Dhaka, Saturday, July 10, 1993

### Of a Megacity and **Rising Waters**

The United Nation's 'State of the World Population' report, published on Tuesday has more than one aspect touching upon the interests of Bangladesh. First, it forecast that by the turn of the century, 2000 AD to be precise, Dhaka would become one of the 20 megacities of the world. At place 17, it would then boast of - or weep over, if you will - a population of 1.22 crore. What is not readily appreciated is that this hardly happy news means that in a matter of only seven years we will hit that figure. What is the present population of Dhaka? Time magazine recently put it at 80 lakh. So, we will have an additional 32 lakh people with us in the city by the time it takes an undergraduate to pass out from the Dhaka University. And 32 lakh is more than most historically important cities of the world ever had as their popu-lation. Calcutta became a great city of the world when its population touched a million. The additional 32 lakh would mean we shall have in seven years' time another great city's whole population in Dhaka, but, surely enough, without having another city's material wherewithall. In fact, it can be an interesting topic of study as to what size of a population can Dhaka's present material strength - housing and power, roads and transport, water and sewerage - can ideally sustain. The whole of its present capacity may not be sufficient to provide for even 32 lakh residents let alone accommodate a one-crore-plus population.

Neither the municipal budget nor even the national budget of the current year betray any awareness of the impending peril, not to speak of any plans to take up the challenge or making any kind of preparations, or moving effectively to inhibit the endless journey of the rural populace to the town.

There is a kind of foolishness in worrying over only 2000 AD and a 12-million-and-above city population. Neither time nor population would stand still at those points. What will happen in twenty years from now? What, if not the ghost of Malthus would then stop Dhaka hitting two-coreand-more, the figure Mexico city will attain by 2000 AD. The point is to change the process and pattern of population growth and of migration to cities, something our leaders are failing to appreciate even at this late hour.

The UN report has this year as its first concern the question of large scale international migration. Of the many aspects of such migration it has dealt with, the most horrible for any Bangladesh citizen with any feeling for the fellow men and women would be the fact that as a consequence of global warming parts of Bangladesh would go under water forcing 10 per cent of the population -12 million that is — to migrate abroad. Where will such a huge population migrate, and how? This prospect would only harden the immigration barriers put up by countries unaffected by the rising

waters. The 12 million wouldn't get a Noah's Ark to board in a jiffy. Before they land on foreign perches what will be the shape of our economy, and what of our society? So far we haven't heard the voice of anyone who is concerned over these dangers threatening all our tomorrows, starting from any moment now. Migration, whether to the capital city or to foreign lands, is a human tragedy of the first order. It does not take place before one is completely defeated as it so poignantly happened in the case of Harihar, who migrated with Apu and Sarbajaya to a maze of uncertainty called Benares in Pather Panchali.

We the constituents of a new-emerging nationstate do not want to court defeat so early on the day. We want our government and other leaderships to please care.

#### Full Speed to Rural Electrification

In reply to a question by opposition MP in the Parliament on Thursday, Energy Minister Dr Khandakar Mosharraf Hossain informed the House that all villages would be supplied with electricity by the year 2005. He further informed that 321 thanas out of a total of 460, have already been brought under the rural electrification programme.

This is indeed a welcome news. Nothing is likely to change the life of rural Bangladesh as electrification would. If there is one priority target that government should try to fulfil, it is the target of rural electrification. The immediate impact would be new job creation. Thousands of small and cottage industries are likely to go up in our rural areas the moment electricity is made available there. This will result in all sorts of new technologies and ideas penetrating into our ageold rural society.

However, for the type of growth of rural industry that availability of electricity is capable of generating, we must also make available rural credit so that people in our villages, with some amount of capital, can borrow additional amount, and get started some small scale industries. So the approach of making energy and credit available to our villagers, must go hand in hand. These two ingredients of production can work wonders, only if done in a coordinated fashion.

Here the experience of areas already receiving electricity should be examined. Initial findings show that the growth of cottage and small scale industries in rural areas already receiving electricity have not been upto expectation so far. Our view is that it is due to the absence of easily accessible credit, that rural industrialisation has logged behind. We urge the relevant ministries to

carefully examine this question.

Another ministry that should push for early electrification of all villages, is education. With electrification, rural schools should be supplied with television which, then, can be used to impart the latest in knowledge about every subject. Practical classes and experiments in agriculture are also likely to get a big boost through educational programmes on the TV.

The Rural Electrification Board, the body responsible for all this work, deserves our commendation for the job they have so far carried out and full support for their future programmes.

