

Tribal Repatriation: Well-orchestrated Overture

The forty thousand tribal refugees now crammed in the squalid camps in Tripura should prefer breathing fresh air at their homes in Bangladesh to languishing indefinitely on the margin of life without any future.

Private Sector Capacity

State Minister for Planning Dr Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir struck more of a populist than a pragmatic note with business leaders on Tuesday. Giving a preview of what the Fifth Five-year plan would be like when it is released later this month, Alamgir stated with characteristic aplomb that the private sector would be treated as the engine of growth.

At an annual average GDP growth rate of 7.2 per cent over the next five years, the private sector's share of the total projected resources would be 58 with a relatively diminished role visualised for the public sector. The private sector is to mobilise 20 per cent equity in order that it is eligible for 80 per cent drawal from the country's financial system.

This is a highly generous equity: credit ratio being promised, apparently glossing over the formula in force at present whereby investment proposals are sanctioned. It is strictly done now on the basis of 50 per cent equity participation committed by a private sector entrepreneur.

There is evidently a perceptual difference between the State Minister for Planning and Finance Minister SAMS Kibria on what should be the right equity: credit ratio. The latter has made it plain that a project which did not carry a fifty per cent financial commitment by an entrepreneur hardly merited any serious consideration.

We have been unrelenting in giving full-throated support to the private sector and have even interminably insisted upon the government to curb its unbridled borrowing from the banking system in order that there can be a steady flow of credit to the private sector. At the same time we cannot be oblivious of the Finance Minister's concern over misuse of loans, taken on low equity base, by irresponsible private parties or individuals.

Some business leaders counselled that bank financing to the industrial sector be not suspended during the loan recovery operations. While understanding their concern, we cannot turn a blind eye to the default culture as such. Both sides have points to cross their swords on and it is advisable that they have debates across the table to thrash out their differences.

Why should not the leading representative bodies of the private sector take a role in helping the government recover the long overdue loans? Let's see this fresh approach from them.

Fighting Fatwabazi

Discussants at a meeting have demanded that the government enact laws against fatwabazi. Against the backdrop of a discernible strong current of this form of religious extremism, it is a predictable clamour no doubt. A deeper look into the matter, however, will show such laws against fatwabazi may be necessary but are not going to be enough for fighting this malaise. What are the ways of implementing the laws? If the laws favour a victim of fatwabazi, it is definitely going to act as a deterrent but there is no guarantee that it will effectively bring an end to the problem.

Better fight it on the social front. Society is getting restive— thanks to a remarkable process of awakening that has of late come about among women, particularly in the lower segment of society. The religious fundamentalists and others feel threatened. They are exhibiting their aggression from an exaggerated sense of their diminishing influence and interests. The reason behind their intolerance is this. They want to keep society perpetually chained to dogmas because that is what serves them best. And no doubt, they target the vulnerable ones.

So, it is up to our society to arm itself against the rising trend of fatwabazi. Educated people must join hands with the target groups to fight the extremists both on the theological and society's practical planes. A social movement has to be launched against this religious obscurantism and social mediaevalism. Women at the grassroots level are gradually being aware of their rights and potential through their increasing familiarity with the harsh economic realities. That they are coming out of homes in a growing number for a living is a good sign. If planfully organised, they have the potential to change society by banishing religious extremism and conservatism from the country's soil.

Inspiring

Man is never too old to learn. However, academic education after a certain age could be an elusive goal. But perhaps not for men like Habibur Rahman, a teacher of a high school in Jhenidah. He appeared at Degree (B A) examinations along with his son and both the father and son have come out with flying colours. This is remarkable for a teacher who ran the risk of embarrassment in case he failed and his son passed the exam. We do not know how old is he, but can realise that he was pretty confident of his success.

Years ago there was a text book for class IX in which we came across a story about a man named Adu Bhal. An epitome of perseverance, the man was never tired of subjecting himself to repeated annual final examinations to get promoted from class V11 to V111. He got married and had children, but could not manage to pass the hurdle.

