Dhaka, Saturday, February 20, 1993

Dhaka's Drainage System

An ambitious drainage project costing as much as Tk 159 crore for Dhaka Metropolis taken by the government in 1992 for completion in 1996, according to local government, Rural Development and Co-operatives Minister Barrister Abdus Salam Talukder, is progressing well. Already works of Tk 68.45 crore have been completed The project, part of greater Dhaka flood control and drainage scheme, looks set to effectively deal with a perennial problem the citizens of this metropolis have been encountering. Such a comprehensive project to solve the drainage problem in the city was long over due. With the ecity expanding in an unplanned manner, there is perhaps no alternative to a drainage and sewerage system that can match the pressure of a more sprawling Dhaka in time to come.

We believe, the planners have not neglected this aspect of future requirement. Until now Dhaka, specially the old parts of it, had a worst system of disposal of its refuse and garbages. The fact that the drainage system has been coupled with the flood control scheme certainly augurs well for the Dhaka people. Unplanned construction and filling up of the low lands have been responsible for much of today's water-logging and unsafe disposal of drain water. The problem has been created not only by individual people but also by private and government agencies. A city's arbitrary and indiscreet growth can never be helpful for bringing its physical facilities in order. But this has exactly happened here.

Even in the past there were canals crisscrossing the city and would help dispose the drain water. Then, of course, there were many ponds dotting this metropolis that helped conserve the rain and flood water for the lean season and also lessen the pressure of excess water in the monsoon. Gone are those days when the Dholai Khal alone served the entire old part and some of the new areas of Dhaka. This project envisages to reexcavate as many as 21 canals measuring 78 kilometre. This sounds most appropriate for the purpose. One thing, however, needs to be taken into consideration: the city is stretching to the north and the canals in this part of the city cannot be effective unless they are connected with the river in the west or north. There are also some pockets stretching from Agargaon Taltola to Ibrahimpur to parts of Cantonment, the problems of which have to be solved locally. An earlier plan to create a lake at the old air port and connect it with an integrated canal system seems to have been shelved, for the lake has been dug partially and the canal has never seen the light of day.

Apart from such local cases what we are really interested in is a guideline for future construction. There were several natural water disposal systems. But all those have been obstructed by real estate businessmen who have bought lands and filled them up for sale. No supervision and monitoring system could be developed so far to bring a halt to such practices. This is however too much to expect specially when the city planners have not a comprehensive picture in their minds of the city of future. Not only the drainage system could be less costly, but blind alleys and narrow lanes unfit for driving ambulances and fire brigades could be avoided if such a plan could be drawn before construction of residential houses and other facilities. In the areas the city is now expanding, such a plan can still be chalked out for implementation. Anybody can see that this is a prerequisite for developing a sound drainage system for the city.

Wanted More Books on **National Heroes**

Thursday's topic for the Ekushey lecture series at the Bangla Academy was biography and autobiography. Speakers made the most of the subject by hitting hard at the paucity of this genre of writing in the recent times and underlined both the social need for them as also how best they should be written.

. It is a shame that we do not have a nonpartisan and tolerably perspicacious biography of either Moulana Bhashani or Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman - a need pointed out by one of the speakers at the Academy discussion. So do we haven't practically any biography or books of appreciation and evaluation of any of our myriad national heroes - in war and the arts, in the sciences and in discharge of social commitments. There is one good reason to account for this disquieting absence. There are only a handful of writers here who can do justice to a life better than average, not to speak of the truly great ones. This is something we cannot have quick and cut and dried answer for. A successful biography must combine insight into the subject's life as well as laborious research on it — the latter not being a forte of Bangladesh writers. And God save us from the labours of the academic researchers who write drearily enough to discourage all people interested in pouring over the details of the life of their dear hero.

