Dhaka, Friday, March 17, 1995

Fertiliser Bungling

As the events in Tangail and Sherpur showed on Wednesday, the fertiliser crisis has erupted in an ugly tashion touching off a limited, but potentially an explosive, peasants' unrest. The backlash of the deep-seated problem may have only begun. The government will have difficulty containing it; because it is plugged in its heels.

College student Atiq's death in police firing and the wounds inflicted on several farmers and some policemen, as matters came to a head, near the Ghatail food godown were a pointer enough to a simmering situation. Even more message-oriented were the attempts at taking away fertiliser, the snatching of a rifle from a policeman at Ghatail, a half-day hartal in Sherpur, a sevenhour barricade on a highway and the encirclement of the TNO's office. These are no signs of an ordinary law and order breakdown capable of being held off in the future without removing the root cause of it.

It is a bread and butter question for farmers. The Irri-Boro season is of only 3 months' duration. They do not have the fertiliser to cultivate these varieties of rice in a minimum quantity and a fair price. They counted on such crops to have something to feed them with following the huge Aman crop deficit. Besides, they have gotten so used to fertiliser over the years, knowing how it works on the soil, that their sense of deprivation looks complete. If the farmers suffer another crop failure they can't have the money to buy food from the government either.

It is a conventional necessity and a routine drill for the government to keep a buffer-stock of fertiliser for three months. This seems to have been ignored for short-term foreign exchange gain through exports shockingly trivialising production schedules. Even if the factories would run over-time they could not hope to meet even a partial demand and the imports would also take their time. The neighbouring countries maintain their buffer-stocks and may not like to part anything at this time of the year.

This is a serious situation, calling for, in over view, two urgent steps by the government. Let there be a thorough investigation to find out coordination lapses among the ministries of commerce, industry and agriculture. Secondly, the government should feel obliged to give full details of the fertiliser situation. We would like to be proved wrong on some points.

Birthday of a Giant

It is a happy coincidence that the birthday of the leader of our liberation war and the highest point of his life's achievement came about in this month. March 17 welcomed a baby in the quiet hamlet of Tungipara, who was destined to shape the nation's fate through his uncompromising struggle for his people's rights. It was again in the tumultuous and decisive March days in 1971 that the supreme leader of the Bangalee people brought them the most prized present ever their liberation.

In fact Sheikh Mujib's rise to fame throughout the Pakistani days is a most necessary prologue to our independence. He played the prime role in galvanising our national ethos. He has all through been a part all the movements that occurred during the Pakistan days. All this he could do because he was a people's man, a leader who could feel the nation's pulse. But then popularity was not his only plus point. He had that enviable quality of character that happily blends a strong will with love for the common people and the land; sincerity of purpose with enough dedication to pursue it up to the realisation of the goal.

Regrettably though, there has been a consistent attempt at the state-level to ignore his contributions as the country's founder. History does not tell a lie. Not to acknowledge the debt the nation owes him is virtually a refusal to accept history. So when his anniversary of birth or death goes unnoticed by the administration, it is not only painful but glaringly exposes our narrow mindedness as well. By denying the official recognition to him, can we really benefit? Let this question be answered; and the sooner the

This time we really wanted to see a change in the official line. Our hope was kindled by the homage paid to Bangabandhu's mazar in Tungipara by our prime minister. But the official silence continues to confuse us. We wish to see an end to this to build a better Bangladesh.

Child Potential

In sports and games there is a dictum, "Catch them young". As a matter of fact, this applies to all areas of life. Wherever the principle has been respected, amazing results could be achieved. At a time when the country's children are suffering from widespread malnutrition and neglect, some people somewhere are thinking of expanding their mental horizon through cultural initiation. Indeed, we know more of the physical deficiencies than of the mental malnourishment of our children. So it is good to know that a national theatre festival has been organised specially for the children upto 14 years of age. Organised by the People's Theatre Association, the festival is being held at the Shilpakala Academy.

