

## Ekushey's Challenge for Political Parties

It is perhaps most befitting that the observance of the anniversary of our great language movement of 1952 should now cover the whole month of February rather than just the day of the 21st. The day of course marks the dramatic turn of events when several of our students laid down their lives to brutal police firing that galvanised the movement to establish Bangla as our national language.

Over the years the month of February has more and more acquired the character of celebration rather than pure commemoration. And that's how it should be. While we mourn the deaths of martyrs, yet it is the far more important and dynamic aspect of the movement's thrust to take the nation forward that we celebrate today. February has become the month that produces the highest number of publications - novels, short stories, non-fiction and of course hundreds of books of poems. It is as if the creative energy of the nation suddenly bursts out in a spontaneous surge that rejuvenates and re-energizes our people. This year the celebration of Ekushey has already got off to a great start with the poetry festival that began in the city from the 1st of the month. This month of celebration and commemoration of our language movement will no doubt set into motion a whole range of cultural activities that will introduce to us new writers, poets, dramatists and creative cultural activists. These new found talents will no doubt greatly enrich our cultural scene in the coming year.

With all this creative surge and new works in arts and literature, a feeling cannot be avoided that there is something hollow about it all. With a literacy rate of 29 per cent claimed by the government and far less claimed by those who are in the field, with our quality of education on a steep slide down, with a drop-out rate at the primary level of nearly 80 per cent - all our talks of giving due respect to our mother tongue are nothing but empty words.

Government after government have played politics with education. Ershad government's talk of universalization of primary education, of making girls' education upto class VIII free of charge and making education available for all by the year 2000 were nothing more than political slogans. The present government has been more realistic. Instead of biting more than it can chew, it has taken a modest plan of ensuring primary education in 64 villages in as many upazilas. It is too soon to comment on how this particular move will shape up, but the early indications - of uncoordinated move by various departments and the phenomenon of the right hand not knowing what the left hand is doing - do not speak of a well thought out move.

Can we not mark this year's celebration and commemoration of the Ekushey February by adopting some actions plans? Is it not possible that hundreds of organisations that participate in the events, collectively take a decision to fight to lower our illiteracy rate? The role of the political parties is particularly important in this regard. Instead of competing with one another to expand their armed strength, can't they compete on eradicating illiteracy? Let us see this year that BNP, AL and other political parties publicly declare that by Ekushey next year they will have made so many villages free of the curse of illiteracy. They can start with the villages where they have won. Each political party can really show their sincerity to the task of national development and express genuine respect for the martyrs of the language movement by taking up this challenge. Will they? Enough of slogans, meetings, hartals and vehicle burning - and more than enough of pontificating from decorated pedestals. Let us see all joining hands in doing some real work.

## Summit with a Difference

If the summit at a special UN Security Council served any specific purpose, it was to provide President Boris N Yeltsin of Russia a place in the international field at the highest level. Cynics would say that the other objective was to let British Prime Minister John Major, who chaired the meeting, get an additional limelight which might stand him in good stead at the next General Election in his country.

What else has the summit achieved? Not a great deal, really. In fact, it has produced some disappointments. Instead of putting the emphasis on peaceful development, the summit ended with a declaration of collective security for what President George Bush called this "dangerous world." What will this collective security offer? What kind of mechanism will it produce? Maybe the world will have the necessary answers in due course. However, Mr Yeltsin called for merging the controversial US Strategic Defense Initiative system with Russian technology to protect all nations from nuclear attack with a global anti-missile shield. At one stage, a sizable section of the international community joined the former Soviet Union in opposing the proposed "Star War" programme of Washington. Moscow now sees it differently.

It seems the Russian President is determined to woo the United States in order to gain necessary concessions in the economic field. How this will be seen by his republic and other members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) remains to be observed.

It is a pity that the summit did not make a breakthrough in tackling some real problems in the post-cold war era, from reconstruction of newly-emerging democracies in the Eastern Europe to problems in the Third World. If the summit has really served any long-term issues, it has escaped our attention.

# Halt the Drift in Planning a New Media Policy

As a newspaperman, this writer gets pretty nervous whenever he hears a Minister for Information in any developing country, like Bangladesh, talk about "objective journalism". More often than not, it sounds like a warning signal.

This is because the concept offers a few variations. Its final test lies in the way it is practised rather than in the manner it is preached. This also means that even the most well-meaning advocate of the concept may not necessarily know how it is translated into reality, with all its strengths and weaknesses, with the linguistic subtlety and professional nuances.

