

A Signal from Washington

Washington has given a new signal to New Delhi of its growing interest in reshaping the Indo-US relationship and in placing it on a strong and mutually-beneficial footing. It is the decision of the Bush Administration to transfer Thomas Pickering, currently the US permanent representative to the United Nations, a job he has performed with great skill, to New Delhi as the country's new ambassador. The Indian assignment has always been a challenging one for successive US envoys. It is more so now when the two sides appear determined to make the best of the post-cold war era in their relations, in line with the evolving power equations in the region and outside.

True, Mr Pickering's move from the UN to India may well have other implications and, in some quarters, be somewhat controversial. It is said that at a time when the world body has a new Secretary General, Mr Boutros Boutros Ghali who is still in the process of gaining experience, the continued presence of Ambassador Pickering, beyond his just completed three-year term, would have been good for all concerned, especially in his dealings with the UN Chief. There are also talks of personal differences between Mr Pickering and some high officials of the State Department, who wanted the envoy out of the high profile position at the UN.

It is still early to speculate on the changes which will take place in Indo-US relations, with Ambassador Pickering playing a key role in the process. However, certain things are clear enough for all concerned. With the break-up of the Soviet Union and Moscow losing its central authority in foreign relations, New Delhi must work towards modifications in its relationship, both political and economic, with its former staunch ally. These modifications need not be negative, but there will be scopes for adjustments, especially in India's relations with the United States. Again, the new diplomatic and economic offensive launched by Pakistan to develop its ties with the Muslim republics of the former Soviet Union as well as with Afghanistan cannot but cause some concern to New Delhi.

Here, the area of mutual interest between India and the US is wide and far-reaching, but New Delhi probably needs the support of Washington a great deal more than what is perceived from outside. The new policy of privatisation so vigorously pursued by the Indian Finance Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh is undoubtedly most popular in Washington, but India cannot do without the strong support from US in getting increased aid and loans she has asked for from the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The fate of the minority government of Narasimha Rao depends on how fast New Delhi can tackle the problems on the economic front, especially the mounting deficit in the balance of payment.

In immediate terms, New Delhi's political interest lies in ensuring the continued US support for India's policy on Kashmir and Washington's strong suspicion of the nuclear ambitions of Pakistan. In the longer run, New Delhi would also like to have Washington's vocal support for obtaining a permanent seat, with the power of veto, at the UN Security Council, along with Brazil and Nigeria among the Third World countries, a proposal that is being openly talked about in international circles.

What India can offer the United States in return remains to be seen. One hopes that the process would be of benefit not just to the two countries concerned but also to the whole region of South Asia.

Tourism and SAARC

Another Tourism Week is underway with, not surprisingly, Cox's Bazar being the focus of all attention and effort. This sort of "weeks" is now a regular occurrence in Bangladesh, although it is doubtful if any competent authority could produce a well-researched study or survey to show the precise impact of such events, whether it is a Traffic Week, or a Literacy Week or this Tourism Week.

The thing that is undeniable is Bangladesh's potential as a tourist spot. The attraction lies not only in coastal areas but also inland places of such historical interest as Paharpur or romantic spots like the Sunderbans or Sylhet. Despite that, we have not only failed to attract foreign tourists in any meaningful numbers to this country, we have also failed to generate any tourism awareness, let alone enthusiasm among our own people. The Parjatan Corporation's (BPC) own statistics show that between Nov '90 and Nov '91, just over 1,000 foreign tourists stayed at the BPC's three motels in Cox's Bazar, while the figure for local guests was around 14,000 only.

With our level of economic and infrastructural (non) development, it is obviously proving mighty difficult to attract tourists to this country. However, since we are in the business of fostering closer ties with neighbouring states within the framework of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), why not utilise that to develop our tourist industry? The Parjatan Corporation could, with help from the foreign ministry, take the initiative to organise package tours of SAARC countries, with trippers being taken, in groups, to three, four or all seven SAARC states in a two, four or six weeks holidays. Naturally, people, particularly Westerners, may be more interested in places like India or Nepal than Bangladesh, but that is not the whole point. The SAARC Package Tour would attract people who would probably not have thought of Bangladesh as a place to visit. This way, not only would the idea of regional cooperation be furthered, Bangladesh would also give itself a great opportunity to present its true face to a good number of people who might have known nothing about Bangladesh other than cyclones, floods and famines. In addition, this would encourage the local private sector to invest more money in the industry and help develop a local tourist culture.

