

by Mahfuz Anam

I would like to suggest a plan for sponsorship by our leading banks, insurance companies and private firms. For example, some of the aforementioned organisations could sponsor the cleanliness and upkeep of the Ramna Park. Some other institutions could take up the Shahid Minar area.

Doing Without IMF Loan

Bangladesh had the rare distinction of not facing any balance of payment deficit in 1994-95. Consequently, she did not have to take IMF loans, usually earmarked for countries in a dire strait to tide over payment difficulties.

This is a double delight — one good thing leading up to another. In fact, we are happy to add that it is a triple bonus. For, the above-mentioned pieces of positive news came not from any local functionary doing a bit of governmental drum-beating but from an IMF official.

It is in connection with the release of the Annual Report of the IMF in Dhaka, on Tuesday, that the 'non-borrower' status of Bangladesh came to light. Curiously, not due to any mention about it in the report as such but by virtue of a clarification provided by its presenter as to why Bangladesh economy has not been referred to under any chapter of the document. He put in an advisory note, too, about the reliability and transparency aspects of our statistics suggesting that we may have effected a modicum of improvement in terms of availability of statistics by past standards but that is not clearly enough: We have to step up the flow of relevant information. Bangladesh can make use of the IMF technical assistance to create a strong database.

We have struck a sort of balance between exports and imports. It is more because of the export earnings going up rather than the size of the import bill decreasing that the trade gap is somewhat bridged up now. Evidently, however, this is not what has contributed substantially to our obviating the need for contracting any fresh IMF loans; because, after all, we had to buy a huge quantity of food abroad on an emergency basis in 1994-95.

The ace in the hole has really been the record foreign exchange reserve coupled with a controlled inflation rate. We should not allow ourselves to be relaxing the grip over these two basic advantages.

Forty Thousand Roaming Foreign Jungles

Forty thousand of our compatriot Bangladeshi brethren are now roaming the inhospitable jungles of Thailand, looking for an opportunity to sneak into Malaysia. If they survive the jungles, they are more likely to land in Malaysian detention centres already bristling with 2200 Bangladeshis, 32 of whom have died recently.

One is bound to shudder at the thought not only of the 40,000 scouring the treacherous Thai fastnesses for a road to life, but also of the 72,000 others rotting in hide-outs and detention centres. Add to this the 161 thousand working legally in that country. This tallies to about 273 thousand Bangladeshi men crowding into Malaysia. And Malaysia is only one nation.

This wholly insupportable situation speaks clearly of two things. One, Bangladesh's economy and society has at present no capacity to sustain its population. Two, Bangladesh's administration is utterly inadequate to cope with illegal immigration. Whoever believes in Bangladesh, believes it as an article of faith that Bangladesh has the resources not only to sustain its population but also to let them have a life of plenty — in everything. And the level of governance that has hit a dangerous low of late can, of course, improve with better leadership and better policies. All our political, economic and social agenda must converge on this point so that none will ever need to roam foreign wildernesses anymore.

To come to think of the money these poor men have been fleeced of by the *adambeparies* — about 500 crore Taka at the rate of Tk 2 lakh apiece. That explains much. Must the *adambeparies* have greased all the way to the Thai jungles with enough money. For the moment it is most important to undo the illegal manpower exporter. By all means.

DU is 75

Dhaka University has turned seventy-five. Four commemorative programmes have been drawn up to celebrate the three quarters of a century march of the institution.

The university has had a very pronounced socio-cultural significance in the life of a once vibrant society emaciated to bare bones by colonial exploitation. And perhaps responding to the demands made on it by a backward and predominantly non-literate populace, it burst out of its academic shell and acted as the spring-board of political action that dictated the course for this nation, again and again.

The Dhaka University Students Union — DUCSU — has for most of its 72-year stint been pivoting the activist aspect of the university. And it has been a fit thing that the first of the four commemorative functions, the one being held today, is slotted as DUCSU Reunion. Our national politics is in a shambles. DUCSU is in worse shape with no elections held to it for over four years and with most of its office-bearers no more students of the university. Outsiders residing in student halls and gunmen making it a field-day whenever they choose, decide the reality of this queen of Bangladesh universities. Not the academic and executive leaders of it.

Still, we must repose all our faith and hope on this institution as well as its students. Bangladesh's independence has largely been its contribution. Let DU live to give our society much that will add meaning to that independence.

LAST Friday, the scouts spearheaded a citizens' rally and procession 'Save Dhaka, Clean Dhaka'. While starting the rally Chief National Commissioner of Scouts, Manzurul Karim, announced that from the following Friday — that is tomorrow — scouts acting as catalysts, will organise local youth and start a city-cleaning programme. This programme will continue on Friday the 29 and, then on every alternate Fridays throughout October and November. The idea is to sow the seeds of a civic movement to keep our city clean.

