

## 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 gheraos also. The hell-fire must be put out.

# 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."

penditures 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 evidence, a rise of total public expenditure on social sectors



## Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes

(e.g. health, education and family planning) from around 15 per cent in the early 1980s to over 22 per cent in the 1990s. "In absolute terms, the expenditure on health has been increasing. For instance, in constant 1972/73 prices, per capita public expenditure on health and family planning increased from Tk. 6.67 in 1983/84 to Tk. 12.33 in 1993/94. Disconcertingly, the share of expenditure

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 MAP research findings provide an "incidence analysis" of health expenditures in 1994 suggesting how "gross" benefits of government health spending are distributed across various income groups. Let us pick up a

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 dismally 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 public 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.

## 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, it 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 I 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!

Every year "Mukris" (Hafeez who recite the holy Quran beautifully) from Egypt come to our center during Ramadan and lead the Taraveeh prayers. To pray behind the Quranic recitation of the best, Shaikh Jibreel of Egypt, is a spiritual experience of another dimension.

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It may come as a shock to my co-religionists, but it is true that it is easier to be a practicing Muslim here in the USA than in many Muslim countries. The holy Quran says that lying lies at the root of all evil. Yet, lying is so common in so many Muslim countries that one forgets to even notice it. Lying is a crime here in the US; perjury lands people in jail. The late President Richard Nixon lost his Presidency for lying to the nation.

In many Muslim countries, nothing gets done without bribes — bribing has been institutionalized and carries no social stigma. Again, in the United States bribing is a serious crime punishable by a stiff jail sentence.

For Muslims, Zakat or charity at 2.5 per cent of one's net worth is mandated by their religion. Yet very few Muslims

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 states, 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 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 Taheruddin Thakur standing beside him.

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

Mushtaque: Congratulations Shafiullah, your troops have done an excellent job. Now do the rest.

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 Taheruddin 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, Taheruddin 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 Bangababhan for house, Taheruddin 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 and going.

Coming out of Bangababhan 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 DFI, 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 Shafaat 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 Shafaat 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 Bangababhan 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 Bangababhan at 5:30 pm. At Bangababhan, 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 Zabr

It is becoming clear that terrorism and violence are going to swallow its own creators or godfathers, as evil returns in magnified form to take retribution from the creators and supporters of evil. Our beloved leaders might be the victims in the near future, as per trends observed in other countries and societies.

The recent brutal and savage killings in Keraniganj is one of the pointers. Another is the new type of forced-entry robberies in broad daylight in the residential areas of Dhaka, by armed young gangs who take advantage of the office hours when the adult men and women are out in the office, leaving the servants and the old people behind. Add the daily muggings in the streets, including snatching of cash before or after trips to the banks.

No action means more encouragement.

Who encouraged this indiscipline, defiance of law, and use of violent means? This culture aggravated after the movement to topple the autocratic regime in 1990 through political street agitations, followed by violent opposition street politics for two years in the mid-90s to oust the regime. Such trends could not be nipped in the bud by the subsequent administrations; and the virus spread to the workers unions who started blocking the highways, and stopped work on films 'demands'. This 'dabli' culture is going to ruin development of the country. Suitable public-awareness campaigns have to

be launched, with the full cooperation of all the political parties (is that possible in this world of polarisation?).

The society and the leaders of the society including the politicians have to pay the price for these indiscretions, and the added lack of foresight to take deterrent measures. Now the authorities have to go for 'shoot-to-kill' orders, and heavy RI after capture of those who are unfit to live in the normal and peaceful society. The vested leaders of evil who are encouraging or master-minding such operations will themselves fall victims from their own squads; as this is Nature's way of containing evil by evil.

The government in rather indifferent on ways to combat these social evils. It is presumed that the hesitation may be the desire to protect their own political party workers, although the Ministers loudly claim to be impartial in the application of the law. Political soothsayers won't solve the deep rooted malady.

Tough and emergency measures have to be promulgated to restore the sense of insecurity in the minds of the public.

Can we have Operation Clean-up for a few weeks? The neutral police personnel strength have to be increased to cope with the rise in crimes. But the recruitment process is taking too much time (as for the power, gas, and the telecom sectors). The Administration may discourage the philosophy of sitting on the fence.

## Ershad vs Nooruddin

On January 1, 1998, Jatiya Party Chairman H M Ershad while addressing a meeting marking the party's 12th founding anniversary disclosed that during 1990 opposition movement, the then army chief General Nooruddin had requested him to impose martial law, but he refused it.

The very next day Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Lt Gen(Rtd) Mohammad Nooruddin Khan protested the comments saying "Ershad's remarks were travesty of truth and imaginary... I was deeply committed to the military profession, constitution as well as to the democratic system of the country... It is quite absurd to seek permission or request somebody for declaring martial law... and no one takes permission while proclaiming martial law."

