

LETTER FROM AMERICA

Murderers Deserve No Sympathy

Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton

**Justice delayed is better than no justice at all. Fifty years after the holocaust, the Israelis, the French and the Americans are still hunting down Nazis like Klaus Barbie and bringing them to justice. Any day, any time, is a good day and a good time to apprehend and punish a criminal. That is why it was gratifying to see the guilty verdict in the Sheikh Mujib murder case.**

ON the morning of August 15, 1975, the writer woke up with the startling BBC news: "There has been another coup. This time in Bangladesh." What! The news continued, "There are unconfirmed reports that the leader of the nation, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, has been assassinated." What! I had always told my English friends that democracy had taken such firm roots in Bangladesh that there would never be a coup d'état there. I was very proud of that impossibility. Now this!

True, Bangladeshis living in England were not happy with Sheikh Mujib's one-party BAKSAL politics, but they clearly wished him no harm. Electoral defeat perhaps, certainly no physical harm. Oblivious of the murderous ferocity that was stalking Mujib, they were stunned. The British government, too, was shocked. Prime Minister Harold Wilson issued a terse statement: "The British government regarded Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as a statesman."

Many expatriate Bangladeshis living in London did not. They ransacked the Bangladesh embassy, took down Mujib's portrait, and celebrated wildly. This was not the first time that the writer found his feelings at variance with many of his countrymen. Dalim, who announced Mujib's overthrow over the radio, dominated conversation within the Bangladesh circles; no one had heard of Col Faruq. Yet, when TIME magazine reported Mujib's murder, it published a photograph of Col. Faruq and his wife. To this day I remain perplexed: how did TIME know who the real plotters/killers were right away?

As the details trickled out, the magnitude of the crime exceeded one's worst nightmare. The murderers brought shame on Bangladesh in the eyes of the world. This was no ordinary murder. This was a cold-blooded massacre. The head of the state was gunned down in his home, atop his stairs. So was his wife, his sons, their

wives and close relatives. The killers had a master plan — to wipeout the entire Mujib clan. One thought that civilized societies had done away with such savage carnage in the middle ages. Sheer cruelty of it made one shudder. Gone was 10-year old Russell. And my fellow athlete Sultana Ahmed Khuku (Sheik Kamal's wife), with whom the writer had so proudly represented "East Pakistan" in track and field between 1966 and 1971. What had she done?

The year 1975 was not a good year for Bangladesh. No sooner had the grieving multitude regained a little of their composure, came the news of the shameful "Indemnity Bill" — that the Bangladesh Parliament had decided that the mass murderers were never going to be punished for their heinous crimes. Legally, and then Bangladesh hit real rock bottom. In November, the four remaining top leaders of the Awami League were bayoneted to death in their jail cells. Sheer madness descended over Bangladesh. Like I said, 1975 was not a good year for Bangladesh. It was not a good year to be a Bangladeshi living abroad.

On Tuesday, November 10, the New York Times published a front page article chronicling how arsenic in drinking water has been poisoning Bangladesh for the last two decades. What they do not know, but we do, is that for the last two decades, as Mujib and the "Jail Four's" murderers walked the earth freely, they were poisoning Bangladesh's soul as well. One wonders whether there is a link between the calamities that have been visiting Bangladesh regularly, and the fact that we refused to put the murderers of our leaders on trial, thus earning the curse of the departed souls.

One of the refreshing aspects of American politics is that the two main parties are nothing more than two different approaches to moving the country forward. On important matters, such as going to war against

Iraq, the parties are united. Partisan politics never stand in the way of civility, and giving someone his/her due. Only a few days after clobbering Bob Dole in the 1996 Presidential election, Bill Clinton invited Dole to the White House and awarded him the Nation's highest civilian award, the Congressional Medal of Freedom. It was at Clinton's behest that Dole visited Kosovo, and it was based on Dole's recommendation that the US almost bombed Serbia a month ago.

