Dhaka, Wednesday, March 24, 1993

Independence Day

In observing the Independence Day, our first duty should surely be to pay our stncerest homage to countless martyrs who sacrificed their lives to help us earn our freedom. What they did for the liberation of Bangladesh is part of our history, and a glorious one at that, which, notwithstanding all the varied and often conflicting interpretations, is an integral element in our heritage. One day, perhaps future historians, will accord this heritage its rightful place in our national life.

As we pay our homage to countless martyrs, we also offer our tribute to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Shaheed Ziaur Rahman whose complementary roles in our freedom struggle provided us with inspiration and hope. the roles which eventually turned into those of builders and architects of the new nation. We salute them with due reverence.

From the time of Sheikh Mujib and then of President Zia, we have come a long way, travelling along a bumpy rocky road, often along an uncharted course, looking for a light at the end of the tunnel. Like many other newly-independent countries, we have our own share of failures and disappointments, even despair and frustration. However, we fought against the odds and often won, as we did in ousting the authoritarian regime of Hussain Mohammad Ershad. Indeed. sadly enough, our victories are forgotten, while our defeats often acquire immensely large proportions.

This phenomenon, not particularly uncommon in a developing country, is linked to our expectations raised first at the time of our liberation and then sustained by our successive governments, including the present one. Being an open society, with a cross section of its educated elite being both politicised and articulate, we leave no government that is in power in any doubt as to our expectations, hopes and dreams. No administration can survive if it blatantly defles these expectations. Again, even in the worst of circumstances, a government can enjoy a comfortable measure of public support if it establishes its credibility, asserts its authority against divisive forces and produces a workable agenda for progress.

An agenda for progress for Bangladesh is largely based on a set of priorities that we have talked about again and again. It is reasonably straight-forward. We also believe that it enjoys wide public support, even from a cross-section of politicians. We plead for a national consensus which would enable the major political parties to agree on a common economic programme. We ask for a new thrust in industrialisation and a well-planned movement towards increased interaction between the government and the private sector. There is nothing new about this prescription. In principle, the Government of Begum Khaleda Zia has made its full commitment to this programme.

Unfortunately, the pace of implementation of this prescription remains half-hearted and often pathetically slow. While the Finance Ministry takes credit on the introduction of macro-economic reforms, its performance at the micro level leaves wide gaps, causing frustration in the business community.

The best gift the government can offer the nation on the Independence Day is to take a look at its own balance sheet, at its own gains and losses, in the same spirit of dedication and political honesty that moved hearts of millions in 1971.

Myanmar Students in Thailand

The Government of Thailand has a difficult situation in its hand with an increasing number of dissident students from Myanmar entering the country to escape arrest and harassment by the military junta. The latest report says that Thai police has arrested some 38 students for illegal entry. Now being detained at a police training school in Bangkok, the students may be asked to move to a "special safe area" camp on the border with Myanmar. Meanwhile, the Thai authorities have identified as many as 516 Myanmar students as being eligible for the camp. What makes things a little complicated is the reluctance of the students to move to the camp fearing their safety. It is just too close to Myanmar for their comfort.

It is understandable why the Thai authorities remain opposed in according political refugee status to these dissident students, letting them find jobs and settle in Bangkok on their own. They may never go back to Myanmar, as it happened to waves of Burmese refugees which entered Thailand in the sixties and even later. Putting them in temporary camps provides one answer, as it was the case when refugees from Cambodia poured in.

One wonders if the office of the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) has any role to play in this situation. Perhaps not - yet. However, its Bangkok office should monitor the situation carefully and render even unsolicited advice to Bangkok on the safety and security of

refugees from Myanmar.

The final answer lies in bringing about a change in the internal situation in Myanmar, a change that paves the way for a return of democracy to the country. In bringing about this change, Thailand has already made a shift from earlier aloofness to one of cautious involvement by letting Nobel Peace Prize winners speak from Bangkok last month on the need for democracy in Myanmar and the release of Aung San Suu Kyi. Let us hope that Bangkok will continue with its efforts to create conditions which, in not too distant future, would let dissident students to return to their own home.

