

Khaleida's vengeance

Ignominious exit of Bangla President

The "forced" resignation of Bangladesh President Badrudoz-Za Chowdhury is an ominous portent not only for Begum Khaleida Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party-led coalition government but also for the country's democratic institutions and political stability. He was until December last number two to prime minister Khaleida Zia in the BNP parliamentary party and known to be a "personal loyalist" of President Ziaur Rahman. This was the first time the country's President was asked to go by his own party which only eight months ago elected him unopposed. But once elected he, to his credit, sought to project an impartial image. Disregarding protocol and party whip he called on senior Awami League leaders and had a book published which highlighted the "frailties of character" of BNP leaders. But his "worst crime" was not to visit Ziaur Rahman's grave on the slain president's death anniversary and his refusal to acknowledge him as "the leader" who declared Bangladesh's independence in March 1971. His recent remark that failure to control the present anarchy would result in the country's social and economic collapse was the proverbial last straw. This was viewed as "treachery" both by Begum Zia and her son Tareq Rahman who organised swift removal. BNP MPs at the parliamentary party meeting who said that the President's failure to visit Ziaur Rahman's grave could hardly be termed reason for impeachment and resignation were "silenced".

Actually both mother and son were scared of President Badrudoz-Za emerging as an alternative power centre. Disaffection is growing in the party because of what is contemptuously described as *paribartantra* or family rule. Tareq and Begum Zia's brother retired Major Iskander are openly accused of being extra-constitutional authorities at whose bidding sweeping changes and dismissals are made in the bureaucracy. In the military about 222 officers including 13 major generals and naval and air commodores have been sent packing; many freedom fighters had been promoted during Sheikh Hasina's rule. In an unprecedented move the army chief Lt Genl Haroon ar Rashid was compulsorily retired 16 months ahead of his three year term for being a freedom fighter and "close" to President Badrudoz-Za. Directives to the army chief to retire and President Badrudoz-Za to resign are linked. Their humiliating exit has labelled Begum Zia's government as intolerant and divisive and tarnished its image. There is considerable anxiety in Bangladesh that both mother and son have undermined the authority of institutions, including the presidency and the military. Tareq's induction in the ruling party will trigger a fresh realignment of forces. A sure recipe for troubled times ahead for Begum Zia.

THE STATESMAN

29 JUN 2002

BNP shows door to President

Dhaka, June 20 (Agencies): The ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) asked the country's figurehead president today to resign immediately because lawmakers had lost confidence in him, the official BSS news agency said.

President A.Q.M. Badruddoza Chowdhury's son said his father would resign tomorrow.

"The BNP parliamentary party today urged A.Q.M. Badruddoza Chowdhury to immediately resign from the office of the president," the agency said.

The BNP, headed by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, decided at a meeting today to ask the president to resign as the "BNP lawmakers have lost confidence in him," the news agency said but gave no other details.

"He (the president) will definitely honour the party decision," Chowdhury's son Mahi, a BNP lawmaker, said.

The BNP chief whip in parliament, Khandaker Delwar Hossain, said the party's lack of confidence in Chowdhury has been conveyed to the president.

BNP lawmakers attacked Chowdhury for not visiting the grave of Zia ur-Rahman, who ruled Bangladesh between 1975 and 1980, on the party founder's 21st death anniversary last month. The President also failed to mention in his official message on Rahman's contribution to Bangladesh's liberation war.

Chowdhury was elected president uncontested for a five-year term on November 14 last year on nomination from the BNP, which in alliance with three other rightist parties, came to power in the October general elections. The centrist Awami League of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, which lost the elections, has since boycotted parliament.



**Bangladesh
President
Chowdhury**

THE TELEGRAPH

2 JUN 2000

Bangla opp threatens series of strikes

Bangla

51-10

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE

16/6

DHAKA, June 15. — Police in Bangladesh today laid siege to a Dhaka office of the main opposition Awami League ahead of a planned strike, witnesses said. The development came amid reports that several opposition members were being rounded up.

Police prevented activists from staging a march to beef up support for tomorrow's strike, called to protest the recently announced budget, the witnesses said. A vehicle was damaged by angry protestors. There were no immediate reports of injuries or arrests.

The Prothom Alo daily reported today that police had started rounding up opposition leaders and activists ahead of the strike.

Police told the daily that the arrests were aimed at preventing any law and order problems during the stoppage, which was originally called for today, but moved to tomorrow to prevent school tests being disrupted.

A ban was also imposed from Saturday on torch-light marches "to safeguard people's life and property," police said. Awami League today threatened further strikes if their supporters were arrested or prevented from taking part in demonstrations, amid reports that some were being rounded up.

Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina Wajed told reporters today: "We will no more tolerate any torture, we will extend the strike by a day or more if torture and repression on our workers are intensified," she said. The Awami League says the 2002-2003 budget, which was proposed to parliament last week, is "anti-poor and pro-rich". The party has decided to end an eight-month boycott of the parliament to register their protest against the budget inside the parliament. The party, with 58 MPs, has boycotted the 300-seat parliament since last October's elections.

16 JUN 2002

16 JUN 2002

Bangla replaces army chief

Press Trust of India

DHAKA, June 12. – Begum Khaleda Zia's government has given marching orders to incumbent Chief of Army Staff Harun-ar-Rashid and replaced him by Major Gen Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury.

Maj Gen Chowdhury, currently serving as Bangladeshi ambassador to the United Arab Emirates, has been appointed for a three-year term with effect from 16 June and has also been promoted to the rank of Lieutenant General effective from the same date, BSS news agency quoted an of-

official release as saying.

Lt Gen Rashid was appointed for three years in December 2000 by the previous government of Sheikh Hasina Wajed.

According to the official release, Gen Harun will get all retirement benefits as per rule, but some media reports said he might be given a diplomatic job.

Awami to end boycott: The long political impasse in Bangladesh inched nearer to an end after the main opposition Awami League said it would lift its eight-month long Parliamentary boycott. AL "decided in principle" to join parliament but said it would wait a few days before announcing the dates.

THE STATESMAN

12 JUNE 2002

'Minorities persecuted in Bangladesh'

410-15
By Haroon Habib

DHAKA, MAY 29. Amnesty International, the international human rights watchdog, in its annual report 2001, has alleged widespread persecution and ill-treatment of minority communities, women and custodial deaths in Bangladesh before and after the last year's general election.

The annual report was released simultaneously from 56 countries on human rights during 2001. The report on Bangladesh was released here on Tuesday.

The report alleged attacks on minority communities, particularly Hindus, and custodial torture by police and armed forces in the country. While commenting on religious persecution, the AI report said hundreds of Hindu families were reportedly subjected to violent attacks including rape, beating and the burning of their property following last October's election.

The Khaleda Zia Government did not, however, accept the charge. While admitting some of the incidents, the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami-led coalition Government said the criminal acts were carried out by its

political opponents. "They (the Hindus) were allegedly attacked by BNP supporters because of their perceived support for the Awami League" (which lost the election), the Amnesty International said adding, "several Hindus were reportedly killed and Hindu women raped and their houses burnt. Hundreds of Hindu families were driven off their homes. About 150 people were killed in political violence before the elections," the report said and urged the Government to bring to justice the perpetrators of these attacks.

As a signatory to the International Convention on Elimination of All Forms Discrimination Against Women, the Government is required to take steps to eliminate discrimination against women, it said. "Hindus came under attacks by members of the BNP-led alliance before the election also, since it was perceived that they would vote for Awami League", the report said adding "the backlash after the election was systematic and severe".

The report observed that the police failed to take effective measures to protect the minorities. Though some arrests were made,

most of the perpetrators were not brought to justice. No information was also provided about an official investigation into the atrocities as promised. The failure of the police to investigate and take legal action against perpetrators of violence against women engendered a climate of impunity, it said.

In response to a petition in November by the legal aid organisation, "in-O-Shalish Kendra", the High Court gave the Government one month's time to explain why it did not protect the Hindus. The Government promised investigation into the atrocities, but no information was provided in this regard, the AI said.

The report also said that the people of other minority communities also suffered attacks. In June, 10 people were killed and more than 20 injured in a bomb blast in a Church in Baniarchar in Gopalganj district. "The authorities appeared to ignore torture allegations. Thousands of people awaited trial in overcrowded prisons. In July, large number of people were detained during a drive to recover unlawful weapons, forcing prisoners to take turns to lie down to sleep."

THE HINDU

Dhaka seeks more trade concessions

Bangladesh
19.12 By Haroon Habib

DHAKA, MAY 5. The Bangladesh Commerce Ministry has said the Indian announcement to allow duty-free access to 13 categories of Bangladesh products "did not contain export potential items". Officials in the Ministry of Commerce and its allied bodies said India had not shown "any intention" to provide access to Bangladeshi products even a month after the last round of trade talks.

"The Indian authorities have allowed duty-free access to 12 Bangladeshi products under 13 categories although we have 120 high potential items under 25 categories", a Commerce Ministry statement said on Saturday. It said the Indian side split the 13 categories into 16, which did not include all items under the categories.

Senior officials, who attended the Commerce Secretary-level talks between the two neighbours in Dhaka last month, said items having high export potential were not included in the "offered list" provided by India. "What is the problem if they (India) accept our list of 25 category products? We had a very bitter experience with India regarding our lead acid battery export", the Commerce Secretary, Suhel Ahmed, said at a press briefing.

He refuted Indian claims that Bangladesh did not have the capacity to export items in its list because of its narrow export base.

"It is true that our export basket is narrow. Still, we export goods worth around \$3 billion to the European Union and \$2.5 billion to the U.S.", Mr. Ahmed, who led the Bangladesh team in the talks, said. "We hope that India would look at the huge trade gap it has with Bangladesh and give us a meaningful concession".

There is a huge cumulative trade gap between Bangladesh and India since the country's independence in 1971.

Had India given duty-free access to all the items under 25 categories as demanded by it and removed all non-tariff and para-tariff barriers, Bangladesh exports would have increased reducing the gap to a tolerable limit, the officials said.

They said the business community was astonished when India wanted trade facilities from Bangladesh although it maintained a huge trade balance in its favour. According to the Ministry, the country's trade gap with India was \$150 million in 1990-91, which soared to over \$1 billion in 2000-01.

Mr. Ahmed said the next round of trade talks would be held this year.

"Talks will continue and Bangladesh will demand preferential treatment as a least developed country".

Minorities: Dhaka rejects charge

By Haroon Habib

DHAKA, MAY 1. Rejecting suggestions by the U.S. Congressman, Benjamin Gillman, that religious minorities in Bangladesh are subjected to repression under the patronage of the ruling Bangladesh National Party (BNP) alliance, the Foreign Minister, Morshed Khan, has denied the charge, saying that there is "no minority problem in Bangladesh".