In Bangladesh, the two major parties seem to exist not for the country, but for themselves. And there is this unyielding unwillingness to give the other its due. We have neither learned how to give compliments nor how to accept it. We are much too good at dishing out abuse. Sheikh Mujib's post-independence conduct may be debatable. His pre-independence role is not. Here is a man who spent thirteen of Pakistan's 24-years in jail, fighting for the East Pakistanis. If there was one East Pakistani the Pakistanis truly feared it was Mujib. There were other contributors to Bangladesh's independence, most notably General Zia. However, there cannot be much doubt that if there was no Mujib, there would be no Bangladesh.

Justice delayed is better than no justice at all. Fifty years after the holocaust, the Israelis, the French and the Americans are still hunting down Nazis like Klaus Barbie and bringing them to justice. Any day, any time, is a good day and a good time to apprehend and punish a criminal. That is why it was gratifying to see the guilty verdict in the Sheikh Mujib murder case. The man who has done so much to wrest Bangladesh's independence from Pakistan, and ultimately gave his life for it, let him and his family rest in peace.

Let the murderers of the Jail Four be also brought to justice. In the process, Bangladesh will cleanse its remaining sins.

**MEDIA** can play 'beyond-healing' as well as 'healing' roles during disaster and its aftermath. Any disaster has a number of phases. • Pre-disaster phase; • Awareness build-up or sensitising phase; • Signalling or warning phase; • Disaster phase; • Post-disaster phase. Media have to, and can, play the role at different stages of disaster vis-a-vis disaster management.

**Pre-disaster phase:** During the pre-disaster phase Bangladesh Betar remains alert upon receipt of the first alert message from the Meteorological Department to ensure prompt dissemination of subsequent forecasts, and warnings in case of cyclone. Betar also keeps the people informed about flood by regular flow of information and forecast received from the ministry of disaster management and relief as well as flood forecasting and warning centres (FFWC). To avoid possibility of any discontinuation between Bangladesh Betar and Meteorological Department, arrangement of Non-exchange Maguet Telephone Line has to be ensured.

**Arrangement of special programmes** are made with the approval of the ministry of disaster management and relief, meteorological department as well as FFWC.

**Special programmes** are broadcast with sufficient explanation and clarification of the warning signals of Meteorological Department.

**Awareness build-up or sensitising phase:** After receiving warning signals from Meteorological Department as well as FFWC, immediate and necessary arrangements are made for broadcasting messages from different radio stations at a certain interval.

**Warning Phase (In case of Cyclone):** After receiving Local Cautionary Signal No. 3, necessary coordination between Bangladesh Betar and Meteorological Department is established in order to continue announcements during normal programmes. Immediately after receiving Local Warning Signal No. 4, from the Meteorological Department, Bangladesh Betar announces it every one hour with elaboration and explanation. If there is any special advice from Meteorological Department, announcements continue without any break.

Bangladesh Betar, Dhaka Station, broadcasts the announcement of the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, Meteorological Department

Role of the Media in Disaster Management

by Dr Shaikh Abdus Salam

**In every stage of disaster and its aftermath media can play the role of an educator. To suggest for alternative crops; to take preventive and curative measures from various diseases; to protect the environment and the eco-system, media can launch special programmes to educate the people at large. It can, thus, really a lead and guide the nation during the time of disaster. Leadership is action, not position. Can our media come forward to take leadership through their action? Let us hope for the best.**

ment and FFWC, while, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Sylhet, Rangpur, Khulna and other regional stations broadcast the directives of the local administration (in case of emergency).

**Disaster Phase:** Danger Signals every 30 minutes and great danger signals every 15 minutes are broadcast, without any break in this phase (if the Meteorological Department advises, it continues in addition to normal announcements also).

Announcements on the directives as passed by the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief for the local administration to shift the people threatened by the disaster to safer places go on without interruption.

**Post-disaster Phase:** Bangladesh Betar broadcasts programmes designed to lift the morale of the people. It broadcasts programmes on short-term as well as long-term rehabilitation arrangements.

