

End to Somalia's Trial!

With the multinational forces — led significantly by the US Marines— penetrating deep into the rugged territories of Somalia, relief convoys look set to smoothly distribute food among the starving villagers. Whether the mission will be able to see the country through a successful transition is a different matter. It is, however, not easy to save a country that is at war with itself. Somalia's saga of internecine dates back as far as 1969 and made all the more tragic by the worst droughts of 1975 and this year. Tens of thousands perished in the earlier one and this year's toll is expected to be even greater. For much of this over-size tragedy, related mostly to hunger, the Somalis themselves are to blame. Ever since the ouster of President Mohammad Siad Barre almost two years ago, there is virtually no central authority to run the country and all international relief efforts to save Somalia have ended in failure.

Now that the UN-mandated peace troops are making their presence felt in outlying Somali villages, the bandits and looters responsible for making the hunger-stricken people's plight worse are running away. Some of them have even surrendered their arms when challenged by the forces. The peace-keeping forces' arrival in Baidoa— strategically important for an airport— appears to have made a significant breakthrough not only in reaching food to the severely affected but also to restoring order in the area around.

Evidently, a good start has been made. The effort surely stands the chance of averting the worst tragedy in terms of human lives. But this limited optimism again is dependent on a set of conditions. The fact that the armed looters ventured into one of the villages to plunder the wheat after its distribution does not allow the fear of similar nefarious activity to rest. Again, the UN can ill-afford to station the forces, which is growing larger with more nations contributing to it, indefinitely in Somalia or for that matter any place. But in the absence of a politically representative and strong central authority, there is no point leaving the warring Somalis to mind their own business the hungry and malnourished will be requiring a long-term food aid for their mere survival.

How the UN is going to ensure that is not clear. The fact that the forces have been instructed to ensure the safe passage of relief materials hardly meet the requirement of the prevailing condition where the rag-tag thieves are in no mood to lead a disciplined life after giving up their arms. Once the international peace-keeping troops have departed, they will appear on the scene to press for their advantage they have so long enjoyed. No doubt, the requirement of the time is massive food aid along with medicare for the dying Somalis. Still then, it is not a reasonable proposal to keep them perpetually dependent on foreign food supply on a charity basis. Their rehabilitation and restoration of their farming should be the objective of any international programme. This will call for a stable government in the country. Apart from the services of the UN forces, therefore, there is a need for diplomatic efforts to bring sanity in that embattled and famine-stricken country. The tribal chiefs have to be brought to the negotiating table for a political consensus leading to an election for the country's government. Meanwhile, the peace-keeping forces ought to be delegated more-power for disarming the gun-toting elements. The UN must stretch it a bit further—if not for anything, at least for the grateful hungry millions of Somalis who have welcomed the multinational forces.

A Celebration of the Hour of National Awakening

A sadder thing could hardly take place than the premature death of Dr Noorul Ula on the eve of the Victory Day. That was the last thing one expected to read in the newspapers of December 16. Dr Ula's name has been inextricably woven into the history of the Liberation War due to his one act of singular valour. Nobody in Bangladesh could on the March 25 night imagine that a state would mount a genocide on people who constituted a majority of that very state. That sense of vexation did not stop Dr Ula from acting— doing the most dangerous thing of the time. It was shooting with an 8 mm movie camera the Jagannath Hall carnage live. During the Liberation War hundreds of cases of similar and more incredible daring and higher heroism took place— but there were very few that came at the very outset of the Pakistani horror show. We salute Dr Noorul Ula once again.

What made Dr Ula, a thoroughly professional and one hundred per cent professional man, to do that piece of potent indiscretion? What he saw on the morning of March 26 from his residence window could have thrown him off-balance and compel him to make a rush for fleeing the area. Nothing of this kind that could come very instinctively indeed happened. He was possibly feeling something tug so strongly at his humanity and conscience. And he coolly went about setting his camera and hanging it from his window— something, if detected could have ended in not only his own death but also the wiping off of his family, as well as the whole blocks of buildings— the Engineering University staff quarters. And in the first lights of dawn and with Pakistani hounds sniffing for anyone sneaking, Dr Ula's act called for such unbelievably strong staff that the whole of the Liberation War was made of.

