

Mojaheed gets his due

The wheels of justice move on

JAMAAT-E-ISLAMI'S secretary general, Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed, has got his comeuppance. Given the magnitude of the crime he committed as the head of the al-Badr, a death squad with the mission to decimate Bengali intellectuals at the fag end of Liberation War in 1971, the capital punishment handed to Mojaheed by ICT-2 is fully justified.

This is the sixth verdict in a series of convictions against persons tried for crimes against humanity in 1971. In the preceding verdicts, three got capital punishment, while two received jail terms.

It's a hallowed moment in the Bengali nation's 42nd year of statehood that it has been able to extricate itself of yet another moral thorn in its side through this verdict.

But we are dismayed at the unabashed arrogance with which Jamaat-e-Islami and its student front Shibir have been reacting through violence and mayhem to the ICT's verdicts pronounced against these bitterest enemies of our war of independence and Bengali nationhood. The acts of vandalism and destruction perpetrated by Jamaat activists in the holy month of Ramadan during hartals since Monday have taken their huge toll on life and property. Until Tuesday, nine people died in hartal-related violence along with its attendant collateral damage.

This is extremely reprehensible. They must feel remorse, behave and respect the people's sentiment.

Credit disbursement suffers

Banks' profitability under strain

THE banking sector continues to suffer a mismatch between deposits to credit ratio. Over a twelve month period, deposits have risen by nearly 18 per cent compared to about 9.4 per cent growth in credit or loan disbursements. The scenario is hardly conducive to profitability of banks. A surge in deposits on which banks have been unable to make productive investments is causing a rise in cost of funds. Ever since the share market debacle and falling rates of interest on other savings instruments, investors have turned to banks as safe havens for investment.

What has prompted banks to give competitive interest rates a year ago has turned into a bane since industrial credit has fallen drastically. The fallout from politics of violence that arrived on the national stage since January has already cost the country 17 days in hartal accompanied largely by acts of arson and damage to public and private property. With uncertainly looming large on the political horizon, it is little wonder that investors' confidence has dipped to an all time low. Production-related investments have fallen due to actual and potential threats that confrontational politics cause. Credit flow has also seen curtailing with new regulations coming into effect after the recent banking scams involving Hall-Mark and Destiny group.

The result of all this mayhem is that banks are now sitting on an excess liquidity of Tk72,000 crore as of May, 2013. Unless there is fundamental change in the way national politics is conducted, we see no change in the fate of the banking sector.

Mandela: Bigger than us, one of us

SYED BADRUL AHSAN

THERE is little question that Nelson Mandela is the last statesman of our times. And there are all the diverse reasons why such an honour comes to be bestowed on him by people around the world. Let his record speak for itself.

Mandela spent altogether twenty seven years as a prisoner of South Africa's apartheid regime. That was a time when many of us went from infancy to adulthood, from kindergarten to profession. In all this time, Mandela, along with his closest comrades in the African National Congress, persevered in the harshness of prison, breaking stones in the glaring light of the sun, tolerating the racial abuse regularly heaped on the prisoners by white prison guards. But, again, prison became a centre of moral purpose for Mandela. It gave him time to reflect on politics, on the future. It transformed him, over the years, into a liberal from the youthful radical he had been. The liberalism came, of course, on the sturdy wings of unshakeable political convictions. Mandela would not compromise on the principle of black majority rule.

In the end, it was an incarcerated Mandela who steadily, quietly, resolutely had the fortress of apartheid crumble. The Verwoerds and the Bothas and the de Klerks all bit the dust. For Mandela, as he walked out of prison, the opportunity was there to take charge of South Africa for as long as he lived after February 1990. Like any other African leader -- Mugabe, Kaunda, Museveni, Afewerki, Zenawi -- he could have grasped power and held on to it. He chose not to. The four years that elapsed before he was elected South Africa's first black president were a moment in historical time when Mandela transformed himself from a politician into a statesman. As president for the subsequent four years, he forged a rainbow nation out of the disparate racial and political realities battering the country. He shared the Nobel for peace with F.W. de Klerk. More significantly, he built for his people -- black, white, coloured -- a granite-like edifice of peace. And then he chose to walk away from the presidency. Only a true leader, only a brave man, could achieve such a feat. He would not be a banyan tree under which no other plant would grow. There were the Mbekis and the Zumas who needed to rise into leadership after him.

