

## S Africa Comes out of Woods

South Africa has started coming out of the darkness the country was enveloped in for over three centuries. With the promulgation by President FW de Klerk of the Transitional Executive Council (TEC), which will be charged with the responsibility of overseeing the preparations for S Africa's first multi-racial elections on April 27, the white minority rule in the country — once known for its nauseating policy of apartheid — virtually comes to an end. Immediately after taking office on Tuesday, the TEC got into business and has succeeded in finalising an interim constitution. The specialty about the TEC is that it reserves the right to overrule the government on any issues deemed to be an obstacle to the holding of a free and fair election. With one delegate from each of the 21 parties favouring the handing over of power through a representative election, the TEC looks forward to a peaceful and orderly transition to a democratically elected black majority rule.

The installation of a more powerful authority than the Klerk government is by all account a historic event in that it can be counted upon as the beginning of the end of the long white minority rule in S Africa. Although the event will primarily bring a significant change in the lives of the South African people, its positive impacts will also be felt around the globe yet to completely overcome the racial prejudice. Through the demolition of the myth of racial supremacy, man has time and again upheld human values instead of the colour of his skin. South Africa has taken a long time to recognise this reality — the inner worth of man.

However, the official position of the Klerk government has not been universally endorsed, particularly by some of the right-wing whites. Strongly opposed to the black rule, the white radical groups want to salvage whatever is possible from the ruins of their privileged status they have so long enjoyed in the S African society. When the whole cake is not available, at least a substantial portion of it, they reason, must bear the special stamp of the white rule. Then there are the black conservatives who are not happy with the draft constitution and have aligned themselves with the white rightists. This strange partnership poses a formidable challenge to the smooth holding of elections and the subsequent transition to democracy. However, the government and the African National Congress (ANC) headed by Nelson Mandela have so far demonstrated an unwavering commitment to the cause and this is going to be decisive on the final count. The opposition forces now gathered under the banner, the Freedom Alliance, may only prolong the woes of S African people but not the transitional process. Certainly, their alienation will leave them out of the pale of democracy and they have nothing to gain from this opposition.

As for the whites who are yet to reconcile with the idea of a representative majority rule, the progressive leadership perhaps has nothing to do. However, for the disgruntled blacks, the doors can still be kept open — provided that they forsake violence and leave the company of those who have been in between the blacks and their equal rights. Nelson Mandela, who is likely to become the next head of government, enjoys all the good wishes he needs from around the world to shore up the statecraft. The rebels, we believe, are a minority who will realise their mistake and come to reconcile with the most positive development ever to take place in centuries in that country. The international community has closely monitored the painful process of transition and their support for a just cause will leave the Freedom Alliance hopelessly isolated, giving the majority S African people a chance for basking in the sunshine.

## Rokeya Dibas

Rokeya, coming from a decaying family of feudal aristocracy of Pairaband in Rangpur, was married to a non-Bengalee magistrate before the turn of the century. She had an uneventful conjugal life and, surviving her husband, she tried to perpetuate his memory by founding a girls' school in Calcutta after his name. In the fifties, pieces of her writing started finding their way into school text-books of what was then East Pakistan. Rokeya died in 1932 prematurely at 52. Our society took more than half a century to recognise in her the great epoch making person Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain.

Today is her 62nd death anniversary. It has become imperative to observe this day as Rokeya Dibas by all that has the good of the society at heart. The government can only promote its image by observing the day as such at the national level. But it may remain hard for forces of establishment — whatever party be in power — to take the teachings of Begum Rokeya to heart and practise them. For the purdah-obeying ideal housewife and a Muslim worthy of emulation saw ill of the society with unsurpassed radicalism and spoke out her mind in choicest and strongest unminced Bengali.

