

Independence Day

In observing the Independence Day, our first duty should surely be to pay our sincerest homage to countless martyrs who sacrificed their lives to help us earn our freedom.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Bombay Blasts: Conspiracy or Security Lapse?

I 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.

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.

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.

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 assertion of identity which many in these areas believe will remain submerged until the country is restructured into a federal polity.

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

In fact, it is the foreign conspiracy theory which baffles me. I cannot visualise 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.

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.

I do not rule out the possibility of some foreigners individually or in groups operating 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 troubled 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 visualise 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 13 blasts, which took many 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 example at air bases, cantonments, etc) or of wireless and camera-equipped agents. The IB feels that even the apprehension of high-grade escorts

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

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.

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

Such elements may have been helped by the forces which are inimical to India. This may have helped them plan and execute the blasts with precision.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

been helped by the forces which are inimical to India. This may have helped them plan and execute the blasts with precision. But the situation is not of their creation. It is the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) family, including the BJP, that has built an atmosphere of hatred.

It is a warning that if they, the 12 per cent of the population, are sought to be destroyed, the 82 per cent of the Hindus will not stay unharmed. 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.

Such elements may have been helped by the forces which are inimical to India. This may have helped them plan and execute the blasts with precision.

It is easy for the government and others to project the economic argument as a reason for communal riots in an oversimplification of the problem. Indeed, intolerable inflation in urban areas, steadily diminishing job opportunities, the irrational distribution of land in the countryside, the total change in the complexion of traditional cottage industries like shoe making and

It is easy for the government and others to project the economic argument as a reason for communal riots in an oversimplification of the problem. Indeed, intolerable inflation in urban areas, steadily diminishing job opportunities, the irrational distribution of land in the countryside, the total change in the complexion of traditional cottage industries like shoe making and

It is easy for the government and others to project the economic argument as a reason for communal riots in an oversimplification of the problem. Indeed, intolerable inflation in urban areas, steadily diminishing job opportunities, the irrational distribution of land in the countryside, the total change in the complexion of traditional cottage industries like shoe making and

cloth weaving, have impoverished the Muslims. And when they find that they have little to lose, they are more prone to listen to counsels of desperation.

Politicians and preachers have in reality never left the glibble common man alone, whether Hindu or Muslim. The Muslims have been fed with distrust and fear, while the Hindus have been told that they are being unjustly coerced into making undue concessions to the Muslims in the economic, social and cultural fields.

Had 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. 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 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

ANGOLA is on the verge of total breakdown, with hunger and disease threatening the lives of three million people, including 1.5 million people newly displaced by the return of civil war.

The country is being further ruined by the war, a build-up of internal refugees and the destruction of its infrastructure. Philippe Borel, WFP director in Angola, says: "It is a combination of the worst that happens to a country."

Thousands of civilians trapped in towns that are swollen with displaced people and accessible only by airlift have little food left to eat, said Borel.

Many, including the sick and the wounded, are crowded in makeshift shelters with inadequate water supply and sanitation. The threat of cholera, malaria and diarrhoea looms.

Food is being airlifted by WFP to 10 towns: Lobito, Benguela, Uige, 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 and Menongue.

Although the group is still sending truck convoys from the capital Luanda to Dondo, in Kwana Nord, overland transport is generally impossible. It is either unsafe because of mines or impossible because bridges have been blown up and Unita rebel forces refuse to allow aid to pass.

Fighting between Jonas Savimbi's Unita movement and the MPLA government led by President Jose Eduardo dos Santos disrupted the early harvest. And the resumption of the war has virtually stopped planting for the late harvest, normally done in January and February.

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.



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 any, will be extremely poor. If any, will be extremely poor.

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.

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 relief 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 Uige 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.

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 Malange.

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

total diamond production, estimated to be worth \$750 million. With the incursion of Unita into diamond-producing 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 a year.

To avoid a repeat of the devastation caused by famine in Somalia, the WFP is planning to place stockpiles of food in the ports of Luanda, Lobito and Namibe, to be used when needed.

Francis Mwanza is a Zambian journalist based in Rome.

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 participated by all religious sects.

Specially the service holder with his limitations is always swaying, 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.

The shopping at this time also assumes a form of festival. In markets you will find different faces featuring different moods. The quaint shops at the Bailey Road has spread their petals with eye-catching Jamdani. Cute looking girls and ladies are the clients of those shops.

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.

The market before Dhaka College with the rejected items of garments industry is an ideal place for shopping. Low earning groups are the main buyers of this market. But the rider of the cars are also available here.

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 pajamas.

To the Editor...

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.

We do not have anything against these Iftar 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 20-minute broadcast, watching either or both the ladies 'hosting' their Iftar parties.

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 Iftar 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 taxpayer? And if so, who has given the elected representatives the right to squander the hard earned money in this manner?

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 activities? Let them not forget nothing is endless and at some point, they will be answerable to the very public who they are so shamelessly ignoring now.

Jumuna Bridge

Sir, We could learn from 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 general public as yet.

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 activities? Let them not forget nothing is endless and at some point, they will be answerable to the very public who they are so shamelessly ignoring now.

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 in 1992.

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.