

Reason for Renewed Hope

It was an old song sung, hopefully, with more sincerity and determination than ever before. The fact that our fortunes will change if we cooperate rather than confront, is something we have heard from leaders of India and Pakistan many times before. The fact that our historical, cultural and economic ties point more towards our making common purposes with each other rather than enemies of ourselves is also something we have heard many times before. However, the tragic fact is that we have a long record of NOT doing things that are good for us. Will that habit change because of the business summit? Well, not necessarily, but perhaps, possibly.

Thanks to a timely and commendable initiative by the government of Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh can feel legitimately proud about bringing the regional cooperation agenda firmly back on to the centre stage of our collective concern. Never before have the three Prime Ministers of Bangladesh, India and Pakistan stood at one forum and spoken so determinedly about mutual cooperation. Why, and why now? Simply because, as the Indian Prime Minister put it, "The cost of NON Cooperation has become unbearable."

One fact distinguishes the Dhaka summit from all the rest. Here the main participants were business people, only led by their respective prime ministers. Business people are known for their hard headed pragmatism; and if they speak of making common cause with each other — as distinct from the politicians — then may be we have reasons for renewed hope.

The Dhaka Declaration sets before the three participating countries some specific goals the most important of which, in our view, is developing infrastructure and adequate communication network. The possibility of joint ventures and of harmonisation of relevant laws for that purpose are timely suggestions and should be followed up immediately.

For all these good intentions to bear fruit what is needed is mutual trust. In the euphoria of summit rhetoric we cannot forget that trust still eludes us in a fundamental sense. The legacy of prejudice, suspicion and even hatred characterised Indo-Pak relations for most of their 50-year history. Still we hope that the winds of change that has swept the world, and practically every region of the world, will finally have its impact on their bilateral relations. The Dhaka Business Summit has, we feel, made a significant contribution towards that end.

We congratulate Sheikh Hasina for holding this summit, and the Indian and the Pakistani prime ministers for participating in it with sincerity and enthusiasm. We hope that where political leadership failed, business leaders will show the way.

Blood Smuggling

This time it is not cattle. Neither it is women or children. The northern part of the country has woken up to a new smuggling danger — human blood. A newspaper informed us last week of an international smuggling network's use of the greater Rangpur as its route for smuggling blood from across the border. Reportedly working in tandem with hospitals and clinics in Coochbehar and 'divisional town like Siliguri, the members of an international smugglers' racket buy blood at cheaper price at the other side of the border. Brought to Bangladesh mostly under cover of icecream boxes these blood bags are then sold to different medical facilities including Rangpur Medical College.

Blood could be the most disastrous of all smuggled items. In all likelihood these medical facilities use this supply of blood without screening it, leaving patients exposed to all sorts of health hazards. Mind you, the hazards of 'untested' blood is no longer limited to allergy or what we have generally come to know as 'reaction'. There lurks a very young and potent predator in the name of AIDS. This is where this news comes to worry us most at the beginning of 1998.

And it is not only in the pages of newspapers that we get to know about this steady supply of untested blood. Health Minister himself expressed his concern the other day lending credence to this rather new development in the horizon of health sector hazards.

Now the question is can we check this evil? With such an expansive and largely unguarded common border with India, it is impossible to stop smuggling. But then there is very little to muddle blood smuggling with any other type of smuggling simply because it involves people's health. Many feel the problem suffers from a serious legal insufficiency when it comes to meting out punishment to those who are involved in smuggling and also those who are involved in that part of the health sector which exclusively deals with the preservation, collection and infusion of blood.

We suggest a power trinity of three ministries — Health, Home and Law — to combat this evil. Hanging fire might prove too costly a damage to repair.

The Vicious Stake There

The endemic linear and congestive ferry ghat dislocations have created underworldish dens of entrenched vested interests hell-bent in keeping things as they are, going by a probing report in a prominent Bangla daily. Even when the fogs are lifting away raising hopes for a purring stimulus to the mobility, those who have developed a stake in the chaos are keeping the wounds to fester.

