

Making up for Lost Hours

WHEN the government and the Bangladesh Federation of Teachers Association (BFTA) leaders reached a nine-point agreement to end the teachers' strike at the non-government schools, colleges and madrassahs late last month, 45 days had already been lost from the academic calendar. However, the assuring aspect of the accord rested in the clause whereby the teachers had agreed to take special classes to make up for the hours lost. Unfortunately for the students, the teachers now appear to be dithering on their commitment. Not a single institution has had any special class since the deal was struck. Although one BFTA leader promised on Thursday that they will "start taking special classes from next week," but before we can put any credence to his words those would need to be converted into deeds. Subtract 57 for scheduled holidays from the 122 days left in the academic calendar, you have actually 65 days to complete the syllabi of secondary and higher secondary levels. Most of these educational institutions had to skip the second terminal examinations, which would have marked the halfway point in regard to completion of the syllabi. Overall, although the strike has ended, uncertainty over academic progress of some seven million students still looms large.

Whether the teachers had been wronged against or not is debatable, but that their students are affected by their strike cannot be in question. Now that the teachers' demands have been largely met and they too have accepted the conditions put forth by the education ministry, they should live up to their commitment. Given the time constraints, obviously they would have to take at least four extra classes a day for each group of students. Of course, it would be taxing for them, but they should remember as well that nothing is more exciting than the sheer adventure of grooming the students for their future careers. Likewise the nation owes it to the teachers to look after them. We urge the government to keep its part of the commitment as the teachers put in some extra hours for a few months to meet a passing contingency.

Small Arms Big Crimes

POLICE have made startling revelations about the use and renting of licenced small arms in the country combinedly increase the rate of crimes in the country. It is unthinkable that people having licenced guns rent those out to criminals for perpetrating crimes in the society and get away with such heinous activity. If and when caught, they would feign innocence saying that the firearm was stolen.

When the Awami League came to power in 1996 they published a list of criminals to whom BNP government had purportedly issued licences for procuring small arms and thereby 'contributing' to lawlessness in the country. It was a commendable attempt by the new government to share 'an important information' with the public. But now that the situation has turned more volatile and dangerous the citizens have a right to know the licencing policy of the government since the corroboration has come from the police themselves of crimes being committed with licenced guns. The system of police verification before issuance of licence and later monitoring of the arms by them seems to have broken down. As a result there is hardly any effective check and balance in the total system. The Officers in Charge (OCs) of police stations are supposed to maintain records of licenced arms in their areas but this is not also done these days because of 'increasing responsibilities' shouldered by OCs, according to a report in The Daily Star on Sunday. The result being rampant use of licenced guns obtained on hire by the criminals which help them in 'precision and accurate' killing.

All these lead inevitably to the conclusion that stricter methods of issuance of licences and monitoring of these weapons should be in place as quickly as possible. Provisions for severe punishment as a deterrent for those who rent out their licensed guns for money to criminals. It also appears from the report that discretion of the authority in issuing licences is also being abused by greedy officers of the state. This whole rot has to be stopped before it is too late.

Forget Rituals, Give Succour to Sandwip

STRANGELY enough, the true magnitude of the damage wrought to the offshore island Sandwip by a series of tidal surges since August 29 dawned on Dhaka authorities only on Saturday, September 2. And this also happened not through any direct communication with the local authorities but by virtue of the reports emanating from the chiefs of upazila administrations, who in turn, collated information collected and furnished by the union parishad chairmen. In these days of super-fast communication where timely information is regarded as an easily attainable goal and the most reliable tool for reaching succour to people in distress we are at a disadvantage even before we have initiated an approach to the desperate cries for help in Sandwip.

We look at this as a big flaw in terms of our state of preparedness against natural vagaries. Anything out of the routine or coming as a slight deviation from pattern catches us on a wrong foot. The monsoonal depression in the Bay together with Amabashya (moonless night) put the sea in spate as successive tidal waves as high as 5 to 7 feet left little leeway for the waters collecting on the offshore island to ebb away into the sea. Thirty-five thousand people have been rendered homeless with 90 thousand people in total having been affected in varying degrees.

