

Wanted Govt Statement

The fertiliser crisis is surely a created one. Not by journalists, to be sure, but by men, and situations created by them — out of greed and self-aggrandisement, inefficiency and may be sheer miscalculation.

It is our considered opinion that government itself has contributed very substantially to this sliding into a regular panic of what was a temporary supply dislocation — of whatever size and caused by whatever reason.

The BCIC chief has been sacked. But he has confidently said there had been nothing wrong on BCIC front. And an eminent economist has said too much fertiliser has been exported, ostensibly to cash in on the lucrative international price.

But as long as the government doesn't itself say its say on whether the World Bank-imputed corruption channel or the generally suspected corruption at the mill to dealer level has any substance — and what is government doing about stopping that possible bottleneck — rumours and talk of politically-inspired downright theft will only be spreading like fire.

How many people have already been killed in the fertiliser agitations? Three died even on Tuesday. These are no terrorists or professional looters. The government must find ways other than firing to cope with farmers' agitation.

A Case for Jatra

It is indeed difficult to keep count of how many times this government has changed its decision on jatra, a traditional art and entertainment form. Once it so happened that immediately after holding a national jatra festival at the Shilpakala Academy, where the prime minister graced the awarding ceremony on conclusion of the gala event, the sword of Damocles came down on its performance in the shape of an official ban.

However, State Minister for Cultural Affairs Jahanara Begum has had no reservation in praising this art-form and the need for protecting it from its decline. Let us hope the tone she has set will not be disturbed throughout the festival and ever after.

Still the jatra groups will be delighted to get the recognition they truly deserve. The banning of jatra greatly disappointed the artistes and the audience alike. Clearly it was a body blow for them. Although the ban has gone, there are references that this art-form is surviving on indecent performance. Those who are campaigning against jatra have conveniently mixed up a highly serious artistic performance with the intervening dances.

Great Dhaka Delicacies

An uncorroborated press report said on Wednesday the US First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton on her visit to Bangladesh commencing April 2 would like to taste *suti* (sic) *kabab*, *bakerkhani* and *bhapa*. No doubt she had been advised on the culinary point by some old Dhaka gourmet. It is pleasing to see the greatness of Dhaka delicacies reaching the important ones of the world.

Now what is *suti kabab*? The reporter and his editor are less than connoisseurs of the stuff. It is *suti kabab* simply because of being held together by strands of thread while being turned on the spit for long hours in charcoal fire. And what is a *bakerkhani*, pray? The brittle and rusky and munchy round breads going by that name are *nimsukha* — a preservable variety of the *bakerkhani* which is more like a family of breads.

*Bhapa* — the steam cake — also comes in a great many variety. Of course, if she can gorge down big lobsters done in coconut-milk — many will be the dishes she can relish now and cherish ever after.

A Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) for Dhaka

THE streets of Dhaka give the clear impression that within next few years, either rickshaws would stay and cars must leave the streets of Dhaka, or rickshaws ought to be effectively banned from major arteries of public transportation as well as busy business districts, at least during working hours.

WINDOW ON ASIA Shaded Latif

point of no return? In the world of rickshaws, do we have any other choice? The huge dimension of daily needs of millions of people (which is likely to increase to one crore men and women by the turn of the century) to move around give rise to the inevitable solution through construction of mass rapid transit system or in short, MRT.

The brutal conclusion is that the sea of rickshaws would densely cover important public thoroughfares. There seems to be no alternative. Our fate is sealed: regardless of the transport mode, speed of traffic would tend to be determined by the slowest moving rickshaws.

Mode of MRT First of all, what is the MRT for Dhaka? I will define it as an elevated electric train system, through which millions of people can transit within a short time between the core city and the suburban or peri-urban areas at an expense which is affordable on a daily basis.

Assume for example, an elevated electric train line running from Kamalapur/Motijheel area through Hatkhola, Demra and then towards Shitalakya river and upto Narshingdi town and beyond upto the highland areas, short of the beginning of the lowland towards Bhatraib; a sister line branches off towards Narayanganj-Rupganj where a town is already being planned by RAJUK.

The first consequence of such a MRT would be elevation of Dhaka into a mega city within a decade, if not less. The spread-out system covering practically the entire former greater Dhaka district (and may be beyond, at a later stage), would mean the possibility of developing not only one Rupganj satellite town, as planned now, but 25 to 40 such towns, each accommodating a population of 100,000 to a quarter million.

MRT should be viewed in a highly dynamic context of the national industrial and urbanization programme. The transport system envisaged will speed up the process of economic growth in general and intensive growth of manufacturing/service sectors in particular.

Can the existing per capita income sustain the massive investment? I have calculated that an investment of US\$ 500 million should be feasible, provided there are two million daily passengers, using the system 25 days every month, for a round-trip fare of Taka 10 only.

Revenues Multiply However, the most important issue is the resultant growth of the city economy through rapid expansion of residential, commercial and industrial investments — much more than the investment for

the MRT system itself. Hence both the national and the city government revenues should multiply manifold, so much so that eventually the grant or the loan on capital account would more than pay for itself.

