

Reliving the Spirit of Ekushey

During our years under Pakistan, 'Ekushey' — the term which now means everything that our language movement stood for — served the purpose of galvanising the nation to struggle against alien domination. After our liberation, 'Ekushey' stood for a struggle against our overall backwardness, especially cultural and intellectual. In the first we had succeeded. In the second, our success has been far from satisfactory. Some would say, we have not only failed to make any progress during our 21 years of independence, we may even have gone backward in certain respects. Though such thinking may not find widespread acceptability, yet there is merit in the view that some very retrogressive trends have made inroads into our cultural and intellectual life, something we had to happen in independent Bangladesh. The fundamentalism in Bangladesh is taking advantage of the deep-seated religious and cultural sentiments of the people, the fundamentalist forces are the cause of hatred and bigotry. These forces are contrary to the spirit and the ideal of Ekushey. For us to have to rise once again against the forces of communalism is perhaps the most telling evidence of our failure in carrying forward the ideals of Ekushey. But, however shameful a failure it has been, we have to fight this battle once again — and fight better than we did before. We owe it to the martyrs of the language movement.

The overall development of our language and culture, as envisaged by the leaders of our language movement, has not come about either. Except for the emergence of some writers, the growth of the theatre movement, and perhaps some odd development here and there, we can hardly claim to have made any major breakthrough in any fundamental sense.

The reason for the lack of overall advancement is of course the backwardness of our education system. The existence of such a huge number of illiterates is the first stumbling. Then we have the shortcoming of the system itself. The lucky ones who are able to enroll themselves in the school system, and the still luckier ones who are among the 30 per cent who continue till class V, are perhaps not the best examples of what a good education system can and should produce. No education for large number of kids coupled with poor education for the majority of school going children, stands out as the biggest insult to the memories of the martyrs of the Ekushey.

We in The Daily Star have repeatedly urged the government, the members of parliament, the political leaders and the opinion makers to join hands in eradicating illiteracy and making the school system successful. What better, and constructive way can there be to commemorate this year's Ekushey than to take the most determined pledge to fulfil the goals of Education for All by the Year 2000.

In the old days the spirit of Ekushey always served to unite the patriotic forces. Perhaps in those days the enemy was clear and it was easy for us to unite. But today, we think, the enemy is equally clear — poverty and underdevelopment. Winning against this enemy is as important as all our previous victories ever were. For it is through our victory over poverty and underdevelopment, that our victories in the language movement, and in the liberation war, will become truly meaningful. This we must understand. In the hope for the revival of the old spirit of sacrifice and patriotism, we pledge to work hard, and work together.

UN and Bosnia

The UN Secretary General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali has acted with commendable firmness in asking the UNHCR to resume its humanitarian aid to Bosnia-Herzegovina, which had been somewhat arbitrarily suspended on Wednesday by the agency's chief, Sadako Ogata. In calling a halt to the relief operation, the UNHCR boss was protesting against a blockade of the UN convoys by local Serb militias. The situation was made further complicated by the refusal of even Bosnian authorities to let supplies enter Sarajevo in solidarity with the inhabitants of eastern Bosnia.

From the point of view of Ogata, the situation had become untenable and perhaps even impossible. Therefore, she took the easy way out, to suspend the operation unless all parties concerned co-operated with the UNHCR in its relief operation.

Dr Ghali had several reasons to oppose Ogata's decision. The UN Chief himself had recently come under severe criticisms for dragging his feet on the Bosnia question, calling for more elusive talks among warring factions. In this sense, the world body had failed to earn the confidence of the population of the ravaged part of the former Yugoslavia. The UNHCR's move certainly came at the wrong moment. What's worse, it was taken without consultation with Ghali, with Ogata said to be exceeding her authority in suspending the relief operation.

