

### Break this Uneasy Silence

The inexplicable silence of the ruling party on the future form of government is disconcerting. The first session of the parliament is about to come to an end and we are as much in the dark on this vital national issue as were when the parliament began. Throughout the six weeks long session we have proceeded as if such an important question did not really exist. The Treasury Bench took no initiative to include this topic in the agenda of this session and the opposition bench's attempts to do the same got bogged down for one reason or the other.

There appears to be a tendency to side-track the issue, to try to sweep it under the rug, or worst still to think that it will disappear if we do not talk about it. What else can explain the consistent silence of the ruling party on this matter?

So far we have seen no clear cut indication as to their thinking on this question. Of course much of the energy of the government had to be diverted to the immediate task of disaster relief, and it could be argued that they really did not have the time to discuss the matter in the party circles as they had originally planned. While we sympathise with this position, we would also like to draw BNP's attention to the fact that the absence of any clear articulation of their thinking on this vital question is creating a sense of unease in the public mind which may hamper the effective functioning of their government. The administrative machinery is itself suffering from a sense of drift stemming from this confusion.

During the last few days two junior ministers of the government spoke on this issue in the parliament. (One wonders why the minister concerned, Mirza Golam Hafiz, a former Speaker, a man with so much experience and expertise on legal and constitutional matters, did not speak on the issue.) What the two ministers said further added to the confusion in the public mind.

One said that the President could hand over power to the Speaker if he wanted. Was he then indirectly hinting that the Acting President does not want to do so? This comment has fuelled the already circulating rumour that there is considerable gap between the thoughts of Justice Shahabuddin and that of Begum Zia. Comments were also made that there could not be any question as to the "sovereignty" of the parliament as a legislative body. Is it then the view of BNP that the current parliament — without any amendments to the existing Constitution — is a "sovereign" one?

The other minister said that BNP's manifesto enjoins all MPs to support a presidential form of government. If so, then are we to understand that BNP's well known position that it will be the parliament that will decide on the form of government, has now been changed?

It is high time that the country is told as to what the ruling party is thinking on this vital question. If they prefer a presidential form, the BNP should clearly say so and tell the nation why. It is possible that as the people were persuaded to vote the BNP way, they might once again be persuaded to accept the majority party's view on the form of government. But we must know. This silence on the part of the ruling party is unhealthy for democracy and effective government, unfair to the electorate and unnecessary if one trusts the people.

### Researches into the Days After

It is interesting to note that a 'group' of professionals and researchers, in a meeting held on Monday, recognised the need to initiate and promote research in the area of the disaster. The group decided to help 'individuals willing to conduct research on the issues concerning the aftermath of the disaster such as the social, economic, demographic and nutritional effects of the cyclone in the short and long run, the effectiveness of and the processes in the relief and rehabilitation operations'.

It is heartening to see that a private group has come forward to appreciate a very important gap in our response to disasters of the order of what visited the eastern coastal districts on April 29. And that they have also thought of themselves trying to help plug that.

It's a very broad spectrum of all that follows such a disaster that the group proposes to help investigate. Each of the links in the chain would need volumes to be covered even in a casual fashion. While the group has very gallantly taken upon themselves not only to help such researches with their own knowledge and experience, they have also hinted at even funding such investigations. One cannot help feeling that this wonderful move should have come from our universities as well as our government. When that hasn't been the case, we commend it all the same for their consideration in the hope that the more resourceful back-up that can be provided by these bodies would help rake in a truly significant harvest of research findings and solutions over such a broad range of aspects of the disaster aftermath.

Even amidst the mad rush of reaching relief to millions on a most difficult terrain and salvaging not only facilities but whole areas and setting the ground to launch a meaningful programme of rehabilitation and reconstruction, which we believe the government to be at present immersed in, — care should be taken by all, most of all the government, so that our society is not reduced to a relief-dependent one. We must start eschewing the present ad-hocism in our response to the natural disasters and attempt to cope with the challenge with knowledge and application born of that.

We thank the Working Group on Essential National Health Research for having infected us with their awareness of this. And we hope others in the right quarters would not fail to take the cue.

