

'Set Democracy Free'

If a single photograph ever captured the moods and hopes of a people, then the snap of Noor Hossain taken by Pavel Rahman on November 10, 1987, was it. It was not so much the photographer's skills with the camera, but the three Ms that he captured—the moment, the man and the message.

The moment was one of the most significant days in the long history of the popular movement to oust Lt Gen Husseyn Muhammad Ershad from power. Nov 10 marked a watershed because after that, there could be no going back. Nov 10 was truly the point of no return, the precursor to Oct 10, 1990 and final victory over a dictator who had insulted the people at home and humiliated the nation abroad. Nov 10 saw the unleashing of popular rage on a scale rarely seen in this country since the late 1960s.

In retrospect, the fact that the Dhaka Siege Programme of '87 did not succeed in toppling the arrogant general from his lofty perch, does not seem all that important. The crucial thing was that the outpouring of passion on that day gave birth to a new popular consciousness, which was hypnotised and put to sleep by the politics of intrigues, palace coups and midnight murders that had come to characterise this country.

The man, Noor Hossain, personified that awakening of the people from his long slumber. He was a political worker, a self-less youngman who had nothing to gain materially by putting his life on the line. His was no accidental death, because he was at the forefront of the demonstration in the city that day. Angry, restless and an inspiration to those behind him, the police singled him out as a target. Noor Hossain passed into history moments after Pavel's shutter clicked.

But what really immortalised Noor Hossain were the messages painted on his bare, bony body. On his chest were the words "Down with Autocracy," and on his back "Set Democracy Free". Those two sets of words became the rallying cry in the snowballing movement to restore democracy. So much so, that during the decisive push in October and November last year, many youngmen could be seen in demonstrations and processions with those words painted in identical style on their bare chests and backs. The death of one Noor Hossain had indeed given birth to thousand Noor Hossains. And those in power in 1987 never even knew what they had done!

While we commemorate the day in 1991, the question facing us now is, have we truly set democracy free? With the coming to power of a representative government, the first phase of the transition from authoritarianism to democracy has been completed successfully. But the second phase—shedding of arbitrary ways of doing things and practice of democratic norms—is proving harder to accomplish.

Parliament, reflecting the popular will in the country, is pushing ahead with its task as expected (or even better than expected, some would say). But outside the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban, where real politics of this country still gets done, there is a great deal of intolerance. Lack of a democratic culture and tradition is cruelly exposing our limitations—as in the case of campus violence—despite the best of intentions.

But if we really wish to set democracy free, then political parties will have to take on the task of reforming themselves. We cannot have democracy until political parties begin to show greater tolerance of one another's views. Until then, the dreams of Noor Hossain and other martyrs remain unfulfilled.

Ministers and Fund Commitments

According to agency reports the Finance Minister visited the Jahangirnagar University last Friday and announced that funds would be allocated for the construction of an auditorium and women's residential hall. On Saturday the Communications Minister addressed a group of Madrasa teachers at Chandanpura, Chittagong, and assured all help in the construction of hostel building for students. On the same day Minister of State for Cultural Affairs appeared to be a bit more ambitious when she declared that Home Economics Colleges will be set up in every division—meaning four in all.

Well, it is heartening to see so many ministers spending their very valuable time and energy in trying to promote the cause of education. One just hopes that they are in touch with the education minister and his budget office before going about making their gallery speeches. By the way, shouldn't he be saying some of this, if not all of this? In addition to running the risk of making commitments which may not match with the priority decisions of the concerned minister, such doling out of funds, just because one is invited to address this or that gathering, is setting a very disturbing precedence. For one thing such a practice puts at a disadvantage those ministers who do not consider on the spot fund commitment to be a wise practice. Moreover, when this becomes the norm, an expectation is built that whenever a minister is invited he or she will dish out some funds. In fact that may become the criterion of selecting which minister to invite and which ones to avoid. There is also the risk that an unhealthy competition may develop as to who can make donations of bigger amounts compared to others.

The whole affair of ministers dishing out funds during ceremonies of sorts smacks of adhocism and unplanned allocation of scarce resources. Even if it is coordinated with the concerned ministry, there is something unhealthy about such a practice. It looks too much like a personal gesture of individual ministers. Will it not be better to make such fund allocation appear as a part of an overall plan of the government? And again, will it not be better to leave the affairs of a particular ministry in the hands of the minister concerned rather than having policy decisions and fund commitments pouring in from all sides?

