

**A Foundation of Peace**

Wednesday, March 4, 1998 was a great day for our hill people in the south-east. They have fought for two decades for their cause and they have ended belligerence and courted peace and are partnering now in the establishment of the same. The armed and warring wing of the Chakma resistance, the Shanti Bahini, formally ceased to exist from yesterday with the handing down of the last of arms in its hands. It was a great day for us all but for whose collective wisdom and understanding the Peace in the Hills Treaty would not be here.

There now, however, looms a great danger over the hills and dales of CHT. After every accomplishment of a great deed well worth remembrance down the centuries comes a situation of lapsing into inertia. A sheer precipice after the pinnacle. Many a great achievement flounders at this hole of laxness, a sudden slackening of what was taut telling upon the string of accomplishment. And this is frequently confused for a backlash. And such wrong diagnosis costs a nation immeasurably. This must not be allowed to hurt the vista of possibilities that has been opened by the Hill Treaty.

The first great challenge comes in the shape of rehabilitation of 40 thousand families — both of the plains and the hills. The hill people suffered greatly because of displacement caused by the strife. Now that all of them are heading in search of their hearth and home, they need to be helped in this prickly problem. So is the case with the settlers from the plains. Because of strife they had to concentrate into cluster villages. Now they also need to be returned to their lands or some habitat has to be found for them.

This is going to be a crucial test for all three sides to the hill denouement. The newly empowered management and administration, the settlers and the hill people. But then there is also a fourth and important party. The government, which must keep a close and uninterrupted vigil on the development and be handy for any need that may arise for state intervention.

Much depends on those that will people the hills from now on. Not only tolerance, positive friendship must develop between the communities there. Both have problems and not a dissimilar kind either. They must overcome these in a spirit of sincere cooperation. There may be provocations from outside the hills. But these designs must be undone by those that will live there.

Let a satisfactory and effective rehabilitation of all displaced persons form the foundation of peace and prosperity in the region.

**PM's Timely Message**

Few would disagree over the general inefficiency of the government officials. Despite the fact that it is the bureaucracy which runs the show and there are people in the system who stand out like islands in a sea of incompetence and attitudinal problems for sheer individual excellence, government officials as a clan would perhaps come on top of any inventory of professional groups that have gone down in standard since independence.

It is nice that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wednesday last chose a ceremonial occasion to drive this point home. She called for an attitudinal overhauling of the government servants urging them to be more discreet and respectful towards taxpayers' money.

Having said that the Premier could not have trodden on a more debatable ground. Because politicisation of the bureaucracy is as much of a problem nowadays as is professional competence of the government officials. While the latter is eminently removable provided the republic is prepared to invest on the training of its servants and if a proper evaluative system is in place, nothing can be done about the former if the politicians do not stop placing petty party interest ahead of the country's. The worst example of this took place prior to the last elections when some bureaucrats renounced their professional obligation to speak their minds from the so-called *Janatar Mancha* or people's dais. Although it helped her party's cause at that time nobody perhaps realised better than the PM from the subsequent events that it was a 'costly advantage' and a bad precedence for governance.

Stopping politicisation would also call for a strict if not ruthless approach to the tyranny of trade unionism at the lower tier of the government service. Government has to make sure trade union activities remain confined to the welfare of the employees and never indulge in the use of political clout to promote coterie interest.

We are happy that the highest executive of the country has focused on the problems dogging the public sector service for years. We hope her words would transform into affirmative action and reflect in the quality of governance.

**Poor Dhanmondi Lake**

The reexcavation project to give the moribund Dhanmondi Lake a new lease of life has come to a grinding halt. Since the project cannot be completed before the rainy season, it has to be halted, intimates a Daily Star report. This is the most disappointing news for those who have been looking forward to the revival of this dying water body known once as Dhaka's necklace. The ten crore Taka project which began October last year and was earlier expected to be completed by June next year would now definitely take longer time. What irks one is that this has not been caused by any unavoidable adversity but by the same old bureaucratic interference. Informed sources of our correspondent have indicated interference by the LGRD ministry has spoiled the broth this time. Why did it become abruptly interested in halfway through the job? Could not it do without unnecessary meddling in a job that was otherwise sailing towards completion?

