

The Other Saline

There is news from all around the devastated areas of spreading diarrhoea. This was universally known to occur in the wake of the recession of the flood waters.

There, however, has been one good performance. Very satisfying and almost an achievement. Messages from all around are saying they have a surfeit of oral saline.

The dextrose or IV saline is a different matter. It cannot be made by popular initiative. The manufacturing pharmaceutical facilities, government, private or international, should be asked to maximise their production of this stuff.

It is not possible to exaggerate the losses or the size of the challenge. But it is also wrong to declaim like the alarmist Jeremiah. The inadequacy of our collective responses — governmental or organisational in the shape of different agencies, party or NGO or sheer philanthropy-based — is largely made up by the truth that in each of our 120 million individual lives a diehard resistor.

There is another disquieting news from the districts. Medical teams are tending to be stationary. Rather than moving out to the needy, the teams wait in their quarters expecting the afflicted to present themselves to them.

Indo-Pak Thaw

On the sidelines of UNGA session but under considerable international focus sharpened by the goading of big powers, recently nuclearised India and Pakistan have agreed to sit for a dialogue to reduce strains in their relationship.

This is quite a step forward from the inauspicious break-down of the meeting they held on the fringes of the Colombo SAARC summit.

The western powers have been pressuring both India and Pakistan to sign the CTBT and settle the thorny Kashmir question peacefully.

In the western perception, signing the CTBT is regarded as the key to reducing tension between the two countries while Pakistan believes Kashmir is the core contention and India perceives the bilateral problems in a package and insists on a composite approach.

Why Rahims are So Few?

He could have easily gone home with the windfall. Nobody would have ever asked him anything about it. Instead, as a leading Bangla daily reported Thursday last, autorickshaw driver Abdur Rahim scooped from one end of the city to the other with the frenzy of a man possessed in order to find the passenger who had inadvertently dropped a bundle of Taka ten thousand while alighting the three wheeler.

To the reward of his honesty and endeavour Rahim did find the owner and together sped back to the newspaper office on that very night.

It is amazing that at a time when the general trend is to put a tin hat on the conscience and enter the rat race for buying economic well being at any price, a poor simple autorickshaw driver can muster such unflinching commitment to honesty!

Of Plebiscite and Elections in Kashmir

Fresh elections in Jammu and Kashmir will have to be held under the supervision of NGOs and human rights activists. The government's interference in the elections since Day One has corroded the Kashmiris' faith in the Election Commission.

talks and a third party intervention will only impede the process. New Delhi's own information is that Washington does not want to impose any formula on India and that it will try its best behind the scenes to see that the talks fructify.

However, if the Hurriyat leaders in the valley are to be believed, they say that Washington has revived the proposals by Owen Dixon, who was trying to mediate on behalf of the UN in 1950.

The second proposal was in parts similar to the one that Karan Singh had proposed in 1964 when he was still the state's Sadar-e-Riyasat. He was in favour of dividing Jammu and Kashmir, so that the former could be merged with India at once.

me in an interview in New Delhi. India was then in favour of Dixon's proposal to hold a plebiscite only in the valley of Kashmir to which the addition of Muzaffarabad district, part of Azad Kashmir, was suggested so as to have a natural geographical feature provided by the river Kishanganga and its watershed in the north.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

Ladakh straightaway and that the plebiscite be confined to the valley.

However, the proposals did not materialise because Pakistan demanded control of Kashmir straightaway. Later, India also rejected the plan for a limited plebiscite.

India cannot afford to have a situation where the choice offered would be between the Quran and the Geeta and between the Muslim umma and the Hindus. The Dixon proposals may revive the part-partition animosities and reopen the old wounds.

means. They or their political masters must find a solution through talks and a sense of accommodation. New Delhi cannot go back to plebiscite.

Already the RSS parivar, including the BJP, is trying to change the country's agenda, from secularism to Hindutva. A plebiscite in the valley will only give the party an opportunity to inject more of communalism in the society.

will go to town with the argument that the Muslims, even after 50 years, have preferred Pakistan.

However imperfect, India's secular polity has come to stay. Yet it cannot take any chances when the Hindutva forces are already breathing down the nation's neck.

It is, however, significant that the Hurriyat has stopped asking for the valley's independence. Pakistan has reportedly given a dressing down to the party leaders for having raised the demand for independence.

