

Keep off this Green Lawn

By dissociating themselves from the party activities of students, by discouraging student leaders from visiting and confabulating with national leaders, by clearly demonstrating that national leaders have no time for them and they too must learn to employ their time in their own legitimate activities, political leaders can play a positive role in restoring order on the campus.

The Virtue of Export

'Export or perish' is the latest to be added to the numerous cliches we have become accustomed to in the name of economic recovery, development, social and economic restructure etc. Most of the time, the much-trumpeted policies and programmes have started with a bang only to end up in a whimper. Planning Minister A M Zahiduddin Khan also has unveiled a plan of the BNP government envisioning a rosy future for the country's economy. A long-term export development strategy, this is aimed to generate massive employment, to alleviate poverty and to remove the two billion or so US dollar trade deficit the country has to suffer annually. Dubbed as an export-led growth, this sounds nice but people are no more interested in all the best to happen in a distant future, rather they want to see actions immediately undertaken as a measure of the actual execution of the plan.

What is therefore necessary are certain immediate steps that will surely substantiate the tall claim of the government that it is bent on going with the export promotional drive by having done its home work properly. The compulsion for the government to get out of the economic rut itself is an indication that export is one area that, along with production, has been badly managed all through. Under the prevailing circumstances, what ought to be the most important question is if the country has first of all developed the base of production for the exportables. The much-heralded investment climate has so far remained on paper only, investors either from home or abroad are not in the least convinced. It is not only the liberal investment policy but other factors such as socio-political stability and rules of law that account for attracting investors. On both these counts, our records are much too deplorable.

Even then Bangladesh has commodities it could export to better supplement its foreign exchange earning. Foreign Minister Mustafizur Rahman in an exclusive interview with this daily made it clear that all the Bangladesh missions abroad will be virtually turned into export promotional cells. Exaggeration in the statement notwithstanding, one can easily see the point. What we would like to know is how far the government has moved in that direction. While the necessity of assigning our missions abroad with such a much-needed promotional job is paramount, we suggest that the government keep a regular tab on the export promotion activities by the neighbouring countries. Without monitoring the prices and volumes of their exportables, the question of our being competitive does not arise. One of the effective ways of promoting products is arranging trade fairs or participating in such fairs abroad. Considering the huge cost, a country like ours cannot always take part in such promotional extravaganza. Our suggestion is that we explore the possibility of forming a SAARC trade mission to jointly exhibit our exportables.

Last but not the least, there is a tremendous scope for effectively taking help of media for export promotion. Publication of supplement on selected items in foreign newspapers or journals, video films highlighting the merits of those items etc can be an effective tool for the promotion of our commodities — specially the non-traditional items. These are some of the steps the government can consider for immediate implementation. Both short-term and long-term targets will thus be achieved with relative ease.

Savings Account for Animals

The affluence of the rich is the envy of the poor. This has always been the case but never before did affluence bring in so much material comforts and benefits as of now. With the scaling of new scientific and technological heights almost at regular intervals by scientists, consumerism is also reaching astronomical peaks. To match with such ever-expanding materialistic frontiers, inconceivable new diversions — sometimes bordering on to the most bizarre craze — are invented. Affluence is diseased only that way.

However, not everything affluence produces as a diversion can be devoid of seriousness, although judged against the context of a different climate and society, it may look devious or even sacrilegious all the same. Yet, there is not even an iota of doubt that the novel experiments must have the adequate financial support.

Japanese affluence, now leading the rest of the world, has broken a new ground in that a bank — Sanwa Bank to be precise — has offered for pet animals, the novel facility to open savings account with it. To give the scheme a more humane touch, the initiators of it count on people who "care about pets as members of their family." Starting next Thursday, this "pet account" will surely stand to succeed. Japan being the world's largest saver nation for 1990, with per capita savings amounting to 45,118 dollar, according to the International Savings Bank Institute, the pets of the Japanese are expected to get at least a small share of the huge chunk. There are obviously reasons to be optimistic. The pampered pets there have already been enjoying such facilities as water beds, flush toilets and even stress therapy using compact disc music.