Then came the crucial test of his life. His son also appeared at the 7th class examination along with him. Could he or could he not pass? The suspense came to an end with his success at last. And the epitaph on his grave summed up the man's entire life's effort: Here lies one who was promoted from class V11 to V111. In this case, we do not know if Habibur Rahman had any such failings before. Whatever it is, he is certainly one of the rare breed like of whom kindles hopes in the bosom of every unsuccessful soul.

THE National Committee on CHT (NCCHT) has sent a tribal-dominated delegation to the ethnic refugee camps in the Indian state of Tripura in a fresh bid to bring back their tribal compatriots to Bangladesh. Not only is the seven-member team headed by tribal leader and MP Kalparanjan Chakma, three other prominent leaders of the same community viz. Samiran Chairman, Khagrachari District Council, Bir Bahadur, MP from Bandarban, and Akhoy Muni Chakma are also included in it.

Three other members of the team are Bangladesh government officials like the Divisional Commissioner, Chittagong, M Sakawat Hossain, Director General, Special Affairs Division at the PM's Sectt, ASM Mobaidul Islam, and DC, Khagrachari, Ismail Hossain, persons who have grown sufficient expertise in their fields of competence. They have also developed good rapport with the tribal negotiators from a series of encounters they have had under the leadership of Abul Hasnat Abdullah, the ruling party Chief Whip who heads the NCCHT.

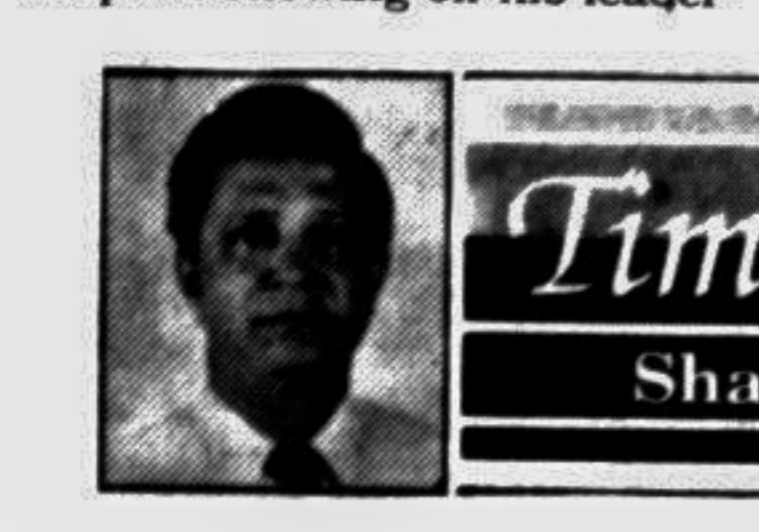
The tribal leaders in the del-

egation are being relied upon to persuade Upendra Lal Chakma, a former MP and leader of the refugees in India not to put a spanner on the wheel of their home-coming. The apprehension about his likely obstructionist role grows because it was chiefly owing to him that a well-resumed repatriation process early this year came unexpectedly to a halt.

Under a 20-point accord reached between NCCHT and the Refugee Welfare Association in India, of which Upendra Lal is an unquestioned supremo, as many as 7,600 tribal refugees actually trekked back home in the March-April period of the current year. They were rehabilitated with care and compassion.

On return from his reappraisal mission to Bangladesh rehabilitation camps Upendra Lal Chakma disavowed the refugees in Tripura camps from going back to Bangladesh on the plea that implementation of the repatriation agreement was being lawed. His contention in-

involved matters of detail, and not so much of principle. Even looking at it from his side, it sounded quite like pandering to either the extremist views within the Shantibahini ranks, or that it was his indiscreet attempt at showing off his leader-



Shah Husain Imam

ship clout to the community at large.

Upendra Lal Chakma made matters worse by raising the demand that no further repatriation would be allowed except under the supervision of the UNHCR or the ICRC. There was no human rights violation, no blood-letting, no sign of overt or covert persecution and not even any acute manifestation of

mismanagement on the Bangladesh side that could have warranted a demand for an international involvement like that. This tangential move to associate an international agency with repatriation when the CHT has not been a flash-

point, either in terms of internal commotion or refugee exodus, is manifestly an extension of the Shantibahini extremist's desperate bid for internationalising their separatist political goal in order to keep it alive.