At a seminar in New York on Sunday, Mr. Gillman, Chairman of the U.S. Congressional South Asian Affairs Committee and the co-chairman of the Bangladesh Caucus, demanded of the Bangladeshi Prime Minister, Begum Khaleda Zia, a new law ensuring the security of minority members as well as a committee to investigate the allegations of "large-scale" minority repression.

The seminar, which was organised by expatriate members of Bangladesh's minority communities, was also addressed by several leading U.S. politicians who have expressed "concern" over the alleged persecutions.

When his attention was drawn to the allegations, Mr. Khan maintained that all citizens were treated equal under the law in Bangladesh and that there was no religious discrimination. "Therefore, the question of enacting a new law in this regard did not arise", he said. He also rejected Mr. Gillman's allegation that the members of the minority community in Bangladesh were being tortured under the patronage of the BNP alliance.

Mr. Gillman told the seminar that after reading reports by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, he wrote a letter to Ms. Khaleda Zia, but

did not receive a response. Later, he said, the Bangladesh Ambassador in Washington sent him a letter, but he found the explanations were "not based on facts".

Meanwhile, human rights organisations, Opposition politicians, lawyers and journalists have visited sites where a Buddhist monk and a Hindu priest were brutally killed recently in their religious centres. The monk, Gyanjyoti Mahathero, was killed by a group of masked men on April 21, while the priest, Madan Gopal Goshwami, was murdered last Sunday. Though suspects were detained, police failed to identify motives of the killers. Mainstream newspapers, however, quoting local sources, said that in both incidents BNP-linked hoodlums were involved. Embarrassed by the incidents, the Government has termed these incidents



The former Bangladesh Prime Minister and leader of the main Opposition, Sheikh Hasina, consoles a minority Hindu girl Purnima in Dhaka in this February 14 file photo during a convention on Crime Against Humanity. The 2-day convention discussed the acts of violence and attacks on minority communities.

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Perilous course

Khaleda Zia had better watch out

There has been no let up in killing, kidnapping and rape even three weeks into Khaleda Zia's BNP-Jamat-e-Islam alliance government with a two thirds majority in parliament passed the Law and Order Disruptive Crimes Act, 2002 for speedy trial of cases of law and order. The immediate objective of the legislation is to combat lawlessness which has assumed epidemic proportions forcing foreign donors including the World Bank to suspend aid until Begum Zia's government is able to restore law and order. The situation is so bad that visiting foreign investors have made it a condition for making fresh investments. But doubts persist about the ability of the anti-terror law being able to deliver as the ruling alliance leaders from Begum Zia downwards, instead of looking inwards, are holding Awami League "solely responsible". Having been justly punished in the 1 October parliamentary poll for supporting terror and also being the target of a variety of attacks from the goons of ruling alliance and the police, the Awami League, is in no position to create the "reign of terror" that Begum Zia alleges. The fear is that the new law will be indiscriminately used against it not only to settle old scores but also to exterminate it politically. Already the demand has been voiced by alliance leaders some of whom even want Sheikh Hasina's banishment from the country. Indiscriminate arrests and killing of Awami League cadres and inhuman torture and even sexual abuse of detained Awami League leaders are proof of the ruling alliance's capability.

That Awami League's fear is not baseless is borne out by the fact that the police refused to arrest 37 "most wanted" criminals who contested the just held City Corporation elections of Dhaka, Khulna and Rajshahi as candidates of the ruling alliance and as independents. Alliance leaders called them "our priceless assets" and helped most of them win elections although the police and the election commission had declared rewards for their arrests. These are grave forbodings with the potential to land Bangladesh in fresh turmoil.

THE STATESMAN

5 1 MAY 2002

Khaleda 'backs' hill peace treaty

By Haroon Habib

DHAKA, APRIL 23. In her first-ever meeting with tribal leaders, the Bangladesh Prime Minister, Begum Khaleda Zia, assured them that her Government would contribute to peace efforts in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) region and urged them to contribute to national development. The meeting, held here on Saturday, hinted at a significant policy switch in the ruling Bangladesh National Party (BNP)-led alliance. During the previous administration's tenure, the BNP had been opposed to the CHT Peace Accord, which in 1997 ended the decades-long tribal insurgency for regional autonomy.

In the 90-minute meeting between the Prime Minister and a tribal delegation led by the Parbatta Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) chief and CHT Regional Council Chairman, Shantu Larma, Ms. Khaleda Zia said that her Government would do its best to develop the region. She also said she would soon visit the region to see for herself the ongoing development activities.

The coalition's shift became evident as the Prime Minister discussed progress in the implementation of the Accord. In 1997, under the administration of the now-Opposition Awami League, the BNP and the Jamaat-E-Islami were not only opposed to the treaty, but Ms. Khaleda Zia herself led a "Long March" to the region, branding the resolution as "Indian machination" and announcing that she would scrap it when she came to power. Such pledges, however, were not discussed at Saturday's meeting.

Reiterating long-stranding demands, the tribal leaders urged the Prime Minister to withdraw army camps from the hill region and take prompt steps to implement the remaining provisions of the treaty. "It was sort of a courtesy call since we met the Prime Minister for the first time...We had good discussions", said Mr. Larma, who commanded the Shanti Bahini insurgents branded as "criminals" by the BNP. The tribal delegation also demanded the immediate suspension of the special army operation in the Uttaran hill districts. "Still the army enjoys supreme authority in the region. We think it should be sorted out and Regional Council and Zila Parishad have to be made operational", said Mr. Larma.

The Prime Minister also asked the tribal leaders to play a greater role in the development process and maintenance of law and order. The meeting also considered means of strengthening the CHT Regional Council and improving civil order, which has seen a sharp deterioration during recent months.

Chittagong council head meets Khaleda

Statesman News Service

DHAKA, April 21. — The chairman of Chittagong regional council, Mr Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Larma, also known as Santu Larma, met Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday to discuss the implementation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord.

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party had opposed the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord signed between him and the then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in 1997 to end the armed insurgency problem in the region over the demand for autonomy by the outlawed Shanti Bahini.

The Prime Minister discussed with the leaders of Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity the progress in the implementation of the Peace Accord. They also discussed strengthening the Chittagong hill Tracts Regional Council and measures to improve law and order in the three hill districts.

"It was sort of a courtesy call, since we met the Prime Minister for the first time ... we had a good discussion. We have focussed on many issues," Mr Larma was quoted as saying after the meeting but declined to elaborate.

11 die in Maoist violence: Ten Maoists were among 11 people killed in encounters between the rebels and the security forces since yesterday in Nepal, a defence ministry official said on Sunday. Eight rebels were killed late on Saturday as they were planting explosives to blow up a bridge over the Sindhu river in Sindhu-palchowk district, he said. — PTI

10 killed in Pak accident: Ten people were killed and nine injured today when a passenger van ran off the road and into a tree in central Pakistan, state television reported. The vehicle,

Muzzling the press

sr. Khaleda Zia seeks absolute control 1994

The proposed legislation introduced in the Bangladesh parliament by Begum Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party-Jamat ruling alliance which will empower the government to imprison journalists between two and seven years for perceived insults about House meetings, individual MPs, the country's President and Supreme Court judges has outraged the country's media. The bill gives members of Parliament immunity from criminal charges and empowers the Speaker to order arrests of journalists without warrants. The bill's passage is assured as Begum Zia's alliance commands two thirds majority in Parliament. Never before has the Bangladesh Press come under such legal attack and faced such a draconian law whose sole purpose is to muzzle the country's vocal and assertive press into submission.

While the alliance leaders never spare an opportunity to refer to Sheikh Mujib's authoritarian tendencies, including forced closure of some national dailies to establish full governmental control, they themselves are no different. The home and other ministers have accused journalists of "exaggerating and manufacturing stories of minority persecution so as to tarnish Bangladesh's image". This has encouraged ruling party goons in the districts to threaten local journalists not to file reports highlighting continuing attacks on minorities and portray their tragic plight faithfully.

Some leaders have also threatened journalists with dire consequences, forcing the Brussels-based Reporters sans Frontieres to send a senior representative to Bangladesh to make an on the spot investigation. The RSF findings corroborate reports of Press muzzling. Three journalists have been killed by mafia in the last four months. Leading national dailies like *Janakantha*, which are critical of the ruling alliance's policies and workings have been denied government advertisements. The government's vendetta extends to forcing private advertisers close to Government, to avoid advertising in "rogue" dailies one of whom had its power lines cut recently. It had to seek legal redress to get supply restored and resume publication. The declaration of an "unfriendly" district paper was withdrawn which was subsequently overruled by High Court. About a dozen journalists have been sacked from the government controlled news agency, BSS, as they are considered "suspect and unfriendly". Several senior journalists have been demoted for the same reason. Massive pressure has been mounted on the private TV channels to toe the government line.

But all this did not have the approval of the highly cultured information minister Moin Khan who was against muzzling of the press under any circumstances. This resulted in his humiliating transfer to a nondescript ministry which he refused to join for three weeks to register his protest. Begum Zia should have drawn lessons from Sheikh Mujib and Indira Gandhi's failed bid to control media. That this eventually proved to be their nemesis is not unknown to her. Those who ignore the past are fated to repeat it. //

BNP Govt. to go through with Bill on media?

By Haroon Habib

DHAKA, APRIL 8. The Bangladesh Parliament is likely to pass two controversial Bills — one will restrict the media from publishing reports about certain issues before Parliament and the other is to help “quick disposal of cases” relating to law and order.

Independent newspapers and commentators have said the Private Member's Bill called “The Jatiya Sangsad (Special Privileges and Powers) Act, 2002”, which seeks special powers for the lawmakers, appears to be a tool to curtail the freedom of the press. Some constitutional experts have also said the Bill goes against the spirit of Article 29 of the Constitution that guarantees free-

dom of thought and speech.

The Jatiya Sangsad Bill, introduced by Abu Hena, a ruling Bangladesh National Party (BNP) lawmaker, defines publishing reports on documents, statements prepared for presentation in the House or debates of a parliamentary committee as a punishable offence. The publication of confidential decisions, reports, documents or proceedings of parliament has also been made a punishable offence under the Bill.

The Bill suggests that a Member of Parliament will enjoy the status of a Supreme Court Judge. The proposed legislation gives immunity to MPs against criminal charges and empowers the Speaker to punish “strangers” in Parliament for “misconduct”. The publication

of defamatory comments made in the House or in parliamentary committee meetings about the President, Speaker, Supreme Court Judges or MPs is also a punishable offence under the proposed law.

Publishing offensive remarks against an MP or reports that are deemed to be obstructing the functioning of parliament will also be considered punishable crimes. According to the provisions of the Bill, the Speaker, with the approval of the House, will have the authority to mete out punishments, including imprisonment and fine.

