

## Setback for the Region

India was widely believed to be a screw driver away from the atom bomb. The three underground tests she carried out on Monday with a thermonuclear device have brought her that close also to a hydrogen bomb. The stages now left for India to enter the peer Group of Five are weaponisation and development of a delivery system. The last-named has already got underway with the test-firing of Agni, Prithvi and Trishul.

The BJP-led government in India within seven weeks of coming to power has raised the spectre of open nuclear rivalry in the region. It is also likely to fuel the nuclear ambitions of threshold countries. This is tantamount to stoking nuclear fire because the so-called logic of striking a balance of terror with these high kiloton devices could prove self-defeating. The nerves on both sides would be so tense and taut that the fear of being struck down first could prompt either party to push the button before the other.

India's hostile neighbour Pakistan has not yet carried out any atomic tests but is believed to be a nuclear threshold country. Her firing of Ghouri missile could have been a provocation for India but hardly enough to justify a nuclear re-testing bravado. Pakistan will be spurred on now to go the Indian way. Given the non-pacific track-record in the relations of the two countries, a manifest nuclear race between them has all but begun. We do not see how this can be stopped especially when the interminable process of dialogue between the two countries might come to a grinding halt.

We think the whole regional atmosphere has been vitiated by a fell stroke. We question the BJP government's wisdom in carrying out the tests after a lapse of 24 years since the first series were conducted testifying to India's nuclear capability allright. This is a setback for the process of cooperation in South Asia based on the concept of peaceful coexistence among the member-states of SAARC.

There has been an interesting build-up to this baffling episode. Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes had been mincing no words for some time to declare China as the first threat to India after Pakistan. This bore a link to his allegations that China helped Pakistan with the missile technology to test-fire Ghouri. BJP's display of ultranationalist flair so early in the day needs to be watched more closely in the coming months.

Our sole concern is to stave off a new escalation in nuclear arms race.

## Extortionists at Large

Entering one's newly bought house is usually a fond memory. But not for Mohammad Ali and his family. Refused and angry extortionists at city's Gulshan area have sent the whole family to the hospital with Ali's fatally injured wife in real bad shape.

Deals specially those involving purchase and possession of land or house have become particularly hazardous. Whether you have come from somewhere else to start living or you are about to pull up the stakes from a particular area, you have to pay the local anti-socials their 'taxes' — that is the order of the day.

Going to the law enforcing agency is almost invariably of no help in matters like these. The problem is two-pronged with the men in uniform. Usually police and these extortionists enjoy excellent relationship based on mutual benefit. So more often than not they don't bother to listen to the victims. In fact, in many cases seeking help from police proves a much costlier exercise.

Then there is political patronage of the criminals which not only makes it difficult to enforce law but also gives the corrupt members in police a chance to make light of their professional obligations. Police would not nab the criminals saying they are 'highly connected'. Those who attacked Ali and his family are allegedly linked with the ruling party. This probably explains why they were roaming freely even after such a widely publicised murderous attack.

Besides, police's tardy operational tradition is a great handicap in tackling problems like this. It will get a move on only after something has happened. No matter how desperately one implores for measures to preempt possible strikes, police seldom pay heed. Let it happen then we shall see seems to be the eternal motto. In most cases the police's role is relegated to that of a 'clearer' than a protector after the worst has happened.

Authorities need to sensitise the law enforcing agency immediately to this problem which is assuming epidemic proportions. Things have already turned considerably bad for law abiding citizens with a conscience to put up with. Allowing it to worsen further will throw the society into complete chaos.

## A Norm Turns Example

This is apparently the age of aberration. Everywhere there seems to be a race to tamper with rules; to bury ethics; or to destroy norms. But not Reboti Mohun High School, a little known educational institution in Siddhiganj, Narayanganj. At a time when the whole country was drowned in the sickening report of question leakage and widespread copying, this quiet exam centre showed refreshing resilience in upholding the standard of evaluative system.

In the just concluded SSC examination, not one candidate was expelled from here. Rather expulsion was not required. Because no one had the chance to adopt unfair means. Much to our admiration, Reboti Mohun High School stood against the wind with its unfancied head towering above many others.

According to the report of a national daily, the school owes this feat to one Giasuddin, a former Upazila chairman. Prior to the exam he convened meeting with the local units of major political parties and formed a group of volunteers who in tandem with the law enforcing agency and district administration screened the examinees and maintained vigil outside the hall through the exam hours to make sure there was no external assistance. With all kinds of external interference effectively taken care of and examinees exorcised of any unfair intention and means whatsoever, maintaining order inside the halls was a relatively easy job for the invigilators.

