

Dhaka, Monday, March 9, 1992

Security Council Must Act Immediately

We welcome the move by the government to take the Burmese refugee issue to the United Nations Security Council. Bangladesh should leave no stone unturned to impress upon the Council as to the gravity of the situation and to ensure that its deliberations are held at the earliest. The situation is becoming grim with every passing day, with more and more refugees crossing the border. All attempts to talk with the Myanmar authorities have so far failed and the indication appears to be clear that they have absolutely no intention of stopping their oppression on the Rohingyas — at least not at the moment. The international community will therefore have to act in a concerted manner to stop their political, social and religious persecution.

The UN Security Council must impress upon the Myanmar authorities that what they are doing to their minorities cannot be allowed to continue. Not only the issue is one of justice, of human rights, it is also a question of security for Bangladesh and by extension, for the region itself. The massive mobilization of Myanmar troops across the border cannot be taken lightly by Bangladesh. The international community must also see the security threat that is implied by this huge concentration of forces.

We urge the Security Council to bring maximum pressure upon the Myanmar authorities to settle the problem through discussions. Failing which the Council must consider the possibilities of mandatory actions which it has taken on similar situations in the recent past. The options of imposing arms embargo could be a possibility that should be seriously considered. It is now more than evident that the arms that the regime is procuring is mostly for the purpose of oppressing their own minority.

Information filtering out of Myanmar indicate that the army junta may have embarked upon an all out offensive against all minority groups. Instead of any early solution to the problem, we could just as easily see a massive escalation of it. Under the circumstances, it is quite possible that of the 3 million Muslim population in the Arakan region, a large number may be forced to flee their homes and become refugees, swelling their number on this side of the border. Such a burden will be totally beyond the capacity of Bangladesh to bear. All these considerations must figure into the deliberations of the Council and a solution be found which is just, democratic, swift and, above all, peaceful.

In this time of trial we expect China, which maintains a very close link with Myanmar including giving it vital military assistance, to use its good offices to bring the latter to the negotiating table. Given the close and friendly relations that exists between our two countries, we naturally expect a positive role from China in this regard. It cannot shy away from exerting a sobering influence on Myanmar, which, we believe it can. Given the near total isolation of the Myanmar regime, a gentle nudge from their northern ally may work wonder.

The Security Council and the international community must be aware that the real solution to the Myanmar problem lies in the democratisation of the country. Towards that end, all the democratic forces must join hands and totally isolate this illegitimate military junta that now clings to power only through oppression.

Welcome to a Writer

The emergence of former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev as a writer, newspaper columnist and the head of a research foundation provides just another sign as to how much has changed in a country where a deposed leader, more often a dictator than an elected head of state, once rarely faced such a colourful future. If we welcome the change in the former Soviet Union, as indeed we do, we also extend our greetings to the 'new' Gorbachev as the newest and a somewhat unlikely member of the journalist fraternity.

As a journalist, the former Soviet leader has much to tell the world about the collapse of the system he tried his best to save and to offer his own reasons as to how and why he failed. Like any politician who has fallen from power, Mr Gorbachev will probably defend all his actions, blame his adversaries (we can guess who they are) and finally declare his total lack of interest in returning to power. He is, therefore, fully qualified to join that well-known international club of former national leaders, such as Willie Brandt, Edward Heath and Julius Nyerere, that meets once in a while to discuss what's wrong with the world. So far the club has got little publicity in the world press. The admission of the Russian leader who has not lost his knack of gaining the global attention would make a lot of difference to this little-known association of former politicians.

Yet, one wonders, can we write off Mikhail Gorbachev as a politician? True, on balance, all his reforms, especially on the economic front, failed in their end results. True, some of his ill-defined political ideas also failed to get off the ground, either in saving the union or in preventing a coup by hardliners. But does Boris Yeltsin provide the right alternative to Gorbachev? If Russians cannot be blamed for pondering this question, the former Soviet leader-turned-journalist could well be asking himself the same one. Much depends on how Mr Gorbachev answers this question. One only hopes that the strife-torn country, or whatever is left of it, is spared of any power struggle of the kind that had marred the Soviet history for over half a century. Let Gorbachev continue as a newspaperman, with his column syndicated to all different newspapers, including this one, instead of just the affluent ones in the United States and Germany, while Yeltsin runs the show, badly or otherwise, in Moscow.