Like Bangladesh Betar, Bangladesh Television also do the same job in their own arrangement.

It may be mentioned that there exists, in case of sea ports, a total of 11 signals. For the riverine ports, there are four cyclone signals. It is to be said that there is no specific or classified warning system developed for the common people of the coastal belt in particular. So, they have to follow the signals meant for the river and the sea ports. In most cases people in general and the coastal people in particular fail to understand the language as well as the meaning of the warnings as these are complicated for easy understanding. As a result in many cases, they cannot take necessary preventive measures to face the disaster.

At immediate pre-disaster time and during disaster time, the newspaper cannot play a significant role as radio and television. The newspapers cannot cover or even reach in time to the remote areas during emergency situation. The newspapers have a vital role to play during the time of relief and rehabilitation activities and its aftermath by the administration, the NGOs and other national and international bodies. During this period the newspapers do not cover the issues only but also discover and then help recover the wounds found, if any.

Besides radio, television and newspapers, there are other bodies like — volunteers for Cyclone Preparedness Programme (CPP) of Bangladesh. To face and manage the impending disaster situation, they act with the warning and forecasts to warn and advise the people through miking, posting and also help establish interpersonal communication by rendering door to door services.

Mass Media, Disaster Management vis-a-vis National Development

Mass media have a vital role to play in national development. To quote Wilbur Schramm: "People who live in societies where the mass media are common, sometimes forget

how much they learn from the media. Yet for 300 years the printed book has been the strong right arm of public education. Wherever newspaper have been available, they have become the chief reporters on environment beyond the reach of one's own senses; indeed, whole generations of people have formed their ideas of the no local world largely on what they have learned from newspapers (and more recently from radio, television, and news magazines)".

During the recent flood, the media truly tried to unite the nation to face the danger. Media's role in every count was really praiseworthy. Newspapers of the country covered the flood intensively from every angle. BT, produced and telecast a total of 86 special programmes on floods and relief distributions in the last 50 days to educate and make people aware about health, hygiene, agriculture and other issues of public interest. Bangladesh Betar has broadcast over 150 similar programmes.

**Media as Watchman and Warner:** Media have the responsibility to keep watch on the whole process of disaster vis-a-vis disaster management such things in proper direction. They explain reasons behind any natural calamity. As a regular phenomenon in Bangladesh, there are many reasons behind flood. To give a sense of direction to the nation, the media should involve themselves in rooting out the reasons behind the reasons. For instance, media can highlight the unplanned growth of road communication, bridges, culverts, embankments for water management that severely bar the free flow of water from upper to lower basins. Similarly fast growth of human habitation creates pressure on greenery of the country that affects the environment and eco-system as well. Besides, sedimentation on the river beds, sea level rise due to greenhouse effect are the causes of severe flooding. These issues should be published and broadcast in the form of suggestive and in-depth reports.

**To Communicate Flood Forecast:** The media, particularly the electronic media like radio and television, have a prime role to communicate to the common people the flood forecasting through a very simple and communicable language. Usually experts and officials release forecast report full of technical jargon. General viewers, listeners or readers have less knowledge about those technical terms and hence the forecasting fails to achieve its desired goal.

Only news bulletin is not enough to communicate people in such a situation. Media should put up special features highlighting the various aspects of apprehension and the campaign on flood forecasting to reduce the extent of damages and human sufferings.

**To Guide the People in Taking Precautionary Measures:** Experts can usually apprehend

the strength of the disaster beforehand. They have the scientific reasons to explain how the disasters come, how they move, how long they would last etc. If media focus all these issues effectively, the government, the NGOs and the other humanitarian organisations can take precautionary measures. It can give a positive direction to the common people to take decision earlier.

Similarly, radio and television can produce short-length and easily communicable spots on precautionary measures and the newspapers can publish boxes items in this light.

