

Use the Respite

Amidst a heated and hay-wire controversy over the draft accord for peace in the CHT, a respite has come off an undated postponement of the signing ceremony earlier scheduled for yesterday. BNP's danger-prone threat of 'hartaal' the moment government signs the CHT treaty, the government party's unwavering belief that the negotiated outcome is in the best interest of the nation and the PCJSS hardliners' 'surprise' demand for amendment to some settled points definitely generate an urgency that we utilise the breather thoughtfully.

The vague and uniformed debate on the subject in search of a needle in the haystack and the various motive imputations between the BNP and AL are neither enhancing public understanding of the details nor taking two decade-long insurgency problem anywhere near early resolution.

This is what we would like to suggest as a way out of the deadlock: Let the two BNP MPs who were originally included in the NCCHT but have since stayed away from the negotiations carried out with the PCJSS be made privy to the provisions of the draft peace accord. This will be just by way of having them take a look at what is there in the treaty without their running any risk of being regarded as a party to it nor will the government have to suffer any loss of face on this account.

While remaining supportive of the AL government's sincere and patriotic efforts to strike peace with the tribal leadership, we urge it not to take too much on its shoulders to clinch a deal which will have to endure through thick and thin in the political arena. In the ultimate analysis, the government has to take the people along in the all-important task of implementing the peace accord. Rather than ploughing a lonely furrow the AL government must now strive to associate public opinion with the basic framework of understanding reached with the PCJSS on routine army presence, Bengali settlers' fate and above all power equations between the central government and the regional council.

To the BNP we say, please stay back from creating a hysteria over the contents of the peace accord and help us all emerge through a creative by-pass by instructing your two MPs to join the NCCHT if only to be conversant with the terms of the draft peace accord.

The Bad Education Hole

At the Bhoror Kagoj roundtable held on Saturday top people gathered to say in unison that education is in a shambles. It has gone to the dogs.

The Education Minister said at the roundtable about 4,000 crore taka is spent annually under this head. Destruction of education, it is all too evident, has gone hand in hand with leaps in money infusion into the sector.

Another inexplicable thing has been the growing literature on the problems of education. This too has failed to come to education's benefit. Mr Matiur Rahman, the editor of Bhoror Kagoj was right to point out in his opening remarks that as teachers head all kinds of governmental enterprise in education, the failures in this sector are traceable to them.

That opens up a whole new world of problems — a pandora's box almost literally — that has not had any helpful exposure so far. Whatever the structure and management, whatever the backing with money and other inputs, education falls flat or is wholly counterproductive if the teacher doesn't teach and lead and love and give himself or herself to the cause of education and of the pupil. That has gone out of our education thing. It didn't do that in a day or a year or even a decade. It has been going out and out all the time. But some milestones in criminality — such as changes in examination systems as also in syllabi — gave this inexorable undoing some inconceivable spurt. Some teachers, countable in tens of thousands, became minters of money trading in merchandise made necessary by the boards for a pass. The rest of the profession and with that the whole educational ambience became worst converts to consumerism. The coaching centres, the tutorial homes — or educational business flourished to ensure that the pupil would not be able to know or even write or do anything on his or her own.

Much has to be said on the teacher's side also. But perhaps not before a return to teaching or even a will to do that is perceived. The crunch of the whole tragedy is perhaps, of the 4,000 crore taka, only a fraction is spent on 'education' as it is understood universally.

Reassuring Presence

UNICEF executive director Carol Bellamy's maiden visit to Bangladesh was a fine occasion to recall and look ahead into the UN body's commitment to development in this country. We share her satisfaction and delight at Bangladesh being the second largest place, globally, of UNICEF activities.

The occasion, however, calls for some soul-searching, too. Have we been able to make the most of UNICEF's expanding activities? There is no doubt that its enabling presence has brought some wholesome changes, notably the reduction of child labour as a result of an MOU dwelt on fondly by Ms Bellamy. And it is looking forward among other targets to curb women and child trafficking, a problem that is slowly assuming pretty ominous proportions. But on the whole what has handicapped us from making the most of UNICEF and other assisting presences is the lack of our commitment to development particularly towards children as its integral component. This single pervasive absence has put us years behind other developing nations. We have said it before and we take this opportunity to reiterate that with such a huge young population like that of ours — more than 50 per cent being under 15, we cannot afford to lack in commitment to our children. There has to be a holistic — political, social and individual awakening about this commitment issue and then, only then can we really hope to be hitched to the wagon of progress.

