

A National Disgrace

That 30,000 children of the country go blind every year is a national disgrace. It is extremely disturbing to know that the situation of child-blindness during the past 10 years has hardly marked any change for the better. But the figures of the disease, it seems, are a fractional reflection of the whole problem. The disease is not a cause but the consequence of a still greater and more complicated problem facing this underdeveloped society. The problem is economic, first and foremost, which is a strong determinant of the quality of life of a people. Unless the standard of living of our population can be lifted to a certain level, the problem of childblindness cannot be adequately addressed.

In fact, it is not the only disease children here suffer from. The varying degrees of their prevalence may hold the focus on them accordingly, but the essential truth that remains is that they all explain the widespread poverty of the people. The question of nutritious and balanced food does not arise at all when the poor people are more concerned about filling their stomachs with whatever they can lay their hands on. A peace-meal solution will not do when the main problem is left out of sight. A tall order no doubt, but there is no other choice. The sooner this realisation dawns upon the planners and policy-makers, the better.

Currently, under consideration is a 37-crore-Taka project which, according to government claim, is aimed at preventing childblindness. Spread over four years beginning this financial year, this project is divided into three component parts—nutritional education, distribution of vitamin A and distribution of iodine tablets. No question about either the government concern about the problem or the merits of the proposed programmes. Of the three components, the first one is of immense value provided that the men responsible for the execution of the programme go about the business in a manner the obtaining socio-economic conditions demand. No doubt, unlettered people can be taught some health rules but certainly not the array of principles of primary health care. Education has a lot to do with health care. When educating people in the conventional way has proved so difficult, nutritional education will only prove more so. Supply of tablets, on the other hand, will seek to have a temporary solution, never a permanent one. There will still be life after 1996, the culminating year of the project. Will the situation then come back to square one?

The fact that figures on the coverage of vitamin A capsule distribution are contradictory is an indication of the attention the issue is presently receiving. But surely there were a lot to do in making people convinced of the benefits of changing their dietary habits. True, this cannot be enough to address the problem in totality, yet it could be substantially beneficial to society. But to match with the gigantic problem, the entire socio-economic situation of the people vis-a-vis their health index has to be thoroughly considered and then appropriate action must follow to tackle the crisis. A proper social environment has to be created before letting the people discover their own potential and decisively take care of themselves against the preventable diseases like childblindness.

SAARC Cultural Festival

The state minister for culture has announced that a massive cultural festival will be organised in connection with the forthcoming SAARC Summit to be held in Dhaka in December this year. We welcome the decision. Of all the fields of SAARC cooperation, it is in the area of cultural exchanges that some progress has been made. All the SAARC members have rich cultural heritage and it is only fitting that the Summit of this regional body should include a cultural festival. Let the occasion of the Summit become an occasion of genuine learning about each other's diverse heritage and rich traditions. Durable regional cooperation will depend, in the final count, on widespread knowledge and appreciation of each others cultures, and what can be a better occasion to promote such knowledge than during the Summit.

While complimenting our state minister for taking this timely initiative, we would like to suggest the occasion should be used to bring in a wide variety of cultural teams from as many SAARC members as possible. While taking special care for making the festival a State supported, and not a State 'sponsored,' event, we should try to bring together the best exponent of as many branches of creative arts as possible. Cost will no doubt be a major constraint in making the event a varied and colourful one. The option should be examined whether or not private sponsoring can be arranged in every SAARC country to send their cultural troupes to Bangladesh. For example, the national airlines of SAARC members could perhaps be persuaded to provide free passage for the members of the cultural troupes, while some other business houses could be asked for logistic support.

We would like to suggest that the proposed cultural festival should not be looked upon only as a colorful sideshow to the main event of the Summit. By itself the event has an immense intrinsic value. Through the cultural festival the people of the various SAARC countries could be drawn closer by bringing about greater mutual understanding and respect for the diversities that we collectively represent. Arrangement could be made, if the excellence of the event should so deserve, to have the festival telecast live to all the SAARC members and thereby bring about a regionwide mass participation in the event.

As for Bangladesh we should not make the occasion a source of patronising the artistes of this or that group or for promoting any particular brand or interpretation of what our heritage is or should be. On the contrary, let it become an occasion of exhibiting the true cultural excellence that we are capable of by involving the widest possible range of participants and events from all over the country. We urge the preparatory committee that has been set up for this purpose to spare no efforts in making the proposed cultural festival an event magnificent both in scope and quality.