The militants and their surrogate variants are fighting a lost battle in view of the sea-change that has occurred in the objective situation pertaining to

contiguous states has fomented local sentiments adversely, something that Tripura government could not trifle with.

The forty thousand tribal refugees now crammed in the squalid camps in Tripura should prefer breathing fresh air at their homes in Bangladesh to languishing indefinitely on the margin of life without any future. They are being given all sorts of rehabilitation support and if there is any snag in their re-settlement which is also eminently suited for bringing about a political rapprochement with the tribals on a durable basis.

The Bangladesh Army's counter-insurgency role in the CHT has been dubbed as the most low-profile one in the present-day world. In fact, it has evolved, matured and mellowed over the years.

While the Shantibahini operations have ceased from across the border, the Tripura state government does not see any reason why in the present congenial conditions across the border the tribal refugees should not return to their hearths and homes in the CHT. Their occasional sneaking into the outer periphery of the camps and straying into the

The Fateful Cambodian Weekend

Dr Firdous Murshid writes from Phnom Penh

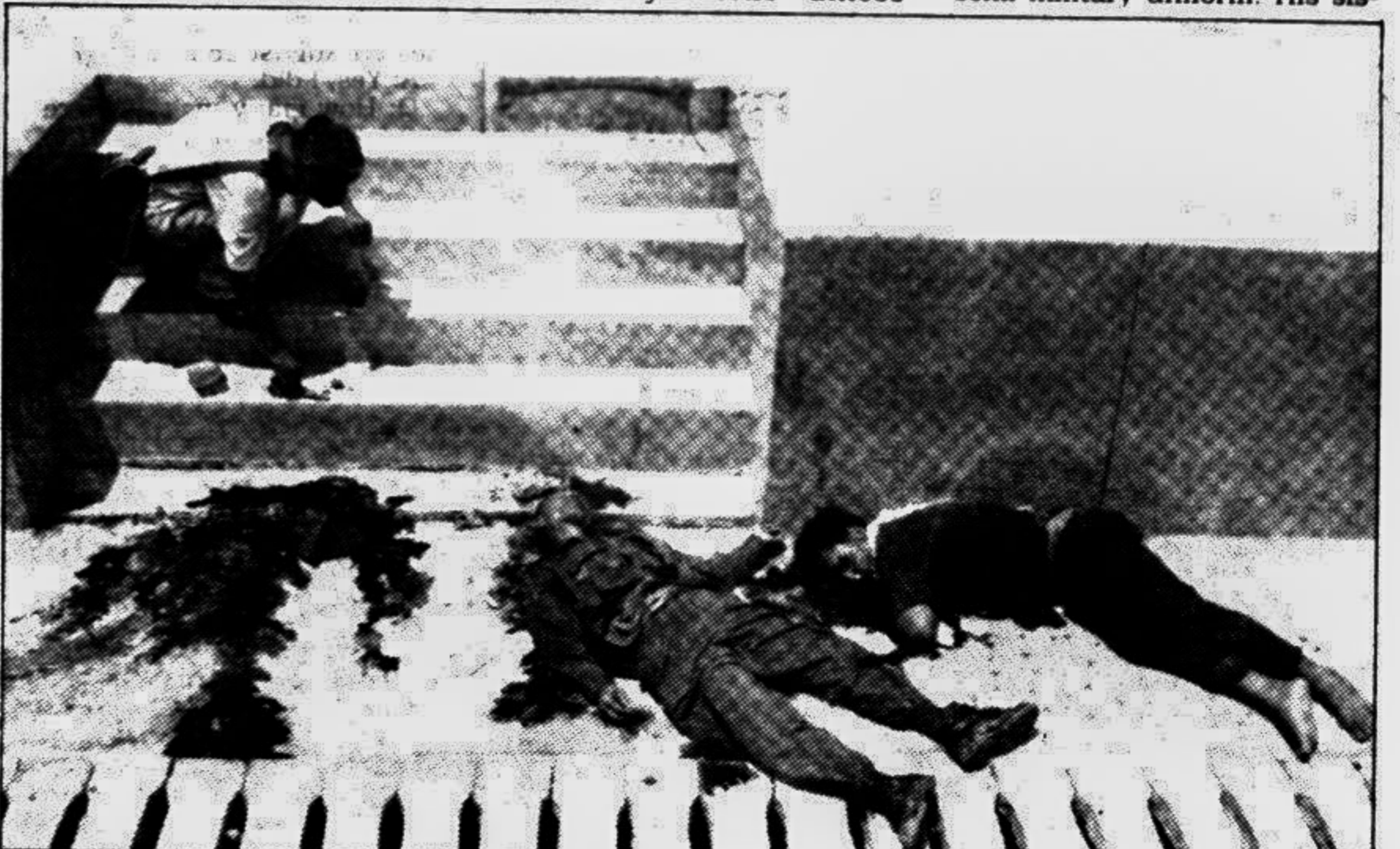
Saturday morning appeared quite normal, at least to untrained eyes and ears! True there appeared to be the distant sound of gunfire and B-40 rockets — but surely that cannot be of significance in a country where people shoot at the sky when it rains or when they are trying to get assistance from the fire service!