The elderly Hurriyat trio of Gillani, Lone and Prof Ghani, which has been consistently

following an anti-India line, has accepted Islamabad's command. In fact, the three are now articulating the Dixon proposals. What they have not realised is that the formula which endangers India's pluralistic society will not be acceptable.

In the medley of voices, what Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah has suggested is not a bad formula. He has proposed fresh elections so that power could be transferred to new leaders.

Eventually, Pakistan may come to realise that an autonomous status of the state will improve its ties with Srinagar and New Delhi.

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Taliban Rings Alarm Bells in India

The Taliban is consolidating its grip on Afghanistan and India is getting worried about regional stability. The government reports Gemini News Service, has started talks to forge a joint front with Afghanistan's neighbours because a prime need for India is to secure oil supplies. D K Joshi writes from New Delhi

prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has decided to make the Quran and the Sunnah (the saying of the Prophet) the "supreme law of the land."

Sharif may have had his own reasons to make Pakistan an Islamic state — to divert popular attention from his country's dire economic problems, particularly after the nuclear tests — but his timing has caused unease in New Delhi.

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah was among the first Indian politicians to warn, in an address to the state assembly on August 26, that "the victory of the Taliban has posed a new threat to our security which needs to be understood and met collectively."

The Taliban has not been directly involved in activities in India, but army generals fear Taliban consolidation over

Afghanistan could lead to battle-hardened Afghans being diverted to Kashmir.

The Taliban (students of Islam) are the children of the Afghan jihad. Many studied in the 1,500 or so madrasas (religious schools) founded for the Afghan refugees in Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province and Baluchistan. It emerged as a military force only in 1994.

Jane's Defence Weekly has corroborated Indian fears that Pakistani military involvement in Afghanistan is deep. Half of the Taliban soldiers currently engaged in major offensives against the forces of the Northern Alliance are Pakistanis providing logistical support, command and control.

India does not want access and control of the Central Asian oilfields to pass into hostile hands. It has friendly

relations with the Muslim-dominated Central Asian republics and Russia.

Indian energy needs are growing and require that the central Asian oil is not disrupted. The central Asian oilfields have attracted US, Russian, Iranian, Pakistani, Chinese and Indian interests.

New Delhi feels the Taliban militia may find it difficult to convert Afghanistan into an Islamic Emirate.

The US air strikes on the Khost guerrilla training complex in Afghanistan, where exiled Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden is stationed, shows that Washington recognises the danger of the Taliban philosophy.

The international community does not favour complete Taliban control of Afghanistan. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has asked the Taliban militia to stop

fighting and negotiate with opponents like Talfiq leader Ahmad Shah Massoud and the Uzbek commander Rashid Dostum.

On August 28 the UN Security Council unanimously called on the Taliban regime to refrain from harbouring and training terrorists and their organisations and to halt drug trafficking activities.

The Taliban government is internationally isolated. Only Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have recognised it.

Iran has increased its troops on the Afghanistan borders. It is against a Taliban-dominated Afghanistan for many reasons. Iranians are of the Shia sect of Islam and the Taliban are Sunni. Murderous clashes between the two sects are common in Pakistan.

Teheran and Moscow believe

American business interests have put their hopes in the Taliban so as to ensure unhindered building of oil and gas pipelines from Turkmenistan via Afghanistan.

Iran is incensed by the killing of its diplomats by the Taliban militia and threatens revenge.

Russia shares with its former Soviet states fear of the Taliban being motivated by the missionary zeal of Sunni resurgence, trying to spread its brand of Islam with force.

Moscow, weakened by political instability and financial crises, dreads losing its foothold in the Central Asian region. The former Soviet states fear a flood of refugees into their territories. They believe that the Pashtun-dominated Taliban may indulge in ethnic cleansing in the northern part of Afghanistan.

So India hopes the Taliban movement will be contained by the combined will of the countries of the region.

The author is a freelance journalist who formerly worked for the Bombay Free Press Journal.

Sin and Redemption in American Politics

by Chaklader Mahboob-ul Alam

The Republicans want the Democrats to pay for the humiliation suffered by Nixon and defeat Al Gore in the next Presidential elections. The Democrats are leaving Clinton in droves. In this power game no one wants to be seen with a potential loser.

Power should be in a position to play his role fully and without having to worry about a scandal. The survival of democracy as a workable political system and global stability are the core issues in this worldview.