All this does not mean that Minister for Information Nazmul Huda is not conversant with his subject when he used the expression, "objective journalism" at the parliament on Thursday, while he presented what sounded like the government's tentative plan on the development of media. We say, "tentative" deliberately in the hope that the Ministry will carry out a good deal of homework on all the issues concerned, in consultation with the cross-section of the public, before Barrister Huda presents the country, through the parliament, a blueprint of the country's communication policy, covering both the print media and the Radio/TV network, for a national debate.

Until we have gone through this process, it will be a mistake for the authorities, for Minister Huda in particular, to announce any plan as such "concerning the declaration of newspapers in a bid to encourage objective journalism in the country," to quote from the Minister's speech at the parliament on Thursday, as reported by UNB.

In an integrated approach to media development, there may well be a linkage between the "declaration of a newspaper" and "objective journalism", although I, for one, would not know where it lies. It is just possible that in the new proposed bill the declaration for a newspaper would be given only to a person who is qualified

to be a dependable editor, one who can promote "objective journalism". But this is only my guess. However, there is no room for guess as to what exactly lies behind "objective journalism". It is the professional training of the highest order. However, to put this training into effective use, a journalist needs a congenial political

should be ready to deal with any threats posed against any of these rights.

In other words, if the free media serves as a watchdog, it is the government which remains the custodian of the rights enjoyed by the press.

In an ideal situation, the relationship between the press and the government should,

## AT HOME AND ABROAD

S. M. ALI

climate, access to information to the government and the private sector, editorial independence within the journalist's own organisation and the acceptance of the role of the media, regardless of its political affiliation, by all sections of the public and political parties. This means that, within the rule of law, the government

therefore, be as well-defined as possible. The key to this relationship should be a measure of understanding, especially where national development is concerned, instead of mutual dependence. It is this dependence which has distorted the relationship of the press with the authorities today, mainly because of the control



# Chinese Officials Push Family Planning as Crusade

FAMILY planning is now a personal crusade for many Chinese local officials.

While family planning is a state policy in China since 1979, it is called the "Number One Tough Job Under Heaven."

Probably out of the old conviction that even an upright official finds it hard to settle family disputes and had better stand aloof from them, few decision-makers in the Communist Party and government would get themselves involved in family planning.

Now, the 200,000 full-time family planning workers need not feel lonely, as government officials from high up down to villages get involved in an effort to stem population in a country with one-fifth of the world's peoples.

It probably started to receive multi-sectoral attention when Jiang Zemin, general secretary of the Communist Party, and Premier Li Peng convened in April, 1991 an unprecedented, high-level forum on China's population problem.

The forum followed the 1990 national census which showed the mainland population at 1.13 billion.

Today, at many places the success of family planning has been set as an important criterion for appraising the work of regional and local governments.

"The family planners no longer have to put on a one-man show," says Peng Yitun, minister of the State Family Planning Commission. "A number of departments, including those of public health, education, finance and insurance, are cooperating with them to carry out the state policy."

The state officially encourages a one-child family, and offers attractive awards to those who practice it - for example, priority in housing.

Since the early 1970s, when China started to promote family planning vigorously,

Minister Peng claims the country has averted over 200 million births.

With a population growth rate of over 16 million annually - equivalent to the population of a medium-sized country - and with another baby boom seen in the next five years, China's population situation has been described by Premier Li Peng as "very grim."

Even if China succeeds in holding the average population growth rate below 1.25 per cent over the next 10 years - against the current 1.47 per cent - about one-fourth of the increased national income will be consumed by population growth.

Today, top officials in many parts of the country are personally attending to family planning work, laying equal stress on it as well as economic development.

In 1991, Governor Wu Guanzheng of Jiangxi province, southeast China, signed "family planning contracts" with all 11 administrative commissioners and mayors.

Under the contract, the local officials assumed responsibility during their tenure for encouraging late marriage and late birth and holding birth rates and population growth rates within certain limits.

Those who fail will be denied promotion and awards. Similar contracts have been signed in Henan, Shaanxi, Ningxia, Guangxi and several other provinces and autonomous regions.

Noting that poverty and indulgence in births often go hand-in-hand, the provincial government of Sichuan, China's most populous province with a population of 107 million, successfully combined family planning with projects under the 7th Five-Year Plan (1986-1990).

"In allocating relief funds in these areas," says Governor Zhang Haoru, "we gave priority to those households who had taken measures on family

planning and we helped them draw plans to develop production."