vice! We switched on to CNN, which was already reporting heavy fighting in the vicinity of the airport (which happens to be quite close to my place of work). We also heard that Ranariddh could not be located in PP. What was going on? Should one worry? Were we in any danger? We had just moved to the house from the hotel a day earlier. What were our neighbours like? I was very glad that we were due to have lunch with Eva (my boss — and reportedly on very close terms with Hun Sen) — she was going to come and get us at 12:15. Then, a creeping doubt. If the situation is so bad, she cannot come, right? I walked up to the main road with my wife and our restless seven-year-old, Shabab, on the appointed hour. I looked at my watch: 12:20. My heart sank. Eva is never late. She couldn't come. I felt insecure standing there on the road. I told my wife to go back into the

house. Shabab and I would give her another couple of minutes. At that point, she appeared on the horizon. Eva had spent the morning in the office trying to finish up some work related to the planned workshop on 'conflict resolution' (!), when the shooting started. She was trying to remain calm, but the tension on her face was obvious. She tuned in to BBC on her car radio. BBC had not yet caught on to Phnom Penh. I told her what I had heard on CNN. She noted that Hun Sen was in Vietnam (was it significant she wondered). The Prince had left the country already, along with most of his top people. Would they just run away like this, leaving Hun Sen a free rein? Eva thought that Ranariddh must have a longer term plan. Plead to donors? Start another insurgency in the North West by joining forces with Khmer Rouge remnants? Donor pressure rarely works unless

backed up by sanctions or force. And the Prince would appear to be an unlikely leader of a guerrilla army? And at any rate, ordinary Khmers were fed up with fighting. They are fed up with war.

ter? wife? girl-friend? (we found it difficult to figure out who was who) only told us of bombs, rockets, every time there was an explosion, followed by 'no problem' perhaps trying to assure us that those were coming from a long way off. The pictures on CNN were horrendous. Yes, we could see the smoke from the fires. But could it all be that bad? Was CNN exaggerating? In the meantime, the French TV channel began displaying a communique from the French and European embassies: Do not leave your houses under any circumstances. Draw the curtains. If there is fighting in your area, go into the bathroom or in an inner room without windows.



PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA: A bystander on July 7 collects personal belongings of two killed soldiers loyal to First Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh at a library at Phnom Penh University, named after Second Prime Minister Hun Sen. The men were reportedly killed after blowing up a tank on July 6 during clashes between troops loyal to Cambodia's two feuding prime ministers.

There has been heavy damage to Pochentong Airport. No flight are operating for the time being. The communique was being updated every six hours.

colleague reported that many villagers from around the city had come into town with their ox-carts on that weekend, hoping to literally cart away looted goods.

