# The Baily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

Govt Stands Exposed

Dhaka, Tuesday, March 14, 2000

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 Joynal 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 Joynal 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 record's 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 Llazari 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 I 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 bor-

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.

# Dangerous Turns in Politics

by Muslehuddin Ahmad

Both parties should decide to agree to initially suspend, at least for an agreed period, the political activities of their student political wings and leave the students alone to pursue their studies so that on completion of studies only they could freely choose to join politics. This will not only ensure a promising future for these young people because of their proper educational qualifications but also enrich politics of the country.

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.

HE 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 fag 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

SPA 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 writ-

ten about this and there is prac-

litical issues have, however,

made Bangladesh politics abso-

lutely sour and bitter. Indeed,

one can see a dangerous turn

there leading to total con-

frontation. Any general elec-

tion with this sort of dangerous

political confrontation will be

meaningless in terms of democ-

litical parties worked together

ago. It's really a pity that the

same parties are now fighting

in the name of democracy and

indeed, if the present con-

TS President Reagan used

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 arse-

nals to be disbanded and it re-

ceived 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%) respec-

tively. Israel also receives an-

other \$2 billion from the Amer-

ican Jewish community. Is-

rael's 50 years of arms build-up

is still unable to guarantee

zens. Many die from the bullets

and bombs that may have been

supplied or manufactured by

maximum amount of money on

arms race followed by NATO. It

spent \$266 billion or 33 per cent

of the global spending on mili-

tary in 1996. NATO was created

to ensure security and protec-

tion to European allies from the

threat of communist East par-

ticularly from the former

public of Russia. The USSR had

been disbanded into 19 CIS

countries and a few former

communist countries have be-

come 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

Union of Soviet Socialist Re-

The United States spends the

the West or its funds.

peace and security to its citi-

to believe that if warring

parties were equally well

to establish only about a decade

racy which these two major po-

The PSA 2000 and other po-

tically nothing more to add.

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 of the country to go beyond advice and consider asserting his moral authority to bring the feuding major politi-

table at a neutral place like Bangabhaban. The President may decide to personally facilitate and supervise dialogue until they arrive at an "UNDERSTANDING" that both parties can live with. If necessary, he may set up a small committee of politically neutral citizens to support him with the details of the negotiations.

Time has come for these two major political parties to realise that it is they who will rule this country by turn - the sequence to be decided by the people. It goes without saying that the people do not like excesses. Any political party indulging in excesses will eventually face the wrath of the people. The civil society is gradually waking up to its responsibilities. The days of "big money" politics, political manipulations, election fraud etc. must come to an end. Therefore, it is released in the interest of these political parties themselves to arrive at a political "understanding" that would save democracy and also help them in coming to power trally and impartially.

cal parties to the discussion instead of losing their chances

To reach the desired politi-

cal "understanding" the commitment of both parties on the following lines would be neces-

#### The Ruling Party's commitments:

- Next General Election to be held on an agreed date soon after the next Holy Ramadan (Prime Minister at one stage indicated early election which may go a long way to change the present dangerous turn in poli-

- Awami League continues to go by its commitment of 'No Hartal" whether in power or in op-

- No police attack on peaceful demonstrations of the opposition parties

- Ruling party and their activists NOT to oppose or attack Opposition's demonstrations Political detainees need be

due time for deliberations in the Parliament.

- Speaker to act absolutely neu-

Opposition parties to be given

tween ruling party and opposition on Parliament matters to

> - Issues relating to Election agreed through discussions

- T V & Radio to be made au-

soon in consultation with the Opposition.

#### The Oppositions'

opposition or in power.

- Agreement already signed be-

be implemented. Commission and next election dates for all elections to be

with Opposition. - No violence, no cheating, no forced voting etc. during elec-

tonomous - the details to be agreed through discussions with Opposition - Ombudsman to be appointed

commitments: - With early election, the Opposition to abandon its "One Point" demand i.e resignation of the government

- Combined opposition and particularly BNP to commit to "No More Hartal" whether in Only peaceful demonstra-

- No violence, no attack on civilians, no breaking of cars, other vehicles, shops etc.

riod, the political activities of their student political wings and leave the students alone to pursue their studies so that on completion of studies only they could freely chose to join politics. This will not only ensure a promising future for these young people because of their proper educational qualifications but also enrich politics of the country. The students will, however, have the right to form association/union to pursue their demands on academic and other related issues. The students may also decide to give/project their views in a peaceful manner on issues of national importance. They have done so before and contributed immensely in the Language Movement, the struggle for Liberation of Bangladesh etc. and their contributions are historically recognized.

