

Belated, but Good Steps

The high-power national export council, chaired by the Prime Minister on Saturday, took some good steps to stimulate the sluggish export trade of the country.

For instance, the exporters' long-standing demand that they be spared income tax levy at the source is being fulfilled, up to 50 per cent, by the Prime Minister's intervention.

If the export houses do get the other facilities that are being contemplated for them in terms of the Prime Minister's green signals in principle, then, of course, the export business can pick up.

Within the limits of our fiscal kitty concessions need to be showered on an evenly balanced blend of industries with new export promises and those of traditional nature.

Next to the reduction in advance income tax realisation, what we hail as a very good step is the elevation of agro-based farms, dealing in cut-flowers and vegetables, to the status of industries enabling them to draw bank loans among other facilities.

Enduring Spirit

The Lalit Baraat was observed this time amid a gathering gloom in the country's political arena. So divisive has the politics been of late that the people felt genuinely concerned about it.

Can we also take the opportunity to ask our politicians to get imbued with the spirit of Shabe-Baraat. If they had lived by it, a national reconciliation would not have been hard to come by.

The true meaning of the occasion can better be realized if the God's unreserved generosity on the night can be appreciated. Let us hope the devotees have made most of the occasion through prayers.

However this year too the DMP's (Dhaka Metropolitan Police) appeal and instructions for not blasting crackers fell on deaf ears. The concentration of the followers of the faith in prayer was seriously disturbed by the non-stop blasts of crackers.

Crime, Innovative

This is new. Bank robbery western style is gunmen storming a bank working in full swing, take away the cash at gunpoint and clear up the vault by making bankmen open it.

The robbers broke into the bank at night and after killing Aziz, the only guard on duty, rummaged through the establishment and tried to drill their way into the vault. They failed and fled. That they could not set hands on any cash whatsoever may discourage others waiting for the cue.

Insecurity in the villages is, however, a different story. The villages cannot be wholly policed. Rural criminality, specially the violent genres, are a bloody testament to the decline of the social mores and norms that ensure security to an unpoliced multitude of people.

Our villages are dying fast and our cities are not really growing into cities. Poverty and attending degradation and criminality are the only things growing. Any government's first and final test will be in a meaningful appreciation of this malady.

The Return of the Hermit: US-DPRK Relations

by MN Mustafa

The US-DPRK nuclear accord has been ruthlessly criticised in the US. The Republican leaders including Senator Bob Dole criticised the US promise for providing four billion dollars to DPRK for building safer energy source and threatened withholding funds.

ONCE the Japanese imperial rulers considered Korea as a dagger pointed at Japan's soft underbelly. To blunt that dagger they annexed Korea, setting worst example of what an invader could be like.

Ever since 1954 North Korea built itself as a local bastion of what Marxist-Leninist doctrine stood for, used all communist jargons in national and international behaviour and shunned the prodigal capitalist norms.

Moscow and Beijing who got locked themselves in an ideological and border dispute for a long time particularly when Nikita Khrushchev came to power and backed India tacitly on its border dispute with China.

Despite all these, why have DPRK dangled the nuclear sword, the building cost of which she could easily divert for other economic development? The reply lies in single-track arrogated US policy for four decades which sought to reduce recalcitrant DPRK as an international outcast.

collaboration with Japan and ROK. It armed ROK to the teeth, developed it materially as a counter-poise without taking into account the ethical affinity which bounds south with the north.

It is accused that the DPRK developed nuclear technology to blackmail. Partially true, it was the principal weapon with which it wanted to gain some importance — a carrot for bargain and also some kind of deterrent to show the militarily powerful neighbour, ROK, it had reportedly sold scud missiles to the middle east and more were in the pipeline.

capability and already extracted 800 fuel rods enough to make at least five bombs. The US, accused to be the lone policeman in world arena studied the consequences of this looming danger and the nuclear proliferation it could make.

The US-DPRK nuclear accord has been ruthlessly criticised in the US. The Republican leaders including Senator Bob Dole criticised the US promise for providing four

billion dollars to DPRK for building safer energy source and threatened withholding funds. But others rate it as a smart, tough deal which is the result of patient and creative diplomacy.

The writer, former Director General, Radio Bangladesh, now works as Media Advisor, Bangladesh Open University and Correspondent World Broadcast News, New York.

When Water is a More Lethal Weapon than Bombs

Peter Moszynski writes from Montreux

Water as a weapon of war is the subject of a new campaign by the Red Cross. The organisation warns that destruction of water facilities often kills more people than bombs.