The cyclone shelters were a tower of strength as thousands of people rushed to their safety at the slightest hint of approaching tidal waves. But this gain seems to have been little offset by the delayed start in getting our act together for a vigorous relief operation. Let's reach adequate succour to the affected area on a double-quick basis.

On a view which is especially among Vajpayee supporters, the BJP 're-invented' itself at its Nagpur national council meeting. Its 'moderates' asserted themselves, while hardliners beat a retreat. This is seen as signifying a major change in the *parivar*.

Proponents of this view emphasise new party president Bangaru Laxman's talk of reaching out to Muslims. Most important, they say, the party overwhelmingly endorsed the NDA's economic policy and shifted away from *Hindutva*.

However, none of this means that the BJP has changed radically by making a break with *Hindutva*. Despite some mutual discomfort, the RSS and BJP have not got into an antagonistic relationship. They are only reaching a new accommodation. The BJP has in no way diluted the *Hindutva* perspective—the distinctive characteristic of all *parivar* members. It still wants to transform India to assert Hindu primacy.

There has indeed been a shift away from *swadeshi*, with even Mr Govindacharya embracing messianic neo-liberalism. But this is not a break with *Hindutva*.

Hindutva has never been reducible either to *swadeshi* (economic pseudo-patriotism) or to the infamous *trishul*, viz. Ram temple, abrogation of Arti-

This is premised upon Social Darwinism—the belief that society, like nature (in a distorted view of Evolution), has to be hierarchical. The rich are rich because of "natural selection". The poor are inherently inferior or lack virtue. Social Darwinism involves faith in macho contests, "meritocracy", and contempt for the underprivileged. It glorifies social inequalities.

cle 370, and Uniform Civil Code.

These are only instruments of Hindu majoritarianism. The *parivar* has deliberately decided to keep them aside, for the moment. It explains the rationale unambiguously. Power dictates coalitions with parties which do not accept the three demands. This does not mean it has jettisoned them.

The BJP has now fashioned three other approaches to advance the same agenda. It has imposed these upon its allies without much resistance. These instruments could turn out to be more potent than the crude *trishul*.

The three approaches are: goon-style violence against vulnerable Christians; coercive censorship and "disciplining" of social behaviour; and promoting virulent "cultural nationalism" in education and the media. However, this coercion is also laced with a sweetener for the upper-class elite, viz. shamelessly right-wing pro-rich and anti-poor policies, coupled with unjust globalisation.

The second ("social censorship") approach is increasingly visible today. Its advocates are

Myth of BJP's 'Moderation'

Hindutva thrust continues

Praful Bidwai writes from New Delhi

Take attacks on Christians. These are frighteningly numerous (57 this year, a total of 400 since January 1998) and synchronised. They follow a pattern. The latest instance is the humiliation of a Protestant deacon in Gujarat. On August 22, he was beaten and paraded naked for distributing the Bible. Degrading treatment of Christians started in south Gujarat, but has spread to the north.

The relentless violence against Christians all over India has generated so much pressure and fear that influential members of the community now think it might be safer to declare a voluntary moratorium on conversions. These also include Black Sheep like Mr John Joseph, close to some BJP politicians, and the sole Christian on the National Minorities Commission.

But a moratorium will unreasonably restrict a fundamental right. It will be seen as admission of forcible conversion and make Christians more insecure.

The third *Hindutva* plank is

the BJP's culture police, the kind who put *teekas* on the foreheads of little schoolgirls, or impose *Saraswati vandana* upon non-believers.

Now, reports *The Statesman*, "the BJP has begun intruding into citizens' privacy ... The Delhi BJP has appointed its own lieutenants in every area to maintain a close watch on everything that's happening in private homes and the community... unit workers have been told to maintain tabs on 250 families each."

