

**Amar Ekushey**

Every struggle of a people — almost of any people — for its national identity is unique, in its historical setting, motivation, sources of inspiration and finally in its short-term and long-term consequences. So it is with our "Amar Ekushey" — the immortal February 21 — which is unrivalled in the contemporary history of mankind. Never has a movement that sought to give a mother tongue its rightful place in national life developed into such an upsurge, inspiring its protagonists and ardent supporters to be ready to give their lives for the cause and finally culminated in a tragedy and triumph, setting in motion a process that changed the history of a people.

Today, four decades later, we look at this milestone in our history, not as an event but as a process which, with all its intangible undertones and almost hidden messages, laid the foundation of our nationhood. There may be divergent views amongst ourselves — such differences exist about any part of history — as to how the process worked and how the socio-political forces interacted in setting the framework of a new scenario.

These are matters of interpretations which, important as they are, often obscure one fundamental question. What precisely is the single most important message that we can derive from Amar Ekushey?

Undoubtedly, it is one of national commitment, a commitment that transcends partisan politics, sectarian interests and narrow selfish individual motives. This commitment was based on a set of ideals, including some new found ones, which, some 20 years later, received a new boost during our liberation war.

It will be unfair to a vast majority of our people to say that these ideals are no more. However, we would like to be proved wrong in our assumption that a broad-based national commitment no longer serves as the corner-stone of our socio-political life and that it no longer moves the hearts and minds of people who hold the destiny of the nation. If we are not wide of the mark in our assumption, then we must confess that the message of Amar Ekushey has ceased to be a driving force, except in the ritualistic observance of the day or except when we pay our homage to the martyrs who gave their lives for the cause of our language and for our identity.

Yet, even in our regrets and sadness over our present-day national life, we join millions of our people in welcoming the return of Amar Ekushey in its sublime glory, a legacy that fills our hearts with pride.

**No Case of Condescension**

No society is perfect, poorer societies are expected to be least of all. Cultural mores and social prejudices play a vital role in setting the course a nation must chart. Physical handicap has been looked down in most of the societies for most part of the civilization. Only recently has the attitude gone through a substantially qualitative change in the developed countries in particular. The physically disabled are no more held as a drag on society but in certain cases they can be extremely productive so far as their contribution to nation-building activities is concerned.

A seminar on Disability and Community-based Rehabilitation held recently in the city has once again brought to the fore the point that physical disability is not a barrier to normal life. There should be no two opinions about that but the fact remains that it can happen only when a society reaches a certain level of development and is even able to shirk the notion of condescension. The disabled perhaps need some special type of education and training but at no point should they be given the impression that they are pitied and cannot do away with such special care.

The fact that the physically handicapped are often gifted with some special qualities is a plus point in their favour. What is needed is the creation of appropriate facilities for tending those specially gifted powers. Even normal people today cut a really sorry figure without skill development training and other cares. In a world of automation, the question of disability counts only as much as it is allowed to.

Life after all is governed by a collective decision which is why the case of the disabled gains further ground in the overall socio-economic activity of a nation. In this respect, the taboos and barriers should disappear with the technological advancement. But that is no excuse for subjecting the disabled to senseless deprivation of the minimum basic facilities for fruition of their talents in the mean time. Even in the limited scope, provisions may be created for them to meaningfully participate in nation-building tasks. More to the point, there is a need for coordination between the various non-government organisations and government agencies working for the rehabilitation and other well-beings of the disabled people.

In a less advanced country like ours, however, the issue of physical disability poses a special problem in that it is still viewed in association with superstition and social prejudices. The neglect such handicapped people are subjected to is a great impediment in the way of their merger in the social mainstream. This attitude must change and that again is dependent on a set of conditions, the first of which is qualitative improvement in the level of consciousness of people through education — not necessarily formal.

Once this attitudinal improvement is achieved, the disabled might get what they really deserve. But question that troubles our minds is that the number of the mentally retarded is on the increase. Already it has become a staggering figure and its causes should be identified to suggest remedies. Nutritional deficiency is a major cause and this should be well taken care of.

