

Grozny Writhing, but Who Cares?

WHAT Russia is doing with the Chechens in Grozny is state terrorism and how the western world has been reacting to it is a virtual abatement in the crime.

After butchering the Chechens right, left and centre, in the name of fighting terrorism, Russian military has been committing the most rabid form of state-sponsored terrorism on record.

They have encircled Grozny from all sides and threatened the Chechen residents with simultaneous attacks from the air and by land if they failed to vacate the city by December 11. For some time past panicked women and children have been moving into refugee camps near the Chechen-Ingush border to flee the Russian military persecution and also taking fright of the imminent showdown between the Russians and Chechen separatist rebels.

Since the Chechen rebels are to make their last stand in the Russian encircled city it is utter destruction that lies in store for Grozny. When a whole population is writhing in the trepidations of an extinction, the world, especially the powerful western countries, are doing no more than issuing empty, at best academic, threats to Russia.

Let the muted international reaction to Russian brutalisation be transformed into a crescendo of protests against making Grozny into another Kosovo or Bosnia as the powerful countries get their act together to intervene rightaway.

What about Bangla Academy?

THE prime minister's declaration that a Centre for Mother Language Practice and Research will be set up in the capital in a way reminds us of the existence of Bangla Academy which has been involved in the field for long. The academy was founded with a view to upholding and enriching our linguistic and cultural heritage.

True, Bangla Academy may not have lived up to the expectations. It is also true, more could have been done in the field of research on Bangla. Still, isn't it true as well that the academy has had torrid times negotiating with the whims of successive regimes? More often than not, we have seen the government tampering with its internal affairs influencing project outline and recruitment matters.

Unesco declaration of February 21 as the International Mother Language Day enhances not only the nation's prestige but also its responsibility. Indeed, we need to play a pioneering role in language research. But the government's enthusiasm in this regard seems misdirected. The thrust should be on identifying the impediments that are not letting the academy perform at the level it is expected to and eliminating them; and not on setting up a centre just for the heck of it.

Let's Do It Differently

THE city experienced horrendous traffic disorder on Tuesday afternoon on account of a public rally organised by the government to celebrate the Unesco's declaration of 21st February as the International Mother Language Day. It is perhaps the most glorious day in our national history to be honoured with such an international recognition of the sacrifices we made for the sake of our mother tongue.

But couldn't we have celebrated the occasion without causing any hardship to the citizens? Was it not possible to do it differently? The route map of the procession, published in the major dailies, was not followed resulting in jams at most important and vulnerable points. These caused a terrible disruption of civic life in the capital.

A perfectly well-intentioned gesture of the prime minister tended to cause a serious dislocation in city life. We strongly feel that in future the organisers of such rallies and marches should stick to a set plan that will spell less trouble for the citizens in an already precarious traffic jungle.

Four-Party Declaration and Political Situation

How could one believe in the sincerity and seriousness of the desire of the Prime Minister to hold talks while at the same time she herself deliberately vitiated the atmosphere by vilification of the Leader of the Opposition and shooting down mercilessly, by action of her obedient police force, senior opposition leaders in the street?

THE long awaited and much talked about 4-party summit of the opposition political parties finally took place on the 30th ultimo at the official residence of the Leader of the Opposition, Begum Khaleda Zia.

The Declaration has been viewed by the intellectuals and a cross section of the general public as a comprehensive, rather restrained and fairly balanced one. In line with the constitution, it reflected democratic norms and aspirations. The Declaration portrayed a vivid picture of the current socio-political-economic conditions of the country as well as undemocratic and repressive measures undertaken by the government to throttle political opposition.

The major fields in which the government had manifested stark failure were many. They cited that the parliament, the focal point of democracy, was rendered ineffective by not allowing opposition members to speak on major national and international issues.

Let the muted international reaction to Russian brutalisation be transformed into a crescendo of protests against making Grozny into another Kosovo or Bosnia as the powerful countries get their act together to intervene rightaway.

Hindutva Invades Curricula Education as Prejudice

Praful Bidwai writes from New Delhi

It is not often (at least in India) that conservatism produces distinguished intellectuals. People like M.N. Srinivas or Girilal Jain are rare exceptions. The run-of-the-mill saffron conservative is far too insecure to run institutions in a consensual, open, democratic way.

