

Another Reminder to Disarm Campus

The felling by bullet of police sergeant Hasanul Farhad in the fierce gunbattle between two factions of the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal, on the Jagannath University College campus, earns him a rare distinction for having died at the call of duty. We believe he has a further claim to honour because his death, which has orphaned a family, has poignantly confirmed what has been frighteningly common knowledge about the campus.

Fire-arms in young hands are dangerous. They can be lethal when feuding students have them. And, these can be hellish of Dantesque proportion when possessed by rival factions flaunting the label of a student wing belonging to the ruling party. They can naively press their luck too far—even beyond the normal dread of law's heavy hand falling on them. So it is from the unhaltered possession of weapons that they derive the doses of self-confidence until they turn into complete desperadoes itching for a gunbattle with total disregard for time or place. And if the motive should go wild with the factions' bitterness exacerbating over differences in splitting dividends of toll collection, construction tenders and student admissions, what you have is a battle for supremacy like in a war-field. American wild West trigger-happiness is reminded minus its demonstration in desolate places, the shooting ranges here being crowded.

The notable thing about the JUC campus violence is that the battle for supremacy had started raging some nineteen months ago. While it has had the extremely unstudentlike agenda, in all that time, to extend control over areas adjacent to the university college—the reference being to extortions and cuts from work or business orders—, lately the admissions season added a new dimension to the conflict.

Some JCD student leaders at the JUC have alleged through a press statement that presence of armed students and outsiders made them keep away from the campus during the last nineteen months. They said, instead of actions being taken against them they had received support. The central leaders of JCD have attributed it all to a 'conspiracy' hatched in and around the area, according to a report in a vernacular daily.

Indeed the 'gunrunners' and killers 'have no party—they are simply murderers. Let this be an established fact and not a rhetoric. Rather than disowning them after something deadly has happened, it is desirable that they are identified, disarmed and neutralised preemptively. This will not only save the government from loss of face and lack of credibility but also from unwittingly raising a Frankenstein.

We are hoping that the Prime Minister's strict directives to ferret out the culprits as well as the probe ordered by the government would yield results in the shape of a definite improvement in the campus situation.

The Glorious Seventh March

Today is the Seventh of March. Seventh with a capitalised S. The history of the emergence of Bangladesh has capitalised it. If there is any one day germinal to our independence as a nation, it is this. There is no doubt a relentless struggle for democracy spread over more than two decades and mounted by the whole of our people fashioned this day. That notwithstanding, without the crucial stroke administered by the best leader of the time, this day wouldn't be the day it became and continues to be. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman catalysed on this day the thousand disparate flashes of a power to break out of the Pakistani straitjacket into one mighty heave geared uniquely to independence and nothing less. This day commencing as it did spiritually the independence of Bangladesh and physically the irrevocable march towards carving out the same, is at once a fit testament to the height of patriotism and statesmanship of the great leader.

On March 3 while leading a procession headed for a Paltan meeting Faruk was murdered by Pakistani armed personnel at the Mouchak intersection. A stunned Bangabandhu could not tell the great Paltan demonstration his ideas of the escalating situation and instructions for them for the morrow. He only told them he would give them—the whole frenzied nation that is—all about what that historic juncture demanded of the people to do and to be.

From March 3 evening to March 7 afternoon public imagination seethed and frothed for 95 hours over the question of what the leader could say, what indeed were the options open to him. Towards the end of that impossible wait an unspoken consensus was emerging—the Sheikh must declare independence.

Inside the cantonment everything was being readied to roll tanks on the March 7 rally and kill all including Bangabandhu, standing in the way, and crush all signs of Bengali impudence—if the Sheikh dared to speak of independence.

In one of the greatest pieces of oration in the political history of mankind, the great leader ropewalked between the two total positions and laid the foundation of the armed struggle that would eventually beat Pakistan into an ignoble defeat and a loss of its dear colony. No one has claimed knowledge of Bangabandhu being helped by anyone in the formulation of his March 7 speech. It was the last word in political wisdom and concern for the weal of the people and no meaningless incitement to any misadventure—and at the same time it was so spontaneous coming very palpably straight from the heart.

It is very unfortunate that political expediency and perhaps myopia too has led a section of our political people to ignore the importance of this day in our national development. This is sure to pass and the glorious legacy of this day would shine bright for us all ever as a beacon does.

Planting Trees in Ricefields to Renew Forest Resources

In late January this year, the world's rich and poorer nations reached an accord at the United Nations in a brave effort to match the global use of tropical timber to the pressing need for conservation of forest resources. The agreement involves some 50 nations—23 producers like Malaysia, Indonesia and Brazil and 27 consumers, mainly in the West, including European countries, the United States, as well as Japan.

