Dhaka, Saturday, December 14, 1991

Homage to Martyrs

As we pay our homage today to our intellectuals who were killed during the Liberation War, several questions are bound to arise in our minds. We would certainly ask ourselves if developments in the country's socio-political life reflect what these intellectuals believed in and died for.

Most of our people would probably answer this question in the negative. But ours is a more qualified one. The fact that the sad anniversary this year is being observed, at long last, under a democratically-elected government underscores one major achievement. It seems not all our struggles go in vain.

However, sadly enough, this achievement is obscured by our failures in many different fields. failures which would have caused much sadness and anger to our slain intellectuals had they been still with us today. While we have restored democracy to our country, we seem unable to make it work in the way it should in the best national interest. Political divisiveness, at all levels, has eaten into the vitals of our nation, robbing us of the chance of working together towards a broad-based consensus on economic and social issues. Corruption is rampant; law and order situation critical; and the economy remains stagnant.

What is undoubtedly most tragic is the situation that exists in our universities with which so many of our murdered intellectuals were so closely associated. Instead of serving, as they once did, as centres for learning and research, almost each one has become an arena for mindless violence and senseless killings. There are no signs yet of the situation being brought under control. If anything, every passing day makes the situation more critical than ever.

Notwithstanding the seriousness of the situation, this paper will never say that we have reached the point of no return. We have also no intention of assuming the role of the prophet of doom. On the contrary, we believe that the ideals of the Liberation War and the hopes and dreams which were once nursed by our intellectuals, often reflected in their writings, live on, as part of our national heritage. We also believe that our hopes in our own future can be rekindled if a cross section of our people, especially leaders and workers in our political parties, firmly decide to turn their back on our past failures and look forward to the task of creating a new future. When they do so, it may not seem all that formidable to restore a proper academic atmosphere, free from chaos and violence, to our educational institutions. As it has happened to other nations in different parts of the world, at different times of contemporary history, Bangladesh can rise to the occasion and work out its destiny. The country earned this right during the Liberation War, the right that we must exercise now. When we do so, we will be paying the most meaningful homage to those who gave their lives so that we may be a free nation.

Righting the Wrong in Education

Please, help increase the literacy rate to make the independence of our nation meaningful. That was the appeal President Biswas made to a delegation of non-government primary teachers when the latter called on him recently. It is very easy to agree with the President in his emphasis on the importance of literacy in the nation's life. But the fact remains that such an obvious and supremely urgent need has gone by default during all kinds of governments. Even our changing statehood from British India to Pakistan, then from Pakistan to the present Bangladesh - couldn't effect a desired change in our literacy profile. There is nothing wrong in hoping that things would improve. But a definite knowledge that the true figures would not improve by even a paltry ten per cent during the whole tenure of a government makes us live with a particularly unencouraging reality. Luckily for us, most of even our conscious citizens can be quite forgetful of certain basically important things - whenever they wish to shut themselves off and for however long a time; the whole nation would be on the point of despair considering this one aspect of our national life.

The President very naturally went on to stress the importance of 'educated' people in the fashioning of a self-reliant society which he said was one of the objectives of the Liberation War. There is much scope for treating such evident truisms with unsparing and critical scrutiny. Literacy, or for that matter illiteracy, has one good thing in that it can be counted in accordance with a chosen yardstick. The quality or state of 'educatedness' has, however, eluded attempts to devise a yardstick with which to dependably measure it - not to speak of being able to counting the 'educated' people. It is an open secret that in our country most of those that have passed out of schools of all denominations — are as 'uneducated' as the illiterate ones, if not worse. The best of the many working criteria for an educated person is to look for how the person bears himself or herself and what he or she does to the society, for the society. It will be hard for a big majority of our educated people to pass this test.

This nation has long continued to be charge of the 'educated' people - almost exclusively. We say almost because lately mastani and financial and governmental corruption leading to plain swindle by rather unlettered people are having much to do with the shaping of the national life. On fair weighing of all things constituting personal and social life we are perfectly in a soup because of an unmitigated welter of failures. The credit of the microscopic success that we have had are few and far between and the credits for that must go to the right quarters — those who have fought and sacrificed and suffered, some among whom may come from the 'educated' ones. But for the overwhelming failures, none other than the 'educated' elite can be blamed.