Bombay Blasts: Conspiracy or Security Lapse?

do not buy the theory of international conspiracy regarding the series of bomb blasts in Bombay. The government has played this card too often to hide its inadequacies. When Indira Gandhi was gunned down, it was 'a foreign plot'. The same charge was repeated on Rajiv Gandhi's assassination. Even the Shiv Sena-made riot in Bombay was attributed to

external forces. Prime Minister Narasimha Rao has been more specific this time. He believes that the blasts are designed to scare away foreign capital. The argument does not jell because no investment worth the name, not even domestic, has matured in the past two years despite the liberalisation of economy. What sounds more plausible is that the disturbances have come in handy to the government to cover up its failure to attract capital. That the smugglers want to return to the pre-reform days is true. But they realise that no amount

of blasts can bring them back. It is also alleged at times that foreign elements are out to destabilise India. Militancy in Kashmir, Punjab, Assam or the north-east reflects the asscrtion of identity which many in these areas believe will remain submerged until the country is restructured into a federal polity. If at all, the interest of foreign elements is a

consequence, not the cause. If militancy has lessened in Punjab and Assam and not in Kashmir, it is primarily because the people have got disillusioned with those who have been indulging into it. The foreign factor, whatever its level, has not disappeared. It was there because of the climate; it had no independent existence. The people who

NGOLA is on the verge

of total breakdown,

A with hunger and dis-

case threatening the lives of

three million people, including

1.5 million people newly

displaced by the return of civil

war. The United Nations World

Food Programme (WFP), the

only relief agency fully opera-

tional in the country, warns a

ruined by the war, a build-up of

internal refugees and the de-

struction of its infrastructure.

Phillippe Borel, WFP director

in Angola, says: "It is a combi-

nation of the worst that hap-

Thousands of civilians

trapped in towns that are swollen with displaced people

and accessible only by airlift

have little food left to cat, said

and the wounded, are crowded

in makeshift shelters with

inadequate water supply and

sanitation. The threat of

cholera, malaria and diarrhea

WFP to 10 towns: Lobito, Ben-

guela, Ulge, Luena, Lubango,

Cazombo, Saurimo, Mbanza

Congo, Makela de Zombo and

Toto. But fighting has kept

three big cities off-limits -

Huambo, with an estimated population of 400,000, Kuito

Although the group is still

sending truck convoys from

the capital Luanda to Dondo, in

Kwanza Nord, overland trans-

port is generally impossible. It

is either unsafe because of

mines or impossible because

bridges have been blown up

and Unita rebel forces refuse

Fighting between Jonas

Savimbi's Unita movement and

the MPLA government led by

President Jose Eduardo dos

Santos disrupted the early har-

vest. And the resumption of

the war has virtually stopped

planting for the late harvest,

normally done in January and

to allow aid to pass.

February.

and Menongue.

Food is being airlifted by

Many, including the sick

pens to a country."

Borel.

The country is being further

famine is in the making.

scapegoat for its own mistakes. the 13 blasts, which took many

gave the militants shelter and support have stopped doing so; consequently, an abrupt drop in militancy.

As regards the left-wing extremist activity, it is a fallout of years' neglect. There is a belief that violence may change the people's lot since the democratic methods have failed to bring it about. Foreign intervention, to the extent of providing training and arms. stopped long ago in the wake of close relations between India and China. Even the gov ernment does not suspect a nexus between the left-wing extremists and foreign powers.

I do not rule out the possi bility of some foreigners individually or stray groups operat ing in India for nefarious purposes. The Intelligence Bureau is not happy even over the presence of 15,000 foreign students. But this scenario is not peculiar to India; it is all over the world. Some external forces would like to fish in the trouble waters. The blame lies not on the forces which do so but on the countries which keep the waters disturbed.

