

Colleges Not Solely to Blame

The idea of rewarding colleges with the authority to independently award degrees is good, but the question is whether our colleges are prepared for it. The measures the government has been pondering upon for sometime now to curb violence and terrorism on the campuses of educational institutions find a close ally in this latest move under consideration. Earlier reports had it that the colleges would either enjoy or lose government recognition, benefits etc according to their records on campus violence.

Well, then the government is keen on rewarding colleges which, according to it, do not deviate on the count of campus peace. So on a college's record on the maintenance of peace or its absence, not the academic performances, will depend if it can deserve government patronage or be left alone to mind its own business. Given the chaos and turmoil now prevailing in the educational arena, some stringent measures ought to be in order to enforce discipline and order there. The government threat issued to deal with the problem may indeed end up healing part of the wound or even surgically operating upon the rotten parts for their dismemberment where the institutions are endemically violence-ridden or violence-prone. But there are colleges — indeed the majority of them — violence-free and yet with dismal academic records. As trend-setters, it is the universities which should first of all come under fire. Can the government apply the same principles of rewarding and firing to the highest seats of learning?

Since the saga of campus violence finds its origin in universities and has spread downwards, the clean-up operation must start from the top. Otherwise, violence as a culture cannot be brought to an end. By any standard, the proposed measures should be considered a short-cut that has failed to take note of the wider social perspective. Terrorists among students are a creation of the present day politics of the country. Even today the number of students wielding arms is small and instead of punishing them, the proposed measures seek to penalise general students and teachers for no fault of their own. College authorities, moreover, stand vulnerable in the face of intruding violence, especially where opponents are hell-bent to exact revenge even for personal enmity.

Apart from such dangers, the short-cut measures can indeed force the parties involved in running a college to find an expedient formula by which the rivalries can either be put under the carpet or exported to some other venues. All this is only for deserving the coveted authority to award degrees, no matter if this means a compromise on the standard of education. The government would have done better if it moved step by step. Enforcement of stringent measures of the order calls for doing necessary ground works without which they stand to cause serious dislocation. We need more educational institutions, including colleges, instead of losing them through any rash action.

Return of the Dead

This was no case of a dead Lazarus rising to the bidding of Christ. But for the people of Kutubdia this was nothing less. Four-year-old Yunus was washed out to the seas in the April 29 cyclone strike on the offshore areas in 1991. He has trekked back to his village, to the arms of his parents. To complete the miracle Rahim, an older boy of ten, swept away by the murderous waters the same night from another village nearby, returned home as if from nowhere, the same day as Yunus did. Nothing could be happier not only for their parents but also for all of their neighbours. It was fairy tale come true.

It is, however, certain that although sharing in the jubilation, hundreds of Kutubdians must also have shed hidden tears in profusion. Their children and their parents, spouses and others in the family, lost on the same cataclysmic night could not make it in the Yunus and Rahim fashion — and never will patently because miracles do not repeat.

The story of the boys' rescue is where actually the miracle was, more than in their return. Yunus, the kid, was swept to Banskhali — a distance of thirty miles — and there he lay unconscious on the shore. A fisherman family nursed him into full health and reared him until returning him to his true parents whom he would not accept leaving his saviours. Rahim drifted for two days and was found floating off the Khulna beach. He was saved by another fisherman family. How could these good Samaritans track down the families of the two boys, specially of Yunus who knew the rescuers to be his parents, was an achievement of no mean measure. It was a most fitting finale of the drama of dead coming to life.

With the Kutubdians whose lost ones haven't returned, let us once again mourn the unnecessary deaths of April 29, 1991 on this happy occasion. Let us do so by asking ourselves certain questions. First, do we now know the casualty figure for certain full 17 months after the tragedy? Has the death toll been settled at 150 thousand, if so, how? Secondly, this is a fitting occasion to ask about the progress so far made in the building of the cyclone shelters which proved so effective in saving the lives of more than 300 thousand. Thirdly, as the cyclone season sets in, how are the offshore areas preparing for the murderous eventuality that is certain to strike any season? We are of course not talking of only the areas affected by the '91 elemental swoop. It is very easy to work out the surging-sea sweeping area — or the 'gorki'-prone area from Khulna to Teknaf. All of it should be secured against unnecessary deaths resulting from storms, sea-surges, tidal bores and other natural calamities.

Most important of all, has ways been evolved to maintain in even times of utter distress two-way telecommunication between Dhaka and Chittagong on the one hand and the affected areas on the other? Has measures been taken to ensure that all devastated spots can be reached by surface or air communication? Have we organised appropriate vessels that can venture to the afflicted islands with succour just the morning after?

