

Deaths at RMCH

Somebody must be held responsible

THE circumstances that led to the death of nine patients at Rajshahi Medical College Hospital, four on Thursday and five on Friday, following the work abstention of the intern doctors are horrifying and utterly unacceptable. These unfortunate patients, including some children and old persons, came to the hospital seeking treatment for their ailments but they were denied the needed medical assistance, which the intern doctors were oath-bound to give. And when children die under such adverse circumstances people are bound to ask the obvious question: Who will be held responsible for these deaths?

By all means, the incident at Rajshahi Medical College Hospital was blown out of proportion when an unpleasant altercation took place between the intern doctors and some attendants of patients on Thursday, which snowballed into a major disorder. From exchange of verbal abuses it went as far as resorting to physical violence, which was followed by the intern doctors calling for an indefinite strike. The doctors simply walked out of their job. Here is where the whole sordid affair takes a turn for the worse. Assuming that the doctors were not at fault how could they bring themselves to turning the hospital into a hellhole with their action that took a toll of nine lives?

We cannot but ask a couple of questions: How can doctors resort to physical violence while seeking to 'right' some wrongs done to them and turn their backs to patients under their care? Aren't they supposed to be the epitome of professional commitment, discipline, level headedness and tolerance in every situation? This trait of losing control too easily paints a sorry picture of the people in the medical profession, who otherwise are held in the highest esteem by common people.

We cannot but say that the refusal to attend to patients is tantamount to committing a criminal offence. Therefore, the relevant authorities should lose no time in defusing the volatile situation and also launching a proper investigation to hold the people responsible for the deaths accountable.

Paul Wolfowitz caves

in, finally*The World Bank must now get back to business*

PAUL Wolfowitz would have done himself and the World Bank much good if he had resigned on his own rather than as a result of pressure. As it is, in his attempt to hang on to his job as president of the institution, he not only demonstrated his own churlishness but also made the bank hostage to his personal indiscretions. Any individual occupying such an important position as chief of the World Bank is expected to understand when he must sacrifice his self-interest once it clashes with the larger goals of the organisation itself. Mr. Wolfowitz, after he was ousted on the generous pay package he had arranged for his partner Shaha Riza when she was seconded from the World Bank to the US State Department, clearly did not let such considerations stand in his way.

Now that Wolfowitz has agreed to give up his job at the end of June, the World Bank must begin to clean up the mess his conduct has created in these past many weeks. President Bush, we understand, plans to put forward a quick replacement for the man whose ideas he has always shared and whom he is reluctantly having to see leave. We hardly need to mention here, as so many others are doing around the world, that Mr. Wolfowitz's successor must have credentials higher and better than being on friendly terms with or sharing ideology with the neocons in Washington. Of course, Wolfowitz's reputation as a neocon had little to do with his recent conduct. Even so, one cannot ignore the fact that he was a bad choice to head the World Bank. As a leading exponent of the Iraq war, the now disgraced chief of the World Bank took the lead in propagating the lie about Saddam Hussein's (non-existent) weapons of mass destruction. His prediction that cheerful Iraqis would welcome American soldiers as liberators in Baghdad turned out to be a joke. The joke then became a near tragedy when Wolfowitz himself escaped death in an explosion in Baghdad. It was a shaken deputy defence secretary (which Wolfowitz then was) who was quickly flown out of Iraq's chaotic capital.

The World Bank needs to begin working on a fresh new slate. Mr. Wolfowitz's successor ought to be appointed on the basis of personal integrity and a good grasp of international economics, neither of which was a qualification in the departing president. If that is ensured, the bank can redirect attention to its global mission of addressing poverty, a job that has been in suspension these few weeks.

Discerning dissimilarity



KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

GOING DEEPER

In the case of Bangladesh, we should not be swayed by external pressure that, however well intentioned, may not be conversant with the ground realities of the country. In the ultimate analysis, the people of Bangladesh who time and again have displayed enviable political maturity, are the ultimate judge and are expected to garland the good intentions of the interim government and other agencies who are determined to present to the people a politico-administrative structure bereft of the ills of the recent past.

ONE of the advisors has told the press that Bangladesh army chief and the Pakistani president (who stubbornly wants to retain his position of the army chief) are not to be compared in similar vein. Indeed they are not to be.

