

Stop BCL Terrorism

We commend last Monday's police drive against party cadres on the Dhaka University campus. Quite naturally activists of Bangladesh Chhatra League were the target. It is now plain as a pikestaff that if any collective identity is to be singled out for actively contributing to the deterioration of law and order in the country — at least in view of incidents in the last six months — then it is Chhatra League, the student front of the ruling Awami League. From Dhaka University to Shahjalal University everywhere BCL has been in the thick of things.

But the place where monstrosity of the BCL cadres' oppression has perhaps crossed all limits of tolerance is in and around Dhaka College. With Eid approaching these people who have turned two college hostels into their lairs are making life miserable for the traders and business at the neighbourhood. The name of the BCL leader who reportedly enjoys tremendous clout with the authorities and his accomplices have come up in the press. We demand of the Home Minister to take initiative to have these anti-socials arrested before Eid. But for police to go the whole hog against the criminals, the party in power has to make an effectual, and not a rhetorical, stance against the criminals operating under the banner of BCL. None of these sporadic police swoops would show any result unless the party high command takes an inviolate decision of severing all links with student politics. At least this has to be made sure that there will be no fortresses within the party ranks that may stop the long arm of the law from reaching those perpetrating crimes by using the party name.

It ought to be remembered that these elements are not only fast turning into a curse on the civil society but they are also damaging Awami League's image eminently. Weapon brandishing, extortionist cadres cannot be the strength of any party.

If she has any care for her own image and prestige then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina should reckon that the seemingly uninterrupted reign of BCL tyranny is making a mockery of her call to the law enforcing agency for nabbing criminals irrespective of their party identity.

Ugly and Unsafe

Housing is Bangladesh's truly booming sector of economic activity. But the statement needs to be qualified for precision's sake. Overall housing situation in the nation is far from a happy one. Despite the fact of BUET churning out a good crop of fairly competent and even creative architects every year since the late sixties, it is a sad fact that Dhaka's planning and building development has been, all told, bad to indifferent.

Builders and owners, mostly the latter, have played a big role in the bad showing. No doubt about that. Most of Dhaka's house-builders perhaps have yet to know about the profession called architecture. They depend on mason's ideas and know-how, masons who have all but lost touch with the enviable building knowledge and skills of the Pathan, Mughal and earlier times. All this could be held in check and better — functionally and aesthetically — buildings and town layouts could be had to make Dhaka a satisfying and soul filling habitat for the citizens and an eminently attractive city for the people around the globe, if only the successive governments had true and benign, competent and efficient control of the situation. People occupied areas as best as they could by means foul and fair and built on them ugly structures that are hardly serviceable beyond a decade or two.

Considerations of physical and town planning and even of aesthetics apart, many of the thousands of new structures are dangerously weak and unsafe — for the user as well as for those frequenting the vicinity. The Daily Star yesterday reported demolition of 50 unsafe buildings in the last five years. It can be taken as a consolation that there are after all some people or agency conscientious enough to tear down a built-up structure. But a suspicion stares us in the face that buildings may be as many as ten times over that would be needing outright demolition right now. What about those?

The present and immediate past generations of our leaderships in the various fields have all been wanting in one thing — vision. That RAJUK had never had any true vision, was always a fact bare enough for all to see. What is bedeviling Dhaka's existence as well as development as a city is corruption that the set-up is riddled with. If it cannot be rid of corruption and malpractice, government will be well-advised to institute another body to vet housing plans and to monitor the building work as also the performance of the structures after these have been put to use.

Good Discharge at Farakka

It is now confirmed knowledge that the fullness of the Padma at the Hardinge Bridge owed it not merely to an upper riparian plenitude but very cogently to the expectedly dutifully generous discharges at the Farakka point. The joint expert committee of the two countries has released data which show that during the first two ten-day cycles of this lean season the discharge of water at Farakka and its availability at the Hardinge Bridge point more than doubled the levels of Jan 1-20, 1997.

We are greatly heartened by this improvement in the outlook on implementation of the Ganges Water-sharing Treaty which went largely by default last year causing a big heartbreak in Bangladesh. With the water level at the Hardinge Bridge at one stage falling even below the lowest point recorded during the pre-accord proximate year, many started wondering whether the treaty was being a stark non-starter in the most crucial launch year.

