

Let Us Do It Now

by Dr A.K.M.A. Quader

...YASMIN... SHEEMA... SHARIF... RUBEL. The list of names must end there. With each of these names bleeds our soul. Each of these names bears the testimony of gruesome torture and torment through which every one of them went before being murdered, and then invention of covert story was there for final public consumption. We wonder what has happened to us, to our civil society, and from here where do we go? Each of these names unmask the ugly faces of the law enforcers themselves. Each of them tells the brutality of the police excesses. They together unveil the multifaceted ugly truth about the force. We are ashamed for the simple fact that our civil society has failed to protect and uphold the rights of fellow citizens to live. Neither the constitution nor the court or law could uphold the pledge and rights given to these people, while alive or dead, as enshrined in the constitution.

Yasmin was violated when alive; was dishonoured when dead by calling her a floating prostitute and the brave people of Dhaka were killed and tortured when they took to the streets to protest the rape and murder. Sheema was violated inside police station by the on-duty police personnel while in their custody and later on the same clan caused her death inside the Chittagong Central Jail and attempted to make us believe that dehydration stopped Sheema's heart beat. Sharif was tortured to death in police custody as a 'security risk' and he died inside the court prison prior to producing him before the magistrate. His death was termed as 'heart failure'. Does one's heart beat when one dies? And now Rubel... oh God! It has culminated into a chilling horror of crime perpetrated upon him by the DB police personnel leading to his cold-blooded

murder. After Rubel's murder, the cover-up efforts by the involved police personnel only reveal their crooked and criminal psychosomatic mental frame. My heart bleeds for the family of Rubel and may God rest his soul in peace and may God punish us for our moral failure to stop the rot and degeneration of the police and such personnel in particular.

A judicial commission has already started to work on it and let it find the truth, the ugly truth and the whole truth. I strongly plead to the commission that it shall not end like other similar commissions instituted in the past. Let the commission work with its claws and jaws hunting down all the criminals involved.

I feel sorry for Home Minister Major (Retd) Rafiqul Islam for being unable to provide the police force under him with a dignified image. As long as there will be man in police uniform who thinks he is the boss, the police force shall remain the symbol of torture, crime and horror. Time is ripe now and without further delay, such elevation be downsized to save the heads of common citizens. Home Minister shall be in the driving seat and must prove that he is the boss and as he is elected by the people he is pledge-bound to uphold the constitutional rights and privilege of the people.

I also feel sad for Prime Minister who herself has suffered the most tragic bereavement at the hands of similar criminals. She is tormented each time such a crime takes place when she herself is the Prime Minister. The people of Bangladesh have, 21 years after the murder of her father reposed the faith and trust in her to be assured of getting a civil society. May

what come she must demonstrate her mettle that she means business. She must clean up the police force and provide it with a dignified face. If necessary, it is to be reconstituted with personnel who believe in dignity, honesty, human rights and civil society. This may be the toughest test of her life but the people at large feel and believe, she cannot fail them.

The police force since its creation by the imperial lords for their imperial interest after the Sepoy Mutiny has an inextinguishable history to its credit. It is a history of barbaric acts and excesses, lies and deceptions, corruption and greed. Their agenda towards the citizen and civil society have not changed though their imperial creators had left the subcontinent more than a half century ago. They gloat over their imperial birth and anti-people heritage. The situation has worsened over the years. The existence of Special Powers Act, Section 54 etc. and extra-constitutional arrangements have transformed a larger section of the police force into monsters whose legacy of brutal encroachment upon the life and property of the common people have stunned our senses. Amongst themselves, the police force have been blamed time and again of incorporating immorality and corruption. The practice sprouts with recruitment and gets deeply rooted as the career progresses. Without that nothing work. It is said that juniors receive 'bakshish' and seniors take 'salami'.

Some members of the police are believed to be the custodians of thugs and they share the prosperity with immunity. Some of them have been decorated with nicknames com-

mensurable with their pompous life style. Education, training, religion and vows have had little impact upon them. If so they are rather a malignant tumors on the body of a civil society. Let us remove each of them to give the civil society a hope worthy of living. I feel rather sad for those police personnel who are different and all their good works have been stained by the deeds of the otherwise others. It is a total rot and there is nothing worthy there which can be salvaged. A total change is a reality. Let us go for it, otherwise the Frankenstein within the police force would gulp us all.

