

Violence and South Africa

Seldom has a leader found himself in as awkward and potentially damaging a position as President Frederik W de Klerk of South Africa. Recent revelations that his government has been financing the Inkatha Freedom Party of Zulu tribal chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi (at the request of the security forces, apparently) are now posing a serious threat to de Klerk's credibility as an effective leader and a reformer.

Over the past year or so, de Klerk has turned South Africa around from being an international pariah into a near-respectable member of the world community. He managed the feat by courageously dismantling those repugnant laws that made 30 million black South Africans aliens in the land of their ancestors. He released political prisoners and lifted bans on anti-apartheid political parties.

But de Klerk made one serious mistake. He did not, or could not, pay the kind of attention to rising violence in black townships that was required. The ANC's legalisation last year coincided with a sudden surge in Inkatha attacks on ANC supporters, leading to deaths of thousands. The violence served to tarnish the image of black people, hamper ANC efforts to consolidate its organisational base within the country after 29 years in exile and it seriously eroded Nelson Mandela's position as the spokesman of black South Africa. Because of its impact, the upsurge in Inkatha attacks was not viewed as a mere coincidence by many blacks, while leading ANC figures have repeatedly accused the government, and particularly the white-dominated security forces, of financing, arming and assisting in every other way Buthelezi's Inkatha in its campaign of violence against the ANC.

De Klerk has never been able to satisfactorily answer those allegations, while being totally unable to stem the violence. The prevailing impression now is that he has been, at best, unaware of the true extent of the police's collusion with Inkatha, or that the whole business has been going on with his full knowledge. If the latter is the case, then de Klerk should resign without further ado.

But even if we assume, as we must at this stage, that he was genuinely unaware, then that too would leave him in a pretty vulnerable position, because that would imply that the President of the republic had no knowledge of, and consequently had no control over, policies and actions that could threaten to destroy chances of a peaceful transition to a new, democratic, non-racial South Africa.

There has already been a resignation in the government, as well as one in Inkatha. But since we cannot accept the idea that mere individuals acting on their own were responsible for events of this magnitude, we can only look upon these resignations as clumsy attempts at a whitewash. In fact, it is difficult to imagine a major policy decision such as a concerted attempt to destroy the ANC, being taken without the consent of some highly-placed government figures.

De Klerk now needs to extricate himself from this mess and put negotiations with the ANC back on its tracks. To do that, he should launch a thorough public probe into the affair and come clean about the whole thing. For the time being, the world at large should apply some pressure by putting on ice its current policy of lifting sanctions and welcoming Pretoria back into the fold. The place is not, as yet, as clean as we all thought.

Talking Nobly of Illiteracy

It is good to see important people talking more and more of illiteracy. Our newspapers every now and then carry promises and exhortations centring on the problem by top people in politics and administration. And these are encouragingly growing in frequency. One can only hope at this point that the words would be matched by deeds — and in good time. The miserable performance of the last four decades no doubt had sets of apologists suited to the genius of the successive regimes weeping their hearts out over the dismal literacy situation and making resolute pledges to change it. We have however nothing to lose in keeping our faith in what stalwarts of the stature of Badruddoza Chowdhury and Saifur Rahman say about the problem and in hoping that theirs would not be leaves taken out of the decades-old literacy records.

Both the important personages of the present administration were caught speaking literacy the same day and on the same page of The Daily Star of Tuesday but at two distant places. Mr Saifur Rahman was appealing to regional pride with the hope of exciting the Sylheti people to come out of their poor national showing in education. We feel this to be a very correct approach. This approach of showing the Sylhetis and Chittagonians and Rangpuris and all others into action to extricate themselves from the ignominy of illiteracy should pay handsome dividends if the regional people truly feel for their region's good name and prestige.

We have two examples close at hand in neighbouring India that could encourage the Sylhet people to rise and resolve that not one per cent of illiteracy would be there in Sylhet, say, ten years from now. The Indian state of Kerala is not a model of a paradise on earth — far from it. But this leader in literacy performance has this year claimed to have some very close to a hundred per cent. Closer still is the case of the West Bengal district of Bardwan which also has hit a hundred per cent this year. Both of these achievements are regional.

