

A Day of Soul-Searching

A nation has its strong points as well as some weak spots. It is a nation's utter misfortune if it does not know its strengths from its weaknesses. Our nation is decidedly one among such unfortunate nations. It fought to keep its language and then forgot totally about the needs of the Bengali language. It observes an Education Day to commemorate the sacrifices made by students for thwarting Pakistani conspiracies against education. Education is now Bangladesh's worst afflicted area of national activity.

The nation observes the Martyred Intellectuals' Day to remember the sacrifices of its writers and artists and teachers — but perhaps mostly as a ritual. It cannot be said that the intellectuals of this country are now sacrificing anything to resist the continued de-intellectualisation of the nation. Or that they are preparing themselves for the great salvage work of the nation's intelligence and wisdom, learning and culture, historical awareness and philosophico-scientific acuity.

We are very adept in reducing our brilliant strengths to crass weaknesses. In so doing we carry forward the black work of the Jamaat hatchetmen who murdered the best talents of our nation confronted by the nightmare of Pakistan's defeat and ignominious surrender that was to come in half a week's time.

It would be best on this sacred Martyred Intellectuals' Day that all educated people, working intellectuals and potential ones, take a vow to be honest to themselves and to the nation and to be untiring and all-giving in the pursuit of their fields of inquiry and cultivation and in their professions and avocations and to mightily contribute to the lifting of this nation from the intellectual morass that is killing its elan as a new nation and all possibilities of making life worth living.

This is the day for the intellectuals to search their souls. If they led the nation by their honesty and brilliance and shunned the self-serving streak in most of them this nation wouldn't be the place harbouring the murderers of 1971 and nurturing the killers that may strike any time not far in the future. They would have simply faded away for want of any foothold.

We pay our respects to the martyrs and our sympathies to their bereaved families.

Sickeningly Savage

The audacity and savagery with which miscreants attacked the students in a campus bound bus of Jahangirnagar University Thursday night did not only convey once again the alarming message that the society is teetering on the verge of lawlessness but also ravaged the spirit of the victory month. Both in the collective assault of the miscreants believed to be truck drivers and workers from the nearby depot at Aminbazar and the retaliation of the students that literally burnt a few vehicles and brought traffic on that busy road of immense networking importance to a halt we find a monstrous exhibition of clannish mentality.

From the reports available it is clear that the incident referred to as the cause of clash and subsequent road barricade was only the culminating event. The ground, evidently seething in hatred and intolerance seemed to have been prepared long before. There could be as the reports suggest a sinister and dangerous liaison between some powerful elements of the truck depot and Jamaat-e-Islami. This looks a very bad mixture of local anger and political motive. While demanding that the administration ferret the people responsible for Thursday's attack immediately and punish them, we counsel it to investigate into the alleged nexus as well.

Angry as we are at the attack on the students we cannot help expressing our consternation at the crude and blind nature of their retaliatory measures. By setting fire to those laden trucks and holding commuters on that road hostage by laying a prolonged siege they have shown abject irresponsibility and belied the impact of their academic training.

An unfortunate incident has taken place and they have sought justice to the administration. We plead with the students to behave responsibly and help the administration in restoring normalcy in the area. They must not forget that as agents of reason and enlightenment they are not expected to act impulsively under provocation from any quarter.

Set a Realistic Number

We have it on the authority of city mayor Hanif that more rickshaws will be licensed to operate in the metropolis. The present official number is 80,000 and this will be gradually raised to 150,000, said the mayor at the founding anniversary rally of the Jattia Rickshaw Sramik League on Friday.

He has not given any specific time-frame for the numerical increase nor has he indicated that licensing will be frozen after the magical figure 150,000 is reached. We also do not know whether the new 70,000 licences will go to freshers or will benefit the hitherto unregistered rickshaw-pullers who swarm the city streets. It should be possible for the mayor, in consultation with rickshaw union leaders, to pick up the lucky winners from amongst those who were illegally given serial numbers by the latter to operate on the sly. The police turned a mute spectator to the whole show as the unlicensed rickshaws plied in ever greater numbers as nobody's business. The DCC should have been in touch with the rickshaw union leaders at the ward level not to have let the problem snowball like it has to its present horrific proportions.

All of this is indicative of a carpet-bombing approach rather than a planned and focused one to the traffic congestion problem. It should be possible to set a realistic number to rickshaws we can allow on our streets right upto, say, the year 2000, given the span of roads, magnitude of traffic turn-around, need for rickshaws as assessed in relation to rise in the number of other modes of transportation, etc. We should then phase out the excess rickshaws and pave separate lanes for them.

