

WORLD FOOD DAY

Uniting against hunger

The observance of the WFD will not be fully meaningful until the present number of about 1 billion malnourished and hungry people is drastically reduced to the minimum. The united fight against hunger at national, regional and international levels must go on until the goal is achieved.

M. ABDUL LATIF MONDAL

OCTOBER 16 will be observed as World Food Day. World Food Day (WFD) was launched in November, 1979, by Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) member countries in its 20th General Conference. Since then, the member countries have been observing the day highlighting awareness of the issues behind poverty and hunger. Along with other countries, Bangladesh will observe the day in a befitting way.

The broad objectives of the WFD include:

- Encouraging the increase of agricultural food production and stimulating national, bilateral, transnational and non-governmental initiatives to this end;
- Catalysing economic and technical coordination among developing nations;
- Enhancing the participation of rural people, particularly women and the underprivileged, in decisions and events impacting their living conditions;
- Augmenting public awareness of the issue of hunger in the world;
- Advocating the transfer of technologies to the developing world;
- Revitalising international and national solidarity in the combat against hunger, malnutrition and poverty, and attracting attention to accomplishments in food and agricultural development.

The theme of WFD 2010 is "United against hunger." It has been rightly chosen because, according to FAO, close to 1 billion people in the world live in chronic hunger at the moment, and united efforts at national, regional and international levels are urgently required to combat this curse.

Global food security now faces two serious threats. One is from rapid increase in world population, and the other is from the adverse impacts of climate change and global warming. On the eve of the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen in December, 2009, FAO Director-General

Jacques Diouf wrote that over the next three decades, the world's population would grow by 2.3 billion.

Meeting the demand of the world's 9.1 billion inhabitants in 2050 would require 70% more food than the world produces at the moment. If right decisions are not taken at this point of time, there is the risk of finding the global cupboard dangerously bare in the near future. More importantly, he cautioned about the growing challenge of climate change, which might reduce potential agricultural output by 30% in Africa and by up to 21% in developing countries as a whole.

"The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2010," jointly published by FAO and WFP on October 6, says that 22 countries, almost all from Africa, are facing enormous challenges like food crises and extremely high prevalence of hunger due to a combination of natural disasters, conflict and weak institutions.

A few countries of Asia -- China, India, Indonesia, Pakistan and Bangladesh -- are primarily contributing to the rapid increase of world population. While the governments in these countries are mainly responsible for undertaking appropriate policies and programmes to reverse their high growth rate of population, the international communities must provide them necessary technical and financial support to attain the goal.

The world leaders must reach an agreement at the COP16 this year to cuts in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to ameliorate the adverse impacts of climate change, which has already started affecting food production globally.

Developing countries like Bangladesh must not suffer from the adverse impacts of climate change and global warming for no fault of theirs. They must be provided with sufficient funds outside Official Development Assistance (ODA) for enabling them to cope with the threats of climate change.

As for Bangladesh, while successive governments have tried to reduce the curse of poverty and hunger by increasing food produc-



GUDUS ALAM DRINKENIS

tion and adopting measures to increase the purchasing power of the people for access to required food, the adverse impacts of climate change and global warming have affected her food production, biodiversity and public health.

At a recent conference styled "Crop production under changing climate: agronomic option," organised by Bangladesh Society of Agronomy and participated by agronomists from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the Philippines and Sudan, the experts said that feeding the people of Bangladesh would be a major problem in the next 40 years since production of rice would decrease by 8% and wheat by 32% by 2050 due to climate change, while the population would go up by 50-75 million over the existing 150 million.

This will complicate the food security situation in Bangladesh because already about 40% of her population live below poverty line. Food insecurity resulting from insufficient supply of food grains and their higher prices seriously affects the ultra-poor, who constitute around 20% of the population. They cannot have access to necessary food grains because of

their poverty, and this forces them to reduce their consumption of food grains, endangering their very lives.

While addressing the 65th Session of the UN General Assembly on September 26, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina thus aptly said: "Bangladesh has been adversely affected by global warming. Food security is faced with serious threats due to climate change and global warming. Though our share of carbon gas emissions is negligible, we are its worst victims."

Bangladesh has undertaken an adaptation and mitigation action plan. Materialising the action plan needs enormous funds. So the world community must come forward to help implement her action plan.

The observance of the WFD will not be fully meaningful until the present number of about 1 billion malnourished and hungry people is drastically reduced to the minimum. The united fight against hunger at national, regional and international levels must go on until the goal is achieved.

M. Abdul Latif Mondal is a former Secretary. E-mail: latifm43@gmail.com

Barbarity at its worst



GUDUS ALAM DRINKENIS

political links, why did the law enforcement agencies fail to catch the politicians involved? Without mincing words, it can be said that what happened in Natore was evil and would perhaps not have happened if the law enforcers were up to their task.

