

Facing Facts in CHT

The dialogue for peace in the three troubled hill districts of the country is on course. One gathers this impression from the positive vibrations of the two rounds of talks held on December 21 and 24. In a strange way, this seems to have been reinforced by the gunning down of pro-peace tribal leader Subinoy Chakma. That has been an act of sabotage by elements ruffled by a prospect for a change in the status quo.

The first two rounds of dialogue have been basically of a confidence-building nature. At the end of the talks on December 21 both sides agreed to extend the ceasefire upto March 31 in a spirit of cordiality and friendship. At the joint press conference Jatindriya Bodhipriya Larma, President of the PCJSS hastened to add the word 'fruitful' to the amicability theme of Abul Hasnat Abdullah, the Chairman of the National Committee on CHT. After the second round on December 24, Abdullah said, "there has been much progress in the dialogue" while the PCJSS President Bodhipriya Larma stated that it was 'meaningful'. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina made the nice gesture of telephonically enquiring about the health of the ailing PCJSS leader Shantu Larma which the latter duly noted with gratitude at the talks. The PM has also directed all concerned to round up those who are behind the killing of Subinoy Chakma. Mention must also be made of the regrettable non-participation of the BNP MPs on the national committee in the talks.

While exchange of pleasantries and nuanced expression of hopes are necessary parts of a negotiatory process resumed after a considerable time-lag, we want the facts separated from the fiction and faced squarely. We regard this as the precondition to solving the deep-seated ethnic problem which has had at least 20,000 people killed to date.

The five demands of the PCJSS include granting autonomy to the regional council in 36 matters, changing the nomenclature of the CHT as Jummaland, identifying the illegal immigrants since 1947, expelling them from the CHT and effecting a land settlement of their choice. The tribals have been suffering from a minority complex in view of the ratio between them and the settlers now standing at 53:47. An extreme view taken by them is that so long as the settlement issue persists, they might even spurn an autonomy offer. If all their demands were non-negotiable then why should the tribals have sat for a dialogue with us at all? In principle, we are not opposed to according them a special status, if necessary with a constitutional guarantee, but this must be done within the purview of national sovereignty and integrity in the best tradition of democratic pluralism.

Cricket Deserves Better

Cricketers have made news again. This time for a sad cause. With the season for this game of a chosen part of our calendar at its peak, the authorities have requisitioned the Dhaka Stadium to accommodate an intemperate, commemorative football tournament: the first Bangabandhu international football championship. While the Football Federation's decision to launch an international tourney as a mark of respect to the architect of Bangladesh calls for ready commendation, the element of myopia which has had cricket thrown unceremoniously out of the Dhaka Stadium asks for an resounding condemnation. No wonder, the cricketers have announced programmes protesting this "injustice" with the most notable among them being a practice session on the road in front of the National Press Club.

Cricket, notwithstanding the Kenyan type debacles, is still the only team game which holds any promise for us to reach the international standard. And with the ACC Trophy in our pocket, the ideal situation should have been an integrated approach to uphold the cause of cricket and cricketers until at least the next ICC Trophy, to be held in Malaysia early next year. Unfortunately, the truth has been far from that. Let alone preferential treatment, cricket has struggled to get even the commonsense treatment from the authorities. The latest example of this appalling reality has surfaced in the recent gesture of the National Sports Council (NSC) and the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF).

By holding the football 'show' sports authorities can only impede the national cause. Because the suspension of the ongoing domestic cricket leagues, and the ballyhoo over this can only undermine our ICC preparation.

Besides, by causing disruption to a game deemed promising in the popular imagination, the authorities have unduly controversialised a great leader. And all this for an ordinary club level tournament and not even an international meet!

Chaos at Kamalapur

Bangladesh Railway's (BR) bid to expand its Inland Contained Depot (ICD) at Kamalapur has suffered reversal at the onset. According to a report published in last Thursday's issue of The Daily Star, local people strongly resisted the rudimentary effort for expansion resulting in the suspension of spade work. The cause of the strong resistance mostly by people residing in the areas on the east and west of the Kamalapur railway station is understandable.

The link road which is now at peril of being devoured by railway's ICD expansion project has been of great help to people of these areas in getting transported to the city centre or the official downtown rather quickly.