There was something wrong with their education. It is time we righted that.

CORRUPTION REVISITED

Necessity of Survival Links up with Greed for Riches

by Muhammad Azher Zafar Shah

URING the past two decades, since the liberation of Bangladesh, there has been regular and extensive condemnation of corruption, in seminars and conferences, in the electronic and print media, in mosques and temples, in public political meetings, and social gatherings, and by successive ruling regimes. Indeed, there has been so much criticism of corruption, publicly and privately, by so many, that one wonders who is actually engaged in such anti-social activities. However, the net consequence has been a drastic increase, both qualitatively and quantitatively, in

corruption within our country. To prescribe the cure for a disease, either physical or social, one must first discover the real cause and provide the correct diagnosis. All the apparent assaults on corruption so far have proven futile, indieating that the decision-making elite, either deliberately or out of ignorance, had conducted no attack upon the roots of corruption. Perhaps this is because the elite was also the beneficiary of corrup-

Of course in our under-developed economy, with the population boom outstripping the limited resources, accompanied by a vast rich-poor gap. one does not have to be exceptionally elever to identify the two basic causes of corruption poverty and greed, or, to put it in another way the desire to survive and the lust for wealth land all the trappings which automatically follow it).

cure monthly wages that are commensurate with the requirements of physical survival and social status. The price of essential consumer goods rises alarmingly because of the desire of the producers to maximize profit. Thus the necessity of survival links-up with the greed for riches, to pro-

duce the climate of corruption.

tained without some degree of

In this blatantly unhealthy social environment and regressive economic condition. what is the antidote for the curse of corruption? Two centuries of colonialism and four decades of capitalism have demonstrated in an incontrovertible manner that unfet-

greed, which would require a fundamental reform of the economy and the society. In the economy dimension, this would mean a fair distribution of resources and the reallocation of priorities, through a capable and honest administration, to establish a prices and income structure that promotes social justice. In the social dimension, this would entail a voluntary revolution in

than a half decade ago, and the passage of time has proclaimed the defeat of the "jihad" and a, total victory for corruption. which has infiltrated into all spheres of the political, economic, social, legal, educational, and religious activities of Bangladesh. To the extent that in effect it has become a non-issue, accepted as a way of life, either under duress or by desire : its public condemnation is merely routine and devoid of sincerity, while in private discussion it is laughed away, either because of help-

The revolutionary measures to combat corruption effectively shall not be undertaken by the contemporary decisionmaking elite, there must be a protest against the hypocrisy of those who simultaneously conduct and condemn corrup-

lessness or due to indulgence.

For who is the Mr. Clean

amongst us that can throw the

first stone against the culprits

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The termination of corruption is intrinsically linked with the eradication of poverty and greed, which would require a fundamental reform of the economy and the society.

The majority of the population is unemployed or underemployed, and many of those who are working, i.e. women and children in their own households, are unpaid. On the other hand, the majority of those who are fully employed are on fixed wages, which have no rational relationship with the prices of essential items in the market-place, with a logical indexation to inflation being out of the question under the present politico-economic system in our society. The fixed-income groups, whether belonging to the lower-class or to the middle-class, do not se-

To be a member of the upper-class, one must, by definition, be wealthy. In a amoral secular society such as in this country, financial wealth is the primordial criterion of ultimate worldly success. Our poverty-stricken society grants unqualified respect to the rich. no questions asked. The fortunate few who fulfil their basic needs then race for success. which is synonymous with wealth. In our secular society, with no ethics governing the economy, with too many persons competing for a slice of the insufficient economic cake, 'wealth' cannot be ob-

tered free enterprise cannot solve, but rather actually aggravates, the core economic problems of unemployment and inflation. Moreover, materialist values encourage the exploitation of the majority by the minority, under the camouflage of secular ideologies, which promote elitist interests, to the detriment of moral values. which propagate the supremacy of the collective interests of the society as a

The termination of corruption is intrinsically linked with the eradication of poverty and

materialism : each member of society would compete to do good to others, and thus uphold the common interest. rather than subscribe to a cutthroat rat race, as is currently taking place.

individual values, where

morality would be the yard-

stick of success, rather than

Under the current negative conditions prevailing in our country, this prescriptive write-up may justifiably be described as idealistic. Rightly so, considering that a "jihad" was declared against corruption by the head of state more

The Maghreb, Islam and the Politics of Need ing life sentences in Tripoli

by Allan Thompson SLAM has always been a

unifying factor among the Arab Maghreb countries of North Africa. Now it is a potent political force as well - not because North Africans want to live in Islamic republics like Iran, but because the existing political order has failed them.

