

The Cyclone's Aftermath

The latest hurricane to make a visitation along the coast of Bangladesh may not have caused damage to the extent of 1970 or 1985 or 1991, but there is no denying that every cyclone alert brings back memories of those dreadful events. For several years now, visitations by cyclones appear to have increased in frequency, possibly due to changes in the climatic pattern. Fortunately, these cyclones did not carry the same force as the ones in 1991 or even 1985. But more importantly, experiences of previous cyclones have enabled both the government and people of the country to learn to cope with threats of natural calamities, no matter how devastating they may be.

Since 1991, a great deal of energy and resources have been invested in preparedness and response strategies to minimise loss of life and damage to property. We have already seen during the floods this year the effectiveness of the government's relief and rehabilitation efforts and emergency response in the health sector. Again, the rapid response to the hurricane alert on Saturday has also come as a relief to the people of the coast, who have been re-assured that the emergency services remain vigilant. What this latest eyeball-to-eyeball with the hurricane has shown is that there is no alternative to preparedness. The government deserves commendation for the way it has responded to the hurricane alert. Now the government machinery has to work flat-out to ensure that the impact of the cyclone is mitigated through effective rescue, relief and rehabilitation.

The critical task before the government is to treat the hurricane that swept over the coast Sunday evening as an emergency, even if loss of life and damages are not severe. Even a relatively weak storm can cause severe damage to infrastructure particularly communication, which could expose the affected people to risks of hunger and disease. The government needs to ensure that this does not happen. The destruction of property along the coast is likely to be fairly extensive since most households there are built of mud or thatch. Therefore, shelter, emergency food distribution and medical supplies will be required immediately. Since the cyclone is likely to leave a bitter cold front behind it, the government would be well-advised to place high priority on distribution of warm clothes to districts directly affected by the cyclone.

Deadly Neglect

Seven patients in the surgical and gynaec wards of Rangpur Medical College Hospital died on Friday. All of them were on intravenous administration of Dextrose saline, alleged to be at least 16 years old. Twenty others are in a precarious condition after being pushed IV saline. Two survivors said after being put on saline, their body temperature spurted to unbearable heights and convulsions followed. Terrorised, they themselves snapped the tube and came back to normal. Panicky patients soon replaced their saline with hurriedly bought saline from the market and are out of danger. The containers of the pushed in fluid bore markings of 'Dacca' — the spelling of the city clearly indicating that these could not have been made later than 1982, when the spelling was changed.

The hospital chief has not admitted to the cause of the deaths but has said the stock of IV Dextrose saline from which the administrations were made have been kept away for the enquiry team.

Rumour is rife in the town. Only the other day Public Health Directorate had sent to RMCH a consignment of 3800 phials of Dextrose saline. The allegation is that fresh saline is sold out to market and old unused saline from the hospital's own stock is used instead.

Whatever comes out of the inquiry, a crime of the gravest order has been committed. The findings must be made public without delay and punishment dealt out soon after.

Hospitals are in general very badly managed institutions in this country. Government-run hospitals surpass others in this. Bad management and commercial tendencies cause unnecessary deaths in perhaps tens of thousands every year.

The Rangpur death procession comes as surpassing all that. This can be an accident. But a case of neglect causing the accident. While our sense of shock abides with us, we marvel at the same time why such tragedy hasn't occurred earlier or doesn't keep on taking place all the time at all the places. Man is an infinitely resilient animal.

Live Up to 16 November

BNP and its allies are today on an emotionally rather intense, but by definition non-violent protestation programme against the government alleging political repression by the latter. The eight-hour hunger strike they are set to stage at the Paltan Maidan would be followed by a rally of a presumably substantial size to be addressed by BNP and alliance leaders. Utmost restraint on all sides — from the opposition and the ruling party — would be an imperative necessity to head off any untoward incident.

We can certainly put faith in the symbiotic process that has lately got under way in the political dynamics of the country following Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's unconditional abjuring of hartal as a weapon in national politics.

There are vibes from opposition leader Khaleida Zia, which discerning people can easily read, that she is generally favourably disposed to the idea. But because it would be for her to make the immediate sacrifice as the present leader of the opposition, with Hasina's turn left in the womb of the future, she is naturally keen on getting some guarantees for the effectiveness of opposition politics.

