

Rehabilitation is the Key

HERE is a welcome departure from heavy-handed raids and scythian operations to wrench terrorists out of their hide-outs. The soft-touch persuasion method worked wonderfully well with 210 outlaws who in a public show of avowal committed themselves to turning over a new leaf in their lives. They surrendered their weapons to the Home Minister in Jessore responding to the government's offer of general amnesty that coupled with assurances for their early rehabilitation. A fresh beginning has been made in bringing armed cadres of outlawed parties, who have been striking terror in southwestern districts, to normal life.

Our thanks to the Home Ministry and its agencies like the NSI, the police intelligence network and the local administrative units which got their act together to make all of this happen under the leadership of Home Minister Mohd Nasim. Hopefully, in time, this trickle of surrender will broaden into a process whereby all kinds of hardened criminals and terrorists will have surfaced from their underworld to embrace normal lives in the mainstream of the society.

For the present though, we would like to adopt a clinical approach and utter a few words of caution. In the first place, all this is nothing new, there are precedents of surrenders of weapons by extremist operatives and amnesties granted to them but these largely foundered on the rock of rehabilitation. It is assumed that those who lunged forward to lay down their weapons are the softer species of terrorists. The hard-core ones may be waiting on the sideline to observe how everything goes with the first batch of surrenders before they make up their mind — one way or the other. So, rehabilitation is key to the reform initiative. And it will be self-defeating if we rest on the laurels of surrender and amnesty. Actually, these terms would be meaningless, even counter-productive, if we should fail to hold them to normal lives by providing them the right kinds of support and incentives. We need to sustain these also till such time as they have fully integrated themselves into the society. So our real task is ahead.

Our key suggestion, therefore, will be that the Home Ministry open a special office to focus on their rehabilitation needs and meet them wholly and squarely, within a realistic time-frame.

Poverty Alleviation by Attitudes

PROFESSOR Mohammad Yunus' eight-point formula for poverty alleviation stands out because it does not call for additional finances; rather it puts accent on governance agenda alteration and enhanced law enforcement. In the process, he has touched upon professional honesty and sincerity of an individual to stringent punishment for violators of law, matters that certainly deserve serious consideration. His emphasis on similar facilities to all, regardless of social status, may appear utopian to some; but to us this appeals as an accent

on average oriented dispensation in terms of utility services.

Development certainly entails responsible inter-personal, professional and social behaviour apart from, of course, investments. Unfortunately, in our country, behavioural inadequacies at the individual and group levels more often than not hamstringing our collective development efforts. While law enforcement remains a prime factor to rid the system of violations, imperative are sensitisation efforts aimed at improving, and at times generating, sense of responsibility in the individual. On both counts we are lacking, and the Grameen Bank chief's arguments lend a sharp focus around that fact.

Refreshing bit of news to come out of Tuesday's seminar was that the rate of people living below the poverty line, the hard-core poor, in NGO jargon, had declined by one per cent in the last four years. Globally, the number has actually risen from 300 million in 1993 to 340 million in 1997. The trend is certainly optimistic. The crunch is, however, sustenance, and in this regard inadequacy in governance and law enforcement must be dealt with. Misuse of wealth is rampant, so is violation of rules and regulations. Law-enforcement system needs to be shored up, not only to punish the perpetrators but also to imbibe respect for law and order in the commoners. To that effect, Professor Yunus' suggestions are certainly worthy of implementation.

Police Station at ZIA

MINISTER for Civil Aviation and Tourism Mosharraf Hossain told the Jatiya Sangsad on Monday that the government was contemplating to set up a police station at Zia International Airport to improve 'security for incoming and outgoing passengers'. The situation at the ZIA has come in for severe criticism from the press and the public alike from time to time. The predicament of the passengers has been under sharp focus along with the breach of security inside this important installation. A couple of stowaways losing their lives caused serious concern about routine security arrangements.

Passenger harassment at the outer concourse of the international terminal building is a daily feature. Rackets operate under the nose of law enforcing agencies. The whole area and the crowding into it give the look of a railway junction instead of an airport. In the absence of a full-fledged police station at the airport, which should have been there when it was opened to international flights, the mastaans and culprits have had a field-day. A police station can help curb passenger pestering and harassment by hangers-on if it means business in that small zone of activity.

