

### In Memory of Mujibnagar

In observing the Mujibnagar Day today, which, two decades ago, marked the establishment of the Bangladesh government-in-exile, we pay our tribute not only to an everlasting symbol but also to a milestone on the country's road to victory.

There are many historical and political implications of the day, which tend to be obscured under the weight of the process leading to our independence. In the first place, the establishment of the government-in-exile, set up within the border of Bangladesh, provided the liberation forces with a legal and administrative framework which, in turn, was based on a popular electorate mandate earned by the Awami League in the previous year. In the absence of such a framework, a large number of army officers and men who now owe their allegiance to the new government of Bangladesh could have been regarded by some as mutineers, while diplomats who had defected to Bangladesh would have had no government to be accountable to. Again, a number of our spokespersons who travelled around the world explaining various aspects of our liberation struggle did so in the name of the government of Bangladesh. This made a historical difference to the whole scenario.

It was the start of a process which was set in motion with the help and assistance of the country's closest ally, India, which we acknowledge today with gratitude and friendship. However, there were also other countries, like the former Soviet Union and a number of East European countries and peoples, if not their governments, which stood by us in our struggle.

There are also sad memories which are evoked by our recollections of Mujibnagar. Virtually all the leading figures of the government-in-exile are no more with us. The dastardly prison killings of 1975 robbed the country of such valiant heroes as Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin, Kamruzzaman and Mansur Ali, while the country's first commander-in-chief, General Osmany died a few years later of natural causes. Their contribution to our liberation struggle are remembered by millions, but it remains largely unrecorded in our history, one of the many lapses which mar the saga of our independence struggle. Yet a bigger failure lies in the loss of our idealism that Mujibnagar symbolised for the people of Bangladesh. Maybe, in not too distant future, we will remedy these failures, and then the spirit of Mujibnagar will be rekindled in our hearts again.

### A Lesson in Accountability

By resigning his position as the leader of the Labour Party in the wake of its defeat in the general election, Neil Kinnock has upheld the unwritten principle of accountability in a democratic system. An opinion poll had shown that some 53 per cent — indeed, a narrow majority — of the British public had lost confidence in Mr Kinnock as the head of the main opposition party. On the other hand, a case of sorts could be made for letting him keep to his job. There was no motion passed by the party against his leadership. Again, under his leadership, the Labour Party which once looked like a winner had increased its number of seats to 271 from 229 it had won in the last election, with those of the Tories slashed from 368 to 340.

The resignation of Mr Kinnock raises serious questions about the future of the Labour Party. Over the years, especially on the eve of the last election, the party chief had taken the organisation, once known for its radical socialist views on most issues, more and more towards the centre, keeping in line with the changing climate in European political and economic fields.

While the leftwing inside the party could now make a case that the growing centrist position taken by Mr Kinnock has not yielded the result the party had expected — a return to power — it seems highly unlikely that the process can be now reversed. If anything, the party's middle-of-the-road position even on economic issues may become more pronounced under a new leader.

Here, one should salute Mr Kinnock for providing the democratic world a lesson in accountability. It is a lesson that has relevance for many developing countries, including Bangladesh. In most of these countries, the attachment to power overshadows — even negates — any sense of accountability of a politician, whether he or she is holding an office or leading an opposition party. Furthermore, barring a few countries, developing countries have seldom seen their cabinet ministers resign to accept the responsibility for train disaster or an airline mishap, or, for that matter, a serious decline in the law and order situation. In such situations, ministers concerned would blame their subordinates who, in turn, would pass on the responsibility to others, down the chain of command. One never knows where the buck stops.

In more ways than one, accountability has a strong moral implication. It is this aspect which prompted Mr Kinnock to resign as the leader of the Labour Party. Here is a lesson that deserves to be learnt by all politicians, in all different countries.

THE Indian foreign minister Madhavsinh Solanki's exit from the Narasimha Rao government and President's rule in Nagaland are as removed from each other as is king from cabbage. Yet both developments have something common: a desperation and dishonesty that has taken over the Congress (I). Whatever the situation, the party goes to any length to conceal the truth. In fact, the tendency is to lay the blame at the door of the opposition.

