

Change Sought

Of all the financially able Bangladeshi patients who go abroad to seek better treatment, those with cardiac complaints form the clear majority. The main reason for this inclination is the inadequate treatment facilities both in terms of specialist doctors as well as equipment.

But this is not, as President Shahbuddin Ahmad observed while inaugurating the conference, a matter of letting the able people have their own ways in matters of health care. A great amount of foreign currency is being lost regularly due to these medical trips.

This economic consideration in the national context should inspire the more privileged section of the physicians to come up with projects that can contribute to the creation of modern treatment facilities and the restoration of confidence among treatment seekers.

The few private clinics that have sprouted over the years are yet to strike a safe balance between professionalism and service. One feels, an unexpressed and unjustified air of hesitation that investment in the health sector is reserved for the government and doctors, has considerably retarded the process of development.

Seemingly, a more general entrepreneurial interest is needed in this sector. Competition will not only minimise the scope for monopoly in business but will also ensure quality. Business men will be out there to make money but if only they can guarantee good service in exchange of good money, the great rush of patients going abroad will cease automatically.

Inadequacy in the number of good doctors and proper medical facilities is not a typically national health concern it is a national economic concern. Also, it is not a reality born only yesterday. The situation has been like this for quite some time. The new government would do well to take up the issue seriously.

For a Better BUET

The Chancellor of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has very wisely chosen Professor Iqbal Mahmud, the noted chemical engineer as one who will replace the controversial Dr Shahjahan as the VC of that University. Professor Mahmud happens to be the seniormost among those deserving the coveted post. He was for some time a state minister for science and technology in General Zia's government. We congratulate the Prime Minister for seeing past this piece of quirky history and choosing an appropriate person for the job — not only qualified and competent. Informed people will long cherish Professor Mahmud's expose on the doings of Foster Wheeler, the main contractor for the Ashuganj Fertilizer Factory. And Professor Mahmud has never so far been caught on the wrong foot.

A right choice but hardly at the right point of time, students and all concerned people thought the Prime Minister would replace the unmoving Dr Shahjahan before her departure for the Rome conference. For education had come to a standstill weeks before that. The rumoured cause of the delay is doubtlessly disquieting. Was there a junior fellow there among the aspirants whose cause was being promoted politically? Hasina has resisted that — excellent, but the time wasted is national loss and is also indicative of soft spots in administration as well as politics that would compromise education and every other thing for personal and sectarian interest. The stakes of this present government are too high to be allowed to be lost to pettified betrayal in the delay in making the choice.

Now on to the classroom. Perhaps this is the best run university in the country. Still how cannot it afford to forget that it is running one full year behind schedule. Utmost effort should now be taken to see that the latest problems do not add to the backlog and the session starts more or less on time.

A Study in Courage

She is a study in courage. She has so far proved to be the ultimate in so many other things — compassion and sacrifice and a very Christian abidance by the poor. When death is knocking at the door, very insistently and perhaps with a note of finality — one's compassion and all other great giveables become irrelevant. It is then only courage which is left and with which one must face the inevitable. And Mother Theresa has a world of courage and some more to spare. Her courage, so poignantly proved by her declining to go along with medical procedures, takes on a very fresh and new and nobly elevating dimension when she says "Let me die as do those that I serve." Have we heard this before? Perhaps not. But nevertheless, there have been saints and saintly ones outside the pale of religion who have acted this sentiment out. Mother Theresa is in line with the world's greatest givers — and lovers.

Our hearts go out to the great woman and we join millions the world over in praying that she comes out of the present predicament exactly as she had done so many times before.

Andre Malraux and Bangladesh: An Untold and Forgotten Episode

A great Frenchman, nay a great man of all times, Andre Malraux passed away 20 years ago. The government of France, in bestowing the highest recognition accorded to a son of its soil, decided to transfer his mortal remains to the Pantheon, the great monument of burials of French heroes in the heart of Paris, in a befitting ceremony this month.

Andre Malraux was a versatile genius. Very few people in human history combined in one's own self so many interests and vocations that embellished human mind. He was an eminent author, philosopher, archaeologist, freedom fighter, politician and, above all, a humanist, all in one.

It is difficult, rather well-nigh impossible, to narrate even briefly the vast involvement and experiences of this great explorer of human mind and civilisation. At the age of 21, he went to the jungles of Cambodia in search of the ruins of a legendary temple. In 1929, he made important discoveries of Greco-Buddhist art in Afghanistan and Iran. In 1934, he flew over the vast desert track and discovered what may have been the lost capital city of legendary Queen Sheba.