Hats off to Giasuddin without whose pioneering effort Reboti Mohun High School too could have easily joined the bandwagon of smuttied exam centres. But the downside is probably we have already slipped too far down the slope to glorify on instance that should have been the rule and not an exception.

# About a Letter, a Statement and a Commitment

*Why the women community parades in the streets of the capital city claiming that this country is a paradise for rapists, child lifters, child molesters? What is the meaning of Premier's commitment to rule of law or accountability to Samias who are unable to breathe safely, dream of a rewarding life and able to love the country with a non-bleeding heart?*

**T**HIS article is about a letter, a statement and a commitment — published in the newspapers on Monday last. The letter, written by one Samia Islam, an A-level student, was published in *The Daily Star*. The statement, made by the Vice-Chancellor of Dhaka University, was published in *The Daily Ittefaq*. And the commitment, expressed by the Prime Minister, was carried in most newspapers.

The student is unsure of her life and liberty, the educational administrator appears to be a hostage in the hands of terrorists, and the chief executive of the country reiterates her commitment to democracy, rule of law and accountability. Obviously, they represent different layers of the society and perhaps, different strata of power structures of the country. It is little surprising that their perceptions of the society's problems will be different as well.

Let's begin with the student — a teenage girl — who wrote about her "utter hatred and disgust" with the living in a country which apparently is "a paradise for child lifters, child molesters and rapists" and where even "a two year old girl cannot live in safety." She wonders, how the politicians can claim that the country is running smoothly in a situation where teenage girls like her live in utter fear, unerring shakiness and unease because of all pervasive lawlessness.

She also questions the integrity of a senior American diplomat, who recently described Bangladesh as a role model for the developing countries. She is at a loss to understand how a country that cannot save a two-year-old child from rapists could be a role model for others. She is also not so sure whether she, and others like her, will find protection of law and order, before it

is too late, before she is deep inside a gutter.

Of course, it would be wrong to conclude that all teenagers are thinking in the same web length or mental frequency levels. All are, of course, not as "disgusted" with the state of affairs in the country as she apparently is. But can anybody deny the level of helplessness, uninhibited innocence or cry for sheer protection that had been running through the mind of this teenage girl? What the society has done lately to convince her that all is not wrong around her and that cries of her and others like her will not end up in wilderness?

The question is, if only 20

might be watching them.

Now the statement of the Vice-Chancellor. *The Ittefaq* report suggests that while addressing a seminar in the city on "Student Politics and Terrorism," he stated that only about 20 terrorists — having links with high-ups — were holding the Dhaka University as a hostage. In a normal situation, such a statement from the Vice-Chancellor of Dhaka University could create a furor all over the country. But such is the state of the nation today that few seem to bother about it — everything seems to be normal all around.

The question is, if only 20

independently and neutrally? How the Samias can feel secure in a campus where those who create chaos, resort to gun battles, collect tolls and terrorise normal life, are protected by the high-ups of the society? And if Samias are insecure at home, at school, at work place, don't they have the right to feel disgusted with the society, with the nation?

Finally, the commitment of the Prime Minister. She was speaking at a seminar on "Democracy, Rule of Law and Accountability" in the city. Reports suggest that the Premier reiterated her commitment to democracy, rule of law and even to accountability by proudly mentioning that her government repealed the Indemnity Act. She, however, didn't mention how the infamous Special Powers Act 1974 — that empowers the government to pick up anybody at any time from anywhere in the country — fits into the framework of her democracy.

The question is, if the Premier remains committed to rule of law, why then Samias are sending SOS signals in the newspapers for the safety of their persons, lives and innocence? Why then, the VC of Dhaka University, who is an ardent supporter of her party, cannot take action against a handful of terrorists? Why the parents live in a constant fear — every day, every moment, all over the country — for the safety of their offsprings? Why the women community parades in the streets of the capital city claiming that this country is a paradise for rapists, child lifters, child molesters? What is the meaning of Premier's commitment to rule of law or accountability to Samias who are unable to breathe safely, dream of a rewarding life and able to love the country with a non-bleeding heart?

Samia's comment about the comment of an American diplomat that Bangladesh can be a role model for developing countries also deserves serious attention. Although Samia may not be old enough to understand the intricacies or pleasantries of diplomacy, she appears to have understood it quite well that it must have been a joke. What she apparently does not understand is that even such farcical statements do receive extensive coverage in our country.

Of course, the state propaganda machinery had been more enthusiastic than others in making the point that the concerned diplomat meant what he said. Obviously, neither the concerned diplomat nor the media or the state machineries realised that there are some Samias out there who

terrorists were at the root of all untoward activities in the campus and if the VC knows the terrorists, why is he not taking appropriate actions against them? If the university remains under effective command of the 20 or so terrorists and nothing can be done against them, what purpose the VC serves by clinging to that position? Everybody knows this VC had been an adviser to the ruling party for a long time and he apparently has access to the highest level of government. Why does he, then, seem so helpless in the hands of terrorists?

