

Let's Put the Controversy Behind

Taslima Nasreen has left the country and arrived to a warm welcome in Stockholm understandably with a protective shield thrown in. This does not presage any punctuation in the legal proceedings here because the *ad interim* bail granted by the High Court to her allowed her to be represented by a lawyer. Only that she needed to keep the authorities posted about her whereabouts. She has a valid passport, and as a person on bail, according to legal practices followed by many countries, there could not be any hard and fast restriction on her movement during the pendency of her case. So, the legal process is theoretically on and could be practically so on the expiry of the bail period. This is one aspect of the scenario despite her departure.

Since the Swedish Foreign Minister Margaretha Uggla expressed her satisfaction at Taslima's travelling out of the country legally, we can deem this as a sense of relief shared internationally in extension of what we ourselves felt when she threw her lot with the law of the country in the first place. This should preclude any possibility of the controversy over her to be added to, or even kept alive abroad. For that could be regarded as an avoidable embarrassment to Bangladesh. The relaxation of the tension around her in the wake of her exit from the country, which can be felt even internationally now, is the result of some tangible positive developments in her case. Even before these took place we had seen a reflection of the true nature of things in Bangladesh sneaking through some in-depth analyses filed first-hand from Bangladesh. This trend should now pick up from the proven ability of Taslima to go out of the country as an unmistakable mark of her personal freedom. We believe wherever she goes now she will conduct herself in full deference to the sensibilities of her countrymen. Likewise, given the respect for international opinion which Taslima's ability to move freely essentially connotes, it is not too much to expect of the western media perhaps to spare Bangladesh any more adverse publicity.

Internally, we need to introspect, as well. She was traumatised inside the country by death threats issued by fanatics who were so high-strung by the obsession against her that it raked up abroad some deep-seated notions of religious extremism. It is a mind-set getting a grist to the mill. The worry of physical dangers on her life is off now. But there could be attempts at whipping up the issue by the same elements who had tried to take law into their hands while she was here on the plea that the government let her go unpunished. The people palpably want the issue to be left behind.

There has been enough of a national distraction owing to the high-pitched controversy over Taslima Nasreen with many a priority issue going badly unattended. Enough is enough. National attention must now revert back to the burning issues in hand. Much of the defective mood of the nation came from a slanted publicity that Bangladesh got abroad, in some part, due to the manner in which we addressed the issue from time to time. The government ought to draw its lessons from the episode thinking that there could be a repetition and it must be prepared to handle the same better in future. It cannot be a one-time affair. That's for sure.

The Physical Challenges

The country is now passing through an erratic spell of weather. Or a spell of erratic weather, if you will. Either way this is a common man's complaint made possibly every Shravan for many many years past. Now it's a dry Shravan, then it was an extra-wet one last year. On Wednesday, however, a stamp of authority was put on this brand of popular meteorology by a top brass of our Met Department. Not to mind his technical abracadabra, his observation boiled down to saying that this year's weather conduct was erratic, to be sure, but not unusual. Well, that exactly was the popular idea of the thing which is quite patently neither here nor there. Our people, specially those depending on water behaviour, have by now learnt to take these fluctuations in their stride. They sell their cattle, then their utensils, then their land and then, part by part, their home-stead-windows and doors going first and the roof and posts last. And trudge up — or down — to the city slums. Those who survive with ploughshares remaining with them together with the plots of land to work them or, carry on with the biggest money-churner of the national economy — namely, agriculture — no matter if it's no rain or an excess of it.

Once while imbibing the elementaries of Bangladesh economy, the pupil was taught that 'vagaries of nature' was a factor contributing to the health or otherwise of the peasant and indeed the whole of our society. We have come past that. Droughts and erosions do continue to affect individual families or even particular areas. Nationally speaking, things average out to a goodly yearly increase on the annual yield of our national agricultural produce. Thanks wholly to the resilience of our peasants who do not grudge sliding down to subhuman levels of existence.

But can this go on for too long? The towns and cities would swell in the manner of cancerous growths. To obviate the ills of an erratic weather, the society is becoming ill beyond easy recovery. Neither politics nor society is caring to address this challenge, this degeneration of social response and resolve so necessary to overcome physical challenges.

We have been spared a Doomsday-April '91-style visitation for three years. Any time the elements may strike again. How have we prepared to face that? A still bigger challenge looms over the horizon, threateningly. The danger of the Bay of Bengal engulfing much of our Southern areas sloping down into the sea — as a result of the world ocean rising due to global warming. Has the government begun to take the threat seriously? Hardly. But why?

