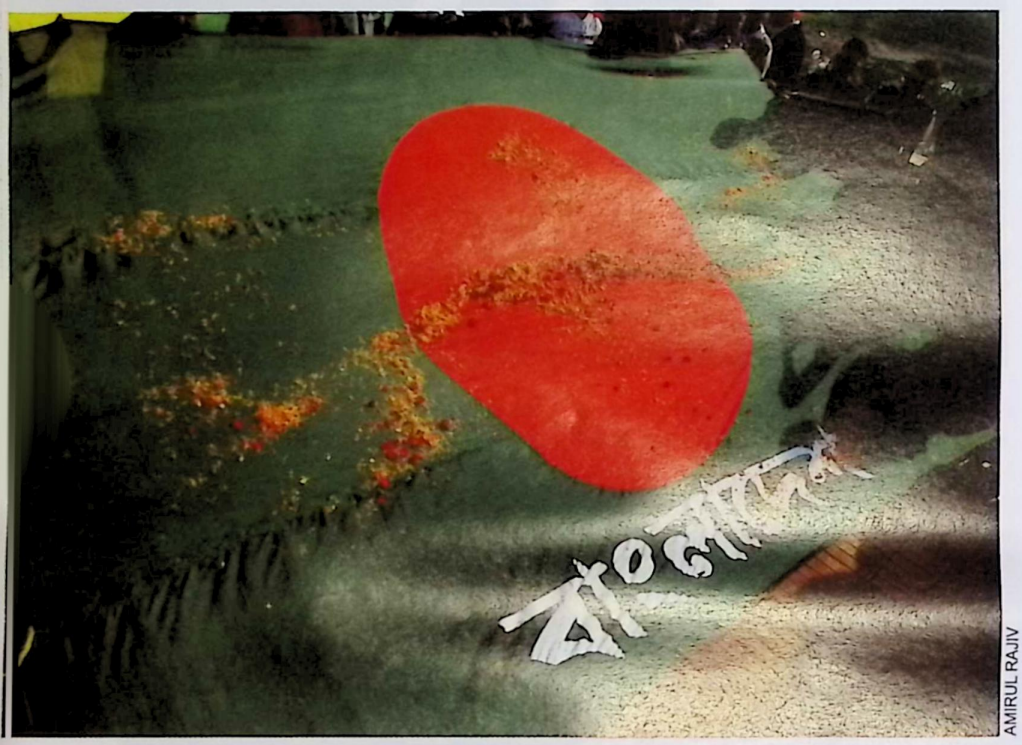
around the world, from Bosnia to the Congo. Bangladeshi sportsmen have enthralled their compatriots with a stunning victory against the world champions of cricket.

The people of Bangladesh have amply demonstrated their preference for change of governments through constitutional means and, when all else had failed, successfully overthrowing our own home-grown despots without inviting an invading army. One can only conclude that Bangladesh is visionary and inspirational and passionately indomitable. Without a doubt, she has earned her rightful place in the community of sovereign nations.



AMIRUL RAJIV

Only one obstacle stands in the path of Bangladesh and her destiny: Politics! After a life and death struggle for freedom and social justice the political culture of liberated Bangladesh has come full circle, from total revolution to total failure. Two assassinations in two decades of disastrous political misadventure, corruption and misrule have completely crushed the spirit of "liberty, equality, and fraternity."

One cannot overstate the damage to the national psyche. All the idealism and all the heroism and all the patriotism could not diminish the deluge of dashed hopes. Since then, societies for secret killings are an open secret, libel and slander are liberally exchanged and "status" is traded with ruthless jealousy. Unconstrained by tradition and social custom, "liberty" has come to mean the licence to indulge in every desirable evil, untouched by the long amputated arm of the law.

Since then, the silent majority of innocent by-standers lives in constant fear of the feuds between colliding ambitions, and the arrogance of easy money. The endeavours of ordinary citizens stand for nothing, and decency is condemned to solitary confinement. Streets are the seats of learning where our children are apprenticed in the crafts of violence. Legality is denied independent dispensation, while political patronage tips the scales of justice. Freedom of the press is not infrequently silenced by lethal "rejoinders." While the holiest of holies, religion, is embraced with lust by passionate power-seekers. When ignorance and arrogance complete a fatal attraction, any crudity is conceivable.

Power is the end game -- the first and last game. Nothing takes precedence over the acquisition of absolute authority. This appetite is no less fundamental than religious fanaticism, ideology or tribal loyalty. It is the driving force behind the grand charade of political manifestos, and the elaborate pretence of the common weal. In the spirit of this all-consuming philosophy our leaders remain inflexible to the bitter end, demolishing everything in their path.

Political parties are glorified cult followings that ritualistically echo their masters' voices, and offer little to choose between one above the other. None of them displays even a spark of imagination, and all are equally enthusiastically aggressive and obsessively confrontational. What is worse is the fact that there is no reason to expect any change in the political climate, since intolerance and intimidation are the tried and tested formula for success. The rest is history.

Under these conditions it seems totally unnecessary to repeat the litany of sins of the mighty -- the endless strikes, the refusal to negotiate, the abuse of power, the harbouring of criminals, the armed cadres, the personal vendettas, the complete disregard of the rule of law and, of course, the infamous corruption.

Needless to say, none of this is news to anyone anymore and all of the above apply equally to all the usual suspects, whether in office or in the opposition. Compromise, accommodation and consensus are words that have been deleted from the dictionary. Instead, the politicization of every organ of government, the breakdown of law and order, the absence of accountability and the "modest" veiling of transparency, have become the accepted norms of "good" governance.

The alternative represents a Utopian ideal, consisting of cliched catch phrases that no longer bear any meaning whatsoever, even to a single foot-soldier on the battlefield of political Bangladesh. Predictably enough the arch combatants will readily agree, but only when the evils of "bad" governance are applicable to their arch rivals alone. Despite the electorate's clear message every five years our political elite remain unrepentant and supremely confident of eluding the judgment of history. Public opinion, of course, is completely irrelevant. So much for liberty, equality and whatever else ...