The Baily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

A Family Orphaned

Dhaka, Tuesday, November 16, 1999

THE news dailies cast a pall of gloom every I morning on the minds of the readers. The front pages are often replete with reports, tragic to grotesque, of accidents to murders, from normal to bizarre, and of the innocent and the crooked. The stories, more often than not, are revolting against the brutality of the killers, in many cases for the inaction of the law enforcing agencies. Obviously for those who lose their kith and kin, their loved guardian and bread-earners of the family, the spair is complete and the agony endless. We cannot share their sorrow, we can only be sympathetic.

Dr Mosharraf Hossain, 45, returned home after about twelve years of service in Iran in 1996 and just about started his own medical practice. But a couple of bullets fired by a couple of young murderers ended his life on the morning of Sunday in front of his eight-year-old daughter who was getting a ride with her father to school in a rickshaw. This tragedy took place in front of a number of people and not far from his house. Police say it was a sequel to personal enmity between Dr Mosharraf and a gang of muggers who snatched money from the deceased in May last. He caught one of them and after assurances from him for the return of the entire amount he released his captive on good faith. He did not go to police for reasons best known to him. Perhaps as a good human being he had reposed faith in another fellow being. But in reality the muggers turned out to be killers. Eyewitnesses said they saw these two youngmen for a number of days waiting at the Bat-tala Maxi stand where they waylaid the doctor on Sunday morning.

Police have nabbed three suspects - father and two sons — but they must find out and arrest Ibrahim of Pallabi who was caught by Dr Mosharraf during the mugging. We want prompt action from the police and we would like to see justice is done to the family of the victim. We seek the personal interest of the home minister in this particular case. The tragedy assumes a more heart-rending hue as the whole family of the doctor was to fly for the USA in less than a month's time on DV visa. But the dreams of the family were shattered by the

.... killers. Perhaps, we expect a bit too much from the police, perhaps we feign a bit too much civility but none of these appear to be a virtue that can normally be associated with a society that we live in.

Charif in the Dock

way the architect of the latest military take-over in Pakistan, General Pervez Musharraf, has so far treated ousted Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has a disturbing resemblance with the ouster and eventual execution of Zulfigar Ali Blant! a ngineered by General Ziaul Hug in the late 1970s. After being held in army custody at an unidentified location since the coup d'état on October 12. Sharif was flown to Karachi on Saturday to stand trial on charges of treason and kidnapping at the anti-terrorist courts ironically he himself had established. What's more, the deposed premier "is expected to be held in an ordinary prison cell until his trial". The general appears intent on inflicting extreme humiliation on a man who was overwhelmingly voted to power only two and a half years back which is despicable. On the whole, the General's actions so far show his express intent to stay at the helm despite intense pressure from the international community for restoration of civilian rule in Pakistan.

Nawaz Sharif's predicament simply does not sit in with the notion that a person is innocent until proven guilty. The deposed leader has already been treated as a criminal by the military regime. He has been denied the rights he, as a citizen, ought to enjoy. Although General Musharraf has assured otherwise, fear of Sharif's loyalists is that their leader would be denied a fair trial looks highly likely to prove true. However, the military chief must realise that the time has changed and in the present global context, it is absolutely impossible to get away with such denial of rights. While the special court tries Sharif, the international attention would be on the general. The nature of the trial would be a determinant of his credibility; however, only to the extent that it would be complimented with immediate announcement of a definite timeframe for restoration of democracy.

Nonetheless, the military regime should, at this point of time, stop harassing Nawaz Sharif and let him defend himself against the charges brought against him. Accused he may be: however, that he was voted to power by the people certainly gives him the right to have better treatment.

Trouble at Mongla Port

T ROUBLE at the Mongla Port shows no sign of letting up. In fact, now that the 23 unions of workers and employees of the port have expressed solidarity with the casual workers on an indefinite strike to press home their 15-point demands, in all probability the tensile atmosphere will only intensify over the next few days. Both the stevedores and the workers have blamed each other for 'creating a deadlock at the port'; however, what appears to have evaded their attention is the fact that their hardened position would harm their own interest in the long run.

