

Bangladesh Needs a Permanent Task Force

by Kaiser Rasheed

The proposed Task Force could interface with the civilian government and voluntary agencies under an apex national authority acting directly under the head of government.

A Plea to BTV

While we are still reeling from the shock-effects of violent incidents in the Dhaka and Chittagong Universities, we have been presented with an outbreak of the same at the Agricultural University in Mymensingh. The groups involved are familiar, the tactics are familiar, and the end result — closure of the university — is no stranger either. Again, the spark was provided by an issue which should have merited no more than an argument at best. Apparently, the fight erupted following a dispute between two rival groups about whether a television programme commemorating the 10th death anniversary of former president Ziaur Rahman or a film on video should be watched.

The very basic principles of civil, democratic behaviour seem to have been replaced by an attitude of intolerance which finds its fullest expression through violence. This paper has already editorialised on the question of campus violence, no less than four times in the past month or so. The pattern of behaviour of some of the major student organisations of the country appears to be moving in a direction which is wholly contrary to democratic norms, and therefore, unacceptable. We have already called on student parties to show restraint, and then inject some civility and commonsense into their politics by expelling hooligans and renouncing the use of musclepower, whether in Dhaka, Chittagong or Mymensingh. We do so again, in the hope that what is happening at present is an aberration which will soon be sorted out when wiser heads and cooler tempers prevail.

But a point ought to be also made about the approach Bangladesh Television (BTV) is currently taking towards dealing with events and personalities of national, historical importance. There should not be any dispute over the appropriateness of BTV's decision to screen special programmes on a leading hero of the War of Liberation such as Ziaur Rahman. But BTV has done the nation a great disservice by merely touching or wholly ignoring other occasions of equal or greater importance. For instance, the 70th birth anniversary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the man who founded this very country, did not merit a programme by BTV reckoning; April 17, Mujibnagar Day, one of the most important dates in our historical calendar, was ignored, along with the historic March 7. We have other great, historical figures too, not only from 1971, but also from the days of anti-imperialist struggles, such as Sirajuddin, Surja Sen, Khudiram, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. Such great leaders should be subjects of tribute in the way BTV commemorates Sher-e-Bangla, Maulana Bhasani and Hussain Shahid Suhrawardy. By not projecting these and other events and personalities, BTV is failing in its duty to present our history in its truest and fullest form. What BTV should remember is that it is a national, public corporation, paid for by the taxpayers of this country. It will make a serious mistake if it continues in the ways of the past, giving preference to the agenda of one political party over the national interest.

However, lapses by BTV is a separate issue. No groups should exploit such events to perpetrate acts of violence. We all need to sit down together to stop this mindless drift towards a state of absolute intolerance.

Helping the Fishermen

The government has decided to manufacture one thousand mechanised sea-going fishing vessels to give these out to the fishermen's families affected in the April 29 tidal surge. There could hardly be a better decision although this figure is decidedly very small compared to the boats that the accursed community lost in the disaster or to the number of vessels they will be needing to attempt to recover from the bashing. We congratulate the government on the decision in the hope that this would make only the beginning of lasting process of making such vessels and employ them, among other things, in making up for the lost vessels.

None has suffered more, as a community, in the cataclysmic strike. Most of our national press reported about a lakh fishermen missing till well into the second week of the strike. This is certainly on top of the number of bodies of fishermen found and identified. This journal reported on the third day of the strike that something between 10 and 25 thousand fishermen had died on April 29 in the Chittagong metropolitan area alone. Apart from the tragedy it represents in human terms by way of loss of life in such huge numbers all from a community — which means complete ruination for tens of thousands of closely knit families — this loss would hit hard the economy of the coastal region in the first place and even have repercussions on the national economy.