In the subcontinental tradition, national heroes do not write autobiographies — Gandhi, Azad etc. are only glorious exceptions. Our heroes have been mostly of the self-effacing type. They did what made heroes of them — and stopped there short of aspiring to literary pretensions. But take Rabindranath and Binodini Dasi - although differing so much in the fields of their achievement, are two of the best autobiographers telling the tale without imposing their selves and personalities on the readers but instead leading them by a loving hand into their times, their challenges and their successes and failures. Tagore's Jibon-Smriti could be a necessary reading for intelligent people all over the world.

We are not lucky in the post-liberation period about autobiographies of whatever merit. A very notable teacher who is a prolific writer as well, has demanded that the Bangla Academy publish all 150 books of biography and autobiography published in the last 150 years. We are all for it. In fact we cannot overstate our support for this demand which, when accepted and duly acted upon, would yield more dividends than we can imagine.

Memoirs and reminiscences by leading workers in very many fields - from education to bureaucracy to arts and politics - are able relatives of autobiographies and can prove both eminently readable and capitally useful in reliving times past which is so essential for the making of a nation. These are coming but in trickles. A torrent of these, specially from those involved in the Liberation War would enrich the nation spiritually and in so many other ways.

Lessons from Mirpur

lessons for us to learn. First, that if allowed, the election system works. Thanks to the two judges - Justice Shahabuddin, who did so much to revive our confidence in our electoral process, and Justice Abdur Rouf, who gave an all new and absolutely refreshing status to our Election Commission (EC) - we can now begin to feel that the standard set by the Feb '91 election was not an one-shot affair. Perhaps, election as a system has finally come of age in Bangladesh. Yes, the system works, if we are only willing to allow it to work. Even the fact that the Awami League is going to the norms and was transparent court after the recounting, is a to a fault - the EC has further proof that the system is working. It is the demoachieved two major gains in institutionalizing democracy. cratic right of any participant First, the EC which was statuin the electoral process to

OOKING back on the

Mirpur by-election, I

feel there are several

only strengthens it. In my opinion, the BNP has just retained a parliamentary seat, but the real victor of the Mirpur experience is the Election Commission. Calling for a recount has never been done here, either when we were a part of Pakistan, or after we became Bangladesh a good 21 years and a number of elections ago. And then, let us neither forget, nor underestimate the importance of the fact that the recount call was against the ruling party's victory. Imagine, if the case equally legitimate - was the reverse. An opposition victory, and the Election Commission asking for a recount. Forget how the opposition would have behaved, we in the media our-

either go to the Election

Tribunal, or to the High Court

to seek legal redress for any

grievance it may have. It is part

of the electoral system and the

Al.'s going to it, as reported,

selves would have been party of the future can criticize plagued by all sorts of suspithe EC if the latter asks for recion and would have been extremely sceptical. No, the recount call, in my opinion, speaks volumes for the independence and integrity of the Election Commission, and of the determination of this statutory body to do an authen-The reason I feel obliged to underscore this particular point is because it is so precedent setting. With the recount move - and having pulled it off in a manner which observed all

counting or for re-polling. The Mirpur by-election may have given BNP its seat back, but definitely it has given us a far more powerful Election Commission. The very image of EC's independence, which has emerged larger than it ever was before, has taken us a few steps towards institutionalizing demogracy. Another, not so obvious gain from the EC move, is a clear indication as to what we the people should do to strengthen democracy. We should do everything pos-

ous members of the ruling chinery behaved as such party. In a bid to impress the leader, they manipulated the media to create a premature impression of fatt accompli. This backfired and they proved a bit too clever for their own good, bringing shame and disgrace to the BNP.

Here lies the second lesson. Do not make by-elections appear to be bigger than they really are. Too much importance was attached to the Mirpur by-election which led to tremendous pressure being put on party henchmen, who felt compelled either to cut

The Third View by Mahfuz Anam

sible to make our EC as independent, and as powerful as is possible. The stronger our Election Commission, the better will be our chance for fair elections in the future.