A soul searching for all of us who aspire for a civil society is the need of the day to find the roots for the degeneration of our value system, priorities of life and self-respect. Irrespective of our religion and political belief let us put ourselves in the dock to establish our individual contribution to the process of degeneration of our society and life. The process of regeneration must begin from the top starting with political leadership. We must practice what we preach and believe in. Raising the boundary walls higher and higher around our residences, adding a few more bolts on our doors, putting on electronic surveillance, hiring a few more armed guards or licensing guns for self protection do not create a healthy and stable society; rather these are clear symbols of degeneration of a civil society. The leadership must pave the way for establishing a civil society through their exemplary plain living and noble deeds. If they to-day sow seeds of such mission and vision of life, the people at large may reap the harvest in near future.

The writer is Professor of Chemical Engineering, BUET, Dhaka.

But for Whom the Bell Tolls?

by Dr M Zakir Husain

The civil society, the vocal group in particular, must take responsibility to demand universal rule of law and security for life and limb for all...

THREE months after death of Shazneen, media attention has waned; public anguish has evaporated. Street demonstrations, media stories, press conferences, and other expressions of grief and outrage are matters of the past. A gruesome incident and a murder most foul are behind us; life and daily routine goes on. Yet, there is a time to pause and ponder. Shall we merely mourn and move on or shall we wage a war to eradicate the underlying disease of which such incident is merely a symptom? Is it a gender issue because the victim happens to be a female? Public concern may be deceiving itself if we fail to face the issue for what it really is.

This murder is a conspicuous event but still only a manifest symptom of a social pathology that minimises the security of life and liberty of so many. Or else why the newspapers day after day are filled with reports of murder, rape, molestation, disappearances, and other criminal acts? These single incidents collectively signal a condition far more sinister. A steady diet of such accounts eventually makes the incidents appear trivial; people become insensitive. The danger is that inevitably, Shazneen and others will be off the media pages and forgotten.

It does not require great expertise to see that there is a wider and pervasive societal

decline. The single events, to my judgement, are the tip of the proverbial iceberg — a part of a larger mass of default, dereliction and delinquency. When loan defaulters abound with impunity, when hoodlums reportedly dare to assault persons in police or judicial custody, when known rapists roam at large waiting to be prosecuted, when gross dereliction of public duties go unpunished, when acts of cruelty against women and children are tolerated, it is very poor comment on governance and the civil society.

Yet, many of us seek to escape responsibility by considering these as mere law and order problem. And we cry hoarse to catch a thief and wish more police action as if that will be the end of it all. Problem is it will not.

Regrettably too, public service delinquency and political violence seem to be condoned or unchallenged, especially when the perpetrators are well heeled or well connected. What then is the message sent loud and clear to the rest of the society? Is it not selective justice and selective impunity? A very wrong and dangerous signal. Can we

really be serious? Do we honestly believe that simply by having more policemen we will pre-empt or reduce such incidents? Where is the political will? Where is civil society's determination and self-discipline?

The vocal middle class is justifiably outraged. Very understandably so as their sensitivity is aroused, especially when one of them is the victim. Many again call for very harsh, quick and exemplary justice. But strangely, the same middle class gets lulled into mild whimper or benign indifference at reports of numerous other acts of social, financial and political delinquency — some of which could well be seen as crime against the society and public morals.

Does the vocal minority agitate as much when the poor and the destitute are victims of utter injustice and crimes? Is it not a case of cynical exclusion and selective outrage? The civil society, the vocal group in particular, must take responsibility to demand universal rule of law and security for life, and limb for all and not only for some. If we are willing and able to

reflect and ponder — and do so deeply and dispassionately — we cannot fail to see the big picture. We can, and should, resolve to reinvent and re-establish accountability in the marketplace, banks, public offices and utilities, streets and homes, including especially in the 'high places'.

