

Sustain This Tempo

By arresting four members of ruling Awami League's labour front during a four-hour combing operation in the wee hours day before yesterday against the criminals responsible for last Monday's lethal clash at Adamjee Jute Mills, police have indicated that they mean business. Although allegations are there that the big fishes have escaped the predawn swoop by 850 law enforcing personnel drawn from four adjacent police stations and the deadly AK 47 which was reportedly used in the battle of rival labour factions on that day could not be recovered, yesterday's police activism nonetheless deserves to be acknowledged as a sign of government's intention to let the law take its own course. Given the nature of trade union movement in this country and the vested political interests that a public sector behemoth like Adamjee epitomises, it is gratifying that the government has so far been able to steer clear of the influence that the party in power tends to exercise in a situation like this. So far so good.

But not every front is emanating such reassuring news. While the police is going unhindered in its effort to arrest the troublemakers at Adamjee, activists of a faction within the ruling party student front Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) have reportedly indulged in lawlessness at a Dhaka University residential hall. This is nothing new with the BCL. Factious feuding has broken out within BCL with all its ugliness for quite some time now. The same tendencies that marked the behaviour of BNP's student front JCD when the former was in power seem to have returned.

In order to uphold the cause of good governance and law and order it is imperative the ruling party assert itself morally. And for that the party in power has to dissociate itself with its fronts be it in the educational sector, be it in the industrial sector. Once it delinks itself from student and labour politics it will be able to go about curing the diseases that have been plaguing the two fields for years. Our economy and future will be retrieved from the suicidal precipice it is currently heading for.

A BATEXPO Preview

This year's three-day Bangladesh Textile Exposition acronymed BATEXPO which is to open on October 16 is billed to be a special event, more aspirational than the earlier ones we have seen staged.

Two motivational factors are at work to strive for obtaining a maximum advantage from BATEXPO. First of all, the range and quality of the products to be on display are expected to project our competitive edge over those of rival garment exporting countries. The implication is that this could help strengthen our claim for a 30 per cent increase in the US import quota. Such a good piece of news was supposed to have been declared by US President Bill Clinton on a visit to Bangladesh which has since been unfortunately postponed by the US State Department citing a reason that is not of Bangladesh's making: lack of forward movement in the non-proliferation talks between India and Pakistan.

Bangladesh has laid a claim to quota enhancement on the ground that she has been scrupulously abiding by the accord signed with the ILO and UNICEF in 1994 on sending child workers to schools. Eight thousand youngsters are already enrolled in 300 schools. Vigorous efforts by BGMEA's lobbyist Steve Solarz at the US corridors of power may have melted the ice for a quota increase to happen.

Regardless of whether a Clinton visit to Bangladesh materialised or not, as part of his APEC itinerary in Malaysia as is being ambitiously pressed for by the BGMEA, the "raise quota" appeal by Bangladesh should receive sympathy because of the impending MFA phase-out.

Coming to the operative part of the BATEXPO, we have it on the authority of the BGMEA president that there is a ready stock of apparatus for spot sale in addition to various samples that would be on display for placement of orders. How much we wish that BGMEA's expectations of \$ 70 million worth of spot orders at the BATEXPO are fulfilled.

Hanson Sized Up

John Howard, the Conservative Australian Prime Minister has survived a scare photofinish with a six-seat majority in the Lower House in the election called to endorse a radical Goods and Services Tax. Howard's landslide victory two and a half years back was reduced to that slim majority by a resurgent Labour receiving 51.5 per cent of votes cast against the Conservative tally.

The Australian general election had a special significance for the Third World, specially in Bangladesh. This was the first time racist Pauline Hanson was pitting her One Nation anti-immigration party in the national polls against the long entrenched two major ones. It is gratifying for us, as it is also for all right-thinking people around the globe, that she has failed to return, surprisingly in her stronghold and home state Queensland. Her deputy in the neo-fascist party and also close adviser David Oldfield has also failed to get a seat on the Senate.

But the debacle was somewhat made up by the One Nation capturing in its debut about 8.6 per cent of the national vote. While with such a showing Hanson is not going to cut a figure in national politics, it will be foolish to dismiss the 8.6 per cent and the nuisance value of Mrs Hanson.