While journalists have expressed concern about the proposed law, the Opposition has said it is against the fundamental right of the people. Al-

though the press is considered an integral part of democracy, the Bill identifies working journalists as “strangers” in Parliament. Given the opposition, it is unclear whether the Government will go ahead with the Bill. The Bill enjoys the support of a significant number of MPs belonging to the ruling coalition.

The other Bill, called “Law and Order Disruption Crimes (Summary Trial) Act, 2002”, will provide for special courts to try offenders within 60 days and lays down rigorous imprisonment of two to five years for crimes “disrupting social life”. “It's not a black law. It will be used against criminals and not against any gentleman,” the Home Minister, Alraf Hossain Chowdhury, told Parliament.

Strike paralyzes Bangladesh

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

DHAKA, April 6. — About one hundred people were injured and 1,000 others arrested in Bangladesh today as a dawn-to-dusk general strike disrupted normal life in the capital and elsewhere.

The strike was called by main Opposition Awami League in protest of alleged atrocities on minorities and AL workers and the repeal of a law regarding display of the portrait of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Father of the Nation.

Police beat up around 20 people near the central office of AL and arrested several others, witnesses said. Private *Ekushe Television* reported a bomb blast in

Chowkbazar, in the old part of city, injuring two. In a *pre-hartal* swoop yesterday, police arrested more than a thousand leaders and workers of the Awami League. The houses of two senior Awami League leaders, former minister Mr Amir Hossian Amu and advocate Ms Sahara Khatun, were raided last night. However, they were not at home. Another report said police made fresh raids in the house of AL leader Mr Haji Selim.

Massive security arrangements were put in place after clashes between ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party and AL supporters left 50 injured yesterday while 20 were injured when police teargassed and lathicharged

AL demonstrators.

Shops, business establishments and educational institutions remained closed today and government offices recorded less attendance. A skeletal transport system was operating on roads while train and air services were not hit. Garment houses were also exempted from the strike. There were a few incidents of bomb blasts in the city.

The AL has boycotted parliament since the October polls and its 58 MPs have threatened to resign *en masse*. Reports said the authorities are contemplating the enactment of a law to ban work stoppage with provisions for punishment of violators.

THE STATESMAN

Khaleda alleges 'information terrorism'

HD-15 By Haroon Habib

Banladesh 679
DHAKA, APRIL 5. The Bangladeshi Prime Minister, Begum Khaleda Zia, has warned of stern action against the Awami League, the main Opposition, for "triggering unrest and launching a planned propaganda campaign" to malign the country as fundamentalist and Taliban-friendly.

Reacting to a report on Bangladesh by the Hong Kong-based *Far Eastern Economic Review*, which the Government has seized, the Prime Minister accused the party of resorting to "massive criminal activities under a blue print" to tarnish her Government's image and trigger social unrest.

She told Parliament: "This party has ordered its leaders and workers of different wings across the country, including Dhaka, Chittagong and Khulna, to conduct various anti-Government activities.

They are also sponsoring articles in newspapers to go about their ill-designed campaign".

Her remarks came during the question hour on Thursday, when her attention was drawn by angry members of the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) to the *Review's* cover story, "Beware of Bangladesh", in which the news magazine claimed that rising fundamentalism and religious intolerance were threatening secularism

and moderate Islam in Bangladesh under the new Government.

The Government has lodged a complaint against the report and the Prime Minister has said that those involved in the "information terrorism" would be punished.

Pledging her Government's resolve to curb terrorism, Ms. Khaleda Zia said that the army would be called upon, if necessary, to recover illegal arms and improve law and order.

She alleged that the past Awami League Government had created a reign of terror by illegally distributing arms among the party workers.

"Leaders and workers of the party are being organised to harbour terrorism and create anarchy in the country's industrial belts, education institutions and the transport sector", she said.

She further alleged that the Awami League had made attempts to discredit the Government, both at home and abroad, by persecuting the country's minority population.

Claiming that the campaign was not credible, she said: "They (foreigners) are quite convinced with the Government's performances. They also know Bangladesh has no Talibans or fundamentalists".

She continued: "A certain quarter stationed abroad is engaged in spreading falsehood against Bangladesh and its Government. They are dishing

out untrue and misleading information abroad only to harm the country and its people. They are also using Internet websites and getting articles published in foreign newspapers".

The Cabinet Committee on Law and Order, in its latest meeting, decided to direct the country's foreign missions to take necessary steps to counter such "evil propaganda".

Meanwhile, the Awami League president, Sheikh Hasina, has brought a counter-charge against the Government accusing it of turning the country into a "heaven of terrorists" and tarnishing Bangladesh's image.

"The BNP and its fundamentalists ally, the Jamaat-e-Islami, has made the country a terrorists' sanctuary by resorting to terrorism during its six-month rule", she said on Thursday.

She also alleged that the country was internationally recognised as a "model" of secular moderation during her last five-year rule.

"But BNP-Jamaat alliance has now turned it into a terrorist country... We cannot tolerate the way the country's image and dignity is being tarnished", she said.

The Awami League has reacted sharply to the Prime Minister's accusations that the party masterminded the criminal offences, saying there must be some "ulterior motives" behind the charges.

THE END

Report on Bangladesh angers Dhaka

By Haroon Habib

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K.D. 15
DHAKA, APRIL 3. The Bangladesh Government has lodged a strong protest with the Hong Kong-based *Far Eastern Economic Review* news magazine for publishing a cover story in its latest issue headlined "Beware of Bangladesh", which suggested an alarming rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the country.

In its April 4 issue, the magazine portrayed Bangladesh as "a cocoon of terror" saying, "Rising fundamentalism and religious intolerance are threatening secularism and moderate Islam".

The protest note by the Government said Bangladesh has been considered a role model for religious harmony. The recent communal violence in Gujarat did not trigger any violence in Bangladesh and this had once again shown the maturity of the people, it said. The headline of the report particularly angered the Government which considered it "outrageous".

Meanwhile, acting on information provided by an unnamed intelligence agency, the Home Ministry has reportedly issued a classified circular, saying that "different quarters" were trying to portray Bangladesh as a nation sheltering terrorists and fundamentalists.

The mass circulated *Ittefaq* and *Daily Star* newspapers quoted the circular as stating, "Some anti-Bangladesh organisations based in different parts of India are

actively working on spreading chaos and creating a crisis in Bangladesh to damage its image internationally. In such a situation, the country should make maximum efforts to improve law and order and curb the activities of the hardline fundamentalist groups". The circular also said, "An intelligence agency informed this Ministry that the anti-terrorism drive in Afghanistan which strengthened the strategic presence of the United States of America in this region, India's stand against the militants in Kashmir and the current situation in Central Asia are having a negative impact on Bangladesh".

The circular asked Government departments concerned to seriously consider a few suggestions forwarded by the intelligence agency which include improving law and order and taking steps to establish the rule of law.

In a related development, three leading human rights groups said in reports released to the media that 258 people had been murdered in March. During the period, 122 women had been raped and 19 fell victim to acid throwing. In February, the number of murders was 336, including that of a journalist.

In the circular, the Ministry also said, "The Government should be alerted against taking any decision that could trigger unrest among the people and undermine the Government's popularity".

The proposed precautionary measures

also include taking security measures in and around the religious places of the minority community, ensuring the security of the community and taking

steps to stop trafficking in illegal arms and drugs across the borders. The security of foreign missions and organisations and also of foreign diplomats would also be beefed up.

A leading newspaper, meanwhile, said Government sources had admitted that there were some armed fundamentalist outfits in the border region. The Government was going to take steps to reinforce border security and strengthen security at the Rohingya refugee camps in the Chittagong region and bordering areas where some fundamentalists groups were active.

"A revolution is taking place in Bangladesh that threatens trouble for the region and beyond, if left unchallenged," the *Review* said, adding, "While the Western-led international war on terrorism

continues to focus on a few high profile countries, Bangladesh, a nation of 120 million Muslims and 10 million Hindus, is moving away from its tradition of moderate Islam".

The report said the number of radicals in the country had been swelling over the past decade with graduates from the country's 64,000 madrasas, or religious schools, joining the ranks. They have been described by a retired high-ranking civil servant as a "political time bomb", the magazine said.

Awami demands Khaleda ouster

Bangladesh
ST-12 UNITED NEWS OF INDIA *31/3*

DHAKA, March 30. — Thousands of Opposition Awami League activists today rocked the streets in the capital to celebrate the country's independence from Pakistan in 1971 amidst calls for bringing down the six-month old Khaleda Zia government for "repression, misrule and corruption".

Sheikh Hasina Wajed led the longest-ever procession since her party's election defeat last October as the marchers shouted various slogans against the coalition BNP-Jamaat government.

"Down with Khaleda-Nizami; Sheikh Mujib — synonym of Bangladesh; Go ahead Sheikh Hasina," shouted the supporters while parading the seven-km-long road from Bangabandhu Avenue to Bangabandhu Bhaban at Dhanmondi where the father of the nation Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was assassinated in 1975. Hasina, Bangabandhu's eldest daughter, led the colourful procession standing on her jeep, waving to the people standing along the routes and roof tops.

Hundreds of riot police and the paramilitary BDR were deployed along the route, but the administration, for the first time, allowed the Opposition to take out a procession on the streets unhindered.

THE STATESMAN

31 MAR 2002

Hasina sets terms for peace talks

Imran Rahman
Dhaka, March 29

THE KHALEDA Zia Government has for the first time invited the main Opposition Awami League to hold talks to resolve some contentious political issues, including the display of Sheikh Mujibur Rehman's portrait.

In a swift response, the Awami League leader Sheikh Hasina has accepted the Government offer but on three conditions. The conditions are revival of the law for preservation and display of Mujib's portrait at public offices, allowing the Opposition to practice its democratic right to agitate and an end to political persecution of Opposition cadres.

Hasina, however, said, "We do not find the Government sincere about holding a meaningful dialogue. It invites us to a discussion on one hand and mounts its repression on our activists on the other." She referred to the police action on the League protesters in the city only hours after the Government made the dialogue offer and said it is nothing but a political stunt aimed at gaining publicity.

Earlier, Local Government Minister and BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan phoned Zillur Rahman to invite the latter's party to the proposed dialogue. Confirming his offer, Bhuiyan told newsmen that he requested his AL counterpart to sit across the table to discuss some disputed issues, including the proposal Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia made in Parliament last week.

The Prime Minister had proposed display of portrait of Mujib as well as late President Ziaur Rahman along with that of the head of the Government at public offices and institutions. The AL rejected the proposal and launched a countrywide protest against the repeal of an act providing for mandatory display of the portrait of Mujib.

Asked for his comments on the AL's conditions, Mannan Bhuiyan said he is yet to receive an official response to the Government proposal and will talk about the matter once he gets it. Since Parliament scrapped the portrait law, the AL has been continuing street protests. Police clubbed AL leaders and activists during the latest agitation in the capital.