# "What We Need is a United Front against Communalism"

by Mahfuz Anam

T a comparatively young age M J Akbar became a renowned journalist and built him enviable reputation first as the editor of the Calcutta-based weekly Sunday, and later as the first editor of the Telegraph, also published from

Interview with M J Akbar

After the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984, Mr Akbar joined politics and was elected the Lok Sabha on Congress (I) ticket. A close confidant of Rajiv Gandhi in late eighties, Akbar suffered electoral defeat in 1989, but was elected back to the parliament in 1991 from Bihar.

Author of several books on Indian politics, and a well thought of biography of Nehru, Akbar now professes to the resolution with politics and plans to return full time to journalism. He now writes a weekly column in the Telegraph of Calcutta, and in finishing his

book on Kashmir. The Daily Star (DS): Did you expect what is happening now in India? The rise of BJP, the insecurity of the Muslims, and the emergence of Hindu fuhdamentalism. Did you expect all this?

M J Akbar (MJA) : I don't know about expectation, but there was a kind of inevitability to it. You can't understand today without seeing the kind of politics that we've had over the last forty years. In a very critical way the Congress has been responsible. I think the Congress never recovered psychologically and intellectually from the defeat it suffered in 1947 — the partition. So it took the casy way out. It imitated the politics of the Muslim League in dealing with the Muslims who were left behind in India during the fifties and the sixties.

DS: What do you mean by Congress following the politics

of the Muslim League? MJA: The Congress became convinced that in the end the Muslim masses would only listen to the mullahs, and not to the community leaders. Therefore, the politics of the Congress over the last four decades, was based on establishing relations not with the Muslim masses, but only with the Muslim mullahs.

DS: Please elaborate this

point. MJA: In 1947, the migration that took place was not a migration of the people, but o the elite. This is especially true for Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Bihar, It was the Muslim elites and the middle-class who went to Pakistan. It was the elites who had created the Muslim League. I don't believe that the Muslim League was ever a mass movement. It won a victory in 1947 but it could not sustain it. Why did Congress last here for 40 years and why did the Muslim League collapse within a few

years after partition? The Bengali language movement in Bangladesh was the end of Muslim League. Muslim League politics was based on creating a power structure among the Muslim elites. The British were also very happy with it. They be-

lieved that the leaders of the community were the community - peaks were the mountain, so to speak. This belief was inherited by the Congress. And who were the peaks in Muslim society - elites were gone, to a large extent the middle-class had gone, the bureaucrats, the professionals, the academics, the high government officials, teachers and what have you - had all gone to Pakistan. So who were we left in India? Maulavis and mullahs. And hence the creation of what I call the maulavi politics of India; the madrasa politics.

DS: How has this "madrasa politics", as you call it, affected the Muslim politics in India?

MJA: It has perverted our goals. What were branded as Muslim priorities, were not the things the Muslim masses

When the BJP charges Congress with appeasing Muslims, it is of course telling a lie, but not a complete lie. The Congress has never appeased Muslims in India, it has only appeased the mullahs. Each time there was a question of giving a share to the Muslims in social upliftment, it would be carried out by doing what the mullahs would want,

tablishing contact with the masses would mean solving their problems, doing some-

thing real. DS: What are the real prob-

lems of the Muslim masses?

MJA : Security, jobs, education, economic opportunity. These are problems of all poor people, and nobody is poorer in India than the Indian Muslims. Poverty, backwardness and the like are their problems. No attempt was ever made to solve these problems. The illiteracy rates of Indian Muslims are substantially higher than those of the general average. But since the ruling classes and the regimes never addressed these problems, and still needed and wanted their votes, they would take the shortcuts - go to the religious leaders, appease them, and then get them to seek votes for you.

DS: How do you explain the rather sudden rise of BJP in

Indian politics? MJA: BJP did not rise in India for a long time, why? Because the perception of Muslims as the 'enemy' did not find support among the common man. But the BJP in the 80s, using a multitude of fac-

The Congress became convinced that in the end the Muslim masses would only listen to the mullahs, and not to the community leaders. Therefore, the politics of the Congress over the last four decades, was based on establishing relations not with the Muslim masses, but only with the

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and not by doing something for the Muslim masses. Even now that is being done. When they (Congress) want a vote in one by-election in Kerala, they announce Friday as a holiday in Muslim majority areas. How does it contribute to the economic or social well-being of the Muslims?

For argument's sake, let us assume that Congress genuinely believed that Muslims should get Friday as their weekly holiday. I am a Muslim and I know how important Friday prayers are for me. But then the question is, why should the Congress take such a step just before an election? Such a decision then becomes vitiated, becomes questionable. It helps nobody, and becomes sellout to the mullah forces and constitutes 'appeasement'. From 1952 onwards this became the Congress policy towards Muslims. Their only aim was to get the Muslim votes.

