

## A Matter of Political Will

Two politicians best known for their efforts to maintain cross-floor harmony in the Jatiya Sangsad, Deputy Leader of the House Dr A Q M Badruddoza Chowdhury and Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdus Samad Azad, have spoken in unison again. The topic this time, at a seminar on Saturday, was the crucial issue of political violence and general lawlessness popularly known as 'terrorism' that is now gripping the country.

The words spoken by them were reassuring because they showed both the major parties were under no illusion about the kind of danger now facing the nation. Their words also went a long way to suggest that people who had consistently claimed that terrorism, its existence as well as its elimination, was a matter of political will, had been right all along. Another well-established truth, that political interference was to blame in large parts for the failure of the police to enforce the law, was also admitted by the two leaders.

There have been plenty of talk in recent weeks about forming anti-terrorist committees in city neighbourhoods; of strengthening the administration; and of passing new, tougher laws to deal with the problem. The flaw in these approaches is that, first, the committees would probably be dominated by the same people who usually turn a blind eye to existence of terrorists among their own ranks; second, the administration is powerful enough as it is, but not functioning to its optimum capability due to political interference and corruption; and third, the law cannot make an iota of difference unless it is applied fairly and firmly, which takes us back to where we started.

Both Chowdhury and Azad spoke of cooperation and dialogue at the seminar. The question now is, are they, or rather their parties, prepared to commit themselves to do the things that would make their words more than just words? Do they have the courage to sit tightly and watch silently as the police pick up their cadres and charge them with crimes that can be proven? Most importantly, do they have the political will to give up, in principle as well as in practice, the maintenance and use of armed cadres?

The two leaders have reached a consensus of words, but such words have been spoken by all and sundry in the past. What we need to see is a consensus of deeds. Both the major parties need to come to terms with each other's existence as rivals, but not as enemies. For the greater good of the nation as well as their parties, the BNP and AL ought to reach an agreement that neither will harbour terrorists within their ranks, and that any individual leader found to maintain his own cadre force would be expelled without so much as a warning. Once these two parties have truly cleaned up their acts, the task of dealing with other organisations, such as the Jamaat-e-Islami and its right-wing, fundamentalist allies, should pose no problem for the law enforcement agencies. In fact, with their commitment to a violence-free democracy reiterated through a binding agreement, the activists of BNP, AL and other democratic forces can be expected to unite to foil any attempt to threaten the independence and freedom of the nation by neo-fascist and fundamentalist forces lurking behind the smokescreen of the present crisis. The people of this country, by casting 70 per cent of their votes for the 'sheaf of paddy' and 'boat' in the last general elections, have clearly shown their faith in these two parties to lead the nation towards democracy and prosperity. Now the AL and BNP have to repay that trust. But government leaders should understand that it is they who have to take the initiative. The BNP should acknowledge that unless the party in power begins the process of disarmament, the opposition never will. The opposition is always the weaker party in the equation because it does not control the police or para-military forces, and in a system where the administration and police are under constant political pressure, the opposition is always at a disadvantage. Therefore, the display of genuine good faith ought to come first from the party in power, and only then can we expect to see some results.

## Untimely Protest, Timely Caution

On Saturday afternoon the 22-year-old Cancer Ward of the Dhaka Medical College was closed down. At the moment it seemed to have been for ever. For the ward was put under lock and key and sealed meticulously. That alone would not make the scenario so bleak. Before the act of closing, the inmates were pushed out refugee-fashion. That lent a poignant touch. Even that could not possibly make the case of the cancer care unit so hopeless. It is unfortunate to the power 'in' that a very lofty mission is being used to wipe the cancer ward out of existence. The poor tin sheds used to house the even poorer souls of the cancer afflicted ones are now to make way for the construction of an auditorium to celebrate the martyrdom of Dr Shamsul Alam Khan Milon.

The manner in which the patients were removed from their ward, as also the ones from the adjacent central and skin disease wards — as reported in the Press — is most deplorable. As a natural consequence of the closure of the ward, nowhere in Bangladesh a cancer patient can turn to for specialised attention. One reason for that is nowhere else there is the Cobalt Ray machine the DMC has and this is very necessary for certain types of cancer treatment. We are constrained to point out that the locale where the extremely bad drama is being played is a hospital — a place where the importance of a patient and his or her welfare is paramount, and nothing else counts. We are all for erecting a magnificent memorial to Dr Milon. There are so many buildings named after so much less important mortals. But why this one should be built at the cost of a very important hospital ward and in such a manner?

