Dhaka, Friday, January 17, 1992

## Now, Debate It

Foreign Minister Lt. Col. (retd) A S M Mustafizur Rahman finally got around to issue his long-awaited statement to the Jatiya Sangsad last Wednesday in which he gave a detailed chronology of events since December 21, read out quotations from the local as well as overseas media reports and offered a slight allusion to the difficulties that may lie ahead.

However, we are still not fully sure as to the policy the foreign ministry is currently pursuing. There is little doubt that everybody wishes to see a peaceful resolution to all conflicts, whether internal or external. But the question is, how much would we concede in order to reach that peaceful solution? The foreign minister is running the risk of appearing to appease a military dictatorship, and his statement did not do enough to dispel doubts. It is well-known that the Myanmar regime has problems, but they are problems of its own making and Bangladesh should condemn Yangon for its repression of minorities, rather than cite the various insurgency movements as bonafide causes for its military activities along our borders, as the minister seemed to do in his speech

With his assertion that Rohingya refugees would not be sent back to Myanmar "against their wishes", Mustafizur Rahman appeared to concede that repatriation may not be as smooth as he had imagined earlier. The Rohingyas themselves say they do not wish to return until they have guarantees that their rights would be respected by the regime. But, judging by the manner in which the Yangon military authorities rode roughshod over the peoples verdict in the 1989 general elections, we would be justified in assuming that no protection of minority rights was feasible so long as the military remained in power in Yangon.

So where does that leave Bangladesh? Will we continue to bear all the costs of looking after the refugees, and risk social disharmony and political instability in our south-eastern region in the process? Or will we call in the United Nations High Commission for Refugees and the International Red Cross to help us out? The minister did not clarify.

Another matter left unclear was whether the minister was willing to face a parliamentary debate on the issue or not. It is in the interest of the government, indeed the nation, that such a debate takes place.

The issue to Myanmar and the refugees is a matter of national concern, and the minister has a duty to put his policy on the issue up for debate in the House, just like any other issue of the day. We suggested in an earlier editorial that there should be special sittings of the House to debate foreign policy matters, because such a crucial area cannot be kept away from the elected representatives of the people. The government is morally and politically duty-bound to bring its policies in all spheres of public life to the attention to parliament and allow the members to scrutinise them. That is what a parliament is for, and the foreign ministry, like all other ministries, should be made fully accountable to it.

However, the Treasury and Opposition benches ought now to think seriously about setting up a special parliamentary committee on foreign affairs with the power to summon ministry officials to explain policies and actions. The committee should be an all-party one, and report to the full House on a regular basis. This is essential, because under a democratic dispensation, no area of government can remain a grey one, as was often the case with foreign affairs under previous regimes.

### 500 Murders — but Not a Genocide

Over 500 murdered in a year. That's a headline appearing in this journal on Wednesday. Before you can reason out that the area over which this had happened is not mentioned and perhaps once that information is received things would appear far less grisly, the sentence sends a shiver down your spine: 500 murders! After all you can-not and should not make a tally of all things. You should not talk of murders in aggregation, because a murder is a highly individualistic aberration of human judgement and sensibility, social mores and other compulsions. Murder has as such, except in the case of state-appointed executioners, not yet developed into a profession as other crimes such as burglary. And dacoits and burglars have their gangs and communities—and murderers not. There are many other reasons why murder. like rape, should not be talked of in aggregation.

Well, at least 528 persons were murdered in 1991 in the districts of the Khulna Division. That's not a tall figure if you think that number of cases of termination of life occurred in a group of people at 25 million strong, that will help overcome your sense of shock. the killing rate thinning out to 0.00002 per cent. But arguably this also is rather high for an area largely pastoral and bucolic and featuring vast tracts of sylvan wastes.

Roughly a hundred murders had their origin in land dispute clashes. We have nothing to say to that for it is a privilege for the peasants in a country thoroughly agrarian for at least five thousand years to bash each other's heads over where should the field-dividing 'aisles' should be. But what to say to 71 killed in cases involving love affairs? Seventyone Othellos killing 71 Desdemonas? Oh it can very well be the other way round at least in some cases—that is a jilted girl trying to square up things in the ultimate fashion. That's logical but the report doesn't mention anything of the kind.

On the contrary, it says one-third of the five hundred and odd victims of murder or 176 were women. If you add all 71 love killings to 35 'unhappy conjugal life' murders and take it that all of these victims were women—that still leaves 70 murdered women unaccounted for. Categories such as land dispute, political clashes, business rivalry and conflicts over blackmarketing can safely be rated out as responsible for woman bashing. That leaves us with only one category—'social friction' in which 150 persons were done to death. Was this a very even-handed category accounting half and half for killings—sexwise? But why and how should be women killed in 'social frictions'?

