

## For a World Conference on Bosnia

The Islamic Countries Foreign Ministers' Conference, now being held in the port city of Pakistan, should immediately call for a World Conference to put an end to the war and genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Bangladesh should take the initiative in moving for such a resolution.

There are many reasons for taking such a step. The war to wipe out the Muslims in former Yugoslavia has long ceased to be a Balkan, or an European, affair. It has become even larger than a United Nations affair. It has, in fact, become a world affair. The reason we say that it has become more than what the UN can handle, is because the Charter, the rules of procedure and the bureaucracy of the world body are not adequate to handle the crisis of the magnitude presented by the present situation in the Balkans. We need a World Conference to bring in the type of consensus necessary for collective action, including military, that is required to save the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The repeated and continuous defiance by Serbia and its Bosnian allies, of the United Nations resolutions, have proved, if proof was ever necessary, that diplomacy and negotiated settlement will not work in the case of the murderous regimes like that of Slobodan Milosevic.

After dragging their feet on direct military action in the Balkans for the past few months or so, both the US and its European allies now appear to be ready for a more direct course of action. If the latest attempt by David Owen does not bear any fruit, the Western powers will be more receptive about the idea of a World Conference on this issue. Only last week the United Nations Security Council issued tight economic embargo. But so far such moves have had practically no impact on the regimes of Serbia and Montenegro, the two states that now make up Yugoslavia. We strongly feel that given the record of relentless brutality and the known policy of genocide, which is now known by the world at large, economic embargo and other such measures are most inappropriate. Their effectiveness, in cases like South Africa, Iran and Iraq is at best questionable. The time span over which such measures were applied, is just not available in the case of the Balkan crisis. Thousands have been killed, hundreds of thousands are suffering due to injury, lack of food, shelter and medical care. A deliberate policy of raping Bosnian women and then forcing them to bear the child with a view to ethnically cleanse the population of Bosnia-Herzegovina are crimes that hardly can be corrected by economic sanctions.

The Bosnian foreign minister, Haris Silajdzic, attending the ICFM conference in Karachi has asked for the lifting of the western arms embargo against his country. His statement that "We do not want humanitarian aid, we want weapons" is a cry of frustration, resulting from months of ineffectual moves that brought them global sympathy and support, but little else. The OIC's role itself has been far from satisfactory. Except for passing strong resolutions, and making pleas here and there, the OIC cannot be credited to have taken any concrete action either to take effective diplomatic initiative or to work towards a military option, even if it were to be confined within the Muslim states.

We strongly suggest that a world conference should be convened now, because it will bring together the type of coalition that is necessary for a serious military action. The US and the European powers, now that the Russian referendum is out of the way, are likely to be more open to using force. Their fear that military involvement may trigger adverse domestic reaction can be countered through the process of a global conference.

There is still time for Bangladesh to take such an initiative, both in the current conference and later, through bilateral contacts with other OIC members. What is happening in Bosnia-Herzegovina is counter to all the values and norms our civilization represents. To counter it, the whole world must stand as one. The conference that we propose will help to forge such a unity against a force that can easily be termed as the enemy of whatever mankind now represents.

## A Well-earned Award

Professor Muhammad Yunus of Grameen Bank was on April 22 awarded the King Boudouin International Development Prize of 1992 at the Royal Palace in Brussels. In honouring Professor Yunus the Belgian royalty, government and people have indeed recognised elimination of poverty as one of the foremost tasks of our time. And it comes also as a mark of appreciation for some exceptional work done in that direction in Bangladesh, largely through the visionary innovations of Professor Yunus who chose to go out of the idyllic gardens of Akademie and into the painful yet rewarding world of the landless multitude. While we rejoice at his recognition, we congratulate the miserably poor clientele of the Grameen Bank but for whose strength of character the Professor would hardly have been successful with his radical ideas.

The King Boudouin Foundation, the sponsor of the prize, in their citation specially recognised "the role of women in the development process and the originality of a credit system which contributes to the improvement of living conditions for women and their families in rural conditions". We hope the real value of Professor Yunus's work was recognised at home on the same lines and meaningful efforts made to engage that main key to development and social reconstruction — women — with any amount of sincerity of purpose.