For Rokeya to remain a perennial source of inspiration for all addressing themselves to the task of healing the society of inequality and injustice, specially those arising from gender discrimination, it is very important not to label her with the cheap stereotypes of a feminist philosopher or a pioneer of Muslim female education. Hers were the mind and the strivings put to the identification of social wrongs and their denunciation. Ever since the emergence of the patriarchal family very late in the million-year saga of man, women had been the butt of unremitting exploitation and injustice regardless of class, caste or creed. In the subcontinental setting of very many ancient peoples Rokeya's was the one voice, profound and distinct, that indicted the society of harbouring with zeal the remnants of an inhuman past, gender bashing being the most persisting and ghastliest of them. Rokeya exposed this as no other did.

Rokeya was no preacher of the primacy of women or the denouncer of the villainy of men. And she cared for the whole society and not a part of it. In fact the whole gamut of her writings shines with a singular distinction of secularist opposition to the communal way of looking at men and things. We are certain in our mind that the influence of Begum Rokeya will grow in our society inexorably in spite of any communal or otherwise big push to thwart the march of times.

# BJP's War Cry Fails to Rally the Hindus Behind

THE secular case for a pluralistic society is more or less won. It is nobody's contention that the Bharatiya Janata Party has done badly or that it has ceased to be a force to reckon with. But its war cry of *Hindutva* has failed to rally the Hindus behind. The sweep or the wave, which the party claimed, was just not there.

The BJP may attribute its failure to 'an understanding' among the non-BJP parties. But it is the electorate which has gone away from it. The people have indicated that harmony, not hatred, appeals to them. A Hindu wants to live in amity with his Muslim neighbour as he has done for centuries. His faith in co-existence has survived a barrage of religious crises and he wants to sustain it.

Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and UP, which went to the polls, contain a little more than one fourth of India's population, 82 per cent of which is Hindu. This is the area where the BJP has been working at the grassroots for more than 25 years under one name or the other. This is also the area where L K Advani, the BJP chief, drove in a *rath* to foment Hindu chauvinism over the disputed Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid. But when the chips were down, the pro-secular force voted against the communalists. Parties with secular credentials did better than the BJP.

True, the BJP has captured Delhi and done quite well in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. But their tally of

members has come down in the two states. The real battle was in UP, the *Kurukshetra* of the *Mahabharata*. It was here that the Babri Masjid was demolished to promote Hindu support and it is here that the BJP was reversed. Both Advani and Kalyan Singh, former BJP chief minister in the state, had said practically from every rostrum that the *mandir* was the issue. The verdict was that it had ceased to be so. At least the fire-brand Uma Bharati has admitted it.

Had the demolition of the Babri Masjid been a popular act among the Hindus, as the BJP assumed, they would have given it an overwhelming majority at least in UP. But the BJP has lost the government in the state. It has secured in a 425-member house only 180 odd seats against the 221 last time. An average Hindu wanted the temple to come up but not at the expense of the masjid.

In fact, the demolition of the masjid may well prove to be the BJP's achilles heel. One, it has awakened the secular forces to join the battle with the communalists; two, it has hurt the sensitivity of the Hindus who believe in the equality of religions. Three, it has united Muslims against the party all over the country.

The BJP has not, however, learnt any lesson. Soon after the debacle in Himachal Pradesh, and the defeat in UP, Murlidhar Joshi, former

BJP chief, said the campaign against the "pseudo secularism" would be intensified. In other words, the party is determined to further communalise the atmosphere and polarise the country. Already, different identities have been delineated. Sparks of misunderstanding have ignited many fires and consumed several people and homes.

What the BJP and its supporters do not realise is that an average Hindu is not a fundamentalist. He believes in reli-

gion, but not in bigotry or fanaticism that the BJP is trying to instil into him. He can be worked up, as the BJP did on the question of the Ram Janmabhoomi and reaped the harvest in the shape of 120 seats in the Lok Sabha and governments in UP and some other states. But the frenzy does not last. The election results have proved it.

The BJP should learn from the example of the Janata Dal, which has been decimated in the election. It continued to demand at the hustings a better deal for the backward, even when the Mandal Commission's recommendations for reservations had been enacted. Had the party enlarged the demand to include the poor, not of one caste alone, it would have gone down better. By plugging the *mandir* line, even after the demolition of the masjid, the BJP has been only flogging a dead horse.

