

Govt Stands Exposed

THIS is a telling proof of the government taking sides with its favourite at Feni. Zoynal Hazari, the local ruling party MP, is on record having boasted to a Bangla daily (*Jugantar*, March 12, 2000) that his boys did have arms and that he would only ask them to surrender those to the government after the weapons in possession of BNP cadres have been made over to the local administration by them. He even made a 'valiant' reference to the fact that he had said so in no less a forum than a meeting of the law and order committee. Now, what his words boil down to makes a horrific reading: he has been a keeper of armed cadres, heaven knows for how long, and that too with a command and control structure presumably running parallel to the local administration, at least that is how it should have been looked at from the law and order point of the view. Did he not stand liable for legal action on the very basis of that statement he had the temerity to issue?

The matter did not end there. Hazari sat on the same dais with the Home Minister at a Feni public meeting and heard the latter proclaim that a terrorist would be dealt with an iron hand regardless of the party he belonged to. Then followed the combing operation on March 8 swiftly hauling up Joyal Abedin, General Secretary of the district unit of BNP with eight of his party colleagues, including some Jubo Dal leaders. They have landed in jail under Arms Act and their petition for bail stands rejected. One hundred and fifteen persons have been mopped up since combing operation began less than a week back. It has been almost entirely a one-sided affair. True to Joyal Hazari's words that his boys would surrender their weapons after the BNP cadres did theirs, the combing operation has neither touched his cadres nor the cache of weapons kept by them.

This is the worst indictment on the government's law enforcement records to-date. Feni has been a test-case for the home ministry to prove its oft-professed resolve to apply the law impartially. If it had failed earlier to extricate itself from allegations of partisanship, here was at least one opportunity to make amends. But alas! the trend seems only reconfirmed. The fact that Zoynal Hazari belonged to the ruling party and was being openly so disrespectful of rule of law should have only obliged the government to deal firmly with him. The failure is bound to be costly, both to its image and law and order in general.

Concern over Asthma

THE painful disease of Asthma is on the rise in a context featured by meagre and costly treatment facilities. According to a study, there are around seven million people, young and old, who suffer the affliction across Bangladesh. This constitutes more than five per cent of the total population of the country. For such a huge number of patients who suffer in silence gasping for oxygen in front of their helpless parents and near and dear ones it is an excruciating ordeal for all concerned. In the absence of proper treatment facility the disease turns into chronic ailment.

The incidence of Asthma over the past ten years or so have rapidly escalated. During the past two years the number of patients seeking admission to hospitals have also sharply increased. This will continue to rise so long as we fail to arrest the deterioration in urban environment including smoke, dust and lead pollution. It is not yet known what causes asthma but certain factors that have been identified as 'allergens', seem to trigger its onset. The country has only one specialised hospital to treat this disease which is the Institute of Disease of the Chest & Hospital, Mohakhali. Since the medicine for asthma is costly most of the patients can not afford it. We suggest that the health ministry pay priority attention to Asthma and introduce specialised treatment at least in the medical college hospitals of the divisional headquarters with adequate stocks of drugs and medicines made available to them.

BDR Men Going Haywire

THE responsibility for Sunday's clashes at Damurhuda thana in Chuadanga has to be borne by the BDR jawaans on duty. Starting from the raid on the bazaar to merciless assault on villagers, including women and children, to arrest of seven people, their actions have been defiant of any standard procedure laid out for them to be followed under those circumstances or any rational thinking. First of all, as we understand, they cannot conduct a raid on an establishment without prior authorisation from the civil administration. For the sake of argument, say, they have the authority for such actions under extraordinary circumstances; but it certainly doesn't permit them to beat up people and ransack households. It was a remorseless show of strength in the hunt for two suspected smugglers who had allegedly brought in 200 kilograms of sugar from India. We condemn the BDR action.

We feel the BDR men involved in this particular case are blame-worthy on two counts: first, vigilance failure and second, excesses committed on innocent civilians. Also, there is the disturbing possibility of the BDR men taking their frustration and anger for having failed to nab the smugglers out on the villagers. Whatever may have been the case, even if it were a matter of extreme provocation from the villagers, the BDR action could not be justified because they are our sentinels of the border.