DS: Can you give some example from 1952 onwards, of Congress appeasing the mul-

MJA: Just before the elections Congress would always parade the mullahs around. The madrasa teachers, who were really the managers of the vote banks, were wooed by Congress, not the Muslims

DS: No attempt was made to establish contact with masses? MJA: Not at all. Because es-

tors, very cleverly brought the image of the 'Muslim' as the enemy into the mainstream of Hindu middle-class consciousness. Not only using the Hindu-Muslim question or mosque and temple, but using Pakistan, using Pakistan's support in Punjab, they managed to build up the sentiment that all Muslims were suspect. Thus, a pent up hatred was brought out. This was later symbolised by the Babri mosque, whose demolition became their demand.

For me personally the presence or the absence of a mosque is not the issue. Islam survived in India long before the Babri masjid was built, and it will survive long long after it has been destroyed. Islam is not a faith of weakings. And similarly, the construction of a temple will not suddenly make everybody Hindu. What was the importance of Babri masjid? What were the reasons it should not have been destroyed? Because it was made into a symbol. It was made into a symbol by liberal and secular India. The secularists said that this was the watershed. This was the symbol of whether India was to be secular or communal. This is where they would take a stand, and there would be no compromise.

DS: And the secularists

MJA: Totally. Now it is a complete mess. Nobody knows what is going to happen next. And, as usual, whenever there is confusion, there is depression. What do you do then? Any psychologist will tell you what

suicide in a large social level? It is the incitement and temptation to violence.

you do when you are both con-

fused and depressed. You con-

template suicide. And what is

DS: What are the Indian

Muslims doing now? MJA: Unfortunately, the Indian Muslims have become a plaything of everybody. They

were killed. But did we have a Pakistan for the Muslims of UP and Bihar? They were killed in riots before '47, and they are

being killed now. The final trony was that after the partition, when the vulnerable Muslims - from UP and Bihar - actually went to Pakistan, they couldn't find any place for themselves. They were treated like pariahs, as outsiders. They still are. There are the Biharis in Bangladesh and Muhajirs in Pakistan. imagine being called "Muhajirs" - refugees, 46 years after the creation of the

Unfortunately, the Indian Muslims have become a plaything of everybody. They are a plaything of the ruling parties of India whether Congress, or Janata Dal. They are a plaything of the BJP, who are its enemies. And worse, they have become the plaything even of their neighbours — Pakistan, and to some extent, also of Bangladesh. In my view Pakistan is the biggest exploiter of the Indian Muslims.

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today, in my view, is Jyoti Basu. More

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DS: Please elaborate on this MJA: Pakistan has done

nothing, absolutely nothing for the Indian Muslims. DS: Why do you say that?

MJA: I say that because the Muslims of Pakistan suffer from guilt. They created a country in the name of the Muslims. Their argument was that if we do not divide, then there is no security for the Muslims. The Muslims would be finished in India. Now what does that mean? Think about it. The argument of security was the most important. So

Pakistan was supposed to pro-

tect the vulnerable Muslims.

Where - in which provinces of

India - were the Muslims

most vulnerable? Where the

Muslims were in majority, or

where they were in minority?

Pakistan was created where

Muslims were the majority.

Pakistan was not created

where Muslims were insecure.

When there were riots in

Peshawar or Lahore, it was the

llindus who were getting

killed. It was in the riots in UP

and Bihar where the Muslims

country for Muslims of India. llow do you think Muslims of UP and Bihar feel?

DS: So there is a deep guilt about Indian Muslims in the minds of the people of Pakistan and Bangladesh. How does it affect contemporary situation?

deep guilt, you get passionate, you get prejudiced, you get hysterical, you get irrational because you have no answers to the problems at hand. The only answer you give is the answer that Gen Ziaul Huq gave when I asked him. He said Pakistan was created to protect Islam in the subcontinent, not the Muslims. It is a very interesting difference - meaning that we are not concerned about the condition -social and economic - of the people. Religion becomes a political tool in such a case. At this point I asked him "Since when did Islam become so weak that it needed the protection of a

MJA: What you do with a

day vote for Mulayem Singh Yadev than for any Muslim leader in UP and Bihar because the perception is that he and his people will not betray the Muslims. The biggest leader of Indian Muslims today, in my view, is Jyoti Basu. More Muslims trust him compared to any Muslim leader. This is despite the fact that he was against banning Salman Rushdie's book and was against the Shahbanu legislation. His popularity is based on the fact that, while in power, he addressed real Muslim issues, and not the mullah issues.

rights. The others also have

human rights. Who does any-

ity of Kashmir seceding?

