Dhaka, Friday, April 14, 1995

Subha Nababarsha

The dawning of Pahela Baishakh heralds, following the seasonal course, the prevailing of nature's regenerative force ower its destructive power. An inescapable irony in this law of life and nature has been fully recognised by the Bangalees. This is why we have placed the month of Kalbaishakhi at the beginning of our calendar. An intimate knowledge of the capriciousness of nature has made us courageous enough to find the universal truth in which creation and destruction are the two sides of the same coin. No wonder, the greatest of Bangalee poets, Rabindranath invokes the spirit within to burn down the spoils of useless life and vows to begin anew.

As a nation too we also made our first few uncertain steps in the foot-prints of the Bisva Kabi, which over the years turned into a cultural wave to put our national politics in its right perspective. Indeed without that sustaining cultural nourishment our socio-political aspiration could not have reached us where we are now. This is however not to say that during the past 24 years our national ethos shaped into a wholesome psychic urge. The strength society needs to hold itself together mainly comes from our commitment to culture. The cutting edge of culture is manifest by the fact that songs of Rabindranath and Nazrul are gradually making way into the hearts of more people across the country. Thanks to a few dedicated people and institutions, music and drama have also assumed a fitting role in advancing our culture.

Amidst a growing list of failures topped by our politics, a most notable progress has been made in the area of women's participation in the task of nation-building. Despite some calculated attempts by forces opposed to women's socio-economic emancipation, they have come a long way along the path of empowerment. Although they still have miles to go before being at par with men. they have at least responded to the beckoning of the horizon. Taking stock of our national achievements in other areas we sadly record our poor performance in education, health, industrialisation and law and order. Yawning poverty now seems to bring down everything we could otherwise show as signs of progress. All this, needless to say, relates to our political ineptitude.

Does this mean that we must feel resigned to despondency? In fact, this is all the more reason why we must build on the few attainments already recorded by us. Let these inspire us to make fresh pledges on this new year's day for taking the good work into other areas of our national life. Subha Nababarsha to all.

Private Company in Power Sector

If everything goes according to plan, the country will be producing soon, in the private sector, a substantial portion of the electricity it needs. Earlier two US companies had initialled a deal to set up power plants here. Now two more companies - Solar International and Occidental Venture Corporation — have decided to join in to help us generate power in the country's private sector.

Although the government has done its part of the initial job by signing the memorandums of understanding (MOU), this does not bring any immediate relief for us — the consumers. From the signing of the MOU to the production of power it would indeed be a long process taking up at least a lead time of four years. During this period government cooperation will be solicited almost at every stage. Unless it is ready to extend its help and cooperation, the implementation of the projects will be very difficult.

Admittedly, we have taken a long time to make our first move in inviting foreign companies to the power sector. Our neighbouring countries have all been miles ahead; specially Pakistan, which has made a deal for power generation with foreign companies worth about four billion dollars. Yet let us console ourselves with the oftrepeated cliche: better late than never. Now that the agreement has been reached on power generation, it should be made clear as to how its distribution will be accomplished. Generation alone does not solve the problem. Surely we cannot rely on a distribution system noted for its inefficiency, mismanagement and obsolescence for reaching to our consumers the electricity

The question is: why should we accept the mismanagement, theft and inefficiency in the power sector, which have stigmatised the PDB, until before the private companies go into electricity generation? Steps have to be immediately taken to improve its service. Both administrative and legal measures are called for. Laws to deal with discrepancies and abuses entrenched in the system are outdated calling for immediate reform.

produced by an efficient management.

Births and Deaths

A report from Cox's Bazar points to the gross negligence of all concerned in entering cases of death and birth into record books. There is a provision for a fine worth Tk 5 only if the parents should fail to report the birth of their baby to pourashava or union parishad authority within 90 days of the child's arrival. Parents apart, the health workers are also responsible for collecting information about the new-born.

Maybe, the original idea behind involving health workers was to double-check on birth. But since this has been a dual duty, neither the parents not the health workers do their job and hence births go mostly unreported. However, there is a need for birth certificates at the time of admission to a school or for various other purposes. No doubt, such a requirement is dubiously met.

The implications of this can hardly be overemphasised. What happens as a consequence is that people coming up with fictitious dates of birth render the population records suspect. All this in turn reduces the reliability of the voters' list with the added factor of unreported deaths ingrained in it.

There is therefore an urgent need for strengthening the system of registration of deaths and births. If the existing law fails to cope with the situation, let us have an effective one.

A Military Exercise that Misfired

The Pakistanis perceived that India might attack under the umbrella of an exercise. The vulnerable point was considered Sind. India's belief was that Pakistan's stationing of troops in the Ravi-Cheneb corridor was a threat to its troubled areas of Punjab and Kashmir.

troops carried live ammunition, not done ordinarily in military exercises.

ESEARCH reports on

military matters seld-

om find or say what

actually happens. Brasstacks

and Beyond', a research report

on the exercises the Indian

armed forces conducted in

December 1986 and January

1987, is no better. After

reading the report, one is not

wiser. The five scholars from

who have conducted the

India. Pakistan and America.

research, admit in the in-

troduction that "the full truth'

has eluded them and that they

have had "no information or

conflicting information" on

been able to reconstruct gives

an uninterrupted account. And

since they have been able to

talk in India to the people who

planned and executed the ex-

ercises and in Pakistan who

took counter measures, the

reports has a ring of authen-

ticity. It is also revealing in

soon after his appointment as

chief of army staff. General K

Sundarji conceived the exer

cises code-named brasstacks.