Helping them out with their means of production is undoubtedly the capital thing to do. But will it alone — and coming as it does in such small doses — suffice to rejuvenate the community back to its very much dangerous and yet immensely productive profession? They would be needing much more than the fishing vessels which will come to, benefit only the big ones in the community — and perhaps naturally so — and not all in the fold. But all of them will be needing houses and food and medicine and nets and what not. The April 29 scourge, it seems, specially took on the fishermen. Let fishermen be our very special subject of succour and rehabilitation.

THE first concern in an effective disaster management must, indeed, be the saving of human life. This, in turn, will bring into sharp focus the entire gamut of the early warning system and the facilities for rapid evacuation of people from areas facing imminent threat of a cyclone/tidal bore strike.

Listening to the radio on the night of the 29-30th April, the threat of imminent disaster was quite clear. Marine signals, 9 at Cox's Bazar, 10 at Chittagong and 8 at Chalna, coupled with inland water Great Danger Signal number 4 along the entire length of the estuary provided sufficient indication of the imminent disaster. The only problem was that the movement of the cyclone was not very clear to the layman and at no stage did specific areas get pinpointed for instant evacuation. This needs to be looked into for future improvement of the early warning system.

Perhaps for a better understanding of the problem, one could consider the behaviour of two groups lying at the opposite ends of the population spectrum. Some of the more educated and disciplined groups, including members of the armed forces, physically located at the Patenga area and having all the facilities of communication and transportation needed for rapid evacuation, would represent one end of the spectrum. The failure of this group to respond to the warning signals would certainly point to the need for more effective measures to ensure that the gravity of the impending calamity is better appreciated by the target audience.

The other end of the spectrum would be the ordinary, uneducated cultivators and fishermen inhabiting far flung remote areas of the coastal belt with little or no access to either communication or means of rapid transportation and in most cases, with no safe haven within easy reach.

For them, the next step would, perhaps, be to improve communications wherever possible and to regulate habitation in the more remote and inaccessible coastal areas. In the latter case, other factors causing reluctance among the people to abandon their homesteads will also need to be considered. Provision of more adequate cyclone shelters within easier reach, construction of a network of embankments and other medium and long term programmes

will necessarily follow. In the meantime, regulation of human habitation in such remote areas, coupled with improvement in the land administration system along with introduction of some form of collective security in addition to appropriate insurance schemes could all be undertaken in the first phase of rehabilitation. This would all contribute to a higher rate of timely evacuation in the event of future calamity.

To remain confined to the specific objective of life saving, the next thing that requires careful consideration is the logistics and deployment capability in the immediate aftermath of natural disaster and the need for the most effective possible mobilization of national and international (if need be) resources for relief.

In the post disaster phase, a great deal can be achieved if deployment could be speeded up. The reaction time needs to be shortened to the barest minimum. Supplies and logistics for instant deployment should remain in place as a standing arrangement periodically updated and subjected to regular drills to maintain a high level of efficiency and preparedness.

It is obvious that much of this is beyond our capacity to implement, both in terms of resources as well as management capability. Our objective should be to acquire sufficient capability to provide the infrastructure around which a massive buildup can take place with the least possible delay.

It has been found from past experience that the most efficient means of providing im-

mediate relief is through deployment of the armed forces.

The setting up of a permanent task force composed of appropriate units constituting the backbone of a future disaster management action plan would appear to be a logical step. This force could interface with the civilian government and voluntary agencies under an apex national authority acting directly under the head of government. With the UN Disaster Relief Organization and other international agencies providing liaison and other appropriate inputs, such a national body could be organized to handle all matters relating to future disaster management.

The existence of such a specialised agency would go a long way to ensure that in times of natural disasters, there will be no gap between the assessment of Bangladesh and that of the world community. Participating countries could then shorten their reaction time in making men and material available for rapid deployment whenever necessary.

