

PM's Policy Speech

We are heartened by the substance of the speech Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina delivered to the nation on her assumption of office. By no means has it been a customary policy speech. Nor did she allow her emotions a free play which could have happened given the fact that Awami League is back to power after a lapse of two decades.

With a steady sense of commitment, relevance and direction, she has identified the priorities before her new government. She has also set the order in which she wants to address them. From this point of view, her presentation has been more than a reiteration of her election pledges.

Her top-most priority to rid the society of a debilitating sense of insecurity born of armed terrorism, dastardly murders, extortion and free-for-all striking of fear in the minds of people, should find instant favour across the political spectrum.

The women's issues deserved a focus of attention in her speech not only because they constitute 50 per cent of the population but also by virtue of a record turn-out they have shown at the polls. The PM has referred to repression of women and their dire need for security in the street and at the work-places. We would like to see an exhaustive plan of action geared to uplift the status of women.

We see eye to eye with her crystallised goals to strengthen the parliamentary system through an effective exchange of opinions cutting across party lines. The long-pending tasks to separate the judiciary from the executive and make the radio and television autonomous have fallen on the shoulders of the new government and the new PM has pledged to address them immediately. We suggest a committee of experts be set up, so far as freeing radio and television from government control is concerned. We need to go into the various details of the structural changes involved for the conversion. This will help the parliamentarians legislate on the subject appropriately.

Sheikh Hasina has made significant commitments in her speech of Monday. We look forward to her starting to implement, even one or two of them, immediately.

Outrageous Indifference

Once again there have been deaths in garment factories. The cause behind the loss of lives, as in most of the previous incidents, is stampede that followed fires in two factories. The fire as such did not kill but led the panicking garment workers inside to a suicidal run for their lives. This shows that the garment factories had done nothing to improve the working facilities and least of all to provide the workers with any emergency exit. Despite repeated pleas and warnings, the factories continue to use the entrance as the only exit point. The fact that garment factories have been set up in commercial buildings without any special provision for the extra electricity load and exits is responsible for the recurrence of such tragedies.

It is high time now to make it mandatory that a) the factories have at least two emergency exits; b) a process be started to relocate the garment factories in an area where better working facilities can be provided.

We do not ask the factory owners to invest beyond their means in creating facilities but they must not ignore the minimum standards for safety. They can set aside a special fund for improving the conditions progressively. At the same time we suggest that a system for monitoring the electricity wires, machines and equipment be mandatorily developed in all the factories. Even monitoring of the infrastructural development should be desirable on the part of the administration.

As for the deaths in the two Mirpur factories, their owners must be made to pay an adequate compensation. The legal side cannot be ignored. If prosecution is carried out against some insensitive factory owners, others will not dare take the issue of improving facilities in the garment factories lightly.

Concern for Poor

The number of people who can afford to spend less than one dollar a day is increasing worldwide. But the standard of living in the developing world has improved significantly along with that of the developed world.

For the present our concern is that more and more people are living in extreme poverty. The benefit of development in the developing world is yet to reach the people of the lower strata. Evidently, a drastic social polarisation is taking place. The great strides in development over the last decade or so have completely left out more than 1.31 billion of people in the world over.

There is an argument that these unfortunate people will start getting benefits of economic development at some later stages if growth continues. But the World Bank's latest revelation hardly gives any hope. If the polarisation continues for another 10 to 20 years, will there be any chance to reach the benefits to such a large number of people?

Even if we shy away from the equity issues, let us at least face the fairness issue in economic growth, and refocus our attention on the plight of the poor.

Mexico 1994, Pakistan 1996?

Nothing was more devastating to Mexico's economy than the corruption among the ruling family that permeated through the ruling clique, in effect corruption was institutionalised through the bureaucracy and the party.

and technocrats present. Aware that NAFTA's emergence had ensured the commercial world's intense excitement at Mexico's availability as an industrial staging post just south of the US border, these government functionaries made no bones about their utter contempt for the low-life we were representative of the third world. "Miracle-worker" US educated economist President Jorge Carlos Salinas was eulogised in God-like esteem.