An isolationist protectionist whites-only Australia has in the recent years come up significantly in its deals for the aborigines as also in liberalising immigration. Hanson aims to turn this welcome trend. But she can hardly make ground with only one political plank — racial prejudice.

A Looming Disaster of Another Kind

There seems to be no big purpose of our national existence. We only care for our individual convenience and comfort by any means. We simply want to endure in a maze of crookedness and contradictions — crookedness because nothing is obtainable in a straight path, and, of course, contradictions because the way a thing is implemented is often at variance with its accepted rule.

THE flood water is now reported to be fast receding and so subsiding are the trauma and sensation connected with the deluge. Those displaced by inundation have started returning home and the compassion aroused by their miseries are also dying down. Notwithstanding many hurdles and uncertainties of post-flood reconstruction the country will hopefully limp back to normality within months and the life will pick up its rhythm and start anew on the ruins of the devastation. The gloom charged with human sufferings will be lifted and the people will go about their usual business as if nothing had happened. The tragedy of 1998 will sink into oblivion and will, at the best, be referred to in the future only as a matter of academic interest. This is the pattern we witnessed after all earlier disasters befalling Bangladesh each one of which was called the 'worst' with some exceptions.

But the peculiar geographical setting as well as physio-morphological features and hydrological characteristics has been historically a disaster-prone country. An ever-worsening ecological degradation across the planet, particularly its greenhouse effects have further aggravated the vulnerability of Bangladesh to natural disasters. In our life time we saw it battered by the devastating floods of 1954, 1988 and 1998 as well as cyclonic storms of 1960, 1970 and 1991. No less affected were our woes due also to man-made catastrophes like the famine of 1943, the war of 1971 and acute food shortage of 1974. Even if the calamities of human making are not repeated we perhaps will have to confront nature's fury also in the future because of the physical reality of Bangladesh.

Nevertheless, man is no more entirely at the mercy of nature much of the mystery of which is now a matter of common knowledge. Whether with the acquisition of appropriate technology we can achieve a de-

gree of immunity from the natural calamities can be best said by the experts. However, all we understand as lay people is: as a lower riparian of Himalayan drainage system we can do precious little about what happens in the upper reaches of the system like deforestation, damming of the rivers or releasing of surplus water through the sluice gates of Farakka. The sluice gates of these activities in the upper reaches which are believed to aggravate the flood situation presuppose a close political understanding among the co-riparians. So far, that understanding remains elusive.

On the credit side, however, Bangladesh has survived the calamities of the past. After each of those disasters Bengalis rose like the phoenix from their ashes. Belying all grim predictions of the doomsayers they sprang back to life with surprising resilience. They rebuilt their lives with courage and never accepted defeat from the nature. This spirit is perhaps our great single asset. May be much greater challenge lies ahead for us with the deterioration in global ecological regime and certain disequilibrium in Himalayan ecological system of which we are an integral part. But then the role of disaster management the quality of which has certainly improved over the years also cannot be overlooked during future events of disasters. Yet the immediate impact of any natural calamity is bound to arouse instant pity and compassion as we find during each of the calamities.

But what happens when a calamity comes down surreptitiously and silently engulf the whole nation without even letting it understand the dangers involved?

It is an irony that there is no outcry let alone initiatives for actions, against plethora of dangers for Bangladesh which has since been pushed into a moral void — a void much more cataclysmic than cyclonic storms, alarming than deluge and devastating than war. Not only that, when a moral degradation sets in — it does so to the end of the nation's vitality and its will to endure. The void is characterised, among many of its syndromes, by pervasive corruption at each layer of the government and the society which alone is potent enough to destroy a nation.

It is an irony that there is no outcry let alone initiatives for actions, against plethora of dangers for Bangladesh which has since been pushed into a moral void — a void much more cataclysmic than cyclonic storms, alarming than deluge and devastating than war. Not only that, when a moral degradation sets in — it does so to the end of the nation's vitality and its will to endure. The void is characterised, among many of its syndromes, by pervasive corruption at each layer of the government and the society which alone is potent enough to destroy a nation.

one afford this additional cost unless his income is proportionately increased. If the man is not on the payroll of an employer he has to make good his loss either by mugging or hijacking. Precisely that's what sets in motion a vicious circle of corruption which draws in everyone in its whirlpool of foul play.