The crisis could have been averted if the BR had done beforehand what it is doing now: seeking opinion of the local people. Now that it has awoken to the democratic wisdom, albeit under duress, the BR should not allow the acrimony to hibernate. More importantly, no quarter should be allowed to politicise the issue. It is a matter of public inconvenience and national interest. With help from all concerned quarters, BR should have the matter settled quickly.

ONCE upon a time, so goes a story, a Mughal emperor went to visit a place where he had never been to. He found that people there were living in caves shrouded with darkness. Frightened as he was at this deplorable condition, the benevolent emperor ordered lamps and fuel for every household so that there could reach the light. After five years, the said emperor again visited the place and found that those households were still in dark caves. He was told that the lamps were broken and the fuel finished. The enraged emperor then ordered a new set of lamps and fuel for those ill-fated households. Again, after five years, the emperor could see no sign of improvements there. This happened for five consecutive times. The frustrated emperor then called his learned, experienced Ujir and asked for the reason. The Ujir replied, "You have given the lamps to men. You should have given them to women." The emperor later acted on the advice of the Ujir and the caves continued to be flooded with light.

The above story, cited in many documents, apparently points to the role of women in the uplift of societal development. But unfortunately, the present status of women around the globe does not seem to bear that out. Few statistics are presented to highlight the sordid state. Women constituting the half of the total population in many countries of the world are the worst victims of exploitation and deprivation. Available research reports tend to show

No nation can claim to be civilized or developed unless they value the contributions of women in right perspective. To this effect, they need to change the century-old outmoded laws and regulations, beliefs and suppositions that seemingly deter women to eke out a better dividend. Let women come to the forefront.

Let there be Light



Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes

dependents. In Bosnia-Herzegovina's war, the initial months witnessed 20 thousand women raped.

The primary plank of food supply is women. They also contribute substantially to the growth of GDP. But most of the contributions fail to enter into government's statistics. In poor societies like Bangladesh, women usually eat meals after the males have finished. They are the first to rise from bed but the last to go to bed. Despite their formidable shares in the economic uplift of the household, women are virtually left out of decision-making processes. In most of the societies women have rare access to the

factors of production. About one-third the total labour force in the world is women. Of all the ministerial posts, only six per cent are occupied by women. In economic ministry the share is about four per cent. In 144 countries, there is no women minister. In corporate companies and non-government organisations, individual initiatives etc.

The celebrated Beijing declaration echoed strong determination to some of the specific issues. For example, it said, women's rights are human rights. The member-countries of the UN expressed their eagerness to respect the declaration. However, the areas where the government should step in to materialise the 'dreams' are as follows:

(a) framing and implementing laws that ensure equal rewards for men and women for same kind of jobs.

(b) framing and implementing laws against any discriminatory attitudes in the labour market. The laws should see that access to and security of jobs for women are properly maintained. As in many other countries, a growing number of NGOs in rural Bangladesh are reaching out to vast multitudes of poor women with collateral-free credit programmes either by integrating them with their pre-existing social welfare pro-

gramme or by adding the latter with the former, providing comprehensive range of services. It has been observed that the provision of such integrated range of welfare and economic services not only reinforces social and economic well-being of the poor women but also empowers them. A recent study by Dr Ruhul Amin and this writer found that both authority and autonomy indices are significantly and positively associated with NGO credit programmes. The part of the positive relationship of NGO credit membership with authority and autonomy indices may indicate that the growing power that the poor women are achieving because of their increasing contribution to the economic well-being of their family. The study thus shows that women should be brought into the net of credit lines not only by NGOs but also by the government.

By and large, all societies should reevaluate the roles of women and divide the total receipts according to their contributions. Monetization of the household level non-monetary activities as carried out by women could perhaps show that women lag men by few inches not by few yards. No nation can claim to be civilized or developed unless they value the contributions of women in right perspective. To this effect, they need to change the century-old outmoded laws and regulations, beliefs and suppositions that seemingly deter women to eke out a better dividend. Let women come to the forefront. Let there be light.

Two Hundred Days of Uncertain PM

A person like Gowda, who belongs to a region which knows the rigours of a faraway state from Delhi, should have realised by this time that it is not the geographical distance alone, but the emotional one as well in a country which is not yet a federal structure.

PRIME Minister Deve Gowda's difficulty is in some ways worse than it seems. It is not the uncertainty of Congress support, which has been under threat since the beginning. Nor is it the government's prosaic performance, however disheartening. It is not even the contradictions of the United Front because they have been there from the day it was put together.