The initiative to revive the Dhanmondi Lake was a great tidings for Dhaka's denizens for whom life has become minute struggle with polluted air in concrete jungle on one side and squalor of slums on the other. The few epitomes of nature are fast diminishing in the face of relentless attack of urbanisation. Dhanmondi lake apart from its sister in the Ramna Park is one of the very few refreshing remnants of a once sylvan and watery Dhaka. Muddled thinking or rather thoughtlessness of the authorities has put spanner in the works of the resurrection process of a life giving source. It is most unfortunate and emblematic of poor governance. Does the LGRD ministry have any answer for the wastage of public money and dunking of public expectation?

A recurring refrain in these columns has been a new and dangerous dimension to hunger. The very systems that enable our farmers to feed all of us are under threat. Two weeks back I flagged two elements of that critical threat, namely, exhausted earth and polluted water. Today, I shall focus on a more irreversible loss, that of plant genetic diversity. Here, extinction is forever.

Genetic diversity is a critically important life of defense against catastrophic loss for the peasant farmers. The peasant's gardens of traditional agriculture are less vulnerable to such loss because they contain a wide variety of plants including land-races. Homogenised seed-based technologies along with concomitant chemical intensification could smother traditional and wild varieties with their unique genetic traits. This loss has been massive. In Bangladesh and India today, to quote only one example, 10 rice varieties are sown where once over 30,000 different varieties flourished.

In the aftermath of the Earth Summit, the contribution of indigenous and rural communities to conserving and enhancing biodiversity has been recognised but not necessarily understood. That indigenous peoples inhabit the most diverse fields and forests of the world is sometimes viewed as both coincidental and unfortunate. That a correlation exists between the uses made by people of biological diversity and the availability of that diversity is seldom considered.

Rural societies maintain genetic diversity because it is essential to their survival. They

breed improved varieties for the same reason. There is no useful distinction, for them, between conservation and development. However, institute-based scientists, still predominantly male, may consider rural conservationist/innovators especially hard to find because many of the latter (some say most) are women. The traditional roles of rural women in genetic conservation and selection need recognition and revitalisation. The same is true for the herbalists in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. They preserve representative samples in hill side genebanks.

In fact, evidence is mounting that virtually all of nature's diversity within the reach of rural communities — be it in the fields or in the forests — has been nurtured or developed by community conservators. What we have often called "wild" species may be more properly called "associated" species as they are often an integral part of farming systems and can be considered to form part of the intellectual achievements and contributions of rural societies.

Despite their importance for livelihood security of the rural poor, crops of local importance, farmer-developed varieties and wild species are sometimes ignored in ex situ conservation through national and international genebanks. Although much genetic variation within major food crops has been collected in the genebanks of International Agricultural Research Centres and their national networks, often collections are inadequate and tend to be limited to physically ac-

cessible areas. Very little is known about the varieties stored in genebanks and even less about their potential uses. Second, the high cost of regenerating the seeds and the risks of mechanical failures make seed banks less than fail-safe. Third, evolutionary processes which otherwise ensure sustained adaptation to changing environmental and social conditions are frozen out.

A more important question is the continuing free and universal access to genebank materials. Three areas are of particular concern. First, the Conven-

tors are nonchalantly dismissed as folklore. Further, the patenting of living organisms is not desirable on both ethical and equity considerations.

My point here is that while acknowledging the contributions of ex situ genebanks in plant genetic resources conservation, there is a strong case why the control over the conservation of plant genetic resources should be brought to the local communities. As Christine Weiszacker puts it, "their sound analysis based on long (organic) co-existence with biodiversity" can be the most sta-

they need and how they can improve their system. Peasant societies and culture have been deeply influenced by the plants they know and grow.

For the best use to be made of Plant Genetic Resources, farmers must control their own bio-materials and have access to as wide a gene pool as possible. They must be able to incorporate knowledge and information about their material when it is available elsewhere. They will need funding and scientific support to develop their resources, generate their own technologies and make appropriate use of other technologies. Policies should be implemented that will create an environment conducive to the empowerment of local communities and the establishment of a partnership between institutional scientists and community based practitioners.

