Founder-Editor : Late S. M. Ali

A New Frontier

Dhaka, Sunday, December 31, 1995

Humanists and rationalists from 22 countries formally met in the Indian capital New Delhi to announce the formation of an international alliance against fundamentalism on Friday. No doubt the liberal and rational thinkers the world over feel extremely concerned over the rising fundamentalism of various forms ethnic, racial and above all, religious. Highly organised fundamentalist forces are all set to turn the clock back. They have already caused grievous harms to liberal, humanist and rational thinking in society. So it was overdue to open up a new frontier to meet the challenge coming from the fundamentalists of every make-up and colour.

Ethnic, religious and racial impatience and hatred of varying degrees have swept different parts of Europe, Africa and Asia in the past few years. Conditions in other continents may not be equally volatile but far from ideal. What is even more worrying is the fact that in many cases fundamentalism is sponsored and directly patronised by powerful backers - often a few states. They pump in huge amount of money and material into the cause of the radically harmful ideas.

In some countries inept and corrupt leadership may provide fuel to the fodder and end up turning their countries into a happy hunting ground for the fundamentalists. Our problem in this part of the world is mainly religious fundamentalism. A glaring case in point is Pakistan where Ziaul Haq played with fundamentalist forces that have now grown into Frankenstein proportion. A democratic government such as Benazir Bhutto's had to come out to openly declare a crusade against the fundamentalists who plotted a military coup.

Pampering the fundamentalists to derive immediate political gains returns in inconceivable backlashes. Benazir's dire strait should serve us a lesson of immense import. The liberals, humanists and rationalists who have formed the alliance must need all their organisational powers and persuasion to fight the rising fundamentalism. Surely we need to join forces to boost their strength and overcome the challenge of fundamentalism.

Developing Tourism

A country projected in international media as the land of floods, cyclone and diseases can hardly attract foreign tourists. True, the international media are all-powerful and little do they care for the consequences of this negative image created, courtesy of them, over a long period. But at the same time we at our end have hardly done anything to counter their efforts. We simply do not know how to present our case in a positive light. Our rich heritage and heroic achievements go unappreciated not because foreigners are averse to them but because we ourselves have downgraded our history.

There is again a debate over the role of the public and private sectors in developing tourism. Evidently, the private sector has not done much to deserve any credit. But at the same time let us not forget that the country's economy has become market-driven only recently and the private sector has had little chance of getting into the stride. The successive governments, however, did not realise the potential of tourism which got its recognition as an industry as late as 1991. How else do you explain the lack of any facility of accommodation or allied services near the ruins of the capital of Pundrahardhan in the country's north?

The same goes with most other places. From the point of conservation or preservation of our forest resources and places of historical importance the public sector's role has been unenviable. These are areas where interference by the private sector can wreck havoc with the spots of tourist attraction. The private sector must play a significant role in allied areas of travel and tours, accommodation, catering etc.

At a time when tourism has emerged as the single largest employer in the world, we have no plan to develop either the tourist spots or the roads and highways for smooth communication. Let us give a thought to the development of all these facilities to encourage domestic tourism first. Then foreigners can be mindful of our places of attraction.

Death of a Journalist

With the death of Monajatuddin, rural journalism is not likely to be the same again. A committed man Monajatuddin almost singlehandedly fought against the urban-biased news in our journalism. For the first time here was a man who travelled widely across the country's rural areas and could easily identify himself with the masses. Objective and down-to-the-earth his reporting instantly captured the readers' attention. His observation and unpretentious love for the neglected section of society soon distinguished him as a journalist close to people.

Monajatuddin spent his best years with the Sangbad. His stories published in that daily had the added quality of follow-ups even after years. This was a pioneering task. Mostly he had worked in the North Bengal. And the tragic death came while he was on his assignment to cover the problems facing the ferry service at Teestamukh ghat. An on-duty death is perhaps the most fitting for a man of Monajat's calibre and vocation. Yet it is tragic because at 52 he was highly active and could give more to journalism.