Though Bangladesh for some time had remained a part of Pakistan due to then propagated two nations theory that the Muslims and the Hindus were so different that they could not stay together, it has now been proved after loss of lives and shedding of blood that the two wings of them Pakistan ordained by the British colonial rulers to be one country were also vastly different.

Therefore it is no wonder that two persons heading similar institutions but of two countries so dissimilar linguistically, culturally, and in many other ways would also not be similar in thought.

Even in the olden days of the

British rule, points out political analyst Robert Kaplan (The Lawless Frontier) "British civil administration extended only to Lahore, in the fertile Punjab." But the rest of Pakistan, he writes, the rugged border regions of Baluchistan, NWFP, the alkaline wasteland of Sind and the Hindukush and the Karakoram mountains has never been subdued by the British or anyone else.

Bengal, on the other hand, though no less rebellious, had an intellectual understanding of the freedom movement during the British Raj, prompting one eminent political leader to say that what Bengal thinks today the rest of India thinks tomorrow.

It would, however, be a travesty of history if one were to give full credit to Bengal for achieving Indian independence and the partition of the sub-continent. While both

Mahatma Gandhi, Sardar Patel, and Mohammed Ali Jinnah were from Gujarat, Pandit Nehru, and many others were from different parts of India. Independence struggle was therefore a fruit of Indian unity as Pakistan was the result of their unity displayed by the Muslims of India though many preferred not to migrate to Pakistan.

The events of 1971 blew apart forever the myth that religion alone can be the basis of national unity and bore testimony to French Orientalist Ernest Renan's assertion that nations are basically unstable and are susceptible to collapse into divisions and sub-divisions based on clan, tribe, language, or religion.

The creation of Bangladesh and the collapse of Yugoslavia into several independent countries are testimony to the accuracy of Renan's thesis. Besides, "nation language," as seen in the use of Caribbean

English which, as seen by Edward Braithwaite may be English in terms of its lexical features but is heavily influenced by African heritage in the Caribbean culture, and is not English "in its contours, its rhythm and timbre, its sound explosion." Similarly, the language spoken in the two parts of Bengal are different in experience and sensibility, with religion having profound influence on the culture of the two Bengals.

The point made in this discourse is that of the fragmentation of national personality even within the context of a nation-state, as in the case of the Pashto who never accepted the Durand Line drawn by the British envoy Sir Mortimer Durand in 1893 as the international border between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

It would be asinine to draw similarity between what the military leaders of the two states now dis-

tanced by more than one thousand miles had said in different context. For a few decades Pakistan and Bangladesh had shared history that could not form a nation and finally dissolved into two countries.

While democratic aspirations of the people are global and people's consent to govern is the prime requisite to gain legitimacy, both nationally and internationally, each country, particularly the developing ones who lack centuries old transformational experiences of hereditary monarchy, fascism, and communism, as opposed to the developed ones and who have reached the "end point of mankind's ideological evolution" in liberal democracy, should be given time to put their house in order.

Inordinate delay, however, in letting the people have the opportunity to elect their own governors and the process announced by the Election Commission (questioned by the political parties) that appears to be not only in violation of electoral rules and the judgment of the High Court but may also flawed in light of the religio-cultural background of the voters have raised concerns.

The Election Commission would be well advised to consult the main stakeholders (i.e. the political parties and the people) before taking any firm decision. The unsolicited

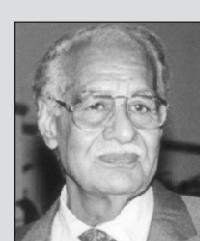
advice from abroad, if received in the form of pressure, should be ignored. But advice and technical assistance given to hold a free and fair election should be welcomed.

One must be cognizant of the fact that the subaltern history is a matter of the past and in this age of globalization there should be no let up in the resistance to the new elite who presume to carry on the White Man's Burden. Indeed a famous sociologist had aptly observed that for a society to claim universal desirability while turning its back on others from which it is convinced it has nothing to learn is not only cultural elitism, it is cultural racism.