The BJP can itself judge from the poll results that fundamentalism has stopped selling. Atal Behari Vajpayee, leader of the BJP's parliamentary group, made greater impact in the constituencies he visited

because he did not raise the issue of *mandir* or the *Hindutva*. Bhairon Singh Sekhawat won half the seats in Rajasthan on his own because he avoided projecting the extreme Hindu line. In contrast, Advani and Joshi, cast in the fundamentalist mould, alienated voters by concentrating on the *mandir* and the *Hindutva*.

The BJP should also take note of the forces it has unleashed by adopting a communal posture. Take the pro-Nathu Ram Godse campaign. It was once confined to a nook of Pune alone. This year he; Mahatma Gandhi's assassin, was lionised in Bombay itself. Gopal Godse,

his brother, has the audacity to say in public that "even if we know that only two days were left for Gandhi to die a natural death, we would have sought for two moments to pump two bullets into him. So intent were we to despatch him to death at our hands."

Advani did well in dissociating his party from Godse. But when you sow the wind, you reap the whirlwind. Since the atmosphere has been fouled, such a fallout is not unnatural. Advani has not, however, explained his party's alliance with the Shiv Sena, which was visibly represented at the meeting where Godse was praised and Mahatma Gandhi abused.

The BJP is yet to condemn the cold blooded murder of Laldas, the official priest at the Ram Janmabhoomi shrine (inside the Babri Masjid). He was the star witness in the trial of those who have had a hand in the demolition. The Central Bureau of Investigation, in charge of the case, has chargesheeted, among others, Advani, Joshi and Bal Thackeray, the Shiv Sena chief. Two weeks before his murder, Laldas told an editor from Bombay that he would be killed because he knew "who ordered the demolition."

The BJP intellectuals and ideologues are conspicuous by their silence. They are at pains to condemn the cult of gun but have not uttered a word against the shooting of Laldas, whose

deposition would have probably exposed the leaders they protect. Surely, they do not believe the FIR, which says that "it is a property dispute within the family."

The BJP reverses can lead to two things: the party can become militantly Hindu with no pretension and no apologies or it can come increasingly under the liberal control of Vajpayee, Sekhawat and Jaswant Singh. If the latter course is preferred, the problem will still be how the party lessens the craze of Hindu identity it has spread. Can it ask the genie of communalism to go back into the bottle which it had opened?

The Congress party's feeling of satisfaction is not understandable. It has been routed in UP, the state which counts. And it is being squeezed from above and below, the upper classes being appropriated by the BJP and the lower by the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and over other such combinations of the Dalits and the backward. Most of the votes cast in Congress favour are not because of its performance but because it is considered a lesser evil than the BJP. Had there been a third force — the Janata Dal has failed to emerge as the one — the people would have opted for it.

Finding an alternative to the Congress, other than the BJP, may be a long haul. The disconcerting part, in the meantime, is that caste is taking the place of religion. And if the threats by Kanshi Ram, the BSP chief, to the upper castes are any guide for the future, the Indian society is in for a caste confrontation.

will not be cost effective because of the cost involved in installation of the tank and the pipes is too high. But to have a compost pit in the homestead is most suitable and affordable, replicable and also environmentally friendly. To most people, cultural and spiritual development is still part of their total living pattern. What technology they select, therefore, should be appropriate to their total approach to life. Technology should also be climatically and environmentally sound and manageable.

**GOVERNMENT LINKAGE:** The success of the voluntary activities always depend upon the government support. Extension of government assistance for the implementation of voluntary programmes usually give better results. We have a programme in Sri Lanka, with school children, to mobilize them for voluntary work. It is similar to the Student Community Involvement Programme (SCIP) of the Volunteer Centre of New South Wales, in Australia. In Sri Lanka, Sarvodaya organizes education camp for the students during the week-ends. The government supports this project by allowing them to organize the student sector for the community work.