While the belligerent parties are busy grumbling over their grievances, Tk. 125 crore worth of shrimps, meant for export, are lying in freezers. If these were not exported immediately the contract with the importers would become void. In that case, the sale value of the shrimps would fall by ten to fifteen per cent. The loss incurred would tell

upon them as well.

The Mongla Port deadlock, once again, points at lack of communication between the employees and the employers. At this point, there should be the intervention of a third party primarily to facilitate dialogue between the two sides. The Bangladesh Employers' Federation (BEF) has reasonable experience in dealing with troubles at port and should, therefore, play the conciliator's role to end the crisis. By no means, the stand-off at the port should be let to linger. We urge both parties to let their good sense prevail and sort out their differences through talks lest their obduracy results in immense damage to the economy.

Why Bangladesh Failed to Secure the ANGLADESH contested Position of the C'wealth SG

by Harun ur Rashid

There is a view that it is not the candidate but the country which is contesting the election stands itself on test. Given the political situation in the country, the question is: has Bangladesh been able to demonstrate a positive image of democratic traditions to the members of the Commonwealth which cherishes the ideals of democracy as its goal?

population in Commonwealth live in South

It was thought that New Zealand recently captured the post of the Director General of the World Trade Organisation and there was a view that having done so, the position of the New Zealand's candidate to secure another top job in an intergovernmental organisation would be weaker. A view prevailed that New Zealand, a country with a population of nearly 4 million only, has had enough share in holding inter-

national jobs. However, it appears that the majority of the Commonwealth leaders did not accept the view which Bangladesh has canvassed. Why? It seems that they looked at the scenario from a different perspective. They might have considered that the top job was held successively by the nationals of the developing countries for twenty years (first Guyana and then Nigerial and now a turn has come for a candidate from a developed member-country to occupy the position. It appears that they took the view that the top job should rotate between the developed and developing member-countries of the Commonwealth and not on the

Furthermore, New Zealand is seen as an Asia-Pacific country which continues to exert a

no defence. The state did practi-

cally nothing. Even when it

came to know that lakhs of

people were marooned and had

no food, no drinking water, it

expressed helplessness. If this

is not the failure of the state

machinery, what else is?

Politics came in the way; oth-

erwise, it was a fit case for the

president to take over the ad-

getting warnings and ignoring

them to the people's peril.

Kendrapada was hit by a fierce

cyclone as far back as 1971.

Some 10,000 people lost their

lives at the time. In the last 28

years, the state has learnt little

from what happened. The two

chief ministers during the pe-

riod, Biju Patnaik and Janki

Bhallab Patnaik, emptied the

state's treasury but spent noth-

ing on building an organisation

which could take care of the

people hit by cyclones, floods or

such other tragedies. Even the

victims of 1971 cyclone had to

True, natural calamities are

hard to avert. But in Orissa the

ordeal is also man-made. There

has been a systematic destruc-

tion of mangrove and other

tropical trees having branches

that send down roots. This

growth protected the coastal ar-

eas. Greedy contractors, politi-

fend for themselves.

In fact, the state has been

ministration.

geographical basis.

great influence on the member countries in the Pacific region (the number of members from this region alone is 9). New Zealand attracts many nationals from the Pacific island countries for their higher education and often New Zealand judges were appointed to head inquiry commissions in these countries. New Zealand's close relations with the Pacific members of the Commonwealth

has been a great plus for the

New Zealand is seen as a

country.

country whose foreign policy on nuclear weapons and tests are at variance with those of the US and the West. It earned admiration from many countries in the Asia-Pacific region when it banned the US nuclear-powered ships in mid-80s from its ports. The US accused New Zealand of undermining the West's nuclear deterrent and jeopardising its own security. New Zealand is seen as a pacifist country because it had instituted a case in the International Court of Justice against French nuclear tests and in 1985 the Greenpeace vessel Rainbow Warrior which was to have led a protest voyage against the testing of nuclear weapons in French Polynesia was sabotaged and sunk by French secret agents in one of the New Zealand's harbours (Auckland). The country retained a positive

image among the developing

nations of the Commonwealth. Second, the New Zealand candidate is the current Foreign

Minister of the country for the last 7 years. This seems to have acted as a great advantage for the candidate. As a Foreign Minister he has continued to maintain a high profile and easy access to the leaders of the Commonwealth. Moreover, the past two holders of the position were Ministers in their governments. The Guyanese personage was the Law Minister of Guyana while the present incumbent was the Foreign Minister of Nigeria. There is a view that the position of the Secretary-General is ordinarily equated with the level of a Minister and the New Zealand's candidate who is the Foreign Minister appeared to have met this unspoken convention.

