

It's a Shame

This is perhaps the surest sign of ineffectuality and desperation. Government unable to protect its law-abiding citizens from the criminals and consequently impelling them to be up in arms in defence. The lead news item published in yesterday's *Daily Star* that dwelt on the plight of the insecure traders in Chittagong forms a sad commentary on the presence and performance of the government. It is a shame on the government that traders at Terry Bazaar, a locality in country's premier port city have decided to fight terrorism and extortion on their own because the law enforcing agency is of no help to them. The men in uniform reportedly have not stood by them with any remedial measures despite repeated complaints. Out of sheer frustration and helplessness they have taken to hockey sticks and whistles to fight and call the community people into collective resistance whenever an occasion demands.

We dare say the news from Chittagong about terrorists' tyranny and the emasculated or anaesthetised state of law enforcing agency is not typical of the port city but reflective of a general picture prevailing in every centre of trade and commerce in the country. Not long ago newspapers reported how traders in some areas of Dhaka formed vigilante groups like *Mrittyunjyee Squad* to fight the terrorists. We ask the powers that be what is the use of there being the administration if tax paying citizens have to think and act on their own for protection?

We understand the scourge is more of a legacy than a creation of the present government. It has grown and struck roots over a long period of time with factors like poverty, unemployment, erosion of moral values everything contributing to it. It is argued more often than not that providing employment opportunities to the hugely frustrated and derailed youth population is the biggest insurance against the malady. True. But this is something that will take time. But on long or short term, have our leaders so far shown sufficient signs of their worry about the situation? Have there been any step in the right direction? This is where our biggest concern lies. Neither the government nor the opposition seem seized of the cancerous growth that is eating into our vitals. The issue is a national concern.

Welcome to You, Prodi

Italy and its capital city Rome are place names that give an instant tinkle in the Bangladeshi mind. The reasons are quite assorted — from serious to lighthearted. In the first category fall the cultural contributions of Rome together with her sometimes endearing life-like vulnerabilities, her playing host to a sizable Bangladeshi population, the status Italy enjoys as a G-7 country and her robust business sense. The lighter variety of positive vibrations are the country's sleek charm, fruity orchards, rhythmic music, combative soccer etc.

So much for the receptive mood here for the august visit to Bangladesh today of the Italian Prime Minister Professor Romano Prodi. The trip's agenda seem focused on exploring investment opportunities in Bangladesh as part of Rome's new economic strategy to reach out towards Asia which is regarded as the upcoming centre of gravity for the global economy.

Prodi comes heading a 30-member business delegation of big names in automobiles, telecommunications and other fields and evincing keen interest for investment in some core areas of the economy. Of special significance are the possibilities that Italy may seek to establish an exclusive economic zone for relocating some of her textiles and leather (including, hopefully, shoe-making) industries and help us build backward linkages to shore up our fledgling textiles sector and beef up the process of value addition to our readymade garments exports. Italy's investments will be most welcome for setting up a string of small and medium-size industries on collaboration basis in mutually complementary sectors. For us Italy holds a great potential to give a shot in the arms of our telecommunications, road transportation and energy sectors.

We look to Romano Prodi's visit as an invaluable input for strengthening the foundation of a rewarding new era of economic cooperation between our two countries. Bangladesh now has a new profile as part of the prospective sub-regional groupings, something which may not escape the visiting dignitaries' notice.

Drinking Deaths

The problem started on Saturday. About forty persons got sick after drinking country liquor in the many shack shops of the brew at the Tejaon railway station gate! And some of them died the following day. But strangely, patrons went to those shops on Sunday, took their drinks and a number of even these fell sick. And a number of these died as a result. The police came to know of the poisoning deaths only on Monday, the day *people's action* began and ransacked at least three or four of the dozens of drinking joints.

The victims did not go to hospitals and their relatives avoided police. This is both sad and interesting that the addicts cared for social stigma not while they were alive and boozing but when they were very nearly dead from what they believed to be a vice.