My response to Ramadan, as it slowly and steadily comes to us, is a mixed one. Its demands are sharp and unequivocal. I am not one of those who are thrilled at the thought of responding to those demands. Not that I do not see the point of those do's and don'ts; not that I grudge the rewards of discipline but I find the rigours of month-long fasting and the demands of an otherwise active life somewhat incompatible with each other. Most active people find it so and they do their best to strike a balance between the temporal and the spiritual. There are variations in the balance, depending on individual will and ability. I have known men who have never lapsed in offering their prayers but who have not fasted and also men who have not missed one day of fasting but who have not prayed. Between the two extremes are the people who have found their own individual balance.

The observance of fasting and the sanctity of Ramadan should be left to the good sense of adult men and women. It would be extremely unwise to bring these within the scope of governmental decrees because that way lies tyranny. People who are not fasting — and reasons may be many and most of them quite valid ones — must have their access to food. Keeping eating houses closed and thereby denying some people their right to allay their hunger and thirst, without in any way hurting the feelings of fasting men, appears to me a gross violation of human rights. The intention behind such decrees is unclear. The credit of intro-

ducing this ban goes to the past regime. The regime was keen to cover its fundamental lapses and aberrations by over-doing its religiosity. The present government loses no opportunity to castigate the nine years' misrule of Ershad, and now, strangely enough, by continuing a practice introduced by the same man, famous for his pretensions and hypocrisies, has palpably put political expediency above political, ethical and moral correctness.

I find myself in agreement with those who have publicly opposed the government order because the motive is far from religious. In a democratic society, public sanctity should be the concern of the public. Anything done to educate the public through all available means of instruction and guidance would be in order. Ramadan has its own injunctions. To cap it with more restrictions and prohibitions, making a direct inroad into a citizen's civic rights and denying hundreds of honest wage-earners their legitimate wages, is a sad show of political exhibitionism, unbecoming of a democratically elected government.

I regard the present government as a fruit of a long struggle for democracy and human dignity. People have placed their trust in the present government. It is a sheer irony that the government have not responded by showing the same trust in the sanity and good sense of the people.

On Fasting and Feasting

in their ability to protect and preserve the sanctity of Ramadan. With such a poor opinion of people's sanity, no government can claim to be the guardian of democracy.

Out of deference to Ramadan's claims on believing and practising Muslims, public functions, social celebrations are usually kept suspended during the month. No governmental decrees are needed for this. People have their own understanding to guide them. Even weddings, unless there are extreme compulsions to do

personal connection with either institution, I think I qualified because they saw me as a teacher, and simply as a teacher. If they thought that I also had profound truths to utter on education, both learning and teaching included, they must have exaggerated my capacity.

The format of the celebrations had many points of coincidence, — honouring the distinguished old students, a general invitation to all alumni to come, to register themselves on payment of certain fees, a

to speak came after what appeared to me an interminable session of reminiscing. One of my many failings is that, in my usual role as virtually the last speaker, the longer the session continues, the weaker becomes my ability or my inclination to speak. For no fault of mine, I am often reduced to this role. I have often been astounded by the audience's and especially the organisers' appetite for a lengthy oration from the chief guest, at the end of a long session, when brevity should have been accepted as the soul of wit. At Mohanganj, when I ended my thirty minutes of talking — for I am not capable of doing more than talking — and it was past two-thirty pm when I stopped, my good friend assured me that I might have continued for longer. The audience, according to him was ready, but I was not.

Brevity, I am sorry to reflect, has never been much appreciated. Like our traditional marriage negotiations (a wedding is a matter of million words, goes the saying) our meetings and our discussion meetings go on interminably. Our folk drama consumes the better part of a winter night, and nobody is an orator here unless he can harangue for a couple of hours. It is the sound of words that matters, not the content of a speech.

