The Daily Star

Founder-Editor : Late S. M. Ali

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Getting them Back on Track

At least an audience in two functions organised in observance of the National Youth Day on Tuesday had the opportunity to hear separately the judicious views of the country's prime minister and a leading politician. Amazingly enough, the substance of Begum Khaleda Zia's speech and that of Dr Kamal Hossain's are almost carbon copies. Their more or less identical views provide some food for thought on a subject of utmost national importance.

Both leaders have eulogised the role of youths in shaping the country's destiny and called for their united and greater contributions to the nation-building task. The prime minister has also stressed on upholding "our national tradition, culture, values and morality". These are nice words no doubt. But the problem is that calls and sermons such as these have been issued by our leaders many times over in the past. So ritualistic these calls have become that nobody today takes much of a notice of them.

The anachronism and ambivalence are all too apparent. People have been made a forced witness to tragic and dismal developments in society, thanks to the country's murky politics. The potentially most resourceful and vibrant segment of our population — the youth and students - has been lured into the politics of vendetta and the criminal world of making easy money. It is no secret that the armed cadres and many of the student leaders — if not all —are on the pay-roll of political parties. The students and youths mostly get the orientation to debasement and dehumanisation from the political *gurus*. The political parties use — better say abuse — them to serve their narrow ends. Now the militant students have turned into monsters of Frankenstein's proportion; even the parent organisations can no longer rein them in.

It is against such a background that the appeals are made to the youths for their selfless sacrifice and efforts to make the country a better place to live in. Admittedly therefore these could ring hollow in the youths' ears. Along with the politicians others are also partly to blame for leading our youths to such a crisis. Unless all who are responsible for the situation acknowledge the failure and guilt, the youths will never be the same again. The next step would be to review the socio-economic pattern for giving the youths a greater say. Only then they will find life no longer demeaning and be eager to put in their very best not only for individual but collective well-being.

Something Special to Man

It first used to be said that of the living creatures only human beings had in him or her a hidden predilection for suicide. The first law of survival of living forms is self-preservation. Human beings are special in that they choose every so often to take their own lives — in contravention of that law. Then lately came to light cases of whales and birds committing suicide. And from very ancient times man could sacrifice life so that the loved ones could live. In this also he was not special. We know birds dying voluntarily in grief over the death or killing of the spouse.

But what Khurshid Alam did on Wednesday in Uttara could answer a search for man's special power of behaviour. He jumped on the railway tracks with a speeding train yards away to swoop on an unknown young woman lying there in a suicide attempt, and snatch her to safety. Alam couldn't make it. He was crushed under the wheels along with the girl. What was it that made him jump into certain death? The woman was not known to him. He did not give his life for love or in desperation or frustration. Isn't this special to man that he can give life just to save another — any other — human life?

Perhaps Alam's youth had something to do with it. He has just taken his HSC exams. With years man seems to lose such demoniac prowess that moves him elementally from within, caring little for consequences. Alam's sacrifice contrasts so heroically things that attended the ghastly death of Shilpi Sarkar the other day, on the Sonargaon Road. Run over by a minibus, the young and comely Shilpi lay dead in pools of blood for more than two hours in the crowded hours on a crowded road. Nobody cared to reach her to a hospital. The hundreds that saw Shilpi's mutilated body and walked away with a "the poor girl!" expression of sympathy belong to the same society as Alam does. In the society of those passersby what to make of Alam's heroism?

Caring Child Health

Deputy Leader of the House Professor Badruddoza Chowdhury in his speech at a seminar in the city has drawn attention of all concerned to the need for attaching more importance to the study of pediatrics in the medical curricula. In the same breath he has also suggested that each divisional headquarters should have a 100-seat mother and child hospital. We find both proposals very suitable to our need.

Badruddoza Chowdhury rightly laments the neglect the child health here is subjected to. Constituting half— 46 per cent to be precise — of the population, the children certainly deserve better in term of health care. Unfortunately, children and mother — owing to their vulnerable position in society — are discriminated against. The discrimination however has its long-term effects. So the child experts, according to Chowdhury, should be well versed with the problems facing the young ones, their disease and nutrition, growth and mental aptitude.