Gowda's problem is that he is trying to touch too many points at the same time, with no follow-up. He goes to the north-east, a good gesture early in the innings, and announces a bonanza of Rs 700 crore. He takes up Kashmir and assembles a package of Rs 650 crore. He presides over the Planning Commission and lays down an annual growth rate of seven per cent in the ninth plan, without discussion. And somewhere along the line, he declares the creation of Uttarakhand, a state to be hacked from Uttar Pradesh.

All these statements assume importance because they emanate from the prime minister. They are promises which have to be made good. Presuming he means business, where are the men or material to give them shape? The bureaucracy has the same old formulas, which have been found wanting. And the few advisers Gowda has did not have the sweep or the vision to

straighten the problems. They are not even familiar with the efforts made in the past and the men made them.

Money is only one part, although finding it at a time when the Centre and the states are facing serious financial difficulties will be hell of a problem. The real challenge is how to find solutions. People in the north-east and Kashmir feel hurt and humiliated. They are an alienated lot. The security forces, which have stayed for years in these areas, have enforced a pattern of governance that does not go well with a democratic system. Too many forces, too many laws have clogged freedom and liberty.

A person like Gowda, who belongs to a region which knows the rigours of a faraway state from Delhi, should have realised by this time that it is not the geographical distance alone, but the emotional one as well in a country which is not yet a federal structure. The disenchantment in Assam, Nagaland, some states in the north-east, Kashmir and in certain other parts of India is a symptom, not the disease. The disease is the imperious attitude of New Delhi which no amount of

money can compensate.

Gowda's priority should not have been to write cheques but to re-write such rules and regulations as have reduced the states to mere vassals. At least the Sarkaria Commission recommendations to the Centre-state relations requiring no constitutional amendment, should have been implemented

problems. He can begin with Kashmir. However imperfect the stage elections have provided an opportunity to initiate a process of conciliation. The Kashmiris, tired and exasperated, want peace. This mood will not last long. New Delhi must act now. Farooq Abdullah is a factor but he alone is not an answer to the Kashmir problem.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

by this year. But the manner in which the UP's elected representatives have been treated — they have not been allowed even to take an oath of allegiance — indicates that New Delhi has the last word. The appointment of Ramesh Bhandari as the governor speaks volumes about the Centre's intentions. No closing a park for his son's entertainment. Probably, the Moghals did so.

The Gowda government, for its own sake as well as the country's, needs to take up a few

The other leadership, that of the Hurriyat and of others should be associated with the proposed talks. New Delhi's thinking is reflected in the continuation of governor Krishna Rao, who epitomises the excesses committed in the last few years. Money is not an alternative to a political settlement. Past experience also shows how the bulk of funds went through the channels and ended up with the same people.

But it seems that the politically congested domestic scene

has forced Gowda to stop out into a realm of policy — foreign affairs — so as to make a mark. The breakthrough on the Ganga water has won him attention. But for his assurance to West Bengal chief minister Jyoti Basu on helping the Calcutta port to stay navigable, the agreement would not have gone through. With Nepal also, the relationship is far better following a settlement on the Koural power project.

Even on Pakistan, Gowda's approach has been applauded. His message to Pakistan President Leghari to resume talks confirms his intentions to normalise relations with neighbours. The visit of the Chinese president to New Delhi has opened new windows of opportunity, not so much on the border as on the norms how the two countries should behave in the region. Foreign Minister Indar Gujral may have done the ground work but the credit goes to Deve Gowda.

The rise or fall of Gowda is, however, dependent on the domestic scene, which is far from happy. There is gloom on the economic front. There may not be a dip in the industrial production and in the purchase of durables. Still, the impression is that the country is tumbling down. The Prime Minister may be quite right in maintaining that everything has not gone wrong in the last six months.

But the disappearance of wheat from ration shops is a situation which, a country with a large buffer stock, is not understandable. Import of wheat has a dampening effect on a country which has been exporting it till the other day. It is bad for the reputation of a prime

minister who calls himself a farmer's son. He should have known better. Strange, none has been held responsible for the bungling.

As far as the public is concerned, it has inferred that the corrupt administration is guilty of all the lapses, whether the scarcity of wheat, rise in prices or even the perennial failure of electricity. Charges against former ministers — top police officials have joined their ranks — have already pushed the government's reputation to the lowest depth.

