

FBCCI Speaks Out

Presidents of nearly 30 Chambers of Commerce and Industries and the same of 45 trade associations, meeting under the auspices of their Federation — FBCCI, have jointly expressed alarm at the deteriorating law and order situation of the country which, they said, was seriously hampering all sorts of economic activities.

We are confused, to say the least. While on the one hand the business community is expressing its inability to carry out regular economic activities, our finance minister is saying it is the bankers who are spoiling everything.

May we suggest that maybe the finance minister is "barking up the wrong tree", as the expression goes. Maybe he should listen to the very people who are potential investors and promoters of industries.

The voice of the Chamber and trade association leaders are the most authentic voice of the entrepreneurial class. Even those businessmen who are not part of these bodies will make their own decisions on the basis of what organisations like the FBCCI will say.

The statement by the Chamber leaders that "subscription to any political faith should not provide immunity to the crimes committed in the marketplace" makes it as plain as a statement can be that law enforcing agencies are no longer impartial and are a part of partisan politics.

Fight against Tuberculosis

That the prevalence of tuberculosis in the country is one of the highest in the world is known to many. What is however less known is that the number of death due to the disease is also very high.

Highly contaminating and yet curable too, this disease poses a serious threat to public health because the process of contamination is increasingly proving far too stronger compared to the remedial steps for its containment.

The answer to why so many people here are vulnerable to tuberculosis is not even an intricate one either. The prominent causes lie in the widespread poverty and the absence of cleanliness in our social life.

A much used expression during the closing weeks of 1990 was 'transparency in the business of government'. A Bangla equivalent was quickly found and it gained currency in no time.

Between the government and the public, there is a wall of uncommunication. The agencies and instruments of public relations are doing exactly the opposite of what they are expected to do.

That the radio and television are today exactly where they were in Ershad's days was made perfectly plain in the news bulletins of 20th August.

Another 400,000 have taken refuge in other countries, according to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. They have found their way to such far away places as Iceland and Finland.

But the official figures give only part of the true picture of the disaster which has created Europe's biggest refugee crisis since World War Two.

There is no record of the hundreds of thousands, perhaps more than a million, who are not registered as refugees. They just packed their bags quietly and fled to other regions and countries as Yugoslavia disintegrated and the fighting spread from one republic to another.

Another 800,000 are trapped by the fighting in Bosnia. They, too, would be refugees if they could break out of the besieged cities or cross the armed barricades.

Some refugees are housed by families. But a vast number are on the move, either searching for homes or seeking to leave the country.

Nightmare Faces the Balkans — II

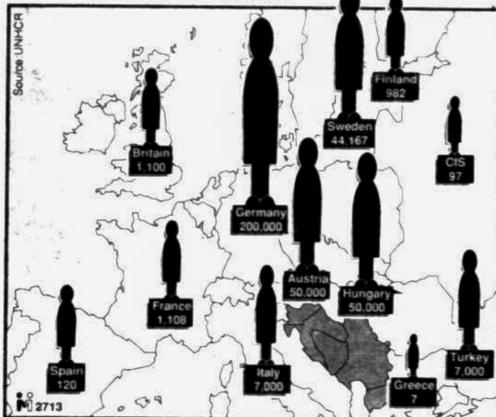
Winter Begins to Loom as Refugee Flow Grows

by Petar Hadji-Ristic

The Yugoslav civil war has already claimed nearly two and half million refugees. According to UNHCR, half a million of these could die unless the fighting stops at once.

Where Yugoslav refugees are going

In early August, 423,000 refugees were searching for a home in Europe. Nearly two million were displaced within former Yugoslavia



Many of the refugees within the former Yugoslavia are now in Croatia, once the second largest republic in the federation. Three-quarters of a million have contributed to the virtual collapse of an economy already devastated by the civil war.

To the Editor...

'Society and the rotting fish'

Sir, Congratulations for your admirable leader in the 10th instant issue of your esteemed journal. While you have rightly hit the nail on the head, the real point, however, is, since the fish has rotted from the head, who else other than the Administration itself can reverse the process?

To meet drastic situations, drastic laws are necessary. Corruption has seeped into the very vitals of all fields of the Administration and it is just not possible for the ordinary citizen to have even a small thing done without bribery and

kickbacks. Our existing legal system is cumbersome and time-consuming. Special laws should, therefore, be enacted providing for Special Courts or Tribunals with summary powers to try all cases of grave crimes and, equally important, all types of corruption.

Topics of debate Sir, Frequently debating sessions are arranged by

Whither Transparency?

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2. hotly and passionately debated on the floor of the Sangsad, a debate in which Mr Menon's voice was one of the loudest in condemnation of the government's handling of the law and order situation.

The enormity of the suppression staggered me, as it must have staggered all viewers. The radio must have done the same. We are quite used to our electronic media ignoring many happenings.

No, there is no transparency in the governance of the country. We often see the US President or at least the spokesman of the US administration in our TV screen but never our Prime Minister, nor our ebullient Information Minister, nor a spokesman, who will appear periodically for a Press briefing that will be telecast for the benefit of the

nonetheless curious. There was a strike call. But was there a strike? Did people respond? The shopkeepers, the office workers, the mill hands, and others? Did the public transport operate? What was the attendance like in the Secretariat, in schools and colleges? How did the city's thoroughfares look?

PASSING CLOUDS Zillur Rahman Siddiqui

All this and more came out in the newspapers the following day. So people knew all they wished to know. But this denial or failure of the electronic media to serve news, does it constitute a criminal failure to perform what the law of the land obliges them to perform? Not being an expert in law, I do not have the answer myself.

