Dhaka, Saturday, July 6, 1996

A Greater Challenge

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has been explicit from the very beginning that she wanted a government of consensus and that her first job in office would be to eliminate terrorism. Although Khaleda Zia has termed this consensus thing as outlandish, President Boris Yeltsin has repeated Hasina's idea of healing a nation torn asunder between victors and the vanquished and offered to take in the government anyone offered by the Zyuganov team.

Elimination of terrorism continues as the first item on the card. But the Prime Minister has a greater challenge at hand now - one which, if mishandled, can damage all her other programmes. This is the sudden development of that perennial physical threat to Bangladeshis life and property - the floods. There is no way to diminish either the spread of the force of the present floods already sweeping one-fourth of all our districts. Nor will there be any in the near future. What the government and society can do to minimise loss and suffering is for the government to rush succour to the remotest of needy areas and the society to make sure their equitable distribution and encourage and support local innovation for survival.

Khaleda Zia, on assumption of office in 1991, was met with a similar situation — the challenge of the Doomsmonday tidal bore attack in the southern districts. She mismanaged it ideally - an island of the importance of Sandwip could be reached only after the tenth day of the cataclysmic disaster. Let the present government learn from the mistakes of 1991.

If necessary, all helicopters must be requisitioned for relief and all water vessels in government service must be put to flood relief task. While PHE will of course take charge of repairing all tubewells and sinking new ones where necessary, medical squads, both private and government. should get down to work. This first flurry of food and water and medical attention satisfactorily complete, the government should go forth with building materials, where necessary.

The Prime Minister herself must stand by the people in distress, talk and sympathise with the victims and urge them to take heart and ensure them government help.

Sad Commentary

This year's Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) examination seems to have been begotten by trouble upon misdeed. Followed by the first two exam days marked by a demoralising spree of large scale expulsions, the third day literally opened the pandora's box.

Not only more than thousand examinees from different centres across the country were expelled for adopting unfair means, but also incidents, like road blockage, manhandling the government officials, setting fire and stabbing a college principal carved considerable niche in yesterday's dailies.

Thirtyfive government officials proving rather ham-handed in their role as flying monitors were injured. Heaven knows how the authorities will decide the fate of the twenty eight answer sheets that went missing in the martial mess.

For sheer depression the story that beat all others in the race was the stabbing incident of a college principal in Meherpur. Here again expulsion of a student triggered off the trouble. Hoods in the masks of students did not stop by snatching the expelled examinee from the police custody. they even went on to stab the principal of Gangni Degree College. And what a section of agitated people did in Tangail in connection with the trouble in an examination hall was extremely condemnable. Nuisance would be an euphemistic expression to measure the suffering that must have arisen from the road blockade imposed by the agitated supporters of the student under fire.

Worse news was in store from a couple of centres in Khulna. Fire was set to a part of the Phultala Women's College building following the expulsion of a student leader of sort of the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), the student front of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). Police had to fire blank shots and tear gas shells to quell the violence. More so, because students, a large section of the youth citizenry, was getting drawn on to a collision course with the law enforcing agency.

The problem lies there. Students and youths are the greatest source of our strength as well as weakness too. Because the juggernaut of our politics has a history of using the students as its wheels. But then, this must have to be contained.

Redolent of Saurav

When he was getting dismissed pretty cheaply and regularly people, particularly pessimists and the preachers of the philosophy that Bengalees do not make quality sportsmen or women were indulging in negative complacency. Saurav Ganguly the youthful and exuberant cricketer from West Bengal has of late made his bat talk in a manner that has forced the detractors of Bengalees' potential in sports and games, eat their own words. The elegant left-hander batsman whose first name means fragrance has indeed made the whole cricketing arena redolent by virtue of his elegant batsmanship. After his well merited century in his debut of all places at the Lord's, Sauray, a familiar character also in Bangladesh due to a number of successful visits here, hit another ton on Friday to confirm his mettle.

The second hundred in his second successive test earned him a place in the elite club of five batsmen in the world. His predecessors in this feat are Bill Ponsford, Doug Walters, and Greg Blewett from Australia, Alvin Kallicharran from the West Indies and fellow Indian, his present captain Azharuddin.