The people have watched Natore slide into a pathetic state of political clashes and killing of political figures since the last 30 years. Given Natore's history of such violence and gory past, the administration should have anticipated trouble and taken timely action that could prevent such clashes and also save a life.

Even after a credible election that brought the AL-led mohajote to power, dark clouds of uncertainty hover over the horizon, because of the exercise of muscle-power, and greed for power and money in the Chatra League and Juba League activists. In fact, reality has betrayed expectation.

There have been intra-party clashes, killings and lootings and, topping it all, the new dimension of militant activities. The government pledged in its election manifesto to curb terrorism, and must face down these groups without fear or favour. We have leaders who are very capable of shedding tears or speaking glibly about plans and programmes of development, but perfectly incapable of assuming duties.

People wonder how many incidents of killing, looting, stalking, extortion and repression will prod the administration into effective action against the criminals. Ironically, the criminals' arrogance is fed by the response that unfortunately greets each new barbarism.

"Get these terrorists and criminals out," these people cry out, referring to a system that has allowed hardened criminals who are constantly changing colours to terrorise the society for decades. The P.M., after watching the criminal activities of a section of Chatra League cadres and Juba League activists, issued orders to book the criminals without discrimination. But people wonder to what extent this order has been carried out.

The decline in the law and order situation and the stagnation in the economy that this government inherited are too widespread and deeprooted to be cured by tinkering. Sure enough, over the years things have drastically changed. The country's largely illiterate and overwhelmingly poor electorate, despite all the handicaps, are now well informed.

Dull and stereotyped propaganda, leader worship and rhetoric indulged in meetings and seminars do not appeal to them any more. At the same time, fewer and fewer people fit the stereotype of illiterate populace on whose bovine passivity earlier rulers could rely. The present AL-led government must heed this

fact, and that it will be judged by its track record.

Indeed, the present government need not look beyond the immediate past political regime for lessons about the predicament into which a democratic government, just for lack of sensibility and realistic appraisal of people's sentiment, can easily slide into. People are fed up with the venality of politicians, economic deterioration, social tension, and insecurity on the road and even within the safe boundary of their houses, mostly spawned by party conflicts and self-centred activities of disgruntled politicians.

The challenge facing the government is how to stem the eroding public confidence in government. The first prerequisite is probity on the part of the leaders matched by tough and consistent enforcement of laws without malice or favour towards anyone. And that should start with bringing the accused persons in Noor Babu killing case to justice.

Secondly, reduction of corruption in public life would restore the confidence of the people and inspire them to work for the growth of the country. The task for the prime minister and her cabinet would appear to be most challenging as they have inherited a dismaying legacy of moral malaise, economic stagnation, population pressure and colossal unemployment.

Even if we condemn such killings and violence in the strongest language, we cannot remain oblivious of the cracks and tremors that have developed in the society over the years. People have hardly any knowledge as to how many of these offenders -- killers, rapists, stalkers, abductors or extortionists -- have ever been tried and brought to justice. Rather the victims have stories full of anguish, shock, horror and harassment.

With societal norms torn apart, people are now becoming increasingly restive. In the face of adversity, calamity and unrest threatening them one after another, there is little for them to hold on to, or to hope for and be proud of. The administration is yet to wake up to the tragic consequences of these shocking episodes of sinister crimes. But to a whole generation growing up with psychological trauma, shock and grief there must be a ray of hope.

The government must take note of the fact that failure to bring crime of any sort under control could cost not only the image of the government but also our fledgling democracy. Peace-loving citizens hate chaos, and the unremitting violence they see every day has shaken them to the core. The growing loss of confidence could even produce sudden political swings, which most people do not cherish.

Md. Asadullah Khan is a former teacher of physics and Controller of Examinations, BUET. E-mail: aukhanbd@gmail.com

Passing away of a freedom fighter and nationalist

ASHRAF UD DOULA

THE untimely and sad demise of Major General Moinul Hossain Chowdhury B.B (Retd) on the morning of October 10th, 2010 came as a deep shock to me.

On completion of high school, Moin joined the 29th batch of the Pakistan Military Academy (PMA). Soon, he was appointed a Battalion Sergeant Major (BSM) in the PMA, a rare distinction achieved by few Bengali cadets at that time. Commissioned in 1964, Moin traversed through several important posts, including Aide de Camp to the General Officer Commanding (GOC) 14 Division based in Dhaka. In the eventful days of 1971, Moin was a company commander of the Second East Bengal regiment based in Joydebpur.

Conscious of the political developments in the country, Moin had no doubt as to what was in the offing in the political horizon of Bangladesh. The historical address of Banghabandhu on March 7, 1971 was a signal to the then Bengali army officers based in Bangladesh, including Moin who prepared himself for any eventuality.