We are sure the authorities are taken up with all of the above and much more. The return of the two 'gorki' boys made it imperative for us to enquire about the progress.

In the year 1492, Columbus discovered America and since then the world has changed in the most profound manner; so much so that we do not expect the world to undergo such fundamental alteration any longer, unless and until large-scale human settlements are possible outside the planet earth — somewhere else in the wide open universe. Five hundred years ago from today is a very very long time — at least 15 generations before — a new world was added to the old. The awesome reality of the great discovery totally overshadowed the fact that the tremendous achievement of Columbus was entirely unintentional. Never in his wildest dreams did Columbus ever imagine he would find what he did.

It was the fabulous wealth of the great Indian subcontinent that relentlessly drove the great genius on the unorthodox maritime path of discovery. Today, when both in the Iberian peninsula as well as all over the Americas, the 500th year of the great discovery is being celebrated, never did it for once occur that the legend of wealth in a completely different part of the world was the prime mover of discovery. Poor and cold Europe was frantically searching for ways and means to touch the warm golden shores of India.

And why it should? After 500 years, history has reversed itself: the countries constituting the subcontinent of India are the poorest in the world today. The golds have vanished from their shores over the past centuries; while riches have accumulated beyond the seven seas and 13 rivers — far removed from our struggling habitat where we eke out pitiful existence.

Although the fabulous legend of wealth of old India is now the 500-year-old story, still it is worthwhile to recall what was our land in those days. After all, a man without a sense of history is no man at all. We had a past of glories equal to if not more than anybody else in the world. These days, people line up in front of the American Embassy of Dhaka from late at night, waiting for the American Visa. Short of suicide, there are very many prepared to do anything else to touch the John F Kennedy International Airport of New York city. It was exactly the opposite case during the time of Columbus: Europeans were frantically looking for ways to break the monopoly of the Arab traders on the lucrative Indian trade. Innumerable expeditions were launched to find the direct shipping route to our lands of Muslin, pearls and spices, to name a few of the important tradeable commodities.

Bangladesh in those days was known as Samatrat comprising the present day administrative divisions of Dhaka, Chittagong and Khulna divisions. The Arabs and European traders of the West and the Chinese from the southern coastal provinces were fully aware of the famous port of Tamlalita located at the present day Sunderban area be-

cause Muslin and varieties of cotton fabrics from Tamlalita used to be exported all over the world. Not only that, Chaggaon was (like as it is now) a thriving port of the Eastern Samatrat. As a matter of fact, we have two sea ports at present; five hundred years before, it had been exactly the same story. Even the location of Cittaogang has remained almost the same for five centuries.

In all the ancient maritime maps, two ports of Samatrat were prominently featured as an integral part of the world's shipping and trading routes. Today Singapore has emerged as the Asiatic like Rotterdam as the Europort. Nobody knew of Singapore in those days. It was at best a small fishing village while Rotterdam was beneath the sea.

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our present-day world. The discovery of America fundamentally changed the Western world. Their affluence of today perhaps would have never come if the Americas were not there. On the other hand, was there any such momentous (although extremely unfortunate) event that initiated our centuries of decline?

I do not believe that any such single factor could be isolated for the purpose. One might argue that the landing of Columbus opened the path of prosperity for the Western world while the landing of the East India Company forced us in the opposite direction. No, it was not true. The decline started much earlier. The colonisation of the subcontinent was strongly indicative of the rotten state of our homeland during 18th century, in fact much earlier.

If we look at the history of the subcontinent, we find that throughout the centuries from before the birth of Christ, there had been successive periods of the so-called golden age; either all over the subcontinent or parts thereof like in Bengal or South India. A period of glory followed by the age of decline and then again the golden age. It was like the modern day business cycles but of much longer durations. One common characteristic of all these golden ages had been strong Central power which reigned supreme; therefore no

could aspire to the highest political position.

This intransigence by both sides is likely to prolong the war and the people's suffering. Aid workers say south Sudan needs influential international figures to speak out on its behalf, as has happened in Bosnia.

This could be difficult, especially now that, with the end of the Cold War, the West's attention is directed to eastern Europe where available infrastructure offers investment opportunities.

UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, who as an Egyptian is no stranger to the Sudanese problem, blames Africans for some of their problems.

Recently he said that while Western statesmen called him every day about Yugoslavia no such concern was shown by African statesmen in the case of Somalia. —GEMINI NEWS

MOYIGA NDURU is a Sudanese freelance journalist based in London.

conclusive peace talks with a Sudanese government delegation in the Nigerian capital, Abuja, in May.