One may not underestimate the challenge facing the UN agency whose entire modus operandi depends on how it carries out its humanitarian activities. In UNHCR, every one, from the top boss to the ordinary field worker, knows what the ordeal is all about, an ordeal that the agency cannot shirk. In this context, the UNHCR's decision to pull out of Somalia two years ago will in retrospect, continue to be viewed with mixed feelings, especially when it is the agency which had earned the Nobel Peace Prize for humanitarian activities.

The UNHCR should indeed return to Bosnia without any further delay, while its chief should feel free to discuss with relevant quarters how the agency's operation can be made less hazardous. Even if Ogata's conditions are not met, her agency should think of another suspension of its aid operation only as the last resort and this should be based on a decision of the UN Security Council.

The UNHCR's resumption of aid to Bosnia should boost the morale of the strife-torn population in Bosnia at a time when, in a welcome move, France with British and US support, is working on a resolution for the Security Council to establish an international tribunal to try war criminals for their atrocities committed against predominantly Muslim population in Bosnia. There are some signs that the nightmare in the conflict-ridden republic may be coming to an end. The UNHCR has a role to play in this development.

If the weather is good — no major flood or drought — to batter the fragile rice stalks — we get a bumper aman harvest when within a span of two to three weeks, the bulk of the near-around 12 million tons of paddy enter the rural primary markets. Arrival of so much paddy in so short a time creates the "mess", otherwise termed as the bumper harvest. It is an illusion no doubt; the much sought after self-sufficiency is a distant mirage.

Basically, it is a marketing problem. Farmers have no capacity to hold on to the harvest. Wholesalers lack processing and storage capabilities since government policy of strong intervention in the rice market, given the persistent regime of scarcity, did never support private sector market development for the politically most strategic commodity — rice. Traditionally, it is a highly regulated market constrained through compulsory procurement, stocking limitations and price control.

Looking at the concentrated arrival of a disaster free aman crop this season, profound optimists have even urged the government to think of exporting quality rice to Middle-east markets. Also, general lack of liquidity on the part of stockists due to overall economic recession has further pulled down the prices in the face of large arrivals. The euphoria of a surplus and talk of rice exports, let us pray and hope, be short-lived. Let us not rush in where 'angels fear to tread' since rice is practically the sustenance of the nation and nobody should play with fire. Definitely, the occasion does not call for fireworks in the misty evenings of cold January.

A look at some statistics will clarify the issue. According to Government's standard food budgeting procedures, an average quantity of 15.5 ounces of food grains (rice-wheat) must be made available for each human being, everyday of the year. For the 115 million popu-

The Illusive Bumper Harvest

lation of 1993, total consumption requirement of food grains would amount to 18.5 million tons. If 2.5 million tons of wheat are available from food aid, cash purchase and domestic production, then 16 million tons of rice required for consumption imply domestic paddy production of 26 million tons, inclusive of 10 per cent extra on account of seed, feed and wastage.

Boro Cultivation

Now, if the boro paddy that will follow aman is equally good, then it is possible that total rice output might slightly exceed estimated requirement of 16 million tons. As a matter of fact, a production level of near around 16 million tons had been maintained in the years of no natural calamities during the recent past. So, comfortable projections for the current year is very legitimate.

Yet there are no grounds for illusions. If farmers fail to receive a reasonable return to the current aman harvest, it would adversely affect boro cultivation, particularly in the transplanted aman areas where irrigation is available. Boro requires a great deal of cash investments for irrigation. The new class of 'water lords' that have emerged in the country would see to it that such costs are not lowered for the benefit of farmers and bargadars.

Between the beginning (1979-1980) and end of the decade (1989-1990), total rice output increased from 12.5 to 15.5 million tons. The entire increase of 3 million tons is accounted for by boro alone. In fact if we look at the figures, boro output increased by 3.4 million tons but its cultivation is expanding at the cost of broadcast aman whose output fell by 400,000 tons during the same period. Thus total net gain in terms of rice was three million tons.