In Bangladesh, let it be recorded, young talents have a better chance of realising their potential in the cultural arena than in the track or gymnasium. Thanks to some of our initiatives, we have indeed been able to find a few prodigies in this area. Whether it is in dance, song or acting, these young performers look like beating their seniors. So there is a healthy cultural current running against the more aggressive intrusion of alien culture, courtesy of the satellite TV. Theatre is one area where the children have left the mark of their talent. In this respect the holding of a theatre festival ought to receive all the patronage and

encouragement we can give.

This happy development is however not without some blemish. We have noticed that politics has made its undesirable interference with the fruition of our young one's talent. Sometimes political considerations and divisions vitiate the otherwise heavenly world of children, including their cultural pursuits. Even if this is not enough to ruin their nice little world, there is the constraint of not tending the genius to a mature culmination when they grow up. This needs a plan, one that does not bend the prodigies to our limitations but allow them to realise their full potential later in life. The festival now being held may provide, even though in a small measure, such an opportunity. We will be looking forward to more such events.

Sheikh Mujib: The Man of Destiny

If not the government, the people whom he loved and who loved him - observe the 75th birth anniversary of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, lovingly called Bangabandhu, by the grateful nation.

HE assassins thought they had hit upon a very clever idea. By burying the body of Sheikh Mujib in an obscure village in the interior of Gopalganj they thought they would consign the man to obscurity. Obviously the killers had no idea about either the greatness of the man or the enormity of their crime. They could not have foreseen the vast procession of men and women converging every year towards that very obscure village to pay homage to the man who, they believe. gave them the dignity of free citizens in an independent state of their own. Indeed, the memory of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is not dinimed by the passage of time. With every passing year the throng gets larger.

Bangabandhu was born on 17 March, 1920. He would be 75 on this day this year if he was living. In making the pilgrimage to his birth place and grave side in Tungipara I have pondered over the question of why do we revere the memory of this man with such intensity of emotion? Which qualities in his character exercise such a magical spell on the people and draw them to him even two decades after his death? Is it because he was a great orator or because he was the President of Bangladesh when the conspirators gunned him down on 15 August, 1975 or is it beçause he won a landslide victory in the crucial general election of 1970?

It is difficult to pinpoint the precise reason for the place he has earned in our hearts as well as in our history. The real reason, in my view, is that he touches a responsive chord deep down in our national psyche involving our very identity as Bangalees. Thanks to him, today we can proudly take our place in the world forums as a nation equal in status to other free nations. Despite the false, mean-spirited and misleading propaganda campaign carried out against him since August 1975, most people of this country know in their heart of hearts that but for Sheikh Mujib they might still be under alien boots. It is this realisation that might be the main reason for the spontaneous recognition being accorded by a grateful nation to his unparalleled contributions.

What are those contributtions? First and foremost. I would say. Sheikh Mujib gave a sense of direction to the Bangalees drifting like a rudderless boat in stormy political waters. We were being ruled and exploited by the Pakistani ruling elite who used religious slogans to silence dissent and opposition. Of course, we have had great leaders in the past who dominated the political stage for decades. Sher-e-Bangla Fazlul Huq, for example, made significant contributions to a backward nation, particularly in expanding educational opportunities. Maulana Bhashani, a populist leader, fought long and hard for the peoples' cause and articulated their problems. But it was Bangabandhu Sheikh Muiib who gave expression to the innate yearnings of the people for independence and a separate national identity. More than anyone else in our history, he symbolised our national aspirations.

His six-point formula, though it appears so simple and even modest in retrospect, was a powerful charter for self-determination. The masses of the Bangalees correctly sensed that the six points were but a stepping stone to independence. Interestingly enough, the Pakistani ruling elite also sensed it and hence their hostility to Sheikh Mujib and his six-point was so bitter. In order to discredit him they tried to tap the latent pool of communal sentiment by concocting the Agartala conspiracy case. We all know how it backfired. The nation was not fooled. They stood by Sheikh Mujib despite the skilful propaganda campaign launched by the Pakistani rulers. They did have, one has to admit with regret, their collaborators. among the Bangalees. Some of these elements are still active in our political field. After all, the communal sentiment and fear of Indian domination was aroused and used by these very forces against Sheikh Mujib's daughter, Sheikh Hasina, during the 1991 election campaign. Fortunately for the nation, these machinations against Sheikh Mujib failed.