The Grameen Bank has done wonderfully as a bank or a credit and investment set up. It was not its mission to do so but it was necessary that it does so for its mission to be fulfilled. The Professor and his bank have surely made inroads into the citadel of poverty but only marginally up to now. And perhaps it is not up to a bank, however wise and benign, to eliminate that hydra-headed viciousness — poverty. Still one feels they would go a long way in devising means and mounting attacks to take the worst fangs out of the jaws of that monster. We know they would in no time be involved in plugging holes in agricultural production — from ensuring the inputs to helping the grower to a just and paying market.

Can we, while Professor Yunus goes on winning new ground in his quests for a poverty-free Bangladesh, expect other initiatives directed towards the same goal to spawn in the wake of Grameen Bank's international recognition? We, on our part, take the occasion to congratulate the Professor.

THE historical antipathy between the Armenians and their neighbour Azerbaijan has once again exploded into armed conflict. According to reports reaching here, Armenians have taken the offensive and occupied not only large tracts of the enclave Nagorno-Karabakh, situated within Azerbaijan, but have penetrated into Azerbaijan territory as well. The result is a full blown crisis involving Russia, Turkey and Iran and, of course, the two adversaries.

Since the outbreak of the recent hostility, it is front page news here. The collapse of the Soviet Union and consequent emergence of the newly independent states in Central Asia and the Caucasus, has catapulted Turkey from the periphery of Europe into a vast world populated by her kith and kin. It is a kind of family reunion after 70 years.

Turkey has wasted no time to seize the opportunity and has forged and is daily forging new ties with these states. In her scheme of things,

Azerbaijan has a special place. Of the Turkish speaking republics, Azeris are the closest. Turkey was the first to recognize the independent republic of Azerbaijan and establish ambassadorial level representation. Delegations are exchanged almost daily. President Ebulfez Elchibey, who assumed power a year ago, has a special place of affection among the Turks and he reciprocates in kind by lauding Ataturk and his reforms to the skies. Turkish media speak frequently about the Turkish model for the Turkic republics. Azerbaijan has wholeheartedly embraced the Turkish model including the Latin script introduced by Ataturk in the twenties replac-

ing Arabic. In the economic sphere, Turkey has adopted market economy abandoning state enterprises introduced as a part of Ataturk's sweeping reforms in all spheres of Turkish life.

The rapid advance of the Armenian forces was followed by frantic appeals by Elchibey for help. The Government of Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel has so far limited its action in the diplomatic field. It took the question of Armenian attack on Azerbaijan to the Security Council which simply put out a statement calling on the parties to cease hostilities. Turkey has made some menacing noises and late President Turgut Ozal, who completed an official visit to all

the Turkic republics, outdid everybody else by making such statements as 'what does it matter if we drop a few bombs in Armenia'. In fact President Ozal made quite a reputation by making similar statements from time to time and attracting caustic comments from columnists who delighted in pouncing upon all his statements.

In his search for help President Elchibey has sent emissary to Iran. President Rafsanjani who has also taken a somewhat neutral stance, stated that should hostilities not cease, Iran would be compelled to move more forcefully. It should be noted that whereas Turkey does not share a border with Azerbaijan, Iran

does. The secular stance of President Elchibey is not viewed with favour in Iran. The Azeris are Shia unlike most of the Turks and there are more Azeris in Shia Iran than in Azerbaijan.

Russia, undoubtedly has the highest stake in a peaceful settlement in the conflict involving two members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). There is an unified command led by the Russian general Grachev. Although the Soviet Union has collapsed, Russian troops are stationed in virtually all the CIS states. President Boris Yeltsin has taken upon himself the role of a mediator and has been attempting to bring the adversaries to the

negotiating table. There has already been one meeting at the Black Sea resort town of Sochi and an announcement of cease fire was made, although it turned out to be premature. The members of the CIS led by Russia are becoming increasingly concerned at the continuation of hostilities, which they are strenuously attempting to bring to an end. In fact, everybody is determined to find a negotiated solution.

The mood here is watchfulness and let Russian diplomacy find a solution. Turkey has no intention to act alone and this was stated by Premier Demirel. This sentiment was echoed by Russia through her ambassador in Ankara, Victor Chernishev. Although the emotions are overwhelmingly in favour of their Azeri brothers, Turkey appears determined to facilitate a negotiated solution. She really has no interest in making a long time enemy of any of the newly independent states, with whom she is forging very profitable economic ties.

