

Dhaka, Sunday, April 7, 1991

## A Welcome Address

Since assuming the office of the Acting President on December 6 last year, Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed has, many a time, confounded political pundits, puzzled his many admirers but has always acted in the way he thought best, not necessarily to everyone's satisfaction. In the process, he has gained both respect and credibility from a cross-section of the people of Bangladesh.

If the major political parties had lately developed some misgivings about the role of the Acting President, especially about his future intentions, issues on which — we hasten to add — they found no specific ground to doubt Justice Ahmed's neutrality, they should have felt obliged to revise their opinions when they listened to his inaugural address at the Jatiya Sangsad on Friday afternoon.

By all accounts, the address did credit to the high office occupied by Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed as well as to the unique fifth Jatiya Sangsad where it was delivered. With its objective and straightforward approach to the issues raised in the address, not to mention a certain crystal-clear sincerity that shone through the Acting President's performance, the speech was certainly one of the best — if not the best — heard in the parliament of Bangladesh.

The address dealt with several different, but inter-related, issues and problems: The dismal socio-economic situation inherited by the interim administration on December 6; the political uncertainties surrounding the transition to democracy; the clear-cut mandate given to the caretaker government to organise a free and fair election on time; the outcry to put the deposed President and many of his ministers on trial; and above all, to bring a chaotic law and order situation under control.

Finally, without mincing words, the Acting President turned to the issue that was undoubtedly uppermost in the minds of members of the Jatiya Sangsad: What about Justice Ahmed's own future plans? To put it bluntly, as some members might have said privately, when is he going to leave us alone?

Here, he told the Sangsad in the most unambiguous manner that he wanted to be relieved of his present responsibility "at the earliest" and that he would like the parliament to find the way for his exit. In other words, the Acting President has put the ball in the court of political parties, especially of the BNP, which can work out the necessary constitutional provision to this effect, in a matter of days, if they so desire.

Significantly enough, Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed has identified the correct reason why he should quit his present high office. This is to avoid a continuing dichotomy of running a government which is headed by a neutral Acting President but where the real power lies — or ought to lie — with a cabinet formed by a political party. As Justice Ahmed put it, "The Cabinet will consider issues from a party angle and I would do it from a neutral angle. Hence, it is essential for me to leave before any conflict of opinion has emerged." He approached the question of his exit with total frankness, but he was certainly more subtle in mentioning the question of his transferring power to a sovereign parliament, as suggested in a joint pre-election declaration of the three alliances, "which may not have any constitutional validity but it has sufficient political significance."

By calling upon the parties to enter into mutual consultation to resolve these issues, the Acting President has pointed to the right direction — the direction towards consensus — which would undoubtedly smoothen the process that completes the transition to total democracy. Let us hope that this sincere and unselfish advice from the Acting President will get the attention it deserves.

## Wanted More Paramedics

There is a news report in Wednesday's The Daily Star which is at once pathetic and funny. A four-column spread headline announces: 10 Medical Assistants' Training Schools closed. Your sense of shock and alarm would however heal greatly as soon as you get into the story and know that this was something that happened in 1985. And nothing new has 'reportably' occurred to those closed schools or the eight that survive to this day. By all canons of news this is patently no news at all.

However, it has still a value of its own. A time-less gem, one can say. Eighteen schools to provide training aimed at grooming paramedics were set up at different urban centres of the country in 1980 — thanks to funding by the government of Netherlands. When the agreement under which the money came ran out after five years — ten of the schools were closed down. The report says no attempt was made to either extend or renew the agreement. Eight training schools remained — and they all are in a miserable shape for the whole of the last five years.

In the initial five years the full array of 18 turned out as many as five thousand paramedics — all of whom are now employed in various health establishments and are reportedly turning in good work.

Now to the crux of the matter. There is no denying the fact that we need paramedics more than we need doctors. Only paramedics, can effectively fight the quacks and reach the benefits of modern medicine and the gospel of public and personal hygiene to every doorstep.

The only way to make better than fun of the 'Health for all by 2000' is to groom legions of paramedics. It was a break for us that a timely good turn from far Holland started us on the path of materialising such an essential programme. But could that mean without the Dutch dole we wouldn't have taken up the task? When shall we be doing our necessary things out of our own resources? How much would, say, 30 such schools need to be established and run? The figure in all probability wouldn't be more than a tuppence when compared to any other government programme of maybe far less importance.

It is never too late for starting on good and much-needed job. Let us first of all have the full complement of 18 back and then proceed to set up more of such schools.