The cover-up of Bofors gun pay-offs, now estimated at \$ 250 million (nearly Rs. 650 crore), has been a six-year-long story of lies and disinformation. Right from Rajiv Gandhi, who arranged the 'commission' for the party, if not the family, to Narasimha Rao, who has promised to monitor the inquiry personally (and in all fairness he should report the progress to parliament regularly), there has been a persistent effort to suppress the facts. Whatever has come out so far, it is despite the government's determination to keep the lid tight on one of the biggest arms scandals in the world.

The holier-than-thou attitude of Narasimha Rao does not go down well because his actions have given the impression of a person who is not un-concerned. He is the one who removed M.D. Sharma and K. Madhavan, the two conscientious officers of the Central Bureau of Investigation, who were beginning to see through the web of deception that Rajiv Gandhi had woven to hide the kickbacks. Mrs Margaret Alva, supervising the CBI, told lie to parliament when she said that Madhavan was taken away from the inquiry because of his

# Problems Stretch from Bofors to Nagaland for Narasimha Rao

promotion. The fact is that he was promoted to the rank of Inspector General of Police one and a half years ago and he continued to look after the probe until four months earlier.

Still more serious is the manner in which Solanki has been made a sacrificial lamb. It was Narasimha Rao who summoned him from Tokyo, where he was on an official visit, and took him to Davos in Switzerland for the world economic forum of leading countries. Solanki has no pretensions about understanding of economics. Then why he and not the finance or commerce minister was chosen? Three times chief minister of Gujarat, Solanki is no fool. He could not have acted inadvertently when he delivered a note to the Swiss foreign minister not to press the probe.

The pertinent portion of the note is: 'The balance of convenience would lie in favour of continuing the order of suspension.' The purpose was to let April 3 pass, the deadline of the Geneva court to decide whether it should suspend its pronouncement on the names of the pay-off beneficiaries. The media and parliament did not allow that to happen and their protest made the prime minister withdraw the note.

The note itself has more than what meets the eye. It was reportedly drafted in New Delhi by a topmost lawyer, who purposely did a shoddy drafting job to hide his identity.

And he was not the one who handed it over to Solanki. That job was done by a faceless lawyer, who had free access to the former foreign minister.

The other intriguing point is that the note dated February 2 remains secret, undiscussed for two months and hits the country like a thunderbolt a few days before the all-India Congress (I) session at Tirupati, where Sonia Gandhi was to be projected as the Congress (I) president. (Satish Sharma, elected from Amethi, Rajiv Gandhi's constituency, is seldom seen in the Lok Sabha

Narasimha Rao will stick to his promise that he will get at the truth 'without hindrance'. In sharp contrast, his commerce minister, P. Chidambaram, Rajiv Gandhi's close ally, who is all over the government, has demanded that the Bofors inquiry against Rajiv Gandhi be dropped. The Congress (I) spokesman said the other day that no more money should be wasted on the Bofors inquiry. Such observations raise doubts whether the inquiry would be allowed to go all the way.

Already the disclosure by *Schweizer Illustrierte*, a Swiss

opposition for an inquiry has made no difference. The government has become impervious to public opinion.

The same lack of sensitivity is reflected in what the Narasimha Rao government has done in Nagaland. First the Congress (I) engineers defection of some 12 assembly members so as to reduce the Vamuzo government to a minority. When governor Thomas dismisses the state assembly and orders fresh elections, making Vamuzo as the caretaker chief minister, — the right course to adopt — the Centre intervenes six days later to impose President's rule and does away with the caretaker government as well as the announcement to hold early elections.

The government's action was under Article 174, which empowers him to prorogue and dissolve the state legislature. But the Centre invoked its pet Article 356, which is used when the constitutional machinery in state fails. How can the two articles be invoked for the same purpose? It is strange that the Centre should come to the conclusion that the constitutional machinery had broken without the governor's report. Official sources in Kohima have confirmed that Nagaland was placed under President's rule on an order issued by the president and not on the recommendations of the governor.

