island country into a deeper crisis.

The separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have struck -- from the rear. They have killed by snipe shots Sri Lanka's astute, articulate and internationally well-known septuagenarian foreign minister Kadirgamar.

The lethal sniping, as contrasted with suicide bomber, that could penetrate the heavy defense-ring around him is a proof, if any were required, of the inherent vulnerability that potential political targets have to determined assassination bids.

Kadirgamar, in spite of being a fellow Tamil, and, perhaps because of it, had courted LTTE's wrath by taking his nationalist approach of integration between the Sinhalese and the Tamils to a point where his role was being openly looked with discomfiture by the hardcore separatists. He was courageous enough to own up the successes in getting the Tigers outlawed in a good number of countries including the United States and Britain. Little wonder, he had premonitions of what was coming and he had expressed as much in public.

But it seems an LTTE left beleaguered by factional breakaways, allegedly backed by the government security forces, acted in desperation.

Strains have been developing on the peace process brokered by Norway under which a cease-fire truce was accomplished three years ago. The talks themselves have been stalled for more than two years, although the LTTE had agreed to abide by the cease-fire. But the battle lines may have been drawn afresh now.

With President Kumaratunga declaring national emergency and taking all state powers into her hand, the government's emphasis on military solution may have got the better of its approach to a negotiated settlement. We have to wait and see. Bangladesh being a close friend of Sri Lanka will only earnestly hope for a full revival of the peace process in that potentially highly resourceful country in the near future.

M. ABDUL LATIF MONDAL

WHEN the media people asked the Minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Moudud Ahmed as to why the government had unilaterally appointed Justice M A Aziz the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ignoring the opposition parties' demand for appointing the CEC through consensus of the political parties, his reply was that such a political culture had not yet developed in Bangladesh. This gives rise to the question as to what characterises political culture in Bangladesh.

First, personality cult has been dominating the arena of politics. Instead of "institutionalising" their charisma, the leaders started "a process of personalisation." The personality cult destroys cohesion and discipline within the political parties concerned. Empirical evidence shows that it has affected the growth of democratic culture within the major political parties.

Second, the political parties have a winner-take-all mentality. In other words, the political parties, in particular the ruling party, lack give and take mentality. Compromise gives in to confrontation. Egotism reigns over logic. For instance, the BNP-led alliance government could easily have avoided a confrontation with the opposition if it had consulted the opposition on the appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner.

Third, the political parties and their leaders have always been intolerant of criticism by the opposition and the press. In his book *Democracy and the Challenge of Development* (1995) Moudud Ahmed has described the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour of the leading leaders of the ruling parties during the first two decades or so of

independence. He writes: " If we examine carefully the behaviour pattern of the leaders of any ruling party, their reactions and reflections, we find that it was a lack of tolerance that led them to jeopardise the growth of democracy in the country. For example, Sheikh Mujib became so intolerant of the

willng to go for a battle of wits. In the columns of an English daily it has been stated that in the past the politicians argued over the issues and mobilised the masses in their support. At the end of the day, though, they never forgot to be civil to one another. They laughed, they bantered, and they shared jokes,

ment boycott culture" has put the nascent parliamentary democracy at stake.

Sixth, since the return to parliamentary democracy in 1991, the BNP and the AL in their role as the main opposition party have been active in using hartals (national strikes) as a means of protest. The opposition parties led by the BNP and the AL resorted to frequent hartals to bring the downfall of the Ershad government in December 1990. Even after the fall of the Ershad government in December 1990 and return to parliamentary democracy in 1991, hartals have continued to be used by the main opposition party more frequently. According to a UNDP report released in Dhaka in March last, the frequency of hartals has increased dramatically after reintroduction of parliamentary democracy. Between 1995 and 2002, for example, 611 hartals were called. The report dubs this "vicious spiral" as Bangladesh's "hartal culture," and concludes that this culture is

all away from the ideologies or principles they upheld in public. The present day political leaders of the country do not learn from the leaders in the west and India. The British Prime Minister and the leader of the opposition converse and laugh as they walk together to the opening of parliament. The President of the United States and the man he has just defeated in the race for the White House do not hold anything against each other. Atal Behari Vajpayee and Sonia Gandhi greet each other with folded hands. Bangladesh has reached such stage where the Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and the leader of the opposition Sheikh Hasina do not have the time or the inclination to speak to each other.