Monajat is dead now. But he has been a ground-breaker in an area still suffering neglect of the editors. The capital or a few other urban centres certainly do not make up the whole country. Its heart lies in the wider parts of illages. We will do honour Monajat if we can get in touch with the country's heart through journalism.

Nurul Islam

Dear Mr. Home Minister. There is a well-known Bengali proverb which says that those who do not speak have no enemy. One wonders if you have been saying so little in public because you believe in the wise hint of the proverb or because you believe that a "democratically elected government" does not have to account for its actions. Given the long record of your reticence. I do not hope for a reply though I hope you will hear my voice. I have no doubt that I am voicing the feelings of millions of our compatriots who are living their days and nights. even inside their homes, in fear. I wonder if you know that fear of the armed terrorists and assorted thugs and extortionists is the dominant reality of life today.

A campaign was launched. on the advice of the Election Commission, to recover illegal arms. I have followed the progress of this commendable effort every closely. On the average about 80 arms and some ammunition were recovered daily and several hundred persons were arrested. A week's work, according to the Press, yielded only 494 arms. According to press reports, which quoted police sources, there are at least 2 lakh illegal arms in the country. Should we be proud of the achievement of our police force? One is not surprised that there is already a programme for deploying the armed forces to recover arms. That, Mr. Minister, is a clear vote of noconfidence on you. Yet, following the example of your redoubtable leader, you will probably continue to find

wisdom in silence. The blaze of publicity prior to the launching of the campaign must have been calculated to warn the terrorists that they should go into hiding while the going was good. Had it not been so. there is no rational explana-

NDIA'S Electoral Commi-

Government's proposal

to hold elections in the

northern disputed state of

Jammu and Kashmir in

The decision will delight

Kashmiri separatists who had

threatened to kill candidates

taking part in state elections.

back for Prime Minister P.V.

Narasimha Rao, and may

damage his political fortunes

in general elections due next

Kashmir had been aimed at

ending six years of armed in-

surgency in which more than

14,000 people have been

killed. It would have also

ended more than five years of

federal rule imposed after

the local government was

dismissed following the out-

break of fighting by Kashmiri

toral Commission had little

after all major Kashmiri polit-

part. T N Seshan, chief elec-

sent conditions were "not

consistent with holding a

: "The commission will wait

for the creation of appropri-

struck when the National

Conference group, which has

monopolised state govern-

ments in Kashmir since the

1950s and is a close ally of

India's ruling Congress Party,

president and former state

Chief Minister Faroog Abdul-

lah said his party had

National Conference

decided not to participate.

A fatal blow to the poll was

ate conditions.

The three-member Elec-

A state poll in Jammu and

But it comes as a big set-

December.

militants.

ssion has rejected the

tion for giving the arms holders the opportunity to take cover well before the operation began. Some of them have reportedly moved across the border One is, therefore. surprised that even a few hundred arms were recovered. Most people believe that the police knows very well who hold the arms. Bangladesh is a small and compact country and these thugs do not use their weapons under cover of darkness. Most of the gun fights take place in broad day light. Even the ordinary people can make shrewd guess about the identity of

the arms holders. Yet the police netted only a few hundred arms in a week-long campaign. What about the arms openly brandished by political activists? Would you claim, Mr. Minis-

banner of the ruling party and collect regularly, huge amount of toils from the bus owners. No one will believe that the authorities do not know about this massive criminal operation but you. Mr. Minister, have done

nothing to stop it. Detecting and apprehending the criminals could not possibly present a problem because the operation is being carried out in a number of well-known terminals. Though you are now in your lame duck stage, we would all want to know why you failed to bring the transport sector out of the grip of these criminal gangs. Perhaps we are asking too much of you. You chose to remain mute even when a bus load of innocent people were deliberately burned by a criminal gang.

The latest law and order

by Shah AMS Kibria

An Open Letter to the Hon'ble Home Minister

guestioned the authenticity of the document. In a very matter of fact way he replied that it was a "No 2 category" licence which he got on payment of three hundred taka He further advised me that everybody that he knew in the profession had similar lake beences and that such fraud was routinely committed, with the knowledge of the BRTA and the concerned

police authorities Again, here is a vast network of corruption operating right under government's nose. Who would believe that the police and BRTA authorities who launched the campaign to check the licence of the auto-rickshaw drivers were unaware of the licensing racket? If you really meant business, you would have ordered the dismantling of the corruption network

guished University colleagues and students, there is no word on the progress of the police investigation.

