

## End of the line?

Despite so much of public support, the CTG has disappointed us. Instead of protesting against errors and omissions of the CTG, we supported it in the hope of establishing a true democracy. It is time that we ask the government as to what were its achievements during the last 20 months if we see the return of the old system. Has it surrendered completely to the politicians to ensure a safe exit?

A.B.M.S. ZAHUR

**W**E are totally confused. Certainly we did not expect such a miserable end for a neutral, non-accountable government. People are now even questioning whether the government set up to rescue the 4-party alliance from wrath of the people and not to save the sovereignty of Bangladesh or its people from total disaster.

Whatever may be people's speculation about the present political scenario, the majority of the people are becoming concerned that the CTG may not be able to reach its goal of holding a free, fair and credible election.

From the events that took place after Tarique Zia slipped in the toilet and after his official release from detention on September 4, the government should well understand as to what may happen in case it allows full political freedom by lifting of emergency.

From sincere, honest and relentless effort of our newsmen we could learn that very little has changed since January 12, 2007. Given the vandalism that we have seen (during state of emergency) on the day of Tarique's slip, what can we expect in upazila or national elections?

The incident of September 4 was an internal matter of BNP, but how could it happen during a time of emergency? It may be pointed out that both events revolved around one man (i.e. Tarique) and both the untoward incidents were committed by BNP activists.

If emergency is totally lifted

and all the top level political detainees are released (on bail or otherwise) one after another, only the March Hares can expect a peaceful, smooth, free, fair, and credible election. We would have to give up hope for establishing true democracy with triumphant return of the front ranking leaders of dictatorial democracy.

For the last 20 months also we were under the impression that the CTG would be able to prepare a level playing field for political parties to contest freely and fairly for a credible election. As the things are progressing, there are legitimate doubts as to whether to expect a free, fair, and credible election by the end of 2008 because the EC seems not fully prepared and the CTG is uncertain about participation of political parties in emergency. It is not yet sure whether EU countries would send any observers to the national election under emergency.

In the bargaining with BNP, the CTG has lost and exposed its weakness in withstanding the pressure of big parties (and perhaps big powers). Release of so many top political leaders whose cases were at prosecution stage has created a sense of frustration among common men and women who have tolerated so long the failure of CTG to control price fluctuations and price hikes of essential commodities for achieving a true democracy.

In running the administration CTG has committed a number of mistakes which have considerably reduced its stature. The first was



Let's not keep throwing away our energy like that.

rough handling of business community (large, medium, and small). Second, what looked to be selective prosecutions of politicians. Third, soft handling of corrupt and politicised bureaucracy.

Tough handling of business community has created a panicky situation, though the subsequent attempt to win them back could be successful. Some syndicates were responsible for abnormal increase in price of essential commodities through creation of artificial scarcity by refusing to arrange timely import (where necessary). The rate of investment (both domestic and foreign) went down because of uncertainty. A greater economic slowdown was averted only because of high increase in remittances from expatriate Bangladeshis.

Because of lack of experience in handling business community and rather unfriendly attitude toward media we see severe damage done to the initial bright image of the CTG. The general impression is that no corrective measures were taken against bureaucracy because of misapprehension of the CTG that any corrective action may bring the administration to a standstill.

Though advisers of CTG are experienced in different fields

they have shown weakness in handling the people. In a parliamentary government, we get the reaction of the people from parliamentary debates and discussion. In the absence of parliament, it is the media which plays the role of parliament. Due to its mishandling of the media, the CTG failed to obtain real co-operation from it.

Even now the media does not have clear understanding as to what are the over-riding considerations which forced the CTG to release well-known extortionists, bribe-takers, and money launderers. As such, the average person does not know why such strange things are happening. Is it due to quest for participation of all large parties in the election or pressure from outside the country?

Despite so much of public support, the CTG has disappointed us. Instead of protesting against errors and omissions of the CTG, we supported it in the hope of establishing a true democracy. It is time that we ask the government as to what were its achievements during the last 20 months if we see the return of the old system. Has it surrendered completely to the politicians to ensure a safe exit?

The writer is a former joint secretary.

