

PAKISTAN'S commercial capital is being silenced by fear Karachi's 12 million residents find themselves under siege from invisible gunmen, endless strikes and bomb threats in a round of violence which has claimed about 200 lives.

Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto claims that the violence is caused by India-trained terrorists and is exaggerated by the press.

But Mansoor, a young man from the poor area of Korangi, knows that he is witnessing a battle for control of Karachi.

The key protagonists belong to the Mohajir community of Urdu-speaking refugees who came to Pakistan from India at the time of independence in 1947. The community provides the bulk of Karachi's educated — and angry — unemployed.

Tension with other ethnic groups in Karachi, along with military rule in the 1980s, which sought to pit Mohajirs against supporters of Bhutto from her stronghold in Sindh, have brought the city to the brink of civil war.

Mansoor is literally caught in the cross-fire. In Korangi clear battle lines are drawn between the Mohajir National Movement (MQM) led by Altaf Hussain and its breakaway Haqiqi faction, which was sponsored by the army to diffuse the MQM's unexpectedly large following. Korangi Streets are deserted by night-fall, as hitmen from both groups take up position on each side of the main Korangi Road and fire at one another until dawn.

Many mornings Mansoor

cannot get to work across town because the firing has not stopped. He describes dodging



Altaf Hussain: Leader of Mohajir National Movement

Pakistan's Commercial Capital Caught in the Crossfire

Ayesha Khan writes from Karachi

On a fence-mending visit to Islamabad in mid-January, US Defence Secretary William Perry described Pakistan as the "key to peace and stability" in South Asia. Residents of Karachi, the country's commercial capital would first like to see peace and stability in their troubled home city.

through side-streets to reach his bus-stop, and finding himself stuck for hours when transport is cancelled by a strike or "rainfalls of bullets" prevent him from returning home.

Mansoor does not belong to either MQM or Haqiqi, but he fears for his life. Since his brother is a thief and possibly even a hitman for one of the parties, Mansoor lives in constant terror that his brother's enemies will one day get to him. "I buy a newspaper every day just so that I can hide my face behind it when I walk on a main street," he says.

Terror of the fatal bullet appearing from nowhere is common among Karachi residents. Ahmed, who comes from multi-ethnic, low-income Orangi Town, knows no security at home.

A local gangster, who takes advantage of the corruption in Karachi's police force and the easy availability of arms, regularly raids houses and shops. He is known to have killed people, says Ahmed, but the police do not investigate.

In Mohajir areas of the Orangi district, he says, the police do not even have a presence. That is also the case in Korangi, where Mohajirs are engaged in in-fighting. The police have lost so many men in the violence that they steer clear of danger zones or shoot to kill at the slightest provocation.

In a recent incident, a teenage girl was shot dead while driving in a car with her family. The survivors claim police halted the vehicle from a distance and opened fire before determining who the occupants were.

Even Karachi's elite is not immune. Bomb threats, robberies, murders and kidnappings have invaded wealthy residential suburbs. Although the wedding season in the posh suburbs is celebrated with much drinking and parties with up to 1,000 guests, this year people are cautious.

Before we used to discuss the situation and read in the newspapers about 10 people getting killed and continue as if nothing was happening," says Abintah Zuberi. "But now you

don't go out much, and you do feel guilty (about the situation)." When word spreads about a bomb scare or shooting incident, the streets may become deserted in mid-afternoon — only to fill up again when Karachi's resilience takes over and shopping centres welcome their determined customers.

One of the most serious consequences of Karachi's continuing lawlessness and political strife is the long-term effect on business. US businesses were invited by the government to invest in power and other large projects in the city. Government optimism that foreign investment will boost a weakening economy is contrasted by the apprehensions of local businessmen.

Garment factory owner Zaheer Adamjee says his business is plagued by labour trouble, delays in raw material delivery, and resulting inability to meet buyers' deadlines. He says the situation is so volatile that it is impossible for business to plan ahead. When labour cannot get to work because of strikes or because

members of their families have been shot, Adamjee is forced to explain away the delays to his buyers. Too frightened to visit Karachi themselves, buyers are increasingly turning to other countries for their garment supplies. Adamjee says that "everyone will have to take a good hard look at this business." Some have already been forced to shut down production altogether.

In hard-hit areas, shops and small businesses are repeatedly forced to remain closed. Employers elsewhere are also fed up with the growing absenteeism of staff who commute from such districts. Newspaper job advertisements often advise people from Korangi not to apply.