PATC, Public Administration Training Complex, is next door to Jahangirnagar University. I had the luck—good or bad I do not know—of sharing some of its birth pains. The land which is now its campus originally, that is from its inception, belonged to the University. The earlier history does not concern us here. One fine morning, we saw a fresh looking sign-board on the highway close to the eastern end of our sprawling campus announcing that portion of the land as the site for the proposed PATC. When we registered our protest to the government, meetings and consultations followed. Our claim was established. Next followed more consultations and negotiations. Since according to the University Act, the Syndicate is the authority to acquire or to dispense with the university's property, my initial job was to persuade the Syndicate. And it was not easy to do so. But I had my arguments and the Syndicate finally agreed, on one condition: the Vice-Chancellor will always be on the Board of Governors. The government also seemed to agree but I suppose has later chosen to forget.

Though the Syndicate agreed the students didn't. The contractors built the boundary wall only to see it pulled down within a matter of days. This went on for some time. I argued with the students and I knew that they had the secret support of a section of the faculty. Mr HT Imam, the Project Director, boldly offered to personally come, hoping to win the student leaders over. The meeting was friendly and protracted, yielding no result. Time passed, and I carried on a game of patience and persuasion, directly and separately, with the students. Their resistance was wearing out and finally came the day when they no longer objected.

In the ceremonial opening of PATC, Mr Justice Sattar,

the President and the Chief Guest, had the pleasure of being saluted and greeted by the elected leader of JUCSU.

That reminds me. For many years, since the days of Governor Monem Khan, our university campuses have enforced their no entry sign on all chancellors. There was a brief break after the Liberation. But there were signs of a thaw in the closing days of the BNP regime. We were hoping for a regular Convocation with the presence of the Chancellor. We had designed, and much thought was given to it, ceremonial gowns for the Chancellor, the Vice-Chancellor and the graduates, and we had received the supplies. But the curtain was hastily drawn with the appearance of a new general in the scene.

During the years the PATC was taking shape, physically and institutionally and later, when it finally wore the prosperous look, the neighbours, the university and its poor inhabitants, have given it no further troubles. I have not heard of any such thing.

But I remember the cautionary words of some of my sceptical students, and those have proved prophetic words: Sir, you will see money being poured into the making of PATC, while the trickle of it coming to us will make us their permanently poor neighbours. That will not be a happy sight.

I must have comforted them with some soothing words but I do not wish to recall them now.

Two Neighbours

I had hoped that the two neighbours, the University and the Centre, will gradually develop meaningful academic relationship, each drawing on the resources of the other. A

similar prospect had appeared briefly when the Atomic Energy Commission was looking for a site close to the university. Now the two are in splendid isolation, each mourning the other's loss. With the PATC, our expectations are still alive. Relationship, academic and otherwise, is inevitable, provided the willingness is there. A university divested of its terror syndrome, can be a co-partner in many courses and projects falling within the scope of PATC.

The complex had invited three of us, Professor Khan Sarwar Murshid, Professor M. Harunur Rashid, both of Dhaka University, and myself to a

visual and independent perception of the speaker.

Education in its Totality

The speakers being all of them university teachers, the emphasis fell, perhaps unavoidably, on the universities. I had thought that the issue was a broader one, as the title of the theme suggested. I wished to see education in its totality—primary, secondary and tertiary. Even the tertiary level of it is not fully covered by the universities. We have over three hundred and fifty degree-level colleges. Universities, taken in isolation, are not all that is meant by the system. But for some obvious

number of pockets, and with outstanding success at Chittagong. The operational field of the two major parties is co-extensive with the whole of Bangladesh.

My fellow speakers, while dwelling on this, said nothing that was new. But they had their own points of emphasis. The picture that Prof. Rashid drew went beyond terrorism and covered the entire university, its faculty, its administration, and the cancer of politicisation which was eating into the vitals of the universities. Here was a point on which many university teachers agreed in private and disagreed in public. If this double-facedness is not good, many consider it necessary, some in the interest of the university, and some to protect their image in the community. The latter are those who find their job exciting because of politics, an escape from the drabness of teaching. Their evenings are not long enough in the club. On this point, while two of us were in agreement, we were pulled up, gently, by our senior, Professor Murshid, who was convinced that no more than ten percent of the faculty members were guilty of this passion.

Professor Murshid, while fully aware of the gravity of the university situation, refused to give way to despair. There are areas within the university where not only was the basic job of providing instruction being done by teachers with a full sense of responsibility, but also where the quality of scholarly pursuits remained as good as it ever has been. It was good to hear him speak in this optimistic tone but I had the feeling that Professor Rashid's gloom and despondency was a truer reflection of the prevailing mood than his. (Prof.