During March '71, the Pakistan army started increasing its strength in Dhaka. The people of this country continued to agitate against the perceived conspiracy of the Pakistan army to thwart the Bengali aspiration. Some people of Joydebpur, led by a local Awami League leader threatened to march towards Joydebpur cantonment and put up road blocks and barricades in order to prevent the movement of the Pakistan Army.

At this critical juncture of the nation's history, Major Moin was asked to take his company to remove the barricades and shoot at sight in the event of any resistance. It was he alone who had to take the decision. It was the Bengali part of Moin that prevented him from taking any drastic actions against the Bengali agitators, and he calmed the situation by joining the crowd and telling them that he was a Bengali and a part of them. This incident may well go down in history as a precursor of our War of Liberation.

On the night of March 25, 1971, the Second East Bengal regiment was without its Commanding Officer (CO). The entire responsibility thus fell on then Major Shafiqullah, second-in-command. It was Moin who gave him all the support to launch the resistance against the Pakistan army.

Subsequently, Moin fought valiantly during the war of liberation. He was bestowed with Bir Bikram for bravery during the War. Following the independence of the country, Moin served as Military Secretary to the President (MSP), Adjutant General, 46 Brigade Commander, Log Area Commander, and quickly rose to the rank of Major General at the age of 37.

Consequent to the killing of President Ziaur Rahman, in May 1981, a deliberate process of persecution of freedom fighter officers in the army began, and Moin also fell prey to this conspiracy. He was sent on deputation to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and served Bangladesh as an ambassador before retiring from government service in 1998. He also served as an adviser to the caretaker government in 2001.

I had the privilege to come in close contact with General Moin as his deputy in Australia. I had also served under him in Singapore for a brief period. My first contact with him, however, took place in 1973 after my return from former Yugoslavia, where I had gone for treatment. Moin was the Adjutant General and I was posted to Adjutant General's Branch as a Staff Officer.

My admiration and respect for him increased after I attended a lecture he presented to the officers of the army headquarters, dealing with many burning issues of the day and calling upon the officers to serve the nation inspired by the ideals of the Liberation War.

An upright and honest officer, Moin was a strictly disciplined person. Moin had a sharp and witty mind, often sprinkling his sentences with quotes. He was deeply aggrieved for being pushed out of the army and especially for not having had the honour to serve as army chief, which he aspired to a great deal. It is a sense of deprivation he perhaps never reconciled with. I believe the Bangladesh army was denied the leadership of one of the finest soldiers the country has produced.

General Moin was critical of political leaders who put party and personal interests above that of the nation. He never pandered to the powers that be and never compromised on matters of principle. These qualities perhaps cost him the post of army chief. Moin was deeply resentful of the political leaders running to the foreign ambassadors at the drop of a hat. He also detested the way these foreign diplomats behaved in this country.