A society doesn't these days die so easily. But every time the elemental challenges take a macro-sized toll of life and property, it diminishes the society dangerously. When shall we be sensible enough to be so organised as to respond to the physical challenges in a civilised manner?

In the next few days the partition of the subcontinent will be 47 years old. At that time the Muslim majority areas separated from India and founded a new country, Pakistan. In the holocaust that followed, nearly five lakh people were killed, twice that number injured and almost 3.5 crore uprooted. I was one of the uprooted.

I have not forgotten the pain-stricken faces, men and women, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, with their belongings bundled on their heads and their fear-stricken children trailing behind. Thousands of us passed in the opposite direction. We understood each other: it was a spontaneous kinship. Both had seen murder and worse; both had left homes, hearths and friends behind. Both had been broken on the rack of history; both were refugees.

I was confident that with the passage of time the wounds would heal and India and Pakistan would become good neighbours, if not friends. But I have been proved wrong. I see the walls of fear and distrust going higher and higher and the relationship between the two deteriorating further, touching to day the lowest point in normal times. Now the bottom-line is that even diplomats of one country are not safe in the other.

It is no use apportioning the blame because both are not free from it. There is not a single international forum where the two have not clashed. There is not an economic or diplomatic device which they have not used to harm one another. Their enmity is proverbial. And there is no exaggeration in the observation that New Delhi's foreign policy is formulated in Islamabad and Islamabad's in

No Go from Indo-Pak Talks

The two governments have now taken intractable positions. Pakistan says that it will not hold talks with India unless there is a meaningful dialogue on Kashmir. India's stand is that unless Pakistan stops helping militants in Kashmir, the question of having a dialogue with Pakistan does not arise.

New Delhi because, out of habit or spite, one acts opposite of the other. Still both are aglow with a sense of self-righteousness, seldom realising their own mistakes.

What makes the situation more distressing is that the new generation has neither the nostalgia nor the pull of personal relations. They have grown up in an atmosphere of ignorance and unfriendliness. They have been fired with the belief — thanks to intelligence agencies — that the people on the other side are their enemies.

On the other hand, the two countries have exhausted various possibilities. There are not many stones left unturned. Practically all avenues have been probed. The dialogues, which have been held in the subcontinent or abroad, have come to nought. The same people are covering the same ground with the same results. Even the limited contact is snapping off.

Newspapers and books stopped selling in each other's country during the 1965 war. A few years ago, the hockey and cricket teams suspended playing in the subcontinent. Now visas have been drastically cut. The few who are able to travel to the other side face the police harassment endlessly. The much-publicised Samjhota (agreement) train between Delhi and Lahore is a nightmare, the passengers undergoing numberless indignities on both ends.

Kashmir obfuscates the re-

lationship at every level. In private also, Kashmir is the stumbling block. The two governments have now taken intractable positions. Pakistan says that it will not hold talks with India unless there is a meaningful dialogue on Kashmir. In other words, it wants some indication before hand how far India is willing to go and on that far depends Pakistan's response. India's stand is that unless Pakistan stops helping militants in

India, except cause destruction. Kashmir may become another Afghanistan, as the JKLF leader, Amanullah Khan in Pakistan, has warned.

The fact that Kashmir has got entangled with domestic politics on both sides has further complicated matters. In Pakistan, Kashmir is the only topic which brings the two inveterate opponents, Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, together. One tries to

disease; whether the two countries would not have found some other issue to hate each other. Kashmir is in ferment from 1990. But even before, there was an uneasy peace between the two, one mistrusting the other. It appears that hostility between India and Pakistan is basically between Hindus and Muslims that had led to partition. The division should have lessened hatred. But it has got institutionalised.

Nothing could be more futile than an argument now about who was responsible for the partition of the subcontinent. With the sequence of events stretching back for over several decades, such an exercise can only be of an academic distraction. But it is clear that the differences between Hindus and Muslims had become so acute by the beginning of the forties that something like partition had become inevitable. But the if of history are at best hypothetical and at worst subjective.

Has partition served the purpose of Muslims? I do not know. In Pakistan people avoid the word partition. On August 14 they celebrate their deliverance, not so much from British rule as from the fear of Hindu rule. During my trips to that country, I have heard people say that they are happy that at least they have 'some place' where they feel secure. The ruling Congress will be wary of saying or doing anything which may be considered a concession to Pakistan.