The Youth Ministry, the Dhaka City Corporation and Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) and this newspaper have joined in the process. The impressive rally and the procession of last Friday is expected to be followed by physical cleaning of city areas tomorrow. This is to be organised in several wards of the city. Scouts have instructed their local level units who in turn are getting in touch with the local youth and social bodies to come together and start a civic action programme of cleaning the very areas where we live in. Already several community bodies of the ministry of youth affairs have been working at the grassroots level, some with very successful results. These youth bodies are also joining hands with the scouts and are expected to participate in tomorrow's event.

Whatever the scouts and youth bodies would do tomorrow, the key figure, in all

these, is the city Mayor. It will be he who will have to activate all his ward commissioners to see that the efforts of these young people bear fruit. The Mayor will have to ensure that all the garbage trucks operate in the areas where the scouts will be cleaning the city and collect the accumulated garbage. This coordination is of crucial importance. If the volunteers clean up an area, and the DCC trucks fail to remove the garbage, then these young boys and girls would feel demoralized. It is, therefore, extremely impor-

tant that DCC activates its network of garbage trucks and coordinate their pick-up time with the scouts. It would be even better if we could publish a timetable of when trucks will go to a specific area so that the clean up drive can be completed in an orderly manner. This may be expecting too much. But why not aim for it.

Whatever the scouts and other volunteer groups do, in the final analysis, the task is that of the DCC. Cleaning up the city is something that the city corporation will have to do. What this move of the

scouts and the youth groups will do is hopefully revive the self-help spirit of the Dhakaites. Mayor Hanif should take full advantage of this possibility. It is his golden opportunity to work very closely with the scouts and other youth bodies and give leadership to a citizens' movement which Dhaka has not seen for a long time.

This step is essential for the work of Mayor Hanif not only in the short term but more so for his long term goals. For example, if this experiment of city-cleaning is successful, then the scouts

and the youth groups will feel motivated and encouraged to take up other community issues like developing local parks, play grounds, libraries etc. All these will help to advance DCC objectives.

In this regard I would like to suggest a plan for sponsorship by our leading banks, insurance companies and private firms. For example, some of the aforementioned organisations could sponsor the cleanliness and upkeep of the Ramna Park. Some other institutions could take up the Shahid Minar area. Baitul Mukarram and Stadium shop

owners association could be motivated to cooperate with the local youth bodies to keep that area clean. This should also be a matter of our pride.

Some people may say that why should any business house or financial institution sponsor any of these activities. We pay good money to the municipality as urban and other taxes and the DCC should do all these work. Here Mayor Hanif should take the citizens into confidence and tell us how much resources he has, and how much more he needs to keep the city clean. Then, he should approach the big institutions, as mentioned above, and try to persuade them to share some of his financial burden to keep Dhaka beautiful.

As we have noticed in the recent past, living conditions in the city have deteriorated dramatically. DCC or other public and government bodies alone cannot meet the present challenge without the involvement of the whole community.

The initiative of the scouts and other youth groups is a grand opportunity for us all, especially the Mayor, to get the community involved.

Whatever else happens, tomorrow we are likely to see the beginning of a great and laudable voluntary effort. We urge our colleagues in the media to give the efforts of our young people a generous coverage, and thereby create a greater enthusiasm and participation for this civic effort.



Thinking the Unthinkable

Nobody asks for martial law (or any form of it) but what is required is definite nudge (or shove) towards a national government with a short agenda, to reform the system on a logical basis in conformity with the essence of democracy as it should be practiced, not as it is in fashion today.

and party, have emerged much stronger while Ms Benazir, a brave front notwithstanding, has been severely wounded politically, using up many of her renowned nine lives — and her near and dear ones that much poorer for having doled out millions to the greedy and undeserving in a no-win game of horse trading.

Pakistan today is in a deep crisis because of the farce that is practiced in this country in the name of democracy, having no relation to constitutional logic or morality. The wonder is that educated men prefer to ignore this reality. In Sindh there is an urban-rural divide that is gradually fostering an economic crisis. While one or two-day strikes hurt petty businesses, the frequency of strikes has started to paralyse commercial activity on a wider scale, particularly those dependent on daily cash flow, such as various services, vending, etc.

Children stayed away from schools, shops remained closed, office attendance was thin, Karachi Stock Exchange was closed, port activity was minimal, and most important, since the cash counters of the banks and the Central Clearing House of State Bank of Pakistan did not function, money movement which is the oil of the economic engine was shut off. The result is that the engine that revs up the economy in the form of livelihood of the middle class and the poor, is grinding to a halt, no matter that certain areas of Karachi had transports plying on a reduced basis.

