

Fertiliser Bungling

As the events in Tangail and Sherpur showed on Wednesday, the fertiliser crisis has erupted in an ugly fashion touching off a limited, but potentially an explosive, peasants' unrest.

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.

It is a bread and butter question for farmers. The Iri-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.

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.

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 co-ordination lapses among the ministries of commerce, industry and agriculture.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

THE 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.

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?

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 Bangladeshis.

What are those contributions? First and foremost, I would say, Sheikh Mujib gave a sense of direction to the Bangladeshis drifting like a rudderless boat in stormy political waters.

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 Bangladeshis 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.

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

before him. He was certainly 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.

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.

He was Mujib Bhai even to 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.

A basic point that is often overlooked is Bangabandhu's role in laying the foundation of Bangladesh as a nation state. However weak and flawed it was, Pakistan had an ideological basis. Islam was to be the cementing bond for that nation.

Bangabandhu is often criticised for his decision to forgive the collaborators. It is easy to be wise in hindsight. Now one can see that the collaborators deserved to be punished for their misdeeds.

He loved the people without 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 between him and his people.

Here I would add a footnote to suggest that Bangabandhu's legal advisers at the time failed him in not suggesting special legislation to bring collaborators to trial in special tribunals.

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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.

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.

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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 Bangladeshis.

Untying the Gordian Knot of Our Politics

'No Alternative to Caretaker Government'

An Interview with Matiur Rahman Nizami, Secretary General, Islami Bangladesh

by Krishna P Roy

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.

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

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

DS: Do you think that there should be some sort of political understanding between the ruling party 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?

DS: Do you think that black money being factor in the next election. What are your suggestions to make election funding transparent and accountable?

DS: Do you think that terrorism 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

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

A vice-like grip of such politicians, corrupt bureaucrats and torts men 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 Tweedledum 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 well-nigh impossible to break the untrammelled powers of a well-entrenched uncaring bureaucracy, the rapacious moneyed-class 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 fellow-travellers — power-brokers of all hues and colours.

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.

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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.

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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 yet come to an end. General Yahya 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."

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 Urme Hussain)

Art Buchwald's COLUMN

A New Fund-raiser

WHILE 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 fund-raisers. 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 ate their lunches. The congressmen would discuss ethics, morals and their constitutional right to bring assault weapons into the classroom."

"My concern is that the children have been getting into 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 applause for dessert. This country cannot afford a school lunch programme and Hatti 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 kid?"

"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.'"

By arrangement with Los Angeles Times Syndicate and UNB



ON THE RECORD

by Shah A M S Kibria



charismatic personality but more than the charisma it was his honesty, simplicity and accessibility which made the most profound impression on the people.

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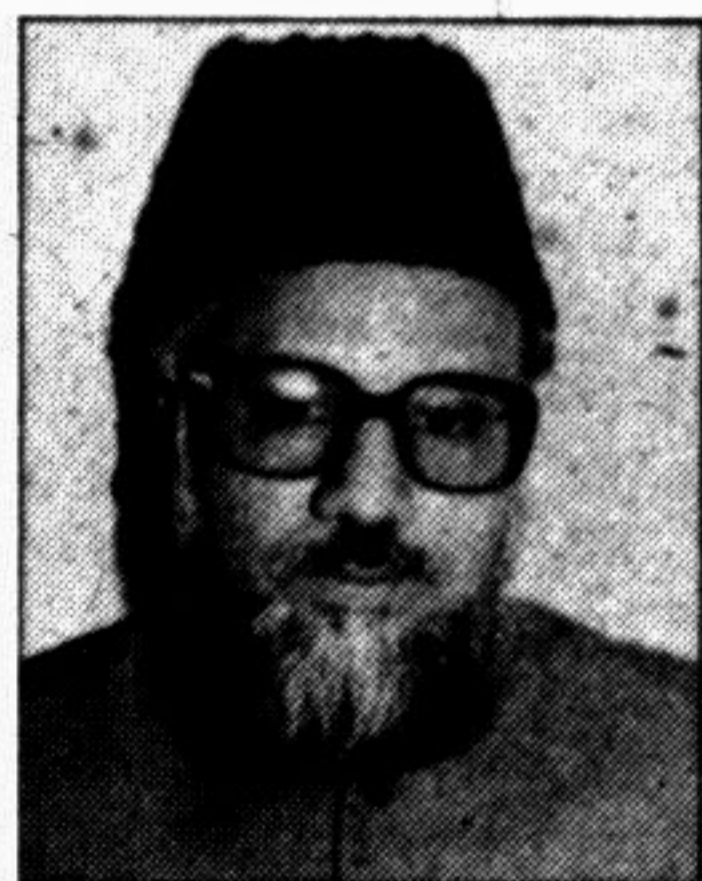
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Robert Kader 34 Mehdiabagh, Chittagong