Dhaka, Thursday, July 8, 1993

## Housing for the Poor

The Dhaka City Corporation has earmarked an amount of ten crore Taka in its budget for the current financial year for financing housing projects for low income people in the metropolis. Though of limited import for a city of seven million people where one-third of the population are slum dwellers, this new initiative nevertheless is a welcome move.

Meanwhile, the draft of the proposed national housing policy is getting a final shape. Addressing a two-day seminar on the housing policy held here last week. Works Minister Rafigul Islam Mia said that under the new dispensation, the government's main job would be to create an environment conductive programme for the development of housing sector. The government, he said, would arrange access to land, infrastructure, services, credit and ensure availability of building material at reasonable prices. Actual construction of houses, he added, would be left to the people themselves, the private sector developers and the NGOs. The minister also spoke of the formation of a National Housing Authority to promote housing development in the country and to encourage use of indigenous technology and building materials without sacrificing quality of construction.

This approach looks basically right. Even now, ninety per cent of urban housing and nearly all rural housing is provided by the private sector. Grameen Bank had been quite active in promoting low cost, relatively durable, housing in the rural areas. From among NGOs also, a few are already working in this area.

Inadequacy of shelter for the populace is such a gigantic problem in this country that it is more than doubtful if, left on their own, resources of the private sector or the banking system, can finance housing development which could create a real impact even in the medium term. At one stage. World Bank affiliate International Finance Corporation (IFC) had shown some interest in participation in financing housing development. IFC had also fielded a fact finding mission in Bangladesh. It is not known if anything came out of this move. The IFC, it may be mentioned, is quite active in financing housing development in India.

The nature and trend of urbanization in the country present an even more baffling issue. People migrate from rural areas to cities and towns in search of jobs, higher income - of a better life. The city just cannot provide housing to the influx of people. So, most of them turn into slum dwellers. According to recent estimates, if migration to towns and cities continue at its present rate, more than half of our urban population will be living in slums by the turn of the century.

Faced with the problem of a rapidly swelling population in the island of Java and the capital Jakarta, Indonesia is said to have embarked on a policy of shifting people to its sparsely populated islands, providing attractive resettlement benefits to the emigres. However, we do not have any virgin land to settle our people. The experience of the neighbouring Indian state of West Bengal with urbanization, could possibly be of some help. Briefly, the policy thrust appears to have been to identify growth centres, encourage income and employment generating activities there, create and improve civic amenities in these and outlying municipal areas - in short, make living outside big cities more attractive. It has taken them years but they have been able to stem the influx into Calcutta.

A national housing policy is hardly the instrument to tackle overcrowding in Dhaka or any other city. However, it can bring the issue into a sharper focus, seeking an integrated approach for easing the problem. This assumes new importance with the just-revealed UN report that the capital of Bangladesh will be the 17th megacity in the world by the year 2000.

## Manhandling Teachers

The surge of violence that overtook the newest university in the land in the past few days does not seem to be an isolated and localised event. It points to a chain - from Rajshahi to Chittagong - and now to Kushtia. Armed student cadres of a particular political party have taken hold of those three universities one after the other in a manner shutting out all those that do not either subscribe to their ideas and ways or lower before their might. Only God knows when, if ever, students would again be allowed to pursue studies as they should in the Rajshahi University. For about three years at a stretch Chittagong University was closed to all that dared not to join the ranks of those armed bullies.

On Tuesday both students and teachers of the Islamic University of Kushtia boycotted their classes. The teachers' action coincided with the students because on the previous day twenty people had been hurt as a result of Shibir attack mounted with hockey sticks and Chinese axes and five of them were teachers. On that same day after a five-hour raging battle. Shibir was able to capture two residential halls and turn all non-Shibir students out. The teachers' appeal to the police posse detailed on the campus failed to move them to action. And all that the VC could do in the matter was expressing his regret.

Biblical wisdom laid it so well — as you will sow so will you reap - our first democratically elected government after so many years did not move in time to contain the organised hoodlums seizing the Rajshahi and Chittagong universities. In both these universities the Shibir gave no quarter to Chhatra Dal, the student wing of the ruling party. The Kushtia experience should specially be galling to the ruling party for it was Chhatra Dal which bore the brunt of the Shibir attack there.

