

Reign Of Terror In Bangladesh BNP-Jamaat Government Orchestrates Spiraling Political Killings.

The gruesome murder in broad day light of Mr. Manjurul Imam, President of the Khulna Awami League has not only stirred the conscience of the whole nation, it has also highlighted the BNP-Jamaat regime's blue-print to kill all the opposition political leaders. Across the country, Awami League leaders are being killed, often in cold blood, one by one, according to *a hit list*. The murder of Mr. Manjurul Imam is a part of the grand design of the ruling alliance. A highly respected political leader who was held in great esteem for his upright character and long and distinguished public service, Mr. Imam's popularity was not confined merely to the Awami League members and supporters. When the news about the murder reached the common people of the city, they spontaneously came out to the street in thousands and vented their anger in ransacking the offices of the BNP and the Jamaate Islami. These were the obvious targets because the common people knew for sure that the murder must have been committed by the BNP-Jamaat killers. The pattern of killing is too well known for them to make a mistake. They knew that at the October 1 election, Manjurul Imam contested against Begum Khaleda Zia. BNP-Jamaat's plan to eliminate all the prominent Awami League leaders especially those who are likely to contest in the next election is by now a common knowledge to the people. No one told the angry and grieving crowds that BNP-Jamaat was responsible for the killing but they knew that the ruling alliance was orchestrating these political murders. The government has not only unleashed a reign of terror in the country, it has also let loose the ruling party thugs against the Awami League leaders and activists.

Paying tribute to the slain leader, an English daily in an editorial said, "What is particularly agonizing about the ghoulish crime is that it ended the life of a man who had an unflinching faith in democracy and constitutional politics. He was a leading organizer of the Liberation War in the southern region and his political career was never stigmatized by any dubious activities. He enjoyed wide acceptability cutting across party lines" Small wonder that the BNP wanted to eliminate such a formidable rival at the next election.

The government lost no time in putting the blame for the crime on others. People heard with surprise and bewilderment a speculative report in the local television news that Mr. Imam may have been killed by some factions of the Awami League itself! Such blatant lies by the propaganda machine of the government have become so common that no one was surprised at the twisted and bizarre report. Later the Police informed the Press that one of the criminals arrested by them has confessed to the crime and that he was a member of the notorious gang of so-called leftist terrorists who have been operating in the south western region of the country. Obviously the BNP-Jamaat realized the enormity

of their crime and wanted to quickly shift the blame to others. A fake confession from a man in Police custody seemed to be a clever ploy to divert attention away from the BNP-Jamaat killers. The Prime Minister and the Home Minister have often tried these tactics on many occasions. They have often made such preposterous claims without a shred of evidence that their credibility now is almost nil. Unfortunately, despite these clever manipulations of the news media and cooperation by the compliant Police, the BNP-Jamaat alliance cannot escape the responsibility for the crime. It matters little whether the killing was done by its own killers or by hired killers, the master plan to kill this prominent Awami League leader who was the likely candidate at the next general election, was hatched by those in the ruling alliance who have masterminded the killing of thousands of other Awami league leaders. It follows a familiar pattern.

The list of noted Awami League leaders killed since BNP-Jamaat came to power is so long that the only explanation for these political murders is the calculated and systematic campaign by the ruling alliance to eliminate the Awami League as an effective opposition party. How many Awami League leaders have been killed during the last 22 months? A precise list will be difficult to compile because it will run into thousands. However a list of the well-known leaders who have fallen victim to the BNP-Jamaat's politics of revenge and victimization in the months since they came to power will give a good indication of the range and scope of the 'hit list' and the highly selective murders aimed at physical removal of the potential rivals to the BNP-Jamaat alliance. Quite clearly, the ruling alliance is moving systematically to destroy the Awami League as an effective political party. A list of 30 prominent leaders including Mr. Manjurul Imam and Mr. Sharif Mozammel Huq, Secretary of Awami League Ward Committee for Ward No. 90 of the Dhaka City. Mr. Huq was gunned down in broad day light on 26 August-only 24 hours after the murder of Mr. Manjurul Imam. The list of dead Awami League leaders seems to get longer every day!