There seems to be no big purpose of our national existence. We only care for our individual convenience and comfort by any means. We simply want to endure in a maze of crookedness and contradictions — crookedness because nothing is obtainable in a straight path, and, of course, contradictions because the way a thing is implemented is often at variance with its accepted rule. We grease the policeman's hand, keep our fingers crossed before the wily clerk of a revenue office and certainly not a favour. Yet the exasperated citizens of the republic find their entire civic life in peril and do not know an exit route.

Our political savants often exhort us to abide by the rule of law. And we comply. This way Bangladesh is among the most over-governed countries of the world. There are plenty of laws and regulations for everything from constructing a house to obtaining a route permit or securing a trade license. It calls for 60 or so permissions for setting up an industry and twenty-seven signatures for a case file to move up from its initiator in the secretariat to the concerned minister for his decision — each signature costing amount subject to bargain. After all, files

are there to pile up and gather dust unless serviced by the affected individual. Getting a refund of money overpaid either for electricity or Income Tax is a nightmare. There is, indeed, no dearth of regulations to curb irregularity of any sort. Yet most of the chauffeurs hold fake driving license, nearly half of the electric connection in the country are illegal, numerous houses are constructed in Dhaka city without adhering to approved specification of Rajuk and any items from railway tickets to import licenses are available in the black market. Because for every regulation there are two loopholes and three ways to be crossed.

There is not only the corruption that haunts the spectre of our dependency. The moral void in which the country exists breeds all kind of evils, challenging the forces of reasoning and sanity. To make things worse the country has dipped to a new low of moral precipitation. The violence, rape, murder, extortion and unrest were nothing new in the country, but now they have assumed alarming dimension. There are twenty lakhs of illegal arms in the country which, according to a research finding, can be hired by extortionists patronised by political parties. The campus dormitory within the precinct of the highest seat of learning can turn into the den of criminals who can collect ransom for their captured prey with an immunity prevalent in the campus. The soul of the nation is desecrated with places like Shahid Minar and the library in university campus used for carnal orgy of gross perversion. There are trading with human miseries with the mushrooming of pseudo relief workers forcibly collecting relief materials from frightened traders and businessmen.

Yet there is no outcry, no protest. Poet Ezra Pound, it is told, went berserk at the horrors of Second World War. None seems to be even seriously moved at our national horrors.

PERSPECTIVES by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

Twentyseven years after the independence we are near the top of the corruption chart of Transparency International. Worse still, few are disturbed by it and many, on the other hand, draw comfort from the argument that corruption is not a unique Bangladeshi phenomenon. True, corruption is both historical and universal phenomenon. What is, however, not grasped is just how pervasive, deep rooted and cancerous it is in this country and its pernicious effect on our fragile developmental process. In a rich developed country corruption stirs up public reaction more as a matter of morality but in our case it is directly linked to the question of our survival because it impedes development to the

detriment of public interests. It is no accident that Bangladesh, a least developed country at its birth continues to be so after almost three decades of graft culture taking its toll. The occasional scams reported by the media in an advanced industrialised country are easily absorbed by its political and economic clout. But in a country like ours the corrupt practices in the government not only slows down the pace of progress and stagnates its development, it also adversely affects the aid flow from potential donors. Internally, it is vicious cir-

Life after CTBT

For Pakistan the signing of CTBT has far lesser implications than for India, India's stated ambitions being to join the nuclear club and to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council. Our nuclear weapon programme has always been stated simply as a legitimate security necessity meant to be a counter to the Indian capability.

AS widely expected, in his address to the UN General Assembly the PM 1. Out that Pakistan was not averse to signing the CTBT before the mandate runs out next September, provided that US-led sanctions that had caused suspension of the IMF programme and other aid programmes were lifted.

Before the PM's visit to New York a well-orchestrated media campaign to support the government's stance leading towards CTBT-signing culminated with a claim by prominent national nuclear scientists, led by Dr Abdul Qader Khan, that with the series of tests of Chagai there was no need for further tests for weaponisation (and subsequent deployment) of nuclear warheads.