This is premised upon Social Darwinism—the belief that society, like nature (in a distorted view of Evolution), has to be hierarchical. The rich are rich because of "natural selection". The poor are inherently inferior or lack virtue. Social Darwinism involves faith in macho contests, "meritocracy", and contempt for the underprivileged. It glorifies social inequalities.

This exercise is deeply disrespectful of other cultures. The underlying sentiment is: We are the Big Boys on the Block. Underlying such hegemony is the equation of the new arrogance of the upper crust (which today enjoys an unprecedented consumerist boom) with India coming into its own.

This is premised upon Social Darwinism—the belief that society, like nature (in a distorted view of Evolution), has to be hierarchical. The rich are rich because of "natural selection". The poor are inherently inferior or lack virtue. Social Darwinism involves faith in macho contests, "meritocracy", and contempt for the underprivileged. It glorifies social inequalities.

The elite tells itself "our India has arrived. No one can ignore us. The Bomb has done us proud, never mind the swollen bellies of malnourished children, explosive disparities and growing poverty..."

Such dangerous ideas violate humanism, tolerance, social cohesion and pluralism. Yet, because this malignant ideology wears a nationalist garb, not many progressives criticise it. This must change. Or we'll soon be swamped by hyper-nationalism in which reason, tolerance and respect for difference have no place.

Supplementary Report of Hamoodur Rahman Commission: Some Relevant Extracts

Tenth instalment

Continued from yesterday Conclusions

This Commission of Inquiry was appointed by the President of Pakistan in Dec 1971. After examining 213 witnesses, we submitted the Main Report in July, 1972. However, at that time we did not have before us the evidence of the major personalities, except Major General M. Rahim Khan who had played a part in the final events culminating in the surrender in East Pakistan. Accordingly, we stated that "our observations and conclusions regarding the surrender in East Pakistan and other allied matters should be regarded as provisional and subject to modification in the light of the evidence of the Commander, Eastern Command, and other senior officers as and when such evidence becomes available".

After the repatriation of prisoners of war from India, the Commission was reactivated in May, 1974. At the resumed session, we have examined as many as 72 persons, including Lt Gen A.A.K. Niazi, Commander, Eastern Command, all the Major Generals and Brigadiers who had served in East Pakistan, Rear Admiral Sharif, Flag Officer Commanding the Pakistan Navy, Air Commodore Iman, the senior most Air Force Officer, and several civilian officers like the chief Secretary, the Inspector General of Police, two Divisional Commissioners etc. Maj. Gen M. Rahim Khan was re-examined at his own request.

As it appeared to us that the defeat suffered by the Armed Forces of Pakistan was not merely the result of military factors alone, but had been brought about as the cumulative result of political, international, moral and military factors, we examined all these aspects in our Main Report at some length. We have followed the same pattern of study in the present supplementary Report.

Although we are now naturally in possession of far more detailed information as to the events in East Pakistan, yet the main conclusions reached by us on the earlier occasion have remained unaffected by the fresh evidence now available. In the paragraphs that follow, we intend briefly to summarise our conclusions on these major

aspects of the causes of surrender in East Pakistan, making reference, wherever necessary, to the conclusions already enunciated in the Main Report.

Political Background

In the Main Report, we have traced the genesis of the Pakistan movement, the events preceding the establishment of Pakistan, and the political developments which took place between 1947 and 1971, including a detailed study of the effects of the two Martial Law periods in hastening the process of political and emotional isolation of East Pakistan from West Pakistan.

We have also, in the Main Report, examined at length the role played by the two major political parties, namely, the Awami League in East Pakistan and the Pakistan Peoples Party in West Pakistan, in bringing about the situation resulting in the postponement of the session of the National Assembly scheduled to be held at Dacca on the 3rd of March, 1971. We have then examined the events occurring between the 1st and the 25th of March, 1971, when the Awami League had seized power from the Government of General Yahya Khan, necessitating resort to the military action of the 25th of March, 1971. We have also touched upon the negotiations which Gen Yahya Khan was pretending to hold during this period with Sh. Mujibur Rahman on the one hand and political leaders from

West Pakistan on the other. Although he never formally declared these negotiations to have failed, yet he secretly left Dacca on the evening of the 25th of March, 1971, leaving instructions behind for military action to be initiated when his plane reached the Karachi area.