THE image of the refugee—the individual seeking to escape from persecution to freedom—stood among the most powerful symbols of the Cold War era. The end of the Cold War has thus had a positive effect on a number of serious, long-standing refugee situations. Voluntary repatriation, which is the most desirable and durable solution for refugees, has now become possible for hundreds of thousands of Latin Americans, Cambodians, Angolans, and Afghans. Elsewhere in the world, there is reason to believe that a large number of the world's 16 million refugees may be able to return home over the next few years. Though political solutions in many areas are less than complete, we are heartened that the overwhelming majority of returning refugees wish to overcome differences and proceed with rebuilding their war-torn homelands.

Unfortunately, the end of the Cold War has also brought new problems in certain parts of the world. Two noteworthy examples are in Nagorno-Karabakh and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Tragically, in these places tyranny at the hands of the state has been replaced by violent manifestations of long-simmering ethnic and religious hatred. We are all appalled at televised footage of innocent people being

massacred while attempting to buy bread in Sarajevo—the city that was celebrated during the 1984 Olympic Games for having achieved social harmony within ethnic diversity. Having served as the US ambassador to what was once Yugoslavia, I am deeply saddened to see that utter madness and chaos now reign in what could well have been one of the success stories of the post-Cold War period.

It is also ironic that scenes similar to the Berlin airlift are now being repeated in Sarajevo in 1992. As in 1948, the international community must be concerned not only with the welfare of beleaguered people, but also with the security of those attempting to provide relief. Whereas then the motivation of those seeking to hamper relief efforts was ideology, now the motivation is nationalism and centuries-old hatreds. Under the authority of the UN Security Council, and the superb coordination of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United States is participating in multinational efforts to ensure that humanitarian relief is delivered to the people of Sarajevo.

Closer to home, since the September 1991 coup in Haiti, we have been working for the restoration of democratic government in that country. In recent months the number of Haitians intercepted by the in-

place to ensure that UNHCR and external staff resources are available for immediate assignment to an emergency. Draft agreements to allow the efficient and expeditious involvement of NGOs have been prepared and a stockpile of items commonly needed in a refugee crisis is being created.

Late last year, in the context of efforts by the United States and other countries to reform the United Nations, the position of Undersecretary General for Humanitarian Assistance was established, along with a \$50 million emergency revolving fund. We have already begun to reap the benefit of these initiatives in dealing with the flow of Somalis into Kenya and Burmese Rohingyas into Bangladesh, as well as with the crisis in the former Yugoslavia.

The international community is also utilizing its prior experience in an effort to prevent future refugee crises. UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) have been working with the new governments of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union to provide needed technical and legal training for dealing with refugees, displaced persons, and migrants. The United States has actively promoted and participated in these mul-

tilateral initiatives. We also believe that our own national experience of ethnic and cultural diversity is worthy of sharing with others. Through a series of on-site technical assistance projects, we are exposing relevant officials of the new governments in the former Soviet bloc to the roles of public and private sector institutions in the field of refugees and migration. The Department's Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs is providing training on the rule of law for judicial officials from Eastern Europe and the new independent states of the former Soviet Union. We repeatedly remind such officials that our bilateral relationships will be affected by the degree to which human rights—particularly those of members of minority groups—are respected in their countries. Indeed, at Secretary of State Baker's urging, the issue of in-

ternational migration has now been placed on the agenda of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE).

In current trends continue and barring major unforeseen developments, the numbers of persons requiring permanent resettlement in the United States could decline by the mid 1990s. The president's proposal for fiscal year 1993 allows for the funded admission of 122,000 refugees—a reduction of 10,000 from the current fiscal year level.

The administration has proposed that the 122,000 admissions numbers be divided as follows: East Asia (including Amerasian immigrants)—52,000; former Soviet Union—50,000; Near East/South Asia—7,000; Africa—7,000; East Europe—1,500; and Latin America/Caribbean—3,500. In addition, we have included an unallocated reserve of 1,000 numbers which could be used in regions where allocated

numbers prove to be insufficient.

Our programme will continue in the near term to address many of the residual human problems created by communism. Former reeducation camp prisoners from Vietnam and religious minorities long-denied the right to emigrate from the Soviet Union clearly constitute the vast majority of refugee admissions in fiscal year 1993. In the not-too-distant future, however, we hope to be able to fulfill our commitment to these groups. Once that point is reached, the primary avenue to US residency for persons from Vietnam and the former Soviet Union would be through normal immigration channels.

The US admissions programme is designed to focus on persons of special humanitarian concern to the United States and for whom repatriation or local integration is not a viable option. In recent years, UNHCR's assessment of the global need for resettlement places has shown a steady decline. While the United States consistently resettles more than 50 per cent of the refugees identified by UNHCR, we have been working with UNHCR to improve further our responsiveness to refugees in high risk categories in a manner consistent with our own goals and constraints.

