

## The Signal from Aganagar

Medieval barbarity descended on Aganagar Saturday afternoon. Gunmen mowed down newly elected chairman of the newly created Aganagar union, Haji Tariqullah. In retaliation a frenzied mob led by the brother of the victim attacked the house of liberation war commander and AL leader Nurul Islam, drew him out, stabbed him and forcing the man into a gunny bag set it on fire. About thirty houses were ransacked. The whole area is still shrouded by a sense of panic.

It is an irony that the place is hardly ten minutes journey from downtown Dhaka — across the Buriganga and by countryboat ferry. The revolting proceedings of Saturday afternoon smacked of a blood feud in the making. Haji Tariqullah was purportedly the head of an infamous terrorist gang called *Tariqa Bahini* and has been implicated in numerous criminal cases including murder and has also served jail terms. It is likely that he was slain by some victims of his and his *bahini's* misdeeds. That no one from the area has come forward to file a case with the police about the mind-boggling killing of Nurul Islam, reportedly for fear of Tariqa retribution, speaks amply of the Aganagar area's unbroken subjection to terror over the years.

That police wouldn't even enter the scene, not to speak of engaging the Tariqa Bahini on rampage, till well into the night is another proof of the unacceptable law and order situation in Aganagar. It is highly likely that the half-baked and vulgar urban industrial and housing developments on the other side of the river have been accompanied by a more than equal rise in crime and criminals. The moral of the Keraniganj double murder terror is — the other side, from Barisal to Kaliganj, is no more sleepy villages and needs intensive policing. This alone cannot ensure the people of this other Dhaka security and a civilised life. The establishment of a municipality is overdue there. And unless a planned town development is effected there and soon, the whole area will rot into a bloated Aganagar.

## Boards in Limbo?

If the employees of the eight education boards have not undergone a change of heart, a highly unlikely prospect in view of their scheme of things, then this year's SSC examinees may not have their exams on time. The inter-board employees' federation called indefinite strike from yesterday as a follow up of their feet-dragging policy pursued over the last couple of days. The Federation is demanding the cancellation of the report of a task force set up by the Education Ministry to probe the widespread allegation of corruption in the education boards.

Although the content of the report has not been made public, it is understood from the various reports published in the press from time to time that the report is based on facts. No action has been taken but the fear of being exposed by the findings of this report has already sent the employees in a frenzy of agitation. The reason for the board employees' choice of this point of time for disruptive programmes is obvious. With the SSC examinations due in less than four months' time what could be more expedient than to agitate now?

There is no doubt corruption in the education sector has reached a point where it can no longer be allowed to spawn unchallenged. We had welcomed Education Ministry's initiative to probe into the heart of darkness and uncover things. We reiterate our support again. But the question that looms large in this crusade against corruption and its fallout is the future of the SSC examinees. We urge the employees to give up this ploy of playing with the future of thousands of examinees in order to attain their 'goal'. This is blackmailing, pure and simple. The Ministry of Education will make a mistake if it shows leniency on this issue. What it can do to keep the air clear from any possible confusion is to get the findings of the report across to people. Press could be of great help for that purpose. It is on the right track and public need to know that.

## Turn it into an Advantage

Lest the government machinery is thrown off-balance when the deluge sweeps in we deem it a duty to share the rumblings of a storm our antenna has lately caught. We have it on the authority of the Malaysian Deputy Interior Minister Datuk Tajol Gazali, as reported in a major Bangla daily yesterday, that one million expatriate workers might be sent packing by the severe economic depression in Malaysia. Of them, a little more than one hundred thousand are likely to be Bangladeshis on whom though no termination notice has yet been served. So, the first thing the government ought to do is join issue with the Malaysian government to try and head off the unscheduled home-coming of so many Bangladeshis. Failing which, the attempt should be to persuade the Malaysian authorities to at least reduce the number of returnees to a tolerable extent.

We realise that manpower export is coming to a fresh crunch from the depressive unemployment situation across the whole of South East Asian region caught lately in the whirlwind of a deep financial crisis. During the last couple of years we have seen waves of deportation of our wage-earning nationals from abroad breaking on our shores in close succession of surprises.

