# The Baily Star Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

Dhaka, Sunday, April 11, 1999

## Our Bag of Faults

Government's mind on the donor community's overture for an early resolution of political conflicts raging in the country can be read from what commerce and industries minister Tofail Ahmed told The Daily Star on Thursday. The gist of his remarks front-paged by this paper in an exclusive political story on the following day is presented in quotes: (a) "We have advised them not to talk politics any more;" and (b) "We don't like to see the donors interfere in local politics". In a manner of speaking, he has minced no words to tell them off in reaction to what he must have perceived as a critical threshold being crossed here.

In principle, no sovereign and independent country worth the salt likes to be told about what she ought to do in resolving her own political crisis. If it should come to that, then the sensibilities of a nation would be badly hurt. But a line has to be drawn between an expression of concern over a situation and an act of interference in the internal affairs of a country. If in-between there have been meetings sought and had by the development partners with the opposition leader and the PM before they contemplated seeing the President of the country as indeed they did then all we can say is this: It is time for self-analysis rather than being dismissively critical of others. For, it is both the AL and BNP who through their own failings to abide by the fundamental ethics, practices and norms of democratic behaviour have set up the tradition of looking to others for bailing us out. Attributes of sovereignty, no doubt, are precious possessions worthy of preservation by a staving off affronts to them; but pray let us know who was instrumental in bringing the then Commonwealth Secretary General Ninian to the country for a facilitatory role to get a dialogue going on the political tangle around the mid-nineties? Now the same Awami League in a self-serving about-face is priding itself on the name of sovereignty which certainly would have carried conviction had they maintained a singe standard throughout.

If the ruling party and the opposition had behaved responsibly by playing their respective roles through a steadfast adherence to institutional laws and rules there would be need for others to be exhortative with us. Why do not we admit our own mistakes, and what is more important, our utterly incorrigible sense of self righteousness?

We are sorry and ashamed that the donors had to do it; but we do believe their move was not meant to denigrate our country, rather it was out of a genuine concern for Bangladesh's development and welfare. We think, given their intent and purpose, it was not all that negative an initiative. After all, they ought to be credited with the minimum knowledge of what constitutes interference. We wish the government's reaction were more mature.

### Auspicious Trial Run

Trial run of the trans-border bus service between Dhaka and Calcutta has gone smoothly and so have the talks between two sides on the nitty-gritty of the proposed commercial operations. The fourhour meeting in the capital Thursday ended on a positive note, both sides reaching agreement on the minute details, including the much-debated bus fare. The draft deal awaits ratification from the respective governments to come into effect. Commercial operations are likely to begin some time in the first week of May. The bus service between the two cities certainly represents a giant stride towards strengthening friendly relations between the two neighbouring countries. With a similar service in operation between New Delhi and Lahore, the Calcutta-Dhaka bus-link inspires vision of a closelyknit sub-continent, at least in terms of communications. Besides, an increased people-to-people contact, facilitated by the trans-border services, looks poised to engender better understanding among the neighbouring countries, and thus, usher in an era of regional harmony and congeniality.

The process was indeed long-drawn, with both sides sweating over certain niggling details despite their basic agreement early in the day over launching the bus service. However, what matters, at this point of time, is the fact the deck has been cleared for the auspicious launch. The bus fare seems reasonable, and so do other travel details like baggage limit, designated stop-overs, etc. More importantly, assurances of smooth and less time consuming customs and immigration procedures from West Bengal's Commissioner of Customs Dev Kumar Dutta are really heartening. Undue delay at the point of entry on both sides of the border would defeat the purpose of the direct bus service. Private transporters may have to wait until the threemonth trial-run ends and operators from both sides meet for a review. On the whole, it has been an auspicious start, indeed.

### Security for Girls

Two news items in a Bangla daily on Saturday certainly sent dreadful signals. A contingent from the Motijheel police station rescued a 15-year-old girl, hailing from Kushtia district, from forced prostitution. One Kamrul and his alleged associate Fazila were arrested from their Fakirerpul residence in this connection. Reportedly, they promised this adolescent a job at a Dhaka garment factory. The Manobadhikar Bastobayon Sangstha notified the police after the getting tip-off from a phone call.

