

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 'hartal' 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 uninformed 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 Bhorer 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 Matur Rahman, the editor of Bhorer 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 conceivable 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 resource.

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.



PERSPECTIVES

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

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

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 war footing there is not visible initiative from any quarter to stop the spread of the cancer.

The corruption, as an endemic evil spreading through the different layers of the political system and economy is by no means a unique Bangladeshi phenomenon. Developing countries with few exceptions have been trapped in the dragnet of corruption over the long era of development aid. The development funding of the World Bank and its affiliates have spawned enough opportunities for money-laundering by unscrupulous operators in politics and bureaucracy. Panicked at the enormity of corruption and bungling, the donors themselves are now repeatedly pointing to the issues like corruption and governance of the recipient countries. Unfortunately, corruption has already set in so deep into the social fabric of these countries that only some extraordinary steps can perhaps heal its running sore.

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,

the CBI, long years of unrelenting democracy and an ever vigilant media in that country does not let even the highest and the strongest in the republic to escape the long hand of the law. Pakistan also has instituted an *Ehtesab* (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 upon 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 governments in Bangladesh.

On the contrary, corruption has been nourished in our country over the years. Bangladeshis tended to be soft about corruption of their partymen 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 plundered 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 of 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

corruption are visible everywhere. What is not visible is government's explicit will-power to root it out.

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 roidism — 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 extortionists and terrorists patronised by the political parties. The

frequent work stoppage or hartal stalls the nation's economic life. The near-total collapse of the law and order as well as constant instability emanating from chronic political crises provide anything but an incentive for carrying out healthy regular economic activities, what to talk of planned set of developmental programmes leading up to our nation state-building.

Our self-serving politicians have little inclination to address these hard issues of national life to provide a conducive atmosphere for production, investment and infrastructure building. They are too busy in their squabble for power grabbing to restore order and discipline in the society for increasing growth and accelerating progress. It has been a ritual, instead, for the government leaders over the years to sermonise the foreign entrepreneurs about the virtues of investment in Bangladesh and allure them to attractive returns failing however to convince them. Obviously, there have been few to avail of the advantages offered. Even the local entrepreneurs shy away from large-scale investment leaving the nation to lurch in its chronic underdevelopment and backwardness.

Barring a few — the beneficiaries of the existing chaos and

disorder — it hits hard the entire population, their well-being as well as security and survival. We would fail as nation state if we cannot provide our people a sense of security at least in its rudimentary form — the security from hunger, poverty, disease and illiteracy. What would then an entity called Bangladesh stand for? Also otherwise these are basic human rights are recognised by the world body. As evident from the advanced industrialised countries in the west the security is essentially a function of development and development is directly related to a social order nourished by democratic norms, tolerance, discipline and high moral values. In those countries national security in on the top of the agenda of the statecraft.

In our case 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.

In the past, whenever the society disintegrated in a state of moral decadence even a civilisation fell and its constituent unity withered away. On the other hand, it rose through renaissance, reforms or at the worst social movement. The state of things in Bangladesh today only suggests that at least a powerful social movement to combat the forces of evil prevailing in the country is long overdue.

A Homage to Moulana Bhasani

by Prof Roushan Ara Hoque

TODAY (November 17, 1997) is the 21st anniversary of death of the great *Majlum Jananeta* (leader of the oppressed), Moulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani who strode over seven full eventful decades of our history like a colossus and had ultimately become synonymous with history. The flame of his life had extinguished but the beacon will remain here for ever. Even after 21 years of his sad demise the nation feels if there had been such a dedicated and towering figure who would overcome all obstacles and lead the nation towards right direction!

The mission of this great political philosopher, Moulana Bhasani, was to establish one exploitation-free welfare state the State of God, to be run according to the rules of God. According to him, all resources of this world belong to God. As such all should equally share all the resources of God irrespective of caste, creed and faith. He said that due to exploitation of the poor by their selfish rulers the society has been divided into two parties — the *jaleems* or the exploiters as the *maylooms* or the exploited. He dedicated his whole life in relentless fight against the oppression, injustice and exploitation of the *maylooms* by the *jaleems* and that is why he had been regarded as the undisputed leader of the *maylooms* or the oppressed.

