

Dhaka, Wednesday, October 20, 1999

Message from Dighinala

THE Deputy Commissioner, Khagrachari viewed it as 'misunderstanding between a military sepoys and a young girl' that triggered trouble at Babuchhara Bazar under Dighinala police station on Saturday last. But some tribal elements who took up the 'outrage' as their own obviously thought otherwise; in their eye, it was a case of attempted molestation of a Chakma girl.

The turmoil snowballed into a bloody eruption as three tribals died and ten persons were seriously injured. Throughout Sunday the situation remained extremely tense and nervy between the tribals and plainland settlers.

According to Partosh Chakma, the chairman of Babuchhara Union Parishad, the local military personnel fell upon the tribals hitting them with rifle butts and lathis 'wherever they could' on Saturday. His other allegation is that they 'incited' the Bengali settlers to assault the tribals. Shops were shuttered down and commodities looted purportedly by Bengalis.

At the same time we have had some positive signals from the troubled spots to suggest that through a meeting attended by local civil and military authorities and tribal and non-tribal leaders the situation has since been 'brought under control'. It is also worthwhile to note that the local administration has constituted a three-member probe committee comprising the ADC, Additional Police Commissioner and importantly, the Babuchhara UP chairman Partosh Chakma, who has been strident in his version about the incident, to go into the whole episode.

To our mind, it is not merely fixing responsibility, ferreting out culprit or culprits and punishing trouble-makers that ought to be the sole purpose of the process of inquiry which has got underway. In fact, we need to draw the right lessons from the Dighinala experience. The incidents have been a reflection of the prejudice that still lingers and in a way, rules the roost in spite of the signing of the historic peace accord for the CHT that otherwise stood out as a model of peace for ethnic conflicts elsewhere. Let's not be ostrich-like to ignore the pent up rancour which can only be worked off if both sides scrupulously avoid giving provocation to each thereby laying a strong foundation for mutual trust and confidence to reign supreme.

Happy Vijaya

TADITIONALLY, this part of the world has enjoyed unique religious equanimity and communal harmony. Festival of any particular religious group or community has unfailingly evoked a pervasive sense of jubilation across the society, cutting across socio-cultural barriers. Be it Buddha Purnima for the Buddhists, Christmas for the Christians, Durga Puja for the Hindus or Eid-ul-Fitr for the Muslims, people from all walks of life have always been imbued with the pristine spirit of festivity. Participation rather than mere accommodation has taken the religious harmony that exists in the country to a glorious height, given it an elevated stature. Therefore, Vijaya in our country comes as a reminder of not only the goddess' fight against evil forces to ensure continuity of the rule of the virtue and the good, but also appeals to sensitivity as a renewal of the humane spirit in each and every individual, a spirit that elevates a person above his or her position to one that enables communion of minds.

This year, however, the Durga Puja festivities have been stalked by what appears, in our view, as an obscurantist design. To our sheer disgust and dismay, some hoodlums, allegedly with the blessing from the local influential quarters, went on a rampage in Feni, Manikganj, Faridpur, Tangail, Mymensingh, Sunamganj, Narayanganj, Narsingdi and Comilla, wreaking havoc on puja pandals with a clamour for extortion of money. On the whole, the incidents in those districts smacked of an attempt to disrupt social peace, which we must do everything in our power to stave off in the future.

We believe Vijaya will dispel misgivings, strengthen faith in each other as human beings, renew the commitment to work together to make the world a better place to live in.

Happy Vijaya to all.

Male Victim of Dowry!

NOT only did the tragic incidents happen on the same day but intriguingly also 'dowry' has been the common culprit in both cases. Delwar, 35, of Madartek area at the outskirts of Dhaka set a rare example of anti-dowry sentiments by hanging himself from a ceiling fan on Sunday when pressed hard by his parents to extract dowry from his wife. As a conscientious and loving husband Delwar thought it to be the last resort to protect his innocent wife from harassment. But little did he realise perhaps that his wife would be a widow.

On the same day newly-wed Rina, 15, strangled herself to death at Charkaliganj under Munshiganj district to escape dowry-related torture of her husband. Another life was lost because of the curse of dowry at a tender age. When children of Rina's age go to school and play in the shadows of banyan trees, she was already married for three months and tortured for something that was quite unknown to her.

Society must take note of the supreme sacrifice made by Delwar to protect his innocent wife. His example must be taken up by social scientists and social organisations as an added impetus to the fight against the scourge of dowry throughout the length and breadth of Bangladesh. Let the likes of Delwar embolden the hearts of millions of young Bangladeshis to rise against the system of dowry and protect the honour and dignity of women in the society.