Ershad in his response claimed an overwhelming support and loyalty from his soldiers during those days and said "... so I could not impose martial law at his sweet will... rather, the army had support to my decision and that's why I could take all steps to transfer power in a constitutional way."

To dig further a little research is carried out. The result is the following from a published article:

"In the November-December 1990 uprising, the govern-

ment had difficulty in quickly reinforcing troops in Dhaka, the capital, because of opposition from the Chief of General Staff, Maj Gen Abdus Salam following the declaration of the State of Emergency on 27 November 1990. Relying upon the support of the lower and medium-ranking officers, Lt Gen Nooruddin Khan, the Chief of Army Staff, a constitutionalist, rejected Ershad's request and the interventionists' pressure to take over the reins in the final stage of the anti-Ershad movement, which underscores the importance of the rise to higher rank of some constitutionalist officers in the fall of the government. The military hierarchy also realized that it would not be able to solve the complicated politico-economic problems. Furthermore, the attitude of the exogenous forces was unknown, given the fact that, with the Cold War over, they were interested in political reform in Bangladesh. Most importantly, the military hierarchy was afraid that any military intervention might set off civil war in the country, given the strong desire of political forces and the civilian society for democracy."

Now to whom do we give credence to? Ershad? Or Nooruddin?

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## Youth Conference

Md Muhibul Abrar Choudhury

It refers to the DS special supplement dated 3 January '98 on our young professionals and entrepreneurs.

I think, this is for the first time, a national daily has taken the trouble to go for such an unprecedented move in holding a youth conference, though it is not their job. Our ministry and different authorities concerned may take lessons from this conference for their future reference and compliance. The special supplement being a follow-up of the youth conference has also paved the way to know the different views and opinions of our smart and energetic young professionals and entrepreneurs.

Being an avid reader of The Daily Star, I have read the whole context of the supplement at a stress. It was simply like "the bold and the beautiful". Everybody almost in a convincing way have expressed

their firm belief and determination to be an active partner in the process of the betterment of our country which is very essential and expected in the next millennium.

As a matter of fact, they have echoed the same feelings as mine. Literacy expansion in an accelerated way, uprooting of corruption and adieu to our traditional mindset are the demands of our present-day context or in preparing in the best possible way for the next century. I also welcome the DS's bid to declare this year as the year of the young professionals.

And in this regard, I firmly believe and expect that you would launch your next programme for the overwhelming number of unemployed youths. Who also feel that they are also the integral part of our any action plan that meant for everybody's well-being.

## To the Editor...

### Now Spurious Ph Ds

Sir, The attention of the Chittagong University authority has been drawn to the editorial of your widely circulated daily captioned "Now Spurious Ph Ds" published on January 10, 1998. The real picture is depicted below:

That the University of Chittagong wrote a letter vide memo no 1593/p400/genl dt March 18, 1985 to His Excellency the High Commissioner of India based in Dhaka to let the University of Chittagong know about the authenticity of D Sc as well as Ph D degree conferred on certain scholars of the different universities of Bangladesh by the Vishwa Un-

nayan Sangshad situated in West Bengal, India and in an interim reply vide memo no Dac/Edn/32/3/85 dt 1st April 1985 to the same, the Education Advisor of the said High Commission advised us that the office concerned of the Indian High Commission would probe into the matter and inform us about their findings later on. But, nothing so far has been received from them about the fact. On the other hand, in a meeting of the Standing Committee of the Vice-Chancellors of the Universities of Bangladesh held at the Bangladesh University Grants Commission on 17.11.1982 it was decided that "recognition to the Degrees obtained from

such institutions bears no justification."

In this connection, it is worthwhile to mention that at present, no teacher of this University uses any such degree.

Besides, letters were also written to the Embassy of the former Soviet Union and Universities concerned of the USSR when some teachers of this University were alleged to have obtained Ph D from some of the Universities of the then USSR. But no reply has so far been received from their end. It will not be out of place here to mention that there are teachers on employment at other universities of Bangladesh who had obtained Ph D from the USSR.

For your kind information,

we would like to add that the University of Chittagong takes disciplinary action against any teacher/officer/employee whenever any specific charge is framed against any of them after proper enquiry.

Dr M Shafiullah Alam  
Deputy Registrar (Information)  
University of Chittagong

### A grand load-shedding

Sir, 'Load-shedding' is a well-known word in our country.

For a couple of days the sky was foggy and the sun could not be seen. It is a new kind of load-shedding, I think.

M A Rahman  
Dept of IR University of Dhaka