**Media to Focus on the Extent of Damages:** To draw the attention of the government, the NGOs as well as the international community, the media have the role to focus on the extent of damages objectively and promptly. Usually it is not possible for the government alone to assess the volume of damages instantly. In that case, the government and the international community usually take decision on the basis of assessment report of the media. At the same time, common people can gather knowledge about damages and mobilise themselves in taking united moves to help the distressed humanity.

During the catastrophic flood of 1998, media focused on sector-wise damages. About 80 per cent of country's crop land went under water. The media should give top priority in covering agricultural sector. People have a common fear that damages in agricultural sector may cause a severe food shortage in the coming days. In this case media should produce objective reports on the governmental arrangement. Media should also launch campaign on the availability of essential commodities to remove panic among the common people. Our media is perhaps doing very well in this regard.

Secondly, media should focus on the damages in industrial sector. This sector incurred a colossal damage. The deluge has forced over 5,000 small, medium and big industries to suspend their production. The suspension of operation in the industries has already caused a loss of over 200 billion taka in terms of production. The media at this crucial stage of the country's industry-building can guide the nation with in-depth reports, editorials, features and articles.

The environment was the worst victim this year's flood. The stagnation of water for months and the contamination of water affected the environment severely. Diarrhoea and other intestinal diseases usually break out in an epidemic form due to contamination of water. Use of polythene bags during relief distribution make the drainage and sewerage system almost inoperative. The media should have the capability to strengthen the campaign against the use of polythene. If media can effectively focus on the alternative use of polythene, it may yield a long-term positive effect.

Similar programmes should be launched for the welfare of the country's livestock, fisheries and other sectors.

**Upholding the Humanitarian Spirit:** To help the distressed humanity, media can print and broadcast humanitarian stories. Such stories can sensitise the people. For example, by exposing the sufferings of a group of people at a remote area, the television can help draw attention of the authorities concerned to send relief goods not only for that particular area but also for far remote areas. Similarly if media highlight the relief activities of a particular person or groups it will also inspire more individuals or groups to engage in relief operations.

Media can point out the loopholes and other mismanagement about the relief activities by the government as well as by other bodies. It can help the government in running smoothly the relief activities. It can also guide the government for rational distribution of relief goods. Media, by its campaign technique, can inspire the NGOs and other voluntary organisations in relief activities.

**Making People Aware of Their Health:** Health hazards are one of the main problems in prolonged floods and other natural disasters. Outbreak of epidemic diseases comes as a threat to the victims. To strengthen the preventive and curative measures, the media can put up different programmes. Radio and television can produce special discussion or documentaries involving experts. Similarly the newspapers can publish special items highlighting the health and related issues.

**Direction for Policy Makers:** Electronic media like radio and the television can organise special dialogue with the policy makers to figure out ways to cope with the catastrophe. Similarly, the newspapers can organise round-tables with experts to find out solution for the problem.

**Mobilising People:** Coping with the disaster properly is a colossal task. But it can easily be done if people's participation can be ensured. For instance, Dhaka-Narayanganj-Demra (DND) embankment could be saved during the recent flood due to people's participation. Media should encourage people's participation during natural disasters so that it inspires others to get involved.

**Helping and Strengthening Rehabilitation Activities:** Rehabilitation activities are a tough challenge after any disaster. It requires proper planning and efficient running of rehabilitation works. Media can put together different expert opinions. Besides writing editorials and special articles, the media can guide the government in the right direction.

It can be said that in every stage of disaster and its aftermath media can play the role of an educator. To suggest for alternative crops; to take preventive and curative measures from various diseases; to protect the environment and the eco-system, media can launch special programmes to educate the people at large. It can, thus, really a lead and guide the nation during the time of disaster. Leadership is action, not position. Can our media come forward to take leadership through their action? Let us hope for the best.

The writer is a Professor, Mass Communication and Journalism, University of Dhaka.