Briefing reporters after a meeting of the Awami League's highest decision-making presidium, Hasina further said police arrested seven leaders of the Bangladesh Chhatra League, the AL's student wing, from the Dhaka Central Jail gate defying a High Court order to release them.

"What can we expect of a Government that does not go by the law or court order? Where do they want to push the country to?" Hasina said. She accused the Government of pushing the country towards lawlessness and destruction. "They are, in fact, conspiring to destroy the hard-earned democracy."

Referring to the repeated police actions against her party's agitation programme, the AL chief said the Government does not believe in democracy and cannot stand opposition in the

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

5 0 MAR 2002

Politics of hate

Khaleda's desperate bid to nail Hasina

There is no doubt that Sheikh Hasina's announcement asking all 58 Awami League MPs to resign is aimed at mounting pressure on Begum Khaleda Zia's BNP-Jamat government to stop the repression it has let loose on her party supporters and the "gross humiliation" of the country's founding father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Whether or not she carries out her threat, the move is a clear indication that Hasina and her supporters are unable to bear the onslaught. Hasina is the main target. Her car was recently smashed by someone "close" to a self-confessed killer of her father. Her residence has rings of plainclothesmen who question those visiting her. Arrest of several Awami League leaders from outside her residence has caused panic in her party. The torture of her former private secretary, charged with sedition has turned him into a physical wreck. Begum Zia has now also booked Hasina for "murdering" two students in police firing two decades ago when Ershad was in power, something she avoided during her last stint in power between 1991 and 1996. The murder charge carries a death sentence. The process of initiating cases of high treason and sedition against Hasina has begun "as she has internationally tarnished the Government's image by highlighting the killing, rape, maiming and looting of properties of minorities during and after last October elections."

What hurts most are the attempts to denigrate Sheikh Mujib and project him as a "funk" who shied away from declaring independence. Mujib is described as a "controversial politician who failed". Already Begum Zia has got the history of the country's liberation war rewritten in which her husband is credited with giving the call for independence. She is not only removing his portrait from government offices but systematically renaming all establishments named after him. By indulging in hate and revenge Begum Zia has largely forfeited the goodwill and support which swept her to power last October. If she does not initiate a dialogue with Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh is in danger of being taken to the brink of disaster.

THE STATESMAN

27 MAR 2002

Bangladesh seeks to re-write its history again

By Mahendra Ved
Times News Network

NEW DELHI: With a new political dispensation in Dhaka since last October, Bangladesh is again seeking to re-write its history and re-define its geopolitical location in South Asia. It is not a new process. But the attempt this time appears to go beyond settling of scores between the two women who dominate the country's political scene.

'Bangladesh Diary 2002' published by its foreign affairs ministry justifies its people joining Pakistan at the time of the Partition in 1947. It says the people of eastern Bengal "decided in 1947 to be part of the newly created state of Pakistan. The decision was one taken in the interest of the political, intellectual and social wellbeing of the people."

Bangladeshi historians first tried to justify break up from Pakistan, after having been the pioneers of the Pakistan movement—the Muslim League was born in Dhaka. The second phase of history's topsy-turvy came in 1975 after the assassination of the founding father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The first tenure of Begum Khaleda Zia (1991-96) saw efforts to project her slain husband Zia-ur-Rahman as the hero of the freedom struggle. Sheikh Mujib's role as the founding father was restored during the next five years when his daughter, Sheikh Hasina, and the Awami League ruled the country. It was during this time that the name of Zia International Airport was unofficially changed to Dhaka International Airport, angering Zia's supporters in the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).

It is the BNP's turn again to pay back the Awami League. Last week, the Jatiyo Sangsad (National Assembly) repealed an Act that compelled all public places to dis-

play Sheikh Mujib's photographs, prompting Awami League members to begin resigning from Parliament.

The diary does not name the 'majority political party'—Awami League, that won the unified Pakistan's last general election in 1970. But it talks of "a young Bengali officer in the Pakistan Army, (referred to as 'occupation forces' in the same sentence, but in different context) Zia-ur-Rahman, who acted "in one of those defining moments of history...Major Zia galvanised a whole nation and gave it a new fortitude and direction..." the diary records.

The Awami League comes in for bashing for switching over to a one-party presidency. It caused "stifling circumstances" when "some disillusioned officers in the army, under the guidance of senior politicians of the ruling party, the Awami League," organised a coup which led to the death of Mujib and most of his family members. While this may be factually true, the diary does not mention that Rahman was elevated as the army chief and deputy chief martial law administrator (DCMLA) by the 'senior politicians' who took power.

Rahman was freed from jail "in a remarkable political move which has come to be known as the Sepoy-people mutiny" in November 1975, the diary notes. But the recorded history, not finding mention here, also says that almost all the leaders of the 'mutiny' who fell out with Rahman, were jailed or liquidated in the course of numerous rebellions that followed in the next three years.

These differences apart, the diary records two occasions when the arch rivals cooperated: the joint fight against the 'autocracy' of H.M. Ershad, who was removed in 1990, and in 1991 when they restored parliamentary democracy.

Bangladesh: Independence and National Day

Prime Minister's Message

TODAY, 26 March is our Independence and National Day. Our glorious Independence, achieved through the sacrifice of millions of martyrs and the sufferings and humiliation of thousands of our brothers and sisters, constitutes our best accomplishment and remains a great source of national pride. On this auspicious day, I recall with respect and gratitude the invaluable contribution and sacrifice made by our national heroes and martyrs and I pray for the salvation of their souls. I also convey my warmest greetings and felicitations to my countrymen and to Bangladeshis living abroad.

The prime objective of our Independence was to establish a democratic society, moored in our culture and history. We also sought to achieve freedom from exploitation, with a view to ensuring a decent and dignified life for our people. This aspiration was, however, belied by the introduction of one-party rule in the 1970s and the autocratic rule during the 1980s. By the grace of Allah and the gracious contribution of the people, the country is today free from the one-party rule and the autocratic regime. The October elections heralded a new era of democracy, economic progress and prosperity. What we need to do is to translate this potential into a reality. Consistent with our commitment, we intend to do everything possible to strengthen the democratic values and institutions in the country through ensuring the meaningful participation of the people in the overall development process.

It was Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman who showed us the



enlightened path of development by restoring multi-party democracy and forging national unity. Inspired by this motivation, we also undertook huge strides in development during our previous term of office in 1991-1996. In the process, Bangladesh came to be known as an Emerging Tiger in the South Asia.

On assumption of our responsibility of the government after receiving the overwhelming mandate of the people, we have been making relentless efforts to improve the lot of the people. As a part of our commitment, the government has taken determined and effective initiatives to eliminate terrorism. A number of measures have been taken to enhance the outreach of education. We want to utilise education as an effective tool to fight poverty.

Efforts are also on to bring order into the ruined economy, which we have inherited from the previous government. While we call upon all our countrymen to constructively contribute to the process of economic regeneration, we also believe that expatriate Bangladeshis could infuse dynamism in the economy through increasing remittance and by making investments.

On this day, let us take a renewed vow to forge greater national unity to build a strong, self-reliant nation and prosperous society for our future generation.

I wish continued happiness, peace and prosperity to all Bangladeshis at home and abroad.

Allah Hafez, Bangladesh Zindabad.

— Khaleda Zia

Foreign Minister's Message

ON the 31st anniversary of our glorious Independence and National Day, I extend my heartiest felicitations to all Bangladeshis at home and abroad.

The War of Independence began this day in 1971 and we earned independence after a nine-month-long struggle at the supreme sacrifice of our millions of martyrs. I pay tribute to them and pray for their departed souls.

The war was waged aiming at creating an exploitation-free, democratic, happy and prosperous Bangladesh.

We should take a fresh vow today to materialise the dreams of the martyrs and dedicate ourselves to the task of rebuilding the nation in accordance with the people's aspirations.

The four-party alliance led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party

Headed by Begum Khaleda Zia, the government has taken numerous steps towards socio-economic development and measures put in place to discipline the economic sectors. In respect of foreign policy, Bangladesh continues to promote wider bilateral, regional and international cooperation.



Bangladesh plays an active role in Saarc, UN, Commonwealth, OIC and NAM. Above all, the government is determined to make our hard-earned independence meaningful to all.

Bangladeshis living abroad are our goodwill ambassadors. They can improve Bangladesh's image across the world and make positive contributions in terms of money, expertise and investment for the country's development.

I wish continued peace,

30 years of independence

EMAJUDDIN AHAMED

BANGLADESH, though an old society, is a new state born only 30 years ago in 1971 after the heroic War of Liberation. The gory details of the war, the terrible ordeal that the nation had to undergo, the sufferings and sacrifices of the people are too well known to be recounted here. The spirit and ideals that inspired and motivated the people during the War of Liberation have always been the motivating force for Bangladesh's march forward.

Thirty years is not enough for the realisation of the full potential of a nation; for Bangladesh, however, it has been crucial not only for its vibrant present but also for its bright future. Bangladesh is much stronger today than it was in the 1970s. In terms of population, it has become the eighth largest country in the world. In this era of globalisation, its market of 130 million people is taking on attractive hues. The newly found gas reserve is making many nations woo Bangladesh.

Its strategic location, standing as it does between South and South-East Asia and East Asia, in the vicinity of the Indian Ocean, the probable theatre of big power confrontation in the days to come, is significant.

If international relations are redrawn along the axes of national interest and if the webs of diplomacy are creatively woven, Bangladesh may play a key role in the region, both in the political and the economic spheres.

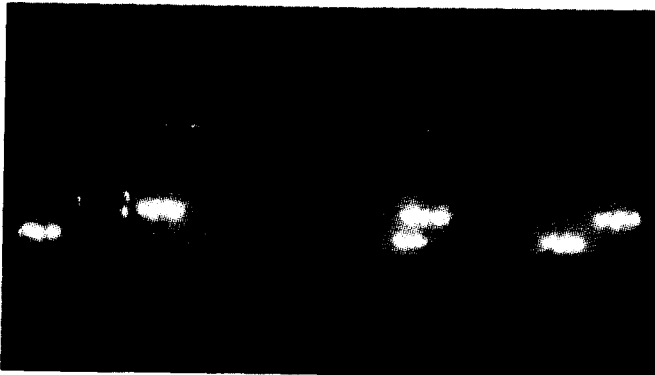
Bangladesh has an innate orientation to democratic order with a Westminster type parliamentary democracy since 1972 but it could not sustain it for long. Slowly but steadily it degenerated into an authoritarian system and became locked up in a one-party BKSAL-ite (Bangladesh Krishak-Sramik Awami League) monolith. Then followed a period of uncertainty. Coups and counter-

coups by "men on horse-back" rocked the polity. Bangladesh had to experience martial law for quite some time till the major political parties of the country fought unitedly for the restoration of democracy and won in the late 1990s. The parliamentary system of government was re-introduced in 1991 under Begum Khaleda Zia's leadership.