The mood among Karachi residents has become strongly anti-government because they feel that both civilians and military are involved in arming ethnic and sectarian groups.

Talks initiated by the government with the MQM and Haqiqi to sort out their demands for more jobs, political autonomy and municipal control are viewed as too late to be effective. So is the government's decision to shut down the Indian Consulate in Karachi for its alleged involvement in training terrorists.

Says Mansoor: "The only solution is to leave the city or the country. We can't do anything else to help ourselves."

AYESHA KHAN is a freelance Pakistani journalist specialising in environment and development.

Fall-out of Newsprint Crisis

Forewarning is a vital means of dealing with future crisis. In our case such early signals are a rare event. And even when such rare warnings come, they are mostly ignored or not taken seriously to avert an impending crisis. One classic case of indifference is the printing of text-books for the secondary schools this year. The Khulna Newsprint Mill (KNM) every year runs a lean period during the months of September-October. But this year the mill's problems were of a far serious nature. This is despite the KNM's claims it made on the contrary when the first hint of the crisis was available. The press however insisted that the country's publishing industry would be in a dire situation. Later on the KNM too admitted its own incapacity.

However, there was enough time for the government to act decisively and overcome the newsprint crisis. So acute was the crisis that the newspapers had to make do with a reduced allocation on their newsprint quota. The students also were badly hit as the prices of both newsprint and white paper registered a sudden rise. Student bodies bolstered by the support of general students made a series of protests against the price hike of newsprint and its unusual crisis. It was also correctly predicted that the Ekushey book fair would be badly hit because of the scarcity of newsprint. Some publishers on their own went to Calcutta to get books published because of lower costs there.

The government however remained unmoved. What it did at last was the sanctioning of permission for importing newsprint from abroad. But it proved too little too late. With the import duty on newsprint having been reduced only the other day, it will be sometime before this has any positive effect on the price. The results are for everybody to see. The students of the secondary schools have passed one month without most of their text-books. And, who knows how long they would still have to wait for books on all subjects to be published and delivered to them? The Ekushey book fair is getting a lean supply of new books. There is an apprehension that no more than half the number of books published every year on the occasion will be ready for the fair.

This is an incalculable loss. Whatever may be the authorities' considerations, they have overlooked the value of education as well as that of the creative power of our writers. The crisis could be obviated through emergency import of the material. The expenses involved would have been insignificant compared to the benefit gained. Let it be a lesson for the future.

Fare Thee Well

Mr Shahabuddin Ahmed, an illustrious head of a nation's judiciary by any standard, ended his tenure at the Supreme Court on Tuesday in a most predictably becoming manner. This high-achieving jurist set, during his long career, a norm for himself and for all in the profession to follow. There was no departing from that as long as he was in harness — and his bowing out was a glowing testament to that.

This we say for he was not just another Chief Justice. Revolutionary developments in Bangladesh's political situation at the beginning of the nineties thrust upon him the task of building a way out of a near anarchic condition. A condition arising out of a long and unmitigated denial of rights to the people and the multitude thirsting for their due share in the shaping of their own destiny. Chief Justice Shahabuddin, on agreeing to lead the interregnum as the universally accepted President, accomplished first the near impossible task of reining in the mad-horse of a people suddenly untethered. Even better than containing the big bang of December '90, he indeed built a sure foundation for democracy to rise.

Ever since the emergence of Bangladesh the cause and practice of democracy were being dangerously undermined by one big criminal act: manipulation of elections by powers that be to a degree that rather than furthering power-sharing by people, pushed them out into a helpless state autocratic dispensation. President Shahabuddin hit the nail exactly on the head and at the right hour. But for his conduct of the state and his handling of the aftermath, the improbable election results would have led to a burst of conflicts and social turmoil beyond easy control.

How did Mr Ahmed do that? By a rarely matched example of moral probity pinioned on spotless fairness and solid selflessness. Above all his dignity—the dignity he brought to his task, daunted all attempts to and even thoughts of compromising his mission.

The above is known universally in Bangladesh. We repeat it to express our admiration of him and tender our gratitude to one who was so unflappable and unyielding in one situation and completely self-effacing in another — all supremely to the good of the nation.

Disturbing Tidings

There is alarming news from Rangpur. Rice, the coarse variety of course, is selling at Taka 13. And that is also the price, strangely of a kilogram of *atta* also. When high cereals price comes in tandem with the name of Rangpur one has reason for serious concern. It has been a particularly famine-prone area for many decades. Gone are the days when the cash crops of tobacco and potato used to plough in enough money to the Rangpur farmers to offset the effects of producing less than enough rice. The peasant has been left in the lurch, for many years now.