The monitoring pattern of unrelenting vigil already established this year with daily measurements of water religiously taken at the relevant points in both countries must be maintained till April of the current year. Simultaneously, the other hydrological parameters need to be constantly under watch. In other words, the implementation machinery will have to be fool-proof and efficient drawing on the knowledge of the pitfalls of last year.

It is absolutely essential that along with transparency secured in the operationalisation of the treaty our own government ought to release relevant data at regular intervals to keep the people in picture.

OIC: Serving an Important Purpose

What kind of a future for OIC? OIC responds to a deep felt urge among the Muslim Ummah for a united platform. It has steadily grown in size and continues to attract new members. It is today an assembly of 55 member states, second largest international organisation. It has financial clout as some of the member states have per capita income which can be matched with that of the richest nations on earth.

notably the Middle East and particularly Palestine. All the member states have to dwell on the Arab issues as a matter of routine. Over the years there has been erosion due largely to the Arab negotiations with Israel. Diplomatic relations was taboo for the Islamic world. That barrier broke down in 1979 when diplomatic relations were established between Egypt, the largest Arab state, and Israel. Egypt was expelled from all the Arab organisations and after an acrimonious debate in Fez, she was expelled from the OIC. She staged a comeback at the Casablanca Summit in 1984. Full or partial diplomatic relations have been established between Israel and Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia. Meanwhile Arab pressure continues on most Islamic countries not to establish diplomatic relations with Israel, so that pressure is exerted on Israel to make an honourable settlement with the Arabs — namely Palestine, Syria and Lebanon.

Turkey, which plays an important role in the economic activities of the OIC has seen her hands tied, due to her long-standing diplomatic ties with Israel. From relations at a low diplomatic level, they have blossomed into full diplomatic relations and lately into cooperation in the military field leading to consternation and protest from the Arabs and Iran. As the peace process between the Arabs and Israel proceeds, at times haltingly, it is inevitable that relations will grow and expand between Israel and some other member states of OIC. Turkey is fortunate to find support from the OIC on the question of Turkish Republic.

Based on the author's speech delivered recently at the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies.

The Horizon This Week

Arshad-uz Zaman



BORN in Rabat, the capital of Morocco, OIC, the Organisation of Islamic Conference, is the largest Islamic assembly of nations and responds to a long felt urge of the Islamic world.

The OIC was born in the backdrop of arson that burnt down a large portion of the Al-Aqsa mosque of the famous Dome of the Rock. Situated in Jerusalem; this is the third holiest shrine of Islam. As is well known, Jerusalem used to be the first Qibla and the Muslims turned their heads towards this shrine before deciding on Makkah-al-Mukarramah. All simultaneously with the birth of the OIC, an Al-Quds (Jerusalem) Committee was established under the chairmanship of His Majesty King Hassan II of Morocco, with headquarters in the Moroccan capital, Rabat.

The present strength of OIC is 55 member states. After its birth it has chosen Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as its headquarters. The organisation is patterned after the UN with some important differences.

Like the UN it is a multinational, multilingual secretariat, which looks after the functioning of this international body. Like the UN, at the head of the organisation sits a Secretary General, elected by all the Foreign Ministers, who gather annually in a different capital. Whereas all the Annual General Assembly sessions of the UN are held at the headquarters in New York, the Annual Foreign Ministers meetings of the OIC are held in different capitals of the member states. The Secretary General is assisted by four Assistant Secretaries General, who too are elected by the Foreign Ministers with concurrence of the Secretary General. The Secretary General and the Assistant Secretaries General are elected for a single non-renewable term of four years. Below them sit Di-

sation is also located in Jeddah. The Head of the Institution is a Saudi National.

Over the years the OIC has grown in size. Thus specialized institutions have been added to this Organisation. The Permanent Committee on Economic Affairs has its annual meetings in Istanbul, which is its headquarters. There is an Islamic Cultural Affairs Organisation also housed in the famous Yildiz Palace of Istanbul. There is another OIC institution on Technical and Statistical matters located in Ankara, the capital of Turkey. In Islamabad, Pakistan, there is a permanent committee on Science and Technology, which meets annually. In Rabat, Morocco, there is a cultural centre and a centre for trade in Casablanca. In Dhaka, Bangladesh there is an institution, where degree courses are offered to students from all over the Islamic world on engineering subjects.