Malraux brought to the fore the independence movement of Indo-China, a colony of France, and edited the fiery journal, L'Indochine Enchaînée (The Chained Indo-China). He founded the Young Annam league, which, in fact, became the precursor of Viet Minh, the political party that directed and won Vietnam war.

Much later, in the thirties, he participated in the Spanish civil war in late thirties and even went as far as to America to raise funds. He fought in the Second World War, was shot and arrested by the Germans

and escaped. Following the French resistance and victory of the allied forces he became close to De Gaulle, who made him his information and, later, Cultural Minister.

In the domain of philosophy, art and culture, Malraux made immense contribution as well. He was a prolific writer and his voluminous works speak eloquently of his thoughts and actions. He published La Tentation de l'Occident (The Temptation of the West) in a bid, perhaps vainly, to interpret the two civilisations, the Eastern and the Western. His La Condition Humaine (Man's Fate), which received Prix Goncourt award, brought for him mere of a literary than politico-philosophical success.

In his Psychologie de l'Art (The Psychology of Art) Malraux sought to bring about relationship with his other interests, like the philosophy of action, which would always be a factor of man's eternal questioning of his destiny and his response to it. L'Espoir (Man's Hope) is considered to be his masterpiece and chronicled some of his experiences in the Spanish civil war.

His autobiographical work, Anti-memories, did not escape observation and surprised many about his omission of reference to some of his near and dear ones like his wife and sons. During his monumental meditation on art, in the solitude of his villa in the Bois de Boulogne on the outskirts of Paris, he wrote Les Voix du Silence (The Voices of Silence) in 1951. It sounded the notes of universal humanism, that of

the brotherhood of the works of art, through which man inherits all that is noble in the world. Les Chenes qu'on Abat (Felled Oaks) contained much of his disillusionment to achieve due to limited resources as his friend Charles de Gaulle's Minister of Culture. His last piece of work, Lazaro, published in 1974 and the one before that, Oraisons Funebres (Funeral Orations) dwelt mostly on his preoccupation with death. Besides these, Malraux has other works to be proud of. Malraux's connection with

October 1971 at his village, Verrier le Buisson, not far from Paris. I was then acting as Head of the Unofficial Bangladesh Mission in London which was founded and headed by the late Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury. Special Overseas Representative of the Government of Bangladesh, Justice Chowdhury was then away to New York to lead the unofficial Bangladesh delegation to the UN and practically stayed most of the period from October to December 1971 there in order to lobby among the

UNGA delegates for Bangladesh. As his deputy, I was entrusted with the charge of the Mission during his absence. From our resident mission in London we covered not only the UK, which was the largest concentration of Bangladeshis outside Bangladesh, but almost the whole of Europe. The purpose was to bring home to various governments and people the plight of Bangladeshis in the then East Pakistan and to seek diplomatic and material support for their struggle for independence.

It was a memorable occasion for me to have met Andre Malraux, the living idol for the cause of the liberation of colonial and down-trodden masses

ernment had, indeed, been condescend to hear our views by allowing me to be received, unofficially though, by Andre Moreau, Deputy Head of the Asia Division at the Quai d'Orsay, the French Foreign Office. Malraux shook his head, as if to indicate his disappointment at the French and other European governments' hesitation to support Bangladesh. He spoke about some of his experiences in Liberation Wars and stated that he would be prepared to raise a brigade for Bangladesh and join our fighting people to liberate our land. I was stunned, delighted to no end and became speechless. Somehow I muttered some expression to thank him and promised to convey his benign offer to our government by the speediest means possible at that time. He was happy and escorted me, despite my loud protestations, to the verandah outside. While I was shaking his hands for the last time before departure, his gaze became fixed to the lapel of my jacket where a small metallic Bangladesh flag had been pinned. I immediately took it out of my lapel and pinned it onto the lapel of the great man with a curious look. His face flashed, flashed with the happiness of a child the sight of which I shall never forget.

I visited Malraux once more at Verrier le Buisson, after we became citizens of sovereign nation, accompanying the then Foreign Minister, Dr. Kamal Hossain. Malraux also paid a four-day visit to an independent Bangladesh in 1973 in response to an official invitation of the government of Bangladesh. That was an unmistakable opportunity provided to the nation to receive in gratitude an eminent personality in his seventies who was ready even to make the supreme sacrifice for the people of this country.