In the second story, a crowd in Narayanganj handed Babul and his crony, to the local police after battering them on suspicion that Babul had taken his fiancé to Narayanganj to sell her off at the Tanbazar brothel.

These, however, are not fleeting incidents. Allegations of racketeering in sex trade have been commonplace. The villains exploit the destituteness of poor women and girls to lure them away from home. These masterminded crimes, are going on unabated without any significant resistance by the law enforcers. Why does it always have to be "human rights agencies" to keep the vigil? While asking the police personnel to rise to the occasion and cater to the security needs of the hapless girls, we equally demur at the fact that law is being fremently taken into one's own hands. Physical assault on mere suspicion is a criminal offence. This paper discourages this phenomenon.

# The Shifting Sands of Iran's Revolutionary Politics

Khomeini's dream of 'exporting the revolution' has today given way to a 'dialogue of civilisations' without the revolution suffering the loss of any of its basic tenets. The detractors of Iranian revolution may find consolation in the current debate over Iran's liberalisation but the Iranians are matured enough to draw the perimeter within which to limit such liberty.

its first radical Islamic republic and provided a new inspiration to political Islam all over the world. It brought her enemies on all front, and few friends. But the most significant of the enemies it created was the United States whom the revolution's spiritual leader. Ayatollah Khomeini called 'the great Satan'. The revolutionary Iran's alienation of the West was thorough and comprehensive when she rejected the West ern civilization and its influence as inimical to social development in Islamic policy and slammed its door to the West as a matter of official pol icy. The West - more specifically the United States - responded by clamping an economic sanction that lasts till

HEN an Islamic

Revolution in 1979

▼ V catapulted Iran's clergy

to power, the predictions about

its future were grim indeed. According to the prognoses — then

made — the country would inex-

tricably plunge into medieval

darkness and an anarchy of

unprecedented dimension. But

before that, in ensuing power

struggle, it would be crushed by

a counter revolution. The

Shah's regime which was over-

thrown by the revolution had

been a lynchpin of the West in

the region and would, in all

probability, be restored through

West's machinations. Few

thought that it would match the

intricacies of twentieth century

True to the speculations, the

statecraft and survive the tur-

radical regime run by the cler-

ics did encounter a series of

cataclysms of bewildering vari-

ety. From the outset, the West

was not reconciled to the emer-

gence of an Iran which would

be the arbiter of its own destiny

and from the Day One it con-

trived to destabilise the post

revolutionary regime in

Tehran. The clerics soon came

into open confrontation with

Washington over the American

'hostage' crisis. At home, a

counter revolutionary move-

ment by Mujahideen-i-Khalq

led to political chaos and assas-

sination of senior clerics. The

leftist urban guerrillas of the

Khalq played havoc with the

new regime. With surprising

agility the Iran's Islamic regime

overcame these odds and estab-

lished its bonafides both in

domestic politics and external

one of the most significant

events of the century — had been

unique in many ways. The

World had lived with many

deeply conservative Islamic

states in the past. It has also

seen many nationalist and

avowedly secular nations in

the Islamic world. But the revo-

lutionary Iran gave the world

THE Pakistan government

L the coming crucible: man-

aging sectarian tensions in the

month of Moharram and pre-

venting them from exploding

is bracing itself against

The Iranian revolution —

relations.

bulence of West Asian politics.

The worse response was to come from the fellow Muslim countries of West Asia. Frightened by Iran's fervour to export revolution the existing political order - whether secular or conservative Islamic - in West Asia, started to perceive a new threat in revolutionary Iran. The historic differences between the monarchies and republics on the Arab side of the Persian Gulf were papered over to face the new perceived danger from the Islamic revolution in Iran. Saddam Hussain, the sly dictator of Iraq, stepped in to protect the conservative kingdoms of the Arabian Peninsula. of course in return for both monetary and political gains and, at the same time, cut Iran - his principal contender in the gull — to size. Before the Iranian revolution could con-

solidate itself at home. Baghdad launched a treacherous war against Tehran in 1990. The western nations in their blind abhorrence of Iran's Islamic revolution now found great virtues in the socialist dictatorship of Iraq which they had stunned for long. In a queer convergence of interests, both the Arab countries of the Gulf and the West closed their rank to fight a common enemy — the revolutionary Iran. Saddam Hussain was hailed by the West as the republican gendarme against Islamic hordes' from