I often wonder whether Kashmir is a symptom or a

outdo the other in rhetoric.

Prime Minister Narasimha Rao says in the same breath that Kashmir is an integral part of India and that New Delhi was prepared to have talks with Islamabad on Kashmir. Even if he were to be conciliatory, he could not afford to do so when the assembly elections in 10 states are due in the next six months. And after that, only a year will be left for the Lok Sabha polls.

The Bhartiya Janata Party is wanting to scrap even Article 370, which gives Jammu and Kashmir a special status. The ruling Congress will be wary of saying or doing anything which may be considered a concession to Pakistan.

I feel that the Muslims have been the biggest losers; they

are now spread over three countries — India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Imagine the influence that their numbers — their votes — could have commanded in the undivided sub-continent! They would have been one-third of the total population.

I do not see any prospect of governments on both sides making any conciliatory gesture. The officially-sponsored intellectuals may clothe their suggestion with sweet arguments but they cannot stray from the line indicated to them. Probably, voluntary organisations on both sides, particularly the groups working for human rights, should meet and find out the points on which they agree. Their joint team should tour both India and Pakistan to present their consensus, however inadequate. The new generation which lives with falsehoods may begin to revise its opinion. Others may join and build pressure on the two governments.

It may sound unbelievable but even the proposal to improve relations between the two countries touches respondent cords in many hearts. The other day I cursorily mentioned — and some newspapers reported — that politicians and diplomats have failed and that the people on both sides should take up the matter in their own hands. I have been flooded with letters, telephone calls and fax messages, not only from the sub-continent but also from abroad. Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs have responded to the suggestion enthusiastically. But how do I take the next step when the governments on both sides have restricted travels from one country to the other? Their cussedness is the biggest hindrance.

easily adaptable. But they have to know how to start an NGO.

I have a suggestion for NGO Affairs Bureau. They should allow freedom to our expatriates abroad to send funds, small or big, to NGOs in Bangladesh. The NGOs should have freedom to receive money through banking channel or post office in support of their activities. A quarterly statement should be submitted to NGO Affairs Bureau by the NGO receiving the fund, to monitor the funds received. The NGOs who propose to receive such fund will have to register with NGO Affairs Bureau but no formal project proposal need be submitted. For, project really will depend on the size of the fund received.

When an expatriate comes home on holiday, s/he can do some supervisory work over the NGO activities undertaken with expatriate donations. The strategies are indicated here, for example:

(a) An NGO can be started in the USA by the expatriates from Bangladesh. It can be registered as a local NGO also in Bangladesh. In such a case donations will be sent to it through private channel and exchange value will be credited in the bank account of the NGO concerned.

(b) A local NGO can register itself with NGO Affairs Bureau and receive foreign fund. However, before registering itself initially, a project small or big has to be developed.

(c) Expatriates can form an

part time assistance and with out hiring any premises. Such NGOs can be run from one's own home. An educated retired gentleman or a lady can do it. The important thing is the will to do it.

Some welfare activities can be done in Bangladesh with as little as US dollar one hundred per annum. A student can be rendered help for education or a rural clinic can use this money. Bigger projects are possible. But the important thing initially is to keep the administrative cost down. It can be done in numerous ways with as little as US\$100 to US\$200 per month. Efficient NGO work can be done with

The writer is a wellknown columnist.

left was beaten or arrested. Finally in May, 1,000 security personnel descended on the property on the order of Prime Minister Itzhak Rabin. In that incident a 19-year-old boy was killed by a sharpshooter after police claimed he shot at a helicopter. The next day Meshulam, his students and 150 followers around the country were arrested.

Zerubi claims there was little public interest in the siege and arrests because 'sophisticated media campaign' made Meshulam out to be dangerous man similar to David Koresh, the American cult figure who died along with more than 70 followers when police attacked their Texas compound last year.

"Once he was labelled as a kook, the public forgot about the crime he was fighting to solve," Zerubi says.

Rabbi Meshulam and 11 followers remain in jail, waiting for a court hearing on a variety of charges, including conspiracy and attempted murder. About 140 other devotees and sympathisers have been released on a gag order that sanctions their re-arrest if they talk to the media.

But many Yeminites in their 40s and 50s — including singing star Boaz Sharabi — are speaking out about the stolen babies.