General al-Bashir has ruled out any idea of a referendum for the south, warning that the unity of the country is non-negotiable. Instead he has proposed as federal system where the non-Muslim states in the south, which form about 40 per cent of the country's total population, would be exempted from the Islamic Sharia.

The SPLA fear this system would amount to relegating the non-Muslims to second class citizens because under an Islamic republic none of them

could aspire to the highest political position.

Early last month, the first editorial of a vernacular daily stated very clearly that in the border areas smuggling has increased greatly. Some of the smuggled items are sugar, saffron, lungis, green peas, match boxes, 'ganja', phensedyl, optum etc.

In today's world, a country can only survive if it can produce quality goods and excel in managerial efficiency. The dominance of Japan in the area of international trade is because of its quality goods and price competitiveness.

We are unable to sell our goods even in the home market, and, furthermore, all the smuggled goods are things of our daily necessity. Can a country survive, or develop in such a situation? For how long can we survive, with grants and aids? The country has to produce and sell in the ultimate analysis, it is the people that matter. The search for quality is an attitude of mind, which we must nurture. Hard work and workmanship can then follow. Poor management and low productivity, lack of industrial and social peace are not conducive to the growth of an economy. Our present attitude is one of doing the least work for a full day's pay. The present problems of the country are our own creation. With each passing year, we are getting poorer and more dependent on others. The conditionalities of the loans become tougher.

All the old and the newly industrialised countries started with the cotton textiles, and there is no reason why we cannot do the same. There has to be a promotional and supportive role for the government in our quest for fine quality fabrics. If adequate and timely supplies are made to the home market, on a competitive basis, there would hardly be any need for us to have smuggled saffron and lungis. Our handlooms sub-sector alone, when geared to its full capacity, can meet all our requirements. When the textile mills in other countries are running at a profit, our weak management, frequent

WINDOW ON ASIA

Shahed Latif

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Why the World has Forgotten Sudan's Southern War

by Moyiga Nduru

The Islamic fundamentalist government of Sudan is proposing a federal system in which the non-Muslim states in the south would be exempted from the Islamic Sharia. This new plan follows years of war with the rebel Sudan People's Liberation Army led by John Garang which wants autonomy for mainly Christian southern Sudan from the predominantly Muslim north. In 1987 alone 250,000 civilians died of starvation in the south.

A tragedy similar to that in Bosnia and Somalia is in the making in the beleaguered southern Sudanese city of Juba. The half a million civilian population is reported to be traumatised. People are shot at the slightest violation of the law or if they flout curfew regulations.

The witch-hunt began soon after the rebel Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) faction, led by John Garang, laid siege to the town. Since then, many innocent civilians are said to have lost their lives in the crossfire.

Beheaded corpses of suspected SPLA sympathisers are fished out of the Nile daily. About 100 have so far been recovered from the river, according to reports.

The people have been forced to abandon their homes, and are now craped into an area of about three square kilometres. Their houses have either been set on fire or razed by the warring factions.

The Nairobi-based Southern Sudanese Peace Forum (SSPF) said: "With no shelter, and insufficient blankets, clothing and food, the plight of the people is extremely desperate. With the people exposed in open spaces, coupled with the absence of any sanitary facilities, it is easy to see how diseases like cholera, diarrhoea and malaria are breaking out."

The marooned population, cut off from the outside world and lacking basic medical facilities, is now left to the mercy of the warring factions, whose main preoccupation is control of the town.

