

Let Justice be Done

Setting at rest controversy upon controversy about her fugitive status, writer Taslima Nasreen has come out in the open and placed herself judiciously in the hands of law. We are greatly relieved by it and happy at the healthy turn of events. Without going into the merit of the point at issue we can say that she deserves the fullest measure of justice in which our interest is all-pervasive now, a shade more because she has thrown her lot with the law. Our legal system and the invocation of what has been termed as a 'secular law' — being applied in her case — are doubly on call to prove themselves in a test-case situation. We feel sure, now that she has subjected herself willfully to the legal procedure, as expected of a responsible citizen, the process will be completed without the slightest of undue interference from any quarter whatsoever.

Her denial of having demeaned the Holy Quran in course of her interview with the Indian newspaper notwithstanding, fanatics did not cease trying to hound her out taking law into their own hands. They pronounced death threats against her and put a price on her head. All these we recall not only to deprecate them once again as a tendency that must not recur but also to urge upon the law enforcement agencies to see the great need for extending a fool-proof protection to her as she meets the legal requirement being on bail.

At the same time, no more fomenting of the issue can be tolerated or eschewed now that the law has taken its course and the matter is subjudice for all practical purposes. In fact our great relief in the wake of Taslima's appearance before the court and the latter's grant of bail to her is precisely because of the radical improvement in the objective situation that allows for no further whipping up of the controversy, even by the remotest reference to her.

The world press she got during the last two months in hiding was regrettably as adverse verdict, by and large, on Bangladesh's image. It was made to appear as if Bangladesh was teetering on the edge of a surging fundamentalism with the essential truths about the Bangladesh society going screened out of sight, for the most part. The negative publicity that Bangladesh got over the issue set her back from the position she had painstakingly reached by giving lie to the label of basket case she had earned in the early seventies. And through no particular fault of hers, as far as her inner progressive instincts went, Bangladesh may now acquire another sobriquet abroad: a fundamentalist country. This may all happen because of the fact that the first series of reports, articles and commentaries that appeared before the foreign readers and eventually set the tenor of a campaign on the Taslima issue, were based on material emanating from outside Bangladesh. Then at a later stage, of course, when foreign correspondents made it to Bangladesh, life-like details of the situation came to light and the pattern of one-sided emphasis started changing for the better. Thus, if we have acquired a bad name abroad it is incumbent upon us now to try and have the stigma removed by allowing more foreign correspondents in so that there is no more of this slanted projection of Bangladesh. We have nothing to hide on this score.

BTV to Go International

The decision of the government to rent satellite transponders from ASIASAT-II to broadcast programmes from Bangladesh is welcome indeed. It shows that our vision is expanding. Normally, the prospect of our own television capability acquiring an international reach should excite us all. But given the quality of its programmes and the overtly partisan nature of its focus, we cannot but shudder to think what sorts of myopic image BTV's programmes will actually create on an international audience.

There are two diametrically opposite aspects of our Information Minister's policy towards the BTV. One is his drive to open it up to international programmes. It was minister Huda who brought first the CNN, and then the BBC, and gave us a taste of what international news broadcasting is all about. We commend him for it. But again, it is the same man whose policies have prevented BTV from becoming more open and more balanced in its news coverage. Given his legal background, it was expected that when he took over this sensitive ministry, we would see a sea-change in BTV's scope and vision. But it soon became clear that whatever innovation and dynamism that was to come, will be confined to introducing foreign channels, and nothing, absolutely nothing, of that attitude would be reflected in BTV's own programming. What hurt BTV, and minister Huda's own reputation most, is the way the government controlled media provided one-sided news coverage of national events. In this particular aspect the national radio and TV appeared to be a replay of the much vilified Ershad era. What the minister did not seem to appreciate sufficiently, is that in the BTV news, the BNP government appeared — on a daily basis — to be no different than the Ershad government, in terms of over exposure of the government and of the ruling party leaders, and the lack of coverage of opposition news. Yes, there were some flicker of change in such programmes as 'Mukho Mukhi' and the like. But they all degenerated into more of the same, over time. The tragedy of it was, that even in doing government propaganda, BTV and Bangladesh radio showed to be so utterly unimaginative and facile, that instead of doing any good for the image of the government or its leaders, it brought only a backlash of disgust and resentment. What minister Huda did not seem to remember that in a democratic system, there cannot be much impact of a government controlled media. It has never worked anywhere, at any time, in any part of the world.