Both Mohanganj Pilot Sarkari Uchcha Bidyalaya and Naldanga Bhusan Pilot Madhyamik Bidyalaya were pri-

ate schools and both have by stages been raised to the status of Pilot Schools (Mohanganj has since been raised to a government school). This is the highest that a private, a non-government school, can aspire to be. The next step is to be transformed into a government school, which, according to popular perception, is a consummation devoutly to be wished. But I thought otherwise, and I said so, at both the places. I must have sounded a discordant note for I know that most people are convinced that nothing could be better than to become a government school.

With my personal experience of three government schools, I too should have thought so. But the predicament of the governmentalised colleges have forced other thoughts on me. The better ones, the reputed private colleges of British days, once they were forced into this alluring tie and were levelled into the dubious stature of government colleges, in the process gained but little and lost much. I am not an advocate of governmentalisation, which means little more than red-tape and apathy to me and I am not sure if the message was well received or not.

If you do not see my point, please make a trip to Rangpur, and visit the Carmichael College. The impressive structure, the beautiful original college building is what the founders had built. Next to it the structure which will impress you by its sheer ugliness, as if built to ridicule the original, is what the college got from the government soon after it was adopted by the government.

PASSING CLOUDS

Zillur Rahman Siddiqui

otherwise, are either advanced in date or postponed, with this consideration in mind.

But for Ramadan, social and cultural activities would have continued right through the mid days of March. This year, one saw a flurry of such activities between February twenty-one and the advent of Ramadan. The major part of February is dedicated to EKUSHEY celebrations. The fortnight preceding Ramadan was particularly hectic, culturally and institutionally speaking. During this interval, I had to respond to the invitation of two institutions. The invitation came from two schools, one celebrating its diamond jubilee and the other one hundred and ten years of its birth. I felt flattered to be so chosen to be a party to their celebrations in spite of the fact that I had no

session of speeches mostly in the form of 'what I remember in my days in the school, cultural evenings — recitations, songs, music, staging of plays —, and last but not the least, a feast, a bara khana. In both the places, Mohanganj in the district of Netrokona, and Kaliganj, in the district of Jhaidah, I found the biggest problem was the management of the feast. Both the schools have a small town setting, where hearts are warm but food tends to get cold, between the motion and the act. At one place something close to a food riot was avoided with great difficulty, and at another place, packet lunches and quick delivery ruled out a riot but produced no visible signs of joy which good food normally does.

At both the places my turn

Girl Guiding — Development through Participation

by Siddiqa Taufiq Khan

It gives one immense pleasure to write about a movement and its programme which is proud of its 80 years of existence. Those familiar with the programme know that its activities help develop girls into all-round individuals and useful persons in a changing society. It is well known that the Guide Programme provides the girls opportunities for self-training in development of character, responsible citizenship and desire to serve the community through direct participation.

World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) is deeply involved in development. Its members contribute internationally to nation building and community development projects like literacy, health, rehabilitation of the displaced and the disabled, nutrition, skill development and relief activities during natural calamities.

The basic philosophy of the movement being the training of its members to learn about themselves, to use their potentialities to the fullest and improve own skills i.e. personal development — all through participation or learning by doing.

The nucleus of Girl Guide/Girl Scout educational method is the self governing system, where every member has the opportunity to participate in decision making. It is the only organization which provides opportunities to its members from the early age level to share responsibilities in life. This helps them grow and develop into persons interested and involved in planning all these activities.

Girl Guiding, as we know, is meant for the girls falling between the age range of six to 24 years. But 24 is not the culminating year. The membership is life-long. Once enrolled they continue to be members and also adult leaders in course of time. So all the programmes are stretched out to keep provision for catering to the personal and social needs of the members as and when they enter into practical life.

It is true that Guiding is for girls. But these girls grow into women, become mothers and housewives. That is why all the

Of late, role of women in the society has been a much discussed subject at seminars and meetings, in newspaper columns and television programmes. Although their active, envisaged participation in broad-spectrum activities depends more on how much freedom they enjoy in our male-dominated society, but there has hopefully been a modest beginning. In that Girl Guides are playing a significant part. Following the observance of the joint birthday of Lord Baden Powell, the founder of Scout Movement and Olav Baden Powell, the World Chief Guide, on February 22, and the International Women's Day on March 8, an attempt is made to project the efforts of Bangladesh Girl Guides Association — its members — girls and women.

trainings equip its members with knowledge and skills needed to run a happy home and enable them to rear up a generation of happy, healthy and worthy citizens.