So, I repeat, the system works - if it is allowed to work. Yes there was tremendous rivalry between the two major contestants, and the parties that backed them. There was also a widespread fear of open violence. Yet the campaign phase of the Mirpur by-election passed off with only limited show of force much, much less than feared. The election day itself was unbelievably peaceful and the polling was - as described by the editor of The Weekly Holiday - "smooth as silk". This happened, because the major parties allowed the system laid-down by the EC - to work. It would have worked till the end, if not for some overzeal-

corners or to use administra tive or physical power to in fluence the outcome. 'Sky would not have fallen' if the BNP had lost at Mirpur. Ruling parties, in every democracy, almost regularly lose a few byelections during their term in office. If BNP had lost, it would perhaps have had the salutary effect of nudging the ruling party into realising that its days of speech making, and proclaiming its laudable intentions have long been over. That what matters now is how it is governing the country, how it is implementing the policies it has already proclaimed.

Too much was made to appear to be at stake, which built up too much pressure on the party machinery to deliver. Every bit of energy and resource was made to work at Mirpur. It was made to look like a "life and death" question, and therefore the party ma-

from BNP's side - had happened, and the AL had won. A lot would have been said by AL about BNP having lost people's trust and that people are realising their mistake in voting for the "sheaf" and are now coming back to the "boat". So what? Aren't they saying it anyway? Government would not have fallen, the voting pat tern in the parliament would not have changed. Power balance, in every sphere would have remained the same. In fact nothing would have changed, except that the AL's propaganda machine would have got a big boost. But the steps the ruling party took to save itself from that embarrassment of defeat, got it into deeper, and more ignoble stigma of trying to pre-empt the public verdict by deliberately manipulating the media. Here again, the system would have worked, and delivered the same result as in the second count, only if the ruling party did not lose its nerves under the pressure of "wining at any cost".

Suppose the unthinkable

This brings me to what consider the third lesson to learn from Mirpur. Awami League's call for continuous hartal in Mirpur, and half-day hartal in the capital and again a 6 am to 2 pm hartal nationwide an overkill of a reaction by any definition. It was a classic case of how to lose a political advantage unexpectedly produced by the political ineptness of the opponent. It was blunder that cost the AL the public goodwill that was coming its way, produced by a

party's last moment attempt to interfere with the EC's vote counting process. The public sympathy turned towards, what they perceived to be, the "under dog" the - Al., But all of it changed after the highhandedness of the AL in literally shutting down the factories and work-places of Mirpur for days and bringing, first Dhaka, and then the country to a total standstill. The decisions for two days

negative reaction to the ruling

of hartals, especially when the complaint submitted to the EC was under examination, made the AL look as if it only cared for its own wounded ego and not a bit about either the ecqnomic welfare of the country, or for the daily income of the traders, the wage-labourers. rickshaw-pullers, street vendors and millions who are living on marginal income.

Here again AL should have waited to see if the system delivered. The system did. The EC found valid several of AL's complaints, and ordered a recounting. Even after it, other legal avenues were and still are open, to which it can, and has decided to take resort. Why. why, then, for God's sake, were the hartals? Charttably speaking, the first day could be attributed to instant reaction. But the second? Arrogance, perhaps?

The bottom line is that, both parties revealed that when the chips are down - or at least when it appears to be so - they are easily willing to abandon the system. If the BNP lost on demonstrating its sense of propriety and respect for EC's procedures, the AL lost in its demonstration of caring for the marginal people and the economy.

The last is, perhaps, the saddest lesson from Mirpur.