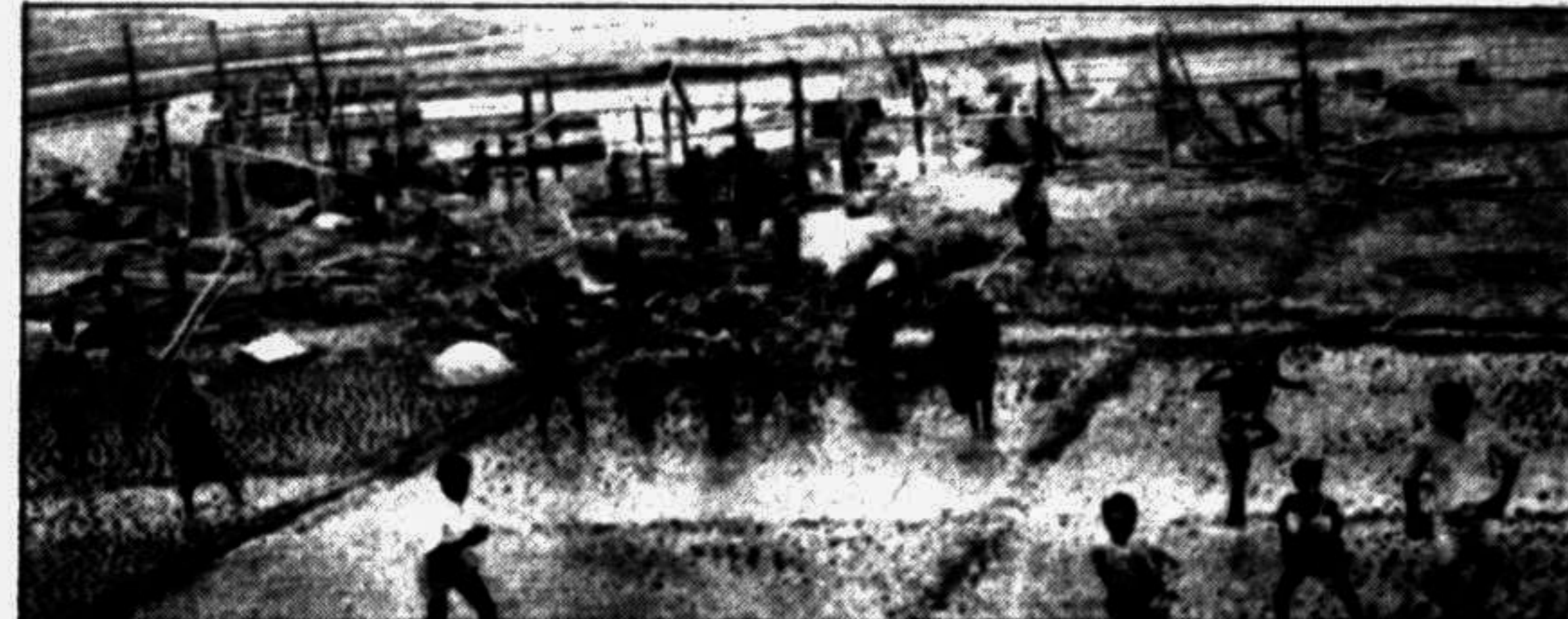
The impact of the recent cyclone, tidal bore and extensive floods on national planning is likely to be significant and far reaching. This will certainly play havoc with existing priorities. As it is, we are in the midst of reappraisal and restructuring on a national scale. The 29 different studies conducted by national experts under the leadership of

Professor Rehman Sobhan, will stand us in good stead. These studies were undertaken by eminent national experts in an environment of neutrality and freedom. They were not prepared as blueprints of any particular government or party. All those concerned with development activities in Bangladesh will do well to acquire at least a nodding acquaintance with these studies because they do represent a unique national effort.

Needless to say, anything that is done for future disaster management would need to be integrated with the evolving national planning effort. Prone as we are to such colossal natural disasters, we need to take immediate steps to set up a permanent organisation for disaster management and also contribute to the growing awareness in favour of a concerted multinational effort in this regard.