THE Red Cross has launched an international campaign against the growing use of water and sanitation as weapons of war.

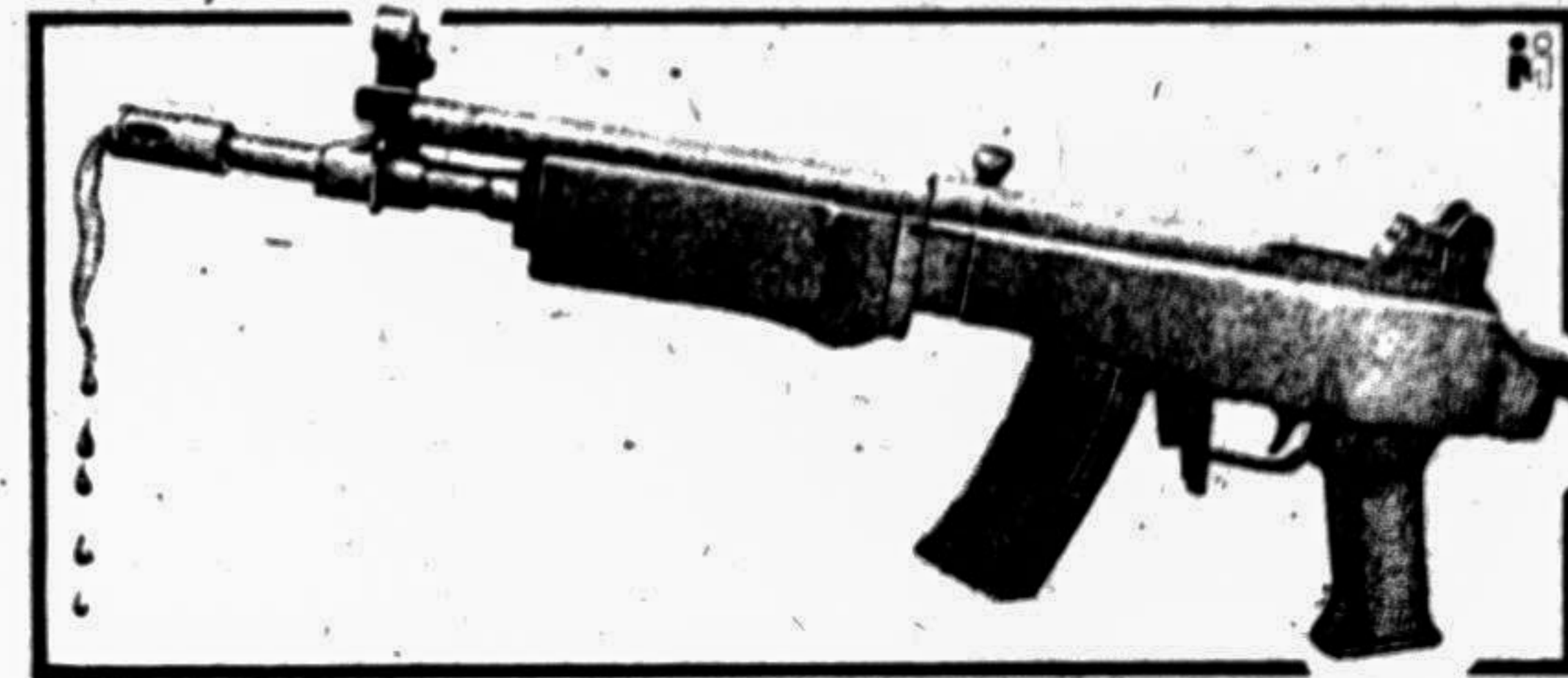
While it is well known that access to water is often a potential cause of conflict, especially between neighbouring riverine states — as in the case of the Nile, Jordan and Senegal rivers — it is not often realised that water can itself be a more lethal weapon than bullets and bombs.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) claims that "the number and severity of modern conflicts have made millions of people victims of a cruel practice which affects their very existence — the shelling and destruction of water facilities, and deprivation of maintenance for those facilities."

We are now facing a situation whereby more people are dying through the effects of water than bullets.

The ICRC says that water systems "are often attacked, destroyed or damaged deliberately for military advantage; as a consequence, standards of hygiene deteriorate, diseases spread and mortality rates increase."

Damage to water and sanitation infrastructures heightens the risk of epidemics. Life-threatening diseases such as cholera, typhoid, hepatitis and dysentery are all linked to inadequate clean water and sanitation. Lack of water for washing increases skin diseases and pests such as ticks



and fleas, which spread diseases like plague and typhus. Thirst, dehydration and diarrhoea add to the misery, as well as being potentially lethal in their own right.

