

Expose the Men Behind

Neither the adversity of nature nor the spirit of continence of the holy month seems to have any effect on the orgy of violence across the country. After Aganagar the report of violent death comes from Pahartoli of Chittagong where three people reportedly died from bullet wounds in a clash with police over an eviction drive of illegal occupants.

Bangladesh is an overpopulated country and land hunger is a fairly natural instinct here but the problem is that it comes to serve the unscrupulous commercial interest of a group of powerful and hardened criminals. The real men behind illegal occupation are all influential people with tremendous political clout. What they do by capitalising on human miseries and necessity is unscrupulous business — a business that is only filling their pockets and robbing the country. The government is cheated in more than one way. Most of the illegally occupied ghettos have unauthorised electric and water supply connections leading to a huge pilferage of public resources. Every time a tough legal action gets underway only the underprivileged helpless people whom they use as pawns die or suffer, the 'bosses' staying out of harm's way comfortably. These elusive evil clique has to be brought to light and it is understood the government of the day will have to muster great deal of courage, honesty and political will to do that.

As a paper The Daily Star supports the drive against illegal occupation. We support it because despite its obvious human face illegal occupancy of land and dwelling places is fast becoming a widespread criminal phenomenon. It holds serious threat to law and order and society in general. But we want it to be done in a humanised manner. In order to stop the recurrence of these unfortunate incidents of bloodshed the authorities need to take up the issue of illegal occupation more seriously and professionally.

At the moment there is serious coordinational flaw plaguing all the government agencies in this respect. They need to forge a professional unity among themselves otherwise only Jamal, Ashraf and Walullahs will die and illegal occupation will live as a social scourge.

The Unkind Cold

At least 60 persons have been killed till Sunday in the cold wave now sweeping the country. This figure well hides the important fact that at least 600 lakhs are shivering insufferably not far from the point of dying. If this is not a natural disaster, what is? But very evidently we haven't prepared for it. To blame it on 'unprecedentedness' can be a good excuse. But only an excuse, nothing more.

Cold spells are not unknown here. Our northern districts lie straight on the way of the Himalayan cold draft and are specially cold-prone. Not a year passes without some people dying due to cold in that part which falls in the temperate zone. Experience of the visitation seems to have been totally lost on us. The most urgent and affordable measure like distributing clothes and blankets on a large scale and evacuating the poorer sections of the people to school and UP buildings could minimise both the suffering and the deaths.

Dhaka had a whole sunless day on Sunday and with the maximum never making beyond 16 degree Celsius was far colder than the recorded 11 degree said it was. Daytime visibility came down to meters all over the country. Navigation was impossible on the rivers affecting goods and passenger movement. More than the biting cold, soaking into the bones, the eerie atmosphere all around ran an element of panic in the mind.

The most unspecialised of all life forms, man evolved to survive all climatic upheavals. There cannot be — at least should not be — any question of man dying in droves because of temperature shifts. Our casualties to cold are but martyrs to our condition of underdevelopment and socio-economic equations ruled by inequity. They die not because of cold but because of poverty. It is as simple as that.

Shakespeare says, even an winter wind is not as unkind as man's ingratitude. There's a crueler thing. An uncaring society. Our politicians delight in bickering and quarrelling while our people die a beast's death with the third millennium and the 21st Century only two years hence. They are immune to even shaming.

Computer Enclave

The government decisions for withdrawal and reduction of duties on computer software and hardware imports respectively could not have come a day later. In fact, these should have been already in place given the heightened computer popularity in Bangladesh which can be our stepping-stone to the 21st Century.

Despite the constraints of availability and unaffordability for many, a genuine craze for computer possession and literacy has simply broken loose leaving a fertile ground for a silicon valley of our own to be set up here. There is not only a local market for it but also a huge potential for export which when fully exploited could give us a high-tech image almost magically overnight.

This government deserves full credit for prioritising the agenda of computer industrialisation and providing definite fiscal concessions for its initiation in the country. But the whole range of incentives being offered for import, industrial enterprise and training in this sector would seem to be taken away if their actual delivery turned elusive owing to procedural bottlenecks.