The political parties, despite their lack of institutionalisation, have

investment.

The concept of nationalism has taken root as a unifying force with the emphasis on national unity and integration of all citizens and social groups irrespective of caste, creed, gender, culture and religion. The nation reflects the broad-based cultural and intellectual - even spiritual - cravings of the people, transcending ethnic and religious barriers. Bangladesh is committed to consolidating its image as an



The Parliament Building in Dhaka by night.

arrived by now at a consensus on the nature of political system in the country. Nothing short of representative parliament is acceptable. The government must be accountable to parliament. The judicial branch must be independent as the bulwark of basic human rights. The press must be free. The exploitative and wasteful system of economy, the so-called socialism, introduced in the early 1970s, made room for a humane and production-oriented system with the interplay of market forces and dynamic private entrepreneurship, thanks to the creative genius of late President Ziaur Rahman. Through structural adjustments, Bangladesh has been linked to the global economy. As a result, the nation has attracted

independent, politically stable and economically viable country and enhancing its role as a contributing member in the world community. At the regional level, it has developed ties with Nepal, Bhutan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Maldives and India. Bangladesh had taken the initiative to forge regional co-operation in South Asia, and the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation got off the ground in Dhaka with a summit in

1985. Bangladesh has played a leading role to promote the cause of developing countries - to bolster self-reliance and move away from aid-centricity; seek closer North-South dialogue for the creation of a conducive external environment for revitalising growth and eliminating poverty and to intensify South-South co-operation towards collective self-reliance and target in particular such areas as food production, man-power planning, trade and investment and joint ventures.

Another priority consistent with the constitution has been to strengthen the role of the UN as the central organ for the co-operative management of the world's problems. Bangladesh's membership of the OIC (Organisation of Islamic Conference), the Commonwealth and Non-Aligned Movement has enhanced its ability to contribute to the great goals of peace, security, development and the rule of international law. Bangladesh's commitments to peace-keeping is apparent from the deployment of its forces at one point in 13 different areas of conflict.

In sum, though Bangladesh has yet to build a political system based on consensus and compromise, it has covered a long distance. Democratic order can only strike roots in the political soil if parties operate within the framework of consensus and compromise politics. Prime Minister Khaleda Zia is keen to see that happen.

(The writer is a former Vice-Chancellor of Dhaka University.)

President's Message

ON Independence and National Day, I extend warm wishes to my countrymen and pray to Allah, may the souls of the martyrs of the War of Independence rest in peace. Independence and the establishment of a sovereign Bangladesh was achieved at the cost of the people's blood, after a nine-month-long war. The names of the courageous people, politicians at all levels, the brave organisers of the war, the armed forces and the freedom fighters are written in gold.



Inhuman acts of murder, destruction and mass annihilation were countered by those who pawned their lives for freedom. Victory was snatched at the expense of mass participation and sacrifice by the people, including students, labourers and peasants, cutting across age, occupation and class.

We became the proud owners of a new map, a new national anthem and a new national flag. The history of our freedom struggle is steeped in blood, tears and the pain of losing our dear ones. We are proud of the courage and the lore built around incidents of bravery displayed during the war. The unforgettable contribution made by the martyrs will light up the path we take in the

future. To make the independence more meaningful, basic needs like food, clothing, shelter, education and hygiene will have to be taken care of. We will have to fulfil this aim to achieve a beautiful life, the idea intrinsic to the war of independence. For this, people of all classes should work together. Political integrity is required to build a self-reliant Bangladesh. We need to draw up an acceptable action plan to make political, economic and social freedom a reality.

Come let us unite anew with a hope to achieve the well-being of the country.

Allah Hafez. Bangladesh Zindabad.

— Prof AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury

26 MAR 2002

Police crackdown on Awami supporters, 3 leaders held

Statesman News Service

DHAKA, March 24. — Police today charged batons and lobbed teargas shells to prevent Opposition Awami League leaders and supporters from staging a protest in the city against the repeal of a law by the ruling coalition that earlier made mandatory the display of the portrait of the nation's founding father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at government and semi-government offices.

At least three top leaders and former ministers of the Awami League, including Begum Matia Chowdhury, Mr Saber Hossain Chowdhury and celebrated actor Asaduzzaman Noor, MP were arrested by the police when they were heading towards Osmany Udyan, the venue where the Awami League leaders and supporters were to begin this morning their hunger-strike to condemn the repeal of the Preservation and Display of the Portrait of Father of the Nation Act, 2001. Fifty persons were injured.

Police put up barricades around Osmany Udyan after the authorities ordered ban on any gathering there, apparently to thwart the Awami League leaders and workers' move to stage a demonstration.

When police charged batons and lobbed teargas shells to disperse the crowd, angry protestors threw bricks at them.

The Opposition leader and Awami League chief, Sheikh



Police arrest former minister Begum Matia Chowdhury during a hunger-strike in Dhaka on Sunday. — AP /PTI

Hasina, who was supposed to lead the hunger-strike, said at a public meeting in the western district town of Jessore yesterday that the people would take revenge on those involved in disgracing the Father of the Nation.

After police chased the Awami leaders and workers from Osmany Udyan, they assembled in front of the National Press Club and attempted to begin their hunger-strike.

It appears now that both the BNP-Jamaat government led by Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia and the Opposition Awami

League of Sheikh Hasina have taken a hard line on their respective stands on the issue which, according to observers, will certainly snowball into a major confrontation in the days to come.

The Awami League has 58 members in Parliament who have already handed their resignation letters to party chief Sheikh Hasina for submitting them to the Speaker whenever she feels necessary.

Sheikh Hasina, however, said her party would attend Parliament only for a day to tell the people why they are resigning.

THE STATESMAN

25 MAR 2002

Protest over Bill on Mujib portraits

Bangla
① 24/3 By Haroon Habib RD-14

DHAKA, MARCH 23. Amid extraordinary security measures and angry protests, the Bangladesh Parliament passed a controversial Bill scrapping the law which called for the display of portraits of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in all public offices.

The Bill was passed in Parliament by a voice vote on Thursday even as police and para-military forces cracked down on leaders and activists of the main Opposition, Awami League, and used tear gas to disperse demonstrators protesting against the Bill. Awami League MPs, who have been boycotting Parliament, staged demonstration inside the parliament building against the "black law", which was an insult to Mujibur Rahman who was assassinated in 1975.

The Opposition MPs also paraded down parliament corridors wearing black badges and holding black flags. In protest against the unprecedented security measures put in place by the Government, 58 Awami League members threatened to resign from Parliament. Police cordoned off the residence of the Opposition leader, Sheikh Hasina, who is away on an organisational tour.

After the Bill was passed, the Prime Minister, Begum Khaleda Zia, proposed another Bill that would authorise the display of the portraits of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman along with her husband and former President, Gen. Ziaur Rahman and herself as head of government. The Awami League immediately rejected the proposal, saying it was not only "indecorous but also aimed at distorting the nation's independence history".

24 MAR 2002

DDM 11

Awami League sponsoring terrorism, says Khaleda

By Haroon Habib

HD-12
11/3

DHAKA, MARCH 10. Against the backdrop of unabated violence after the general elections, the Bangladesh Prime Minister, Khaleda Zia, has charged the main Opposition party, Awami League, with "sponsoring terrorism" to upset law and order and "destabilise the Government in a planned way."

Begum Zia, who completed five months in office today, ruled out the deployment of Army to combat the deteriorating law and order situation though some ruling party leaders suggested the option. She also hinted that a new law, if needed, would be enacted to curb violence.

Begum Zia repeated her allegation against the Awami League each time she was asked about the rise in crime rate at a news conference here on Saturday. The conference was organised to brief journalists on the outcome of the just-concluded Commonwealth Heads of Government Meet in Australia.

Expressing her Government's resolve to combat the growing acts of terrorism, Begum Zia, who heads the ruling coalition of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party — to which she belongs — and the fundamentalist Jamaat-e-Islami, denied reports that most of those arrested in connection with the recent acts of crime were BNP activists.

When her attention was drawn to newspaper reports which said that, on an average, about 8 persons were killed in the country everyday and those who were arrested on charges of attack,

loot, extortion, rape and murder mostly belonged to the ruling BNP, Begum Zia claimed that law and order had, in fact, improved under the caretaker government and during the five months of her rule.

She alleged that the Awami League, led by the former Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, was engaging in violence to "cover up the limitless corruption and terrorism committed by it during its five-year tenure." Citing the recent arrest of Sheikh Hasina's personal assistant, Bahauddin Nasim, she said her Government would spare no one found guilty of disturbing law and order.

Asked if she had any specific information on opposition-sponsored terrorism, she said: "I do have information that the opposition is conspiring to deteriorate law and order."

Sheikh Hasina, for her part, blamed the ruling coalition for the unabated acts of violence. Referring to the "atrocities" against her party workers, she wondered whether in the name of democracy, "martial law" was in force in the country. "Democracy is in name, martial law is in force — people want to get rid of this situation."

The Awami League also accused the Government for not allowing a parliamentary delegation of the party to meet Mr. Nasim in Dhaka central jail. The delegation alleged that police had resorted to "inhuman physical torture" of Mr. Nasim, who was arrested from the airport when he was on his way to the U.S. on February 28. Police recently failed to produce Mr. Nasim in the court despite its order.

Dhaka ditches stand, ready to move ahead

■ Decides not to review treaties signed during Sheikh Hasina's tenure

SONIA TRIKHA
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 19

BEGUM Khaleda's Zia's government today made its first effort since the October elections in Bangladesh to engage India in talks on long-term links. In their first foreign secretary-level contact since the BNP government took over, Dhaka reversed its stand that all Indo-Bangla treaties negotiated by former prime minister Sheikh Hasina be reviewed, and agreed to move on even the contentious border treaty issue it had earlier opposed.

Bangladeshi Foreign Secretary Shamsheer M. Chowdhury, who was here on a goodwill visit, conveyed this to his Indian counterpart Chokila Iyer. In their talks, both sides discussed progress on transit and transshipment protocol agreements that haven't yet been implemented and agreed to initiate talks on the border treaty soon. They also agreed to discuss the long-pending demarcation of the 6.5 km border and the enclaves and areas in adverse possession that saw a flare-up in Pyrduah last summer in which 16 people died.

Dhaka also assured India that it would not allow its territory to be used for any kind of terrorist or criminal activity "that was detrimental to the interest of any country including India".

Dhaka, according to sources, is now ready to discuss the obstacles in the implementation of train services and a bus route between Kolkata, Dhaka, and Agartala as well as transshipment routes in the adjoining waters of both countries. The Bangladesh Foreign Secretary also called on the Minister for External Affairs Jaswant Singh who told him that India stood by its commitment towards expanding and diversifying ties between the



two countries.