Thus far the governor's report has been sacrosanct.

although Article 356 has been misused. The Narasimha Rao government has the credit of even dropping that formality. When the state government was dismissed in Meghalaya last year, the governor had made the same complaint that he had not sent any report, although Mrs Alva flew all the way to Shillong to inform him to do so.

I wish President R. Venkataraman had resisted the violation of the spirit, if not the letter of the constitution in Nagaland. He should have sent back the proclamation and forced the government to override his 'no'. The nation would have seen the President upholding the constitution and the Narasimha Rao government murdering it. Now the President has let the government off the hook.

There are instances where Venkataraman's predecessors have not allowed the government to run roughshod. Zail Singh did not give assent to the postal bill, which empowered the government to intercept private mail. Not many institutions are left to resist the government's highhanded and arbitrary actions. When even the institution of President is seen to be willing, one feels sad and helpless.

Venkataraman cannot probably be the only point of resistance to the government's faulty steps. But he can at least assert himself to save the prestige and power that the constitution gives the President. Venkataraman is in office till July this year. But as long as he is there he should be seen carrying out the responsibilities which his position has put on his shoulders. Too bad he failed on Nagaland.

## Between the Lines Kuldip Nayar

but during the Bofors-Solanki affair, he stayed in the house all the time as it he was watching somebody's interests.

The prime minister's statement that 'no business house can use him' has a ring of doubt because the business house allegedly involved in the Bofors pay-offs was able to influence the Narasimha Rao government to send its representative at the last Diwali party in London. This is the same business house which was once pally with the Rajiv Gandhi administration and now with Narasimha Rao's. The prime minister met one of the brothers of the business house at Davos.

Still one hopes that

magazine, that Rajiv Gandhi had left behind "2.5 billion Swiss francs in a secret account in Switzerland" has remained unpursued. At current rates, the amount works out to Rs. 4,625 crore. When Amal Datta, a CPI (M) member from West Bengal, tried to raise the matter in the Lok Sabha he was shouted down.

The Narasimha Rao government is also seen mixed up with the purchase of locomotives, again from a Swiss firm, paying \$92 million (nearly Rs. 240 crore) more than it should have. The Indian firm in the public sector, the Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited, was ignored although it was cheaper. The concerted demand by the

## ALLEVIATING POVERTY IN BANGLADESH—II

# An Agenda for Action to Achieve Targets within the 1990s

deremployed doctors and large underutilised capacity in its pharmaceutical industry to equip the PHCC provided that budgetary priorities are redirected to this goal.

iii. Extension of Grameen Bank type credit facilities for the rural poor into every union in the country. This would require some national level coordination between the Grameen Bank, NGOs such as BRAC and Swanirvar, offering credit to the poor and the GOB's own leading programmes to the poor through the Rural Development Board. As of now there is both overlap of facilities in some areas and a complete absence of credit access in most other areas. A national level body with perhaps the Managing Director, Grameen Bank as its Chairman, and Chief Executives of the RDB, Palli Sayak Foundation, BRAC, Swanirvar and a few other NGOs supported by small secretariat located perhaps in the Palli Foundation, should map out a macro-credit strategy for the poor. The allocation of responsibilities across the country for NGO's seeking to initiate credit programmes should be directed by this committee to areas where credit facilities for the poor do not exist. The secretariat should prepare records which clearly identify the total constituency of the poor households which need to be covered throughout the country and should then publish half yearly statements. Thana-wise, of the households in this category covered by the various programmes, along with regular information on recovery rates of loans and information on their outcomes. This information on the impact of these credit programmes could be collated and analysed for the secretariat on a regular basis by such organisations as BIDS and the Academies for Rural Development in Comilla and Bogra so that the policies can be regularly modified to improve its efficacy.

iv. It should be noted that most of these credit programmes usually cover non-farm activities. However a large segment of the rural poor consist of small subsistence farmers who live precariously at the mercy of nature, mahajans

This is the second part of a three-part series on Alleviating Poverty in Bangladesh. The first part was published yesterday and the third and concluding part will be published tomorrow.