It is high time that in conjunction with our efforts to break new grounds in manpower export we stood ready with a blueprint to utilise the services of the returnees. To the best of our knowledge, there is no government policy to absorb or harness their skills acquired the hard way overseas when they are back to the country. Let their technical, supervisory and management skills be fully identified, categorised and inventoried for early utilisation in the various sectors of our economy. We cry hoarse on human resource development groping for a breakthrough but here is something tangible to go forward with: the returnees cannot only cater to our growing needs for variegated skills but also help groom technicians in the country under a specific skill multiplication programme if this is adopted. They can really be the catalyst for change we are looking for.

With the stigma of being one of the poorest countries of the world. Although it is not exactly known where we are placed now according to the socio-economic index of the World Bank or IMF, but being an identified LDC (least developed country) this country is still somewhere at the bottom of the developmental pyramid. Yet routine praises were showered on the country for its progress and prosperity by myriad dignitaries visiting Bangladesh from time to time. They also spoke high of the leadership of the incumbent government for bringing about such transformation thus affording the person or party in power some mileage in domestic politics. The dignitaries cannot be fully blamed for the praises they shower almost customarily. The visitors who are usually hosted by the government are, in the first place, obliged not to embarrass their host with adverse remarks on the state of the governance. On the balance all governments are beneficiary of the practice. Moreover, their complimentary observations are also based on what they come across during a conducted visit usually of short duration.

And there is indeed no dearth of the signs of progress to impress any outsider. He can be convinced of a measure of prosperity from a large number of gleaming cars in our city streets, the lavishly furnished bungalows they visit for cocktail parties or mega social events attended by smartly turned out elegant guests. The crowded diplomatic parties are jostled by chic women and westernised gentry. They also come across crowds in costly restaurants and large presence of buyers in expensive shops selling luxury

goods. Added to these are the numbers of persons going aboard for routine medical checkup, wards of rich parents studying overseas and families going to Hong Kong or Singapore simply on holiday or shopping. Any observant visitor gets to know these statistics within no time of his arrival from the compatriots living in the sole metropolis of Bangladesh. Even the first impression makes his eyebrows rise — how can Bangladesh be poor even if once it was! After all there is plenty of the display of prosperity on the road, in posh housing society and colourful shopping plazas.

An outsider can be easily led to have a bloated impression of our "prosperity" but for us, it would just be illusory. Because we know exactly what lies beyond these small isles of affluence that dazzle equally us and an outsider. We know upto the hilt what a vast unfathomable sea of impoverishment lies all around us. Only intriguing question that remains unanswered to many of us is as to who are these nouveau riche and how could they have tapped up hidden treasures sustaining them with so much of abundances? There was a time when we could know of those sources in case of 90 per cent of the people we knew. Now it has dwindled down to bare 10 per cent at the most. They live in a strange mysterious world which remains by and large impenetrable. All we know is that their incomes are fabulous, even if illegal. So there are competitions and temptations to spend recklessly and ostentatiously. Because

# Only a Creamy Layer

Ours is an extremely poor country but with a sizeable ultra-rich class. It has not come up at its own, it has been propped up to serve the purposes of the system and at times of the establishment.

savings can expose the holders of illegal money.

Where then is the source of all these wealth and ostentatious spending? Let us begin with Tk 13,000 crore defaulted bank loan which has been accumulating over the years. Our national riches were mercilessly siphoned off to the personal accounts even of the policy makers. The banks were used as instruments of state coercion to punish political opponents and benefit the men of the establishment. The bank loans were given to the privileged few and favoured ones without adequate securities, as it appears, with

usually pay their tax it would still be no less than 50-60 per cent of our economy. This huge black money has invariably found its way to a consumption-oriented profligate lifestyle creating in the process a false economy in the country. Evasion of taxes on imports including the smuggled goods has been estimated as something enormous. It is said that if everyone pays his income tax according to the law the revenue collection could rise three to four times of its present level. There is heavy evasion of taxes in the service sector, particularly trade and high paying pro-

ghastly. A visit to a custom or income tax officer's home and their property show how 'over-paying' these services are. Some of the ostensible glamour of our social life give expression to these ill-gotten money.

There are (no denying) vantage appointments in the government which make big deals of purchase with the foreign concerns. In each deal the person holding those appointments may quietly pocket huge amount of kickback and commission part of which can be 'usually' kept in hard currencies in foreign bank. This partly explains the allegation how the wards of some fortunate bureaucrats are educated and groomed in foreign countries and they themselves possess houses abroad. And they can turn to a high-profile social life with impunity by becoming bonafide members of the local elite. Our elite class is after all an exclusive club affiliation to which is extended to the people only through camaraderie, blood relationship, business connection, parochial belonging with, of course, political like-mindedness working as an additional glue to hold them together.