In order to achieve all this and more there is need for a revival of the national spirit. While we mourn the dead let there also be thanksgiving for all those who have been saved. Let this nation also acknowledge an abiding debt to all those who have contributed to the relief effort and engaged in the task of bringing succour to humanity in distress — for gratitude is a noble sentiment and in the ultimate analysis, humanity itself is all about nobility of the spirit without which great achievements are seldom possible.

A former diplomat and an expert on national and international affairs, the writer is now a free lance contributor to the local press.



Starving survivors anxiously look for food packets being dropped at devastated Sonadia. Can we save these people from their predicament? — Staff photo.

Training can Improve Performance of Employees

by Syed Naquib Muslim

POSITIVE change is the essence of any training activity. Training aims at meeting the performance gaps of the employees; it is a powerful means of improving their performance level. Broadly speaking, there exists two major varieties of training — a) institutional training (IT) and b) on-the-job training (OJT) both at the public and private sectors.

Experience indicates that institutional training alone is not adequate for improving performance level of employees. Institutional training must be combined with on-the-job training to supplement the deficiencies of IT. Now both IT and OJT are necessary for upgrading the performance level of government employees.

Since officials of all levels have integral and interdependent working relationship, training of support staff officials concurrently with that of upper level staff is important for improving effectiveness of the government agencies. A support official has to be trained both institutionally and on the job in order for him to develop the desired level of competence. Skills cannot be transferred systematically and strategies cannot be rationally devised unless training needs

of the support staff are carefully identified.

On-the-job training

On-the-job training occurs at the workplace. Here the role of the supervisor is dominant. The responsibility of identifying the learning needs of the subordinates and of adopting measures to meet them devolves on the supervisor. Learning-teaching is contingent upon situation, context and chance. A training need perceived by a subordinate in a given situation may not be applicable for another subordinate working in the same office. It is therefore difficult to bring out a uniform and common profile of training needs for standardizing the subordinates' performance level. However, basing upon the experience of the supervisors and perception of the training needs by the subordinates themselves, efforts need to be made to identify the training needs that are commonly felt or that generally emerge on the job.

Experience suggests that OJT, though a conventional variety of training, is not practised systematically in the government offices. No set of guidelines has been specified in the National Training Policy about the principle and modalities of OJT operations. So far

no document has been available indicating systematic training needs assessment by the government or government-sponsored training institutes. The national planning document envisages wide application of OJT for government officials irrespective of level and cadres and the government is committed to strengthen this aspect of training activity. But the assessment of training needs is a weak field that merits special attention and efforts.

Curricula

The training curricula designed by the government training institutes are based mostly on speculation. Ideally, training curricula have to be need-specific and competence-based. The government of Bangladesh and its creditor/sponsor in the field the World Bank are assigning strong emphasis to need-based training programmes and therefore assessment of OJT needs for support level government officials is crucial importance. Training needs of support staff have to be identified depending on their job analysis or job variation. It is a collaborative responsibility; the supervisors and support staff must sit together to bring out

the deficiencies that relate to their job performance.

The quality of governmental performance is closely linked to the quality of training provided to the support staff. Assessing training needs is therefore a key task without which training programmes cannot be rationalised. Identifying training needs is a highly technical and time-consuming activity.

Training needs assessment and OJT have a sequential link. Needs must be assessed first and then the process of intervention by supervisors through OJT is to be made. In order therefore to identify systematically needs for OJT of support staff, it is necessary to employ the methods prescribed by the training specialists/practitioners. Since the role of supervisors is crucial in on-the-job training situation, it is necessary to employ face-to-face interviews with the supervisors and the incumbent support staff themselves.

Interviews

Face-to-face interviews may be conducted with the beneficiary of the class II officials. The beneficiary includes the service-seeking public and the support-receiving higher offi-

cial. Supervisors must keep their eyes open to observe the performance of their subordinates and record their observations to identify the issues. Data and information may be gathered from Regional Public Administration Training Centre (RPATC) on the training performance, training evaluation of the participant support staff for identifying their performance discrepancies. Existing training curricula designed by RPATC may be updated according to the changed needs and contexts. The missing ingredients and redundant elements of the

present curricula should be identified by way of rationalising the existing training courses.