Turkey in Europe: Seeking a Seat in EU

If Turkey has sought EU membership with a remarkable single-mindedness, there has been great hesitation within the EU regarding this new member. The inclusion of Turkey would radically change the complexion of EU. Because it will cease to remain a Christian club

THE European Commission, the executive of the European Union (EU), urged the 15-nation powerful European body to give Turkey candidate status, but it maintained that negotiations can start only when Turkey meets the Copenhagen criteria, the obligatory political and economic conditions.

Thus once again the long quest for Turkey of membership of EU has begun. It may be recalled that a severe brake was put in Luxembourg Summit two years ago, when the 15-nation body accepted to enlarge the body by the addition of 12 members but decided to keep Turkey out. It had then created bitter disappointment in Turkey and there was talk here of abandoning the quest for membership. Turkey has been after the membership of EU since as far back as 1963.

The recommendation of the Commission made on 12 October in Brussels, at the EU headquarters, will need to be approved by the EU Summit in Helsinki in December next. Barring a major mishap the Summit is expected to approve the recommendation of the Commission.

The recommendation of the Commission has been greeted favourably by the Turkish authorities. Turkish Prime Minister

Bulent Ecevit has characterised it as 'a favourable and hopeful development'. He added, 'Whatever conditions have been accepted for other candidates, same must apply for us.'

The Copenhagen criteria proposes measures including enhanced political dialogue with particular reference to human rights, providing association of common positions under a common foreign and security policy, and coordinating all sources of EU financial assistance for pre-accession within a single framework. The Commission's report maintains that Turkey is still far from meeting the Copenhagen criteria particularly in the areas of human rights and protection of minorities. On the economy the Commission notes Turkey's progress in reducing inflation and urged continuation of privatisation.

On the path to Turkey's membership of the EU, the strongest roadblock is no doubt the thorny question of Cyprus. The island, which won independence from Britain in 1960

was effectively partitioned in 1974 between the Greek majority south and Turkish minority north. The Greek part is two thirds of the island and the Turkish part, one third. The Greek part is recognised by the world community including the UN, whereas its Turkish part known as the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is recognised by Turkey alone. Over the

claiming the recognition of two Cyprus. Should the Greek part of Cyprus join the EU, there is a distinct possibility that Northern Cyprus will join Turkey.

The US has taken in hand the entire Cyprus question and the mediator of President Bill Clinton, Alfred Noses, has had several rounds of talks. He is

supposed to have resumed his

years long drawn out negotiation between the two sides of Cyprus along with Greece and Turkey, with a UN mediator have led to no result. The Greek part of Cyprus is about to start negotiations with the EU to join it as a member. With the passage of time the gulf between the two parts of Cyprus has grown and Raul Denkita, the President of Northern Cyprus has been

efforts attempting to weave in the question of membership of Turkey in EU. Of all the ideas floated on Cyprus, the one that appears to have some chance of success is the possibility of a confederation between the two parts of Cyprus, which will save the integrity of the island. In 1960 when Britain withdrew from Cyprus granting the island independence, it created a fed-

eration and tried to balance delicately the demands of the two communities — Greek and Turkish. It proved to be a non-starter right from the beginning and following a pro-Greek military coup in 1974 the arrangement fell apart. This led to the Turkish invasion of northern Cyprus and partition of the island. A big distance has grown between the two communities on the island and the only solution would appear to be a loose confederation. The two communities would need time to live together once again.

Turkey has taken 36 years to reach one point from where she must start her yet another long search for membership of the EU. The situation this time around looks more promising than any time in the past. Her arch enemy Greece appears to have lifted her veto, although she has not implicitly said so. The earthquake of August 1999 that devastated a large part of Turkey along her Marimara sea shore, provoked an amazing outpouring of sympathy, support and complete assistance from Greece. The earthquake in

Greece, though of much lower intensity also provoked spontaneous Turkish help. The friendship between the two peoples has blossomed and augurs well for the membership of Turkey in the EU.

If Turkey has sought EU membership with a remarkable single-mindedness, there has been great hesitation within the EU regarding this new member. The inclusion of Turkey would radically change the complexion of EU. Because it will cease to remain a Christian club

The Horizon This Week

Arshad-uz Zaman

A Personal Tribute to Mwalimu Julius Nyerere

A Champion of South-South Cooperation

by Farooq Sobhan

Perhaps the idea of strengthening the South Centre can be taken up at the first-ever South Summit to be held in Havana next year. A summit at which Mwalimu would have certainly been one of the key figures. It will be a tragedy if the South Centre to which Mwalimu devoted so much of his time and energy, which was a testimonial to his strong commitment to South-South cooperation, was allowed to fade away into obscurity.

years later in 1981 in Caracas, when the G-77 adopted a comprehensive programme of action on ECDC, but sadly the process of implementation remained slow and painful.