The overall trend have been static or variable for aus and aman harvests but rapidly increasing boro cultivation due to spread of irrigation (by 1.8 million acres during 1980s) as well as substitution of local variety by high yielding ones. At the same time, if we look at wheat, its output from the all-time high of one and a half million tons during mid 1980s declined to less than a million ton at present. This is because with irrigation available, farmers switched over to boro. After all, rice is the preferred cereal.

Boro has been the mainstay of increasing food grain pro-

duction at the cost of broadcast aman which being low yielding, is an ideal substitution but wheat also declined when irrigation water had been in abundance for paddy culture. This has become the established pattern of change but we can never achieve high growth agriculture through expansion of boro cultivation alone.

In the year 2000, Bangladesh population of 145 million (World Bank estimates) should consume 23 million tons of foodgrains. If domestic output plus import of wheat alone is maintained at two million tons, then rice production by the year 2000 should increase by five million tons from the estimated level of 16 million tons of 1993. In the past, the entire incremental output came from boro. It took the decade of 1980s to increase boro output by 3.4 million tons; in less time, in fact within the next seven years,

we have to secure more than five million tons increase in boro output since further fall in area under broadcast aman is inevitable while wheat would tend to revert itself to a minor cereal. Above all, irrigation must expand by 700,000 acres each year against an average annual expansion rate of 225,000 acres during 1980s.

Damaging Impact

The damaging impact would be virtual elimination of varieties of rice crops, oilseeds and pulses in particular. The whole scenario tends to be utterly ridiculous. Most important, irrigation cannot be ex-

ceeded land were under aus and aman; within the next 12 years, that is by 1988/87, such lands declined by three million acres. At the same time boro area increased by 3.8 million acres — thus causing an overall increase of paddy land. What happened is that not only broadcast aman lands were dispersed with, late varieties of boro also replaced aus. Thus additional output from boro paddy have to effect an overall increase in cereal production after compensating for the loss of the main season rice crops.

Our experts at BIRRI are fully aware of these trends. They also know that 8.5 million acres of paddy land are potentially suitable for double cropping of HYV aus followed by HYV aman largely under rainfed conditions. At the average yield of two tons of paddy (per crop) per acre, 70 per cent rice recovery against the usual two-third of paddy because of improved milling; and seven per cent instead of 10 per cent loss on account of seed, feed and wastage through better storage and other post-harvest practices, an output of 22 million tons of clean, high quality rice can be obtained from only 40 per cent of the net cultivated land of 21 million acres estimated to be available by the year 2000. We estimated our food consumption requirement to be 23.0 million tons, we can achieve the cereal (not food) self-sufficiency along with a small surplus to carry over, with less than half the crop land under paddy today, assuming wheat consumption remains at two million tons.

Bumper Harvest

The entire boro output would then be a real bumper harvest. Instead, we should try to divert land through price

incentives for cultivation of the wide variety of rice crops possible only during the dry season, while the rainy months are earmarked for rice cultivation since it is the only feasible alternative apart from jute during that period on the flood plains of our river deltas.

In addition, modern rice processing would also enable extraction of edible rice bran oil to the extent of 400,000 tons while two million tons of deoiled bran cake would be excellent poultry feed. This might be the beginning of the modern poultry industry on a sufficiently large scale, competitive enough to force out the smuggled eggs from India.

Expansion of high yielding rice cultivation during the rainy season have been tried in the past without much success. Hence the emphasis has continued to remain as before — increase irrigated boro paddy acreage. But this must end since the real bumper harvest on a sustainable basis must originate from a diversified cropping system. We are regrettably going backward through mono-culture of rice and rice alone. The alternative strategy suggested for this purpose is twofold: first, concentrate at the upstream end of the production cycle through adequate supplies of seeds, fertilizer and extension services; second, promote modern large scale processing including by-product utilization so that maximum value added could be secured at the downstream end of the production cycle.