Professor Chowdhury called a spade a spade when telling Rotarians at a city hotel that ours was a nation of 80 million illiterates. He cited former President Ziaur Rahman's endeavours to eliminate illiteracy understandably to show that this can be done and done within a small time-frame. He said a 'movement' would soon be launched to make the adult population literate. The compulsory universal primary education programme would be introduced in next January to get all children to go to schools.

These speak of noble ambition formed out of very elevating thoughts and we are one with the whole nation to wish all success to the two programmes. Perhaps as a proof of our sincerity we want to sound a word of caution. Taking the present claims of primary enrolment at their face value — the base has to be broadened by at least thirty per cent. Does our budget reflect this projected big leap forward?

We wish responsible people gave their best thoughts to these aspects of the unquestionably sincere attempts of the government in the matter of eliminating illiteracy.

Small Farmers for Rapid Agricultural Growth

THE agrarian reform strategy as detailed earlier in this column emphasized the urgent need to develop, out of the landowning families of Bangladesh, the modern entrepreneurs spearheading the manufacturing sector development through conversion of their own land into investment equity in industrial and service enterprises. The target, like the village and township enterprises of China, should be setting up of half a million upstart enterprises, small to medium in size but accounting for bulk of the gross domestic product accruing in the rapidly expanding secondary and tertiary sectors of the national economy.

This is one side of the agrarian reform proposal. The other vital component is small farmer development for rapid agricultural growth. Around half the cultivable land, if not more, is currently owned by 10 per cent of the rural households. Such lands are either share-cropped or cultivated by hired labour. It is primarily this land which would be taken over by the government. The other half of the cultivable land is covered under marginal family farms or constitutes the land under owner-cum-tenant farms. All cultivable lands are farmed in Bangladesh. It cannot be

otherwise since too many willing farmers are chasing too few lands. In addition, a large proportion of the land belonging to small owners are mortgaged under a variety of informal arrangements. It is not unusual to find that on paper, land is owned by a farmer but in reality, he is a share-cropper of his own land mortgaged to a money-lender.

Another agonizing reality of agriculture in Bangladesh is fragmentation of land-holdings. All farms are subdivided into several plots spread over an area of one to two square miles. A three acre consolidated owner-operated farm where family labour is primarily used is a fragment of imagination today. But this is exactly what we must establish tomorrow all over the country as the necessary condition for intensive irrigated agriculture with year-round cropping. Land in Bangladesh can be subdivided to the nth degree. There is no legal restriction to it and the law of inheritance relentlessly pursues its course dividing up the land into ever more smaller parcels. Thus an ever increasing proportion of the land is going out of cultivation in order to provide for the field boundaries marking the limits of the minuscule plots. Development of small consolidated farms would automati-

cally eliminate a great deal of these field boundaries, bringing in precious extra lands under the plough.

Legal Restriction

Another significant agrarian reform measure would be to put legal restrictions on further sub-division of such consolidated farms which must be heritable but cannot be broken up again. A good approach would be to treat each farm as a business and manufacturing enterprise where, the land,

including the communist countries of the Eastern Europe, Soviet Union and China. Bangladesh is also no exception. As early as 1972, a World Bank study estimated that by the year 2003, our rice production could be increased to 51 million tons with maximum development of irrigation, drainage and flood-control and the use of improved varieties. There is no inherent technological reason why substantially higher agricultural output could not be realized. But, (and it is a very crucial

own the land. It is most unfortunate that landowners and cultivating peasants are two distinct groups or social classes, the haves and the have-nots, with divergent, if not conflicting, interests on the land. Unless and until we create consolidated owner-operated farms, we will remain one of the poorest peoples of the world.

Family Farms

The small family farms are the most productive because of several reasons. First, use of labour in cultivation by landowners themselves will be maximised since, for family labour, no immediate payment of cash wage is involved. The landed rural households at present undertake cultivation by hired labour. They are restricted in maximising the use of labour because at the end of the day wages must be paid. An economist would argue that labour will be employed until the marginal product of additional labour is equal to the wage to be paid. Beyond that although more can be produced but the landowner would be losing money. Second, quality of work, — the amount of care for the land and the plants are obviously much more in case of family labour working on their own lands. In studies all over

Bangladesh, it has been found, time and again that use of fertilizer is higher in family farms, — better seeds are used and weeds are less. In a nutshell, yields are bound to be higher in family farms where the fruits of the family labour are all retained by the family.