DS: Do you see the probabil-

MJA: I see it as a sure way

of bringing BJP to power. BJP

will be the first party to wel-

come it, if Kashmir secedes.

You know why? For the same

reasons that Zulfigar Ali Bhutto

was happy that East Pakistan

was gone. Because the people

who were supposed to protect

Pakistan - that is, the army -

could not do so. So Bhutto

could step into that vacuum.

The moment Kashmir goes,

BJP will say "we told you these

people (Congress) cannot pro-

tect India, only we can' and

step into the vacuum. You see

BJP is the only party that can

justify partition. They are the

DS: It appears that the

Muslim leadership in India is

failing to provide any clear di-

rection to the people. What do

miserably failed to produce a

leadership that can represent

their genuine interests. So far

the Muslim leaders have just

used the Muslim masses for

selfish purposes. Today, there

is more trust for some genuine

Hindu leaders among the

Muslims than for any Muslim

leaders. More Muslims will to-

MJA: Muslims of India have

other side of Jinnah's Two-

Nation Theory.

you think?

thing for them?

DS: Where do you go from here? You have no faith in Congress leadership?

MJA: It is not really a question of having or not having faith in this or that leadership. We need to work together. I feel that what we need now is some sort of a United Front against communalism - communalism of both types, majority communalism and minority communalism. This United Front must include everybody.

DS: Is such a United Front

emerging? MJA: I doubt it. In this country everything happens before the election. Unless the crisis stares us in the face nobody does anything. There will have to be elections by November or December, in the four states, whose governments were dismissed by Congress after Babri demolition. Let us see if some sort of concerted

effort comes out then. DS: Thank you for your

MJA: Thank you.

(This instalment concludes the author's current four-part series on India.)

## US Missile Attack on Baghdad — Many Questions

HE US Missile attack on Baghdad created world reactions on predictable lines. US allies and others getting direct or indirect benefit from the US, supported the attack and others, including most of the opposition parties of the allied countries, criticized it. This is how the world behaves and this pattern of behaviour is not likely to change as long as "might is right" and some are obliged to support that "might".

The civilized world is no doubt concerned about the increased terrorism and particularly the state sponsored terrorism. There must, however, be acceptable ways to deal with it and combat terrorism so that actions taken are not branded by others as state ter-

The US launched the cruisc missile attack - obviously a military action against another

sovereign territory under the Article 51 of the UN Charter in

the name of "self-defense". The US used this once before against Libya. The question is - could an assassination attempt on George Bush, former US President - now a private citizen of the US — by a bunch of terrorists be termed as an attack on the US? More than one US Presidents were assassinated by the US citizens. Were those not assassinations that attracted court actions? In this case the attempt took place some time back in foreign territory and but luckily failed. The alleged terrorists were caught and must face full and fair trial and receive punishment commensurate with their crime. The US, however, justifiably tried to find out whether Iraqi Government or its agencies were involved. It ordered all its own agencies to go for full

their job but as the investigations were directed against a foreign country which fought war with the US and allies only recently and has been having regular clashes with the US in the 'no-fly' zone in Iraq, it was necessary to have the involvement of concerned specialized UN/international agencies and even reputed private investi-

order a military strike against a foreign country. Here the main question is whether the US was right in using Article 51 of the UN Charter after several weeks of the so called attack which also ceased, the attackers caught and the legal process started against them? The UN charter at Article 51 "acknowledges an emergency

SPOTLIGHT ON MUDDLE BAST

#### Muslehuddin Ahmad

gating agencies with a view to avoiding any bias in the investigation. It was probably this concern which led President Clinton not to rely fully on Kuwaiti investigation results. But ultimately President Clinton did not show full respect to this concern and solely depended on the reports of his own agencies to

right of unilateral self-defense against armed attack when time does not permit waiting for the Security Council to act." In other words, the attack was no more in existence and as such there was no cause or case for self-defense. What US could have done was to go to the UN Security Council and ask for a suitable action keep-

It is often found that some lawyers, knowingly or unknowingly, interpret such cases in terms of other Inheritance Laws, thus giving risc to confu-

sions and complications. Christian Inheritance Laws other inheritance laws.

ceased Christian is equally shared among his/her sons

A Bangladeshi Christian

ing in view the gravity of the situation.

separate state? Islam was not

weak when there was only one

Muslim in the world - the

Holy Prophet? The Prophet

never said that unless I have

political power Islam will dis-

present problems of Indian

is to find a solution to the ex-

isting problems for more than

130 million Muslims in India.

It is not only the Muslims in

Kashmir who have human

Muslims?