Saurav's rare feat could not have been better timed. With India trailing one nil in the three match Test series and desperately searching for the equaliser in the last match of the series. Saurav summoned his talent for a delightful duet of long and lovely spell in harmony with the redoubtable class of Sachin Tendulkar. Old Trafford in redolent of Saurav's batting skills. We are happy for a Bengali young man's success because he has put prejudice on the course of silken bowler's back drive course. Three cheers for perseverance's victory over prejudice.

Let the Morning Show the Day

If the words of the PM are closely and quickly followed by her deeds, a better governance and, as such, a better future, should not be out of reach. Unfortunately in our case the morning usually does not show the day. Hope it is not so this time

is, perhaps, neither fair nor pragmatic to comment on the deeds of any government that is only 11 days old. But the words that came out, within those 11 days, from the speeches of the PM and her cabinet colleagues warrant some scrutiny to put the cup and the lip together. The nation witnessed important pronouncements from

the side of the present gov ernment in the recent past which, no doubt, would inject some rays of hopes among its citizens. For example, (a) the commitment that Radio/TV and some controlled news papers would be allowed to breathe fresh air by freeing them from the clutches of bureaucratic control is a longawaited step. Already, some improvements seem to have taken place in the structure of TV/Radio news casting and other programmes. We would only hope that the proposed committee would soon be constituted to sit with the modalities of an autonomous structure of the electronic news media. (b) The commitment that the judiciary would be separated from the executive is also a long overdue task Again, one would only hope that the upcoming parliamentary sessions would take care of the bill. Likewise (c) the pronouncement on the declaration of assets held by the ministers is a welcome move! The declaration so coming forth might not tell the whole truth but definitely it would say some truth. And on that score alone, something would be better than nothing If the pre-

OLLOWING the polling

sent government of Sheikh Hasina can turn the words contained in (a), (b) and (c) into real actions, she would be able to set a land mark in institutionalising democracy by achieving (i) the autonomy of the electronic news media: (ii) the supremacy of the judiciary over the executive and (iii) a sense of accountability on the part of the public representa-

Close at heel, the pronouncement that the PM would wage a war against the criminals, the corrupts and the terrorists is welcome. given that the society at present is gripped by these vices In fact these three weevils are said to contribute more than two-thirds of the society's problems. Trade, business, investment, education and above all, a normal civic life are being ransomed by these evil forces. It should be noted here, per haps, that the declaration of a war against these forces was not made by the present PM alone. Her predecessors e.g. Begum Khaleda Zia and Hossain Mohammad Ershad also assured us on this but ended with a flasco. Even with a bitter past, the nation awaits a better future from Sheikh Hasina, given her political background and also given that her future courses of actions are presumably going to be influenced by the realisation of the past follies of her own party (while it was in power)

and of other parties. The success from such a war is not far to seek. The head of the government needs only to be neutral, committed and less wishful to continue with the

On the economic front, the government needs to move cautiously and judiciously. There seems a lot of misgivings on the commitments of some of them. For example,

farmers get the input at Tk 189? Absolutely not. In fact, they had to pay Tk. 400-600 for a bag. The subsidy so offered, was visibly pickpocketted by those rent seeking mandarins who "thrive" on controlled prices. The other reason against such subsidy is the reason that, the demand for fertilizer increased over the years despite a hike in fertilizer prices. Given the prevailing syndrome in our agri-

Beneath the Surface by Abdul Bayes

what is meant by agricultural subsidy? After all, agriculture includes crop sector, fisheries, livestock etc. One needs to be clear as to which part of the sector would get subsidy and why they should get such a subsidy. "Subsidy" is no longer a favourite topic in the realm of economics only because it does not help those whom the subsidy is meant for. We can imagine that the government is eager to help farmers with fertilizer subsidy. During the last boro season, the government set the price of a bag of fertilizer at Tk 189 — a highly subsidised price. Did our poor

culture, a timely delivery of this vital input and a timely delivery of agricultural credit at the right moment should emerge as the most important policy initiatives. The government should, therefore, aim at clearing the hurdles in the ways of a quick delivery of this vital input. The best use of scarce resources would occur when, say. Tk 100 crore on subsidy to help the so-called poor larmers is diverted to help the health and educational uplift of the members of these poor families.