Pride cometh before a fall and by the end of 1994 a series of political assassinations and a sharp rise in US interest rates led to a substantial reduction of capital inflows (and subsequent outflows) requiring a sharp reduction in the Mexican current account deficit (8 per cent of GDP). Continuing outflows brought massive pressure on the currency to devalue. With steep decline in official reserves and heavy selling pressures in domestic financial markets, the Mexican "peso" was allowed to float, thus rapidly increasing the dollar linked debt. The domestic interest rates were then raised to stem the outflow of capital but this significantly increased the amount of non-performing loans of the banking system, most of which in any case had been given to favourites of the ruling clique, thus threatening complete collapse of the banking system.

To contain the possible resultant anarchy from eventually spilling over its borders into the American heartland, the US President circumvented US Congress in organising a massive rescue package of almost US\$30 billion in loans and guarantees from the IMF and the US (another US \$10-12 billion was arranged by the Mexican govt. separately), a total of about US\$40 billion. It may be noted that the political assassinations carried out were

of political reformers who had upset hard-line members of their own party for campaigning against corruption among the ruling clique draining the country of foreign exchange and commensurately raising the domestic debt.

Today Raul Salinas, (then) President Salinas' brother, is accused of maintaining at least 700 secret accounts in different banks in many countries. Former President Salinas himself lives in absolute luxury in the US in self-imposed exile since he apprehends detention on various criminal counts. This was "the right stuff" of the Mexican "miracle". Our current

most "immediate" nature, induced by wrong macro policies and inadequate response as well as adverse political developments (2) external shocks such as substantial deterioration in Pakistan terms of trade i.e. falling cotton prices and rising oil prices, increase in international interest rates, reduction in workers remittances, worsening law and order situation, scenarios termed as of "moderate" likelihood in the "short and medium term" induced by external events (3) unsustainable fiscal deficit alongwith rapid build-up of domestic and internal debt, rapid domestic

domestic loans and thus cannot take wings easily. Our economic grave-diggers do not seem to take into account encasement of export bills, worth US \$1.5 billion at any given time. Unlike Mexico, 90 per cent of our debt still remains medium to long-term. God forbid that there is a large cash outflow (US \$ 1-2 billion) or should individual depositors try pulling their funds out like it almost happened in November 1995. Pakistan's economy will not crash as the World Bank pessimists seem to be implying in a worst-case scenario it will SLIDE. Mexico's debt was (and is) much larger. Its structure was far weaker than ours and its economy very vulnerable to the rise and fall of US interest rates. Pakistan's liquidity requirement in a doomsday scenario would be less than US\$ 3 billion (i.e. one-tenth of Mexico's). Some worried but patriotic technocrats not so enamoured of the World Bank and IMF as the likes of Ms Jafary, Alimullah, etc had unofficially (and independently) lined up the required liquidity in November 1995, just in case.

The price of the Pakistani rupee against the US dollar is likely to slide but not plummet, going down to Rs 50 to the US dollar in controlled fashion by end December 1996. In 1991, the Russian rouble was 5.6 against the US dollar, today it is 2000 roubles plus. If the Pakistani rupee slides as expected, an average refrigerator that would normally cost Rs 15,000 would end up costing Rs 40,000 and even more. Taking into account inflation and devaluation of purchasing power, a person who today earns Rs. 5,000 has to spend more than Rs. 5,000 to maintain the same lifestyle in comparison to January 1995 while his purchasing power of Rs 5,000 has eroded down to Rs 4,100. After a sustained

AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

situation can be compared to that of Mexico in 1994 i.e. large short-term foreign currency dominated debt is in excess of official foreign exchange reserves (foreign exchange reserves US\$1.3 billion while foreign currency deposits are US\$7.4 billion) but there are critical differences that protect us from Mexico's fate despite the best efforts of V A Jafary and Qazi Alimullah to scuttle the economic equilibrium by following a virtually insane economic policy of adding to taxation when relief across the board is necessary.