Among the senior government officers those who do not take to outright corruption have several legitimised means of becoming rich. They can be favoured with a commercial or residential plot in Dhaka or Chittagong even if some of them have inherited ancestral house or part of it in either of these cities. This provides an instant financial jump enabling them to earn to the tune of crores through its disposal.

If one has to be made rich, there are myriad ways of making him so. Give him a good posting where the money would flow in — either in fair or foul ways. But if he is well meaning person, give him a posting abroad. After a stint of a couple of years he would be baptised to an elitist way of life. No slot? One can be created if someone has really to be obliged. There are many precedences of creating slots in our country. If not anything, there are contracts, trade licenses, permits, agencies and so on. These used to be favourite means for some of our past regimes to placate their potential opponents or simply to favour their favourites. If nothing else, just institute a commission and make your chosen person to head it with any rank, status and salary. Only prerequisite is to be on the right side of the establishment. All these would ensure instant production of elite without pang, toil or time with visible prosperity at least in the urban society.

Ours is an extremely poor country but with a sizeable ultra-rich class. It has not come up at its own, it has been propped up to serve the purposes of the system and at times of the establishment. They have unlimited money. Money easily made is easily spent. As they say counterfeit money circulates faster than genuine, so the black money circulates fast and is visible everywhere. Its result is the visible roaring prosperity witnessed by the baffled outsiders. And obviously it gives a spur to corruption among the powerful and to crimes by some other. Notwithstanding creamy toppings the broth underneath is not only poorly cooked, it is also composed of poor ingredients.



## PERSPECTIVES

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

connivance of the bank authorities. Most of them defaulted because they took the loan with no intention of returning it. As the practice goes, on one pretence or other the big shares of the loan are perhaps ultimately written off under pressure and political manipulation.

There has been speculation about the size of the black or tax evaded economy. It has been estimated by some as high as 100 per cent of the regular economy. Even if there is an element of exaggeration in it because there is no tax on agricultural products and the multinationals and salaried persons

fessions like doctors and lawyers.

Next is, of course, the large income that comes from graft money and remains unaccounted. The transactions of bribes are always off the record and the exact amount involved in each deal cannot be known unless authentically enquired into. The possession of graft money by corrupt people becomes palpable only when it spills into their lifestyle. Nowadays, one can see enough evidence of it almost without an effort. Although bribes are pervasive in our country, the depth and extent of corruption in the police, taxation and customs is

# India Faces Uncertain Political Future

Prakash Chandra writes from New Delhi

Altogether it is a confused picture with Laloo Yadav throwing his hat in the ring and a series of alignments and realignments emerging on the scene. The election commission is itself sharply divided on the hot issue of Shiv Sena.

enemy in the Congress party. Mr Vajpayee's drive to win the maximum number of seats starting from Uttar Pradesh to the south of Vindhya's backed up by Advani's no-holds barred campaign is still considered a doubtful venture. The BJP's chances will brighten only if the United Front — united at the national level and split in the states — continues to worsen.

For it is crystal clear that the UF partners are going to oppose each other whenever it suits them. Their coalition is opportunistic and tricky.

They would like the people to believe that they can join hands at the centre while killing each other politically in the states. It is difficult to imagine the UF under Chandra Babu Naidu capturing a larger number of seats than what they have now.

Their fond dream is that they can do without the crutches of the Congress party. For they are used to the backstabbing tactics of Kesri who, they believe, is an aspirant for the top job — the Prime Ministership. It is absurd to believe that Kesri can even think of becoming Prime Minister when he lacks the tact and political wisdom of a leader worthy of such an office.

The gentleman Prime Minister, Mr Gujral lacked the political finesse but he had charm, ability and a degree of persuasiveness. He had managed to create a false sense of security for the coalition. He also succeeded in launching the not so successful Gujral doctrine.

Yet Gujral will be remembered as a Prime Minister who attempted to achieve the impossible but slipped on the political banana skin. It is not known whether Gujral will once again emerge as Prime Minister although he has the backing of that unpredictable Bihari leader, Laloo Yadav.

For the kingmaker has returned not to power but to politics. Regrettably the former Bihar Chief Minister, Laloo Yadav

was symbolically in the prison. It will be more accurate to say that he was under house arrest and was free to receive political visitors and even visiting ministers from other states.