Share-cropping, in contrast, directly restricts production. Whatever labour the farmer puts into the field, he gets back only half the returns.

Most often he pays for the fertilizer and all other cash costs of production, obtaining practically nothing against the extra contributions. His share always remains at half the total produce. Under such circumstances there is no incentive to adopt yield increasing technologies.

Thus unless we have small family farms, our agriculture can never prosper, and our march from poverty to growth would remain a distant mirage.

This is in spite of the fact that there are no deserts in the beautiful, lush-green landscape. And yet there is hunger in the fertile land which is perhaps the most abominable tragedy likely to be carried over to the 21st century unless we are determined to promote family farms through agrarian reforms.

From LDC to NIC by Shahed Latif

buildings, animals and implements constitute the assets of the farm-firm similar to a registered company. Its ownership can be shared by many but the farm-firm must not be physically divisible. A consolidated indivisible farm-firm operated as a commercial enterprise is one of the fundamental objectives of the agrarian reform programme. Assuming an average size of three acres, seven million such family farm-firms must be basis of rapid agricultural growth.

But why such small family farms are so critical. It is because such family farms have been found to be the most productive all over the world

but the existing land-ownership patterns and tenurial arrangements pull the nation down to a continuing state of poverty and destitution for the vast majority of the people. What is technically feasible remains practically unattainable and hunger persists in a fertile land. Our farmland is one of the most fertile in the world. The region was once legendary for its wealth and agricultural abundance. Yet its rice yields are one of the lowest in the world today.

The single most important barrier to increased production is scattered land holdings cultivated by those who do not

Passport Sales Row Changes a Constitution

David Robie writes from Auckland

The Tongan government has admitted its controversial cash-for-passports scheme is illegal and abruptly changed the kingdom's constitution. Among the mainly Asian passport holders are exiled Imelda Marcos, wife of the former Philippines dictator, and two of her children. Unrest in Tonga spilled into an unprecedented protest petition to the King.

A hasty legal juggling act to grant citizenship of the South Pacific Kingdom of Tonga to more than 400 foreigners has done little to quell unrest over a passport scandal. One of the 400 is Imelda Marcos, widow of Philippines dictator Ferdinand Marcos.

Although MP and pro-democracy campaigner Akilli Pohiva recently agreed to his court case being dismissed, he has forced the government to admit the illegality of the passports and to change the constitution.

More than 2,500 weeping and praying protesters marched to the royal palace in an unprecedented demonstration, led by Roman Catholic Bishop Patelesio Finau and other clergy, and Pohiva and other MPs. They presented two petitions to King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV through his private secretary.

The King was urged to cancel citizenship of the 426 foreigners and sack Police Minister 'Akau' ola. The Minister accepted responsibility for the illegal sales of naturalisation certificates and passports. He told the Legislative Assembly: 'I take the blame... it is my fault.'

However, the Tonga Chronicle reported the King as saying that the Kingdom could not afford to cancel the passports. Changing foreign exchange rates for the Tongan pa'anga, plus possible lawsuits by passport holders, meant paying out refunds and declaring the documents null and void would be too expensive for the country.

He also said none of the foreigners was living in Tonga and most were unlikely to do so. As for ousting the Police Minister, it was up to Parliament to amend legislation and to impeach ministers.

BCCI: Whither urgency?

Sir, Much has already been covered by your esteemed daily regarding BCCI debacle and its adverse effect on the clientele. It is true that no sudden action could be taken overnight by Bangladesh Bank to resolve the problems faced by BCCI and its clientele, but it is beyond any body's comprehension as to how a 'body' like Bangladesh Bank who supposedly monitors and controls the financial activities not only of BCCI, but of the other banks of the country as well could not so far arrive at any decision to alleviate the sufferings of the business houses and depositors having account with BCCI, not to speak of re-opening of the bank to resume its functioning in a limited way in the interest of small depositors only. On the evening of 11 July Bangladesh Bank came up with the press release saying BCCI matters would be handled by Agrani Bank. This press release is so sketchy and incomprehensive that neither the clients of BCCI nor Agrani Bank could understand as to what message the press release carried. I have personally observed that clients of BCCI were running in Agrani Bank



The King of Tonga Demonstrators at his palace

Under it a 30-seat parliament has 10 cabinet members, two governors appointed by the King, nine members voted for by the 33 nobles, and nine people's representatives elected by Tonga's 100,000 commoners.