## Recalling Sher-e-Bangla

# The Roar that Made Thrones Tremble

by Syed Ashraf Ali



read in history about the great men of several hundred years ago — men of intellect, men of action, men of vision, men with golden qualities of head and heart. He also reminded us of what might be called the great qualities of olden days — graciousness chiefly. There were many bad qualities in the old days, of course, but there was a certain graciousness, a certain courtesy, a certain tolerance, a certain patience which we sadly seek in the world today. No wonder, we have made tremendous and fantastic achievements in scientific and technical ways — we have reached the Moon, we have harnessed the hitherto unknown strength of nuclear fission and fusion, we seek to reach Mars and penetrate deep into the limitless space; but we do it with a lack of graciousness, with a lack of tolerance, with a lack of something

which have made life worthwhile since life began. It was the strange and unique mixture of the good qualities of the past — the graciousness, the deep learning and tolerance, with the urges of today that made Sher-e-Bangla what he was.

Providence often distributes its gifts to different persons in diverse measure. To some it gives physical strength and to others, intellectual eminence; to some it gives affluence and to others fame and recognition. It is rarely that all these gifts are showered upon the same individual. Sher-e-Bangla, A.K. Fazlul Huq was one of the fortunate few to whom Allah, in His infinite Mercy, gave in full measure all the things which human beings desire, and yet with a contrariety which is beyond human understanding, combined all these gifts with a sensitiveness and sympathy for human sufferings which sometimes turned his personal achievements into an agony at the sight of so much futility and so such hatred all around.

Sher-e-Bangla's was a career of outstanding service, of great achievement and of dedication to a cause. The flame of his faith in freedom and in nationalism did not flicker at any time. Neither his powerful pen nor his enviable gift of oratory in three different languages was ever used for any but the highest purposes.

Great as a statesman great as an orator of the first water, great as a philanthropist, great as an administrator, great as an educationist, Sher-e-Bangla was undoubtedly a giant among men, almost an institution by himself. A rare combination of human qualities, he had a heart that suffered for the poor and the people around him. His extreme kindness imparted a goody grace to a personality that was even of otherwise lovable. Courteous, shrewd, witty and kindly, he gave out of his mature judgement and ripe experience counsel which was often sought and ever valued. His ardent patriotism, his deep scholarship and his robust thinking have always been distinct assets in the political evolution of the sub-continent.

Single-minded in his devotion to the national movement, broad-minded in his approach to the varied international problems, national, regional and sectional, Sher-e-Bangla had always been revered and adored as a keen intellectual, eloquent speaker, sober politician and above all, a lovable man.

Entirely selfless, free from all narrowness, truthful in thought, fearless in action, meek as a lamb, but a lion in spirit as he was, Fazlul Huq never failed to rise to the occasion and respond to the call and urges of the country and its people. His foresightedness was indeed amazing, and in a letter written to the then Governor of Bengal, Sir John Herbert, on the 2nd August, 1942 he had the courage and conviction to demand a separate Bengali Army, and wrote: "I want you to consent to the formation of a Bengali Army consisting of a hundred thousand young Bengalis consisting of Hindu and Muslim youths on a fifty-fifty basis. There is an insistent demand for such a step being taken at once, and the people of Bengal will not be satisfied with any excuses. It is a national demand which must be immediately conceded." He also pointed out in the same letter, "Administrative measures must be suited to the genius and traditions of the people and not fashioned according to the whims and caprices of hardened bureaucrats to many of whom autocratic ideas are bound up with the very breath of their lives."

A great man of dauntless spirit as he was, he never cared a button for his personal security and safety nor hesitated an inch to bring a person to book whatever might be the rank and status of the person concerned. Even the Governor of Bengal was warned in writing by this fearless representative of the people.

In February, 1943, he made a statement in the capacity of Chief Minister of Bengal on the floor of the Bengal Legislative Assembly regarding the then government's policy on

Midnapore Affairs. Sir John A Herbert, the Governor of Bengal, could not relish the statement and in a letter written to the Sher-e-Bangla on the 15th February, 1943, he demanded: "I shall expect an explanation from you at your interview tomorrow morning of your conduct in failing to consult me before announcing what purports to be the decision of the Government."