The political philosophy of Moulana Bhasani can only be compared with that of Mahatma Gandhi of India. Both of them had no lust or greed for power but struggled hard against the tyranny of the colonial lords and the colonial rulers. Both of them regarded politics as the only golden path through which poverty, hunger and oppression can be wiped out from society and equality, rule of God, justice and freedom of speech can be established. Both have sacrificed their lives in fighting against the oppression of the poor by the rich and removing all class distinctions between the rich and the poor. Both had firm faith in religion but were free from fanaticism

and communalism and fought against religious discriminations. Both have freed politics from palace intrigues and brought it out to fight for the public interest. Both believed in democratic rights of the people but they differed in their ways. Gandhi believed in peaceful movement of non-violence but Bhasani introduced political movement against the oppressive rulers often tinged with violence as the only weapon of strength of the poor — his movements of *gherao* and *march*.



Moulana Bhasani believed that it was only the *rububiyyat* or the rule of God through which peace could be established in every country and welfare of the people best achieved for men, the best creation of God. To propagate this doctrine of *rububiyyat* he had established his *Huquq Mission* at Mahipur in Bogra on 60 acres of land inherited by his first wife. His vision was to mould the nature of the young learners by teaching them according to the *rububiyyat*, or the law of God from their early life. He believed that only ideal people can create ideal society and state. That ideal state will be called *Huqumat-e-Rabbaniya* or the State of God where all the citizens will equally share all the

resources of God and no class distinction will create any rift between the haves and the have-nots.

In 1970 Moulana Bhasani established the Islamic University of Santosh, in accordance with the basic principles of the Bishwa Bharati University of Rabindranath Tagore. Bhasani introduced political movement against the oppressive rulers often tinged with violence as the only weapon of strength of the poor — his movements of *gherao* and *march*. Students of all religions would be admitted there and taught the same *rububiyyat* or law of God and share the same modern cultural activities. During his life-time he had established several blocks of it but did not live long to complete the same. The university is now administered by a Trust but due to financial crisis and lack of recognition from the government it could not be completed and his mission remained unfulfilled.

Moulana Bhasani had extensively travelled throughout the length and breadth of the country to alleviate the sufferings of the oppressed, formed political parties to fight against the injustice of the rich and the lords. He had settled in as many as 24 places making 24 huts of small size and living a very simple life sharing his foods with his followers. Whenever he had changed his abode he had donated his house for the welfare of the society. Though the mission of Bhasani remained unfulfilled, his doctrine of establishing one exploitation-free state will inspire the nation for all time to come.

Today, while we pray for the eternal peace of the soul of this great leader let us also emulate his ideals.

OPINION

Terrorism - Our Middle Name?

Touheed Feroze

Opening the newspapers, one is more likely to come across sordid and often graphic details of murder, mugging, physical assault and all the other heinous items that can be categorised under the omniscient term 'terrorism'. This term has become synonymous with life in the capital Dhaka. The city is passionately besotted with terrorism. Sitting here in London, I can feel how this nine-letter word has overtaken life in Dhaka. In this cosmopolitan city stabbings, bombings, extortion and rape are just daily incidents without which life cannot be perceived. Sometimes I think if the life of the ordinary Dhakate will be darn prosaic without these features. The front page of most newspapers contain reports of agitation and its quite unnerving consequences. Everyone seems to be agitated. No tolerance whatsoever.

I think that nowhere in the world is the word so extensively used. 'Agitation' and 'terrorism' are the key catch words of the present not so pleasant times. You are angry? Want to vent your temper on something? No problem, go and stop an innocent-looking man going home in his much treasured car, and then, after hurling a few abuses at him burn or cause severe damage to his automobile. Yes, it's just as easy as that.

Sitting thousands of miles away from home one just can't

help wondering if there is any segment of discipline in the country. Waiting in eager anticipation for a whole week to take a glance at the newspaper from Bangladesh is sadly cold showered by news of all sorts of anarchy and lawlessness. After reading the stuff, one is just demoralised and depressed.