## Why Kosovo wasn't worth it

The irony is that Kosovo could have achieved almost as much through an international guarantee of autonomy within Serbia. Yet Washington never permitted that alternative to be discussed. Now, given Russia's misuse of the Kosovo precedent in Georgia, it's worth reviewing this option should similar cases arise in the future.

RUTH WEDGWOOD

**I**N February, with US backing, Kosovo declared its independence -- nine years after Nato went to war to end Serbia's thuggish behaviour in the province. Shortly after Kosovo hoisted its new national flag, Russia, Serbia's patron, warned (in the words of its foreign minister) that the theory of secession used to strip away Kosovo had "created a precedent" applicable elsewhere.

Now, in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Georgia -- supposedly for the protection of separatists in Abkhazia and South Ossetia -- it's a good time to pause and ask, was Kosovo worth it?

A recent visit to the tiny country underscores how difficult life can be for a microstate. The good news is that Kosovo has a young pro-Western population that speaks English, has strong tech skills and is excited at the thought of creating a new government.

But there is plenty of bad news. The unemployment rate for young people is 60 percent. The landlocked, mountainous country has a long growing season and could serve as a garden for Europe, but it lacks any transport beyond two-lane roads, a rusting rail line and expensive air links.

The current prime minister, Hashim Thaci -- a former leader of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) -- promises to build a real highway to next-door Albania in five years, but that's hardly the best path to the outside world.

Meanwhile, the electricity frequently shuts off for hours at a time, even in the capital, Pristina, and the construction of a World

Bank-financed power plant has been slowed by quarrels over who will supply the coal.

Pristina bustles with restaurants supported by a large population of international personnel, whose spending habits outpace the locals. The roads leading to Kosovo's borders are lined with half-completed brick houses. But these are funded by remittances from young people who've left to work in Germany, Switzerland and Italy.

Inside the country, the economy is so bad that many fear that unemployed young men will start turning to old-fashioned, illicit forms of cross-border commerce: trafficking in narcotics, weapons or human beings.

As for the government of this nascent state, there's still a great deal of confusion about who's in charge. Blocked by Russia, the UN Security Council has not been able to lift its supervisory political framework put in place after the Nato intervention.

The international proconsul, Lamberto Zannier -- the UN secretary-general's special representative -- remains in Kosovo, though his duties have become increasingly unclear. But he's still needed, since Belgrade refuses to talk directly to the Kosovo government.

The UN Mission is also the only local authority accepted by the many Serbs who still live in northern Kosovo, including in the contested city of Mitrovica.

The European Union and the United States have recently mounted an independent effort to help the fledgling state write laws and solve administrative problems.



Finally the long awaited freedom.

But the wiring of this operation would fox any electrician.

The EU was to deploy 1,700 police, judges, prosecutors, jail guards and Customs officials to help, but their assignments have been delayed because of the confusion over who's in charge.

More than 15,000 Nato troops remain on duty in the tiny state. But Nato forces failed to control ethnic riots the last time they broke out, in March 2004, with disastrous consequences, including eight reported deaths, 990 injured, the destruction of hundreds of Serb homes and the burning of churches and priceless artifacts.

Nato countries have since loosened the rules of engagement that hamstringed the troops, but they remain soldiers, not police, and it's not clear whether they have the tools for nonlethal riot control.

The recent return of former KLA leader, Ramush Haradinaj, to political life may further roll the new state. Haradinaj was acquitted in April by The Hague tribunal on charges of complicity in the murder of Serb civilians during the war.

This decision, following the intimidation and deaths of witnesses, further unnerved the local Serb community, and Haradinaj's return may also threaten Thaci's leadership.

Internationally, the outlook isn't much brighter. Only 45 countries have recognised Kosovo's

independence. It will never be admitted to the United Nations while veto-wielding Russia opposes it, though it can join the World Bank, where no vetoes can be cast.

Among its European neighbours, Bosnia, Greece, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Slovakia -- and, notably, Georgia -- have all refused to grant recognition. Kosovo's newly issued passports may go unrecognized at international airports, leaving Kosovar travellers stranded.

Although the United States pushed for Kosovo's independence earlier this year, at least one former US secretary of State, Lawrence Eagleburger, warned against it, saying that the creation of new microstates would needlessly provoke Russia and other multiethnic countries.