BARRY CHAMISH is the editor of *Inside Israel*, a monthly intelligence newsletter.

Our Expatriates can Have their own NGOs

by Syed Ali Kabir

small donations. The members of Bangladesh community may have several strategies to donate money for welfare activities in their home country. The strategies are indicated here, for example:

The idea of this paper is to encourage expatriate communities of Bangladesh in USA, Canada and elsewhere to initiate some NGO type activities in Bangladesh. The members of expatriate community are highly intelligent and patriotic. They are gradually becoming financially affluent. They can render help to their kith and kin in the country.

Thus an expatriate Bangladesh community can make a small but a steady beginning in an area and in about a decade it may have an NGO with significant capital fund. Meanwhile, unless the fund accumulates, many activities can be undertaken with

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nity hospital when told his new-born sister had disappeared. Yosef's mother was arrested, roughed up, warned never to open her mouth again and thrown on her doorstep from a moving car.

Researchers allege that those who collaborated in the operation included the Health, Welfare, Interior and Defence Ministries as well as the country's first Prime Minister Ben Gurion, former President Chaim Herzog, current Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and many members of the Labour Party.

In 1967, journalist Uri Avneri exposed the matter in a magazine article. An assassination attempt against him failed when the gun jammed. The attacker was captured and identified as an agent for Shabak, the internal security agency.

Meshulam picked up where Avneri left off, collecting the names of missing children in order to trace them. A former military intelligence officer, Meshulam had the contacts,

many of them Yemeni Jews, to get access to sensitive information.

Kuzriel says Rabbi Meshulam 'worries that incest will be committed as brothers and sisters unknowingly become lovers or spouses.'

"His primary concern is that further sins will be committed that can be prevented only by tracing all the children. Unfortunately for him, the information he wants implicates some of our leaders today."

In the 1980s, Meshulam got the Knesset (Parliament) to open a preliminary investigation into the allegations. During that probe, a government official at the time of the kidnappings admitted "numerous illegal adoptions occurred," and pointed to the "involvement of the government establishment in the affair."

The Knesset turned down the recommendation for a full investigation. But Meshulam continued his campaign and in 1988 public pressure forced the Government to appoint a

commission of inquiry. One of its first findings was that "only 650 babies disappeared," an admission that the crime did take place.

The matter remained dormant until this year when Meshulam published a magazine in which he named those he charged with responsibility for the crime.

Within two weeks, an attempt was made to vandalise Meshulam's home and seminary, and in the ensuing dispute 250 police and intelligence officers backed by sharpshooters, sappers, helicopters and attack dogs arrived on the scene. During the fracas a policeman was reportedly shot by one of the students.

"You don't see that concentration of force deployed against terrorists in Lebanon, let alone to settle a neighbourhood argument," says Avi Zerubi, one of Meshulam's students.

Zerubi says that the property remained under siege for six weeks and that anyone who

clear violation of cadre rule. But the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Establishment and even the BPSC are paying no attention to this.

BPSC has submitted its annual report but did not disclose the matter as a discrepancy, that education cadre is not participating in the senior scale promotion test. But the matter of police service and some other services has been mentioned as not following the cadre rule in toto.

However, BPSC has announced the examination circular of February session. We, therefore, most humbly draw the kind attention of the honorable President to the matter so as to ensure participation of the members of education cadre in the coming examination.

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(BCS Education Cadre)
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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.

BBC

Sir, I had more than a fortnight back addressed BBC through the column of your esteemed newspaper. I had expected an answer from BBC Bangla Service but in vain. Hearteningly quite a few persons have shown their dismay against the arrogant attitude of BBC.

The Bangla Service of BBC is, it seems, biased, provocative and in a sense anti-Bangladesh. Is this because it has huge number of Indian Bengalees serving in the BBC Bangla Service or are the pro-

time-being stopped listening to BBC Bengali Service (of course, if that matters at all to the BBC Bengali Service).

While upholding the views of Advocate Abdul Azim, I would further suggest that Radio Bangladesh may relay in FM Band the Bengali programmes of various countries. That way we will be able to form our own assessment and will not have to depend on the monopoly of BBC and CNN.

May I humbly request the BBC Bengali Service that if they earnestly want to keep a stronghold in Bangladesh, they please address themselves to Bangladesh and not India. Bangladeshi problems have to be solved from the Bangladeshi perspective and not Indian perspective.