The other big issue during the talks was that of atrocities on the minority Hindu community in Bangladesh. According to highly-placed officials, India assessed that the post-election excesses were not just communal but also politically motivated by "BNP supporters".

Bangladesh had earlier acknowledged the murders as "communal violence" but then went back on their stand and said they were committed by Awami League supporters based in India. The BNP government has now gone on to say "nothing actually happened". This issue was raised by Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee when he met Khaleda Zia in Kathmandu last month. Today, Chowdhury said his government was setting up an independent national human rights panel to look into it.

Sources point out Bangladesh's softened its stand because it needs India to grow economically in the region. Iyer and Chowdhury agreed foreign secretary-level talks, due to be held in Dhaka, should be convened soon.

INDIAN EXPRESS

20 FEB 2002

Post-poll torture tales haunt Bangladesh crime convention

By Ershadul Huq

DHAKA: Tales of torture haunted a crime convention here, as the audience fell silent with horror on hearing sagas of rape and pillage allegedly by activists of the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party-led government.

The convention on "Crimes Against Humanity" has been organised by the BNP's political rival, the Awami League, and focuses on post-election atrocities on nearly 20 million Hindu-dominated minorities in Muslim-majority Bangladesh.

The dais at the auditorium resembled a hospital emergency room with some 50 wounded people lying on stretchers or sitting on chairs holding crutches.

With their hands or legs broken, eyes gouged out and signs of brutality all over the body, the victims cried out for justice. They blamed "terrorists" of the ruling BNP-Jamaat-e-Islami alliance for attacks on them in a spate of violence before and after the parliamentary elections last October.

The citizens' group, which organised the two-day event drawing participants from home and abroad, brought dozens of victims, including women and children, from across Bangladesh to Dhaka to the convention on stretchers.

Awami League chief and former prime minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurated the convention that was attended by leading human rights activists, diplomats, politicians and professionals.

Of the 50 victims on stage, some shared their traumatic experience.

"I was tortured for voting for the boat (the Awami League election symbol). They also tortured my daughter whom I had to send to India," said Shefali Rani, who came from southern Bhola, the worst hit area. "I want justice."

Ms Shefali said she asked the terrorists to have mercy on her and

her young daughter. "All I want now is justice."

The story of Chanda of southern Narail of greater Faridpur is no different. "Terrorists stormed our house and splashed acid on me and my elder sister. My crime was that I was an election agent of the Awami League."

Bangladeshi Hindus are traditionally seen as a vote bank for the Awami League.

Kamaruzzaman, a member of the Awami League's youth front, said: "BNP cadres kidnapped me from my grocery store and started beating me up. When I asked for a drink, they gave me hot water. Then they chopped all fingers of my hands off."

Foreign dignitaries and guests at the convention appeared shell-shocked.

"The government is completely denying what is happening here," said William Sloan, a North American human rights activist and jurist. He urged international rights groups to see and understand what is happening in Bangladesh.

Ms Hasina in her speech said: "Humanity is being razed to the ground and human rights trampled across the country... It cannot even be imagined where and when this black episode will end."

She appealed to the international community to help prevent "political and religious persecution" in Bangladesh. "Let humanity raise their voice for the tortured people of my country, for the sake of humanity, and for the preservation and protection of human rights, peace and security."

To counter the Awami League convention, the ruling BNP-led coalition will organise a two-day national convention beginning March 15, on repressive and criminal activities by the Hasina-led former government. (IANS)

The dais at the auditorium resembled a hospital emergency room with some 50 wounded people lying on stretchers or sitting on chairs holding crutches

Pandering to Islamists

Begum Zia had better watch out

The refusal by Begum Khaleda Zia to let the well known Bangladeshi writer and social activist Taslima Nasreen return from her forced exile and the reluctance of the police to apprehend supporters of Jamat e Islami, her alliance partners, who recently carried out the bomb attack on a reception accorded to the leading human rights activist Shahrar Kabir in Chittagong, speaks volumes for her government's mind-set. It was during her first term as prime minister (1991-96) that Taslima was hounded out of Bangladesh by a "fatwa" declaring her an infidel and carrying a death sentence. Her "crime" was writing a novel, *Lajjya*, which revolved round the plight of minorities and the studied indifference of the majority community. In 1996 Sheikh Hasina allowed Taslima to return home to see her dying mother. But she was again forced into exile as the fundamentalists kept gunning for her. Even Sheikh Hasina failed to provide the required protection, fearing a backlash from the Islamists.

Almost a decade later the gutsy human rights activist and freedom fighter Shariar Kabir has been framed on treason charges by Begum Zia's government for daring to highlight both in the national and international media the persecution of minorities by BNP and Jamat supporters of Begum Zia. He was recently released on bail after two months' of harrowing detention during which he was subjected to inhuman mental torture. His "other serious crime" was to pronounce his resolve, while in detention, to "remain steadfast in my commitment to protect human rights and interests of the country's persecuted minorities." The government holds him solely responsible for sullyng Bangladesh's image abroad, specially in India, by presenting well documented cases of rape and torture of hundreds of minority women and widespread looting of their property. It would be tragic if Begum Zia with her moderate outlook decides to play second fiddle to fundamentalists purely for political reasons. The world is watching.

... cut the rates on small savings now, minister.

A welcome change

SR Zia should give Hasina her due *19/2*

It is incredible that Bangladesh water resources minister LK Siddiqui should welcome the 1996 Indo-Bangladesh treaty on the sharing of Ganga Waters as "beneficial for Bangladesh" and praise the former prime minister Sheikh Hasina for it. He acknowledges that the treaty has "helped widen the country's irrigation network" and admits that while before the treaty only 10,000-45,000 hectares of land were under Ganga-Kabodak Canal, the country's oldest irrigation project, now 15,000-58,000 hectares have been brought under irrigation resulting in substantial increase in food production. His more significant admission on the floor of parliament is that while the 40-year-old GKB project could not be implemented earlier because of water scarcity, the GKB's canals now have enough water to raise crops during the lean season. The statement marks a complete reversal of Begum Khaleda Zia and her ruling BNP's stand on the water sharing treaty, which she called a "total sell out to India threatening to turn Bangladesh into a desert." As leader of the Opposition she had led a "Farakka march" whose participants had threatened to cross the border and smash the Farakka barrage identified by her as a symbol of Bangladesh's ruin. Far worse was her reaction when Sheikh Hasina signed the path-breaking peace accord with Shanti Bahini, which after a quarter century brought peace to the Chittagong Hill Tracts. This too was projected as bartering away Bangladesh's sovereignty since, according to her, one-third of Bangladesh territory had been ceded to India.

Begun Zia knew that the two landmark treaties have been extremely beneficial for Bangladesh. Personal ego and jealousy outweighed national interest. She had even promised to scrap the water treaty. Now that she is back in power she knows its worth. The tragedy is that Begum Zia has never given Hasina her due and vice versa which has prevented both from reaching a consensus on vital national issues. It would be a welcome change if the reversal of BNP's policy on the Ganga water treaty marks a departure from its politics of mindless rivalry and pettifogging.

THE STATESMAN

15 FEB 2002

Hasina alleges rights violation

Statesman News Service
and agencies

DHAKA, Feb. 14. — Bangladesh's main opposition leader Sheikh Hasina Wajed today accused the ruling four-party coalition government of violating human rights after the general election held on 1 October and said she would initiate a dialogue with all political parties and sociocultural forces on the matter even as at least four people were killed and more than 100 others injured in two separate shootouts in Bangladesh, reports said.

Three people were killed in a gunfight sparked by a family dispute late yesterday in the western Shariatpur district, the Daily Star and other newspapers said.

In another incident, a student of an Islamic religious school was killed during clashes between students and police backed villagers in the southeastern Patiya district yesterday, the Daily Star said. The incident also left more than 100 people injured, the reports said.

In Dhaka, Mrs Wajed inaugurated a two-day national convention titled Crimes against Humanity. "No one is outside the law. Those who believe in the politics of murder and repression should not have place in any political party," she said.

The convention, organised by Civil Society with support from Awami League, was aimed at discussing atrocities on Opposition activists and minorities after the last parliamentary election.

It was chaired by the convener of Civil Society, Justice KM Sobhan and addressed by former in-



Sheikh Hasina

ternational cooperation minister of Belgium, Dr Reginal Marrels, president of American Jurist Association, Mr William Sloan, former Speaker of Nepalese Parliament, Nepalese poet Banira Giri, leaders of Bangladesh's various political parties and human right activists. Invitees from India and Pakistan could not be present due to visa problems.

The government, however, denied the charges and said it was an Opposition propaganda to malign its reputation.

Speaking on the occasion, Mrs Wajed, who is also the President of the Awami League, said, "People are suffering from utter insecurity and thousands of helpless men are being subjected to political revenge. Officials and employees of the government and semi-government offices are being sacked. Hundreds of officers of civil administration, police and defence forces have been dismissed from duty."

"Islam is a religion of peace and humanity. True believers do not support oppression and terrorist activities," she added.

THE STATESMAN

Test for Khaleda

Can she fight the insurgents? 2/11

There is no justification for the "displeasure" expressed by the Bangladesh foreign Secretary over reports in the Indian media that not only Indian insurgents but also those belonging to foreign Islamic extremist and terrorist groups were using Bangladeshi territory for getting shipments of foreign arms, terrorism training and launching attacks against Indian targets in the north-east and Kashmir. He has taken strong exception to the Kolkata police commissioner Sujoy Chakravarty's remarks that two Bangladeshi nationals were among those detained in connection with the attack on the American Center. What made the foreign secretary react the way he did is not comprehensible. Nothing objectionable was said since some Bangladeshi rulers in the past had overtly or covertly provided moral and material sustenance to these groups in carrying out their anti-India objectives. Whether it is ULFA or NSCN their leaders and armed cadres were provided sanctuary by successive Bangladeshi rulers and Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia in her last stint as leader of the Opposition had hailed these insurgents as "brave freedom fighters" carrying out a "heroic battle against an oppressive regime". When Sheikh Hasina came to power she disbanded most of the "overground" training camps of these insurgents but could do nothing to those going "underground" with the assistance of various government intelligence agencies.

It is no secret that jihadi groups in Bangladesh responding to calls of their counterparts in Pakistan have openly campaigned to fight Indian "occupation forces" in Kashmir. They have raised funds, recruited jihadis and sent them to Kashmir where many of them got killed. Much of this has been reported by the Bangladeshi media. It must be said to Begum Zia's credit that she in her second term as Prime Minister is trying hard to turn a new leaf in Indo-Bangladesh relations. The familiar anti-India rhetoric was missing. In fact she is now spearheading the campaign to sell Bangladesh's gas to India although she had opposed it while in the Opposition. But the Islamists in the BNP-led alliance are forcing her to revert to her earlier anti-India line. Whether she succumbs will be her real political test.