A Good Man Lost in the Thickets of Politics

He will be remembered as an honest prime minister, a lot to say in today's India. His credibility will continue to be admired because of the smeared reputation of several of his predecessors

It told more than reams of printed words. The photo that the newspapers frontpaged on the day Congress stamped its claim to form the government showed top leaders of the United Front holding their clasped hands aloft. It was meant to convey solidarity. But right in the middle, there was a gap. The two persons, who stood apart were the outgoing Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral and Marxist leader Harkishan Singh Surjeet.

That explains why the Gujral government went from one crisis to another. Both were at odds since the ousting of prime minister Deve Gowda. The latter, chairman of the Front, had also thrown his weight on the side of Surjeet. The rift told upon its working. And it is the rift which flawed Gujral's strategy in parliament.

When Congress threatened to withdraw the support to government, he was determined not to resign — and rightly so — and to expose the party. He wanted it to bring against him the motion of no-confidence so that Congress should be seen on the side of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) while throwing him out. Had Gujral stood his ground, he would have bared the chicanery of Congress, once again ditching the UP prime minister after promising him the full term.

Congress gained in the sense that it was able to avoid the debate. The party was justifiably afraid lest the entire episode of training and arming the LTTE should come out in the open. It would have proved that it was Congress prime minister Indira Gandhi who initiated the whole

plot and that the DMK was not alone to be blamed. It goes to the credit of Gujral that he stood by the DMK. He preferred national integration to the partisan move by Congress. He could not have his way for a debate in parliament because many in the Front did not want to destroy the Congress image. Their argument was that it should not be weakened since it was the only viable opponent of the BJP in many states.

Both Surjeet, and Gowda pressured Gujral to submit his resignation. Mulayam Singh Yadav of the Samajwadi Party also joined them since he envisaged in UP some adjustments with Congress at the next polls. Apparently, Gujral had to bow down to their wish in order to keep the Front intact.

What remains unexplainable is that if the Front did not want to embarrass Congress why the two did not think of a way out long before the Jain Commission report was placed before parliament? Both had nearly five months after the report was submitted in July. Even after the report was made public, it was possible to ward off the crisis. It is obvious that such Congress leaders began to control events who were not even members of parliament. In the new polls they saw a hope of returning to the Lok Sabha. They are the ones who pushed things beyond control, probably to settle scores with Sitaran Kesri. That is the reason why there was a frantic search for a face-

saving formula at the eleventh hour.

Some way to effect an equation with Congress was clear from Gujral's submission of resignation without asking for the Lok Sabha's dissolution. Only after allowing Congress three days did the Front request the President to dissolve the house. It is another thing that Congress could not form the government because it did not have requisite numbers and appealed to the President to give it a chance.

The Front has realistically

that he wants a new front. The Rashtriya Janata Dal, under Laloo Prasad Yadav in Bihar, has joined hands with Congress. The Communists have always gone it alone in elections. Will the Front contest as a single force, with West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu playing a leading role, is the question?

The 17-month rule of the Front has been fairly good. Its common minimum programme did not solve the country's problem. The failure was in the implementation. Still it gave a

he was able to keep India in the right groove. By having direct interaction with the industry and business, he was able to arrest further deterioration. However, his outstanding contribution is the autonomy to Doordarshan and Akashvani, a landmark which the BJP has threatened to undo.

The way he handled India's foreign policy has brought back Jawaharlal Nehru's vision. His visit to the US was particularly rewarding. Many who covered him compared his influence on President Bill Clinton with that of Nehru's on President Kennedy. Gujral removed the cobwebs of misunderstanding and, for the first time, made America formulate a policy on India alone rather than the region on the whole.

The visit of US Secretary of State Albright underlined the impression. When she arrived in India, despite the advice to call off the visit, the Gujral government was on its way out. But she wanted to give a message to India, not a particular government, that Washington had realised its mistake of not looking at India independently and maintaining parity with Pakistan. From her visit it was clear that America was thinking of relaxing its rules so that India gets the latest technology in various fields, the nuclear knowhow for peaceful purposes is one of them.

Albright sought Gujral's help to bring round Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, then in New Delhi, to start negotiations

with Israel. She also conveyed America's favourable response to India's application for a permanent seat in the Security Council. This was in sharp contrast to the earlier cool and stand-off attitude Washington had.

