

**Speak with One Voice**

Though on the wane, we continue to suffer from the violence and killing that have been triggered by the destruction of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya in India. While condemning the demolition of the mosque, and all that has followed, the task before us is to work together to prevent further death and destruction.

We had hoped, and continue to do so that, if not in anything constructive, at least in preventing something which is particularly destructive, our political parties will unite. We are referring to an united stand against communalism and violence that nearly engulfed our country. We particularly feel the absence of such a united move because what we are fighting against is fundamentally against the principles of our Constitution, contrary to the ideals of our liberation war, and totally against the teachings of tolerance and respect for others' religions of the Holy Quran and Prophet Mohammad (SM).

Yes, so far almost all parties that believe in democracy and the true spirit of our people, have condemned the violence and attack on other communities and desecration of their places of worship. The ruling BNP and the leading opposition parties have all separately condemned the violence and communal attack that has so far occurred. These were timely actions, and we welcome them. But most regrettably our petty and shortsighted political interests have prevented us from speaking in one voice against what everybody agrees, is contrary to everything that our country, our nationalism and our religion stand for.

Therefore, we propose that an all party peace procession be organised, not only in Dhaka, but in all parts of the country, if possible in every thana and village.

We are aware that behind the scene moves have been afoot, but so far without much success. We would like to appeal to all parties, especially to the two leading ones, to set aside whatever reservations they may have — justified and unjustified — and unite against the rise of communal disharmony and work together to restore peace and order. If we cannot expect the two leaders of BNP and AL to lead the peace march, we can at least hope to see the two deputy leaders out in the streets, leading thousands and thousands of our people in strengthening what has been a glorious tradition of ours. Let not the impact of a joint move, all over the country, be lost on any political party. It will be many times more effective than separate attempts to fight the forces who are exploiting the religious sentiments of our people to create discord and disharmony. We have said so earlier, but consider it worth repeating, that no citizen of Bangladesh can be held responsible for what had happened in another country, and as such, should not suffer the brunt of a reaction for an act in a foreign land.

In this regard we would like to call upon all leaders and members of the parliament to return to their respective constituencies and to work with the common people to defeat the forces that may create violence and destruction. They really shouldn't be sitting in Dhaka or other big cities and issuing press statements. The move by the AL leader Sheikh Hasina, asking her party stalwarts to return to their respective villages, is a timely one. However, we would like to caution, that politics at the moment should not be partisan but national and not against one another, but against the communal forces.

Whatever may be the provocation to divide us, for the sake of our national interest we must speak with one voice against those who exploit religious sentiments to create violence and unrest.

**Leave Them Alone**

The unprecedented but not quite unexpected has happened. Britain's heir to the throne Prince Charles and his wife Princess Diana have agreed to, so far, a middle-of-the-course solution to their troubled marriage. The solution is no more and no less than separation; but not divorce at any rate. On the rock for quite sometime now, their relationship however is not expected to be devoid of the usual courtesy. The only thing that will be missing is the warmth and tenderness with which they treated each other. After nine years of an eventful married life, the royal couple have taken the painful decision, we believe, to salvage whatever remains of the lost love.

However, the personal decision they have arrived at is not an end in itself. Its close relation to British monarchy and the public interests in the developments following it will not allow the matter to settle so easily. The noisiness of the British media responsible for fuelling public interest in personal lives of the members of the British royal family has almost turned the whole affair into a show-biz. Admittedly, however, the recent royal escapades are no less responsible for the present state of affairs. Indeed, the media in Britain may well be having a last laugh and congratulating themselves for rightly predicting the royal couple's separation. This success of theirs may give them further causes to be even more daring. But, to our minds, that will be the most unkind thing ever to happen to the couple going through the traumatic experiences of separation. The media should leave them alone, showing respect for their private lives.

What however may be of interest — both legal and ethical — is the fate of Prince Charles in particular and British monarchy in general. Even more intriguing will be the question if Princess Diana qualifies, in her separated state, to be the queen. John Major, Prime Minister of Britain, has been categorical in pointing out the eligibility of the couple for their respective crowns. That would have been reassuring had veteran legislators like Tony Marlow of Major's governing Conservative Party not sounded dissent. So strong is the dissent that they would not mind taking away the British crown from Prince Charles even if it means handing over the same to his eldest son William. Legal experts will have a tough time working out the solution but suited to the purpose. That a sizeable Britons feel that the monarchy in Britain has outrun its course has been made all the more important by the wayward behaviours of the members of the royal family itself. The ethical considerations, given the British value system, cannot be ignored.