NOW that a Parliament has been elected it is natural for us to expect that all democratic forces, irrespective of their individual party interest, will combine to solve the vital problems that have been crippling the nation. One of such problems is the prevailing campus violence. If not solved under the present setup when true representatives of the people and a neutral President are in charge of national affairs, the chronic problem will cause irreparable damage deteriorating quality of education and dwindling its standard.

It is indeed a hopeful sign that the Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia in her address to senior officials has made a mention of campus terrorism and need for stopping this evil. The present education minister Prof. A.Q.M. Badruddoza Choudhury who was a teacher and is fully aware of the prevailing situation, has constituted a committee with Prof. Kazi Saleh Ahmad, Vice Chancellor of Jahangirnagar University to study the problem and suggest remedial measures. I therefore consider it an opportune moment to deal with the problem as I see it from my long experience of teaching and student management.

Our education has its origin in the western countries. Its books and reading materials came from the west. Our scholars of repute received education in the west. Our then rulers who initiated education came from the west. Thus our education had and is still having tremendous western influence. It is thus natural that our students receiving such education would be imbued with values of western democracy and its practices. Thus from early years of Dhaka University came the process of students union and election of its office bearers by the stu-

### CAMPUS VIOLENCE

# Leaders can Help Students Out of Vicious Circle

by Mofizuddin Ahmed

While such processes were going on, movement for Indian subcontinent started. Student community could no longer wait and jumped immediately into the great movement. This movement gained momentum and students in more numbers participated in political activities, be that lawful, or unlawful, open or secret, and many gave their lives of the hands of cruel administration. During the process came up the movement

Against this background let us turn to campus violence. Disagreement on any important political issue or even important university affair may lead (in fact in the past led) to some forms of demonstrations or even serious student agitation, and such situations may perhaps be tackled successfully by teachers and university administration. But now campus violence — clashes between students' groups leading to physical assault and in some

cases murder, armed attacks on different students' residences and university campus, use of guns and other lethal weapons, and similar application of brutal force — is continuing alarmingly. Mild violence originated in mid-sixties when serious difference existed between political parties. Situation gradually became grave from early seventies. Many killings took place in universities and educational institutions since then. So-called 'outsiders' and hoodlums move on the campus freely with guns. Teachers and great majority of the students remain silent observers, being helpless. The elements raid the students' Halls, use their guns freely on the campus, explode bombs, and attack oppo-

nents. The entire campus is at their mercy. What had been done to stop this great menace? Occasionally police raided the Halls and recovered arms and lethal weapons and in some cases arrested some 'miscreants'. That reportedly turned to be just a show! Most of those arrested came out through back doors and Halls were refilled with fresh weaponry. University and Hall authorities felt absolutely help-

less. I am told that they even supplied lists of miscreants to the government but, regretfully, there were no or little effect. Inflow of arms and undesirable 'outsiders' to the Halls remain unabated. The present violence is caused not only for political reasons but also to meet personal ends. Time is running out and action should be taken without delay to save the edifice of education from destruction.

When political parties care little for democratic norms and want to gain power by force, its effects are manifested in various ways. Campus violence is one of such manifestations. Further when democratic power is usurped without lawful means by say, the military, the situation as well be armed clashes. We have witnessed many such incidents; no amount of efforts by teachers and officials of a university can contain such flare-ups. If such hoodlums, musclemen and agents of evil force as allegedly find support in the government they would care a fig for administration and authorities. Police raids in the Halls and arms recovery become just superficial attempt and eye wash. Formation of committees and commissions may even meet similar consequence.

The most important point is the sincere efforts of government as well as opposition parties. It is not unknown to our present MPs and for that matter to the different politi-

*It is not unknown to our different political parties what are the causes of present campus violence and therefore they may come forward to help the country out of the situation.*

for Pakistan. Indian Muslim students by and large threw their forces behind this movement.

Following the birth of Pakistan our students were immediately involved in the movement to establish Bangla as a State language of Pakistan. Since then one movement after another brought the participation of the students into the mainstream of national politics. Dhaka University emerged as the centre of student politics, sometimes becoming the centre of national politics itself. Often the political forces took their cue from what the students did. Years of struggle for democracy ultimately culminated in the armed struggle for liberation in 1971.

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Most students are individually sensible, polite, submissive and conscientious. Many of them are much more knowledgeable than the students of our times and brilliant ones are comparable to world standard.