Nonetheless, if one were to assess Gujral's performance, one would come to the conclusion that he was a good man who got lost in the thickets of politics and pragmatism. With 14 parties claiming his attention and pressuring him, he was practically not in a position to do much. The consensus demanded compromise and he had to give in. But one wonders whether he should have gone so close to Kesri as he did. It created misunderstanding in his own Front and among the anti-Kesri Congress leaders.

He will be remembered as an honest prime minister, a lot to say in today's India. His credibility will continue to be admired because of the smeared reputation of several of his predecessors. But where people may find fault with him is that he could have done more knowing that he was a one-term prime minister. Gujral could have pushed at least the Lokpal Bill, the Right to Information Bill and electoral reforms. There was opposition both from the Front and Congress. But he could have withstood it. He was on a strong wicket in the beginning of his stint because neither the Front nor Congress could have changed him. Anyway, the success of a person is measured by the number of difficulties he overcomes. Gujral overcame only a few.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

fallen back on its own resources and strength. Its declaration to swim or sink together sounds good to ears. But it may not be possible. Were it to stay united and contest elections on one symbol, with one programme, it would emerge as the real third force. People want an alternative, both to Congress and the BJP. And they have not been getting it since 1977 — when the emergency ended — in a durable shape. They can still be won over if the Front present itself as a coherent force with a time-bound programme.

However, electoral considerations may divide the Front as they did in the past. Mulayam Singh Yadav has already said

new turn to policies and meaning to certain programmes. Its achievement would have been far better if Congress had not disturbed it, first after 10 months and now after seven months. In fact, the party never allowed the Front party to settle down. Before the prime ministers had the hang of things, they were pulled down.

Even Gujral's second half of the tenure was more productive than the first one. Although he was too much dependent on the bureaucracy and was cut off from political and public advice, yet he was beginning to make impact. He could not stall the downward trend of economy but

LETTER FROM AMERICA

Frailty! Thy Name is Not Woman!

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton

Men glorified women's role in home-making and raising children. Women were discouraged to work outside home. While men wrote poetry about women's beauty and "mystery", their total dependency on men made women vulnerable to widespread exploitation and abuse.

chemical laboratory to the head of her party.

Ironically, while the West considered Thatcher as an object of ridicule, it was the Russians who realised how tough she was, and dubbed her "The Iron Lady." American women colleagues want to know: "You have so many women Prime Ministers in the Indian subcontinent, are the women more advanced in the subcontinent?" Although there is a tremendous urge to answer in the affirmative, the truth has to be told. That unlike Margaret Thatcher of Great Britain, none of the women came up through the ranks, or attained those lofty positions on their own — they were either the wives or daughters of a famous male Prime Minister. The more painful admission is that women's representation in the government is too heavy; very few women get elected to the Parliament on their own.

For centuries men have treated the "weaker sex" as a plaything and children. Men glorified women's role in home-making and raising children. Women were discouraged to work outside home. While men wrote poetry about women's beauty and "mystery", their total dependency on men made women vulnerable to widespread exploitation and abuse. Before the twentieth century, no western country, except New Zealand, had allowed women suffrage. The great bastion of western democracy, Great Britain allowed women to vote in two stages, in 1918 and 1928. Through a constitutional amendment, the United States

enfranchised its women citizenry in 1920. France granted women their right to vote in 1944. Switzerland did not permit women to vote in national elections until 1971.

decades after Muslim women were casting their ballots in Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq and Pakistan. Oxford allowed women to attend classes, but would not give them their degree. Rhodes Scholarships were only for men — the British Parliament had to modify Cecil Rhodes' will in 1976 to allow women to compete. Princeton University admitted its first woman undergraduate in 1969. As the women's liberation movement took its first faltering steps in the West in the early 1960s, for many men it was a hilarious nonsense. Gaining in confidence, women quickly dubbed these brutes "MCPs". Women began challenging many of the myths men had created about women. That their physical weakness made them unfit for certain tasks. With the advent of power equipment, women showed that they could do most jobs as well as men.

American women were the pioneers in women's liberation movement. As they mobilised their voting power, the society began to take them more seriously. Thanks to the women's movement, women now find employment in every field of national life, including combat. Although women still earn less than men for doing the same work, American women have advanced by leaps and bounds in the last 30 years. One unfortunate offspring of the women's

lib is promiscuity; but that is another issue.

Women in developing nations such as Bangladesh have benefited from the western women's movement in terms of employment opportunities. Although women are visible everywhere in public life, western, especially American men have effectively blocked women from attaining the ultimate power. Ironically, although Bangladesh's average women have not benefited as much as the West from the women's movement, there is no bar to Bangladeshi women catapulting to the top of their government.