The illusion of a bumper harvest is now at our doorstep. Government is worried. Farmgate prices have crashed. Our present modern milling and storage capacities are grossly inadequate to deal with it; we have promoted paddy cultivation but not rice processing — that is the source of the New Year illusion of a bumper harvest.



Bosnia — No Light in Sight at the End of the Tunnel

by Arshad-uz Zaman

THIS nine month old crisis which has given the world a new expression — 'ethnic cleansing', and whose statistics in human cost is mind boggling, seems like a never ending saga. Diplomatic activities continue without a let up as new brutalities overshadow old ones. With the advent of President Clinton and appointment of a special envoy Mr. Bartholomew, the US policy has not yet taken a clear shape, although men of good will around the world have pinned their hopes on a strong US initiative.

The Bosnian crisis, which has held centre stage of the world for the better part of 1992 and particularly in the Islamic world, deserves to be analysed in some detail. Three communities — namely Muslims, Serbs and Croats are involved. The Muslims, who are 44% of the population, are so far the main losers for the Serbs, who are Orthodox Christians, have conquered

70% of Bosnia. The brunt of Serbian ferocity has been borne by the Muslims, for not only have they lost territory but 'ethnic cleansing', meaning rape of their women, have been largely practiced on them. It is they who have been massively uprooted from their homes and whose beleaguered capital Sarajevo wait hopelessly for relief supplies. The Serbs are progressing according to a well defined long standing plan — Greater Serbia. Thus they would be happy to see Bosnia as a community of sovereign states whereas the Muslims want a unitary state, where the three communities would be represented. The Croats, who are Catholics are 18% of the population and their position is close to that of the Serbs, for they want a loose confederation in Bosnia.

On January 2 last, Mr. Cyrus Vance representing the UN and Lord Owen representing the European Community, presented a peace proposal in

Geneva. The two main points of the plan were a confederal structure of Bosnia-Herzegovina comprising ten provinces along ethnic lines — three with Serbian preponderance, three Muslim and three Croats and a demilitarized capital — Sarajevo. The Croats immediately accepted and naturally the Muslims and even the Serbs rejected. The plan is now before the Security Council in New York. This plan, prepared by Vance-Owen, has been waiting for the new American administration's moral and material support. By appointing Mr. Bartholomew as his special representative, President Clinton has signalled that he is getting ready to move in the matter. It is noteworthy that Mr. Bartholomew has made Moscow his first point of contact in search of a solution.

The Bosnian crisis has vividly demonstrated the inad-

equacies of the EC as a political instrument. It must of course be stated that EC is yet to have a political structure and its hands are more than full with inter EC problems particularly in the currency field. The fallout of Maestricht is far from over. Russian position on the Bosnian crisis has been ambivalent, to say the least. Russia has traditionally warm relations with the Serbs. Any stiffening of the Security Council resolution, which the Serbs routinely violate, will need Russian approval. It is the US alone who can speak to them and hence the visit of Mr. Bartholomew.

After the last Gulf war, which traumatised the entire Islamic world, it is Bosnia, which remains the single strongest preoccupation of Muslims round the world. In Turkey, where there are nearly as many Bosnians as there are in Bosnia, emotions run high.

The Turkish Government and the media have continued a relentless campaign for military action to bring Serbian atrocities to an end. The OIC Foreign Ministers have met in emergency session in Jeddah and have called upon the international community to act. President Bush, who focussed entirely on Saddam Hussein and later on Somalia, stayed from any concrete action in Bosnia. Even the No Fly Zone resolutions of the Security Council remained dead letters and the UN relief convoys carrying essential food and medicine remained bogged down on the snowy former Yugoslav mountains.

The young US President, whose election pledge was on the home front, finds himself before hard choices on the international front. From the manner he has moved it is evident that caution is the watchword. It appears that President Clinton would wish to tighten the noose around

President Milosevic, who has made a mockery of the Security Council resolutions. The air power is a distinct possibility. War crimes trials are another possibility that President Clinton's administration is talking about louder and louder. The brutality of the Serbs are ammunition enough for such a course to be followed.