In 1985 Mwalimu's decision to step down voluntarily as President of Tanzania. This unprecedented step was both applauded and mourned, applauded because this was the first time that a third world leader who enjoyed the unquestioned support and popularity of his people had voluntarily handed over power, even though he was in good health and mentally as agile and active as ever. This was a powerful example to other third world leaders and greatly enhanced Mwalimu's stature and moral authority. But Mwalimu's decision to retire was mourned and regretted throughout the third world, for it had lost one of its outstanding leaders — a man of vision and a man of action. The South simply could not let him go.

Both as Chairman of the G-77 and subsequently as chairman of the third world forum's committee on ECDC, which included a number of third world's most well known authorities on ECDC, we advocated the setting up of an independent commission of the South. The purpose of this commission would be two-fold. The South Commission on the one hand put forward a plan of action for the South on how best to activate North-South negotiations and also put forward their ideas on the shape and nature of the new global economic system and the rationale for the existing system. The South Commission would also be required to put forward a blueprint for South-South cooperation, as well as specific proposals on how best the South could implement these go.

In 1984 I moved from New York to Malaysia as the High Commissioner of Bangladesh.

In 1985 the Institute for Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) in Kuala Lumpur in collaboration with the Third World Foundation hosted an international conference on South-South cooperation. The Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dr



Tanzanians mourn the demise of former Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere who died in London last week. — AFP photo

Mahathir bin Mohamad, chaired the conference, which was attended, among others, by Mr. Michael Manley, the then Prime Minister of Jamaica, Sonny Ramphal, the then Secretary General of the Commonwealth, Gamani Corea, former Secretary General of UNCTAD, the late Ken Dazlie his successor, Sir Alister McIntyre, Deputy Secretary General of UNCTAD and many other eminent personalities from the third world.

I was closely associated with the preparations for this conference and also wrote one of the keynote papers for the conference: "The opportunities for South-South cooperation." This conference recommended the establishment of the South Commission. Shortly thereafter Dr Mahathir set up a steering committee for the establishment of the South Commission, I was invited to serve on the steering committee and wrote the concept paper and the other supporting papers.

I also suggested to Dr Mahathir that the best person to chair the South Commission would be Mwalimu. I remember Dr. Mahathir saying, "President Nyerere has just retired. Will he agree to assume such a major responsibility?" I said that I was sure that if Dr Mahathir personally met with him, he could persuade Mwalimu to accept. Here were the two most vocal and enthusiastic supporters and believers in South-South cooperation. Their partnership could be an important turning point for the South. Dr Mahathir personally flew to Dar es Salaam and met

with Mwalimu in 1986 at the time of the Non-aligned summit in Harare. The rest is history. Mwalimu visited Malaysia shortly thereafter. The South Commission was born. This in turn spawned the G-15 and the South Centre.

For the remaining years of his life from 1986 till his death Mwalimu devoted a substantial part of his time and energy first to the South Commission, and subsequently to the South Centre. I had the opportunity to meet Mwalimu a number of times during the past ten years in Beijing when I was ambassador, in Delhi when I was High Commissioner and more recently in Dar es Salaam, at Durban during the NAM summit and again in May this year in London. We invariably spoke about South-South cooperation and the South Centre.

It was one of Mwalimu's most fervent desires to see the establishment of a strong third world secretariat. The South Centre, he felt, could be transformed into such a secretariat. Instead of having a multiplicity of small units helping the G-77 in different parts of the world, it would be perhaps the most fitting testimonial to Mwalimu if his final legacy, the South Centre, could be converted into a permanent and strong secretariat for the third world, similar

to the OECD. Such a secretariat could assist the different chapters of the G-77, as well as the Non-aligned Movement and the G-15. It would above all ensure proper coordination not only among the different chapters of the G-77 but between the NAM and the G-77. It would serve as a research centre and think tank for the South and would also serve both as a nerve centre as well as a clearing house for all matters relating to South-South cooperation. It would assist the South in formulating its positions on different subjects in various fora in their negotiations with the North.