No matter, whether we consider sin as the violation of a divine law or the transgression of a social taboo, it is clear that most human beings, including the saints have some time or other sinned as well. The more correct he (the President) feels, the greater the chances are of more bombings and killings like those of Sudan and Afghanistan or a new war in the Middle East.

Has he ever coveted his neighbour's wife? Probably yes, but, oh Lord, we human beings are made of flesh and blood. Has he ever coveted another's possessions? Probably yes, like most other human beings. Has he violated the Commandment, "you shall not kill"? Yes, although not personally. In any case, every time he has taken a decision of this nature in the name of his country, the vast majority of the American people have in a very un-Christian fashion not only endorsed his action but considered him as a national hero.

Has he ever denied the existence of one God and worshipped false gods and idols? No. Has he taken the name of God in vain? No. No, the con-

trary, these days he is probably remembering the Lord in all earnest to get him out of this quagmire.

Has he failed to go to church on the seventh day of the week to remember the Lord? No. Has he failed to honour his father and mother? No.

Has he violated the norm, "You shall not steal"? No. Has he ever given false witness against his neighbour? No, not that I know of.

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"preserve, protect and defend the Constitution" and the main objective of the Constitution is to establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty for the American people. Now, where has Clinton failed?

Has he obstructed justice? No.

Has he done anything to upset domestic tranquility? No.

Has he not done everything for the common defence of his nation? Yes, militarily the US has never been more powerful than what it is today. (I, personally dislike the idea of such concentration of power in one nation).

Has he not tried to promote the general welfare? Yes, actually if he were allowed to have his way, there would be more general welfare in his country and not less.

Has he done anything to deny the blessings of liberty to any American? No. The fact that Mr. Starr has had no difficulty in digging into Mr. Clinton's past and has exercised his wide statutory powers with such fanatical zeal for such a long time perhaps proves this point.

So, what are the charges against Bill Clinton? If the "sin" he committed is a private matter, and if today the US is in an all-time high position, what is behind all this fuss. Well, it is power. The Republi-