(middlemen) who supply credit, farm inputs or bury their crops. The credit programmes indicated above should thus aim to target poor farmers as well, perhaps using as a cut off point households which do not generate a net marketable surplus. Loans to such households could be linked with other related programmes such as providing title to irrigation machinery to groups of the poor as is being done by BRAC and Proshika and measures for crop storage facilities whereby poor farmers

representational services to poor farmers caught up in debilitating land disputes with more affluent farmers or under harassment from local touts or even the administration. If this latter role is to be taken seriously, it will be a major responsibility and may best be done under a separate Land Bank agency. These agencies may be set up in every district either by the government or an NGO specialising in this activity and may be federated at the national level so as to broaden the capital base of the facility.

## POLICY ISSUES Rehman Sobhan

can sell their crop to a warehouse at harvest time for a remunerative price if such is not on offer in the open market. This facility could be either set up and run by the credit agency and used also as an instrument for loan recovery or it could be owned by a cooperative of the poor but supported organisationally by the credit agency. The organisation could then enter into contractual arrangements with the Food Department of the GOB and the jute marketing agencies or even with large private buyers to lift the stocks at the official procurement price or at a higher market determined price as the occasion arises.

v. The Task Force proposal for a Land Mortgage Bank could also be linked with the above farm credit facility since this facility of mortgage would also be directed to poor farmers exposed to the insecurity of nature and the market. It would need further study if such a Land Bank should be a separate facility with specialised expertise in both Banking and Land management. Such a facility could indeed provide legal advisory services to the poor and even

pool the risks and strengthen their political authority. This political backup for the proposed Land agency would be of considerable importance since the local touts, affluent farmers and even the administration who are the main source of insecurity for small farmers under the prevailing system of land administration command considerable political clout and have ties with the major political parties.

vi. The Task Force proposal for an employment guarantee scheme, on the lines of the famous Maharashtra Employment Guarantee scheme merits consideration. This programme should be located in the most vulnerable thanas rather than designed for coverage throughout the country. Such a programme can be linked with the national Food for Work Programme (FFWP) which has wide national coverage. But it should target the thanas most exposed to natural hazard and with the least prospect of remunerative employment in the lean season. For these vulnerable areas a special programme designed to provide work for all in need should be designed

and kept ready with the back up of necessary resources, organisational arrangements and a list of viable employment programmes. This programme should be a permanent feature of the FFWP with a capacity for expansion during periods of national calamity. The essence of this employment guarantee and other FFWP programmes is that they should be properly integrated into a national plan for both rural development and poverty alleviation rather than as an ad hoc seasonal exercise to provide employment every year through donor provided food aid. The donors have been wanting the GOB to undertake this integration of food aid into the planning process for several years but the GOB has shown little urgency for this most important task and continues to wait for technical assistance and project aid to see this proposal to fruition. With the volume of food aid Bangladesh gets a well conceived anti-poverty programme linked to employment creation and building of the rural infrastructure could have changed both the social and physical face of rural Bangladesh in the last 30 years. But we remain dependent on aid with no substantive structural change in the rural areas to show for this. For the future employment creating FFWPs will have to be made self-sustaining through a system of local taxation and allocative prioritisation in the national budget. Donor's cannot be expected to underwrite such programmes indefinitely.

vii. Under the Food Aid programme a number of projects such as the World Food Programme's (WFP) vulnerable group feeding programme (VGP) for destitute rural women has been in existence for many years. The VGP has indeed played a useful role and covers nearly half million female headed households which is about 14% of all such households identified as a major constituent of the hard core poor in the BIDS study. The goal of a long term anti-poverty strategy should be to provide security to all female-headed households under a special social security programme. This suggests that, the VGP should

be integrated with a government social security programme for female headed households and with the variety of official and NGO derived programmes designed to deliver credit and training to poor rural women. We are talking here of an integrated national plan with female headed households as the focal point, which covers employment generation, skill enhancement, credit, marketing interventions and an income based social security system where both government and NGOs are assigned clearly defined responsibilities on a programmatic and territorial basis. The VGP will provide the core of this programme but should tie in with a much wider resource base. Their is enormous programmatic overlap in programmes for the rural poor women which needed to be corrected and made more cost effective within the framework of a national programme for poor women.