All of this has come to glaring light as the transport operators, especially the truck drivers, and the BIWTC employees have fallen foul with each other in what appears to be a virulent form of clash of interests. Some time ago the minister concerned in a surprise visit to Aricha caught a truck driver boarding a ferry out of turn red-handed and the ghat employee whom he had bribed to jump the queue was identified on the spot as well. This isolated example got lost into the ether with the minister's departure.

The latest vicious turn to the situation is said to be the handiwork of corrupt officials and employees allegedly enjoying the patronage of a certain political party, according to the transport workers who apparently did not name the party. The higher authorities in BIWTC are either unable to proceed against the recalcitrant employees or are simply unwilling to do this. In the process, the transport deadlock worsens through corruption among people who are on the government pay-roll to ease it.

At the other end, the transport operators and workers have carried out barricades at the ferry ghat, attacks in the booking counter and gheraus also. The hell-fire must be put out.

THE pervasiveness of poverty in Bangladesh is well documented. The latest nation-wide statistics on poverty released by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) leaves no room for complacency. The Poverty Monitoring System of the BBS (printed in Monitoring Adjustment and Poverty) (MAP) newsletter of CIRDAP, December 1997 postulates that in April 1996, 48 per cent of the rural and 44 per cent of the urban population continued to lie below the poverty line with a per capita per day calorie intake of 2122 k.cal in rural areas and 2112 k. cal in urban areas. According to the survey undertaken by the said source, the monthly income of the urban household stood at Tk 1,507 (about \$34) and that of rural at Tk 673 (\$15). The aggregate statistics, however, conceals more than it reveals. For example, the per capita income of the urban poor is one-fifth of the average income of the urban non-poor. On the other hand, the average per capita income of the rural poor is 42 per cent of the rural non-poor. The Gini-coefficient — that captures income inequality — is reported to

Poverty — Health — Alleviation

"Since poverty is a complex process of multi-dimensional nature, the key to sustained reduction in poverty requires not just resources but combining resources with local social mobilization, capacity building and creating enabling conditions for empowering the poor."

be 20 per cent higher in urban areas compared to rural areas. Statistics on income shares of the lowest and the top deciles appear to substantiate the hypothesis: the lowest decile in urban areas constitutes 8 per cent of the population but reaps one per cent of the income share. For rural areas, the figures are 13 per cent and 54 per cent respectively.

Readers should be aware of the fact that expenditure pattern by decile groups could posit lower income inequality in both rural and urban areas "due to the fact that households of lower income groups improve their consumption through access to ecological/community resources."

Of all the poverty reducing instruments orchestrated by Bangladesh government — promoting income growth of the poor, interventions in education, nutrition and health — public expenditure on health can meaningfully influence poverty alleviation. "Public ex-

penditure on health provide opportunities for the poor to improve their health status and other capabilities to earn higher incomes and enhance living standards." There is, in expenditure on social sectors

on primary health care in total health spending has declined from 39 per cent in 1990/91 to 33 per cent in 1993/94 — as opposed to a rise in secondary health care from 34 per cent to 42 per cent.

The moot question is: Has

few shots from their estimates: Bottom 20 per cent of the households are reported to reap home nearly 22 per cent of public spending on rural health while top 20 per cent bag 21 per cent. Accounting for 52 per cent of households in 1994, the poor claimed 57 per cent of public spending on health: the share of non-poor is 43 per cent. Thus the pattern of public health expenditure is not so skewed. Households of the top income decile receive 14 per cent compared to 13 per cent of the lowest income decile. The emerging pattern is pro-poor." More revealing, the poorest income decile — sharing only 2 per cent of rural income — is observed to have pocketed 13 per cent of total health benefits.

MAP report also points out the disturbing aspect of public health intervention in rural areas: (a) the share of public health access is still limited to only 12-13 per cent with negligible variation across income groups; (b) the access to maternal health care is dismal low

at 1 per cent; (c) the share of rural health expenditures on curative care has declined over time; (d) poor quality of health services is reflected by opinion received from beneficiaries: 28 per cent cite that doctors pay inadequate attention, another 26 per cent cite non-availability of medicines as the principal cause for not availing medical services.

By and large, the distribution of public health spending over various income groups is more egalitarian than other forms of interventions in poverty alleviation. "Since poverty is a complex process of multi-dimensional nature, the key to sustained reduction in poverty requires not just resources but combining resources with local social mobilization, capacity building and creating enabling conditions for empowering the poor."