Cheddi Begins to Rebuild Debt-ridden Guyana NVESTORS are finding

Narmala Shewcharan writes from Georgetown

Cheddi Jagan has just completed his first 100 days as president of Guyana. He ousted the government of Desmond Hoyte last October in the country's first fair elections for two decades. Jagan, once feared by the West for his leftist views, is now talking of open markets and courting corporations such as American Express. The atmosphere in Guyana is transformed and investors are being attracted to the deeply indebted country.

warm welcome has been extended to them by the new President, Dr Cheddi Jagan, who inherited a debt-ridden state from the Peoples National Congress (PNC) government he defeated in the October general election. "The goodwill for Guyana is

Guyana palatable agaih. A

touching," Jagan noted at a press conference Georgetown marking his first 100 days in power. The new regime finds itself saddled with a \$2 billion foreign debt. Guyana, a small tropical country on the northern shores of South America, is now ranked among the poorest of the world.

It sits alongside Haiti, as a country with rich natural resources in sugar, bauxite, gold, diamonds, and timber that once had expectations of feeding neighbours from its

surpluses. The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) has estimated that at least twothirds of the Guyanese population are living below the poverty line. One political party puts this figure at 80 per cent, an indictment of the PNC, now an opposition in dis-

"We inherited a dismal situation," said Jagan. "The country, under what was effectively a one-party administrative dictatorship, suffered from gross economic mismanagement, corruption, disregard for civil rights and general neglect of both social and physical infrastructure."

Jagan seems content to let the PNC pursue its public quarrels. He has said there will be no investigation into corruption charges against former public officials. Relaxed and ready to exchange pleasantries with journalists, the man who

had waited 25 years to become president and is now 74 years old showed that he had not lost his sense of humour.

tortly independent, has ap-

peared in the public eye, to

have functioned indepen-

dently. This is of extreme im-

portance. In democracy, the

fact, and the public demon-

stration of that fact, are both

equally important. And this,

against a popularly elected

government, led by a leader

whose coming to power two

years ago was phenomenal and

charismatic. Second, the EC by

having the recounting of votes,

has sent a clear message to all

political parties, especially the

BNP and the AL. Meddling

with the election process will

get them anywhere, and the

EC can not only call for a re-

exist, can also ask for re-

count, but, if sufficient reasons

The ruling party, by accept-

ing the EC's decision, and

abiding by it, has also set a

laudable precedent which will

be binding on all future ruling

parties - meaning no ruling

Jagan condemns corruption. He calls his Peoples Progressive Party (PPP) "lean and clean" and plans "integrity legislation" to govern the conduct of public officials.

Former president and PNC leader Desmond Hoyte quickly declared a political vendetta against the new administration, but now he seems keener to fight his former prime minister Hamilton Green, who is alleged to have denounced Hoyte as a schoolboy who sold out to white people. (Green

denies saying it). Green walked out of a party disciplinary hearing, denouncing it as a kangaroo court and urged that former United States President Jimmy Carter, who helped bring about recent electoral reforms, be called as a witness.

Carter is something of a hero among sections of the population. The Carter Centre and international organisations, notably Commonwealth, worked for reform and then monitored

the polling. As a result, the election was considered the first fair one for more than two decades in a country that has a majority of East Indians and a large number of blacks.

Jagan won his first national

elections in 1953 when the country was still a British colony and again in 1957 and 1961, five years before independence. He was chief minister and the country's first premier, then was ousted through western intervention - in favour of his erstwhile political bedfellow Forbes Burnham, who became leader of the PNC and eventually took the country to bankruptcy.

In those days, Jagan was feared for his leftist views. Now he has become a champion of free market forces and his PPP/Civic government (Civic is being used to indicate a racially indicated government) is looking to the US for closer ties.

The new government is keen to bank the goodwill and relief which has greeted its assumption of office. For example, Jagan's call for Guyanese overseas to return home was backed up with a package of concessions to those who re-

Tourists are also being attracted — a radical departure. In the Burnham years Guyana wanted nothing to do with tourism. Now there is a Minister in charge of Tourism, Micheal Shree Chand, who speaks of the development projects daily being brought to his office. To boost the fledgling industry, visa requirements have been lifted for countries such as Britain

Agriculture

tion of rice in the country is

quite satisfactory. Credit for

rice production in order to at-

tain self-sufficiency in the food

Meanwhile, certain market-

sector.