Given their eye for meticulous details of rules and procedures, the Japanese, here the bank officials, should have analysed the pros and cons of the innovative scheme. Maybe, other Japanese banks will not be far behind to follow Sanwa Bank's grand move. With the success of the Japanese programme almost ensured, a look at the national savings record of Bangladesh may present an intriguing situation. Hundreds of millions here will never know what a savings account with a bank is. Even barring the people living below the subsistence level, considerably wealthy families, of course by Bangladesh standard, have never recognised the virtues of savings. Whatever little they save, they set it aside in various odious manners — stopping the circulation of money. Poverty manifests itself in myriad mismatches.

PRIME Minister Khawaja Zia, almost immediately on her return from NAM summit conference, held in Jakarta, has dissolved the central committee of her party's student wing. It was a decisive action she took, and she did not take it too soon. In fact she might have done something similar long ago. That would have saved a few precious lives besides dispelling the widely held notion that her main reliance was on her student followers.

Let us hope that as the Prime Minister of a terror-stricken nation, and in her present mood of disillusionment with campus politics, she will have time to ponder over the whole sad business of getting too much involved with students. In a moment of comparative clarity, she would see the difference between exhorting students to come out and lend their support to a national cause and getting them involved in the power-game of national politics. It must be admitted that she endeared herself with the youth of the country when she inspired them to fight against tyranny. In this role she outdistanced other leaders in the political field. It must also be admitted that this following has cast a spell upon her. She has come to regard this following as essential for her political future. There she is mistaken. By elevating student politics to the national level she has helped destroy its essentially institutional character. And when student politics ceases to be purely and strictly institutional, it is no longer student politics, basically concerned with student affairs.

Over the years, the confused and ugly nature of what passes as student politics has become quite clear. Only one

aspect of it will illustrate my point: the leadership. In the past, students were left free to choose their leaders, and the choice usually fell on some of the best students. For the last twenty years or so, the choice has often been made by leaders of the political party whose junior partners carry the party flag and cry the party slogans in the corridors of the institution. The pattern is now so well-established that ordinary students do not see any anomaly in it. Student politics that left a tremendous impact on our national politics, was essentially autonomous in the past, spearheading rather than camp-following in movements of national importance. With this decline in the quality of student politics has come a corresponding decline in the quality of leadership. Brawn has replaced brain, ex-students have replaced students, and what is worse, many leaders are known to be enjoying a life-style disproportionate to their known sources of income. The general view is that within the full knowledge and under the direct patronage of political leadership, the quality and tenor of student politics have deteriorated, and have plunged to the lowest depths in recent years. And if this be so, some of the blame must attach to the ruling party, because it has the largest student following. In the rank and file,

there is considerable idealism, if slogans and graffiti carry any sense. It is leadership that must be changed and re-oriented towards institutional allegiance. If decency is to be restored in the educational arena.

Clearly, the institutions have a role to play. Universities have been blamed for their lapses and failings. Teachers have been blamed for their lapses and failings, and especially for pursuing their selfish ends at the cost of teaching

chill down the spine of a man endowed with average sensibility.

The problem has become intractable and that is why a parliamentary committee was proposed. With the killing of Ratan Sen and with the attempt on the life of Rashed Khan Menon, the question of law and order acquired a new urgency and it was possible to look at campus violence in a larger perspective. We have made some probe into the question in recent weeks and

innocence, because the happenings will disprove it, it should take the initiative in involving all parties in a fresh peace move. The move will be meaningful if it is preceded by a cleansing operation within the house. I would have hesitated to suggest this but I am emboldened by what I read in the newspapers. A few purges within the JCD central committee — now dissolved — will not be enough. The problem has to be seen as a national problem, and not merely a party one.

I am not suggesting, at least not at the moment, that there should be a moratorium on political activities on the campus, a cooling off period. This could be misinterpreted. Many suggestions have been made, including those put forward by the committee set up by the present government, and there isn't much to add, excepting that the delinking of student politics from external/national politics must be seen as the basic step. By dissociating themselves from the party activities of students, by discouraging student leaders from visiting and confabulating with national leaders, by clearly demonstrating that national leaders have no time for them and they too must learn to employ their time in their own legitimate activities, political leaders can play a positive role in restoring order on the

PASSING CLOUDS

Zillur Rahman Siddiqui

and research. There is some truth in all these charges but the main charge is now aimed at the political parties, and particularly at the party in power. The same would be the case had the main opposition been in power.