Murders of any kind, the state-ordained ones included as well as those resulting from battle engagements, were never a distinguishing feature of the society of the Bengalees. Still it was never quite free of it. Let us hope to walk up to an urbanised 21 century in a fashion that takes murder out of our society.

# Factors Responsible for the Low Demand

by Dr Abdur Rahman

NLY a half century ago. during the early period of Pakistan, jute of the erstwhile East Pakistan carned as much as 80% of the total foreign exchange of the then Pakistan. During the 70's, jute was serving as the economic backbone of our newly independent country. In the 50's. 60's and 70's the man-made fibre like poly-propylene, nylon etc. were discovered and they came into various uses, in place of jute very quickly. As a packing material and even in textile, the uses of these synthetic fibres got so much popularity and priority that it was about to replace the entire natural fibres including the cheap jute from their commercial uses. As a result the use of our "golden fibre", jute, in all fields, started shrinking day

Further deterioration of this situation occurred because less attention was being paid to the scientific improvement of jute fibre. On the other hand, the few and very important technological developments, already made so far, in the improvement of this valuable crop, were not also implemented. Yet, surviving under this adverse conditions jute and jute products are still earning about 56% of the total foreign currency of this country without any additional manoeuvre or expenses.

by day.

As such, the country is neither jubilant nor unhappy over this economic role of tute. This economic condition began to rapidly aggravate when thousands of Bangladeshis coming back from the Middle East, due to the Gulf crisis. A great deficiency is observed in the country's foreign exchange deposit. In this situation there is a further addition of the money being smuggled out of this country. The misunderstanding in the aid giving groups. about the use of foreign assistance in Bangladesh, the difficulty in remittance of money

earned by the Bangladeshis abroad and the unexpected poor earnings by jute, in particular, combinedly put the country into on awkward economic position. A systematic analysis of this situation will surely prove and reiterate that the tremendous role of jute in our national economy can

never be overstated. Negligence to this very importance of jute in our economy and entrusting the management of this vital issue of our nation to a group of government employees - who are trained to function as bureaucrats, without having a competent committee comprising patriotic economists. scientists, business experts is apparently the root cause of the present down fall of our jute-based economy. Due to this, not only the economy is at stake but also the country as a whole - with crores of jute farmers, workers and traders - is in great danger and chaos

In the context of the present situation of Bangladesh, it
is an unpardonable crime to
neglect jute. Those who realise the need for improvement of this crop with time,
and have made new technologies to meet the requirement
of the day, deserve respect
from all. In the country, indiscipline, unrest, unemployment
and under-evaluation of real
causes of problems are rampant in all sectors.

Since everything is virtually interlinked with economy, all activities of the nation are, at present, paralysed, existing only in name, I believe, for want of proper funds. There is no way to come out of this stalemate now or even in the future, unless there is the generation or creation or development of a concrete and continuous source of economic flow within the country.

Thus it will not be wise to give less importance to our only yearly renewable and

Muldoon.

Reluctant politician

critics.

Bolger's fiercest backbench

He roundly attacked the

government for what he called

"the destruction of the welfare

state which has been the pride

of New Zealand and the envy of

other countries for just 100

obsession with inflation" and

warned the government was

headed for electoral disaster if

it maintained its present

He also condemned the

abundantly produceable jute —
the "golden fibre" — and the
only main-stay of our country's
economy. Moreover we do not
have anything at present besides this jute that can provide
support to retain and develop
the country's economy. From

all said and mentioned before.

the prime question before ev-

ervone of us is why has jute been pushed to this present unfortunate situation? What are the reasons behind it and how can these be solved or overcome? Surely it is possible to get a solution to these overwhelming and disappointing problems of the jute and jute industry. The downfall in the demand of this important national crop can be linked to the reasons narrated below: 1. Manufacture of jute goods using old, obsolete and outdated machineries: 2. Use of cancer-producing substance like JBO in Jule processing: 3.

processing inspite of repeated request to avoid their uses; 4. Untimely and unscheduled delivery of jute and jute goods to foreign destinations as required; 5. Failure or unwillingness in developing and making new jute goods with international likings, applying advance scientific knowledge made so far.