IF Mr M.M. Joshi has his way, our children will grow up believing that "Bharatiya culture", as the sangh parivar defines it, is the sole influence that has shaped India. This culture, they will learn, has remained unchanged since time immemorial. All other influences, and traditions are "impure", alien, not part of our "heritage".

Other bodies like the NCERT and the CBSE are also about to adopt a similar approach. These Papers not only stipulate the objectives of education but also lay down its core-content.

This adds up to a massive brainwashing programme. No one has ever attempted anything one-tenth as ambitious. Earlier, textbooks were manipulated to introduce a communal bias. But this is the first time that the whole curriculum is being comprehensively rewritten—not to update it.

The Discussion Papers are reminiscent of fatwas issued in Hitler's Germany to inculcate the spirit of "nationalism", and specify what constitutes the authentic "German culture" of the Aryan "master race".

They come on top of many measures that the BJP government has taken to alter the character of institutions like the Councils of Social Science and Historical Research, and the University Grants Commission.

Not to be left behind is Mr Arun Jaitley, the new I&B minister. He has shown his true colours by arbitrarily removing Prof Romila Thapar and Mr Rajendra Yadav from Prasar Bharati.

This makes a complete mockery of autonomy. Autonomy means the government cannot interfere with PB's management. Legally, it is not empowered to remove or appoint directors. But it brazenly did so. For retention, an objective criterion could have been applied, like drawing lots— which the PB Board itself proposed.

These ideas form the core of the "Discussion Papers" prepared by the principal institutions that draw up school curricula, including the National Open School (with over a million pupils, from whose document the quotes are taken).

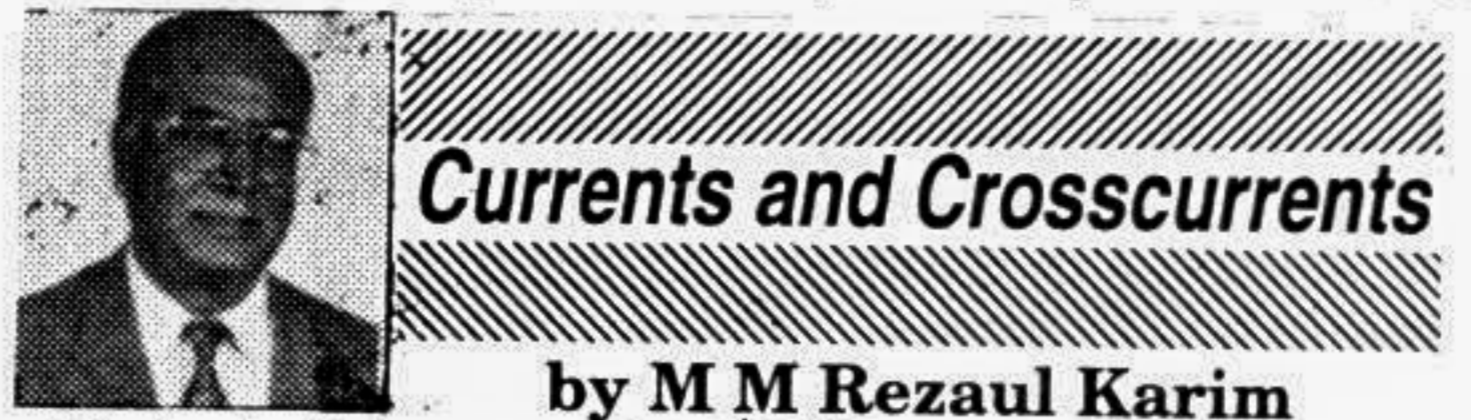
To the Editor...

Amusing Sir, First let me say that when I write this I do not mean to speak against my country in any way. As a citizen of a democratic country my freedom of speech has urged me to speak and hence.

In the issue of the DS dated 23.11.99, I was shocked and amused to see that a writ petition has moved against the campaign of the 'Voyage of Discovery'. Are we so bored that we have to do such things as a means to pass time? Some may think that I am all for 'Western' ideas. Truly speaking, when the advertisement of the 'Voyage of Discovery' used to appear on TV, I felt happy to see that Bangladesh was also on the list of their visiting countries.