In fact, it is the foreign conspiracy theory which baffles me. I cannot visualisc some countries getting together and planning the destabilisation of India. By spreading the impression, the government is only trying to find a scapegoat for its own mistakes. The Bombay blasts indicate sheer incompetence. Ever-expanding intelligence agencies, both central and the state, failed to get any prior clue of

days to plan and which required many visits to the well frequented buildings.

The IB itself admitted that there has been a sharp fall in the detection of high-grade agents or resident agents planted under cover (as for ex ample at air bases, cantonments, etc) or of wireless and camera-equipped agents. The IB feels that even the apprehension of high-grade escorts

Union Home Ministry, has not been able to identify the known and suspected terrorists. The specially set up cell, the Terrorist Information System [TIS], for the purpose too has failed. Even when some culprits have been arrested, it has not been able to know from where they got the ex plosive devices. It is no use raising the bogey of foreign conspiracy to instill fear.

My thesis is that the

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

of couriers, providing the link to well-placed resident agents or espionage nets has become comparatively rare. Therefore, it is the fatlure of our own ma chinery.

The use of plastic explosives by terrorists, as witnessed in Bombay, has been on the increase for the last few years. Time power units. plunger devices and the electronically-operated remote controlled contraptions have also been employed in the past. The directors and in spectors general of police have themselves discussed this annually in their conference from 1989. If still some persons have been able to cause the blasts, the intelligence and police organisations cannot escape the blame.

Apparently, the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). working directly under the

Bombay blasts are a retaliation to the demolition of the Babri Masjid and its aftermath, par ticularly the riots in Bombay early this year. The Muslims had felt altenated and helpless and had warned at that time itself that some of their youths could become terrorists. A few from the underworld, if not from among the motivated,

few worked up. It is a warning that if they the 12 per cent of the popula tion, are sought to be destroyed, the 82 per cent of the Hindus will not stay unhurt. They have given the message that Bombay will either belong to all or it will become another Beirut. This is desperation but they can say that they have been driven to the wall.

took upon themselves to

acy; it is the handtwork of the

avenge. There is no conspir-

Such elements may have

In fact, it is the foreign conspiracy theory which baffles me. I cannot visualise some countries getting together ished the Muslims. And when and planning the destabilisation of India. By spreading the impression, the government is only trying to find a they find that they have little to lose, they are more prone to listen to counsels of desperabeen helped by the forces which are inimical to India. This may have helped them plan and execute the blasts

with precision. But the situa-

tion is not of their creation. It

is the Rashtriya Swayamsevak

Sangh (RSS) family, including

the BJP, that has built an at-

mosphere of hatred. It has

made the Muslim youth, which

has been growing up to comply

with the demands and obliga-

tions of a secular society, con-

the demolition at Ayodhya and

the riots in Bombay were not

the Hindus versus the Muslims

but some Hindu chauvinists

taking the law into their own

hands. Even at the height of

riots, 90 per cent of Hindus

and Muslims were sharing

hearths and neighbourhoods in

the countryside and other

parts of the country. In Bombay

itself, most of the relief work

was done by the Hindus, draw-

ing money and goods from

their own community. Those

who are trying to deform the

Indian society are no friend of

Hindus or, for that matter.

Muslims. They have only their

It is easy for the govern-

ment and others to project the

economic argument as a rea-

son for communal riots in an

oversimplification of the prob-

lem. Indeed, intolerable infla-

tion in urban areas, steadily

diminishing job opportunities.

the irrational distribution of

land in the countryside, the

total change in the complexion

of traditional cottage indus-

tries like shoe making and

own brand of politics to ped-

This is a tragedy because

scious of their identity.