The Vance-Owen plan which is at present before the Security Council, unfortunately allows Mr. Milosevic get away with his ill gotten gains. The reaction in the Islamic world is one of dismay. The Clinton initiative holds out the hope that justice may yet be done to the principal aggrieved party — the Muslims. Bosnia is a test case, for Kosovo, with its 90% Albanian population, is next. It should be remembered that the Serbs consider Kosovo their cradle and Mr. Milosevic made his political career there.

The question finally is: who will bell the Serbian cat?

AGGRESSIVE promotion of contraceptive use has led to an eight year low in babies born in the Marshall Islands, a nation which until recently had one of the world's fastest growing populations.

The Marshalls' family planning campaign has coupled the use of the contraceptive implant Norplant — that prevents pregnancy for five years — and the injectable Depo-provera, with strong community backing for population control from the Protestant and Catholic churches.

By world standards the Marshall Islands population of 50,000 is small. But with two-thirds crowded into fewer than two square miles of land in this coral island group, the two urban centres in the Marshalls are densely populated.

Hospital statistics show that 741 babies were born in Majuro, the capital island, during 1992. This is the lowest figure since 1984, the last year that fewer than 700 babies were born.

The 1992 total reflects a more than 17 per cent drop in births over Majuro's record setting year of 1987 when an out-of-control birth rate pro-

Churches Preach Family Planning

Giff Johnson writes from Majuro

duced 895 babies in the nation's capital. A national census in 1988 confirmed that the Marshalls had a phenomenal 4.24 per cent annual growth rate, one of the world's highest. Recent figures suggest that may be changing.

It shows that more people are using family planning, says Marita Edwin, the assistant director of the government's Division of Population and Family Planning. "We're especially seeing more young people in the 20-to-24 age group coming in to the clinic for services."

Yet family planning is a relatively new concept to this staunchly conservative Christian country. Until 1984, there was no family planning programme at all. And when it was launched, with World Health Organisation, United Nations Population Fund and United States federal assistance, the programme attracted barely a handful of clients.

To gain public support for family planning, the programme started a high profile, peer education project to focus

Aggressive promotion of contraceptive use has strong community backing from the Protestant and Catholic churches in the Marshall Islands, until recently with one of the world's fastest growing populations

on youth, the vast majority of the population. The Youth to Youth in Health programme employs skits, songs, puppet shows and audio visuals about sexually transmitted diseases, family planning, alcohol abuse and a wide range of health concerns.

The impact on the community, say health officials, has been dramatic. Within a year of the launching of the peer education programme in 1986, contraceptive use began to take off. A recent report by the Asian Development Bank observed that family planning use had doubled during the first years of the 1990s. Family planning now has more than 3,000 contraceptive users annually.

As the population burgeoned in the 1980s, the cases of malnutrition sky-rocketed —

in a country with no shortage of island foods. Rapid change from a subsistence life to overcrowded urban centres has spawned serious family problems, prompting church leaders to speak out in support of family planning.

Even the Catholic church has shown support for family planning. "Having unlimited children for the sake of having children is not blessed," said Fr James Gould, S.J., the vicar of the Catholic church in the Marshalls. "Families should use appropriate family planning to achieve their goals. A married man and woman have within them the means to act responsibly. They can space and have a certain number of children."

Pregnancies among teenagers have accounted for one-in-six babies born in the

Marshalls. "Why do we have so much teenage pregnancy? Because they are left alone. We need to sit and talk on sexual issues facing young people. It is every important to do because people look up to pastors," says Rev Enja Enos, the president of the national council of churches.

"The traditional family system is being blown away by children having children. If young people are not taught to be human beings by their parents then you will have gangs and increasing violence because they are not loved and cared for by their parents," says Father Gould.

The church concern, combined with active outreach promotion in the community, is having its impact.