It is time, our political parties — especially the leading ones — take up some action plans to do something about eradicating illiteracy. We consider that the 40th anniversary of our historic Language Movement is an ideal occasion to move away from our practice of paying lip service to the cause of mass education. The traditional celebrations have immense symbolic value and should continue as a part of the practice that we have established. But time has come when some other forms of observing this unique historic event will have to be thought of, especially those that will lead to achieving the very goals for which our martyrs have laid down their lives. One that I would like to suggest is that all organised groups — trade unions, workers' and employees' associations, professional bodies, social and cultural groups — should take up literacy programmes and become a part of the national movement. In this, I would like to suggest that our political parties should show the way. Can we not make the 40th anniversary of the Shaheed Day dramatically different and historically significant by having our leading political parties declare concrete plans as to how they intend to contribute, during the coming years, in the national effort to eradicate illiteracy? It will be so organised that by the next Shaheed Day our political parties can tell the nation what they have actually done. We from the press, will give them all the praise and credit, after of course, independently verifying their claims. In line with what was suggested in an editorial in The Daily Star on 3rd February 1992, I would like to

**Ekushey and Educating the Masses**

**Can BNP and AL Lead the Way?**

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invite our leading political parties — especially the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (as distinct from the Government) and the Awami League — to publicly declare their respective party plans and tell us what they will do from now and the next Ekushey in eradicating illiteracy and spreading mass education.

The Prime Minister often speaks of our bleak future without adequate human resource development. The Education Minister is crying himself hoarse about the need to provide education for all by the year 2000. Opposition leaders have also often spoken on the subject. So the obvious question is — what concretely are they going to do about it?

The practice here has been to wait for the government to do everything and for the rest of us to sit back and either praise, if we are on the side of the ruling party, or critically reject it, if we are on the other side. Our political parties talk of nation building tasks only when they are in charge of governance. When they are in the opposition they behave as if it is only the government's responsibility to be involved in development work. It is my belief that the need of the hour and the exigencies of the tasks that confront us make it abundantly clear that our political

parties will have to change this attitude. And there has seldom been a better moment to do so, as pointed out earlier, than now.

With a literacy rate variously claimed to be between 20 and 29 per cent, with a drop-out rate of more than 70 per cent at the primary level, with a significant portion of our children still deprived of enrolment in schools — there are hundreds of ways in which the political parties can help the

common people they will have to do something for them as well. This will be a valuable service they can render to their constituencies. As repeated research has shown that it is not so much the absence of school buildings or of proper facilities but more so the inadequacies of mass mobilisation that has put the clock back on our drive towards universal education. And it is here that the political parties have a distinct advantage.

realise, the least they can do, as a start or, to motivate their own members and supporters to send their kids to school, their women to literacy classes and to the vocational training programmes. To put it simply, our political parties must become a part of the movement to break away from the poverty chain that is throttling this nation. Can they not organise, on self-help and voluntary basis, a rebuilding programme for schools destroyed by the natural calamities? These schools have remained unusable for months and in some cases, for years.

All this and much more can happen if the leadership of each of our major political parties has the necessary vision. If they can extricate themselves from their narrow partisan view of things and see the nation above everything else. The tragedy is that our political parties have not learnt a fundamental lesson that it is precisely by rising above their narrow partisan interest and showing the people that they care for them — not through eloquent speeches but practical work, that they can win the heart of the electorate.

I have often heard senior political leaders fretting over the proliferation of NGOs, and the clout these foreign funded bodies now have in the rural areas. It is now a fact that in

many rural areas the NGOs have more influence on the people than the political parties. This is so because the NGOs have been doing practical development work while the political parties confine themselves to giving speeches.

A reality that our political parties are not waking up to is that times have changed and so should their method of doing politics. Armed struggle gave us independence. Protracted civil struggle destroyed autocracy. Now we have both independence and democracy and what do we do to them? Obviously if the need should arise we will definitely go back to those forms of struggle. But what do we do now? We have elections through which we can make and unmake governments. We have a genuinely representative parliament through which we can strictly supervise the work of those whom we have elected and expose them to the public through open discussion. And far above all we have a nation to develop — a nation that is miles behind the rest. A nation which is burdened with a huge population, hamstringed with acute resource constraint and possessing a nature which is at once friendly, generous and life-generating but, on occasions, incredibly destructive.

It is not my intention to suggest that the need for political movements is over. What I want to bring out to the fore is that the need for the whole nation's involvement in development work is equally, if not more, important. We really don't have a minute to lose. Let us then make this Ekushey truly historic by launching the type of programmes suggested above.

**The Third View by Mahfuz Anam**

nation overcome the ignominy of mass illiteracy.

