

We are All Disturbed

We are feeling disturbed. We believe the nation too is terribly disturbed. What has been happening in Dinajpur can unsettle the very roots of this state if the whole weird and unwholesome situation down there is not soon brought to normal by some understanding and wise and delicate handling. The best and perhaps the only way to defuse the dangerous situation there is for the administration to go for finding out the culprits and charging them in a matter of days and then embark on very expeditious — and, as importantly, very transparent — procedures to deal them the harshest of punishments. Justice must be done and soon. And must also be seen to have been done. There cannot be a fitter case for justice to be meted out in that ideal fashion. Or, both our society and state will take a bad beating, such that we cannot afford.

Not that some harm hasn't been done already. The allegations made against a police party, and believed as true by great many people in Dinajpur, are sickening. A whole populace has been thrown into a violent and continuing protest by the revolting nature of the allegations involving the death of a teen-aged girl picked up by the police patrol to reach her to her destination in Dinajpur. People believe she was gang-raped and dumped by the roadside.

The protest has very many elements of a just popular resistance, the kind that sustains society. The police have acted in a manner that tends to make the whole department a party to a crime which has been evidently committed by only a handful of them. A number of lives have been lost to police firing and God only knows about attending atrocities.

This, unless righted here and now, would seriously endanger police credibility which was never high. For people to lose the modicum of confidence they still have in the police would gravely injure our body-politic. This case must rather be taken as an opportunity to establish the dependability and probity of police. A genuine police initiative and co-operation in identifying the criminals and punishing them would benefit them immeasurably.

Why should situations involving broad sections of our masses be left to be met by police action? What are the political and social leaderships there for?

There is Still Time

On Sunday, a rather modest Awami League programme of agitation against the EC, as compared with the loaded one the party has scheduled for September, went out of hand, giving a fore-taste of what lies ahead.

Awami League processionists coming out of a rally at Panthpath met with an obstruction from JCD supporters near the Farmgate area where the latter were holding a meeting of their own, hardly by any strange coincidence. With the police joining the fray, albeit, in response to a call of duty, there was, nonetheless, a triangular fuelling of the fire, so to speak, in that highly chaotic situation.

The backlash was marked by the first political casualty in an agitation for quite sometime, to say nothing of injuries sustained on a large scale and damages caused to vehicles.

These are indeed serious forebodings of not only a dangerous drift in the law and order situation but also of a deeper political crisis with all avenues for a solution slammed shut.

There is still time to pull back from the precipice provided we return to the path of discussion forthwith. Talks would be of little avail when things will have gone out of hand with the mood on either side souring beyond any redemption. In a democracy, the best answer to political agitation by the opposition is not certainly counter-agitation or 'action' against the opposition by the ruling party but rather the engagement of the opposition in meaningful talks. And, since talks were held earlier with a forward foothold reached in terms of striking some common ground, picking up the threads should be an automatic exercise now.

Our latest editorial po sitioning on the subject has been that since agitative politics has a way of returning with vengeance when all expectations for a peaceful solution of a crisis are belied we must never be naive to shun the path of discussion. But again, since so many routes have already been tried to reach a political settlement we are but left to be entirely fail-safe with this one final attempt.

Art of the Possible

It is not quite the icing on the cake but a noteworthy step forward in the relationship between two one-time implacable enemies, Israel and the PLO have signed another partial accord, the second in a row in less than two months taking them yet closer to the point of reaching a comprehensive agreement on extending Palestinian rule to the West Bank.

But admittedly there is not much as yet on the ground to be unreservedly euphoric about the prospects of the dialogue. When difficult issues like Israeli troop redeployment, conduct of Palestinian elections, control over the city of Hebron and Palestinians in Jerusalem participating in the polls remain unresolved they do cast a shadow on the fate of the talks.

Still, both sides have done extremely well by advancing their negotiations on the basis of dealing with the easier problems first so as to clear the course for handling intractable issues later on. Israel and the PLO have wisely concentrated on the art of the possible at long last after wasting nearly two years in barren negotiations over unyielding sticking points.

The transfer of administrative powers to the PLO will be really meaningful when political authority devolves on them through elections.