The jute goods manufac-

tured, using old and outdated

Use of poisonous chemicals

and insecticides in preserving

sizing material for jute goods'

machineries look backdated, and contrast oddly when compared with the similar goods made in Japan and China. Using the finest quality of jute available only in Bangladesh, our jute products become outdated and have little demand in the world. Moreover in foreign countries, every year, new models of machineries are developed, and jute goods manufactured with these machineries are much more attractive. However, light-weight jute

goods cannot be made with these outdated machineries of

The second main reason which makes the foreign buy ers unwilling to accept Bangladeshi jute goods is the use of hydro-carbon based JBO in jute processing. It is well known that this petroleum product creates health problems, or diseases like cancer. Due to this, the developed world has practically banned the use of Bangladeshi jute bags for packing food stuffs like rice, wheat, sugar etc. Inspite of their repeated request to avoid this, we could not stop, till today, the use of this cancer producing and bad-smelling JBO in jute processing, although there is a Bangladesht substitute

Very often undergrade jute fibres are shipped and even the time schedule in shipment is not maintained. So, these buyers abroad never like to purchase Bangladeshi jute from Bangladesh but purchase the same from other countries or places. In Bangladesh, the sizing materials, used in making jute products are tamarind seeds, rotten wheat, rice grains etc. To preserve these sizing materials, the dangerous DDT and many deadly potsonous insecticides are widely used. Ultimately, these hazardous chemicals are detected in jute products in consuming countries, and it makes the buyers unwilling to accept Bangladeshi jute products

Through the 19th and 20th centuries, there has been tremendous scientific progress across the world. Men's endless new thoughts, aims, and ambitions to gain progress and prosperity are the main roots of all these new discoveries and inventions. In the countries where there is no changes, they lag behind and are pushed to deplorable living conditions.

In the field of jute there is also a great demand for new products and the necessity of these changes was first felt when beautiful and attractive products from synthetic substitute of jute began to flood the markets of the world. At this juncture the need for scientific researches for the improvement of this crop was felt. But to meet these new demands the jute industry or the organisations concerned completely failed to respond.

Among these new and pressing demands light weight bio-degradable jute bags was one; so that these can also be used side by side with synthetic bags. But achievement, as needed in jute, could not be made because of poor attention on researches in this field. With this opportunity open light-weight attractive bags of synthetic material, captured the markets and pushed jute to its present deplorable condition.

and this made jute to go the

Yet it is true that there is no problem that cannot be solved through scientific researches, and in fact many problems of jute have already been solved. For example Mihitantu-89, a fine fibre for making light weight jute yarn. invented by the writer of this article, substitute of conven tionally used JBO invented by Mr. Munir Uddin Talukder. high pressure-resistant Australian wool' pack and jute bags by Mr. Taher Bux, and upgrading of low grade jute and jute cuttings by Mr. Shaheed Ahmed, are worth-mentioning here. Implementation of all these or even Mihitantu-89 can create a revolution in the field of jute and jute goods. But it is our misfortune that these inventions are yet to be na tionally evaluated or implemented. It is like seeing the death of a patient, having doc tors and medicines around.

under these circumstances.

what can we expect in the, world market for jute and jute; goods? Economically we are so much linked up with jute but we are reluctant to its needed and available improvements!

From the above, it is hoped that everybody will understand why jute the "golden fibre" of our country has gone to the "Indigo way" and what are also the main reasons leading to this consequence. It is not true that jute is not wanted by the world of today but, in fact, its demand is increased tremendously in the face of nonbiodegradable synthetics. The jute-based economy of our country can be uplifted from the present deplorable condition only through the implementation of new technological improvements and inventions in the field of jute.

Being indifferent to, and keeping aside the real and main elements constituting our economy of the country mere lectures or talks in public gatherings will no longer eut any ice. In the true sense, we are away from the real problems of the country. We can spend a lot of funds in so many sectors but we can not spend only a few crore Taka for the industrial implementation of Mihitantu-89 or such inventions which alone can bring an economic revolution with its immediate recovery.

The people who unknowingly do such mischief to the country's economy in not implementing the technologies, will surely not be forgiven by the nation. Let us come forward to save jute, jute farmers and workers and thereby uplift the damaged and broken economy of the country. Keeping the real problem aside, only systematic moving of files from one table to another will not do any good.

The writer is Director, Technology, Bangladesh Jute Research Institute, Dhaka.

# New Political Force Threatens Bolger

David Robie writes from Auckland

Prime Minister Jim Bolger of New Zealand and his right-wing government, in office for

just over a year, lurch from one problem to another. Bolger has the lowest popularity rating

of any New Zealand leader for 16 years. His National Party lags far behind the opposition

new Alliance thirdparty political force
that has emerged in
New Zealand in response to
the country's harsh economic
and social policies threatens
both Prime Minister Jim
Bolger's beleaguered government and the opposition

Labour Party.