From 1910 to 1991 much has been achieved though "Guiding for Girls". But there is still a lot to be done. In 1975, when the UN declared the commencement of the decade for women, they became a new focus for development projects. Though even after more than a decade, in no country women attained equality with men, yet development of women and their potential has been recognised as basic to any developed society. Without their participation no country or nation can think of sound progress and prosperity.

Guides do not engage in debate — who is better man or woman. They believe in the identity of female force and provide and utilize opportunities for advancement of women's potential not only for their self-development but for national progress. It is the guide programme in different form that encompass nation building activities, community development projects, health education, child care, vocational training leading to self-employment and, in some cases, helping to career-selection, which aims at development through actual participation.

It is these guides, the programme planners believe, who can help change attitude of members of the society and create certain awareness about needed change in prevailing social conditions and customs. They can not only help bring change but help preservation of cultural heritage and age old moral values and bring back security of family life so much needed for the present day youth.

Against this backdrop,

Bangladesh Girl Guides Association chalks out programme of their Guide activities.

People in this region are poor and are deprived of any gift of nature. But this situation can be ideal for rendering humanitarian service by our Guides. They do it, sometimes in partnership with other organizations. They share experiences and information and extend that to those who need. And as said before these Girl Guides of to-day will grow into

women — they will play different roles at home, at work places and as educators and health care personnel. The National Organization plans trainings catering to all these requirements. Some of the areas as described below equip our Guides with the knowledge needed for participation in the developmental process.

Literacy— Believing that ignorance is curse and education raises consciousness about improvement of prevailing con-

ditions, our girls take part in adult literacy programmes and education of school dropouts or children who have to earn their own living and are available only for part of the day. Guides at school try to teach the school's lowpaid employees and their children in their off time, free of cost. Guides learn to prepare easy and cheap reading materials to supplement literacy campaign. The collect old and used books for distribution among the needy. The Guide Units help by paying school tuition fee of some students. Sometimes the Units try to provide school uniforms too.

Nutrition — Malnutrition and ignorance regarding proper food for growing children are among the prime causes of ill health and high mortality rate of poor nations. Sufficient knowledge about food value and nutrition is given to the Girl Guides who try to pass on this knowledge to slum dwellers or villagers so that they can derive the maximum value out of their accessible food. Utilization of available land or space for kitchen garden and preservation of seasonal vegetable is taught as also demonstrations are arranged to change age old ways of food preparation and create healthy food habits.

Health and Hygiene — Awareness about pure drinking water and sanitation is created among the people whenever Guides visit slum areas. Arrangement for pure drinking water also is made through Guide efforts in cases. During floods water purification methods are taught and means are provided. Importance of personal cleanliness, healthy environment is explained and use of sanitary latrines are encouraged. Home Nursing courses are arranged for senior Guides. Guiders and Guide members. Guides are encour-

aged to keep physically fit and enjoy life out of doors. Plans are in hand to teach ways of reducing infant mortality and encouraging smaller families. Guides prove effective in preventive medicine, helping in child growth monitoring, prevention of night blindness by distributing Vitamin A capsules or use of OHT to fight dehydration during diarrhoea and in taking child immunisation programme.

Emergency Relief and Rehabilitation — Our Guides are always prepared for and ready to help during natural calamity. Most common in our part of the globe are floods and cyclones. Our girls collect cash, used clothing, first aid materials, building materials etc. for the affected. They distribute these themselves or hand that over to other agencies who have access to the affected areas.

Voluntary Work — Our girls go to render service at hospitals. They are required by certain organizations regularly for voluntary services. Village service has been started. Due to many social and financial constraints very limited efforts have been made, but future expansion is seriously under consideration.

Citizen Training — All guide teachings have the objective of training for good citizenship. Participation in traffic weeks, clean-up campaigns, service weeks, observance of national days, reception of dignitaries, service during international events and gatherings, raising funds for a good cause, help at home, raising voice against social evils and prejudices like dowry system, child labour, polygamy, early marriage and crimes are all trainings for responsible citizenship.