The gradual wearing down of Karachi's commercial life is having a domino-like effect on the rest of the country, we are not many miles from economic midnight. Sharing of the ever-decreasing eco-

nomic pie by competing ethnic groups, makes Karachi's problem very political. While Gen Babar has had success in his single-minded campaign against the terrorists, the Administration is losing the battle for the hearts and minds of the people, only possible through a dual-track socio-economic package meant to alleviate the miseries of the common Karachi citizen. Without such an initiative, the schism is going to get deeper, instead of trying to re-induct the alienated Mohajir community back into the mainstream of Pakistani life, we are making

We have annoyed, on one count or the other, our core circle of friends in Iran, China, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, we are not coherent in either Afghanistan or South Asia. Ms Bhutto's strong suit is US support, this convinced the likes of late Gen Asif Nawaz and (after his death) the three uniformed Musketeers who orchestrated her return to power, each one secretly hoping for the coveted COAS post as a reward. After Ms Bhutto ascended the PM's throne, she was supposed to say 'Open Sesame' and in the twinkling of an eye the F-16s

ensuring that the hierarchy of the Pakistan Armed Forces will keep believing in the mirage that Ms Bhutto will deliver one day. This scam will likely be played out till the Army hierarchy is neutralised (like the exercise carried out in the Air Force and the Navy) by bringing in a 'suitable person' as COAS. The premise is that the preferred gentleman can deliver by keeping the Army quiet so that the man who matters (Ardeshr Cowasjee's 'Decision Maker') is free to keep on making billions.

Rumours they may be but contrast this man's fabulous acquisition of wealth with the plight of millions of our pensioners. Having risked life and limb for the country they are literally forced to eat humble pie. Our shaheeds are better off than the living dead who make up our pensioners, receiving a pittance that is not enough to maintain a dignified and honourable living to afford one square meal a day, what to talk about children's school and college fees, electric, gas, telephone and petrol bills as well as the odd medical expense, maybe the marriage of a sibling, etc.

The principle of indexation that is inherent in Islam is lost if pensions are not adjusted to inflation in present day values. Given that a Lieutenant Colonel (for example) retiring in 1995 does not have enough, what does one expect of the person who retired 35 years ago in the same rank and served his country as well but to roll over and play dead? It is not for the pensioners alone (both civil and military) to only speak out against this great injustice but for those serving to remember that they will also retire one day and visualize their own plight 35 years hence, will they be able to live on the same pittance given the drastic reduction of purchasing power in the value of the rupee due to rabid inflation? Surprisingly, nobody in uniform has the temerity to question this outrage, where is this famous courage and devotion to country and morality that most of us speak about?

Nobody asks for martial law (or any form of it) but what is required is definite nudge (or shove) towards a national government with a short agenda, to reform the system on a logical basis in conformity with the essence of democracy as it should be practiced, not as it is in fashion today. A national government should be focused on continuity and reform, leaving the luxury of accountability to a successor elected government. The national government should have an 'Executive section' who should run day-to-day government in the interim period and the 'reform section' who should (independently of the Executive) decide on the changes in our democratic system.

The first administrative change would be to make 'Self-governing Administrative Units' (SAUs) within the Provinces, those SAUs being autonomous on the pattern of (and by grouping a number of) Local Bodies with the added responsibility of tax-collection and spending thereof, second to make the judiciary independent of the administration and thirdly to ensure that the local government remains in the hands of those so elected. Three vitally necessary electoral reforms called 'the unity factor' must also be carried out, i.e. (1) if a candidate fails to get 50 per cent in the first round then a runoff election between the first two candidates to ensure a majority vote, (2) proportional representation (PR) so that there are at least 50 per cent more seats in each assembly on the basis of party slates in order of priority with 80 per cent of such seats going to women and 20 per cent to minorities, similarly Senate seats either on direct election or else on PR basis (3) no indirect elections for any major post such as President, etc because that is an open invitation for corruption.

Obviously the present feudal class that rules Pakistan in turn is going to resist change because (as we have seen in Punjab) the prevalent system allows manipulation. Because of the farce being perpetrated that we are a democracy, we are disintegrating as a nation. Obviously someone has to stem this rot, unfortunately the only institution capable has become gunshy because of previous bad experiences and fears that the world environment is against authoritarian rule. This is a fallacy because even among Muslim countries many absolute monarchies and dictatorial regimes exist without any cynosure as we fear would be applied to Pakistan. 'The only thing we must fear is fear itself', to quote US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt but in an environment where every red-tabled rank carries with it a retirement price tag of Rs 3.5 to Rs 5 million with every step of promotion, discretion becomes the better part of valour so that we do not even question daylight robbery or protest the system's inadequacies that allows this in the name of the constitution. In the absence of the exercise of conscience one can only conclude that this country's future has been sold out for plots and promotions.