OIC is an observer at the UN and its affiliated bodies. The OIC Ambassadors at the UN meet annually on the eve of the UNGA. Subjects concerning the Ummah are discussed and attempts made to harmonise the positions of member states. Bangladesh joined the OIC in 1974, that is three years after its birth. It was not a simple matter. It involved the mutual recognition between Bangladesh and Pakistan. Some Arab States and particularly President Houari Boumediene of Algeria, played an important part. I was Ambassador of Bangladesh in Algiers and our Foreign Minister Dr Kamal Hossain, paid a visit. Right at the beginning Bangabandhu had taken a decision that he would visit only such capitals

as on and I represented the OIC Secretariat. The summit decided to set up a peace committee composed of eight heads of state including from Bangladesh. The peace committee met at the Royal Palace in Jeddah, elected president Sekou Toure of Guinea, Chairman and quickly adopted a resolution to be presented to the two warring parties. With a plane provided by the Saudi authorities the committee flew the next day to Tehran and Baghdad. In Tehran it was rough sailing. The committee of eight heads of state was received by Imam Khomeini. He poured cold water on the OIC peace plan by demanding that the OIC brand Saddam Hussain, the aggressor. He would also have nothing to do with Saddam Hussain. Sekou

bours. It is common knowledge that Iran has been very critical of the Peace Treaty between some Arab States and Israel, notably Egypt and Palestine. It is also common knowledge that Hezbollah guerrillas in South Lebanon are financed and trained by Iran. Iran was thus signalling an end to her activities in the Arab region. She even extended an olive branch to the USA and offered dialogue to sort out the differences. It can be confidently stated that with the Iranian presidency of the OIC Summit, the organisation itself has gained in health.

Although the OIC is supposed to involve itself with problems concerning the Islamic world, in focus has largely been the Arab problems,



1974: Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, attending the OIC Conference in Lahore, is seen with Algerian President Houari Boumediene and Pakistan Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto at Shalimar Gardens civic reception.

rectors and they are followed by a hierarchy of officials, all provided by various member states. Until recently, Arabic, English and French were used as three working languages. Following the break up of the Soviet Union and the joining of a large number of Russian speaking Muslim majority states, Russia has become the fourth language of the OIC.

The membership of the OIC has been in general on the basis of countries having a Muslim majority population. When OIC was born in Rabat with the presence of Ambassadors of prospective member states, the Sikh Ambassador of India was present but on Pakistan's objection had to withdraw. The yardstick of Muslim majority is not very strictly applied specially with regard to countries from Africa. By and large a state is admitted to membership, when it signifies a desire to become a member and there is no opposition from any important member state.

Bangladesh has played an active role in this largest Islamic organisation. Bangladesh nominated Justice Abu Sayeed Chaudhury, a former President of Bangladesh as candidate for the post of Secretary General for election in 1979. When it looked pretty certain that he would be elected, Pakistan put Ghulam Ishaq Khan, a senior bureaucrat of Pakistan as a candidate. An impasse developed and the compromise candidate Habib Chatti of Tunisia was elected. In the OIC election in the real sense never takes place but a consensus is reached and one person is declared elected by the Foreign Ministers. Since Bangladesh stood down it was given to understand that at the next election a Bangladeshi candidate would be elected the Secretary General. A R S Doha, Foreign Minister of the Government of H M Ershad was nominated by the government. But he failed and his candidature had to be withdrawn in favour of the Pakistani candidate Syed Sharifuddin Peerzada.

The OIC has faced two major tests in the political field and has failed to give a good account. The first one was the Iran-Iraq war, which started in 1979 and lasted for eight years. It was a grave challenge to the OIC, established on the basis of Islamic brotherhood. I joined the OIC in September 1980 and was assigned the Political Department, Palestine and Jerusalem, Information and Legal Affairs. I was the first deputy of the Secretary General

that would recognise the independence of Bangladesh. In the case of Pakistan this was even more important. The formula of mutual recognition between Bangladesh and Pakistan was applied. President Boumediene sent his personal plane to Dhaka along with a group of officials to carry Bangabandhu to Lahore in 1974 for the Islamic Summit. The reconciliation between Bangladesh and Pakistan took place at the OIC Summit in Lahore.

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To the Editor...

"Whither Equal Rights?"

Sir, Lubna Mariam has done a painstaking job in focusing the real issue of equal rights for women of Bangladesh in her article.