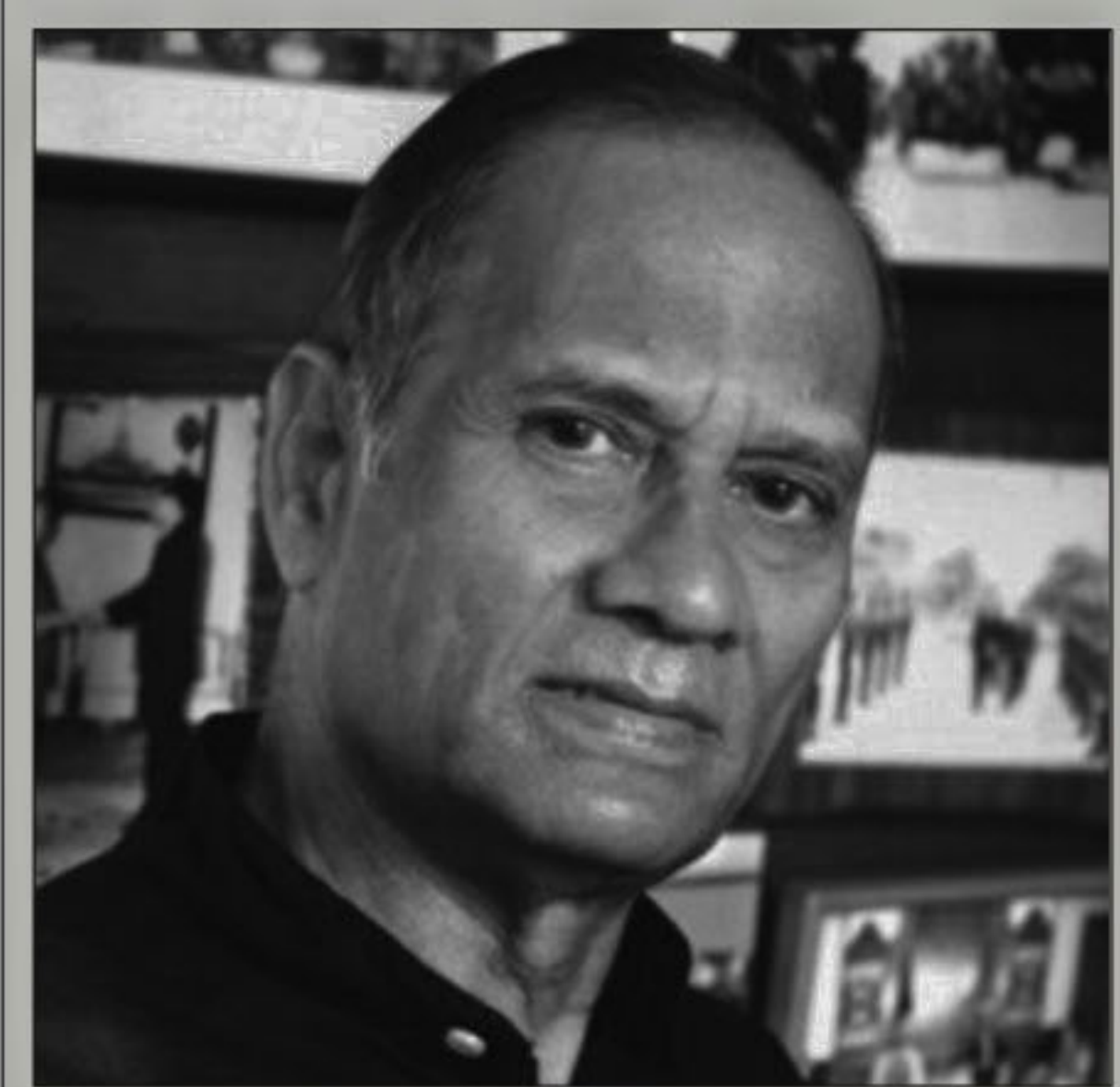
I would fail badly if I didn't mention one particular aspect of his life. His wife, Ruby became a victim of multiple sclerosis early in life. I never found Moin despairing or losing attention to his wife. He was very devoted, loving and caring to his wife until his last day.

General Moin's Namaj e janaza was held in the Dhaka Cantonment Mosque, and was buried at the armed forces graveyard, following a state funeral. There were condolence messages in galore. Yet, a condolence message from the highest state authority was missing, which I believe Moin eminently deserved as a distinguished and decorated freedom fighter.

We salute you freedom fighter general. We salute you not because you were a General, but we salute you for what you did for this country and for what you stood for, above all for your undiluted and uncompromising patriotism. Your loss is not only irreparable for your family, to whom we convey our deepest condolences, but also for the nation, for in your demise you took with you another freedom fighter, which will never be born again.

May Allah, the Merciful, the Benevolent grant you His infinite Blessings resting your soul in infinite peace. Amen.

Ashraf Ud Doula is a former Secretary and Ambassador.



Moinul Hossain Chowdhury B.B (Retd)

MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

THE gruesome killing of Sanaullah Noor Babu, BNP-backed chairman of Boraigram upazila, has stunned the whole nation. If there is unanimity on anything, it is on the shameful inability of the law enforcers, who were present in Bonpara bazaar at the time, to launch an offensive on the attackers. How can the law enforcers near the place of disturbance, as newspaper reports reveal, explain their inaction?

This time, people in the country would like to take the P.M.'s word in letter and spirit very seriously. The P.M. vowed on Saturday last that the killers in Natore, regardless of their party affiliation, would be brought to justice. Joining with the P.M., the police chief also said that the killers had been identified from video footage and there would be a massive manhunt to arrest them.

But, even 3 days after the incident, only one alleged perpetrator out of 16 identified in the video footage has been nabbed, although the victim's family sources suggested that the alleged killers were roaming freely in Bonpara bazaar. People now increasingly feel that unless the criminals moving in the garb of political

activists are tried and convicted, such criminal activities would flourish.

I had occasion to meet a veteran politician, a person known for his honesty and dedication, just after the horror incident in Natore. We talked about why things had gone so wrong in the country in the past few years. He replied that, in his view, the main thing that had gone wrong was that Bangladesh had become a "soft state."

What he meant was that the state had revealed itself to be completely incapable of fighting the forces of violence and terrorism. The reason he cited was that no attempt has been made so far to retrain our policemen to think of themselves as representatives of the community rather than instruments of the government.

The flipside of the story is that in most cases the investigation was so sloppy and shoddy that the courts released many of the arrested criminals because of lack of evidence. Consequently, large sections of the populace seem disillusioned with the court, police and administrative integrity.

Admittedly, law is necessary, and more so commitment and unbiased attitude, to nab the criminals. If the perpetrators had powerful