The machinations by the communal forces failed in 1970-71 because Sheikh Mujib had mobilised and organised the nation as no one had done

the finest political organiser that the nation has had until now. By dint of hard work and a down-to-earth 'approach he won the people's trust Countless villagers fondly recall to this day the presence of this legendary figure in their midst. There are few thanas and unions that he has not visited. He had a fantastic capacity to remember names. No one knows how many names of his admiring compatriots he carried in his memory. He remembered their names because he cared for each of them. He was undoubtedly a

charismatic personality but

more than the charisma it was

his honesty, simplicity and ac-

cessibility which made the

most profound impression on

the most humble party worker.

The organisation that he built

up was durable enough to

stand up to and survive the

brutal assault of the occupation

forces. It proved to be a crucial

and decisive factor during the

nine traumatic months of the

Liberation War. A government

could emerge to take up the

leadership of the struggle

which the people accepted

and obeyed willingly. This, I

must note, was a tremendous

achievement. The party struc-

ture remained intact even dur-

ing his long incarceration in a

overlooked is Bangabandhu's

role in laying the foundation of

Bangladesh as a nation state.

However weak and flawed it

was, Pakistan had an ideologi-

cal basis. Islam was to be the

cementing bond for that na-

tion. Even in the early fifties

Bangabandhu had the liberal

outlook, foresight and vision to

realise that communal and re-

a strong enough substitute for

the fundamental factors which

make a nation. Language and

literature, culture, shared his-

tory, a common heritage and

geographical unity were the

basic ingredients of our na-

tionhood. By shedding, in the

early fifties, the divisive reli-

gious label from the Awami

League against much opposi-

tion he introduced a qualitative

change in our politics. It was

because of this wise and far-

sighted step that the

Bangladesh Awami League

could become a truly national

party and effectively serve as a

rallying point for all those

fighting for economic and po-

litical freedom. Thus it was

Sheikh Mujib who truly united

a nation which earlier rulers

had sought to divide along

When the time came to

fight for the motherland we

did not have to grope for a

philosophy to underpin our

struggle. Thanks to Sheikh

Mujib it was already there.

There was no need to argue

that through a thousand-year

long process of historical evo-

lution the Bangalees living in

this green delta that is

Bangladesh had become a ho-

mogeneous nation. The blood

that they shed proved the

cised for his decision to for-

give the collaborators. It is easy

to be wise in hindsight. Now

one can see that the collabora-

tors deserved to be punished

for their misdeeds. They did

not deserve forgiveness. One is

understandably troubled by the

fact that Bangabandhu's kind-

ness was not only not recipro-

cated but was repaid with vio-

lence by these treacherous

elements who struck at him'at

the first opportunity. But we

must not judge Bangabandhu in

the light of the conduct of

others whose character and

values are miles apart from

qualification. He had an almost

mystical belief that his right to

lead them and rule them was

derived from this bond of love

and affection that existed be-

tween him and his people. His

decision to forgive the collabo-

rators must be seen in that

context. He saw them as

Bangalees who were weak and

misguided and who did not

have the strength of character

to stand up to the might of the

alien rulers. Of course he did

not forgive the rapists, arson-

ists and murderers who should

have been tried under the law.

Here I would add a footnote to

suggest that Bangabandhu's le-

gal advisers at the time failed

him in not suggesting special

legislation to bring collabora-

tors to trial in special tri-

bunals. The inordinate delay in

disposing of cases created the

impression that the govern-

ment was not seriously pursu-

ing these cases. This lapse had

exposed Bangabandhu to most

unjustified criticism for an ac-

tion which reflected nothing

but the greatness of the man.