Opposition parties to return to

Parliament and continue to

participate effectively in the

- Opposition to cooperate fully

to settle Election Commission

- No violence, no cheating, no

forced voting etc. during elec-

- Opposition to cooperate fully

in the appointment of the Om-

Both parties should also de-

cide to agree to initially sus-

pend, at least for an agreed pe-

and other issues of elections.

deliberations.

The author, a former Ambassador, is Chairman of Civic Watch-Bangladesh.

used to repair schools or to

guarantee universal health-

care". Bad news is that in 1995.

the U.S. arms industry received

\$7.6 billion federal subsidies at

lishments are also a major

source of pollution and a signif-

icant emitter of gases causing

global warming. The military

spending in Afghanistan over

the years has turned it into a

'no man's land' and it helped

spreading terrorism in many

nations. In fact, military ex-

penditures are a catalyst for

prolonging conflicts and wars

that are creating more

refugees-each year 14.5 mil-

lion people seek refuge in other

countries and each year another

20 million are displaced within

their own borders. Not all

refugees are poor people---

many had their homes, social

standing and families. Albert

Einstein was a refugee. Many

rich people with family, friends

and servants were uprooted in

Kosovo, Bosnia, Rwanda, Viet-

The global military estab-

tax payers expense.

# WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION Good News and Bad News

by Dr. Abdul Momen

There is hope that a commission of Nobel Peace Prizewinners headed by Nobel Laureate Oscar Arias has proposed an International Code of Conduct to control global weapon sales. This seeks to prevent exports of weapons to regions of instability, and to human rights abusers, dictators, and military aggressors by laying down certain criteria.

South-East Asia and the Middle billion in 1996. However, in re-East that are currently finding cent days, due to pressure from economic difficulty due to the conservatives, even Presi-Asian crisis and global oil price dent Clinton had come up with debacle, are being cajoled and a defense budget of \$1200 bilmore arms. The Emir of itary-is given in the table below.

of weapons from US Defense Street Journal, 1998 and 1.3 Secretary William Cohen. The worldwide spending on the mil-1996 Global Military Expenditures Country/Region Amount in billion US\$ United States NATO without US 24% East Asia & Australia 18% Middle East & North Africa Non-NATO Europe 4% Caribbean, Central & South America Central & South Asia 2%

Source: Institute of Strategic Studies, London, 1997 There is hope in the horizon. After the Cold War, the activeduty US military personnel have come down from its peak of 3 million in 1970 to 1.5 million in 1996, a reduction of 50 per cent and its military spending has been reduced from \$295 world including the East & billion a year in 1989 to \$266

Sub-Saharan Africa

forced to continue buying mili- lion. This may adversely affect tary arsenals. The US and the the social programs in the U.S. British Defense Secretaries which may receive a further cut have been visiting the region although children under again and again maybe to sell poverty in the US has gone up from 15.1% in 1970 to 20.5% in Bahrain died of an heart attack 1996. Currently more than 15 immediately after signing an million children are living beagreement to buy \$3.2bn worth low poverty in the U. S. [Wall billion or nearly 1/3 of the earth's population have income Percentage (%)

> 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.

Good news is that President Habibie of Indonesia agreed to stop killings in East Timor, and Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in spite of provocation and strong opposition from political parties, signed a Peace Treaty with its tribal insurgents that killed 25,000 people over the years. Good news is that Pakistan and India are about to be engaged in a dialogue for a peaceful resolution of their problems. Good news is that the military might of Yugoslavia's Slobodan Milosevic would not allow him to continue his ethnic cleansing and mass murder and this should be a lesson for other war lords to stop accumulation of killer weapons. Good news is that the U.S. leadership is outraged at the loss of classified weapons secrets to the Chinese and it may trigger to stop the sale of more advanced and more dangerous weapons to other nations. Good news is that the European countries in 1998 agreed upon a regional Code of Conduct on arms transfer. In it they agreed not to export weapons to countries if there is a clear risk that they could be used for internal repression; if they would provoke or prolong armed conflicts; or if they will hamper sustainable development in the recipient country. But this 'Code of Conduct' is too vague and may fail to end arms race.