The moral of the piece is man doesn't count in Bangladesh. Are there stupider persons possible anywhere here who would think that the action is going to enhance the honour of Dr Milon's memory? Such brash brute and mindless actions can only compromise the love and respect we have for Dr Milon in our hearts.

By the time our protest will be out in print, perhaps the bulldozers will have begun their work — and there would be no turning back. Helpless, we await with all the premonitions in the world that the same kind of bureaucratic-political action that made the eviction of the patients possible will cause an auditorium to be built in no way fit to pay homage to the immortal soul of Dr Milon — that valiant soldier against autocracy. We caution the government against that.

**F**OLLOWING his victory in the Gulf war President Bush claimed that the New World Order had already emerged. Unfortunately, this seems to have been premature. Subsequent events, in Europe and elsewhere, do not seem to support this view. Given the current uncertainties in the political arena, one would be justified in thinking that the post-cold-war global political order is yet to take a clear shape. However, the global economic order is certainly taking shape rather quickly. On August 12 an announcement was made by three countries — the United States, Canada and Mexico — about the creation of a free-trade zone. The North American Free Trade Agreement creates an enormous economic bloc containing 360 million people. In terms of land area, natural resources and industrial and technological strength, NAFTA can easily rival the EEC and Japan. Indeed that seems to be a major goal of the initiative. As a result of the agreement, the three partners feel that they can collectively face the rest of the world with vastly increased strength. NAFTA will, of course, fall far short of the integration achieved by the EEC. It is neither a customs union with a common external tariff nor do the participating countries cede sovereignty to a central authority. However, the agreement does emphasize the worldwide trend to form regional trading blocs.

The hard part of ratification of the agreement will begin now. It will not be an easy process. The United States, in particular, will have to go through a complicated procedure involving the Congress.

The uncertainties in an election year are obvious. However, the leadership of the Democratic party including Governor Clinton have given qualified support. Americans seem to believe that the free trade area will, inter alia, stop the massive tide of Mexican immigrants. The prospects are therefore good that the agreement will be approved though the process may be long and tortuous. Canada may also have tough domestic op-

# North American Free Trade Agreement : Impact on Asian Exports

**The most promising industry in the country will face an uncertain future unless we are able to negotiate safeguard provisions in good time to prevent disruption of our garments exports. The Mexican challenge will become more and more serious with every passing year.**

position though no one doubts that the eventual outcome would be positive. Mexico should have no difficulty in ratifying the agreement because it will stand to gain most in terms of higher levels of investment, employment, tourism and transfer of technology. President Carlos Salinas de Gortari of Mexico believes that the free-trade zone will facilitate his market-oriented reforms.

The United States and Canada have economies which are at the same stage of development. The difference mainly lies in the scale of operation. It would therefore be relatively easy for the two economies to accept the changes which will come with the introduction of the free-trade zone. The Canadians have reportedly driven a hard bargain to safeguard their industries and existing exports. The change for Mexico will, however, be almost revolutionary. It is expected that American industries will move south to avail of the cheap labour thereby changing the entire structure of the Mexican economy. Benefits to Mexico from the free flow of capital and technology and increased tourism will outweigh the negative consequences. On balance, however, all three countries expect to benefit from the creation of the free-trade area. While Canada is the No 1 trading partner of the United States, Mexico has recently become the third. The volume of trade within the bloc is likely to increase further after the agreement comes into force.

It is too early to predict with any precision the impact of the agreement on world trade. The Japanese are concerned because their exports will be affected adversely but

they have already started preparations to make the necessary adjustments. The EEC countries have not yet expressed any particular anxiety about the likely consequences but much will depend on how their own integration plans succeed. However, the impact on the Asian economies including that of Bangladesh is going to be quite serious. The reason is Mexico's low wage economy. Currently the US is one of the biggest export markets for the Asian countries. For Bangladesh, the fledgling garment industry depends, to a great extent, on the American market. As a result of the agreement, the Americans will find it both

cheap and convenient to buy the wearing apparel and other simple manufactured products from Mexico. There is therefore a distinct possibility that there will be a major shift in the pattern of US imports. Of course, under the agreement, existing tariffs on Mexican goods are set to wither over the next 15 years, spreading out the effect on other countries. Mr Alexander Yeats, the World Bank's international trade analyst, admitted that it was impossible at this time to calculate just how big these potential costs to the Asian countries are likely to be. According to him, with exports from South and South East Asia valued at about \$346 billion a year, the immediate cost to the region will be minor though the long term effect will be dramatic and significantly larger. Many developed countries including

Japan (and perhaps also Korea and Taiwan) may shift their production facilities to Mexico in order to take advantage of duty-free entry into American and Canadian markets. It is most likely therefore that there will be a shift in the flow of investment away from the developing countries of Asia.

