Dhaka, Thursday, March 16, 1995

Wake up to the Groundwater Sign

The groundwater level in more than half of Bangladesh's land mass has registered unprecedented falls - up to an inconceivable 26 meters. The government and other kinds of leaderships should have started having nightmares the morning The Daily Star made it its story of the day - on Tuesday. Thanks to the leaderships' total imperviousness to everything that requires past-school-level knowledge and understanding of the physical state of our country, the bad news has been left to the care of low-level technical hands and their unmoving bureaucratic superiors — and to a press screaming in the wilderness.

We have long been harping on this constant theme of an unliveable and unliving physical reality fast overtaking our dear dank and verdant land without raking up any disquiet seemingly in any quarter. The groundwater low comes both as an undismissable symptom of that process as also as a contribution to it.

The Daily Star report mentions the absence of any contingency plan to face the situation and also of there being no sign either of implementing a recent task force recommendation in the matter. The government, in the interest of sheer survival of us and our posterity, should not dither

about moving into action about both.

The total volume of water, sustained and renewed and running, available to this Gangetic delta, has been declining over the years. This has global and regional contributing factors on top of the very local ones. The local causes are better known but not at all better battled. And the global and regional causes call for researches on a very broad front of earth sciences to be understood in order to be properly addressed. We do not think the government has any thinking along this line. It is behaving exactly as it has done about the very real threats of wider and wider floods; more and more eating erosions and of the entire southern districts submerging with the warming of the biosphere. -

The government's failure to respond to the urgency of the situation will not be forgiven by our progeny.

Signals of State Polls in India

A series of election reversals for India's ruling Congress Party at the state level has made that country's political future quite uncertain. In the latest round of state polls the loss of Gujarat and Maharashtra to the Bharatya Janata Party and the Shiv Sena has dealt a crucial blow to the Congress Party. Most likely the Congress will not recover from this humiliation unless something dramatic happens before the national elections. Earlier defeats in state polls brought about a rift in the party and prominent dissidents like Arjun Singh posed a serious challenge to the Congress leader Prime Minister Narasimha Rao. This latest reversal will only compound that problem.

A weakened Congress Party and the Hindu revivalism have a whole lot of adverse implications not only on India as a secular, advanced and modern country but on its relations with other countries, particularly its neighbours. The immediate casualty of course is going to be the reform process now underway. Immediately after taking the oath of office, Manohar Joshi, the second man in the Shiv Sena hierarchy, has sent alarming signals. Not only his party wants to change the name of India's commercial city, Bombay but also would like to drive out 'illegal immigrants' from that city. The immigrants, according the party, are from Bangladesh and Pakistan. The other campaign for replacing English with Marathi as the state's official language is going to draw popular support.

Obviously the Hindu revivalist parties have set their eyes on the power at the centre. The task may not as yet be easy for those parties. But there is also a no-win situation for the Congress in the national elections. This is exactly where the political uncertainties in India stem from. But India needed a stable government at the centre not only for it to complete the reform process it had started, but also to continue with its secular and liberal politics. In that task we consider no other party to be an alternative to the Congress. Internecine feuds will sap the party of its re maining strength. Considering the price India will have to pay in case the country falls in the hands of religious fundamentalists, the Congress should resolve the internal bickering and think hard about ways to overcome the loss of its image.

A Thousand Death-traps

A loss of a million Taka a year is less than paltry for such gigantic organisations as the Dhaka City Corporation or the Dhaka WASA, specially when the bill is shared by the two. That is roughly the price of about 1000 manhole covers that are stolen every year from the streets and lanes of Dhaka. And these coverless manholes are each a veritable death trap, posing a dire threat to thousands of road-users if not of death at least of injury resulting in maining. This concerns us seriously and should be a constant headache for those two authorities who maintain the sewers.

Sources close to WASA say that round the clock guarding of the manholes are impracticable and as such public awareness was the only insurance against the vanishing covers. Anyone knowing the present state of society even by a small pinch would say if the former is not practicable the later is unrealistic to the power. If orime on roads were amenable to public opinion, there were a lot more urgent candidates to be eased from mugging to rash driving. Besides, the attitude betrays the mind of an agency not quite

knowing its business and trying to pass the buck. Is it beyond fin de siecle technology to develop a pilferproof manhole-cover? That cannot be. Each piece may cost substantially more than the running rate of Tk 1000. But even a Tk 5000 price tag is worth paying if that can buy hole-free roads.