CANONIZATION was the privilege of the Roman Church. Outside the Church, nobody had the authority to proclaim any body a saint. Even so, the number of saints could be counted in hundreds.

It is both a gain and a loss that we do not have a Church in the Western sense. What we have instead is public opinion, an amorphous thing, in a country and at a time when literally hundreds have died on our streets as victims of police firing, and when hundreds have died in detention, and all for a political cause, there is no dearth of martyrs. Our word for martyr is shaheed, and though both the words have their religious connotation the extended sense takes care of secular causes. No questions are raised when casual victims of indiscriminate firing are glorified with the name of a shaheed.

Questions can be asked and can also be answered. In that very moving poem, Easter 1916, W B Yeats was apparently arguing with himself, and coming to grips with the fact that the very people he had known personally, ordinary, nothing notable about them, and one of them a drunken, vainglorious lout, had changed, through death, into something entirely different. Each has resigned his part in the casual comedy. And each one of these common people is now transformed utterly/ A terrible beauty is born.

Of Martyrs and Martyrdom

The transformation of Yeats' MacDonagh and MacBride and Conolly and Pearse reminds me of our own Barakat and Salam and Rafiq and the rest of them. There is an unbroken chain since their days to the present.

Nowhere in the poem the word martyr is used. Poetry can do without these clichés. But the process Yeats was describing, rather suggesting, is the same when we find referring to the dead — I mean those who died through various instruments and means at the disposal of the government — as martyrs. It is the circumstances leading to the death that dignifies it. It is the circumstances that create the motive and the impulse. And the motive and the impulse have something mysterious about them which puzzles the poet, for otherwise he, in his clear senses, cannot see these common people in the light he now sees them.

The transformation of Yeats' MacDonagh and MacBride and Conolly and Pearse reminds me of our own Barakat and Salam and Rafiq and the rest of them. There is an unbroken chain since their days to the present. The question whether this or that death meets the requirements of martyrdom seems a trite, irrelevant. The question whether this or that fellow had a heroic heart or a coward's soul is quite inappo-

site. At that particular moment when the bullet pierced through the body, nobody was a coward. And death transformed them utterly, a terrible beauty was born.

Yeats, as we know, refused to write war poems during the First World War. He saw only

paint and brush. And music, if it is created by a Beethoven or a Mozart, would be a far better medium than poetry can ever be.

As we turn our eyes to the scene at home, the very number of the dead will stagger us. The majority of the dead are

this rule. After the Language Movement martyrs, came the turn of Asad, Sergeant Zahurul Haq, and almost immediately after this, of Dr Shamsuzzoha. If deliberate heroism is the criterion for a person to be regarded a martyr for his death, then Dr Shamsuzzoha's name could well be the first. The nearest contender would be Noor Hossain. In the sheer spirit of defiance these two, so different from each other in almost every thing, come close to each other. If there is a life after death, and if the martyrs are honoured in heaven, I can imagine Shamsuzzoha giving an affectionate pat and a hug to the young man the way he would a young sportsman under his tutelage making a fine drive through the fences.

Zoha, our beloved Zoha, was a very special person to all those who knew him. I am glad that the day of his heroic death is still very much alive, not only at Rajshahi but also here in Dhaka. February 18 was duly celebrated at the University of Dhaka, and by the Rajshahi University alumni living here. The newspaper report was re-

assuring, because I had an apprehension that the memory was going to be washed out at a time when so many recent deaths claimed attention. No, it was not. Zoha had his tribute of love and affection in atleast a couple of memorial meetings.