This certainly calls for churning out more pediatricians in the country. But more of child physicians do not necessarily mean better treatment of the little patients. If our thana health complexes are any guide, we definitely need something extra to put into the effort for the country's child care to succeed. The first requirement will be a qualitative change of mentality both for our populace — most of whom are illiterate — and the pediatricians. There is also a need for recognition of the relations between child's and mother's health.

The fact that 30 per cent of food taken by a child is eaten away by intestinal worms is really alarming but few people are aware of this. Even doctors are of little help in such a situation. Better it would be if the mothers are given the rudimentary knowledge of child care in a more scientific way. Things may really look up then.

Diplomacy, Summitry and Chief Anyaoku's Facilitator

by Waliur Rahman

"Save the people's right to vote" is the slogan in Bangladesh : Right to shelter, right to education, right to employment, right to justice, and right to vote, for the person you like, unencumbered by any influence of any kind.

IN 1596 Ottaviano Maggi said 'an ambassador-negotiator should be a trained theologian, well versed in Aristotle and Plato and be able, at moment's notice to solve the most abstruse problem; with the knowledge of civil and canon law, the negotiator should be fluent in Latin, proficient is Greek, Spanish, French and Turkish. Today's negotiator, ambassador has to have the knowledge of English, the universal lingua franca, and be an expert in facilitating the meeting of minds of two rival groups and political parties in quest of finding a common ground for conflict resolutions. Sir Ninian Stephen, the special envoy of Commonwealth Secretary General, Chief Emeka Anyaoku has thereby added a new jargon to the lexicon of diplomacy : mediator, negotiator, arbitrator, and now facilitator.

Being faced with the prospect of impending veto in the Security Council in 1972 by a permanent member, Bangladesh was well advised to seek international recognition and legitimacy as a nation state by admission to the specialised agencies of the UN system. It was at that time in the first quarter of 1972 that Chief Anyaoku first came face to face with the problem Bangladesh was facing in securing international recognition. A successful Canadian diplomat, Arnold Smith, elected as the first Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, certainly had a vision — the vision of bringing the Commonwealth upfront by admitting Bangladesh as a member and risking the withdrawal of Pakistan from the Commonwealth and Arnold Smith was right. Pakistan's subsequent return to the fold proved the point. Not only that, Anrold Smith thought that the nation deserved more than mere recognition. He took upon himself the moral responsibility of taking the case of Bangladesh to the member states of the Commonwealth.

It is at this juncture that Arnold Smith called upon his colleague, a bright young Nigerian diplomat, his director in the Commonwealth and asked him to take his message to these countries in support of Bangladesh's admission to the World Health Organisation (WHO), the first UN agency to admit Bangladesh. Arnold Smith himself spent about 10 days in Geneva to help Bangladesh in mounting a well-coordinated election campaign in Geneva. The Commonwealth Secretary-General and his colleague Chief Emeka made no small contribution in helping Bangladesh secure the highest number of votes in the history of WHO.

Chief Emeka's succession as the Commonwealth head was never in doubt with the interregnum of Sonny Ramphal's tenure. His involvement in resolving the present political crisis in Bangladesh did not therefore come as a surprise. A deeply religious man, Chief Emeka got it right during his brief visit to Dhaka in September. A nascent democracy unable to find its way . . .

The civil society was foundering because of near absence of juridical defence in the country. "Save the people's right to vote" is the slogan in Bangladesh : Right to shelter, right to education, right to employment, right to justice, and right to vote, for the person you like, unencumbered by any influence of any kind.

Sir Ninian Stephen, a distinguished jurist, has a formidable credential behind him. Administering the largest island continent as its Governor-general was not perhaps so daunting a task as helping the ANC and President de Clerk of South Africa to the path of democracy and peace. He also had his hand in defrosting the Irish imbroglio. He is also an adviser on the UN initiative to investigate alleged war crimes in former Yugoslavia. Sir Ninian is a man, with a long record of association with justice, peace, and understanding. It is not very difficult for him to understand the problems we are faced with, particularly as Richard Casey's successor in Australia. Casey was Governor of Bengal in 1944.