The Laloo factor will keep everybody guessing. If reports are true he has plenty of cash to run an election campaign. But what he does on a national level it is difficult to imagine. For the Congress is splitting and is a divided house.

If Mr Kesri believes that he can bring back the old Congress wallas into the fold, he is mistaken.

For the Congress is already broken in Uttar Pradesh which once was the seat of power. The BJP has sown the winds of power which they hope to harvest later.

They will face the combined wrath of the Bahujan Samaj Party and the Samajwadi Party. Even if the latter do not fight the battle together, it will not be easy for the BJP to fight the Congress as well as other political units.

His only hope is Mulayam Singh Yadav. Yet no one in Delhi is prepared to bet his money on the Congress winning more seats in UP.

In Orissa the situation is bad enough with Janata Dal splitting. The BJP may derive some comfort from a weak Congress and even weaker Janata Dal.

The Congress chances in Bihar are supposed to be beelied up by Laloo Yadav. But he will demand his pound of flesh.

Many analyst believe that Laloo Yadav is still caught in the midst of several money scandals. Legally it seems he has not been cleared of all scams. These cannot be wished away. It is difficult to imagine how the Congress can fight corruption while supporting corrupt forces almost everywhere. While the prospects in the north are pretty bleak, it is difficult to imagine how the Congress can

join hands with the ousted Chief Minister, Jayalalitha and still talk about combating corruption.

Many observers say that Kesri is nursing impossible dreams. He lacks the charisma to lead the Congress party to victory whatever his admirers in the party might say. The Congress high command is divided even at the top. You have Jitendra Prasad, Mr Pilot and some members of the working committee critical of Kesri's political style. They are also depending on the Sonia factor although Kesri has no admiration for Sonia's ability to conduct an election campaign.

The prospects of a coalition government emerging at the end of the day are clear to many

people. Only the BJP and the Congress are fondly hoping that they will be winners all the way. The question is who leads the coalition. Will it be the Congress or the BJP. The question of national government does not arise in the Indian context for the BJP remains a virtual untouchable. And unless the Congress and the BJP can join hands, it will be impossible to form a national government or even a stable administration. In all these calculations we should not forget the crucial role of that wily political animal, called Mr Surjeet, the Communist (M) leader who are the power behind the throne in the UF administration.

Mr Gujral what ever he might claim was controlled by

Surjeet much to the dislike of the Congress party.

Perhaps that was the reason why the Congress stabbed the UF in the back. As one Congress leader says, 'The number of communist MPs in parliament was not so large and yet they wanted to control the UF. And nothing could happen without Surjeet's tacit support. We should not allow this to happen again. While the communist movement has fallen everywhere, Will India be governed by a small communist party lending its strength to the so-called UF which will be fighting each other at the state-level.'

Altogether it is a confused picture with Laloo Yadav throwing his hat in the ring and a series of alignments and realignments emerging on the scene. The election commission is itself sharply divided on the hot issue of Shiv Sena.

The coming weeks will decide the fate of India. For it is also facing an economic crisis although not on the same scale as the ASEAN countries.

## OPINION

## Under-20 (?) Cricket Team

Ahmed Ali

only confined to the selection part. He, however, admitted that their are several players who, even according to his assessment and knowledge, were well over 20 years. He was specifically very critical about Rokon's selection in the team. He refrained from answering whether he raised this point during selection meeting or why he did not put his note of dissent since he was convinced that some of the players being considered were over-aged.

Another selector expressed the feeling that the BCB actually imposed the over-20 ones on the selectors. According to him, during the Hong Kong trip, the officials found out (?) that some players in other teams were over 20, which prompted them to conclude that the teams playing in South Africa would also have players over 20. Some justification! Going by the same logic, the selectors or the BCB could have selected players from the selection committee itself, as most of them were reasonably good players during their prime time! The same selector also mentioned about Shahid Afridi of Pakistan, who, according to him (also according to us), does not look below 20, is almost certainly playing in the tournament in South Africa. He had very strong words of criticism for similar acts of having over-20 players in other teams. He, however, kept quite when asked about whether this act of Pakistan or other teams justifies our selection of players who are over 20.

I am sure many more cricket fans and citizens of this country have very strong feeling to condemn this shameful and unacceptable act of the selectors and BCB.