**T**HE herbal treatment of ailments must be included in any programme to develop a primary health care system which is an essential service for the community. The traditional Ayurvedic system which has been in practice from ancient period was severely affected. We had been dependent on our own medicines the raw materials (plants) which grow naturally in the fertile lands of our countries. We learned the self treatment from our parents and practiced it ourselves using medicinal plants since our childhood.

The traditional medicines are very effective and the majority of the people still use herbal medicines in China, Nepal, India and Sri Lanka. This practice which is called "Ayurveda" is an ancient system of medicine that was developed in the Indian sub-continent centuries ago and is very common throughout Sri Lanka today. More than 75 per cent of the island's population depend on these very common and popular traditional medicines.

The Buddhist temples in the villages are the centres which sometime serve as clinics, which supply medicines and treat patients. The monks act as village doctors and treat the village folk. The temple is also the place of preparing of medicines in various forms such as tablet, syrup, balm etc. Many common ailments such as fever, cough, cold, cuts and burn injuries, headache, ear-ache, stomachache, kidney infections, diarrhoea and skin infections can be cured at the village level by the use of herbs. These herbal treatment are very effective, locally available, less costly and free from the side effects. Some major ailments incurable by western medicines can be cured by the use of these wonderful herbal

medicines. Bone Injuries, urinary stones are some of the major problems which can be cured with herbal medicines.

The governments of China, Nepal, India and Sri Lanka have launched various programmes to activate and popularise traditional medicines by encouraging their fellow countrymen by establishing Ayurvedic medical institutions, hospitals and dispensaries both in the urban and rural areas, the traditional system of treatment with medicinal herbs is disappearing gradually among the local people because of the introduction of modern medicines which has become available inexpensively in packets or bottles in the cities and even in the villages.

There are abundant natural edible plants grow in every part of our countries which are rich in vitamins and minerals and regular use which can cure diseases and also act as preventives.

'Thankuni' (Hydrocotyle Asiatica): The leaves are curried. Thankuni can cure stomach problems, dry cough, cold and skin diseases. Pounded leaves is a remedy for wounds.

It will also often used as an aphrodisiac. 'Helencha' (Alternanthera Triandra): The leaves are curried. Helencha will help in curing the gonorrhoea and largely used in preparation of hair oil. 'Kalojira' (Vernonia Cinerea): The leaves are curried. Kalojira plant is largely employed in the marasmus of children. 'Kohila' (Lasia Aculeata): The young leaves and root stock are curried. The root stock is useful in hemorrhoids, habitual constipation and diabetes. 'Phutka' (Cardiospermum Halicacabum): The young leaves of Phutka cook with ghee oil and take with rice. Phutka is useful in flatulence, colic and constipation. It has aphrodisiac properties of some value and is employed in sexual debility. 'Muktajhuri' (Acalypha Indica): The young leaves are curried and very good remedy for stomachache of children. A poultice made with the bruised fresh leaves of Muktajhuri and applied to the lower part of the abdomen is a popular remedy in spasmodic retention of urine. It is valuable in cases of fever with constipation. (Excerpt from Vegetable Mate-

rial Medica — India and Ceylon). These plants can be added to our daily meals as vegetable as well as to prepare orridge, which is rich in vitamins and minerals. This can be prepared by boiling a little rich with coconut milk, and lastly adding the juice of the plants and enough salt. This will serve as breakfast for the whole family by adding a little sugar or a piece of khezur of tal goor (molasses prepared from the sap or the date and palm tree). This practice has been experimented and has had good response in the village schools which was started by CDS in the districts of Pirojpur and Bagerhat. We have been using these edible plants (leafy vegetables) from times immemorial.

But for the introduction of western vegetables which has less food value because of the use of huge quantities of fertilizers and chemicals most of our people were made to neglect the natural leafy vegetables. The use of poisonous chemicals for growing vegetables badly damaged our environment and resources too.

# Herbal Treatment Essential for Community Health Care

by B.A. Gamini Gunasingha

Today, April 7, is another World Health Day. Health for all and all for Health" this theme of the World Health Organization is directed to all the people who are engaged in community health development. That everyone in the society should take a very strong individual responsibility to make use of their own traditional medicines which flows from generation to generation is the main idea.

medicines. Bone Injuries, urinary stones are some of the major problems which can be cured with herbal medicines.

The governments of China, Nepal, India and Sri Lanka have launched various programmes to activate and popularise traditional medicines by encouraging their fellow countrymen by establishing Ayurvedic medical institutions, hospitals and dispensaries both in the urban and rural areas, the traditional system of treatment with medicinal herbs is disappearing gradually among the local people because of the introduction of modern medicines which has become available inexpensively in packets or bottles in the cities and even in the villages.