I heard a story from the former president of IRR and the present Philippines Minister of Health, Dr. Juan Flavio, during my training at IRR. It is something that we all should pay attention to: There was a farmer in a village who owned a mango tree. The mango tree was full of mangoes. Everyday some suggested, "You should buy a dog from the market which will help you to protect your mango from the thieves." One day he rushed to buy a dog. He told the seller that he wanted to buy a dog to watch his mango tree from the petty thieves. The dog seller told him, "You buy this big dog, it will serve your purpose but it will be a little expensive." Since the farmer wanted to protect his mangoes, he did not bother about the price. He bought the dog and brought it home and fed it well having in mind that he won't have any problems from the thieves anymore. He woke up in the morning and found that the same thing had happened.

He was very upset as he found that the dog had slept well after having the dinner. Again he went to the dog seller and complained, "Your dog is not much of use as it slept all night and it also ate too much. It is too expensive, I want to change the dog to a small dog." Then the man said, "I will give you a small dog but you have to keep the big dog too, as it is the big one which can fight. The small dog won't sleep like the big one and it will wake up the big dog to chase away the thieves."

This is how the Government, and the voluntary organizations should work together. The cooperation, partnership, understanding among the government and non-government voluntary organizations should be developed and the non-government voluntary organizations should wake the government up from its slumber.

The writer, who hails from Sri Lanka, has been an IRR Volunteer/Programme Advisor in Bangladesh assigned to Centre for Development Services through International Voluntary Services, a reputed national NGO networking organization which provides support services to the small NGOs.

## BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

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## Voluntarism: A Shri Lankan Experience

by Gamini Gunasingha

"We are rich only through what we give; and poor only through what we refuse and keep." (Suetchine).

The 8th anniversary of International Volunteer Day was observed globally on the 5th December. Every year the Day is observed on the basis of a United Nations General Assembly declaration in 1985.

In the villages of Sri Lanka, we start the Sarvodaya work by laying a very strong psychological infrastructure in the village. Villagers must think together, plan together and also implement programmes together. For this, the most essential thing is to lay what we call a psychological infrastructure. A group of people who are interested in helping the poor to help themselves build up their community, go and encamp in the village and have a planned programme of activities, for a week or even longer. We call it a *Shramadana* camp — a camp where one donates one's labour for the well-being of all.

**CAMPING FOR SHARING:** A Sarvodaya *Shramadana* camp provides the psychological, social and physical environment where the individual and group can find a totality of life. According to our culture we believe that if a human person is to be awakened, there are four prerequisites. Firstly, our mind and heart should be full of respect for all life and friendliness towards all beings. This is called 'loving kindness'. Loving kindness towards all is the thought that an awakening person should have. But this thought is not enough; it is only the motivation which should lead us to compassionate action. When our minds and hearts are full of love for humanity and for the living world, we are quick to perceive the suffering that we witness around us. There is so much suffering going on around us that those who are mindful of respect for life should go in search of those who are suffering and try to remove the causes of their suffering. We call this 'compassionate action' which is the second prerequisite. The thoughts of loving kindness and compassionate action combined, the result is

'unselfish joy' which is the third component for an awakened person. As social workers, when we go into the villages and try to help our fellow human beings, we find lots of people who will be indifferent to what we are doing. They may even abuse us which would make us feel depressed. All this should not discourage us rather should make us over-jealous or over-forceful in our attitude. What is required is an attitude of 'equanimity' which must be adopted to be able to have a balanced approach in situations like this. Equanimity, then is the fourth prerequisite of awakening person.

Similarly, we have four other principles of group behavior. These four principles are 'sharing', 'pleasant language', 'constructive activity' and 'equality'. What is happening in our world today is that we isolate the poor. Isolation means poverty. In many parts of the non-industrialised world, particularly in the rural areas, isolation imposes a heavy burden on households and whole community.