High-technology Transfers to India and Pakistan Possibility Ruled Out

by Aziz Haniffa

**Talbott took strong issue with Indian and Pakistani assertions that nuclear weapons assured stability on account of the mutually assured deterrence (MAD) effect, reminiscent of what prevailed during the Cold War. "It's almost as if they see the Cold War brinkmanship between the superpowers as something to be emulated," he said.**

US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott has reiterated that India and Pakistan are not welcome to the exclusive nuclear club unless they fulfil certain conditions and also in effect ruled out high-technology transfers to both countries. In a major speech on "US, Diplomacy in South Asia: A Progress Report" at the Brookings Institution, Talbott said two principles have guided the American side in the six rounds of discussions with Indian emissary Jaswant Singh and seven rounds with Pakistan's Foreign Secretary Shamshad Ahmad. "First, we remain committed to the common position of the P-5, G-8 and South Asia Task Force, notably including on the long-range goal of universal adherence to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)," he said.

"We do not, and will not, concede, even by implication, that India and Pakistan have established themselves as nuclear weapons states under the NPT," Talbott asserted. "Unless and until they disavow nuclear weapons and accept safeguards on all their nuclear activities," he emphasised, "they will continue to forfeit the full recognition and benefits that accrue to members in good standing of the NPT."

Talbott, the key interlocutor for the US administration in non-proliferation talks with both the countries, said: "This is a crucial and immutable guideline for our policy, not least because otherwise we would break faith with the states that forswore a capability they could have acquired — and we would inadvertently provide an incentive for any country to blast its way into the ranks of the nuclear weapons states." However Talbott, in his speech, seemed a trifle conciliatory vis-a-vis Washington's second principle, which he said "applies to the near and medium term and to the practice of diplomacy as the art of the possible." "We recognise," he said, "that any progress towards

a lasting solution must be based on India's and Pakistan's conceptions of their own national interests." Talbott acknowledged that the US was "under no illusions that either country will alter or constrain its defence programmes under duress or simply because we've asked it to." He said, "That's why we've developed proposals for near-term steps that are, we believe, fully consistent with the security requirements that my Indian and Pakistani counterparts articulated at the outset of our discussions." "The prime ministers of both nations have said publicly that they seek to define those requirements at the lowest possible levels," he noted. "In other words, while universal NPT adherence remains our long-term goal, we are not simply going to give India and Pakistan the cold shoulder until they take that step."

He pointed out that Washington was working with New Delhi and Islamabad to take "five practical steps that would help avoid a destabilising nuclear and missile competition and more generally reduce tensions on the subcontinent and bolster our non-proliferation goals." He reiterated, yet again, that both India and Pakistan must sign and ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT); halt all production of fissile material and announce that they will refrain from such activity pending conclusion of the Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty (FMCT); limit the development and deployment of missiles and aircraft capable of carrying weapons of mass destruction; tighten export controls on sensitive materials and technologies; and address the underlying causes of longstanding disputes, including Kashmir, bilaterally. Talbott said even though "my Indian colleague Jaswant Singh often says that India and Pakistan are 'born of the same womb'," both countries "have been prisoners of their animosity and distrust." He acknowledged that "no amount of diplomatic exertion on our part, on non-proliferation or any other subject, will have much effect unless and until India and Pakistan can liberate themselves from their own enmity."

"While we and others can help through our offices with both, that liberation will occur only through direct, high-level, frequent and, above all, productive dialogue between the two of them," he added. Saying that the resumed talks between the two countries at the foreign secretary-level that included discussions on Kashmir, confidence-building measures, better communications between

civilian and military experts and trade were "favourable developments," Talbott said only a "breakthrough" would allow the US to develop "the kind of broad-gauge, forward-looking bilateral relationships" with both countries, "each in its own right, that they, and we, want and deserve."

Talbott said, "High technology cooperation and transfer is possible only if and so far as it does not benefit entities, which is to say either private sector entities or government entities in India or Pakistan, that are engaged in either nuclear activity or ballistic missile activity." Talbott, however, acknowledged that "it can change over time if we can achieve a significant breakthrough on these benchmarks where so far there has not been a great deal of progress." He spoke of the "tricky calculation" the US was faced with in terms of providing India and Pakistan with the sophisticated wherewithal that was available to the US and the erstwhile Soviet Union during the Cold War to avert a nuclear strike because of some miscalculation.