We believe the ruling party has not just a responsibility but a stake as such in ensuring that the opposition perform its given role under the Constitution so as to get a reciprocal courtesy when the former sits in the opposition.

On top of that positive outlook we have this standard of behaviour set by Begum Zia during her march on parliament on November 16 to follow today to the hilt. Begum Zia personally leading that potentially agitation-laden programme from the front made sure that it was peacefully conducted till the very end. The government, for its part, acted not out of impulse but with caution and understanding. We expect that to be repeated today.

The 1998 Floods

Floods came rather late this year and as the water receded, some crops, even in the flood-affected areas, that had escaped the wrath of the floods stood ready for harvesting. That provided work for some agricultural labourers at a critical time.

THERE was considerable criticism in the country about the timing of the government's announcement this year that the floods are here again. The authorities, some said, were tardy in making the matter public. An earlier announcement, they thought, would have lessened the sufferings of the affected people. It would have brought relief and succour to them earlier. The authorities, however, maintained that they had wanted to be absolutely sure about the likely severity of the flood and had not wished to be caught crying wolf. Besides, they had not wished to ask for international assistance without exhausting the possibilities of self-reliance. It was also stated that the government had wanted to draw up the list of the relief assistance with care so that we were not burdened with unwanted aid items.

The controversy reminded me of two episodes — one of the difficult situation of 1974, when as the Relief Coordinator in the Foreign Office, it fell on me to convince the well-meaning Argentinean Ambassador that Bangladesh could indeed do without his country's generous help of a plane-load of fresh apples, mainly because we did not have any refrigeration facilities in the rural areas and also because the village folks were unaccustomed to the luxury of partaking to the fruit that keeps the doctor away! Food items less exotic than the Sri Lankan apples, such as chairs or 'muri' submitted would be most welcome instead. The second episode I was ordained to witness was in 1988, while serving as the High Commissioner to India. During the floods that year President Ershad's Secretariat announced that the services of foreign helicopters were needed to air-drop relief materials in the remote flood-affected areas. India promptly dispatched four M-18 helicopters to Dhaka from its North-eastern Air Command. One wondered whether the irony of this request escaped the Indians: for a few months earlier Bangladesh had criticised Indian air-dropping of food items over Jaffna in Sri Lanka, carried out, one had to state, without the knowledge and consent of the Sri Lankan authorities. Our situation was of course different. Nonetheless many Bangladeshis did not take well to the idea and the Indians decided to withdraw the choppers somewhat abruptly. All this left a rather bad taste in the mouth and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and his government were not exactly amused. As the Bangladesh High Commissioner in Delhi, I was the first on the firing line and my discomfort was heightened by the fact that personally I very strongly felt that the presence of Indian helicopters in Dhaka was imprudent in view of the delicate bilateral relations that then existed. The normally warm, genial and kind Rajiv Gandhi displayed a lack of all these three attributes of his head and heart when he discussed the matter with me, and I dutifully reported all this home.

President Ershad arrived in New Delhi on the morning of September 29, 1988, on a brief half-day visit, at his request. I do not wish to go beyond what had appeared in the press on this visit. It was stated to have been undertaken to consider joint Indo-Bangladesh flood control actions. It was also assumed that 'other matters of bilateral and regional interest' would be discussed! Ershad, in addition to the formal and much photographed formal talks we had had with the Indians, had a half an hour exclusive meeting with Rajiv Gandhi with none else present. I for one did not assume that they met to discuss the rather dry and warm Delhi weather! Nor did the Indian press; for they reported the morning after that Ershad had apologised to Rajiv Gandhi for the helicopter incident. My inquiries with the Indians, official, as the High Commissioner and private, as a curious on-looker of history, elicited enigmatic replies! But for me the story did not quite end there. A couple of years later I was playing golf in Mauritius with an Indian Airforce officer, Group Captain Gill, who was on deputation to the government there. I happened to be concurrently accredited to Mauritius as High Commissioner and met this excellent golfer per chance. Group Captain Gill gave me a thrashing at golf, whereupon he invited me for breakfast at the Club. While enjoying his hospitality, I asked him whether he had ever visited Bangladesh. "In a manner of speaking, yes, was his answer. Seemingly embarrassed, he then disclosed that he was the leader of the squadron of choppers sent over by India to Bangladesh for relief work during our 1988 floods! What a chance meeting and I, of course lost no time in changing the subject! Group Captain Gill obviously realised that I knew more about his Bangladesh visit than I cared to talk about.