More importantly, how hundreds and thousands of Samias can enter the university knowing fully well that the VC is incapable of protecting the interests of the common students and dispensing other responsibilities of the university

## Winning Battles, Losing the War

*Probably, New Delhi's worst defeat has been in the political field. An elected government was expected to set into motion a process of reconciliation. It is not yet there. Instead, the MLAs are generally afraid to go into the field.*

**Y**OU may win battles but you can lose the war. This may be a cliché. But it needs repetition in the context of Kashmir. **N**o doubt, New Delhi has rolled back militancy to less than half a dozen pockets. The 63 groups have been reduced to three. Bunkers are fewer than before and soldiers are generally not visible on the streets.

Equally pleasant sight is the return of life, if not confidence. Bazars in Srinagar are full of people. Shops are loaded with goods. The Boulevard is gay with boys and bareheaded girls without any fear of fundamentalists. Moghul gardens are once again blooming with flowers in Srinagar early this month.

This is an indication of the several battles New Delhi has won. But it is retreating rapidly on the human rights front. And this may make the proverbial saying of losing the war come true. The men in khaki, whether from the state or the Centre, lay down the law. They are arrogant in deportment and rude in behaviour. So much so that a remark to a rash driver to slow down the vehicle's speed brought wrath against a press photographer, who is still in plaster. I am reminded of a poem by famous Urdu poet, Faiz Ahmed Faiz:

*Nisar main teri galyon ke, al watan ke jahan/ Chalt hai rasam ke ko I na sar utthake chale/ Jo ko I chahane-wala tawaf ko nikale/ Nazar churake chale, jism-o-jan bachake chale;/ Hai ahl-i-dil ke liye ab ye nazam-e-bast-o-kushad/ Ke sang a khish muqaiyad hain aur sag azad... (May I be a sacrifice to your streets, o fatherland, where it has become a custom that none shall go with*

equally the return of the people's mood is sour. Their alienation has not decreased in any way. They continue to be distant from India. If they are going about normally, it is apparent that they are taking life as it comes. Frankly speaking, they are tired. Something within them has died. They have seen murder and worse. They want to be left alone.

In the last 10 years, they have undergone untold sufferings. There is hardly a family which has not lost a near and dear one. Hundreds of people are still going from pillar to post to inquire about the missing relatives. Interrogation centres are the same old torture chambers. Many recall nostalgically the past when the valley would be agog to receive tourists. And then they pose the question which they have posed again and again in recent months: What did they get from the sacrifices they have made?

**T**o the Editor...

### Education Minister responds

Sir, I read with interest and astonishment the article entitled "Crisis in BUET: Is the Autonomy of Educational Institutions at Peril?" by Mr M M Rezaul Karim in your daily of May 7, 1998, which was brought to my notice today.

His intellectual attainment notwithstanding, I feel that Mr Karim could have got the facts right before offering comments. I had narrated the Chronological events in the press conference of 5 May, so I don't need to delve into it again. The principal point at issue was the legal authority of the Chancellor. Al-

though as the Chancellor of the BUET, the Hon'ble Prime Minister had full legal authority, she chose not to exercise it by issuing commands but had preferred and chose to settle the issue through dialogue with all the stakeholders concerned. This was in the true spirit of democratic norms of working out a consensus. The gentlemen's agreement reached through this consensus was broken by the BUET authorities. That was the crux of the problem: not "naked interference and glaring pressure tactics" as Mr M M Rezaul Karim puts it. In fact when around midnight, following the consensus reached through the good offices of the Hon'ble Prime Minister (the Chancellor) in the evening of 23 March, I could persuade the boys and

girls of the Architecture Department of BUET to discontinue the hunger strike, the Vice-Chancellor who was present there, had thanked the Hon'ble Prime Minister and me for the effort! One should remember that the hunger strike was not against the government but was actually directed against the BUET authorities. That honest intervention, which Mr Karim calls "gross interference" had enabled the BUET authorities to hold the admission tests on 28 March scheduled and peacefully.

Mr Karim's comment that "no one made that allegation" about the pressure on the Vice-Chancellor to resign is misconceived. There was a direct question to me during the press conference about such an allegation, hence my reply. Mr Karim, who was not present at the press conference should have tried to learn the facts.