He continued to be a faultlessly full professional as before. This was how people like Alim Chowdhury and Fazole Rabbi got into the glorious war of national survival and had they survived the Al-Badr scimitar, they would surely do what Dr Ula did — doing the professional duties of healing man.

Policemen in droves spread out on March 25 night from their Rajarbagh billets shouting O Bengalee brothers, prepare yourself, they are here spilling death, resist them. Three thousand of them laid down their lives without a regret. First-rate professionals were they. Similar acts of supreme courage were being staged in EPR and numerous other places. It was the quality of those hours — that juncture of our national awakening that made the whole people rise in unison. Dr Ula's act of heroism would ever remain a celebration of that time, of that spirit.

He was only 55. Why should he have to die so prematurely? We send our heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family.

The verdict seems unanimous. Everyone, including those in the political right, agrees that Bill Clinton is good news for America. With less than five weeks to go before his inauguration, the US economy appears to have rediscovered its rhythm: the consumer confidence has soared, job market has slightly expanded and America seems ready for a happy Christmas. These are perhaps cyclical effects of a capitalist economy, but everyone is eager to give Mr Clinton most of the credit. Even people in far off Somalia seem to have a positive view about the President-elect. Two Somali gunmen, tired of the war and the endemic poverty, told Ted Koppel, a TV journalist, "He is OK. He seems to like black people".

The two-day economic conference, which finished on 15th December in Little Rock, the Arkansas capital, may have helped to further enhance Bill Clinton's image. Though largely managed, and often played to the camera, the conference displayed his total command over intricate economic issues and policy options. For almost 20 hours, Mr Clinton presided over the conference which was organized more like a post-graduate seminar. He asked questions, listened to experts, challenged their views and often offered his own recipes. "You watch Bill Clinton and you think he has a Teleprompter in his head and he is just reading from it," said Vernon Jordan, a top Clinton aide.

Seemingly off the top of the head, he discussed variations in immunization rates for children in different states, and in another breath, the contrasts in hospital costs between Harlem and the rest of Manhattan", wrote Thomas Friedman of the New York Times. After 12 years of Reagan and Bush presidencies, it is refreshing to see an "activist" President, who is not only aware of the issues being discussed but also eager to learn from them. At the economic conference Mr Clinton was all ears, and at the end of it, there seemed to have emerged a general consensus of the areas of concern: soaring deficit, sky rocketing health care costs, falling productivity, lack of competitive environment. The list went on, and the President-elect and most others ye-yeyed to the growing list of maladies. However, there was no inkling as to how Mr Clinton plans to attack any of them. If budget deficit has to be tamed and growth spurred, taxes will have to be raised and government spending reduced. Except for saying that he will do both, no one knows how he will achieve his goal of raising \$20 billions annually for new investment. Taxing the super rich and foreign companies, as he has promised, will fetch only a fraction of the amount needed.

The conference was not an event which was expected to produce a clear cut prescrip-

Hasan Ferdous writes from New York

scrupulous fund raiser, Mr. Benton is still remembered for having charged the lobbyists \$10,000.00 a piece for attending a monthly breakfast meeting with him. Same is the story about Ron Brown, the Commerce Secretary-designate. An insider and a consummate Washington lobbyist, Mr. Brown has represented numerous foreign governments, including former Haitian dictator "Baby Doc" Duvalier. These appointments don't fall in line with Clinton's promised crusade against Washington lobbyists and foreign interest peddlers. His choice of such an insider as Leon Panetta as budget director has also raised some eyebrows. He began by saying that he is an outsider, now he wants to embrace all the insiders his hands can hold," said a Republican commentator.

Everyone, including the hard nosed media pundits who are often ridiculed as "spin doctors", are willing to grant Mr. Clinton a grace period before the avalanche begins. William Safire, a life-long Republican and well known conservative, is all aglow over Clinton's command over the issues. A M Rosenthal, the best known pro-Israel columnist, can't wait to see Mr. Clinton take over. Even a headline conservative like John Sununu, former White House chief of staff-turned CNN talk show host, has expressed guarded optimism over the shift of power in the White House.