Bullying on such a scale and holding entire campuses in hostage in such a manner are things that directly spawn incidents of Fatikchhari and the Feni type - in the former case three invigilators were injured by examinees, eyes of one of them were gouged out and in the latter, seven invigilators were beaten up and three of them

Perhaps we all are parties in our own fashion to the nurturing of a veritable Frankenstein. The Government because it is charged with the wellbeing of the body politic of this nation, must rise from the seemingly self-imposed slumber first of all. Or the consequences would go past mending before long.

thrown into a pond.

YED Shahabuddin, a professional diplomat, served in the Indian Foreign Ministry up to 1978, and later he was made Amba-

ssador to Algeria for some

Shahabuddin is from Bihar, and at the invitation of Chandrasekhar, he joined active politics. Winning a seat in the elections he became an MP from Bihar. In 1991 he lost

this seat to M J Akbar. At present Syed Shahabuddin is an active leader of the Babri Mosque Movement

Committee in India. The Dally Star (DS) - How do you see the future of India. especially in terms of Hindu-

Muslim relations? Syed Shahabuddin (S) think there is a dominant feeling among both the Hindu and the Muslim masses, that whatever may be the tensions of the moment there is no alternative to peaceful co-existence. That the Muslims cannot simply be wished away. They cannot be driven across the border or thrown into the sea. Nor can they be liquidated. And I think among the Muslims there also is a feeling that the security of a minority community essentially lies in the social environment. Constitutions and laws by themselves cannot provide the ultimate protec-

think between the Muslims, feeling of accommodation, and the Hindus, feeling of acceptance, a way can be found to avoid a total divide, a total alienation.

But there are forces in this country - and I would like to call them marginal forces both among the Hindus and the Muslims, who are extremists, who see things in terms of black and white, in terms of we and they.

DS - How do you judge the present situation?

S - You know about the murderous events of Bombay and Surat, where hundreds of Muslims were killed. It was a great human tragedy. But one must also remember that while the Bombay and Surat killings were taking place, hundreds and thousands of other places Hindus and Muslims were living peace with one another.

During the last decade and half, certain forces that were off stage but always there including during the freedom struggle - have come on stage, and are trying to dominate the national politics.

So the key question to me is, why is this upsurge at this historical moment? It is my view that Muslims are not the primary target of this rising Hindu chauvinism.

The national reality is that the Hindu communal upsurge is directed against Hindu

The entire theory of Hindu consolidation is primarily a political manoeuvre to maintain the status quo. To maintain the dominance of Hindu society by the 15 per cent high caste, and to silence the rising voices of protests, rising claims for social justice.

The high caste Hindus are using their very last weapon, that of communalism, to get the Hindu masses behind them, to consolidate the masses in the name of Hindu religion, Hindu culture, Hindu history, by arousing passion against the Muslims.

This they are doing by depicting the Muslims as historic adversaries, by recalling real and imaginary grievances from the past, by presenting the Muslims as the demons. \*Look, India has enemies all round, India has enemies within - the fifth column the historic adversaries right amidst you, getting millions of petro-dollars to convert India into an Islamic state, getting funds from across the borders to create a new Pakistan inside India. Muslims are not adopting family planning and are procreating like rabbits with the intention of creating a demographic majority" - all this nonsense is being propagated relentlessly to inject into the Hindu mind a sense of fear. So that out of that fear they will come together, get consolidated behind the caste Hindu leadership and allow the vested interest to continue to dominate and prevent the people from demanding a

As I see it, the battle in India is not between the Hindus and the Muslims, but between status quo and antistatus quo. It is quite another matter that the forces of sta-

Interview with Syed Shahabuddin

## 'The conflict is between the Caste Hindus and the Hindu Masses"

tus quo have a Hindu face, belong to high caste, and use the Hindu religion to fight the masses. It just happens to be so in the present context of events. Muslims are only a

convenient scapegoat. DS - So your answer to the question 'why now', is that it is the Hindu vested classes' response to the mass upsurge against exploitation. It is the ruling classes' ideological offensive against demands for social justice and a restructuring of the present society. Who represents the rising force for social justice?