So for me, thankfully now as a private citizen, it was a case nonetheless of being twice bitten. When it came to Bangladesh's asking for foreign assistance to combat this year's floods, I was pleased that the government had so readily and took its time before asking for emergency foreign assistance. As a result, we got what we actually needed. No apples and helicopters please! We are Bangladeshis!

For reasons both historical and contemporaneous, in all forms of crises this country is prone to, natural or man made, one turns to the BBC for the truth. In the early days of this year's devastating floods, the BBC, quoting, I think, a UNDP Report, stated that this year, as many as twenty million people in Bangladesh faced this disaster, including death, if there was no stitch in time, in terms of relief and food-supplies. Any death is tragic, for it is final; but there can be some justifiable relief that in the event, less than two thousand perished. It was pleasing again to hear the BBC quote the British Development Minister Clare Short as saying that considering the magnitude of the Bangladesh disaster, "less than two thousand dead stands out stunningly. One cannot here let the government walk away with all the kudos. There would be others to share the honour. For instance, the people themselves, who are now aware, more than ever before, of the need for pure drinking water. There is more sanitation awareness now in the villages and the availability and use of Orsoline and BRAC propagated drink of molasses and salt has helped in keeping the diarrhoea death toll within manageable limits. In the past, during floods, the number of people dying of snakebites used to be considerable. This has, according to experienced relief workers, diminished considerably this time. Maybe in the limited geographical area of Bangladesh, both the snakes and human beings, cannot go on procreating in gay abundance and, with the fast diminishing forest and jungle areas, the serpents are having to practice family planning more rigorously than their homo sapiens counterparts! Or is it simply a case of the survival of the fittest!

Notwithstanding the fact that through the successive regimes the permanent services of the country have turned largely politicised, the government did well to make good use of the district administration in relief distribution. The armed forces, called out on occasions, in aid of the civil administration, performed well and the cooperation between the government and the NGOs in relief work was on the whole reasonably satisfactory. But it is the patience and resilience of the flood-affected millions that kept things going when the going got tough. Two chapatis per head per day, a fistful of molasses, some dry land for living and with some luck, a lungi or a sari, were enough for a nod and smile of gratitude. And there were many who extended their

helping hands. There are some unforgettable experiences of those who and some of the feelings, not of hartal-bound people attacking each other or of burning cars, but of love, compassion and sympathy for each other in crisis. The image of a caring Bangladesh, of people, who have lived together for a thousand years through all the vicissitudes brought about by both man and nature.

There was this little girl, hardly in her teens who came to the BRAC Relief Centre, and whose name escapes me. She had a thousand taka saved up from her allowances that she wished to contribute. The centre would prefer her to contribute in kind, say some flour and molasses, that she could buy from the market, she was told. She did not quite know how to buy things worth so much, she said, and that she had not taken her parents into confidence in this humanitarian adventure of hers. But a couple of hours later she did return in a rickshaw with some flour and molasses and a friend accompanying her this time. One does, of course, share secrets with friends that one does not with the parents! One recalls the gesture of Lutfunnessa, a Gulshan housewife, who, every day while the relief operations lasted, sent some relief items, from her affluent house-hold, through her grandson. The rickshaw-puller, Shahtajan, who had lost a daughter in an earlier flood and who had nothing to contribute. But he brought relief items donated by others, in his rickshaw, free of charge! An eighty-year-old aunt of mine who insisted that I went to see her and handed over to me an envelop containing a good part of her month's budget. The seven-year-old Shafi, who came with his father to BRAC's Magbazar office to hand over his birthday money. And the little nine-year-old Malvika of Mirpur, who came to the relief centre opposite her home and hopefully enquired whether she could donate old clothes for she had no new ones! Their photographs were not published in the newspapers shaking hands with celebrities while handling over their donations. But their stories that do a nation proud and provide hope in despair.