Gowda does not look like a person who is going hammer and tongs against corrupt politicians. Political considerations are attributed to him because of the mathematics he has to work out to keep the numbers straight. He is often blamed for the CBI's sluggishness. That Congress president Sitaram Keari was deflected by the additional solicitor general of India, was noticed with alarm.

It seems that Deve Gowda's instruments are blunt. The administration has no longer a sense of purpose. The values and ethical considerations that once motivated public servants are lacking. On the other hand, he has not been able to bind the United Front together and span its divisions. Both are a daunting task.

But he should have looked like a prime minister making an effort to retrieve the administration as well as erring politicians. Even after 200 days of prime ministership, he is fumbling for ideas how to do so. Mere good intentions will not do.

And perhaps 200 days are not a long enough period to take the "system" out of the morass in which it has been stuck for so long. What Deve Gowda does in the next 200 days or whatever time he gets will show how right or wrong it has been to hope.

To the Editor

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.

Prime Minister's live TV programme

Sir, This is an appreciation of certain important suggestions, made by Mr. A. A. G. Kabir of 33/1 Joarshahara, Dhaka, on the PM's live TV programme published in your daily, dated 14-11-96.

I extend my cordial thanks to Mr. Kabir for his nice and constructive suggestions, to be passed on to the Prime Minister, as well as to the TV authorities, through your esteemed daily, for their active consideration while conducting the PM's next TV programme expected to be aired, in every six-month time.

In addition to this, I would also request the TV authorities not to allow any biased supporter, of BNP and it's the notorious Freedom Party to participate in the PM's next live TV programme. M.A. Lals Green Road Dhaka-1215

"Diminishing tiger"

Sir, Forest Department's attention has been drawn to a published editorial "Diminishing Tiger" in The Daily Star dated 20-8-96. This is to clarify that there is no record of Royal Bengal Tiger population at 900 in the Sundarbans of Bangladesh as quoted in the editorial. Forest Department never heard of this number of tigers in the Sundarbans in the past.

The population of the Bengal Tiger (Panthera tigris tigris) which is popularly called 'Royal Bengal Tiger' has been estimated at 362 in 1993 by the Forest Department. Earlier estimates like Guy Mountford put the total tiger population around 100. Others also estimated tiger population with large variations. The differences in the estimates were due to different field techniques used. There is no indication that tiger population is shrinking and CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and

Dish antenna and its impact on our posterity

Sir, Millions of Bangladeshis viewers have been watching programmes on television screen since the opening up of the TV station in our country. This TV station was a state-owned, low-powered transmission system primarily installed in the DIT building. After independence the government has installed the TV station permanently at Rampura in Dhaka. Since then efforts for its improvement have been being aimed at by the TV authority under the government directives. After a long time TV viewers have come in touch with the network of dish antenna. This has facilitated us to watch updated world news and views transmitted by BBC, CNN and the like. It has opened a new horizon to all sections of educated people who have easy access to TV sets.

TV transmission is done on frequency modulation (FM). This FM system has a notable limitation, that is, the FM transmission gets restricted if there are mountains or high-rise objects in between the TV set and the station. So we cannot receive transmission from distance places or countries. To overcome this limitation, some technologically advanced countries have placed satellites in the space. One of these satellites has covered the South and South-east Asian countries. This has made it possible to cover this region with 24-hour transmission systems. But it is very much necessary to fix a dish antenna — satellite receiver — to receive such directional reflection by the satellite

from the space.

The receiver is also a directional antenna. It is a dish-shaped object made of solid metal plate or metal net. An additional electronic receiver is fixed in its centre. Then it is set on a high place facing properly towards the satellite. Then special cables are connected between the dish and the TV sets. This is how an individual can be put into a dish antenna network. Rampura TV station has fixed a gigantic dish antenna on a huge tower.

The relay transmission of BBC and CNN through the Rampura TV station is popularly known as the network of dish antenna. It facilitates us to watch the BBC from 7 am to 8 am and from 2 pm to 4.30 pm and the CNN from 8 am to 11.30 am except on Fridays. Whoever has a TV set, can avail these programmes at the mentioned times. We get them at our home channel.