So many people dying from being poisoned and at a time — is a revolting scandal. And it gains in notoriety because of the facts that the drinking dens prospered and proliferated with police patronage. Not a few policemen apparently frequented the joint for a free sip. A retired policeman, as reported in a vernacular daily, gave protection to the business for a monthly toll of not less than three lakh taka.

The other alarming fact is that the so-called *people's action* against the drinking dens stopped abruptly after the ransacking of only three or four shacks. Just for the fear of local mastans who understandably want the dens to thrive.

Who will be made to pay for these deaths? Someone must bear the responsibility. And something must be done to prevent any repetition of such tragedy.

January 8, 1972

Bangabandhu Lands in Freedom

In the afternoon, British Prime Minister Edward Heath cut short his customary weekend sojourn at Chequers and returned to 10 Downing Street to receive Bangabandhu.

whelming support of foreign powers for the cause of an independent Bangladesh. The person who contributed most by his relentless efforts and judicious guidance to the success of this movement abroad was the late Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury. Special Overseas Representative of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, who was appointed as such by the exiled government at Mujibnagar.

I now wonder how I did what I did. But I did have the audacity to chide the great leader by raising my forefinger at him, albeit affectionately, when I defied his orders to take him to the President Hotel in Russell Square, a favourite joint for London students. Instead, I pleaded and succeeded in obtaining his consent to settle him at the same suite of the posh Claridges Hotel that used to be reserved for Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and President Yahya Khan. Having worked as



Currents and Crosscurrents

by M M Rezaul Karim

Political Counsellor at the Pakistan High Commission earlier, I was knowledgeable in these matters. My friend and Head of South Asian Division in the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Sir Ian Sutherland, later came to the airport to receive Bangabandhu as Her Majesty's government's representative.

Bangabandhu decided to travel by my old car, with myself at the steering, instead of using the limousine provided by the British government. He listened intently to the story of the nine-month-long Liberation War, his first briefing of the glo-

rious deeds of his people. I was sweating with nervousness, hoping that no mishap would befall us on the slippery rain-soaked route, thereby causing bodily harm to my valued passenger which could not have been done even by Pakistani troops or the Junta so long.

At the hotel, the problem arose about how to accommodate requests of thousands of people to pay homage to Bangabandhu and those of the warning journalists for an exclusive interview. We decided to allow groups of five persons to visit him at a time. My colleagues at the Mission worked



Bangabandhu's historic press conference in freedom. Seated on right Dr. Kamal Hossain and on left the present writer, London, 8th January 1972.

To the Editor...

CHT accord, AL and BNP

Sir, When the entire nation is besieged with the critical question of Chittagong Hill Tracts accord, two of our major political parties — Awami League and BNP — are stuck in mind-slitting altercation, vindictiveness and exchange of words of war. They are least interested about how the people are suffering.

When the Awami League won the last general elections, formed the government 16 months ago and declared "We are a consensus government" many of us said, "Let bygones be by-gone, let us start anew". We also expected that Awami League would run the affairs of the state through consensus.

Unfortunately we have found that most of our political leaders of both the Awami League and BNP are always interested in achieving immediate and short-term profit and gain for themselves rather than attaining long-term and permanent benefit and welfare for the people. A collective decision, a consensus of opinion is hundred times better and solid than an individual's like or dislike. This is the core of success and essence of democracy.

To err is human; forgive divine. We are not saying that Awami League government has not committed gross mistakes, lapses, omissions and inefficiencies with regard to agreeing and signing certain clauses of CHT accord. So the question before us is: "what to do now?" If the Awami League government insists on implementing the CHT accord what is the panacea, treatment or peaceful solution of the problem? Haral, road blockade, boycott of the Jatiya Sangsad?

We would request the BNP leaders to kindly draft a revised peace agreement for CHT without further delay and wastage of time and energy and to place it before the nation for information, perusal and consideration.

