

Hope for National Renewal

Every independence day comes to us with a message, but also with a warning. The message is essentially one of hope, hope that had moved millions of hearts and minds twenty years ago today and had sustained our faith in the nation's destiny.

Unfortunately, the victory had never been a complete one and often tended to turn into a defeat during the past two decades, a defeat resulting not from a battle against an outside enemy but from an internal feud — social, economic and political — that has been unquestionably our own making.

Now, at long last, there has come a moment, a watershed in the history of Bangladesh, when the sense of despair that characterised the nation's thinking on most previous independence days should make way for optimism and hope.

The biggest responsibility for translating our national ideals into reality lies with the new administration. There can be no two opinions about it. It is the government, earned with a clear popular mandate to govern the nation, which must provide the leadership and motivation to the people.

Yet, somewhere along the line, responsibilities which are undertaken by the new administration must indeed be shared, through a sense of willing participation, by all the political parties and groupings inside and outside the new parliament.

Too Good to be True?

A news story claims everyone in a Jhenidah village is literate. In the early years of independence such a claim was made for Mithapukur, a Rangpur village. No one knows what happened to that literate village in the last decade and half.

It is futile to address this question to that wonder-working Jhenidah village. A report published in The Daily Star offers a glimpse into how they did it — and proves that there was nothing magical about the performance, or even a lot of rigour and sacrifice.

There are some more claims for Moidhorpur. Perhaps equally, if not more, impressive. There are no beggars in the village. And there hasn't been one case of violent crime in the village over the last five years.

And the villagers are not unmindful of the importance of green life. They have already planted more than two thousand trees on the two sides of the main road. That's not all. A campaign has been launched for making Moidhorpur a smoking-free village.

The last claim is the most important of all. All this has been achieved without any government assistance whatsoever.

Now what holds the other villages from achieving as much? Why wouldn't they match Moidhorpur in this — and even surpass?

We hope that all that has been claimed is true. As much as we hope all of this and more will be sustained and taken further forward.

MARCH 25, 1971. The night was still young when the Pak occupation forces suddenly swooped down on the unwary and defenceless citizens of Dhaka simply because the latter wanted their legitimate share of rights and power on the basis of their electoral victory.

This was followed by declaration of independence of Bangladesh. After nine months of the bloody war of liberation, which culminated in our glorious victory, emerged the independent sovereign state of Bangladesh on December 16, 1971.

This brief historical background must be repeated as often as possible to let the present generation know the past which usually reveals the structure of the future. The young people of today should be told how they came to inherit the rich legacy of the sacrifices made by their

predecessors. This alone will enable them to deserve and preserve their national identity.

Today, March 26, 1991, we celebrate the twenty-first Independence Day with pride and pain. For a nation that won independence at a tremendous cost pride undoubtedly in an appropriate feeling. And the memory of countless lives lost in the war and the widows, orphans and wooden legs that the nation got naturally causes pain of the mind and of the body.

March of Democracy

by Obaidul Huq

freedom from want, hunger, ignorance, illiteracy, ill-health. The promise of an abundant life and an improved standard of living is yet to be kept. This chronic dependence on foreign aid has turned the nation into a perpetual charity boy and the political freedom into a shadow.

This year we are celebrating the Independence Day in an atmosphere of renewed hope. A general election has been held for the first time under a neutral care-taker government following a mass movement for restoration of democracy by transforming autocratic rule of one person into a true

democratic set up to ensure people's representatives to take charge of the country's affairs as a whole.

Today as we move toward democracy, we must make sure that the values that democratic societies cherish everywhere are correctly identified, honoured and protected. It is not infrequently that democracy as the guardian and guarantor of fundamental rights and civil as well as political liberties is interpreted differently to suit and serve different group interests.

above the pursuit of power. All systems of government claiming to be democratic must pursue this common goal.

The fact that in a democracy majority decisions prevail does not mean that makers of such decisions can be intolerant of the opinion of the minority. The right of the people to choose who will govern them and run their affairs on their behalf must recognise the opposition as an indispensable part of the democratic system.

Civil Servants in Mass Exodus

THEY are leaving in droves. There is a massive exodus from Sri Lanka's public and administrative services under an exceptionally concessory retirement scheme.

This number comprises officials and workers from all levels and grades — from minor employees to Secretaries of Ministries. Among the retirees are 11,798 schoolteachers, 83 doctors, 226 nurses, more than 12,000 mid-level public servants, and 1,500 clerical servants of all grades.

The hospitals are bound to feel the pinch with the additional departure of a considerable number of hospital attendants, ward clerks, lab assistants and other technical men.

The departing schoolteachers include, 1,394 school principals, 8,182 trained teachers, 1,358 graduates and 54 diploma holders.

Besides there are engineers, accountants, educational and agricultural services officers, tax officers, planning and scientific services personnel, bookkeepers, storekeepers, shroffs, typists, stenographers and so on.

It is the most golden of handshakes and no wonder many are taking advantage of it. Public servants who have served 10, 20 and 30 years

were able to retire before Dec. 31, 1990 and draw 90 per cent of their salaries on the date of retirement, as pensions, in addition to commuted pensions and bonuses.