As part of its campaign, the ICRC is calling for humanitarian law to give engineers the same degree of neutrality and protection as doctors and medics, as their repairs to water systems generally save more lives than medical intervention.

Water and sanitation engineers play a vital role in reducing mortality during conflicts, yet their essential humanitarian work is seldom recognised. People need a minimum of 2-3 litres of drinking water each day to stay alive.

front line. The provision of stand pipes, as have been supplied by the Red Cross to Bosnia, often attracts the lethal attention of snipers.

The use of water for offensive purposes is an ancient military strategy. Thirst is a traditional siege technique, and throwing dead bodies down wells to poison them is a method used since Biblical times.

But the increasing sophistication of both warfare and water and sanitation systems have caused a massive rise in water-inflicted fatalities. Another major factor in the rising death toll is urbanisation.

In one region of southern Sudan, only one of the hundreds of "donkey" hand pumps provided by the UN Children's Fund is still functioning, and all water storage facilities have been deliberately destroyed by government armies. Most of

the estimated 1.5 million war-related deaths in the last 12 years have been from disease, hunger and dehydration.

Conflicts now occur more frequently in urban environments such as Sarajevo, Alen, Mostar, Monrovia and Kigali, where complex water systems are hard of fix in combat situations.

Destroying water supplies also means that deaths and illness continue even after peace has broken out.

The US-led bombing offensive against Iraq in the 1991 Gulf War has left a legacy of three times the pre-war incidence of water-borne diseases and related deaths.

Prolonged warfare can destroy decades of development efforts. Disruption of water supplies can make entire communities destitute.

Unlike military facilities, which usually have their own back-up generators, water-pumping and sanitation systems inevitably break down — as they almost always rely on power from the national grid.

The Red Cross points out that "in times of war, water supplies are often interrupted or cut off altogether. Deprivation, contamination, damage or destruction of water supplies can have devastating effects. Sometimes the damage is incidental to the brutal process of war. At other times, tragically, it is quite intentional, despite the fact that such action is prohibited by international law."

The international community may not be seriously interested in reducing the barbarity of modern warfare. The West has hardly set a good example with the doctrine of "Mutually Assured Destruction" adopted in its superpower confrontation with the Soviet Union.

And as the war in Iraq showed, the supposedly civilised nations of the industrialised world are as capable of violating the existing rules of war as the dictators whose they oppose.

Peter Moszynski is a London-based freelance journalist.

To the Editor...

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.

Martyrs and shaheeds

Sir, A certain news item captioned as 'Sena Kaiyan Sangstha Stipend' published on the second page of the 8th January issue of your esteemed daily couldn't but draw my attention. I quote from the first paragraph — 'The Sena Kalyan Sangstha invites applications from the wives and children of the martyrs and ex-servicemen who are studying in various classes of school and madrasah...'

I have no problem regarding the family members of the 'ex-servicemen', but let us look up the family members of the martyrs. Who does Sena Kalyan Sangstha regard as 'martyrs'? I would like to believe them to be the 'braves' who sacrificed their lives during our Liberation War only.

If so, let us do a little calculation. Our Liberation War ended over 23 years ago. So a martyr's child has to be at least 23 years of age. And a wife of a martyr? Can she be below the age of 35? Now my question is, can we imagine a person aged 23 years to remain a student of class IX? And is it possible for

someone of that age to still remain a student of Class VI? Someone may argue that there are non-formal schools in this country, which provide adult education. But as far as I know, none of these non-formal schools provide mark sheets/report cards whatsoever.

It has become common practice now-a-days to call any victim (of even a minor political dispute) a shaheed, which I believe, is hampering the total greatness of the true shaheeds of this country, and also of the word itself. It is painful to see organisations like Sena Kalyan Sangstha making the same mistakes. They may argue that there are many Bangladeshi troops going abroad these days on UN and other missions, where they are also being killed. With all due respect to these brave soldiers, I would say that, these people are usually highly insured, and their families are paid so highly in case of such accidents, that they (families) can do without these petty stipends. Moreover, the education costs up until SSC level is not much high in this country as yet.

So I would like to suggest that, if organisations like Sena Kalyan Sangstha really want to help the families of the martyrs by providing stipends, these should be provided to the children who are studying in higher classes such as medical or engineering colleges, or universities, or to those children who are going for vocational or technical education.