For both the major parties there is a clear signal; they must meet over this intolerable situation and they must, with the active support of all concerned, thrash out a clear action plan to put a stop to bloodshed on the campus. Though the Dhaka University campus happens to be the main battle field, there are others equally affected. A journey across the country will prove this, and a glance at the first page of a daily will send a

It has left us convinced that the tentacles of violence on the campus goes much beyond the confines of the campus. Not that we didn't suspect as much, but now it is no mere suspicion or guess. The evidences are staring us in the face.

According to newspaper reports, the leadership of the ruling party has, after the latest killings in Surya Sen Hall, and the dissolution of the central committee of JCD, given serious thought to the problem of infighting within the party. Apparently it has taken a fresh, and may I say a frightened, look at the situation. If it now realises that merely by accusing others of perverting the ruling party cannot establish its own

the country's resources are being misused may be illustrated with one glaring example. This is clearly indicative in the official life style of some of the middle and higher level officers in the civil and military administrations. Each one of them is officially allotted two fully state maintained chauffeur driven motor cars, one for the officer and one for his family, each costing the exchequer about taka ten to fifteen thousand a month. This is, surely, not much short of corruption and bribery. What a great pity for the poor half starving Bangladeshis! We can hardly afford more than one car except for the Head of the State and Head of the Government. Such and similar other gross misuses push the country in to a bottomless basket case. No body below the rank and status of a full secretary should be allowed any official car. Other entitled persons may be given adequate conveyance allowance and recoverable interest free car loans on easy terms. How long are we to face these sort of ills in our socio-economic sceneries?

Bangladesh: Dream of a Cherished Land Withering away

by M A Baquie

IN a people oriented democratic system of Government unlike the Presidential one, the Head of the Government should act as the chief co-ordinator rather than the chief executive even when the ruling party may have an absolute majority in the Parliament. Because the PM is not expected to rule with the brutal majority force of 'Ayes' but on the basis of general consensus. Hence the PM should not be overburdened with too much routine work and instead should be left relatively free to coordinate important national issues with the general public, the opposition, other political parties, the press, the professional groups and the Ministers. In practice, however, in backward countries like ours, we find concentration of all powers in one hand. Hence no real progress leading to stagnation.

The natural question arises, why has there been no real change in the lot of the common people even after twenty one years of real independence? The obvious answer is that like a dangerously ill person, the government has been infested with almost incurable cancerous like growths in the administration. The accumulated ills of the past regimes and the ailing symptoms of the Government and other contributory causes are far too many and widely known to the people. And yet the important and serious ones are being repeated here with a specific purpose to try to make the general public aware of the stagnating situation in our socio-economic-political fields.

The accountability and transparency of the administration are limited to rhetorics and are only talked about matters for public consumption in meetings and rallies. Public are otherwise treated almost like untouchables; they are not allowed even to pass through public thoroughfares when VIPs are on the move and the traffic has to come to a standstill. Who dares to ask the administration about anything they do even whimsically? The bureaucrats conduct themselves as the real masters and not certainly as the public servants. The other cause of national illness, is the lack of honesty of purpose in what we do, say or try to achieve in the name of public interests.

We are unable to identify or fix proper priorities for our na-

tional developmental projects. Politics and emotion play more important guiding roles. The only way to national prosperity may be achieved by proper utilization of our vast human resources through training and planned rapid industrialization, particularly export oriented ones provided, of course, discipline and law and order have taken firm roots in the society and the Government does not falter to strictly enforce law without any discrimination. After poverty alleviation and education, the next highest priority should have been given to save the country from colossal annual losses of about taka 2,000 crores by streamlining the administration and denationalization of losing units of the public sector corporations.

We do not appear to manage the national economy with effective controls on our expenses. We rather prefer to beg, borrow or oppress the

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countrymen with the burden of additional direct and indirect taxes for the easy spending by the administration.