The irony is that Kosovo could have achieved almost as much through an international guarantee of autonomy within Serbia. Yet Washington never permitted that alternative to be discussed. Now, given Russia's misuse of the Kosovo precedent in Georgia, it's worth reviewing this option should similar cases arise in the future.

Wedgwood is a professor of international law and diplomacy at Johns Hopkins University.

© Newsweek International. All rights reserved. Reprinted by arrangement.

## There is no honour in killing

Some would prefer not to discuss such issues because this brings a bad name to the country. They need to ask themselves who is responsible: those who perpetuate the violence, or those who are its victims? What would make us a better, stronger nation: dealing with the issue, or burying it in the sand?

BEENA SARWAR

**G**IVEN the multiple issues facing Pakistanis, the last thing we need is for a legislator to defend a heinous crime in the name of tradition. We don't need the heinous crime either, in this case the murder of women who were apparently defying their families by trying to marry of their own choice.

The resistance of conservative families to expressions of autonomy by their daughters is an ongoing problem in patriarchal, conservative societies like ours. Some parents accept their children's wishes. Others submit to the inevitable, cutting off inheritance or refusing to meet them.

In Pakistan, some misuse the legal system to gain submission, filing cases of zina (adultery) against daughters who elope, preferring to see them tried for a crime punishable by death rather than married to someone unsuitable. Others resort to physical violence in an effort to gain submission.

In extreme cases, some family

member uses weapon to end the defiance once and for all -- termed a 'crime of passion' in much of the world. Here, it is called 'honour killing'.

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan recorded over 600 cases of 'honour killings' or karo kari last year -- just the reported incidents, compiled from reports appearing daily in the media. Over ninety such murders were reported in the first three months of this year alone. The actual number may be higher, as not all cases are reported.

Is the violence actually rising or is it just that the media is reporting such cases with greater frequency? The media boom is certainly instrumental in bringing more such stories to light. However, such cases may also be on the rise because of emerging conflicts within a rapidly modernising conservative, patriarchal society where women are seen as family property and the repositories of honour.

Greater exposure to media and more education leads to a heightened awareness of human rights issues. Those who defy the old

order have greater support -- legal, moral, and financial -- from various non-government and even some government organisations.

Pitted against these developments are conservative elements fearful of their culture and traditions changing before their eyes, who then seek to codify tradition, until now fairly amorphous. This may be the context of the inexcusable justification that Senator Israrullah Zehri of the BNP presented in defence of the brutal murders reported in his home province Balochistan: five women reportedly beaten, shot and then buried alive for defying their families.

This is hardly the first time that culture and tradition, or even religion, were used to justify violence and suppression of women. The prosecuting lawyer in the Samia Waheed "love marriage case" argued that in the sect of Islam to which Samia belonged, a woman must seek the wali or guardian's approval to marry "even if she is sixty years old." Although she won the case, fearful for her life, she fled abroad along with the man she had eloped with.

In another infamous case,



Let us live our lives.

Saima Sarwar wasn't so lucky. The young woman from Peshawar had left her abusive, drug-dependent husband. Her parents accepted that but drew the line at her intention to divorce him and re-marry. She took refuge at a women's shelter in Lahore.

In April 1999, her mother asked to meet Saima at AGHS, the office of her attorney Hina Jillani, arriving with a manservant. As Saima

entered the room, he pulled out a pistol and shot her dead. Her mother escaped in a rickshaw but a plainclothes policeman at AGHS shot the murderer dead as he attempted to flee.

What many found astounding was that Saima's parents were not some illiterate people from a remote tribal area, but educated, influential, city dwellers. The father was a businessman who had

headed the Peshawar Chamber of Commerce and Industry while the mother was a gynaecologist.

Then too, there was uproar in the Senate, when former law minister Iqbal Haider of the opposition Pakistan People's Party initiated a resolution against the murder on August 2, 1999. Like Israrullah Zehri of the Balochistan National Party, which has secular, nationalist credentials, Ajmal Khattak, the

supposedly progressive leader of the Awami National Party, also a secular, nationalist party, had shouted Mr. Haider down.