THE STATESMAN

Govt denies Hasina extra security cover

Imran Rahman
Dhaka, January 30

THE BANGLADESH Government has refused to deploy more security personnel at the residence of the Opposition leader Sheikh Hasina at Dhanmondi in Dhaka although payment for it was made by the Awami League, party sources complained last night.

Adjutant of Dhaka district ansar assistant Shah Alam communicated the decision in a letter to Sheikh Hasina's private secretary. The letter was received on Tuesday, her officials said.

Dhaka district Ansar adjutant in its letter quoted the commissioner of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police as saying that since 19 policemen have been deployed at Hasina's residence, deployment of ansar would not be logical.

Earlier, following a request from the opposition leader's office, the deputy commissioner of police had requested the Ansar authority to deploy two



SHEIKH HASINA

sections of Ansar at her residence. Later, the Opposition leader's office asked for one section of Ansar and had deposited 82,728 taka as three months' advance salary and ration benefit for the Ansar personnel and requested the authority for deployment of the auxiliary force.

Earlier, the Government had

withdrawn crack commandos of Special Security Force (SSF) and some personnel of the Special Branch of police from Sheikh Hasina's security corps.

As leader of the Opposition, Hasina is entitled to security of a Cabinet minister's level, as it was given to Begum Khaleda Zia when the latter was the Opposition leader during the last five years.

The Government withdrew SSF security after the Parliament scrapped a law that was enacted by Hasina to give her and her younger sister, Sheikh Rehana, lifelong security net. The Awami League president, however, has raised a private security force under the supervision of four retired Army Generals and the first ranks of such security comprise senior leaders of the Bangladesh Chhatra League, student front of the Awami League.

However, Hasina spent over one month in the US and Britain without state security.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

31 JAN 2002

Bangla HC seeks report on Hindu torture charge

Imran Rahman
Dhaka, January 22

THE HIGH Court today directed the Khaleda Zia government to submit reports on torture and brutalities committed on Hindu minorities in Bangladesh during the Awami League administration in 1998 and the present BNP-led government after the October 1 Parliamentary election.

A High Court division bench comprising Justice Abu Naim Mominur Rahman and Justice Arayasuddin issued the order in a judgment today on two specific writ petitions filed by internationally-acclaimed jurist and former Foreign Minister Dr Kamal Hossain on behalf of a legal aid body Ain-O-Salish Kendra.

The bench heard the two writ petitions together and gave the verdict. When the Awami League government headed by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was in power, on February 29 in 2000, Hindu minorities were attacked and tortured by armed cadres of a private army, Georgia Bahini, in Duaria union parishad under Lalpur police station in Natore district.

In a reply to the writ petition filed by Ain-O-Salish Kendra, the Awami League government had informed the High Court that torture and repression of Hindu minorities in a Third World

ROAD BAR FOR HASINA

LEADER OF the Opposition and Awami League chief Hasina Wajed was barred from using the Dhaka Cantonment road while she was on her way to participate in the final prayers of the World Muslim Assembly, north of Dhaka, today.

Awami League sources said, Hasina's was intercepted by military police at Shahid Jahangir Gate of Dhaka Cantonment. After being held back for nearly an hour by on-duty military police, the Opposition leader took the crowded Mahakhali road to reach the the World Muslim Assembly. Condemning the incident, Awami League general secretary Zillur Rahman in a statement said, "The fascist government has not only tried to prevent Sheikh Hasina from attending to her religious duties, but also degraded the spirit of Islam. **HTC, Dhaka**

country is quite normal and not surprising. But during the hearing of the petition, Attorney-General of the four-party alliance government Hasan Arif disagreed with the submission of his predecessor Mahmudul Islam. Arif asked for a proper probe into the communal incident during the Awami League administration.

The court ordered the government to submit a report on Natore incident by February 28 and fixed the date for hearing of the writ on March 10. The court also asked the government to locate the then Deputy Commissioner and the Superintendent of Police and produce them in the court for failing to take any action against the attacks on Hindus.

Acting on the latest writ petition against repression on Hindus after the alliance led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party came to power, the High Court, extended the deadline for the Khaleda Zia government to submit its report to the court by March 20 this year.

The deadline had expired on January 15 with the government failing to submit the probe report. In his submission to the High Court last week, Dr Kamal Hossain said, the Hindu minorities were attacked and oppressed when the governments of Hasina and Khaleda were in power. "Now all are waiting to see what steps the government will take to protect the Hindu minorities in the country as they are equal citizens," he said. Meanwhile, the Awami League has again deferred its planned two-day convention on torture of Hindus to the first or second week of February this year.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

23 JAN 2002

Police to challenge Kabir's bail

Imran Rahman
Dhaka, January 21

POLICE WILL move the highest appellate division of the Supreme Court against a High Court order granting six-month ad-interim bail to writer-columnist Shahriar Kabir that set him free on Sunday after two months in jail.

Kabir was arrested on November 22 from Zia International Airport in Dhaka under Section 54 of CrPC and later police filed a sedition case against him.

"We have full respect for the High Court verdict but police will appeal to the higher court soon challenging the bail order as Kabir was involved in anti-state activities," said a clarification by the police over Kabir's

arrest.

It said police seized four Betacom cassettes, three CDs, one videocassette and nine audiocassettes, which showed that Kabir made a documentary interviewing the so-called minority refugees in India.

The cassettes also contain placards and slogans like *Ei Shimana Manchina* (We do not recognise this boundary), 'partition of India has created more problems that it solved, 'every action must have reaction today or tomorrow', 'communal partition is the great sin. It is against universal ideology of India.'

The clarification also said police and the intelligence agencies have information that Kabir was involved in anti-state activi-

ties during his stay in India and he also confessed it to the police. Some newspapers also carried news items about Kabir's negative activities.

On the basis of specific allegations and information, police interrogated Shahriar Kabir and filed a sedition case against him, the clarification said.

Meanwhile, Kabir, relaxing in his house in Dhaka today after 58 days of captivity, told newsmen that he is firm to complete the film on atrocities on Hindu minorities in Bangladesh, come what may.

"Police have seized footage of the movie but I will get more such footage for my venture," he said adding that a film focussing on the attacks and brutalities on Hindus in Bangladesh was his

long cherished dream.

He described the granting of bail as a reflection of the highest court's upholding of the freedom of expression in the country. Kabir revealed that the CDs, now in police custody, contained interviews with 30 Hindus who fled to India to take refuge in the wake of general election in Bangladesh.

"My sole aim is to bring to light the real issues the Hindus are facing in Bangladesh. During the 1971 war, many of them had left the country only hoping to return after liberation. But this time, they have gone for good and would never come back," he regretted.

He said, brutalities on Hindus must not be allowed to recur in future.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

22 JAN 2002

Hasina faces contempt charge

27/1
HT-11
HT Correspondent
Dhaka, January 21

THE BANGLADESH High Court will hear on January 26 a lawyer's petition suing Awami League president and former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for contempt of court.

The contempt petition was filed in the High Court over her alleged remarks during her recent New York trip. Advocate Joynal Abedin, representing 84 lawyers loyal to the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party, filed the petition.

The petitioners enclosed a copy of vernacular daily Manabzamin that published a statement of Sheikh Hasina on December 22. "I have not indulged in corruption. The President has played a dirty role



SHEIKH HASINA

with us. Whatever Moudud Saheb gives in writing will be come as the verdict (of court)," she was quoted as having said. The statement was also published by vernacular weekly *Thikana*, based in New York.

Moudud Saheb is Barrister

Bansrodish
Moudud Ahmed, now Law Minister in Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's cabinet. The petition said the former Prime Minister's statement amounted to contempt of court. The lawyers had earlier submitted a petition to the Chief Justice of Bangladesh. The latter advised them to sue Hasina lawyers in the High.

Hasina last year provoked a strong warning from the the Supreme Court when she made similar contemptuous remarks against the High Court and the Supreme Court.

Hasina had even incensed the judges of the higher courts by organising a procession of party leaders and workers, warning the judges of dire consequences if they did not hang the self-proclaimed killers of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

1990

A vindictive act

Kabir's detention would have complicated matters

It was only to be expected that the Bangladesh High Court, which had earlier struck down his detention under the Special Powers Act, would grant bail to the country's leading human rights activist and litterateur Shahriar Kabir who was under detention for almost two months on charges of sedition. The charge-sheet filed by the Khaleda Zia Government has evoked a spontaneous condemnation from the country's media and leading intellectuals besides the international human rights groups who have found his detention downright vindictive. Kabir's crime was that he had with him both audio and video cassettes with interviews of victims belonging to the minority community and subjected to rape, torture, loot and arson in the wake of Bangladesh's 1 October parliamentary poll. For this he visited some border districts in India. This enraged Begum Zia's government which was making desperate efforts to cover up the most dastardly chapter of Bangladesh's history. Already Dr Kamal Hossain has put her government in the dock by filing a public interest litigation. Benjamin Gillman, chairman of a US Congressional sub-committee on south Asia has sought Begum Zia's intervention.

Naturally what Kabir did amounted to showing a red rag to the bull. If the video shots and interviews of victims were to be broadcast they would have severely compromised her government's image and credibility since most of the perpetrators of various crimes belonged to her party and those of her coalition partner the Jamat e Islam. The contention of Begum Zia's ministers that cassettes seized from Kabir contained subversive materials undermining Bangladesh's sovereignty is ridiculous. Is it a crime to interview victims of persecution and whose fundamental rights the state fails to protect? Almost similar arguments were advanced when Taslima Nasreen projected the plight of minorities and Bangladeshi women, resulting in her being hounded out of the country by fundamentalists. Actually Kabir has to be commended for doing a great national service. Any effort to punish him will certainly recoil on Begum Zia's government.

THE STATESMAN

21 JAN 2002

High Court frees Kabir on 6-month bail

Imran Rahman
Dhaka, January 19

THE HIGH Court today granted six-month ad-interim bail to writer-columnist Shahriar Kabir in a sedition case and issued a show cause on the Government of Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia to explain as to why he should not be given permanent bail.

A High Court division bench comprising Justice M A Aziz and Justice Nazrul Islam Chowdhury granted the bail after a protracted legal battle fought in various courts of Bangladesh where judges refused to set him free.

The Awami League had given legal support to the writer.

Shahriar Kabir was arrested at the Zia International Airport in Dhaka on November 22 on his arrival from Kolkata where he reportedly went to make a documentary film on alleged atrocities on Hindu minorities before and after the October 1 general election.

Hearing the detainee's bail prayer in a treason case for filming incidents of human rights abuse, the High Court bench also asked Attorney-General Hasan Arif how the film could be taken as an offence when it was yet to be screened.

Earlier in a note of sarcasm on his confinement in Dhaka Central Jail, the High Court wanted to know why the writer-columnist was kept in the "State guest-house".