"People are beginning to realise how high the cost of living is," says Mr Edwin, as a primary motivation for using contraceptives to prevent pregnancies. Depo-provera, a contraceptive that is injected and prevents pregnancy for three months, is now the most popular method for women in Majuro, she says.

In addition to Majuro, island, contraceptive use is increasing on the many remote and sparsely populated outer islands since health assistants were trained to provide family planning counseling and dispense new methods of contraception. Because Norplant, Depo-provera and pills are now available on these outer islands, more women are using family planning, Ms Edwin says.

Recently, Foreign Minister Tom Kijner noted that the Marshalls was the only Pacific country that was promoting the contraceptive implant Norplant on a nationwide basis.

Rev Enos says the churches are getting involved. "Family planning is not only the government's concern," he says. "It's the church's, too, because there are many people in the church with large families but who cannot support them."

After parties at the United Church of Christ in Majuro, Rev Enos says he often finds people coming by to collect the leftover food for their families. "If there is no party, where are the kids going to eat?"

— Depthnews Asia

To the Editor...

Haji Policy

Sir, The Government has recently announced Haji Policy for the current Haji season. It has been decided that district quota will be fixed on the basis of population of each district. Although apparently this seems to be alright, if one goes deep into it, its inherent drawback will be all too clear. In some of the major foreign exchange earning districts it may be found that the ratio of selected people comes to 1:5 but in my district with very little or no foreign exchange earning, it stands at 1:1. That means the intending Hajjis of affluent and major foreign exchange earning districts will suffer for no fault of their own.

Hence it is felt that quota of each district should be fixed not on the basis of population but on the basis of applications received so that ratio of selection is roughly the same for each district. Would the Haji Ministry ponder over this? Saleh Ahmed Chowdhury Dhaka Cantonment.

Migratory birds

Sir, Migratory birds, unless they are endangered species, are allowed to be hunted, everywhere. But in Bangladesh, out of emotional frenzy, some people like bird lovers and bird watchers call them guest birds 'Atithi Pakh'. Although catching or hunting local birds except for few months of mat-

ing season is not prohibited, Ershad Govt, under the influence of so-called bird lovers, passed orders prohibiting catching or selling of these migratory birds. These migratory birds come in huge numbers at the advent of winter and stay here for about six months during which period they devour huge quantity of small fishes, shell-fish etc and ripe crops causing great loss to our country. Due to their devouring spree our local birds are deprived of their food.

BTW now showed an advertisement drama claiming that these migratory birds help us much by devouring insects and spiders. Even if they devour some insects and spiders, they do us harm as spiders and

many species of insects are very helpful for our crops because they devour many insects harmful to the crops. The entire episode is full of falsehood. The two birds shown as symbol of 'Atithi Pakh' are actually local 'kaim' birds found in north Bengal and also in Mymensingh and Sylhet.

As there is no restriction to use these migratory birds as table birds in Siberia, then why this senseless law in our country to prohibit their catching, specially when there is no prohibition on catching of our local birds except in the mating season? As these migratory birds are not endangered species, do a lot of harm to our poor fishermen and peasants

by devouring fishes and crops, prey on the foods, of our local birds and ducks, destroy the insects and spiders beneficial to our crops and meet a portion of poor people's demand of protein, the restrictive law must be withdrawn. At best, the Government may fix some water areas as bird sanctuaries prohibiting hunting of birds there.

Aburageem M Jahed West Nakhlaipara, Dhaka.

Individualism

Sir, According to the theory of individualism, man is entitled to exercise his all rights irrespective of race, colour and

religion. State has little right to interfere with his personal business.

But what does it mean by individualism as prevailed in our socio-political system? Here people set a 'car abaze' in the name of hartal. If law enforcing agencies resist them from such anti social acts, they make it a new issue, calling it an infringement of their political right!

So I humbly request the political leaders not to exercise such right in the name of individualism which is actually contrary to the purport of individualism.

Md Kamal Hossain Dept of Law, DU