Mr. Home Minister, I did not want to raise the questions of political victimisation but this question cannot be shoved under the rug; it is there to haunt the nation because most people believe that political protection and patronage is at the root of the whole escalating crime situa-

Can you deny, Mr. Home Minister, that there are armed cadres belonging to the youth or student wings of your party which have escaped the long arm of the law because of government connivance? Can you deny that protection given by ministers, MPs and other ruling party bigwigs, directly or indirectly, has made it possi-

tors. Do you know, Mr. Home Minister, that Article 37 of the Constitution guarantees every citizen "the right to assemble and to participate in public meetings and processions peacefully and without arms..." Perhaps you attach more importance to that part of Article 37 which speaks about "reasonable restrictions imposed by law."

Was it reasonable to close down almost a third of the city because the opposition was planning a peaceful demonstration? Such demonstrations, you should know, is a normal part of the democratic process in other democratic countries. But honestly Mr. Home Minister. do tell us if it was "reasonable" to send the police force up the stairs to the third floor of the building to attack the Awami League central office? Have you offered any explanation or apology for this gross violation of the democratic and constitutionally guaranteed right of the Awami League to hold a press conference in the security of its office?

As I said earlier, even if you do not give an answer to this open letter, you should at least read it to know the concerns and anxieties of the common people. Your five years as the Minister in charge of the nation's security will go down as the most insecure period, in Bangladesh's history. On the other hand, these have been the golden years for the criminals and mastagns and the chandabaj fraternity.

We publish this piece as an anguished outcry of a citizen who wants an explanation from his elected government. We sincerely hope and expect that the Home Minister will exercise his light of reply (and his obligation to keep citizens informed) and write — Editor

Most people believe that the police knows very well who hold the arms. Bangladesh is a small and compact country and these thugs do not use their weapons under cover of darkness

ter, that you are not aware of their political affiliation and identity? You turned a blind eye when the political activists favoured and patronised by the ruling party indulged in open gun fights in different cities and campuses. Almost every day one reads frightening stories about these gun fights. Another point, why did you have to wait for the Election Commission to tell you to launch a campaign for recovery of arms? Is it not your sworn duty to maintain law and order and uphold the law and protect the citizens? You have failed in this duty Mr. Minister and the nation has a right to demand an explanation from you.

To illustrate your failure, let us take the transport sector. It is common knowledge that the bus terminals have become the den of criminal elements who masquerade under the

problem caused by the striking auto-rickshaw drivers is still fresh in our mind. Hundreds of transport vehicles of all types were damaged or destroyed by unruly strikers. For several days car and bus owners were afraid to venture out with their vehicles because out there on the road there was no law. In a freefor-all situation any body could damage vehicles with impunity. Much to the disappointment of the common people, the police failed to deal with the unruly elements firmly. Why? Is it because they knew from the very beginning that the autorickshaw drivers had a valid grievance?

The drivers, I am told, have been complaining of harassment by the police on the plea of checking their driving licenses. Recently, while looking at the licence of a prospective motor car driver.

which is masterminding the distribution of these fake li-

Do you have any idea how insecure we all felt during the last few days even to venture out of the home with our cars? Perhaps you have forgotten by now how it is like when you go out on the street without any police escort!