Most foreigners involved in the passport affair are Asian. They include 189 mainland-born Chinese, 152 Hong Kong Chinese, nine Macau Chinese, nine Thais, nine Burmese, eight Singaporeans, four Filipinos and two Indonesians.

One of the ethnic Chinese is Sam Wong, a Filipino-born businessman who plans to build a multi-million business complex in the capital, Nuku'alofa.

Exiled Imelda Marcos is the best known foreigner to get a passport. She was also reported about to file an application at the Philippine consulate in New York, but the Philippines government says it will reject any passport application from her.

Other people gaining Tongan passports included Marcos's daughter Aimee and son Ferdinand Martin, as well as Americans, Libyans, South Africans and a Palestinian businessman, Toufic Barakeh, with five relatives scattered from Israel to Dubai.

Tonga has operated the illegal passport scheme since 1983. Under it two types went on sale: the Tonga Protected Person Passport and the Tongan Passport (issued to those who become naturalised).

The first was created in 1983 primarily as a travel document for non-Tongans in difficulty travelling beyond their own national boundaries. It sold for US \$10,000 each.

Because it did not give the holder automatic right of residence in Tonga and a visa was needed, a growing number of countries, including Australia and New Zealand, did not recognise it.

In 1984 the King was given power to grant naturalisation to any foreigner of 'good character on humanitarian grounds.' The naturalisation fee was US \$ 20,000. Extra fees could take it up to US \$ 35,000.

Commoner MPs and their lawyers challenged the scheme as unconstitutional. In 1988, 'Akau'ola admitted that the 1984 legislation was unconstitutional because Clause 29 of the constitution requires residency of at least five years before naturalisation. The 1984 Act was repealed.

It is uncertain how many foreigners have been naturalised or how much money has been made, but considerably more than the 426 people named in the Government Gazette may have acquired passports.

Tonga's Consul in Hong Kong, George Chen, who succeeded his father, Tom Chen, in 1989, told Matangi Tonga magazine how the scheme works. The consulate was said by Attorney-General Tevita Tupou to have issued all but three of the purported naturalisations.

The Chens and South Pacific Sea Land Air secured a 30-year lease on the volcanic island of Fonualei, in the northern Vavau group of Tonga.

Through this 'leasehold operation' foreign nationals could buy Tongan passports. By last year foreigners had bought about 900 20-year leases on Tongan land.

Chen says a passport applicant had to qualify under the leasehold scheme before applying for protected person status or naturalisation as a Tongan.

Chen reportedly said that his consulate had issued about 900 protected person pas-

ports and 84 certificates of naturalisation. About US \$5 million had been received and invested in the Tonga Trust Fund account with the Bank of American San Francisco.

In 1989, Pohiva filed a lawsuit against the Kingdom and the Police Minister, claiming the passports should be declared invalid.

Chief Justice Geoffrey Martin was on February 22 finally to set a date for an open hearing in the supreme court.

Four days before, the government called an emergency session of Parliament in an attempt to legalise its passport practices over six years.

Parliament usually meets between May and December and this was only the third time it had ever held an emergency session. The other occasions were in 1914 at the outbreak of World War One, and in 1982 in the wake of devastation from Cyclone Isaac.

Parliament was bitterly divided between the cabinet and the nobles, who supported the passport legislation, and seven commoner MPs, who argued it would be damaging for Tonga to amend the constitution to legalise a mistake.

Pohiva and two other commoner MPs walked out of Parliament and the legislative and constitutional changes were made by a 15-4 vote.

When Pohiva agreed to the dismissal of his court case and was awarded NZ \$ 23,500 in costs he said he had been 'vindicated.' But he added: 'The case does not end. It marks a new page in our history.'