Sir Ninian may not be proficient in Greek and Turkish; with his knowledge of history, military science and "a cultured taste for poetry", he may fit into the paradigm of Franciois de Calliers, chief dfplomat of Louis XIV that a successful diplomat-negotiator must possess the patience of a watch-maker and be devoid of personal pre-judices.

French king's chief diplomat was not so kind with lawyer-diplomat. He believed that the training of a lawyer habits harlots and dispositions of mind which are not favourable to the practice of diplomacy. Was he far off the mark when two lawyer-ministers of the ruling party were about to torpedo the fragile mosaic of dialogue carefully put together by Sir Ninian, through their talkathons on 25th, October night?

Open Diplomacy and Summitry

President Woodrow Wilson was ready to go to any length for asserting "open diplomacy openly arrived at" — but times have changed. Sir Ninian and his two able colleagues, Moses Anafu and Christopher Child, — please note : sincere diplomacy is no more possible than dry water and wooden air, but follow Nicolson's advice that negotiations openly televised and broadcast often tend to degenerate into political propaganda — read the Government media headlines of October 30!

A French ambassador to the United States early this century, Mr Combon was right "the day secrecy is abolished negotiation of any kind is impossible". That is why M Phillipe de Commines thought that two great princes who wish to establish good personal relations should never meet face to face! Sir Ninian however would do well to take middle ground, between these tow thoughts. While the size of the table has not posed any problem, length of his smiles may. The government is in a bind, to be credible the party in power must need to give more. The opposition, on a moral high ground, thinks they have already placed their cards on the table. Suspicions will naturally abound; when ballet boxes are subject to executive whims, counting and recounting of votes of a deceased MP is administered by government fiat, when hundred votes have been cast in one minute (Magura), Sir Ninian's task will be quite difficult in conveying the finer elements of 'facilitation' to the party in power!

He has already shown extraordinary gumption and skill in getting the two parties agree to sit across the table after a sudden interruption in the process on 25th October night.

At some point he may feel compelled to arrange a summit between the Leader of the House and the Leader of the Opposition. If the summit has to succeed the Leader of the House has to brace herself with some home truths - constitution is not a sacrosanct document. It can be amended. The 5th, 6th and 7th Amendments to Bangladesh Constitution were made purely for personal reasons, neither national nor universal. The US constitution started with 21 Articles. Today it incorporates over 200 Articles. Britain does not have a constitution, but to meet exigencies, laws are passed in the House of Commons.

In Bangladesh, the demand for change is almost universal. Even a large majority in the ruling party would accede to the fact that a neutral, non-partisan caretaker government is a sine qua non for a free and fair election in this country. If Sir Ninian succeeds in performing this job, Commonwealth will receive a shot in the arm in its policy of nurturing democracy in the Commonwealth family.

The writer, most recently Bangladesh Ambassador to Italy, was Permanent Observer AI in Geneva in 1972.

The regular weekly column of Abdul Bayes will appear tomorrow.

For A Hoodlum-free Society

by Hubert Francis Sarkar

ANARCHY reigns supreme in this homeland of 112 million Bangalees, in the wake of the horrendous inversion of the time-honoured values and mores. The mortal blow henceforth handed down is pushing the state and the people along a deep precipice in all counts, from economic subtraction to social dereliction to political subversion to ethical constriction.

The deadly plunge has been amply demonstrated by the recent murders in the capital city and the supposed fact-suppression about these horrific incidents. People are chilled by the very fact that culprits could commit grisly murders, says, at the residence of a topranking government official! They are afflicted with more drearier mass psychosis. Undoubtedly, Bangladesh is in turmoil and needs to be rescued; the experts and planners must get to the heart of the task, however mammoth it may appear.

Believably, this awkward divergence has been most-malignantly foisted onto the frazzled fabrics of the social and state institutions by the anti-social and anti-state forces from within and outside. Agreeably, the situation has worsened due to the deadpan, almost-dyspeptic, always-didactic and characteristically-deficient and dysfunctional stands taken by the intelligentsia and also, due to the incompatibilities omnipresent in all departments and organs of the aggregate entity. However, the lion's share of the blame must be borne by the law and order enforcement agencies and other related agencies because their apparent nonchalance and the poor management have contributed enormously to the rise of this dreadful situation.