Before this more important issue is addressed, there is however a greater need for restraining the media focus from scandals and the prurient. The estranged royal couple have had enough of the media gaze, let them mind their own responsible businesses.

**Humanitarian Relief and the United Nations: Is It a Story of Failures?**

It has been alleged that the United Nations has failed in its humanitarian tasks. The western press is most vocal in taking the UN to task for its many shortcomings. The Somali case is often advanced as the clear proof of the alleged failure. I find these allegations to be unfair. On the basis of my experience in the UN system I can say that the UN Secretariat has always taken its responsibilities most seriously and despite occasional lapses and shortcomings, a good job was done in most situations, often under extremely difficult conditions.

It has to be admitted at the very outset that the number of humanitarian problems, both in terms of frequency of events and number of people involved, has increased beyond reasonable expectation. The founding fathers of the UN did not set up machineries big enough to cope with such massive number of case loads. The cases of the Afghans, the Cambodians, the Laotians, the Kurds, the Iraqi Shi'ites, the Somalis, the Sudanese, the Angolans are some of the relatively well known humanitarian problems. The tragedy in Bosnia is unfolding everyday.

The refugees from the war are getting a lot of news coverage but not enough assistance in preventing the atrocities. There are many other cases but they may not have attracted as much international attention as those mentioned above. For example, how many people in Europe or America know about the plight of the Burmese refugees in Bangladesh? It has to be recognized that we are passing through a rather unstable period in which nationalist forces as well as linguistic or ethnic minorities are aspiring after self-determination and independence often by disturbing or even by destroying the established order. Every war and certainly every civil war creates some refugees. The break-up of the former Soviet Union has added to ethnic, linguistic and political tensions. Some of the refugees are fleeing from political or religious persecution; others are

running away from theatres of war and yet others are simply getting out of a country which does not offer them economic security or reasonable prospects. In Africa droughts and famines have been another reason for people to flee from starvation and death.

Given the fluid international political situation it is no surprise that today the world has the largest number of refugees that mankind had to deal with at any time in history. I do not have the precise number but it would be bigger that the population of many medium size countries. One may divide them into different categories according to certain criteria but they all share one common feature: these helpless human beings are thrown into alien and often hostile surroundings and they are cut off from their normal sources of income and means of support. They depend, almost entirely, on other people's kindness for survival.

What are the machineries created by the United Nations to deal with these refugees? The most important is the office of the High Commissioner for Refugees. This office has not only tried to take care of refugees in every corner of the earth, it has also acted as the most important champion and spokesman for refugee rights. Some refugees have not only suffered on account of being in an alien land without any means of support but also because, as victims of discrimination or political persecution, they can never hope to go back to their own country. These are sad cases but unfortunately their number is not small. The Bangladesh refugees who took shelter in India in 1971 suffered brutal oppression at home but luckily their sojourn in a foreign country was short. Besides, India and the international community including the UNHCR stood firmly by the side of the refugees. There are however many homeless and displaced people around the world who are not so fortunate. Often they are not welcome in the country in which they

sought shelter. The example that comes to my mind is that of the Vietnamese boat people in Hongkong.

The UN member countries, particularly the developed ones, have not always been ready to provide the funds needed to care for the refugees. As far as I am aware, the High Commissioner's main concern in the recent years has been paucity of funds. This has severely constrained the capacity of the office to respond in time or if it did respond, it could not fulfil its mandate due to lack of funds. In the case of the Cambodian refugees living in camps in Thailand the situation was somewhat better because of

the political support that they enjoyed. The UN Secretary-General went out of the way to create a special office to mobilize funds and coordinate the relief operations. The ASEAN countries and their allies in Europe and North America wanted to ensure adequate funds for these refugees because these camps were also the recruiting ground for the resistance forces. These countries had an interest in building up the strength of the non-communist factions fighting the Vietnam-backed regime in Pnom Penh. Despite the political support for the programme, I had to appeal every two or three months to replenish the dwindling resources in the Cambodian trust fund. I used to hold donors' meeting in New York, Bangkok and Geneva and travel to the capitals of the major donor countries and plead with them either to maintain the level of their contribution or to increase it or to provide some rice or fish or oil or some other commodities.