Struggle for survival, in these days of rehabilitation, is on, in the villages and towns of this country. The picture is grim but Amartya Sen is not likely to be proved wrong in Bangladesh. No, there will be no famine here, for even in this nascent democracy, there is the required political will to prevent the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's declaration to abjure hartal in the future is a demonstration of that political will. This also is a demonstration of the fact that democratic practices in Bangladesh are attaining a maturity, however painful and slow the process maybe proving to be. Sheikh Hasina's bold and imaginative decision will help healthy democratic tradition in the country take root, enhance the image of Bangladesh abroad, and will have positive impact on our economy. There are loudly heard criticisms of the government's handling of the crisis, and why not? Criticisms and debates are the wherewithal of democracy. But not 'hartals' of the kind we have been practising both now and when the BNP were in power. In the democratic cricket game 'hartal' is like a 'no-ball' that not only does not take the opponents 'wicket' but also adds to their score. More than that, it spoils the 'pitch' that the country is 'ISSUE' or no 'ISSUE'. Sheikh Hasina will be remembered well by history not for the 'hartals' she declared while in the opposition but for her recent decision to abjure it for ever, if, of course, she sticks to it in future, come what may. One wishes she had done so while she was in the opposition. The credit for the decision would have been much more then. But Begum Zia has now the opportunity that Begum Zia missed. One fervently hopes that Begum Zia would join in and help, as she has in the past, and admirably so, in transforming the political panorama in the country by jointly working with Sheikh Hasina, not only in bringing back democracy, but also in strengthening its foundations by instituting the parliamentary form and caretaker governments.

Coming back to this year's floods, according to a survey done by BRAC, which has been closely involved in relief and rehabilitation work, 189 areas of the country, each with a population of around a lac or so have been severely affected. In places like Gaibandha, Kurigram, Sirajganj, Tangail, Jamalpur, Rajbari, Pabna, Shariatpur, Faridpur and some other areas losses sustained by the populace as well as infrastructural damages have been enormous. But then in this essentially fertile land there has been good crop elsewhere where the situation is not that grim. Floods came rather late this year and as the water receded, some crops, even in the flood-affected areas, that had escaped the wrath of the floods stood ready for harvesting. That provided work for some agricultural labourers at a critical time.

Floods did create new employment in certain sectors. For instance, with a large part of the roads and rail-road network under water, country boats, large and small, took over the supply and transportation work in the country. The normal income of surface transport owners and workers was therefore shared by boat owners and boatmen, many of whom even acquired small country boats to respond to the flood-created needs. Fishermen stood to gain in some areas with enhanced quantities of catch of fish brought in by the flood waters. These are some of the reasons why BRAC did not stop its micro-credit programme even in the 1988 worst-affected areas though the amount of loans there came down from 35 crores in June to only 15 crores during the flood-affected month of September. The loan recovery rate dropped from a healthy 98 per cent in the pre-flood period to a worrying 57 per cent during September. The latest recovery figures have not yet fully come in, but indications are there that the curve is on the way up and that it will be above 70 per cent in October.

However, as a recent World Bank study has shown, the floods will have a big negative impact on our economy. The overall budget deficit, according to the study findings, could increase from 4 per cent of GDP in 1998 to more than 5 per cent in the financial year of 1999. Trade deficit may widen and exports may stagnate. Expectations of high growth rates may be frustrated in the short term and the nation will have to bear the burden. But then we have seen it all before and the country, born in 1971, with few assets and a shattered economy has coped with a great deal more. Geographically situated as we are, we cannot ever escape natural disasters in the form of cyclones, floods and perhaps even earthquakes. But we must learn how to quickly turn our agriculture around, taking advantage of our fertile soil by assuring prompt supply of agricultural inputs, to locate our industries in flood and cyclone safe areas, and to streamline investment procedures so that there is a steady growth in investments. We may draw some comfort from the recent observation of the British Minister for International Development, Clare Short, to the BBC that Bangladesh is better prepared to face natural calamities than many other countries and that it has "coped admirably" with the recent floods. This is indeed a far cry from the hurtful Kissingerian description of Bangladesh in the seventies as a "basket case." We have to remain ever prepared for natural calamities and therefore have to refine the relief and rehabilitation techniques and procedures. To acquit even better in a future emergency, we have to further improve our capacity for disaster management. In a country that cannot wish natural disasters away, this is our only option.