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Kazi Anwarul Masud is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

Caste stalls communalism

KULDIP NAYAR
writes from New Delhi

BETWEEN THE LINES

India is not what the RSS foot soldiers represent, forcing their set of "morals." An art student at the university at Vadodara, Gujarat, was detained by the Narendra Modi government for exhibiting "objectionable" paintings. The RSS youth wing, Akhil Bhartiya Vidya Parishad (ABVP), destroyed the exhibition and even had the dean suspended. In Bhopal, the ABVP reportedly killed a professor who objected to its rowdy-ism in student union election. The state government is that of the BJP. The RSS has torn a leaf from the book of Taliban. It is beginning to do the same things to Talibanise Hindus. It is setting into motion such forces which may one day become a Frankenstein. Pakistan knows it to its cost.

rivals, their victory is a defeat for those forces which pulled down the Babri masjid, released a cassette to vilify Muslims, and evoked little hope for a better future for the poor. Consequently, the BJP has been reduced to a rump with 50 seats, 38 less than the last time, with only 16.93 percent of the votes polled.

No doubt, Mayawati is way ahead of Mulayam Singh, 206 seats against 97 (vote-wise, the difference is a mere five percent). But both represent a phenomenon which may well counter the elements that are determined to demolish the pluralistic character of the Indian polity. This caste combination, with Muslims and poor Brahmins, may throw up a different type of identity that may demand a bigger slice of the cake. The combination may also become firmer by 2009, when the parliamentary elections are due. The Congress will be hard put to prove its credibility.

The two leaders, Mayawati from the Dalit (untouchables) and Mulayam Singh from the Yadav (the other backward classes), have won between them 303 seats in a 403-member house -- which is two-thirds -- with 56.5 percent of the votes polled. Although both are arch-

By raising Jai Ram slogan

once again, and by re-selecting Kalyan Singh who was the chief minister when the masjid was destroyed, the BJP threw down the gauntlet, which the Dalits, the other backward classes, and Muslims picked up. The outcome has been the decimation of the Hindutva forces. Yet, there is no remorse or introspection in the BJP quarters for having taken a blatant religious and anti-Muslim stand. Murli Manohar Joshi, a party stalwart, wants more of Hindutva and regrets its "absence" from the party's agenda during the polls. Maybe, he expresses the BJP's reaction to its debacle.

Strange, a party which aspires to rule India has not yet realized that its sectarian, religious stand does not sell in the country, which is proud of its diversities and identities. At one time it looked as if the BJP had felt the futility of making secular India into a Hindu rashtra. This was when it placed its bigotry aside, and came to power at the centre with the help of parties known for their

faith in secularism.

It turned out that the BJP had only changed its tactics, not its ideology. The BJP, in its furtive way, went on chipping at India's common heritage. Education was the worst sufferer. The fatal blow was the ethnic cleansing in Gujarat. The BJP's defeat in the last election should have chastened the party. Despite its contribution to development, it lost because the Indian society, however divided, does not like its leaders to be parochial.

Still, both caste and communal forces are not good for the country's health. Both are divisive in their approach, and both put India, as such, behind. Let there be a plague on both houses. But what does one do when one of them is determined to break up the country in the name of Hinduism and its superiority? At least, caste has many layers contesting against one another. Communalism is monolithic, with passions and prejudices of one community brimming to the surface to the

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The Hindutva crowd forgets what India represents. Many years ago, Yehudi Menuhin, the outstanding violinist, told Jawaharlal Nehru in a letter: "When I myself think of India I think of a quality specifically Indian, which in my imagination holds something of the innocence of the fabled and symbolic Garden of Eden. To me India means the villages, the aesthetic harmony of their people, the life of the oxen and the monkeys to the flame trees and the mangoes; I think of the innate dignity and tolerance of the Hindu and his tradition. The capacity of experiencing the full depth and breadth of life's pleasures and pains without losing a nobler recognition, of knowing intimately creation while remaining deeply humble, are characteristics peculiar to those villages."

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

Sarkozy takes over

Though Chirac and Sarkozy belong to the same camp, Sarkozy's entry into Elysee Palace is seen by many as a turning point in the political history of France. Sarkozy is intensely liked and disliked by the French polity because he is at once a sharp-tongued conservative, authoritarian, pro-American, and pro-Israeli. To many, Sarkozy is a leader who lacks aristocratic elegance, which his predecessor graciously manifested.