At the University of Rajshahi, there was an elaborate programme starting with 'Prabhat Pherry' at dawn and merging into the memorial meeting at which I had the honour of being the guest speaker for this year. This is the third of its kind. My speech, like the speeches of my two predecessors, Dr Q A Latif and Dr Al Mootti Sharfuddin, was on a topic of my own choice. But before one entered into the theme, a preliminary reference to the man whose name the lecture bore was inevitable. For me especially, because I had known Zoha since his earliest school days at Bankura when we were both students at the Zila School. I had just begun and then the unexpected thing happened. My voice was choked and I could hardly proceed. I saw consternation in the faces of the audience. I took a full minute to recover and the audience heaved a sigh of relief.

There are literally scores and scores like me who would find their voices falling thin in a similar situation. For them the question who is a martyr, what is martyrdom is no question at all. They have simply to remember their beloved Zoha.

PASSING CLOUDS
Zillur Rahman Siddiqui

passive suffering in modern warfare, and that was far from heroic, and therefore no theme for poetry. There can be argument on this view of war and deaths resulting from war. But I suppose Yeats was right, in a sense. A modern war is too massive and impersonal an affair for a poet to be moved to write hymns or elegies. These are inspired by particular feelings. A mindless massacre, or a holocaust of the dimension of the Hiroshima can raise a sense of horror and smother our feelings but not all poets will respond to the pity and fear of a Hiroshima. Words will fail, but a Picasso of the La Guernica could try with his

nameless. Who will care to know the individual identity, for example, of the few score persons killed by police firing in which the present Leader of the Opposition narrowly escaped, and that, too, through the heroic action of those who had formed a human wall around her? That killing in Chittagong had sent a wave of horror through the nation, and one still shudders at the thought of how the massacre was planned and executed. It was a Jallianwalabagh on a smaller scale, and as in the case of Jallianwalabagh, the incident is remembered, not the individuals.

But there are exceptions to

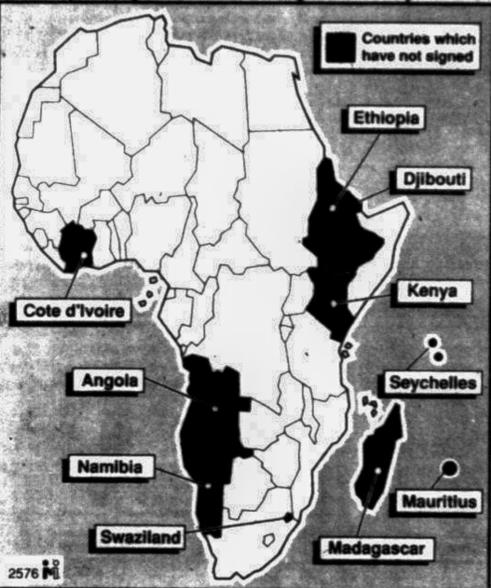
The Ears, Eyes and Consciences of a Continent

Rosemary Long writes from Banjul

For years President Sir Dawda Jawara of The Gambia has been a champion of human rights. In the Commonwealth he has been pushing for the setting up of machinery to improve the record globally. In his own continent he has set up a centre to monitor democracy and human rights. Gemini News Service has talked to its director.

Africa: human rights

Forty countries have signed 1961 African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. Lesotho has signed but not yet ratified



He says: "I am optimistic. There have been turbulent changes in Africa in the last five years or so. The Anglophone countries have tended to be in the forefront of democratic movement.

The Francophone countries lagged behind, apparently because the French had tended to leave them a more secure power base for regimes without respect for the democratic rights of the ordinary people. Now change is happening fast and the call for multiparty rule is heard everywhere.

It would be a mistake, he agrees, to imagine that multipartyism would be the solution to all problems, a guarantee of

peace, freedom and prosperity. He concedes that even The Gambia, which has been a parliamentary democracy since it became independent in 1965, has a high level of corruption in every level of bureaucracy.

Many Gambians fear that the death of Mamadou Jarju is a dramatic pointer to what many are routine, unpublished irregularities in the manner in which the police deal with suspects.

Nevertheless, Gambian President Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara has consistently supported the work of the Centre, of which he is the patron.

More input from other African states, both financial and intellectual, is urgently

needed. The Centre's legal framework was established in 1989 and the nuts and bolts of equipping, staffing and fund-raising were launched in 1990.

Funding and other practical support have come from the United Nations Centre for Human Rights, from Canada, the US, Britain, Norway, Denmark and Sweden. "We would like to have at least token financial contributions from African governments," said Sock.