The muscle — and firepower of the muggers, looters, killers and other social deviants has become the constant source of affliction, agony and anguish of the populace. The ugly head of "the phantom of terror" is showing; and, overwhelming fear of it is chipping away at the virtues that help to build a civil human settlement, whittling away the most rudimentary facilities and utilities.

Doubtlessly, the people themselves can become the shield of self-protection if they are helped by adequate patronisation from the highest authorities, instead of all the pontification and other rhetorics. The confidence-building of the people, that they would be helped when they take a moral stand against the wrong-doers, is sine qua non for the restitution to come. Unfortunately, no one comes forward to correct the malaise or give the masses moral courage to put up a resistance. Most of the times the police slink away in the face of the frequent law-breakers. The silence maintained by the police when the assailants grabbed Jain Mian and hacked him to death right in front of them is a ready reference to their mind-boggling apathy. If they stand like the dummies in the face of the armed hoodlums, in spite of being armoured with the provisions of law and order enforcement, the law-abiding people perhaps have got nothing to do in reaction except looking unto the high heavens for the recompense.

More regrettably, oftentimes the thanas are, reportedly, seen to be thronged by the known culprits; and, thereupon a naturally, nasty mollycoddling happens to be seen by the harassed and humiliated masses who expect the law and order agency to help the distressed people in getting justice. The disenchantment with the police intensifies as they contribute a lot in heightening the misery of the commonmen while they constantly fail to obstruct the muscle-flexing by the unscrupulous elements of the society.

Also, the so-called leaders of the masses do not take an iota of interest in alleviating the already-grim situation. They are yet to look beyond the petty party and even personal interests; for this narrow-mindedness, they cannot take notice of the writings on the wall that the woes of the masses will one day engulf fully the society and the state and they would not be spared of this splenetically stark scourge.

Some try to depict the scenario as being the fall-out of utter poverty and unemployment. But, if one delves deep into the heart of the trouble, one would identify moral decadence as the *raison d' etre* of this monstrous outgrowth. If one looks at the culprits one would be astonished that they enjoy a good measure of affluence; the under-nourished and the under- classed are the bit-players in this sinister knot. The bigger the crime, the richer the law-breacher. Why? Self-actualisation is the missing ingredient that makes a monumental contribution to the making and nurturing of the society and the state. Perhaps, this deviation is the original sin. Unemployment cannot be blamed as the driving force behind these brutalities and monstrosities.

Not that, these are newly gained knowledge; all these have been told time and again. The independent journals are outspoken about the ubiquitous stolidity of the authorities. From time to time, they sound caution and raise a call to break the long hibernation. The monthly round-up on the law and order situation conducted by The Daily Star has been transpiring increasingly grimmer picture month by month. The concerned authorities must wake up and must not listen to what the mealy-mouthed and the cronies might have whispered.

We intend to say that the duty of the police cannot be moonlighting like a venal force of only the influential quarters. The tax-payers feel betrayed now by the system. Also, when the police assault the journalists, students, nurses or garment workers for often made-up reasons, they lose trustworthiness. Sadly enough, the writers, poets, educationists also are mauled oftentimes for no criminal fault at all.

Why should the police cooperate with the affluent and the local influentials and mistreat the humbler sections of the society?

Often the police high-ups harp on the shortage of manpower as a negative co-efficient in the campaign to stop the downsliding to lawlessness. But, we don't see the scarcity of the police personnel when they raid the households of the well-behaved, peace-loving citizens at the behest of the unscrupulous. Ironically, the police are rewarded annually for heroism. But, seldom there is the act of heroism Instead, often we see downright cowardiee.

However, if there is a genuine case of manpower shortage and the police have a sincere intention to arrest the culprits and the culture of gangsterism, why don't they request the highest decision-making bodies to equip them properly? Is there any dearth of competent young job-aspirants? Many youngmen are waiting for a call to the nation-building services, provided they are given the basic amenities to keep body and soul together. Of course, a completely unobstructed vision is needed to tap potentialities of these youth.