The most obvious thing that a political party like the BNP or the AL can do — and here they do not have to be philanthropic — is to educate their own party cadres at the rural level. They could start by undertaking a fact-finding exercise as to how many of their grassroots workers are able to read and write. Follow this up with a serious effort to set up adult literacy classes for them. This effort itself will likely help educate hundreds of thousands of our rural youths. But of course political parties will have to remember that looking after their own cadres cannot be the end of their efforts but just the beginning. To really win the heart of the

age. They excel in the art of mass mobilisation which our educational programmes have so far lacked. Within the ranks of our major parties there are thousands of qualified teachers who can organise non-formal literacy classes which will be a valuable addition to the existing government and NGO sponsored programmes. Wherever possible they could help set up full-fledged primary schools with private funding and put the local community to supervise it. In conjunction with non-governmental organisations and professional bodies such as Teachers' Associations, the political parties could organise teachers' training programmes etc. If they find the above suggestions difficult to

**Severe Winter of Discontent Engulfs Dying Soviet Empire**

THE scantily-clad female dancers on stage at the Moksva restaurant are said to be a part of Boris Yeltsin's new Russian "revolution".

Unimaginable in the austere Communist era that died a few months back, the outfits probably would not pass a test of public decency on a California beach.

The burlesque chorus line act is a far cry from what goes on across the street at the Bolshoi Theatre which can be seen through a frosted window. Once-prized tickets for that show are being scalped outside for just US\$5.

But inside the Moksva, the city's elite indulge in the best of what a dying empire has to offer: caviar by the jar and vodka by the bottle.

Their mood: live for the day, for tomorrow may bring with it a new dictatorship.

A sign on the door says the restaurant is closed but all here know the password — "herd currency." That means a fee of US\$15 a plate in greenbacks only.

These are the high livers; people with connections, says a retired newsmen, Boris Chekhonin, who complains that after three decades in the employ of the Soviet Union he receives a pension equivalent to just US\$3 a month.

Outside the Moksva along the snowy walls of the Kremlin the brown slush of economic despair has engulfed the former Russian empire and brought with it scenes of utter destitution.

This is a winter of discontent that threatens to become one of riots and bloodshed. For many it means having to

beg in temperatures of 25 degree below zero.

Others sell wooden souvenirs of a pale-faced Mikhail Gorbachev draped in a red cloak and holding a tattered gray hat.

Inflation is running at a 700 per cent annual clip according to Harvard economist Jeffrey Sachs, an advisor to Russian President Boris Yeltsin.

Many stores have only a single product on the shelf. A line of consumers waiting for women's underwear extends around a city block near Red Square.

The rouble has become a shunned currency. "We now consider vodka to be a liquid hard currency," said Andrey Rykum, 26, employee of a Siberian-based oil firm. Rubles are almost worthless so vodka is the best thing to give a plumber, who comes to fix your pipes. Even if he doesn't drink it, it will be of more value to him than money.

The Soviet Union once prided itself in keeping consumption and spending within the bounds of the state. Now those controls are suffocating the economy. Hoarding in expectation of 500 per cent price rises in January is rampant. Trains arriving in Moscow from Kiev are packed to the roof with smuggled produce.

"Anything I see, I buy — even if I don't need it now," says one consumer.

The economic slide has brought out the worst in the Russian temper. A doorman refuses to let foreigners be seated in a cafe without being tipped in advance. A waitress snaps at a customer who asks for a clean plate. "I'm not the

one serving your table!"

Taxi drivers slam the door and roar off into the night if a potential customer asks to pay in roubles. Tourists with dollars and little sense are their only passengers.

The Soviet Union's airline, Aeroflot, is a showcase for the worst of times. A stewardess pokes futilely at a drunken man who has fallen into the aisle as other passengers laugh and kick down the seats in front of them. Many planes have been grounded for lack of spare parts.

In the countryside, the sense of frustration is echoed. "You see for yourself that we have nothing," grumbles Gearasema Bramitch, 63 a retired school teacher. "We don't know what is the right course for our country. We had more during Stalin's era. I don't even know what capitalism is."

"Anybody with money is being surrounded by thugs anxious to get a piece of the pie," said a citizen from South Russia. "If you don't pay up, they will destroy your business overnight."

Economic collapse has only aggravated a growing disdain for politicians who might lead the country into a brighter era. "I don't want any new leaders," said one worker. "They only cost the country money."

Citizens wonder openly where thousands of tons in gold reserves vanished over the last three decades. They complain that Communist officials have been snapping up opportunities to buy government resort homes for richly

lously low rouble prices.

Most believe it is only a matter of days or weeks before President Mikhail Gorbachev resigns his post as the head of the Soviet Union; a political

entity considered by most to be already defunct.

"He should never step down," says a restaurant worker. "Counters another: 'He stands for nothing so what difference does it make?'"