There are variations in the scheme of benefits for those who have served less than 20 years.

Those who have served for 30 years and have not reached 59 years by the deadline are the biggest beneficiaries. Take Mahinda Jayatunga who served in the Inland Revenue Department for 34 years, starting as a clerk. At the time of retirement he had been promoted as an Assessor.

"I found it was most lucrative to retire at this point of time," said Mr. Jayatunga, who almost the day after, walked into another job in a tax consultancy firm. He explained the arithmetic.

His salary was 4,500 rupees (US\$112). After deductions he got around 4,000 rupees, or 96 per cent of his salary into his hands. When he retired he got 90 per cent of his salary at time of retirement, which meant that he was losing only 4 per cent, a matter of 161 rupees (US\$4).

But then look at the other concessions: he got two years salary as commuted pension, not deductible from the amount of his pension (which under normal circumstances would have been deducted). In addition he got six months

Mallika Wanigasundara writes from Colombo

The aim of the retirement scheme is to lure public servants to leave in the shortest possible time in the largest possible numbers.

bonus in salary. This meant that he got 30 months salary as bonus amounting to 135,000 rupees (US\$3,375).

He could invest this money in the state-owned National Savings Bank whose current rate of interest is 18.5 per cent. This is of course the safest bank. Finance companies pay higher interest rates, but many of them have turned out to be a wobbly lot.

There are several reasons for this drastic bloodletting in the public services, even though many departments, schools and hospitals could be adversely affected to begin with. The need for a sharp thinning of the flabby public services has been in the air for some time. There is an equal imperative for restructuring it.

An Administrative Reforms Committee headed by a senior administrative officer which investigated the public services found that it was over-loaded in some areas by 20 per cent. This meant 20 per cent of about 500,500 public servants. Thus, around 80,000-90,000 jobs were redundant. According to this report,

there was a freakish distortion of salary scales. The most professionally qualified officers at the top were underpaid, while non-professional grades which formed more than 90 per cent of the service were overpaid.

The rationale behind the restructuring of the service was to reduce the strength of the cadre and use the savings to pay higher salaries to the professionally qualified persons at the top. Because of poor remuneration many qualified officers, trained and highly experienced in top jobs, have been pulling out of the service to take up jobs abroad or in the private sector.

Departments and agencies set up to handle specific assignments during special requirements tended to go on even after the job was done. Five of these departments have been shut down completely.

The government has also been pressured by the World Bank to prune its public services. This became a condition for the release of the second tranche of a World Bank loan by January 1991.

THE hopes of 20,000 Tibetan refugees for 'equal human rights' with the Nepalese were dashed when the Kathmandu government gave in to Chinese pressure and cancelled a religious discourse by their temporal leader, the Dalai Lama.

A Nepalese religious organisation, had invited the Dalai Lama, who is Buddhism's highest pontiff, to address 200,000 Buddhists on February 28. The event would have seriously embarrassed Nepal's northern neighbour, China.

Sun Zhongqiang, of the Chinese Embassy in Kathmandu, said: "The Dalai Lama is not an ordinary religious figure but a political exile who has been living abroad carrying out activities aimed at splitting the motherland."

"We resolutely oppose any foreign government or organisation instigating or supporting the Dalai Lama in whatever ways to conduct such political activities for undermining the national unity of China."

The Dalai Lama fled to India with 110,000 supporters in 1959, when China invaded Tibet. He formed a Tibetan government in exile at Dharamsala in India's northern state bordering Nepal. After India, the second highest number of Tibetan refugees live in Nepal.

The first arrived here in mid-1959 and confronted some harsh realities. Farming techniques were different, land was scarce and jobs almost nonexistent.

Special settlements were set up with help from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Refugees began woolen carpet weaving and took up other traditional Tibetan crafts to earn a living. The Swiss helped find markets for their products in Europe. Business boomed.

Tibetans Look for Better Deal from Democratic Nepal

Gopal Sharma writes from Kathmandu

Now that political pluralism has returned to Nepal, Tibetan refugees living there since 1959 hope the days of discrimination against them are over. Till now treatment of the Tibetans has varied according to the state of Nepalese relations with China. While the situation is more relaxed, they still look forward to eventual return to their homeland.

Major Nepalese banks now finance the carpet industry, which employs 100,000 people directly. Nepal earned 2,294.7 million rupees in foreign exchange from carpet exports last year.

While some Tibetans have

their own businesses, most still live in 10 self-supporting cooperative settlements and community quarters scattered throughout Nepal. Carpet weaving is their principal occupation.

A few have started restaur-

rants popularising Tibetan cuisine among tourists. Others practise traditional Tibetan medicine.

UNHCR now considers the Tibetans to have been assimilated into Nepalese society, facing no barriers to physical

protection and enjoyment of basic human rights.

But Wangchuck Tsering, 52, who was among the first Tibetans to arrive in 1959, says that the refugees still have no legal status.

He adds: "We have to get married to local Nepalese in whose name our businesses run as we can't have our own industries. Our children who are in schools or colleges need work."