Not infrequently, we hear that the police have to oblige the political 'lords' that they have to kowtow to the demands of the mighty; otherwise, their survival will be at stake. Yet, the authorities usually remain silent even when the allegations are brought to their notice. In this regard, the mighty callousness prick our conscience. Likewise, the politicians wallow in self-gratification. We are reminded off and on about the commitments to banish the trace of terrorism; we just do not see the reflection of all these rhetorics. People are terrorized regularly and, agonizingly enough, the law-breakers are apparently lent an easy hand.

Unless and until the heavy hand of the Administration is applied in accordance with verdicts of the judiciary to mete out condign punishment to the criminals, all the holy wishes of having a hoodlum-free society will remain a distant utopia. And, more ominously, the Administration risks the prospects of becoming handi-capped and, lamentably, the handmaiden of the agents of the dark if they keep mum even at this critical juncture. In all likelihood, the political leaders will not take steps against the musclemen as they seem to derive political clout from them and perhaps consider this sort of crusade against the anti-socials as grossly countermanding to their interests. The honest and bright personalities have become a marginal sub-species in the political arena, maybe awaiting near-extinction.

So, here is no Robin Hood. But we all know that pessimism never pays. We must keep hope that somehow we shall be able to find ways and means to overcome this seemingly unredeemable situation. Hopefully, it has not yet grown into apocalyptic proportions. If leprosy is curable, this is also rectifiable. And, the remedy should include first and foremost the supremacy of the judiciary and the readiness of the Administration to enforce the rulings of the judiciary.

Of course, we must not look forward to having the magic lamp of Aladdin. The changed-for-the-better situation may not be as fascinating as magic-works, but its after-effects would surely be breath-takingly far more marvellous.

Voice of Nascent New Nation

The West Bank wakes up to the Voice of Palestine, the nascent voice of a new nation. ***Deborah Horan*** *of Inter Press Service reports from Jericho, West Bank.*

"THIS is the Voice of Palestine. The time is half past nine and this is Fadil Suleiman here to . . .

". . . Sorry about that interruption folks. We're having a little trouble with our electricity. As I said, this is Fadil Suleiman here to bring you the news."

And so the new Palestinian radio station, located on a dusty back road of Jericho in a building guarded by two Kalashnikov-slinging Palestinian policemen, comes to life daily.

But even with technical troubles, like the frequent power shortages and a severe lack of funds, these highly-trained pointers of Palestinian television and radio say they are satisfied with the work they have done.

"We have problems, but we are here making the best of what we have", says Daniela Khalaf, who will host TV programmes and anchor the news once the pilot television station gets on the air.

Schooled in Cairo, Amman and Europe, and with the help of German, Danish and Swedish assistance and training, 44 young professionals — many fresh off college — have managed against difficult odds to bring the Palestinian people their own radio and television for the first time in Palestinian history.

The station is penniless and functioning on equipment donated by Europe. But the airwaves now carry nine-and-a-half hours of daily radio programmes, including news, political commentaries, call-in shows, and a weekly half-hour programme on Palestinian tourism.

The crew is also gearing up for four hours of daily television broadcasts. These have yet to begin because of a dispute with Israel over the channel Palestinians can use and because of technical problems like transmitters and equipment, says television director Ali Rayan.

Still, the crew has been preparing material for the past few months, and ready-to-air reels are already neatly lining the shelves.

For the first time, television news in the West Bank and Gaza will then be shown from the Palestinian point of view. Organisers stress that the programming will also include plenty of shows that highlight non-political aspects of Palestinian life.

Says Khalaf: "There's more to Palestinians than just politics. Little children in the street may be able to discuss the political problems we have here like adults, but they — and all the people — deserve to be entertained for a while".

All employees have been working for the past months on a volunteer basis. There is only one television camera, so the crew has to share — meaning that only one event in this news-packed part of the world can be filmed at a time.

There is not even housing available for out-of-town employees. Most of the crew come from West Bank towns located hours from Jericho, and they usually sleep on mattresses on the roof.