O H Kabir
6, Hare Street, Wari,
Dhaka-1203

"Ever changing colour..."

Sir, The item "Ever changing colour of a defaulting borrower", published on January 2 1998, gives you a clear perception of how a person who has money, can buy influence and manipulate rules and regulations in his favour to make more money and do more corruption. I can tell you that this sweet man has presented sweet valuable lands, money, cars, women and so on to top bank officers, businessmen, politicians and top government officials to achieve his goal — to make money and to gain influence. Can you see why our country has not changed a bit though power has changed form one to another?

We thought that Awami League government would be able to change some of that. This story proves that expectation of the millions is wrong.

How was this pardon included in the delegation of our PM? Was there any thorough investigation on him before his name was placed in the list? I have a request to our PM. The request is to look at Nelson Mandela and Mahatir Mohammed. The PM has nothing to lose. It is time for her to include her name in history as a visionary — as a successful politician and as an honest leader. If she cannot do that then I have doubts that nobody can.

We need the PM's leadership — bold leadership — to root out all sorts of corruption. Please form an investigation committee to enquire all irregularities and corruptions that took place in the last couple of years. If you want it from your heart, you can change Bangladesh from a most corrupted country to a country that will be respected by its own citizen and foreign countries as well.

Jamir Chowdhury
(By e-mail)
Morgan State University
Baltimore, MD 21030, USA.

Will BTV do it again?

Sir, The three-nation Independence Cup Cricket tournament begins on January 10,

1998. We have already learnt that neither ESPN nor Star Sports is going to cover the matches live and so it is the BTV which we are hoping will come to our rescue. A match which generally starts at around 10am ends between 5pm and 5.30pm.

Our bitter experience which we cannot but recall is that the last few overs of many matches (covered by BTV) were interrupted by the local news. It is unnecessary to mention that in a limited-over match the last 5 or 10 overs are the most exciting part when tension mounts to the peak and the eyes of the viewers are glued to TV screen. If at this moment the local news comes on the screen, viewers feel absolute dismay. Must BTV be *punctual* to such an extent?

And what crime it will commit if the local news is telecast when the match ends?

I, on the behalf of all the cricket-loving viewers, appeal to the authority concerned so that they don't 'do' the same again.

Shamim Ahsan
64/M, R K Mission Road
Gopibagh, Dhaka-1203

Col Huda and Not Gen Mannaf was the First Commandant of BMA

Sir, I read with great interest the article printed in *The Daily Star* on December 30, 1997, "General Mannaf: A Soldier Passes Away." However, with all due respect to the departed soul of Major General Mohammad Abdul Mannaf, I would like to bring this rejoinder to the attention of Bangladesh Army Head Quarters and to the general public. In the above article a statement was made about late Gen Mannaf that is totally incorrect and far from the fact. It stated that "Bangabandhu chose him to raise the first Military Academy for the nation and he became its first commandant".



Colonel K.N. Huda, Bir Bikram, 1st Commandant of Bangladesh Military Academy, sitting on the left of Bangabandhu

The fact is, it was my late father Colonel Khandakar Najmul Huda, Bir Bikram who was chosen by Bangabandhu to raise the Bangladesh Military Academy in Comilla's Mainamati Cantonment and to become BMA's 1st Commandant in 1974. Col Huda, BB, was concurrently holding the post as the Brigade Commander of 44 Infantry Brigade (Comilla Formation) and as the 1st Commandant of BMA, 1974. Bangabandhu officially inaugurated the BMA on March 11, 1974 when Col Huda, BB was its 1st Commandant. Gen Mannaf (then Lt. Col Mannaf) was Deputy General Anwar Hossain, BP (then Major Anwar Hossain, BP) was the 1st Adjutant of BMA. I still possess many evidences including the 1st BMA album and the BMA crest presented to Col Huda on his posting out to 72 Brigade in September 1974. The above photo should stand as hard evidence to the fact that it was only Col Huda, BB who was the 1st Commandant of the Bangladesh Military Academy.