Some men have difficulty accepting women in other than subservient roles. It challenges their masculinity — male ego. Men and women have different strengths, as the holy Qur'an reminds us. Women routinely beat men in quantifiable intelligence measurements — such as academic examinations. And as far as physical beauty is concerned, women stand unchallenged. Of course, only women can bear children. However, for many men, physical strength is what makes them "superior." That being the case, the natural extension of that logic would lead one to declare that several species of wild animals are "superior" to men!

Hickish men crave for that frailty in female heads of government. The reason they are disappointed is because a female prime minister does not have to engage in a boxing match with her male col-

leagues. She embodies the prestige, power and threat of the nation she leads.

Some men can never come to grips with that. As India's diminutive Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was outstripping him in every phase of the struggle during Bangladesh's liberation war in 1971, Pakistan's military dictator Yahya Khan could only blurt out, "That woman!"

Israel's founding Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, once referred to Golda Meir as the "only man" in his cabinet.

OPINION

Which Raj is it Anyway?

Al-Haj S M Khalid Chowdhury

The basic irritant that is hindering the growth of democracy in India is the undemocratic attitude of the so-called secular forces trying to keep BJP out of power and the alliance of diverse elements leading to the formation of minority governments. The foisting of minority government time and again negates the very principle of democratic norms which visualises a polity based on majority consent.

The emergence of BJP in very much a historical process trying to assert the fundamental concept of Indian nationalism as the secular polity as enunciated by eminently Jawaharlal Nehru and others is nothing but trying to implement on Indian soil an alien concept. The Hinduism is not only a religion but it is an ancient culture and the concept of "Ram Raj" is very much ingrained in the mind and vision of the broad masses of Indians confessing

Hindu faith.

The remedy lies not in suppressing the legitimate aspiration of the majority but trying to adopt to the changing social and circumstances which calls for adjustment on the part of BJP as India has vast non-Hindu population and to rule this nation BJP shall have to be more accommodating and realistic.

The latest ploy of the Congress party to bring to the fore the Italian-born widow of Rajiv Gandhi Sonia Gandhi might lead to a disastrous consequences, leading to the complete routing of the Congress party. The Nehru family is definitely revered and held in high esteem by the people of India, but the present situation cannot be reversed by display of personality as the cult of personality is gradually diminishing from Indian politics but nevertheless let see which Raj is it.

It Matters, Because . . .

Dr. Sabrina Rashid

'Made in America, It Matters' — I liked this slogan very much when I first saw it on TV, while I was in USA. Lately this slogan is coming back in my mind again and again. Because it applies to Bangladesh too. Since our policy makers have successfully opened our economy and markets (while our neighbours have kept theirs tightly closed in order to protect their industries), our markets are flooded with foreign goods. In what way it is best for the country only the policy makers and experts know. We lay-people can only understand this much that it is surely having an adverse effect on our industries. It is a slow process but we can very well see that the process has started.

Latest example is the giant Karnaphuli Paper Mills. It not only used to meet the whole country's paper requirement, but also exported it. Now it is at the verge of closure. Can you imagine what sufferings it will cause to hundreds of workers who will be laid off if the mill closes down, only because it has failed to compete in the open market economy? So are the jute mills, sugar mills etc. All have failed to compete. So close them down and let the workers and their families starve to death.

Who cares? Let the already rich importers get richer and richer. Is that the remedy? Is that what the policy makers want? If that be so, then we common citizens must come to rescue our mills and factories

from total ruin and save our poor workers and their families from getting poorer still.

Therefore our slogan now should be 'Made in Bangladesh, It Matters'. It does matter, because the backbone of a country's economy is its industries and if that collapses, we will be back from where we started. What we had built so painfully in twenty-six years will be lost. Do we all want that? Maybe our goods: our paper, our sugar, our jute products are not as good or as cheap as the imported or the smuggled ones. But can't we all make this little sacrifice. In the greater interest of our motherland and to save it from total ruin which our experts have led us into.

So let us all buy Bangladeshi — and only Bangladeshi — goods. If our toiletries and textile products are as good as any others, then why use the foreign ones?

Since visits to neighbouring country has been made the easiest possible, our ladies are now frequently going there for shopping-spree. Let the fashionable ladies and elite wear only Bangladeshi saris and feel pride in that. To set example for other ladies.

To the Editor...

Classroom problem of DU

Sir, Classroom problem is acute in Dhaka University. Especially, we who are the students of Mass Communication and Journalism Department are affected seriously with this disgusting problem. There is no any allotted room for our department. So we have to run from one room to another and one floor to another to get a vacant room, especially at the time of pick hours that is 9 am to 12 noon. Sometimes we become successful and sometimes we fall in disappointment at this work.