But those are minor problems when compared to the reward, they say, and many of these Palestinians have seen worse times. Suleiman himself spent our years in an Israeli prison before being released in 1991 and starting to train in journalism.

These days, however, Suleiman and the rest have put such events behind them and trying to make a brighter future for themselves — and for their people.

"It's taken so much effort and so much of our sanity," says Khalaf "But everyone is willing to sacrifice. It's worth it to have our own radio and television stations."

The station is waiting for much-needed dollars to pour in from as many as 300 companies that want to buy air time for advertisements as soon as the television station goes on the air. It also expects funding from the Palestinian Authority once donor money begins rolling into the self-rule government.

But with foreign aid stopped up because of antiquated Palestinian accounting methods, that money could be a while in coming.

Government funding has also raised questions of press freedom. The recent month-long closure of the Palestinian-owned pro-Jordanian daily newspaper An-Nahar has put many journalists on edge. Says on *An-Nahar* employee. "I don't see the democracy. You want to speak out your mind, go to Europe."

Officially, *An-Nahar* was closed because it lacked a permit from the Palestinian Authority to distribute in Gaza and Jericho. But most journalists in private say tension between Jordan and Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) chairman Yasser Arafat over the issue of Jerusalem is the real reason for the closure.

An-Nahar, however, is now back and a new Gaza-based newspaper run by the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas organisation that opposes peace with Israel on religious grounds has also begun.

Bassam Abu Sumaya, director of Palestinian radio in Jericho, insists Palestinians can put what they like on the radio without interference from authorities.

"We say that the Voice of Palestine is open for everybody for all the parties," said Abu Sumaya. "It's not a radio for one party.It's a radio for the Palestinian people."

Abu Sumaya says bigger problems than censorship face Palestinian media. One is finding a permanent home for the broadcast studio, which used to be located in an East Jerusalem neighbourhood. A dispute with Israel over the presence of Palestinian Authority offices there had forced the crew to pack up for Jericho.

The Jericho home though is also temporary. The crew is planning to move to Ramallah once the Palestinian Authority expands to most of the rest of the West Bank, but they are set to return to where they first began.

"When the question of Jerusalem will be solved," says a confident Abu Sumaya, "we will move to Jerusalem.".

To the Editor...

Jute

Sir, Lots of ideas, criticisms and suggestions have been thrown at the Round Table on Jute organised and published by The Daily Star on September 19, 1994 with consensus of holding a National Dialogue for the formulation of a "National Jute Policy". The discussion was mainly centred on the ongoing Jute Sector Restructuring Programme.

Although it is said that recommendations on the restructuring programme have been made jointly by all concerned, including private sector, professionals, traders, associations and organizations on jute, but most of them were highly criticised. This would not have happened if there had been a political consensus. Now it is felt to review the whole programme.

A section of participants blamed World Bank for taking a one-eyed decision about the jute sector of Bangladesh while it recommended India to extend their activities on jute.

Perspective of the two countries is totally different. In Bangladesh, there are so many problems such as decreased production, squeezed export market, insufficient and inefficient promotional activities, lack of research on jute and jute products, cumbersome management, excess labour etc. We have to take our decision under the problem context.

Problem and Prospects of Jute have already been revealed at the Round Table. So, before going into action of next phase, the Government should review the Restructuring Programme. And we look forward to the National Dialogue on Jute to be held soon.

Abdullah Al Mamun
Mirpur, Dhaka.

Caretaker government

Sir, This refers to some news reports published in various national dailies that in a crucial dialogue between the government and the opposition leaders, the BNP has proposed for holding the next general election under a broad-based national government to be headed by the Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia instead of accepting the opposition demand for neutral caretaker government to hold national elections.

We vehemently oppose, the proposal for various administrative, legal, bureaucratic, political and constitutional problems and crisis.

We strongly believe that three consecutive general elections may always be held under a caretaker government to be headed by the Chief Justice of Bangladesh or the Chief Election Commissioner and nobody else.

In this connection if it is necessary, a referendum maybe held in the country under the supervision and control of Sir Ninian Stephen the Commonwealth Secretary General's emissary and the former Governor General of Australia to bury for good the controversy over the caretaker government issue.

O H Kabir
Dhaka