In doing so, we may have to administer strong medicine, sometimes to ourselves. Then we may begin to put an end to sporadic justice and selective hue and cry. It will at the minimum demand strong social and political will, mobilisation of public opinion and action combined with universally applied and transparent rule of law. Not doing so will inevitably corrode the very core of human rights, dignity and security — the foundation of a modern, just and civil society.

I am afraid we could be crying out wishes hoarse to palliate the symptoms yet fail to cure the disease. However piously and with wrenching heats we denounce single crimes and voice outrage and anger, we will only be deceiving ourselves and continue to send green signals to offenders to commit crimes whenever opportunity beckons.

The bell is ringing loud and clear and we pretend to be deaf at the peril of the society. To take a leaf from medicine, mere applying Band-Aid is no cure for a deep festering sore. Is anyone listening?

Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury

Some Reminiscences

by Barrister Harn ur Rashid

lawyer is an officer of the Court and must assist the Court to arrive at a just decision in accordance with the law.

I had the opportunity to appear before Justice Chowdhury at the High Court many a time. He was very patient as a judge and it was great for a young lawyer like me to make submissions to the Court without any interruptions from the Bench. He was kind to allow the young lawyers to take as much time to complete the submissions to him. Often if the submission was not relevant, he displayed a



quiet smile. His temperament and manner was typical of a judge.

I met him in Rawalpindi in 1970 when he was Vice-Chancellor of Dhaka University. By this time I was an officer in Pakistan Foreign Office in Islamabad. On instructions from the Foreign Office I proposed to him whether he would be agreeable to become a member of the UN Human Rights Commission. He agreed. When Justice Chowdhury was attending the UN Commission meeting in Geneva, the military cracked down on the people of East Pakistan on 25 March 1971. He could not reconcile his position as a Pakistani and accordingly resigned from the positions of Vice-Chancellor and Judge of the High Court. He devoted his

about his expertise and the dispassionate way Justice Chowdhury conducted the meetings. The delegations respected him for his impartiality and fairness.

I had the opportunity to accompany him to Caracas, Venezuela in July 1974 to attend the substantive session of the Law of the Sea Conference. I was the only member of the delegation with him. As a former President he was entitled to a large suite in a hotel but he chose an inexpensive room saying to me that it pricked his conscience to pay such exorbitant rate for a suite when the people of Bangladesh were poor. I was struck in awe by his sincerity and depth of feelings for the people of Bangladesh. In my foreign assignment never had I come across a person who gave away what was his due under the government rules. He was a patriot first and last.

I remember one incident in Venezuela which could have had tragic consequences. Justice Chowdhury and I planned to get out of Caracas during the week-end. We decided to travel by car to a nearby town, Valencia. The journey was through mountain ranges and the driver while negotiating one of the narrow routes almost caused the car to fall to a gorge. Fortunately, the driver was able to brake the car, at which time we found that we were left stationary on the edge of the mountain tip. Justice Chowdhury got out of the car, was very composed and prayed to Allah for His mercy.

Justice Chowdhury never sought to impose his own values on others, but his understanding and quiet guidance on matters of a personal nature have benefited us over the years. Justice Chowdhury was an inspiration to many of us. He was not only a great Bangladeshi but a dedicated freedom fighter. He left his mark on the international stage in many ways, in particular his contribution to the field of human rights. Justice Chowdhury will be sadly missed but will live on through those he encouraged.

The writer is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN in Geneva.

THE decline of the leader of Zimbabwe's liberation war veterans, Dr Chenjerai Hunzvi, has been as rapid as his rise.

A year after he emerged from obscurity and entered the political spotlight, his star is being eclipsed. His weakness appears to be an inability to recognise his limitations.

Hunzvi, 59, rose to prominence last August after organising veterans' demonstrations for compensation. The protests were fuelled by allegations that leading government and ruling-party officials had milked Z\$400 million from the War Victims' Compensation Fund.

In a rare direct challenge to President Robert Mugabe, who has always been given widespread respect for his leadership role in the nationalist struggle against white minority rule, the ex-combatants interrupted a speech he was giving by beating drums and singing revolutionary songs.

The challenge was totally unexpected because the war veterans' organisation is regarded as a wing of the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) Front.