Politicians and preachers have in reality never left the gullible common man alone, whether Hindu or Muslim. The Muslims have been fed with distrust and fear, while the llindus have been told that they are being unjustly coerced into making undue concessions to the Muslims in the economic, social and cultural fields. Thus, fear, distrust and suspicion between the two communities is the real cause for communal disharmony.

cloth weaving, have impover-

liad the institution, which were devalued first by Mrs Gandhi and then by Rajiv Gandhi, been revived, the challenge to the state would have been easier to meet. The system would have worked. But the ruling Congress party is engaged in the game of politicising as usual and the government servants have lost the sensitivity to the ethical considerations inherent in public behaviour. The administration seems to have no sense of direction. Where the Rao government is at fault is that it backs the will to fight. It appears that to have lost the battle before even joining it. Surprisingly, all the non-BJP parties, as has been witnessed in parliament, have extended wilfy-nilly, their support to the

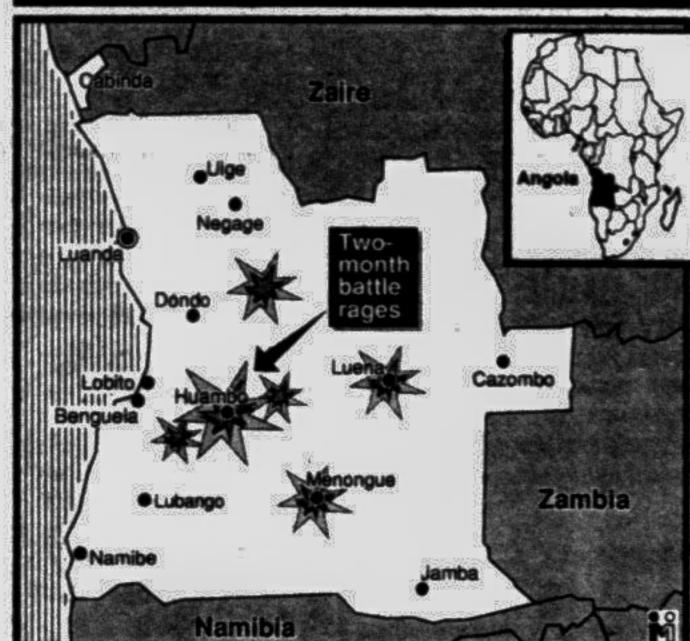
The result is widespread pessimism and despair. The people's morale at no stage of post-independent India has been so low as is today. There is fear that the worst is yet to come. Indeed, there are many threats but foreign conspiracy is bitterly ironic.

Angola on Brink of Becoming Another Somalia

Francis Mwanza writes from Rome

Jonas Savimbi's Unita movement stayed away from the Angolan peace talks convened in Addis Ababa by the UN, US, Portugal and Russia. So the war goes on with the two-month battle for Huambo still raging fiercely. Hunger and disease are now endangering the lives of more than three million people. Fighting has disrupted farming and is hindering the shipment of vital food aid. Fears are growing that another Somalia situation is in the making.

Angola: torn by war again



Rain has come to most parts of the country and that could have helped the harvest if peace had taken hold after the elections last September. "The harvest, if any, will be extremely poor. If subsistence farmers are reduced to eat their seeds, they will have

Sayaguez. Added Borel: "Whatever stocks of food people had will be quickly exhausted. The destruction of infrastructure and the loss of life are enormous."

Aid workers say thousand of

none left to plant," said WFP

Angolans have died in the war ravaging the former Portuguese colony. Many of the dead are said to be victims of what is increasingly referred to as "ideological cleansing" carried out by armed bandits and special police loyal to either the MPLA or Unita.

Some cities, such as Ulge and Negage, have become spokeswoman Mercedes ghost towns. The inhabitants fled to escape Unita attacks. Other towns, such as Malange and Saurimo, are swollen with people who fled fighting in the countryside. Rural life has been disrupted almost everywhere.

to the Govt, and the Opposition

sat up and came out from their

ivory tower to hear and see

what the public in general

seem to think of their activi-

ties? Let them not forget

nothing is endless and at some

point, they will be answerable

ther. Quite contrary to what

they might think and feel, they

are not the only ones with the

intellect to put two and two

77-D. Uttara Model Town,

Even in the capital, Luanda, there is scarcely any food in the markets. "We are looking at twice the number of people in need of food assistance than before the elections," said Borel, a veteran of 20 years of food aid emergencies. "This may be one of the largest relicf operations of WFP in 1993."