This kind of free-hand reception of all satellite-oriented European, US and Indian transmissions has some impacts on our national character. As for the state-owned network of dish antenna, we can safely say that the viewers get an updated knowledge of world events, news, views, sports and others. But the private network of antenna is giving us entertainment as well as all sorts of acceptable and unacceptable shows. Some of them are never a part of our socio-cultural life. Therefore, we are getting mixed impacts on our national character. This will lead our young generation to an unpredictable destination in the future. At present, it is impossible to profess on such matter as we should be cautious if not alarmed about our children, regarding these mixed impacts on our national characters.

The network of dish antenna has the following advantages. We can know what the people of other countries are doing at the moment. We may feel ourselves as the members of the world community. We may have an indirect bondage with the sorrow and happiness of the world population as a whole. Our general knowledge increase with an unthinkable pace. We may be conversant with all modern thoughts and techniques for better living. Finally, there may come out other advantages with the continuation of this network.

As all good things on earth may turn to be bad if they fall in the hands of bad guys. We may not write off the probability of evil impacts in the use of dish antenna network in Bangladesh. Majority of our TV users are half-educated. Their understanding of some programmes may be misleading in their lives. They may be mistaken with those alien programmes of show business as their own. And by implying them into our society, they may create a socio-cultural imbalance. Moreover teenagers may not build up a good morality following some of these alien programmes. Some ignorant housewives and young girls and boys may also indulge in free sexual life which has no religious, social and lawful recognition in our country. These are the probable errors, we may gain from the dish-antenna network of private accord.

In this age of modernisation and computer technology, we must adjust ourselves with the world community in all spheres of knowledge and wisdom. So in spite of some setbacks the network of dish antenna is an added facility for our nation. We should do the best of its use. We have to keep in our mind that we shall accept the best part of this network and avoid the worst. This is not the age of backward march. So we have to go ahead with not only the network of dish antenna but also any further new technology for human welfare. Lieut (Retd) Shahadat Hussain Dhaka

Abduction Sir, Just going through the daily papers we get the news of abductions, which the newspapers run out of space to print. Actually, there are many such crimes committed in different places of the country regularly that remain unnoticed. Now, on reading the unabated flow of kidnapping news, it appears the authority concerned is not so much active and alert.

If any danger befalls another, we naturally do not become concerned. But we feel tensed when we become the victim of the same. The abduction is becoming a chronic social problem. So, the authority concerned should take measures to prevent it by dealing severely with those involved in the crime.

Afsana Choudhury Emu S S Road, Stragjary

Art Buchwald's COLUMN

Take It Away, Donors

ALTHOUGH most Democratic Party workers are out holiday shopping, one division is hard at work returning conflict-of-interest questions in the press.

Bill Maudlin is in charge of this section. When I visited him in his office, he was busy writing to the big contributors from Taiwan, Thailand and Nepal.

"It's heartbreaking to return money to these people," Bill said. "It's insulting to mail back political gifts that rightfully belonged to us in the first place."

"Why did you take the money to begin with?" "At the time we didn't realise that they were donating to the party only so they could tell their friends that they had White House connections. As soon as we found out that they were using us for that purpose, we were determined to put a stop to it."

"What exactly do you tell fat-cat donors?" Bill handed me a form letter that accompanied each returned contribution. It read: "Dear Party Loyalist: I am happy to report that the presidential election campaign ended with a surplus amount of cash, and so we are returning you check. On behalf of the entire party we wish to thank you for your generosity."

"Because of the refund we will have to cancel your upcoming visits to the Oval Office at the White House and your breakfast with Vice President Gore on the aircraft carrier of your choice. This does not mean, however, that we no longer hold your Uncle Gao, the financier, in esteem. Nor are we canceling our feasibility studies concerning your request for us to build a train tunnel beneath Mount Everest. These are both on the president's list of overseas priorities."

"That's a good letter," I said. "You managed to give him back his money without hurting his feelings."

"People in Asia don't like having their political contributions returned because it can make them lose face."

I commented to Bill, "It must kill you to return money when the Democratic Party needs it."

"It's no fun. When a big spender from Borneo gives to us, he expects at least one night in the Lincoln Bedroom. Here's another example of how we break the bad news to donors. We are returning your check for \$500,000 because the president wants you to know that he likes and respects you for yourself, not for what you give to the party. Just the other day Mr Clinton told me how much he missed playing pool with you in the White House. He said that, even without your donation, his casa is your casa."

By arrangement with UNB and Los Angeles Times Syndicate