Frankly Speaking...

by Faruq Choudhury

The Palestinian Diaspora

Whatever optimism the signing ceremony of Wye Accord might have generated in Washington it was not much in evidence either in Israel or territories under Palestinian Authority. The neutral observers are unanimous that the Wye deal will make little headway in its acceptance by the bulk of Palestinians who have since lost faith in Arafat.

THE UN Partition Resolution for Palestine to create the Jewish state of Israel was published on 29 November 1947. Six months later when the British withdrew from Palestine at the end of their mandate without any formal transfer of power, the resultant vacuum prompted both the Jews and the Arabs to clash violently over its possession. The British, confident of a local balance of power heavily in favour of the Zionists, ostensibly wanted to give effect to their Balfour Declaration of 1917 and left the mandated territory for the contenders to fight out the issue. With the West Bank falling to the Arab league of Jordan's King Abdullah, Gaza strip to Egyptian Army and the rest of Palestine to Israel when the Armistice Agreement was signed in the summer of 1947, Palestine as a political entity was practically liquidated. And as a result, 700,000 Palestinians were evicted from the areas that were allocated to the Jewish state by the UN or occurred during the 1948-49 fighting. During and after the exodus, every effort was made — from the razing of villages to promulgation of laws — to prevent their return. The Palestinians were rendered stateless, just when they, after their long period of subjugation under the Turkish rule and then British mandate, were about to have their taste of self rule. Dispossessed of their territory and scattered as refugees over the neighbouring Arab countries and beyond the saga of the Palestinians for next half a century has indeed been one of insuperable quest to restore their lost homeland.

With few choices, the Palestinians, in the struggle to regain their statehood, obviously threw in their lot with the fellow Arabs who fuelled by their strident Arab nationalism not only did not reconcile to Israel's existence in their midst, they also, like the Palestinians, rowed to wipe out the Jewish state from Arab heartland. However, three wars fought between the Arabs and Israel did not prove that the Arabs, in spite of their material and demographic superiority, were in any way equal to the task — at least militarily. On the part of the PLO which had been essentially the product of Nasser's Pan-Arab dreams and represented the bulk of the Palestinians was also heavily influenced by intra-Arab politics and could make few headway in its primary mission of return to their homeland. Only after the Arabs' defeat in the six-day war in 1967 the PLO moved on somewhat independently and within short span of time achieved spectacular successes both on military and political front.

After 1967 war the Palestinians were for the first time defined as a distinct nation by Yasser Arafat who articulated the Palestinian cause, organised and fought for them under the banner of Al-Fatah. Little did the Israeli authorities understand that the Palestinians politically deprived, homeless and living under miserable conditions in refugee camps were evolving a radical nationalist movement. Gradually the movement, characterised by desperation and terrorism had become a detonator for internal Arab conflict and a major cause for the escalation of Arab-Israeli tensions.

But the Palestinian initiatives came too late to yield much results vis-a-vis Israel which by then had under its occupation the entire length and breadth of historic Palestine. The overall situation obtaining in the Middle East at that time also did not favour the Palestinians. The Arab defeat in 1967 war, the infamous 'Black September' of 1970 and subsequently the Egyptian recognition of Israel in 1979 virtually dealt the PLO a mortal blow. And ever since the PLO was on retreat. Finally when driven out of its operational bases in Lebanon following the tragedies of Sabra and Shatila the PLO lost much of its bites and the Palestinian cause was lost in the maze of an intra-Arab feud. Then in the wake of Iran-Iraq war Iran replaced Israel as the principal adversary of the Arabs and the PLO cause was given the lowest priority by its Arab patrons.

At that critical juncture it was in fact the Intifada starting in late 1987 in the occupied area of the West Bank and Gaza which provided key political bargaining chip for Arafat to carry on with his struggle for Palestinian state. With the Intifada also going out of steam Arafat had little in his hand to redeem his pledges to create an independent state in the entire area which was then Israel and territories occupied by her. Meanwhile, Israel was finding the occupation rather costly both in financial and diplomatic terms. An outright annexation of the occupied area was also fraught with grave risks while she was, at the same time, overly averse to a Palestinian state. Israel was also bearing the stigma of being a 'pariah state' after the UNGA passed resolution in 1975 condemning her blatant Zionism. Under these circumstances she was already considering some arrangements for the Palestinians — may be in the form of autonomy — in the occupied area to contain the adverse criticism of the international community. In 1991 Madrid Peace Conference on the Middle East came as a great relief to Israel for giving shape to her designs in the occupied area with even lesser price than thought earlier. The spotty freedom for the Palestinians in the West Bank — being negotiated for over five years — only presaged that Israel has been able to resolve much of her problems in the occupied area almost at no price.

On Arafat's part he exhausted all his winning cards with the end of the Cold War which was decisively won by the West and its allies that included also Israel. The Arab governments lost their Soviet benefactor, Iraq, the new centre of Arab resistance was thrashed in the battle field. Under the trauma of the Gulf war most of the Arab governments came to accept Israel, as a

permanent, if not welcome, reality. The PLO lost its Arab financial backers in the Gulf region for choosing wrong side during the Gulf War. The Palestinians also were divided with the rise of several extremist groups challenging the leadership of Arafat. With the loosening grip on Palestinian movement Arafat found in Oslo Agreement his last clutch to clasp. But with it he precipitously scaled down both in his demands and expectation. With his signing of Israeli-Palestinian declaration of Principles (DoP) Arafat played his triumph card — withholding recognition to Israel's right to exist. Through mutual recognition of each other in a ceremony on the south lawn of White House in September 1993 what the Palestinians got in return was a 'civilian' control over a dreary Gaza strip and a decrepit city of Jericho in the West Bank — let alone the question of even a semblance of a statehood. This too came through Gaza-Jericho agreement a year later.

However, an interim agreement (Oslo II) signed in 1995 called for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from about 31 per cent of the West Bank in a first stage to be followed by three further withdrawals taking Israel out of most of the occupied area by the end of 1997. The negotiations for the final status of the West Bank and Gaza strip including the most difficult issues of settlements, refugees, Jerusalem and borders were scheduled to begin in May 1996. None of these Oslo stipulations have gone according to schedule making bleak the prospect of a permanent agreement which was supposed to have been achieved after the interim period on May 4th 1999. The entire process, as a matter of fact, stalled with Netanyahu's right wing government coming to power in 1996. But for the peace process to work the maintenance of time table set at Oslo II is an overwhelming imperative.

Instead, the much ballyhooed Wye River Agreement — considered as one of the milestones of Clinton presidency — only broke a 19-month old stalemate and merely set out steps to facilitate implementation of an agreement signed in 1995. The process would resume now from where it was three years before but with stringent conditions this time for the Palestinians. Some 3 per cent of the returned land is to be so-called 'nature reserve' — a smoke screen for creating a buffer zone — a Palestinian's cost. The US would assume an unprecedented and apparently a controversial role as security guarantor with CIA stepping in as a permanent factor in the area. It would in all probability play a partisan role in assuaging Israel's sense of insecurity of a state at its doorstep for the Palestinians who are yet to strike off all references to the destruction of Israel in their charter. According to Wye agreement, Israel could turn over only additional 13 per cent of land to the Palestinian Authority. Later another 14 per cent will pass over to the Palestinians bringing a total to 40 per cent of the occupied territory under their full or partial control. How, when and with what all territories of Palestinian state would — if at all — emerge remain opaque in the agreement. There is also no timetable as the agreements are based more on hopes, goodwill of the parties involved and their internal politics. Particularly, Israel has so far shoved back the deadlines several times.

Given these developments the Palestinians seem today further away from their prospect of achieving the statehood they have been dreaming of. However, an aging and ailing Arafat caught between pressures at home and limitation imposed on him by the peace-brokers is bent upon declaring a Palestinian state next May if there is no permanent agreement with Israel by then. His public pronouncement in this regard is oddly in conflict not only with the ground realities but also with the pace of progress in the peace process as well as his own army's readiness in reaching a final status agreement. Both Israel and the PLO have been going round and round the mulberry bush for last five years with regard to the minor aspects of the total problem. Can the much more difficult hurdles like those of statehood, refugees, border, settlements and Jerusalem be overcome in next six months? If not and if the threats of Arafat and Netanyahu's forceful public reaction to them come true after the expiry of interim period only conceivable outcome will be an inevitable armed clash between the two plunging the region in a conflagration of much wider scale and dashing the dream of a Palestinian statehood for indefinite period of time.

Whatever optimism the signing ceremony of Wye Accord might have generated in Washington it was not much in evidence either in Israel or territories under Palestinian Authority. The neutral observers are unanimous that the Wye deal will make little headway in its acceptance by the bulk of Palestinians who have since lost faith in Arafat. The majority of the Palestinians, particularly the younger generation, believe that neither independence nor statehood lies on the road being followed by Arafat and his corrupt colleagues. Their suspicion is not entirely without reasons. Because the way Israel is quietly creating realities on the ground ensures that a future Palestinian state, even if given, will consist of little more than some disconnected dots isolated from each other. The Palestinian anxiety is succinctly summed up by Sheik Ahmad Yasin, Hamas' spiritual leader: "Gaza is separated from the West Bank, Hebron is separated from Nablius. Practically speaking we are in a situation that does not make it possible for an active or independent Palestinian entity." And if that situation persists the Palestinians will unfortunately continue to remain in a diaspora.

To the Editor...

CHT peace agreement

Sir, After a long spell of suspense, darkness and apprehension it is now coming to light that both AL government leaders and PCJSS leaders made some unwritten agreement with each other while signing the much publicised historic CHT peace agreement. And so PCJSS leader Shantu Larma has fallen into difficulties and he has refused to accept the formation of CHT regional council.

Both the government leaders and the PCJSS leaders are not to be blamed for playing a hide and seek policy and both sides are at fault for making unwritten agreement on an issue of national interest without any knowledge and information of the people.

For the sake of accountability and transparency and also in the greater interest we would request the AL government leaders and the PCJSS leaders to publish the unwritten agreement and to make a fresh review of the agreement acceptable to all concerned.

We appreciate the policy of our government not to bow down before any threat or pressure of PCJSS leaders and to hold any further talks with him unless the PCJSS leaders accept

the formation of CHT regional council.

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DV 2000

Sir, By handling the huge rush for sending DV-2000 applications, Bangladesh Postal Department has earned a huge amount of money. According to a press report about 15 lakh people have mailed their applications. If we calculate the amount at the rate of Tk 18 as postal charge per letter, then the amount earned by the postal department stands at Tk 2,70,00,000.

Well, my intention behind making the above calculation is to point out that our postal department has earned quite a lot of money. But unfortunately the postal service including condition of post-offices, delivery system and the plight of the postal employees are not improving in the same way.

So, I would sincerely request the government to utilise the earnings of the postal department for improving the overall postal service and system in the country.

M Zahidul Haque
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Explain, please...

Sir, I see that the Minister Md. Nasim made headlines (DS 13/11), by asking Khaleida Zia to vacate her Cantonment residence. I'll leave the details of her occupation for the government to sort out, but I'd definitely like to see Minister Nasim make good on his statement, and I quote, "It is our responsibility, as an elected government, to recover property from illegal occupation".

How about taking on the 'low profile' cases. We all know that the illegally encroachments in Gulshan and Dhanmadi, the illegal structures coming up on public roads, the unauthorised party offices on public land, need I say more? Why are there no strong commitments to recover public property, restore Dhaka's Master Plan, and put the responsible people behind bars? Maybe because these have all gone to various party cronies and businessmen with party ties, all with RAJUK's collusion?

Let's drop the hypocrisy, solve these problems, and then go for others.

Sadat Omar
Dhaka