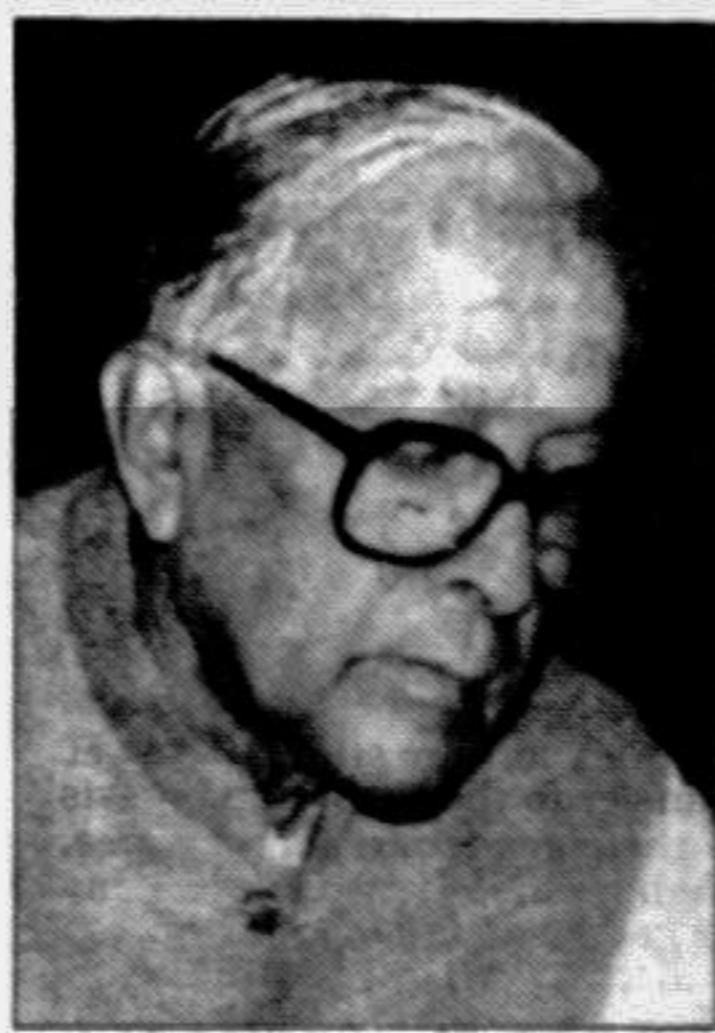
Currents and Crosscurrents

by M M Rezaul Karim

Bangladesh is but a natural re- flection of his philosophy and tireless struggle for the Liberation of enslaved people. His act of commanding an air force squadron in the Spanish civil war, leading a tank regiment in the Alsace Lorraine Brigade to liberate Strasbourg and even his participation as a foot soldier against the Nazi Germany evoked so much of spontaneous sympathy for the people of Bangladesh that he was even ready to raise an international Brigade to fight in our Liberation War.

This offer of Andre Malraux to fight along the freedom fighters of Bangladesh was conveyed to me for transmission to our government. This happened in

Jyoti Basu's Dhaka Visit, Water Issue and PM's Visit to New Delhi



This country needs water. All the contacts in this regard between the governments in Dhaka and New Delhi will culminate in the outcome of Mr Basu's visit and this will facilitate the visit of Bangladesh PM to India and reaching an accord with premier Deve Gowda, writes Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury

Indian capital for discussions with Indian opposite member Jani-shwar Mishra about a month ago. All these contacts were preceded by high level visits from India — first by foreign secretary Salman Haider as special envoy of the Indian prime minister H.D. Deve Gowda immediately after a new government was formed in this country following the general elections. That was followed up by the visit of Indian external affairs minister Mr. Gujral to Dhaka.

The visit of the Bangladesh foreign minister to the capital of West Bengal and talks with the chief minister on the water issue had drawn criticisms from the critics of this government and some other quarters. They said diplomatic behaviour warranted that such talks could take place only between government and government where the component state authorities or the chief minister can take part but not as a full-fledged side. But the government said the visit was not devoid of protocol niceties and that the government was moving with all out seriousness to secure water and the West Bengal chief minister occupied an important position in the entire water-related scene for manifold reasons. The government found validity and usefulness in the visit while the country's foreign secretary was also there. The opposition views this from different angle. All these are natural in a pluralistic pattern of governance and the issue would finally be judged in terms of achievement of water which

this country so vitally needs. West Bengal's chief minister Jyoti Basu has grown more important and enjoys greater clout in his country since his visit here eight years ago. He is a key figure currently in the national politics in India and this can be concluded from the fact that he had almost become, the prime minister of the country a few months ago when the United front government took over. The Communist Party of India (CPM) is supporting the present government but has not taken part in this unlike the CPI which has joined the government as its veteran parliamentarian Indrajit Gupta is now the home minister of India. Had the CPM central working committee in a razor-thin majority not voted against joining the government, Mr. Basu would have been in South Bloc today. In any case, his position in the present coalition government remains important and he has a big say in its functioning. Besides, in the water issue, the views of West Bengal is well taken by the central government since the Farakka Barrage is located in this state which has its opinion on the quantity and consumption of the Ganges water and ways to augment the dry season flow of the river.