He smiles wryly: "Right now, communicating with the heads of government is rather awkward. You never know if the leader you write to will still be in power by the time the letter arrives."

The staff of the Centre are principally Gambian, with one Briton, one Irishman and one American girl as part of the team. But four programme off-

icers are now being hired from the different sub-regions of Africa.

Says Sock: "This Centre was created to cater for the whole of Africa." Last May, for example, it hosted a training course for senior magistrates from Benin, Togo, Cameroon, Guinea and Gabon, dealing with such topics as torture and the independence of the judiciary. Other courses are held for activists and academics, and for senior police officers.

Even more important than teaching and training is the work of research and documentation. A computer data base and the library is available to students for research. A list of hundreds of published tracts on human rights abuses, by such organisations as Amnesty International and Africa Watch is on file, including books, reports, journals and new-

sheets from African non-governmental organisations.

The collection is always being expanded and the Centre is anxious for any documents on the promotion and protection of human rights which it may add to its library.

"We don't receive complaints," says Sock. "If someone comes to us with a story of some abuse of his rights, we would direct him to the African Commission, situated upstairs in this building. But we observe, document and publish."

"These are interesting times. The people of many African countries are only now achieving the basic right to run their own countries. They have to learn that everyone must participate."

Each step of enlightened progress or brutal repression will be monitored by this small, industrious team in The Gambia. They are the eyes, ears and consciences of a continent.

— GEMINI NEWS
ROSEMARY LONG is a former award-winning Scottish journalist, now living in The Gambia with her African husband.

OPINION

Tutorials and Kindergartens — Specialised Education?

Tasneem Mosaddeq

With the aim of diminishing the percentage of illiteracy in the country, various mass literacy drives have been launched. As such maximum attention is given and effort made to motivate the rural population into enrolling in the literacy programmes. In the process, urban schooling has suffered. The ratio of government primary and secondary schools with respect to the urban population has widened over the years. Previously, other private schools, especially those run by the church had shared the government's responsibility of educating the urban children. But with the present rate of population growth in the metropolis these schools can no longer cope with the demand. And so, salvation has arrived in the form of kindergartens and tutorials mushrooming all over the city.

Parents are relieved as these new schools offer more choice and ease the pressure on admission queues. And because of very high demands, the tutorial business has flourished with infallible returns—encouraging just about anyone and everyone with money and time to open at the least a kindergarten.

Housing these institutions is not a problem, residences are rented for this purpose. Drawing-cum-dining halls are partitioned with hardboards and converted into two or three classrooms. The space-conscious owners of the tutorials judiciously turn even a tiny dressing room into classroom. On an average, forty pupils are crammed in a 10 feet by 12 feet classroom. Children sitting in the first row are merely two feet away from the blackboard. And in between the teacher positions herself communicating with the students from her fixed spot as it is quite impossible to move through the rows without stepping on tiny feet. Some teachers prefer this close proximity with the pupils, as they can keep an eye on the back benchers as well. And parents are elated because each individual child gets personal attention!

Hardboard walls obstruct light but not sound. So, the teachers trying to be heard over the din of adjacent classes embark on a high pitched voice-raising contest. And it is very likely that the children utterly confused by the medley of instructions emanating from all directions follow the one that takes their fancy. So, at the end of the year it is not unlikely for a child to forget his own lessons and memorise the rhymes followed in the next class. For playground there is the lawn in front of the house or tutorial. Children can only wait there to be collected after school, the lawns are not big enough for everyone to play. In some tutorials children are deprived even from that much facility. So, they spend their tiffin hour in the nearby park, if there is any.