Third, the voting-pattern in any inter-governmental organisation is very difficult to fathom. It seems that many of the countries who assured to support Bangladesh did not do so at the critical time. One cannot rely solidly upon the verbal or even written commitment from a country, however friendly it is. The election is a time of horse-trading and hard bargaining. There are so many variables and behind-the-scene diplomacy which operate prior to an election of a prize post. There are many instances when nations were puzzled about the

voting pattern in a multi-lateral forum, even when they had received commitments from many countries. It is not infrequent that the number of votes does not add up to the number of commitments. This is a hard reality in the multi-lateral

diplomacy. Furthermore, the time-lag between the commitment and the election may cause a change of the position of a country towards a candidate. Since the vote is secret, it is highly risky to predict any outcome. No country can be sure of winning any election at an international level. For example. Australia was surprised in 1996 to obtain much less votes than it had expected when it contested a seat of the UN Security Council. India was also taken aback when it had received fewer votes in the Security Council election a few years

Finally, if there is a consensus on any elective position, there is no problem for a country. But when a position is contested, the profile of that country looms large in the eyes of those who will vote for that country. There is a view that it is not the candidate but the country which is contesting the election stands itself on test. The scenario may be compared to a candidate of a political party in an election. The voters do not often care the personality of a candidate in the election so long the person represents a particular political party of his/her choice. The Commonwealth is an

ardent promoter of democracy and all the heads of membercountries attending the Summit in Durban are democratically elected. Not a single unelected head was allowed to attend the Summit. Nigeria could attend the meeting because it had restored democracy this year. Pakistan has been suspended temporarily from the Commonwealth because of the military coup. No other intergovernmental organisation has taken such action against Pakistan.

Given our political situation in the country, the question is: has Bangladesh been able to demonstrate a positive image of democratic traditions to the members Commonwealth? Commonwealth Secretariat which got deeply involved in 1995 on the issue of Non-Party Care-Taker government in Bangladesh is fully aware of the political situation in the country. The diplomatic personnel who are stationed at present in Bangladesh must have been reporting the current political state of affairs in the country to their governments. Who knows what perception and image Bangladesh continues to display in the eyes of these governments? There is a view the perception and image of a country is very important to succeed in an election at a multi-lateral level when a position is contested, in particular when the Commonwealth cherishes the ideals of democracy as

The author, a barrister, is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

Orissa Tragedy

Authorities Criminally Slack and Sluggish

The tragedy should have awakened us to the privations of most people all over India — how they

live on the periphery of poverty and how the 52-year-old independence has made little difference to

their condition . . . Even a small flood, much less the cyclone, destroys their meagre existence. And

then they get so engrossed in finding food, shelter or work for themselves that they have no time to

TT THEN a cyclone lashed Berhampur in Orissa in the third week of October, Parliament was in session. Members demanded a discussion on the inadequacy of relief. They were assured that the Business Committees of the two houses would allot time. But the introduction of the Insurance Bill was preferred to a debate on the devastation in Berhampur.

the position of the

Secretary-General of the

Commonwealth against New

Zealand. At the current Summit

Conference in Durban, the

Commonwealth leaders elected

on 12 November the New

Zealand's candidate. He will

replace the present incumbent

Chief Emeka Anyaoku of

of the country's best diplomats

for the position. The

Bangladeshi candidate is artic-

ulate, pleasant, suave and meets

all the necessary attributes to

lead the Commonwealth

Secretariat. His experience in

both bilateral and multi-lateral

diplomacy earned admiration

in and outside the country. The

failure of the Bangladeshi can-

didate to win the top job does

not at all reflect on either his

Bangladesh lose the election?