We are simply nurturing manhole-cover theft may be for the simple reason that it doesn't cost much or that its elimination would not come to anyone's profit. The real loss lies elsewhere correctly computed it may come to tens of crores.

Least Governance is Not Always the Best

have no intention to do This is worse still, because a government must not only any injustice to its prolonged come clean on an issue of such reputation for sitting on probgravity but also take remedial lems and desperately bringing measures well in advance to its acts together at the last avoid large-scale scarcity of moment when things are out foodgrains and the related adof control. That it has hapverse impact on their prices. pened in the country's fractious politics is for every body to see. But allowing it to make

HE government of Beg-

need to accuse the newspapers

for serving their readers with

lies. If the newspapers were

publishing false reports, they

could surely be taken to the

court for punishment. There is

no reason to think that the

government likes false report-

That was the beginning

The drought caused food

shortage but the government

was in no mood to admit the

shortfall. It had all through

been claiming that the country

had plenty of food reserve and

the harvest did not give any

cause to be unduly concerned

But as the price of rice contin-

ued to register newer heights.

the people panicked and the

government had no way but to

admit there was a shortfall in

cereal production. All its ear

lier assurances proved to be

false when the government

looked for international mar

ket to make up for the cereal

shortage. The administration

alle hor make campt an ellipte th

time to tide over the food cri-

sis that was looming so threat

eningly and many had warned

of. Not only did it refuse to ac

cept the truth - it perhaps even did not make any serious

attempt to know about it: it is

also blamable for keeping

ours the traders took the

fullest advantage of this. It was

made easier by the govern-

ment's hasty decision to do

away with the system of paddy

procurement. Now the traders

were able to unchallengingly

manipulate the market. And

that explains the unstoppable

price hike of not only rice but

of almost all agricultural pro-

duces. Today the government's

last-moment salvage operation

such as the open sale of food-

grains at a fixed price is prov-

ing too little, too late. Even if

we want to give the govern-

ment the benefit of doubt that

it is not total inefficiency that

blinded its vision of what was

to come after floods and the

severe drought, we cannot

help thinking it was too com-

placent to assess the reality.

ANKIND is at its closest point to welcome a world free of polio.

Rotarians of the world have

been working since 1979 to

accomplish "a dream of pro-

tecting all the world's children

from a cruel, crippling disease,

poliomyelitis". Rotary's in-

volvement in polio eradication

began in 1979, when Rotary

International funded a 3H

(Health, Hunger and Human-

ity) project to protect six mil-

lion children in the Philip-

pines against polio. In 1985,

The Rotary Foundation of Ro-

tary International launched the

single largest project in the

history of Rotary - 'a bold new

commitment to rid the world

of polio". Millions of children

in the world today are alive

and enjoying normal, life with

health and happiness because

of Rotary's Polio Plus pro-

gramme and "now the world

has set its hopes on ending the

threat of this disease once and

The Disease

One may not know that

behind fever, cold and heada-

che of a child is hidden the

cruel scourge - which takes

away 111,000 lives every year

and 250,000 more bear its

effects throughout their lives.

In the developing world, this

often reduces a person to live

as a beggar. "A child wakes

with a fever or headache. Par-

ents hope it is just cold but the

next day, young legs or arms

are stiff. Slowly, the inexorable

truth is acknowledged. It is

polio. The paralysis is per-

manent. Their lives forever

altered." A little boy, Luis

Fermin Terorio of Pichanaqui,

Junin, Peru, one day in August

1991 awake with what appe-

ared to be a summer cold but

24 hours later his legs were

paralyzed. It was polio. For-

tunately Luis is the last polio

victim in the western hemi-

The Treatment

ment. To children, this vac-

Oral vaccine is the treat-

sphere.

for all".