The government does not appear to realise that what the people had accepted as quite normal on the part of an autocratic government, they will not accept from a government they shed their blood to bring into existence.

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With the electronic media in chains, and the print media under a constant threat of punishment, if it fails to serve 'objective news', the arbiter of what constitutes objective news being the very agency which excels in suppressing news, in strangulating information, one turns to the Sangsad and one is tempted to ask how far has this August body been able to serve as a window on the thoughts and doings of the government.

Sangsad has all the potential of establishing itself as the grand instrument for achieving transparency. True, it does not have anything like a perennial

session. There are large time-gaps between its sessions. During sessions, the question and answer hours could be highly informative. But are they? The record of the last session showed that answers, where these were available, were given mostly in terms of figures. It seemed to me that mere figures were not enough, unless these are explained fully. Sometimes figures will speak for themselves, but not always.

Doubtless the murderous attack on Rashed Khan Menon, following close upon the heels of the dastardly murder of Ratan Sen, has brought into focus the twin issues of transparency and accountability. The two are inextricably bound together. The government, especially the Ministry of Home Affairs, finds itself in the unenviable position of accused along with the alleged perpetrators of a chain of crimes. The charge is one of callousness amounting almost to complicity. The Frankenstein of terrorism made into a creed might have been hatched in other nests, but — so goes the accusation — it has been fed and nourished in quarters close to the government, if not within it.

Lack of transparency in administration has directly contributed to a mood of distrust, an absence of faith in the government's ability and willingness to curb the monster. The handling of investigation, the beating-about-the-bush manner in which it is being conducted, has, if anything, deepened the distrust. The government, if it really wishes to restore public confidence, must abjure the habit of indulging in ambiguity and equivocation.

OPINION

Hasan Shahid Suhrawardy

Anisuzzaman

Mr. S M Ali's "My World" (The Daily Star, 21 August) prompts me to put down on paper whatever little I know about Hasan Shahid Suhrawardy and his article in question.

Born in 1890 (24 October) in Calcutta or Midnapore Hasan Shahid Suhrawardy (he changed his name to Hasan Suhrawardy, 1870-1949) and Khujasta Akhtar Banu (1919-7, daughter of the eminent scholar Ubaidullah al-Ubaidi Suhrawardy, 1834-86, and sister of Sir Hasan Suhrawardy, 1884-1946, Vice Chancellor, University of Calcutta, and Sir Abdullah al Mamun Suhrawardy, 1935, Tagore Professor of Law, University of Calcutta). Shahid obtained his M A degree in English in 1910 from the University of Calcutta and BA in History in 1914 from Oxford University.

great scholars and creative talents used to meet three Fridays a month. Malcolm Muggeridge reminisced much later of another gathering: 'In Calcutta there were five of us who met regularly and became close friends — Tulsī Goswami, Apurbo Chanda, Shahid Suhrawardy, Sudhin and myself. Now, alas, all are dead save me.' It was in these informal gatherings that Shahid's erudition and critical appreciation of literature and the arts came to be widely recognized. He was persuaded to write for the Parichaya and later for the Chaturanga the prestigious literary quarterly founded by Humayun Kabir (1906-61). One however assumes that while the contents of these essays were Shahid's, the language was somebody else's, for Shahid himself attributed his lack of facility in Bengali to his "defective upbringing".

In 1932, Shahid Suhrawardy succeeded Abanindranath Tagore as Bagiswarī Professor of Fine Arts at the University of Calcutta and held the chair until 1943 when he was made a member of the Bengal Public Service Commission. He was elected a Fellow (and ex-officio member of the Senate) of the University of Calcutta in 1945. After partition he moved to Karachi to take up his position as a member of the Pakistan Federal Public Service Commission of which he became the Chairman later on. He was invited, together with Picasso and a couple of other luminaries, to advise on the art-decorations of the UNESCO headquarters in Paris. He was a Visiting Professor of Oriental Arts at the Columbia University and Pakistan's ambassador to Spain, Morocco and Tunisia. In 1959 he returned to Karachi to lead a retired life, all by himself, and died there in 1965 (3 March). Among his publications are Essays in

Verse, Mussalman Culture and Mussalman Art in Spain.

Shahid Suhrawardy's paper, 'Tagore at Oxford', was published in the Calcutta Municipal Gazette, Tagore Memorial Special Supplement, on 13 September 1941. It is said that C R Das (1870-1925) felt the need of publishing the Gazette when he became the Mayor of Calcutta in 1924 and asked Amal Home (1893-1975) to take charge. It goes to the credit of Amal Home, satirically nicknamed Home, sweet home, that during his editorship (1925-49) he made the Gazette an extraordinary publication. Of immense value were the three special numbers that he brought out — those on C V Raman, Jagadishchandra Bose and Rabindranath Tagore. The Tagore Memorial Supplement has been reprinted by the Calcutta Municipal Corporation in 1986 on the occasion of Tagore's 125th birth anniversary. A note at the end of Suhrawardy's article says: 'By arrangement with Chaturanga, Asvin 1348' which suggests that a Bengali version of the essay was earlier published in that journal following the death of Tagore. A photograph accompanying the article in the Gazette also shows the younger brother, Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy (1892-1963), in the Oxford group.

It is a matter of great regret that Shahid Suhrawardy is not so well-known to us and even an historian of RC Majumdar's eminence has, in his memoirs, confused Shahid Suhrawardy, the scholar, with Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, the politician. There was some talk of bringing out a Bengali version of the Bangla art criticisms by the Bangla Academy, but matters do not appear to have progressed.

Dr. Anisuzzaman is Professor of Bengali, Dhaka University