The Green Party, which has enjoyed a remarkable popularity rise in spite of an uncertain leadership and economic strategy, recently signed a declaration to join forces with the mildly left New Labour and Democrat parties, and the Maori nationalist Mana

Motuhake.

Alliance leaders declared they were committed to forming, if elected, a government whose objectives would be the "social, economic and environmental reconstruction" of New Zealand to "enhance and empower the lives" of New Zealanders.

Creation of the movement is seen as blowing fresh air into the bleak national debate. It could even be well-placed to win a parliamentary majority as the economic and social crisis worsens.

The movement has pledged to contest the next general election in 1993 and any parliamentary by-elections—including one coming up for the Auckland seat of Tamaki vacated by the disillusioned former prime minister Robert Muldoon.

Muldoon dominated New Zealand politics for a decade from the mid-Seventies. He bitterly opposes free market policies and has been one of Labour Party and a new political force — the Alliance. The harsh gutting of the nation's welfare system has stirred a backlash leading to the resignation of former premier Robert

policies.

Muldoon believes his resignation will generate a strong swing against the government. His traditionally conservative safe electorate, comprising the affluent Auckland suburb of Remuera with some of the

country's most expensive real

As tension mounts toward the February by-election, the ruling party has included former All Black rugby union captain David Kirk among its prospective candidates.

The opposition Alliance, with only one MP at present — New Labour Party leader Jim Anderton — believes it can mount a strong challenge to the government.

Already it has humiliated former Labour cabinet minister is b Tizard in an election for the Auckland Regional Council, the local body managing an urban area with a quarter of New Zealand's 3.4 million population.

The veteran politician was defeated by author Bruce Jesson, a New Labour activist noted for his opposition to the Queen, his radical publication Republican and his potent analysis of the national political

Jesson is a onetime lawyer and bakery worker. His political analysis had shown him the dangers of New Zealand con-

tinuing a "colonial depen-

dence" on Britain and he

rejected the regal dominion.

His grassroots experience led to a book in 1980 which exposed the "almost incestuous nature" of New Zealand big business and the "oligarchic" nature of the country's major companies.

Portrayed in the news media as a reluctant politician.

Jesson believes success of the Alliance is vital for the future of the country.

"It's not ambition — it's ideas and principles," he explained in one interview. "There has been a total collapse of ideas and principles in New Zealand politics.

"Something is fundamentally flawed in the culture of the two main parties. They're parties of careerists and opportunists. They have rejected principles and they are unperformable."

Within days of Jesson's success, an opinion poll by the respected National Business Review showed a surge of support for the Alliance, putting further pressure on the two major parties. The poll gave Labour 40 per

per cent and the ruling
National Party trailed at 28 per
cent.

The result was especially
damaging for the government

damaging for the government as opinion polls already showed Bolger's personal popularity had slumped to seven per cent — the lowest popularity rating of any New Zealand prime minister since polling began 16 years ago.

lronically, the most popular politician was Winston Peters, recently sacked by Bolger as Maori Affairs Minister because of his condemnation of government economic policies.

The poll also upset Labour. Opposition leader Mike Moore abruptly reshuffled his shadow cabinet and severed the last links with Rogernomics, named after Roger Douglas, the architect of New Zealand's free market policies ushered in by the Labour government of David Lange.

David Caygill, a Douglas disciple, was dumped as shadow minister and replaced by Michael Cullen, known for his welfare and education systems.

Already Cullen has indicated an increase in taxation may be

radical defence of the social

an increase in taxation may be preferred to retain a free health system. At present it would cost only \$10 million to abolish a complicated part charges and "poor card" system introduced by the Bolger government.

But Labour has along way to

go to regain the credibility it once had for its vision of a "caring, sharing society" — an image that now appears to have been captured by the Alliance.

Many people supporting the Alliance do not know clearly what is stands for. Some commentators regard this as not a liability.

"Voters know they do not like what Labour did." noted one newspaper. "They do not like being deceived by the present government. And they want to go back to the good times when most had jobs, health, education and superannuation all came free from the state. And they want it

This is the question that many New Zealanders are now asking: can the Alliance produce the alternative leadership and policies people want within the next two years? Or will the uneasy coalition break up with rifts and conflict over ideas?