If it is the present BTV that goes international, then God help us. Minister Huda must do some serious thinking about the quality of BTV's programmes. So while we welcome the decision to go international, we express our serious doubt as to the image BTV will give of Bangladesh abroad if we do not drastically improve the quality of our programmes. This will only come if the professionals working in these institutions are allowed to work independently, and in freedom.

A central intelligence agency, which was deputed to report on the demolition of the Babri masjid, has come to the conclusion that it was not a pre-planned affair. This may not surprise many. The general belief, soon after the demolition, was that some people were egged on, there and then, at Ayodhya, to pick up the shovel, axe or basket to break the structure. The instigators, who provided them with implements, may have entertained such a possibility. But a well-devised secret scheme, which was duly executed on December 6, 1992, was hard to imagine, although some of us went wrong.

What the intelligence agency has said is technically correct. The horror with which L K Advani and Murli Manohar Joshi, the two top leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party, present at Ayodhya on that day, reacted to the demolition initially ruled out prior on their part. But does the planning mean only an arranged act or a process leading to the act?

The BJP and its ally, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, may not have drawn a map, showing how the mosque should be pulled down and from which direction. The raths their leaders conducted and the venomous propaganda they made had polluted the atmosphere to such an extent that the execution of the act, the actual demolition, was bound to follow sooner or later, in one shape or another.

The relevant question to us is whether the people, who took up the shovel, were guilty or those who converted the dispute into a religious warfare. True, the ones who

BJP Amid the Ruins

Advani is wrong in inferring that Hindus are becoming anti-religious. Has it occurred to him that they do not like the type of religion, the fundamentalism, the BJP is preaching? Hinduism has survived for centuries because it has remained pluralistic, tolerant and accommodating.

ignite the fire are in the open, visible, but what about those who collect brush-wood? Does any blame come to them or not?

Had the BJP left things at that, the society would have probably overcome the traumatic experience it went through after the demolition. But it has been chipping secularism since. The party leaders, aglow with self righteousness, are holding seminars and meetings almost every other day for denouncing the concept. Advani has gone to the extent of dubbing secularism as a Western concept. For that matter, even democracy is, and there are many in the West who believe that the system is not suited to the genius of India.

Strangely, Advani analyses the situation correctly but when it comes to the conclusion he is determined to prove the contrary. He is right in pointing out that Indian culture is fundamentally secular and that it has flourished for centuries on such values. But after saying so, he goes at secularism, reproaching that it has created anti-religious atmosphere, obviously referring to Hindus.

This is not true. The number of Hindus, who now frequent temples, or make it a point to wear the religion on their sleeves, are many more. Pilgrimage centres from Vaishno Devi in Jammu to Tirupati temple in Andhra Pradesh are thriving.

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Pradesh attract devotees in lakhs as compared to thousands a few years earlier. Even Doordarshan and AIR are a victim to the BJP's demand for Hindu identity. They have live coverage of practically every yatra and big Hindu festival in any part of India.

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the plurality of God is the different manifestations of the Almighty. The Jammat will do well to confine itself to propagating Islamic values among Muslims and removing misconception about Islam among the Hindus. Strange, the booklet does not have the word, secularism, in the 16-page text.

The BJP mentions secularism but of what use when it nullifies its meaning? It contends correctly when it says that the Indian constitution did not have the word, secularism, until Indira Gandhi had the preamble rewritten during the emergency. But does the letter matter if the spirit is defeated? The BJP, which was the erstwhile Jan Sangh in the ruling Janta from 1977-79, could have had the word deleted if its objection was so strong.

The pertinent point has been made by a young bright lawyer, Arun Jaitly. He has rightly drawn attention to the fact that the Indian constitution, even when the preamble did not mention secularism, promoted the concept through articles 14 (right to equality), 15 (no discrimination on the basis of religion), 25 (freedom to profess religion), 29 (freedom to run an institution) and 44 (a state shall endeavour to make uniform civil code).

The thing to worry about is that despite a liberal constitution we have, ensuring equality before the law, the Muslims, by

and large, do not get their due. When the BJP talks about their appeasement, it wants Hindus to feel that their share has been appropriated by the Muslims. There is no such evidence available.

See the pitiable conditions in which they live in the urban areas. They do not get jobs. They are nearly 12 per cent in the country but their representation in government service is only three to four per cent. Their population of 120 million should have had larger representation in the state legislatures and parliament than it is today.

The reason why the BJP is raising all types of issues is the failure in finding a slogan that may attract the Hindu support once again. The mandir problem created an euphoria for a short while but the Hindu society is not excited when the temples sharing a common wall with mosques in Mathura and Varanasi are mentioned. The economic issues are never attributed to the BJP.