Fifth, boycotting the parliament sessions and sittings has been a "culture" since the reestablishment of the parliamentary system of government in 1991. In a parliamentary democracy, the parliament is the place for the discussion, debate, and settlement of important issues, national or other-

there to show that some ministers of Ziaur Rahman's regime who were convicted by martial law courts later joined Ershad's council of ministers. One notable example is that of a minister in Sheikh Mujib's cabinet who resigned then but later joined Ershad as prime minister. Another notable example is that of the vice-president of the Ershad government who has joined the BNP and become a cabinet minister. More instances may be cited. According to many, the driving force is primarily to have a sense of security as well as the propensity to hang on to power.

Last but not the least, an important feature in Bangladesh politics is the hereditary nature of leadership developed in the party system, particularly in the AL and the BNP, the two major political parties in the country. Sheikh Hasina joined national politics in 1981 as president of the AL banking on the image of her assassinated father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, founding father of the nation. Begum Khaleda Zia joined politics a cou-

ple of years later banking on the image of her assassinated husband Ziaur Rahman, a liberation war hero. Although both of them are now well settled in their respective positions, yet they "are perhaps a bit tired and possibly pondering over abdicating to their successors."

Bangladesh has adopted a Westminster style of parliamentary democracy. But as democracy is a complex system of government based on a political culture of checks and balances and representation, it is always more than a mere form. The political scientists and analysts are of the opinion that the success of a parliamentary democracy depends upon the democratic spirit of tolerance, devoted sense of respect and relentless response towards the institutionalism of democracy. In a country like Bangladesh where democracy has made a fresh start, the political parties, particularly the ruling party or the principal leadership, must do everything towards developing a political culture that would contribute to the successful functioning of democracy. The onus primarily lies on the leadership of the ruling party. To attain the objective, the ruling leadership must, *inter alia*, respect the opinion of the public and the opinion of the opposition, resolve all political disputes with the spirit of democracy, take all steps to make parliament effective, and build up honest and devoted future leaders.

M. Abdul Latif Mondal is a former Secretary to the Government.

Fresh light on 1984 riots

this week, too has not done a thorough job. It has failed to name the real persons who were behind the carnage. Jagdish Tytler's resignation from the union cabinet has lessened a bit of pressure on the Congress party which was in power in 1984. But he is not the real culprit. He, like Sajjan Kumar and Dharm Shastri, named by the Nanavati report,

guards evoked "a spontaneous reaction of the angry public." He says there is evidence to show that male members of the Sikh community were taken out of their houses. "They were beaten first and then burnt alive in a systematic manner. In some cases tyres were put around their necks and then they were set on fire by pouring kerosene or petrol over them. In some cases white

less a promise for introspection. All that the government report says is that "it has decided to advise the state governments, Union Territories and Delhi public to take necessary action accordingly." This bureaucratic jargon does not mean anything, at least nothing to the families of victims who are far from rehabilitated.

I talked to Nanavati after he had submitted the report. I found

help heal the wounds that are still agape. When I initiated in the Rajya Sabha a proposal for the appointment of a commission, I had in mind something on the lines of Truth and Reconciliation Commission appointed in South Africa to know frankly, without the fear of punishment why the whites harassed, hounded, and even killed the blacks during the apartheid regime. I wanted some

because Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was too engrossed in his grief over the assassination of his mother. Alexender cannot run away from the responsibility of delayed action against the mobs. Gavai has said from Nagpur where he is living after his retirement: "I was fighting my own battle then. None were interested in containing the riots. I was just called for meeting after meetings but received no help as far as containing the riots were concerned. Even the army help came a day late, when most of things were already under control. Whatever damage had to happen, happened on the first day itself. When I asked then army chief General A.S. Vaidya why there was delay in sending troops, he said, 'It takes time to organise troops'."

I am disturbed to hear that the further investigations that Nanavati has proposed will be given to the same old investigating agencies. They failed in the past. Nanavati has said so in his report. Entrusting probes to them will be a deliberate act not to pursue things seriously. The ruling party is probably afraid that more Congressmen and their loyal officers may be exposed. Some truth may come to light if further investigations are entrusted to the National Human Rights Commission. It does not have large machinery for probe. But it has a small but honest and dedicated team of investigators. They may be able to ferret out the facts, which are lost or hidden at present among a lot of things.

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.