In an age of shrinking global contribution to the UN fund we have reasons to feel reassured by Ms Bellamy's remark about UNICEF's continued activities in Bangladesh but only if we like other developing nations are ready to make optimal use of external assistance in developing and mobilising internal resources. And the area we need to remain unfailingly focused on is our vast human re-

Social Order: A Matter of National Security

Even after celebrating the Silver Jubilee of the nation's birth we are not apprised of our national security objectives — what to talk of their safeguard; neither do we have an integrated approach — combining military defence with socio economic progress — to achieve them.

increasingly depriving our public even of the 'trickle down' benefit.

AMIDST diverse perceptions on security, there is an unanimity of view among the experts that its attainment is possible only through the safeguard of the nation's core values. There also exists a consensus that, for the developing countries, the sustenance of an internal order conducive to the uninterrupted socio-economic development for the people's well-being ranks highest among a nation's core values only after its political independence and territorial integrity. In the same vein the national security can be assumed to be under threat when a disruption in the social order wrecks the congeniality of environment impeding the country's developmental process.

Few disputes the notion because there is hardly any difference between the devastation caused to a country by an external aggression or a chronic social disorder. What is, after all, the difference between the bullet fired by a gun-running terrorist or from across the border? Both can find their way to hit an unarmed innocent citizen. There is little difference between the country's economic dislocation due to hostile enemy action or by political violence prevailing in a society. The aggression can still be quite often vacated and its scars erased through reconstruction and rehabilitation. The social maladies continue to remain there like a smouldering fire quietly devouring all the potentials of a nation. As a matter of fact, the effects of social disorder can be much more devastating than all-out war.

How has this core value been safeguarded in Bangladesh? Is there a domestic order conducive to the country's all-round development to which are hinged the fate of our teeming millions and in turn our national security? Ever since Bangladesh has been created, hundreds of crores of takas are allocated every year under myriad schemes and projects for multiple developmental sectors with most of them remaining stillborn or abandoned halfway and, at the best, perfunctorily completed. After twenty-six years wastage of billions of takas, the end-result is writ large on the face of the nation which still bears the stigma of being one of the odd three dozens of the least developed countries of the world. It is a veritable puzzle and few ever attempted to penetrate the mystery. In the meantime, the developmental allocations are virtually looted by a few — the traditional beneficiaries of aid and developmental money —

In an opinion poll conducted, off late, by Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad (BUP), corruption has been identified as the single-most hurdle to our development. And the matter rests at that. Neither the establishment, nor the politicians show any concern at the revelation or any commitment for its redress. It essentially remains a subject of discussions in the drawing rooms, social functions and seminars. The only official response is that of a callous indifference. Even if the war cries are occasionally heard from odd political maverick or any concerned citizen, there has been a total lack of political or administrative will to take any convincing action — let alone wage a war on the most devastating epidemic sweeping the country.

Indeed, the successive governments of the country — supposedly the custodian of our national security — have done precious little to combat the threat which puts at stake our survival as a nation. Whereas the issue, being threat to our development, should have been tackled on a warfooting there is not visible initiative from any quarter to stop the spread of Bangladesh.

On the contrary, corruption has been nourished in our country over the years. Bangabandhu tended to be soft about corruption of his partymen on the plea that they sacrificed and suffered in the past. The BNP men often prides on the personal honesty of Zia who however introduced the worst ever corruption in this country — the corruption of politics. He used both public money and office to break and make political parties thus denigrating politics as a whole in this country. Ershad came to power in the name of crusade against the corruption but he and his cronies virtually destroyed the country for a decade.

Although many were involved in the predatory process the corruption and criminal cases were pursued only against a few including, of course, Ershad by the succeeding BNP regime. This and BNP's hobnobbing with Ershad to enlist his support after the party's defeat in 1996 election prove that the BNP's pursuit of selective corruption cases was guided more by political consideration and less, if at all, by the party's concern for corruption. There was outcry of corruption against some to the BNP ministers, but no serious efforts seem to have been made to bring them to book. The time is not ripe as yet to implicate any AL high-up for corruption, but otherwise the

There are positive steps taken with regard to corruption in some of the developing countries. In neighbouring India, corruption has been taken up as a security issue. A commendable role of judicial activism.

To the Editor

Death trap?

Sir, In the recent times, road communication of the country has turned into a death trap which is evident from daily casualties, and injuries to many passengers who make journey by road transports. 'Most unsafe and uncertain while on a road journey' is a common saying of the day. Whenever there are serious accidents, as a normal practice, the government comes forward to set up an enquiry committee reports of which are never published. Reasons for frequent road accidents can easily be pinpointed in the following ways :

1) Due to poor railway communication system, winding up many branch rail lines and squeezing of water-ways, entire load of huge population is on road communication.