Principally these will be of little avail if we fail to attract sufficient quantities of foreign and local investments to this sector. The BOI's 'one-stop service', on actual materialisation, will be a very useful tool in giving shape to the process. We understand the laws on intellectual property rights need some fine-tuning and that banking support will have to be kept ready.

Let heads be put together in a focused manner to get things moving in this sector on a crash basis.

The Winter of Discontent

Awami League should look into its past — its long chequered history of almost half a century — take lessons and be led by the people.

A cold wave is blowing all over the country. I once wrote that cold is gold for Bangladesh. It is the time for fresh vegetables of all kinds which originally came from temperate countries. In winter, export of vegetables from Bangladesh can be a big business. It will be a highly labour intensive programme, considerably augmenting incomes of small farmers. But how do we do it? Vegetables will all perish waiting for the ferry boat. There may not be enough cargo space. Domestic flights of Biman have all vanished and there are too few international flights. No modern grading and packaging facility is available and specialized cold stores for vegetables are also not in existence. Large scale export of fresh produce calls for highly efficient management support services.

How such management systems should be developed?

No body has an answer since the winter of discontent is spreading like a thick fog all over the country. It is a blinding fog. It is a poisonous fog. Like the poison gas, it would cripple the people and vegetables shrivel out in the field. Millions of small acts of business, new initiatives in the production of goods and services, innovations and new opportunities are the basic ingredients which combine and interact with each other to promote sustained growth and development of the economy. Unfortunately,

nately, in the foggy winter of discontent, politicians outperform everybody else and manage to drive out of circulation all acts of business and growth. Hartals instead of business take over the cities and hooligans instead of orderly traffic dominate the streets.

The months of Ramadan is basically off season to brutal, agitation induced politics of pure Bangladeshi vintage. It is the month of preparation through rounds of iftar parties and series of hectic party meetings. The stage for an open political confrontation with no holds barred is now under preparation. It will be a very carefully crafted stage, outlasting enormous quantities of rubber bullets and tear gas shells which would inevitably pour in like rains — once Eid holidays are over. The Opposition is getting ready with the single point campaign (the ideal they were seeking since the last general election) — 'Down with the Government'.

There are all the indications that the Opposition has so far managed to zero in on a single issue, the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) peace agreement. It is not a question of what is right or wrong. The force of propaganda is of vital concern. Repeating the same statement, times without number, the strategy is to create serious

misgivings in the minds of a small section of the people, in particular, those who live in the CHT. Nazis in Germany perfected the techniques of such vicious propaganda, first by creating strong antagonism between the Germans and the Jews. Following the same technique, it was possible to create animosities between the hill people and the settlers.

Starting therefrom, the basis of agitation has been expanded. Now it is no longer a

face a mass agitation. At the same time, the propaganda machinery keeps on working overtime — nurturing a core group of supporters who would come to believe that it is true that the country will be divided — we will perhaps lose the country. Interestingly enough, the movement would very soon no longer aim at obliteration of the agreement but downfall of the government itself.

Last time, it was Magura. This time it would be CHT.

led, they must always lead.

Mahatma Gandhi often used to say, 'There does my people must follow him because I am their leader'. This is the true definition of a leader. Unfortunately, we have no such true leader who follows the true interest of the people. A genuine leader of the people of Bangladesh will not plant the seeds of discontent in the holy month of Ramadan. It is an entirely unholy act. Instead, a true leader will promote the planting of winter vegetable seeds for augmenting the income of the small farmers, who have neither the time nor the inclination to agitate in the streets of Dhaka.

On the other hand, political understanding is a two-way process.

An unbending attitude would inevitably imply that the two-way process would become too stiff and therefore break. If it breaks, then we reach the point of no return which in other words, is chaos and disaster. It may be recalled that such an unbending attitude beginning with the Magura incident led to disastrous consequences for the people and the nation. Till today, we are not fully recovered from the shocks of Magura.