This is Mandela's legacy: a strong, proud, inclusive South Africa as a model for the rest of the world to emulate. This is our tribute to Mandela: he is greater than all the rest of us -- and yet he will always be one of us.

War crimes trial: We should be united behind it

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING



Brig Gen
 SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN
 ncd, psc (Retd)

His party men think otherwise, and they think the same about Mojaheed.

However, if the Ghulam Azam verdict has divided opinion, just as Quader Mollah's had, it may seem to some that the ICT trials have just about divided the nation. In our view it has been used to divide the nation. And that is what begs the question. Should an issue that has to do with our nationhood, like the trial of war criminals, which has been long pending, be allowed to divide the nation?

It should not be lost upon anybody that the trials under International Crimes Act, for crimes against humanity, perpetrated in 1971, is neither to seek revenge nor to victimise. For those not conversant with our history may be misled to think so, given that all the six accused who have been sentenced so far belong or belonged to a particular political party, and that too it is a part of the BNP- led opposition coalition.

Through the trial the nation is seeking justice for the grave hurt the people suffered as a result of the heinous activities of the accused. They had attempted to thwart a nation's aspiration for independence, its struggle to break free of Pakistani shackles. And that they did, not politically but by brutalising the people of Bangladesh. They were the acolytes of the occupation army in 1971. And they were complicit in the killing of innocent Bengalis, in the wanton rape and arson.

And for far too long they have gone about with impu-

THE icon of the massacre of the Bengalis, the symbol of repression and torture in 1971, has been handed down a 90-year prison term. That Ghulam Azam's age was the mitigating factor in the award of the verdict is very clear. His cohort and leader of the infamous Al-Badr gang in 1971, Mojaheed, has been awarded the death penalty.

Understandably, the degree of Ghulam Azam's punishment has disappointed many; and for different reasons opinion is divided on the verdict. Some feel that he has not got his just desert.

There are a few national issues which politics must not be allowed to influence. Trial of war criminals is one such. The ICT verdicts should help heal long festering wounds. The trials should unite the nation rather than divide. And those who say it will divide the nation are in fact the ones who want to divide us.

nity. And all these they were able to do after the cruel killing of Bangabandhu when the changes after August 15, 1975, went in favour of the reactionary elements. President Zia's policies not only revived the defeated forces they were also rehabilitated in politics that allowed them to regroup in the form of Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh and eventually call the shots. I feel it was then that the actual hiatus in the nation started to appear.

It is reprehensible that all the major parties, and certainly the military rulers, had tried to curry favour with Jamaat at some time or the other, for political gains. This party is now the largest member of the 18-party alliance.

To those who say the trials have created a divide in the nation my question is would we have had real integrity without the trials? Was it possible for us to forget the dark chapter of our history? More so when these people had never reconciled with the idea of Bangladesh and when they had been going about asserting that the Liberation War was a civil war and that no war crimes were committed in 1971, and that there were no war criminals in the country? And would that unity have survived long, knowing that it was built on a loose foundation.

In this regard the BNP's ambivalence on the trial has confused many. One is not sure what is meant by 'transparent' and 'international standards.' A party that was created by a freedom fighter who gave out the clarion call for liberation on behalf of Bangabandhu should be opaque on the issue is disappointing.

There are a few national issues which politics must not be allowed to influence. Trial of war criminals is one such. No doubt BNP's position on the issue is compelled by its association with Jamaat. BNP should realise that Jamaat is a dead weight around BNP's neck, and any short-term dividend by associating with it is certain to be lost in the long run. There is every possibility that Jamaat, like the old man of the sea in Sinbad will never descend from BNP's shoulder. And one is not sure whether BNP possesses the political adroitness to get it off its shoulders like Sinbad.

The ICT verdicts should help heal long festering wounds. The trials should unite the nation rather than divide. And those who say it will divide the nation are in fact the ones who want to divide us.

The writer is Editor, Oped and Defence & Strategic Affairs, *The Daily Star*.

THE STRUGGLE FOR EGYPT Saudi Arabia's regional role

JAMES M. DORSEY

WHEN Egypt's military chief General Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi declared last week that President Mohammed Morsi had been deposed, standing next to him were leaders of the Saudi-backed Salafist Nour Party. This endorsement signalled Saudi support for the coup and gave the military the fig leaf it needed to assert that its intervention was against the Brotherhood rather than the rise of political Islam.