There are abundant natural edible plants grow in every part of our countries which are rich in vitamins and minerals and regular use which can cure diseases and also act as preventives.

'Thankuni' (Hydrocotyle Asiatica): The leaves are curried. Thankuni can cure stomach problems, dry cough, cold and skin diseases. Pounded leaves is a remedy for wounds.

It will also often used as an aphrodisiac. 'Helencha' (Alternanthera Triandra): The leaves are curried. Helencha will help in curing the gonorrhoea and largely used in preparation of hair oil. 'Kalojira' (Vernonia Cinerea): The leaves are curried. Kalojira plant is largely employed in the marasmus of children. 'Kohila' (Lasia Aculeata): The young leaves and root stock are curried. The root stock is useful in hemorrhoids, habitual constipation and diabetes. 'Phutka' (Cardiospermum Halicacabum): The young leaves of Phutka cook with ghee oil and take with rice. Phutka is useful in flatulence, colic and constipation. It has aphrodisiac properties of some value and is employed in sexual debility. 'Muktajhuri' (Acalypha Indica): The young leaves are curried and very good remedy for stomachache of children. A poultice made with the bruised fresh leaves of Muktajhuri and applied to the lower part of the abdomen is a popular remedy in spasmodic retention of urine. It is valuable in cases of fever with constipation. (Excerpt from Vegetable Mate-

rial Medica — India and Ceylon). These plants can be added to our daily meals as vegetable as well as to prepare orridge, which is rich in vitamins and minerals. This can be prepared by boiling a little rich with coconut milk, and lastly adding the juice of the plants and enough salt. This will serve as breakfast for the whole family by adding a little sugar or a piece of khezur of tal goor (molasses prepared from the sap or the date and palm tree). This practice has been experimented and has had good response in the village schools which was started by CDS in the districts of Pirojpur and Bagerhat. We have been using these edible plants (leafy vegetables) from times immemorial.

But for the introduction of western vegetables which has less food value because of the use of huge quantities of fertilizers and chemicals most of our people were made to neglect the natural leafy vegetables. The use of poisonous chemicals for growing vegetables badly damaged our environment and resources too.

## A Worrying Issue: Intolerance Among Intellectuals

by Khan Ataur Rahman

**M**EN make society and societies form a nation by belonging to a sovereign state. State needs statesmen to govern it and different ideologies create different political parties demanding their selective form of governments, say democratic, socialist or autocratic and so on. Since a man is the basic unit of a society and also a political being, he cannot but have his own inclination towards any of such different political institutions. It is perfectly fair this far.

But there are subdivisions among the broad divisions of political schools. Like there were in the nineteenth century the Tory and the Liberal and presently the Conservative and the Labour, both believing in democracy, in the United Kingdom. Like Trotskyites and Leninists in the early days of USSR and even the present day rift between the advocates of free economy and those of socialist economy, both belonging to the Socialist camp. Likewise there are various forms of autocracy as far apart as clemency and despotism.

For Bangladesh, let the common people be left alone because of their being uneducated, unconscious about their rights as citizens and humble enough to accept whatever form of government having its own order of social life set. The middle class, the second largest group of our society, are great gossipers regarding society and politics, but silent workers and, even though constantly grumbling, never forthrightly vocal in front of

the power holders. The upper middle class are, as they always have been through times immemorial, opportunists. The last and the most privileged class, the upper class, have always cashed their crops by their malevolent ways no matter whatever regime came into power.

But there is one class which is called 'intellectuals' and includes people like painters, poets, writers, teachers, lawyers, the performing artists and such others.

They are called BUDDHIJIBEE in Bengali, a word which is paradoxical to me. In literary translation the word in English would mean one who earns his livelihood by selling his intellect. I often wonder who, except the ones selling their labour, earns his livelihood without selling his intellect, a doctor, an engineer, a technician, a bureaucrat or for that matter even a carpenter or a bricklayer. Does the term BUDDHIJIBEE applies only for those who work in the field of culture? But then culture is such a wide term that even cooking is very much a part of culture. Is then a good cook also an intellectual? Any way I beg to be excused for the brief deviation from the main line of my issue. Let us accept this term intellectual meaning BUDDHIJIBEE IN Bengali.

What about this class? being a part of the society, each member of this class is also a political being and he must have his individual liking for a particular political faith. But

must they go deeper into the matter and lend their active collaboration to any of the numerous subdivisions of, say, the democratic school? Whether they should or not, they do and so vehemently. This I think violates the ethics, rather the code of conduct of an intellectual and this I think classifies him to be recognised as an ardent patron of a particular political party, backing it with his intellect. Obviously because of this he

ter, even autocracy. But must he be in league with the party of his choice?