Ehtesham Huda
159, New DOHS, Eastern Road, Lane 3
Dhaka Cantonment

OPINION

Wanted: Micro Good Governance

Alif Zabr

The citizens expect the ministers to talk less politics and more about their ministerial duties and responsibilities to keep the public informed about the government's activities, and concentrate more on aspects of administration and governance than political oratory (habits die hard), notwithstanding the cruel fact that we are a talking race, with lots of tides in our conversation. We frequently face tidal waves in internal politics, with the backlash persisting even today.

According to the current style of politics in this confusing country (I am an adult citizen from Day 1), it is difficult for the layman to guess whether a minister is talking as a 'minister' or as a 'politician'. Perhaps they are not so busy with their official jobs.

A politician-cum-minister has a dual role, and he should play both the roles, but not mix up the two time and again by using his discretion liberally and judiciously (the economy of life is a rare Law). The roles are separated depending on the occasion, time and the place, although a water-tight compartment is neither possible nor desirable. This is possible, and is standard practice all over the world, except perhaps in the LDCs, although we are new to governance in an environment of political flux. A minister's speech at a party meeting would be quite different from that in an official capacity, whether indoor or outdoor. It is always difficult to resist temptation!

The purpose of this comment is to point out that the administrators do not talk about hot issues engaging the mind of the public, and waste their time in flippant dissipation. They should forget the party interest while on duty — the party will not evaporate as in the case of a

nuclear bomb blast! Firm the root first, then shake the branch.

There are numerous examples. The DCC Mayor is not obsessed with the city's problems, while the living pressure on the residents pile up geometrically. The police and the home minister can neither raise the public nor tame the law breakers to control lawlessness and crime. There is official quietness on the rampart smuggling of goods across the borders and the high seas, and that too mostly one-way. The short and long term solutions of the semi-permanent crisis of the delta's ferry services are left floating to public speculation. The campus violence is loud, but the response is silence (despite the Hon'ble President's polite reminders)! The KNM problem is blacked out (announce the official demise; but another paper mill is coming up in the private sector, with foreign tie-up; how's that?)

The ports are silted up with local politics, and superficial statements are the order of the day (despite the vile base, cosmetic solutions won't do). There is no analysis of the delays in urgent projects (publicise your weakness for public sympathy). The codes for the private educational institutions (including English-medium) are not being announced; nor the inefficiency and poor service in the government hospitals and clinics. When the teachers are corrupt, then who will teach?

The railway is crawling at a loss, and it is accepted philosophically; (make Bangladesh a railway-less country?). By what percentage ticketless travelling has been reduced by the current regime? The price spirals during Ramadan is not made a live issue (why destroy the

process started immediately after recognition of Bangladesh by Britain and other countries and was completed shortly thereafter. In the afternoon, British Prime Minister Edward Heath cut short his customary weekend sojourn at Chequers and returned to 10 Downing Street to receive Bangabandhu. The talks comprised substantive matters.

The day and the better part of the night passed off amidst great commotion. Bangabandhu chose to fly by the British Comet, though people were told an Air India plane was to carry him home. It was a ploy for a decoy for the purpose of keeping secrecy in order to ensure security which was greatly warranted. Bangabandhu wanted me to accompany him back to Dhaka, as per requirement of protocol. But, following the advice of the Indian High Commissioner Appa Pant that I should stay back in London to calm down our compatriots for the unscheduled and hurried departure of Bangabandhu, the decision was reversed. At about 5 O'clock in the morning of the 9th January, I whisked Bangabandhu away by the rear service door of the Claridges, to evade publicity, for the airport. At about 6 O'clock, the British Comet took off for Nicosia, for refuelling, en route to New Delhi for its final destination of Dhaka, with the Head of British Foreign Office Sir Dennis Greenhill and myself waving good-bye and wishing a safe return home to the VIP passenger.