However, bad news is that the U.S. refused to support an

International Treaty banning land mines that is one of the great killers and is responsible for maiming thousands of people. The U.S. argued that it had to maintain minefields in the Korean peninsula to protect its nearly 40,000 troops there. However, public pressure including the late Princess Diana's high profile photograph with the victims of land mines in Mozambique has forced 89 countries to approve banning of land mines. Bad news is that by shipping top-of-the-line U.S. weapons overseas, the big corporations are creating ground for making 'more sophisticated weapons systems' to maintain U.S. supremacy and that would translate into lucrative defence contracts. For example, in the early 1990s the Lockheed Corp. advocated the development of 'next generation' F-22 fighters with the argument that, as 'sophisticated fighter airplanes and air defence systems are being sold around the world' weakening the American air superiority, therefore, F-22 is a necessity. More interesting was that 'even before a prototype of this advanced aircraft came off the assembly line, company lobbyists were pressuring federal officials to approve its export. Oscar Arias, therefore, wrote, "While the arms industry profits, people throughout the world suffer. Americans are hurt when the defence budget

nam, Lebanon and Palestine. They were displaced from their homes by killer weapons. There is hope that a commission of Nobel Peace Prizewinners headed by Nobel Laureate Oscar Arias has proposed an International Code of Conduct to control global weapon sales. This seeks to prevent exports of weapons to regions of instability, and to human rights abusers, dictators, and military aggressors by laying down certain criteria. This Code may not be enough but it may provide some insight into this dark side of the modern world of weapons and it may enrich global citizens to start a movement of their own to end manufacture of 'killer weapons' in the foreseeable fu-

The author, a Professor of Economics and Management in USA, is currently working in squanders money that could be Saudi Arabia.

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.

### "Clinton Visit: A Glimpse of

Opportunities" Sir, On behalf of the Management of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers & Exporters Association (BGMEA), we would like to express our sincere thanks and gratitude for your excellent editorial Clinton Visit: A Glimpse of Opportunities on March 9 which reflected the wish and desire of the entire industry.

The editorial was not only timely but also rich in its content. We hope, you will continue raising issues of national importance for the economic emancipation of our country.

Mohammad Uzair Afzal, FCA, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers. & Exporters Association (BGMEA). Dhaka

### Not so fast

Sir, The top most agenda of the US President's visit to Bangladesh is to discuss the issue of exporting our natural gas with our government.

Reports say that US oil company, Unocal, is planing an underwater natural gas pipeline from Bangladesh to Andhara Pradesh in India, and also, another surface pipeline to Delhi through Calcutta on Production Sharing Contracts (PSCs) basis. And the US President is coming to Bangladesh to help facilitate the same.

We feel that Bangladesh and

America should not move so fast as far as gas export is concerned. These two governments should let the people of Bangladesh know about everything: the modalities, terms and conditions, the quantity and duration, expected profit and the like. They must consider all the important factors failing which Bangladesh-US relations may suffer adversely.

We hope our Prime Minister and the US President would honour and respect the sentiment of the politically conscious people of Bangladesh.

O.H. Kabir 6, Hare Street, Wari, Dhaka-1203

#### Welcome Mr President

Sir, I would like to extend my heartiest welcome to the US President Bill Clinton to our country. In the DS issue of 9 February, 2000, an article entitled "America and South Asia in the New Century, " by the US Assistant Secretary of state for South Asia Mr Karl F Inderfurth was published. Therein, Mr Inderfurth explained why President Clinton was interested in traveling to South Asia.

According to him, the US is very much interested in supporting a democratic future for skilled human resource. all these countries of South Asia. He has also mentioned in the write-up that democracy. economic reform, social devel opment and integration into the global mainstream, are the factors on which depends the

relationship of the US and the anything but instead take time countries of South Asia. Cer- to formulate a portant for any developing reaching profitable and beneficountry. It is a matter of great cial energy policy favouring the ing in favour of democracy The U.S., President Bill Clinacross the country.

placed with future. In the era of globalisation, the US and Bangladesh both should work together for the greater interest of democracy, secularism, human rights and development. Let us hope that Clinton's visit to Bangladesh will pave the way for building up a developed and progressive society.