ANKIND is at its clo-

In a sellers' market like

people in the dark.

ing or it is unduly lenient.

um Khaleda Zia seems tô

The price is shooting up and nobody knows where it will an inroad into all means of As if it was not enough. To ensuring food for the popumake the matter worse has lation at a reasonable price is most likely to be considered come on the heels the fertil izer crisis. Here the goverthe greatest failure of this nance by default is even more government. The scarcity of glaring. This is because the food and fertilizer and their country produces 21 lakh price escalation are hurting tonnes of fertilizer - urea to the people most and they are be precise — as against an esnot going to forget the government failure to distimated annual requirement of 16 lakh tonnes. Wonder of charge its responsibility. At a time when the coun wonders, with a surplus of five try's north suffered successive lakh tonnes of this chemical fertilizer the country is facing bouts of flood and drought, a serious problem with the the government kept its hands withdrawn. Even newspaper commodity at a crucial time. Here is a classic case of a govreports on famine in a wide ernment failing itself by its inarea of the north only drew the judicious decision and lack of government's customary revision. Also the government sponse. Not only did it repeatedly deny the onset of any kind has long stayed warned. But it of famine but went on to harphas perhaps preferred to become blind and deaf on the ising on its favourite note. What sue. Its policy of unending dewas however strange is the fact lay and shirking responsibility that the government felt no

> Now is the time for IRRI cultivation. It is common knowledge this particular variety of paddy is absolutely dependent on chemical fertilizer

crease people's sufferings.

is reaping the harvest it should. No one had any com-

plaint if it did not affect the

country's production and in-

One is right to smell rat in the development that brings the fertilizer crisis to coincide with the cultivation season of IRRI. But here was chance for substantially making up for the crop failure due to drought in the Aman cultivation season. Instead, the government is now accused of favouritism in the selection of dealers charged with the responsibility of distributing fertilizer at Tk 230 a 50-kg-bag. The favour, reportedly, is distributed among the members of the ruling party. However, the irony is that the party men are bringing the BNP government to disrepute. Worse still, it is earning a bad name for the privatisation process. How?

simble anguends straight and Bangladesh Agricultural Devel opment Corporation (BADC) that distributed fertilizer among the farmers. The donors suggested that the responsibility be handed over to private hands. It was done and ever since the move was made a couple of years back, it has simply gone all the way wrong There has been widespread allegation of malpractice in lifting and distributing the commodity. Genuine dealers were subjected to all kinds of harassment, intimidation and coercion at several points before making it to their destination with the lifted fertilizer from the mills. With the inclusion of nonprofessional and partisan dealers the programme has fallen further apart. Still more alarming are the reports that fertilizer is being smuggled out of the country. It is plausible too. Either it is a case of hording by traders/dealers or smuggling has to explain the shortage of the commodity The production of fertilizer did not suffer in any way. Whatever the case, the artifi-

cial crisis of fertilizer or not,

the higher price - in places

almost double the officially

by Nilratan Halder fixed rate - is not going to earn the government many a sympathiser

> Not surprisingly: infuriated farmers have gone to the extent of clashing with the men responsible for distribution of fertilizer and even looting the item from trucks in broad daylight. They know how affected they will be if they cannot apply this much-needed soil nutrient to their lands. They will compare between the delivery systems by the BADC and the private dealers. Those opposing privatisation will find it easy to apportion blame on the privately managed system and will receive sympathetic ears from the farmers. The government will indeed be credited with making privatisation programme unpopular with the farmers. But the creation of an artificial crisis through

manipulative means has nothing to do with privatisation. It is the lack of government's proper role in curbing the illegal manipulation that is to

The question one might ask if the government has picked up the idea that the best governance is the one that governs less. Unfortunately, the government is in no mood of doing so where it really should exercise less power and influence. There is the inconsistency. Moreover, less governance needs a lot of home work and ground preparation. Without creating that base, where competition will be the virtue and market forces rather than dishonest traders will dictate terms, the government's supervisory role cannot be dispensed with. The BNP government seems to have miserably failed on that

Looking Back at

March towards Independence March 16, 1995

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, on invitation from General Yahva Khan, went to the President House in Dhaka to discuss with General Yahya. At this time. Sheikh Mujib was accompanied by a few members of his advisory committee - Syed Nazrul Islam. Tajuddin Ahmad. Khondoker Mushtaq Ahmed. Mansoor Ali. A H M Quamruzzaman, and Dr Kamal Hossain. The discussion at the President House, beginning at 10:27 am, was over at 1:00 pm, when Sheikh Mujib came out of the House, and said to about 200 journalists then waiting outside: We have told Yahya Khan about our demands. The discussion has only begun. Yahya Khan is now holding a meeting with his

in the afternoon, a slogan-charged procession went by the President House: the procession consisted of the common people and the student activists of the Chhatra League.

