DHAKA SUNDAY MARCH 11, 2001

Still no end to kidnap crisis

Better co-ordination between govt. and regional council necessary

ITH the hostage crisis into its fourth week authorities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts still grope in the dark for an effective strategy to secure release of the three European consultants. In fact, they have never looked quite in control of the situation since the kidnap crisis began on February 16. Even before establishing a workable link with the kidnappers, supposedly opposed to the CHT Peace Accord, the local authorities hinted at military intervention to resolve the crisis. But that was at the earlier stages when confusion raged over who would take charge of negotiations. Later on at a co-ordination committee meeting the CHT Affairs Minister Kalparanjan Chakma was clearly entrusted with the task of peacefully securing the release of foreigners. But closely on the heels Kalparanjan Chakma himself had to publicly issue an ultimatum surrender or face massive military offensive to the abductors. But now, he is imploring the kidnappers to set free the three foreigners on "humanitarian ground" with an attendant assurance of "immunity from all legal charges."

As if the situation were not intricate enough, Shantu Larma had to cast doubt over the negotiation process by terming the kidnap crisis "a drama staged by the government." The chairman of the regional council of the CHT also alleged that a particular quarter of the government was involved in the abduction of the three Europeans. Utterly irresponsible as they were, Larma's utterances smacked of a degree of ire at not having been involved in the negotiations more directly. His statement, however insensible, betrays a disconcerting facet of the crisis -- all is not well at the negotiators' end, or for that matter, at the tribal leadership end. Political manoeuvre is the last thing we expect at this time. The authorities must understand that localised rivalry over such a grave issue would give a negative signal to the international community.

The government has its share of blame, too. It hasn't paid any effective attention to the episode at the CHT. After the lull induced by Eid-ul-Azha vacation, we expect the government to redouble its effort to put an end to the hostage crisis, lest it gets tangled even more.

Quake warnings

No move towards greater readiness

ANGLADESH has been subjected to several earth tremors in the last month, notably in Rangpur and Chittagong, the north and south-east districts which fall within a zone of high seismic activity. We are concerned about these rumblings and even more by the fact that the authorities have not reacted with any sense of immediacy.

Neither the magnitude of the rumblings nor their origin could be measured, because our lone meteorological station in Chittagong lacks the basic equipment to carry out such a check. Technologically, therefore, we have been literally in the

We would like to know why plans to build three more meteorological stations around the country and upgrade the existing one, have not been accelerated? It is highly dismaying that the government is continuing to adopt a nonchalant attitude to the possibility of a major disaster striking this land.

Experts have warned that nearly 80 per cent of the high-rise structures in the capital city are vulnerable to shocks. We know that the death toll in the Gujarat earthquake was multiplied manifold because of structural defects in building procedures.

A survey of all buildings is absolutely necessary, together with enforcement of building code regulations for ongoing and future projects. Civil defense capacity-building has to be launched without delay. Only the army has any preparedness to meet civil defense requirements. Why have the existing civil defense forces not been able to upgrade their outdated equip-

We urge the authorities not to look the other way. We have fortunately escaped a calamity so far. But Bangladesh sits on an earthquake prone zone. Seismic activity has been recorded. These are all warning signs that should mobilise the authorities to enforce an earthquake readiness programme without delay.

In our yesterday's editorial "Early election looks certain", the date of the expiry term of the present government was mentioned as July 23 instead of July 13. We regret this typographical

Horns of dilemma



KULDIP NAYAR writes from New Delhi

HEN Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee visited Lahore nearly two years ago, the banquet in his honour was delayed by three hours. The road leading to the historic Qila, venue of the banquet, had been taken over by the extremists. They were stoning every vehicle passing that way. Police first chose to leave them alone but, after some time, it chased them away and cleared the road to enable the PM's cavalcade to proceed.