Mr. Basu's visit here. He has said in Calcutta that a permanent accord on sharing the waters of the Ganges is unlikely this time and a two years sharing formula is likely to take place during Bangladesh prime minister's visit to India. The quantum of water to be shared also remains to be sorted out. Bangladesh is favouring a permanent solution of the problem and an accord to this end before the next dry season, which is in January. Hence is the urgency for signing an accord in December. Water resources minister Abdur Razaq said things were moving well and a resolution of the sharing issue can be found on the basis of two earlier agreements — of 1974 and 1977. Foreign minister Abdus Samad Azad and his Indian counterpart spoke of political will to solve the problem and exuded optimism.

doubt a reasonable quantum of water is critically important to this country for its survival.

Polemics often queer the pitch of negotiations. What is important is that this country needs the water at least to its minimum requirement. All the contacts between the two new governments in Dhaka and New Delhi will culminate in the outcome of Mr. Basu's visit and this will facilitate the visit of Bangladesh prime minister to India at an early date and in reaching an accord with premier Deve Gowda.

As someone who has witnessed the signing of the 1977 accord and closely followed the series of Indo-Bangladesh talks at different levels both here and in the Indian capital over the last many years, I believe political will and the intention to solve the problem constitutes the key to settle complex problems since nothing is insurmountable in relations between sovereign countries if a positive spirit guides the parleys. Water issue has been always contentious both nationally and internationally but not unresolvable as it is clear from many instances. It is necessary that the issues which may hinder or delay a settlement should be avoided. For instance, it is necessary to delink the Ganges water sharing issue from any proposal for augmenting the flows of the river since this will only consume time.

Once the sharing issue is settled to the satisfaction of the parties concerned, more particularly the disadvantaged one, this may open up much greater cooperation covering management and development of the precious and vast water resources in the entire region down the Himalayas. And, for that international assistance would be available as evident from the Mekong river understanding, not too far from this South Asian region. Mr. Basu's visit and its outcome has great stakes on a vital area of wider scope.

To the Editor

Asthma

Sir, A report titled "Rush of bronchitis, asthma patients in city hospitals" published in "The Daily Star" of 24th and 25th November 1996 has drawn our attention.

In this respect we would like to inform you that we market our own research product INTAL in Bangladesh. The drug is imported from UK and is recommended in all International Guidelines for management of asthma. We maintain adequate stocks to serve the prescription of our valued customers. INTAL is available in many important drug stores throughout the country and there is no reason for non-availability/selling at an exorbitant price of INTAL. Inhaler by anyone, since we maintain adequate stock of the product.

In addition, any patient with doctor's prescription can also buy INTAL from any of our 12 sales depots throughout the country. Further any patient facing problem in obtaining INTAL inhaler can contact us directly for assistance.

Amuwaruddin Ahmed Marketing Manager Fisons (Bangladesh), Limited Dhaka

"Child labour in Bangladesh"

Sir, Thank you for printing a response to Mofituddin Ahmed's article on the above subject. Allow me to make comments on the letter, published in your paper, by Simon Mollison.

I thank Mr. Mollison as the head of a donor organisation that have made this "unconventional" comment which one hopes will lead to other such transparent expressions on child labour.

The Daily Star's initiative to give impetus to freedom of expression on this debate is significant in view of the fact that the MoU is a debatable issue in relation to CRC.

In response to Mollison's reference to lack of a movement on "opposition" I am in agreement but it should be noted that the MoU was considered as a result of:

Firstly, of a western boycott, supposedly engineered by the forces of international market. Secondly, it was a result of a donor/NGO drive to see that justice was done to the retrenched child and education given to the retained child.

Nevertheless what happened to the 40,000 children, mostly girls, who were summarily dismissed from the factories should have been a major cause of concern by the boycotters and the signatories of the MoU. That this is being pushed under the carpet makes room for many speculations, such as: Are the children still there in subcontracted units? Have the children taken more hazardous and abusive jobs?

As someone said about a retrenched garment girl-child worker: "She used to sew clothes for her living. Now she takes them off for a living."