These students could be turned into admirable and excellent products if they are left along in the care of their teachers and freed from the clutches of outside forces. Our educational system is designed in such a way that our students are made aware of the situation around them, be it socio-economic or political. They may be allowed to express freely within the academic framework their opinions on important national and international matters of interest. They may work as watch-dogs. Their minds are sympathetic and just — yet to be polluted by evil design for selfish gain. The whole nation is eagerly awaiting the action of the government and opposition parties, especially the present MPs, and expects that they will help students out of the vicious circle.

# Laidback Ocean Nation Takes a Democratic Lead

Mark Gleeson writes from Sao Tome

*Almost in a time warp, the islands of the tiny nation of Sao Tome and Principe stand isolated from the African mainland. But politically they have shifted with the times. Almost without incident they changed from one-party to multi-party rule. After a night of mild revelry following the election of a new president the people went back to their fishing and farming routines.*

DESPITE a virtual clamour around Africa for multi-party reform, few countries have so far actually made the transition from one-party to multi-party rule. One such, however, is Sao Tome and Principe.

Sandwiched between free elections in Cape Verde and then Benin, were those of this tiny island nation.

Sao Tomeans are of mixed African, Jewish and Portuguese descent who have peacefully tilled the soil and fished the seas off their islands for centuries.

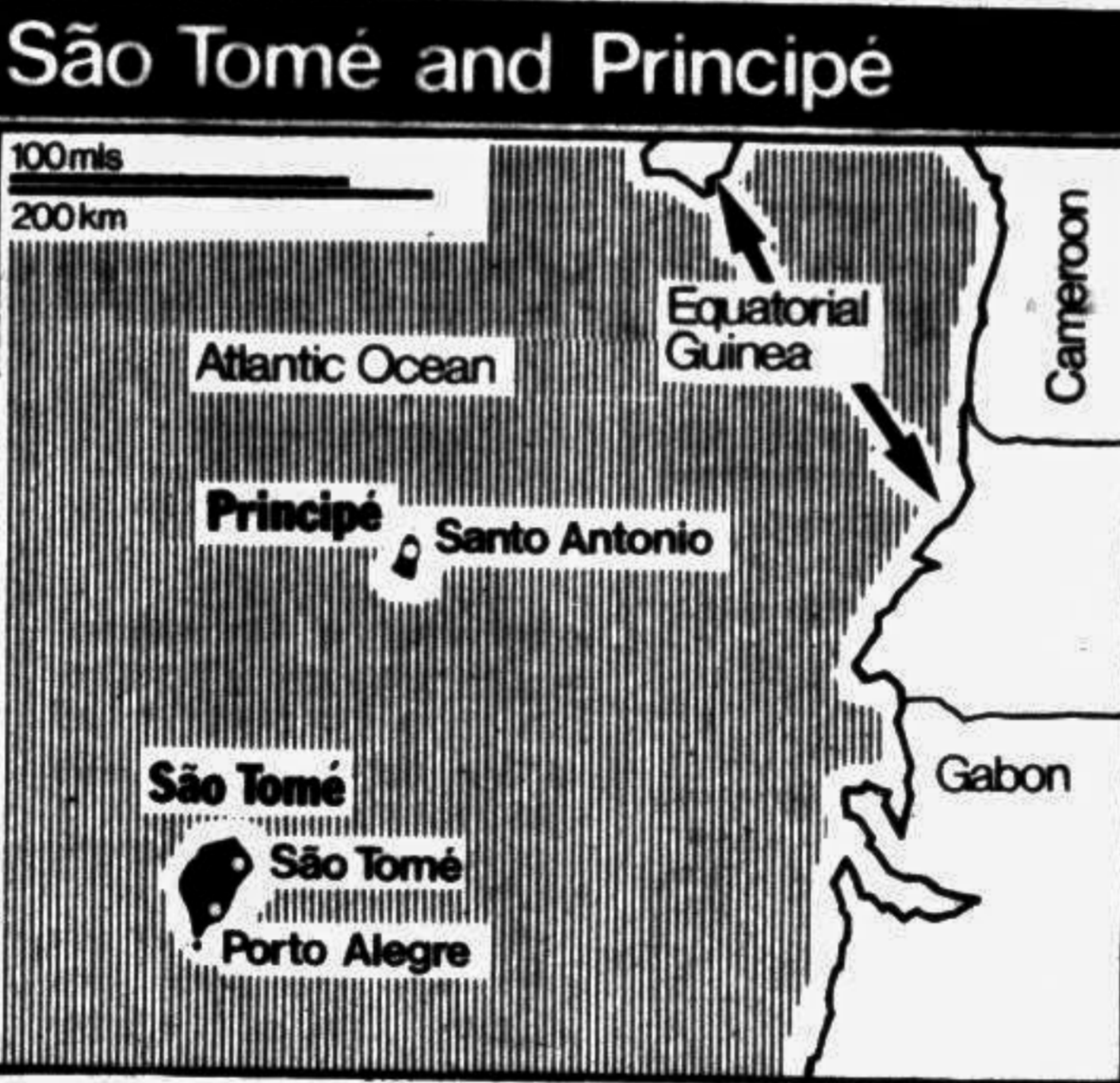
After independence in 1975 they were governed by the Movement for the Liberation of Sao Tome e Principe (MLSTP).