Pakistan is vulnerable to major downside risks resulting in slow growth or even economic collapse, viz (1) sudden outflow of capital collapse of exchange rate and serious banking crisis causing financial instability, scenarios termed by the World Bank Report as one of "high" likelihood and of al-

expansion, accelerating inflation and exchange rate depreciation, scenarios termed as of "moderate" likelihood in the "medium term" induced by loose fiscal and accommodating monetary policies and (4) slowdown and reversal of structural reforms in areas of trade, taxation and privatisation leading to fiscal and balance of payments problems and slowdown of growth, scenarios termed "moderate to high" in the "medium term" induced by yielding to pressures from interest groups.

Of the foreign currency deposit (PCDs) amounting to US\$ 7.4 billion US \$6 billion belongs to individuals and the remainder (US \$1.4 billion) to foreign banks. We have 2.15 million ounces of gold in State Bank of Pakistan's (SBP's) vault worth US\$ 900 million and of the resident accounts 60-70 per cent is pledged to cover

all walks of life. Sufia Kamal chaired the meeting. They both were sitting on the podium decorated with yellow flowers. Both had garlands of roses around their neck. Laila Hasan and her group Natraj presented a dance in their honour. Then many people spoke about her contribution. Both Jahanara Imam and Sufia Kamal had tears in their eyes. The audience became emotional as much as they did. Jahanara Imam in fact was very sick at that time. She was in pain, yet she spoke for 45 minutes. She gave the most powerful speech to inspire our visions and commitments. This was her last speech in public. It was a meeting where she inspired everyone to continue struggle against the communal forces as well as against the war criminals.

Within four months, Jahanara Imam died. I still can hear her voice speaking to me as if straight from the podium. She is no more with us. It is like a feeling of emptiness, as if we have lost everything we had. Soon we had to remember that we must carry on the movement. When we are active we instantly feel her touch and caring love.

Narigantha Prabartana held a weeklong exhibition of photographs of Jahanara Imam in her personal life and in the movement. In the discussion sessions held everyday at the bookstore, people came to speak their feelings about her.

In 1995, on the occasion of the first death anniversary of Jahanara Imam, Narigantha Prabartana took the initiative along with Projonmo Ekattoor and Bangladesh Mohila Parishad to demand that the road, which is presently known as Old Elephant Road (from Gousia market to Bata corner), should be named as "Jahanara Imam Sarak". A human chain was made to demand for the road. This time, in a changed situation we have again demanded for the naming of the road. Sammilita Nari Samaj has also taken up the demand and is observing the death anniversary along with other organisations. The Mayor of the Dhaka City Corporation was approached but Sammilita Nari Samaj and Narigantha Prabartana on 23rd June for his cooperation. We have got assurance from him that he is going to take necessary steps to name the road as Jahanara Imam Sarak.

The movement against communalism and the anti-liberation forces is where she will always remain alive and with us. The result of the 1996 election is a small signal that her movement is in the winning. However, it is not enough that Jamaat-e-Islami as a party could not win the election. Jamaat only represents a fragment of the force we are struggling against. We have to fight against all the trends of communalism, nurtured and practiced by all the major political parties. We are quite shocked to see how religious sentiments of the people have been exploited to get votes during this election. Attacks on the minority communities after the election is also a great shame for us.

In the second year of her departure from us we are not mourning. We are rather strong and united. I know somewhere up in the clouds she is smiling like a child as she always did, and below, underneath the clouds, the vast terrain of land and rivers of Bangladesh are silently waiting for a soothing monsoon.

She is rain to us, our mother.

JAHANARA IMAM

The Struggle Continues

by Farida Akther

THIS year, on the second anniversary of death of Jahanara Imam, the leader of the movement against communal and anti-liberation forces in Bangladesh, we are remembering her in a different context. First of all, we are happy to know that the government has decided to withdraw the sedition case against her and 23 others colleagues of her involved with the People's Court, the *Gonodadalat*. If it is done she will be no more a *Rastradroh*.

The case was filed by the BNP government in 1992 because of the mock trial she organised against Golam Azam, the war criminal of 1971. It was held at a people's court, called the *Gonodadalat*, under the leadership of Jahanara Imam. The *Gonodadalat* was attended by hundreds and thousands of people from all walks of life. Of course, the verdict of the *Gonodadalat* never could be implemented. However, the exercise achieved the imme-

iate goal: the recapturing of ethical and moral grounds of the society. The regime in power reacted back. The persons holding the *Gonodadalat* were called *Rastradroh*, against whom the sedition case was filed.