It is better to be poor in some countries than in others. The August 19th-25th issue of *The Economist* has presented a number of cases to show why. As catalogued the whys are: effective local government, an egalitarian outlook, an open economy, a degree of personal liberty, sensible and sustained spending and patience. To disprove that state control has anything to do with the miracle, the London-based magazine refers to the UN's top ten achievers in terms of improved human development from 1960 to 1992. These are China, Iran, Syria, Turkey, Portugal, Thailand, Tunisia, South Korea, Malaysia and Botswana. Of course, the focus has been concentrated on the different developing countries' development parameters.

While the development indices have been compared to establish the point in favour of an open society, at times the arguments have stumbled on a number of facts completely opposed to the substance. For example, Cuba and China are centrally planned economies and both score highly on various social indices. In case of Cuba and Vietnam, the evaluation is that national and local freedoms are different. China has not been termed as a close society but there is no reason why it should be treated differently from Vietnam and

LIFE is about growing up. In the beginning, every bit is news. Phones ring incessantly; the wiring almost dribbling with saliva as the exhilarated young mother narrates to her mother how their four-month old (actually it's counted in days at that stage) has managed to sit 'You know, all by himself' for four-and-half seconds. Then there will be phone calls for the first crawl, the first fall from the cot ('He is so naughty, you know'), and the first step is almost a national news. Often there's a hush in the house as the entire family gives undivided attention to the baby making his or her first important speech: 'acheo brilliant kacho'. There will be more speeches by the mellowing infant, but by then the whole family will be shouting back, 'Will you please shut your trap?'

Well, my parents did it when I was falling off cots or making oratory nuances. My wife and I enlightened everyone with every little bit that our little ones did. Now I could actually yell in boredom, but so silently that I would only let out a yawn. But, in fact, I manage to maintain a very

No Easy Road to Development

by Nilratan Halder

One other contention is that five per cent of GDP is enough to provide a poor country's population with the basic services: five years of education, pre-natal care and access to health care. We spend several times more but with what results is for everybody to see.

Cuba. And look how freedom itself has been categorized between the local and national.

Throughout the article one comes across many such contradictions and a pervasive ambivalence. This is however not to say that there are not anything where one can agree with the contention. In fact, there are many observations that demand attention. The best one is when it argues for education of girls or women. Then again there is a caustic comment on the improper spending by poor countries. Instead of building up rural health care facilities and primary schools the trend is for establishing high-technology hospitals and universities at fabulous costs. This is how the governments in such countries try to pacify the elite groups. In countries where the army and other influential groups work as power brokers, such misplaced spendings for spectacular establishments are likely to happen beyond any logical conclusion. Because it

brings immediate political dividends instead of long-term, popular and pro-people benefits.

So Cuba, China, Vietnam etc look to be misfits in the development model. But the reality is that their development indices are comparable with those of the developed nations. What is however most amazing is the recognition to egalitarianism. Do less governance and egalitarianism go together? Most economic gurus today have given the unanimous verdict in favour of decontrolling economy. Now here the local government has been postulated for reaching economic benefits to the poor of society. This is notwithstanding the fact that a country may have scarce resources — indeed less than many others in terms of GDP or per capita income — and still perform better on account of human development.

Now can the credit go to the local government? If so, what is wrong with the central government that can manage the entire show and

plan better? The local governments in a country have to work under varying conditions — some to their advantage and others to their disadvantage. It is the central planning that can bring some sort of rationality in the distribution of wealth. Some local governments may run short of money just to ensure the fundamental necessities — the first step to development indices — for their people. If some nations are better managers and do it centrally, why find fault with it? The argument against this is that most nations have failed to do it. After revolution most nations tend to ignore their expensive social programmes and entrenched elitism continues to consolidate its stranglehold.

Admitted, it so happens. But what is the guarantee that the central government will not be accountable to the people who can protest 'cockroaches at the local maternity clinic'? In countries like ours we have health complexes at the thana level but have been able to

make the doctors stay at the hospital premises? As citizens of relatively free society we have no right to decent treatment for diseases in hospitals. The system does not simply work. The doctors are more busy with their private practices than their hospital duties and then the poor have the least chance of availing of such medical facilities in their lifetime.

The simple truth is that local governments do not build up such facilities as hospitals and primary schools. It is the central government that does the job. Now here is a very strong advocacy for making education free. Even if we consider primary education and think of providing mid-day meal — the merit of which has been recognised — can we believe the market economy to have made such allowances? According to it, nothing is likely to be free. How will this anachronism be reconciled? Devolution of power as against the elitist bias can be of help. But first a society has to decide how far it will allow

itself to be enmeshed in the octopus-like consumerism. A society must come through the painful process of rejecting comfort for producing more and more. Without making that sacrifice, it is a sin to compete with the developed societies in consumerism. A classic case is Bangladesh, no doubt.

One other contention is that five per cent of GDP is enough to provide a poor country's population with the basic services: five years of education, pre-natal care and access to health care. We spend several times more but with what results is for everybody to see. However a lot depends on how the money is spent. The East Asian countries spent just 3.7 per cent of their GDP on education in 1989 and yet produced far better results compared to many other regions. So it is a question of well-spent budgets made to meet the specific needs. That is important. To decide one's priority, if China and Cuba believe the development theory raging over the rest of the world, there is perhaps need for a pause before prescribing a common recipe for each and every country. Some are better at things others find intractable. So leave alone those who enjoy their own way of doing good for themselves. Don't go to another extreme for global dictates of any kind.

Cho Chweet Chotto Chonamoni

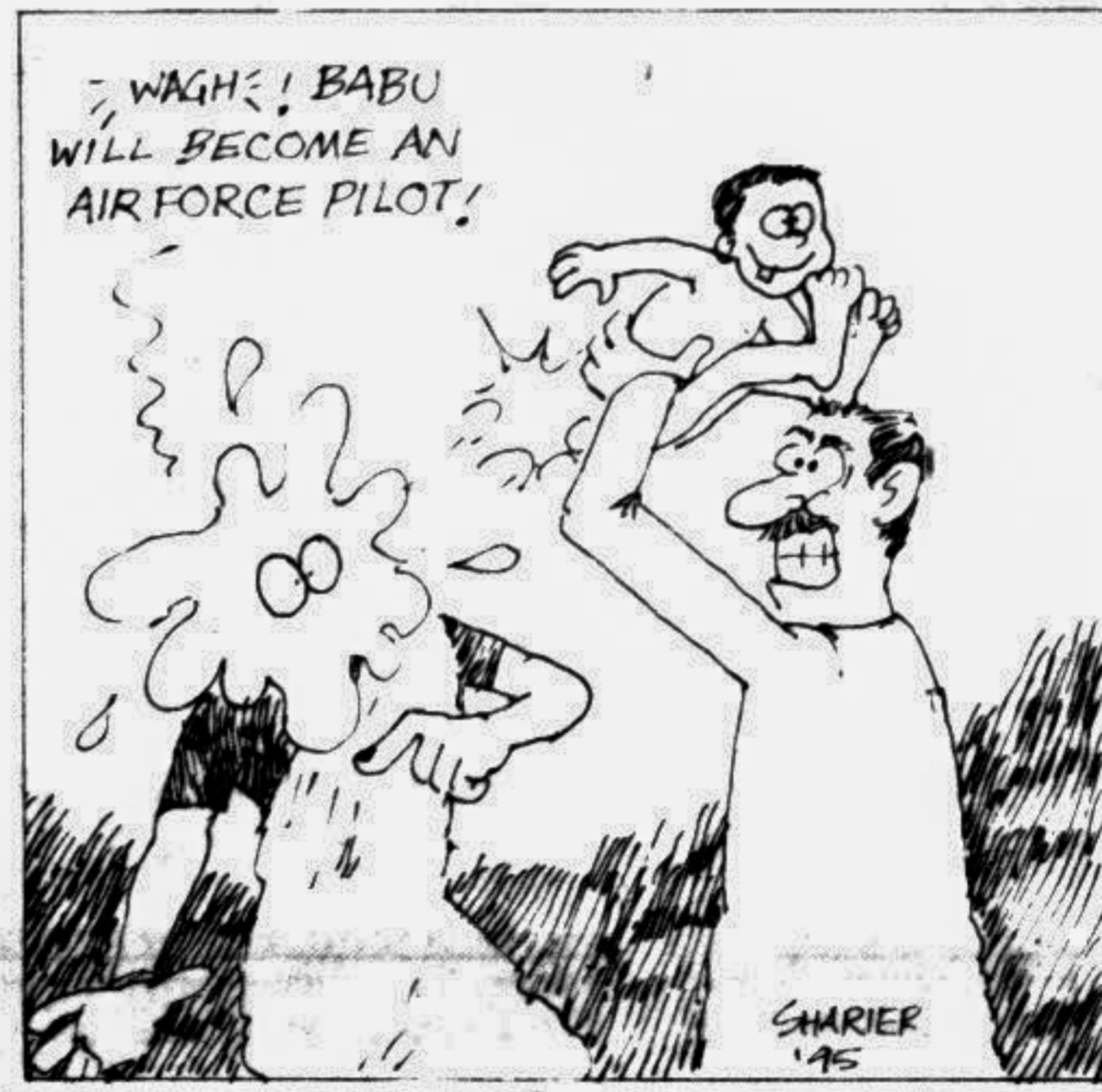
Pinch of Salt

by Chintito

Interested-looking face while this couple narrate how their 'cho chweet chotto chonamoni' fell off the cot.

Soon the kid is climbing over the cot-railing (the little devil that he is). Not much later, the prince is actually venturing out of the bed room. Later, the loveable darling is exploring under the table, behind almira's, into three-pin sockets. The mother is losing hair by the hour.

You have lots of names at that age. Come to think of it, people actually call you more names as you get older. But, that's different. At childhood, you get wonderful names. Everyone has a special name for you. A khala might cuddle you with a 'My gundu', an hefty uncle might hand out a bear hug synchronised with a thick-voiced 'bagher bachcha' (son of a tiger), and you might start to believe that your elder sister actually calls you 'disturb koro na'. Early in life, you are the



Babu of the house. But then, more than half the people in this country is known by something in the vicinity of Babu, Bablu, Babul, Babla, Babli, Bublil, betcetra. Then comes a boring time in life when people actually call you by your real name.

As you grow older, you gradually graduate into a Bhal or a Bhatya or an Apa or Babu. You begin to feel important. The elders of the mahalla greet you with a friendly, 'Kee Bhatiya?' routine. I thought this phrase would last for ever. But, I have been dismayed.

You may have seen thirty winters, led your men on the battlefield, made decisive decisions at the UN, set up multinational industries, and but you are always the little Babu to your parents. Its the other people around you, the strangers on the street who remind you that everything is not so green.

I was at this Meena Bazaar thing just as I had been doing since the last, let me see.....

about 20 odd years. Oh, God! Was it that long ago? Well, I was feeling very much like a Bhal but this sprightly little lad (I still feel like whacking him) walks up to me and, with politeness oozing from his teens, gestures to buy something from his stall. That was okay. But, at the same time he said, 'Uncle, come visit our shop'. It was awfully impolite of him to call a greying 'Bhatiya' like me 'Uncle' without my sanction. But, that was my day of awakening. It suddenly dawned on me that with only a few dark hair and light wrinkles, I would need more than a jazzy punjabi to hold on to my youth.

The Uncle thing is the courteous way the young tell us that we are growing. The real rude ones call you 'Chacha'. But, in the ladies section, some aunts last forever. No 'chachi' stuff for them. If you prefer to use 'khala', don't forget to suffix a long drawn 'moni'. Come to think of it, five years after I was first Uncle, the other day some young chaps did actually call me Chacha. Nowadays, I have been upgraded to Chacha Miah. Oh, my God! The End is near.

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.

Money and blessing

Sir, I am a resident of East Rajabazar, one of the most densely populated areas of Dhaka. Majority of the population are Muslims. Each Friday thousands of people gather at the East Rajabazar mosque for the 'Jumma' prayers. Before the prayer an interesting phenomenon takes place. The 'khatib' of this mosque reads out a long list of donors and prays for them according to the amount of money donated.

I am a Muslim and I don't know if there is any provision in our religion asking for Allah's blessing by donating money or if this sort of occurrence are happening in any other mosque of the city. But shouldn't this be immediately stopped for Islam?

Asif Rahman
East Rajabazar

Auto-rickshaw without fare metre

Sir, An advertisement in the press has tendered for import of 5,000 autorickshaws (3-wheeler) in CKD condition. The gov't should insist that fare metres be included in the contract. How long there will be no taxi service and no metre service? These 5,000 baby taxis can set a new trend, which would be immensely popular with the public.

It is difficult to get into the mind of the government. What is the response, may we hear from the authority?

A Husnain
Dhaka

Chittagong: Criminals' haven

Sir, Chittagong nowadays has become a haven of criminals. High crimes like kidnapping, murder and dacoity have become everyday incidents. The rate at which the criminal activities are increasing, it seems criminals are well aware of the incapability of our police force and do give a damn. People are passing their days in fear and anxiety and parents can-

not rest till their children are back home safely.

According to newspaper reports, in the past two months, 80 children were kidnapped from Chittagong city alone. It is shocking and unacceptable. What is our police department doing to combat the menace? Not one of the 80 children reported to have been rescued. One or two children had been lucky to escape the kidnappers by dint of their own intelligence and with the help of the public where police did not play any role as such.

We know that in advanced countries, even to rescue one child, they leave no stone unturned. But what is being done for our 80 children?

We know about the kidnapping and subsequent release of millionaire Taher Ali Fakhr by unidentified miscreants, after 72 hours. It is a real mystery and he was very lucky to escape unhurt. But it is very funny that police is trying to get the credit of his return. The question arises if they are so competent why they are not able, reportedly, to rescue a single child out of the eighty?

I think, parents and teachers must warn the children to be extra careful and they themselves should keep a close watch. Radio and television can also play a role by airing special programmes.

We hope that government will do whatever is necessary to save our children from the clutch of the culprits.

Nur Jahar
East Nasirabad, Chittagong.

Democratization of UN

Sir, This year the United Nations is completing its 50th year of formation. During the past fifty years the United Nations has undoubtedly done a great job in promoting world peace, understanding and development. But unfortunately in the recent years, the UN is facing financial crisis because some of the member countries are not contributing their sub-

scriptions regularly. As a result the global development activities of the UN through its various agencies are suffering set-back.

Perhaps no nation in this civilized world would deny the importance of retaining such an international forum, i.e. the United Nations for maintaining global peace and for ensuring economic development especially in the less-privileged member countries. Meanwhile, it is strongly felt that the UN should be democratized for protecting the equal rights of all the member-states. Of course, the role of the super-powers cannot be ignored, in my opinion, they should act in the UN on the basis of the democratic views of all the member countries.

M Zahidul Haque
Asstt Prof, BAI, Dhaka.

City's traffic jam

Sir, Of late we are coming across a lot of write-ups regarding the traffic jam of Dhaka city. It has now become a real problem of the city calling for an immediate redress. The magnitude of the problem is such that the Prime Minister herself had to issue directives to the relevant authorities for streamlining the system immediately.

Dhaka is now a megacity and also the capital of a country. There is no denying the fact the influx of people to the capital city will be swelling up with the passage of time. The situation will, therefore, go from bad to worse day by day if nothing is done to get rid of this present state of affair. Construction of fly-overs could have eased off the situation. Probably we don't have sufficient fund as well as space required for the purpose.

To speak candidly and with all sympathy for the rickshawpullers, the phasing out of the non-mechanised three-wheelers from city roads along with strict adherence to traffic rules will help much to solve the problem. To begin with, the authority may withdraw rickshaws from some important and busy roads by traffic rearrangement as a trial case.

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OPINION

All Our Offices are Like Immigration Counters of Foreign Country

Dr A K M A Quader

The article of Mr K F Rahman published a few weeks ago in The Daily Star describing his experience at the foreign airports and immigration counters is amusing and sad. What Mr Rahman has narrated is everyday experience of a Bangladeshi passport holder. My own experience inside my country tell that our people in authority behave with us like the immigration officers at foreign airports if you happen to go to their offices even for legitimate things to be done.

Once, I had to see a secretary to obtain a government clearance to go abroad with a fellowship. Even with a prior appointment, I had to wait more than an hour to see him.

I explained the reasons for visiting him. He told me to be patient and I would be issued the clearance soon. While I was leaving his room Mr. Secretary instructed me to see the concerned Joint Secretary. So, I went to see the Joint Secretary and narrated him the reasons for being there. He listened to me patiently and told that there would be no problem, but advised me to see a particular Deputy Secretary. Thereafter, I looked for a particular room and found it out. I entered into his office. He told me that he had a close relative at BUET. And I told him that I was his nephew's classmate and a good friend of his. He then informed me that the clearance letter would be delivered to my office the following morning and told me that the process through which I was coming would have brought me to the desk of the dealing assistant. Thank God, he put an end to my journey further and prevented me from learning more about the Secretariat.

Mr Rahman himself being a man from elite cadre is always treated as VIP at our own airport custom booth. Do we ever notice how our foreign currency earners (who work abroad specially in the middle east or UK) are treated at Dhaka Airport? Who would be harmed if the officials behave humanely with these tired and haggard looking fellow countrymen returning from their foreign

work places to be united with their families after an interval of three or four years?

I shall now narrate another incident which took place recently in another important office. A few weeks ago, I had to visit that office to collect my passport. First, it was difficult to enter into the compound. I asked the duty police to let me in to collect my passport. When I was presenting my receipt at the counter, the police started lathicharging upon the people who wanted to enter into the compound. I panicked, because things were taking place behind my back. When the passport could not be traced, I entered the building to see the concerned officer. The concerned officer was busy in another room. So, I had to wait for another ninety minutes to see him. While I was standing in the veranda I came to know that the Director General of passport would be visiting this office in the afternoon. When I finally got my passport, it was half past two.

Here I shall describe an encounter while standing in a queue for getting a US visa. Some years ago one of my colleagues and I went to the Adamjee Court for obtaining US visa. We were going to Canada but we wanted to go to US to visit some of our friends on return journey. It was about 8 in the morning and the queue was already long. So, we stood in the queue and were about 50 meters from the court footstep. There was another man standing ahead of us. He was well dressed and appeared to be in good health. We got ourselves introduced and we came to learn that he was a retired career diplomat. His last assignment was in a prestigious country in East Europe as our Ambassador. When the May sun appeared in full blaze over our heads, we started sweating and felt bad about queuing in the sun. Mr Ambassador retired was very upset and started telling us that the US embassy by asking us to queue in the sun was humiliating us, and so forth. After sometime I made

up my mind to reveal my real feeling to Mr Ambassador retired. I opened my mouth by stating more or less like this, 'Mr. Ambassador retired after your retirement you have now learnt that your countrymen stand in a long queue in all weather before the Adamjee Court to get US visa. You did not care to know about the mistreatment of your own kind by various foreign missions in Dhaka, because your subordinates would collect visa on your behalf on the strength of note a verbatim issued by your foreign office. Unfortunately, it is now useless to brag about it. Because your own kind in Segunbagicha, compound would do little for you as you now wield neither power nor authority'. Mr Ambassador retired was not at all prepared to hear me like this but he kept quiet thereafter till we were escorted into the interview room. I also told him that it is worse with the missions from the countries of Muslim brethren. You are treated by them as *misikins* in your own country. Still things have not improved for our countrymen in the missions in Dhaka. Who cares?

Mr Rahman, please do not be upset having been treated badly by the immigration officials abroad. One of our friends who goes abroad frequently, told us that when he produces his green passport, he is always treated specially and he leaves the counter after all the passengers have left the arrival enclosure. He says, by carrying the green passport he carries the burden of entire Bangladesh. He still continues to carry this burden bravely.

Experiences have taught me these:

- i. Collect your pension papers before you vacate your office.
- ii. If you do not have to go to the Secretariat do not go.
- iii. Be prepared for unexpected turn of events in our government offices.
- iv. Our officials consider themselves as 'azaradars' of their offices and they behave so.

The writer is a Professor at BUET