Murshid) countervailing words.

Terrorism and Politics
On this question of terrorism—politics, our pattern of political culture, the major political parties, and sometimes certain nonpolitical agencies that operate with terrible efficiency in the background,—all these have had their due share of blame. Autonomy is a valued possession for the universities but its rampant abuse can be traced back to several factors, most important of which is the successive governments' callous intrusion in to university matters. Unable to choose Vice-Chancellors directly, they have influenced the Senate, and Senate elections, with the result that they have managed to get greater conformity than ever before. Politics within the university has been further vitiated by the fact that the government is no longer neutral in its attitude to whatever is happening on the campus. It feels it has a stake, a vital stake, in the political configuration of the campus. Successive governments have failed in gaining a foothold in the universities, in the real sense of the term, but they have successfully contributed to the increasing helplessness, the gradual vulgarisation, the creeping atrophisation of the highest seats of learning.

It is not clear whether all this has been done deliberately, or this rot and decay is but a part of the general rot and decay in the nation's political life. One thing can be said without much fear of contradiction: there is a lack of awareness in quarters where it is expected,—the political parties. They are so busy in playing the game that they are oblivious of this vital truth. If things are allowed to go on like this, if education is sacrificed to win the dubious support of some student activists, who change their loyalty with every changing regime, then the trophy at the end of the game will be one of clay, not of gold.

PASSING CLOUDS

Zillur Rahman Siddiqui

panel discussion in which the topic given was Crisis in Education, our audience consisted mainly of the participants of a foundation Course. With them were a number of senior officers.

The smoothness of the evening was hampered on two counts. First, the traffic jam at Ghabtali. Ghabtali has become a nightmare for all who have to travel by that route. I will come back to the Ghabtali theme one of these days for the theme deserves a fuller treatment. The traffic jam made us take a circuitous route and we were late in arriving.

Second, the exact scope and format of the panel was not made clear to us beforehand. Co-ordination among the speakers was lacking, each speaker following his own track. This is not to suggest that enough light was not thrown on the given topic. Only, the topic itself changed shape according to the indi-

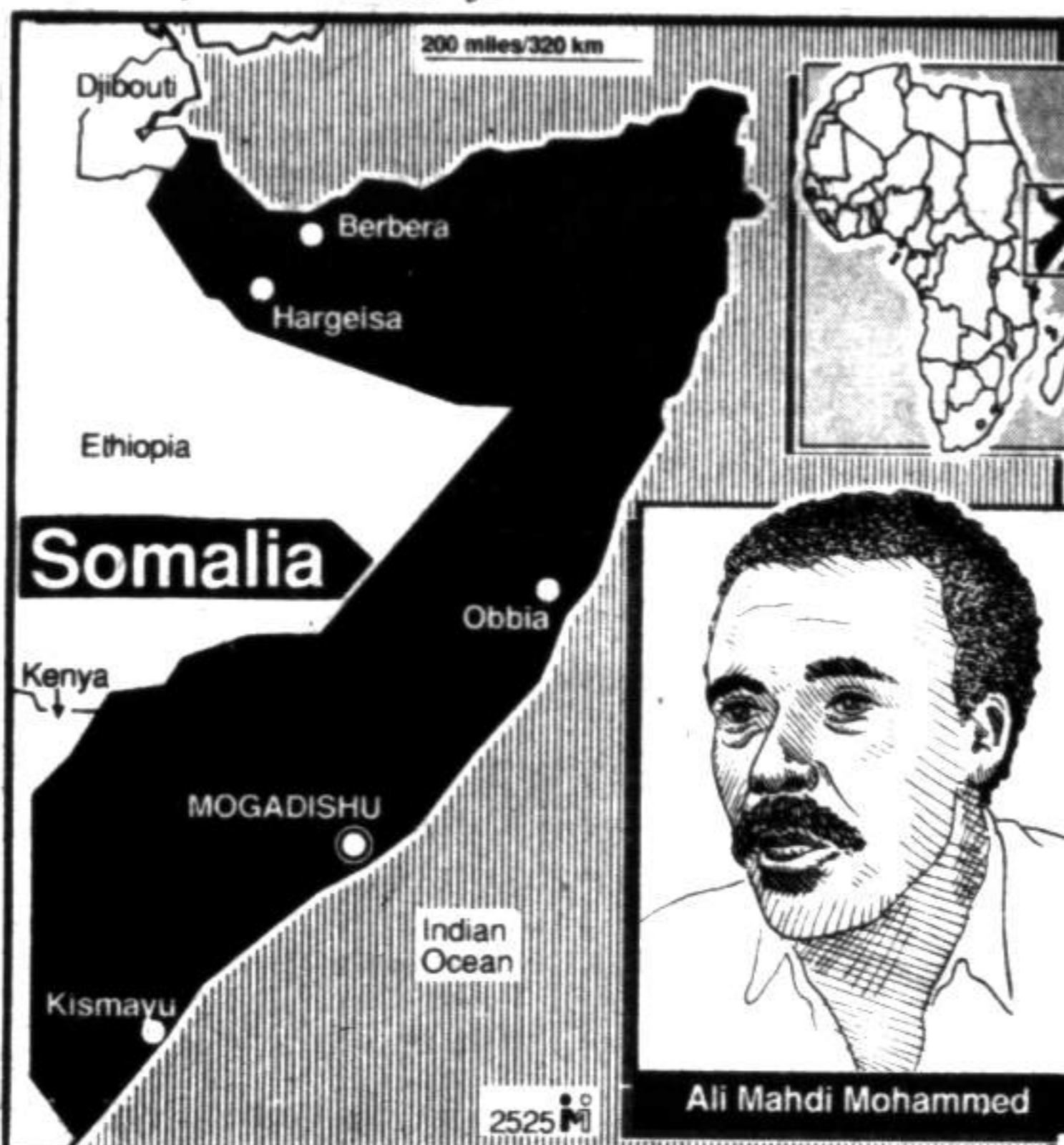
reasons, they manage to get most of the attention for most of the time. And the forum was not an exception. May be that was what the host institution wanted, and in that case I was in the wrong in my thinking.