Unfortunately, as Dr Geoffrey Hawt in points out:

"The granting of patents covering all genetically engineered varieties of a species, irrespective of the genes concerned or how they were transferred, puts in the hands of a single inventor the possibility to control what we grow on our farms and in our gardens. At the stroke of the pen, the research of countless farmers and scientists has potentially been negated in a single, legal act of economic hijack".

Dr M S Swaminathan, the father of modern agriculture in India, states in a similar vein that genetic variability which serves as the feedstock for the biotechnology industry is at the same time the most important

safety net for farmers who must seek to minimise risks arising from pest epidemics. Conservation and sustainable utilisation of biodiversity are essential for halting the deteriorating balance between food and people. In the current atmosphere of promoting market-driven economies, it is obvious that a symbiotic balance must be found between private profit and public good.

With the growing spread of trade-related intellectual property rights culture, such a symbiosis is all the more essential to protect the farmers' rights. Farmers Rights, as defined in the International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources, is their right to recognition for contributing to the common welfare by providing and nurturing genetic diversity. Such rights are necessary in respect of insitu community conservation. Only thus the evolutionary processes that generate new germ-plasms can be maintained and the contribution of farmers as their custodians can be acknowledged and compensated for.

As the exciting vista of frontier technology in plant genetics opens up, let the exhortation of Albert Einstein serve as the guiding principle of all scientific enterprises: "Concern for man himself and his fate must always form the chief interest of all technical endeavours in order that the creation of our minds shall be a blessing not a curse." Hopefully the scientists themselves will take the lead in bringing and end to the mad race for patenting inventions which can have a profound impact on human nutrition and health. What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?

**Extinction is Forever**

"Concern for man himself and his fate must always form the chief interest of all technical endeavours in order that the creation of our minds shall be a blessing not a curse."



**Do I Dare!**  
A Z M Obaidullah Khan

tion on Biological Diversity recognises that nation-states have sovereign rights over biological resources, but focuses primarily on naturally-occurring species. The status of collected specimens prior to the convention vis-a-vis intellectual property rights still remains in limbo. Second, the terms of availability of materials placed in depositories both for the farmers and the plant breeders. Third, farmer's rights in relation to these accessions and compensation for past and present community innovation. It is tragic that in the emerging marketplace of patents over living materials and life-forms, discoveries of indigenous inno-

ble foundation of a sustainable system for its conservation, utilisation and enhancement. Michel Pimbert agrees that "broadening the circle of social control of how genetic resources are managed and used is central to tomorrow's food security". Rene Salazar points out that the creator, custodian and end-user of plant genetic resources is the farming community. Farmers and their plants have been together for centuries. Community conservation by the farmers ensures evolution and adaptation of the genetic resources in living conditions. Farmers tend to know which plants are useful and for what purposes. But most of all they know what

women taking bribes but I have heard about males not only taking bribes but many a times constructions of many projects had to be stopped if toll-collectors — who happen to be males — are not paid a handsome amount of money. These are everyday incidents.

I hope Mr Deepak will be gracious enough to acknowledge these facts.

Nur Jahan  
East Nasrabad, Chittagong

**The positive Pak**

Sir, "A Positive Step" by Shamim Ahsan printed on the 16th of February raised an important point. The PM of Pakistan finally announced that those responsible for the war will be punished and a formal apology will be given. Maybe it is the correct time to do so. Just recently Japan asked forgiveness for their atrocities during the Second World War.

If it wasn't for Pakistan's stubbornness, this horrifying war could've been avoided. I see no reason why some Pak officials recently declared that nothing the PM said will be done. Is this another sign of their pig headedness?

Masroor Ahmed Deepak  
Dhaka

**Loadshedding and girls**

Sir, Nowadays, girls are doing better in their academic careers than boys. Loadshedding is an important cause for this; boys go out from their rooms or homes during loadshedding,

and waste their time by gossiping; but on the other hand, girls keep themselves engaged with studies by the help of alternative lights!