2) To drive heavy vehicles on highways trained and experienced drivers are required, and it takes 5-7 years to be a good driver. But to meet huge demand of drivers for thousands of heavy vehicles which are put on the road every year, new and inexperienced drivers are enrolled by the owners most of whom are quite new in this profession.

3) Authorities for issuing driving licence do not examine driving skill of licensees and scrutinise their documents properly. Driving licence can be obtained both for light and heavy vehicles even without facing any test.

4) Due to heavy pressure of transports, roads are damaged and become unfit for vehicle movement which can't be repaired then and there due to official formalities and fund constraints.

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Dhaka for 21st century

Sir, When we first (permanently) settled at Dhaka in the early '40s, it was a provincial town — slow-moving, peaceful and rather green for an urban area. Except for a few rickshaws, hackney carriages, etc., there was hardly any mechanical transports to mention. We would walk to school, go walking the Buckland Band and shop at the two malls the Nawabpur and Islampur. Ramna area was rather no man's land to us, and we only went less during daylight hours for games football normally. The lakes and green parks and open spaces — all welcomed us, but we dared not visit.

Political upheavals for national identities changed the map of the sub-continent — once in '47 and then in '71 — and Dhaka is now a mega city with all modes of transport, both old-fashioned and modern. Traffic is unruly and uncontrolled so far. And the metropolis is under the iron grip of rickshaws, three-wheelers and the private cars. They now kill or maim you without any re-

morse. Their victim could be you, your husband/wife, your child or the next-door neighbour. Again, pollution has reached to that extents which is beyond the control of the city corporation.

In our eagerness for economic advancement, most of the greens and open spaces in lakes and low lands have been used up leaving no 'Exchange Spaces' and 'Mobility Lanes' where people could walk without fear of physical harms and mechanical transports could glide along without getting into jams. Therefore, after living for more than 50 years and being in love with this historical place, we would like to point out for certain facilities to make Dhaka livable for the 21st century — more than a beautiful or glorious city as our leaders would like to assure in their lectures.

Happily, the city has now a few bypasses, over- and under-passes and many more are likely to be commissioned in near future. Yet considering the 10 factors that are essential for healthy living — public safety, traffic, no ice, health, education, housing, cost of food-stuff, tele and other communications services, cultural and economic activities — we would like to suggest the following for Dhaka during the 21st century:

Give priority to pedestrians in certain areas rather than allowing all sorts of transport to dominate the streets e.g., Gulistan Crossing, Elephant Road(s), Sadarhat area including the Buckland Band, Motijheel Commercial area etc.

Ensure more of strolling places where people can take a walk, speak freely without fear of interferences like those of Old Airport area, Crescent Lake, Shuhrawardy Uddan etc.

Develop the Dhaka Central Jail area for easing out pressure on Chawk Bazar and adjacent places.

Allow general public to go for window shopping in certain areas at day time and others during late-evening hours without any restriction or fear of vehicular movements.

A new "Newmarket" is a must and the place to be converted to allow the people have resting place at the centre, multi-storied shopping areas with underground vehicle parking including rickshaws etc.

Motijheel C/A must be traffic-free during working hours; only people paying charges can take their transport — with parking areas on the edges for others.

Silent zones, restricted areas, routing away high-density traffic from residential areas, hospitals, schools, etc., to bring down noise level and air pollution (to be initiated immediately); therefore the need for flyovers in certain streets e.g., Mohakhali, Kawran Bazar etc.

Introduce bi-cycle lanes covering most of the areas between the new and the old city.

Introduce the system of 'Road Pricing to charge com-

PERSPECTIVES

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

the CBI, long years of uninterrupted democracy and an ever-vigilant media in that country does not let even the highest and the strongest in the republic escape the long hand of the law. Pakistan also has instituted an *Eh te as a b* (accountability) mechanism to fight the menace. While taking over Sri Lanka's Presidency in 1994, Ms Chandrika's one of the first few actions was to clamp down on the country's defence establishment which earned the notoriety of accepting huge kickbacks and commission in defence purchases. A similar initiative and earnestness have been lacking on the part of the government in Bangladesh.

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But then corruption is not the only malaise that awaits a cure for ordering our society. A moral decay festers the country with its wider ramifications of violence, terrorism, unrest, lawlessness, extortion and plain rowdiness — showing no sign of abatement over the years. These syndromes are also nourished in a political culture of power hunger, vengeance and an apathy to the nation's core interests.

Nevertheless each one of these syndromes is indeed disincentive to developmental process. The institutions for development — the industrial units, educational campuses and communication network — are now the flash points of violence with acquiescence, if not abetment of the politicians. The business houses are routinely stalked by the gangs of extortions and terrorists patronised by the political parties. The

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