Poverty is both a cause and effect of health status pertaining to the poor. The facilities should be extended to the poor at a low price so that the increased human capability could outweigh the costs incurred. And government should make sure that things are right on health front.

Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes

LETTER FROM AMERICA

Ramadan in the USA

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton

Muslims have come a long way in the USA. New Jersey Governor Christine Todd Whitman has proclaimed January, 1998, as "The Muslim Holy Month of Ramadan" in her state. Many other states, with significant Muslim population, do the same.

WHEREVER Muslims are, they are required to fast during the holy month of Ramadan. Fasting in a non-Muslim country such as the United States, presents unique set of challenges.

Unlike Muslim countries, the US as a nation is not geared towards fasting. Normal life goes on; with no allowance for those abstaining from food or other physical pleasures. One is required to work, travel and contribute full time. In a way, that is not the essence of Ramadan, anyway? That one has to sacrifice in the sake of Allah (SWT), purify the body and the soul, while going about one's normal daily routine?

Americans are not overly impressed when they learn someone is fasting. Fasting in one form or another is practiced by the Jews and the Christians as well. However, when they learn that a Muslim cannot even have a sip of water, they are truly astounded. Inevitably, the question leads to why fasting is prescribed. "So that one acquires a first hand knowledge of how it feels to go hungry, so that one can be more compassionate towards the hungry," we reply. After all, fasting and charity are supposed to go hand in hand. More important, fasting is commanded by God; human beings cannot always rationalize God's commandments.

Abstaining from food is much more difficult at younger ages, especially when their non-Muslim friends are snacking all around them; yet, Muslim kids insist on fasting. I have wondered why. Although normally kids like to be a part of a crowd than to stand apart, in this case they prefer to stand apart. Muslim kids sit in one corner of the school cafeteria and commiserate, as their non-Muslim friends eat and sometimes mischievously dangle food under their nose. Yet, Muslim kids persist. All I can think of is, Allah put them up to it.

Whenever Americans learn that someone is fasting for religious reasons — as opposed to dieting, it elicits sincere respect. On a work related trip a few years ago, when he learned I was fasting, a colleague refused to eat anything, even a soda, in my presence. Since Iftar was going to be after 9 P. M. in northern Iowa, I told my friend to go ahead and have his dinner at the usual time of 6 P. M. After nine, there was a knock on my door. "It's after nine; aren't you hungry? Let's go!" My American friend had not eaten his dinner either!

One of the beauties of being a practicing Muslim in the USA is that one gets to meet the Muslim umma from all over the world. Our Islamic Center boasts of Muslims from over 35 countries. There are Egyptians, Saudis, Syrians, Lebanese, Turks, Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis of course; we even have Bosnians and Chechens!

abide by this pillar of Islam. If all the wealthy Muslims of the world contributed 2.5 per cent of their net worth annually to Zakat, there would be very little poverty in the Muslim world.

Americans, on the other hand, are very generous people. Every year they give away a significant part of their income to charity voluntarily. Drug dealers and gold smugglers with ill-gotten wealth are respectable and influential members of society, in many Muslim countries. How one acquired so much wealth so quickly, is never questioned. In the USA, these criminals and fugitives from law are always on the run. Once caught, instead of getting a chance to pontificate to the government, they rot in jail for the rest of their lives.

Criminals with the right connections escape punishment in many Muslim countries. A criminal on the run in the USA can never call up someone in power and influence to get off the hook. If he tried and was successful, the public official himself or herself would be severely punished.

Sometimes it is puzzling as to how the US and several western nations have adopted these truly "Muslim" values, enshrined in our holy Quran, whereas the real Muslims have gone away from it.

Could it be one of the reasons why the West is so advanced and we are not?

BANGABANDHU MURDER CASE

Gen Shafiullah Tells Court

Continued from yesterday

He said that he told Dalim, "I am used to seeing and using these arms, so if you have come to talk then you ask your troops to go out and also leave your arms outside this room."

Dalim, taking down his arms, said, "Sir, President wants you in the radio station."