S - I would say the Janata Dal, to which I belong. Eighty five per cent of the people of India are suppressed by the 15 per cent high caste Hindus. However, all the forces of social justice do not operate through the Janata Dal. Our greatest success lies in 'Mandalising' all political parties (referring to the Mandal Commission Report which was adopted by the government of Janata Dal of Prime Minister VP Singh).

Lower caste demands represent the inexorable force of social justice. But let us not underestimate our enemy. The RSS, which has never allowed anybody other than Bhramins to its hierarchy, is putting up backward classes in the leadership of its front organisation. DS — Please explain.

S - RSS has about 25 front organisations, of national stature, in every walk of life youth, student, women, kishan, worker - every branch

by Mahfuz Anam

fringe. But you must understand that people who have seen their families butchered and their houses burnt down, will find it extremely difficult to accept this analysis which is essentially a long term view of things. As human beings, these people are taken up too much by the question of revenge and retribution. The rumours of the growing militancy among the Muslims cannot be ignored and indeed, if the Muslims are pushed back to the wall, and if the process of reconciliation and understanding takes too long, one cannot rule out the possibility of militancy penetrating the Muslim masses.

DS - I repeat, are the Muslim masses listening to

your message? S — By and large, among the Muslims, while they have a lot of grievances, there is a growing realisation of two things : one, that we have to accommodate ourselves to the social realities of India; two, that we are not the only oppressed people in India; and we cannot win our battle alone. To win, we must join hands with the other oppressed sections of Indian society.

DS - What about the Hindu masses?

S - As for the Hindu masses, you must realise that our means of reaching them are very limited. And on the other hand those masses are being brainwashed, day in and day out. The VHP, RSS and the BJP have such vast organisa-

When I went to Manipur recently after the carnage, I was informed that propaganda had been going on for years: don't trust the Muslims, don't give them jobs, buy or sell to them, don't employ Muslim rickshaw pullers to send your daughter home, don't rent them your house, even if that means it stays empty. In Gujrat, which is the hottest spot in India in terms of communal tension, all buses that pull out of Ahmedabad carry posters saying Hindus should boycott the Muslims in every way -economically, socially and other-

So the Hindu offensive is coming from many sources through education, the market place, the pulpit, the media, and through political propaganda. In spite of all this, if I am still optimistic, it is because the Hindu communal forces represent a trend against the current of history, and as such they are bound to be defeated. Democracy will prevail, social justice will prevail, and when the Hindu masses get their share of the social cake, so will the Muslims.

DS - I admire your faith in democracy and rationality. But isn't reality proving somewhat different?

S - In the short term, yes. There is one danger. If the Muslims play communal politics, and don't join the common struggle, and then when the Hindu communal forces

the market place after 1971 had no sense of the past, and had nowhere to go but to remain here and fight for their future. So this generation made the resolve that they had to live and die here - not in Pakistan or some other land in

To give one example, in one of my visits to Ayodhya, two months after the demolition, a young Muslim man came up to me and said "I don't know whether or not Ram was born here. But I know that I was born here. I will live and die here." This, to my mind, symbolises the new attitude of the Muslims of India which came after 1971.

DS - Well it is now 22 years after 1971. How far has the new Muslim attitude of assertion taken them?

S - The Muslims are now acquiring a sense of destiny within the Indian framework. We do not consider Pakistan or Bangladesh as our custodian. our supporters, or even as our helpers. We must, and want to, stand on our own legs. We seek the accommodation within the

But there are fringe forces within Muslims who say that our aim is to establish Muslim rule in India. One man says this, and the entire community has to pay for it. I have heard Muslims say, with only 20 people we conquered Bengal. So what ean't we do? Have trust in Allah and be prepared to shed your life and we can put these Kafirs into their place. This is nonsense. It is

gious world? Why do we dream of all India becoming Muslim? in the Holy Quran Allah says that it was not beyond Him to make us all to be born in the same 'Mazhab'. But that was not Allah's intention. So what Allah said was not his intention, we mortals say we want to do and achieve. I am at a loss to understand when some Muslim leaders say 'our intention is to make an Islamic india. There is that vainglorious approach to Islamic history, and to my mind a wrong interpretation of Islamic his-

Islam envisage a mono-reli-

'DS - What provokes these \*misinterpretations of Islamic history" as you call them?