In our world, unless we share our wealth, share our power, share our responsibilities, conflict will not stop. Today, through educational systems, through political movements, through economic arrangements, an individual at all times is running after power, position and wealth. This leads to an almost 'human type of competition' and various types of social unrest. The only answer to this situation lies in human beings learning to live together and sharing together. That's why, in a village community, when we start a project, we give emphasis on this concept of 'sharing' — the sharing of our labour, intelligence, knowledge/experience, wealth/land, and responsibility and power.

The Sarvodaya Movement uses this traditional value system to restructure the de-structured society. We have accepted the Sarvodaya thought and this thought is translated into concrete action by *Shramadana*. *Shramadana* does not require outside aid to begin its programmes. We begin with what we have and where we are. We have no machines that the developed countries have; but we have plenty of excess and unused labour which, only when organized and mobilized as a productive force, can create sufficient wealth for our people to take them at least to the take-off point in economic development. We organize this 'shramadana' (labour) for a well planned rural development project on a voluntary basis. Thus the 'dana' (donation) comes into play.

**LIVELIHOOD:** Volunteering is part of our life. Volunteering is prevalent in various occupations. In a farming society, the people share their resources, the buffaloes and harrows for ploughing the land, seeds for cultivation and each other's labour. The farmers volunteer their labour to clean the irrigation canals, build fences around their cultivated areas and even to chase the wild animals (elephants, boars etc.) when they try to destroy their cultivation.

In a fishing society when the boat reaches the beach full of fish they need the support from others. To pull the net full of fish, a fisherman needs help from other people.

This same practice I have seen in the Philippines and here in Bangladesh. **PARTNERSHIP:** There should be partnership between both sides — those who extend their hands and those who receive the help. The poor also have something to share. There are many people in Bangladesh who survive with only Taka 20 to 40 a day. How is it

that in our neighbouring country India, prices of essentials available under rationing system are kept strictly at the minimum so the general masses can purchase them at a cheaper price. Few positive points about rationing are: It provides essentials to the low-income group at an accessible price; when this system is in force the business community cannot raise prices of essentials at their free will; and even if the government has to give subsidy, at least the poor citizens of the country are saved from the wrath of hunger.

If we also mentioned in this connection that the government does give subsidy in rationing for the armed forces and police. Why not then for the poor citizens?

So, I urge and insist that a proper rationing system be reintroduced in our country, where low and middle income people may have access to essentials at a price cheaper than that in the open market.

It may be mentioned here

## 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.

### Student politics

Sir, Is BNP facing any crisis on the issue of campus violence and student politics? As the party in power, it has the basic responsibility in restoring law and order in the society, including the campus. The BNP leaders must decide on a united stand and announce it as a government policy, and thereafter follow it up firmly and democratically.

Democracy does not mean soft-glove governing and opposition based on hatred and sentimentalism. This poor country cannot afford this sort of vacillation in decision-making. BNP must act firmly and transparently.

A Zafar  
Dhaka

### Strict laws needed

Sir, The conscience of the whole nation was again terror-stricken by the news of the death of a medical student Rumana Parveen. How long do we have to put up with this type of ruthless acts of criminality perpetrated by careless drivers? How many promising lives have to be crushed under the wheels of speeding trucks?

It may sound barbarous in this civilized century, yet we do want only capital punishment and nothing else for this kind of reckless behaviour. Mild action or forgiveness is not always appreciated, if it helps to nurture criminal and deliberately unscrupulous attitudes day after day. We, the mothers, the sisters, the daughters — all, condemn the prevailing state of af-

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### For a rationing system

Sir, If the rationing system were not there in Rajshahi, the death toll in the famine of 1974 would have been higher.

But since 1975, prices of essential food items under rationing have gradually been escalated. As a result, the prices of items available under the rationing system are higher than those in the open market. This has only helped in driving the people away from the rationing system itself. So, rationing system has failed to play its previous useful role.

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So, I urge and insist that a proper rationing system be reintroduced in our country, where low and middle income people may have access to essentials at a price cheaper than that in the open market.

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