Contradictory demand

When campaigns against the death penalty are ongoing the world over, some of the political leaders and lawyers in Bangladesh are pressing the govt. hard to cancel the clemency extended to Jhantu by the President of the country. By that they are abdicating their responsibility to the society. If the President of the Republic has pardoned someone it is his prerogative which cannot be questioned.

Ahmed Sujon
One e-mail

Sufferings of two girls

On Wednesday August 3, DS published two pathetic stories of child abuse. The first one is of a 12 year old, Aklima, who was sent to prison, accused of stealing by her

employer. She was beaten severely and forced to admit of the theft, which she did not actually commit. Second is of Mursheda, an 8 year old, who was beaten by her landlord as she was trying to get a guava. Later she had to be admitted to hospital. Of late there have been many reports of these kind of heinous acts on children, mostly on domestic help. The matter of sorrow is that it is the educated and rich who are perpetrating these barbaric acts. I wonder when will they accord the dignity and the rights to their domestic help that they deserve? I request all conscious people, to come forward to save the innocent children and helpless domestic help.

Muhammad Bin Abdullah
Cox's Bazaar

Passport renewal fee

This letter is for the attention of the Foreign Ministry. Renewal of passport in UK costs 70 pounds, which is one week's expense (rent + transport + food) of a student. It was 36 pounds previously. This fee is highly exorbitant compared with other countries' consular service. Will the ministry look into this?

Maruf Mahboob
London
UK

Who's to bell the cat?

I hail Mr. Manmohan Singh, the Indian PM who addressed the joint session of the US

Congress and asserted that, "fight against terror can not be selective". I do not know if India, as he referred to, has suffered grievously for terrorism, but I know they could not stop communal riots!

However, I must say, as he said in

his speech "we know that those who resort to terror often clothe it in the garb of real or imaginary grievances. We must categorically affirm that no grievance can justify resort to terror," well said.

As Mr. Singh did not identify in his speech the 'real terror' in the world today, I want to prompt him to fill up the blank--that's the US' and the real terrorist is Mr. Bush. Let Bush push aside his kind of terrorism in Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine, the world will see no more the, killings and destruction that have been let loose by him and his lackeys.

AF Rahaman
One e-mail

Bourgeois democracy

The bourgeois democracy has taken a new form in Bangladesh and a handful of people is amassing

huge wealth while the rest are starving. This phenomenon has given rise to extremism of all forms and the Parliament has become a debating chamber only.

It has become a tradition for the Opposition to boycott the Parliament. But the boycotting M.Ps draw their allowances borne by the people whom they are supposed to represent; but they negate the practice of parliamentary democracy and deliberately fail to ventilate their views in the national forum. Instead, they pass their time in the secretariat lobbying for business while the nation faces uncertainty.

This trend has led to the emergence of Maoism and religious radicals. In Britain, discrimination has led to emergence of extremist elements, and if the British society had remained integrated, this would not have taken place in U.K. As is

happening in neighboring Nepal, the Maoist movement has taken their grip and the unemployed youth are filling the rank and file of the Maoist movement. It is high time that our society took cognizance of this trend. Or else, there is every possibility of moving towards complete destruction of our social fabric. This is definitely a conspiracy to harm the nation so that we do not survive as a sovereign and independent country.

S.M. Khalid Chowdhury
On e-mail

Encouragement for exporters

While the country is reeling from severe dollar shortage during the last few months, we were amazed to see that none of the cabinet members, specially our "Honourable"

Finance Minister, had anything to say to encourage the exporters. If the government does not appreciate the exporters, at least in words, then it is really shutting out one way of relief.

CNR
Chittagong

Stop using stick

In our country many schools use stick to punish their students. I don't support it at all. I think it is a wrong way of punishment. On the other hand, it creates immense frustration on their soft mind.

They are also being hampered psychologically. It is our responsibility to make a friendly environment for their education. School authorities should search for an alternative way. They may use detention system. These students are our future prospect. We can't be complacent with this important issue.

G.M. Rezwana Rasul
Dhaka City College, Dhaka

Mobile number system in Bangladesh

Nowadays mobile phones are very much common to our people. Many people use it for different purpose. The number system of mobile is not clear to me. People says my number is 0171,0189, etc. The 0 at first

comes for our country code +880. Ultimately if anyone says that his number is 0171123-456 then the real number is 171 1230456. I am confused because the mobile companies also say in that format to append a 0 in front. Will anyone clear my confusion?

Hasnat Ahsan Jyoti
CUET, Chittagong