The slide to lawlessness in the country started almost from the day BNP-Jamaat assumed power. 53 thousand known and identified criminals who were in jail on specific charges were released by the BNP-Jamaat government on the plea that all these criminals were actually members of their parties. Disregarding the specific allegations against them, the government opened the jailed gates. The result was the rapid deterioration of the law and order situation in the country. Quite clearly, Begum Zia's government is more interested in using these hardened criminals in eliminating her political opponents than in restoring law and order in the country. The spate of political killings targeting the Awami League is the direct result of the encouragement given by the government to these known criminals. How can the nation forget the bizarre spectacle of the country's ruling alliance nominating 36 notorious criminals for election as Ward Commissioner in the Dhaka City Corporation? Four of these criminals have killed each other in internecine fights but the other criminals are still masquerading as respectable Ward Commissioners and BNP-Jamaat leaders! The murders, muggings, rape and extortions and near-anarchy prevailing in the country are the direct outcome of the policy followed by the present government of patronizing killers and criminals for political gains.

Today the Police force is hardly available for public service. The most common complaint heard these days is that the Police refuses to register a case against any ruling

alliance activist. It is exclusively used for promoting BNP-Jamaat alliance interests. Almost everyday one comes across reports in the Press that the BNP or the Jamaat activists or their student wings attack the members of the Awami League in front of the Police who not only refuse to intervene but often aid and abet the ruling party thugs in their murderous attacks. Only a couple of weeks ago this was seen in the Dhaka University campus when the ruling party student wing Chatradal expelled Chatra League members and supporters from the dormitories. They repeatedly attacked the Chatra League members and injured scores of them. All this happened with the connivance not only of the University authorities but also of the Police who were there to guard the Chatradal goons. There was not a word of reprimand or criticism from the government for such naked display of muscle power by its student wing. On 24 August the nation learned about a disgusting incident in which the BNP's student wing the Chatradal attacked a Khulna women's college and assaulted the women students for allegedly not removing the portrait of the Father of the Nation. The sight of young men of the ruling party attacking women is not new. This was done in the Dhaka University when the Police entered the women's dormitory at dead of night and assaulted the women. Women belonging to the minority communities are routinely raped by the ruling party goons as punishment for supporting or voting for the Awami League. Sadly, the politics of the country has not only become violent, it has also reached the lowest possible moral level.

The country is on the verge of anarchy. Murder, kidnapping, rape and extortion by the ruling party members is on the increase. In Chittagong city, businessmen are spending sleepless nights because of the frequent incidents of kidnapping often leading to murder. While the terror-stricken common people have no sense of security, the BNP-Jamaat activists are amassing vast fortunes by loot and plunder. Against the backdrop of this intolerable situation, Begum Khaleda Zia suddenly deployed, on 16 October 2002, the armed forces to restore law and order. After several months of a highly controversial operation, (Operation Clean Heart), the armed forces were withdrawn in the midst of nation-wide protests and complaints of torture of innocent people and violation of human rights. Between 16 October 2002 to January 2003 as many as 58 persons were killed while in the custody of either the military or the Police. In order to prevent the relatives of these victims of torture to seek justice in the court of law, the BNP-Jamaat government passed a law to indemnify all those who were responsible for these deaths. As the situation becomes more and more desperate every day, there are rumours that the armed forces may be once again used by the government to bolster the tottering regime. No one really knows if they will once again undertake such a controversial task to save a government that is unable to govern by using the machinery of the civil administration. Begum Zia's failed government seems to have only one goal: Eliminate the Awami League by killing all its prominent leaders.

Friends of Bangladesh both at home and abroad must wake up and resist this murderous regime. Neither democracy nor the rule of law is safe in the hands of this clique.

The Supreme Court that has been regarded as the last refuge of the ordinary citizens against a repressive executive branch of the government, is now under attack.

The appointment of the judges and their promotion has now become a victim of party politics. The BNP-Jamaat government is shamelessly politicizing the judiciary and packing the highest court with its party men whose main qualification is loyalty to the BNP_Jamaat political interests. The entire legal profession has risen against such blatant abuse of authority by the BNP-Jamaat government and the Supreme Court Bar Association as well as the district Bars across the country have launched a nation-wide movement against the government's attempt to destroy the impartiality and neutrality of the judiciary. The judiciary, as a result, is in state of disarray and chaos. Indeed almost all the elements of the machinery of the state are crumbling down. Unless the people of Bangladesh stand up against the misrule of the BNP-Jamaat government, neither democracy nor indeed the life of the common people will be safe. As regards the leaders and members of the Awami League, they are facing risks every day of calculated murder in the hand of death squads master-minded by the BNP-Jamaat leadership. The murder of Mr. Manjurul Imam is a reminder to the nation that the time has come to put a stop to these murders.