This may or may not be true. But there is evidence to suggest that sex abuse is a potential danger in child labour more so when the child is retrenched from a well paid service without rehabilitation. NGOs could be urged to invest in surveys and publish data so as to inform the public as well as to caution the international buyers from making hasty sanctions that in fact go against the CRC.

Some economists in our country share the view with Debapriya Bhattacharya (BIDS) that 'imposing social clause in bilateral trading relations as trade remedies (although difficult to prove) are prompted by protectionist interests of the industrialised countries.'

It is true that Bangladesh is 'developing' on donor assistance. But certainly we the citizens and the government of Bangladesh could act more sovereign in directing donors to use their generosity on advocacy research and campaigns that bring to surface the macro and micro causes of child labour in the Third World. We need to approach Ahmed and Mollison both of whom suggest an enquiry into a participatory donor and partner relationship.

Khurshid Erfan Ahmed Dhaka

Why should anyone plant trees? Sir, Morshed Ali Khan's report "Illegal logging rampant in CHT" (Daily Star 9/11/96) does not surprise me but the crocodile tears shed in it by the various 'Conservers' of Forest

& DFOs evoke no sympathy. The report says: "Armed gangs, with no afforestation in 10 years." True, but whom do most of these gangs take orders from or bow down to, and why only 10 years, there has been no real afforestation for over 40 years — almost all "afforestation" have been restricted to rules and voluminous reports. Anyone who has travelled extensively from 1950 onwards in the so-called forest areas will testify to the progressive horror of bare hills, denuded land and degraded slopes of Chittagong Division which constituted almost 75 per cent of our forests in 1947.

Let me put some pertinent questions to the forest people as I have been doing for the last 10-12 years without a single response from them.

1. There is no profit for the 'gangs' in just felling trees. These must be taken to the urban markets. Logs are huge things requiring trucks, boats, rafts and a lot of equipment, capital and manpower. All the rivers, streams, roads and highways are manned by the ever vigilant forest police and everywhere. The forest officials have confirmed that they do not allow felling except under exceptional circumstances. So how come the timber markets in every urban area is simply bulging with logs to the extent of blocking roads in many cases? How do they get to the markets?

2. Is it possible for one to reap what one sows? To elaborate: if a person plants trees on his own land with his own

labour and money can he harvest, transport and sell the trees without hindrance from anyone? If not, why? What rules, regulations, laws and procedures must be observed to harvest one's trees and how long would they take? What are the 'expenses' involved? How many pairs of shoes will wear out to get such permission?

3. The forest department has recently come up with a new confidence trick. Trees are to be planted in the coastal areas, alongside roads, railways, canals etc., which the people of the localities will look after and on maturity receive 50 per cent of the proceeds. What a rosy picture depicted in the TV ads! But who will decide when the trees are mature? Who will do the actual felling and selling? Who will fix the price? When and how do they get the 50%? And 50 per cent of what? Is it not just another method of ensuring juicy windfalls for the next generation of Forest Staff?

I am sure no answers will be forthcoming just as there were no responses to over 100 letters, article and briefs written by me on the state of our forests over the last decade. At the risk of repeating myself the new reader should know the background of my scepticism.

From 1979 I planted nearly 100,000 trees and plants on my own land with my own labour and money. In 1990 when I applied to harvest the mature trees I was made to run from pillar to post. After two years, because I made such a nuisance of myself, I was issued a 34-page permit (No. 2 of 1991) which I discovered to my horror,

amongst other clauses, does not recognise the Laws of Nature. Human Rights or even the Law of Gravity! Without any return to me, the permit issued was for a fraction of the quantity applied. The Forest Dept thus knew more than me about my plantation and needs. Since there was no logical way for me to harvest my trees and in the face of threats (my son was beaten up in broad day light) to my family I was forced to eventually abandon a 1-2 crore taka show-piece of agro-forestry which was nominated for the prestigious Rolex Award in 1984. I moved to Dhaka in 1992. Within three months all my trees were felled and sold by elements who must have brazenly passed the dozen check-posts without hindrance on payment of the requisite "Salami" No permits required by them evidently! Not content with that the Forest Dept has forcibly occupied a large chunk of my plantation without any notice of any kind on the plea that I was encroaching on forest land. Where were they for 15 years? A personal interview and protest letter sent to the Chief Conservator of Forests (incidentally a personal friend) in July 1995 remains still unanswered.

Will someone in authority at the present administration take some action before it is too late? Will future generations have to go to museums to see trees if the present trend continues?

S Sikander Ahmed Shyamol Dhaka