What is there to read except for news of crimes, strikes and 'gheraos'. Lately, news of terrorist activities monopolise the major portion of the front page. 'Terrorism' — that is your middle name, remarked an Englishman sitting next to me in an underground train. I just lowered my head and tried to hide within the pages as the reality of the remark filled me with inexplicable shame. Of all things, do we have to be recognised as a state ravaged by lawlessness? Can anyone deny the ignominious fact that we are just captives in the hands of anarchy? My friends at the university here in London just have sympathy in their eyes when they refer to Bangladesh and its dubious social scenario. This is the country we are representing in foreign lands. What a tragedy! A few days ago, a Bengali daily published the photograph of a political cadre proudly aiming his weapon at some unfortunate soul. Just imagine, publicly flaunting arms. Where will the situation next move to?

Suffice it to say that Dhaka

divided into different wards for administrative accountability is reminiscent of medieval Germany. The ward commissioners are just puppets in the hands of the local kingpin. It is the master of a ward who really has the power, just like medieval times, when a country was divided into several sections, each being in the hands of a local warlord. The wards in Dhaka city are hostages in the venomous clasp of the local godfathers.

The inhabitants live in terror and constant panic. God knows what other kind of barbarism we will see next? One can't even open a private enterprise in peace. Open a restaurant, a video club or an office — you will be doomed. Once a week collector will arrive to collect a little monetary gift for the Al Capone and his goons. Nothing to do but hand out the hard-earned notes with a wooden smile (remember you have to smile and show that you are giving the money out of love and affection for the senior 'bhai' for else I will leave the rest to your imagination). Extortionism and its other allies have no doubt found a lucrative ground in 'democratic' Bangladesh. Lord knows what other 'redeeming' feature of Bangladeshi democracy we will see in the future, if there is one.

The writer is a student of London School of Journalism.

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.

M A Jalil
372/B Khilgaon, Dhaka

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 non-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 extent 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 underpasses 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, telecommunication, public 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), Sadarghat 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, Suhrawardy Uddan etc.

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

Allow general public to go out 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, Kawan 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-

mercial vehicles including rickshaws for 24-hour use of the city roads.

Finally, ensure traffic sense in our people to bring discipline on the streets and ultimately in national life for decent living.

Mirza Shaif
Banani, Dhaka

Ruppur atomic power project

Sir, We the people of northern Bangladesh warmly congratulate the Prime Minister for taking a bold decision to implement the Ruppur Atomic Power Project. She has rightly felt that without going for generation of power, no industry can be set up. Recently, she has also decided to set up export processing zone in Ishwardi. Two more export processing zones will also be set up in the northern region.

In 1963, the then government decided to set up Ruppur Atomic Power Centre. About 300 bighas of land were acquired and some offices and buildings were constructed. But the project was left abandoned for want of fund. The Prime Minister has assured that the foreign donors will be approached for fund. I am sure she means what she says.

But there are some people who are opposing the establishment of atomic power plant as the same is exposed to explosion. Many of them cite the example of Chernobyl. They argue about the waste products and environmental problem.

Well, Ruppur is a small project, it should not create any environmental problem. The main purpose of the project is to generate power. I would, however, request the Prime Minister to give a time schedule of implementation of the project, otherwise administrative problems may crop up resulting delayed implementation. We want to see the project implemented within a shortest possible time.

Mahbubul Haque Chowdhury
153, Lake Circus, Kalabagh, Dhaka

Paisa-wise, takafoolish

Sir, 'Penny-wise, pound-foolish' sounds familiar. The *Taka* is being devalued at short intervals in increments in the range of around 50 paisa each time.

Perhaps, in this case, it is irrelevant to raise the question of moral courage. Look at the devastation around in the money and exchange market: Pakistan 8 per cent slash, some Asian currencies 25-30 per cent down.

Can we bat down to half a century (50 taka to the dollar)? What difference would it make when the political inflation rate is too high to run an LDC at low system loss?

A Zabr
Dhaka