"They can't apply for employment in the government as they have no identity cards as refugees nor the citizenship papers available to Nepalese."

In 1974 when Nepal undertook to disarm the Tibetan Khamba guerrillas fighting the Chinese Red Army from northern districts bordering Tibet, refugees in Kathmandu or elsewhere were given identity cards. These papers have to be renewed every year.

They were also given the option in 1980 to remain as refugees or become Nepalese citizens. Many were not aware of the decision.

They still want to return to Tibet if it becomes possible. As China's relations improve with the West, the United States and India in particular, hopes of an independent Tibet are



To the Editor...

The map of India

Sir, I feel both puzzled and disturbed to see a political map of India used in your esteemed paper of Monday, March 25, with the post-edit article on Rajiv Gandhi. The map shows Bangladesh, in white, but does not mention the name of our country. Instead, we see the word Tripura, written prominently over the area left white for Bangladesh. Is

it oversight or deliberate? What is the source of the map?

A Reader, Dhaka

Editor replies:

The source of the map is the London-based British feature service, Gemini News. The map did not mention the names of India's neighbours, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh, only because it was meant to be the political map of India alone. If The Daily Star had drawn the

map it would have certainly named Bangladesh. However, we regret if the feelings of any of our readers have been hurt by the Gemini map.

Editor

But for love at war

Sir, British Prime Minister John Major at ease said, "It will take two days" shortly before the military action against Iraq. I am sure he was kind to assure the Arabs and their friends

in commenting on when Kuwait would be freed. Why then it took so long a time as more than a month to do that might trouble one's mind. Finally, after a good deal of thought, I came to learn that, in military action, pinpointing targets delicately takes longer time than wiping out everything. For the safety of lives and properties, it was necessary to pinpoint the targets. Had it been in two days it would lay waste everything.

That would have been a great loss particularly of the Arab countries and generally of the world at large.

So we have commonly to admit that the love of the Coalition Forces for human lives was the main reason behind the conclusion of the Gulf War delayed more than Mr. John Major's "two days".

Besides, one more reason for this could be sought in the Forces giving suffi-

In the apt words of Adlai Stevenson: "My definition of free society is a society where it is safe to be unpopular."

That the leader of the Opposition in Parliament has congratulated the new Prime Minister on her assumption of office and the latter has returned the compliment augurs well for the future. We wish Begum Khaleida Zia every success as the new Prime Minister and in her endeavours to accelerate the pace of economic reconstruction which should indeed be given the highest priority.

The Fifth Jatiya Sangsad is scheduled to sit on April 5. It is expected that the voice of the people will be heard in the House when it starts transacting business as a truly representative institution. This will signal the beginning of the country's much awaited transition to democracy. Whatever the system the Jatiya Sangsad may adopt, nothing should be allowed to slow down, far less stop, the belated march of democracy.

English and Science teachers and the provincial schools are bound to be most affected by this exodus.

In Colombo the problem is not too acute due to the fact that teachers are always willing to serve in Colombo schools. Big schools like the Royal College, Ananda College and Visakha Vidyalyaya were able to find replacements quickly. But school principals mourn the departure of experienced, trained teachers and most of them had over 20 years experience, they said.

The exodus will be felt in some departments because as one official put it, "the most experienced, the best trained and the most mellowed persons have gone." Some deplore the fact that the slab should have been taken out, where it was overweight, instead of across-the-board.

But there is also the view that work seems to expand with both time and cadre strength. Administrators, local government officials and Ministers of Provincial Councils have told the Minister of Public Administration, Mr. Festus Perera that many problems have been created by the exodus.

As a result, a team has been set up to examine the need for fresh recruitments in instances where vacancies cannot be otherwise filled with existing personnel.

— Depthnews Asia

fading. Chinese policy towards Tibet gradually changed after the death of Mao. Communist Party General Secretary Hu Yaobang pushed ahead a programme to develop Tibet's culture, language, art and literature.

But Tibetans, specially the young, are still fleeing Tibet in search of Buddhist knowledge. Two young monks recently arrived in Nepal said that officially there was religious freedom in Tibet, but that Chinese policy is to cut the number of monks and nuns and abolish religious rites.

They said family planning was compulsory. If there are three children in a family the third child does not get a ration card.

The Dalai Lama's office in Kathmandu says that 1,000-2,000 young Tibetans who want to become monks arrive in Nepal each year. They move on to India where opportunities for pursuing Buddhist studies are better.

The restoration in Nepal last year of Western-style parliamentary democracy and the rule of law has raised hopes among Tibetans. They look forward to receiving equal rights with the Nepalese.

Wangchuck says: "We need economic opportunities also so that we can join the Nepalese mainstream, economically, politically and culturally."

Eventually, Tibetans in Nepal, as elsewhere, hope China will have to take steps to make their homeland an independent country or a part of China with a more self-governing rule, as proposed by the Dalai Lama. — GEMINI NEWS

[Exchange rates: \$1 = 30 NR]

GOPAL SHARMA is a Nepalese journalist based in Kathmandu. He writes on national, international and development issues.