We feel very strongly that the Bangladesh Cricket Board must change the team composition immediately and have a new team keeping with the proper age. We must be prepared to play with the best available set of players within the permissible age limit. A nation cannot and shall not look for an opportunity to cheating others, for by doing so will ultimately cheat itself. After all, this is just one tournament. Our boys have opened up an endless opportunity for us by winning the ICC trophy. This is just the beginning. We have a long way to go. Let us look forward. The 'right aged' boys will bring lau-

rels for the nation. We should have patience. There is nothing wrong in making correction, even if it is a bit late — it's better late than never.

We do not have a clue as to why the services of Gordon Grimidge was not taken by the BCB in selecting the team. (Will BCB please explain?) He was always available to offer his unquestioned expertise and experience. The BCB should make good use of him in all spheres of cricketing activities. There are not too many like him available in the present day world of cricket.

I call upon the parents of the over aged players to withdraw their sons from the team and set-up a good example of honesty and integrity. After all, they are the only ones who better know the age of their wards. If they can answer to their own conscience and are satisfied then we have nothing to say.

We urge upon the selected boys who know that their age is over the permissible limit, to also refuse to be party to this unjust act. By doing so, they will be setting good example worthy of emulation and enhance their own country's image. They have a long future to look forward to.

We will not accept that Rokon, Shabbir Khan, Sezan who looks far above teen age and Opee who had the dubious reputation of playing in the Nirman School Cricket for too many years and is married, are all below 20 years.

The selectors will have to shoulder the entire responsibility of selecting the team. Any lapse, intentional or otherwise, will have to be explained by them. No one may go scot free, including behind the scene ones, if any. Haven't they heard of a democratic practice called putting a note of dissent or resigning if a clean and transparent selection process is not followed and selection is imposed from any quarter?

It's time that ICC starts checking to determine age of the suspected players, irrespective of country, sent to participate in the Youth World Cup Cricket Tournament. With the phenomenal progress in the age of scientific research, it is easy to confront an over-aged player nursing hopes of cheating the system and stealing the time light. This practice, if adopted, will make the selection transparent, and the tournament more meaningful.

## To the Editor...

### Save the distressed from cold

Sir, Winter has come few days ago. Heavy chilly wind has started to blowing all over the country. This year, the chill is felt with deep log than the previous year. Bangladesh is a developing country. So, many poor people, beggars and street urchins sleep on the open streets in this capital city and other cities of the country at night. They have no ability to buy warm clothes to cover themselves at night and they are the sufferers in this chilly season. There are many rich people in our country but none, excepting a few, have extended their help to the poor.

I urge the rich and authority concerned to take immediate step to provide them with warm clothes to save these distressed people from cold.

Mr Abdul Baten  
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Dhaka

### "What have we done....?"

Sir, This refers to Ms Sadia's letter under the above caption published on 26-12-97. She commended on your (the edi-

tor's) write-up "What Have We Done with Our Victory?" published on 15-12-97. Frankly speaking, I find your every write-up commendable and that's why I think I need not commend them. I would write if anyone found illogical or irrelevant, but none found so far!

However, I expand Ms Sadia's view that we really do not need to repeat again and again the terms 'father of the nation', 'Liberation War' etc. Such repetitions do more harm than good.

Sheikh Mujib was a perfect orator and organised the independence movement successfully. He was a great leader but no 'peer' as is now visualised in the government controlled media.

I cannot, nevertheless, support Ms Sadia's view. "We do not need to waste time in trying the Razakars", Bangabandhu did not forgive all the Razakars and we also cannot do that. I understand that during the Liberation War there might have been scope for logic having a passive stance even going against the war. But the persons who took part in massacre, rape etc., and still speak out that Pakistan was 'better' and that was 'broken by the Freedom Fighters', cannot be

and should not be forgiven. However, we should not make a hue and cry in trying the Razakars, because such exaggeration would hinder our economic progress.

MAS Molla  
Member, BAAS  
Dhaka

### Contract service

Sir, We are very often appointing the retired personnel on contract basis for 2/3 years. The aim is to ensure efficiency in the administrative tier. People appointed on contract basis are not governed by any service rule.

In my opinion, they cannot produce any innovative idea as their term is very short. They prefer to pass the time in a routine manner as they don't have any further to go. Most of the retired personnel are living with outdated ideas.

I don't understand how the young generation will be groomed up if they are not given to perform responsible jobs. For example, more than 600 qualified candidates of 17th BCS are yet to be appointed.

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