One of the two leading parties must yield — be magnanimous — and it is the party in

power who can afford to do so. It is neither a sign of weakness nor of defeat. When the Opposition asked for the round table conference, the other party should have immediately agreed. It is also claimed by the Opposition that the agreement is unconstitutional. Why not get the agreement reviewed by the Supreme Court? At least in one vital aspect, the issue would then be finally settled. If necessary, stay the implementation of the agreement for 30 days; in which case the leading Opposition party will have no option but to join the parliament and participate in the debate on the agreement.

Interest of the people is supreme which is being continually hampered in the world's poorest country. How a political party after leading the nation to independence in 1971 can afford to do so? Bangladesh, practically immediately after his release from the jail, went straight to Islamabad to attend the Round Table Conference (OIC). Bangabandhu did not refuse the President who put him behind bars in the first place. Why not? Because, as the true leader, he knew that was not in the interest of the people of whom he is the leader. He followed Mahatma Gandhi's principle of being led by the people.

Awami League should look into its past — its long chequered history of almost half a century — take lessons and be led by the people.



Window on Asia

Shahed Latif

problem in the south-east corner of the country; the issue has been blown up to the possibility of a division of the country and the denial of the rights of the people in general in order to bestow unwarranted favour to a small minority. The relentless propaganda gathers in speed and its own momentum. As a result, no rational explanation is necessary after some time. The Opposition is now clearly of the view that the peace agreement is anti-people and therefore ought to be rejected. Otherwise, government will

Politicians always work in the name of the people. They are always careful in safeguarding the facade of belonging to the people and fighting for the just cause of the people. In reality, ordinary citizens of the country are slaughtered at the altar of politics. Growing vegetables is infinitely more important than spreading the poisonous fog in the winter of discontent. But who cares? Politicians are leaders and then there are supreme leaders. The countless leaders and the supreme leaders can never be

The Month of Abstinence

by Sayed Eaqbal Rezvi

Ramadan is the most opportune month to regain what we have so far lost, unite once again to earn the spiritual reward.

THE holy month of Ramadan has begun in Bangladesh and across the Muslim world with a message of piety, tolerance, perseverance and that to be aloof from all evil deeds. Ramadan is a month of abstinence from acts contrary to the sublime teachings of Islam. Concerted efforts are being made to inculcate the spirit and the significance of this holy month into the hearts of Muslims not to indulge in extravagance, pomp and splendour while breaking the fast and indulge without any valid ground on frivolities.

Sermons, posters, pamphlets and rallies have so far failed to infuse in us all the true and inner meanings and teachings connected with the month of fasting. Preserving the sanctity of the Ramadan largely depends on those who declare to observe the month in accordance with the defined principles enunciated in the

Holy Quran and the Sunnah. But the most unfortunate part is that we vociferously talk, discuss and sermonise on the importance of the holy month, but, on the contrary, deliberately refrain from following the injunctions. Why this hypocrisy?

Equally vital to ponder is: Why prices of essentials have marked jumpy in the city's kitchen markets on the eve of Ramadan? Beef price jumped to Taka 80 per kg from Taka 65-70 a day before. The Consumers Association of Bangladesh in a press release said mutton was being sold at Taka 120-140 against the Dhaka City Corporation set price of Taka 110 per kg. Price of gram, the main item

for iftar increased by Taka 5 to 6 per kg and was being sold at Taka 28-32. Price of pulses so far remained stable. Consumers are learnt to be paying Taka 3 to 5 more for one litre of soyabean oil which was sold at Taka 55 to 58. Prices of onion and garlic have registered and will, as feared by the consumers, register a sharp rise.

The government as usual will pursue the wholesalers to maintain stability in prices, but who cares? The commerce ministry reviewed supply and price situation of the essential commodities in the wake of the Ramadan. The Commerce Minister made a clarion call to the businessmen and others concerned to maintain the price at

the normal and subsistence level. The worst affected are the poorest of the poor who are under the yoke of grinding poverty where most of the days they even forego two morsels of food.