S - Lack of education and a sense of insecurity.

DS - You talked a great deal about accepting the social real tties of India. You are obviously referring to accommodating with the majority Hindu community. How far should Muslims go? How much should Muslims give up? Where do you draw the line between accommodating and capitulation?

S - Yes, where do I draw

the line? Upto which point do we accommodate, and at what stage should we, Muslims, should refuse to budge? In terms of the classic Islamic jurisprudence, India is not 'Darul Islam' (Land of Islam). (It is my personal opinion that there is no Darul Islam in the entire world). Nor can India be called 'Darul Harb' (Land of the Disbelievers). Because | participate in the management of the government and in the workings of the society. The laws of the land, as such, are not against me. And above all I enjoy freedom of conscience and religion. This freedom is under attack, I agree. But at least, constitutionally, my place in this society is well de-

Therefore this cannot be

called a 'Darul Harb'. Islam can

be at peace with a situation like that of India. Why? Because apart from Darul Islam and Darul Harb, there is a third category, which has been developed over the last fourteen hundred years of Islam's existence. This third category, I call, 'Darul Ahad' - society based on a compact. In this time and age, the Muslims in India are in a situation of compact. On one hand we are guaranteed equality as citizens, freedom of religion and the right to live peacefully and pursue our vocation. Yes, there are lapses, and we must point them out and correct them. But in every human society there are gaps. You can only judge a society by its principles - you can judge Islam by its principles. You cannot judge Islam by the conduct of the Muslims. There is always a place for improvement. So I draw the line here. So long as the Constitution grants me equality, so long as it gives a scope of seeking Justice, so long as it gives me a sense of freedom, so long as it protects my religious rights, (and this is most important) — so long as all this is given to me, no duty is ordained on me by Islam, or the Holy Koran or by Islamic teachings to fight against this

This is my land and its love is in my blood. I am nourished by this land, I eat its produce, I breathe its air and I enjoy its sun. Hence, I have certain duties upon me for this land. And therefore my fidelity to the system, my acceptance of the situation rises from these

Transform India into a

Constitutional safeguards.

Hindu state, declare Muslims as second class citizens, the compact breaks down. Then I am not bound to be fidel to that state. I may be helpless; I may not be able to rise and revolt. But the fire of revolt will burn in my heart. Today if the Hindus feel that they are powerful enough to break our mosque and give us no justice, then the wheel of history will one day change. The mighty have fallen all through history. It is nothing new. The wheel of history will turn.

Therefore I tell my Muslim friends that we must go to the very extreme in accommodating, provided that in law, and in the Constitution, we are equals, and our religious rights are protected. This is where I draw the line.

DS - Hoping that your faith in democracy and in the common sense of people proves correct, I thank you most profusely for your time. Thank you. S — Thank you.

the whole area of Darus Salam

However flawed, over the last four decades the Muslims believed in the secular principles of India's political institutions. After Babri mosque demolition, and the subsequent events, much of that faith stands eroded.

It was to get a feel of how the Muslims felt, and what they were thinking, that the author interviewed three prominent Muslim personalities representing the moderate, hard and liberal strata of Muslim thinkers in India.

In this second instalment, the author interviews Syed Shahabuddin, former MP and now member of the Rajya Sabha from the Janata Dal.

you can think of. It also runs nearly 600 institutions in the country. Each of these institutions runs hundreds of other bodies. Take for example an organisation called \*Shiksha Bharathi". It runs 50,000 schools. RSS is like an octopus and this octopus is gripping India from all sides.