Every individual who came into

contact with him felt the

warmth and glow of his affec-

tion. I have personally wit

He loved the people without

those held by him.

Bangabandhu is often criti-

point beyond any doubt.

ligious sentiments could not be

A basic point that is often

He was Mujib Bhai even to

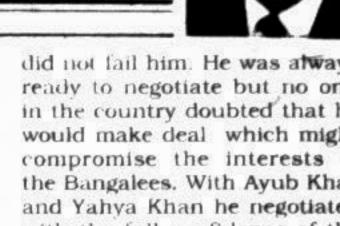
the people.

Pakistani jail

nessed him weeping bitterly and unabashedly when a poor village woman narrated to him. in gruesome detail, how her EPR jawan husband was killed by the Pakistani soldiers. Love of his people and kindness to fellow human beings were integral part of his character and personality

Yet when it came to the question of the basic national issues he stood firm like a rock. The nation instinctively knew that here was a man who would not betray their cause. Indeed even when the enemy was digging his grave in front of his prison cell his courage

ON THE RECORD by Shah A M S Kibria



did not fail him. He was always ready to negotiate but no one in the country doubted that he would make deal which might compromise the interests of the Bangalees. With Ayub Khan and Yahva Khan he negotiated with the full confidence of the nation. Indeed though he continued to negotiate with Yahya Khan till the last moment but no one has ever suggested that he might have yielded on any basic point under pressure. It is this faith that the nation reposed in his integrity that distinguishes him from other politicians. The people knew that the nation's interests were safe in his hands.

It is only much later, after the collaborators had regrouped and reinforced themselves, that a whispering campaign of calumny was launched to malign him. His achievements were either deliberately minimised or distorted Indeed, under the Zia regime a curtain was drawn on his achievements. Instead. false and concocted stories about him and his family members were spread through officially sponsored propaganda to undermine his image. The time. in my view, has come to clear the cobweb and tell the present generation the truth about our struggle for independence and the role that Sheikh Mujib played as the leader of this historic struggle. Let us, on the occasion of his 75th birth anniversary pay our homage to the Father of the Nation. We can never repay the debt that the nation owes him but at least we can acknowledge his contributions with gratitude.

Looking Back at

March towards Independence

March 17, 1971

The NAP chief Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, while addressing a public meeting in Chittagong, said: "The question of compromise between Sheikh Mujib and General Yahya does not arise at all. I don't know much about communism. Leninism and Maoism. I have not even read Marx's Das Capital. But, I know it for sure that the majority of the people in this part of the land are starving hard."

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman once again held a discussion with General Yahya Khan and told the journalists at the end of the discussion: The discussion has not vet come to an end. General Yahva is in need of more time for scrutinizing our demands. And let him scrutinize as closely as he wants to. But, the fact remains that I cannot afford to move even an inch away from our demands unambiguously spelt out." Mujib's face, at this time, was beaming with a glow; he was also laughing while talking to the journalist. One of the foreign journalists present at that time quite curiously asked: "Does your laughter mean anything positive ?" Mujib replied: "I laugh habitually and I can laugh even in hell."

Sheikh Mujib was greeted with birthday-wishes by a host of journalists, as it was his fifty-first birthday, and Sheikh Mujib responded by saying: "I've never celebrated my birthday. In fact, I cannot afford to do so; for, I am fully aware of the fact that most of my countrymen are now struggling to breathe merely"

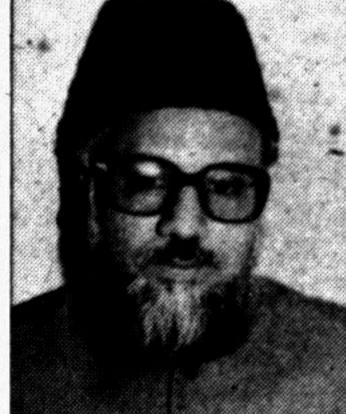
General Yahya told Tikka Khan at one point: "This bastard (Sheikh Mujib) is not behaving well. You better get ready".