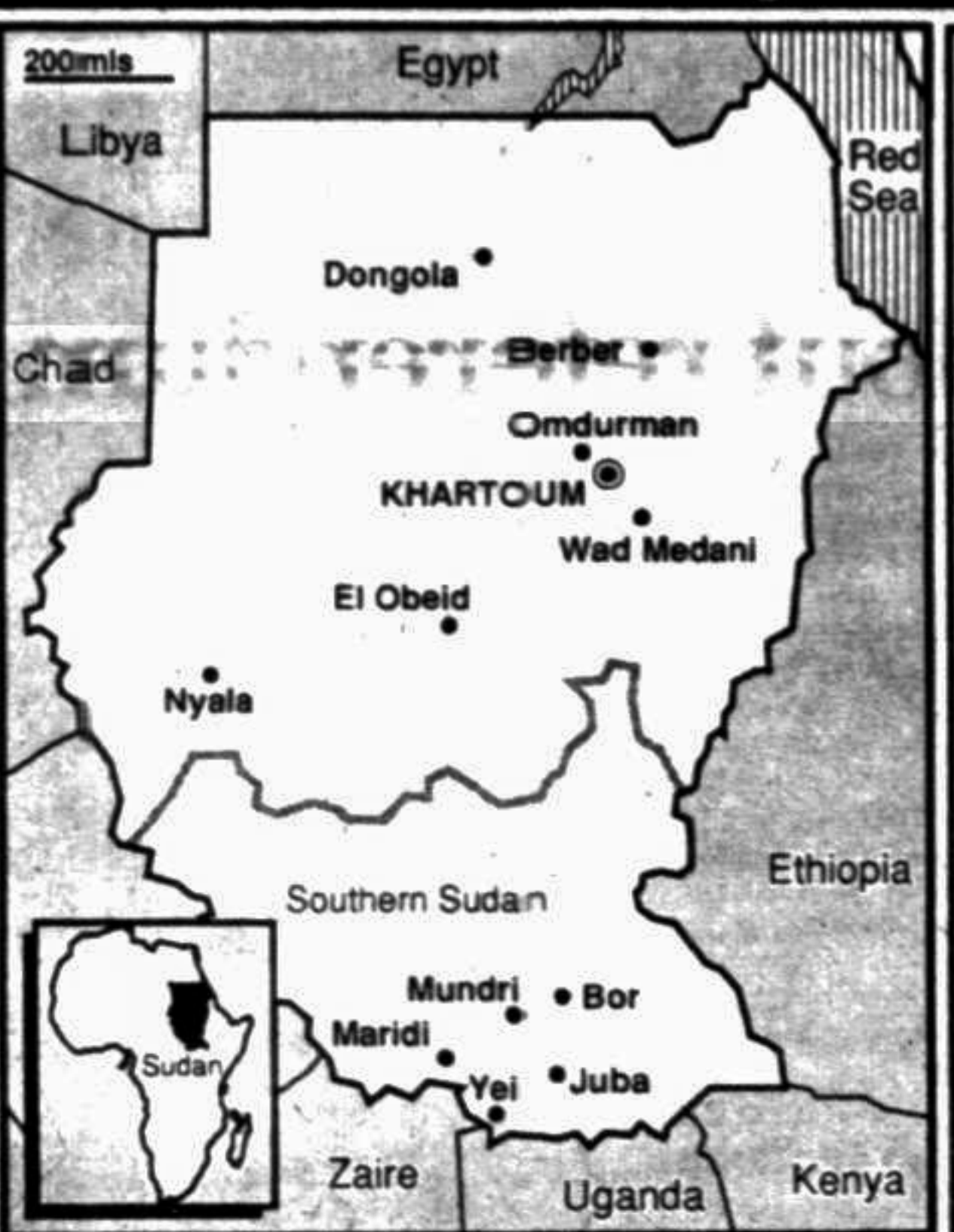
It took the United Nations time to recognise the situation. And when it spoke out in July, it was immediately attacked by the SPLA which considered the UN decision to resume relief flights to the town as "provocative."

Elijah Malok Aleng, of the Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Association (SRRA), which is linked to Garang, warned in Nairobi that "anybody flying to Juba without proper agreement does it at his/her risk."

The warning followed a statement by Ambassador Darko Silovic, of the UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs, that if immediate help did not come many would die.

SPLA claims that the government has been using UN-marked planes to transport soldiers from Khartoum to re-

Sudan: Africa's largest country



- 1956 Independence
- 1958 Military coup installs General Ibrahim Abboud; guerrilla war begins in south
- 1964 Civilian uprising overthrows military regime
- 1969 Jafar Nimeiry leads military coup
- 1972 South gets regional autonomy in agreement to end civil war
- 1983 Regional autonomy scrapped; Muslim Sharia law introduced. Southern People's Liberation Army formed, civil war resumes
- 1985 Nimeiry overthrow
- 1986 Civilian government of Prime Minister Sadiq al-Mahdi elected
- 1989 General Omar Bashir takes over



inforce encircled government-held garrisons in the around Juba.

But the SPLA and the Khartoum government have been accused by international human rights organisations of using food as a weapon against civilians caught in Sudan's bloody civil war.

Many recall that 250,000 civilians died of starvation in the south in 1987. The tragedy forced the UN to launch the ambitious Operation Lifeline Sudan in April 1988. But the operation, too, has been constantly interrupted by the Sudan government and the rebels.

Must southern Sudanese want the UN to pay as much attention to southern Sudan as it is doing to Bosnia and Somalia.

Bosnia and Somalia, however, are keen to provide access to the media — unlike in

southern Sudan. Foreign journalists shuttle between the two countries at ease, coming out with stories that shape international opinion and force world leaders to act.