Because of the uncertainty of funding I could hardly plan the programme. My experi-

ence is one of the constant worry if there would be enough money to pay the salary of the staff or enough rice in the stock to distribute to the camps. I had to discontinue certain welfare activities just because the funds were not available. In my view if there were short comings in the Cambodian relief programme, the main reason was the failure of the donors to ensure steady funding. This is why I said that the western press is unfair in not seeking the root cause of the inadequacies and failures of these UN operations. In the light of the confusion in organizing relief for the Kurdish refugees after the recent Gulf War the European countries

who went to Germany at the invitation of the German government will be forced out of the country. Even if the government officially refuses to endorse the racist activities of the Neo-Nazi elements, the attacks on innocent Kurds will persuade many of them to seek the safety of their original home or some other country. This will create another refugee problem because these immigrants — at least the younger ones — will be strangers in their own country. Thus there are many potential sources from which the world can expect a steady stream of refugees knocking at our door as well as at our conscience. Instead of seeking scape-goats, which the western press seems to love, the world community must seek a satisfactory way to cope with this new global phenomenon.

Broadly speaking, refugees may be divided into the following categories: 1) People escaping racial, political, religious or other persecution or discrimination at home and conflict and strife due to these reasons. 2) Civil war or war with other countries including war of liberation or collapse of civil authority as in Somalia. 3) Droughts and famines. 4) Search for better economic opportunities.

A new convention to revise the Geneva conventions is necessary to provide the legal framework to protect these unfortunate victims of situations listed above. A basic problem, which I have noticed with concern, is the uncertainty of the world community about the policy to follow in regard to different types of refugees. As I mentioned earlier, the Kurdish refugees brought these difficulties into sharp focus. Once the policies on these basic questions have been established and a set of guidelines has been adopted, the funding question will have to be faced. Ad hoc response, often influenced by political considerations rather than humanitarian ones, is not enough. The UN machineries

have to be restructured to deal with the problem in its totality within a policy framework which people can easily understand. Today there are many UN agencies which perform humanitarian functions in their respective fields.

Apart from the Special Representatives of the Secretary General who are appointed for specific problems and the Office of the High Commissioner, the UNICEF, WFP, WHO and a number of other agencies also get involved in them from time to time. The International Committee of the Red Cross is also very active specially in Humanitarian problems created by war or military operations. Often there is only limited coordination between them; it has also been seen that the coordination effort has taken too much of time and energy. Inter agency rivalry or bickering is not infrequent. A more active coordinating role for the UN Secretary-General may reduce the current confusion but the effort so far has not been comprehensive enough to answer the concerns that the international community has felt for the growing number of refugees. Bangladesh is currently carrying the burden of more than two hundred and fifty thousand refugees from Myanmar. In an earlier article I have explained how the UN and its humanitarian arm — the UNHCR — ought to have been associated more closely in the repatriation operation in order to create the confidence in the minds of the refugees. It is a matter of regret that the Bangladesh authorities took upon itself a task which would have been better done in cooperation with the UN. It is in the interest of all small states to strengthen the UN so that the world body has the mandate and the financial resources to deal with these humanitarian problems in satisfactory manner. The UN is an instrument created by the member countries to serve their common interests. Before blaming the UN one should look at the performance of the member countries — especially the affluent ones — in providing the funds needed for the purpose.

**ON THE RECORD**  
by Shah AMS Kibria

recognized that the system of ad hoc special representatives appointed by the UN Secretary-General was not a fully satisfactory response to the refugee problems we have to deal with almost on a continuing basis. As a result a post of an under secretary general for humanitarian affairs has been recently created. He is supposed to monitor the global picture on a continuing basis and take urgent action on behalf of the UN Secretary-General. Of course his effectiveness will depend on the funds at his disposal. This is the crux of the matter. What is the policy of the international community towards different types of refugees? How are these operations to be funded? Instead of criticizing the UN, answers must be found to these questions.