Bangladesh campaigned that

the position of Secretary

-General should rotate on the

geographical basis. In the past

the position was held by a

Canadian and a Caribbean

(Guyana) and at present by an

African. Asia missed out in the

past. It is high time that the po-

sition should go to an Asian

candidate. Furthermore, South

to the make-up of the modern

Commonwealth after India's

entry in 1949 as a Republic with

its own head of state. In addi-

tion to these, it is noted that out

of the existing 54 nations, ex-

cept Britain, Canada, Australia

and New Zealand, all member-

countries are developing na-

tions and therefore a candidate

from the developing nations of

Asia, in particular from South

Asia, ought to man the top job.

After all, the majority of the

Asia has a distinct contribution

The question is : why did

First, it appears that

competence or his ability.

Bangladesh has fielded one

Nigeria in April next year.

Had there been even a limited discussion, the government, both at the centre and in the state, might not have been caught napping. Both would have been a little more vigilant and a little more organised. When the second and bigger cyclone hit the coastal area of the state a few days later, there was no plan, no preparation. The administration threw up its hands. It looked as if the battle had been lost even before it be-

The authorities were criminally slack and sluggish. They had no clue about what to do. And it is no secret that many officials, including the collectors on leave, stayed away even after learning about the yclone. Neither duty not conscience tugged them to return to serve the people.

The military swung into action at the centre's order. Even then precious time was wasted. The relief in certain parts did not begin till a week or 10 days later. When New Delhi had hoisted the danger signal of the cyclone two days earlier it is not clear why the follow-up steps for disaster management were not initiated straightaway. Why were not polythene sheets, equipment for sinking wells in dry areas, sachets of drinking water, tents, apart from food and medicine, not

look for their lost relations, their neighbours or village men. collected beforehand? cians and the bureaucrats have The state government did deforested the coastal area. not wake up for 10 days. It had leaving no impediment between

the sea and habitations. Paradip port was developed in the seventies to provide fillip to the hinterland. It has failed in its purpose. There is only one helipad at the port. The main problem is that the area is criss-crossed by the Baitarani, Brahmani and the Mahanadi rivers, their branches and a hundred rivulets. The delta area is as it was years ago, raw and unharnessed.

to declare the cyclone havoc a national calamity. What more should have happened to qualify the state for that status? The advantage of a national calamity is that international assistance comes more freely and substantially. And the state gets from the centre huge funds in its hands. New Delhi's fear is that once the state government has money, it will divert it to the payment salaries of teachers and others. who have remained unpaid for

the Pope said anything on the Orissa cyclone. He should have emphasised more on the woes of months. But there can be some

persons on their own, slinging a bag on their shoulders, would go to places of natural disasters and spend weeks to render succor to the victims. The international community has been tardy to offer assistance. And I have missed if

volunteers. Not long ago, many

the sufferers, a cleansing and uniting quality, than on saving: "May the Third Christian Millennium witness a great harvest of faith on this vast and

vital continent." The Orissa tragedy should have shaken us. It has not. The tragedy should have awakened us to the privations of most people all over India — how they live on the periphery of poverty and how the 52-year-old independence has made little difference to their condition. They still have no regular income, no firm shelter and nothing to fall back upon. Their children have no school to go to and the old wait for death helplessly. They shudder to fall ill because they have no means to afford medicine. Nor can they remain

idle for a single day. Even a small flood, much less the cyclone, destroys their

meagre existence. And then

they get so engrossed in finding food, shelter or work for themselves that they have no time to look for their lost relations. their neighbours or village

The hard decision that the Vajpayee-led government should make is to curb the greed of elite and how to curtail consumerism. Our development should have provided people with food, clothing, shelter, clean water and sanitation. But the benefits of development have gone to the top. The ruling class has 'seceded' from the common man. Modern gadgets and goodies are an integral part of the globalisation which shape the government's policles. Undoing all may not be possible. We have burnt many bridges. Still some priorities can be refixed so that the programmes concerning people and their welfare are taken up

The basic problem remains the same. The cake is small and the number of people wanting a slice is increasing. Had the size of the cake grown larger there would have been something for everybody to take home. The demand is either by the top or by those who operate in the name of caste and crime. In a way, the Orissa tragedy has a lesson for all communities.