The months leading to the Poush harvest weren't either happy for the whole region. We had then requested for free food centres in selected areas of the northern zone. The same factors operated then as they do now. Rangpur is deficit in rice production. And the people have practically no buying power as there is little employment generating industrial or other investment in the area.

The need was to envision a grand strategy to salvage Rangpur out of this impossible situation. That hasn't been done by any of the successive governments. In spite of many attempts at cutting the size of land holdings, the region continues to be one dominated by big land-holders who live in the big cities and are not interested in making far-seeing investments in their areas. So? The question is first of all for the government to face. And answer.

FAP — an Open Study for Dialogue

by Mesbahuddin Ahmad

I am grateful to Dr Saleemul Huq for kindly mentioning me by name in his very well-written article entitled, "FAP from Debate to Dialogue" published in the opinion column of The Daily Star on November 2, 1994. He writes that if producing water management schemes that are environmentally sound and acceptable to the people is the goal of the Flood Action Plan then "the proponents and critics probably have more in common than dividing them." I agree. There is perhaps no need to go into a point by point discussion of the very well-written article of Dr Saleemul Huq. However, the point that needs a general discussion is the point of public participation and public communication in the FAP.

THE phrases people's participation or public participation are today part of the standard baggage of development rhetoric. While developing the FAP projects and conducting different FAP studies, it was found that it was easier to talk about public participation in development works than to fully comprehend its implications for those who are socially disadvantaged and who are likely to be affected by project intervention. It is well to remember that in Bangladesh "rural institutions" were developed as extension of government bureaucracy rather than people's organisation with lack of awareness and information on the part of the poor. Even when such participation are envisaged, implementation and effective transmission of the idea and achievement to the people are difficult tasks. For the Flood Action Plan, public participation and information dissemination or public communication are inter-linked concepts. If public participation is a focal point in the Flood Action Plan, an effective dissemination of information — open communication — of the FAP related activities is a part and parcel of the FAP programme.

People's participation depends on a democratic system and on the development of the institutions which are involved in the work. Its success also depends on the people being constantly kept aware of the concerned activities. On the one hand, it means that people should be more fully involved in all stages of project development, from need assessment through operation and maintenance and on the other hand, it means people should be kept aware of their role in the development project and this is what the FAP activities have tried to attain. For information, dissemination and for-

mation of ideas and consideration of suggestions in the Flood Action Plan, three distinct steps were taken. They are (1) Two International Conferences on the Flood Action Plan, (2) Special Workshops on water management and flood related selected issues, (3) Regional and sub-regional seminars at district and thana levels where public representatives and village level organisations and representatives of several non-governmental development agencies participated.

In these seminars opinions of the local and affected people with regard to water management have been carefully listened to and the final draft report on the Flood Action Plan reflected many of their suggestions and ideas. The general objective of the whole process on the one hand, was to ensure that conceived projects are in conformity with the local requirements and the people develop a sense of ownership of the infrastructure which are being constructed for their own use; on the other hand the objective was to establish a channel of communication with the people and to keep them informed of the FAP activities.

During the Second Conference on the Flood Action Plan the Government of Bangladesh and the World Bank prepared a working paper entitled "The Flood Action Plan, Achievements and Outlook." This was later printed in thousands of copies both in English and Bangla and together with the proceedings of the conference, has been distributed to all members of the Parliament, Union Council Chairmen and Members, local officials of concerned FAP areas and participants of the conference.

FPCO brings out a Quarterly Progress Report which is routinely distributed to related agencies. FPCO library has been made open for reference

by the Press and other intended researchers and the national press is always kept informed of all the FAP activities. All FAP activities have indeed received a very wide coverage by the national press. Sometimes, of course some people believe what they wish to believe, and there is no known remedy to this malaise. There are critics and critics of the FAP. There is one very internationally well known, flamboyant but certainly very erudite critic who in different seminars would forcefully and almost convincingly deliver his speech against various aspects of the Flood Action Plan but would never wait to listen to the response to his speech. He always has a busy schedule and other seminars to attend. With such critics, of course neither a debate nor a dialogue is possible.

However, since my involvement with FAP, I have rarely met a critic of the FAP, who is totally against the FAP or the need to do something about the recurring floods and flood related problems in Bangladesh. The question that has repeatedly come up is primarily that of degree — whether in the FAP studies environmental considerations were sufficient, whether people's participation were sufficient, whether the dissemination of information relating to the Flood Action Plan was good enough. Since it is very difficult to establish a universally acceptable criteria on these issues, it is also very difficult to fully answer these questions.