The Descripted an account of a press conference addressed by Zulfigar Ali Bhutto who was quoted as saying that he had all the support for the withdrawal of Martial Law and for the transference of power to the elected representatives of the people. At a public meeting organised in Khulna by Bangla Jatiya League, the leaders emphatically demanded that Sheikh Mujib should now move on to form a national government within 48 hours.

(Compiled by Urmee Hussain)

Untying the Gordian Knot of Our Politics

A SERIES OF INTERVIEWS AND ARTICLES ON THE CURRENT POLITICAL CRISIS

'Caretaker Govt and Sovereign EC — Need of the Hour'

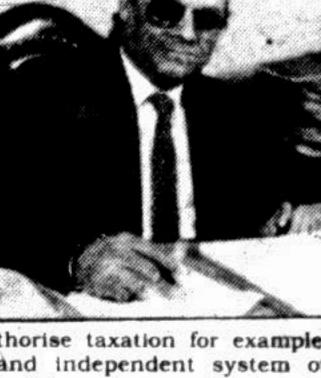
building parliamentary democracy on an autocratic mould lies at the root of the current political crisis. The central point at issue is, obviously, the future of parliamentary democracy which started off in this country in the late 1930s with an elected Chairman of the District Board as the head of the district local government and an elected person as head of a ministry at the centre.

Ayub Khan changed everything after he usurped power in 1958. He replaced "parliamentary democracy" by his own hybrid creation named "basic democracy". The elected head of the district local government was replaced by a civil servant called the deputy commissioner. At the centre, a civil servant called the secretary became the head of the ministry taking the place of the minister.

Over the years all those autocratic institutions have not only remained intact, those have been further fortified during the successive autocratic regimes. In the process, the slavery of the people has been complete and now an ordinary civil servant rules the district as "Jilla Proshashak" and another rules over the thana as

Thanagoverhand can absolve its responsibility for such a crisis. More so when it does nothing in four years to break from the autocratic past.

According to John Locke government is the civil ruler or the sovereign with power entrusted to it by the people through formation of political societies. All sovereigns. therefore, owe their power to the original social contracts made at the dawn of history and "consent" of the ruled remains to be the only title of the ruler to rule. He summed up the rights of man as life, liberty and property. The enforcement of these rights entailed certain necessary institutions: a representative assembly of taxpayers to au-



thorise taxation for example: and independent system of judiciary to ensure that no innocent man was ever penalised by the State. To dispense with such institutions is to forsake liberty and enthrone dictatorship. Locke went to the extent of denying the name of law to the enactments not established by the participation of every part of the body politic representing the bonds of the society as a trust when he said:

"For laws not being made for themselves, but to be by theirs every torkets every part of the body politic in its due place and function, when that totally ceases, the government visibly ceases, and the people become a confused multitude without order or connexion. Where there is no longer the administration of justice for the protection of men's rights. nor any remaining power within the community to direct the force or provide for the necessities of the public. there is certainly no government left.

In these and like cases where the government is dis solved, the people are at liberty to provide for themselves by erecting a new legislative. differing from the other by the change of persons or form or both as they shall find it most for their safety and good. For the society can never by the fault of another lose the native and original right it has to preserve itself, which can only be done by a settled legislative,

by Mohammed Abu Hena Secretary General,

PROKRICHI-BCS Central Council

and a fair and impartial exe

cution of the laws made by it."