Soaring unemployment and economic hardship, especially among youth, have prompted millions to flee to Europe. Many who remain are poor. unhappy and restless - willing to support Islamic political parties not out of religious zealotry but because they yearn for change.

As Algeria runs headlong toward multi-party democracy. Islamic forces are the greatest threat to the ruling party. In Tunisia, where Islamic parties are banned, a president who once headed the secret police is channelling his energies into crushing the Islamists.

In Libya and Morocco, the decades-old regimes of Colonel Moammar Gaddafi and King Hassan II owe their longevity in part to near-total repression of Islamic activists.

It is more than a decade since the Islamic revolution that swept away the Shah of Iran. The domino-like spread of Islamic regimes once expected in the region has not

But in North Africa it seems only a matter of time until secular post-independence regimes have to share power with Islamists and other opposition forces. In the way that North African independence movements swept away colonialism three decades ago, Islamic political parties could be a catalyst for change today even if they do not come out on top.

In Algeria, the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) was legalised only after a brutal clampdown of bread riots in 1988 precipitated political reforms and the move to multi-

partyism. Many FIS supporters are bearded, devout Muslims seeking an Islamic republic, but the party also has widespread backing among Algeria's poor, who simply want change.

"People don't necessarily follow FIS because of ideology. but because it gives them hope," said a senior politician who asked not to be named.

Algeria is holding its first-ever multi-party national elections. The Islamic Salvation Front, which already controls most local governments, is the main opposition. Meanwhile, in Tunisia, President Ben Ali is doing all he can to suppress Islamic activists and regimes in Libya and Morocco keep firmly in power by snuffing out any hint of Islamic political activ-

Islamic revival



FIS is notorious in the West for its insistence on Islamic traditions - the veiling of women, for example - but its calls for wealth redistribution have earned it popularity at

FIS took 54 per cent of the vote in local elections in June 1990. It was expected to do so well in national multi-party legislative elections promised for mid-1991 that the ruling National Liberation Front(FLN) anxiously gerrymandered electoral boundaries in the government's favour. FIS supporters protested against that manoeuvre - and President Chadli Benjedid decided to hold presidential elections only after the legislative ones. which Islamists were expected

In the end, the legislative elections were cancelled and the country clamped under

martial law in early June following widespread political unrest. FIS leader Abbas Madani and his deputy were arrested, accused of fomenting violence. Both are still in jail and FIS says that unless Madani is freed, it will boycott new elections rescheduled for December 26 (with a runoff vote two weeks later).

Martial law was lifted in late September and the interim government of Prime Minister Sid Ahmed Ghozali has moved to meet some FIS demands, including a call for fairer electoral redistribution. The changes could give Islamists a share of power in the next government.

Next door in Tunisia, long the most secular Arab Country. the government has given no hint of conciliation with the Islamist movement.

Under President Habib

Bourguiba, who ruled Tunisia from independence in 1956 until his overthrow in 1987. Muslim Shari'a courts were suppressed, universities secularised and Islamic charitable trusts abolished. Bourguiba even removed a woman's veil on television and broke the fast of Ramadan in public.

The bane of Bourguiba's presidency was the Islamist movement. Initially, he allowed it to operate as a counterbalance to equally threatening leftist forces. Later, he turned his secret police against it. The best organised group was the Islamic Tendency Movement now known as Ennahdha, or Renaissance.

Many Tunisian Islamists were arrested and tried throughout the Eighties. In 1986 two were executed by firing squad on charges they had led a conspiracy with foreign elements to prepare for an Islamic republic.