There are, of course, dissenters too. And they are on both left and right flanks of the great ideological divide in today's America. The left are howling over Clinton's choice of Lloyd Benton as Treasury Secretary. An ultimate insider, Benton is known for his loyalty to special interest groups, like the gas and oil lobby and the real estate sector. An un-

While the rightists found no problem with any of the above appointments, they cried foul

when Mr. Clinton started appointing "outsiders" in various cabinet posts. His nomination of three activists, Bob Reich as Labour Secretary, Donna Shalala as Health Secretary and Laura Tyson as chief economic adviser, has drawn fire from the rightists. Both Reich and Tyson have been criticized for their "liberal views". The choice of Carol Browne, a Gore protégé as environment secretary, has also been mildly rebuked by some corporate sponsors. The fiercest attack has, however, been made against Johnetta Cole, a Clinton advisor involved in the transition process. A M Rosenthal devoted a whole column in New York Times to her saying she was pro-Moscow, pro-Marxist, pro-Castro, pro-Orenada, pro-North Vietnam and anti-Israel. The pro-Israel lobby's attack on Warren Christopher, the transition chairman, as being soft towards Arab may have also dented his chances for the job of the Secretary of State. His fault: he was Mr. Carter's Assistant Secretary of State and Carter was alleged to be soft towards the Arabs.

The mix of the right and the left has, however, been welcomed by the mainstream America. The New York Times described Clinton's economic choices as "anti-gridlock team". He chose the insiders for the obvious reason of safe charting his fiscal legislations through the Congress. Both Benton and Panetta will be there to break the Congressional "gridlock". The logic for such appointments was best defended by Paul Begala, a top Clinton adviser. "Sure, you could pick a forger to be secretary of state. That would be a change. But that would be difference for the sake of difference. Change means getting things done. You have to have people who know how the system works," he told the Washington Post. His choice of "liberal activists" in several other key areas, including health, labour and environment, on the other hand, indicates a willingness to entertain both new and anti-establishment ideas. As Mr. Clinton moves cautiously to complete his cabinet, the future American administration is thus beginning to look like America itself: a mix bag of people, white and black, men and women, centrists and liberals. Only people to be left out will be arch conservatives. After 12 years of "trickle down economics", no one will miss them in America.

In other words, Mr. Clinton is on the right track. Both through his cabinet appointments and public statements, he is trying to prepare America for the changes he will have to bring in order to give this country a real facelift. Changes, yes, but slow and steady changes. As the two-day economic conference showed, America is willing to listen to their new President. America is also willing to believe in a new President.