So I will correct myself and will agree at once that there is a crisis and it is there in our universities. The universities are not really functioning now, and most of them, Dhaka in particular, are in the iron grip of terrorism. Campus terrorism has taken a particular shape over the years. It is organised. In its initial stage, during Ayub Khan's 'glorious decade', and under the wings of the provincial government of Monem Khan, it had the patronage of the government. Later, the same thing reappeared under General Ershad. Now, after Ershad's fall, terrorism has found new patrons in the political parties,—BNP, Awami League and Jamaat. The last of the three operates successfully in a given

Anarchy Reigns in a Divided Land

Leo Odera Omolo and Nelson Kosonei write from Nairobi

Somalia, situated on the horn of Africa, has experienced political anarchy since January when its Pro-Western dictator, Mohammed Siad Barre, was deposed. The country's north has declared itself independent as Somaliland while various factions fight to control the rest of the country.



Supporters of the president and the general fought it out in the streets. The situation is aggravated by reports that Barre, the ousted president, has amassed his newly regrouped soldiers within only 100 miles of Mogadishu and is ready to launch an attack on the capital. The strength of Barre's movement has remained a mystery since he was overthrown nine months ago. Initial reports suggested he had fled the country to take refuge in Yemem or Saudi Arabia. But Barre put the rumors to rest in May when he granted an interview to the Italian newspaper Repubblica from his hideout in the town of Baydhabo in his home region of southwestern Somalia. At the time, Barre called the government "rebels who want to control the city. They are vandals. I am the real legal president to Somalia," he said. The ruling United Somali Congress has suffered a serious split in its ranks because of the falling out between the interim president and military chief. Aided has accused Moahid of corruption and mismanagement. Mahdi, who is under protection of heavily armed bodyguards in a villa north of the capital, has in turn accused Aided of treason, charging that Aided himself is vying for the presidency and has planned a coup.

In a speech broadcast on Mogadishu radio Mahdi promised to restore law and order, revive collapsed state institutions and coax the northern-based clans which have declared independence to come back to the fold. Meanwhile, marauding youths roam the streets in stolen military vehicles, rifles dangling on their shoulders. They but down their opponents on orders from clan leader and kill people at will.

The youths have erected barricades and makeshift roadblocks out of gutted cars and trucks. Violent robbery is common. Many wealthy families have been forced out of their homes.

OPINION

'Campus Crisis and Teachers'

For obvious reasons the subject of campus violence is being widely discussed in the pages of our national dailies and weeklies, and one has to admit that the public opinion which has been created against this unfortunate phenomenon is, to a great extent, due to the positive role played by the national press. However, while conceding this, I would also confess that sometimes I tend to have reservation about the manner in which a particular incident is reported and/or the views which are expressed. The specific example which I would like to cite in this connection is the editorial of The Daily Star of 12 October.