Office of the prime minister Sir, The BNP amended the constitution in 1996 to make provision for non-party caretaker government to hold fair elections. This is known as the thirteenth amendment. As per

and so forth. Over and above these, law and order situation went from bad to worse. Crimes of all types reached a record high. Terrorism, extortion, ransom mongering, rape and repression of women and children became unparalleled in history. Use of law enforcing authorities for unlawful political purposes, police atrocities and killing in police custody spread terror among most people. Continued harassment by instituting false criminal cases and illegal detention prevented thousands of opposition workers and leaders from sleeping at home



Currents and Crosscurrents

by M M Rezaul Karim

and to be in hideouts so that they could hardly devote themselves to their legitimate party work.

In any case, among the special features and achievements of the summit, some noteworthy ones can be enumerated. Firstly, it was unique in the sense it produced a written declaration of common perceptions, policies and projected actions of four major political parties to which they were committed.

The media and intellectuals sympathetic to government criticised and sneered at the BNP for having joined hands with anti-liberation Jamaat and autocratic Jatiya Party forces in order to make a political alliance. But the Awami League clearly sidetracked the fact that they had earlier made alliances with the same anti-liberation and autocratic forces

during the past BNP regime in a bid to topple the latter. As a matter of fact, the Awami League could never have been able to assume power and form a government without support of autocratic Ershad, and welcomed his Secretary General in their cabinet. So the question of political expediency supplanted the matter of principles for our political leaders. One may also recall, while Begum Zia remained unflinching in adhering to the common opposition policy of non-cooperation, Sheikh Hasina in defiance of joint decision participated in the election and legitimized Ershad regime.

The current political situation was largely dominated by the Tangail-8 by-election. In the opinion of domestic and international observers, the by-election polls were marked by unprecedented violence, rampant violation of election rules, indiscriminate and unlawful use of government's administrative and law-enforcing agencies, deliberate flouting of electoral code of conduct and brazen manifestation of muscle and money power.

The other major event relates to the unprecedented slandering on the floors of the Parliament by the Leader of the House, joined by a highly influential Cabinet Minister. Honble Prime Minister spoke most dishonourably about the person of the Leader of the Opposition that stunned the general public and put them to shame. Simultaneously, the Home Minister joked about an opposition MP wounded by police firing saying that the MP's blood-soaked body was in fact smeared by animal blood. In the same breath, Prime Minister made public statements without making any direct or formal approach, asking the opposition to hold a dialogue to solve political problems. How could one believe in the sincerity and seriousness of the desire of the Prime Minister to hold talks while at the same time she herself deliberately vitiated the atmosphere by vilification of the Leader of the Opposition and shooting down mercilessly, by action of her obedient police force, senior opposition leaders in the street?

The author, a former Ambassador, is Member, Advisory Council of BNP.

Remembering National Professor Abdur Razzak

by A T R Rahman

WE are saddened by the death of Professor Razzak who touched and influenced many of our lives profoundly in various ways. The interview by Humayun Azad with Professor Razzak taken on December 2, 1984, published in the December 3, 1999 issue of weekly Thikana, New York gives a perceptive profile of this caring person and brings back to memory several personal contacts that I have been privileged to share as a student and colleague in the political science department of Dhaka University.

Teaching and lecturing in a formal classroom was not particularly liked by Razzak Sir. Very few students could understand his lectures. It used to be said about him that his lecture went over the heads of students and that he was a teacher of teachers. Although I took his class three years as a honors student, the only memory of his lecture that stuck in my mind is the one he gave on the day after the 1954 election results for the legislative assembly in East Pakistan was announced in which Jukta Front trounced the Muslim League by capturing 291 seats out of 300. While we all were celebrating the results and praising the election as the brightest day of democracy in Pakistan, Professor Razzak, in his black Sherwani and white Pajama, entered the classroom and declared that "this is the darkest day of democracy in East Pakistan". We were stunned and speechless for some moments. Seeing our condition, he took the whole hour to explain how a 97 per cent parliamentary majority cannot be a functioning democracy and that it would turn into a virtual dictatorship. But in the case of Jukta Front, he also explained that since it was an alignment based not on agreements of shared positive political views but in opposition to a negative cause of dislodging Muslim League, the electoral unity will not survive the fights over policies and patronage leading the country to chaos and confusion.

His prediction came true although many of us were not sure if we understood what he was explaining at that time.

The impact, influence and the hold that Professor Razzak had on many of us was not due to his lecture at the classroom, his speeches on rare occasions, or guiding research works, or publishing papers and books. It was from his one to one contact with his students, associates and friends who came into contact with him, discussed their problems and sought his advice. I remember Professor Razzak not as a teacher or a

friend but as a caring guide and sympathetic advisor who always kept the full interests of the person seeking his help in mind. In one to one contact, Razzak Sir always made us feel that we are the only focus of his attention and concern of his caring and intellectual abilities at that moment.