In the olden days Tagore gave his unstinted support to the cause of the liberation of India. So did Nazrul, in fierce language, and a lot of other poets and writers from Bankim to Shachin Sen. But can anyone of them be branded as a Congressite, a Communist or a Muslim Leaguer? By heavens, no.

**Today the intellectuals are divided into rival camps and the condemnable part of it is that whenever a particular camp comes into power its 'henchmen of the intellectuals' come in the limelight. But soonest the camp is dethroned by another, they go into oblivion and a set of new names and faces appear in the field of art and culture.**

antagonises all his fellow citizens of other political inclinations. In fine, he ceases to be an artist whose essential basic quality should be fellow-feeling for the whole humanity.

It pains me to see that in Bangladesh there are political groupings among the most enlightened intellectuals of our society like poets, writers, lawyers and the performing artists. I am positive that the readers will agree with me that this is unbecoming of them. One may like the socialist pattern and the other, democracy and, for that mat-

ten that in the recent past a large number of eminent personalities in the arena of intellectualism boldly vented their opinions regarding any matter of socio-economic and political importance. During the last few months of mass upheaval demanding democracy led by the united students forum, almost every day these respected persons came out with signed statements which reflected their alliance with a particular political group. But as the tumult settled down after the peaceful election, the first one that happened after independence, resulting in the victory of a particular political party, their voices were perplexingly hushed in silence.

Their vacancies were filled up with a new genre of intellectuals who started being grandiloquent, first voicefully and then roarily.

Is this fair? Faces that remained absent from the small screen appeared frequently during the brief period of an anarchic sort of movement which, only for the students' sincerity of purpose, did not end up into inner conflicts and a fiasco, presently disappeared again. What kind of a puzzle is this?

But if one reflects just for a while the puzzle will be solved. As the extraordinary enthusiasm the person had shown and actively so in favour of a particular party that with its defeat in the election, he became the target of despise and antipathy of the other persons who belonged to the winning party. The same practice

of witch hunting seems to be the order of the ensuing days.

Strange that one forgets the past so soon. Who does not know that the anti-independence-war groups were costly rehabilitated and some fearless freedom fighters were annihilated? Alas, we don't learn the lesson from history.

Here, I would earnestly appeal to intellectuals gathered under the umbrella of the majority party in the newly formed parliament to be magnanimous towards all belonging to the field of art irrespective of his or her political convictions. Conqueror Alexander the great exonerated the vanquished Porus because the latter exerted his status as a king.

Why can't the presently hushed intellectuals come out of their silence and still proclaim what they guess to be right? Or could it be that the media itself are avoiding them?

If this the kind of democracy for which the boys laid down their lives, then what can be a greater tragedy?

I humbly beseech the present day authority to hold the straps of their militant supporters, be he a political worker or a creative person, and ask them to be benevolent and treat the opposed groups with piety. This alone can lead the country to a harmonious existence. Or else the vicious cycle will start all over again.

The writer is a noted filmmaker, artiste and lyricist of Bangladesh.

## 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.

### Non-profit enterprises

Sir, The Prime Minister has hinted in her first maiden policy speech at the Usmay Memorial Hall on disposal of non-profit enterprises.

The nation heard of such contemplations from Jamaluddin Ahmed, Industries Minister, earlier BNP regime, Shafiqul Alam and Moudud Ahmed, both industries ministers under Ershad regime. But no action has been taken in this regard except selling out of some profitable enterprises while the holding company concept under World Bank prescription is a doom failure.

Chittagong Electric Goods Manufacturing Company and Joydebpur Machine Tools Factory are prestige enterprises but

they are losing every year since inception in 1980-81. The accumulated loss exceeds Tk. 100 crore. Similar is the situation with ship building sector paper industry, fertilizer industry etc. However, some sector are showing profit due to over protection.

None likes to annoy the labourers since they are organised and can create problem. The enterprises who sold shares, are not sending annual reports; not despatching dividend warrants in time; not issuing share certificate in time, not holding AGM in time as per provisions of Company's Act. As a member of general public I am now also constrained to understand the mystery of govt. fixed sugar price, against the Indian price. Sugar is produced from sugar cane in India and Bangladesh

under more or less similar conditions. How the Indians can sell it at half the price of ours!

Let the govt. institute again a series of Task Forces so that they can unearth the real state of affairs in respect of cost of products against world market price.

Let the Prime Minister not repeat that story of disposal of enterprises but act firmly in her righteous way and set things on their right keels.

Sadiq Ali Maghbazar, Dhaka.