He held that Saima Sarwar had disgraced her family who had acted according to Pakhtoon tradition. Some senators from Fata physically attacked Mr. Haider. Only four Senators stood in support of the resolution. Twenty-four Senators including the PML-Q's presidential candidate Mushahid Hussain Syed (then with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's PML) and other luminaries like the retired judge Javed Iqbal and former foreign secretary Akram Zaki stood to oppose it.

Flash forward to another democratic era barely a decade later. Another horrific murder, another voice raised in the Senate (this time by a woman), and another Senator's justification in the name of tradition.

Whether the women were buried alive or whether they were already dead when buried is beside the point. The tragedy is not so much how they suffered. First of all, no one has the right to take another life. Second, the women's crime to want to marry of their own choice was no crime under any law or religion.

Third, even if murdering women who disgrace their families is accepted in some areas, not every aggrieved family resorts to such action. And fourth but not

least, slavery too was once a widely accepted custom. So was the burying alive of baby girls. Neither practice is condoned now, in anyway, anywhere in the world.

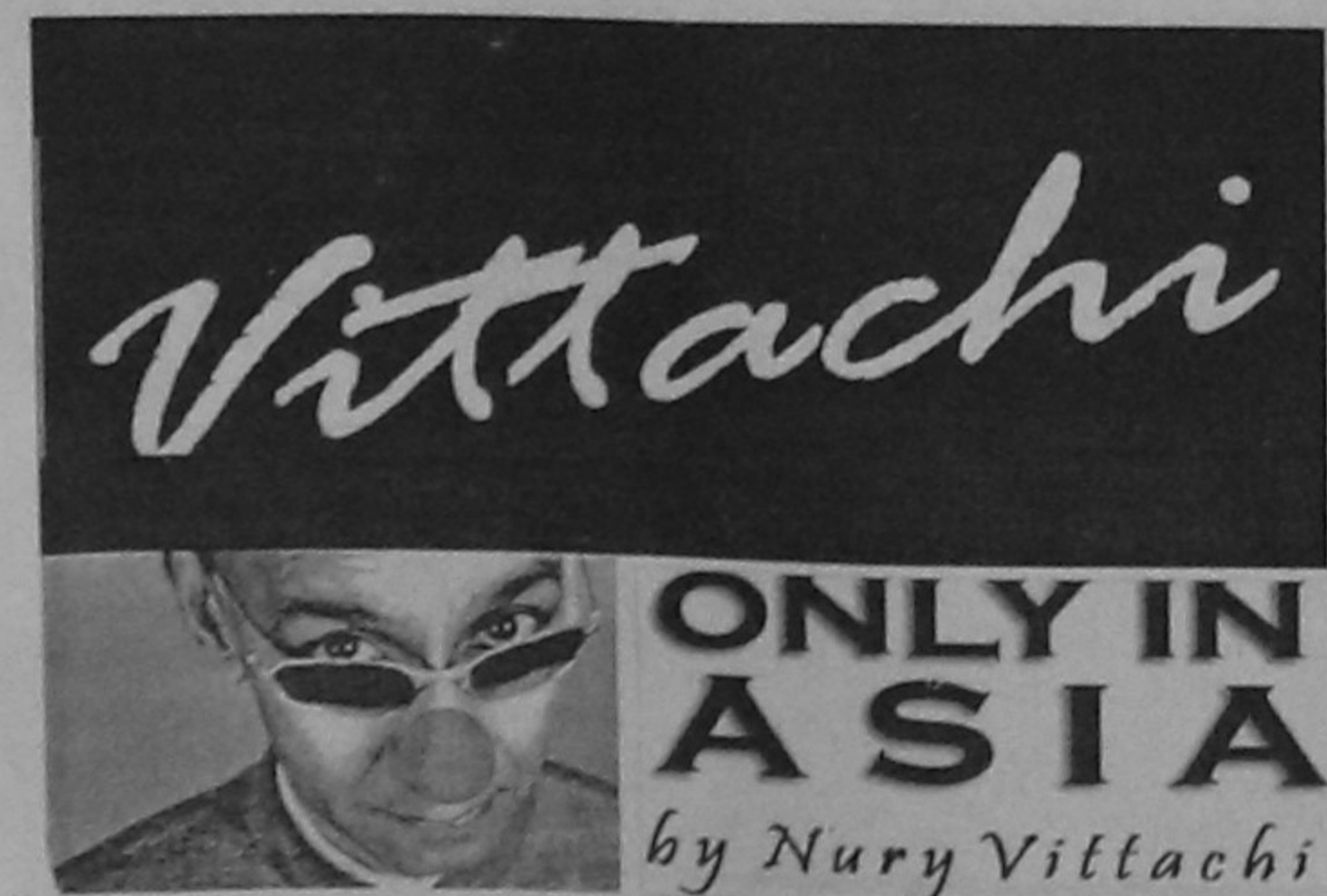
Interestingly, both these Senate debates for and against the murder of women for honour took place after particularly gruesome crimes committed under a democratic dispensation. This is certainly not because there was less gender violence when the military was at the helm of affairs.