Jahanara Imam fought against the anti-liberation forces until the last day of her life. She died on June 26, 1994 in Michigan, USA where she went for regular treatment of cancer. Her body was brought back to Bangladesh for burial. She was still a *Rastradroh*. However, freedom fighters along with the people attending her funeral offered her the last ceremonial farewell in sobre and befitting manner with guard of honour.

When the non-party caretaker government was formed in April this year, the *Sammilita Nari Samaj*, the collective women's front of Bangladesh, went to see the Chief Adviser with several demands. One of the important demands was to withdraw the

Recalling Her Life and Deeds

by Prof Roushan Ara Hoque

JUNE 26 is the second anniversary of death of "Shaheed Janani" Jahanara Imam. She, by her indomitable spirit and unequivocal patriotic zeal, had inspired the nation against the anti-liberation forces who collaborated with the occupation army and carried on genocide in 1971 killing 30 lacs of innocent Bangladeshi and violating the dignity of three lacs of women. Long 21 years after the War of Liberation she had formed a Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee in 1992 for the trial of the chief collaborator and his associates. She at first demanded the trial of the killers of her husband and son, and ultimately her demand was transformed into a national movement for the trial of all war criminals who acted as killers and collaborators during the Liberation War of

1971 under trial. She had taught them that according to the laws of International Court of Justice war criminals and their collaborators can legally be placed under trial even after long lapse of time. They can also be put under trial again and again until proper punishment can be given on the basis of strong evidences. In co-operation with many patriots and intellectuals she formed *Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee* consisting of 12 judges with herself as its chief. On 26th March, 1992 a public court of mock trial of all the collaborators in the Suhrawardy Uddyan in presence of thousands of people was held. The effigy of the chief collaborator was burnt amidst feeling of strong wrath and vengeance of the bereaved relatives of the victims of their cruel deeds. The chief collaborator was accused of 10 criminal offences which were punishable with death sentence. The court and its trial were mock. But the public wrath created there was intensive and she appealed to the government for the trial of all the war criminals in the court according to the laws of the International Court of Justice.

But, as if in retaliation, the then government had brought non-bailable charges of anti-state activities against 24 organisers including 12 judges of that mock court. Later on all of them were granted bail but the charge of anti-state activities remained on all of them. On 28th March, 1993 Jahanara Imam was wounded on her leg by a lathi charge of police. She was leading a procession demanding the trial of the collaborators.

Jahanara Imam was most well-known as a freedom fighter and as the mother of her martyr son Rumi. But in 1992 she suddenly appeared in the political horizon of Bangladesh as a comet, radiating her light on and inspiring the younger generation with food and necessary information she could gather. Rumi used to

commemorate the genocide of 1971 by leading a procession of thousands of people marching from the Shaheed Minar with burning candles in their hands. At the end of the march she had again pronounced the judgement on the War Criminals in a coarse voice but with strong determination.

Leaving the inspired new generation behind to carry out her mission at home Jahanara Imam had to go to Detroit, USA for the treatment of cancer. On 26th June she breathed her last in the hospital leaving a message for all the patriotic citizens of the country to continue the movement till its success so that the new generation can safely live and dedicate themselves for the development of the sovereign country.

Her mortal remains were brought to Dhaka and she was buried with the charge of anti-state activities on her head. She was that patriot but charged as traitor at whose death the President, Prime Minister and the leader of the opposition sent separate messages of consolation to the bereaved family. What an irony! All the newspapers had brought out special supplements describing her great contribution to the nation. Many condolence meetings were held at home and abroad. Jahanara Imam was that rare example of patriot who died with that charge of treachery on her head. She was the mother of *shaheed* Rumi, and as such mother of all the *shaheeds*. That's why she is called the "Shaheed Janani" by all.

We pray for her departed soul and note with thanks that the charge of treachery has of late been lifted from her. We urge the new government to bring all the war criminals under trial so that her mission is fulfilled and in future no such crimes on humanity are committed.

In course of time she had become a national figure with immense popularity. But the killer disease of cancer did not allow her to fulfil her mission. On 25th March, 1994 she had