MAHMOOD HASAN

NICOLAS Sarkozy took over as the sixth President of the fifth French Republic on May 16. The era of Jacques Chirac (1995-2007) came to an end on that day when he left the Elysee Palace at 11:30 am. Sarkozy escorted Chirac to his car, bid him farewell and returned to take charge of the presidency.

In a short but solemn ceremony at the ornate palace, the president of the Conseil Constitutionnel (Constitutional Council) Jean Louis Debre read out the proclamation, whereupon Nicolas Sarkozy signed the document, taking over as president of France. There was no swearing-in or oath taking by the new president. The smooth transfer of powers speaks

eloquently of continuity and strength of the Fifth Republic.

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After taking over, Sarkozy made a brief statement highlighting the programs that his government will pursue. The statement was based on the French national motto -- Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. The only new addition that Sarkozy articulated

was that of "Unity." The French society was deeply divided during the presidential elections, which manifested itself in the street riots following Sarkozy's victory. He has already resigned from the UMP post and declared in his statement that he now was president of France, with a single identity.

The French National Assembly elections are over two rounds -- on May 10 and May 17. Sarkozy's immediate task will be to bridge the two divides and ensure that his UMP gets a clear majority in the upcoming thirteenth parliament. Currently the rightists together have 399 seats with UMP holding 357 in the lower house of 577 seats. The fractured left parties control 178 seats between them. Recent opinion polls show that Sarkozy shall have a comfortable

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fifteen ministers and may be shuffled after the Assembly elections. Conscious of the accusations that he is a divisive leader, Sarkozy cleverly appointed a broad based government with distractors from the opposition.

He has surprised many by naming Bernard Kouchner, a former Socialist health minister, as the new foreign minister. Kouchner, is renowned for founding the humanitarian organization "Medicins sans Frontieres." Kouchner's stature as a human rights campaigner and his expertise will go well for Sarkozy. It was a smart move, in the sense that it will now dampen Socialist criticisms of his government as also help him draw Socialist votes in the elections. The tough former defence minister (Ms) Michele Alliot Marie was named interior minister. Another high profile politician and former prime minister, Alain Juppe has been named minister for environment and sustainable development.

All new leaders start with a bang by promising changes in different aspects of national life. When Chirac

was elected for the second term he too vowed to reduce unemployment by reforming the economy and bringing about changes in the social sector. When he put the EU constitution to referendum he was shocked at its rejection. Thus his five years is described by many as moribund. When he tried to introduce the CPE (first employment contract) he was surprised by the ferocity of opposition.

Sarkozy too has promised a long list of radical reforms. He will have to strike a balance on two fronts -- interlocutors outside the government and within his new government.

Every society has a kind of inertia and resists change. The French are extremely attached to their traditional way of life. The French are notorious when it comes to reforms. For instance, can any government in France propose that the vacation periods be cut down? Going on vacation is almost a religious rite. Such a proposition will be considered as outrageous. Though the powerful and militant labour unions

battle in the streets for more pay and less working hours -- they will be the first to resist any reform. Even before taking over his responsibilities, Sarkozy has engaged himself with the labour and employer organizations to discuss his reform package.

On the other hand, it will be interesting to see how the hyperactive Sarkozy shares his powers with Francois Fillon. All previous presidents had given real powers to the prime minister to run the government. Sarkozy is a man full of energy and has declared that he wants to be "fully involved" as president of the republic. "The job of the prime minister should be to coordinate government action," said Sarkozy.

That is a recipe for duplicating Matignon (prime minister's office) at the Elysee (president's office), that may often lead to clashes between Sarkozy and Fillon. Fillon is described as a low-key and calm person and hence there will probably be no such episode. Some of Sarkozy's ideas of creating different cells and units at Elysee go well

beyond the practices and convention of the Fifth Republic. Sarkozy will have to take all the blame for failures, if he really concentrates all powers at the Elysee.

One will probably have to wait to see what working equation develops between Sarkozy and Fillon. The Elysee is buzzing with Sarkozy loyalists, who may be tempted to interfere with Fillon. There will probably be more of Elysee and less of Matignon under Sarkozy. A comfortable majority in the Assembly and a pragmatic reform package implemented gradually by Francois Fillon will be the key to Sarkozy's success.

Sarkozy has come to power at time when there are significant changes in the leadership in Europe. But more on that later.

The writer is a former Ambassador and Secretary.