Some friends asked me, being an adviser to the BNP, how did I dare write about Bangabandhu in glowing terms, without causing consternation and mistrust of fellow party members. My reply was simple. These events are historical facts and the truth will be duly vindicated. It would merely be a matter of time. In any case, one should aim to be fair and truthful, even in politics. Furthermore, can one deny that all those who participated in the war of liberation did so with Bangabandhu's portrait or image over their head? The answer is in the negative. The notable participants included even the founder of the BNP, Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman, who made the declaration of independence in the name and on behalf of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. One must not forget that neither can the past be denied because of the present nor the present be ignored because of the past.

tradition!). Adulteration of food-stuff and medicines is rampant, but how many times the ministers have talked to the press? Nobody is telling us how Bangladesh is going to be affected by the flu of the recent Asian financial crisis.

The inspectors are not inspecting, the monitors are not monitoring, the controllers are not controlling, the regulators are not regulating, and the prosecutors are not prosecuting. Only the speakers are speaking freely, without tax or VAT (there is no value to add). The police do not police, and the violators are not 'challaned' (issued 'tickets'). How to lead an honest life, however micro-scope!

Private education and medical services have become business rackets, and government's silence might be mistaken for tacit approval and abatement. The systems loss in the secretariat is not announced (like PDB). UNDP might be interested in funding a survey, to encourage better governance.

The major reforms (admin., judiciary) are defying unnatural deaths (homicide?). Robberies are taking new forms, creating panic in the society in the cities and villages. Pornography is not being controlled — do the censors approve what they see, or fail to see?

The list is endless. Can we have less politics and more work, bottom up? The buck stops at the top, so why point the finger at the subordinates? (One new professional quoted a proverb which says that if you point a finger at someone, three fingers of your own hand point at you.) The thorn is in the crown on the head. Perhaps the PM is fed up poking her team to produce more positive results in less time. We seem to be having plenty of time; having wasted 26 years.

Sons or Daughters?

Dr. Sabrina Rashid

What use are sons for a poor man if they are unemployed and therefore rather than supporting their families are a burden on their parents, who need to be looked after now. I told the lady that if she had four sons and almost every other lady has four or more sons, how can our country and our government, which are themselves poor, give jobs to so many sons!

Nowadays, girls have an equal or better chance of getting jobs than boys do — as in garments, NGOs etc., prefer girls. Educated women are also better workers than men, so they may be preferred. They do not steal or take bribes. They are relatively more honest and do their jobs more sincerely and regularly. They stay at their working place and do not roam around for gossip or for cigarette or for a cup of tea.

In our country, the main worry or fear that a person has, is who will feed him in old age. They have no idea about saving money or insurance for old age. Therefore, they need a host of sons — and daughters are not so welcome.

But are all sons capable of feeding their old parents? One old father complained to me that his son was in the army but couldn't spare a penny for his old parents. With fixed, honest income, after maintaining his own family, is enough left nowadays to support one's parents and one's brothers and sisters (if one's parents had a big family)? Very slim chance. It is only possible if one can make extra money from his post or position or if he does a good business.

Another day, an old lady patient while near tears complained that she had four grown-up sons, but not a one was employed. So they had to support all of them at this age.

They do not leave office for personal errands.

If they are employed and have a good salary they are often paid less for the same job than the men, they can always look after their parents in old age. No doubt about that, because girls always have more feelings for their parents. It is just how God has made women. They are capable of giving more love than men. Even when they are married off, they always see to all the needs of their parents. But this is possible for a married man only if his wife happens to be a good one and lets him do so. Otherwise it is very difficult for a man to look after his parents if his wife does not co-operate, as even man wants peace in his household!

So parents should not worry at all if they have no sons but daughters only. They should just give them as much education as they would have given to a son. That alone would solve all their problems and worries.