Subsequently, Shahbaz Sahrif, the then Chief Minister of Pakistan's Punjab, remarked that the Jamiat had gone back on its word and had stood out one hour more than the time agreed upon. In fact, what he meant was that the government had made a deal with the extremists but they had violated it. In other words, they were permitted to hold the demonstration to impress upon Vaipavee that the then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was holding talks with India despite the fundamentalists opposing to them. They were supposed to withdraw and did not do so. On their part, the extremists were satisfied that they had made their presence

It is the same exercise which the Pakistan military government is going over again. It lets the fundamentalists display "their might" to let the world know that they are a powerful lot. At the same time, it threatens to take action against them to show that the government was "determined to suppress To many, it looks like a drama enacted by both sides, playing their assigned roles faith-

fully.

Take for instance Interior Minister Moinuddin Haider. He addresses a press conference at Karachi to announce that Pakition to carry on with jihad. Thus, the show goes on.

For some reasons, Islamabad believes that its statements to take action against fundamentalists are sufficient to make international opinion believe that the government is out to chastise the extremists. Islamabad deludes itself. Outsiders are seeing through the game, particularly when they find that the fundamentalists are having their way

The danger in such an exercise is that hardliners come to believe that their pressure counts. This is leaders who are giving an ultimatum to introduce a rigid, version of Islam. Maulana Akram Awan of Tanzeemul Akhwan has threatened that his followers would march towards Islamabad if Shariat was not introduced. Azam Tariq of Sipah-e-Sapalia wants the Qazi courts to operate in large cities to implement the Islamic laws.

The Musharraf government has placated them to a large extent by lending them its voice and weapons in jihad against India on Kashmir. But the fundamentalists are not content with the state as such. They want to convert Pakistan into a

of their strength vary widely from 15,000 to 25,000 or more. The number of young people studying in them easily runs into the tens, maybe even hundreds, of thousands.

The fundamentalists are well trained and well armed. They are ready to die for the paradise which their religious heads promise Brainwashed as the followers are in the madrassahs, they are willing to do anything in response to the call of jihad. It is not possible to give them any gainful employment. Their education does not equip them for that because they are

phemy laws. In fact, it went further in criminalising any person or group whose beliefs deviated from the accepted Muslim orthodoxy.

Musharraf may have been daunted by the Islamisation of the armed forces during Zia's period. By now the extremists have come to occupy senior positions in the military. Former ISI chief Hamid Gul takes credit in the "Islamisation" of some top army positions. Musharraf's dilemma may be that if he takes tough measures against the fundamentalists, he may risk dividing the armed forces. But, on the other hand, if he doesn't do anything, he may be reduced to a figurehead before long.

India cannot keep its eyes shut to the spread of fundamentalism in Pakistan because the extremists are spreading over a large area, right up to the Central Asia. In the words of a Pakistani editor, "Ten million of Afghans destabilised us, 130 million Pakistanis. Together we can destabilise India of one billion. It is a horrible thought but it is possible for a state like Pakistan to adopt such a course. If the fundamentalists could mess up things in Kashmir, it is not beyond them to create serious problems in the rest of

Strange, some organisations like the Vishwa Hindu Parishad should believe that Muslim fundamentalism can be thwarted by Hindu fundamentalism. Fundamentalism is fanaticism, a culture in pursuit of religious rituals. There is no place for sense of accommodation or spirit of tolerance. The only way to fight fundamentalism is to strengthen pluralism, the composite culture. That alone can be our bulwark against any religious onslaught, not slogans like Indianising Islam or Christianity.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Believe that Muslim fundamentalism can be thwarted by Hindu fundamentalism. Fundamentalism is fanaticism, a culture in pursuit of religious rituals. There is no place for sense of accommodation or spirit of tolerance. The only way to fight fundamentalism is to strengthen pluralism, the composite culture.

stan's revolutionary and jihadi groups will not be allowed to collect donations from the public for buying arms and training their members for jihad. He also says that there is no holy war going on. The impression he creates by his statements is that a massive crackdown on militant groups is imminent

The Interior Minister goes back to Islamabad and, in the face of "open defiance" by the fundamen talists, he is forced to backtrack. He then changes his mind and tone to say: "We respect jihadi outfits and we never called for giving up jihad in Kashmir!" Some of the leading religious and militant outfits, present at the meeting where the minister spoke, renew their determinawhat is beginning to happen in Pakistan. The extremists have become stronger than before. Although General Pervez Musharraf has put their number around 10 per cent as against the 90 per cent liberals, it is militancy which seems to count increasingly.