Even that till very recently, acknowledged members of the nuclear club like France and China, had risked world approbation to carry out tests far beyond their actual physical deployment of nuclear weapons in various modes, this claim borders on the miraculous, but then we live in the age of miracles, mostly contrived, in this day and age.

Whether Pakistan carried out secret tests in the '80s is not known but the fact is that controlled laboratory environment can simulate actual conditions and a crude nuclear weapon programme is possible to be developed without necessarily going through actual physical tests. One cannot know for sure till an actual explosion whether theory has been safely converted into practice and since friend and foe were actually questioning our capability (for their own reasons India had resorted to hooting at our "claimed" capability after their May 11 explosion), the Chagai series was useful to put that

doubt to rest.

For the record, for Pakistan the signing of CTBT has far lesser implications than for India. India's stated ambitions being to join the nuclear club and to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council. Our nuclear weapon programme has always been stated simply as a legitimate security necessity meant to be a counter to the Indian capability.

As was amply demonstrated between May 11 and May 28, our decision to go the nuclear route became a matter of life and death once the Indians went nuclear in 1974. Where we may heap criticism on late Zulfikar Ali Bhutto for a number of major policy mis-steps, particularly the nationalisation route that has economically set us back to the dark ages, let us at least unselfishly give him absolute credit for single-mindedly initiating and pursuing the clandestine nuclear programme to remain abreast with India. The Indian rhetoric after their May 11 explosions amply demonstrated what they would have done to us if we had not had a nuclear programme.

In the circumstances and in spite of our known (and suspected) capability, India went on a brutal psychological warfare campaign after their May 11 explosion to not only explicitly state what they intend to do to us but also to rub our noses in the dirt while we contemplated our possible fate at their hands. To late Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, primarily for initiating our programme, to late Gen Ziaul

Haq for continuing it and both to Ms Benazir Bhutto and Mian Nawaz Sharif for persevering with the nuclear programme, the nation owes a debt of gratitude, this notwithstanding other reasons for disaffection and/or disillusionment. The bringing of our bomb out of the nuclear-closet was not a scientific need alone, it was a dire necessity in the face of intense psychological warfare, it became a matter of life and death, a matter of existence as a nation.

Having been locked into this situation since May 11, with the

like Indonesia, except that Indonesia was still being sustained by the West (and some of its ASEAN friends) while we were being choked by their sanctions. By the end of July it was clear that we were in deep economic straits and our friends could not continue to bail us out forever.

Bad timing continued to obey Murphy's Law, political events within and outside the country continue to be devil us, culminating in CA-15, underscoring the penchant for the Mian Nawaz Sharif regime for shooting themselves in the foot

AS I SEE IT Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

nuclear explosion only a question of timing, no ifs and buts about the necessity, the government of Mian Nawaz Sharif failed to prepare adequately for the consequences. Instead of consolidating and girding up our economic loins, we embarked on a series of disastrous mis-steps inclusive of May 28 and post thereof. The economic sanctions were foreseen, we were ill-prepared to absorb the consequences, rather we took no measures whatsoever to mitigate the consequences. On a number of fronts we took a disastrous course of action.

If China, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Kuwait had not bailed us out financially, we would have been swept away economically

at very short (and not even decent) intervals. At the moment of their greatest triumph, instead of building upon their strength, the regime exposed its weaknesses, one of which afflicts every government, to try and remain in power at all costs, whatever the consequences to the integrity and sovereignty of the country.

Critics may be right in saying that committing to sign the CTBT tends to surrender our sovereign right to maintain a nuclear capability, that this is only the first step in ultimately rolling back the nuclear programme, that to sustain its own existence, the present government is bartering away our options. On the face of it, CTBT is

simply a document that binds us to not testing nuclear devices but the language of the Treaty gives us ample room to maneuver to safeguard our legitimate security concerns.

But with the US now not so subtly "shifting the goal posts" in asking for more nuclear concessions, the suspicions are coming home to roost. Indeed there could be some suspicion that to ensure government longevity Mian Nawaz Sharif could compromise our existence but the PML (N) is not a bunch of rubber-stampers who would blindly follow the leader, case in point CA-15. Quite apart from selfishness and greed among a significant minority, there is always a great silent majority that would not let any such attempt to compromise our sovereignty not so silently. However, given the predilection of our MNAs and MPs to blindly follow the leader, the fear is always there that matters could be bull-dozed to suit the PML(N) leaders and then we could be in trouble. Any international commitment by any government is binding on the nation.