It seems very unreal that a child's nationality depends on that of the father, and not mother, in our country. I am not any legal expert, but to me, the words 'motherland' and 'mother tongue' always seemed

coined because it is the mother who connects the root of her child to her land of origin not the father.

Ms Mariam has drawn many arguments showing how unjust it is, this decision of denying the citizenship to two young boys (Shonjoy and Eeshan) whose mother (Sayeeda Rahman Malkani) is a Bangladeshi. It is ironic that our mothers do not have the right to hand over the rights of citizenship to their children. At a time when we are

becoming more understanding to the fact that women are not only equal to us, men, but in a lot of cases they have superseded us, this is quite ridiculous.

This is a major issue and should be addressed immediately by not only the women organisations, but also the conscientious citizens of Bangladesh.

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MILITARY HARDWARE

Can We Peep into the Shopping Bag?

by Dr Shahdeed Malak

If I take a wild guess and think that each of the MIG-29s costs at least US\$20 million ... how many new high schools could have been built in Dhaka with that much of money? And how many such institutions if we are buying ten MIG-29s?

A famous writer once wrote a novel titled "One No writes to the Colonel any more". Probably my memory is not serving my right and it may have been a short story. Come to think of it, may be I did not even get the title right. Can't seem to find anything with a similar title in my bookshelves. It is not impossible that the whole thing is my imagination. Whatever.

The point is that I want to write to a Colonel of our armed services, but I don't know whom to write to. May be I should try the Prime Minister who is also in charge of the Ministry of Defence. Probably the President would be the right person as he is the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces. I don't think there is any point in writing to the Secretary Ministry of Defence, as government officials do not respond to any query from a citizen. They probably think that they are prohibited from doing so under the Official Secrecy Act or some other similar childish imagination; letting a citizen know about aspects of governance, they probably think, is a major crime. Whatever.

The thing is we, as citizens, need to know. Need to know how many MIG-29s the government is buying, from whom and for how much. The Prime Minister, according to the TV news telecast of the 10th January and also as reported in the daily Sangbad on the 11th January (last page, column 7), has informed [I take it, us] that besides the MIG-29s, the government is also buying C-130 cargo aircraft and helicopters. One can easily assume that the MIGs would come from Russia, the C-130 from the US and the helicopters — well let's not indulge in wild guesses. We know that far, but we do want to know more.

Courtesy the Prime Minister, we do know that we are buying these. I think, very sophisticated and costly military hardware. Is there anything wrong if we, the citizens, want to know more about these hardware? After all these things will be bought with our money and presumably for our defence.

Most people who are interested in these things, i.e. which country is buying what type of military hardware from whom and for how much, and if such people reside or work in the West, can easily find these details from a good library. Let me give you an example, though somewhat dated because I haven't been to a good western library in recent years and moreover I did not, until today, feel the urge to update myself about these things. The example in the table beside depicts the number of aircraft we have bought from different countries, from 1972 through 1989.

Is the above table a state secret? Certainly not. You see there is, again, if I remember right, a central system of registration for sale and purchase of all types of weapon by one country from another. Something similar to, in spirit, our land vehicle registration system. If you buy a piece of land you to register your purchase with the land registration office. So, if one wants to know about weapon transactions, one can easily dig up the information from those sources. However, there are plenty of secondary

120 million or so people of this country.

The city of Dhaka with its eight or more million people, we all know, has only 24 government high schools and not a single new one has been built for almost two decades now. And we have built more than 100 schools since the liberation. If I take a wild guess and think that each of the MIG-29s costs at least US\$20 million, then will you, dear reader, take a guess as to how many new high schools could have been built in Dhaka with that much of money? And how many such institutions if we are buying ten MIG-29s? We have to guess because we don't know. May be our guesses would be wrong. So, will the authorities correct us and tell us why they are spending so much money for MIGs instead of schools and hospitals? We have a right to know and we need to decide whether we want to buy these fancy goodies. After all, we do spend three times more on the 120,000 or so members of the armed forces and their equipment than on the health services for all the

Aircraft procured by Bangladesh, 1972-1989

Year of order	Year of delivery	Seller	Number ordered	Number delivered	Aircraft model	Aircraft designation
1972	1972	India	3	3	An-12; Cub-A	Transport
	1972	India	4	4	DHC-3	Transport
	1972	India	1	1	DHC-4</	