Since then the country has been badly affected by the fluctuating world cocoa price and by a rising debt burden that has left the fledgling state with little export income and almost no scope for economic expansion.

Increased tourism is a possibility: the islands remain a tropical paradise, plentiful in food, natural beauty, and so far unspoiled by the international tourist trade.

Almost as if caught in a time-warp, the islands stand isolated from the African mainland and, to an extent, from themselves.

A daily flight, too expensive for most islanders, plies between Sao Tome, where all but



5,000 of the country's 120,000 live, and Principe, where virgin tropical forest covers 80 per cent of the island. The first rumblings for multi-party reform were heard back in 1985 within the MLSTP. The then president, Pinto da Costa, was initiating economic and political changes as the price of cocoa, the country's most important export crop, plummeted on the world market. A decision to hold multi-party election was announced in December 1989 and later con-

firmed by referendum. Last January the MLSTP was swept from power in parliamentary elections which were to be a forerunner of the presidential race.

Perhaps seeing the writing on the wall, President Manuel Pinto da Costa pulled out of the race before it had begun.

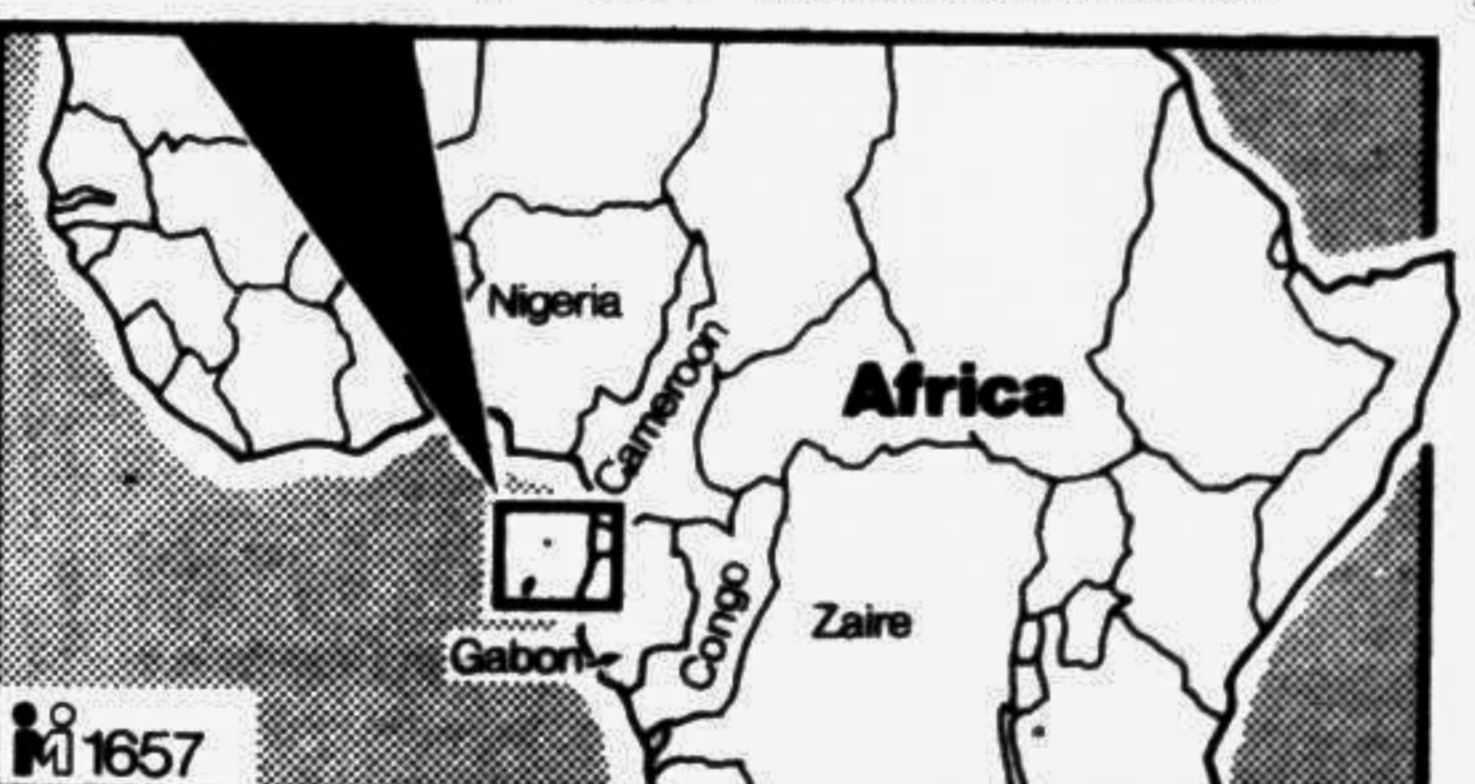
This left the field open to former prime minister Miguel Trovoada, Guadelune de Ceta, who was Trovoada's colleague in the struggle for independence from Portugal, and an eccentric former mercenary, Afonso dos Santos.