viii. The Task Force report suggested a programme of housing for the rural poor. This relates to the approximately 1.5 million of the very poorest households who do not own even homestead land and are living in purely make-shift shelters. A programme to provide homesteads and loans to build durable shelters for this group should be taken up on a priority basis. This programme can combine elements of the Khas Land distribution programme, the Operation Thikana programme introduced by the previous regime and the Grameen Bank programme for housing loans for the poor which has built around 100,000 homes. The state will have to take on the task of both assigning Khas land and purchasing land from land surplus rural households to assign land title to these families. A House building Finance programme managed by the Grameen Bank, Proshika, Swanirvar and other NGO, can be underwritten by loan finance from the banking system. It may be argued that all public credit for housebuilding finance over the next five years should be channelled to this housing programme for the rural homeless. A similar programme may later be extended to the urban poor once a viable policy for urban planning and settlement has been put in place. Prospective urban housebuilders who have been a privileged elite over the last 40 years should be encouraged to borrow on commercial terms for commercial banks.

## To the Editor...

### Crimes and democracy

Sir, The unabated wave of grave crimes like murders, rapes and maimings, are unthinkable in a democratic country to continue, and that too in the capital city, Dhaka.

The current wave of lawlessness and brutalities occurring almost everyday in Bangladesh, demonstrates an overpowering crisis case, exposing the fledgling democracy to uncertainties.

On a regular basis, we come across newspaper reports about horrible murder cases. It is a common understanding of the people that the culprits always manage to evade the punitive measures. The law-enforcing agencies, namely the

police force, have proved to be 99% failure. Under the circumstances, the Home Ministry seem to be a sleeping tiger.

Our politicians are yet to be matured enough to work for the people, stand beside them and extend wholehearted co-operation to the suffering masses. Instead, they regularly keep themselves busy in creating storm in a tea cup and in soiling the image of the opponent.

When some genuine cases are referred to them, they pose, at best, as mere sympathisers. They never bother to stand for the oppressed or, help and exert their political prowess or acumen to put a stop to the process of oppression. There is a strong allegation

that the court, instead of becoming a deity to give neutral judgement, in merely working as a plaything in the hands of the influential and wealthy quarters.

It is a shock when we confront a truth that we do not have anybody to protect the causes of the innocent, peace loving people. It has been a bitter pill to swallow that we cannot avail redress from the police or, the court or, the politicians. Is it time to accept the facts and stand for ourselves without seeking help from the police, the court or, the politicians? We are sure that barbaric medieval age will return soon.

Will our politicians being the part and parcel of the fledgling democracy rise above their own logic of partisanship

to save the nation? May we still keep hope that the police force and the court will be purged, revitalised and rejuvenated to serve the purposes of the countrymen?

A M Sayed Khan  
Farashganj, Dhaka.

### Parochialism

Sir, It is learnt from a Bangali national daily that Bangla Academy has been awarded 'Anand Prize' this year from Calcutta for its immense contribution in Bengali Literature. But Bangla Academy did not get green signal from the government. So we have been deprived of this prestigious award. But why? Does our government suffer from any

'Indo-phobia' or parochialism? Prize means recognition and recognition cannot be confined within any parochial boundary. Because, it has universality to grow mental faculty. We think such kind of parochial attitude should hamstring our literary attainment.

Rathan M. Chowdhury  
East Hazipara, Dhaka

### It hurts

Sir, Energy crisis has been, and is, indeed a global problem and even wealthy nations such as the USA, UK and west European countries have taken measures to avoid mis-use of it. But what is happening in our Bangladesh — one of the least developed countries in the

world? If you are interested, just venture out of your house/office at around 5 pm and you will find the 'Tillotoma Dhaka' (?) trying unsuccessfully to glitter out in the broad day light! Yes, you will find thousands of costly neon-lights (I am sure, costly in terms of fuel consumption, too) glimmering on the road-side when dusk is yet far off. A conscious citizen that you are, the sight will hurt you, as it has been hurting me for the last so many years. Maybe, the people at the helm of affairs are 'hurt-proof', otherwise how could this wasteful game continue for so long. Should I quit: long live our 'Tillotoma Dhaka' at the cost of the poor tax-payers!

Ahmed Hani  
Dhaka