In an effort to give secularism different interpretations, the BJP is in fact trying to cloud the minds of Hindus. The meaning of secularism is not so important as the intention of the BJP. If the Congress and other political parties have tried to build Muslim vote bank by exploiting secularism, the BJP is running it down for polarising the country.

Nearly two years ago, the BJP took the mandir issue to a pitch where even the law was derided and the masjid demolished. Today it is at secularism. One hopes it will not succeed because if it does, the demolition this time will not be that of one structure but that of the entire structure called the Indian polity.

Secularism is not a specific dharma, as the BJP propagates. It is the essence of all dharmas. One may go to a temple, mosque, gurdwara or church. One may even pursue a particular religious order. All this goes well with secularism. The conflict comes when

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

Crime Prevention: ACPF Bangladesh is for a Better Future

by Dr M Enamul Huq

more realization that individual units cannot achieve the desired goal unless they make all out efforts unitedly and that too not only on bilateral or multilateral basis, rather through global unity.

People are seriously concerned that crime is on increase both in volume and seriousness, thus impeding developmental stability and functioning of public institutions. Recognizing that crime in its various forms increasingly transcends national borders and necessitates close bilateral and multilateral collaboration for crime prevention, it therefore stands conspicuous among items of urgent international agenda. Some dedicated social workers and philanthropists of Japan like Mr Naomi Ikejaki came forward to initiate the forum of Asia Crime Prevention Foundation (ACPF). The

The alarming threat and acknowledged gravity of the offences committed through organised crime have been urging many countries to reform their administration and legislation in various segments of criminal justice. Facing its transnational nature, the world community has also been required to establish more effective mechanisms. In order to effectively policing our changing society there has been

valuable contribution in past years and in expectation of its continued support to the work of the United Nations in the field of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice. An important feature of this foundation is special relation to the United Nations Asia and Far East Institute through offering invaluable support to UNAFEI's activities. As a result, many visiting experts as well as participants in training courses and seminars have become members of ACPF.

Being thus a privileged organisation it has its various branches opened in various parts of Japan, totalling twelve, and by virtue of its laudable performance the UNAFEI Alumni Association and JICA Alumni Association have also

played their part to open affiliated organisations outside

Japan. In quick succession the foundation has started functioning in Malaysia, Phillipine, Thailand, Korea, Pakistan. And it is heartening to note that Bangladesh is not lagging behind. The writer of this article is an Academic Councillor of ACPF Japan and being encouraged through colleagues of other countries and specially inspired by its esteemed Chairman Justice Atsushi Nagashima, Advisor Minoru Shikita, Director UNAFEI Mr Kunihiko Horie, ventured to have similar foundation in Bangladesh. And very kindly the Government of Bangladesh accorded the necessary permission in July 1993 after careful scrutiny and observance of due formalities etc. Now ACPF Bangladesh is an entity by itself under the umbrella of ACPF Japan.

The foundation is going to have its annual seminar on 6th

August when distinguished personalities from both home and abroad will participate to deliberate on 'Rehabilitation of Released Women Prisoners and Convicts' which is one of the three projects taken up so far. The other two — 'Motivation for Creating Awareness in Prevention of Crime for Prosperity and Development' and 'Creating Awareness for Reduction to Checkmate Accident Incidents' — are still at embryonic stage and we hopefully expect that through kind cooperation of philanthropists, social workers, volunteers of relevant agencies and government patronisation we will steer through the difficulties to attain the desired goal to help the country in achieving prosperity in an atmosphere of less crime and more performance.

The writer an ex-IG of police, is President, ACPF Bangladesh

Sri Lankan Government Moves to End Ethnic War

Harold Pieris writes from Colombo

In a move to settle the 10-year ethnic war in north and east Sri Lanka, President Dingiri Bandara Wijetunga has initiated a peace process by creating the Ministry of National Reconciliation to find a political settlement for the festering problem.

Prior to this, the Wijetunga government has been criticized for not making any positive moves to settle this problem despite his party's having been in power for 17 years.

The scope of the new Ministry's functions has yet to be defined. But the President has already appointed its head — Anura Bandaranaike, son of opposition leader Sirimavo Bandaranaike. Mr Bandaranaike broke away from his mother's party and joined the government bloc to be in charge of higher education.

"I will work a miracle for unity," Mr Bandaranaike declared upon assuming office. He vowed to perform the same feat that South Africa's Nelson Mandela and F W de Klerk, Palestine's Yasser Arafat and Israel's Yitzhak Rabin accomplished in their respective countries.