But before that, please stop circulating these absurd no-

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Administration

Sir, Experience or knowledge of good administration and maladministration will streamline the effective administration in the way that people will learn good administration — maladministration will be replaced gradually by good administration. But the problem lies with the identification of maladministration such as corruption, unlawful acts, fraud, wrong order, irrelevant, untenable and unjustified decisions taken by the higher official or tier of officials or committee. Every administrative spot will obviously lead to some kinds of administrative faults causing either loss to the government or injury to the individual public official.

In article 21 of Bangladesh Constitution, it is mentioned that: 1) 'It is the duty of every citizen to observe Constitution and the laws to maintain discipline, to perform public duties and to protect public property.' 2) 'Every person in the service of the Republic has a duty to strive at all times to serve the people.'

It indicates that citizens and public or government officials have a duty to serve the people and they are subject to degrading punishment for any wrong committed by them after judicial review. Hence the violations in all the spots of administration for different varieties of wrongs, faults, corruptions, fraud, irregularities should be identified for satisfactory job opportunity in the

offices. Corruption in appointment is a single term but it includes i) violation of recruitment rule/service rules, ii) selection of non-qualified person, iii) acceptance of forged certificate, iv) issue of interview cards after the lapse of interview date, v) improper scrutiny of application form for interview, vi) forged date of birth, vii) misinterpretation of experiences shown by the candidate etc. Similar corruption, fraud, unlawful activities and favouring partisan activities can occur in fixation of seniority, promotion, grant of leave, medical leave; improper utilisation of budgetary funds etc. Thousands of such wrongs and irregularities may be identified in the offices of 38 ministers and secretaries, more than 100 government departments, 68 DC offices, about 470 TNO offices, 500 others offices, 500 audit offices, 30 corporations, 20 banks and its branches, 15 insurance offices and its branches, even services offices and private mills and factories etc.

If both kinds of administration such as good administration and maladministration could be chalked out in all the spots, it will help all the sectors to gear up good administration for the benefit of the country and the nation. Moreover, detailed knowledge of laws, rules, regulations, ordinances, circulars, office orders, office memo on administration and financial matters is essential for running good and effective administration. And this may be included, say, under head 'Administration Spot' in one page, every week, of The Daily Star. This may also include law reports and judgements passed by the administrative Appellate Tribunals at Dhaka and Bogra, labour courts and District Judge's Courts.

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OPINION

Political Factors and Low Productivity

Shahabuddin Mahtab

Last year the study report of the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry spelled out many disquieting features, which still call for serious consideration by the government, and all major political parties. It stated that during the period 1972-1991, 8.36 million man days were lost for labour disputes and unrest. It revealed that the percentage of strikes due to political factors were as low as 17.6 per cent in the seventies and but rose to 100 per cent in the last part of the eighties. In the face of so many other debilitating reasons leading to our poor productivity, this avoidable factor is man made, and the major political parties cannot absolve themselves from this responsibility. While the private sector including the multinational companies maintained relative calm, the public sector corporations remained volatile. This led to large scale subsidies by the government at the tax payers' cost, just to keep afloat the inefficient public sector companies, which were riddled with burgeoning problems. Our productivity during the last two decades have been continuously declining. And the scene is more or less the same till now.

The market forces, and the import of foreign goods without any restriction, are a real threat to our small manufacturing industries. There is an old adage which says "nurse the baby, protect the child and free the adult". Open market operators have also to take into account the state of our industries and allow selective import restrictions. For instance, the Bangladesh Insulator and Sanitary Factory could only

come to its present state, because the imports were banned in the early eighties.

Now we may look to our other limitations, with a view to eliminating, or at least reducing these. A serious concern for us is the lack of infrastructural facilities such as good roads and communication facilities, the availability of uninterrupted power supply etc. In today's world the most valuable resource of a country is a literate population, well qualified technologists, able managers, top scientists etc. As we have not been able to provide appropriate opportunities to our youth, there appears to be a serious brain drain. We have to create opportunities for the youth, to be the entrepreneurs. Our macro economic reforms, have not yet been able to bring ripples in the micro economic sectors. We have to address ourselves, as to how we can extricate ourselves from the present quagmire. There has to be continuous dialogue, between the government, the management and the labour. Without co-ordinated efforts we cannot aspire to compete with the developed world, or the newly industrialised countries such as Thailand, Malaysia or Indonesia. Even compared to the South Asian countries, we are lagging far behind.

Unfortunately for us, we have an image problem, which is a negative one. Our frequent hijacks and political unrests, frighten our own people, and discourages the would-be donors and the direct foreign investors. The ball is very much in our court, and we have to take the hard decisions, and the right initiatives.