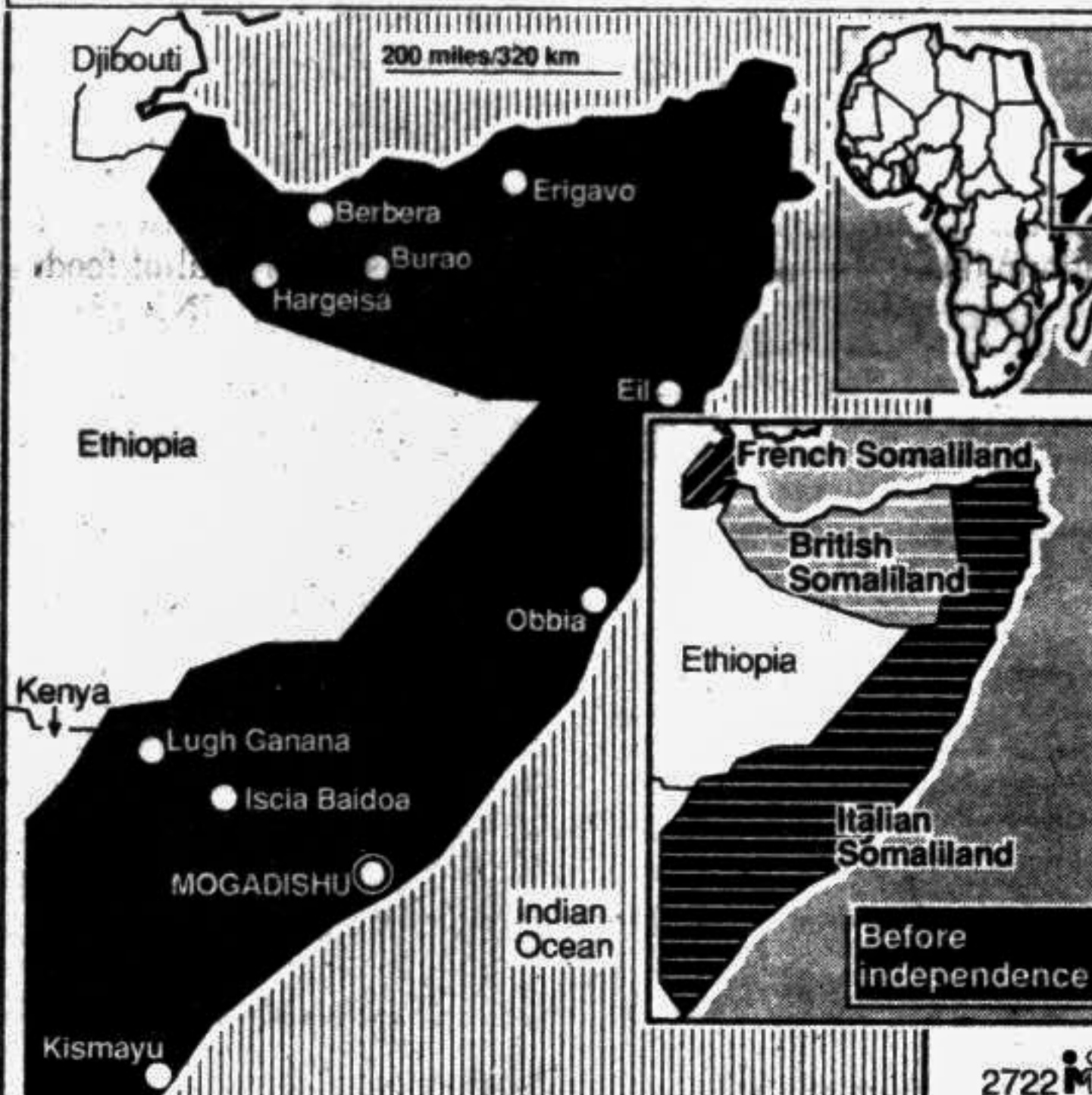
Somalia — where Roaming Gunmen Run Black Market

Mark Richardson writes from Baidoa, Somalia

As US troops land in Somalia, they find a ruined country where warlords control swathes of territory. A black market thrives on looted food even as thousands continue to starve. Gemini News Service correspondent Mark Richardson reports from the war-ravaged country where people buy Kalashnikovs in the street market and become thieves.

Somalia: path to ruin

- In colonial days Somali peoples were ruled as three countries under British, French and Italians
● At independence in 1960 British and Italian Somaliland merged as Somali Republic
● French Somaliland became independent in 1977 as Djibouti



- 1960 Somali state born under Ali Shirmarke as Prime Minister
1964 First elections
1967 Shirmarke president
1969 Shirmarke assassinated. Army takes over. Barre becomes leader
1979 New constitution—party and state invisible
1987 First riots against Barre in Mogadishu. Rebels step up guerrilla war
1991 Jan Barre flees after years of unrest. Civil war and chaos follows
May North (former British Somaliland) declares independence
1992 Mass starvation

of grain were rescued by the intervention of Baidoa's corrupt police chief (since fled into hiding in Mogadishu), who didn't want to sour the deal he was making with the Irish charity Concern to rebuild his police station.

It's unbelievable — it's a nation turning upon itself," says Mike McDonagh, Concern's field director in Somalia. "I don't think it's a Somali trait, though, because I've seen it in other countries, like Sudan. It was the same in post-war Germany. It could be the same everywhere".

Looters want only goods that can be sold easily. The essential recovery foods that are mixed especially for severely malnourished people are rarely touched, he says.

Ten tonnes of recovery food, worth \$40,000, was driven through Mogadishu the other day without being touched. If that had been 10 tonnes of sorghum, worth \$800, it would definitely have been stolen".