"On the one hand we want to share with them as much as we possibly can about our own experience...and indeed we have started to do it," he said. "However," Talbott said, "we do not think it is useful or helpful for us to provide what I might call a user's manual to India and Pakistan because that would concede a basic point, namely, that they are going to be possessors and users (of nuclear weapons) forever." Talbott said, "I think we have to stay on the right side of -- if I can use this term -- a red

line. And the red line is not conceding the fundamental point that the best thing for everybody, notably including the two parties here, is universal adherence to the NPT."

Talbott took strong issue with Indian and Pakistani assertions that nuclear weapons assured stability on account of the mutually assured deterrence (MAD) effect, reminiscent of what prevailed during the Cold War. "It's almost as if they see the Cold War brinkmanship between the superpowers as something to be emulated," he said. Talbott recalled that the US and the Soviet Union "had more than one narrow escape. India and Pakistan have even less margin for error than the US and the USSR did over Cuba and Berlin, if only for geographical reasons since no ocean separates them." He dismissed New Delhi's contention that Washington was not willing to treat India on a par with China as a major power and sought to deny India the kinds of weapons systems.

"I think there are quite a number of examples of countries that have been able to attain a major power status with outgoing the route of becoming nuclear weapons states," he said. Talbott said he failed to understand the logic proffered by India that nuclear weapons would enhance its security and warned that the acquisition of such an arsenal would only have "a deleterious effect." He said India in particular should know better "given its aspirations for global leadership and being an exemplar of other nations."

—India Abroad News Service

Teachers' Salary in India Looking into the Future

Amrik Singh writes from New Delhi

ONE of the casual remarks made by an important policy maker to the teachers when negotiations between their organisations and the Ministry of HRD were in progress call for some discussion. He said, "This is probably the last time that the salary scales of teachers are being decided at the Central level." What he was referring to was the fact that when the number of teachers at university and college level was small, things could be decided at the Centre. But when the numbers are large, this may not be all that feasible in the years to come.

In 1973, when salary scales of university and college teachers were equal to those of IAS officers in the Government of India, the situation was somewhat different from what it is today. For one thing in the early 70's, the number of teachers involved was 1,50,000 unlike today when it is more than double that number. For another, till then, teachers were grossly underpaid. When the Centre therefore pushed in the direction of higher wages, the general perception was in favour of the new recommendation.

Some people in the Cabinet, notably C. Subramaniam, Babu Jagjivan Ram, and Swaran Singh opposed the move. It went through mainly because the then Prime Minister had made up her mind. In the political sense, she wanted to carry teachers at this level with her and this is exactly what happened. The gap between their revised scales and that of teachers in secondary schools remained pretty wide for almost a decade. It was the Chattopadhyaya Committee in the early 80's which did justice to teachers at the secondary level. Once again, the distance between them is going to widen and this is generating new pressures.

That apart, the real issue which is going to erupt in a sharp way within the next few months is what happens at the state level. Salary scales in State universities and colleges are determined by the State governments. In the agreement signed when the strike was called off, the Centre agreed to consider "sympathetically" the question of helping a state with the implementation of the new scales in case such a state had any problem. The whole thing is so vaguely worded that there is no knowing what will eventually happen.

One of the principal demands of AIFUCTO (dominated by teachers working in colleges) was that assistance from the Centre to the States for the first five years should be raised to 100 per cent from 80 per cent which had now been agreed to. The Centre did not accept this demand. What it said was that it would consider the request of any state for assistance "sympathetically". In plain words, the issue remains unsettled. Will the Centre give 100 per cent assistance to any state? It looks doubtful.