The genie of fundamentalism, released first to join hands with the Taliban in Afghanistan and then goaded to fight in Kashmir, will not back into the bottle even if usharraf wants it to. After all, it has tasted blood and enjoying the limelight. Now it has become a Frankestine devouring Pakistan, bit by bit, facet by facet. Instead of the government

challenging them, it is the religious

religious state. Over the years its polity has grown democratically weak. The mullah and maulvi have come to acquire more and more say because of the strength they have gained through seminaries (madrassahs), which produce some 40,000 graduates every year.

"The privately funded Islamic schools, where children mostly receive education together with food and accommodation, are commonplace throughout Pakistan," says a US State Department report on global terrorism. While many are part of a tradition dating back almost as far as Islam itself, a significant number of them owe their existence to General Zia-ul-Hag's Islamisation drive. Estimates

versed only in religious teachings. Musharraf may be serious to curb fundamentalism, one for the image of Pakistan and, two, for the sake of escaping America's wrath.

Not long ago, Musharraf even ordered the registration of madrassahs. But this move was openly opposed by the two religious leaders, Fazlur Rehman and Samiul-Haq of Jamiat-e-Ulema Islam Will Musharraf join issue with them is the question. If more aptly put, can he do so? He is far weaker now than when he assumed power. The backtracking by the Interior Minister shows that. The Musharraf government had made a hasty retreat last year when it met with opposition on the proposal to amend the blas-

water almost non-existent and the

water in the major dams danger

ously low, purchasing_power_will

become non-existent. This vicious

cycle further eroding the founda

tions of commerce and industry. We

badly need increased revenues.

More importantly, we need many

more jobs. Immediate job creation is

many countries are guarded by private security, freeing the law enforcement agencies (LEAs) to do their own jobs.

The other sector that can imme-

diately produce hundreds of thou-

sands of jobs is Information Technology (IT). On a crash programme, government should train IT instructors who can spread out and impart computer education on a mass basis. We can then short-list several thousands every year for higher computer education oping software, etc. The SBP has been active in buying foreign exchange from the kerb market, why don't they create incentives to make the service more efficient and secure, this would increase the foreign exchange remittances by our expatriate workers abroad. As a last drastic measure let us

also make contingency plans for "Food for Work" Programmes in the rural areas. While on contingency planning have we catered on a 13.8 per cent increase in Indian defense outlays. Peace with India should always be a priority but we should not be guilty of criminal indifference

The neutron bomb is often eulogised as a "clean" bomb, it kills only living beings but leaves inordinate objects intact. If the unemployment bomb ever goes off in our faces, the creeping anarchy may well turn into an unmitigated disaster and destroy rural and urban areas both, taking us centuries back to when the only SBP's second Quarterly Report does not mention unemployment at all, almost as if this most potent problem did not exist. We should take immediate steps to diffuse this explosive device from destroying the country's future

Creeping economic anarchy

IKRAM SEHGAL writes from Karachi

N order of priority the three major sectors of Pak economy are: agriculture, industry and services. Our planners set very ambitious targets for Financial Year 2000-01, most of which cannot - and will not - be met. Because of acute shortage of water (and other reasons including WAPDA's shift to metered electricity in place of a flat fee), farmers were forced to reduce acreage under cultivation. The output of sugarcane and rice declined by as much as 19.1 per cent and 11.4 per cent respectively. Cotton registered a slight increase of area under cultivation, the overall production remained the same. . Punjab harvested more wheat, it was offset by decreases in Sindh due to lack of irrigated water, even if grain production manages to reach 700,000 tons if the rains do come, it will be well short of the projected 772,000 tons. Given that cotton, rice, sugarcane, grain and wheat account for 94 per cent of the agriculture sector, there will be an overall decline in all the levels forecasted. According to optimistic predictions, the people will not starve, shortages will be made up from buffer stocks but even they concede that the overall economic outlook for the year 2001-02 is exceedingly bleak, given that acute water shortage is imminent, we are well on our way to a creeping eco-