Others simply try at all

costs to avoid the predictions of an economic doomsday. "I never read the papers before lunch," said a man in a beaver-skin hat rushing to London on an Aeroflot flight to cash a check for US dollars.

— *Depthnews Asia*

**OPINION**

**Pending Cases and Suffering Masses**

The staggering number of cases pending in the courts vide The Daily Star dated January 16 (news item '4 lakh cases pending in civil courts') made the most harsh comment on the state of affairs in the judiciary, ineffectiveness and impertinence thus being numerically projected. Such wholesale piling up of cases gives rise to many immediately important issues associated with the handicapping outdated *modus operandi* in vogue in our courts namely the role of the judges, lawyers and other people directly involved in the judiciary. One may easily understand that it is time for speedy house-cleaning. May I put my observations as follows:

a) A great number of families as well as individuals are forced into litigations for no fault of their own, by ill-motivated trouble-mongers to harass and gain unjustly. As a result, the good meaning and peace loving people are suffering in terms of monetary loss, time and human and healthy living. The courts are created with pious objectives to safeguard the interests of the civilised law-abiding people, but virtually it has turned out to be instrumental for the violators of law and order to amass wealth and power.

b) The lawyers and the law experts make up a considerable part of our population in Bangladesh. Usually, they show very little interest to take the issues to appropriate forums and platforms. Interestingly, the strikingly pathetic situation in the judiciary does not pose any threat to their pecuniary gains. Instead it flourishes their business. Easy formula: more litigations, more clients; more clients, more money.

c) Usually the civil cases run for 10-20 years. Thus being the situation, often the litigants die and their children inherit it. This defeats the very cause and purpose of justice as we know, "Justice delayed is justice denied". Under the circumstances, the victims of injustice prefer to remain away from the court as far as possible.

d) Allegedly, the lawyers and the clerks thrive mostly on the woes and misery of the poverty-ridden people. Many citizens opine that if the judges and lawyers alone would agree to practise culture of justice, many cases could be disposed of in no time.

e) The extravagantly time-consuming process of justice actually helps the culprits in framing false cases often allegedly in connivance with the unscrupulous police. Thus it has become easy to harass a person and almost impossible for one to get justice. In most of the cases, the commonmen just cannot stand their ground and in the long run they surrender to the three-pronged attack of the culprits. Firstly, the culprits infringe upon

their possessions and properties with the assistance of their hired musclemen. Secondly, they influence policemen to frame fictitious charges against the aggrieved people. Thirdly, resorting to daily-daily court proceedings, they put poor people into the morass of frustration and despair. And, the society as lame as it is, looks at the poor chap sightlessly.

f) A few visits to the court will confirm that the judges are very much indifferent towards punctuality. This, in turn, adds more to the suffering of the people, vainly seeking justice.

g) Allegations are commonplace that many of the judges and magistrates also sell the dignity attached to their profession. It is further alleged that it is wiser for innocent people too, to pay to get rid of judicial haphazardness and entanglements.

h) The present state-of-affairs in the judiciary enables thousand of disciples of the Barber of Baghdad to flourish in a society which for centuries has upheld the values of justice and fairness without referring their disputes to courts.

If the above contentions are true, one must conclude that the judicial institutions have gone bankrupt, necessitating thorough overhaul. To straighten up the loose-state of affairs in the court, the following suggestions may be given serious consideration.

i) The long-discussed and agreed proposition that Judiciary should be separated from the Executive, should come into effect soon.

ii) A separate task force may be formed to assess and re-assess the causes of the sickness and formulate ways and means to dispose of cases promptly. If need be, judges may be given special training to cope with such long-standing disputes, and expertise in the field of law and justice may be imported from abroad.

iii) The respectable Law Minister must move relevant law amendment bills to modernize the whole machinery of justice keeping in mind the people's interest. The loopholes and shortcomings of the courts by which the unscrupulous people humble the very principles of the judiciary and ride roughshod over the poor, should be plugged immediately.

iv) A high powered national body may be formed with retired judges and non-practising seasoned lawyers who had made spectacular marks in their career. They may extend support directly to needy people against the moneyed culprits, advise the Law Ministry and suggest the amendments.

v) Organizations may also be formed privately by the judges and lawyers. They may save the commonmen from ultimate pauperization at the very

blueprint of the local touts and often abusings of local Government machineries.

vi) Only appointing more judges will not be a panacea as some might have thought for resolving the mammoth crisis. The judges are needed to exemplify dedication, integrity and professional commitments. For the sake of those, the courts should be allowed to work independently.