In response, Mugabe agreed to make payments of Z\$50,000 each to at least 40,000 ex-combatants and also promised them Z\$2,000 tax-free monthly pensions. Some economists and political pundits say the award will damage the economy. Nevertheless, Hunzvi emerged from the confrontation as a prominent figure — even regarded by some as a potential future presidential candidate. But instead of building on his newly-acquired glory, Hun-

Which Globalization?

National Professor Atwar Hussain Memorial Lecture 1998
The Asiatic Society of Bangladesh

ECONOMIC REFORMS
PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION
AND DEVELOPMENT
IN BANGLADESH

QAZI KHOLIQZAMAN AHMAD

Dr. Q. K. Ahmad sets off the directions of his thinking on the different aspects as well as the totality of the issues that have a bearing on the on-going development efforts in Bangladesh: "(The) control, ownership and utilization (of the spectacular post-Second-World-War breakthroughs in science, technology and wealth creation) have largely remained concentrated in the developed parts (i.e. the OECD countries) of this planet, which together account for less than 20 per cent of the world's population but 80 per cent or more of its total wealth... (while) the economies of most of the developing countries have remained trapped in low levels of socio-economic progress, with large segments of their populations in absolute poverty. Thus, there are gross inequalities... Between developed and developing countries, an unevenness in the poor in developing countries. Obviously, the unprecedented economic advancement that has been achieved has not been inclusive. In fact, exclusion is glaring. What is more, exclusion is a process that has tended to increase and perpetuate deprivation. At the same time, the global environment faces catastrophic consequences as a result of the assaults made on it by the type of economic growth pursued..." The message is clear. Inclusion is the key if there is to be orderly, equitable progress of the global society, which the vicegerents of the OECD pantheon, the IMF and the World Bank, profess to promote. But there's the rub...

Bangladesh has been implementing stabilization and structural adjustment reforms since 1987 within the framework designed by and with assistance from the IMF and the World Bank. And it has gone on subscribing to the package of reforms as it evolved from the initially introduced macro-economic stabilization and structural adjustment measures to include those concerning political and administrative reforms aimed at effective governance. Considerable successes were attained on the stabilization front by 1993, but, as Dr. Ahmad points out, the expected transition from stabilization to growth has not taken place. Although poverty alleviation is not a direct goal of the structural adjustment programme, safety nets such as food-for-work, rural works and vulnerable group development programmes are accepted as part of the reform programme. Besides, programmes aimed at poverty alleviation are being implemented by government agencies and a large number of national and international NGOs. Their emphasis is on so-

cial sector programmes to raise the capabilities and the quality of life of the people, including the poor. But the proportion of the absolutely poor remained unchanged between 1991 and 1996, and their number in 1997/98 has been estimated to have increased by some seven million over 1991/92 (i.e. from 52 to 59 million). And when computed following the cost-of-basic-needs (CBN) method, which takes into account other basic needs along with food, the number of the absolutely poor would be even higher — 65 million. In a country like Bangladesh, where over half the population is absolutely poor, and hence poverty alleviation is the very basic national goal, an increase in poverty is socially unacceptable. Also, socio-economic inequality as between the rich and the poor, between urban and rural populations, and between men and women, has accentuated, putting further strain on the social sustainability of the process of growth being pursued.

Are donor conditionalities the villain of the piece? the author asks, and goes on to examine their implications. He advances the opinion that Bangladesh, like all other countries that have embarked upon economic reform programmes prescribed and supported by the IMF and the World Bank, is subjected to harsh conditionalities when adjustment loans and project financing are provided; there are conditionalities which imply social costs in terms of, for example, putting people out of jobs, adversely impacting on agriculture, and accentuation of disparity which is the basic cause of persisting poverty.