Vocational Training — Short courses most of them without any fees are offered for Senior Guides. Most popular among these are doll making, artificial flower making, Batik print, book binding, jute work, dress making and sewing and handicrafts with throw away raw materials. These skills enable the Guides to utilise their leisure time profitably.

The writer is International Commissioner, Bangladesh Girl Guides Association.



Robert Baden Powell and Olav, Lady Baden Powell, photographed in 1931.

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.

Terrorism

Sir, The country sadly witnessed the mass walk out by all opposition MPs on a bill tabled by a treasury member to amend the existing law to contain the growing terrorism in the country. In a parliamentary form of government it is a normal to stage a walk out if the ruling party dares to pass any unjust and un-acceptable law and we all should be adhere to this practice.

Needless to mention that terrorism at present has become a national problem and is eating its vital. Every one is worried about one's own security and safety. From top to bottom, the entire society is now under the grip of terror-

ism and we are in full knowledge as to what heinous deeds these terrorist groups are indulging in.

While mentioning the cause of their mass walkout one opposition member said, "We are afraid that the ruling party would utilise this amended law to harass our workers and this will provide the law-enforcing agencies un-limited power and will engulf the society." Oh, God what a wonderful logic!

Our political parties are, it is alleged, in habit of playing double standard. They occasionally demand stern measures to curb the growing terrorism through their statements and speeches but the situation ironically turns serious when something is

practically done about. It is not wrong to say that all political parties have been indulging terrorists in their respective organization known as 'armed cadre' to gain supremacy over their rivals and the ultimate result of this is the victimisation of common people.

Observing the entire gamut some questions pop into our mind: Do the political parties themselves believe in the principle of democracy? Are they fully aware of the country's socio-economic problems? Do they really want to make ours a happy and prosperous nation?

Unfortunately we all are destined to be great without being little active. This tendency has taken us to a stage where poverty, over population, unemployment and social unrest characterise our identity.

Bangladesh got rid of the autocratic rule one year ago and most of the present MPs fought alongside the people for long nine years. It is a sovereign parliament and is

expected to represent people's hopes and aspirations. Let us hope that our honourable MPs would unanimously respond in favour of the bill that should have been passed much earlier.

Md. Reyazuddin
Dhaka.

MPs as entertainers!

Sir, After watching the TV programme of MPs in the evening of 27th February I was stunned by surprise. What an unbelievable innovation by the elected representatives of the people 85% of whom are so poor and deprived! Whatever inspired the honourable Members of Parliament to perform as TV entertainers, it was certainly not in good taste, nor did it serve any purpose whatsoever except perhaps to flatter themselves. Such a show is not something which inspires people's confidence in the MPs who are supposed to have a minimum standard of decency and dignity.

After I watched the programme, I have had the opportunity to talk to a good number

of students and teachers of the university about it. And without exception everyone of them had nothing but ridicule and contempt for such a mindless, useless and disgusting exercise indulged in by the MPs who, as the Deputy Leader of the House claimed, spend so much of their time thinking about the poor people who elected them! It is nothing but an insult to the intelligence of the electorate who cannot help noticing how many times the

Speaker has to adjourn sessions of Parliament for lack of quorum; how the MPs of the ruling party and those of the opposition unite for duty free cars, for higher salary and allowances and pension, for diplomatic passports and other status symbols! Seldom if ever does one read about an MP pleading for or demanding jobs for the millions of educated unemployed, a better deal for the wretched slum dwellers or an end to the exploitation of the vast multitude of rural masses. When does one read about an MP advocating reha-

bitation of the genuine freedom fighters or of the poor women who are sold in foreign countries for prostitution and slavery?

Of course the august Members of Parliament have been elected by the people. However, it is also common knowledge how money, power and slogans misusing religion motivated the voters in many constituencies.

After just one year of our experience with the honourable MPs and an expensive Parliament many citizens have started wondering if there has really been any change at all in any sphere of society: all-pervasive corruption, terrorism and violence unabated, worsening unemployment situation, high inflation and rising prices, supremacy of the bureaucracy, and a captive judiciary. The Members of Parliament would be spending their precious time much more meaningfully if they try to think about these issues than performing for the TV screen.
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