(Compiled by Urmee Hussain)

Untying the Gordian Knot of Our Politics

A SERIES OF INTERVIEWS AND ARTICLES ON THE CURRENT POLITICAL CRISIS

'No Alternative to Caretaker Government"



Daily Star (DS) : What, according to you, are the reasons for the present political stalemate? What is the way out? Please elaborate your personal views on what should be the

next step. Matiur Rahman Nizami (MRN): People's right to franchise must be ensured to give democracy an institutional shape. We tabled a bill in the Parliament to create a perma nent provision for holding elections under a caretaker government. The political stalemate had not been cre ated if the bill was discussed in the House. The crisis could be resolved if the government took initiative to settle down the political issue politically. Now, the situation has come to a stage that there is no way out without holding elections un-

der a caretaker government. DS: Everybody is talking about elections - but when should it be held - within the next few months, or later in the year, or at its schedule time, early next year? Suggest measures to be taken for the timing of your choice.

MRN: The crisis has deepened as the government has An Interview with Matiur Rahman Nizami, Secretary Gene Islami Bangladesh

taken the tactics of timekilling through keeping the resignation issue hanged. Declaration of fresh elections within 90 days of the resignations was the demand of the time. In the present circumstances, election schedule should be announced as early as possible.

DS: How to ensure an independent Election Commission? What are the pros and cons of EC Bill passed?

MRN ? It is irrelevant to speak about the pros and cons of the EC Bill. We also have demanded strengthening of Election Commission. But fact is that, the EC has to depend on the government machineries. The EC would not be able to play its role effectively until the elections are held free from the interference of administration. In the past, we had seen that party govern ment generally interfered the election process.

by Krishna P Roy

DS: How to formulate a Code of Conduct for political parties to hold elections? How to ensure the implementation of such a code.

MRN: During the polls of 1991, we, the political parties, proposed a code of conduct to the caretaker government of Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed and the Election Commission made similar announcement. This time, we can also repeat it, but code of conduct could not be implemented properly without a caretaker administration in the power. Because, nothing could be done if the

party in power violates the code of conduct. You may go to

court and organise agitation. but cannot make the election different.

the need for a computerised voters' list and identity cards? Can we ensure fair election without them? If we want then, then what should be the time frame for elections?

DS: What are your views on

MRN: We are in favour of a computerised 'voters' list and introduction of identity (ID) cards. But it depends on the government whether there would be any computerised voters' list or ID card. If the government accepted the demand for a caretaker administration, it could stay in power for its full tenure and make arrangement of ID cards Election could be free and fair without ID cards, if it is held under a caretaker government.

DS: We hear a lot about black money being factor in the next election. What are your suggestions to make election funding transparent and accountable? MRN: Black money and ter-

rorism influence elections in our country and we apprehend that it would play a negative role on election process in future too. A caretaker government is also needed to check the influence of black money. But the ruling party is the champion of allowing black money to become a factor in the elections. A practical step

is needed to influence of black mor its influence could stopped without havi i itral government in power and creat ing an aware c s mong the people. A monitoring system has to be wered to see whether every a midate fol-

lows the elect of rices

DS : What are your views on the mechanism under which the next election should be he'd" What about Constitutional amendments?

MRN : (reacter government is the nachanism for holding elections ee and fair. A political solu i n could be found out it the government had placed a bill seeking provision for cure to ser government even a le me resignation of the O president MPs.

DS : Do you think that there should be some sort of political understanding between the ruling part and the Opposition to ensure a free and fair election? Is such an understanding possible? If yes, then what should be the next step? If not, why not?

MRN: Any prob in could be solved through olitical understanding. But there is no alternative to a aretaker government to over one the present crisis and er ure free and fair elections. Poi cal understanding, however is also needed under a care ker government so that Elector ommission could play e independently and net 72 1.

Buchwald's



A New Fund-raiser

TT / HILE most Gingrich supporters in Washington agree that there is no such thing as a free school lunch, there is sharp division on how to eliminate it.