New and unpredictable refugee challenges are likely to emerge—some dramatic, such as the situation in the former Yugoslavia, and others slow and pervasive, such as the pressure of population growth on social and political stability. It is therefore necessary for us to recognize that refugee problems will not disappear with the end of the Cold War. They will undoubtedly become less clear-cut and less easily linked to a general political cause.

We must continue to develop new solutions to refugee issues. In the current environment—free of superpower competition—the prospects are excellent for the United Nations to assume the leadership role envisioned in its charter for dealing with refugees and other issues of concern to the world community. The United States welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this effort.

The author is US deputy secretary of state. The article is adapted from recent testimony before the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration and Refugee Affairs.

Lest We Forget

Abu Sayeed Chaudhury

by Fazlul Quader Quaderi

TODAY is the 5th death anniversary of the first constitutional President of Bangladesh Justice Abu Sayeed Chaudhury. Would it be an exaggeration to say that his name has been washed off from our mind? Should no effort be made to recall his historic contribution to cause of the Bangladesh War of Liberation? Shouldn't we, the so-called professionals, intellectuals, writers, journalists, poets, historians and politicians recollect the courageous role played by him during those days of nightmares in 1971?

Justice Abu Sayeed Chaudhury's historic contribution to the cause of Bangladesh, will always shine like the "Northern Star" in the political horizon of Bangladesh. Nobody can deny it and undermine his historic role during those perilous days of our National life. He was the first man to have sent a letter to the then Education Secretary of Pakistan saying, "There is no point in my continuing as the Vice-Chancellor of the Dhaka University any longer after the shooting of my unarmed students. My dead body will lie in London street, rather than I compromise with Pakistan". He was also the first person to unfurl the National Flag of Bangladesh at Hyde Park in London in April 1971. He also inaugurated for the first time the exhibition of stamps for Independent Bangladesh designed by Amiya Tarafdar, an

Indian National. All these are facts and will always remain as history. Can anybody deny these facts? If there arises any confusion, I would very humbly request them to read the Urdu Daily 'Huriyat' of 30th July 1971 and the weekly 'News Week' of 16th April 1971 respectively.

Justice Chaudhury moved heaven and earth, ran from pillar to post to mobilise world opinion in favour of just and humane cause of Bangladesh. His endeavour to win the confidence of 270 members of the British Parliament was no easy a job. It was the turning point in history in favour of Bangladesh War of Liberation. His press conference in Geneva will remain as a milestone in his onerous task for the War of Liberation. His famous speech which was published in the Sunday Times under the head "Genesis of Holocaust" is a burning example of his invaluable contribution to the cause of Bangladesh. He was made the first Constitutional President of Bangladesh not because of any fear or favour. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman realised the truth, appreciated the work done by him and thus chose the right man, in right time in right place. Justice Chaudhury earned both name and fame for the country as head of the state. A man of his status with profound background was quite befitting for the post. No other President of Bangladesh has had such rich educational

and social background to befit the post of the President of Bangladesh.

He contributed to the framing of Constitution of 1972. He represented Bangladesh in different international forum. One such was his representation in WHO seminar in 1975 in Geneva. He was, because of his quality of head and heart, elected as the Chairman of Commission on Human Rights in United Nations in 1985. He was the judge of Dhaka High Court, the Vice-Chancellor of the Dhaka University, Chairman of the Bangali Development Board, the President of the country in National level, while at International level, he was representative of the country in the UNO; Chairman of Commission on Human Rights in Geneva as a well-known jurist. All these were possible for his dignity, honesty, belief and firm courage of conviction. An unparalleled example of humanism, fathomless knowledge in history and literature, an undaunted brave fighter, as Justice Chaudhury was, are never to be found in Bangladesh. Mr. Sidharta Sankar Roy, the former Chief Minister of West Bengal and ex-Governor of the Punjab, hearing the sudden news of his sad demise, wrote a letter to Mrs Chaudhury saying: "Shahjahan was one of our brightest jewels. God has taken him away. My prayer is that when the time comes for me to part too, I may be able to see him again."



Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh

Breastfeeding and Beyond

by Shameem Ahmed

BREASTMILK provides a source of nourishment uniquely adapted to the requirements of the baby. Recent research has greatly extended the knowledge of the potential benefits of breastfeeding. Breastmilk provides the infant with protection against pathogenic microorganisms. In addition, breastfeeding facilitates the establishment of a strong relationship between the mother and infant. It also suppresses maternal fertility and thereby assists in achieving a more desirable birth interval.