Maeen Uddin Sabuj  
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Dhaka University

**One Book Fair!**

Sir, Recently, the State Minister for Youth, Sports and Culture, Obaidul Qader has declared that there will be only one 'Book Fair' in the capital. Would it bring any benefit for the publishers or the readers? I request him to consider the decision once again.

Md Ahmadul Haque (Topu)  
Dept of English,  
University of Dhaka

**Sanctity after death**

Sir, The question of appointing women doctors in doing postmortem works was raised in the Parliament and I feel happy that the health minister felt the necessity of women doctors in this particular field. In fact, doing postmortem of female dead bodies by male doctors is tantamount to dishonour the body of the victim and is not allowed in Islam.

It is a fact that during post-mortem, the dead body remains undress. And in such situation a female corpse should not be approached by male doctors as it is against the teachings of Islam. Even the other religions do not support such medical approach to the female dead bodies.

Halima Bagum  
North Mugdapara, Dhaka

**To the Editor...**

**Sanctity vs Sufferings**

Sir, I am amused to see a photograph on page 3 of The Daily Star (Saturday 2 March '98) of the Dhaka University lady teachers carrying a placard which says, in Bangla, "Maintain the sanctity of Shaheed Minar". It is supposed to be a silent procession in protest to the 'desecration' of Shaheed Minar.



The organisers of the procession, the Dhaka University Teachers' Association (DUTA) is a very powerful organisation of learned people. Ordinary mortals like us look upon such organisations to show us the path of honesty and righteousness, of knowing right from wrong. Anyone siding or sympathising with any political group or party is bound to be controversial in the eyes of the students. The Dhaka University Ordinance (1973) made the teachers of this institution partisan and controversial by law.

The country is passing through a very disturbing phase of history. There are thousands and one issues of public interest which not only affect the ordinary people but intellectuals like the teachers of Dhaka University also that can be taken up and projected. The recent price-hike of essentials must have touched all and sundry. The prices of rice, onion, garlic, turmeric, sugar, salt etc., have touched new heights and some of these items are already out of market. The lady teachers of the University, I believe, also look after their families. Many of them, I am sure, go to the markets, and that should make them quite unhappy if they are to manage within limited source of income. Do they feel the pinch? What about the male teachers of the University? Don't they go to the market? How come they don't protest the price-hike? Why can't they take a position from where they can lead the nation on important non-political national issues?

Millions of poor people in this country who cannot have two square meals a day and cannot possibly survive by eating sanctity and lodge protest against desecration of holy places. They need food at reasonable price.

O J Shams  
Dhaka

**Generalisation is not correct, Mr. Hossain**

Sir, This refers to the letter of Mr Faiz Hossain, Texas, USA published on 24th Feb, 98. It seems that Mr Faiz has stretched his knowledge to the unknown by castigating that none of our political leaders loves the country which is brazenly untrue.

It is a common knowledge that generalisation is not correct including this one. Before insinuating our political leaders, he should trace back his memory that it was the political leaders who mobilised public opinion in establishing the

then East Pakistan. Again it was the political leaders who galvanised public opinion under the umbrella Six-Point Programme which under the leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman culminated in creating sovereign and independent Bangladesh.

I guess the remark of Mr Faiz, was slip of the pen.

Javed Mortuza  
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Dhaka.

**...Have no know-how?**

Sir, The letter captioned 'We are Concerned' printed on 3rd February got me worried. I am an old man and have seen many things happening in our country over the years. I feel that in the name of liberalisation and opening up, we are creating problems for our own industries. I can understand the concern of the Packaging Industries Association.

Recently, the doctors expressed their deep concern over the decision of the government to allow foreign doctors to practice in Bangladesh. As far as my knowledge goes this decision was later amended and I think that was a wise thing to do. I do not know how complicated or what special technical knowledge is required to work in the service sectors as in an advertising agency that should call for giving employment to Indian citizens rather than recruiting our own citizens. The government should definitely look into these and act in a manner that is beneficial to its own nationals.