Till mid-July, normal flights out of PP were yet to resume. The gold shops had begun to open — an important barometer of normalcy here. The city turned into a ghost town after 7:00 in the evening. Most bars and restaurants remained closed. The non-government banks were yet to re-open. Travelling to the provinces was unwise. Tourists have fled from the fabled Angkor Wat. Well, Carol has gone off. Nirmal (a Bangladeshi-Australian) and his family got evacuated by the Ausies. Dominique, a Bangladeshi with the Asia Foundation was ordered to leave. The Americans on US-funded projects must go back. The Asians (Malaysians, Philippines, Thais, Singaporeans, Taiwanese) have been evacuated. The British advice was to go away quietly. However, everyone agreed that there was no immediate threat to security! It was likely that the (large) expatriate press would dwindle to around 40-50 per cent of the pre-coup level. Aid has been stopped by the Japanese (one Japanese engineer died when his house was hit by two rockets). The Americans, Australians and Germans have followed suit. Multi-laterals were staying put. The sense of dynamism and rapid growth that was in evidence a week ago, has simply evaporated. There were about 60-70 illegal or quasi-legal Bangladeshis in the country. They did like to get out. If it came to it, a possible escape route would have been the nearby through Ho Chi Minh city nearby. The Vietnamese said that foreigners would be allowed to get away through Ho Chi Minh if their governments so requested. Could I request the Foreign Ministry to make necessary requests to Vietnam, Thailand and to the British for possible assistance, in the event of an essential evacuation? Let me, however, reiterate — there was little sign of any immediate security concern at least in Phnom Penh. On the other hand, things have a way of changing quickly here.

The writer, an economist, researcher and consultant is currently based at the Cambodia Development Resource Institute, Phnom Penh, on a UN assignment.

To the Editor...

'Project on Gulshan Lake.....'

Sir, Being an interested party I thank the DS for the earlier reports and the above-captioned news published on the 'Gulshan Lake' scandal appearing in the paper of 1 August.

Some 300 or more applicants paid the price at the rate many times over the Tk 40,000 per bigha 10 years earlier applying for a plot of land at Gulshan/Banani/Baridhara. But RAJUK allotted them 5 katha plots at a fictitious area called Baridhara J-Block. The said block has no evidence of existence. Ministers of earlier governments promised early allotment abetting the crime of criminals in RAJUK, even on the sacred floor of the Parliament! The RAJUK Chairman made solemn promise of early allotment to the Speaker of the Parliament. During all these time the conniving group were conspiring to sell the land at Taka forty thousand per bigha!

I request the minister to thoroughly enquire the mystery and make RAJUK immediately hand over the allottees' plots in localities for which they made the payment.

A Frustrated Citizen Dhaka

Computers instead of satellite dish

Sir, I think RU authorities are trying their best to educate the students, not to entertain. I read in the DS with dismay regarding plea for satellite dish. Why don't they ask for computer upgrades! How many computers does RU have? I think these so-called students are living in a fantasy world. And I must bluntly blame

the politicians for their morose attitudes. I am horrified to picture a depressing future for Bangladesh. I must attest that the Indian students are far ahead of us because of their acquaintance with sophisticated technology. And it is also easy for them to get funding in US universities due to their prior skills.

If we don't take any action now, all our hopes for the Golden Bangladesh as promised by Bangabandhu will be lost forever. Please stop student politics immediately and inspire them in science and technology. Otherwise we will remain and do as others wish us to do. May be our leaders like to keep us unskilled and ignorant, who knows? We need better computing facilities right now. Satellite dish — NO!

Kaiser Matin Texas Tech Lubbock, USA

Culprits must be punished

Sir, The verdict of not-guilty on the four accused police personnel of Seema rape case stunned us. People from all walks of life are outraged and indignant by this gross injustice, being policemen, who are employed to protect people, they should be punished more severely than common people. But what do we see? The law let them go scot-free!

If this is the condition of our country, then our future is doomed — criminals will be more daring, knowing they are free to do anything they want and will smirk at us. We learned that the Home Minister has ordered a reinvestigation of the case and firmly

assured severe punishment for those found guilty in the reinvestigation. But I am not very optimistic about it. The Home Minister had declared that if he could not control the criminal acts within six months after taking charge of his office, he would resign. But neither has happened. Crimes of all sorts are increasing at such a degree that people are at their wit's end.