Former secret police chief Zine el Abidine Ben Ali toppled the near-sentle Bourguiba in 1987, but despite an initial wave of political freedom, now uses the same tactics as his predecessor against Islamists. Amnesty International says "repression against Islamists has given way to an escalation in use of torture and secret detention."

Ben Ali's response has been: "No liberty for the enemies of liberty." His anti-Islamist operis codenamed Eradication.

Today the Ennahdha movement is in disarray. Some members were accused in March of torching a government party building. Three executive members, including general secretary Abdel Fattah, Mouru, suspended their activities in the party. There is speculation that Mouru plans to launch his own party which would play by Ben Ali's rules. Rachid Ghannouchi, movement president, lives exiled in

In May Tunis announced it had foiled a plot by Ennahdha

to "set up a religious power." claiming it had infiltrated the administration. Ghannouelri responded by telling Agence France-Presse that "there is no Islamic plot in Tunisia, but a plot by the regime ... against Islamists and democracy."

The attempts to crush Ennahdha show that Tunisia's security establishment, of which Ben Ali is a product, remains strong. Even before a wave of arrests in late 1990 and early 1991. Islamists were divided and lacked access to power. Ironically, however, repression has bolstered support for a movement which would probably muster only about one-third of the vote if it took part in free elections. of 9

Mouru predicts power, or a share of it, will eventually come. He stresses that he seeks not an Islamic republic, but a return to traditional val-

He said: What we are trying to put in place is a democratic political regime with an Arabo Islamic cultural base. But we put emphasis on respect of liberties. It's not up to me to decide what you wear - you The secretary in his law of-

fice did not wear a veil.

In Libya, Colonel Moammar Gaddafi does not hide his contempt for Islamists. They have provided the only significant opposition to his 22-year-old regime. And while many Libyans are religious conservatives, Islamist political rhetoric has never made serious inroads into Libyan society

Gaddafi infuriated traditionalists in 1980 by altering Libya's Islamic calender. in 1989 his criticism of some Muslim holy books was also seen as an attack on Islamic fundamentalism.

In February 1987 Gaddafi's regime publicly executed nine people - three of them soldiers - for membership in Islamic groups. That may, another 21 suspected Islamists were executed.

Five Islamists are still serv-

after being convicted in 1973 of membership in the Islamic Liberation Party. In 1990, most of the 445 people arrested for political reasons were accused of belonging to or supporting Islamic groups. Repression has forced

Libyan Islamists to keep a low profile. The country has no developed Islamist movement, only small autonomous groups with the common goals of a return to Islamic values and an end to Gaddaff's regime.

In Morocco, where King Hassan II holds the religious title of Commander of the Faithful, the Islamist move ment is weak but sometimes serves as a convenient scape goat for the King. He blamed "communists, Zionists and Iranians" for rioting over price rises in 1984.

Most often, rioting has been caused by economic deprivation - not religious fervour and left-wing opposition is much stronger than that of Islamists. Nonetheless, after riots last December, supporters of the previously clandestine Islamist movement emerged in public alongside the longstanding leftist, Arabnationalist opposition.

In February, 30.000 Islamists took part in a mass demonstration in Rabat. Their largest movement - Al Adl wal Ihsan, or Justice and Charity had previously endured harsh

repression. Islamists who dare challenge Hassan's legitimacy as commander of the faithful often face trial. In February 1990 Rabat ordered Justice and Charity dissolved, arresting most of its leaders. In March 1991 six alleged mem-

bers were jailed for two years. Between December 1989 and March 1990, 32 others had been tried on similar charges. Abdessalam Yassine. leader of Justice and Charity, is still under house arrest.

But in Morocco, as across North Africa, the Islamist movement and parallel opposition forces cannot be arrested forever. Real change must - GEMINI NEWS come.

ALLAN THOMPSON is a Canadian journalist with the Toronto Star newspaper. He spent part of the year conducting research in the Maghreb, travelling in all five countries of the region.

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.

Housing problems

Sir, We were inspired by the remarks made by the Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia while addressing a ceremony to mark the handing over of deeds of residential plots of Journalists Housing Cooperative Society at the project site, Mirpur on December

She said that the government was giving serious thought to solve the housing problem in the metropolitan Dhaka, particularly for the people belonging to low-income groups.