People already have a somewhat negative perception of their failure to have the desired impact on smuggling, drug and arms racketeering and trafficking of women and children across the border. Such an incident of highhandedness is bound to put further dent on their credibility. To salvage the situation and restore some credibility, the BDR high command should immediately initiate an investigation into the matter and take stringent disciplinary measures against the responsible jawaans. Also, a formal apology to the villagers should be made.

We feel that Bangladesh and

THE recently introduced Public Safety Act (PSA) 2000 attracted wide reactions from the political parties and the civil society in general. According to some, the PSA is 'dangerous'; others, however, said it would bring criminals, extortionists, muggers, transport breakers, etc. to their senses and public might ultimately find the city less dangerous. The combined Opposition was of the view that PSA passed at this end of ruling party's term will be used against the Opposition parties and their activists before the general election and thousands of opposition activists would be put behind the bar. Some of the Human Rights activists say, the PSA is against fundamental rights. Thus there are serious differences of opinion in the society about the PSA. Any way, so much has been said and written about this and there is practically nothing more to add.

The PSA 2000 and the political issues have, however, made Bangladesh politics absolutely sour and bitter. Indeed, one can see a dangerous turn there leading to total confrontation. Any general election with this sort of dangerous political confrontation will be meaningless in terms of democracy which these two major political parties worked together to establish only about a decade ago. It is really a pity that the same parties are now fighting in the name of democracy and indeed, if the present con-

frontational situation continues democracy itself is likely to be the casualty. Therefore, it is in the interest of the political parties themselves and also for saving democracy, immediate resolution of the present political crisis is a must. The political parties should, however, bear in mind that they will have to go back to the people in about a year's time for a fresh mandate. Therefore, all political parties particularly the major ones like Awami League and BNP must sit across the table and find a way out of the present political impasse.

In view of the dangerous turn in the political situation, the President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed may come to rescue. Regardless of what happened before and during PSA crisis and whether he has any constitutional authority or not — he has undoubtedly the moral obligation and as such the moral authority, too, to save democracy. The civil society, however, feel that the time has come for the President to go beyond advice and consider asserting his moral authority to bring the feuding major politi-

US President Reagan used to believe that if warring parties were equally well armed, there would be fewer wars. He may be right. This may tend to justify why Pakistan and India should have nuclear arsenals or all warring nations should have 'weapons of mass destruction' to end wars. The problem is, such situation makes you vulnerable on your arsenal and you divert your resources from social programmes to military maintenance and build-up. Ukraine realized it and allowed its Soviet-made nuclear arsenals to be disbanded and it received an economic package from the US for such decision. In the Middle East, Israel, Egypt and Jordan receive 82 per cent of the total US economic and military assistance. Their shares amount to \$3 billion (46%), \$2.1 billion (33 per cent) and \$183 million (2.8%) respectively. Israel also receives another \$2 billion from the American Jewish community. Israel's 50 years of arms build-up is still unable to guarantee peace and security to its citizens. Many die from the bullets and bombs that may have been supplied or manufactured by the West or its funds.

The United States spends the maximum amount of money on arms race followed by NATO. It spent \$266 billion or 33 per cent of the global spending on military in 1996. NATO was created to ensure security and protection to European allies from the threat of communist East particularly from the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The USSR had been disbanded into 19 CIS countries and a few former communist countries have become members of NATO. In spite of this, the NATO spent \$192 billion or 24 per cent of the global total in 1996. Many countries of the rest of the world including the East &

less than \$1 a day.

The good news is that the U.S. Senate has ratified (74-26 votes) an International Treaty banning chemical weapons, including curtailment of its use and storage and this treaty is already signed by 160 countries.

anything but instead take time to formulate a more formidable, fool proof and far reaching profitable and beneficial energy policy favouring the utilisation of our gas wealth. The U.S. President Bill Clinton's visit is a very timely one, though only for half a day. The energy policy is expected to be high on his agenda. In the light of the above we should explore the possibility of US assistance and active participation in advising our resource development and energy policy using our major national energy source for the benefit of our present and future nation building endeavour and activities.

I feel that the American President will not let us down, because history will bear the witness to the fact for all time to come how he helped a developing nation like Bangladesh to proceed in the right direction to meet the challenges of time in providing the quality of life for the teeming millions of Bangladesh; because his economic policy has been the most successful and sustainable one.

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