As we have seen in the matters of IPPs, once a government of the day signs a sovereign guarantee, other States tend to hold you to it, regardless of the legitimacy and logic of arguments against such agreements.

Therefore, if the government of the day speaks with a forked tongue, that is churn out a lot of rhetoric to please a domestic audience while at the same time negotiating a secret undertaking otherwise with the powers-

that-be, then we are in real trouble and then the question arises, what are the safeguards against such an eventuality?

If CA-15 sees the light of day, especially in its present form, the checks and balances in the system will go down the tube, the dangers will then become very real for the existence of this nation as whoever is in charge of the government scrambles to please the West in order to be economically bailed out. There is life after CTBT but that is for a government that exercises prudence, both domestically and internationally.

Unfortunately successive governments have tied our economic strings to an overflow of debt (and their repayments), as such in having to steer a conservative course out of this economic minefield we will have to pay a price. What price we actually pay will depend upon the integrity and sincerity of our leaders to the nation above and beyond their own interests. The world now recognises that our security concerns vis-a-vis India is legitimate and that the Kashmir question is a real issue that needs resolution. However, the world will tend to drive a hard bargain while our leaders are weak, tending to agreement at any cost.

No individual government has the moral authority to mortgage the existence of the nation in such circumstances, all elements must become a part of the campaign and they can only do so if asked to by the government. Now, as never before we need a united nation, government and opposition allied in the quest to sustain our sovereign independence. National government, anyone? Preferably one led by Mian Nawaz Sharif but if he does not agree, then regrettably without him.

To the Editor...

Why Should University Bleed?

Sir, I refer to the above article published in your esteemed daily, dated October 3rd, 1998.

Professor Bayes, the former treasurer and the newly-appointed Pro-VC of Jahangirnagar University rightly pointed out that the universities have been profusely bleeding, not only for providing educational services at a highly subsidized rate, but also in maintaining transport service, for the teachers and students of a residential university at a great cost.

He also demonstrated, how, by fixing meters to residential quarters of the university, he contributed to save a lot of scarce resources of the university. Professor Bayes, definitely deserves appreciation for the above valuable contribution made to JU and the nation. We wish we had treasurers like him in all our universities.

May we, however, ask him kindly to throw light on the following:

1. Other than the buses used by the commuters, does the university maintain a fleet of cars and other transports as well? If yes, for what purposes?

2. Who in the university are officially entitled to use full-time transport? How many actually use them?

3. What were the costs of procuring and maintaining these vehicles during the last two financial years?

4. In a residential university, is there any justification to allocate a full-time transport to any official other than the VC?

5. Is there any ceiling on use of fuel per transport per month?

6. Is there any distinction made between private and official use? If yes, does the bill for private use include besides fuel also the overtime payment made to drivers of the university vehicles?

Professor M. Masum Jahangirnagar University

The JU criminals

Sir, It was shocking to read the outline of the report published in the DS in the behind-the-scenes male-female relationship prevailing inside the transport service, for the teachers and students of a residential university at a great cost.

Naturally, due to social taboos in the present cultural mores of the society, the shady deals were elusive and did not see the limelight. But now that the washing of dirty linen has been started in the public (congrats, press!), the movement of cleansing up the campuses on criminal sexual aberrations should be stepped up, under the direct guidance of the Prime Minister, and none else, as powerful vested interest would try to nip the proceedings in the bud.

The UGC and the Ministries of Education and Culture have to initiate basic reforms (via the JS) to channel the students life in the right direction, for the sake of the new generation who will run the country in the near future. Times and social mores are changing fast as we continue to develop in all sectors, and attitudes and outlooks are in a state of flux.

The mechanism for implementation of the revised Code of Conduct has to be laid into

place carefully in open-ended configurations, so that modular amendments are possible from time to time during periodical reviews by the top leaders of the society.

Higher education is meaningless without self-awareness and self-control. Who will take the responsibility for generation, practice and containment of evil practices? It is not a new issue, therefore solutions are possible.