Thus the implications of NAFTA for Bangladesh is going to be quite serious. The most promising industry in the country will face an uncertain future unless we are able to negotiate safeguard provisions in good time to prevent disruption of our garments exports. The Mexican challenge will become more and more serious with every passing

other nations facing the same problem.

In a world rapidly getting divided into trade blocs, it would be difficult to protect our interests unless we also join hands with other countries facing similar problems. At the initiative of Australia a new regional body called Asia-Pacific Cooperation Council (APEC) was recently established. The group has already held several minister-level meetings to draw up a programme of collective action. While the United States and Canada have joined this group as Pacific rim countries, South Asian countries have been excluded from it. Australia, Japan, South Korea and the ASEAN countries constitute the core of the group though recently China has been allowed to join as a member. One can see the beginning of a process in which the major trading nations of the world are getting organized into three blocs: EEC, NAFTA and APEC. The ASEAN countries — Malaysia in particular — are somewhat uneasy about the presence of the United States in the Asia-Pacific group but they had to yield under American pressure. Malaysia made an attempt to create an East and South East Asian trade bloc with Japan as the leader but strong opposition from the United States doomed the initiative. Even Japan was reluctant to support the Malaysian move for fear of offending the United States which is their most important trading partner. Unfortunately the South Asians do not figure in any of these groups. Our relatively minor role in world trade is probably the main reason for this exclusion but the squabbling among the countries in the sub-continent might be another reason. No one wants

## ON THE RECORD

by Shah AMS Kibria

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# After 24 Years — a Chemical Treaty to Make World Safer

by Stephen Court

**The Gulf conflict brought the threat of chemical warfare to the fore. Now the UN wants a new treaty which will ban the production of toxic weapons and require destruction of all stockpiles and production facilities. Many countries are resisting a new treaty arguing that they need chemical facilities for non-military use.**

**A**FTER 24 years of negotiations a final draft of a new treaty to ban chemical weapons has been agreed by the United Nations Committee on Chemical Weapons in Geneva.

The draft is being put before the committee's umbrella organisation, the UN Conference on Disarmament, and will be presented to the General Assembly later this year.

The treaty is expected to come into force by early 1993, with a signing ceremony in Paris. At least 65 signatories are needed for the treaty to come into force. Already 50 countries have indicated their willingness to sign.

The new treaty will ban the development, production, stockpiling and use of toxic weapons and require destruction of all stockpiles and production facilities within ten years of coming into force. It is the most ambitious multinational accord ever attempted.

The 39-nation Conference on Disarmament began in 1968. Its aim was to update the 1925 Geneva Protocol on chemical weapons, which had been agreed in the aftermath of World War One, when tens of thousands of soldiers had been killed or maimed in poison gas attacks.

The Protocol banned the use of chemical weapons in war. But it did not go any further than that. The Conference on Disarmament was given the task of working out the formula for a global ban on toxic weapons.

For many years, the negotiations were bogged down by the Cold War, while the superpow-

ers and a number of developing countries built up their stockpiles.

It was concern over the use of poison gases in the 1980s by Iraq that finally got the talks moving. Baghdad used chemical weapons in its war with Iran, as well as against its own civilian Kurdish population.

In 1990, the United States and the former Soviet Union agreed to begin destroying their own stockpiles, which together amounted to at least 80,000 tonnes. These were by far the largest arsenals in the world, and easily outstripped Iraq's pre-Gulf war tonnage.

The efforts by the UN to reach a wide-ranging solution to the menace of chemical weapons received further impetus following the threats by Iraq to use such arms during the Gulf War.

Out in the Saudi Arabian desert, soldiers carried protective breathing apparatus and clothing in the event of a toxic weapon attack. They were also provided with drugs to take to fight the potentially lethal poisons.