We rely much too much on the advices of donor countries rather than show some confidence and respect to the views of our own experts in their own fields. We must realise that donor countries would not spare a single penny without their own ulterior interests in terms of selling their goods and services or tighten their grips on political, economic and cultural influences over the recipients of aids. It is no secret that in some cases, to keep their factories going hot and strong, they may be prepared to dump their manufactured goods in the sea beds. Why should they not donate these surpluses even totally free of cost to further the hands of their hegemony and remould our culture and traditions to their way of life in place of direct political or military intervention. Whatever they say or do or donate must have some strings attached to those. We may not be able to single those out. Instances are not unknown when some donor country had gone to the extent of escalating their prices on our project because

we were bound by single ten-

der option. The Meghna bridge built at a cost of Tk 175 crores with Japanese technology and supervision, was declared open to the public less than a year back by our PM. It is reported to be already needing urgent additional works costing another Taka 110 crores. It does not matter who pays for the additional costs. The project feasibility study and its scrutiny must have been faulty. This must be the result of blind faith and total reliance on the so-called foreign experts. After this tragic news, one must wonder what may happen to the gigantic Jamuna Multi-purpose Bridge, when said and completed under the guidance and supervision of foreign consultants and experts. Because we must have the courage to admit that the so-called experts employed by the donor countries and agen-

the political will to solve those problems. We should rather face them with confidence in our rightful decisions. Inefficiency and corruption are rampant in practically every strata of public life. Cases become worst when intellectual corruption creeps in the decision making process because then we are prone to do anything in the garb of public interests, not otherwise meant to be so. Administration are always careful not to annoy or go against the wishes and desires of the powerful rich elites even at the cost of general public. All promises made before the election have not yet been fulfilled. One of the oft repeated promise made in the joint public declaration to repeal all the black laws, particularly the Special Power Act, is still there in full swing and thousands are reported to have

been detained under it. Rather more black laws have been recently enacted. When we made laws for the protection of only one VVIP, it officially authorized the Director of SSF to fire upon or otherwise so use force against the suspected persons, as to cause death, if they resist arrest. Killing of a person would have been to some extent justified only to save the life of the VVIP but surely not merely resisting arrest. What a mockery of accountability and transparency in a democratic system of Government? Is this black law not another severe blow to the civil rights of the citizen?

Some new taxes are levied or rates are enhanced without consulting the parliament and thus sidetracking the members. So, though in principle we are supposed to have established democratic system of Government in the country, it is still being ruled in an autocratic style as in the past. So democracy in our country cannot achieve greater good for the greatest number of people. A country of about one hundred and ten millions is in reality meant for a handful of privileged ones who have been thriving at the geometric pro-

gression ration. There are some who would not otherwise have been one thousandth of what they are to-day in Bangladesh. It is a paradise for them. Some of them can afford monthly domestic electric bill to the tune of thirty to forty thousand takas. At whose cost? The teeming unfed and unclad millions? Whereas the monthly salary of the lowest paid employees cannot be assured to be only taka fifteen hundred for a family of five persons. They need at least 40 kg rice which alone of the lowest grade, would cost about Tk 1300.00. How can they ever manage proper nourishments, clothing, shelter, education and medicare? Should there not be any limit to the official extravagant costly services and perks in a country like Bangladesh? Security of life and property prevailing in the country is at the lowest ever known level. So as to save our face in the national mirror, the

the whole nation is shouting at their loudest voice that there is no semblance of law and order in the country, the minister in-charge of Home Affairs is reported to have asked for his promotion for the job so well managed by him. What a cruel joke? Murders, rapes, hijacking and the like are rampant in the country. The official figures given out by the Home Ministry for the last eleven months may speak for themselves. Though these figures appear to be conservative, yet these cannot be termed as creditable for any administration and hundreds are crushed under the wheels of killer trucks and buses. No use to compare these with other countries only to compound our confusions. Education at higher levels has practically stopped in the country. Because terrorism has become a way of life in DU campus; four year courses in DU does not finish in 8/9 years. Over a period of last one decade, the classes at DU were suspended for a total number of days equal to five years.