The government also needs to be cautious in pursuing eco-

There would be many to argue that the government should not lower import duties further for the sake of (i) revenue generation and (ii) import substituting industries. Theoretically, both arguments may not sound right. Import liberalisation, other things being equal should lift revenue. earnings given the price elasticities or demand for imports. Empirical evidence, allegedly, suspects no decline of revenue earnings following liberalisation. High import duties, on the otherhand, helps "inefficient" import substitution which is a drag on the national economy. How can the poor people be benefitted when they have to pay 10-20 per cent higher price for domestically produced goods? In fact, for the sake of building dynamic import substituting industries, price of raw materials should be lowered. The process, of course, does not rule out the option that few "thrust" sectors' can claim some protection from the government. But to protect all inefficient industries in the name of infant, level playing field etc. could be self defeat-

nomic reforms programmes.

The foreign exchange mar ket needs to be liberalised further. There is perhaps, very little disagreement to the notion that a relatively floating exchange rate paid some dividends to the economy. The

current account convertibility tibility should be furthered by relaxing some other binding constraints. The argument that a floating exchange rate would swell the market with high demand and thus empty the foreign exchange reserve basket is not theoretically tenable either. The free play of market forces would, in the face of a surge in demand, curtail demand and these restore an equilibrium. It is only under a fixed exchange rate that such a collapse could happen. By and large, the import liberalisation. as mentioned earlier, and the floating exchange rate would be helpful for export-oriented and dynamic import substituting industries which together could make the economy roll

The few tips noted above are to draw the attention of the policy makers. The government needs to be careful in tinkering with them. If the economy performed worsely over the last 25 years, it is because of pervasive government controls on the economy and bad governance. We hope that the new government would present to the nation lesser controls on the economy and better governance. If the words of the PM that we mentioned at the beginning of the article, are closely and quickly followed by her deeds, a better governance and, as such, a better future should not be out of reach. Unfortunately in our case, the morning usually does not show the day. Hope is not so this time. Let the mornings of the words are turned into the days of the deeds.

Cases of Communal Incitement: EC Must Act

by Muhammad Quamrul Islam

It is the primary responsibility of the politicians and government functionaries to ensure security of person and property of each citizen of the Republic

on 12th June and also on 19th and 22nd June in some constituencies, for the seventh Parliament of the country, a number of reports have appeared in the press on cerned. The justification of persecution of minority comthat proposal, which did not munity, more specifically involve additional finance. Hindus, to hinder their free could have been taken up seexercise of franchise. We have riously by the Election not seen so far any reaction of Commission, to find an optithe authorities concerned in mum solution. In that case, the the Election Commission. allegations that voters were Home Ministry or parties prevented from coming to the voted to the Parliament. It is polling centres, a few miles known that generally polling away from their respective vilstations were peaceful and free lages, would not have been so from terrorist activities on the pronounced. Well, there was polling days. But that does not calm and quiet at the polling mean there can be no hushed centre; but what happened away cannot also be ignored. It persecution. Acceptance of the truth, as it is, will not underis reported that voters from mine the freeness and fair-39 villages at Chandpur, 30 ness of the last election which thousand people of Rawjan. has been nationally and interetc, could not cast their votes. nationally acclaimed. Of At Rawjan, one Ranubala was course, Election Commission killed on the polling day. From then on, reports have been has set up Electoral Tribunals at the district level; its impouring one after another till pact, however, towards mitidate regarding atrocious gating the agony of minority crimes committed, under socommunity is wet to be called political slogans, actually gauged. People want to see by anti-social elements, on the quick and effective 'steps in minority community for their such allegations of communal assumed support to 'boat' barassment, ignited by the Such reports of killing, loot, contesting candidates in their injury and rape etc. perpetrated on the members of mirespective constituencies. from the Election Commission nority community can not go which is a permanent constituunnoticed by the local admintional body, and respective istration, including District Deputy Commissioners who Election Officers and Thana were Returning Officers during Election Officers, and at the the election. apex by Election Commission's secretariate and Election Previously a proposal was Commission. But, is there any tabled to double the number