In a horrible irony that evoked the use of gas against Jews by Nazi Germany, it was feared that Iraqi Scud missiles targeted on Israel might contain chemicals which had been manufactured by Iraq with the assistance of German sci-

entists. The threats by Baghdad did not materialise. But the Gulf war highlighted the ease with which chemical weapons could be made. It is believed that around 20 countries, including China, Israel, Egypt and Pakistan, have such weapons.

Unlike the production of nuclear weapons, plants producing chemical weapons can be difficult to detect. Some of the materials used in producing the weapons, such as pesticides, have non-military usage.

The central problem of the treaty will be persuading the countries which have chemical weapons — or the desire to acquire them — to sign the treaty, and to see that the treaty is adhered to.

The UN agency which will police the treaty, the International Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (IOPCW), will be based in The Hague. It was established in June.

The IOPCW, a sister organisation of the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency, will have a staff of 1,500. The Prins Maurits laboratory, three miles outside The Hague, will be used by the IOPCW to monitor suspected

chemical weapons samples. The main work of the IOPCW will be to inspect and search military installations, as well as civilian chemical plants making chemicals for peaceful uses, such as fertilizers.

Under the treaty, up to five days' warning will be given of an inspection. The treaty will also enforce the cleaning up of abandoned chemical weapons.

The IOPCW will need to work closely with the Vienna-based UN Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO), which assists in the development of the chemical indus-

tries in the Third World. One potential stumbling-block will be the way inspections are carried out. In 1984, George Bush, then US Vice-President, proposed to the disarmament conference that weapons inspectors should be allowed to go anywhere at any time, with treaty signatories not being allowed to refuse access.

Pressure from developing countries over the sensitive issue of potentially intrusive inspectors, allowed chemically-unrelated secrets to be protected.

## OPINION

### Curb Lawlessness

Free-for-all lawlessness is a frightening syndrome of near-incurable ailments to any fledgling democracy. The implications of such a scenario marks a major psychosis of the society in totality. That is exactly what has happened of late to socio-cultural and political fronts in Bangladesh where democracy is often mentioned to be still in infancy. Regrettably, the euphemistic phrase 'nascent democracy' does not give us solace at all as we increasingly become aware of our position as lagging far behind the contemporary civilisation. The present volatile circumstances thwart all our pious wishes and expectations.

At the very heartland of Bangladesh, we frequently come across a bagful of reports of robberies, snatching, hijacking, kidnapping; in many cases, murders accompany the felony. The rate of these sorts of criminalities is increasing day by day. The most frustrating part of the story is the role of the law-enforcing agencies. Not only they shy away from resisting criminals and thugs; allegedly, often they show them safe exit. Often they pounce upon the people who are powerless, illiterate, underprivileged and, often, don't spare the lettered persons.

Such reverse role of the police has been strikingly brought to anybody's guess by the recent attack on the journalists at the peaceful-and-tranquil Press Club. The violent activities perpetrated against the unprepared and unarmed journalists and the subsequent claims by the high-ranking government officials as regards the heroism of the law enforcement bodies in the Parliament, point to the very malignant spread of decay in the police administration and the bankruptcy of the Ministry

of Home Affairs. Recently, photographs appeared in the newspapers exposing the police as guarding armed youths reportedly of self-styled Jubo Command on the day they called for a hartal.

Beyond any doubt, the administration has failed miserably to add positive elements to the entirely-vitiated socio-political milieu. In the backdrop of rapidly spreading poisoning, the high claims about law and order by the top ranking government officials, throw us into infinite shame.

Again the government owned electronic media prove to be blind, deaf and dumb. They constantly fail to incite the governmental and non-governmental agencies to adopt adequate measures against the culprits. The eternal slavery these media have been subjected to, has been barring them from taking the trails of factual truths.

We have a very little expectation to get any positive response from the politicians. The grim picture thus obtained forces us to ponder for possible remedies.

Firstly, we feel that the much discussed and much talked about overhauling of the police administration should be done without missing time. It is true that the redemption of the law-enforcing agencies can not be engineered unless and until the corrupt officials are retrenched en masse. The eligible candidates from the vast youth force can be recruited. After a rigorous training they can be selected as the law-enforcement officials. Of course, this will entail some extra expenditure but this will have the administration from falling perennially into the devil-works of corruption.

Secondly, the existing laws of the country should be

to get caught in the perennial quarrels among these countries.