The Salafists' key role in doing the bidding of the Saudis was reinforced by their successful rejection of liberal opposition politician Mohammed el-Baradei as prime minister and the military's pledge to retain all references to Islamic law in the constitution. The Egyptian military coup was Saudi Arabia's third successful counter-strike in recent weeks against the wave of change in the Middle East and North Africa and its most important defeat to date of Qatari support for popular revolts and the Brotherhood.

Saudi's wider regional role

The role of the Salafists was coupled with a Saudi effort to counter Qatar's financial backing by withdrawing its comparatively limited financial support for the Morsi government and pledging to shield the Egyptian military from any international financial fallout from its intervention, including a possible US cut in military aid.

As the anti-Morsi protests erupted in Egypt, the Qatari-backed Syrian National Council (SNC) Prime Minister-in-exile Ghassan Hitto resigned under Saudi pressure and Saudi-backed Ahmed Assi Al-Jerba defeated his Qatar-supported rival, Adib Shishakly, in the SNC presidential elections. Earlier, Saudi Arabia succeeded in restricting Qatari support for the Brotherhood within the SNC and the Free Syrian Army as well as for more radical Islamists.

It did so by securing approval by the Obama administration to supply non-US surface-to-air missiles to Syrian rebels. US consent was on the condition that distribution of the missiles was handled by the rebel Supreme Military Council to ensure that weapons did not flow to jihadist forces. Qatar is likely to have little choice but to follow suit.

Qatar's activist foreign policy

The Qatari setbacks raise the question of whether the Gulf state, seeking to carve out an identity and place of its own in the shadow of Saudi Arabia -- the Gulf's dominant power -- will be able to sustain its activist support of popular revolts and endorsement of political Islam in the Middle East and North Africa. They also call into question Qatar's ability, in opposition to Saudi Arabia, to continuously support change in the region as long as it does not occur in its own backyard.

To be sure, it is too early to suggest that Qatar's new emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, who last month took over the reins as ruler from his father, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, will adopt a policy more in line with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states. There are, however,

hints of change.

Host to the largest US military base in the Middle East, Qatar, like Saudi Arabia, congratulated the Egyptian military for its ousting of Morsi. But unlike Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates who remained silent after the killing last week of 54 Morsi supporters and extended Egypt \$3 billion in grants and loans, Qatar expressed regret at the incident and urged self-restraint and dialogue.

Qatar's expression of regret was nonetheless significantly different from the tone that Sheikh Tamim adopted in his first speech after taking office. Tamim pledged in his inaugural address that Qatar would continue to side with the "aspirations (of the people) to live in freedom and dignity, away from corruption and tyranny" and that his country would "remain the Kaaba (Islam's holiest shrine in Mecca) of the oppressed."

Despite the setbacks and the downfall of Morsi, Qatar is, however, unlikely to break its ties with the Brotherhood. Qatar's relationship with the group is longstanding and deep-seated, particularly with Doha-based, Egyptian-born Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, one of the world's most important Islamic thinkers and a significant influence in Qatar as well as within the Brotherhood. "Saudi Arabia has Mecca and Medina. We have Qaradawi," former Qatari justice minister and prominent lawyer Najeeb al Nauimi told *The Wall Street Journal* a decade ago.

Qaradawi's stunning speech

In the absence of an indigenous Qatari class of Islamic legal scholars, Qaradawi and, to a lesser extent, Libyan Muslim Brother Ali Al Salabi, while in exile in Doha, filled a void to influence policy. They helped shield Qatar, the only other Wahhabi state besides Saudi Arabia, against becoming totally dependent on the kingdom's ultra-conservative clergy.

A stunning speech by Qaradawi in late May before the ascension of Tamim, who was in recent years Qatar's main interlocutor with the Saudi kingdom, hinted that change may be in the air. In line with Saudi encouragement of the divide between Sunni and Shia Muslims, Qaradawi urged Muslims with military training to join the anti-Bashar al-Assad struggle in Syria. His condemnation of Lebanese Shiite Muslim militia Hezbollah (Party of God) was immediately endorsed by Saudi grand mufti Abdul Aziz al-Sheikh as was his assertion that al-Assad's Alawite sect, an offshoot of Shia Islam, was "more infidel than Christians and Jews."