Despite frustration with the blatant theft, this disreputable commerce has generally been allowed to continue by the powerless relief agencies. The theory is that at least the food has been available — if not to the truly starving, then at least to those who would normally go hungry — until a harvest can be taken from this year's successful rains. It is also sustaining income for many small-time stall holders, even if a few are growing extremely rich.

In a country as devastated

as Somalia there is no legitimate economy, and if nothing is available to be bought and sold then more will be stolen.

The pressure to steal food to keep the markets going is immense," acknowledges a report from the US AID Disaster Assistance Response Team. "The people selling stolen food, it says, are people who are desperately trying to keep out of the relief lines and for them, selling stolen food confers higher status than standing in relief lines".

It is hoped to restart the economy through a complicated system of selling US donated food cheaply to carefully selected merchants to generate cash in the market, and then use the income to rebuild such institutions as schools and hospitals. This is unlikely while the food can be so easily stolen, which is where the US marines come in.

The period from now until January 20 — Bush's last day as president and the withdrawal deadline for US troops — is expected to be relatively quiet in Somalia, while many Somalis leave their guns buried and wait for the intimidating troops to leave.

Few Somalis know why the marines have come, just as few understand why rich foreigners should want to come from overseas and give away food, but they know they are no match for American weaponry. Rather than losing their guns,

the young louts who've tasted the Rambo bigtime will try to acquire and wait it out.

That is, unless they grow too bored and too high on the local drug Khat. Khat, an addictive narcotic that is chewed from the stalks of widely-available plants, is to blame for much of the violence in Somalia when its users lose their reason through the day to the drug. There are airstrips where relief planes will not land in the afternoons because security guards there can no longer be trusted after a half a day of chewing Khat. At least one aircraft has been fired upon by Somalis who cannot think properly for the drug.

If a confrontation is forced for whatever reason, though, between the Americans and Somalis, it is simply doubtful the marines will suffer; instead, following the traditional Somali custom of vengeance against those of the same tribe, it is the foreign relief workers who are likely to be attacked.

But none of the aid workers ever speak the sentiments that occur to many of the journalists on flying visits, who sometimes mutter that perhaps the Somalis should be left to themselves and not receive any aid at all. That's because few of those visitors actually touch the people who are starving. Few experience the humanity of restoring life to a famished woman or dehydrated man, or receive the gratitude of children who are living a new hope.

The aid workers know this feeling, and don't question the need for their presence. Perhaps in their brief stay, the marines will be lucky enough to feel the same way. — GEMINI NEWS MARK RICHARDSON is a Canadian journalist. He recently visited Somalia.

To the Editor...

Tale of a Freedom Fighter

Sir, Please accept my thanks, and pass them along too, to Ataus Samad. I am so happy at last to see the article "Tale of a Freedom Fighter" about my Moeen! While he was at St. Greg's "Moy" was my student and one of my assistant librarians in the school. Indeed he was everything good and noble... that young man. Now he is in heaven and is praying for us. In life and in eternal life he will always be happy and young, and being good to us, here on earth. The photo is splendid, and shows the idealism and innate goodness he always displayed.

Yes we all loved his personality, and will never forget him. Grateful to you for your remembrance of Moy and his brothers.

Bro. Hobart, csc St. Greg's H S, Dhaka

Thoroughfare or stackyard?

Sir, It appears that City Corporation Authorities have permitted the use of Road No. 51 Gulshan (in front of the American Express Bank) as a stack-yard and for breaking bricks, boulders, peak jhama, etc. If not, then how could one use the road unauthorisedly? Isn't there any law in the country?

Quaf Alif Lalmitia, Dhaka.

Autonomy for BAI

Sir, Ever since the democratic government came into power, the Bangladesh Agricultural Institute (College), Dhaka along with many other national institutions, witnessed new development. Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia announced sanctioning of Tk 75 lakh for the construction of the BAI's ladies hostel when the newly elected Students Union of the college met her recently. The Bangladesh Agricultural Institute (BAI) also received one new microbus and one new pick-up. These vehicles were sought by the Institute for a long time. The case of the construction of BAI's boundary wall is also under active consideration in the Ministry of Agriculture.