contributed to decline in large-scale manufacturing as compared to the previous year. Part of the problem stems from disagreement between manufacturers and growers about the sugarcane prices with manufacturers loath to pass on their profitbenefit to the growers. Some mills are actually shutting down rather than paying increased cane prices.

This sector grew only 3.1 per cent as compared to 7.8 per cent during the same period in the FY 1999-2000. Overall, only 9 out 14 industrial groups showed positive growth, only 4 out of the 9 improved on the prévious year's performance. Cotton ginning and spinning slowed down, the weaving sector continued its momentum. Of major concern was the fact that while production of compact cars and light commercial vehicles increased, falling sales of

tractors dragged down the automo-bile sector. Chemicals and cement

production fell but paper and paper

board showed strong growth

because of availability of import

As part of the stand-by agree-

strong financial adjustments in the

collection target of 24.1 per cent

over last year will certainly not be

met. Still 13.5 per cent higher than

last year, the amount collected is

Rs. 1.9 billion short of the projected

target and Rs. 9.1 billion under the

budget. Obviously the deficit will be

met by bank borrowings. Do the

figures include Rs 11 billion under

the tax amnesty scheme (TAS). A modest increase of 750,000 new

taxpayers have come into the tax

net due to the ongoing tax surveys, but at what cost to the image of the

Army? If CBR does not catch up, we

(SBA), the IMF insisted on

from previous years.

will be more than 10 per cent below our projected figures

Sales tax had an impressive growth of 36 per cent, it still fell short of the budgeted target of 76.9 billion, as did customs duty, which increased only 4 per cent despite the fact that imports grew 10.5 per cent. A sleight of hand is evident in the figures with respect to government borrowing. Having borrowed heavily from commercial banks last year, the graph was misleading, it showed a decline only because government turned to borrowing from SBP to pay off the commercial banks. The public debt therefore

showed a net increase. Private

sector borrowing, which had slowed

down considerably because of the

uncertainty, was the bright spot

showing a significant rise, with

textiles leading the pack of borrow-

credit disbursement was only mar-

ginally higher by Rs. 74.9 million out

of the Rs. 18.9 billion disbursed

Less than 20 per cent of the loans

given out to agriculture were development loans. Workers' remittances

having increased by \$84.6 million in

the July-December 2000 period, fel

during Oct-Dec 2000. SBP

decreased minimum fees for inward

TT charges from \$200 to 100 and

increased the charges banks would

receive for each remittance above

In the major agriculture sector.

Exports fell disappointingly 10 per cent short at \$4.5b than the projected \$5b whereas imports increased by 1.2 per cent despite our best efforts. Obviously the slowdown in agriculture has effected industry but this will mean mini-migration of rural workers to the cities

\$100. Our trade deficit went up to

\$921.7 million, more than \$100

million higher (20.20 per cent).

Very few industries, if any, are being freshly created. In fact, sick industries have resulted in a substantial number of jobs being lost.

more time and money as compared

to agriculture and services. While

not slowing down our efforts for

creation of new industrial units, our

major effort should revive the sick

industries whose skilled and semi-

skilled workers are now mostly out

of jobs. Priority should be given to

agriculture, firstly to our cash crops

such as cotton, rice, wheat, wheat

effort is also necessary in fruit and vegetable farming, poultry and

collection remains our biggest

problem but extraneous factors,

mainly the resilience of an agri-

economy (and to a small extent a

vibrant parallel economy) has

played a part in keeping the nation

going. With both rain and irrigation

and sugarcane but

livestock projects,

EDITOR T

only possible in agriculture and services sectors and that also across a broad front. Besides ensuring that farmers get adequate return for their crops, we have to give out long-term interest-free loans in value addition items like fruit and vegetable farming, poultry and