"We live in an era when apparently irreconcilable opponents have come together in a spirit of reconciliation for the good of their people," he said. "Surely it is not beyond all Sri Lankans — Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim and Burgher (Dutch descendants), those of all religious and political convictions, to come together to build a better home for us all."

Mr Bandaranaike said a firm commitment to fundamental rights, equality, willingness to share power and the capacity to understand another's point of view are essential characteristics for national reconciliation.

Political analysts, while welcoming the setting up of a Ministry of National Reconciliation, warned there are no quick-fix solutions to this ethnic problem.

Earlier, President Wijetunga insisted there was no Tamil problem but only a terrorist problem. This indicated he was only after a military solution to the problem.

However, all agreed that a political settlement would be the best solution not a military one.

The first step in the peace process would be to reestablish trust between the north and south.

The Anglican bishop of

Colombo, Rt. Rev. Kenneth Fernando, who had visited the north in a peace bid, said the people there told him they could not trust the government and the Sinhala people to honour their promises.

When he went south, the people told him they do not trust the Liberation Tigers of the north who reneged on their earlier promises, killed President Premadasa, Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and several others, and attacked while having talks with the late Sri Lankan president.

Recently, it was reported the Tamil Tigers dropped their key demand for a ceasefire and offered to resume talks to end the country's ethnic bloodshed. This was conveyed to a correspondent of the British Broadcasting Corporation.

However, the Tamil Tigers ideologue, Anton Balasingham, accused the Colombo government of preparing for war in the north where the Tigers run a parallel administration.

Thus, the first step of the peace process will be to overcome the mistrust and rebuild confidence among the Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim communities.

The next step is to work out a political solution acceptable to the Sinhala, Tamils and Muslims. This sensitive move has to be undertaken by a group of the country's intellectuals, or "honest brokers."

The crucial question is power sharing or devolution of powers. Many Sinhalese are averse to the term "federal". The Tamils do not mind the system being called by any other name as long as it offers them substantial devolution or power sharing.

Another issue is the merger of the northern and eastern provinces. The Tigers, as well as other Tamil groups, insist on the north-east merger.

But the eastern province,

composed of Tamils, Sinhalese and Muslims (in almost equal proportion), are opposed to a merger.

The leader of the Tigers, Velupillai Prabhakaran, is the

prime suspect in the killing of Prime Minister Gandhi. The question now is: Could the Sri Lankan government hold negotiations with Mr Prabhakaran without antagonizing India?

Many believe if Mr Prabhakaran is eliminated, the Tigers would crumble and this would make negotiations easier.

Meanwhile, Rt. Rev. Fernando reported that the people in the north are living in appalling conditions. They have no electricity, they lack kerosene, petrol and food. In addition, they are under the iron rule of the Tigers, who exact heavy taxes.

Residents are not allowed to leave the province and their children are forced to fight in the Tiger armies.

These people would certainly welcome a political settlement.

Analysts firmly believe a settlement would have to be "brokered" among all concerned by a group of intellectuals or concerned citizens and only then should the government meet the Tigers.

They think it would be futile to meet before this and to ask the Tigers to lay down their arms before a settlement is in sight. — *Depthnews Asia*

along with the other nations. I am sure the business community and industrialists would respond positively to donate for such a noble cause. Whose heart does not bleed by viewing the plight of Ruwanda's refugees on the TV? Only 24 years ago we suffered in the same way as they are doing now.

It is heartening to note ICDDR, B team arrives in Goma as published in your paper on the same day. Alas, it was sponsored by the USAID, Washington.

Can't our main opposition leader do something positive humanitarian service? If she does, she would not need to call hartal so frequently. Then the most of the people will support her as we did in 1970 for Bangabandhu.

Dr K M Magsudur Rahman Gulshan, Dhaka

Teachers' Association gave a rejoinder demanding punishment of the alleged unruly students. The VC formed an inquiry committee which was supposed to submit its report on 21st July. But the teachers stood fast by their demand of not taking classes and more supports from other University Teachers' Associations were pouring in.

But what about the original problem? It has been ascertained that the students' demand for shifting of examination date was mainly due to non-coverage of Syllabus for shortage of teachers. Shortage of books also is a chronic affair. But the honorable teachers perhaps took the poor students' genuine protest otherwise.

The matter has to be screened from behind. Of course, the projects on going from the past are still going on. But neither the authorities initiated or got through any administrative, academic or developmental activity nor could foresee any trouble

shooter and establish intra-relationship, etc. This is a technology-oriented university but what