Some Republicans want to dump the programme and give block grants to the states. This, proposal is known as the "Tofu To You" plan. Still others think that the children should be made to pay for their meals in order to get any fulfillment out of them.

Darth Vader, one of the top advisers to Gingrich, has come up with an idea which has tremendous appeal on Capitol Hill. "We want to turn the school lunches into political fundraisers. We would charge the kids 50 cents a plate for the meal. Twenty-five cents would go for the food and 25 would go to our Political Action Committee."

I admitted that it had some merit, but wondered how Darth planned to implement it.

We would supply speakers from Congress to talk to the students while they are their lunches. The congressmen would discuss ethics, morals and their constitutional right to

bring assault we apone into the classroom. "My concern is that the children have been getting tofu for nothing for so long, that they may not want to pay for a political fund raiser. I said.

"They need to learn to participate in the political process in order to have good government. If they complain that they don't want allowances to go to Gingrich's PAC we'll throw in a second helping of applesauce for dessert. This country cannot afford a school lunch programme and Haiti at the same time. I

have talked to my colleagues in the House on this subject. Those who want to reform the lunches say that they would be happy to go out and make speeches against free milk, providing they begin the meal with a prayer.

"Do you believe the reason that Gingrich wants to abolish federal school meals is that he never had one when he was a

"No. It's the price of the meal. For this country to remain solvent we have two choices: We can stuff meatloaf into the stomachs of hungry children today but their children will be saddled with the debt for years to come. Or we can say, Enough is enough. If you're hungry McDonald's has a \$2.30 special

That's tough love if ever I heard it. We're not forcing them to turn their lunch periods into fund-raisers. But if the kids start giving their money to the PACs they will be able to lobby for any kind of funch

By arrangement with Los Angeles Times Syndicate and UNB.

listen to them

programme they want, and for the first time politicians will

"Cynical Thinking. . ."

Sir. Oli Ahad's write-up Cynical Thinking Needs to be Avoided" was thought-provok-

ing and praiseworthy. As a veteran politician who has participated as well as witnessed many tumultuous events which overtook the Indian subcontinent in the past decades, he did not mince words and spoke fearlessly and with firm conviction.

His contention that a politico-bureaucratic-criminal nexus has played havoc with our polity and destroyed much of our cherished social and societal values can hardly be dis-

The social and political atmosphere in Bangladesh has almost reached its nadir because politics has been highly criminalised and crime nearly fully politicised.

Therefore, disillusionment is all-pervading and the disappointment of our people with their elected representatives has reached a boiling point.

Our political culture is basically semi-feudal and talk we may season in and season out, of many momentous struggles and movements, we have proved our inability to nurture and nourish democracy.

Our first Constitution of 1972 was moulded like the famous Weimer Republic's basic law of the thirties, providing all the necessary freedoms but both these constitutions were torn to pieces by powerhungry politicians and also those in uniforms. The unfortunate aspect being the founders of our Constitution saw it fit to trample under foot

democratic values and freedon when these attributes perhaps did not serve their selfish political desires and ends.

A vice-like grip of such politicians, corcupt bureaucrats and tortsmen of all sorts have stole the mantle and successfully undermined the social and political fabric resulting in making life a virtual hell for our people.

We talk in a vaunted manner of having struggled gallantly against autocratic and authoritarian rule but what has been delivered to us is an inept government and a perfidious opposition, both of whom are enacting a drama starring Tweedledee and Tweedledum.

And though a thorough shake-up of our society and political climate has become an imperative, the tragedy. however, is that the people remain helpless as it is wellnigh impossible to break the untrammeled powers of a wellentrenched uncaring bureaucracy, the rapacious moneyedclass and the type of politicians who determine our destiny but are no better than termites.

Thus a citizen of this country cannot be blamed for being frustrated and pessimistic for he knows, in the kernel of his heart, that Bangladesh for many years to come will still remain a fertile soil for unscrupulous politicians, bureaucrats and businessmen to thrive along with their fellowtravellers - power-brokers of all hues and colours.

Robert Kader

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