We have found, as a result of a detailed analysis of the events surrounding the imposition of the second Martial Law by General Yahya Khan on the 25th of March, 1969, that he did not take over the country in order merely to restore normal conditions and re-introduce the democratic process. He did so with a view to obtaining personal power and those who assisted him did so with full knowledge of his intentions. The fresh evidence recorded by us has only served to strengthen this conclusion as to the intentions of Gen Yahya Khan.

All the Senior Army Commanders who were concerned with the administration of Martial Law in East Pakistan as well as the senior civil servants who were inducted into the civil administration in East Pakistan, have expressed the view that military action could not have been a substitute for a political settlement, which was feasible once law and order has been restored within a matter of few weeks after the military action. Most of these witnesses have stated that the most

favourable time for a political settlement was between the months of May and September, 1971, during which a reasonable amount of normally had been restored and the authority of the Government had been re-established at least in most of the urban areas, if not throughout the countryside. However, no effort was made during these months to start a political dialogue with the elected representatives of the people, who were in any case valuable hostages in the hands of the Indian authorities who did not allow them to cross back into Pakistan.

The use of excessive force during the military action and the conduct of some of the officers and men of the Pakistan Army during the sweep operations had only served to alienate the sympathies of the people of East Pakistan. The practice of the troops living off the land, in the absence of a proper organisation of their own logistic arrangements during their operations in the country-side, encouraged the troops to indulge in looting. The arbitrary methods adopted by the Martial Law administration in dealing with respectable East Pakistani, and then sudden disappearances by a process euphemistically called "being sent to Bangladesh" made matters worse. The attitude of the Army authorities towards the Hindu minority also resulted in large-scale exodus to India. The avowed intention of India to dismember Pakistan was only too

well known, but even then the need for an early political settlement was not realised by General Yahya Khan. The general amnesty declared by him in August, 1971, proved ineffective, as it was declared too late, and left much to be desired in its implementation. It did not result in the return of any appreciable number of the elected representatives of the people, who were in any case valuable hostages in the hands of the Indian authorities who did not allow them to cross back into Pakistan.

Precious moments were thus wasted, during which the Indians mounted their training programme for the Mukti Bahini and started guerrilla raids into Pakistan territory. General Yahya Khan then embarked upon his scheme of by-elections in place of the disqualification of Awami League representatives, but these by-elections were an exercise in futility for the reason that they were supervised and controlled by the Martial Law administration, and even the selection of the candidates was being made by a Major General of the Pakistan Army. In these circumstances, these newly elected representatives did not have any authority to speak on behalf of the people.

Similarly, the appointment of Dr. Malik as the civilian Governor of East Pakistan, and the installation of his ministers, did not produce any im-

pact. These gentlemen did not command the confidence of the people, although Dr. Malik was personally respected as a veteran statesman. These attempts at civilisation of the Government of East Pakistan were, therefore, an utter failure in winning back the confidence of the people. Power continued to rest in the hands of the Zonal Martial Law Administrator, namely, Lt Gen A.A.K. Niazi. In any case, in view of the circumstances prevailing, namely, the over-riding importance of maintaining law and order and keeping the lines of communication open, the role of the army continued to be predominant.

Apart, therefore, from the immorality and political expediency of the kind of military action taken by General Yahya Khan on the 25th of March, 1971, it was his culpable failure to arrive at a political settlement with the Awami League during the crucial months preceding the war that completely alienated the sympathies of the population of East Pakistan, confirming their suspicion that the Generals were not prepared to part with political power in favour of the elected representatives of the people. The refusal of Gen Yahya Khan to negotiate with the Awami League becomes all the more significant when we remember that two of its top leaders, Sh. Mujibur Rahman and Dr Kamal Hussain were in his custody in West Pakistan, and that almost all the friendly countries had advised him to arrive at a political settlement in view of the looming Indian threat of military action.