country permanently? No: rather an ominous silence is prevailing which, in no way will contribute to the consoftdation of democracy. We do not know what action the Chief Election Commissioner has taken on the report of foreign observers, NDI, regarding the terrorist activities in Chittagong 6 and 7 constituencies, where the members of minority community were reportedly stopped from going to vote by show of arms. Response against such heinous crime can not be formation of committee or commission to look into it, but direct action by the Election Commission and Home Minister to punish the criminals, according to law, already in force, without waiting or wasting time for more stringent' rules. Any delay would be deemed as idling away the time and as subtly according patronage to terrorists, etc. The nefarious activities to infringe the right to vote of the minority community at Jessore, Serajgonj, Bogra, Chandpur, Comilla, Savar, Narayanganj and other places are widely known, So. there is no ground to falter on the part of the authorities.

Till now, our political and government outfits have not been able to dispel the fear among the minority communities caused by propaganda and actions by the anti-people

politicians and so-called fundamentalists and communalists. History testifies that Muslims and Hindus fought shoulder to shoulder to liberate the country from Pakistani occupation forces in 1971 and established the independent People's Republic of Bangladesh. At that time other communities also did not fall behind: Buddhists and Christians fought valiantly for their motherland Bangladesh. So all are equal citizens of Bangladesh and have the same right to vote freely, according to one's own choice. As a matter of fact, and law, the general voters share the same senticitizens of Bangladesh, who want to live peacefully and make out a subsistence living, irrespective of majority or minority, community-wise.

Some political leaders and/or election contestants often hatch communal tirade to amass illiterate voters in their favour and do not hesitate to let loose hooligans for their personal aggrandizement Even then, the general voters have inflicted a crushing defect on communal or fundamentalist forces in the recent election. Look how Jamaat-e-Islami has lost. Its seats have come down to 03 in 1996 from 20 in the fifth Parliament (1991).

A learned friend, who heads a Hindu committee.

placed some revealing statistics before me in this regard. According to him, members of minority community have voted for Awami League and other parties too. They have supported non-communal parties and such candidates who are supposed to provide security to them. This is quite natural, in the same way as many Muslims have voted for Awami League. Then, why the Hindus be branded as supporters of AL only? Such nasty attitude smacks of evil designs. It is quite often seen that if a candidate fails, be blames the Hindu voters; on the other hand if one wins, he declares that he has been elected without the support of Hindus.

My friend cited and it is also known to all that many BNP candidates, including Saifur Rahman and Sadek Hossain Khoka, have won from Hindu inhabited areas Strangely, the nominee of Left Democratic Front, Nirmal Sen, a veteran journalist and politician, could not fetch even small number of votes in Dhaka-10 constituency, whatever he got was mostly Muslim votes. From Tangail-6 constituency, Goutam Chakraborty of BNP has been elected, certainly not with only Hindu votes!

He further cited that even a few Jatiya Party candidates and one from Jamaat won the election with the support of Hindu voters. Right to vote according to one's own choice cannot be snatched by force. Therefore, he was baffled to see threats against and oppression on the Hindu voters during and after the election. Hindus, like all other sons of soil actually want to live in peace in the land of their birth and are not at all inclined to migrate to another country. But such incidents and actions as are in question only make them feel insecure. And those who are apparently out to grab Hindu property are doing these misdeeds, irrespective of any party affiliations.

We find reasonings in the

above report, which deserve immediate attention of the Election Commission and Home Ministry. Authorities cannot forget that 12 per cent of our present total population comprise of minority communities - Hindus, Buddhists and Christians. Like in other civilised countries equal rights of minorities should get due consideration here too. It is the primary responsibility of the politicians and government functionaries, from top to bottom, to ensure security of person and property of each citizen of the Republic, specially the members of minority communities. Else, we cannot maintain friendly ties with our neighbouring countries and get support of big powers of the world, who are very keen on human rights.