OJT is an on-going training activity; it continues upto the time when an official retires from his service, therefore, this variety of training is unavoidable if performance is to be result-oriented. In order to create an awareness in and transfer of skills of OJT to government officials Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre may organise from time to time of OJT-based training courses for supervisors of the government offices.

OPINION

Austerity : Some Suggestions

The first thing we would suggest is to scrutinise and re-structure the standards of living of our officials. It is well known that the income gaps between the top officials and the lowest paid employees vary very widely.

Whereas the State spends about Taka twelve lac per annum on a single top bureaucrat, the per capita annual income of the country stands staggeringly only at US \$170! Let us be realistic and also try to follow the greatest examples left behind by Prophet Mohammad (S.A.), and his companions who ruled their countries and yet lived like the most ordinary persons of the State. Furthermore, it is not ethical that the public servants should lead a more prosperous style of life than the public. None would grudge it if the highest ranking Government officials are paid, let us say, even up to 60 times more than our per capita income, because they are educated, intelligent and industrious.

The next step to generate substantial savings would be to cut down the number of our missions abroad. Except for the major donor countries and other countries where there are good possibilities of developing our export trade. We should also drastically reduce the sizes and frequencies of our delegates visiting foreign countries.

Let us now turn to the use, nay, rather the misuses of state owned and maintained transports. We do agree that the top officials must have some reliable transports at their disposal to attend to their urgent duties. Therefore, we suggest that they may be granted interest free loans, recoverable in easy instalments, to buy one of the small size cars and they also be eligible to draw a monthly conveyance allowance, not more than 15 times that are being paid to the lowest grade staff members. This allowance should be all inclusive of fuel, driver if so desired, insurance and maintenance charges. Let the high officials try to lead a modest life.

Housing schemes and government accommodation systems may be re-examined. The population of capital city Dhaka was only about five lac about

thirtyfive years back which has currently grown to over 65 lac. The city just does not have enough woods for ecological balance, parks for the dwellers and adequate sports fields for the children. It is, therefore, admitted without any discussions that the greater Dhaka city hasn't got enough ground to accommodate its rapidly growing population. Moreover, there is hardly any scope of its spreading outwards. The main obstacles in this respect are proximity of the International Airport in the northern side, the rivers Buriganga and Sitalakha on the western and eastern sides respectively. The southern side is already contiguous with Narayanganj town. Also we would need many very costly ridges over these two rivers to spread out besides developing their adjoining low lying areas. The only feasible answer to this acute shortage of housing areas at Dhaka is to have high rise (20 to 30 storeyed) buildings both for public and private sectors. Since these would be cost intensive projects, it should be initiated and programmed by the government in the public sector. At the same time the government should encourage the private sector to undertake construction of such multi-storeyed housing projects with four to six apartments in each floor. The government should also demolish all their existing Bungalows or two storeyed single unit type residential accommodations. Let us stop this colossal waste of valuable lands and build two to four high rise buildings in each of those compounds. Or lease those out to the appropriate property development agencies with preconditions of constructing high rise buildings in a pre-fixed time frame.

Let us also stop waste of hundreds of thousands of active manhours on unnecessary and avoidable pompous, colourful and gorgeous shows organised VVIPs.

I would, like to advance a word of advice on the long term consequences of 'on the spot, off the cuffs' decisions on important national projects.

M.A.Baqui
Dhaka Cantonment.

To the Editor...

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.

Sacrifice affected cyclone affected

Sir, In the midst of the greatest human tragedies, we will be celebrating the holy Eid-ul-Azha around the last week of June. The people in the cyclone affected areas are now struggling for survival and are totally lost on how to begin life again. The relief is not going to continue for long and the time has come to think of ways and means of helping the affected people to resume their productive activities.