This indecent letter very naturally found Sher-e-Bangla in fume, and in a befitting reply sent on the 16th February, the Tiger roared:

"Dear Sir John, In reply to your letter of the 15th February, 1943, I write to say that I owe you no explanation whatever in respect of my conduct in failing to consult you before announcing what according to you is the decision of the Government, but I certainly owe you a duty to administer a mild warning that indecorous language such as has been used in your letter under reply should, in future, be avoided in any correspondence between the Governor and his Chief Minister."

This was indeed the roar of a tiger which in his own words, "reverberates from Bengal across the seven seas to the homes of the British Nation", not the roar of a tiger "who is as docile as a tiger in a circus show". It was a roar which "makes thrones tremble", not the roar of one who "knows how to crouch beneath the throne and wag the tail in approbation of Government policy".

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# Polls Promise Happiness to 'Happy Arabia'

Michael Jansen writes from Nicosia

THE election in Yemen is a milestone on the slow, painful road to democracy trod by the Arab world and the people of newly united country. If democracy is indeed established in Yemen through the electoral process the achievement will promote democratisation in other Arab countries, discouraged by recent failures in Algeria and Kuwait.

This election is the first on the basis of universal suffrage to be held in the Arabian peninsula and could serve as spur to citizens of the undemocratic princely state of the peninsula who do not vote.

The poll today, April 27, is the first multi-party general election for Yemenis. Unfortunately, they have not risen to the occasion. Only 2.7 million of 14 million have registered to vote. Their votes will not only produce a parliament, but also a president who will be elected by the new legislature, the majlis as-shoura.

At stake are 301 seats in the majlis, contested by 2,000 candidates, representing or supported by 40 political parties.

Yemen holds its first multi-party elections today, April 27. At stake are 301 seats in the 'majlis', contested by 2,000 candidates from 40 parties. This is the first election on the basis of universal suffrage in the Arabian peninsula and could spur citizens of the regions undemocratic princely states. The major issue is the economy, yet to recover from the effects of the 1990 Gulf crisis. As Yemenis prepare to vote, Geminis News Service reports on the impact of democracy in the Arab world.

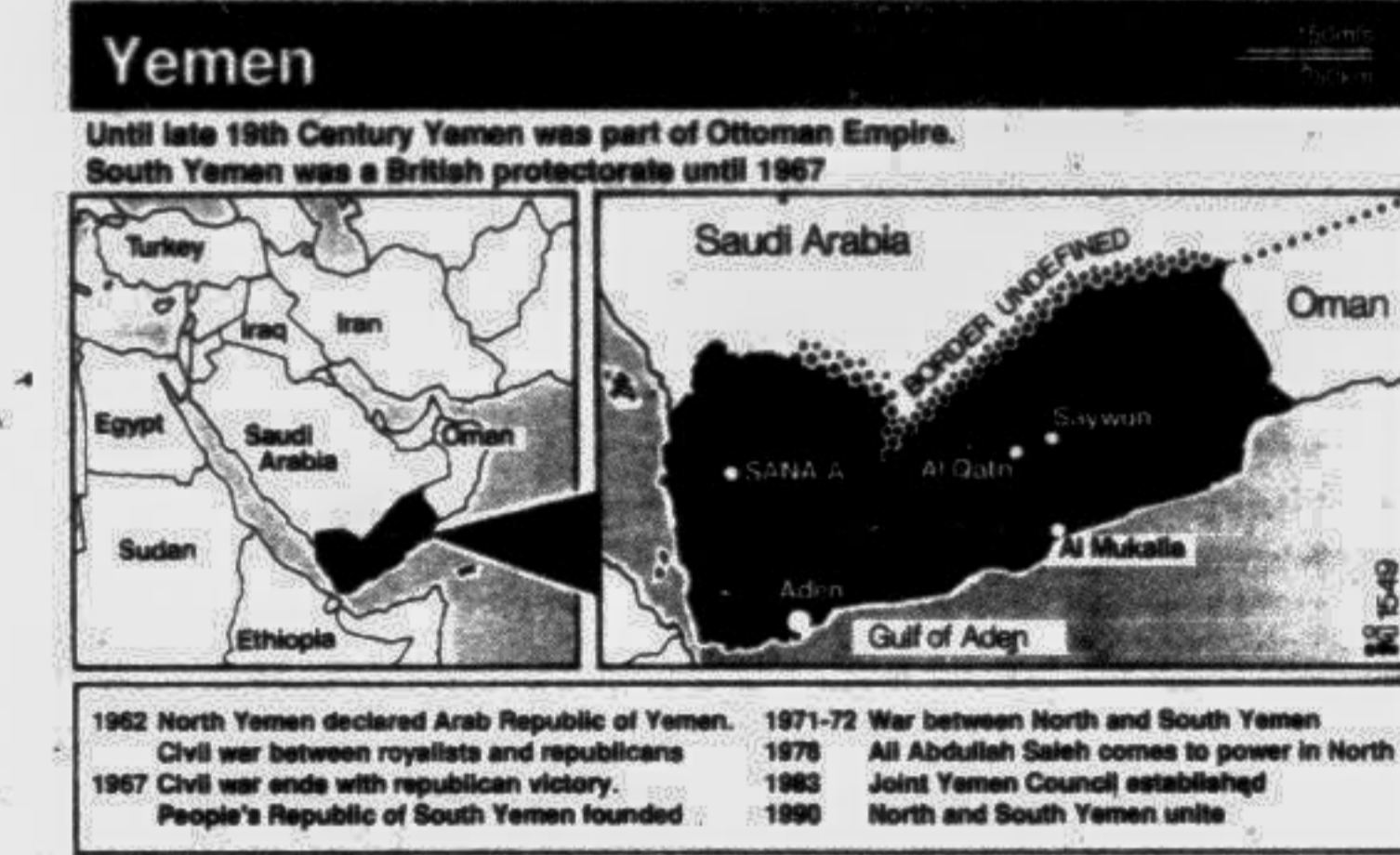
The largest party is the General People's Congress (GPC), headed by President Ali Abdullah Salih, which ruled North Yemen before unification in 1990 and continues to govern in coalition with Yemen Socialist Party (YSP).