Much too much too heavy administration is eating up the country's meager resources. Every year we have to levy additional taxes to feed and cloth the public servants and the administration of the country. Also we do have a definite tendency to politicize the administration and trade unions. This is one of the major sources of inefficiency in the country. Yet on top of one hundred and twenty five secretaries and additional secretaries and one hundred seventy five joint secretaries including their equivalents in rank and status, we seem to need about forty-five ministers, state ministers, deputy ministers for smooth and effective running of the administration. One fine morning we found in the national dailies that 654 officers have been promoted in one day. This was an extraordinary situation, which meant an additional annual expenses of about Tk 500,00 crore. Real milk and honey must have been flowing in all our rivers, haors, and canals on that day but all must have dried up the next morning. To what extent

the management style in our country is still largely based on emotion and adhocism. Because we seem to be unable to fix proper national priorities and hence run the country whimsically. We must have been taking major policy decisions without carrying out perspective survey followed by in-depth scrutiny and detailed feasibility studies. Amongst others, one such illustration is the decision to start another five new medical colleges primarily because late Zia had decided so. A very large number of our qualified doctors are already rotting jobless in the streets. Furthermore, the existing eight medical colleges are still short of qualified and experienced teachers and on top those colleges are yet very ill equipped; without adequate and proper machines and electronic instruments for experiments, laboratory and higher research studies. More colleges will certainly mean more half trained jobless doctors making unemployment situation in the country still worse. Moreover, such off the cuffs decisions may be politically motivated but academically irrelevant and as such not desirable.

Is it not paradoxical that the second poorest country of the world can afford such a large entourage of 52 members including 22 member media team to accompany the PM on the four days visits to Bahrain and Pakistan? This is considered not only a big fallacy, but also self contradictory, travesty and inconsistent in the thoughts and expectations of the public. All we expected is a general coverage of only the important functions. It was sad enough to note from the summing up speech by the Finance Minister on the debate on National Budget on 29 July 1992 that Bangladesh would have to accept the conditionalities of the WB and IMF if it wants money from them. The imposed conditionalities is as likely to make our economy vulnerable. But our administration succumbs to those conditionalities for a bigger development budget with bigger aids whose main beneficiaries are the brokers and commission agencies and not the ordinary simple minded rural Bangladeshis.

To the Editor...

Mushfeq-us Saleheen: A tribute

Sir, On the death of Mr Saleheen, the country has lost a most able and distinguished banker. Possessed with the highest sense of public duty and service, he enriched all the places that he served. The eldest son of late Khan Bahadur Mahbubuddin, a scholar and a public servant, Saleheen carried forward the tradition of his family. A devoted Lion, he had varied interests in life.

A gentleman par excellence, he was both loved and respected by his friends. May his soul rest in peace.

Shahabuddin Mahtab
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

The Bosnia tragedy

Sir, In Bosnia, right in the heart of Europe, it appears, civilisation is currently on holiday.

The carnage being perpetrated on the freedom-loving people there is too appalling to draw any peer except, perhaps, from the dark ages. An enormous toll of life and property had already been exacted and millions forced to flee away their homeland.

Serbia's manifest intention of carving the multi-ethnic region into ethnically pure neighbourhoods is an atrocious idea, to put it at the mildest. It is late in the day, but still the West can attest to the world community that the universally recognised principles concerning human rights and territorial sovereignty are invi-

olable and these are no less precious to them than to others.

One is, however, led to believe that unless the United Nations is mandated to intervene militarily, tragedies of the Bosnian variety shall continue to plague the nations.

But will that really ever happen?

Syed Badrul Haque,
Lalmatia, Dhaka

Suhrawardy Uddyan

Sir, Everyday a large number of people go to the Suhrawardy Uddyan and try to spend some time enjoying the open and fresh air. But it is very unfortunate that people going to Suhrawardy Uddyan cannot spend their time properly and peacefully due to some undesired activities over there.

While visiting Suhrawardy Uddyan on several occasions, I have noticed some young lovers in positions not accepted publicly. I think they should not be allowed such practice any further in view of the sanctity of the park. Another disturbing matter is that the elite of Dhaka city play golf at the Suhrawardy Uddyan every Thursday morning sometimes scolding the visitors then present at the park. This must be stopped by the relevant authority in the interest of the helpless and innocent visitors. In my opinion, a recreational place like Suhrawardy Uddyan can by no means be used otherwise. A park should always remain 'specially open for recreations of the visitors going there.

Md. Delwar Hossain
North Shahjahanpur, Dhaka