Development expenditures in physical planning and housing sector during 1985-90 indicate that total of Tk 550 crore was allocated while total expenditure stood (at 1984-85 prices) for at Tk 625.86 crore physical planning and housing sector during the Third Plan (1985-90) consisted of development of housing, office and

commercial buildings, rural and urban water supplies, sewerage and sanitation, city roads and civic facilities. Major expenditure, however, included construction of International Conference Centre, National Monuments at Savar and Mujibnagar, Osmani Memorial Hall, residential and office buildings at zila and upazila headquarters. In the field of water supply, along with the expansion of water supply facilities in Dhaka and Chittagong cities, in the rural areas, 1,22,082 shallow tubewells, 5,665 deep tubewell and 18,340 set Tara pumps were installed. As a result, rural water supply coverage increased from one tubewell for 138 persons to one for 118 persons against the target of one for 125 persons during 1980-1990.

 Needless to say that previous autocratic government emphasized more on pompous and gorgeous establishments

than addressing the needs of the poor people - both urban and rural. It is a happy augury that our Prime Minister has rightly identified the priority needs of the majority of lowincome groups facing acute housing and environmental problems We want to draw the kind

attention of the PM and see actions towards solving housing problems in the cities - Dhaka in particular. The major constrains, inter alia, are the problems of master plan by the government requiring restructuring in laws regulating accommodation plan, land use, granting of housing building constructions, allotment of plots in Government acquired lands and granting of building plans for non-acquired lands in sub-urban areas in Dhaka. In the absence of care to control haphazard growth of housing in private sector, by the unplanned development in housing sector has been going on. The question of vertical development for maximum land use has been remaining stagnant exacerbating housing problem

in Dhaka city. The efforts of the Dhaka Municipal Corporation in de-, veloping satellite towns by bringing sub-urban areas under DMC need to be geared up

strategies on a long-term basis in the perspective of population growth during the years ahead say, for 50 years when Dhaka would be one of the 7th largest populous cities in the world. It is time serious thoughts and deep consideration given to the DMC Ordinance, 1983 (XL of 1983) under Clause 154(1) bringing sub-urban Uttara, Demra, Gulshan and Lalbagh areas under the DMC Act.

with forward looking planning

The crux of the problem for the newly acquired areas/locations is that these areas are deprived from availing government facilities either as a rural or urban status. The people have been grinding between the dual administration of DMC and union parishad system. On the contrary, the cost of land in such DMC acquired areas have gone abnormally high in the expectation of Pourashava holdings but remaining out of basic process of development in road communication not to speak of gas, water and electricity systems.

The majority people of these areas are in favour of inclusion within DMC. Would the PM very kindly rise to the occasion and order solution of

the legal questions of rural or urban areas to the primary benefit of the poor residents. Vox Populi

Universities

Sir. The democratic government has been in power for about a year. During this period most of the university of the country remained closed 'sinedie and a good number of students were engaged either in party politics of who knows. 'unsocial' activities. These universities may be called "closed universities".

Now the government is contemplating to establish some "open universities" under which the students will be taught indirectly through some information media - Radio, TV, press and so on.

However, under the new scheme the government or the varsity authority will no longer require to face the students directly. The volume of responsibilities will also be reduced. The teachers will also get sufficient time to attend clubs and seminars. But what will happen to the "closed universities"? Should they vanish in the mean time? Md. Abdul Lattf Khahja

Jessore

Sir, It was very informative

Asbestos

to read an article on asbestos and its use in Ghana, in your Feature page of December 1. In fact, most of the articles on environmental problems are interesting. However, what is usually lacking are instances of environmental degradation within Bangladesh. While it is important to learn about other countries' problems one must not overlook the need and the right of the people to know what is going on in their own country. I wonder how many people

in our country while reading about the use of asbestos in Ghana, are aware of its extensive use here. It is being used, in water pipes in Chittagong as well as in other places as roofing material for schools and houses and for many other commercial purposes. The environmentalists and health workers have not yet protested against its use.

There are several such environmentally hazardous activities being undertaken in the country which should be brought to the attention of the public through your esteemed newspaper.

A concerned citizen