"I said President... President is dead. He has been killed," he said, adding that then Dalim told him, "Sir, you should know the Khandaker Mushtaque is the President now."

"As I told Dalim that Khandaker Mushtaque may be your President, not mine, Dalim promptly said, 'Sir, don't make me do something for which I didn't come'."

He said then he left his office for 46 Brigade, telling Dalim that he could do whatever he likes.

The witness said as he was going to 46 Brigade, Dalim along with his troops followed him by a jeep fitted with arms and as they reached there, they dragged him to an unit line.

At the unit line, Shafiullah said, Major Rashid and Major Hafiz pressed him to go to the radio station, but he told them that he would not go alone and wanted to talk to the chiefs of Air Force and Navy.

On one side, the witness said, he thought Bangabandhu was dead and if they go for any counter action there would be bloodshed, which might lead to a civil war.

After contacting the chiefs of Air Force and Navy, they said

that they were also coming, the witness said. He said he then agreed to go to the radio station under the pressure of Major Rashid, Major Hafiz and Major Dalim.

After the chiefs of Air Force and Navy had reached there, the witness said, he moved for the radio station, where he found Khandaker Mushtaque sitting in a room and Tahiruddin Thakur standing beside him.

According to Shafiullah, the following conversation took place between him and Mushtaque:

Mushtaque: Congratulation Shafiullah, your troops have done an excellent job. Now do me something for which I didn't come?

Shafiullah: What rest?

Mushtaque: You know it better.

Shafiullah: In that case, leave it to me.

After this conversation, the witness said, as he was going out of the room Tahiruddin Thakur told Mushtaque, "Sir, stop him, he will be required."

Shafiullah said instantly Dalim, Rashid and another man, probably Moslem, stopped him and took him to another room. After a while, Tahiruddin Thakur entered that room and wrote an oath of allegiance and got it recorded in his voice.

The witness said the oath was also recorded in the voice of the chiefs of Air Force and Navy.

The witness said Khandaker Mushtaque then told them that President's oath-taking ceremony would take place before

Jumma prayers and he wants chiefs of the three services to be present at the function.

Shafiullah said as he attempted to leave Bangabhaban for his house, Tahiruddin Thakur informed him of another conference and from the President House, he could not come out till August 18 morning, although Zia was seen coming to the President now."

Coming out of Bangabhaban on August 18 morning, the PW said, he went to his house first and then to the Army HQ. In the evening, he said, he convened a conference which was attended by chiefs of Air Force, Navy, BDR, Police, DG FI, and few other senior army officers.

In the conference, he said, they talked about the killing incident and they summed up that a few dismissed officers and unruly in-service officers were involved in the incident and in no way the whole army was involved in it and termed it as an isolated incident.

He said the officers present at the conference requested him to take action against the unruly officers.

On August 19, he said, he called another conference of the formation commanders. Prior to the conference, the witness said, Col Shafaaat Jamil met him and informed him that Gen Zia was behind the August 15 incident.

During the conference which he said, was called keeping in the back of his mind actions to punish the "killers" bringing them back to the can-

tonment on the plea that regrouping of army is necessary to resist a possible attack by the Indian Army.

But, the whole thing was frustrated when Col Shafaaat Jamil pointing at Major Rashid and Farooque, who were present there, said that "they have violated the chain of command and they must be court martialled."

He said he then concluded the conference and came back to his house.

On August 22, the witness said, he went to Bangabhaban and tried to convince President Mushtaque that troops outside the barracks should be brought back to the cantonment on the plea of Indian bogey.

In reply, Mushtaque said, "Wait and see."

Shafiullah said on August 24 noon, in a radio bulletin, he heard the appointment of General Osmany as the Defence Advisor to the President.

He said President Mushtaque asked him over red telephone if he liked the appointment of Gen Osmany. He said he had termed it as "good."

Mushtaque, he said, then asked him to meet him at Bangabhaban at 5:30 pm. At Bangabhaban, he said, he was asked by Osmany and Mushtaque to take up foreign assignment and Zia was made the new Chief of Army Staff.

The PW-45 will be cross-examined by the defence lawyers when the court will resume on Monday.

— UNB

OPINION

Monster that Strikes Back

A Zabir