DS: How do you address the

MJA: The present challenge

Sudden unilateral military action also raised question regarding President Clinton's political maturity. Of course, a problem for the US, as it is Iraq and not a country that could militarily challenge the US. The world expects superpower President sitting on world's largest military arsenal to be more cautious in ordering its use against enemies.

President Clinton men-

tioned about "compelling evidence" that drove him to order the missile strike against Baghdad. Yes, "compelling evidence" from the point of US but others may see it differently. The picture of a motor van stuffed with tons of explosives, shown by the US representative during UN Security Council discussion was not enough to convince the world of the "compelling evidence". The argument that Iraq used similar explosives earlier was not convincing; the explosives are freely available in the market. Kuwait, Iraq's staunch enemy, must have provided much of the "compelling evidence". Also the confessions of the alleged terrorists under Kuwaiti police control and interrogation mechanism should not be of much use in any court of law. Ali Ebeld, an accused who was reportedly savagely beaten by Kuwaiti police said, "I didn't know what I was saying when one of them (policeman) kicked me in the stomach while the other clubbed me at the back."

Again, even against a "compelling evidence" surprise missile attack on an Iraqi intelligence complex at predawn was not probably the best course as it was known that at that time none of the men alleged to have been behind the terrorist attack was in the complex. What was the purpose - just to "cripple" the intelligence complex? It was not worthwhile as rebuilding of such a complex was not difficult. Maybe, many of the Western companies have already sent their quotations to Saddam Hussein for rebuilding the intelligence complex and that also with most modern gadgets. The only effective outcome was the death of at least eight civilians who had nothing to do with the abortive assassination attempt on George Bush. A 29-year-old Iraqi lady wept and wept and said she lost her baby, her husband and the house, her happy family destroyed. Who is

responsible for this? The US missile attack on Baghdad has not only met with world-wide criticism but appears counterproductive even from the point of view of international politics. If the ultimate goal of the US and the allies is to drive Saddam Hussein out of power, the missile attack did precisely the opposite. All reports indicate hostile Iraqi civilian reactions against the US. Nothing can be achieved without the participation of the Iraqi people.

The best course appears to

be to build on the goodwill of Iraqi people who have been suffering before the Gulf war and again after the Gulf war as a result of the sanction of the UN Security Council. The sanction has not diminished Saddam's power and authority; it has only increased the sufferings of the lraqi people. Iraq stands crippled after the Gulf war. It will take decade to return to its pre-war strength. By that time Saddam Hussein will be gone. Therefore, allow time, let Iraqi people decide their own fate. The world has by now got rid of many tyrants even without the help of the west. The process will continue. Don't be a tyrant to remove a tyrant.

#### Parliamentary form

Sir, It is the saddest thing for the country, that we have a parliament which fewer and fewer MPs attend, forgetting that the poorest sizable nation in the world is footing the bill of the Parliament. The Parliamentarians instead of grappling with the national and paramount issues of the country, discuss peripheral matters in a non serious manner, as it appears from the media reports. The success of an MP is dependent on the "home work" he/she does, and the midnight oil that he/she burns. Even the most academic minded MP would also require ten to twelve hours of concentrated hard work, if he/she wants to succeed in his/her work. Our Parliament has a splendid library to back up the

efforts of the MPs. All work in the world now, has to be based on knowledge and skill.

scale investigations. They did

The Parliament of a country, besides being an elected representative body is also a "think tank." If our MPs are away from the House when the Parliament is in session, it deprives the nation of their wisdom, sagacity, knowledge, leadership and guidance.

The leader of the House and the leader of the opposition have to give the lead by their constant presence, because the business of the House takes precedence, over all other business of the government, when the House is in session. It is a matter of further dis-

appointment when the House

do not at times have a quorum.

The Parliament must tread a

noble path for the nation to

Sir, Bangladeshi Christians

perform to establish a "work ethic" for the nation to follow. Here and for the time be-

follow. The Parliament must

ing, we would like to conclude, with the sayings of one of the greatest parliamentarians of all times, Sir, Winston Churchill who said, "Democracy is not the only system for running state administration, but in the absence of any other system it is the best one."

Shahabuddin Mahtab Siddheswart Road, Dhaka

#### Christian inheritance laws

being a microscopic minority, our courts of law rarely come across suits relating to Christian Inheritance Laws and that too is few and far between.

do not recognise joint family. Il a married person dies, only his surviving wife and children inherit his movable and immovable properties, unlike in

The properties of a deand daughters.

In view of the above, it is advisable for the concerned persons/authorities to treat the inheritance suits involving Christian families as per Christian Inheritance Laws to avoid complicacies and speedy disposal of the cases.