### BAC and adjacent lands

Sir, Crescent lake area at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar is one of the few places in the over-crowded city of Dhaka where people come and find some open space to breathe fresh air. The area is surrounded by beautiful gardens and parks. On one side of the lake stands architectural display of our nation, the Sangsad Bhaban, while on the other side, country's oldest agri-

cultural education institution, the Bangladesh Agricultural College (BAC) is situated. In between the two, the mazar of the Late President Ziaur Rahman is located. The entire area is blessed with a divine and panoramic scenery with almost a pollution-free environment.

There is a plan to construct new secretariat buildings at this site. But we think, such constructions will seriously pollute the clean and calm environment of the area which will also affect the sanctity of Shahid Zia's mazar.

Once all the plots of land here were owned by BAC. And we think, if all those up to the crescent lake were allotted to BAC, it would not only solve the experimental land problem of the college but would also help raising a useful agro-horticultural farm in the city of Dhaka. Moreover allocation of these lands would make BAC an ideal agricultural educational institution.

I sincerely draw the kind attention of our respectable Prime Minister

Begum Khaleida Zia to the matter.

M. Zahidul Haque Assistant Professor, Bangladesh Agricultural College, Dhaka-1207.

### Tribute to Graham Greene

Sir, World's one of the best novelists is dead. An Englishman by birth, Graham Greene finally settled in Geneva, where he died.

His obituary besides providing information about his eventful and successful life as a novelist, says many other interesting things.

Widely travelled Graham Greene's greatest fears were moths, witches, water, and car. He has to his credit twenty-four novels, seven plays, five screenplays, numerous essays and children's books, and two volumes of his own autobiography. However, the most interesting part of him was that despite being such a writer of repute, he never mastered the type-

take initiatives and necessary actions in promoting the traditional practice of herbal medicine at the village level in the country. In order to develop methods for their propagation, cultivation and production herbal farming should start in different parts of the country. Herbal farming and the supply of herbs will bring additional income for the country's villages. These supplies can be exported to other countries and also help conserve foreign exchange that Bangladesh spends to import herbs from other countries.

The schools, health centres, hospitals etc. should be given encouragement to pull up demonstration medicinal gardens in popularising and motivating local people to identify and get acquainted with these useful herbs. The local people should be motivated to plant the most useful medicinal plants in their backyards. This is the only hope for majority of the people who are living in remote villages of Bangladesh.

The cultivation of herbs would give farmers more income compared with food crops and would create employment. Herbal farms would assist poor farmers to earn extra income. The UNDP WHO and FAO's valuable assistance should also focus on promoting cultivation of medicinal and aromatic plants in large scale projects. The NGOs should focus on implementing this concept in the community where they already working in the village level. NGOs like CDS is promoting the use of traditional medicines through IVS among the local communities in the far flung areas of the country.

The author is the Programme Advisor, Centre for Development Services.

The Government should

Why can't the presently hushed intellectuals come out of their silence and still proclaim what they guess to be right? Or could it be that the media itself are avoiding them?

If this the kind of democracy for which the boys laid down their lives, then what can be a greater tragedy?

I humbly beseech the present day authority to hold the straps of their militant supporters, be he a political worker or a creative person, and ask them to be benevolent and treat the opposed groups with piety. This alone can lead the country to a harmonious existence. Or else the vicious cycle will start all over again.

The writer is a noted filmmaker, artiste and lyricist of Bangladesh.

Why can't the presently hushed intellectuals come out of their silence and still proclaim what they guess to be right? Or could it be that the media itself are avoiding them?

If this the kind of democracy for which the boys laid down their lives, then what can be a greater tragedy?

I humbly beseech the present day authority to hold the straps of their militant supporters, be he a political worker or a creative person, and ask them to be benevolent and treat the opposed groups with piety. This alone can lead the country to a harmonious existence. Or else the vicious cycle will start all over again.

The writer is a noted filmmaker, artiste and lyricist of Bangladesh.

Why can't the presently hushed intellectuals come out of their silence and still proclaim what they guess to be right? Or could it be that the media itself are avoiding them?

If this the kind of democracy for which the boys laid down their lives, then what can be a greater tragedy?

I humbly beseech the present day authority to hold the straps of their militant supporters, be he a political worker or a creative person, and ask them to be benevolent and treat the opposed groups with piety. This alone can lead the country to a harmonious existence. Or else the vicious cycle will start all over again.

The writer is a noted filmmaker, artiste and lyricist of Bangladesh.

Why can't the presently hushed intellectuals come out of their silence and still proclaim what they guess to be right? Or could it be that the media itself are avoiding them?