Forests all over the world are being depleted at an accelerating rate. Studies cited by the UN agencies say that Man has destroyed as much forests in the last two decades as previously cleared in all of history. Everyone agrees now that forests need to be conserved to protect the environment. Given the urgency of the matter, one would expect any agreement designed to ensure environment-friendly utilisation of forest resources to have a smooth passage. However, the negotiations raised sharp controversies over issues concerning sustainable management of forest resources.

Producers of tropical timber wanted the accord to embrace logging in the temperate forests of the industrial nations in the north. They felt that the vanishing forests in the world cried for conservation-oriented policies to be followed everywhere. The rich nations argued that they were careful with their forest resources anyway and did not need to enter into any formal agreement with the developing countries

over this issue. In the end, the developing producer countries did agree to drop their demand that the global pact should cover not just tropical—but all timber. In return, the rich nations affirmed the need to provide developing countries with appropriate resources to enable them to carry on with forest conservation programmes. The North also agreed to continue to follow a policy of sustainable management of their own forest resources. On the whole, it was a compromise alright. The developing countries received some vague assurances of financial and technical support in their conservation efforts. Perhaps one redeeming feature is that all the participating countries gave assurances of practicing policies that would permit sustainable use of forest resources. They also agreed to report regularly the progress made in this area.

At home, a 20-year master plan is said to have been drafted with a view to ensure a sustained growth of the country's forest sector. The plan aims at bringing 20 per cent of the country's lands under the coverage of forests by the year 2015. The world land-utilisation data place about 31 per cent of the total global land area under forest and woodlands. Our 20-year master plan's target is thus a modest one.

It is also rather disturbing to find that our efforts in the past to conserve forest resources have not borne much of a result. Our record in the area seems to be the worst

even in South Asia. According to the Asian Development Bank's publication (1993) Key Indicators of Developing Asian and Pacific Countries, the share of forest and woodland in total land area came to 14.3 per cent in this country in 1990 as against 16.9 per cent in 1975. In short, the area under forest and woodland had been on the decline. Strangely however, in all other countries in South Asia, the share of forest and woodland in total land area has either improved or at least remained unchanged, in

year master plan succeed in reversing the trend? The year 2015 will probably show.

It is said that the government's afforestation programmes in the future would seek to secure increased participation of the people. This is a welcome move. Government tree plantation programme in the countryside holds out much better prospect of succeeding if the people also participate in it willingly. It is understood that a framework for compensating private citizens

nanced by the Swiss Development Cooperation. The VFFP, it is said, aims at promoting tree plantation on private land only—homestead and cropland. I make a mention of this particular agroforestry programme because of its distinctive feature of tree plantation on the cropland, smack on ricefield. It is claimed that if certain norms relating to selection of the right type of plant, density, pruning of the tree to allow for its planned growth and so on, are followed, it might be possible to plant trees in as much as 70 per cent of the country's cropland—mostly ricefields—without affecting the crop yield adversely. This sounds too good to be true. For, such development would help mitigate a major environmental issue—that of the conflicting claims of forest and habitation on land. Some measure of success is said to have been achieved already introducing trees into cropland. For a land-hungry country, the development of this type of tree management technology, attaining a sustainable inter-cropping of trees and foodgrains on cropland, ought to claim top priority.

Shimul tree lends itself to multiple use. Some also call it the silk-cotton tree. A tropical tree to bombaria family, its pod yields kapok, silky fibres growing around the seeds. Kapok is used for stuffing sleeping bags, life jackets, etc, and had been one of our export items. Like many other trees, shimul also has been denuded in the countryside. It light, soft wood used to be prized for making wooden match-boxes and probably matches too. Some ascribe the denudation of the shimul tree largely to its usefulness as matchwood. These days, of course, we mostly see paper match-boxes. Shimul's trunk also yields a useful glue substance.

Planting trees in ricefields without hurting the crop seems like an innovative approach to renewal of forest resources. One wonders if shimul also figures among the trees that are being planted on the cropland. The flaming red flowers would then lit up the countryside in the spring.

Forests all over the world are being depleted at an accelerating rate. Studies cited by the UN agencies say that Man has destroyed as much forests in the last two decades as previously cleared in all of history. Everyone agrees now that forests need to be conserved to protect the environment. Given the urgency of the matter, one would expect any agreement designed to ensure environment-friendly utilisation of forest resources to have a smooth passage. However, the negotiations raised sharp controversies over issues concerning sustainable management of forest resources.