means a mean achievement even in historical reckoning. After two decades of its obstinate adherence to a militant Islamic ideology and tight control over the polity, the clerical regime in Tehran now is visibly moving closer to people's democracy alongside Islamic rule that it proclaimed on the eve of the revolution. Iran is already one of the few West Asian countries that allows its citizens to exercise their francise freely, Muhammad Khatami, the reformist president of the Islamic republic has been attempting at the further liberali-



war launched by Iraq who how- sation of the polity and openever could not defeat Iran in almost nine years but was able to inflict heavy damage nearly one million casualty and sap the national strength of the revolutionary state. During the war Iran found herself virtually isolated and was eco-

nomically shattered. Belying all earlier predictions and speculations and having survived a short civil war. an eight year war with Iraq and America's economic sanctions. the turbaned clerics who still rule Iran celebrated early last month the 20th anniversary of their slowly maturing revolution with festivity. This is by no ing up of Iranian society. Although Iran does not as yet encourage a political party with secular agenda, but the scholars are now arguing that Islamic laws do not prohibit genuine pluralism. The press is relatively free under the new government of Khatami. Most of the newspaper that have proliferated in the last two years are also on the side of the reform-

The gradual transformation of revolutionary Iran towards maturity is however most conspicuous on her foreign policy front. The stridency of her revolutionary policy has apparently

mellowed down while an all encompassing harshness of the past years narrowed down now only to a deep animosity towards Israel and half hearted hostility toward America. Iran has also softened on the only remaining issue of dispute with the West; its death sentence on the British author Salman Rushdie. President Khatami has officially signalled that the fatwa on Rushdie's life is nonactionable. His much talked about call for a 'dialogue of civilisations' which was made with reference to relations with the US seems to have struck a chord with the Americans eager to restore relations with their former ally. Washington is known to have responded by opening high-level communication with the government in

However, Iran's most remarkable foreign policy gains are in the region. Her ties with Saudi Arabia and most of the Gulf countries have dramatically improved. Iran is no longer isolated either in the region or in the world. The high profile Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) summit was held in Tehran last year. Both Russia and China are known to be the weapon supplier to Iran. Once the socialist countries also were contemptuously labelled as the 'little Satan' by Imam Khomeini. Now there is pragmatism in the policy of Iran who, driven by the dynamics of real politik, strikes a delicate balance in her power relations. However the Iranian government's supports for the Hizbullah in Lebanon and

Tehran.

Hamas in Palestine remain steadfast. Also steady is her opposition to West Asia Peace agreement.

At its 20th anniversary the

Iranian revolution is however

at a crossroads. A defining

moment has arrived for the revolution which has now to decide whether it should continue to move - at home and abroad - on the ideological promises as envisaged by its charismatic leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini? Or Should those premises be reworked or redefined in the light of the experience garnered during the last two decades? The clerical regime in Tehran is visibly divided into rival camps - one stubbornly stuck to the hardline of the conservatives under the umbrella of the office of the Velayat-e-Faqih (Supreme guide) and another steering its course of reforms through the choppy waters of Iranian politics under president Khatami. But happily for the revolution. both the camps are equally loyal to the fundamental principles of the Islamic republic and each claims to be the rightful heir to Ayatollah Khomeini's legacy. It is just that each offers its own interpretation of this heritage. While the conservatives are releasing the grounds held by them, Khatami's reformers tend to tread cautiously without provoking major confrontation with hardliners. And quite some distance has already been traversed under Khatami's presidency without a real showdown. After all, Khomeini's dream of 'exporting the revolution' has today given way to a 'dialogue of civilisations' without the revolution suffering the loss of any of its basic tenets. The detractors of Iranian revolution may find consolation in the current debate over Iran's liberalisation but the Iranians are matured enough to draw the perimeter within which to limit such liberty.

# A Profile of Sectarianism

Syed Talat Hussain writes from Islamabad

Mr Sharif's vilification speeches against those who disagreed with the Shariah Bill are a case in point. These have thickened the air of religious intolerance which disallows dissent and does not permit co-existence of different and differing religious beliefs. Sectarianism thrives in this situation.

into bloody sectarian killings. Prime minister Nawaz Sharif and his brother Shehbaz Sharif have met with the leaders of the Shia and Sunni orevent reaction, is thinking in ganisations (Tehrike-e- Jafria time. It shows that the government is adding more meat to and Sipah-e-Sihaba) and are using the services of Dr Israr the exceptional measures taken Ahmad and other Ulema as every year in Moharram and is neutral mediators. A committee using both mediation and law of Ulema too has been estabenforcement and administralished which is tasked to give tive measures as means to recommendations both for defuse the sectarian tension tightening laws concerning terbomb which has already begun rorism and sectarianism and to tick. But the sectarian issue: for bringing the warring sectarwhose ramifications become particularly painful in Moharian organisations together. Together all of this is the govram, when the whole country ernment's response to the ansits under a pall of fear of secticipated trouble in Moharram. tarian clashes and killings, is a The intention obviously is bit too complicated to be settled build strong dykes against the by what the government is doprospective flood of sectarian ing. Without being prematurely pessimistic, it can be said that clashes which, come Moharram, come as sure as night. many of the measures which This is good as this is sign the government has already that the government, breaking taken and is in the process of its set policy pattern of posttaking, will take a lot of good

luck to bear the desired result The idea of forming a committee of Ulema is a tried one and in the past too this has been used to bring the Shia and the Sunni organisations to an agreement to stop their tit-fortat, hit and run killings and to give peace a chance. Also this is not the first time that the leaders of both organisations have said yes to the request and have made the right noises. However, when the time comes for these words to hold good, these do not, and always agreements on good sectarian behaviour among these organisations break down under the first test

Similarly tightening laws on sectarianism and terrorism too is no guarantee that this will deter sectarian killers from

going on the rampage.

This government has a special fascination for harsh punishments and every time the prime minister speaks to public as part of his mercy trips to places where some crime or the other has taken, he wants to "uproot crime", "see the criminals hung from the highest poll", and other such hard stuff. But the idea is a proven failure in Pakistan. By increasing the severity of punishment no government has been able to break the back of criminals, who, over the years, have become so hardened and thick-skinned that they look death in the eye

and grin unrepentantly. Those who kill for sectarian reasons are particularly immune to the threats of capital punishments because to them killing is not a crime; it is their jehad (holy war) in the name of Allah. According to their belief if they die in the path of Allah, that is not a punishment but a reward. On such souls the threats of harsh punishments does not have any impact. Then an aggravating factor, which is neither covered by

forming the Ulema committee nor by strengthening laws dealing with sectarian terrorism, is that of weapons in the hands of sectarian militants. One or two criminals can play havoc with all efforts to establish sectarian peace and unleash a chainreaction which is beyond the control of the government or any committee. And this has been the usual story behind incidents of sectarian killings in Moharram. In some remote corner of a tense neighbourhood of a city still asleep, carriding executioners attack mosques shedding innocent unsuspecting blood and make good their escape.

That sets off an avalanche of reaction as the other side takes its revenge restaring the vicious cycle which has been the bane of sectarian peace in Pakistan. More worrying is the psychological environment in which sectarian crime takes place which again Ulema committees and stronger laws cannot change. It is a frightful example of contrasting attitudes that while sectarian criminals are brazen and andacious, have

organised and armed themselves in the line of an efficient war- waging machine, the society, which is at the receiving end of sectarian tensions, is meek and passive, does not have the motivation nor has thought of the means to stand up and resist the misdeeds of a handful of people. This makes sectarian crime easier to commit because it takes place in a social environment which is least resisting and passively resigned to the fact of this crime. Then there is the domestic political context in which these sectarian organisations operate.

This government like previous governments has politicised religion. This has emboldened the religious zealots to take on each other more ruthlessly than ever before. They can justify their misguided religious crusades against those who do not subscribe to their religious point of view with reference to the need to create a pure Islamic society. Mr Sharif's vilification speeches against those who disagreed with the Shariah Bill are a case in point. These have thickened the air of religious intolerance which disallows dissent and does not permit coexistence of different and differing religious beliefs. Sectarianism thrives in this situation. Moharram is just an excuse for it to explode with full

#### PM's visit to DU campus

Sir, The recent visits of the Prime Minister to the Dhaka University on March 7 and March 16 to unveil a sculpture entitled "Swadhinatar Sangram" and to institute the "Bangabandhu Chair" in the History Department of Dhaka University respectively led to suspension of all classes by a university notification from 10 till 12 noon on these days. Such visits to the campus by the head of the government for not so significant events of national history create huge security problems, and that is perhaps the reason as to why the university authorities had to suspend all classes at these stipulated

Since the PM's visit also lead to protests by the opposition student activists, the general student populace, apprehending trouble and breakdown of law and order abstain from coming to the university to attend classes. In other words, the PM's visit to the campus leads to stoppage of all academic activities of the university as well as partial disruption of administrative activities of the insti-

Now, what is the cost of such high profile visits? At least ten students, including six female students, were injured on March 7, 1999. On March 16, newspaper reports say that at least six buses of the university were allegedly damaged at various points in the city, and at least four persons, including a female student, were injured. The violence of 16th took place to enforce a strike called by the opposition JCD against the PM's visit which earlier led to physical injuries. Besides violence and unrest, the PM's visit leads to enforced work stoppages, leading to further session jams which is already sagging the morale of the students.

From another angle, her visits are also perhaps not in the happiest of moments. The DUCSU and hall union elections are reported to be in the wings. In a constituency where students are politically so conscious of their rights, interpretations put to her visits can be quite misleading and unpalatable. It may even lead to further conflagration of the already tense DU political arena.

Dr A Z Mia, Dhaka

In favour of Kosovars

Sir, "The people of Kosovo have been subjected to the Serbian killings and brutalities. The Serbians are committing the worst crimes against the human rights. The atrocities they are perpetrating are a manifest disrespect to the whole humanity. Earlier, they had done the same things to the Bosnian people. Now they have targeted the Kosovars.

The Serbians are killing the Kosovars indiscriminately and driving them away from their own land. In such a critical juncture, our demands to the NATO and the international community are simple and clear:

. Recognize the independence and self-determination of the Kosovars.

2. The international community should send ground troops and arm the Kosovars to defend themselves:

3. The NATO forces should sustain air strikes until the Serbs forces are totally withdrawn. 4. Arrest and try Milosevic and all other war crimi-

Mahmudul Hasan

#### Creating new crisis in Iraq

Sir, The US continues to find ways to create new crisis and deaths in Iraq. On 24th February 1999, it again started a new phase of air attacks on the socalled 'no-fly zones' there. The US war planes bombed both military and civilian targets. The main victims of this almost everyday action are the common people of Iraq, whereas the 'no-fly zones' are quite illegal according to the norms of international law.

Besides, the US practises double standard policies. According to Washington, the Kurds who are fighting for their national rights in Turkey are treated as terrorists. On the other hand the US encourages the Kurds of Iraq to fight against the legitimate government of Baghdad. How long the US will continue to act like this?

Saidur Rahman. 32, Awlad Hossain Market, Tejgaon, Dhaka

#### Violence creeping up the ladder!

Sir, Violence and killing internally within the political parties has started in the present state of our society which believes in lawlessness and violence during the planning stage at the command headquarters. Leading in this nefarious game of life and death is the abetment by the political leaders, with side effects contaminating the other sectors. From the fringe area, forcing an inside issue using violence is creeping up the hierarchical ladder; which means that the top leaders will

not be safe soon enough. That is, the godfathers themselves will be the future victims, once their orders are questioned or not obeyed. That is the law of nature, as violence carries the virus for self-destruction; because those in the right path are always in a mi-

nority. It is a fallacious presumption that the two major political parties can control each other or one can topple the other. Look at the secret enemies within. Perhaps it is too late. The forbidden fruit has been tasted, and expulsion from the garden of Eden is due. The developments reported in the press already point to one specific direction: the disintegration has already started.

We are in for some bloody situations, like it or not.

Abul M Ahmad Dhaka

#### Commentary is not anybody's job

Sir, I have been watching the Meril Tri-nation cricket tournament on BTV and listening to the commentary o Bangladeshi commentators. Our performance was as much bad, off the field (that is in the commentary box), as it was in the field. Our experienced and all-rounder commentators who are blessed with the rare gift of doing commentary in football. cricket, hockey, and who knows what else are testing the viewers' patience by putting their best efforts. They struggle in choosing words, and in their over-zealous endeavour to make their sentences bombastic they invariably produce an artificial tone much to irritation of the viewers.

Shamim Ahsan 64/M, R K Mission Road Gopibagh, Dhaka-1203

# OPINION

# Unemployment — Root of All Evils

Fahim Ahmed vited to apply for a job either in

the public or the private sector

Even when those with two first

divisions/classes and no third

division are asked to apply for a

job in a bank or corporation,

around a lakh seem to apply

Candidates for the annual BCS

exams also number around a

lakh and everybody knows how

many are taken in. Let me give

an example of the last (18th)

BCS exam, for which about a

It is really difficult to believe that our society as a whole has given serious thought to what at the moment is causing awful decadence in the youth of Bangladesh. Leaving aside the girls and women who have taken the wrong and fatal route to self-destruction for survival (and this is not a social problem to be looked at lightly. In fact, it is yet more serious from all aspects of social life, national health and future of the society), hundreds of thousands of our young boys have either voluntarily joined or have been compelled to join different political parties just to earn a living or ensure survival. Many of them take the party shelter to protect themselves from legal and social action against them while earning enormous amounts through toll collection, hijacking and extortion No party has disowned even the most corrupt ones only to protect their own image thus supporting all these crimes virtually directly. The gangsters and extortionists have thus found it profitable to belong to a powerful party. What a travesty!

Although there is no denying the fact that political patronage has encouraged crime, there is no doubt that the incidence of crimes and political shelter against punishment, at least a large part of it, would not have been there had there been enough work for our young men and women. I am sure there has not been nay serious estimate of the magnitude of unemployment in Bangladesh during the recent years except for the crude estimate of around 20 per cent as reported in the Economic Survey published by the Ministry of Finance. As anybody can guess there are thousands, in fact, lakhs of young men and women with graduate and postgraduate qualifications remaining unemployed in the country. Unemployment of the educated with SSC and HSC kind of qualifications or less is still frightfully larger. This comes to the fore when gradu-

ates or post-graduates are in-

lakh candidates originally applied and only 1753 were finally taken in of this again only 353 were appointed from among general graduates of around 90,000! What a rare chance or luck or I don't know what it should be called! Think about the thousands that are passing out from different colleges and universities every year only to add to the existing rate of unemployment. We know the government cannot absorb all the unemployed people but there is little opening in the private sector also as the economy itself is not growing as expected. The industrial sector. public sector enterprises as well as private sector organisations are not absorbing even one per

cent of the unemployed edu-

cated people, let alone the uned-

ucated ones. God knows whose

business it is to find employment for them! There is at least one causative factor that is seriously true about the present law and order situation, in the country — widespread unemployment among young people many of whom would not have bothered for party affiliation, toll collection and hijacking had these - been any work for them. In fact, when there is nothing to do and yet survival demands income a good many young men and women have chosen the hopeless and wrong way - frustrating for them-

selves as well as the society. Since our agricultural sector is still by and large primitive and the industrial employment is not expanding-rather shrinking, it is time the author-

ities gave a serious thought to the problem. Poverty alleviation through doles or VGF and pretty charities is no solution. We have to go for big industries providing huge scope of employment. As such, in a populous country like ours 1) labourintensive and not labour-saving projects are needed; 2) The number of small and cottage industries has to be significantly increased. For this purpose bank loans under strict supervision have to be made available to all those who want to do any acceptable kind of project; 3) All foreign and local companies have to be compelled to recruit local people for which they may be given tax and other incentives: 4) The most important task before the government, however, is to off-load the burden of loss incurring enterprises which cost the exchequer about three thousand crores of taka a year. All the money saved thereby has to be spent on building new projects which use local raw materials and are supposedly dependent on local labour.

Finally, the government as well as all others concerned have to give utmost emphasis on reduction of unemployment which is supposed to result quickly in reduction of terrorism. looting and toll collection, thus steadily improving the law and order situation. Unless this is done, just policing the criminals will only suppress the crime for a short while but will not really root it out or deter substantially. In view of the current law and order situation, this may be considered as a strategy sure to succeed. In fact given good jobs, thousands of our young people will flee the so-called cadres and will start life anew. If we really care about them and for that matter the nation's overall welfare, we have to think about it. No economic growth strategy can yield any fruit without improvement in the law and order situation that we must ensure. So let's think about it over and over again.