

Dhaka, Thursday, October 28, 1993

## Overpowering Musclemanny

Two reports carried in two vernacular dailies deal with the same subject but unrelated incidents: harrowing tales of victims at the hands of illegal toll collectors. In both cases, the cause of drawing the wrath of these goons is the refusal to pay them the big amount of toll demanded — 20,000 Taka in one incident and 50,000 Taka in the other. In the Rampura incident, the victim's, a trader, houses were put to torch and shops ransacked besides kidnapping two of his relatives who were later rescued by the police. In the identical incident of Azimpur, Mostafizur Rahman, also a trader-cum-contractor, had to suffer physical assault and is threatened with torching his houses, not yet carried out. In both cases, informing the thana of the threat issued on the refusal of paying toll allegedly produced no result whatsoever, the first time around.

At this point the two incidents become different: Atiq of Rampura tried to avert the impending attack by hiding himself for a few days; Mostafizur, knowing full well who his adversaries are, went to the National Press Club to relate his helplessness at a press conference to the media people. He has sought to live a secured life. The latter has categorically mentioned that the activists of the ruling party's student wing are responsible for harassing and attacking him. In the second case, only after the bullies had swooped on the trader did the police move to arrest three of the terrorists.

If the two incidents were just an exception to the order of the day, they could be alarming anyway; but when incidents like these are all too frequent, there is greater cause to be concerned. But contrarily, at least on the face of it, the impression is that we have all resigned to this social excesses. Yes, resigned we have, no doubt about that; for the fear is too overpowering to make any systematic protest, let alone to resist the unlawful. When society fails to manage the spirit of resistance from within, it surely betrays how demoralised deep down it is.

It is at this point that the deficiencies in the governance are very strongly felt. In fact, the leadership has been ineffective in discouraging such disruptive forces. A poor commentary on the ability or the willingness to tackle the problem. When the law enforcing agencies cannot do their duties without fear or favour, chances of an effective redress to the abuse of power become all the more dim. How come the police do not know who the criminal elements are? Our law enforcing agency may have carried a legacy of ineptness and even corruption, but it was the duty of the political leaders to give them the directions how best to cope with the requirements and aspirations of a new nation.

Now demoralised and in many instances corrupt, the law enforcers are either less willing or are under pressure not to meddle in the soaring criminality. When the thana refuses to accept cases, how can one expect it will provide protection and security for anyone becoming a target of the muscle-flexing gangsters. Everyone of the area know the tormentors operating in that particular locality, for the musclemen have divided the entire city among themselves and almost religiously abide by their own set rules, and yet they cannot be apprehended. This has happened in the case of the murder of Mona Bhai, a popular sports organiser and a businessman, and in several other incidents.

What then is the anti-terrorist act for? The much-publicised drives carried from time to time in the past have all proved futile. Why? Because they were not meant to do the job the administration professed to do. A political will is the first criterion to free our society from the stranglehold of the musclemen. The rest of the mechanism can be developed once this is in place.

## Is Strike the Only Way?

Is there no other way of registering protest, except by going on strike? From students to workers to nurses to university teachers — everybody has gone on strike at one time or another. The latest to join the protest bandwagon are the doctors. The Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA) observed a two-hour token strike yesterday (Wednesday) to protest the killing of Dr Mizan in the Chittagong Medical College Hospital on 18 October, and other terrorist activities in different parts of the country. The two-hour strike is a part of a series of on-going protest activities like token hunger strike and wearing of black badges. Doctors are expected to submit a memorandum to the Prime Minister demanding the removal of the Home Minister for his failure to catch the killers of Dr Mizan.

We sympathise with the sentiments of the doctors. We echo their outrage at the killing of their colleague and share their acute frustration at the killers not being apprehended yet. But we cannot help raise the question whether or not the two-hour strike is the appropriate way of responding to that issue. Is not the sacred oath that doctors take to dedicate their lives to taking care of the sick and the suffering violated every time the doctors go on strike? Depriving the sick, the wounded and the disabled of two hours of service may not appear to be a lot, but in a doctor scarce country like ours, those two hours can amount to be quite something.

The point that we are trying to drive home here is to question the very basis of a 'strike' mentality in registering any sort of protest. Generally speaking, strike and hartals have become among the most destructive elements in our struggle to break away from the poverty cycle. Why should we resort to strike whenever we demand an action by the government? The case in point concerns bringing to books the killers of Dr Mizan. The concern that no killer should escape the punishment of the law of the land is quite understandable. But what evidence is there in this particular case that the Home Ministry is not moving fast enough? Legal processes have a momentum of their own and no amount of sympathy for the victim should be brought to bear upon the law enforcement bodies to do what they otherwise would not have done. On the other hand, if those who are undertaking the strike have proof that the authorities are deliberately dragging their feet in this matter, then let them bring it out in public through the mass media. Then again, if the BMA is going to the PM, then why go for a strike, even of a token nature, before the PM has had a chance to act on their demands?