The next few months should provide the crucial answers. — GEMINI NEWS

DAVID ROBIE is a New Zealand journalist and author specialising in Pacific and development issues.

## 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.

# Biman: History and pride

Sir, While man loves the present, he thinks of a shining future. Yet he should not forget to endeavour to accept the base, the "past" depending on which the enjoyable present and glorious future may come. An individual may afford to forget the past. But collectively we cannot afford to do so.

Mr. Habibur Rahman, Additional Secretary-in-charge of the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, in a BTV programme mentioned that Biman had gradually developed. It is a fact. But was it not necessary to elaborate a bit of more about that slow development?

The Managing Director, Biman, says, "Biman is maintaining the air communication on international routes with three DC-3s" and expressed

the hope to expand the fleet of aircraft. It is certainly a good news. Every Bangladeshi loves to see that the national flag carrier connects more countries of the world. But it is rather painful that the M.D. only commenced and concluded with DC-3 and did not touch a single word about the historic Dacota, with which the maiden flight of Biman took place.

The State Minister for Civil

The State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism mentioned that it is better to look ahead rather than look back to the past. Apart from his present ministership he also served Biman in two very important positions. After the amount of all out co-operation made by the builders of Biman to him, there is hardly any chance for him of not knowing the history of Biman. On the eve of the occasion Biman's

20th founding anniversary, his lack of feelings as an administrator and minister is unexpected and sad.

On January 4th, 1992 the National Assembly adopted obituary references on 11 noted personalities. The house also observed one minute silence as a mark of respect to the departed souls. The same day the Biman celebrated its 20th founding anniversary. But there not a single word mentioned about the Biman martyrs/ Biman Freedom Fighter martyrs. We do not know why this disrespect.

Those who contributed in establishing this airline, not all of them have died or retired from Biman. Other than depriving these people from participation in such T.V. programme, if a couple of them were allowed to discuss the Biman history, they would have been able to project it in all required dimensions and directions. In particular, the young generation in the Biman and the nation in general could have a chance to know the historical facts like the placing of

the old Dacota plane by

General Osmani at the disposal

of the Biman authority, and

painting the aircraft in Biman colour overnight, and honouring it with the national flag. They could come to know how Biman started its modest way but its confident journey. They could have a change to know the name of first pilot of the first flight of Biman — Shahid

Captain Khaleq.

The Biman may raise the excuse of not being allotted sufficient time by the BTV authority. That is not acceptable argument. Even then, had there been a total of 5 minutes for Biman, that could appropriately be utilized distributing  $1\frac{1}{2}$  minutes to serving contributors,  $1\frac{1}{2}$  minutes to retired Biman personnel and so on.

In the greater interest of Biman, and the nation, the joint effort of the government and Biman should ensure that the nationalist spirit is not lost from the pages of the history.

It has been observed, often exposition of irresponsible acts causes irreparable harm to the government. We all should make sure to refrain from causing such situations for the people's government.

SA Hussain Bara Moghbazar, Dhaka.

#### Foreigner as party chief

Sir, A motion was reportedly taken in the Jatiya Sangsad in the current sitting of the Assembly on election of Prof. Golam Azam as Ameer of

Jamaat-e-Islam party.

Prof. Golam Azam is not a citizen of Bangladesh. Constitutionally, a party itself can be declared disqualified and banned if its executive body comprises of non-Bangladeshi(s).

M S Haque Naya Paltan, Dhaka.

#### BTV and traffic

Sir, Lately the Bangladesh Television has strengthen their reporting system. We are now more regularly find TV reports on various socio-developmental issues. Recently a TV report was telecast on our existing traffic scenario. It seemed from the audio-visual presentation that our people careless for their lives and properties, at least while on the street: on traffic sergeant was seen discharging his duties with great difficulty. He said that the number of traffic sergeants/police is too meagre to cope with the increased traffic load.

We would strongly suggest that the government increase the number of traffic personnel and intensify publicity on traffic rules and regulations, safety measures etc through electronic media.

M Zahidul Haque Assistant Professor,Bangladesh Agricultural College Dhaka.

# Of lorries and newspapers

Sir, The lorries on Mirpur Road move at ferocious speed almost crushing rickshaws, pedestrians or whatever come in their way. Their bulk and proper liaison at right place perhaps put them above law. By now its an old story to many who know.

This came to my mind Monday morning when I received, free of cost, three copies of a newspaper newly published, within a span of only 2 hours, also at a speed of such trucks (!) isn't it? However, a newer concept, not old as those trucks, but does it have the ferocity too? May be not, what do you say?

A reader