As a result, the downfall of the Brotherhood and the recent counter-response by Saudi Arabia may not deprive the group of its main foreign backer but could well change the tone and approach of Qatari policy towards popular revolts in the Middle East and North Africa. It could also raise the bar for revolutionary forces in the region -- a struggle that is certain to shape the Middle East and North Africa's identity and future.

The writer is Senior Fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University in Singapore, co-director of the Institute of Fan Culture of the University of Würzburg and the author of the blog, 'The Turbulent World of Middle East Soccer.'

ERRATA

The title of our lead editorial published on July 17 should read "Making hartal a plaything" instead of "Making hartal a playing." We regret the error.

The writer of the article "Allama" Shafi's misogyny," (printed on July 17) was inadvertently identified as Pakistani. He is a Bangladeshi and has dual citizenship of Bangladesh and Canada. We regret the error and apologise to the writer.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Arrest Ramadan price hike

With the advent of Ramadan, prices of some essentials have increased considerably. For example, green chili, which sold at Tk.60 a few days ago, now sells at Tk.160 per kg. Prices of some other kitchen items have also increased.

Every year as Ramadan arrives, common people face the heat of sudden rise in the prices of essentials. This has become a rather regular trend. Although the government urges the businessmen to practice restraint, the opposite happens. Consequently, the consumers have to suffer throughout the whole month.

We hope that this year the authorities will do something to keep the prices of essentials within the reach of common people.

Zabed Wali
 Chittagong

Govt. and Prof Yunus

Our PM and her government have miserably failed to utilise Prof. Yunus nationally and globally. Rather they stood against him and his Grameen Bank due to some personal grudge of our PM against him.

The move against Prof. Yunus forced him to seek support from the opposition, which is unacceptable to us. He is a great personality and should stay above politics.

Md. Shahjahan Mia
 Satmosjid Road, Dhaka

US poor denied state-run medical service

California lawmakers improperly stopped funding certain medical services that rural and other specialised health clinics provided to low-income residents under the state's Medicaid program. A three-judge panel of the 9th US Circuit Court of Appeals reversed the finding of a trial judge and said federal law requires states participating in Medicaid to reimburse clinics serving migrant workers, homeless people and other poor populations for "a panoply of medical services to under-served communities" that includes chiropractic care, dental care, optometry, podiatry and speech therapy.

To save money, the Legislature in 2009 eliminated coverage for adults receiving those services through the state's Medicaid programme, known as Medi-Cal, saying they were optional because they were not provided by medical doctors. They even convinced lots of poor people that they were right and persuaded them to voluntarily give up some of the few things they had to make them even poorer and the rich even richer, so the rich could have more and more and the poor less and less.

Ted Rudow III, MA
 Encina Ave
 Palo Alto, CA

Comments on news report, "Deserves death, gets 90 years," published on July 16, 2013

Vikram Khan

Who is *The Daily Star* to condemn somebody to death? Ghulam Azam is probably the most notorious war criminal still alive in Bangladesh. However, he was brought to justice and the judges have spoken. We should respect the verdict. Using your newspaper to demand the death of a person is not very civilised.

Ahmed Zakaria

The Shahbag movement was a spontaneous event of the general youths. However, there is a difference between the general population and a leading daily newspaper. They can condemn someone to death but that should appear in an op-ed column.

Molla A. Latif

The entire nation, except BNP-Jamaat-Hefajat, is totally frustrated with this verdict as they expected the highest punishment for him. The state must appeal to the Supreme Court against this verdict. We have observed the government leaders and ministers express satisfaction on this verdict. These expressions provoke the idea in the general people that there was a compromise behind the screen.

Rashed Sarwar

Do you know the views of Hefajat regarding Jamaat? Personally, I don't like Hefajat's view; but giving incorrect info is not right.

"Jamaat rejects judgment" (July 16, 2013)

Akbar Afridi

Well done, Bangladesh! These so-called religious, non-progressive, un-Islamic parties should be banned and put in jail until they start to understand real Islam which is a religion of peace, not destruction.

Nds

Jamaat's rejection of the verdict was not unexpected because they rejected the very existence of Bangladesh.

hello

For humanity's sake don't blame Islam for this. Nowhere in Islam is there a permission to kill a person, be it Hindu or Muslim.

S.M. Iftekhar Ahmed

Most of these Jamaat-Shibir men have been brainwashed into believing that their so-called righteous leaders could do no wrong and what the people think doesn't matter, despite it being clear that these leaders are going against the true norms of Islam.