Lest We Forget

Professor Mofizuddin Ahmed

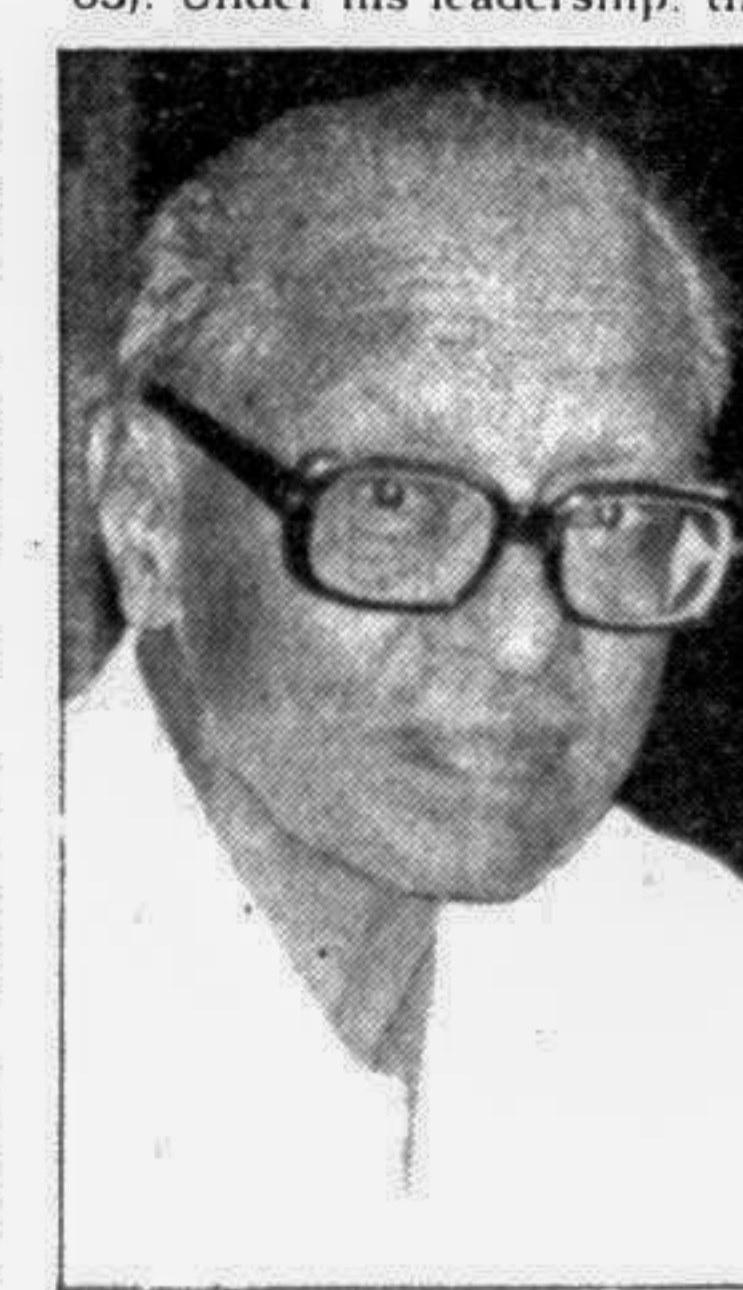
by Lutfur Rahman

IT is one year since Prof. Mofizuddin Ahmed, Professor Emeritus, Dhaka University, passed away on September 26, 1997.

He had a brilliant academic career. He passed Bachelor of Science (Honours) in 1942 and Masters of Science in 1944 in Chemistry, securing the second position in first class from Dhaka University. In 1948 he obtained the PhD from the Pennsylvania University. Since 1948 he had been teaching Organic Chemistry at the Dhaka University, first as a Senior Lecturer (1948-1950), then as a Reader (1950-1963), and finally, a Professor (1963-83). Prof. Ahmed was offered a Professor Emeritus position in 1983 by the University of Dhaka for his distinguished service and eminence in the field of Chemistry.

He distinguished himself by his excellence in teaching and research. A large number of students obtained MS and PhD Degrees under his supervision. He has to his credit many research papers in national and international journals, besides being the author of several textbooks both in Bengali and English. He made notable contribution in strengthening and promoting the corporate activities of the University. He was

the founder Provost of Iqbal Hall (now Sgt. Zohurul Hoque Hall) during 1954-61, and the Provost of S. M. Hall during 1962-1969. He was the first Advisor of Students Affairs (1961-63). Under his leadership, the



TSC at Dhaka University was built and the student advisory programme was introduced. He was a member of the Syndicate, Academic Council, Senate and other bodies of most of the Universities of Bangladesh. Professor Ahmed was a

member of the Pakistan Central Public Service Commission (1969-70). While in that position, he was appointed the first Vice-Chancellor of the newly established Jahangir Nagar University (1970-72). He also served as the first Chairman of the Bangladesh Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (BCSIR). In 1987, he was appointed the Chairman of Bangladesh National Education Commission. He was the founder Director of the Institute of Science and Technology Teaching.

Professor Ahmed was highly respected at home and abroad. He received several awards in recognition of his achievements, including the Independence Day Award in the year 1990.

His many students, including those who were residents of the student Halls when he was Provost, all his friends and colleagues in the various professional and welfare organizations he was associated with, remember him with great respect for his total dedication to work and integrity of character. Professor Mofizuddin Ahmed has left us for a world more suited for the kind, gentle and morally upright soul that he was; and we all pray to Almighty Allah that He also count the prayers of those who benefited from Prof. Ahmed's work in this world and rest his soul in eternal peace Amen.

To the Editor...

Working 'together'

Sir, I would like to thank Mr Muhammad Yunus of Grameen Bank for his timely appeal to avert the catastrophe. I do very much agree with the points Mr Yunus raised and I would like to reiterate some of the points like "Unity we must have".

With my little knowledge when I attempt to think how the total catastrophe and its subsequent crisis all over the country (I even can't figure out) can be solved I lose my ways. But Mr

Yunus' appeal gave me some comfort. But full comfort can only be felt if the appeal can be translated in to action. New ideas should also be encouraged from our think-tanks to overcome this crisis.

I have an impression that our political leaders don't listen to the dailies but I have a strong feeling if all the dailies unitedly and continuously create moral pressure on leaders, it will work. For that I propose that every newspaper should keep a particular column in the front page which will appeal to the

government and opposition to work together. Majbah Uddin Ahmed USA

Cruel dowry!

Sir, To a large extent, our maid servants and female garments workers save money for dowry as a preparation of their marriage. They know that nobody will agree to marry them without dowry.

Can't we help them in any way? Maen Uddin Sabuj 416, Zaia Hall, DU.