But even a party like the RSS is having to take the lower caste into its folds. According to findings, 85 per cent of Hindus are the Sudras, the Harijans (acchuts), and the Adibasis. The rising consciousness of these downtrodden communities is the most decisive development in Indian politics in the last decade or

DS — What does this development mean?

S — A different outlook, a new vision of things and a complete reorientation of politics has come about.

In this struggle between the high caste Hindus and the Hindu masses, the Mushims have suddenly become a particular target of oppression because the tactics adopted by the high caste Hindu vested class is to raise communal passion, and in order to divert attention from the real struggle. they identify the Muslims as the enemy. We are the sacrificial lambs, so to speak.

DS - What should the Muslims do, what role should

they play in this situation? S — It is my view that we should establish a solidarity between the Muslims and the oppressed Hindu classes. This is a way out of the present crisis. Perhaps the only way. Together we must identify the oppressors. We must show that those who are identifying the Muslims as the enemies of Hindus, are the same people who are opposed to giving the lower castes a fare share in society. It is these same people who brought down the Babri Masjid. These are the same faces and the same hands.

DS — Your message sounds very logical. but are you carrying the Muslims and the Hindu masses with you?

S - I think among the Muslims, this feeling is dominant, except in the extremist

tions and networks that they can reach crores of people very quickly. To give you one example, immediately after the demolition of Babri mosque, VHP was able to collect crores of signatures demanding a Ram temple at Avodhya.

The media has also been very planfully penetrated by them. If there is a political force in this country which understands the importance and the effective role of modern communication, which has understood not just the power of the pen, but power of the radio and that of the TV and the video, it is the Sangh Parivar. The amount of things they are able to produce and print is enormous.

They are able to do this because all Marwari business families, without any significant exception, support the forces of Hindu fundamentalism. Therefore, they have no dearth of money or of workers. Compared to this, the Muslim community is nowhere in the picture.

DS — What is the nature and content of the thrust of Hindu propaganda against the Muslims?

S - Once I told Mr Vajpayee, I don't believe in pan-Islamism. But it seems that you do. The Ideology of Hinduvta puts all Muslims into one category - meaning that if Muslims in UAE, or Muslims in Pakistan, or the Muslims in Bangladesh should break some temples, then we the Muslims of India must pay for them. So the Muslims of UAE, Pakistan and of Bangladesh are one and the same. Not only that, if the Muslims did something a 1000 years ago then the Indian Muslims of the present generation must pay for them.

Their propaganda offensive has the following elements : a) Muslims want to re-establish Muslim rule in India, fly the green flag from the Red Fort, so to speak, b) Muslims indulge in polygamy and breed like rabbits to overtake Hindus demographically, c) Muslims invite infiltrators from across the border, and d) Muslims indulge in widespread convertion with the money from petro dollars.

win, we will be targeted. The power struggle is between the high caste Hindus and the Sudras, who are leading the untouchables and the Adibasis. In that struggle, if the Muslims are on the side of the Sudras, then we will share in the spoils of victory. But if we are on the sidelines as the Hindu oppressed classes fight for their rights, then if and when they will win, they will not share the fruits of victory with us! This is our chance to shatter the myths created by Hindu communalists.

DS - Looking back over the past forty years, would you say that the Muslims of India did not play the right role to be come part of mainstream Indian society? S — I have divided the his-

tory of post-independence

Indian Muslims into two periods, with the birth of Bangladesh as the dividing point. The year of your victory over Pakistan marks a psychological watershed for the Indian Muslims. Between '47 and '71 there was a continuous flow of talents from India to Pakistan. There was always the thought among us that if nothing happens here, then I will go to Pakistan. Not necessarily to stay there, but to use Pakistan as a stepping stone to go West, to the US or Europe, or also to the Gulf States. If a community is always trying to escape, then can it ever develop strength? Can it ever stand on its own feet? Can it ever have the determination to fight against adverse circumstances?