Sir, This year the produc-

and the US

Shree Chand hopes that courtesy, good manners and the undoubted attractions of the Guyana hinterland - a vast interior that boasts some of the most beautiful scenery in the world, including the spectacular Kaiteur Falls - will help overcome obstacles to successful tourism. Among these are the muggers, better known in Guyana as the "choke and robs".

Already the main Timehri airport is remarkably transformed. Once-surly officials with a talent for interrogation are now pleasant and helpful. To tackle crime, citizen's committees have been set up across the country.

Guyana, with a population of 800,000, has suffered from a cultural divide. The country is made up of 51 per cent cast Indians, 43 per cent black and mixed races and small minorities of Amerindians, European and Chinese.

The new administration intends to unite the ethnic groups and give a better deal to the Amerindians, the indigenous population sometimes called forgotten people. A committee for racial equality is at pilot stage.

The cultural divide between Guyanese Indians and blacks is causing no alarm in the government's honeymoon period. Pockets of violence did manifest themselves at the time of



The goodwill for Guyana is touching

the elections, but with a feeling of propriety in the air and public infighting preoccupying the PNC opposition, no one is prepared to push the cause of racial unrest.

Shops which began to lose their empty look under the Hoyte regime are boasting full shelves .- even though prices are still high - and hard currency is flowing back to the country.

In anticipation, real estate agents, among those expecting to be swamped by demand from returning Guyanese and potential investors, daily set new prices for their properties, far out of the reach of ordinary Guyanese.

Jagan disclosed that in the first 100 days, commitments

and disbursals of about \$46.7 million were obtained in loans and grants. A team from the US Agency for International Development met Jagan in January to discuss the reactivation of the aid programme for

An IDB mission is about to discuss a financial adjustment programme, which is expected to allow new banking legislation for financing the private sector for different sources. This will be along the lines of similar programmes in neighbouring Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados and Jamaica.

inflation, said by a 1992 UNDP report to be at an annual rate of 20 per cent, was pegged by the government at 15 per cent at the new year. The government has identified 128 projects worth \$612 million as part of its recovery

Its untainted image and good intentions are already attracting outside investment. Among those in Guyana in the new year having serious talks were American Express and American Airlines.

Jagan believes the government has achieved much in the first 100 days, but he was disappointed about not accomplishing more. He blames this on the time wasted chasing stolen state property after the elections.

With the confidence which the government appears to have generated locally and internationally, the stage is set for prosperity. In these times of world recession, it will be ironic, but not surprising, if Guyana sets a new pace for re-- GEMINI NEWS

NARMALA SHEWCHARAN is a freelance journalist and novelist from Guyana.

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

'It's Time for Relaxation"

Sir, I congratulate you for publishing the thought provoking article "It's Time for Relaxation" (Living, February 7). I take this opportunity to congratulate the contributor of the article Dr Rezina Quddus for her presentation of a subject which is not only timely but also very relevant to our present day life.

A Ahmed Motijheel C/A, Dhaka

Re-employment for

Sir, Has any reader of your esteemed newspaper heard such thing as "re-employment for life" under Government of any developing country? If not he may be sure at least in one case it happened in one of the SAARC countries — Pakistan. Mr Shamsuddin Ahmed, once a Political Secretary to the then Chief Minister late Nurul Amin was appointed Joint Secretary under the Govt of

Pakistan in the Establishment Division. On his attaining the age of retirement, he was allowed extension of service (long after the death of Nurul Amin) for nine years in three consecutive instalments. Lastly, in Oct 1992 the present Prime Minister of Pakistan Mr Nawaz Sharif has been pleased to "re-employ" him as Joint Secretary to the Govt of Pakistan "for life". If the Bangladesh Govern-

ment could emulate such examples many Govt servants could heave a sigh of relief. In many western countries the retirement age is not fixed. The incumbent Govt servant may opt for retirement as he feels. Even if the retirement age is fixed in some cases, it is beyond 70 years.