Change is necessary if we are to save this country, change effected by men and women of honesty, vision and courage. Unfortunately we have been blessed with pathological liars who are so glib about their falsehood that they are beginning to believe their own lies. We must stand and be counted now in the present struggle or one day in the near future swept aside by a revolutionary flood whose ravages will be felt by guilty and innocent alike. It is time now for those who matter to think the unthinkable or to go down in history labelled with the good old American description as 'wimps'.

AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

them more estranged from our national ethnic melting pot. Everybody agrees something has to be done to stop this polarisation, why doesn't somebody do it then before the country goes to pieces?

While the awaited revolt in the NWFP against Aftab Sherpao has not taken place, it is lurking dangerously near the surface. In Balochistan, the govt of Zulfiqar Ali Magsi is only surviving by pragmatic exercise of the art of compromise but this delicate blanching act can be undone by the re-settling of the rebel Bugti clan of Kalpars in Sui, what it will do to the supply of gas if a conflagration between the warring clans breaks out is left to one's imagination! As it is the Taliban movement in Afghanistan may well spill over into the areas bordering Pakistan in both NWFP and Balochistan, which disastrous consequences for our more liberal society.

With respect to foreign policy we are in a shambles.

parked in the Mojave Desert would be roaring off Sargodha's runways.

Today that elusive flying carrot is still being dangled in front of us but our aspirations have been drastically reduced over the months from a high expectation of getting the F-16s already paid for to getting our money back maybe (duly adjusted for storage charges) to the low threshold of simply hoping for the return of the military stuff (now obsolete) that we sent to the States for repairs.

The US President cannot make a certification about our nuclear expertise without being indicted for making a false statement, since one doesn't expect him to commit political 'hari-kari' on behalf of Pakistan that will certainly not be forthcoming.

In the meantime, we are kept on line by the well-known ploy of filibusters like the amending of the Pressler Amendment, the Hank Brown Amendment, etc, etc

To the Editor...

Scar on Society

Sir, What a humiliating sight of stripping a respectable citizen of his clothes we have seen in the newspaper. Isn't it a height of audacity? Bravo to the leaders who have trained such youths with such values and bravo to the youths who are wasting their precious time and their parents' hard-earned money, energy etc. to help our leaders to build Bangladesh as one of the strongest democratic countries of the world. What more can we expect from our leaders and their trainees? Is there no other civilised way of protesting? Will these sort of activities solve a country's problem? There are so many questions to be asked to the country's so-called political leaders. Surely, they will not be able to answer as they are busy trying to achieve their own personal goals.

As a mother of two sons, I am horrified to see such pictures in the newspapers

thinking about their future. What will happen to them or to the nation by the time they grow up? I am trying heart and soul to make them worthy citizens. But in return what will I get — this type of nation-builders? Most of the political leaders are far more relaxed than any other parents of our country. Either they have sent their wards to study abroad, to learn proper values of life or they have married them off abroad. But do they ever think of the parents whose children are being used as tools by them? Those parents are trying their best to groom his/her child in an appropriate manner.

What will be the ultimate result? They will be taught by our leaders to strip respectable persons of their clothes in public in the name of nation-building activity! The ill-fated youngsters of the ill-fated parents do not seem to understand that our national leaders are taking

advantage of their youth for their personal benefits only. The same old bunch of leaders each time a government changed and do not hesitate to find faults with each and every government who come to power. They give up their moral dignity. The languages they use in public meetings are not even worth listening to — always degrading oneself or the other.

Youth is supposed to be the best time of life. If youth is exploited at the cost of one's life and wasted in lieu of a certain amount of money, only God knows where we shall end up.

Shamim Choudhury Banani

Wari needs card phone

Sir, Thanks to the coordinated efforts of Dhaka City Corporation, ward commissioner and Wari Samaj Seba Samity that the environment of Wari residential area, once

renowned for its neat and cleanliness and peaceful atmosphere, has started improving, step by step, slowly but steadily.

After years of neglect and apathy most of the streets of Wari area have recently been repaired and recarpeted, drains are being regularly cleaned, garbage disposed off and the street lights are put on and put off timely.

However, due to erratic power supply in the area the sufferings of the people remain unchanged as it is, where it is like twenty years ago.

Unfortunately, there is not a single card phone booth in the vast residential area of Wari. We would be grateful if the T&T Department kindly install two such booths — one at Wari Post Office and another at Wari Community Centre — for the convenience of the people.

O H Kabir Dhaka