The recent wave of racism in Germany is another reminder that what appears settled may not be so in reality. Hatred and irrational emotions can be easily aroused and lead to unstable political situations and in the process create new refugee problems. I do not know if the millions of Turks

**The Ethnic Cauldron that is Brewing in Macedonia**

Adam Novak writes from Skopje, Macedonia

*The Albanian minority in the ex-Yugoslav republic of Macedonia is little interested in separatist politics, while Slav Macedonians have accepted a high degree of multi-culturalism. Greece's economic blockade and its attempts to prevent the European Community recognising Macedonian independence have temporarily united the two communities. But as the crisis exacerbates nationalist feelings, the risk of a civil war, involving Macedonia's neighbours, increases.*



ideal. As everywhere in eastern Europe, ethnic tensions are deep. The Titoist regime in Macedonia allowed Slav Macedonians to dominate economic and political life in the

Macedonians. "Skopje is probably the last place where the two communities live intermingled", admits theatre director Vladimir Milein, who produces drama in both languages. He also leads the 500-member Skopje Helsinki Citizens' Assembly, a human rights group trying to rebuild bridges between Macedonia's ethnic groups. He hopes success in the capital, where a quarter of Macedonia's two million inhabitants live, will turn the tide against chauvinism and nationalism on a national scale.

Low support for separatism among Albanian-speaking Macedonians is partly the result of the openness of the majority Slav Macedonians, probably the least nationalistic of the Yugoslav peoples.

Saso Ordanski, editor of the independent magazine Puls, says: "Independence was a reaction to the descent of Serbia and Croatia into civil war. When this craziness is over, we want to rebuild the closest possible links with other republics."

Macedonian children still study Serbo-Croatian in school, while their parents still buy Serbian or Croatian newspapers and magazines.

Greece is blocking Macedonia and vetoing European Community recognition of its independence and all this has so far united Albanians and Slavs in a common — Macedonian — identity. Four tankers of oil bought by Macedonia are blocked in Thessalonika harbour. Greece claims Macedonia is reselling oil to Serbia against the United Nations boycott of that country.

Macedonians are increasingly circulating by bicycle or on foot, since the black market price of petrol has reached five German Marks a litre — higher than in the Serbian capital Belgrade.

Slav Macedonians are offended by Greek refusal to let them use the name Macedonia and claim Alexander the Great as a Macedonian not a Greek hero. Albanian Macedonians contrast Greek concern for the Greek-speaking minority in Albania with their refusal to

recognise Macedonian-speakers in northern Greece, and the often aggressive treatment of Albanian immigrants by the Greek police.

The economic crisis caused by the blocked encourages Slav Macedonian nationalism. VMRO for the ultra-nationalist Gruffo is increasingly visible in the streets of Skopje. VMRO wants to abolish ethnic minority rights and purify the civil service of "pro-Albanian", "pro-Greek" and "pro-Serbian" elements.

Vladimir Milein, a supporter of the reformed Communist Party, now called the Soviet Democratic Union, says: "That presumably means everyone who doesn't want to fight our neighbours." He is convinced that "the alternative to a coalition with the Albanians is civil war".

Former foreign minister Denko Malesk believes "any open conflict could mean the division of Macedonia, since Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia and Albania could hardly be expected to remain silent."

Macedonia's neighbours all have potential territorial claims on the republic. Ethnic Albanian areas here border on Albania and Kosovo.

Bulgaria refuses to recognise Macedonians as anything more than "western Bulgarians", while Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic has several times proposed the partition of Macedonia, to push Serbia's borders further to the south. — GEMINI NEWS

**To the Editor...**

**New government, old expectations**

Sir, Voting a US President out of the White House may not be anybody's job, but what US electors have demonstrated in US election 92 is undisputedly an excellent "learning experience" for the democratic world.

Unseating of an incumbent US President who enriched his career with all the best everybody dreams of has not only installed confidence in democratic people but has also set a number of first-ever American records — good for American democracy.

As for LDC Bangladesh that has felicitated US President-elect who has achieved people's mandate with his JFK charisma and personal dynamics, such an exercise of democratic rights is a positive impetus to her determination for "institutionalized democracy" after several trial-and-error administrative systems since her independence.

Despite various differences between these two countries half the globe apart encompassing social, cultural, historical, political, educational,

technological, and economical, both countries do have some common grounds of interactions based on reciprocity.

Furthermore, all the dissimilarities that apparently negate the mutuality may not engulf the possibilities of their contributions towards the development of mankind.