Producers of tropical timber wanted the accord to embrace logging in the temperate forests of the industrial nations in the north. They felt that the vanishing forests in the world cried for conservation-oriented policies to be followed everywhere. The rich nations argued that they were careful with their forest resources anyway and did not need to enter into any formal agreement with the developing countries

the same period. In the case of Sri Lanka, the share of forest and woodland rose to 32.2 per cent of the total land area in 1990 from 27.9 per cent in 1975. For Bhutan, forest and woodland expanded to 55.5 per cent of total land area in 1990 from 53.2 per cent in 1975. For India, to 22.4 per cent from 22.1 per cent and for Pakistan, to 4.6 per cent from 3.7 per cent. In Maldives and Nepal the share of forest and woodland remained unchanged at 18.1 per cent and 3.3 per cent respectively, of the total land area, between 1975 and 1990. Bangladesh seems to be the only country in South Asia where the rate of depletion of forest resources outstrips renewal. Will the 20-

who are actively associated with afforestation programme is also being drawn up. For instance, government-owned land left unused in the countryside would be leased out to the local people for tree plantation. Income from the plantation would then be divided among the local planters, the financing NGO, if any, the concerned union parishad and the government. The local planter will have the major share of the income.

There are non-governmental initiatives on afforestation too. The Daily Star special supplement of February 1 focuses on one such initiative, namely the Village and Farm Forestry Programme (VFFP) fi-

Exclusive Interview with Hanif

"Anti-terrorism Committee will be Formed in Each Ward"

The Dhaka Mayor-elect Mohammad Hanif candidly discussed his plans for containing terrorism and easing traffic jam and other problems of the citizenry in an exclusive interview to The Daily Star, his first ever to the Press after winning the election. The Daily Star team that visited his Nazirabazar residence was led by chief reporter M Anwarul Haq. He was assisted by Hasan Shahid, Nazmul Ashraf, Masud Hasan Khan and Shamsad Mortuza.

of terrorists to the press. Secondly, I'll keep the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) free from party policies and will turn the DCC purely into a service rendering organisation. In doing so, I will never entertain any undue request from any quarter including my own party. I will not waver even if my popularity declines with my partymen while protecting the interests of the city people. Third, as I pledged to the voters, I will not increase holding taxes for the next five years. I'll assess holding taxes as per rule but will not let the taxes get enhanced. During the assessment, I will remain alert so that nobody is victimised. To meet the expenditure for increased civic amenities, I plan drastic cut in unproductive sector and also to take income-generating programmes. And fourthly, I'll visit each and every ward of the city to identify the major problems like mosquito menace, traffic jam, dilapidated roads etc and list the tasks required to be done on priority basis in consultation with the commissioner concerned.

DS: Are you afraid of the great task conferred upon you as the first-ever directly-elected mayor of Dhaka?

MH: Not at all. Because, I believe nothing would be impossible for me provided the Almighty Allah is for me.

DS: Do you think that through your election as the mayor of Dhaka public support for your party Awami League has been reiterated in the capital?

MH: My election as mayor is a victory of the wishes of Allah, a victory of the policies Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman of Awami League, a victory of the dynamic leadership of our party chief Sheikh Hasina, and finally a victory of the budding democracy of the country.

I firmly believe the results of the just-held city corporation elections would have a tremendous impact on the next general elections.

DS: What is your suggestion for consolidation of your party's success, especially in the capital and what would be your role in this regard?

MH: My election as mayor is a victory of the wishes of Allah, a victory of the policies Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman of Awami League, a victory of the dynamic leadership of our party chief Sheikh Hasina, and finally a victory of the budding democracy of the country.

DS: Do you fear any non-co-operation from the BNP government as you being an opposition party man would be serving the city-dwellers as mayor? How would you deal with such situation?

MH: Initially, I have planned a four-point programme in conformity with my election pledges. These are: First I'll form ward-level anti-terrorism committee, headed by the elected commissioner. Such committees with representatives of different parties would list the terrorists of their respective areas. All the lists would then be submitted to the Ministry of Home Affairs for action. If the ministry fails to take the trouble-mongers into task, I will expose the government's step-motherly attitude. If necessary, I will even seek support and cooperation

from the donor agencies. As elected mayor, I cannot deprive the seven million people of the city of their rights.

DS: Do you think the government would give you the priority as the mayor of the capital city?

MH: It should do so for its own sake. If the government extends its all out cooperation to me in solving the city problems, ultimately the credit would go to it.