I must mention here that FAP is the first and the only public sector programme where these issues are being addressed in an organized manner. Notwithstanding the locals, some of their international masters asking for more perfection and refinement, are yet at infancy in their own countries compared to FAP in these aspects.

I think the purpose of the Flood Action Plan studies has been to find an acceptable consensus on all the major issues relating to the solution of the water management problems in general and to the flood related problems in particular.

The draft final report of the Flood Action Plan which was formally released to the Press by the Minister for Water Re-

sources on the 24th November, 1994 has been distributed to many agencies with the request for "comments in writing" which could be discussed "before the draft is finalized and officially submitted to the FAP Technical Committee of the Government. The forwarding letter also reads, "We believe the FAP studies have thrown new light on the complex social and environmental issues which are part and parcel of the water sector and we trust the report does justice to this ground breaking work. No programme in the history of Bangladesh has lathomed the depth of public consultation the way of the FAP has. Formal and informal discussion meetings have been held with the broadest possible spectrum of the population encompassing Members of Parliament, local leaders, NGOs, farmers, fishermen, women groups and the landless."

The forwarding letter further reads, "FPCO accepts that the review of the FAP summary will involve many people and although we are anxious to move forward, we recognize that considerable time will be needed to gather all the opinions. We suggest aiming for a discussion on the comments as early as possible in the New Year after mutually deciding on a suitable date. For obvious reasons we are unable to provide individual copies of the huge number of FAP documents produced in the last four years. However, all of these documents may be viewed at either the FPCO or World Bank Resident Mission Libraries.

"We look forward to your comments"

The Association of the Development Agencies in Bangladesh (ADAB) has also been given some copies of the draft Final Report with the same request for written comments. I am sure that FPCO authorities would certainly be glad to receive their point by point written response on the report. Under the circumstances the news, ADAB criticises FAP Document as published in The Daily Star of January 1, 1995 was not only a little surprising but perhaps rather disappointing. However, I hope this meeting of ADAB is not the end of the matter. I hope that they will send their written comments which can then be discussed in an open forum or otherwise.

To my way of thinking, debate or dialogue, the Water Management Plan or the Flood Action Plan, if whatever name it is called is not really important in the last analysis. What is important is to find out an acceptable solution to the water related problems including floods and anyone who has the

good of the nation in mind and the required expertise can contribute to it. Perhaps it will be too much to claim that the draft final report of the Flood Action Plan is the sole handiwork of only those who have been directly involved with the writing of the report. Perhaps it is the end product of many contributors in many form, direct and indirect, but the credit of editing and compiling the thoughts definitely should go to FPCO.

Let me conclude by again quoting from the forwarding letter along with the Draft Final Report of the Flood Action Plan of Mr M H Siddiqi, BU, Chief Engineer, FPCO, "Much more remains to be done such as integrating the results of the FAP studies into the National Water Plan but we hope this will be a natural follow-on-exercise to FAP". Let us not fail to attain what remains to be done. Let me also hope that the critics or proponents of the FAP in whatever name they are known or like to be known, "without the services of a Sir Ninian", to quote Dr Saleemul Huq, shall be able to put their mind together to find technically, environmentally and financially practical solutions to the problems of recurrent floods in Bangladesh. To me, it is inhuman, near the end of the 20th century, to suggest that the people of Bangladesh should learn to live with floods.

OPINION

Facts about Cadet Colleges

Md Masum Billah

With the publication of the SSC result in 1994 cadet colleges have been experiencing bitter criticism from different sections and so I feel it necessary to flash some facts about cadet colleges, through your esteemed daily. Cadet colleges of Bangladesh are existing with their own characteristics and peculiarities. They are different from other educational institutions in many ways.

The first Cadet College was established on 'the 28th February in 1958 at Faujdarhat in Chittagong with a view to producing deserving candidates for the defence and civil sectors of erstwhile East Pakistan. The rather brilliant result of this college encouraged establishment of more cadet colleges. Accordingly, Jhenidah, Mirjapur and Rajshahi cadet colleges were established in 1963, 1963 and 1964 respectively. Teaching method and the system of management of these colleges were followed after that of the British public schools. The positive contribution of these institutions was accepted gladly at the national level leading the government to convert six residential schools and colleges into cadet colleges after the liberation of the country. Now there are ten cadet colleges in Bangladesh including one girls' cadet college at Mymensingh.