Another vexing matter is the rapid growth of iftar-Sehri culture which is totally anti-Islamic and repugnant to the basic principles of Islam. Frivolity, extravagance, competition in having large number of iftar items, hosting iftar receptions even by our political parties are very much agonising and puzzling too when the majority poor are struggling for bare survival. This is not Islam. How long should we continue to follow big and hefty people with ill-gotten money? We are under

the wrong impression and in a fool's paradise that if every one can indulge in iftar-Sehri spree, then why not others?

It is imperative to remember that Ramadan is the month of piety, self-purification, fellow feeling, charity, cultivating the finer qualities in human character and above all complete surrender to Allah.

Let good sense prevail upon our political leadership and the Opposition parties as well to abstain from all evil machinations, give up hypocrisy, practice tolerance, patience and perseverance and heed to the tenets of Islam in letter and spirit. Those who are responsible and obliged to mould the life-pattern and style of the much exploited people should invariably respond to the call of this glorious month of Ramadan and refrain from false promises, catchy slogans to en-

tice the people, and work for the welfare of the broad masses.

It is incumbent upon every Muslim to keep in mind a Hadis relating to our Holy Prophet Muhammad (SM) which says: There are people who derive nothing from fasting except the pangs of starvation. They have been identified as those who cheat in weight, manipulate market prices, demand excess fares and prices from travellers, customers, patients, donations from guardians for admission to educational institutions during this holy month of Ramadan.

Fasting is not at all an end in itself but a means to an end. And that end is: transforming a believer into a practising Muslim. We cannot deceive Allah. This unflinching faith in our Creator and the constant fear of accountability to Him for all our acts of omission is enough to turn the faithfuls into bonafide 'Insaan' (human beings). And to be more explicit, Ramadan is the most opportune month to regain what we have so far lost, unite once again to earn the spiritual reward.

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

IPM and pesticide use

Sir, This refers to press reports and editorials that were published in a section of English daily recently on the captioned subject. Although IPM is the answer to demerits of pesticides use, but in our country farmers are not so much impressed with the success of IPM so that they are not to depend on pesticide use. Funded by FAO and UNDP, this programme was launched in the country in 1983 in cooperation with the Agriculture Department. By this time thousands of officials, field staff and farmers were trained on IPM and large number of demonstrations were organised across the country.

In the news media we have seen smiling faces of the farmers who are supposed to be benefited by saving their crops by adopting IPM techniques. If it is so, why the farmers are still dependent on pesticides? The logic for marketing companies attractive incentive to dealers to sell more pesticides to farmers does not stand as it is a matter of profit and loss. Actually IPM conception has not been acceptable to the farmers as claimed by authorities concerned. As to blaming overuses of pesticides in the country, only 7 per cent land is treated with pesticides at a minimum dose. But it is a fact that despite official restriction on the use of extremely poisonous pesticides it has been allowed for large scale application. The countrywide suicidal cases by taking poison are resulted from this type of pesticides which are freely available at the remotest corners.

In 1989 PITAC took a decision upon request of DoE to gradually eliminate all highly toxic products from official list of recommended pesticides. Subsequently, such decision was vetoed by a sub-committee which dared to scrap the internationally recognised WHO's classification of toxicity. As per provisions of pesticide act no banned or unregistered products are supposed to be sold openly, but unscrupulous traders procure and sell such products. Had the regulatory authorities been active and vigilant, punitive measure could have been taken as per provisions of act.

In view of country's economic condition, it is not possible to adhere to western standard. The use of Alu. Phosphide

by the feed department is very limited. Regarding synthetic pyrethroid it is highly toxic to fishes but for upland crops it can be used. The main setback in successful implementation of IPM is unbalanced eco-system due to extensive cultivation and unbalanced use of chemical fertilisers. Multiple cropping pattern helps the pest population for having host crops all the year round resulting appearance of new pests.

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TV autonomy

Sir, Reading Star report on the probable date of autonomy of the electronic media (DS, Dec 30) and giving the private sector the go-ahead signal, it appears that even if the government decides to retain at least one TV channel under public control, it might wait a) for the BMRE of BTW which is technically in shambles (any technical viewer can spot it); and b) for a second BTW channel for airing fixed time programmes related to development and education. By that time the present regime's tenure might be nearly over, due to the coming next general elections. All cultivate the sense of timing! The organogram is no problem.