To please certain quarters, the government must not act unwisely, people will lose faith in it. Justice must be kept free from slur.

Nur Jahan East Nasirabad, Chittagong

Do we eat soap?

Sir, Advertisement is a way to publicise commodity. Along with it, there is a code of conduct to direct the advertisement and every company as well as advertising firm should obey those codes.

We have noticed that a cosmetic company is violating those regulations by its advertisements of soaps. According to its advertisements, as the company has claimed, all the soaps available in the market have been manufactured from animals' fat and thus those soaps are haram (forbidden) while only its soaps have been manufactured from vegetables fat and thus its products are halal (permitted). The company, by these advertisements, pointed out the food taboos from the idea of eating pork to Muslims and beef to Hindus.

I believe the above-mentioned advertisement has hurt the religious sentiment of the people on account of what it is meaning, that we and our relatives, as well as our forefathers

committed acts of haram before the 'hundred per cent halal soap' came in the market. The religious context of haram have made the food taboos. But we do not eat soap.

The company, however, should be aware that many life-saving drugs and injections are being manufactured from different limbs and appendages of animals' body which are haram by same analogy of what those advertisements meant. For instance, the life-saving 'insulin' for diabetic patients, is being manufactured from the pancreas of an animal like the pig or the sheep or the cow. Moreover, the main ingredient of most of the drugs and perfumes is alcohol, which is haram for Muslims. But we cannot disregard those drugs. Therefore, the advertisements of 'halal soap' are ridiculous.

Asif Rasheed Dhaka

'The Remote Neighbour'

Sir, There is no movement of the heart. Transport comes later. Not closed economies closed minds. Not anti-Bengalee — but the Indo-Pak syndrome.

Party workers in Bangladesh spoiled by the political leaders; hence replacement of the NGO network does not seem feasible right now. Regarding the setting up of 4-tier LG structure, there's many a slip between the cup and the lip. First the central administration reforms.

Where is the Pied Piper of Sonar Bangla? A Reader Dhaka

OPINION

Arrange Fast Exit

A Zabr

The public mind is now seized with the series of cruel deaths during fires in the garment factories located in the wrong type of premises in the residential areas. The latest incident reveals that the fire was controlled but many workers/staff died due to stampede while trying to rush out of the floor and the building. Innocent lives have been lost unnecessarily due to administrative negligence over the years.

The greater and more urgent problem to solve immediately under a crash project is to modify and arrange the quick exits from the premises of the large number of workers to escape from a fire.

Due to security reasons the administrations of the factories work on the basis of one-entry and one-exit point during the daily working hours (the other points are under lock and key; and double staircases do not exist). There is no adequate and compulsory arrangement for multiple exit points for evacuation during emergencies (fire, quake etc.). Multi-storied factories are death traps known to the authorities. How the approval could be issued? It is suicidal!

The garment industry should go immediately for flat-factory in separate industrial zones near the cities, with high-density hostels or dormitories for the female workers. A start has to be made. The present ad hoc and haphazard 'planning' (!) won't do. The philosophy appears to be: go for the profit; the problems will take care of themselves!

The administration has to be more sensitive, and there must be pressure from the regulatory and apex bodies for the factory owners to confirm to adequate safety arrangements which work without waste of time (seconds rather than minutes). The lawful penalties are never imposed. A few heavy fines and factory lock-ups will change the attitude. Why is our society so undisciplined in every sphere of life?

In an undisciplined and unregulated environment during the mushrooming growth period, the factories were set up in the wrong places (why? — the government must find out); and later, the associations did not bother to be strict with the members to carry out modifications, or shift to safer locations. Thus the problems piled up and multiplied (not added) over the years and decades.

For this lax attitude, the indifference of the authority during successive regimes deserve to be condemned. Now the problem has assumed proportions which appear to be going out of control. It is not easy to relocate 2000 garment factories in Dhaka quickly; there are problems of time, space, and human aspects. Which is easier to tackle: a sapling, or a big oak tree? Belatedly, now a high-power probe committee has been formed to spell out the solutions in phases. This is a poor show of the attitude. Good governance is more than lip-service; making noise and sermonising.