They must come together as much to barricade their villages as to develop their resources. Those who are trying to raise the standard in the name of caste or religion would serve their case better if they were to act in the name of welfare.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

Thousands of people have died this time. In Paradip alone, the casualty figure is around 10,000. Hundreds of thousands are still going from pillar to post, seeking shelter and work. Innumerable people are bivouacking along highways and roads. The rice bowl of the state, a 300-kilometrelong coastal belt, has been destroyed. As many as 1.5 crore people have been affected. They have to be helped to restart their life. This will require some Rs 50,000 crore, which is beyond the capacity of even the

most advanced nations. Still New Delhi has refused. method to ensure that the money allocated is spent on rehabilitation alone. The national calamity has to be declared. The mere phrase would make a psychological differ-

The real lesson to be drawn is that the states have neither resources nor experts to deal with natural disasters. The centre must set up a separate organ-

The quantity of assistance is also nowhere near the need of the moment. Diwali was still a glittering wasteful festival. And one missed the institution of

OPINION

The Cost of Politics

The citizens are realising the heavy toll for the maintenance of routine political activities in an emerging and developing country such as Bangladesh. In Dhaka, several mainstream symptoms have been clearly identified, besides a host of minor resultant ones: including, impatience, intolerance, and use of violence. A public debate should be called for whether this poor nation can and should pay the heavy price of political 'ism' based on the cult of personality. The country comes

first — full stop. In a society with high an illiteracy based and low economic sustaining power, it is tough to maintain discipline and codes of conduct, and avoid violent skirmishes by powerful vested groups (including the loan-defaulters), leading to frequent violations of law and order, day in and day out. Now the presence of huge numbers of illegal arms, hand-bombs, and other weapons have added to the volatile situation. Have we progressed proportionately since democracy was restored

in the beginning of this decade? What is more alarming is that the moral degradation has gone down to the lowest level, endangering the daily lives of ordinary families and citizens. who cannot conduct their daily personal and private business quietly and peacefully. In the other sectors, toll collectors. smugglers, kidnappers and mastaans dictate the show. Today there is no social safety; and hardly any means of redress, as the administrations are squeezed with extra burden of responsibility to contain the situation within normal limits.

It is not possible for any administration to cope with the present alarming situation, as the politicians are fighting amongst themselves, the parliament is in limbo, and nobody is listening to anybody. The government is fond of instantly accusing the combined

opposition, and leaving it at that! After that, what? A complete break-up is apprehended at any moment, when the situation reaches the point of no-return, which appears to be likely very soon. How our government is going to tackle the in-

flammable situation? The point to note is that the political activists are now violence-prone. Many more are going to be injured, and some precious lives have already been lost. Use of force can solve political situations only partially and temporarily, as ideologies are involved, and force is a solution at a much lower level. At the philosophical level, the issue appears to be - how much force can shatter belief. There is no safe haven, and neither the government nor any group can guarantee it.

Proposals have appeared in the press for reducing the term of governance after each general election (from five years to three or four years). Bunched elections have also been proposed. The latter has one advantage, the frequency of political activities is reduced every year, giving some respite to the people from the menacing presence of political activists round the year.

Unless the political leaders can come to a consensus on how to run the country and maintain the society at the minimum acceptable moral level, the future of the country is doomed. Then there will be only one solution: questionable take-overs, or revolution, or both. South Asia has abundant experience of such situations in the past (present: what happened in Pakistan, and why it

happened?). The politicians must deliver. or face a change of guards. We are sitting on thetop of a volcano - the deeper issue is deeper than the mere inconvenience of frequent political hartals.

Preserve integrity

Sir, I am profoundly shocked after learning of Prime Minister's recent unbridled verbiage against the Leader of the Opposition in the solemn premise of Jatiya Sansad. We know that she gets over-emotional while attacking her political opponents, especially the Leader of the Opposition. However, she should remember that violating the decorum of the Sansad is an insult to our constitution and national pride. Moreover, it sets an excruciating example of bringing personal vendetta in the public

All of our political leaders should think that this limping nation is already burdened with curses of poverty, illiteracy and corruption. The very last spurring self-esteem will also be at stake if they evince such indignity and lack of personal integrity publicly. Besides their tendency to ignore other more important incumbent tasks. they can at least try to stop eroding our national pride by setting good examples of personal integrity in public fo-

Zafar Hadi California, USA

Osmani Udyan saved

Sir, It was the firm protests of Professor Sirajul Islam Chowdhury and that of the conscious citizens of Dhaka have saved the 11,000 trees of Os-

mani Udyan. The NAM conference centre will now be built at Sher-e-Banglanagar. The revised decision of the government appeals us like a gentle breeze. We welcome the decision wholeheartedly.