A Zabr
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Reducing the line rent

Sir, A T&T telephone set has been become a common deer which is beyond the reach of the common people. It is indeed very difficult if not impossible to have a T&T telephone set installed at your residence or office. It is easier if have a big bank balance and you can spend a huge sum of money pleasing some of T&T employees or you have a giant *mama* or *chacha* behind you.

But the city market is flooded with hundreds of cellular/mobile telephone sets of varieties foreign brands of different countries. A cellular/mobile telephone set which cost Taka 50,000 to 30,000 a year ago is now being sold at one-third of the old price. More and more people are being compelled to purchase cellular/mobile telephone set because T&T telephone set is out of reach of the common people. In the name of market economy a handful of selected business-

men of our country are earning crores of taka by selling cellular/mobile telephone sets.

Our's is a very poor country and the income of our common people is very small. A telephone set is no longer a luxury item. It has become a necessity to meet the requirements and services of our people.

Unfortunately the line rent and the rate of per cellular/mobile telephone call, both incoming and outgoing, are exorbitant and too much on the high side. On average a cellular/mobile telephone owner pays Taka 2000 to 3,000 per month on line rent and telephone calls.

Considering the manifold difficulties and financial hardships of the cellular/mobile/Grameen telephone owners we would request the authorities concerned especially our Post and Telegraph Minister to kindly reduce the monthly line rent and charges per call, both incoming and outgoing of cellular/mobile telephone and to fix the tariff on a par with T&T set for the sake of competitiveness, market economy and welfare of the common people.

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Service age in Bangladesh

Sir, A few 'middle ordered' secretariat officers have recently been raising a hue and cry against the move to raise the service age to 60 years. When the government is reported to be actively considering the issue, the said officers are out to create chaos and indiscipline in the Secretariat. If the generous government of ours increases the tenure of government service in Bangladesh, it will be considered a bold step taken from the realistic view point.

But it is surprising to know that some vested interests in the Secretariat are opposing the idea of introducing 60-year government service in Bangladesh. Isn't it professional jealousy that is working in their mind? It seems these short-sighted and self-hunting officers have forgotten that they too will one day be secretaries and serve up to 60 years. Again, they do not perhaps know that the entry-age to government service is now 30 instead of 27 — the result being comparatively the short tenure of service for the new entrants.

Also, perhaps they are not aware that, with the advancement of medical science, the life-expectancy in Bangladesh is far above the past records. These officers will certainly deny that honest, competent and experienced officers are not many in Bangladesh. Perhaps this jealousy will lead them to any length against the rendering of better service

to the state by the officers around 60 years of age. That is why they are obviously against any epoch-making steps of the government like raising the limit of service age.

So, I would like to draw the kind attention of our Prime Minister to this that service age in Bangladesh should be made 60 with immediate effect in the greater interest of the nation. I would also like her to take appropriate steps against those officers of the Secretariat who are out to blackmail the popular government.

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Crime and punishment

Sir, A few days back, I came to know through the *Daily Ittefaq* that in Iran a judge ordered to throw acid on an acid thrower as punishment. I condemn such punishment.

Once upon a time the crime and punishment used to be equal. A killer used to be killed as punishment.

Nowadays the criminologists are saying that a criminal commits a crime when he has no alternative. It comes about by chance, but not by choice. A criminal can't keep himself normal when s/he commits it. So most of the criminals confess their guilt at last and repent.

A criminal is not a criminal by born. Crime is an evil production of our society and the criminals are mere a little bit of deviated bunch of people. They may be pampered by proper socialisation.

If we kill a killer as a punishment it will be another killing in cool brain as well as a second crime.

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Iraq and the US

Sir, It is now quite transparent that the so-called inspection of lethal arms depots in Iraq is, in fact, a tussle between Iraq and US and the people of the world are but silent spectators although their name is being used. Assuming Iraq has lethal weapons which could be used against humanity they are so precautions!