Another issue, which cannot be side-tracked: the misuse of political power and influence by a section of irresponsible political leaders and workers. The concept of deterrence would be eroded if this type of political corruption is allowed to flourish.

A Zabr Dhaka

US bombing in Sudan

Sir, I condemn the bombing in Sudan as an act of aggression, a dangerous violation of its sovereignty and a violation of international law.

Washington claims that El Shifa plant produced chemical weapons and was linked to Saudi dissident Osama Bin Laden. But Sudan claims the plant produced medicines and veterinary drugs.

Now, if the United States has nothing to hide, they should approve an investigation; otherwise they must boldly say that we don't have to obey any international law.

In the meantime, two European countries' investigation report didn't support US claims.

Tahera Dhaka

Why Rahims are so few?

Sir, The lines of the DS editorial dated 26 September, are wonderful indeed to imprint wonders in the minds of those people who are close to power and position in society. "How wonderful it would have been if people who matter most in our national life were blessed with a semblance of Rahim's honesty!"

All over the world the trend of dishonesty is so powerful that the honest are powerless and helpless to fight the evils of falsehood. Still there are many Rahims in the country, but they remain unheard, unsung and unknown to all. Even in our society the elements of honesty fight the evils of dishonesty quietly and do not get proper publicity. That marks the tragic part of life in our times.

Ahul Ashraf Noor Uttara, Dhaka-1205

Campus

Sir, Campus had been a very popular drama serial on Zee TV network. Unfortunately the Zee TV has ended its transmission on its 200th episode.

Campus was a drama serial based on different aspects of academic activities and administration on the campus. It creditably depicted how student behaves, how a few number of teachers realising their narrow ends violate the codes of teaching ethic, how a VC commits suicide to avoid trial for his apprehended corruption in issuing false certificates, how the chief minister in charge of the ministry of education as a part of his struggle in power and politics resist the autonomy move granted by the provincial

governor to the central college, how a morally deviated police commissioner establishes himself back to moral foundation, how an honest education secretary defends educational reform programme, how some honest and dedicated teachers tried to make education better, how a mere lady secretary controls the whim and actions of the chief minister, how influential personalities sponsor terrorism on the campus for their name and fame and many more complexities the educational system is now facing.

I would like to request the Zee TV authority to re-broadcast of Campus with more up-to-date events and episodes. M Zahidul Haque BAI, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207.

After flood, what?

Sir, Over 40 years time and again scientists, geologists and water experts have I warned us of greenhouse effect. But we did not care for the warnings. Despite the great deluge of 1998 once the flood water recedes we may forget everything once again and sit idle without taking any flood control measure. We may engage as usual in post-flood rehabilitation work, repair roads and bridges, import food and our government may distribute relief goods. And above all the government will accuse the opposition and the opposition will blame the government for all miseries of the people.

Is the flood of 1998 in the known history of Bangladesh the end of future flood, the end of further sufferings, woes, miseries, hunger, disease and poverty of our people? No, Bangladesh is prone to floods, our country would be hit by

flood again and again in future. It is said that about 20,000 years ago the whole of Bangladesh was under water. It is forecast that due to greenhouse effect the whole of Bangladesh would go under water again gradually and by the year 2015 about 18 per cent of the territory of Bangladesh would go under water.

We know that the resources of our country are limited, the revenue income of our government is limited. We cannot take in hand any plan or programme for flood control in our country single handedly. We, therefore, suggest the following measures to be accepted to save our country and the people from the recurring floods.

1) We may pursue with India and Nepal and if necessary with China for a joint river management and flood control of the Ganges and Brahmaputra.

2) We may divide all our river sides into different blocks of one mile long and 1000 feet wide and lease out those for 99 years to private sector for river dredging, building and maintenance of embankments, high roads and tree plantation in exchange of financial, commercial and agricultural benefit of the land of the same size i.e. one mile long and 1000 feet wide, to be given by the government to the leasee.

3) Our government should solicit and seek international help and assistance for flood control.

All our political leaders in the Jatiya Sangsad should arrive at a consensus on the above three suggestions.

O. H. Kabir 6, Hare Street Wari, Dhaka-1203.