Ibrahim Salek  
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Mohammedpur, Dhaka.

**A 'queue' example**

Sir, I was amazed to see a photograph where the Indian President K. R. Narayanan is waiting in a queue with his wife and daughter to vote for the general elections in a weekly newspaper published by the Non Resident Indians in the USA, named 'India Abroad' (20 February, 1998). Thinking of our leaders who go to the polling stations and never stand in a queue, I am compelled to sink in deep sorrow.

May I have the courage to dream that our leaders are standing in a queue to vote in the next general elections (due in 2001) showing respect to democratic norms?

Kazi Golam Towsif  
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**The brother with arms**

Sir, The US's continuing role as Big Brother in international affairs may be considered not very helpful in maintaining the image of the United Nations as the ultimate arbiter in solving international problems. The US has already given enough pointers in its stand-off with Iraq where the other big powers are made to look subservient to the will of the US. Even the significant success of the UN Secretary-General in achieving the accord with Iraq which has headed off the impending armed conflict with Iraq, which, in other words, has highlighted the positive aspect of the UN's role, seems to be in the process of being belittled by the Big Brother attitude of the US. Russia and China, other permanent members of the UN have been made to appear small in the light of the bellicose utterances of the US following the achieved accord with Iraq.

In this perspective, the big question before the world country is whether such atti-

tude on the part of the US helps in promoting the image of the UN as the ultimate trouble-shooter for international problems.

A S M Nurunabi  
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Dhaka.

**Internet censor**

Sir, Once I heard on BBC news that the Singapore Government took punitive measures against a feeder of pornographic pictures on the Internet in accordance with law of the land. Yet we are to add our name in the list of such feeders but in the absence of censorship internet in our country is full of pornographic pictures and materials.

I would like to draw the attention of the authorities to take effective censorship measures immediately to arrest the situation before this is too late.

Mohammad Shah Jahan  
Dhaka

**Odacity?**

Sir, I have a queer proposal: nothing should be publicly named after a living personality. I say it because I would not consent to the current practice in my own case.

The proposal may sound controversial, but it is morally sound. It is not a matter of consolation, as many become famous after their death. Is it necessary to know personally that one is famous?

Citizen-Z  
Dhaka

**Some Doctors!**

Sir, Nobody can tell if Raman Lamba would have lived if arrangements could be made to take him abroad for treatment but I have a feeling the confusion and directionless running from place to place this unfortunate cricketer was subject to before his death could have been avoided.

Now people are coming up with all sorts of stories but the level of ignorance of our doctors as exposed by the press reports — in this case is frightening. The neurologist to whom Lamba was taken first is reported to have predicted that the injury was nothing and Lamba would be playing in six months' time! Imagine.

Anrudhra, Nawabpur  
Dhaka

**Serious lack of seriousness**

Sir, I am confident Indian cricketer Lamba would not have died so prematurely if he could be flown to countries with a tradition of better medical treatment. Not long ago a top industrialist and political leader's daughter and son-in-law were fatally injured in a road accident. The boy died on the spot. But the girl survived because her father had an ambulance plane flown for her treatment in Singapore.

Abahani club officials which boasts names like Salman Rahman, Saber Hossain, Choudhury and many other business magnates should have done something like that. At least they could have taken him to the Elizabeth House at Baridhara where British doctors could have examined if not treated him. Lamba himself reportedly requested the club officials to take him to British doctors. Entering Elizabeth House would not have been a problem, for he was a British passport holder.

Kanta, Baridhara  
Dhaka

**Far from right, Mr...?**

Sir, Mr Masroor Ahmed Deepak took my silence about some of his remarks as my agreeing on those points, is far from right. As he mentioned those points on women again in his letter, I think I should clarify myself.

First, "women spread vicious rumours". I wonder from where he got this absurd idea. It is a well-known fact that men like to play practical jokes, they are free to go any place, any time — so it is easier for them to spread rumours.

Second "come up with the most absurd imaginary medical reasons".