According to optimistic predictions, the people will not starve, shortages will be made up from buffer stocks. But even the optimists concede that the overall economic outlook for the year 2001-02 is exceedingly bleak, given that acute water shortage is imminent, we are well on our way to a creeping economic anarchy. to apparent reality. livestock projects with the promise of purchase of the products from the armers. Transportation from farm to international markets will also

> producing areas e.g., the excellent decision by the government to allow direct flights from Multan to Jeddah in the mango season. At the same ity of extracting juice and juice concentrates. The Services sector creates a wide range of low-paid jobs in

involve chartered flights to various

world destinations from close to

cleaning, maintenance, inspections, surveys, data-entry, assessments, verifications, etc. All over the world, individual and corporate security is handled by private security. Even government ministries in

Medical malpractice

A recent news report about an unfortunate incidence in which a patient of a senior surgeon died after an operation, has created a sensation. The relatives of the patients have brought very serious charges against the surgeon. It is not my intention to comment on the incident. But I would like to request those "expert surremarks in the newspapers on the ability of the senior, to refrain from these type of sage to the general population. The media and much of the public

believe and promote the concept that surgical complications are caused solely by "bad doctors" who should be punished for injuries they inflict upon patients. Medicine is an inexact science and adverse outcomes can occur despite the best medical care because many factors which affect the outcome are outside the surgeon's control. Physicians and surgeons function in a world in which the vagaries of human biology create variability in nearly everything measurable; boundaries are sometimes indistinct and subject to change. Written records are usually a summary rather than an exact or complete record of events. Judgments are made on the basis of probability. Usually, in acute situations, needed information is incomplete or erroneous. Inevitable errors of action and judgement are intrinsic to the practice of medicine. Rational thinking will establish that the occurrence of error is not evidence of negligence; the important thing, if possible, is to recognize and correct errors. So what can be done? In my opinion the

answer lies in stronger professional bodies. These bodies should have professional conduct committees to oversee the action of their members. Any complaints regarding negligence would be heard by these committees. They would decide whether there is any evidence of negligence or any other misconduct. If there was negligence, the committee would suggest appropriate measures. For the sake of fairness, the members would be selected from different professional groups covering all aspect of social dimension. Being a surgeon myself, I

believe this is the only way to protect ourselves from being tried by the media and at the same time do what we have been trained to do--- heal the sick and put the patient's welfare above all other

Associate Prof of Surgery Bangladesh Medical College

BTV English news

The recent change in the schedule of the nglish news on BTV from 10:00 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. is terrible. Since this is the main news bulletin in English it should be aired at an earlier time in the evening rather than late at night. I'm a student and have to wake up early in the morning. I can't stay up to listen to the news

Would BTV kindly reschedule the English news to a more convenient time -earlier in the evening?

A student

Anti-hartal violence

How can the government be so blatantly involved in anti-hartal violence? We have experienced a lot of hartals in the past but have never witnessed government involvement on this scale, such as a ruling MP leading an anti-hartal procession which included armed hooligans. This is the last straw.

Is there absolutely no consideration for the poor victims who are injured to killed as a result of political gamesmanship? The victims have families, who will cry for them, who will be deprived of their love. Do politicians have any idea how much time and effort it takes for a family to