In the light of John Locke's observation one may ask, is there in this country a comprehensive representative body of tax payers to authorise taxation? Asked that way it deserves an answer. It is said that the members of the parliament who abstained from the parliament for last one year represent 69% of the voters who cast votes in the last election. From that point of view it may be said that the present par liament which is an one party parliament represents only 31% of the people's trust and consent. Then comes the second question: Has the government been able to execute bonds of the society keeping every part of the body politic in its due place and function? The answer, for obvious reasons, is in the negative. Independence of the judiciary has been agitated even by the Chief Justice of the country, but to no avail. Consent of the ruled is totally absent in the local covernments viz, the districts

In the absence of any clarity about the future events to follow, the people seem to be 'a confused multitude without order or connexion". Every thing seem to be "inconstant, uncertain and unknown."

John Locke has very precisely suggested what seems to be the way out from such a situation. The consent of the ruled is a must for the ruler to rule. To obtain the consent in a representative form of democracy a free, fair and impartial election is the only way. This country has also seen a class of civil servants engaged in the anti-people activities including election frauds, vote rigging and suppression of the people's rights. The indispensable prerequisite to a free and fair

such people away from the election arena. The second requirement is to conduct the election by a neutral government which will have no direct or indirect stakes in the election. The third requirement is a code of conduct to be en forced rigidly. Proper, and upto-date electoral roll is a must and identity cards can certainly help identify the citizens not only for election purpose but also for many other civic requirements.

At present, in the interest

of the bureaucracy, even the

most basic governmental func-

tions have been ritualised to an

absurd degree. This hothouse

atmosphere may produce some

monstrous fruit unless the proper place of individual citizens is recognised and established as the legitimate basis of government. According to Tom Paine, the individuals themselves, each in his own personal and sovereign right, entered into a compact with each other to produce a government: and this is the only mode in which governments had a right to arise, and the only principle in which they have a right to exist. Appropriate conditions, therefore, must have to be created so that all individuals in their personal and sovereign right can enter into a 'compact' with each other to produce a government neutral caretaker government and a sovereign Election Commission free from all interference of the administrative branch of the government, can enable the individual citizens to enter into such a 'compact' through a free and fair election. The sooner it is materialised, better will be the prospects of overcoming the present crisis. Any further lingering of the present uncertainty will, in any event, disqualify a government to continue in office and the people, as Locke said, shall be at liberty to provide for themselves the change "they shall find it most for their safety and good."

National Immunisation Day

Rotary Dreams of a World without Polio

by Rtn M Mosharraf Hossain

cine looks like a little white sugar pill. This is a vaccine infused pill, pulverised and spoon-fed to infants (0-5 years of age), two doses four to six weeks apart. Poliomyelitis is transmitted from child to child mainly through foecooral route. There is no insect vector or animal carrier of the disease. Oral polio vaccine produces both humoral and gut immunity and displaces wild polio virus.

Effective Strategy

National Immunisation Day had been considered as the effective strategy for providing all out coverage of polio immunisation at national level The strategy for polio eradication consists of three objectives: 1) High coverage with Oral Polio Vaccine (OPU); 2) Effective surveillance systems to identify and investigate all possible polio cases; 3) Conduct supplementary immuni-

Many countries of the world have already initiated and conducted NID. Included are China, Philippines, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Pakistan, India (partial), Iran, Thailand. Polio has been eradicated in South and Central America by using NID approach. In China, the first round NID was launched on December 1994, the second on January 5, 1995 and 100 million children were immunised.

In Vietnam, National Immunisation Days were conducted on November 13-15 and December 18-20, 1993. Ten million children under age five each received two doses of OPV. In India, National Immunisation Days were

Rotary volunteers numbering over 50,000 are continuing to play a key role in India's immunisation force. In 1995, 38 nations plan to administer polio vaccine to more than 200 million children during National Immunisation Days

NIDs in Bangladesh In order to eradicate polio

from Bangladesh by the year 2000, the government took a decision to conduct National Immunisation Days (NIDs) in the first meeting of the National Steering Committee on NID held on December 5. 1994 under the chairmanship of Minister for Health and Family Welfare Mr Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yousuf. The dates were fixed as March 16 and April 20, 1995. This will be repeated in 1996 and 1997. The objective of NIDs, as announced: "Eradication of poliomyelitis is a part of global programme. Primary task is administer of oral polio vaccine to all children under five years irrespective of earlier vaccine/resident status, in one

single day." in rural areas, all existing outreach sites and in urban cities, additional outreach sites will be used to cover the population. All hospitals, health complex and other fixed health facilities will remain open on the days to offer vaccination services. Health and Family Planning Staff. Rotary and other social organisation volunteers have been mobilised to administer the polio vaccine,

record keeping and bringing children from the houses. An estimated 17-20 million children will be immunised in carried out in specific areas. three consecutive NIDs in