The two direct and devastating consequences of this political situation brought about by the military regime itself, since holding the elections of 1970, were the prolonged involvement of the Pakistan Army in counter-insurgency measures throughout the Province, and its forced deployment in pennypockets all along the borders of East Pakistan to prevent infiltration of Mukti Bahini and Indian agents. In the presence of these two factors, the Pakistan Army was obviously fighting a losing battle from the very start.

The eleventh instalment appears tomorrow.

Millennium Summit and South Asia

LEADERS of the major countries of the south Asian region are scheduled to attend the millennium summit at the United Nations within the next few days along with leaders from across the globe. The occasion is to convey that the reasons and noble hopes for peace that had materialised the founding of the world body, remains unfulfilled even today.

The meet would stress on the greater need to strengthen efforts towards creating a better world, free from hostility, acrimony and bitterness, on one hand, and poverty, unemployment, diseases etc. on the other. Hopefully, the gathering of the world leaders will once again renew the call for a happier and healthier human habitat of tranquillity and stability. It is also expected

to make a forceful plea for consolidating peace efforts as well as taking measures that would result in poverty alleviation and remove the barriers faced by the developing and the least developed countries (LDCs) for economic development.

We are looking forward to a meaningful outcome of the Millennium Summit although the results from such events are largely ritualistic in nature and mostly seen as pious hopes. These formalities notwithstanding, there is no denying the fact that such events only seldom cast a sobering effect on the pattern of international behaviour. South Asia is the most densely populated region of the world and is home to more than one billion people, most of

whom are mired in abject poverty. The leaders of the region attending the summit at the UN are expected to put across the problems to the world leaders for effecting solutions to make South Asia a politically, economically and socially comfortable region.

But the bad news that has already come up is that leaders of the two influential nations of the region—India and Pakistan, which are at loggerheads causing grave instability in the area, are not meeting on the sidelines of the summit. While other leaders of this region are meeting each other at the UN to discuss bilateral and multilateral matters, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Pakistan's Chief Executive General Pervez Musharraf have made it known that they are not talking to each other. True, they have their own bilateral differences which have aggravated in recent times, partially because of the military take over in Pakistan. Both New Delhi and Islamabad may have their own viewpoints in dealing with each other, but they should take it in their stride now. The meeting would certainly help to reduce tensions considerably.

Confidence building in the south Asian region seems to have suffered another setback at the moment. The next SAARC summit hangs in the balance with little sign that it will be staged soon. The Indo-Pakistan ties are showing no sign of improvement despite a visit to the two countries by

President Bill Clinton. The leader of the most powerful nation in the world appealed to them to reduce tensions and normalise relations. Japanese Prime Minister Mori's visit to the two countries and call for reduction of tensions also had no effect. Both US and Japan can be called political and economic powers. But the talks that their top leaders had with the leaders of India and Pakistan on the need for peace failed to restore any good will.

South Asia is a major international flash-point for many reasons, but the concern and anxiety surrounding this area is evidently for two reasons—nuclearisation of the region and the welfare of large number of people living here. Home to more than one fifth of the mankind—and most of them living below the poverty line—South Asia has all the need for improving the living conditions of the vast multitude and turn the region into a place of understanding and amity. It is not difficult to attain these two objectives because countries here have enormous manpower and other resources. Developing fraternity should not be a difficult exercise since people are bound by a common legacy

which has strong sentimental values. Unfortunately, the general trend of the political environment here is just opposite of what is desirable. Increasingly people are getting used to hostilities and wars rather than common vehicle of friendship and co-operation.

The South Asia Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) is in existence since it was launched in 1985 and has covered several areas for collective co-operation. But this is not the embodiment of the realities existing in the region. Conditions have changed now after both becoming nuclear powers in May, 1998. Earlier, India and Pakistan used to be in touch bilaterally although such meetings at different levels seldom produced anything substantial. But the very meeting of the contending