vii) The judiciary people must create a healthy environment to dispel suspicions from the minds of the people seeking justice. They must make people believe that going to court is not stepping into a booby trap. The good sermons and accompanying matching work is the remedy; then, people will feel that they have approached the right person. This will enhance the prestige and dignity of the personnel working in judicial matters.

viii) The judges may follow time-schedules strictly thus re-instilling people's respect for them.

ix) The press may play the role of a vital 'catalyst' in streamlining the judiciary. As we have a good number of national dailies, the concerted efforts of the pressmen in this regard will be successful by letting people know what is going on in the court houses and thus keep the related persons alert. Keeping track of hundreds of cases will build up a unique repertoire. This will also be one of the highly creditable trend and will have a far-reaching effect in discouraging "the Barber of Baghdad" to resort to dirty tricks.

x) Usually, we see hot stores of crimes and punishments involving some rich people or scandals of women. The newspapers run stories for days, may be only to pander to the hunger of sensationalities of readers (nobler part of such story telling is still inevitable) and enhance sales. But the newspapers never follow up the cases where crimes are perpetrated against men and women of much humbler sections of the society, the genuinely demanding circumstances. The budding newsmen have got an obligation to carry forth in this respect without of course infringing the privacy and confidentiality of citizens.

Finally, may I ask the persons entrusted with the responsibilities of the relevant Ministry as well as the conscientious members of the society to give a serious thought in this regard and to come forward to contribute their mite towards the metamorphosis of the society to set things on justice, equity and fairness. We must rise to the occasion before centuries-old values of justice and humanism of our society are buried under unwanted judicial incumbrance, impertinency, extra-customary wrangles and interferences.

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**To the Editor...**

**Opposition philosophy**

Sir, The Daily Star's commentary on the role of the Opposition (Feb 5 by Mr Mahfuz Anam) spotlights on the exercise of the proper perspective while looking at the philosophy of the Opposition: first applied universally, then applied locally..

It is incidental that a certain political party (or a group of parties) have to play the role of the Opposition for a limited period of time in the history of a nation. Parties come and go, but the Opposition is normally supposed to exist.

The local Opposition's main role appears to be to harp on its monomania on the unnatural demise of its leader more than one and a half decades ago. It is forgotten that he was a leader of the nation, and not simply the leader of a political party. His place in history is assured. Fact can neither be suppressed or distorted; nor the past altered by any propaganda or silence.

The present Opposition's disenchantment comes from the mistaken notion that it has the sole right to espouse the cause as the sole agent of the departed leader. As a political leader, yes, but as a national leader, no; as pointed out in a recent TV face-to-face discussion programme in which some of the Editors faced the Opposition and Government leaders.

One key question is: if the issue could wait for more than 16 years, then why it has to be decided right now within a few

months or a year or two, and the whole nation accord it No. 1 priority? There are other urgent national priorities to set our house in order. Diversionary tactics at this critical state of the nation will harm the budding nation; and the Opposition is not expected to get the whole hearted support of the majority of the people; thereby causing conflict and damage to the economy and other national interests.

It is a pity that the Opposition's nation-building role is not well publicized or understood, leaving critical citizens with many questions on their minds. The Opposition's stance is not convincing enough to merit support from those who count. Criticizing the Government all the time, non-action, and negative programmes of unnecessary movements and street roles cannot earn the benefit of the doubt.

The Opposition should come out clearly spelling out its nation-building programmes, without sermonizing in political jargon. The people wish to see positive action, not politics. All voters or citizens are not politicians, and the vast majority are not interested in politics, or take an active part in it. The politicians should talk in the language it is understood by the enlightened citizens. The party is not above the nation.

The communication gap has to be reduced.

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**Agriculturists**

Sir, Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia is expected to attend the 'Krishibids Convention-92' as the chief guest which is scheduled to be held on March 4. It may be recalled here that ten years ago, another BNP head as well as of State, President Late Justice A Sattar attended the Krishibids Convention as the principal guest. At that time, certain important announcements were made by him in favour of the professional and institutional development of agriculturists as well as agriculture.

We sincerely expect that the respectable Prime Minister will also make certain important announcements in the convention of this year as she usually does in the conventions of other professional groups. It is a matter of great encouragement that the present Prime Minister and her government have given special attention to solving the various problems of the technocrats.

I honestly hope that in the ensuing Krishibids Convention, the Prime Minister will give some pragmatic policy-directions for the overall development of the agri-sector including absorption of all the unemployed agriculture graduates in various government departments with a view to ensuring their participation in the national agricultural development programmes of the present democratic government.

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