I think nothing could be more unjust from this observation. Women have to be twenty-four hours on duty in their homes. If with imaginary illness women take to bed, every house will become a shamble — it is the other way around, unless they become seriously ill they perform all their duties doggedly. Men can remain absent from their offices if they fall sick but with many sorts of sickness women have to do their household chores. Nowadays many women work outside their homes, but still it is the womenfolk who have to do all the household works, before departing for their respective workplaces — the wife has to attend to all the things there are to be attended to, and after returning from work she again has to see about cooking and clearing of the house, to look after children and all that.

Third, "Women take bribes". I have not heard about

good cricketer, who entertained us. Being a human, depending on the circumstances, one may get hot tempered. This is not unusual. Yes, I am talking about late Raman Lamba.

Raman's death is an unrepairable injury to his family. Kim, his wife, can feel only the depth of wound, and loneliness. His son and daughter will miss their daddy. Parents will miss their son, of whom, they were proud of. A sister lost her brother, and so on. This is quite cataclysmic for a family.

As far I have learnt from The Daily Star and World Tel web sites, may be, it was his destiny. That's why he ignored umpires' and colleagues' request to use helmet. Raman will never return to his family or to entertain us. But his death has left some queries. Why the physician could not realise the intensity of the brain hemorrhage at the very outset? The club officials have watched that the ball, after hitting Raman's forehead, went up, and the wicket keeper had to rush for a couple of yards to glove it. Is it not good enough to understand the momentum? Since the ball hit right on the forehead, one of the sensitive and delicate parts of face, exposed after the men's balls, the officials had to be more sensible. Due to emotion and temper, at that particular moment, a player might not feel the pain. But the injury may be fatal. Raman's incidence evidences this to all of us.

Raman's colleagues from home and abroad, players, officials, and cricket fans from Bangladesh have paid homage. May I request our Minister for Sports, and the Chairperson of Bangladesh Cricket Control Board to send official condolence letters to Raman's wife, parents and to Indian Board of Cricket Control.

M Tark  
Graduate School of the Environment  
Macquarie University, North  
Ryde  
Sydney, Australia



**Destiny ... was it ?**

Sir, He will never be fielding at forward short leg to take a catch, after the bowling from a slow off-spinner, unthinkingly and occasionally played by a batsman. He will not open the innings for Abahani any more. The opponents will have no more headache to keep him out of scoring runs. In the Rhanjee Trophy, Delhi will miss his service. It might happen, after the Rhanjee Trophy, he would stick the India Test cap again. We, the cricket loving people, will miss his elegant stroke, well-timed pull and acute cut-shot. Above all, we'll miss a

**Raman Lamba and a Few Queries**

**Remembering Lamba**

Sir, The tragic and untimely death of the former Indian Test cricketer Raman Lamba was indeed pathetic. He was dearly attached with a Dhaka cricket. Lamba, who had entertained the Dhaka crowd with a touch of high-quality cricket for over a decade will be missed. As human beings, sometimes it is hard to compromise with the cruel course of destiny and so we come up with mere excuses and consolation, like, ifs and buts.

If Raman Lamba had worn a helmet, he would have survived, the ball would have only hit the helmet. If Raman Lamba were able to duck or move away, or if the ball hit the cricketer's feet or hands then the tragedy wouldn't have happened.

The great Indian cricketer died with his boots on, leaving a message that 'fielding at silly point or short leg can be fatal'.

May Allah rest his soul in eternal peace.

Khawaja Viqar Moinuddin  
Purana Pallan, Dhaka

**It's criminal**

Sir, The time lost in treating Lamba effectively is criminal. I fail to understand how a club which has the Prime Minister and some influential ministers as patrons and donors could not find a seat in the hospital for a fatally injured player. Abahani officials have been quoted to have said they could not admit Lamba into the IPGMR in their first attempt.

Is it tenable or credible? Could not they with little more sense of urgency on their part have Lamba flown to India by an airforce jet? It was an emergency which eluded the club officials. I am sure if they really put their mind to it they could have arranged an aircraft — a chopper or a fighter plane to do the job. The fact is they did not understand. But then how could they not when the impact was so visibly heavy?

Mimi, Moghbazar  
Dhaka