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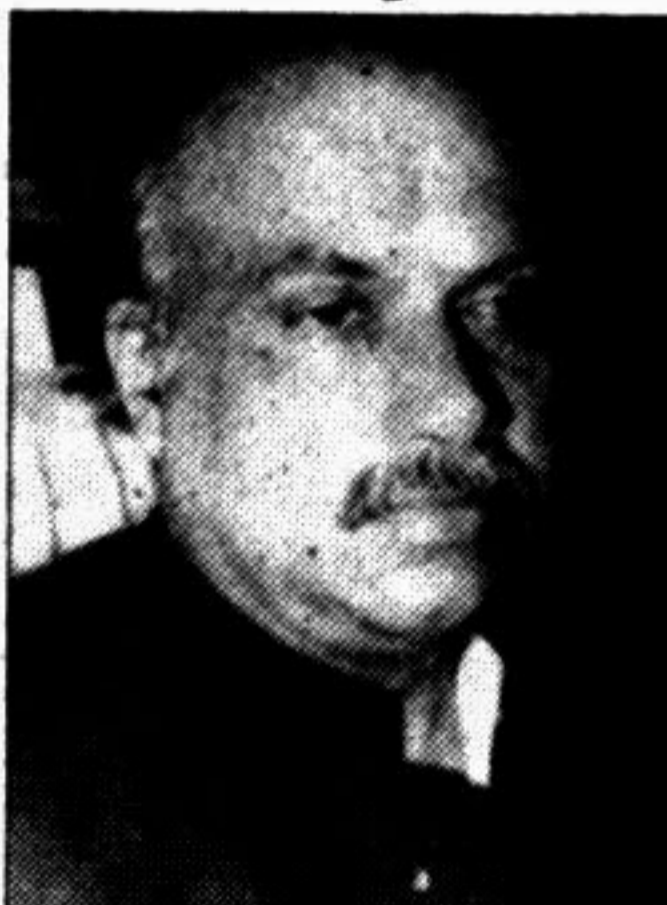
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Looking Back at March towards Independence

March 23, 1971 The flag of Pakistan was hoisted nowhere else except in some cantonments. In fact, it was the flag of Bangladesh which was hoisted atop various government offices including the secretariat. At 7 o'clock in the morning, a large procession brought out by the Jatuya Sramik League proceeded towards the residence of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and it was at the initiative of a few leaders of this procession that the flag of Bangladesh was hoisted atop Sheikh Mujib's residence.

Untying the Gordian Knot of Our Politics

'The Present Parliament should be Dissolved and Date for Fresh Election Immediately Announced'



Interview with Mohammed Nasim, Organising Secretary, Bangladesh Awami League

by Chapel Bashar

their verdict in a free and fair election. To realise our demand, we have been boycotting the Parliament for a long time and also agitating in the streets.

The BNP leadership, especially Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, has been ignoring this demand from the very beginning. She has never shown her sincerity to solve the problem and failed to take a decision on the issue.

There is only one way to overcome this crisis. That is: the present parliament should be dissolved and the date for a fresh election announced immediately.

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 scheduled time, early next year? Suggest measures to be taken for the timing of your choice.

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

DS: What are your views on the mechanism under which the next election should be held? What about constitutional amendments?

relevant aspects of such an EC should be determined through discussion between the government and the Opposition. We can take decision, if necessary, on the basis of a consensus and it can be given effect through promulgation of an Ordinance by the President during the absence of Parliament.

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

MN: I hold the similar view on this issue. The government and the Opposition can formulate a Code of Conduct through discussion, for the political parties while necessary laws may be enacted to implement the Code.

DS: What are your views on the need for a computerised voters' list and identity cards? Can we ensure fair elections without them? If we want them, then what should be the time-frame for elections?

MN: I believe that an updated and corrected voters' list is essential since we now have a good number of new voters who are not in the list. We have no objection to introduce ID Cards, but the ID Cards alone cannot ensure fair election without a neutral government or administration.

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

MN: There is no doubt that money has become a big factor in our election process. However, this competition of spending money will be reduced substantially if we can build a system for fair election and ensure peaceful handing over of power to an elected government every five years.

DS: What are your views on the mechanism under which the next election should be held? What about constitutional amendments?

accept the concept of a neutral caretaker government to make the next election free and fair. The government and the Opposition can prepare the framework for such a caretaker administration through discussion only, if the ruling party accepts the concept.

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?

MN: I think there should be an understanding between the government and the Opposition to ensure a free and fair election. It will not be possible for the government to hold a fair election without such understanding. In other words, the government cannot rule the country unless it takes the Opposition in confidence.

Therefore the government should immediately come forward to resolve the crisis. For this, the best possible step will be an announcement by Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia of accepting the concept of a neutral non-partisan caretaker government. And that announcement may be followed by discussion with the Opposition.

If this step is not taken immediately, the country will have to face a disaster which will bring in fatal consequence for the government. The country already had to suffer a lot due to indecision of this government. If such indecision continued I apprehend, the people may even lose their hard-earned democracy. And whether we want or not, an undemocratic and unconstitutional force may grab power for which we shall have to be answerable to the people.

OPINION News Service Trends

In Bangladesh, the news service created by the news agencies, specially the nationalised ones, is not according to the book, and initial professional training. The training and experience become distorted later, as far as the agencies in the public sector are concerned.

of the item was devoted to the VIPs: that is, heavily personality-oriented; (c) any technical general information was avoided. The video clip showed no equipment. The human gathering is not the RTS!

not from the service, system, equipment, or human angle. The story was not the opening ceremony, but the start of a new service, but it was not reported in that manner. The main story was downgraded to less than one-third of the space, hidden in the bottom lines.