The performance of the cadets in the SSC examination of 1994 does not probe that there is no need of Cadet College in our country as many people reflected in their views and opinions published in different dailies; nor does it prove that cadets are dull students. I used to be sure in a private college, now I am in a Cadet College. So I can perhaps easily distinguish the merit of the cadets from that of the outside students. (of course there are brilliant stu-

dents in the outside institutions also).

Many anomalous things assumed to have happened in the SSC result due to the introduction of computer system in compiling results. Many teachers believably could not handle the computer sheet properly, as a result computer might have given wrong reading. No only that, a teacher had to examine a lot of scripts within a very short time due to the non-government teachers' strike. Necessarily there was lack of fair judgement.

Today whenever we think of an educational institution we think of such an institution which is haunted by bizarre political chaos, fighting between the two groups of students, boycotting classes by the students for negligible causes, teachers' harassment etc. But cadet colleges are offering a different picture in the educational arena of Bangladesh. So I should urge for establishing more cadet colleges. It is our duty to pave the way for our future generation by giving them a good education. And good education can be had at an institution where discipline and congenial atmosphere prevail.

However, cadet colleges are not totally free from ills and absurdities. In the greater interest of the nation, several existing rules and regulations of cadet colleges should be moderated. Often teachers are to remain busy with many kinds of activities which do not concern study. As a result, a teacher gradually loses his interest in study. Brilliant teachers are needed to teach and make brilliant students. But when they find it difficult to incline themselves to study a tendency develops in them to escape. This is why, the shortage of teachers especially

in some subjects has become a constant problem in cadet colleges.

Here teachers are to give 24-hour service to the college. They look after all sorts of activities of the cadets during their stay on the campus. They are not allowed to exercise any 'private practice'. But their dedication to the service contributes a great deal to distinguish a cadet college from other educational institutions. So, the introduction of non-practising allowance will be an incentive for the teachers.

To conduct and ensure discipline activities of a cadet college one army officer (called Adjutant) is working here. There is no clear indication what sort of relationship will lie between the teachers and the Adjutant. The rank of an Adjutant in either Captain or Major but he is considered senior even to an associate professor, let alone an assistant professor. This is found to be a matter of dissatisfaction. I think there should be a mutual relationship between the teachers and the Adjutant who are working in a cadet college. Strict administration is responsible for prevailing peaceful and disciplined atmosphere in the cadet colleges. But dual administration is to be reviewed for running the administration more smoothly.

Every year cadet colleges invite only the brilliant students and in response to this invitation the bright and promising students flock there to receive ideal education. In order to cater to this demand, the teachers should be given enough opportunity to receive different sorts of trainings. They will be able to develop their mental faculty and professional efficiency through these trainings.

The writer is Lecturer in English, Comilla Cadet College

To the Editor...

Hartal for whom?

Sir, The mainstream opposition parties gave call for observing hartal in Dhaka city from 6 am to 2 pm on 24.1.95. According to newspapers this hartal left at least 50 people injured and 18 arrested including Matia Chowdhury and Advocate Sahara Khatun of AL. However, on the same day the two-day International Investment Conference started at Sonargaon Hotel. The conference was inaugurated in the morning and continued when hartal went on.

It is surprising to note that AL leader Tofael Ahmed and JP leader Moudud Ahmed participated in the conference during hartal hours. Tofael Ahmed also expressed dismay at the failure of the local organisers to discuss about the conference with AL earlier.

The very word hartal means 'a stoppage of work in protest or boycott'. How law makers can be law breakers! Now it is

an important question whether observance of hartal is for commonman and 'tokais' only? Is it that there is a great divergence between practice and theory in the policy of opposition leaders?

A M Kats Chowdhury
Masdhair Gorthan Road,
Narayanganj-1400

Installing a telephone line

Sir, From time to time we come across newspaper reports stating that numerous number of applications for sanction of new telephones are lying pending for want of adequate provision or capacity in the telephone exchanges to accommodate installation of new lines. Some applicants have deposited their Demand Notes and are waiting for only days and weeks, but for months for wiring and connection.

While Telephone Department has failed to provide satisfactory services to the subscribers of Analogue phones they have, however, attempted to introduce newer devices and facilities for the telephone subscribers viz. Digital, I.S.D. Card Phone etc which has opened tremendous possibilities for the telephone users. These additional facilities would have been much appreciated if they were provided after ensuring flawless service to the Analogue telephone users.

We sincerely hope that the process of receiving a telephone line would become much easier and people would not have to go through such an ordeal to get a telephone installed.

M R Islam
Mirpur, Dhaka