—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.

plan production as per delivery date stipulated by buyer in the export L/Cs. Failing to meet the delivery schedule shall lead to cancellation of orders and thereby loss of quota by the unit and the country also. The responsibility for such inaction to institute any tangible measure, even after lapse of 15 days since BCCI's closure, to overcome the difficulties being experienced by BCCI clients entirely lies with Bangladesh Bank and consequential loss of foreign exchange from exports. Bangladesh Bank should immediately convene a meeting by inviting senior bankers of the country inclusive that of BCCI's to thrash out the problems concerning BCCI and its clients to arrive at a plausible solution instead of meaningless press release and writing and issuing directives in bureaucratic fashion at snail's pace achieving no fruitful result.

Fazli Hussain Mohakhal, Dhaka.

Sheela murder
Sir, The sensational murder of Sheela at 64/F/1, Ram Krishna Mission Road, Dhaka, has aroused horrible shocks in the minds of the public here. On July 12 young Monowara Parvin Sheela was allegedly murdered by her husband, — now absconding. He, however, was allegedly found loitering in the Tikatuli area while it is heard that investigations are proceeding.

We have some questions to ask: Why police came as late as 5:30 p.m. although information by local people had been sent much earlier? Why after their arrival they dilly-dallied and broke open the door more than an hour later? The investigating officer had no signs of seriousness in his conduct! All these were witnessed by hundreds of people standing outside the house. The officer was seen gossiping with Motaleb (one of the abettors) in a 'friendly manner' which provides presumption. He also exchanged cigarettes with this accused, eye-witnesses said. Similar 'cigarette-exchange' was also reportedly seen even inside the Sutrapur thana. One of the relations of the deceased asserted that the entire machination can be unearthed by wisely enquiring the wife of Motaleb, her young child and their maid-servant, who were made to leave the house before the incident. But police paid scant attention to his urge.

The young woman's body was kept hanging from the ceiling fan till 9:45 p.m. What an audacity! What a fun! Was it not the duty of the police to bring down the body immediately after their arrival, or right after the enquiry? The girl could have been saved, if the body had been brought down from the ceiling immediately, — supposing that she was not dead yet then!

All these are pertinent questions of suspicion.

How could one expect peace and security in a country, where the very law-enforcing agencies themselves are guilty of callousness? We would, therefore, beseech the benign attention of the Hon'ble Prime Minister in this sordid matter to bring immediately the culprit to book as well as to mete out punishment, if necessary, even to the police concerned, for such wilful acts of negligence of public duty.

We hope

Sir, I offer my hearty reverence to Mr. Muslehuddin Ahmed for his article 'Party Politics—National Issues—Sovereign Parliament' published in your daily on 13th July. What he has expressed has an extreme importance for all of us. The last nine years was a prolonged nightmare to all the conscious citizens of the country. What happened at that time was possible because an autocratic government could do whatever it wished, defying all heart-rending cries of the oppressed. But what are happening now in the country under a popular government are contrary to our expectation. Specially the educational arena seems much more vitiated than in the Ershadian regime. However, it is our hope against hope that the government is rock firm to establish normalcy and congenial atmosphere in the educational arena. It is our belief that all the problems which impede our national progress are not hard nuts to crack if the government strained every nerve thick and thin in its sincere effort of doing good to the people. We do firmly believe that democratic norms will get an institutionalised form under this government. This government is unlike the past governments. We expect like your sagacious columnist, that

Road accidents

Sir, In recent days there has been a dramatic rise in the number of road accidents. Hardly a day passes when newspapers do not report accidents taking place in the country.

A comprehensive plan has to be chalked out to reduce the number of accidents. Reckless driving must be stopped at any cost and vigil has to be kept on speed limits. Traffic signal lights should be checked regularly as most of the time it is found out of order in many parts of the city. Violators of the signal should also be apprehended.

Driving licence should be issued only after thorough test, and there must not be any compassion for the traffic offenders.

I hope concerned authority especially the D C Traffic will look into the matter seriously.

Rashid Sultan Babbar Nawabpur Road Dhaka.