The other day a brilliant young teacher of the Dhaka University was brutally killed by some unknown assailants in a main thoroughfare of the city. The young man, the only son of a university professor was not involved with any political organisation, and was extremely popular with students and teachers alike. University teachers have expressed the feeling that police do not seem to have mounted a serious campaign to find the culprits of this gruesome crime. Despite the public outery and the demonstrations mounted by his an-

ble for criminal gangs to establish their grip on vulnegable key points of the economy? Accountability is the

essence of a democratic system of government. In Bangladesh, the law and order situation has taken a nose dive under your stewardship and yet you have rarely, if ever, taken the people into confidence and spoken to them. Even when the conscience of the nation was seared by the rape and murder of a helpless poor girl from Dinajpur, you chose to remain silent. Was it not the duty of the government to reassure the members of the public that the government was able and willing to maintain law and order in the country? Instead, the people witnessed with dismay the deployment of thousands of heavily armed policemen to protect the Prime Minister against peaceful demonstra-

Kashmir for at least a year.

time to turn its attention to

extended on a six-monthly

basis after its current spell

Federal rule will now be

the troubled state.

expires in January. Rao had hoped to capitalise on a Kashmiri poll, and use the success to boost his chances in the general election, due in mid-1996. Congress Party members believe it would have guaranteed their return to office. But now he will have to face censure for having suggested the failed idea.

- GEMINI NEWS

RAHUL BEDI, a freelance journalist, is the Indian correspondent of the London "Daily Telegraphy" and "Jane's Defence Weekly."

Militants Triumph in Scrapped Poll

India's Prime Minister had hoped to reap the rewards of installing an elected government in conflict-torn Kashmir before next year's parliamentary ballot. But the plan has backfired.



reached its decision because the federal government had failed to concede greater autonomy to India's only Muslim-majority state.

choice but to cancel the polls The electoral commission's decision is a victory for ical parties refused to take Kashmiri militants and their political representatives from toral commissioner, said prethe All Party Hurriyat Conference, who are bitterly opfree and fair election", adding posed to such polling.

> Hurriyat members had issued threats against anyone taking part, saying the only ballot permitted would be a referendum on Kashmiri selfdetermination, which was promised by Delhi in 1948 but never held.

Until now, the federal government had been confident of duplicating electoral strategies it had evolved in other terrorism-torn northern states, where long-running conflicts had been quelled in recent years.

Security and intelligence officials reasoned that since elections - however unrepresentative - over three years ago in Punjab had ended 12 years of terrorism, in which more than 20,000 people were killed, they would work similarly in Kashmir.

"A government elected even with a token voter turnout would have legitimacy," said one Congress Party MP.

Security officials also cited tactical reasons for holding elections in the troubled state in December, when snow chokes the passes between the two sides of Kashmir, preventing infiltrators from entering India from Pakistan and disrupting voting.

The new federal government formed after next year's parafter independence in 1947, liamentary polls would take

Rahul Bedi writes from New Delhi

Pakistan, which claims would not now take place in

Kashmir and which seized a third of its territory soon has consistently denied Indian allegations that it sponsors and arms Kashmiri separatists. But security officials in Kashmir's winter capital,

Jammu, say they have prevented many armed infiltrators from entering over the past four months - reducing violence and creating a climate conductive to holding elections. They say conditions may not be as positive next year. Elections were last held in

the state in 1987. They were won by the National Conference in alliance with Rao's Congress Party, amid allegations of widespread vote-rigging, which fuelled the separatist movement.

Holding elections in Kashmir has been a priority for India, anxious to end the civil war which has caused it international embarrassment and criticism.

The continual extension of federal rule, a growing death toll and the presence of more than 175,000 army and paramilitary troops in Kashmir do little to support Rao's desired image of stability and secular governance, designed to attract foreign investment.

With voting now cancelled, Home Ministry officials said a state election

Besides, why should a

Buchwald's COLUMN Bah Humbug

The big news last week was that Santa Claus and

Ebenezer Scrooge decided to merge and become one major colossus that would be able to service holiday consumers more efficiently and at less cost than ever before. In a press conference at the North Pole, Scrooge and

Claus both said that what they were doing was not merging as much as "restructuring their organization." In order to do so, the new company was going to lay off eight reindeer, 10,000 elves and Bob Cratchit, who would be offered a buyout similar to the one AT & T was offering

more than 77,000 of its employees this Christmas. Scrooge told reporters, "We have to fire everyone because our competitive environment has changed radically. It's much cheaper to deliver toys by UPS than by sled. And

our company cannot enjoy the holiday season if we have to pay pension benefits to a bunch of dwarfs who are always getting old."