The defence counsel alleged that the writer fell victim to political vengeance and was tortured on remand. Kabir did not commit any crime by shooting the film and it did not necessarily mean that the movie he shot in India would be entirely used, he stated.

It was also argued that the writer would not do anything to fan communalism as he always talked in favour of communal harmony.

The counsel observed that even if the whole film that Kabir shot in India has been shown, it might have been better for Bangladesh because it would carry messages against atrocities on the Hindu minorities in the country.

After the judgment was pronounced, the Attorney General moved the chamber judge of the highest Appellate Division of the Supreme Court Justice Ruhul Amin to stay the High Court order giving Shahriar Kabir bail.

But the chamber judge refused to entertain the provisional petition seeking a stay on operation of the judgment.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

20 JAN 2002

Mujib's name erased from Bangla texts

Bangladesh
HT-11
16/1

Imran Rahman
Dhaka, January 15

PRIME MINISTER Begum Khaleda Zia's Government has made extensive replacements and insertions in school textbooks for the new academic year in Bangladesh.

These changes have delayed their printing and distribution process for at least a week. The four-party alliance Government, led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, has brought changes in 18 books of primary and secondary levels, sources said on Monday.

The move to bring some changes was initiated to incorporate BNPs ideology into the books and eliminate the changes made by the previous Awami League Government.

Changes have been made in the books of Class II and IV. Two poems — one titled *Mujib Chhara*, by Sanaul Huq and the other *Janani* by Asad Chowdhury — have been excluded from the textbook and two other poems have been included instead since the first two poems had words like Mujib and Bangalee.

In the essay titled *Bir Shrestha Mostofa Kamal* in the Bangla textbook for Class V students, a sentence 'Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman announced the independence of Bangladesh in the early hours of March 26 prior to his arrest', was dropped and was replaced by the sentence, 'On the night of March 25, 1971 they (Pakistani Occupation Army) attacked with arms and started mass killing.'

Changes have also been made in the essay titled, *Daijan Bir*

US PANEL CALLS FOR PROBE INTO MINORITY ATTACKS

THE US Congress Committee on Middle East and South Asia has expressed concern over the recent reports on violence against Hindu minorities in Bangladesh.

In a letter to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, sub-committee chairman Benjamin A Gilman expressed concern and urged her to look into the matter, sources said in Dhaka on Monday. The letter stated that in October last year, Bidyut K Sarkar, convener of Bangladeshi Hindus of America, had apprised the sub-committee about the issue.

A report submitted to the sub-committee stated that 40 Hindus have been killed, hundreds of minority women raped, more than 1,000 injured, over 10,000 homes and business establishments burned down and about 1,00,000 people rendered homeless, Gilman wrote.

Shrestha, in the Bangla book of Class IX. The essay now opens with: "Major Ziaur Rahman announced the independence on March 26 from the Kalurghat Radio Station." Earlier the opening sentence was "Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman called for the independence of Bangla." A Dhaka University teacher was involved in the process of changes.

The National Curriculum and Textbook Board could not maintain the schedule to print and distribute textbooks due to the last-minute changes, sources in the printing industry said.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Release order for Bangla rights activist

Deutsche Press Agentur

DHAKA, Jan. 13. — The High Court in Bangladesh set free a prominent human rights activist after declaring illegal his detention by the government on charges of sedition, judicial sources said today.

Justices Mr Hamidul Haque and Mr Nazmun Ara Sultana said police had acted without lawful authority by holding Shahriyar Kabir for about two months without putting him on trial.

The London-based Amnesty International called Kabir a prisoner of conscience and demanded his unconditional release from jail.

The two-member Bench called for his immediate release while considering his petition for freedom yesterday.

Kabir, a writer and newspaper columnist, was arrested by police at the airport minutes after he returned home from India on 22 November.

Kabir has been accused by the government of anti-state activities for allegedly fanning communal tensions between the majority Muslims and the minority Hindus and Christians in the country. Kabir campaigns for the trial of Muslim militants in special tribunals for war crimes allegedly committed during Bangladesh war.

THE STATESMAN

14 JAN 2002

China's offer to Bangladesh

DHAKA, JAN. 12. Chinese Premier, Zhu Rongji, today promised to narrow the trade gap between his country and Bangladesh during an official visit aimed at boosting economic ties, it was reported.

During a visit to the Bangladesh parliament complex in Dhaka, he told Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar, that Beijing would follow preferential trade policies to bridge the trade imbalance with Bangladesh, the official BSS news agency said.

"The Chinese authorities will be sending purchase missions to Bangladesh soon to narrow the gaps," Mr. Zhu told BSS, admitting trade balance now was tilted towards China.

The Foreign Secretary, Shamsur Mobin Chowdhury, said Beijing had decided to allow duty-free trade of jute and jute products to China which could also help narrow the trade gap.

Mr. Zhu, who arrived yesterday on a three-day trip, also laid wreaths at a memorial for those



The Chinese Premier, Zhu Rongji, and his wife, Lao Au (extreme left), stand with the Bangladesh Prime Minister, Khaleda Zia, during the inauguration ceremony of the China-Bangladesh Friendship Conference Centre in Dhaka on Saturday. — AFP

who died in Bangladesh's 1971 war of independence.

Afterwards he joined his host Prime Minister, Khaleda Zia, for

the opening of a Chinese-funded \$ 24 million international conference centre in the capital, officials said. — AFP

THE HINDU

13 JAN 2002

Ex-ministers injured as ^{Mr} Bangla strike turns violent

Dhaka, January 9 1971

TWO FORMER ministers were among several people injured today as Bangladesh police fired teargas shells to disperse the activists of the main opposition, Awami League, protesting hikes in Government-administered prices of fuel and utility services.

Former Home Minister Mohammad Nasim was severely beaten when members of law enforcing agencies tried to stop him and others from violating a barricade to reach Awami League Central Office in the capital.

Motia Chowdhury, another former minister and a prominent Awami League leader, was also injured in the attack.

The party said several of its workers were picked up and entry into the central office blocked.

The six-hour strike, which ended at noon, forced the closure of most shops, educational institutions and affected business and trade in the capital city. Most banks had their front doors closed as few vehicles plied.

Additional deployment of police and armed police were visible at most road crossings and the strike passed off peacefully except for stray incidents of bursting home made bombs at some places.

Agencies

Bangladesh to send troops to Afghanistan

By Haroon Habib

100-1A 5/1
DHAKA, JAN. 4. Bangladesh will send its troops, the number of which will be determined later, to be part of the International Security Assistance force (ISAF) in Afghanistan.

Dhaka expressed its readiness to support the peace process in post-Taliban Afghanistan as the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, whose country heads the ISAF, ended his one-and-a-half-day brief "working visit" here today. Accompanied by his wife, Mr. Blair arrived here last evening on the first leg of his three-country south-Asian tour to mobilise support for the peacekeeping force in Afghanistan.

The British Prime Minister, who held talks with his Bangladesh counterpart, Begum Khaleda last night, lauded Dhaka's role in U.N. peacekeeping missions across the globe and urged the country to play a similar role in post-war Afghanistan. Mr. Blair, who landed here from Cairo, is to visit Delhi and Islamabad also.

After placing wreaths at the Savar mausoleum for unknown martyrs, Mr. Blair left for New Delhi this afternoon. Apart from the Afghan issue, Mr. Blair and Begum Khaleda Zia discussed bilateral, regional and international issues. Mr. Blair and Begum Khaleda Zia expressed the hope that the heightened tension in the region would not lead to a war.

Some local newspapers reported that they were denied access to cover the official talks held at the Prime Minister's office last night while nearly three dozen British and Western journalists accompanying Mr. Blair were given access. According to the Bangladesh Foreign Secretary, Mr. Shamser Mobin Chowdhury, both Mr. Blair and Begum Khaleda reiterated their desire to expand trade and investment and increase cultural ties. The Finance and Planning Minister, Mr. Saifur Rahman said Mr. Blair's trip would have improve bilateral ties.

The Foreign Secretary, while briefing the media, said Mr. Blair's visit to Dhaka was primarily to stress the importance Britain attaches to its relations with Bangladesh and to congratulate Begum Khaleda Zia on winning the October 1, 2001 general election. Mr. Chowdhury said Mr. Blair described the recent elections as "free and fair". Mr. Blair reportedly regretted that the main Opposition was not attending Parliament sessions. The British Prime Minister also had a meeting with a group of the Opposition Awami League led by the acting party president and former Foreign Minister, Mr. Abdus Samad Azad. The party chief and former Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina is away abroad.

24 JAN 2002

100-1A 5/1

Imran Rahman
Dhaka, January 1

THE AWAMI League has assigned five former top military officials, including three chiefs of the Bangladesh Army, with the task of evolving fool-proof security to the party chief and former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina when she returns to Dhaka on January 8 after a month-long vacation in the United States.

Senior party leaders told reporters in Dhaka yesterday that the retired military officials will chalk out a comprehensive plan for the security of the eldest daughter of Bangladesh's founding father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in view of lifting the lifelong security protection from her and her younger sister Sheikh Rehana by the Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia's Government.

The five military officials are former army chiefs General

Ex-army chiefs add to Hasina security cover

Mustafizur Rahman, Lt General K M Shafiullah, Lt General Nooruddin Khan, Colonel Farooq Khan and Captain Taj.

Of them, General Mustafizur Rahman is a close relative of Hasina. All the five have already begun preparing a security network for the Awami League president.

Begum Khaleda Zia's Government scrapped on December 2 a special law that provided lifelong security by the crack commandos of the Special Security Force (SSF) to the former Prime Minister and her family.

Hasina earlier refused to give a go-ahead to the party's decision

to engage a private security firm to extend round-the-clock security to her.

She, however, approved the formation of a security team comprising former top leaders of the Bangladesh Chattrra League, student outfit of the Awami League.

Meanwhile, the Awami League has ordered import of a bullet-proof car for Hasina in addition to two pick-ups and two jeeps to be engaged for security-related work.

The decision to beef up security around Hasina was taken as a court in the Gopalganj district indicted 17 persons including

Nationalist Party in its poll manifesto had pledged that it would give computers to 10,000 schools in Bangladesh, if voted to power. Officials said, a plan has been worked out for supplying computers to 10,000 schools within the next four years.

A set of criteria have already been laid down for these schools to qualify for computers.

Ershad may return to Dhaka soon

Jatiya Party chairman and former President Hussein Muhammad Ershad is likely to return home sometime in the second week of January but not before his next appearance in the Gen M A Manju murder case fixed for January 7.

Ershad's younger brother and Jatiya Party presidium member G M Kader, MP, said the former President was undergoing treatment for his heart ailment in London.

Computers for schools

The Bangladesh Government will provide free computers to two schools in each of the 300 parliamentary constituencies in the country by January 15.

The ruling Bangladesh