Bangladesh. A total cost of 3.88 million in 1995, 4.20 million in 1996 and 5.01 million in 1997 have been envisaged. The Rotary Foundation of Rotary International has committed 4.8 million (1.6 million each year) to the budget of NIDs in Bangladesh. The other contributors are WHO. UNICEF and Government of Bangladesh. With around 80 per cent success now, Bangladesh can hope to bring the coverage up to near hundred percent and it can join in the polio free world.

Background of Rotary's Programme

One of the important programmes of Rotary Foundation which provides direction for large and global programmes. is the Health, Hunger and Humanity (3H) Grants. The grant is designed to improve health. alleviate hunger and enhance human and social development as a means of advancing inter national understanding, goodwill and peace. Rotary Foundation funded a 3-H project in 1979 in the Philippines to protect six million children from Polio. The success of their first ever grant gave rise to further request for fund. In 1985, the programme was responsible for the distribution of 38 million doses of vaccine of various types in the developing world. This has prompted the Rotary Foundation to the

creation of Polioplus pro-In order to achieve success in this worldwide programme. Rotary joined hands with government and international health agencies such as the World Health Organization

(WHO), the Pan American

Health Organization (PAHO). and the United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF). "The PLUS in Poliplus is the benefit expected to arise from the campaign beyond the drive against polio, because the drive to eliminate polio dramatises the need for worldwide immunisation ef forts against vaccine-preventable disease that kill more than five million children annually." The Plus are: measles. diphtheria, tuberculosis, tetanus and perutsis (whooping cough). The polioplus campaign aims at strengthening primary health delivery system, educate parents the need for immunisation and supplement supplies of non-polio vaccines

Funding

The Rotary Foundation pledged in 1985 to raise US\$120 million from Rotarians, public and private sources However, till day the Rotary Foundation raised more than US\$240 million. The funds are being used to purchase and deliver polio vaccine to immune 100 million children annually.

Success of Polioplus Programme

Immediately after the programme was launched, Rotary had two initial successes, In Mexico, 32 million doses of vaccine and 900 refrigerators to keep the vaccines viable were provided by the Rotary Foundation More than 400 Mexican Rotary Clubs were involved in two national days of polio immunisation and about 12 million children were immunised against polio Polio vaccine, for a five year campaign to immunise 15 million

children was purchased with a US\$2.1 million grant from the Rotary Foundation in Turkey in September, 1985. 2,500 Turkish Rotarians managed immunisation posts in 27 cities. They provided equipment, fuel, transport, official work and lunches for the medical

volunteers. The world's 27,000 Rotary Clubs celebrated with joy their effectiveness and contribution as partners in a historic medical milestone announced on September 29, 1994 at the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO) Washington DC headquarters. Led by Nobel Laureate Dr Fredrick Robbins. an international commission of distinguished scientists offi cially certified that the western hemisphere was polio free.

Mission for Polio Eradication Through the Polioplus Pro-

gramme. The Rotary Founda-

tion of Rotary International supports the World Health Organisation's (WHO) Polio Eradication Initiative, in cooperation with UNICEF, the Pan American Health Organisation, national governments, the US Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, Task Force for Child Survival and Development and other organisations. To succeed, nations will need to sustain high child immunisation levels, maintain disease surveillance, contain polio outbreak and establish laboratory networks. Rotary is working to ensure that there are no more polio victims ever any where on earth. Rotary International urges every government, and every parent to take every possible measure to ensure that polio is eradicated." A worldwide service organisation with 1.2 million Rota rians. 27 000 Clubs launched an effort to ccadicate police even before the experts belte ved it possible

The writer is District Goe ernor R / District 3280 Ba ngladesh