We wish they were so when all the lethal weapons were being actually used against thousands of innocent men and women in Bosnia! Does the world body have two sets of rules for the same offence?

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OPINION

A Misunderstood Reality

Dr Sabrina Rashid

Islam is a religion which is badly misunderstood, not only by the non-Muslims but also by the Muslims, and that is the saddest part. It is the most tolerant and generous religion, it offers friendship to all human beings and malice to none. By Islamic brotherhood, it doesn't mean that people of other religion are our enemies, but that there should be unity among Muslims — they shouldn't weaken themselves by fighting among themselves, which they are constantly doing these days. And for that reason they have lost all their past glory and come down from being pioneers in science, mathematics, art, astronomy, culture and medicine (their books were used in Europe for five centuries) to this pitiful state. Do others ever fight each other? They never do that, in fact even when some of them were doing something as inhuman as genocide in Bosnia.

One shivers to think what would've they done if the opposite had happened! And what about Muslim brotherhood — did anyone raise one's voice strongly enough at that time, as they do for trifle matters? What a shame!

Oh, how far away we have drifted from the teachings of Islam — and that, to our own detriment. Then if one or two people want to say something in favour of Islam a group of our fellow Muslims get so angry, calling them fundamentalists and what not! How strange! Does being a good Muslim and trying to tell others to come closer to Islam mean that you are doing politics or that you are a fundamentalist? Then what are those who don't want to hear a single word in support of Islam? And get so furious? What's wrong with preaching it? If others can preach their religion from north to south and from east to west of the globe, crossing vast deserts and penetrating deep forests, why can't we then preach our religion in our own country?

We are merely trying to make ourselves better Muslims. Since we are all forgetting it, we need to be reminded the rules and laws set by God. He doesn't need our Muslim names or our prayers or anything at all from us, but these rules are set just as a principal sets rules for his pupils to maintain discipline in school and to teach them a code of conduct. For, Islam is not merely a religion of prayers but a whole way of life — it gives us guidance in everything we have to do in our day-to-day life. It lays down a code of conduct for all Muslims to follow — for better behaviour towards their

peers, parents, teachers, spouses, and also when they are guests or hosts and last but not the least, how to show respect to ladies, for Islam gave them the dignity that they never had before. But sadly enough, Muslim men choose to ignore this important teaching especially the ones in our country, otherwise they wouldn't have behaved so rudely or harshly with ladies as they often do, including a few educated ones even!

Every rule of Islam, we try to argue about or ignore. When Ramadan comes, healthy Muslims of our society try desperately to find excuses how they can evade it e.g., complaining of gastric problems etc. But sadly enough they fail to understand that fasting is only good for their health and not harmful as our National Professor Dr N Islam also once pointed that out on TV. What about *namaz*, if we had said that regularly five times a day and taken food in Islamic way (simple and moderate), so many of us wouldn't have had potbellies and so many ladies wouldn't have run to slimming clubs and wasted their money and time? Such a good exercise *namaz* is. And when you wash all your inlets — eyes, ears, nose and mouth also your hands and feet five times a day before *namaz*, you keep most of the diseases at bay. When you eat in Islamic way you don't get overweight and therefore suffer less from diabetes, high blood-pressure, heart diseases, gall stones etc. But nowadays it has become a fashion not to say your prayers or fast.

Very few young ones give *salam* to elders or show proper respect, reason being the Islamic teachings to our younger generation have gone to the minimum. The Islamic Studies syllabus is so small now that they hardly learn enough about their own religion. Parents now no more feel the necessity to impart Islamic teachings to their children along with their normal studies — they have become too westernised.

What about business — is it conducted in Islamic way? Truthfully, honestly and with precise measurements? No bribes given or taken? Far from it, maybe for that reason too, we are such a failure in the business world. For our only rule now is to cheat and fill our pockets by any means, right or wrong! Who wants to follow Islamic teachings anyway? Not even the fundamentalists in the true sense! For Islam never preaches violence and terrorism. It is essentially a religion of peace and harmony.