We would like to urge all social, political and professional groups to adopt the measure of a strike, only as a last resort and not as the first, as we have the tendency of doing now. We should realise that stopping work is no way of showing respect to anyone whose memory we cherish. In addition, it harms the nation. Can we not devise newer methods of registering protest without harming the nation?

# Farakka Raised at the UN: Directions of Our Foreign Policy

by Nazrul Islam

PRIME Minister Begum Khaleda Zia has undoubtedly earned the gratitude of the nation by her powerful espousal of Bangladesh's legitimate and lawful right to its due share of the Ganges water when she addressed the 48th session of the United Nations General Assembly on October 1, 1993.

She minced no words while informing the international community that unilateral withdrawal of the Ganges water by India upstream of Farakka has created a life and death question for Bangladesh. It was once again noted that the commitment made by India at the time Bangladesh gave her consent to a test-run of the feeder canal of the Farakka Barrage to conclude with Bangladesh a long-term water-sharing agreement still remains unfulfilled. Describing the plight of the forty million or so people of Bangladesh who are being driven to increasing poverty and certain death by the consequences of Farakka, she branded this inhuman conduct towards the people of Bangladesh as a violation of human rights and principles of justice. Referring to the fact that the whole world today was both active and vocal on questions pertaining to protection of the environment, she drew attention to the processes of desertification and salinity which not only interdicted development activities but also made life impossible for forty million people in different parts of Bangladesh. Alluding to the international community's manifest desire to see Bangladesh overcome her poverty, she rightly asked as to how this important objective could be achieved when man-made obstacles made it so much unattainable.

This is the second time since 1976-77 that compelling circumstances obliged Bangladesh to go public on the issue and retrieve it from the cold storage of bilateralism to which it has now remained consigned for nearly twenty years. It would be worthwhile to recount a few of the relevant details. In Article 18 of the Indo-Bangladesh Joint Declaration of Prime Ministers of the two countries of May 16, 1974, it was clearly laid down that "... the two sides expressed their determination that before the Farakka Project is commissioned they would arrive at a mutually acceptable allocation of the water available during the periods of minimum flow in the Ganga." Discussions between the two Governments in terms of this declaration continued for less than a year when in April, 1975 India pointed out that "it was essential to run the feeder canal of the Farakka Barrage during the current lean period" and forced Bangladesh to accept a provisional arrangement of ten-day period withdrawals at

Farakka from April 21 to May 31 while "ensuring the continuance of the remaining flows for Bangladesh." The India-Bangladesh Press Release of April 18, 1975 which contained the details of this arrangement noted that during the leanest ten-day period April 21 to 30 during the dry season January 1 to May 31 the volume of withdrawal at Farakka would be 11000 cusecs. This "ensured" practically nothing for Bangladesh as "the remaining flows" remained unquantified.

With experiences of two dry seasons after the feeder canal was given a test run, late President Ziaur Rahman, exasperated by India's policy of evasion and false promises, brought Farakka to the notice of the international community in the form of the "situation arising out of the unilateral withdrawal of the Ganges waters at Farakka" and initiated a

day period shall not fall below 80 per cent of the value shown in column 4." Needless to say that this guarantee clause was intended to protect Bangladesh's interests against the vagaries of nature.

The letter and spirit of the agreement of November 5, 1977 went much further than just determining the withdrawals and down-stream flows of the Ganges during the dry season. It opened the vista for wider co-operation between the two countries on the equally important question of augmenting the flows of the river. Two side-letters exchanged between Ministers of the two countries at this time which formed an integral part of the agreement itself, confirmed that any scheme or schemes already proposed or which may be proposed by either side "do not exclude any

and the need for both countries to do a burden-sharing exercise. An agreement was thus effectively replaced by a Memorandum of Understanding, and while the scheme for augmentation of the flow by building reservoirs in the upper reaches of the Ganges was cast to the winds, attention was focussed on the residual flow at Farakka and we were invited to make sacrifices and share the burden. Nothing was said about India's withdrawal of Ganges water all along its stretch upstream of Farakka where the total flow stood at 200,000 cusecs even during the leanest period.