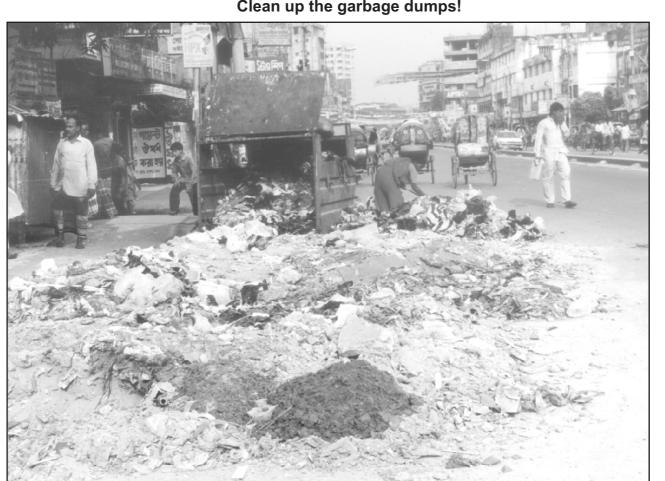
Mohammad Nazmul Islam

Cheating in exams

Every year the SSC and HSC examinations take place with familiar scenes of copying en masse and expulsion of hundreds of students. How do we stop the practice of mass cheating? This gigantic problem must be addressed not only by the government , but also by teachers, students, guardians who should equally share the responsibility of saving our

PHOTORIAL

Readers are invited to send in exclusive pictures, colour or black and white, of editorial value, with all relevant information including date, place and significance of subject matter. Pictures received will not be returned



The DCC has failed miserably to discharge a very basic responsibility: to keep the city clean. Like this scene in Eskaton, there are other horrible examples of garbage spilling on to the streets-- an unhygienic and uncivilised practice that mars the environment and poses a health hazard . Will the Dhaka City Corporation take notice?

In the long run, we must build up a national consensus, but in the short term, the Education Ministry and Education Boards should start making some immediate changes, such as abandoning the traditional style of setting questions. This allows students to predict which questions are likely to come and hence embark on learning select questions up by heart. Parent, guardians and teachers should ensure that students are well they have no need to copy or cheat. The authorities should mount strict law enforcement procedures so that no one can get in without proper authorization and identity checks. Adopting unfair means in the examinations has become a curse for our society. All of us should come forward to remove it in the greater interest of the nation

Rajuk Uttara Model College

Ekushey: global publicityIt is satisfying to learn that a CD of Ekushey February (International Mother

Language Day) has been released in Dhaka. The next objective is to prepare an authorised English version based or this CD, for global circulation and publicity. We should go beyond gloating over mere sentimentalism, and spread the good work abroad.

Agricultural University The government has recently elevated the Bangladesh Agricultural Institute of

Dhaka to a full university, the new Sher-e Bangla Agricultural University. The Agricultural College situated at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka is the pioneer seat of agricultural education in Bangladesh. M Zahidul Hague (a popular teacher at this Institute) has long been striving for this elevation. Now his dream has come true. In a recent letter Mr Hague asked the government to help the new university to use the 'Chandrima Udvan' as ar 'Open Forestry Laboratory'. I fully endorse his views and would like to add that no more open spaces and greeners of the capital city should be grabbed in the name of 'development'

MASMolla

No More Empty Words

Your courageous editorial of February 18, "No more empty words; Put them behind bars" was timely. Our Prime Minister is now undisputedly the most powerful person in this country and her words are more or less law. How is it then that her instructions so widely publicised through the media to arrest forthwith all those who violate the law irrespective of their party affiliations, have been and continue to be flouted by the law enforcing authorities? Is there a catch between her words and her deeds or does she really mean what she says?

It is sometimes reported that the police are often obstructed by influential quarters, belonging to the ruling party, from taking appropriate action against many known criminals and terrorists. Are these so-called influential quarters more powerful than our Hon'ble Prime Minister nerself? In the public interest and above the interest of her petty followers, will the Prime Minister rise to the occasion and firmly tells the law-enforcing authorities that she means business?

A Qayyum Dhaka.

An appeal to doctors

Doctors are supposed to be committed to humanitarian needs. It is unfortunate that some doctors have become more interested in earning money than in taking care of their patients. There are exceptions, of course, but quality care is acking. Examinations are cursory, superficial and sometimes fail to diagnose the patient's illness correctly, leading to terrible consequences for the patient. Doctors treat patients in the most allous manner sometimes

This is why many people go to India or other neighbouring countries for medical treatment. People have lost faith in our doctors. I would appeal to all doctors to do something to change this unfortunate

BUET, Dhaka

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