Sudan strongly discourages visits by foreign journalists. This was even more the case after the Islamic fundamentalist government of General Omar al-Bashir came to power in June 1989, overthrowing the democratically elected civilian government of prime minister Sadiq al Mahdi.

Even during Sadiq's reign (1986-89), foreign journalists needed a special permit to visit the south.

The present regime, which declared Sudan an Islamic Republic early this year, believes foreigners inflame the rebellion in the south.

This suspicion is rooted in colonial days when Britain, which ruled Sudan for more

than 60 years until independence in 1956, pursued a separate policy for the south, barring the spread of Islam and Arabic language in the south. The north has never forgiven Britain.

The suspicion split the country into a predominantly Arab Muslim north and a mainly Christian African south and undermined any possible unity. The two sides have wasted the 26 years of independence fighting each other.

Restoration of confidence, between the two regions seems remote. The SPLA, formed in 1983, has now reneged on its original philosophy of liberating all Sudan and is demanding self-determination for the south, including the marginalised areas in the north that would want to join a future independent southern Sudan.

The demand followed in-

To the Editor...

"Love's Labour Lasts"

Sir, The exultation expressed in your editorial of Sept 2 is cheeky. I am disappointed at the superficiality with which you have treated the situation and your reference to the "whole nation" rejoicing on the happenings is amazing. Of course journalists and politicians these days are so freely using "the nation" to express their own views that nothing can be said about it.

Will somebody care to think a little deeper into the matter involving the real lives of an apparently immature runaway foreign young girl from an affluent society and a married Bangladeshi man with wife and children living in the village home? The girl has evidently become an outcast from her country and relations and would not dare return there

ever as Middle East is still a little away from civilization in human terms. I don't know what hidden wealth has Mr Ali Ahmed, a car driver by profession, to support multiple families by working in Bangladesh as possibly doors to the ME will also be closed to him. Let us just think of the girl a few years hence and pray to God that things work out well for her and the person she loves. It would be desirable for the "whole nation" to have some news of their welfare a few years hence through your esteemed paper. It would be tragic if you should have to carry another news or editorial on these people later under the caption "Love's Labour Lasts."

Anwar Ahmed
Shantinagar, Dhaka

Exam system

Sir, Under the new system, the students have performed quite well in the SSC examination, the result of which is being published recently. It is evident that the new objective plus subjective system of examination has significantly increased the pass percentage. It also helped the students in scoring high marks and thereby in getting good divisions.

Meanwhile, a question has been raised from different quarters putting doubts if the new system is really fit for maintaining educational standard at the SSC level. Well, this indeed is a point to ponder. In a country like ours where the primary and mid level educational instructions are not so efficient and strong,

is it an appropriate time and situation for us to abandon the traditional or essay-type exam system? Even the British educational system has yet to switch over to such objective type of examination procedure.

I think that a review should be made on the new system and certain measures be taken towards maintaining the general standard of the secondary education.

One such measure may be abolition of the present question banks; instead, questions should be kept open and answer to a question may be written in some limited words in lieu of check-list.

M Zahidul Haque
Assistant Professor,
Bangladesh Agricultural Institute, Dhaka

OPINION

Excellence for Survival

Shahabuddin Mahtab

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policy changes, and the lack of commitment force our textile mills to be run with huge losses.

Bangladesh has got a very bright future in the leather industry, if we diligently work for producing quality goods for our home market, and also for export. The finished products have a far greater value added, as compared to the primary products.

We produce an enormous quantity of fruits throughout the year, such as bananas, mangoes, jackfruit, water melon, pine apples, guavas etc. But we have not been able to set up standard food processing industries. We produce poor qualities of cashew nuts and peanuts, but have not worked for the improved qualities which could have found an export market.

The list as indicated can be lengthened. We have not explored or worked hard in the areas where we had possibilities. No one can keep us poor unless we decide on it ourselves.

The dimensions of our problems are so great that the government alone cannot solve it. There has to be some amount of patriotism and an enlightened self-interest on our part. There has to be continuous dialogues, between the government and the opposition, the government and the industrialists, and the trade unions. The lines of communication have to be easy so that mutual trust and understanding can be generated. All the major problems facing the country have to be discussed in the different forums, and, above all, the parliament itself. The national issues have to be decided nationally, keeping in view the interests and well-being of the eleven crore people who have elected their representatives to the parliament.

The government and the opposition have to grapple with the basic and major issues of the country. Now is the time for sagacity, sincerity, understanding and statesmanship. Because, who lives, if the country does not.

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