M Rahaman  
Zila School Road,  
Mymensingh

**Stranded Pakistanis**

Sir, Our attention has been drawn to the letter published in your esteemed daily on 3rd December, captioned "Stranded Pakistanis." We have read it with interest but not without surprise. The description given by so-called "A group of stranded Pakistanis in Chittagong" is totally false, fabricated and concocted only to mislead and divert the attention of stranded Pakistanis and Rabita Al-Alam Islami. The self-made and self-analysed break-down of rate is absolutely false having no links with truth. The survey and group photography of stranded Pakistanis have been done quite fairly, comparable to international standard con-

ducted comprehensively with minimum consumption of three M's.

In this context it would not be out of the way to mention that in the general meeting of stranded Pakistanis at Halishahar on 23 October, the leader of stranded Pakistanis Janab Al-haj M Nasim Khan himself and others threw a challenge to prove any irregularity in collection of money or injustice done to anyone. But there was no response from the audience rather they had expressed their total satisfaction and solidarity with the organisation and the leader.

What do they mean by sale of repatriation ticket and who sold it? There is no existence of repatriation ticket at all, so the question of selling it does not arise. These baseless allegations are nothing but simply flying kicks in the air.

So far the question of categorisation of stranded Pakistanis is concerned it is correct neither Rabita nor SPGR nor Govt of Pakistan laid down hard and fast rules in this connection. It is also an open secret that SPGR has always advocated and fought for the cause of general repatriation

and totally opposed the categorisation of stranded Pakistanis at this stage in Bangladesh. Perhaps the so-called group of stranded Pakistanis in Chittagong is not aware about the pro forma used by Pakistan Govt in conducting the survey of stranded Pakistanis. It is very comprehensive which provides a clear picture of existing socio-economic conditions and categorisation can be done any moment on the basis of these information. The late President Ziaul Huq of Pakistan had agreed on repatriation purely on humanitarian ground in 1985 resulting in signing of Deed of Agreement with Rabita on 9th July, 1988 and formation of Trust..

Those claiming themselves as stranded Pakistanis but serving with Govt of Bangladesh are undoubtedly nationals of Bangladesh. They are not entitled to repatriation to Pakistan. Rabita or SPGR in no way is responsible for their enumeration. Frankly speaking, such persons may be fooling both Bangladesh and Pakistan Govts. Even, reportedly, few of them have got national passports of both countries. It is SPGR providing

opportunity and scope to all stranded Pakistanis irrespective of their socio-economic status to get enumerated if they wish to be repatriated.

Lastly, they have suggested to consider families of stranded Pakistanis from Sardar Bahadur Nagar, Saigunbagan, Islamia School Camp, etc for inclusion in 1st batch of repatriation of 3,000 families because they have occupied Railway properties there. But this is not the lone example. In Dhaka, stranded Pakistanis including orphans, widows have also been living in Govt owned staff quarters. In Mirpur Section 10 and 11 several thousand families are occupying Govt quarters owned by Ministry of Works & Housing, Shimulpara Camp of Adamjee Nagar is located within compound of Adamjee Jute Mills owned and run by BJMC. So the question of occupying Railway property in no way gets priority for consideration.

Taking these into account SPGR has adopted and favoured a nice proposal, of "Alphabetical Order", of repatriation to avoid chaos, confusion and clash among stranded

Pakistanis. It also opposes 'choose and pick' policy as it will generate disappointment and frustration among us.

As regards Rabita, they are sincere, honest and providing bulk of funds for smooth and early repatriation and rehabilitation of stranded Pakistanis. It is only Rabita who initiated, engineered and pioneered the whole process of repatriation. So any allegation against Rabita will tantamount to tarnishing the high image of the only international Muslim NGO. We apprehend if Rabita withdraws its support then repatriation may become a dream for ever. The stranded Pakistanis are conscious and aware of conspirators and inshallah will foil their evil designs.

Sohail Akhter Khan  
Secretary, SPGR  
Halishahar Branch, Chittagong.

**Bangla calendar**

Sir, Have we not had enough of Huseyn Muhammad Ershad? If so, how long more we have to continue with the re-aligned Bangla calendar as introduced by him?  
Shamsul Haque  
South Goran, Dhaka