The Republic was founded on May 22, 1990 by the unification of North and South Yemen. The President of North Yemen became President of the new republic and the head

of state of Marxist South Yemen, which until 1967 was the British colony of Aden, became prime minister.

Until riots erupted last December, when 15 people were killed and 100 injured, the GPC, the most popular party, was expected to secure the largest number of seats in the majlis. This is no longer certain.

To do so the GPC will have



to meet the challenge mounted by YSP, led by Vice-President Ali Salem al-Baidh, which formerly ruled South Yemen. Unpopular at the time of unification, the YSP has since increased its appeal by dropping its Marxist ideology and using its position in government to secure popular political concessions from the president.

The third main contender is the Al-Islah party (the Gathering for Reform), an uneasy union of tribal and Islamist elements held together by the powerful tribal leader, Shaikh Abdullah ibn Hussein al-Ahmar and the charismatic preacher Abdul Majid al-Zindani. Al-Islah appeals to conservative rural voters and to the discontented urban proletariat.

Of the 40 parties formed after the merger, only 14 have fielded candidates of their own while the majority support one or other of the 1,000 independents. Prominent among the lesser parties are the National Conference, a coalition of small parties, and the pan-Arab groupings, the Yemeni Baath Party and the Unionist Popular Nasserite Party.

The opposition parties have made a minor electoral issue out of the March 31st Political Action Pact, signed by the GPC and the YSP. The object was to regulate the campaign and poll. According to the Pact, political parties should adhere to Islam and its teachings and eschew secular and theological totalitarian ideologies.

Parties subordinate to foreign countries are banned, although the Pact did not deny Yemeni parties the right to ac-

cept donations from abroad, a concession to Al-Islah, which receives funds from Saudi Arabia, Yemen's powerful neighbour.

The major issue is the economy, which suffered a stunning blow only a few months after unification when Saudi Arabia expelled a million Yemeni workers and businessmen because of Yemen's criticism of the Saudi alliance with the United States against Iraq following its invasion of Kuwait. The Saudis also cut \$800,000 in aid to Yemen and prevented foreign firms from prospecting for oil in disputed territory near the Saudi frontier.

On November 29, 1990 Yemen, together with Cuba, voted in the Security Council against the critical UN Resolution 678 on Kuwait.