So my earnest request to the authority of Dhaka University — please solve this disgusting problem and save us from running one room to another and one floor to another.

Shahidul Islam
Dept. of Mass Communication and Journalism, DU

DMCTA

Sir, The Teachers' Association of Dhaka Medical College has opposed the recent cabinet decision to allow foreign medical practitioners to practice in Bangladesh. The association opined that the government should not under any circumstance leave the health service to commercial purposes. The teachers have however suggested that the Bangladeshi physicians could learn about the advanced medical treatment from the foreign specialists in the government hospitals, should such arrangements be made.

It would definitely provide scope for training of the local physicians as well as raise the quality of treatment. It may be mentioned here that presently

there is almost no scope for training of the Bangladeshi doctors for advanced medical treatments.

While fully endorsing the above view expressed by the DMCTA Teachers' Association, I would sincerely urge upon the government to arrange facilities for training of our doctors instead of allowing foreign doctors to practice in this country.

M Zahidul Haque
BAI, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar
Dhaka-1207

Announcements of deaths over microphones

Sir, As we know, there is no time schedule for deaths, it occurs every moment everywhere in the world. Of late, it has been noted that whenever (early morning/late night not excluded) somebody dies in Dhaka city, repeated announcements are made from the local mosques over microphones to inform the inhabitants of the area.

Though we all know that death is inevitable, we still find deaths shocking. Many of us cannot take it easily particularly when it is early morning as one has just left the bed or late night as one is about to retire in bed. On the other hand at the other hours of the day, different persons/groups are busy doing different things and as such in different moods. The news of a death dampens the spirit of people. It may cause havoc such as heart attacks/strokes to the senior citizens which may even lead to death.

However, it is not advisable to suppress the information but without announcing over microphone, the related persons may be informed by other sober

means. Should we force everybody to mourn for every death by making the loud announcements over the microphones? If we keep up the practice, we shall probably end up as a mourning nation.

May we request the appropriate authority(ies) to look into the matter and to save us from this everyday mourning by giving appropriate directives.

John Arun Sarkar
2, Protap Das Lane
Shingtola, Dhaka-1100

My Nanamoni

Sir, On December 12, 1971, my grandfather, Nizamuddin Ahmed, was taken away by Pakistani soldiers never to be seen again. They took him away because he was fighting for the rights of his countrymen and for the Bangladesh's Language: Bengali. The Pakistanis wanted to replace Bengali with a foreign language. At home, I and my brother, Sharian, must speak in Bengali or our parents get annoyed. We enjoy talking in Bengali because of the sweetness of the language.

Nanu-ammi told us that Nanamoni was perhaps the best swimmer in his village and in the university. He loved taking his family to Chinese restaurant whenever he could. No wonder Ammujji still loves Chinese food!

We have a picture of Nanamoni hanging in our living room. My Dadabhai picture also hangs there. Even though I have never seen them I feel very close to them. On the day they took away Nanamoni he was getting ready to eat lunch. Nanu-ammi told us they wouldn't even let him finish his lunch. The murderers wore masks and took him away in a jeep. Am-

muji remembers giving Nanamoni a glass of water before he left. Khamamoni and Mamaji were too young to remember anything. My Ammujji has moved on, but she dearly misses Nanamoni. So do I. Everyday when I say my prayer I remember my Nanamoni and ask Allah to grant him a place in heaven.

Anusha Hussain
7th Grade
Duluth Middle School
Georgia, USA

With smiling face (hashimukhey)?

Sir, It is neither a verbatim text nor an extract. It is a reference of BTB's 8 pm Bengali news on 27-11-97. Begum Zia went to Chittagong to see the quake-stricken patients. BNP activists fired gunshots. Two Awami Leaguers (as claimed) died.

Khaleda Zia safely reached Dhaka with smiling face by Biman. (Flight number can't be remembered.)

Did Khaleda Zia go to Chittagong for a pleasure trip or for waging a battle there and return to Dhaka wearing a winner's smile? If not how BTB could serve a news using words with such humour (rather a degradation and insult) — hashimukhey (smiling face)? Are the news editors or the news casters are laymen, or fool? If so, why do they swallow the poor tax-payers' money?

On the other hand if Khaleda Zia managed to reach Dhaka with smiling face after such a troublesome occurrence she should rather step down from politics immediately.

Nur Hossain
151, Bangshal Road, Dhaka-1100