I remember an encounter with him concerning a critical issue of my honors student life. Our head of the department, Professor K.G. Newman, had a policy requiring applicants for B.A. honors with low marks in English in Intermediate exam to take English as one of their subsidiary subjects. I was eager to take honors in Political Science and took English as one of my subsidiaries without fully realizing the future implications. As we progressed in our first year, I heard horror stories



of how only few students passed English subsidiary in the first chance and how many of them failed several times and had to change subsidiary English to some other subject in order to finally pass the honors exam in political science. I got really worried about my prospects of passing English and someone advised me to see Professor Razzak. When I asked the Sir for time to discuss my problem, he invited me to come to his house.

I vividly remember the room in which both of us sat down on a mat (Pati) on the floor surrounded by tall shelves against the walls stacked with books. Sir explained to me that he sleeps on Pati in the same room and that he has no other furniture. We shared Dhaka beef and Parata which he cooked himself and which was one of his favourite dish. After our social introductions, Sir listened to my worries about English subsidiary and advised me not to worry but take charge by practice writing in English, the only way he emphasized that I can improve my knowledge and

write correct English. Specifically he told me to write lengthy diary everyday for at least three months on any subject I chose. Given a seven-day break, I was told to reread and correct my diary entry daily for both grammar and expression. I did what the Sir told me which helped me to pass English easily. I owe it to professor Razzak for passing English at the first chance.

In Azad's interview, Professor Razzak blamed his laziness for not writing any important articles and books and not leaving any published intellectual legacy. Many of his admirers were also baffled by this phenomenon that a person who knew so much did not have interest or stamina to share his knowledge through printed words and make his contribution for the current and future generation. I have a feeling that Razzak Sir was basically a cynic and skeptic about and indifferent to the relevance and showed usefulness of his contribution and laziness to cover this skepticism. It is an unsolved mystery for many of his students that the Sir who liked to read, who knew so much and who could contribute significantly to the current issues and leave valuable legacy for future generation through his writings did not do so significantly.

I tried on one occasion to get Professor Razzak to do some writing for publication. In 1970 Professor Muzaffar Ahmed Chowdhury (who later became Vice Chancellor) and myself as the founding President and Secretary, respectively, organized the East Pakistan Political Science Association and approached the Sir to prepare and present the keynote speech in our inaugural meeting. After much persuasion Professor Razzak agreed to prepare the paper on condition we provided the stenographic support. It was arranged and he got about half way through—about 10 pages. But he declined to complete the paper, expressing lack of interest. We all were very disheartened, but honoured his wish.

The cynic in Razzak Sir always won the fight when the issue was writing something for or sharing his knowledge in print with a larger audience. But when the issue was sharing his knowledge and wisdom with individuals and small groups, it was the compassionate guide in Razzak Sir that won and was at its best. This is the way we remember him and I have a hunch this is how he wanted us to remember him. May Allah rest his soul in peace.

The writer is a senior UN officer and former professor of Dhaka University.

As per Article 57 of the Constitution, Sheikh Hasina will be the caretaker PM to hold parliamentary election. The thirteenth amendment of the constitution made for non-party caretaker government to hold parliament election cannot be applied here.

AKM Khairul Anam House#63/D, Road#15 Banant, Dhaka-1213.

Transshipment facility to India

Sir, As far as trade with India is concerned, we must do it without compromising our national interest and security. Transshipment of Indian goods could be a step in that direction but our leaders should take more time thinking over the issue. As we do not presently have a sound industrial output, I don't think it is the right time

and understanding for mutual benefits. Khaleda Zia, in a way, seems to engineer the politics that lessens our sense of nationalism.

Ameer 3090, 16th st. #405 San Francisco, C.A-94103 USA

Three types

Sir, Some are born Doctors, some achieve the honour by hard work, and some have Doctorates thrust upon them. In the ensuing convocation of the University of Dhaka, we shall see all three types. Amartya Sen will have it thrust upon him, there will be those poor men and women who had to do three to five years' grunge work, and there will be the ones who will claim it by birthright.

Bazlur Rahman 35/2C Basabant Lane, Dhaka