For any reforming country, the problem arises when the conditionalities are out of tune with the realities on the ground, imposing high social costs, even constraining rather than promoting economic progress. The way out, as indicated by Dr. Kholiqzaman, is to adjust the economic reform process by building into it measures required to address the ground realities. A case in point that he refers to as a laudable move is the provision the present Bangladesh government has made for selective input subsi-

BOOK REVIEW

ECONOMIC REFORMS
PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION
AND DEVELOPMENT
IN BANGLADESH
by Qazi Kholiqzaman Ahmad

(National Professor Atwar Hussain Memorial Lecture 1998, delivered at The Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka, on 11 July 1998)

Published by The Asiatic Society of Bangladesh and the Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad (BUP)
Price: Tk. 60, US\$ 10

dies to agriculture in response to the realities on the ground (despite donor pressure to the contrary). The author is also quick to point out that there are many other issues that need to be addressed, for which a framework must be developed for "adjusting the adjustment programmes" to respond to the special conditions and requirements of the country. And the starting point should be to recognise that efforts to accelerate economic growth need to be designed and implemented in such a manner that the goals of growth and of poverty alleviation and inequality are promoted simultaneously.

What has been recounted here gives an intimation of the drift of Dr. Ahmad's analyses and observations regarding the various problems that attend the development process, nationally and internationally, and their implications for Bangladesh in particular. He has developed his essay around three key concepts — economic reforms, people's participation, and development. Defining development as sustained improvements in the living conditions (welfare) of all citizens of a country in an environment (social, political, cultural, economic, and natural) characterized by equity, security and freedom of choice, Dr. Ahmad has discussed its important dimensions as they relate to Bangladesh under the rubrics (i) Poverty alleviation; (ii) Economic growth; (iii) Reduction in inequality; (iv) Access to social services (education, training, health) and improved human capability; (v) Security of life and property; (vi) Freedom of participation (enlarged choices) in social, political, economic and cultural pursuits, i.e. establishment of a democratic order; and (vii) Environmental sustainability.

One notices a rare fusion of macro and micro visions as he ranges over a bewildering array of problems and puts forth ideas for their solution, ideas that carry conviction because of the stamp they bear as much of a patriot's concern for his impoverished countrymen as of a humanist's compassion for the deprived among his fellow humans. Above all, as this book testifies, he has the courage of

his convictions. Consider this: "... country after country, having opted for and pursuing global integration, has failed to gain much. Even the economies of the East and South East Asian Tigers are now ailing... There is a lot to learn from (these) experiences, from the way these countries achieved phenomenal economic growth over the past two decades or more and the reasons behind their present currency crisis and economic turmoil. The share market debacle in Bangladesh in late 1996/early 1997 is also a pointer to the currency-related risks that free market and globalization could entail, unless adequate regulatory safeguards are in place and properly implemented... which globalization is it that a country is pursuing? Who globalizes or integrates with whom? Who gains, who loses?"

If the present reform process is not reformed in the light of the strengths and weaknesses of globalizing developing countries, the author goes on to say, "there may lurk in the background a big jolt and a huge disillusionment." Intellectual integrity of a high order shines through these words. To question the dictates of the divinites of the day takes courage. But the question remains: will these warnings and the questions voiced ring in the corridors of power in Washington, or even closer home?

The author ends his essay with a very significant link-up of two contrasting quotations from Tagore: one from a poem written in 1910 when Tagore envisions the meeting of East and West, transcending all man-made national boundaries and working together to uphold human dignity and the spirit of humanity around the world (*Pashchim jai khulachhe daar...*); and the other from a prose piece, *Civilization in Crisis*, written in 1941, a few months before his death, in which he ruefully confesses, "It has become impossible to retain faith in the western civilization. It has shown us its muscle power but it has failed to uphold its commitment to liberty. True civilization calls for a relationship among human beings which is based on equity and respect. But the West has totally disregarded that basic tenet and thereby virtually closed the door of progress and development for India... At the beginning of my life I had placed great trust in the western civilization and its gifts. Now, at the time of my departure from this world, that belief has been completely shattered." Dr. Ahmad's remark that "under the business-as-usual scenario in terms of the currently ruling paradigm, the future of the global order (might prove to be) a 21st century *deja vu* a la Tagore" is no attempt at prophesying, but is based on the hard facts adduced and the inferences they inevitably yield. Policy makers had better sit up and take note.

Reviewed by A. Moula

War Veteran's Star Faces Early Eclipse

THE decline of the leader of Zimbabwe's liberation war veterans, Dr. Chenjerai Hunzvi, has been as rapid as his rise.