Could the Government think of extending the services of Govt servants to at least 65 years which is the retirement age of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh.

Abunayeem M Jahed

Bangladesh,

Dhaka-1215

this achievement goes to the government, farmers and krishibids (agriculturists) and every other agencies including the donors who actively worked and provided financial and technical assistances toward realising the target of

> ing problems are acting as barriers in utilization of the field products/agricultural commodities. Due to inadequate storage facilities, the rice farmers are compelled to sell their produce at a cheaper price which cannot even cover their investment costs. Same is the case with jute and vegetables. I think, in order to retain the continuity of the agricultural development, the

emergency basis: (i) Govt should fix the investment costs and return values of major agricultural crops. If necessary, subsidies should be provided for protecting the farmers' monetary interests and to balance the cost-benefit

government need to take the

following measures on an

(ii) Govt have to purchase Retd Deputy Secretary, Govt of all the major agricultural produce and ensure transportation/distribution of these to all

ratios.

parts of the country on the ba sis of area wise demands. The agricultural marketing moni-

(iii) Storage facilities are to be enhanced so that farmers can store their produce at a reasonable price and this facility may be made free for the poor and small farmers.

toring system has to be mod-

ernized and made effective.

(iv) More processing facto ries have to be set up near major vegetable and fruit producing areas. This will also generate rural employment.

(v) Jute sacks are environmentally safe and the demand for jute products are increas ing in the world market. The government must explore further opportunities to export our jute goods to the international market.

(vi) Corruption by any has to be checked effectively so that poor, unlettered farmers do not have to face unjust harass ments in getting agricultural credit, storage facilities, mar keting of agro-products and other necessary services and help from different Govt and private organizations.

Last but not the least, the men behind the plough i.e. the farmers, and the personnel behind the efficient plough management, i.e. krishibids, have to be given proper status and participation in planning, execution and evaluation of the

country's agricultural development programmes as per their need and production strategies.

M Zahidul Haque Assistant Professor, Bangladesh Agricultural Institute, Dhaka

Senile repetition

Sir, A Khulna reader has expressed his 'disgust' (D/Star Jan 16) because he had to read one of my letters in two different periodicals a month apart.

The aggrieved Mr K R 'Zakhmi', perhaps, is not aware of the main purpose of the 'Letters to the Editor' column in newspapers the way most readers take it. It is to bring to the notice of the authorities and to the general public, problems of local, regional, national or even international interest. Even individual cases can be given wide prominence cheaply and efficiently. Just recently, justice was done to an innocent languishing in prison, because someone had the decency to highlight his case in several newspapers.

Two Dhakaites are cease lessly campaigning in most newspapers, one for the commercial exploitation of Cox's Bazar's 'black gold' and the other to bring some sanity to the indiscriminate use of pes-

ticides in our fields. A Chittagonian has been very explicit about reform in our Forestry sector. Unfortunately, none of these have yet borne any fruit. Why not, only the relevant authorities can say, once the democratic sensibililies of accountability penetrate their bureaucratic apathy.

If my occasional forays into journalistic jousts with certain established conventions and/or individuals cause jitteryness, irritability and headaches to some readers, then all I can say is that no one is holding a gun to their heads to read my letters. Nor do I subscribe to the view that the same letter should not be sent to more than one newspaper. Readership of newspapers in Bangladesh is confined to a minimal percentage of our population; so what is the harm if a worthwhile suggestion is spread far and wide? And surely Mr 'Zakhmi' must be one of the very fortunate few who have access to more than one periodical.

Finally, most of our newspapers reproduce news items from local and international organisations like, Reuter, PTI, AFP, BSS, UNB etc which are published verbatim in almost all papers daily! Do these reports, similar in content, cause no distress to Mr 'Zakhmi'?

Quazi Akhlaque uz Azeem, Anderkilla, Chittagong