Shahabuddin Mahtab 51 Siddheswari Road Dhaka-1217

Thank you for caring

Sir, I read the DS editorials regularly. When all values, decency, decorum etc., are going away from our society, I join all sensible men of this country, to express our deepest appreciation for the editorial on November 11. Thank you very

much for your writing, which shows that there are still some people, some newspapers in this country, who care about this country, its future, its future generation and above all the values of our society.

Rais Uddin Ahmad Supreme Court of Bangladesh

A wife remembers her husband

Sir, Many readers may think it odd to my writing to give tribute in public to my respected, beloved husband, Henry, who died in a Bangkok hospital on 30.11.99 after a heart operation. But I think it is my duty to express my gratitude and thanks who has done much for me and my family, extended love. affection and acted as the guardian for 42 years. He had a big heart where (in his word) two football teams could play. He had love for everybody. His loving nature never knew to differentiate people of all ages, or classes. He equally enjoyed mixing with his boyhood friends of Old Dhaka speaking in local language of Dhaka city and friends from other countries all over the world speaking in his beautiful English. He had an unusual capability to make and entertain friends.

I spent 42 years of pleasant married life with him and respected him for his courageous nature to fight for any good cause especially against odds. I saw him fighting as a politician against Ayub regime, won election as Bangladesh member. while he was very young, fighting in his own way as a freedom fighter staying in his own residence helping the freedom fighters in many ways, particularly keeping arms, grenades etc. in our house taking risking our lives.

All through his life he fought for democracy - expressed his opinion in his books without any prejudice and fear. He never hesitated to take risk but used to take defeat gracefully and courageously. He never grudged for anything as he was very proud to receive pity or sympathy from anybody even when he

While in Bangkok the doctors explained him about the high risk of heart surgery and risk of heart attack without a by-pass surgery he looked straight into the eyes of the surgeon and said, "Go ahead with the surgery, doctor". As I knew him thoroughly I believe the high risk and the fight to become fit and healthy again allured him to go for surgery. I am sure he also took his death courageously and gracefully. At times he used to tell me, "When I die I would never know I was ever alive". But he is alive in my heart, in the heart of his son, daughter, daughter-in-law, grandchildren and other members of my family whom he loved enormously. We will remember him always for his striking personality and live with his innumerable exemplary memories which will motivate us to love people without any reservation and prejudice. I am sure Allah will bless his soul to rest in eternal peace.

May Allah bless us also to bear this irreparable loss and also give us the strength to accept our lives without him in person. Munira Khan Dhaka.

Who is the Commander in

Chief?

Sir. We all know that Lt. Gen. M.A.G. Osmani was the Commander in Chief of our glorious Liberation War in 1971. But in the Bangla news at 8:00 p.m. on BTV on November 12, 1999, the reader gave us a different information. While reading the news regarding the date of cancellation of the Indemnity Ordinance (12-Nov-99) in 1996. the reader said that Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujubur Rahman was the mukti juddher

sorbadhinayok. Now the question is: did he make a mistake or is that true?

A citizen. Dhaka.

Bad practice and bad odour

Sir. We are the dwellers of Circuit House Road and Shantinagar. These areas are well known as flood prone areas during the rainy season. To solve this problem, the City Corporation took a step in March 1999. After digging the road, large pipes were put up and broken bricks were placed on the road. Even after seven months the work remains incomplete.

Circuit House Road is an inportant road but there are no public toilet or restroom in this area. Hence people resort to using sidewalks for urinating. The Karnaphuly City Garden and Habibullah Bahar College. areas are fine example of such nuicense places. Would the authority concerned kindly take necessary steps to solve these problem?

Benjamin Gomes Circuit House Road Dhaka-1000