Violence against women has risen over the last decade. It was at its peak under Gen Ziaul Haq and his discriminatory religious laws that strengthened reactionary forces and reinforced negative stereotypes about women. But democracy, with elected representatives answerable to their constituencies, opens up spaces to discuss and debate such issues rather than sweeping them under the carpet.

Some would prefer not to discuss such issues because this brings a bad name to the country. They need to ask themselves who is responsible: those who perpetuate the violence, or those who are its victims? What would make us a better, stronger nation: dealing with the issue, or burying it in the sand?

Beena Sarwar, a freelance journalist and filmmaker, writes from Karachi.

## Beggars and other high-class professionals



**L**IFE is tough. You now need qualifications to be a beggar in Asia.

Only professional panhandlers will be able hang out in rags and plead for money on the streets of Thailand after new laws come into effect, I heard from reader Dan Kubiske. After all, you can't have any old riff-raff muscling their way into the profession.

Other Asian nations are watching to see if they should adopt the system.

Fancy moving to Thailand to pick up one of the coveted posts of "Vice President, Begging"? Don't even

think about it. "This will be a reserved occupation exclusively for Thais," said reporter Anucha Charoenpo in a press article on the legislation.

This is a result of globalisation, of course. The government is protecting its home-grown begging industry from the threat of competition by imported beggars, or multinational chain beggars.

I know this all seems unbelievable, but it's true, and actually makes a lot of sense. I've got to know several Asian beggars over the years and they are proud and professional people. Yes, so they say crazy things

and go to the toilet in their clothes, but don't we all do that from time to time? Let's not be elitist.

The next logical step is for beggars to start their own professional body, and do all the stuff that other professionals proudly do -- you know, develop a charter, hold international conferences, and get arrested for molesting hotel chambermaids.

The most impressive beggar I ever met was a guy in Vietnam called Min. When I didn't respond to his English-language plea for cash, he switched to French, then German, then Japanese. He was an intelligent

man who spoke every language. Think of the Pope living on a pavement in Hanoi (but minus the white night-dress and Nazi allegations).

I didn't want to corrupt Min with cash, so I bought him a bar of chocolate. He refused to eat it, complaining that milk chocolate had high levels of sugar and fat, and besides, he preferred dark chocolate, preferably organic.

"You're smarter than I am," I said to him. "So why are you a beggar?"

"Because I'm smarter than you are," he said, strolling away.

I thought about this. I'm not one of these people who romanticise the lives of the poor. But the fact is, one

often sees people in poor parts of Asia who are intelligent, healthy and have abdominal six-packs -- unlike sallow, brain-dead, floppy-bodied tourists whose six-packs come from Wal-Mart.

Last week I met a filmmaker who had been trying to make a movie about the tragic life of peasants in rural Asia. But the countryside looked so idyllic that the movie delivered the opposite message. I spent last weekend talking to filmmakers, writers, poets and dancers -- who speculated endlessly about the best ways of applying for arts council grants.

Yes, everyone's a beggar. It's a

matter of scale.

I once met a Hong Kong guy who wrote to a philanthropic foundation asking for US\$150 million. He was a good letter-writer. They wrote back saying that they were interested and wanted to meet him.

Hopefully, my kids will grow up to be as smart as that. Of course, knowing my luck, they will probably go completely off the rails and end up scraping out a subsistence living in some lowly profession: as doctors or lawyers, maybe.

If you also want US\$150 million, don't write to our columnist at: www.vittachi.com.