Two more exercises of an interim nature were undertaken after the MOU of 1982. This was also abandoned later with the result that no agreement or understanding of any kind ex-

isted since 1988. Meanwhile, the Joint Rivers Commission continues with its fruitless meetings and has so far logged 90 of them. The Ganges remains effectively blocked for Bangladesh at Farakka and the condition of people affected in Bangladesh continues to worsen leading to our devastating experience during the last dry season when the flow under the Hardinge Bridge plummeted to an all-time low of 9000 cusecs when trucks and buses started playing on the track once traversed by the mighty Padma. Does anyone of us need a re-run of Khan Ata's memorable documentary "Ganges oh Ganges"?

As if one neck is not enough for the hangman's noose, we were asked to bring another. The preposterous proposal for a link canal through Bangladesh to mortgage river Brahmaputra also to Farakka was used, amongst other such unrealistic suggestions, to waste time and cloud the real issue in countless bilateral exchanges and meetings of the JRC. At one time when the scheme to involve Nepal for building reservoirs in the upper reaches of the Ganges was revived, India opposed it on the plea that the issue was of a bilateral nature.

The beauty of bilateralism in this case was exposed when in 1987, during SAARC's Kathmandu summit, it became known that India informed Nepal that 'Bangladesh did not want Nepal's involvement and told Bangladesh that Nepal did not welcome the tripartite plan.

It is in this background that Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia was obliged to inform the international community as to

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process which led to the issuance of a Consensus Statement by President of the UN General Assembly on November 24, 1976. It stated, inter alia, that "the parties recognized the urgency of the situation particularly with the onset of another dry season" and that "both parties agree that the situation called for an urgent solution and to this end the parties have decided to meet urgently in Dhaka at the Ministerial level for negotiations with a view to arriving at a fair and expeditious settlement."

Given goodwill on both sides, even the most intractable of problems can be satisfactorily resolved and this was amply demonstrated in the following year when the two co-riparians worked out and signed an agreement in Dhaka on November 5, 1977 on sharing of the Ganges water at Farakka and on augmenting its flows. The agreement which was valid for five years was drawn up in three parts covering water-sharing arrangements; long-term arrangements and review and duration. It contained a schedule on water-sharing at Farakka throughout the dry season every year broken into ten-day periods. For the leanest ten-day period, it was estimated in the schedule that the flow reaching Farakka, based on 75 per cent of availability, was 55000 cusecs out of which the withdrawal would be 20500 and release to Bangladesh would be 34500 cusecs. The agreement provided further that if during a particular ten-day period, the Ganges flows at Farakka come down to such a level that the share of Bangladesh is lower than 80 per cent of the value shown in column 4 (of the schedule), the release of waters to Bangladesh during that 10-

scheme or schemes for building storages in the upper reaches of the Ganges in Nepal." This put into proper perspective the expressions occurring in the joint Declaration of Prime Ministers which spoke of such augmentation through optimum utilisation of the water resources of the region available to the two countries.

Leaders of a political party in Bangladesh appear to believe that we received more water when their party was in power. This is probably based on the fact that the Press Release of April 18, 1975 showed the withdrawal at Farakka during the leanest ten-day period at 11000 cusecs while the figure of 20500 was inserted in the schedule to the agreement of November 5, 1977 for the same period. This is no ground for any particular satisfaction as the Press Release remained silent on the quantification of the down-stream flow after withdrawal at Farakka. The Bangladesh Government in 1977 accepted what was consistent with Bangladesh's legitimate needs and interests.

During the five years that the agreement of 1977 remained valid, there were no problems on either side. Indo-Bangla relations acquired a new depth and dimension especially during the years of Mr Morarji Desai's Government in India. With the agreement running out, the prospects for a long-term water-sharing arrangement became more distant and illusory than before. India used the then military leader of Bangladesh, H M Ershad, on a visit to New Delhi in October, 1982 to sign a Memorandum of Understanding which spoke of sacrifices imposed on both countries by the inadequate flow of the Ganges at Farakka

lustre foreign policy is to be blamed for "internationalising" a bilateral issue as a result of which we are now cast adrift in unknown and dangerous seas.

Without going into the details of the points made in this article suffice it to say that it has primarily been written to give vent to the author's disappointment, at Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia raising the subject of Farakka at the UN. His simple prescription is that a bilateral issue should be left to the confines of a bilateral exercise even if it stagnates there till the end of time. If our foreign policy had no sense of purpose and direction, Prime Minister would not have found it necessary to dwell on the subject in her address to the international community after exhausting the bilateral options available. Even the frame of a low-key foreign

policy is unrelated to the nature and dimension of the exercise undertaken.