The writer is an Advocate at the Supreme Court

would like to know the sources

of this contrasting situation to

rate of growth of income from

agriculture and non-agricul-

tural sources is very unsatisfac-

tory in this modern age of free

market. Can you help motivate

people to modernise inputs

and achieve desired income

Finally, I want to say the

remove my ignorance.

through this media?

Dr A K **M Habibull**ah

H-30. Road-4 Block-F.

Section-1 Mirpur. Dhaka

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Whither honesty?

of polling centres to facilitate

easy access of the voters con-

Sir, I have come under the impression that honest people are in the process of becoming extinct from this country. Anywhere one goes, whether it be an office, an educational institution, a market or a public place or even at one's home, one inevitably gets confronted with dishonesty, hypocrisy, jealousy, etc.

These were human traits previously found only in a few persons. Now these traits are rampant among most of us. Can we not make a concerted effort to avoid such unwanted behavioural patterns and try to be honest, straight-forward, understanding and openminded?

Farzana Yasmin Mannan Dhanmondi, Road No-2. Dhaka-1205.

Geneva camp

Sir, Geneva camp, home to thousands of stranded Biharis. is a name synonymous with desperation, discontent and ennui. A people torn between two worlds. These people have been waiting for what seems like eternity to be flown to Pakistan, the land they call home, which they opted for, after the independence of Bangladesh. These long years have proved to be a period of economic and social instability and disorder.

The condition of these camps are deplorable. There is no proper drainage system, overflowing sewage and scarcity of water make life miserable. Most of them have to put up with flimsy houses to lead their lives with children crammed together. The condition is pathetic but there is...

no alternative. The most affected in these

camps are the youths. They are disenchanted. The malcontent are forced to do what under normal conditions they would keep away from. When other children of their age are attending schools and colleges. they are forced to leave studies and take up different jobs in garment factories, wayside car workshops etc. to earn their livelihood and help their par-

sign of concern on the part of

the government electoral offi-

cials posted throughout the

Driven by poverty and desperation they take to the streets. Forced to resort to illegal means to stave off hunger. They live in complete uncertainty often leading a violent life fured by street gangs to help them in their illegal activities. Crime rate is rising and living condition steadily deteriorating, multiplying their miseries and hardships. The world focus has moved away from them and they are left to

their fate forgotten. Every day, they eagerly look for some signs of hope and fervently pray for their repatriation to Pakistan where they can pick up their lost pieces and rebuild their lives. The disgruntled youths need a home to rejuvenate their spirits and avail opportunities to ensure a better future.

A H Khan Uttara, Dhaka

Mujib Coat

Sir. As reported by your staff reporter and published by you on June 29, tailoring shops in Dhaka are receiving many orders for stitching Mujib Coats. Your reporter has referred to only two tailoring shops. Other numerous tailors in Dhaka as well as at other places throughout the country must have been approached by their customers to prepare

such coats, even by those persons who were till recently wearing 'safari' suits or other

What does this sudden love for Mujib Coat reveal? It simply tells us the grim story. All those who have developed sudden fancy for this dress think that it will facilitate them to identify themselves with the ruling party, Interestingly, most of the new lovers of Mujib Coat are not Awami Leaguers. Even if some of them are, they never thought it necessary to wear Mujib Coat till Awami League came to power last month.

K R Zakhmi Ideal Chemical and Printing Works Ltd

17, Babu Khan Road, Khulna

beware of such impostors.

The general people should

Commercial utilisation of valuable mineral 'black-gold' of Cox's Bazar

Sir, I have been writing on valuable minerals, 'black-gold' of Cox's Bazar, in various national dailies and weeklies of our country and also urging upon our authorities concerned for the commercial utilisation of the minerals, since I happened to find huge deposits of the precious natural resources in some places and islands of Cox's Bazar in the year 1971. In this connection I have met many political leaders and high government officials but unfortunately no pragmatic, practical and concrete step has been taken so far by the authorities concerned to utilise the valuable minerals like Zircon, Eliminate, Garnet, Magnetite, Monazite etc., known as 'black-

gold' of Cox's Bazar. In the meantime during the last 25 years, millions of tons of valuable minerals have been swept over by tidal surges and sea waves at different times. Further it is apprehended that within one-and-half decades or so the valuable minerals would be completely lost in the Bay of Bengal due to the greenhouse