DS— What happened in '71? S — In 1971 that door was suddenly closed - physically and, more importantly, psychologically. A growing feeling came about, about asserting ourselves in this country. Of course by then 25 years had passed, and a younger generation, who had never raised slogans demanding Pakistan, had come of age. It carried no chip on its shoulder and had not committed the 'original sin' for which, by the way, the RSS has never forgiven us, till to-

This generation of young people who were coming to the contemporary need. In multi-religious societies we shouldn't go about brandishing swords and talking about carving out empires. DS - How do you contain these forces?

not a correct reading of history

and, at the same time, it is not

S - It is my view that if the liindu extremists and the Muslim extremists cannot be controlled, then India has no future. And the responsibility for this will lie solely on the Hindu extremists. Muslim communalism, as it exists in India, is of a defensive character. Hindu communalism is on the path of aggression. Muslim communalism, to the exten that it is being generated, is a reaction. But I would say, even if it is provoked, it is not the right reaction. The right reaction would be secularism, as against Hindu communalism.

DS - Do you get the feeling that some sort of unified Muslim leadership is emerging in India? S — One major problem fac-

ing the Muslim leaders is the dichotomy of the Muslim psyche. On the one hand we are full of the memories of Islamic glory which we tend to equate with military conquest. This is basically un-Islamic. Allah lays down in the Koran, that piety alone is the yardstick of a good Muslim. The emphasis is on piety and not on power. This is the essence of Islam. But in our minds Islam is equated with military conquests and military glory.

We take so much pride in stories of the simplicity of the life of our Prophet. Even in his death bed he ordered that the last gold coin he owned should be given away before he breathed his last. At the same time, we take so much pride in the stories of opulence of the Muslim rulers. So which Islam are we talking about? The Islam of the Holy Prophet or the Islam of the Muslim rulers? If God had willed that all of the Indian subcontinent should be Muslim, then seven hundred years of Muslim rule was adequate to make everybody Muslim. But that was not how Allah willed it.

I ask the question, does

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

T&T & direct dialling Sir, Bangladesh T&T Depar-

tment has a fairly modern International Direct Dialling System, but it sadly lacks having uptodate data input in the system. The system rather is a proof of "Garbage in garbage out", the ultimate failure in Data Processing. The access code of St

Antonio, Texas, USA has changed from 512 to 210 about three months back. This data is perhaps still rotting in some dusty file of T&T Department. The result is that as soon as you dial 001 followed by 210 the recorded response is This is a wrong number, please check again." When will the correct data be

entered? Do we have to wait for another three years while the files are being put up? Meanwhile, St Antonio, Texas, USA is cut off from Bangladesh. But who cares? We are all dependent on the sweet will of our slumbering authorities. S A Mansoor Gulshan, Dhaka

'Dal-Bhat' policy

Sir, While in opposition the speeches and promises of some political leaders sound cloquent and charming but when in position they are changed overnight. They asseverate their good intentions for the people but their actions belie their words. This

is a great misfortune for our country. We do not understand why some of our leaders, on the one hand, entertain their guests as well as themselves with 'polaokorma', wear imported clothes and travel by luxury cars and, on the other hand, cry for 'dalbhat' for the people and advice them to wear home-made clothes!

It is true that under circumstances everything is possible. Alright. So why involve public exchequer and waste public money?

'Dal-bhat' policy is noble and appreciated as such. So introduce it both in theory and practice in every walk of life.

Also allow duty free vehicles for the people who travel in dilapidated buses sitting on the roof and hanging by the handles at the risk of their lives. All are equal in the eyes of our Constitution. O H Kabir

Dhaka-1203

Sewerage line

Str. Darus Salam is an old area of Ward 7 under Mirpur Police Station of Dhaka City Corporation. It is strange but true that sometime before no sewerage line was there. At the end of last year, sewerage line was installed but only partially During the recent by election of Mirpur, the Mayor of Dhaka City Corporation assured that

will be covered under sewerage system very soon, but no action has been taken as yet. To add to it, they dug portions of road during sewerage installation work but that also have not been repaired till now. So the tax-paying citizens have been suffering more than before. Now it is most necessary to complete the sewerage system

of the area and repair the

whole road accordingly. The

Mayor may please look into

this matter personally so that

the works resume immedia-

Abdus Sobhan Darus Salam, Dhaka 1218