Santa Claus told the press conference that the merger was a perfect fit. Scrooge of Scrooge & Marley would be charge of the warehouse and keep the books.

"Once Bob Cratchit is fired and the company no longer has to pay health benefits for Tiny Tim, we expect to make a large profit. We're not the only ones to see that it that way. Wall Street was so taken by the merger that Santa Claus stock rose by 45 points. Ho! Ho!"

A reporter asked how much money was involved in the

merger. Scrooge replied, "Santa Claus gave me \$5 billion in junk bonds and a watch fob which he bought by selling his hair. I gave him a set of combs I bought by selling my watch. Santa will be chief executive officer, and I will be

president." "If you fire the elves, where will all the toys come

"China, Indonesia, Tibet - any place but the north

Pole. "What about work for the elves?"

Scrooge answered, "We hope they can all find a second career, thought that isn't our problem. Bob Cratchit came in to see me the other day and asked what he was supposed to do since he worked for Scrooge & Marley all his life. I told him what the other CEOs are telling their laid-off employees: 'Bah humbug, When Wall Street heard what I told Cratchit, the stock went up another 70 points."

you merged with Scrooge, you gave up your independence. Don't you feel bad about that?"

A reporter addressed his question to Santa Claus: "When

"I don't feel good, but I had no choice. I had to make

the best deal for the stockholders. Wall Street doesn't give a damn about Christmas. All it cares about is making money. If I had turned down the offer, some mutual fund would have taken me to court. I believe Scrooge and I will get along just fine. He has a lot of vision and he sees ghosts where nobody else does. That's a plus when you're pushing gifts. Ho! Ho! Ho!"

By arrangement with Los Angeles Times Syndicate and

Monitoring election

Sir, I am surprised to know that Election Commission has refused to recognise and give permission to the pro-active citizens' initiative 'Fair Election Monitoring Alliance (FEMA) and allow its volunteers to monitor upcoming general elections in the country.

This reflects the present government's intention and motive about which the opposition parties have been propagating. By not allowing independent observers to monitor the electoral process and observe the election-day happenings at the polling centres, it seems the government and the Election Commission have something

to hide from the citizens. In the present context, it's very important that the entire election process is made transparent to enhance confidence of the general people in the election process as well as in its outcome.

Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Masters (private) examination

Sir. The date of registration for students intending to appear at the 1996 Masters Examination as private candidates expired on 30th ultimo. It is believed that large numbers of students could not enroll themselves for some unavoidable reasons.

We feel if the time for registration is extended by the concerned authority, many a students would be benefited. Would the National Uni-

versity authority be kind to the students? ATM Nurun Nabi A Guardian

Khilgaon, Dhaka Private lesson!

Sir. A teacher of a high school in Auckland, New Zealand has been charged with 56 counts of sexual assaults including 16 counts of rape of his students over the past few years. Who knows exactly how many counts of such criminal incidents have

been happening everyday world over? Ponderable examples of

marriages between teacher and his/her student are known to have resulted from either their illicit relationship or personal gains.

Now with a target of a better generation to be made, a thorough evaluation of present instructional materials and probable measures to improve them will help.

A developed teacher-student relationship will definitely be enlightening the educated community with regard to self control as well as mannerism, which will bar even teachers to take advantage of students and will discourage any unscrupulous attempts.

A code of standard behavior pattern may be fruitful to both students and teachers as much as to all others on and off campus to do away with any harassment or assault.

Discipline being the centre of a curriculum has to be emphasized with a view to achieving scholastic intellect.

campus-man to be questioned by disciplinary body in case of alleged or suspected nuisance merits an enquiry against the backdrop of universal progress in academic pursuit. M Rahman

Zila School Road, Mymensingh

A new party

Sir. Now the businessmen

and the industrialists have floated a party to act as a pressure group. They have said that their organisation is neither political nor non-political. At present all the businessmen and industrialists have got an association of their own. They voice their demand through this body. All the businessmen and in dustrialists have their own and different political ideologies. It is not understood what kind of pressure will be exerted through this Andolon

Mahbubul Hague Chaudhury Krackeyan, Dhuker