Perhaps this idea of strengthening the South Centre can be taken up at the first-ever South Summit to be held in Havana next year. A summit at which Mwalimu would have certainly been one of the key figures. It will be a tragedy if the South Centre to which Mwalimu devoted so much of his time and energy, which was a testimonial to his strong commitment to South-South cooperation, was allowed to fade away into obscurity and perish because it lacked political and financial support. So long as Mwalimu was alive he would not permit this to happen. Now that he is no more, I am sure that his colleagues, the leaders of the third world, who are today paying tributes to him, will ensure that the South Centre is indeed transformed into the Third World Secretariat.

The writer is Special Envoy of the Prime Minister of Bangladesh

OPINION

Danger Signals!

Abul M Ahmad

Our society is facing a danger signal — the oncoming disintegration due to moral lapses in almost all the sectors, led by the offensive political culture. Now the moral danger is greater than that of the continued political instability.

The politicians and their parties are unlikely to come to the rescue of the society, as, so far, since liberation, they have been looking only inward for self-gain and consolidation; and more so when politics is unstable; which is, unfortunately happening all the time without any break. A person or group in the vicious cycle of self-instability cannot help others, and is therefore disbarred morally and spiritually from public service. The partners in this game will not confirm this underlying condition, and put the blame on other causes (the alibi syndrome); as the mass media reveal so clearly.

The intellectuals in any society are the unofficial guardians for affecting corrections to administrations and policy makers. But today there is no non-political mechanism to monitor good governance. Governance in the under-developed countries care a hoot for public feedback. Such mechanism exists in rudimentary form, and is over-ruled most of the time. The main reason for such weakness is the polarity of the non-independent intellectuals to take political sides, and operate under political umbrellas; thereby making it easier for the political parties to condone moral excesses. Every activity in a society has to be challenged according to the mode of the moment.

The question arises as to how and why the intellectuals have surrendered their individuality of private thinking and to assert themselves independently. Sycophants have never contributed positively to the development of the society in any form, but their number and influence have not waned decade after decade. This cancer in the society is being ignored.

It points to a danger signal: the power of the superior mind in the minority cannot be utilised publicly for the common good of the common people. Secondly, only mass uprisings

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.

Woes of number '32'

Sir, The DS has been sparing the letter columns to project the miseries and sufferings of the community of subscribers with '32' prefixed telephone. Inasmuch as, it has also voiced the malaise through an editorial seeking justice from the right quarters but unfortunately no positive action appears to have been taken as yet. Authorities must impress the public, i.e. the taxpayers by example and not by enunciating policies and speeches only.

Despite the fact that it would be a repetition, I would still like to harp on the same tune and highlight the following identified serious inconvenience to draw the attention of the relevant authority.

— No dial tone.

— Continuous dial tone i.e.

rendering the telephone to be a one-way facility only to receive calls and not be able to make one.

— Regular wrong numbers meaning an additional cost burden on the poor subscriber.

— Restrained access to modern IT facilities i.e. Email

the PM and her government. But are there any relevant reasons for AL to be dependent on the bureaucracy? If 'yes' then what are the causes associated with the AL's dependency on bureaucracy? Are they unable to take proper decision in a given situation? Are the AL leaders afraid of opposition parties' so-called anti-government movement? If the answer is 'no,' then what conditions have made them dependent on bureaucracy?

Most of the AL leaders are known as experienced politicians. In the movement for institutionalisation of democracy in the country their contribution is immense. They were in politics for a long time as a powerful opposition party. During that time they had the opportunity to be close with the people. They have gathered much experience about governance. It should be noted that after coming to power in June 1996, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina declared that good governance would be given priority by her government. So people's expectations from her government were vast. But in reality people have not found any sign of good governance. The more time passes, the more dependency of AL on bureaucracy increases. Previous political history has proved that dependency on bureaucracy was never helpful for any government. So it cannot be an exception in the case of AL government. Under a multi-party democracy, the ruling party has to be dependent on the parliament. on the opinion

of mass people and their representatives.

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Government vs bureaucracy: Which is more powerful?

Sir, Which is more powerful? The government or the bureaucracy? Some decisions and steps (including eviction of sex workers and slum dwellers from their respective areas, raising question about the accountability of newspapers etc.) taken by the government recently have inspired the political observers and analysts to raise such a question. It is evident from the overall situation that a group of influential bureaucrats have already surrounded

Khyr Ahmed
Bagbari, Sylhet

Non-payment of bills

Sir, Many influential people including our political leaders and MPs have not paid their telephone and electricity bills, worth lakhs of taka, for a long time.

We strongly demand that those who fail to make up-to-date payment of their telephone and electricity bills, may not be allowed to file nomination papers or contest in the local or national elections.

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