DS: How do you plan to free the DCC from corruption?

MH: As of now, I don't know if there is any corruption in the DCC. Let me take over the charge and know the nature and extent of corruption, if any. If need be, I'll shake up the administration of the DCC. I will never allow anybody to be victimised or any corrupt person getting relieved by my inaction.

DS: What's your plan to solve the hawkers' problem?

MH: I am thinking of alternative measures for the hawkers. Evicting them from the city sidewalks without any rehabilitation is inhuman. I will look for certain areas for them to trade. Open markets at some particular places could be one option. They could also be given licences for doing authorised business. But nothing should be done which would leave them unemployed.

DS: Holding public rallies on streets often creates traffic jam resulting in suffering of the citizens. How would you solve it?

MH: I will ban public rallies on streets and select some specific spots for the purpose. It cannot go unabated that a handful of people, guided by their whims, would erect a stage on the street and speak through loudspeakers causing suffering to thousands of people.

DS: Do you approve the VIP roads should be closed to rickshaws?

MH: This provision should go. The majority commonmen cannot suffer for a few VIPs.

DS: Do you suggest withdrawal of rickshaws from city streets?

MH: Rickshaws cannot be withdrawn unless alternative vehicles are introduced. Withdrawal of rickshaws right at this moment would only throw three lakh rickshaw-pullers into unemployment. Besides, there are places in the city where rickshaws are the only mode of communication.

gain from my success. I also don't fear any confrontation with the party while implementing my election pledges as those were made in presence of the party chief Sheikh Hasina.

DS: Do you fear any conflict between your role as the mayor and the role as the Awami League's city unit president?

MH: I would not mix up my duties as the mayor and as the AL leader. So long I continue as the AL's city leader I'll implement the party programmes without affecting the responsibilities of the mayor. If the high command of my party asks me to vacate the party position, I would comply with the directive.

DS: What will you do if you face any obstruction from the government while implementing the party programmes?

MH: I'll face such situation politically.

DS: What are the factors, you think, have made you successful in the mayoral election?

MH: Many factors have combinedly worked for my

victory. First of all, the voters liked my election programmes and commitments. Then, my leader Sheikh Hasina desperately campaigned for me and she succeeded to win the hearts of the voters. On the other hand, the voters rejected the ruling party candidate since the BNP government failed to implement its commitments, made during the 1991 general elections.

Moreover, campaigns for my BNP rival was faulty.

DS: How would you plan to accord civic receptions to the foreign dignitaries?

MH: I will insist upon the government to plan such programmes of my own.

DS: When would you like to reside at the Mayor Bhaban in Gulshan?

MH: No I will not reside there. That luxurious house could be used to accommodate the foreign dignitaries.

DS: Do you have any objection to take oath of office from the President, or the Prime Minister?

MH: No, I don't have any prejudice. I am ready to take oath from anybody the government nominates.

DS: Your comment on the election rule that had caused delay in the declaration of your election as the mayor?

MH: It's a defective rule. Such rule should not exist.



Mohammad Hanif will no more catch fish. He has grown a kind of attachment for the tiny friend, his election symbol, that brought him 'good luck' against his BNP contestant Mirza Abbas MP.

"I have planned to give up angling", the mayor-elect of Dhaka says, "for two reasons: One is not to catch fish, and the other reason is that it's too time consuming a pastime".

Nobility will ever say that Mohammad Hanif is a superstitious or sentimental person—except on some very rare occasions. Life leaves little room for sentimentality for a person who has to lead the Dhaka City unit of one of the largest political parties—the Awami League—represent himself in the managing committees of an assortment of schools, colleges, mosques, different sports clubs and social welfare organisations, let alone the coming responsibilities of managing a capital city of some seven million people.

"I had little time to spare for myself and now I'll have even less because from now on

my time will be wholly devoted to the service of the citizens of Dhaka," Hanif said.

The be-speckled mayor-elect in his five feet eleven inches height was bit over-sized for his minuscule of a drawing room. Everytime he went inside the house, he had to bend himself to avoid crashing against the door frame. Donning in milk-white punjabi and pajama, Mohammad Hanif looked relaxed and confident. The coolness that characterised the 50-year-old Hanif to his political colleagues was conspicuous.

Born in an original Dhaka family at Nazirabazar in the old part of the city, Mohammad Hanif came in close association with Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. "This is the room where I and my party chief Sheikh Hasina used to study under a private tutor," he said spreading both his hands. In early years, Bangabandhu was a tenant of Hanif's house. The two families came very close in course of time.

The influence of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib took its political root in Hanif when he was elected as