The references to the plight of the Muslims of Bosnia, however deplorable, and fate of countries like Lebanon, Iraq, Kuwait and Israel, at a time when the UN is stated to be bankrupt and in the custody of big powers, are designed to imply that no sensible person goes to the UN these days and that the big brother next door may not take kindly to the misconduct of smaller neighbours.

The author has taken pains to make us see the point that the big brother has gained, rather than lost, in stature and power even after the recent geopolitical changes in the world.

He seems to wonder as to how could we go to the UN when the pulsation in the old Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai syndrome is simmering again and a Pakistan in low profile on account of drugs and a nuclear programme. To say the least, these are totally irrelevant matters for us as these have been throughout the history of Farakka.

There is nothing wrong in the directions of our foreign policy. Patience is its virtue and dialogue the instrument. Within the limitations of both, we seek to interact with the international community strengthened in the belief that we have only friends and no foes. We are grateful to the international community for their sustained interest in the welfare of Bangladesh and their generous assistance to its development efforts. Bangladesh owed it to them to inform where it hurts real bad, and what has thwarted her efforts to overcome poverty.

The author is a former Foreign Secretary of the Government of Bangladesh. He has held several ambassadorial posts.

## IN MEMORIAM An Overseas Reader's Tribute to S M Ali

ONLY this morning I heard the news of S M Ali's death through The Daily Star (18 October 1993). I was stunned as I was not ready for news like this. Through his untimely death Bangladesh has lost one of those great men who help shape events in the right direction. Unfortunately for Bangladesh, there are not many people of S M Ali's calibre, dynamism and, in particular, his single-minded determination to shape society in a proper and just manner.



Mr Ali succeeded in presenting to Bangladesh a newspaper which has been a very important source of development dialogue. Having lived outside Bangladesh for about two decades and like many other people in my group I have been more familiar with the Western press. But, then, I am fortunate in that I have been able to visit Bangladesh frequently over the last six years. Initially during my visits to Dhaka, I greatly missed my usual morning papers, the *Financial Times* and the *Guardian Weekly*. However, with the appearance of *The Daily Star* a significant change took place in my reading habits. From the beginning I started enjoying the paper and, as it happened, six months ago I arranged to subscribe to the paper for our Bangladesh Community in Glasgow. Since then *The Daily Star* (or should I say, S M Ali's paper) has been one of my regular reading items.

I didn't meet this great man personally but on one occasion I had a telephone conversation with him from Dhaka. This was in July 1992. He asked me to give him a short paper on the area of "Technology Transfer," a subject which I have investigated at some length in the course of a research project at BIDS. I promised to give him an article on this, but this has been delayed and I feel bad that I failed to give him the article. However, early this year I was visiting Bangladesh again and at the request of Dr Majeed Khan of the IUB, I gave a public seminar at BARDEM, on "Industrialisation and Technology Transfer in Bangladesh." I discovered, to my surprise, that in the next day's issue of *The Daily Star*, S M Ali took the theme of my

public address for his main editorial. He didn't even stop there and, following his usual approach of initiating development dialogues in *The Daily Star*, he brought out the theme again after a gap of two days in the context of some remarks made by an industrialist on the economic development of Bangladesh. Reading *The Daily Star* regularly for the last one year or so, the impression I have formed is that at long last Bangladesh has a top quality newspaper which wants to fight against evils and injustice in the society in a non-partisan manner. I think that as the founder-editor and producer of the paper, Mr Ali wanted this, and there is no doubt that he fully succeeded in achieving this goal. At his death, while paying tribute to him I sincerely wish that *The Daily Star* will continue to serve the nation the way S M Ali wanted it to happen. Let the paper continue to remain an important forum of development dialogue, let it continue to fight for a better and fairer Bangladesh. Only in this way, will our tribute to S M Ali be true and meaningful.

Dr Mozammel Huq

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**CORRIGENDUM**  
The name of the writer of 'Our Khasru Bhai', published yesterday in these columns, was inadvertently printed as 'Professor Salma Ali' instead of Professor Salma Chowdhury.

## Disasters: Picking on the Poor

ALL parts of the world are prone to natural disasters, but as the Sept. 30 earthquake in India demonstrated, it is the poorer regions that are much more vulnerable.

Some 10,000 people were killed in that tremor that shook Western India and shattered the dreams of tens of thousands of others who survived.

According to reports of the environmental group Earthscan, the United States and Europe are also prone to earthquakes, but all quakes killing 100,000 people or more have only occurred in Asia.