Trovoada, in exile in France since a fall-out with president

Da Costa in 1979, emerged as clear favourite from the moment he returned to Sao Tome in May last year.

His smiling face stared out from posters on almost every building and on T-shirts handed out to people. His was a slick, almost American-style campaign with long motor cavalcades, populist speeches, balloons, bands and even plastic shopping packets for housewives.

Trovoada's elegant wife and attractive daughter also played a visible part in the proceedings and drew large crowds throughout the islands.



The Sao Tome election was held without incident. Even election night revelry was relatively subdued, being concentrated in the town centre and limited to a few hundred people.

It was, in effect, a sideshow for a nation whose people quickly went back to their routines of fishing, planting and selling in the colourful markets. Trovoada has a complex task ahead of him. He has to deliver on promises to bring economic prosperity to the isolated islands—a formidable task given the country's size and lack of resources.

Some hopes are pinned on finding oil. Exploration has been going on for years without significant results, although both Gabon to the east and Nigeria to the north are now oil producers.

In the immediate future, Sao Tome e Principe will seek to attract investment into its agricultural and fishing industries and to develop its tourism. — GEMINI NEWS

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### To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

#### Biggest indeed!

Sir, British Airways flew her passengers worldwide free on April 23. Among them were 22 lucky persons drawn out of 1.5 lakh eligible coupons entered in Bangladesh, who along with others whose tickets were to be refunded travelled free to London as a part of BA's "World's Biggest Offer" — the best to date!

The extraordinary, colourful, historic, and hearty see-off at ZIA. Dhaka was indeed a morale-booster to both Travel and Tourism sector and the prospective travellers, as was WBO itself that stimulated enthusiasm in Bangladeshis like once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Although BA lost earnings in millions of pounds on that very single day in the super advertisement, the "favourite" carrier should recover in the expected short period.

At this time when the major airlines are about to take off to head-on competitions over the standard of every detail in service, comfort, entertainment, relaxation, and additional facilities, WBO must have put BA ahead of other leaders including Aeroflot, Air France, Lufthansa, KLM, and TWA in

the trade. The global network of BA, however, indicates the carrier's increase in popularity that has enriched BA fleet with almost all types of aircraft suitable to the characteristic routes and chartered to jumbo commercial flights.

From a business standpoint, WBO is of course an excellent lesson to all airlines in terms of promotional efforts; but, still, that experience may be of special benefit to a carrier like Biman Bangladesh Airlines, since the difference the bigger carriers make in the travel world may not always be the biggest.