During the last few years, the Centre has been diverting its funding into the spread of literacy. Higher education is not receiving the kind of support that it used to receive at one time. As is widely known, in the II Plan, higher and professional education received 22 per cent of the Plan support in contrast to 56 per cent to elementary education. This rose to 36 per cent in the II Plan. Indeed this continued to be the approach during the first three Plans. But with the IV Plan it started changing and by the end of the VIII Plan that support had declined to 22 per cent.

In contrast, the support to literacy which declined from 56 per cent to 24 per cent before the beginning of the IV Plan has steadily been going up. In the VIII Plan, it stood at 47 per cent.

The overall meaning of these figures is that there is acute paucity of funds as far as higher education is concerned. Even when the recent revision of scales was undertaken, the Ministry of Finance was not all that "sympathetic". The Ministry of HRD somehow persuaded finance to agree to the recommendations made by the Rastogi Committee and amended further after that. But the general pattern is one of a tilt in favour of elementary education.

These pressures are equally keenly felt at the state level. The states therefore are not all that enthusiastic about accepting the revised scales of pay. None of the states so far has taken any positive step. This is partly because the proposals agreed to in early September are yet to be cleared by the Union Cabinet. It is only after these hurdles have been overcome that action can be initiated at the state level. But how the response remain to be seen.

All that one can say is that the situation will vary from state to state. Almost all states are over-stretched in terms of their commitments. But even then some of them will be prepared to make some moves. The Interim Allowances and various other DA instalments sanctioned over the years will not make much of a difference rightway. In the long run, however, this would make all the difference.

If anyone has studied the report of the Rastogi Committee, he will have noticed that even last time some of the states did not pay the arrears. The problem is a real one therefore. It is not that the teachers' organisations are not aware of it. Only, when there is so much delay in decision making, it becomes a problem. It looks as if history is repeating itself. — Mandira

The writer is a retired Vice-Chancellor.

**Alternatives**  
Our next issue of Alternatives on "Women and Security" will come out on 26 November 1998 instead of 19 October 1998. Scholars, researchers, activists and all other interested parties at home and abroad are requested to send their articles to Intiaz Ahmed, Executive Director, Centre for Alternatives, Room No 431, Lecture Theatre, Arts Faculty, Dhaka University, Dhaka-1000. Tel: 9661900-19, Ext. 4550; Fax: (880-2) 836769; E-mail: intiaz@bangla.net

Democracy Under Threat in Nepal?

Deepak Gajurel writes from Kathmandu

THE eight-year-old parliamentary system in Nepal is facing its gravest threat so far with an intensification of anti-democracy movements over the past few weeks.

While on the one hand the ultra-left Maoists are waging what they call a "people's war" to uproot the present system, the former Panchas who ruled the country for three decades before 1990 under the partyless Panchayat system have also started leading anti-democracy demonstrations.

What has added to the pressure on the democratic system is political instability caused by a hung Parliament and an economy which many feel is on the verge of collapse. The current instability has, predictably, been a shot in the arm for anti-democracy movements.

Political leaders have also

begun joining the ranks of doomsayers, expressing dissatisfaction with the functioning of the system while business circles have been attacking the establishment for failing to arrest the economic slump.

Some prominent personalities have gone to the extent of calling upon King Birendra to take over power and create a welfare state. Nepal currently has a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary system. The King is a titular head of state.

Human rights activist and constitutional expert Rhishi Kesh Shah, in a newspaper interview, alleged that democratic parties have failed to fulfil their responsibility towards the country and the people.

"Political parties have lost their relevance due to their cor-

rupt character and misconduct in the last eight years," Shah, a drafter of the 1962 Panchayat Constitution, said. "Now the time has come for the King to come forward to take over state power, be assertive and rule the country."

Others have begun street protests urging the King to "come and save the nation". Led by a group of former members of the Rastriya Panchayat (the erstwhile unicameral legislature), thousands have in the past two weeks participated in rallies in major towns, including the capital.

"King, come and save the nation," chanted the multi-party system. "Nepal people do not need this alien system," were some of the slogans that reverberated in the streets where placard-wielding protesters congregated.