Last year, California experienced an earthquake of magnitude 7.4 on the Richter scale, about 100 times more powerful than the quake that flattened 73 villages in India in September. While entire families were wiped out in Maharashtra State, only one person died in California.

And when hurricane Elena hit the United States in 1985, only five people died. The cyclone that slammed Bangladesh in 1991 killed half a million.

The average Japanese disaster kills 63 people. In Peru, the average toll is 2,900.

In 1974, a hurricane struck deforested Honduras, killing more than 4,000 peasants. The same year, cyclone Tracy, of equal ferocity, howled through Darwin in Australia, but only 49 people died.

Today, at least eight times more people die from natural

India's earthquake shows natural calamities kill many more in Third World. Praful Bidwai reports for Inter Press Service from New Delhi

disasters than they did 20 years ago — primarily in the underdeveloped countries. The vast majority of those who die in these natural disasters are poor.

Natural disasters like floods and droughts are taking an increasing toll of life and property in the Third World. Indeed, from an average of 23.4 million people a year in the 1960s, they affected 30 million in the 1970s, and more than 40 million annually in the last decade.

Social scientists and relief experts see the causes of natural disasters as rooted in poverty and the associated underdevelopment complex: unsound settlement policies, lack of early warning, bad communications and official indifference.

In India, the recent quake has highlighted many failings of the country's society, and has stirred up its science and technology establishment. It has also spurred a debate on public policy in coping with disasters.

Says A K Roy of the People's Science Institute, an organisation that also pondered on the Garhwal Himalayas earthquake in 1991: "Ultimately, it is not tremors that kill. It is bad, unsafe housing, and collapse of roofs upon vulnerable, poorly protected people living in congested, ill-planned settlements."

He points out that many disasters can be forecast. "People's vulnerability can be reduced if they are not forced to live in overcrowded conditions in dangerous areas," says Roy. "Quick evacuation can be conducted and adequate relief provided to mitigate the effects of calamities."

India's failure to do so was ruthlessly exposed by the tremor that killed people in their sleep — although distinguished geophysicist Vinod Gaur argues, "It would be wrong to say that the quake could have been accurately predicted."

But it is reasonable to maintain that the Latur-Osmanabad area, spread over a radius of 3000 kms in the Deccan plateau, should have been seismically closely monitored.

Nature had given ample warning: In 1962-63, 1967, 1983-84, and most importantly, between August 2 and October 29 last year when there were 125 tremors and people fled their homes in panic.

Significant quakes have also recently occurred in other areas of the Deccan plateau: Satpura (1938), Koyna (1967), Bhadrachalam (1969) Broach (1970), Western Maharashtra (August 28, 1993) and Goa (September 4, 1993).

## To the Editor...

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.

### Band music

Sir, Over the past few years, band music has become rather popular. Using electric guitars, key boards, drums, bass guitars etc., a new dimension has been added to Bangla modern songs. It is a fact that band music has

enriched the arena of modern songs. Among the young generation, band music has created a sensation. Music lovers going for Rock N Roll or such fast music can now quench their thirst by listening to the local band music.

In the past few years, many

bands have sprung up. In some parts of the metropolis, there are bands in every alley. But though too many bands have come into existence, the standard of music presented by them has improved very little, most of them lacking originality. They actually follow western artists and their trend of music. This habit of following (not to mention copying) may not prove to be beneficial for our own modern music. Many tend to copy western songs (through it is very hard sometimes) to detect exactly from which song they are copying. Even some well-known bands have sung Bengali songs using

the music of some famous, well-known English songs. This has to stop, otherwise lack of originality and creativity will eventually leave a dark hallow our modern music.

BAMBA — association for modern music — should have an investigation board which will see to it that band music is free from too much foreign influence, that all the members of a band have at least minimum enlightenment about music, that music played by a band is their own creation etc. This investigation body should directly answer to the Cultural Ministry for their action and

inform whatever they find to the Ministry. Taking steps and forming such a body may prove to be very helpful and will of course work as a catalyst in improving the standard of modern music.

Touheed Feroze  
New DOHS, Dhaka

### DU bus for Cantt area

Sir, Two year back the Dhaka University authorities started a bus service from Kachukhet to the University. This has helped the students of Kachukhet, Kafur, Ibrahimpur, Cantonment etc a lot. If

the same service starts from Cantonment Post Office which is the central point of Dhaka Cantonment, this will benefit the Cantt students greatly without affecting others adversely. From Cantt Post Office the second stoppage of the bus may be at Cantt Workshop and the third at Kachukhet and so on. Will the university authorities look into it?

Saleh Ahmed Chowdhury  
Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka