

Despicable

The police has acted despicably about the Dinajpur affair in more ways than one. We had on August 29 cautioned the government not to transform the situation into a people-versus-government conflict and counselled that there was possibly one opportunity for police to re-establish its *bona fides* by acting fast and co-operating wholeheartedly for an early punishment of the culprits. Now it seems we had spoken to a wall or perhaps worse.

The first bad thing police and district administration did after their August 26 firing was to cap this foolishness by escalating things beyond all limits — killing at least seven and imposing a reign of terror the very next day. On August 28 the government nationalised what was but a district-level action by issuing a most unfortunate Press Note, further escalating the situation with its lies and its anti-people posture.

That was bad enough. But enough is not enough when one has power but is far too befuddled to use its faculties. On top of a departmental enquiry a one-man commission was instituted to probe and report in 15 days' time. The Press Note has not only pre-empted the commission but has also compromised it dangerously. This is unacceptable.

Not to speak of the Home Minister, even the Inspector-General of Police did not visit the spot. One thought this was a development fit only to be handled by the Prime Minister, for both political and governmental reasons. The government, at its cabinet level, seemingly preferred not to be seized of the problem that has jolted the whole nation. To show this all in a ghoulish light not even one leader of the ruling party, of whatever stature, has deigned to go there and commiserate. Incredible!

The nation is now left with no choice but to pray that the government does not try to turn this piece of bad and unfortunate performance into some imagined conspiracy hatched by the opposition.

Law sets down capital punishment for this crime. If the three — or two or one — are found guilty — and the government by now knows the truth — what can save them from that? If government stands between them and their due as criminals, governance will be impaired for decades and BNP stigmatised for long after that.

NGO Forum's Tasks

The holding of the NGO Forum meeting and the world women's conference simultaneously in Beijing is a clear recognition of the voluntary organisations' role in development and women's place in it. While the conference itself is likely to have representations from the governments of the world, the NGOs will represent a more down-to-earth and practical side of the issues concerned. A multi-cultural and multi-dimensional world will gather in one place to identify the common social ills that affect women in particular and development in general. Both the meets will have similar agenda, no doubt. But then, there will be differences as well in terms of perception. The range and scope of deliberations are, therefore, likely to vary from the conference to the meet.

The NGOs with their involvement at the grassroots level are in a better position to provide a closer and forthright perception of the common problems and also to come up with less-than-common ones. The fact is that the voluntary organisations are capable of giving a true and unbiased insight into most of the problems facing women, particularly in the developing countries. This is why the NGO meet will be seen as a balancing act in the dealing of issue-based resolutions that will be adopted at the conference. One apprehension that extreme views will be placed unreservedly at the NGO meet has to be allayed if a unanimous stand on different issues is to be taken.

Sure enough, effort has to be expended to get to the truth and reach a consensus on as many points as possible. Cultural differences should not stand in the way of addressing the fundamental issues relating to women in less developed societies. Temptation, deviation and even provocation will be there for extremism such as China-bashing. That will shift the focus from the real issues. Let nothing like this happen. NGOs as partner of government in development have been engaged in empowerment of women. Let their views be incorporated in getting development perspectives and priorities ready.

The Sprouting Divinities

It is a common belief that only population is growing in Bangladesh. That is not true. Almost everything is on the increase here. You name it, and it has run past the mark at which you named it. Insecurity, unnatural death, crime, slums, cars and rickshaws. One can now brood over which would be the champion sprinter among all things that are on the rise and go. A perfectly convincing nomination for the honour has come from a vernacular national daily. The self-appointed divinities, people with divine power that is, has recently had a big spurt in number in the city.

They are quite a familiar lot. Astrologers and palmists, fearsome tantrics, so-called snake-kings or haloed snake-charmers, precious stone specialists and others baffling all attempt at professional description seem to have taken lease of the mind of millions in the city. Each of them is a fraud. There is nothing that they cannot do for a fee. Impossible is a word that does not occur in their dictionary. And incredible is the faith their clients repose in them.

There is another big organised fraud in the city. The big nature or herbal cure houses. While these houses have scientific and medical pretensions of however suspect nature, the first category straightway claims having divine power. And these powerful people generally use fear and blackmail as an instrument for pursuing their parasitic existence.

Open certain newspapers and you will come across the whole range of them. They are doing nothing on the sly or on stealth. The kind of custom they have and the size of their business set one to wonder if Bangladesh is approaching the Third Millennium. Or, if there is a government here. Even mullahs allow them to claim agency of God because orthodoxy in Bangladesh is a very ambivalent thing — swinging between Wahabi and Sufi extremes.

An early recollection as a teenager is of being beaten up by an elder for putting Ms Fatima Jinnah's election flag atop his house in Abyssynia Lines in the Presidential Elections in 1964. "Did he want his father to lose his government job?" Another was the Rs 14,000 his father collected after years of hard work to pay for the ownership of the house in Azizabad now known far and wide as "Nine Zero". My father was a Railway Station Master in 1947, a man of some means in those days he gave that up to migrate to Pakistan, working as a clerk for many years in a distantly located factory," he says proudly, adding that in many ways his mother did more. Not only the back-breaking normal house-keeping chores but also sewing clothes single-mindedly to ensure that the children got education. From such humble non-political roots is today's Altaf Hussain born, says Altaf Hussain, a political symbol for millions of his ethnic brethren. Loved by many, indeed also despised by many, it is unfair to pass judgment on him without a face-to-face meeting to assess the man and his politics.

Considerably more mellow than he is made out to be, the firebrand and orator in him emerges from time to time whenever a subject and theme he favours or frowns upon surfaces. Gen Babar is one such current favourite object (of hatred), "how can a man without any issue himself, have any feelings about ruthlessly persecuting the children of others? The Mohajir youth are being brutalized, their childhood has been taken away by this self-styled conqueror of Karachi," he asks. Maybe Gen Babar is acting in such fashion, one suggests, as a lightning rod meant to draw the widespread criticism of Ms Benazir after her "cowards and rats" Kasur speech away from her and on himself? This line of reasoning is obviously new to Altaf Hussain, he gives this a little thought before disagreeing since it "tends to exonerate, Gen Babar". He does not condone terrorism, on the contrary he condemns it. "Agencies and hired killers do many of the dirty deeds for which MQM gets the blame," he protests but questions what is the

SINCE 1972, there has been an unhealthy trend towards nationalisation of educational institutions in Bangladesh. One can understand (though not at all agree with) the imperative for this phenomenon in the early years of Bangladesh when socialism was the prevailing ideology here and elsewhere, and became synonymous with nationalisation. But one is really at a loss to find this trend still persisting in Bangladesh, long after the world at large has discarded it.

Why is nationalisation of educational institutions undesirable in the concrete conditions of Bangladesh? Firstly, as soon as you turn a teacher in a private educational institution into a permanent government servant, you have probably destroyed his/her urge to provide the service he/she is supposed to. The government job with all its assurances becomes something like a fixed deposit, so he/she is now on the lookout for private tuition, or other part-time work, all at the cost of his/her job proper. Since, with nationalisation, the job also becomes transferable, he/she now becomes active in trying to leave the mofussil town for a big city, preferably Dhaka, again to the detriment of those who were so long receiving his/her services.

Secondly, as experience shows, nationalisation ultimately means recruiting private teachers with the worst academic qualifications as government teachers because they are not usually subject to any merit screening at the time of nationalisation. Consequently, the minimum quality of government teachers is thoroughly compromised and government teachers directly recruited through the merit criteria feel totally demoralised. Thirdly, the edu-

Admission test

Sir, It is gratifying to note that Govt has announced abolition of admission tests for admission into colleges for the current session. I congratulate the Education Ministry for the wisdom and dynamism displayed by them. In this connection I strongly endorse the views expressed in your popular daily under the title "A journey to sanity."

The general feeling is that Govt should go one step further and should abolish admission tests for University admission too. A press report says that decision in this regard will be taken by the Government after publication of HSC results. I feel this is not fair. An announcement in this regard is called for right now. Otherwise students will get themselves admitted in

A Chat with Altaf Hussain

Abyssynia Lines to Mill Hills

Altaf Hussain was eloquent about launching a "revolution" against the feudal class that has prospered while the rest of Pakistan has mostly suffered.

Mohajir youth supposed to do uprooted from hearth and home, hungry and hunted, without leadership and out of control?

He is vehemently critical about Gen Asif Nawaz, the late COAS having a personal grudge against Mohajirs "he was supposed to go after criminals, why did he target the MQM only? Did not all the other political parties have militants who were taking the law into their own hands? Did he not have the list prepared by his own trusted intelligence agencies about dacoits, kidnappers and those who harboured and protected them?" He asks how can a person who had not fought in either of the two wars (in 1965 or 1971) become COAS? "Are there not others in the army having war experience who could have been better as COAS? Probably removed through intrigues!" he asks and answers his own question. "Asif Nawaz was anxious to prove he was a warrior by conquering Karachi, very much like Gen Babar!" (He gestures dismissively when told that the Federal Interior Minister happens to be a much decorated soldier). Altaf Hussain denies attacking the whole army, saying he really means to target a handful, a "feudal clique" within the military hierarchy, "the rest of the army is poor or middle class like me, why should I be against them? I am only against a few black sheep," he says vehemently, "because they are enjoying life while the lot of the common soldier is not much different to what it was in 1947. They did the same thing in East Pakistan in 1971, they told the soldiers the Bengalis had become Hindus, today instead of Bengalis they are calling Mohajirs traitors and 'Indian agents'. Why does not the rest of the army expose these agents of the feudal class for what they really are?" Altaf Hussain asks.

Most politicians have

been bought. Like many journalists have. Gen Hamid Gul, then DG ISI, came to him in 1988 with a bagful of money and asked him to accept it. When Altaf Hussain refused Brig Intiaz said that it would "complicate" things because almost all the other politicians had taken sizable sums. When Hamid Gul recently visited Altaf Hussain with his 5-point peace formula, the MQM leader reminded him about this episode and asked him to confirm publicly that he had not taken any money from ISI while the others had. He says that the former DG ISI is a living witness to the fact that if he did not take any "incentive" when his movement was turning into a

PM's husband, what about the hundreds of appointments being made in financial institutions only with his consent, etc etc? What about Fauzi Kazmi's famous "Duty Free Shop" and the Lakhani Containers caught by Customs that were passed as Defence material? he asks "Check Zardari's (and his father's) income and wealth-tax in 1988 and then in 1995".

Altaf Hussain was eloquent about launching a "revolution" against the feudal class that has prospered while the rest of Pakistan has mostly suffered. He was vehement about not accepting the status quo that allows a particular vested interest to rule over the masses alternately

crowd rose up to applaud but not many sitting behind me on the leadership dais did so," he says.

Altaf Hussain is painted by the official media as a "traitor and murderer" who has established a network of terror to rule over the Mohajir community which GOP says "secretly hate him". While certainly there is a grey area with respect to militancy, Altaf Hussain's "unpopularity" must be a well guarded secret in Pakistan because those who live in Karachi know at first hand that harbinger of their rights. On the contrary he comes across as genuinely concerned as other leading national figures on the state of nepotism and corruption in Pakistan as well as the other socio-economic ills that troubles the system. He genuinely seemed to feel that his voice was also raised for all those in Pakistan suffering at the hands of the feudal class. He seemed quite surprised and taken aback in dismay when told this was not the common perception and the people up-country blamed him also for Karachi's problems. As for labelling of anyone as "traitor" that is the favourite pastime of anyone in power in referring to their immediate enemies, the present PM has been this route whenever she is out of power (and even many times when she is in power). Altaf Hussain directly accuses Ms Benazir of selling out to the Indians on Kashmir by providing lists of Sikh militants to Rajiv Gandhi's government and now shedding crocodile tears for the Kashmiris.

Whenever PPP has needed MQM support in the political process at critical times, they haven't hesitated in becoming the allies of the MQM, the talk about "traitors" and "murderers" notwithstanding convenience being the mother of necessity. It is difficult to see a self-made man so passionate about changing the system for the whole of

the country simultaneously conspire about separatism and secession. In the chat with him (albeit for a few hours) one does not get any such impression but in all fairness this remains another grey area of contention. Obviously Altaf Hussain sees himself as a revolutionary, but he does so within the parameters of Pakistan. He takes great pains and goes to much length to re-assert that he is a Pakistani and will remain a Pakistani. In the present environment where people are leaving Karachi for up-country out of fear, he has to be more emphatic. While many of us may have reservations on many counts, it is time we view Altaf Hussain for what he is, the undisputed leader of from the cold or do we plan to leave them out there in limbo? The broad mass of Mohajirs voted with their feet, blood and years of privation to come to the land of their dreams, they will continue this struggle as long as they are denied social and economic emancipation.

There have certainly been many excesses by MQM's militants that have turned Karachi into a nightmare, but the basic divide occurred when the MQM hierarchy sought to inculcate moderation when they first entered government while the militants wanted quick rewards. Instead of forcing the MQM against a wall we should recognize their potential and give them their due place (and rights) under the Pakistani sun. Altaf Hussain's dynamism can be harnessed for the good of Pakistan rather than being used against the country. Altaf Hussain may not be a saint but then we must all confess to being sinners in the socio-political sense in depriving the Mohajir community of those freedoms that democracy enjoins. From Abyssynia Lines to Mill Hills (in London) is a long way, the distant leader in self-exile must be encouraged to return to his native land and lead his flock back into the national mainstream. Inherently national leaders must have the courage to stand up and be counted in times of crisis, do we also have the courage to stand up and make such compromises as may be necessary for the greater good of this country?

AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

political party that needed money why should he take money from the Indians, or from others? He says that once anybody takes money from any intelligence agency, he (or she) is hooked for life. "Off the record," he smilingly requests, rattling off a few names.

About corruption he says, "The whole concept of corruption has reached new levels under Asif Zardari, the PM's husband. Unlike others before him, Zardari does not believe in simply accepting money for projects as kickbacks." Altaf Hussain says, "his *modus operandi* is to change the rules so that those affected have to pay to bring the rules back to original. How can anyone document anything to provide even a shred of evidence? Has Daewoo paid money for restoration of the original six lanes (of the motorway), have the sugar manufacturers paid money for lifting the ban on exports, are power projects being allotted fairly or on directions emanating from the

while looting the national wealth. He compares the present system to a monarchy where the armed forces is drawn mainly from the poor rural but by various "incentives" on a sliding scale basis, as officers go up the ladder of promotion, their loyalty is subtly bought through plots, perks and appointments. Control of the state apparatus, namely the intelligence agencies and the media, gives the rulers enormous leverage to stamp out dissent in any form. "My revolution is not confined to Mohajirs alone, it is a struggle that is being waged on behalf of the poor and middle class all over the land whether they be Punjabis, Pathans, Baloch or Sindhis to change the system," he says, adding that his desire to convert Mohajir Qaumi Mahaz into Mullahah Qaumi Mahaz had scared the feudal class (who how label him as a separatist), among them even his political allies. "When I gave a speech at Lahore at the Minar-e-Pakistan the whole

Why is Nationalisation of Educational Institutions Counterproductive?

As it is, nepotism, corruption and anarchy in regard to recruitment, transfer, posting and promotion of government teachers at various levels are proverbial and hence unmanageable. If on top of this, further nationalisation of educational institutions takes place, the whole structure of personnel management will simply collapse.

cational institutions (in particular, the colleges) being nationalised are not necessarily the best seats of learning. On the contrary, they often turn out to be hot beds of vulgar student politics and centres of mass cheating during the final examinations. This is because ever since Bangladesh's independence, muscle power and narrow political considerations rather than any objective criteria have dominated the selection process. Fourthly, most colleges selected for nationalisation nowadays do not have any science or commerce sections. In other words, these are the mass producers of educated unemployed youths, and the nationalisation move is thus fuelling this unhealthy process. The nationalisation drive is therefore utterly incongruous in the context of the general alarm expressed in our country regarding the consequence of growing educated unemployment.

Fifthly, nationalisation of educational institutions implies an ever growing pressure on the personnel management capacity of the Education Ministry and its Directorates. As it is, nepotism, corruption and anarchy in regard to recruitment, transfer, posting and promotion of government teachers at various levels are proverbial and hence unmanageable. If on top of this, further na-

the coaching centres on payment of heavy fees. Just after the HSC examinations they will have no time for rest and relaxation. The idea behind admission tests was, no doubt, lofty. But corruption and stringpulling in connection with the admission tests in recent years have made the system counter-productive.

Saleh Ahmed Choudhury Dhaka Cantonment

Vehicles and accidents

Sir, Road accidents have increased alarmingly all over the country and especially on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway accidents are a routine affair.

I would like to point out that about 93.07 per cent driving licences of all vehicles, including those of

Making Government Work

nationalisation of educational institutions takes place, the whole structure of personnel management will simply collapse. Finally, nationalisation leads to stifling of all local initiative in the form of donations to educational institutions by the local elite and local supervision of management through a governing body.

So, what is the way out? At the very outset, it needs to be emphasized that the main initiative for curing this malady has to come from the political masters themselves and not the bureaucracy. This is because, although the bureaucracy in general and the educational bureaucracy in particular, is a beneficiary of the unhealthy nationalisation process, the main pressure for it has always come from the political masters. (This is not to suggest that government servants do not at all exert pressure.) In order to maintain their popularity in their constituencies, they have generally pandered to the cheap sentiments aired by 'magan' students and their motivated teachers. Therefore, the head of the government and the Education Minister have to somehow take on the unpleasant task of co-

nvincing MPs of both ruling as well as opposition parties of the ultimate futility of the nationalisation exercise, and of the alternative ways of earning political popularity. Maybe the Ministry of Education should organize a series of representative round table discussion/workshops to hammer out this issue once and for all. If the mi-

nistry feels a little shaky in taking an initiative in this matter, it should at least encourage citizens' groups or the media to hold such open dialogues with all concerned. Finally, one can even think of mobilising people adversely affected by the nationalisation process.

However, a stop to the nationalisation process does not mean that government should leave private educational institutional to fend for themselves. Far from it, at least up to the secondary and higher secondary level, gov-

ernment subventions should be increased many fold in order to cover (a) full salary and other monetary benefits due to the teachers; (b) a general grant for overall educational improvement; and (c) specific grants for libraries, outdoor sports and games facilities, science laboratories, etc. The educational institutions to be provided with enhanced subventions should be objectively selected, specifically taking into account the results in the previous five years' examinations, the age of the institution, the quality of teachers, the effort for internal resources mobilisation, and involvement in female education. Subvention to an educational institution should be reviewed every five years, and depending on the progress made, the decision for the next five years should be taken. In short, the government should help all private educational institutions who continue to help themselves.

OPINION

Fidelity to Truth

Munira Khan

I have the chance of reading the contents of a speech delivered by Michael Novak on "Awakening from Nihilism in Preparation for the 21st Century — Four Lessons from the 20th."

According to Mr Novak the four lessons are: First, even under any conditions of extreme scepticism fidelity to truth is better than cowardice. Second, it has been proven that even 'decadent democracy' is more forceful than dictatorship. Third, socialism ultimately brings serfdom and it is not a better economic system than capitalism for the poor. Fourth, the vulgar relativism undermining the culture of liberty would affect the survival of free institutions in the twenty-first century.

Personally I am not much concerned about the second and the third lessons as almost the whole world have taken the lessons seriously and went back or trying to go back to democracy and capitalism in their own way. I am mostly touched with the first, the fidelity to truth.

How many of us think and accept that truth is vital to the survival of self-respect or that truth is necessary to remain as a worthy human being and is essential to keep up human dignity? I always try to compare the conditions of our country to the conditions of Russia under which Alexander Solzhenitsyn wrote that one single truth is more powerful than all the weapons of the world. How many of the Russians also believed that? I guess not many. Not many

were courageous enough to speak the truth and to believe only in truth. Otherwise it would not have taken so much time and so many lives would not have been lost in the process of going back to democracy from dictatorship. And no doubt 20th century is the bloodiest of all centuries. Sixty-six million prisoners perished in the Soviet labour camps on top of the millions dead in Europe, Asia, Africa and other countries since 1900. Even now many more lives are being destroyed, blood is being shed to pay the price for liberty. And nobody is there to guarantee that the twenty-first century will not be more violent, more bloody. If we want to be certain about peace, about the security of politics and economy, one Solzhenitsyn in one country would not be enough. We should not accept any more deaths of our innocent brothers and sisters all over the world and wait for the time when good sense of the leaders would prevail.

One comes to this world only for once. We should not want people to sacrifice their lives for the benefit of others whom they won't even know. We should not listen silently powerful people speaking about morality, truth, liberty and then allow innocent people to be killed with the weapons manufactured and exported from their own country. It is too much selfishness to wait for some people, some intellectuals, some leaders to give lectures on our duty towards our fel-

low human-beings and wait for the time for its effect.

Taking lessons from the 20th century we are to inflame the light, that is truth within us, all of us, leaving hypocrisy aside. The people in general will have to cling to the truth honestly, should know how to differentiate between truth and lie. Some people for their own reason would try to mould others' mind. Only courage to accept reality can save the world from going back. People's struggle — cultural, political and economic — based on tolerance and truth will determine the fate of the twenty-first century. Only getting liberty and democracy is not enough, keeping it is more important and difficult too. For that we are to learn how to be civil, how to argue in public, how to be honest with one's own self.

To keep democracy and free society alive, respect of one human for another, tolerance to other's opinion, commitments and love from heart are necessary. Liberty to do and no to do are equally important in a free society. What we should do for our liberty and what we should not do for others' liberty are equally important for keeping liberty and democracy alive and likeable to everybody.

To make twenty-first century most prosperous as envisaged, the first lesson 'fidelity to truth' is essential and we will have to bear in mind that absence of this can only make the world tormented, barbarous and bloody in the twenty first century too.