All the South Asian countries are dependant, perhaps in varying degrees, on the North American market. NAFTA will make it increasingly difficult for them to gain access to this market. Since group action is likely to be more effective than isolated efforts of a particular country, it would be advisable for SAARC to initiate negotiations with the United States and Canada (and perhaps also Mexico) to work out an effective safeguard arrangement to protect our exports to these countries. It is not going to be easy but unless we begin the process now we will be left out completely. Of course, we could hope to negotiate separately but given our small volume of trade, the chances of getting anywhere are slim. The ASEAN countries have a system of a structured dialogue with their trading partners including the United States and Canada. The APEC forum will also give them an opportunity to press for protecting their interests. Although SAARC has until now a poor record in dealing with problems of this nature, it may be an excellent issue for this body to begin its international role. If we do our home work properly and prepare our case with care, our North American trading partners may find it difficult to ignore our collective approach. Experience of recent years show that countries which are far-sighted enough to take the signals from abroad in good time and seriously, are better able to cope with external challenges. They are also better able to take advantage of the external opportunities. A poor country like Bangladesh cannot depend on luck and chance in developing its export industries on the basis of markets which might be lost in a few years' time. The loss of the indigo market in the 19th century and the diminishing jute market currently should be good warnings for us. We must make every effort to ensure that our growth process is not rudely interrupted by external developments about which we were warned but chose to pay no attention.

A group of 14 developing countries, including China, Pakistan and Iran, has been leading the opposition to the current draft treaty, saying it still wants changes to the text.

As well as worries about safeguarding its secrets, they fear that the treaty will make legitimate chemicals more difficult for developing countries to obtain.

Pakistani Ambassador Ahmad Kamal said: "We are trying to achieve consensus on the draft convention. The objective is more important than any artificial deadlines."

The German chairman of the weapons committee, Ambassador Adolf Ritter von Wagner, has said that negotiations on substances are now closed.

— GEMINI NEWS  
STEPHEN COURT is a freelance journalist and broadcaster, working mainly for the BBC World Service.

## To the Editor...

### Combatting vices

Sir, Our society has been riddled with a large panoply of vices, namely, corruption, nepotism, bribery, terrorism, smuggling, trafficking and so on. However, we have been persistently making efforts to make our society a better habitat for the inhabitants. But we have not been successful enough to achieve the goal.

There is a wide range of factors causing the recurrence of those vices. The most devastating among those being the absence of adequate institutional mechanism to repel them.

Even, heinous crimes like murders very often go unpunished. In the Dhaka University campus, one after another murder is committed with impunity. Following any murder, the newspapers write sensitive reports, pious editorials; a commission gets formed to investigate the murder (which seldom submits its report) and in the 'process' the matter sinks in obscurity. The criminals get encouraged to commit further crimes destabilizing the society. Had there been adequate institutions to punish the first criminal, the second crime would never

### Time to Unite

A man takes a huge amount of loan from a financial institution. As per the law, he is to invest that money and within a certain period he is to pay it back with interest. But alas, he does not do so. He defaults, goes unpunished, other loanes follow suit; the country's financial sector gets crippled. Had there been adequate institutions to punish the early defaulters and their accomplice officials, defaulting could not have gone unabated.

A crime is committed by one and condoned by many others. There should be a complex set of institutions to fight those at all tiers. Once it is established that a crime would not go unpunished, the criminals would overnight change their colours into white, believably.

Spawning of committees, commissions, agencies, organizations and their subs with overlapping functional authorities may be required. But the society, polity, economy should be overwhelmed with a complex network of institutions, to combat all those vices.

Md Abdul Rouf  
Sergeant Zahurul Haque Hall, DII

### Time to Unite

Sir, I was eagerly waiting for your commentary/editorial following the attempt on Mr. Menon. The piece was exactly what was expected but there is a small point which I wish to mention here.

I don't think that any change in the top can bring about an improvement in the law and order situation. Even if any other party is given the control they can do little in the atmosphere that has been created gradually over last decade and half by various factors. The prime necessity is to rehabilitate the process of justice.

Concurring with your concluding comments I urge the major parties to sit down together and ensure judicial protection for all the citizens. Special protection for one or a few persons while providing indemnities for some killing will only prolong the vicious atmosphere to the detriment of everybody.

MA Haq  
Green Road, Dhaka

Mosharraf Hossain  
Hrishikesh Das Road,  
Dhaka.