The credibility of these tutorials and kindergartens lie in their being strictly English medium. Fluency in spoken English becomes the basic pre-requisite for teachers in these schools, then comes smartness and lastly, academic qualification—which is more or less relaxed depending upon the presentability of the candidate. It is evident from the preposterously high school fees that these schools are for the children of the affluent and the nouveau riche, who seem to be perpetually suffering from "exclusive" syndrome. Everything they do, use and buy has the tag of exclusivity attached to it. And schooling is no exception. The higher the fees the more exclusive the institution. To justify the exorbitant fees, almost all the tutorials claim adopting modern and scientific method of teaching hitherto practised in the USA or Europe. The phrase most commonly in circulation these days, amongst the parents, students and the teachers is "Audio-Visual System" of education. Surprisingly, neither the parents nor some of the instructors could clearly describe this method. A friend, however, came up with a plau-

sible answer. In an age of logical explanations what can be a more compact and appropriate description of a teacher—she/he is visible, audible and can attend each student individually—there you have the audio-visual system a nutshell.

These schools have gradually become a symbol of status for the rising elite of our society. So, a frenzied race is on to get the children admitted at the "best" (expensive) tutorial. Recently, an acquaintance rushed from the clinic to a kindergarten to book seat for the new born baby. This incident which is fast becoming a practice, preferred by some tutorials, eclipses even the ostentatious procedures of the class conscious British private schools. One wonders what next? Well, seats would probably be booked as soon as the child is conceived or is only in the planning stage.

Tutorials and kindergartens have undeniably contributed in overcoming the crises of schooling in the city to a great extent. It is now time for certain standardisation. Most of these schools set their own curriculum, that prepare the students for higher education abroad. Hence emphasis is put on English. Children are taught more about other people, country and races. It widens their horizon no doubt. But on the other hand it limits their knowledge and interest in their own people. Parents as well as these schools should make concerted efforts to teach the children about their own culture, heritage and country. Right from the formative years they should be made aware of their true identity and to take pride in it. Moreover, classroom education does not suffice for a child's mental and physical development. Healthy interaction in the playground is necessary for character building. And care should also be taken to provide the essential amenities, such as proper lighting, adequate ventilation and more space. Instructing in English and burdening with books and homework does not necessarily ensure good education!

To the Editor...

Whither consensus?

Sir, Perhaps, there cannot be two opinions about the reality of the "scenario of a national crisis" that you have so dexterously drawn up in your column "At Home & Abroad" (17.2.92). Your plea for consensus for resolving "divisive national issues" has been very timely and your friendly warning as well that "short-sighted partisan policies" of the two leading political parties may further worsen the situation, turning it to be what you have so aptly described as "a national disaster!"

While taking to Mr. Mahfuz Ullah of your esteemed daily (14.2.92) the Speaker of the national Parliament, Shaikh Razzaque Ali also echoed similar feelings about the need for consensus politics without which democracy in our country will always be open to threats. But I personally feel that harping on such a touchy and thorny issue would be tantamount to indirect disrespect to the wisdom of our people and their power which they have repeatedly exhibited in times of need.

leading political parties have hardly spelled out their socio-economic programmes except repeating some old slogans, not to speak of pin-pointing the 'real fundamental issues' which are casually hinted at by many politicians without any attempt to explain in details.

Now, if the proposed "Forum of like-minded politicians" sees the light of the day, and if you lavish your valuable space to the forum leaders to boldly speak up national issues, as you did on many occasions in the past, then it is expected that some day someone will certainly bring the 'home-truths' to the politicians, bureaucrats and other professional groups so that the cat may be belled in their bid to solve the so-called 'fundamental issues' for good and to the utter satisfaction of the nation!

Abdul Kader
Purana Pallant, Dhaka.

Poverty

Sir, It is well-known that poverty is the crushing problem of Bangladesh. In order to get rid of this curse Bangladesh Nationalist Development Council (BNDC) has planned to

organise a series of seminars under a permanent heading "Bangladesh — her problems and solutions." The first seminar took place on January 4, 1992; and focus of the seminar was on creation of a national independent Think Tank and use of technology for national development. Now BNDC intends to give emphasis on "management of national affairs."

We, therefore, wish to avail of the generosity of your column to invite the patriotic scholars and experts who are willing to take part (without any cost) in such a seminar to help the 'poorest country of the world' in getting rid of this curse and help the teeming millions to get a taste of pleasurable living as human beings in this world. All information can be had from the undersigned at the stated address.

We also wish to express our gratefulness in advance to those willing writers, scholars, experts and citizens for their anticipated co-operation in such a noble cause.

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