While appealing to the student-politicians and the government to restore normalcy in the educational institutions, the editorial has expressed the hope that "some initiative" would be forthcoming from the teachers of Dhaka University. It has been said, "The teachers are no doubt aware that they are suspected by many of being involved in student politics, with some even being accused of acting as 'advisers' to various student parties. Naturally, in order to gain the confidence of all the students they have to sever their links, if any, with student politics..." Then in the final paragraph of the editorial we have been advised to "urge students to conduct politics in a manner that does not adversely affect campus atmosphere, while publicly refusing to have anything to do with 'students' who openly take part in violent activities. This will require a good deal of moral courage, but a unified approach by teachers would carry a good deal of moral authority."

I have three submissions in this connection. First, yes, there is a feeling that some teachers are involved in student politics. We have heard it being said in public meetings in the Teachers-Students Centre, in front of the Shahid Minar, in social gatherings and by our friends, relatives and acquaintances. But it is not true, as The Daily Star would have us believe, that the teachers of Dhaka University, in general, are suspected by the members of the public. Secondly, at one point The Daily Star gives the impression that it is not sure whether a link does exist between the teachers and the student politicians, but (as mentioned above) later on it gives the impression that it is reasonably sure about the existence of the

link. One would, therefore, naturally ask: why should The Daily Star advise us to sever a link about the existence of which it is not sure? Or, if it is reasonably sure that there is a link, why should it not mention specific evidence or explain the grounds of such an assumption? (This question is particularly relevant because the editorial comments of The Daily Star on the incidents of 27 October make no reference at all to the alleged involvement of the teachers in student-politics.) Again, if The Daily Star has at all to advise us without explaining why it thinks that there is a link, should it address the advice to the general body of teachers of Dhaka University? I am not at all suggesting that The Daily Star (or, for that matter, any other daily or weekly) should not express its opinion as to what the teachers should do in the present situation. But one would doubt if this approach to a serious subject (as it concerns some 900 teachers of DU) is really in conformity with the promise of responsible journalism which, I sincerely believe, The Daily Star has been able to give us within a short time.

It may be argued that the one-man committee appointed by the government to look into the incident in which the leader of a political party was assaulted on the campus has brought such allegations against 52 teachers of Dhaka University. But let us not forget that the report has not yet been officially published. Moreover, the Dhaka University Teachers Association and more than one hundred teachers have, in separate statements, contradicted this allegation contained in the extracts of the report unofficially published in a national daily. Yet again, we hear that none of these 52 teachers was given a hearing by the committee.

Thirdly, it may be safely asserted that those who are primarily responsible for campus violence i.e. the hardcore activists among the student politicians, will hardly constitute five per cent of the total student population (about 25 thousands) and those armed will not total even one hundred. It will never be possible for us to gain their confidence because they are controlled and financed from outside for political (not educational) purposes. (Incidentally this point has been repeatedly empha-

and have fled across borders into neighbouring Ethiopia or Kenya.

Mahdi's government seems to be barely holding sway in the capital, let alone the countryside, where guerrillas and militiamen roam about exercising their power at the point of a gun.

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World record by Presidents

Sir, On Nov 5, we viewed a rare scene in the BTV news—chronologically five US presidents—Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan and George Bush—attending a ceremony arranged by Regan in the dedication of his personal library to the nation. All five respective presidents are alive, in good health and as seen, in rare brotherly bond! This is the first event in the world history that five successive heads of the same state have good relation and attend a ceremony with pleasure, and obviously to the pleasure of others. I must thank American people, particularly Mr Regan who arranged this rare and

remarkable get-together, and more particularly those five respectable presidents who gave us an unthinkable rare moment.

Though we often feel sorry for our nation, but we must feel proud for the world, that has a nation, which can elect such great leaders. Many of our leaders have still time to take lesson from this ever bright example: Not enmity, but love helps to bring success.

F.M.A. Matin
Mirpur, Dhaka

Agricultural policy

Sir, The government is contemplating to formulate a national agricultural policy.

The Krishibid Institution has already contributed their expert-view in this respect.

Formulation of a national agriculture policy is indispensably essential for ensuring healthy growth and development in our agriculture sector. Such policy should indicate area-wise projects and priorities covering the entire discipline of the agricultural production management.

We honestly hope that the government will announce the National Agricultural Policy soon.

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