By 1988, he says, 180,000 farmers in the province who used to live in poverty began to have enough for food and clothing while doing well in family planning. "Sichuan is now ranking among China's eight provinces and municipalities that claim the lowest fertility rate," the governor says.

To soothe the traditional anxiety to raise sons to provide for one's old age, especially in rural areas, Sichuan and several other provinces have sponsored "serial family planning insurances" that cover the only child and juvenile insurance, insurance for safety of birth control operations and insurance for the old age.

The system favours the healthy growth of sole children and ensures to their parents, with or without sons, a secured life when they turn old," says governor Zhang. "It has to some extent reduced the reluctance to have only one child for one couple."

The family planning efforts have also joined in the literacy campaign among China's 180 million illiterates, of whom more than 80 per cent live in the countryside. The farmers learn to read and write as well as population issues and birth control measures.

Meanwhile, according to the State Family Planning Commission, 2,203 out of China's 2,392 countries have set up family planning service centres which have involved a total investment of 557 million yuan (some US\$100 million).

Zhou Meiyue writes from Beijing

Since the early 1970s when China began to seek fewer but better births, the world's most populous country has averted over 200 million births. But that is not enough

In 1989, China is cooperating with UNFPA in a larger population education programme. The programme, running from the 1990 through 1994, is expected to enhance farmers' consciousness of population policies through lectures in 735 rural adult schools in 25 out of the country's 31 provinces and autonomous regions.

Efforts in family planning appear to be fruitful. The State Family Planning Commission's statistics indicate that more than 34 million married couples - double the figure of six years ago - have sworn to rear only one child in their lifetime. In addition, 150 million married couples of fertile age, or 80 per cent of the total, have taken contraceptives. The one-child rate has jumped from 30.9 per cent in 1977 to 51.9 per cent in 1989.

"We will further promote our service programme and do a better job in securing fewer but better births," Mr Peng says. "An effective and successful family planning programme will not only serve China's modernisation drive but also contribute to the solution of the global population problem."

## OPINION

### United States of Europe!

Faisal M Rahman

Jean Monnet, a French political economist and statesman visualized a European Federation that would cooperate to maintain peace, stability and security. Monnet believed that closer economic ties would lead to closer political ties - a phenomena which has been evolving in Western Europe. In December 1991, 12 EC leaders met in Maastricht and agreed to a greater cooperation in economic, social, foreign, security and monetary issues. The landmark agreement amends the 1957 Treaty of Rome. With its political dimensions expanded, the EC (340 million people) is the industrialised world's largest single market. It provides stability during a time of political, economic and social turmoil in the USSR and Eastern Europe. Although the key issues remain to be dealt with, the EC member nations agreed to cooperate on (a) implementing a single currency denomination, the ECU (European Currency Unit) by 1999 latest. (b) Coordinating foreign and security policies. An EC defence pillar would provide a "bridge" between NATO and the EC. (c) There would be greater cooperation in social issues such as establishing common labour policies on which concessions were granted to Great Britain. (d) There would be greater cooperation to establish a European Union, where a citizen of the EC would be allowed to vote regardless of where the citizen lived.

implemented in Denmark, the Danish Constitution requires the government to have the popular support of the people on the issue. Other EEC nations may implement the currency as soon as EEC guidelines are met.

Total government debt must not exceed 60% of the GDP, budget deficits must not exceed 3% of the GDP and countries must remain within the narrow band exchange rate mechanism of the European Monetary System (EMS) for at least two years before implementing the ECU. Nations must also be within two percentage points of EC. Only France, Luxembourg and Denmark currently meet these requirements. Other European nations must adopt strong fiscal measures for implementation of the ECU. The average EC unemployment rate is 10% and considerably higher in Spain, Greece and Ireland. In these countries tough EC measure will be unpopular. This however leads to the prospect of a "two tier Europe". There may be a growing disparity between the wealthier northern European industrialized nations and poorer less developed countries of Southern Europe. Countries unable or unwilling to implement the ECU (e.g. Britain), will face problems of currency instability, higher interest rate, and other economic problems. The wealthier EC members have established a cohesion fund, pledging \$18 billion or more to help the comparatively poorer countries of Europe to develop their transportation structure, environmental clean-up and other projects. Countries like Spain, which initially threatened to boycott the Maastricht Summit unless their demands were met, were satisfied with the outcome.