Mr Karim says that the Vice-Chancellor "is not a BNP sympathiser as alleged" Mr Karim being an active member of BNP — he is a member of BNP's advisory council — should know better. But the point is that no one had made this point, except as a reference to the Vice-Chancellor's past association. I was not being "clever" as Mr Karim puts it. I was being honest and straightforward.

This point was clarified

again through a press statement published on 9-5-1998. What I had said was that I should NOT give political colour to the Vice-

Chancellor's action as there was NO proof that he was politically motivated. The point was originally made in reply to a specific question on that issue by a member of the honourable press.

I strongly believe that with his background, Mr Karim should be an asset to his party. The BNP, I honestly feel that he and others like him in that party must try to see that the political atmosphere in the country is not vitiated by a state of constant and combative hostility among the political parties, but that an environment of tolerance and mutual trust is created among them and that critically important decisions on social, economic and political issues are taken on the basis of dialogue and consensus and has been repeatedly called upon by the Hon'ble Prime Minister.

ASHK Sadique, MP  
Minister for Education  
People's Republic of Bangladesh

### Currency notes: Colour confusion

Sir, With the introduction of the new 10 taka currency note of green colour, the old 20 taka note of similar colour may be withdrawn and reissued with a new contrasting colour scheme.

Similarly the 10 and 50 taka notes are confused in a hurry in weak (and sodium) light or due to weak eyesight, as the colour

contrast is not much. There are also design limitations for blind users. These regulations cannot be tampered with easily.

A Z Dhaka

### No, it's not the satellite TV

Sir, I agree with A-B-Deshi (34.4.98). Our society is not going to dogs because of satellite TV. Men like the ones who violated Tania and Mousumi do not watch cable TV. Our society is to blame. In our society, especially among the poor and the illiterate, sons are treated like little gods by parents, sisters and near relatives.

They are never disciplined, taught to respect others, taught any useful work. Most of them grow up watching their fathers beat and humiliate their mothers, if they have fathers at all. What is such a son going to be when he is an adult? An illiterate, unfeeling, uncaring individual with an inflated ego and no training in any useful trade. He's going to beat his wife and children, remarry for money and then leave them.

At worst, he'll turn criminal and rape children because he has no feeling, morals or remorse, and little girls have no voice in our brutal society, and because he knows there is no punishment. And he'll get all the encouragement watching

## On the Threshold of a Nuclear Race

by Dr F H Chowdhury

**T**HE declaration by the Indian PM of explosion of three nuclear devices and most importantly the thermo-nuclear test in the deserts of Rajasthan, has heightened the perpetual rivalry and tension between India and Pakistan, the two belligerent nations in the sub-continent. It was not quite unexpected that the leader of a reactionary coalition government in power in India would surprise the nation with something spectacular. The world capitals reacted quite vehemently to it and condemned it roundly. India's neighbour, Pakistan, has reacted angrily at it and asked the UN for imposition of sanctions against India. India has tried to assuage the world that there was no release of radio-activity and that it would eventually lead to global elimination of the nuclear weapons.

It is an irony that at time when the Sudan is facing an acute famine through civil war within the country and Niger is experiencing grim paucity of health care provisions, India

situation. President Clinton was clearly disappointed and this might have put his planned visits to the sub-continent into jeopardy.

The major nuclear powers, the US, the UK, France, Russia and China have been at loggerheads as to how to get the world nuclear weapons free. Since the signing of the last nuclear treaty, many smaller countries on the threshold of nuclear capability have refrained from signing the treaty. Many of them have expressed their clear intention first to have attained the nuclear capability before they have signed the non-proliferation treaty... It seems that they want to make the world free from the position of strength and loathe to be dictated by the established nuclear powers.

It is an irony that at time when the Sudan is facing an acute famine through civil war within the country and Niger is experiencing grim paucity of health care provisions, India

is facing a nuclear test in the city. Reports suggest that the Premier reiterated her commitment to democracy, rule of law and even to accountability by proudly mentioning that her government repealed the Indemnity Act. She, however, didn't mention how the infamous Special Powers Act 1974 — that empowers the government to pick up anybody at any time from anywhere in the country — fits into the framework of her democracy.

The question is, if the Premier remains committed to rule of law, why then Samias are sending SOS signals in the newspapers for the safety of their persons, lives and innocence?

All the shouts or appeals by the Hurriyat, the Jamiat-e-Islami and other organisations fail to move them any more.

That is the reason why there are not even 200 people when there is an exhortation for taking out a procession," says a leading editor in Srinagar. A call for hartal is ignored. Not noticeably, no party could organise a bandh when the state government opened its offices in Srinagar early this month.

This is an indication of the several battles New Delhi has won. But it is retreating rapidly on the human rights front. And this may make the proverbial saying of losing the war come