There are a number of agencies responsible for security, immigration, aviation operations etc., at the airport; but there is hardly any authority that can protect the interest of the passengers. A well-equipped and well-managed police station may provide the answer to the chaos at the international airport.

IT was simmering. Congress leaders were busy talking about it in twos and threes. Workers returning from the field were reporting that the issue of *swadeshi* and *videshi* Prime Minister was being discussed openly, even in the village *chaupal*. This should not have come as a surprise. Sonia Gandhi's prime ministership was bound to be a point of controversy once it was known that she was a candidate.

In fact, the discussion in the Congress Working Committee (CWC) was rather late in the day. It looks as if when RK Dhawan, a Sonia Gandhi loyalist, mentioned her candidature at the CWC meeting it was more to silence conscientious objectors than to take notice of the whispering. He is reported to have said that some irresponsible voices, even within the Congress, were trying to reopen the question of prime ministership, which was settled when Sonia Gandhi was elected the Congress president.

The three persons to challenge him were: Sharad Pawar, PA Sangma and Tariq Anwar. All the three requested Sonia Gandhi not to be a candidate for the prime ministership. They found that the doubts about her foreign origin were real and could not be wished away. Rajesh Pilot took a middle line. He was in favour of keeping the question open till after the polls. But he too expressed his fears over the prospect of India's prime ministership going to a person of foreign origin.

All other members of the CWC, 16 of them, sang praises of Sonia Gandhi. They vied with one another in paying her compliments in the most servile manner. They said the

nation had already accepted her as its Prime Minister. Some even went on to accuse the objectors, without naming them, of supporting the BJP line of questioning her suitability.

Madhavsinh Solanki of the Bofors guns fame said he awaited the day when she would be sworn in Prime Minister. For him, the whole matter boiled down to dual citizenship, which India should have granted to foreign-origin residents long ago. It was Arjun Singh, more loyal than the king, who talked in terms of disciplinary action against those who objected to Sonia Gandhi's prime ministership. In fact, it was she who proposed further discussion at yet another CWC meeting. She was, however, shaken after hearing the intensity with which Pawar and Sangma put forward their points of view. It was no surprise that she wrote a letter of resignation soon after the meeting.

Pilot refused to join the three in signing the letter they sent to Sonia Gandhi. He wanted to stay as a bridge between the two sides. The letter sent by the three was cogently worded and convincingly argued. It was devastating. The operative part, a great blow to whatever her plans said: "The Congress manifesto should suggest an amendment to the Constitution of India to the effect that the offices of the President, Vice-President and Prime Minister can only be held by natural-born Indian citizens."

The Sonia Factor

The nation would recognise one day Sonia Gandhi's gesture if she were to say that she was not a candidate and that she would remain the Congress president and not become the Prime Minister. Probably, she would have done it by now if the self-seekers and sycophants surrounding her had allowed her to have it her way.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi



The letter brought in the open what Congressmen have been talking behind closed doors. The letter rightly interpreted the general feeling thus: It is an issue which affects not just the security, economic interest and international image of India, but also the core pride of every Indian. They should have been listened to, not ridiculed as is being done in the atmosphere of sycophancy that prevails in the Congress. This is not a question of Congress solidarity. It is the question of not fining anyone other than Sonia Gandhi suitable in the nation of 950 million people.

Indeed, Sonia Gandhi has done a wonderful job in rebuilding the party and giving it the confidence of winning at the polls. She has infused life in a dead party and put the Congress back on the map. Her contribution is substantial and even the critics are surprised how quickly she has sprung together the seniors and the youth, even though the halo of Nehru dynasty has helped her.

But the odium of foreigner she carries is an emotive issue, as Sangma put the CWC meeting. This may well be the BJP's trump card. In fact, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has already talked about an

amendment to the constitution to block the entry of the foreign-born to the offices of President and Prime Minister. Undaunted, Pawar has said that they would be campaigning on this point in the next election. He and his two colleagues have even said in their letter that they are Indians first and Congressmen next. This is not a jingoistic expression, it touches a respondent chord in the country.

It would be interesting to know why, how and at what point of time Sonia Gandhi en-

tained the idea of occupying the topmost position, first in the party and then in the government. It appears to have happened when she found that the party was so demoralised and divided that she had only to walk in to it to establish her supremacy. Recall how Sitaram Kesri was removed from the office of the Congress president. None should she tears of him. But the way adopted to pull him down betrayed the unnecessary hurry. Manmohan Singh was then asked to gather the CWC members to discuss economic matters. And there she was installed, while Kesri was sitting in the office with the name plate of Congress president hanging outside.

Again it was strange how she became the chairperson of the Congress Parliamentary Party after the last polls. The party constitution had to be changed to accommodate her. She appointed the opposition leaders in both houses, balancing the popular Maharashtra leader Pawar with the bureaucratic-turned-politician Manmohan Singh. This was the time when a couple of Congress leaders began to see through the moves. They tried to initiate in the CWC a discussion on the role and contribution of Indians and Indians of foreign origin. None dared to pursue the matter lest Sonia Gandhi should be annoyed. It was dismissed as irrelevant.

Things became clear when she went to meet the President all by herself to put the Congress claim to form the gov-

ernment after the fall of the BJP-led coalition. She was the candidate. Arjun Singh was selling her as Prime Minister. The canvassing with the non-BJP parties left no one in doubt about it. There is yet another aspect to which a former intelligence chief has drawn the nation's attention through an article in a Calcutta-based English daily. He has said that Sonia Gandhi as Prime Minister can create security problems since her close relations, mother and sisters, are still living in Italy.

He has quoted an example of Rajiv Gandhi's days: "Many intelligence officers, including this writer, felt uncomfortable over his uncritical admiration for the Italian security set-up and over his keenness that the India security set-up should learn and benefit from the expertise and experience of the Italian set-up. It was difficult to convince him that the Indian security set-up had nothing much to learn from its Italian counterpart. One had an uneasy feeling that he was letting his love affair for his Italian-born wife affect his judgement."

Sonia Gandhi feels hurt. Her letter of resignation shows that. But she should realise that her candidature will divide the nation. The nation would recognise one day her gesture if she were to say that she was not a candidate and that she would remain the Congress president and not become the Prime Minister. Probably, she would have done it by now if the self-seekers and sycophants surrounding her had allowed her to have her way. She must assert herself. For, on her decision depends where the Congress will be after the next election.

Is there Any Hope for Pakistan's Peace Initiative in Kashmir?

by Harun ur Rashid

I argued that Kashmir dispute will remain unresolved because the leaders of both countries are imprisoned by their past mistrust, prejudices and declared positions. The issue has become so entrenched for more than 50 years that no party in power either in Pakistan or India could shake off the past baggage. That remains the bottom line in the unresolved dispute.

hands as it sought to internationalise the Kashmir dispute. The Indian Prime Minister was reported to have said to Mr. Kofi Annan that if he wanted to send an envoy, he should send him to Pakistan. The UN's efforts did not go anywhere in the matter after it was rebuffed by India.

No Muslim country is known to have come forward to condemn India for its military strikes on the alleged intruders in the Indian-administered Kashmir. The Organisation of Islamic Conference or its Secretariat appear to have no role in Kashmir. The Commonwealth Secretary General Chief Emeke Anyaoku (Nigerian) remained silent. Generally speaking he is known to intervene to bring peace in a tense situation involving two of its members. That is not to be the case in respect of Kashmir.

In one of my earlier articles (DS/1st June 1999) I pointed out that India is too large a country to be influenced by the action of any other country to settle this dispute. No country appears to be capable to exert leverage with India to resolve this dispute. I argued that Kashmir dispute will remain unresolved because the leaders of both countries are imprisoned by their past mistrust, prejudices and declared positions. The issue has become so entrenched for more than 50 years that no party in power either in Pakistan or India could shake off the past baggage. That remains the bottom line in the unresolved scenario.

In the light of this scenario, there is a view that Pakistan perceived its futility in the present limited armed conflict. Pakistan or its people are not in a mood to wage a war with India on Kashmir, partly its economy is not robust and partly because it knows that it will be in a no-win situation in a war with In-

dia. Pakistan further realises that it cannot use the nuclear option. The possession of nuclear weapons is a defence mechanism for both India and Pakistan. As Pakistan's Information Minister said that it was "a balance of terror to hold peace".

No one is willing to use the nuclear weapons as a first strike. It will be considered as not only irresponsible and immoral but its effects will not be limited in one country alone. After all, Pakistan and India are geographically contiguous to each other and the fall-out from the radiation will have a devastating impact on the inhabitants of both countries if one uses the nuclear weapons against the other. Even the distant countries, such as the USA and the former Soviet Union did not choose the nuclear option in the Cuban missile crisis in 1962 when the US discovered Soviet missile bases in Cuba which produced the most serious superpower confrontation during the entire Cold War period. The Soviet Union did not use it in Afghanistan during its 10 year fight with the mujaheddin in that country.

One could argue that all these reasons might have led Pakistan to develop the peace initiative with India and it has nothing to lose. India was caught unawares of the presence of infiltrators within 4 miles inside the Indian-administered Kashmir. India maintains that the intruders are highly-trained Afghan mercenaries and have been able to direct Pakistani fire on to the highway with pin-point accuracy from their vantage points above 16,000 feet while lobbing 120mm mortars into India's positions.

There is a view in India that

that the infiltration of the guerrillas under the supervision of Pakistan armed forces began as early as February of this year when both sides had happily signed the Lahore Declaration ushering peace and stability in their bilateral relations. Furthermore, India alleges that the guerrillas were trained with the covert material and military assistance from Pakistan army by the Afghan Muslim militants/Talibans either in Afghanistan or in tribal areas in Pakistan. Since Pakistan could claim that it had no direct involvement with the intruders, it would escape sanctions from the US because the infiltrators might be considered as "terrorists" by the US administration. A view prevails that Pakistan did not expect that the response from India would be so tough and unprecedented in nature. It is argued that Pakistan might not have taken into calculation that Vajpayee government would fall so soon and the election in India would be held in September this year.

Political analysts believe that Vajpayee government's stern action is partly motivated to show that it is tough and strong so far as Kashmir is concerned prior to the polls. The BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) has been tottering since last November when it lost vital state elections in Rajasthan and Delhi, previously seen as stalwart bastions that were filled with its supporters. Galloping inflation resulted in price-rise tenfold in some Indian markets and the voters returned in the by-elections to the Congress Party under Sonia

Gandhi's leadership. The BJP-led-coalition remains a caretaker government until the vote in September, giving the BJP the benefit of incumbency while the Congress Party is ridden with in-fighting and split. During the environment was threat, history tells us that the hawkish party does well in the elections and accordingly it is expected that the chances of BJP's success in the election is being boosted. Had there been no elections in September in India, the response from the Vajpayee government might have been different.

Now where do they go from here?

India is taking time to agree to the Pakistan Foreign Minister's visit to New Delhi. Vajpayee government seems to have been surprised at Pakistan's proposal when it was mooted by Pakistan Prime Minister to his counter-part during telephone talks on a hotline. Furthermore there is a perception in New Delhi that Pakistan army is acting independently of its civilian government in pushing the mercenaries in Kashmir. They allege that the civilian Pakistan government has no effective control on its armed forces and on the operations of its intelligence, ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence).

India obviously cannot say 'no' to the peace offer but is doubtful of its outcome because of the alleged role of Pakistan army in creating the present tension. India's Foreign Minister Singh appears to hold the view that the timing of the visit

does not seem to be appropriate when the fighting is going on in three places, Kargil, Bataik and Dras along the vital Srinagar to Leh highway in the Indian-administered Kashmir. Vajpayee government had pledged to keep fighting until all the intruders were driven from the Indian-held part of Kashmir — something military experts say could take weeks. The visit would not stop India in expelling forcibly the intruders. India maintains that peace can be restored only if Pakistan assists the intruders in departing the Indian side of Kashmir.

Pakistan Foreign Minister Aziz, on the other hand, appears to hold the view that the situation in Kashmir arose out of India's misconception on Pakistan's role. Pakistan maintains that it is the Kashmiris and not Afghan mercenaries who are fighting with Indian army in Kashmir because of the brutal suppression of their rights in Kashmir by the Indian authorities. The problem, according to Pakistan, rests on India's undemocratic policies on Kashmir. The Kashmiris have a right to determine the political status of Kashmir territory through a plebiscite in accordance with the UN resolution.

Although a wide gap between India and Pakistan on Kashmir situation exists, Pakistan Foreign Minister's visit to New Delhi should be seen a welcome step. It is better to talk to each other than firing guns on each other. No longer neither India nor Pakistan can hide behind the shield of make-believe situations. It is hoped that both countries continue to play their role in making the diplomatic peace initiative successful and effective.

The writer, a barrister, is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN in Europe, Geneva.

OPINION

Cricket, Emotion and Politics

Ahmed Rumi Khan

THE Bangladesh team underwent a long and hard training session before the World Cup. In fact, all Bangladesh cricket activities were focused on this 1999 World Cup for the last 3 years. Their hard work paid off — Bangladesh won a decisive victory over their mighty Pakistani opponents. We thank the Bangladesh team for giving the whole nation such an immense pleasure.

The ecstatic delight over this victory that has gripped the nation, however, makes one think: aren't we over-reacting? Remember our ICC trophy victory? The frenzied nation, launched the cricket players out into the skies of fantasy, far from the grounds of reality. What happened in the aftermath? Bangladesh cricket suffered a serious set-back and lost all the matches, even to Kenya and Scotland.

Nowadays, there is not much difference between professional sports and military training. Players need to be constantly on the move and the incentives should be appropriate and composed. The way we're celebrating now, just the same way we did during the ICC victory, is totally out of proportion with what we actually achieved. I think if Bangladesh had won the World Cup, only then this type of magnitudinous celebration might have seemed appropriate.

You don't have to be a cricket expert to know that it was Gordon Greenidge who brought the Bangladesh team back into play by instilling into them the fighting spirit that they severely lacked following the post-ICC collapse, thanks to the pampering, overzealous politicians. Only two years ago, we

gave him the highest possible national honour. This time around, we couldn't even wait to finish the World Cup campaign before we fired him.

Everybody, whether the political leaders or the cricketing ruling class called BCB, wants to capitalise on the passions of our poor nation for cricket. Greenidge's fault was that he spoke against these vested quarters. He said it was not yet time for Bangladesh to gain Test status. Now who knows more of cricket and the ability of Bangladesh team: Is it Gordon Greenidge or is it Saber Hossain Chowdhury? Let's be reasonable and ask our conscience: Is Bangladesh ready for Test status now, after just one upsetting victory over Pakistan? In this same World Cup, Bangladesh was crushed by New Zealand and West Indies. Australia demolished Bangladesh, scoring 181 runs in just 19 overs. Bangladesh even had to depend on the pure good luck of a cruel run-out of Hamilton (His partner's forward stroke hit the stumps) standing on the wrong side of his crease to win a close encounter against Scotland. My very optimistic reasoning says Bangladesh should wait at least 5 more years before really contending for Test status. (FYI: In last years ICC vote, Bangladesh received 0 vote for Test status while Kenya got 1 vote). There is no good reason to pay for 6 months a year foreign tours of the cricketing officials and players to meet test scheduled. Greenidge's honest assessment probably frustrated the BCB officials in their foreign travel dreams.

One more issue bothers me a lot and this happened during the ICC trophy celebrations also. We try to compare these achievements to our 1971 independence. War of liberation is a very sacred event. We should not try to demean it by comparing it to a win in a cricket match or to winning a globally significant ICC trophy. Our 1971 victory in a war cannot and should not be likened to a victory in a cricket match.

More sight of a Pakistani irritates me — a hangover from the 1971 brutalities. Nobody is more happy than me when I see Pakistan lose to Bangladesh. But should we compare it to 71? Won't it backfire? Bangladesh lost all previous six encounters with Pakistan and realistically speaking, Bangladesh's chances of winning against the Pakistan cricket team again in the near future are very slim. If we lose to Pakistan in a future cricket match, would it be appropriate then, following the same line of reasoning, to liken it to the war of 1971 which we had won? Are we morally so bankrupt that we're unable even to reason properly?

Our poor nation is deprived of so many things — we don't enjoy the luxury of resources, comfort of living, military might, and we're to be reckoned with. The jubilation of our people all over the world really reflects our craving for an achievement in whatever field it may be. I support our people and share their feelings at this time of spontaneous outbursts of emotion. They have their right to their share of victory celebrations as for whatever silly reason it may be — like any other people in the world. But I deplore the attempts made by certain quarters to exploit their emotions for political gains.

To the Editor...

Half happiness

Sir, Winning over Pakistan in world cup with all-round performance by Bangladesh will surely be considered as a milestone. Indeed our young team made us proud and gave us an opportunity to celebrate.

But declaring half holiday at the expense of state functioning is rather unwarranted. This is not cricket.

Tanzia Choudhury
Chittagong.

A grateful nation

Sir, It was a great moment, a moment to be remembered all ways when Bangladesh cricket team beat Pakistan team in the World Cup 99. We are extremely proud of the sons of this soil who played superbly and defeated tournament favourite Pakistan who was till then had been undefeated in the tournament. What an extraordinary feat by the newcomers in the world cup. Bangladesh team also scored respectable runs in the matches with West Indies and Australia, defeated Scotland and then the mighty Pakistan.

We hope Bangladesh cricket team will keep it up and we will be able to rejoice in the future as well.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong

Genocide is unforgivable

Sir, I refer to Masroor Ahmed Deepak's letter titled 'Unforgivable offence' (DS, May

31). I find the letter strangely self-contradictory. The writer on the one hand laments the inaccuracy of high-tech weapons and on the other hand slams NATO for pursuing a deliberate policy of genocide in the Nazis. He invites NATO to apologise but this has repeatedly been done! Taking into account that NATO has flown thousands of sorties over Yugoslavia, if there had been a policy of killing civilians, would the casualty figure be what it is today? Surely that is not difficult to figure out.

This is put into perspective by the fact that while air raids are going on over one part of Belgrade, people are going about with their business in other parts. They know that NATO is not going for carpet bombing, whatever their leaders may say for propaganda purposes.

It is true that the Yugoslav people are suffering. But that is due to the policies of their leaders, particularly president Slobodan Milosevic, widely known as the "Butcher of the Balkans". Mr Deepak tries to take a high moral tone but is completely silent about the plight of the Kosovars. I agree that genocide is unforgivable. But accidents do not constitute genocide, however regrettable they may be. Genocide is the deliberate slaughter of hundreds of thousands of Kosovars. It is the execution of men, the systematic rape of women and the mutilation of children, it is the tying of innocent people to tanks as human shields. It is the uprooting of an entire nation. Those who support Yugoslavia are aiding and abetting genocide. As we

approach the 21st century, are we losing our sense of morality?

Muhammad Sayeem
Sydney

Illegal rickshaws

Sir, We wonder and we are bewildered as to why the rickshaw pullers of Dhaka are identifying themselves and displaying and using on the body of their vehicles various number plates/sign boards/monograms of different sizes and colours. Several organisations like Dhaka City Corporation, Dhaka Mohanagar Rickshaw and Van Malik Samity, Number Bihin Rickshaw Parichaye, Mohanagar Rickshaw Malik Samity, Number Chai and so and so forth. Why isn't there one common DCC number plate?

It is very difficult for a passenger to know and to find out which rickshaw is genuine and lawful and which one is illegal and unauthorised.

Whatever be the official claim of figure of number of rickshaws in the city, it is generally believed that about quarter of a million rickshaws are playing the roads and streets of Dhaka. As a matter of fact the number of rickshaws are increasing by leaps and bounds day by day and the sufferings of the city dwellers know no bounds due to road traffic jams.

Can't the competent authorities of DCC and DMP trace out and make distinction between an illegal and legal rickshaw?

O. H. Kabir
6, Han Street
Ward, Dhaka-1203