Frustrated by the divided stance of the EEC during the Gulf and Yugoslav crisis, EEC president Jacques Delors described Brussels' foreign policy apparatus as "organized schizophrenia". He called for streamlining procedures to coordinate foreign and security policies. The EEC members rejected the French suggestion on implementing EEC foreign policy initiatives on a majority basis. They chose to implement these initiatives on the basis of unanimity. The Western European Union (WEU), a 9-member EEC group, will work in coordination with NATO. Greece will be invited to join WEU on a later date and Turkey will be allowed to participate as a non-member.

Brussels also gained mandate powers for the Maastricht Summit. Industrial health, environmental and educational issues were also included in the Maastricht agreements. The EEC nations agreed to cooperate on social issues ranging from political asylum to immigration policies. Europol, an embryo of a continental intelligence police force, is organized to fight narcotics and organized crime. The EEC parliament was granted the right to veto but not formulate laws for EEC countries.

The Maastricht Summit threatened to collapse on the matter of coordinating labour policies. Labour policies would include agreements on minimum wage levels, dismissals and management of union consultation. John Major and his Tory party has been trying to curtail union power in Britain over the last decade. Major feared that labour regulations would increase unemployment. Low wage countries like Spain, Portugal and Greece feared that minimum wage regulations would curtail their competitiveness. It was left to the German Chancellor, Helmut Kohl to formulate a compromise. EC countries signed an agreement to coordinate labour policies, which would not be implemented in Britain. Britain gained a further concession where the word federal was removed from the final accord and replaced with "an even closer union."

No EC country except Britain so far has approached anything near a full debate on the Maastricht agreements. In a financially stretched Germany, a discussion is needed to remove fears of the ECU undermining a cherished anti-inflationary policy. In France the far-rightists have accused the Mitterrand regime of undermining Gallic identity. Such protests have done little to deter integration. The Maastricht Summit is a major landmark in the process that began 30 years ago. As the Community expands its economic and political ties, its political domain is destined to expand. Negotiation will soon begin on the admission of Sweden and Austria into the EEC. The countries of Eastern Europe may also join the EEC in the future. Monnet's dream is becoming a reality.

## To the Editor...

### Apartments and quality control

Sir, Of late, apartment business in Dhaka has gained its momentum as evident from the amount of advertisements the sponsors are putting up in the dailies. Each day at least one new ad will attract your eyes as you browse through the newspapers. The ads will focus on very attractive features of their individual projects, in terms of quality, facilities and services etc. But do all these promises are honestly met?

The answer may best be given by only those who have the experience of buying this commodity or in other words, the consumers of this product.

Recently, some of my close friends and relatives have acquired this very prestigious position. After mutual exchange of ideas and threadbare discussions on the individual experiences, I have got a very substantial insight into the whole business. Some of them have narrated to me their horrifying tales which would have never surfaced otherwise.

The stories are awesome and grueling in some cases. These consumers have invested huge sums of money ranging from Taka 15 lakhs to 35 lakhs in purchasing these

apartments. The sponsor-builders of the apartments did in fact allure them with high promises of best quality materials, finishings and fittings with all the necessary supporting services. But in fact, once the payment is made, the attitude of these vendor-builders do change dramatically.

As payments are made at a time or on short-term instalments, the purchasers are left with no choice but to accept what is delivered to them. The end product, in most cases that I encountered, did not conform to the quality and standard as promised in the agreement or the colourful brochures!

There is no regulatory body or organization existing in the country and in absence of this, the business is proliferating to the very agony of those consumers who had the very misfortune of digesting the bad egg!

Not that all the companies involved in the business behave the same way. There are of course exceptions. But most of them are prone to maximizing their profit margin by compromising on the quality and standard.

It is high time that some controlling mechanism, legal or administrative, was evolved so that in case of gross mis-

trust the purchasers could seek redress.

A citizen Dhaka.

### Road needs repair

Sir, The approach road to Darus Salam Shahi Mosque at Kallyanpur from Mirpur Road opposite Bangladesh Radio Transmission Station has long been remaining in deplorable condition. The road leading to Darus Salam Shahi Mosque is kutcha. The devotees from Kallyanpur, Shaymali, Darus Salam, Technical School and nearby areas have been facing great difficulties for lack of reconstruction of the approach road into a pucca one. This is the only road that leads to the said mosque. The residents in and around the mosque area especially at Darus Salam where hub of modern posh buildings and flats have come up over the recent years are worst victims as well since they cannot commute the road and offer their prayers in monsoon season. Meanwhile, a number of NGO offices have also been set up there.

Will the authorities do the needful to show respects to the devotees and other taxpayers' rights?

MA Rub Darus Salam, Mirpur, Dhaka.