A year ago, the leader of Zimbabwe's liberation war veterans was riding high. There was talk of him taking a national political role. But he appears to have overplayed his hand, reports *Gemini News Service*, and has made several enemies. Tendai Madinah writes from Harare

zvi has crossed swords with several important sectors of society. In June, he narrowly escaped a beating by scores of war collaborators — people who had supported the nationalist struggle without actually taking up arms.

They were angered by remarks made by Hunzvi and former army commander General Solomon Mujuru, who allegedly told a ZANU (PF) gathering that the war collaborators were merely "small boys who never went to war or contributed significantly to it" and had lost direction. Hunzvi was forced to flee.

The collaborators' association argues that members' role in the struggle has not been properly appreciated. War collaborators' national chairman Ranjinos Kawara said: "We feel that in rewarding only ex-combatants, the government was very selfish and unfair. The collaborators made it possible for the comrades to survive."

His organisation has been agitating against ZANU (PF) since the party turned down its requests for official recognition and a financial token of appreciation for members' role in the independence struggle. Kawara accused Hunzvi of being overbearing. "He is for

ever attacking everybody," he said. "I am telling you now, he could trigger a civil war." Kawara threatened to tell his supporters to beat Hunzvi whenever they saw him. Hunzvi denied campaigning against the collaborators. "We do not talk about the affairs of other organisations, except those involving war veterans," he commented.

He has also run into criticism for saying on national television that war veterans would go back to the streets if the government failed to deliver on other demands, including calls for land, free health care and education and financial help in establishing businesses.

Besides this, he told journalists that members of his organisation should not be prosecuted or harassed as a result of the findings a commission of inquiry into the administration of the War Victims' Compensation Fund. The commission, headed by Justice Godfrey Chidyausiku, was set up last year following reports in the independent media of fund misappropriations.

Hunzvi's remarks were widely condemned, even from within his association. Mike Auret, national director of the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe, described it as "shocking" that a person in his position should undermine attempts to ensure the proper administration of the fund, particularly when much of the evidence indicated that fraudulent applications had been made.

"Dr Hunzvi should be reminded that these fraudulent applications have caused genuine war victims to be seriously prejudiced by the suspension of disbursement of war victims' funds," said Auret. An editorial comment in the respected newspaper, the *Financial Gazette*, said: "Undoubtedly, Hunzvi has done a lot to lift the well-being of his comrades, especially his efforts which saw him orchestrate violent protests by the war veterans to wring unprecedented concessions from a terrified government — concessions which have wreaked havoc on an already fragile economy. But he must not get carried away to behave as if he has become a law unto himself or that this country owes him or his members a living. No."

Earlier this year, Hunzvi threatened to mobilise ex-guerrillas to attack and drive out the economically powerful white community for colluding with the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) in its disputes with the government. His remarks not only annoyed the ZCTU, but also brought a police warning against making statements undermining the national economy. Such threats, noted a police spokesman, invited violence.

The author is a writer with *Horizon* magazine in Harare.

Poverty Worsens in Nepal

KATMANDU: The number of Nepalese living in absolute poverty has almost doubled in the last two decades to nine million, according to Nepal's national Human Development Report (HDR) released recently in Kathmandu. About 45 per cent of the population of 21 million lives in poverty, over half a million are malnourished, says the report. Life is infinitely harder for women than for men. And there are great disparities in hu-

China's Education Mission

BEIJING: In the next three years China is planning to invest 5.49 billion yuan in establishing 14,942 primary and middle schools in 469 poor counties in nine provinces. The largest of its kind ever propped up by the ministries of finance and education, the goal of the project is to make compulsory education universal, according to a report in the *Beijing Review*, June 8-14. The project will help nearly 1000 middle and primary schools to improve their dilap-

dated buildings, provide teaching tools, books and materials, desks and chairs and most important, provide intensive teacher training courses. Areas with a significant revolutionary history will get priority over other poverty stricken counties. Between 1995-97 China accomplished the first phase of this ambitious project by directing 5.2 billion yuan to building 52,000 schools in 383 counties of 13 provinces. — WFS/News Network