It is generally recommended that exclusive breastfeeding is what the baby needs for the first 5 to 6 months. The mothers should breastfeed at least upto 2 years, as advised in the Holy Quran (sura Bakara: 233), with adequate additional food after 5 months. Exclusive breastfeeding means that the baby has no other food or drink but breastmilk—not even water or a pacifier. If they are given other food or drinks, even in small amounts, or if they on a pacifier, some of the advantages of breastfeeding may be lost. Also, once the baby is given the bottle he gets 'nipple confusion' and may refuse to suckle from the breast. Exclusive breastfeeding can alone provide 98% contraceptive effect in the first 6 months after delivery if the mother is feeding frequently by day and night. In a country like Bangladesh where the woman are in marginal nutritional status and in whom fertility is augmented and where other contraceptive methods have not been quite successful we should perhaps take advantage of this benefit of breastfeeding. Apart from controlling fertility recent studies have shown that mothers who breastfeed have less than half the chance of developing breast and ovarian cancer.

I quote Mr. Aziz when he says in defence of regulated system, "It has worked in China because there was a strong ideological framework to replace the profit motive". But this China is now opening its door to profit making and ultimately it will be compelled to make its political system flexible.

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can play an important role by reinforcing a positive image of breastfeeding. Ideally every country should develop and implement a long range communication strategy, which whenever possible, links breastfeeding promotion to direct support of the mothers and to other maternal and child health programmes. The decline in breastfeeding in Bangladesh is a cause of great concern. Women both in the urban and rural areas are increasingly exposed to advertising of artificial baby milks and even being advised by doctors to give artificial milk to their babies. Concerned with the present situation of breastfeeding in Bangladesh a national campaign for the protection and promotion of breastfeeding (CPPBF) has been started with professionals from Medical institutions, Government organisations, UN Agencies and NGOs. The Bangladesh Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has developed the National Code for the regulation of marketing of the artificial milks in the light of the International Code. Subsequently, the amendment to the code was passed in Parliament. The Ministry of Health has formed an Advisory Committee for the implementation and monitoring of the code. Yet, today there is widespread marketing of artificial milks in Bangladesh and the marketing of these in no way conforms with the International Code. Breastmilk has no substitute and there is a great concern regarding the violations of the Code.

Today, is the World Breastfeeding Day, the beginning of the breastfeeding week. The theme of the day is 'Baby Friendly Hospital'. The Baby Friendly hospital initiative is aimed at the promotion of successful breastfeeding in hospitals and delivery centres. This initiative has also been launched in Bangladesh with the aim of making 6 hospitals Baby Friendly in the first phase. The Government of Bangladesh has also officially declared the 1st of August as the National Breast Feeding Day. Let us, on this important day, make a pledge to protect and promote breastfeeding for the health of mothers and children of Bangladesh.

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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.

Why indiscriminate?

Sir, The recent furore in parliament with regard to an MP's wife being mugged and the assurance by the home minister to recover the lost belongings appears to me as a conscientious citizen, that one has to become an MP to be immune to such social evils or to get any such mischief undone. We are exposed to such situations in our everyday life and almost come to accept it as the order of the day.

One wonders as to why should the "non-MP's" be deprived of such assurances when they or their family get mugged or killed or their properties like cars or shops get damaged or burnt by unruly elements?

Protection to our lives and property is our constitutional right, irrespective of our position, status or class. We pay taxes to maintain the respective agencies assigned for this purpose. Thus, in this particular regard every body is expected to get what he/she entitled to and at the same time nobody is, however, authorised to give to any individual more than what others equally entitled to as per constitution and law of this country.

I feel, with the winds of privatisation blowing, the talk of the time would soon incorporate the law enforcing agencies within its gamut, unless a drastic improvement in law and order situation is brought

about. Time is not far when people, who can afford, will think of subscribing to the idea of hiring or maintaining private security forces for the protection of their life and property. It would be rather disheartening to see our country, which fought for its freedom, turn into a wild west or North West Frontier. It is high time we should all come forward to do something to protect every law abiding citizen.

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Travesty of truth

Sir, Recently while replying to the question of an opposition member on the state of deteriorating law and order, the Home Minister reportedly expressed his desire to be promoted. This was, we think not desired from a Minister of an elected government. Nowadays a conception has grown among regular newspaper readers that newspaper do not have space to accommodate other news as they become full with news of robbery, hijacking, illegal toll collection, murder, rape, capture of bus stations and business establishments by armed youths and various other crime reports. What is wrong in accepting the facts? If one does not accept his or her failure, how reformation is possible? Unfortunately, we are facing