I appeal to the people of our country not to sacrifice any animal during the Eid-ul-Azha and instead donate the sacrificial animal to the people of the cyclone affected area so that the farmer may have an animal to till the soil or have some milk for the children or use the animal as a capital for his needs. Let us all share the immortal message of sacrifice by helping our brothers to renew their life.

Our government and the NGO's could plan a schedule for acceptance and transportation of the animals so that all the people can participate. I'm sure, there will be no lack of response and I look forward to a movement to materialize the idea.

L. A. Ahmed
Agrabad C/A
Chittagong.

Elections : India and Bangladesh

Sir, In the wave of electioneering in India, its former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was brutally killed, besides more than a hundred others falling victims in the process of Indian general election. Who knows what the deferred dates have in store. However, we hope for the better.

In contrast the general election which took place in Bangladesh on 27th Feb, 1991 has set an example of free, fair, democratic election and put the name of Acting President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed in the golden chapter of history of Bangladesh for his conducting this unparalleled peaceful and neutral election. He and the electorate here have set an example to the world that the heartfelt sincerity coupled with unflinching determination can turn the hard job into an easy one, and sometimes even the apparently impossible into obviously possible.

Indeed, the combination of these two essential qualities should start crystallising from the top. Only then the handful of scattered conscious people of the society will come out of their hides and strengthen the hand of the abbot. That will generate moral courage among the simple minded mass to follow these good people.

A good thing in always good; it may belong to or come from any source, irrespective of cast, creed or country. If India of tomorrow can be inspired with the rare example set by Bangladesh, it will gain, I believe, unexpected benefit in the field of harmony and peace.

S. A. Hussain
Moghbar, Dhaka.

SSC Elective Math

Sir, It is understood that there was an error in the Elective Maths question of this year's Dhaka Board SSC examination. The Question No. 3(Kha) reads—"Prove that $(a-a)^3 - 3(a-a)^2 + 2(a-a)$. In fact, there should be + (plus) after $(a-a)^3$ instead of - (minus). Most of the examinees spent their precious time in solving the wrong question but couldn't prove the same.

Now we would like to request the concerned authority to give credit to all those who attempted the question in any form.

M. Zahidul Haque
Assistant Professor,
Bangladesh Agricultural College, Dhaka.

Faridabad roads

Sir, Faridabad is a well-known residential area of Dhaka city. About two lac people live in this locality. But now-a-days most of the roads of this locality are in very bad shape. Hari Charan Roy Road, Faridabad Lane, Nabin Chandra Goswami Road, Dhaknagar by pass, Lalmoheb Podder Lane, I.G. Gate and Bahadurpur Lane are in a worn out condition. As a result people living here have been suffering much being

deprived of modern communication facilities. Due to the worsening condition of the roads the area is lagging behind in the fields of trade, commerce, education and agriculture and the people of this place have little opportunity to enjoy the facilities of a city life. Moreover, the roads have developed potholes and cracked.

For obviating the miseries and sufferings of the people we urge upon the authorities concerned to take steps for immediate repair of the road.

Mahbubuddin Chowdhury
Hari Charan Roy Road,
Faridabad, Dhaka-1204.

Miracles of destiny

Sir, It is reported that the North Korean President was born in a thatched hut. Whereas today he lives in a palace made of marble.

Therefore, this news item once again reminds us that sometimes destiny plays a strange role in a person's life. For some, it takes him from a hut to a palace, for others, it may just be the other way round. We have heard of millionaires becoming paupers, just by chance or luck in the form of some mishap.

So it is true when those who are wise advise that we shouldn't be arrogant with or proud of our position or possession, for we never know what destiny has in store for an individual.

Well, humility is a virtue we should all try to acquire, as even most of the religions also advise us to be humble and not proud. The more we achieve, the humbler we should be.

Rahim Ahmed
Eskaton, Dhaka