As a result of the influx of expatriate Yemenis from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, unemployment has risen to 36 per cent and the value of the Yemeni riyal has fallen by 2000 per cent. To make matters worse, Yemenis discovered that their government was both inefficient and corrupt.

Rivalry and squabbling between the GPC and YSP prevented the government from dealing with the mounting economic crisis and its own failings. The December riots compelled Prime Minister Haidar Abu Bakr al-Attas to force the ruling parties to cooperate with the National Pact and to institute a reform package which focused on reducing conspicuous state spending.

Yemen will have to pass through lean years before it can realise the prosperity promised by unification. Oil

production, currently at 187,500 barrels a day and expected to rise to 300,000 barrels a day by September (bringing in \$1.25 billion a year), cannot meet the demands for foreign currency to pay for both development projects and consumption purposes. Although on-going exploration by foreign concerns may result in the discovery of new fields, these will not begin producing for three to five years.

Democratisation does not ensure political stability. Indeed, democratisation could destabilise the country. Competition between the GPC and YSP, seeking to secure advantage in the election campaign, caused the postponement of the election for six months.

If these two parties and the others which gain seats in the majlis do not act according to the rules of democracy after the election and continue their unproductive squabbling, they could impede the implementation of political and economic reforms. This would lead to popular disaffection and instability.

Yemen's large, interfering neighbour, Saudi Arabia, could continue to block oil exploration in disputed territory while using its Islamist ally, the Al-Islah party, and some of the smaller opposition groupings hard up for cash, to undermine the government.

Saudi Arabia is unhappy with Yemen's experiment in popular democracy, fearful that its success could increase demand in the kingdom for democratisation. Because of opposition from both secular liberals and Islamists demanding democratisation in Saudi Arabia King Fahd has not been able to constitute and appoint consultative council, his minor concession to democracy. Traditionally the Saudis have been suspicious of even the form of democracy practised in Kuwait, where a restricted all-male electorate votes for an assembly with limited power.

Democracy does not guarantee that Yemen, known as 'Arabia Felix' or 'Happy Arabia' will achieve the happiness it seeks.

Michael Jansen was born in the US, lives in Cyprus, and has covered the Middle East for many years.

## To the Editor...

### Supreme Court Bar proposal

Sir, The present delatory system of examining the law students takes, rather kills, almost five to six years in giving them law degrees.

Supreme Court Bar Association's proposal in Article 21 (1) (a) (c) dated 10.3.93 neglected to consider the above difficulty (time-consuming) of the law students and young lawyers and placed the same for approval. In the proposal, a law-graduate shall have to remain under training for two years as clerk and then to face Bar Council examinations to get enrolled as an advocate. After that, on finishing five years regular practice as an advocate, he can sit for the test to become a member of the High Court Bar. So many years, much of which virtually unutilised! This cannot yield very good for a poor country like Bangladesh.

The quality advocates may kindly be allowed to sit for the membership test after finishing two years practice in the

lower court which is still existing and the fresh proposal for five years duration of practice may well be rejected as it has got no sound grounds and reasons.

FMA Mattin Mirpur, Dhaka

### Highway plantation

Sir, Rainy season is about to set in. It is the appropriate time to start tree plantation on a massive scale all over the country. Government should supply saplings to the people at a nominal cost even if it involves some subsidy. In the interest of conservation of environment and various other benefits.

The plantation along the highways is, however, the responsibility of the Government.

And it is not impossible to plant along the highways in one season if the government means business. Resource constraint, however, may be cited as an impediment. Forest Department has got

necessary experience and expertise in the field. So if the highways are planted by this Department, cost of plantation will be only a fraction of what it would be if plantation is made by the Roads & Highways

Department. Forest Department may be lacking in necessary fund and manpower to go on a massive scale to complete it in one year. It is suggested that if Ansar and VDP personnel are placed at their disposal for one season, manual cost for this purpose will be very negligible, only supervision and supply of saplings will be needed by the Forest Department. In that case, it will be possible to cover all the Highways in one year.

It is also suggested that tall fast-growing trees like rain tree, krisnachura etc. should be planted on the highways. Will the Ministry of Forest and Environment ponder over it?

Saleh Ahmed Chowdhury Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka