

Accusations Go Wild

THIS is incredible. How could the Prime Minister bring herself to publicly accuse the BNP of involvement in bomb-planting incidents at mosques in Khulna and Dhaka and a newspaper office in the metropolis when the investigations have only begun? Given the suspected fanatical, terrorist and destabilising implications of the events and the hightech destructive devices involved, a thorough probe led by specialised army and police teams has been ordered. At a time when the whole nation is trying to regain its composure from the shock suffered through the whole series of strange incidents observations from the top echelons of the government must necessarily bear the stamp of responsibility, prudence and restraint. The intelligence agencies being at a rudimentary stage of the investigation are testing some hypotheses at the moment and it will be some time before they can get to the bottom of it all. Let them be focused on their job now without any distraction whatsoever which could be deemed as an influence brought on the process of investigation.

When making such an accusative statement against the opposition in public which is bound to be picked up by the foreign media, the PM should have had incontrovertible evidence to substantiate her accusation which she could not have possessed till the investigations were over. Home Minister Mohammad Nasim is yet to make any observations on the incidents implicating any party and the home secretary reportedly has said "it would not be appropriate to make any comment at this stage." According to the Inspector General of Police, preliminary investigations suggested that the explosive device might have been kept inside the mosque by some members of the Ahmadiya community. In fact a few from that community have been taken on remand for questioning.

A few days back when the home minister had suggested that the opposition could be trying to assassinate the PM we urged him to come out with full facts because it concerned such a grave matter as the security of the head of government and stability of the political order.

Such serious observations should only be made when the government is ready with unassailable evidence to substantiate them. This not only involves questions of credibility, political stability, future of democracy, etc., but also of basic propriety.

Good for the Lake

SINCE its inception in April 1997, the Dhanmondi Lake Development Project has not quite had a smooth going, hitting more snags than its planners may have anticipated. Illegal occupation of lakeside lands, poor fund management and red-tape have played the devil from the very onset and consequently the project missed the completion deadline of June this year. Already on extension, it is highly unlikely to even meet the revised schedule, e. g. December this year.

Against this bleak backdrop, the concrete proposal from the three-member probe committee, formed at the prime minister's directive on August 17 to find out the causes of delay in executing the project, comes as a refreshing development, because of the fact that it speaks of enforcement of law. Laudable as the proposal is for a demolition drive to rid the lakeside of illegal structures, the committee members certainly deserve appreciation and, more importantly, complete endorsement from the government. In our view, there should not be any compromise on this. The proposal should be translated into action forthwith not only for the sake of expediting completion of the Dhanmondi Lake project but also for sending the message across that violation of law does not pay.

Encroachment on public property has become a regular feature in the metropolis. The Buriganga, regarded as the life-blood of Dhaka, is a victim of this vile practice, so are the Dhanmondi and Gulshan lakes. In their desperate bid to expand their properties, the encroachers do not even hesitate to stifle the natural flow of water bodies. Unfortunately, the authorities have more often than not turned a blind eye to such practices. Activism, on their part, has largely been confined to formation of 'high-powered' committees. In fact, in the case of the Buriganga, there has been constitution of more than one. In real terms, nothing has been done so far. Hopefully, the proposed probe body on the Dhanmondi Lake project would soon be in place to initiate a process of rectification.

Booby-trap on the Street

THE story of a lady doctor being allegedly blackmailed by a Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) leader and his cadres with the help of a couple of police officers in front of the Arts Institute appeared in a couple of newspapers on Monday. A doctor of Dhaka Medical College stopped her car as she saw a small crowd in front of the Arts Institute at Shahbag to enquire whether anyone was injured or needed help. The crowd gathered because a small accident involving a motor-bike rider and a rickshaw had taken place. As the doctor alighted from her car, she was surrounded by the cadres of BCL who demanded taka twenty thousand from her as 'damages' though the doctor's car was not at all involved in the accident. The flabbergasted doctor sought help from her husband (who is also a doctor) on a cellular phone. The husband arrived with Tk 10,000, gave it to the blackmailers and left the place. Interestingly the amount was allegedly split between the BCL cadres and two police officers, identified by a Bangla daily, as Sgt Shafi and ASI Anwar of Ramna thana. The BCL leader, however, has denied his involvement saying that he is a businessman and does not own a motorbike.

This is another glaring example of lawlessness. People, these days, are afraid to move freely for fear of such blackmailing and ransom seeking. In this particular case, all the alleged culprits are known people. Law demands these people be brought to book without delay. Such incidents speak ill of the administration and are not going to help them at all.

Foreign Service and Foreign Office

The government must not issue any new contract, nor renew the old ones and, if possible, terminate existing contracts... the maximum age limit for retirement should be enhanced to 60 years for all government servants. There exist many justifiable reasons for this and this would conform to the practice in vogue in our region also.

who are responsible for causing these anomalies do so merely to serve their narrow self-interests and are impervious or, at best, indifferent to the administrative need for fair and equitable treatment of all officers and upholding their due interests and privileges.

As compared to the fate of these unfortunate officers, old and retired officers of my seniority (1959 batch) appeared to have reaped a golden harvest. A severe shortage of senior officers after liberation may have been one of the prime reasons for this. Some of my colleagues and I were promoted as Joint Secretary in the 13th year of service, as Ambassador in the 19th year and remained so or as Secretary to government for another 14 to 16 years till retirement. It was not because I was called a Muktiyoddha, having had the unique privilege of acting as head of our unofficial Mission in London on the Victory Day in 1971 and having hoisted officially the Bangladesh flag following recognition by Britain. But many other officers who had joined the Foreign Service in the 60's also had been able to serve several terms as Ambassador. I was, indeed, exceptionally lucky to have served as resident

Ambassador in as many as six countries. This, I understand, is a record. But the Civil Service within its cadre scored even a better innings. In 1972, many of its members became Secretary to the government after only 12 to 14 years of service.

But it is preposterous that so

fairness and a set standard, arbitrarily some have been recalled and some others who were to be recalled have not been recalled. This exposes government's policy of favouritism and discrimination.

Most of the political appointees to Ambassadorial posts have perhaps been so un-

utter disregard, inter alia, of sound administrative planning and decision which must have caused huge and avoidable expenses from government coffers. And this action came after the High Commissioner proved more useful having established himself firmly among his contemporary Pakistani officers many of whom were then serving as Secretary to the government.

Why was this Envoy recalled and some others not without paying heed to a sound plan or contemplation? It is believed by many that only those Ambassadors who are in a position to canvass for and secure some specific recognition, award and other desired objects for the Prime Minister are the chosen ones for gratuitous rewards as extension of service. At present Bangladesh envoys, who are now serving under contract or about to retire are now in grim competition to achieve things in all possible or near-impossible ways that will please the high command. A success would entail them longer tenure of office.

Those who had been associated with the Foreign Office for a reasonable period of time are sure to opine that most of the deprived cadres in the Foreign

Service who are about to retire in a few years and have not yet become Ambassadors are our better officers. In many respects, they are superior to most of those who are enjoying contract service after retirement. It enjoins upon the government to be true to its words and seek to redress the legitimate grievances of those disenfranchised officers due to lack of vacancy to posts already filled up by officers on contract. This can be done in two ways. Firstly, the government must not issue any new contract, nor renew the old ones and, if possible, terminate existing contracts. Secondly, the maximum age limit for retirement should be enhanced to 60 years for all government servants. There exist many justifiable reasons for this and this would conform to the practice in vogue in our region also.

Some one told me in jest that such suggestions emanating from me, an opposition adviser, would perhaps be counter-productive. The government will not accept the suggestions, even if they were inclined to accept them earlier. If it is so, I sincerely ask for forgiveness. I would then solemnly declare I really did not mean what I had proposed in this article. If others could say one thing and mean another, why should not I be able to do the same, specially if it is for a good cause?

The author is a member of BNP's Advisory Council.



Currents and Crosscurrents

by M M Rezaul Karim

many smart and efficient officers in the Foreign Service had to be deprived of their due and legitimate posts and status because some of the retired officers, with hardly any notable exception, had to continue on contract for even longer than a three-year term. Strangely, may be not so strangely noting our character, these officers had earlier opposed tooth and nail granting extension to their retiring colleagues. The government recently declared that no extension of service on contract would be granted and those on contract would be recalled. Consequently, without

worthy that their detailed bi-data, in order to evade public indignation, are not published in the media. Some, at least one of them as we all know, indulged in politics among the resident Bangladeshi community so much so that displeasure of the host government was responded, instead of recalling him, by further extending his service contract. Our High Commissioner to Pakistan has been recalled recently only after nine months of posting. Was it not foolhardy in the first place to transfer him to another post to serve only for such a short time? This was done in

Credibility

Ardeshir Cowasjee writes from Karachi

The methods of the tax collectors, the corruption that prevails in the tax department, and the ways and means of extortion are well known to citizens of Pakistan here and abroad and to the multinationals which remain engaged in this country.

born to Haji Dawood, a merchant of Jampur, and his wife Hajra. As the boy grew the secret of success was slowly and inexorably ingrained into him — hard work, more hard work, and yet more hard work, and above all, that hard work had to be complemented by integrity without which there can be no credibility. A man's word must be his bond. Adam grew up to be a fine businessman. His businesses multiplied. Integrity, wisdom, respect and age added to Adam's name first the suffix 'jee' and later the prefix 'Sir' which title he later renounced when Jinnah joined the fight for India's freedom.

The headquarters of the Adamjee businesses was in Burma and one of his ventures there became an international adventure. Realizing that Burma grew the right type and sufficient quantity of wood to support the manufacture of matches in abundance, Adamjee established Asia's largest and most modern factory at Pazundawung, near Rangoon. He imported machinery from Germany and Japan, he employed German engineers and technicians, assigning them the task of teaching the Indians. The factory commenced production in 1923, and attracted the attention of the Swedish financier, Ivar Krueger, born also in 1880, known to the world as 'The Match King'.

Krueger's ambition was to gain a worldwide monopoly over the production of matches. Based in Sweden, himself an engineer, he real-

ized the danger posed to his plan by Adamjee's factory. So he travelled to Rangoon to strike a deal with Adamjee and hopefully take over his factory. Krueger's overtures were rejected, cut-throat competition followed and losses were made which Adamjee bore. Clever Krueger made peace.

The Adamjee family and businesses have survived the vicissitudes of time and tide. After World War II, they had to leave Burma for Calcutta, then with the advent of Pakistan they moved to Dacca, and with the loss of East Pakistan they are now concentrated in what is left of our country, with their headquarters in Karachi. The family has branched out into many other businesses and one branch, Hanif's, owns and controls the Adamjee Insurance Company, Pakistan's largest and most trusted insurance concern.

On August 14, 1999, the government honoured Sir Adamjee Haji Dawood by minting a stamp showing his portrait as one of the men honoured in the series entitled 'Pioneers of Freedom'.

A month later, on September 17 at 1800 hours, extortionists of this irresponsible government, men of the sales tax department with a bevy of policemen, swooped down on the offices of Adamjee Diesel Engineering and conducted an illegal raid. The department had previously asked for an audit. Adamjee had asked for a postponement up to October 11, and their application, unrecalled, stood on the records. The

raiders forcefully entered the premises, no warrants were shown or served. Filing cabinets were broken open, and files, records, computers, diskettes etc., were impounded, the telephones disconnected, and the offices ransacked. No inventory was made of what was seized and taken away. The chairman of the company, 70-year-old Hamid Adamjee, grandson of Sir Adamjee, a heart patient who has twice had bypass surgery, was forcibly taken out of his office, put in the sales tax men's jeep, and driven to their offices in Gulshan-e-Iqbal.

Whatever was done was illegal, mala fide, and violative of the rules of natural justice. No notice of any demand was served, nor was any wrongdoing alleged. No cases were pending against the company in respect of any non-payment of sales tax. Hamid was illegally detained and held incommunicado until 2200 hours that day when his son, Zahid, the managing director of the company, voluntarily offered to be held in place of his ailing father.

Throughout Zahid's custody that night, he was threatened with what might happen to his person and how he would be treated in jail, where they intended moving him. He was only freed from his illegal detention after the sales tax men had managed to get from him pay orders and postdated cheques drawn in favour of the Collector of Sales Tax (West), totalling Rs.12.5 million, to meet the demands for which no notices had been served.

When all this came to the notice of Senator Khwaja Qutubuddin, he immediately apprised Sindh Governor Mamnoon Hussain, who, to his credit, acted as a governor should act. He sent for the sales tax people and laid into them. He then informed Finance Minister Dar of the highhandedness of his men and also informed the prime minister, Mamnoon, an IBA MBA and himself a businessman, knows well how corrupt the taxmen are, how they extort by claiming taxes that are not due. Zahid was freed at 0300 hours on the 18th.

The Adamjees naturally moved the High Court of Sindh. On September 23, the court ordered, inter alia: 'at present postdated cheques amounting to Rs.95 lakhs are lying with the defendants (Sales Tax Department) which according to the plaintiffs (Adamjees) were obtained under duress and coercion. In the backdrop of these allegations defendants are restrained from encashing the same till the next date subject to the condition that the plaintiffs will submit bank guarantees in the amount of Rs.9.5 million to the satisfaction of the Nazir of the Court within one week. . . . Notice for Rs.28.99, Till then defendants are restrained from adopting any coercive methods against the plaintiffs. . . .'

The methods of the tax collectors, the corruption that prevails in the tax department, and the ways and means of extortion are well known to citizens of Pakistan here and

abroad and to the multinationals which remain engaged in this country.

How do we describe Finance and Commerce Minister Ishaq Dar, the virtual deputy prime minister, of late displaying arrogance? He is not straight enough to be able to force the loan defaulters, ministers and members of his party who have robbed the banks and the exchequer to repay their loans. He issues orders and notifications at will, he breaks promises, he has issued savings certificates and documents promising to pay certain amounts to the depositors on the date of maturity and has reneged, not paying the promised amounts. He does not pay back billions of rupees worth of undisputed tax refunds due to be paid back to the taxpayers. He constantly threatens to raise the price of fuel and power. He naturally has a problem raising loans from abroad, with his taxmen abducting company executives and holding them in unlawful detention. He persists in saying we may soon expect billions of dollars of foreign investments, though no one believes him. All that has so far come in is bun-maskaallahs and moorgi-chaapwallahs. Has Mr Dar calculated how much the hamburger man brings in and how much he takes out?

In a recent issue of The Dawn there appeared an article headed 'Overhaul of system needed to take country out of crisis: Burki'. Shahid Javed Burki recently said in London that 'the savings and assets of overseas Pakistanis living in the US were estimated at \$ 20 billion; \$ 15 billion in the Middle East; and \$ 8 billion in the UK.'

What is Shahid's advice to his fellow compatriots living abroad? Send your money to Pakistan? Or, save it where it is?

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

"When will our leaders learn...?"

Sir, This refers to the commentary by Mahfuz Anam titled "When will our leaders learn that their policies are killing the nation?" printed in The Daily Star on October 7, 1999. As far as I remember, the author has been raising this very question several times over the last few months, in one form or the other. But nobody seems to care. I think, the politicians are determined not to listen, let alone pay heed to public opinion. No amount of appeal, caution and admonition seem to work.

Our leaders never took lessons from history before and they are not ready to start now. The country's present and future do not seem to be on their agenda. What we see is their determination to safeguard their respective parties, to ensure how to stay in power or snatch away power by pulling down constitutionally constituted governments.

In this regard, I want to mention another publication of the DS. Since its publication, the Rising Stars has been publishing articles by young citizens of the country on the destructive nature of our politics.

Here I would like to give some examples — in terms of quotes — from the October 7, 99 issue of the RS.

"We are not blind. We see what's going on. How longer must we see this farce...?"

"There is a murderer on the loose. He virtually robbed the 'directorship' of a bank! And you are sheltering him? How can the people trust you after all these things?..."

"These people are siphoning resources that are actually ours..."

"Students are being lured into the vortex of violence..."

"There was a proposal of banning student politics. But no one seconded the motion. Why? Because the politicians have sent their own children abroad. They now can sacrifice the children of others..."

Syed Waliullah
Dhaka

"BNP plans more bite..."

Sir, The report published in The Daily Star titled "BNP plans more bite in campaign" on September 24, 1999 indicated red signal of what BNP is planning to do as part of its current anti-government movements. According to the report, some top BNP leaders said "the opposition parties had called for boycotting the Poursabha elections held in February. But they are now firm to resist the Upazila and City Corporation polls at any cost". This is alarming as they significantly distinguished between boycotting and resisting polls.

"This reminds me of what Awami League-led opposition did in 1996 to foil February 15 general elections. The first item of their programmes was a slogan 'vote die jabe je last hoye firbe se' (those who would go for vote would become corpse)."

The second was calling countrywide standstill by the then opposition on February 15, '96 urging people not to get out of their houses. And thirdly creating panic on the day of voting by hurling bombs around the voting centres and assaulting the voters as well as the polling officers on duty.

These three programmes spread panic among the voters that led poor attendance of the voters in the polling centres. To

make the polls a "success", the then ruling party took resort to rigging which plundered the total credibility of the February 15, '96 general election. Had BNP-led opposition called the above programmes already introduced by AL during the February '99 poura-polls, the scenario would have been quite unpleasant. I think BNP is sober, rationale and realistic and will not go for those tougher programmes to resist the future polls; instead it will participate in all the forthcoming elections to prove its popularity.

Mustafizur Rahman
Dhaka

Transit: A Question of National Security

Sir, The article titled Transit: A Question of National Security written by Brig. (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz, published in the DS issue of October 4, 1999, was clearly written against the idea of giving transshipment to India.

It was very interesting to read. But there are some confusing statements in the write-up. For example, the writer says, "its (the AL's) leaders found it expedient to put the blame on the opposition alleging that it was the BNP which agreed to such agreement by signing of 1980 and later

Dhaka: The city of garbage

Sir, There was a front-page news published in the DS on 5th instant that the system of clearing the garbage from bins and streets has broken down as the DCC has to withdraw more than 90 demountable containers and trucks from the city roads.

Apparently this explanation has been put forward to save the DCC from the bitter criticism. But we feel constrained to ask, have we ever seen the section concerned of the DCC as having been able to keep the city streets free of dumped rubbish, when all their demountable fleet was in serviceable condition?

It leaves no room for doubt that there is negligence on the part of DCC officials concerned for this plight. The Mayor seems to be more hectic with his political stunts than his duties of taking it seriously as to how the citizens would live in an atmosphere of a clean city. He has

no time to go round the city roads to look for himself and bring those to task who are responsible for chronic dumping. Many important roads get congested of vehicular traffic only because along those places over-dumped garbage containers remain stuck up for months. Besides, when it rains incessantly the pieces of

dumped garbage scatterers away to clog the roadside drainage system and that makes us behold many brooks following over Dhaka roads (where vehicles ply like boats). To any visitor from other districts towns, let alone any foreigner, this makes no better impression that Dhaka, capital of Bangladesh is simply a city of garbage, and the DCC authority seated in Dhaka's most impressive Bhaban is merely a white elephant.

A H Dewan
396/1 South Kafirul, Dhaka
Cantt.,
Dhaka-1206

SAPTA."

I would like to ask the author: Isn't that true?

In my opinion, the author should write more about how 'transshipment' is going to jeopardise our national security.

Yousuf Jamil
Mirpur, Dhaka

Religion and global politics

Sir, The politicians, diplomats, foreign offices and the UN agencies avoid direct mention of religious issues and strife, but the fact is that today's major political conflicts are based on religion. The latter is a part of the gene of the soul (if the soul has a genetic blueprint); therefore there is political hypocrisy in the avoidance of direct mention of religious issues in their sham deliberations.

Let us look alphabetically at the trouble spots. African countries (more tribalism than 'religions'), Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Angola, Azerbaijan, Bosnia, China (passive), Chechnya, Congo, Croatia, Daghestan, India (Kashmir issue), Indonesia (Timor), Iraq (vs the West), Israel (vs the Muslims), Ireland (ethnic), Jordan (against Israel), Kazakhstan, Lebanon (with neighbour), Libya (Islam v. Christianity at global level), Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan (and India over Kashmir issue), Rwanda (tribal), Sri Lanka (ethnic civil war), Sudan (fundamentalists), and the West, Syria (Israel), and her neighbours, backed by a super-power godfather, Serbia (former Yugoslavia), Tunisia (a victim), Turkey (and the Kurds; also the revival of religion from Western type of secularism), Vietnam (the problem of the godless communism).

Therefore the question arises: whether to solve the problems with political or religious priority? Fundamentalism is being detested at the global level and is popular at the local levels; and secularism has its own brand of appeal, but can-

not solve the religious problems (religion is a basic need of a human being).

Superpower USA is democratic and secular, but is not bent on wiping out religion, but bend the fundamentalists (a subjective definition?). The largest democracy in the world (India) has not been able to solve the Kashmir debacle for half a century and the Jewish hot-spot is still glowing for the same period. Pakistan had to be broken up by the Muslim citizens themselves! The Arab and the Persian cultures are not fraternizing, and Iraq is isolated in the Islamic world. Both the secularists and the religionists have problems.

The politicians all over the world should talk about politics straight from the shoulder, and not hide the real intentions. The UN system is scared of even uttering the ethnic expressions. Therefore the fundamental question which crops up is: who are ruling us? The mindset of the politicians need deeper probing.

Alif Zabr
Dhaka

"Religious Education"

Sir, I would like to thank Mr Ahmed Shah for the letter under the above caption published on 20.9.99. I fully endorse his view — "Religion teaches morality but most of the people hardly care for those teachings". He lamented that though the nation is a religious one "unfortunately the number of corrupt and dishonest people are no less in number."

Nothing in the world happens without a cause. So there must be some reasons behind the corrupt and dishonest behaviour of the person's belief that God will forgive his/her sins irrespective of the kinds.

M A S Molla
Member, BAAS
Dhaka.