The lawlessness and insecurity in Angola has not spared the WFP, the world's largest multilateral food agency. Its driver in Ulge disappeared last December and is feared dead. Two local staff were killed in Huambo in early January, allegedly by Unita. A base manager was shot on the street, while a radio operator was killed in the WFP office. Later, the entire building was destroyed by artillery fire.

With government troops and Unita rebel forces continuing to fight, Angola's economy is a standstill in rural areas and in cities surrounded by Unita rebels, such as Luena, Saurimo and Malanges.

Experts say that Angola's economy is actually shrinking. Although it has maintained a fixed official exchange rate since 1976, the thriving black market reflects a desperate shortage of foreign currency.

The so-called parallel market value of one United States dollar has soared from 3,500 kwanza to 10,500. Staple foods such as maize meal and fish are sold at prices beyond the means of most people Inflation has doubled since the election.

Traditional agricultural exports - sugar and cotton

sceds, timber, coffee and rice have fallen to very low levels. Official export of diamonds has fallen by 12 per cent to 550,000 carats, with an average value of \$45 pcr

That is an export value of under \$25 million, far below. Rome.

areas, much of this revenue has been taken out of government hands. So far the war has had minimal effect on oil production, even with the fall of Soyo to the rebels. Oil exports are valued at about \$2.5 billion To avoid a repeat of the devastation caused by famine

total diamond production, es-

timated to be worth \$750 mil-

lion. With the incursion of

Unita into diamond-producing

in Somalia, the WFP is planning to place stockpiles of food in the ports of Luanda, Lobito and Namibe, to be used when needed. - GEMINI NEWS

FRANCIS MWANZA is a Zambian journalist based in

OPINION

Eid Shopping: An Ordeal for Jubilation

Habibul Islam

Eid is on the verge. After the hardship of long one month, a delightful reward is waiting for the Muslims. Though a religious festival but Eid in our country has taken a new shape in its spirit. It is now a mundane festival partic-. ipated by all religious sects. As the holy days are coming to an end the velocity of Eid shopping is in acceleration. In this frantic effort nobody wants to lag behind. The departmental stores, shops, footpaths all are heaved by the mass.

Specially the service holder

with his limitations is always swinging, what to buy or not? He has to satisfy everybody. So, with the bonus and the salary of the month, he is going to Bazar, not thinking the month lying before him. In Dhaka the markets are the sites for the higher middle class. The upper sects, now in Bangladesh usually look for difference, so they fly for elsewhere than the country. Middle class people have to appease their family or wards, buying from the markets like those at Elephant Road or Gausia Market etc. A kind of dissatisfaction persists. Again under the summer sun, while in the market, the little ones nag for snacks, then remains the fear of budget failure. Though the saying goes 'cut your coat according to your cloth' this becomes impossible to conserve. But where the whole is bubbling with enthusiasm then who remains as a window shopper? Somehow they are to manage.

The shopping at this time also assumes a form of festival. In markets you will find differ ent faces featuring different

The quaint shops at the Bailey Road has spread their petals with eye- catching Jamdanis. Cute looking girls and ladies are the clients of those shops. While a smart lady steps down from a sedan then a newly married couple is seen leaving Bailey Road. The spouse is a newly recruited assistant commissioner, who prefers anonymity, sullenly says I could not cope with this high price!' A couple is found at Elephant Road, they are quite happy. Their countenance say so, but they comment that the prices of shoes

are too much. A different scene prevails at the Banga Bazar, Here you will find everything you need. You

will not fear to bargain. Gausia Market, famous for female clothings is always busy. Here all are sweating but not tired at all. One from Mirpur Mrs Ahsan came to buy babies wear for her little Tania. Previously she had gone to Garden Market at Mirpur Road. She said Tania has liked a splendid top and skirt, but it is too much on my part'. I looked at Tanta. She is gloomy a little bit.