M. Rahman Zila School Road, Mymensingh 2200.

#### Smoking a hazardous habit

Sir, It is not unknown to us what health hazards can be caused by smoking. Experts are almost certain that a major cause of lung cancer is excessive smoking. Of course there are exceptions. But it is always better to be careful. However, it is really very

sad to observe that many still continue to be smokers and not only that, but chain smokers. This we find among both educated as well as uneducated people. For once a person is addicted to tobacco, it is quite difficult to leave the habit, even if it may eventually become fatal to one's life.

Therefore, it is our ardent appeal to civilized citizens that they should give serious thought and think twice before carrying on smoking, for soon it may be too late!

Rafiq Ahmed Elephant Road, Dhaka.

#### Kurdish tragedy

Sir, The plight of the Kurdish people is undoubtedly one of the saddest tragedies in recent time. Mr. Ashnakhah in his letter of May 5, 1991 blames the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein for this misfortune of the Kurds.

The predominantly Sunni Kurds have suffered untold miseries at the hands of the Iranian leadership, too. During my recent stay in Turkey I observed that the Kurds are also not treated with sympathy and understanding by the Turkish government.

The saddest part of this tragedy is not the indifference of the Muslim leaders to the need of these people but the callousness, I should say, with which the major powers of the world are dealing with the Kurdish problem. Hasan Shaheed Dhaka.

#### "Media needs an open channel"

Sir, Your commentary (Daily Star 7th May, 1991) has been most timely in focusing the fact that the channel of communication between the Government media and the people has been an incomplete one, as a result of which much misinformation, disinformation and wrong information have unfortunately come to the fore. A Government of the people has the responsibility of sharing the full facts relating to the most devastating cyclone of the 29th April with the people. The full and detailed facts about what have already taken place, and now the day-to-day progress of the relief operations, the progress of relief distribution to the victims who are fighting for their survival, and the progress of rehabilitation has to be told. There should be a daily briefing to the press, which should detail what happened during the last twenty-four hours and the action taken by the Government.

In the press briefings all the wrong and false information should be straightaway contradicted, but all real facts have also to be accepted and explained.

The full facts of the calamity have to be shared with the people through the electronic media and the press. A vast number of people in Bangladesh have lost their hearths and homes, and their means of earning. The process of rehabilitation has now to be

successful if massive international support is received. The Governments and the world community must know the full extent of our damage, and specific and particular aid that we need. Only on the basis of full facts, can we fight the unprecedented disaster that has fallen on us.

This present age is an age of communication revolution, and its impact is felt throughout the world in a matter of minutes and seconds. The impact of the electronic media and news media has a great role to play in touching the hearts of humanity. Therefore, we must not fail in giving the complete picture of the disaster, and the day-to-day progress of the relief operations. And thereafter we have to focus on our massive efforts in rehabilitating the surviving people.

Shahabuddin Mahtab Director, Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs, Dhaka.

#### United effort

Sir, We are indeed very much grateful to all our friendly countries and international agencies including the United Nations for their quick and generous assistance extended to our cyclone victims. Lakhs of people have been killed and many more rendered homeless by the devastating cyclone and tidal surge which hit the country's coastal districts recently. The suffer-

ings of the victims cannot be expressed in words. Their plight is heart-breaking....

Meanwhile, we are confident, by the grace of Allah, our miseries will soon be over. What is needed is, united national efforts and efficient utilization of the international aids in the welfare and rehabilitation of the cyclone victims.

M. Zahidul Haque Bangladesh Agricultural College, Dhaka-1207.

#### Quality of products

Sir, The other day I read an item under the caption 'Powder milk quality varies' in the columns of your daily. I highly appreciate your correspondent for writing on such a vital subject. Though we have to import such item by our hard-earned foreign currency yet we are deprived of quality. But who bothers? The quality varies not only in food and beverage items or the imported ones but also in electronic/electronic as well as machinery items assembled or produced locally. Even some products manufactured by same company in a developed country and in Bangladesh are not same qualitatively. But why?

It is hoped that the authorities concerned including the B.S.T.I. should ponder over it and do the needful to ensure a better tomorrow not in slogan but in deed. Mamun Ahmad Deobhog, Munshigong.