I am neither a scientist nor a geologist but by dint of my own eagerness, curiosity and initiative, I have accomplished field work single-handedly, carried out survey and research works with my own indigenous method and technology, walked miles after miles and monitored some mineral deposit sites for sev-

eral years. Economie prospect of these valuable minerals is not a farce but it is hundred per cent feasible and positive. My simple contention is if we can produce salt, cultivate shrimp and earn crores of Taka, why can't we utilise the valuable. 'blackgold' commercially?

It is true that the people of our country especially those living in the coastal areas are not awre of the valuable minerals. They neither recognise the "blackgold" nor do they know as to how to use them. If they are told and trained as to how to recognise and use these minerals thousands of people would rush to mineral deposit sites and this may create law

and order problem. I request the government to reconstitute the defunct National Committee on 'Black-Gold' with Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources as head of the new committee and one MP from each party as members of the committee to examine the matter, visit Cox's Bazar along with some journalists for a day or two to physically check and verify some of the mineral deposit sites and to see the miracles of 'Blackgold'. Then the members of the committee may arrive at a consensus on the commercial utilisation of the valuable minerals either in the public sector or in the private sector in the greater interest of the na-

O H Kabir Member, National 'Black-Gold' Committee (now defunct). Dhaka

Head gear of bearers

Sir, I am surprised and disappointed to see Dhaka Club bearers with 'Turki-tupis'

(Turkish caps). Perhaps are aware that Turki-tupi was widely used during the reign of Turkish Khilafat. Muslims in pre-partition India proudly wore Turkitupi as it symbolised their identity. After collapse of rule of Muslims in India the imperialist western powers, to quell the spirit of the Muslims and demoralise them, among other things, made persons performing servile functions like peons

As an inhabitant of a Muslim majority society, I request the Dhaka Club authority to please consider changing of policy of bearers wearing Turki-tupi. This feeling is also shared by many members of the club.

and chaprasis wear Turki-tupi.

Afroz Rahim 74 Motijheel C/A, Dhaka-1000.

'Reflections on Rural Income'

Sir, I have read the above article written by Dr Bayes published in The Daily Star on 29 June, 1996.

I have noted two aspects in the article Household income of Tk 56,480 in 1995 vs Tk 45,155 in 1988 on the basis of per capita income of \$182 and \$224 in 1988 and 1995 respectively. Household calcula-

ily of six members. 2. Non-agricultural income has increased at village level most welcome in a land scarce country like

tions appear to consider a fam-

Bangladesh. I have some comments on the samples used for survey a) presently possible family size is about four per woman, b) the per capita income in rural Bangladesh is highly unlikely to be of that order. If it is true then the sample was willfully chosen to represent the high-income group which is not a reality in

For your information, I made a crude survey at my village of Char Bheduria union of Bhola district and found the per capita income to be of the order of \$42 only.

Bangladesh.

I am not an economist but

President and **Ombudsman**

Sir, The tenure of the present President Abdur Rahman Biswas expires in September this year. A new president has to be chosen well in advance by the Awami League/the present government. The present Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in her TV interview "Shobinaye Jante Chai" on the eve of the just-concluded general elections mentioned that she would appoint an ombudsman as per provision of the Consti-

We as citizens of the country want to see the government function above narrow party interests, and implant democratic values in all spheres of national life. The task is hard indeed, especially when all democratic norms and values were dashed aside over the past two decades. Nevertheless, upright people with high moral standards who are committed to democratic values, if given the chance, can certainly try to turn the table around and make things happen for better.

With their proven track records. Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed, president of the first caretaker government and Justice Mohammed Habibur Rahman, chief adviser of the second caretaker government, are undoubtedly such persons. May now propose that Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed be elected our next president and Justice Mohammed Habibur Rahman, the first ombudsman of the country.

M A Sattar 1/G, Paribagh, Dhaka