The market before Dhaka College with the rejected items of garments industry is and ideal place for shopping. Low earning groups are the main buyers of this market. But the rider of the cars are also available here. They shop different kinds of wearings from this market for their daily use and for their servants. Rather the young boys peep here to shirts and trousers of different types. So these interventions cause the price of this market to go up too.

Males or boys are contented with their shirts or trousers but the young ladies or girls need new cosmetic items on the eve of the festival. The owners also demand a lot more than the usual time. Nothing but the yield to it. Yet the shopping does not find it's way to home. Because the basic part still remains. The toilsome job of buying raw food

You some boys are sauntering in the market but not buying anything. Would they not? Inquiry gets the way that they are waiting for the Shawal's moonrising night. On that very moment they will buy pujamas or punjables.

Amidst the sounds of different decibels all are hastily running. Though the country belongs to the LDC group the people are trying their level best to forget this tragic classification on the eve of Eid.

With an under current of dissatisfaction, all walks of life are busy in shopping as much one can. After such an ordeal many will not be satisfied, this is inevitable. But it needs to be contented somehow.

The Iftar culture

Sir, Ramadan is supposedly a time for 'restraint' and 'austerity', words used and avidly liked by the administration. But somehow, the wonderful beings at the helm of affairs, do not seem to be practising what they preach. As is obvious to anyone, who has watched the two ladies in competition with each other to host their Iftars.

We do not have anything against these lftar parties; what we do object to is the politics which is so blatantly displayed by such ostentatious, ridiculous behaviour. Switch on the TV any evening to watch the news and we have to spend the better part of the 20minute broadcast, watching either or both the ladies 'hosting' their Iftar parties. One day it's the Army having the privilege of 'lftaring' with the higher-ups and true enough the very next day it's the Navy or the Air Force, being given the same privilege. The day after, it's the Civil Servants followed in line by the Diplomats. Have they ever

paused to ask the beleaguered

Diplomat whether he is interested in these so-called social events? Or the ordinary soul who switches on his TV set at the end of a long day to innocently watch the evening news, to be accosted with the sight of all these people sitting around the lftar table?

Ramadan is a private affair. Why can't we keep it that way? Moreover, who pays for these Iftar parties, so lavishly hosted by the 'supreme authorities'? Surely not the tax payer? And if so, who has given the elected representatives the right to squander the hard carned money in this manner? The ordinary man or the harassed housewife, can barely make ends meet, with the spiralling prices of commodities in this month and yet the ladies who can do something about it, seem least bothered by the hardships faced by the commonman as they indulge in these orgies of Iftar. All they seem interested in is beating the other in inviting the hapless victims to these Iftars. Let

them settle their score in

some other less obvious man-

Is it not time the advisers

Jumuna Bridge Sir, We could learn from

together.

P Hague

Dhaka

the newspapers that international tender for constructions of Jumuna Bridge has been floated and the tender papers have been scrutinised and accepted. No further news regarding the construction has been made known to the gencral public as yet. We are also not aware whether the World Bank has given final consent of aid/assistance for construction of a big project like Jumuna

to the very public who they are so shamelessly ignoring now. And the time is not too far ei-

The people of northern part

ging behind in respect of economic development for want of an easy communication system. The mighty Jumuna river has divided the country into two parts blocking the easy road and rail communication. The river crossing is even harder during dry season due to siltation of river. The bridge when constructed will definitely bring ray of hope for the northern part of the country.

The construction of the bridge has been found economically viable and has been supported by all people of Bangladesh who have contributed Jumuna surcharge as a gesture of participation in a big work like Jumuna Bridge

Mahbubul Haque Chowdhury DGM, Sonali Bank HO, Dhaka

We the people of northern part of Bangladesh are anxiously waiting to see the construction started at an early date as it has already been delayed. Originally the bridge was supposed to be opened for movement of vehicular traffic

of Bangladesh are already lag-