Meanwhile, it is a matter of great surprise and regret that even after issuance of a circular pertaining to the authority's plan to provide both administrative and academic autonomy to BAI and other two agricultural colleges by December 31, 1991, the proposal finally failed to receive the Cabinet's approval. We heard that the autonomy proposal for BAI was not considered in view of the prevailing educational administration in the autonomous educational institutions. But we would like to assure the authorities concerned that in a technical college like BAI, there is hardly any chance of academic disturbances because most of the time the students

will remain busy with their theoretical and practical academic tasks.

Under this circumstance, may we request the Prime Minister and other concerned Ministry to kindly re-consider the autonomy issue of BAI in the greater interest of protecting and improving the quality of agricultural education in Bangladesh. The BAI demands autonomy not for realizing any quarter's interests but for the ultimate welfare of the nation.

M Zahidul Haque Assistant Professor Bangladesh Agricultural Institute, Dhaka

An humble request

Sir, The Prime Minister of Bangladesh while led the anti-autocratic movement on the street would always — attire in simple home made cotton sarees, that would arouse, in me, a deep sense of regard for her. I always aspired her as a struggling leader, of maintaining such a very simple dress even, in the event of her occupying top state power.

I feel rather shocked to see the respected leader dressed in gorgeous silk and costly saree.

Through this column, I earnestly request the honourable Prime Minister to always wear Bangladeshi simple cotton saree, attired in which

I, and I do believe a large number of people, like to see our Premier. More over, if the Premier addresses the ensuing SAARC summit, wearing local cotton saree, this will, I believe, reveal to the guest regional leaders, our Premier's simplicity and love for home products.

Intiaz Zaved Jheeltuly, Faridpur

"H S Suhrawardy — as I saw Him"

Sir, With reference to your "Down the Memory Lane" Column's article entitled "H S Suhrawardy — as I saw Him" by GMF Abdur Rob (11th December 1992), I would like to point out a few mistakes.

At present a practising barrister in England and at one time the president of the Pakistan Youth Federation, Syed Mohammad Ali not Syed Mahmud Ali is the son of late Syed Badrudduja Choudhury, the renowned Indian statesman.

I take this opportunity to that you for the well written article that appeared in the memory of my father Syed Badrudduja in your newspaper on his death anniversary, 18th Nov '92. Incidentally I am his youngest daughter.

Syedza Zakia Ahsan Lalmitia, Dhaka

OPINION

Promotions, at What Cost?

Shahabuddin Mahtab

For the past few months, there have been continuous discussions, criticisms, court cases, petitions, newspaper columns, the walkers clubs deliberations et cetera regarding the promotions made by the government a few months back. All these were not necessary, if we had thought before we leapt. A sudden leap creates innumerable problems, because of our own follies. All forms of government, that of the democrats, the republicans, the communists, and even a martial law government have to observe certain basic rules, norms, the Public Service Commission, the State of the Economy etc, while deciding, the promotion cases. The executive arm of the government can only earn the respect of the people, if its transparent policy and action is reflected in all its doings. The commitment and dedication of the permanent public servants will never come, if many of the ablest officers are superseded, and then completely demoralised.

The commitment of the government is to reduce all non-essential revenue expenditures and this has also been our clear understanding with the World Bank. It is rather strange, that 36 officers were promoted to the rank of Additional Secretaries at a time when there were no posts for them. As many as 191 people were promoted to the rank of Joint Secretaries when there were only 76 posts. In the whole history of British India — the present day Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan — nothing like this had happened. Surely the above subject may find a place in the Guinness Book of World Records. The motivation, sincerity, honesty, integrity, hard work etc. of a sincere worker can keep a government moving in the right direction. All undeserved promotions earned by an inefficient officer, lead to a multiplier effect in the whole gamut of public administration. In extreme cases as stated above this leads to suicide (a senior Asstt Secretary has reportedly killed himself). The mass promotions can only create a temporary euphoria. We have to remember that all rules are required to be followed seriously in matters of promotion, and the Public Service Commission is allowed to function effectively. We are already late in the day. But let us have the courage and conviction of accepting all reasonable criticisms which are constructive in nature. This can strengthen the hands of the government, and restore the shaking confidence of the people.