Kalyan Executive member, Association for the Deprived Children (AFDC) 210/Jagannath Hall, DU.

### Missing the bus

Sir, A news item of DS March, 2000, "Failing to export gas may mean missing the bus" attracted my attention. The report clearly revealed the intention of Mr. Andrew Vaughan, Managing Director, Shell Bangladesh. His logic to sell gas through pipe line to India for ready cash compared to selling power after building plants with value added is a good psychological bait for the authorities concerned and the people but a peril to our future development efforts towards obtaining modern technology and

I simply want to state that a reserve is a reserve irrespective of the figure 13 or 15 trillion or more cubic feet. So the authorities concerned and the decision makers should not rush into

tainly, these issues are very im- formidable, fool proof and far pleasure that the US is advocat- utilisation of our gas wealth. ton's visit is a very timely one, Here I would also like to pro- though only for half a day. The pose that during Clinton's visit energy policy is expected to be in Bangladesh, on behalf of his high on his agenda. In the light nation Mr Clinton should pay of the above we should explore homage to the martyrs of our the possibility of US assistance glorious Liberation War at and active participation in ad-Savar. It is worth mentioning vising our resource developthat the US government, during ment and energy policy using our liberation war acted against our major national energy us. However past must be re- 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.

Society for the Welfare of the CDR (L) psc BN (Retired). Advocate for the Intellectually Disabled 4A Eskaton Garden, Dhaka

A.J.M Hamed Hossain

#### Action against the molesters

Sir, People are anxious about the Public Safety Act 2000. It has been proved that it can be misused. On March 6, 2000, a case has been filed at Kalaroa thana in Satkhira against some unidentified persons who damaged a few government offices in protest of the incident at Kalaroa Government College. Six people including two SSC examinees and a female teacher were killed in that incident. But nothing much is being done against those responsible for this. The

tragedy occurred when a group of youth molested female students and tried to disrobe them. The commotion that followed hearing the screams of the girls resulted in stampede in which six lives were lost.

We do not know what happened later on - whether any actions were taken. We do not even know whether charges were filed to arrest the culprits.

Nur Jahan

#### An alternative way to empower women in parliament

Sir, In a country like

Bangladesh where women constitute about 50 per cent of the total population, their (women's) present representation (and that too, indirectly elected/nominated) in Jatiya Sangsad is a shame. One may argue that women are at liberty to contest in General Elections for any number of seats of Jatiya Sangsad. It is easier said than their actual participation in such elections. One need not go in for a detailed research to find out why even the well-educated, well-meaning, honest and competent gents (not to speak of ladies) do not generally seek election to Jatiya Sangsad. For they do not have enough money and muscle-power to compete with those who have these qualities in abundance.

As part of measures to empower women, 50 percent of 300 seats of Jatiya Sangsad should be reserved for women who should be directly elected.

Being a poor country. Bangladesh can not afford at this stage to enlarge the size of the present Jatiya Sangsad. Hence Jatiya Sangsad should continue to have the present 300 members (excluding of

course 30 seats at present reserved for women), 50 percent of whom should be women members to be elected directly. The existing 300 constituencies should be converted/delimited into 150 constituencies, and each of such 150 constituencies should elect two members of Jatiya Sangsad — one male member and one female member. In other words, each voter in each of such new constituencies should have two votes one to be cast in favour of a male candidate and the other in favour of a female candidate.

This may well ensure respectability of women members of Parliament and at the same time contribute to empower women.

Ghiasuddin Ahmed House No. 95, Road No. 13 Block-E. Banani Dhaka-1213

## TV journalism

Sir, With the passage of time television has been developed tremendously. Colour televi sion has made the black and white TV look very much old fashioned. However, as a jour nalistic medium, television has serious limitations. The fact is that television's dependence on picture makes it not only a powerful means of communication but a crude one which tends to strike at the emotions rather than at the intellect. The BTV journalism seems to be increas ingly focused on action rather than on thought, on personalities rather than on ideas. The coverage proves the inherent limitations of BTV. To make this electronic medium popular. the coverage must be on explanation rather than on happenings, on accurate national and international news not on party-slogan. News and views must be balanced, not distorted.

M A Awal Agargaon, Dhaka