The first three phases were on

paper, new formations and the

mechanisation process

evolved. They did not evoke

much concern either in

Islamabad or in Washington.

(The latter was kept in the

the exercise which caused

"deep apprehensions." The

sheer scale, said to be have in-

volved two lakh troops, and

the location, 60 to 80 kilome-

tres from the border, alarmed

Pakistan. It discovered that

many trains in Rajasthan were

cancelled and train services to

Amritsar, Jammu and Kalka

It was the fourth phase of

picture by New Delhi).

The report brings out how

Yet the story they have

critical details.

many ways

Islamabad's suspicions heightened when the information given by New Delhi -- as promised by Rajiv Gandhi to then Pakistan prime minister. Mohammed Khan Junejo at the Bangalore SAARC summit was found "sketchy" and 'inaccurate.' Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) had given the Pakistan top brass a more detailed picture. Added to it was Islamabad's general distrust about New Delhi's intentions.

Washington, too, did not treat the exercise as anything other than routine until December. But, subsequently. there was a panic lest India should advance across the international border. "If this were to happen, the American assessment," according to the report, "was that Pakistan could last no more than a month unless India committed a major military blunder or unilaterally halted fighting."

Pakistan reacted by prolonging its regular exercise and did not inform India about it. The Pakistani authorities increased their vigilance along the border, especially the brasstacks exercise area, and warned its own formations that collective training might have to be prolonged. Leave for officers and soldiers was cancelled (Islamabad also kept Washington informed.) The bases at full working peak. That was not considered ade-

It was in January 1987 that Pakistani forces crossed the Lodhran Bridge over the Sutle near Bhawalpur, heading for their peacetime location in Multan. But they did not stop at Multan, however, and con tinued marching until they occupied positions opposite to Bhatinda and Ferozepur. l'akistan also moved its sixth armoured division Gujranwala area.

This positioning worried

New Delhi. The report quotes

a senior Indian official as say-

ing that Pakistan could now

strike at two points simultane-

ously - not only in Kashmir

area directly but also cutting

off Amritsar and Ferozepur.

thus denying India access to

Kashmir. Despite the fact that

the Pakistan army was making

cautious defensive moves. New

Delhi read these differently

and began to undertake

that India might attack under

the umbrella of an exercise.

The vulnerable point was con-

The Pakistanis perceived

counter-defensive measures.

ridor was a threat to its troubled areas of Punjab and Kashmir. The brasstacks exercises and the consequent Pakistani response became

brinkinanship. According to the report, Pakistan's military officials tend to justify their defensive move as the direct product of threat generated by the massive movements associated with brasstacks and "the noncooperative attitude" of Indian military officials. Equally interesting was the Indian reading

of Pakistani moves and accom-

panying justification of troop

movements towards Kashmir

and Punjab. Being suspicious of

each other, both saw the

other's moves as offensively

oriented. By January 23, the

two forces were more or less

On January 23 itself. Natwar

Singh, then minister of state

Humayun Khan, then Pakistan

ambassador in New Delhi, to

convey a deadline for pulling

back Pakistani troops.

Humayun Khan quickly sent

the message. In Islamabad.

in a confrontation position.

state for foreign affairs Zian Noorani and told in no uncertain terms that Pakistan blamed India for escalating tension. eventually a big exercise of It was then Pakistan

President Zia-ul-Haq, who advised Junejo to talk to Rajiv Gandhi on the telephone. President Reagan is supposed to have rung him). Junejo spoke to Rajiv Gandhi, affirming Pakistan's desire for deescalation. He pointed out that India had asked Pakistan to dismantle its defences but had not vet conveyed what it intended to do about the amassing of its own troops. After the telephone conversation be-BETWEEN THE LINES tween the two prime ministers, tensions began to diminish. New Delhi accepted

> Pakistan's foreign secretary Abdul Sattar arrived in Delhi by the end of January. The two sides not only agreed to stepby-step withdrawal but a firm commitment that they would not attack each other. The hotline, which had inexplicably remained unused, once again became active between India and Pakistan. The brasstacks exercise was allowed to proceed until the end of February 1987. But it was a mere for-

Humayun Khan's request for

immediate talks on de-escalat-

ing the border crisis.

mality Zia-ul-Haq visited India ostensibly to watch the cricket match at Jaipur and met Rajfv Gandhi to accelerate the pro-

weapons from America. It became more difficult for India to get technology items cleared from Washington India, according to the report. was seen "as reckless and provocative." The report's weakest side is the political input. The re-

brasstacks made it easier for

Pakistan to obtain advanced

search scholars have not been able to find out what went behind the scenes at the top level at least in New Delhi; because all moves, whether military or political, stopped in Pakistan at Zia. But much could have been known in India.

For example, in India there are still leading politicians who tell you how Sundarji exceeded his brief and nearly went into the Pakistan territory. Rajiv Gandhi reportedly came to know about it at the nick of the time and ordered him to stop. The allegation that Sundarji and Arun Singh, then minister of state for defence. were wanting to stage a coup has not yet been scotched fully.

The Intelligence Bureau (IB) is said to have warned Rajiv Gandhi about it. Whether he believed the story or not is not known. But the fact remains that he ousted Arun Singh from the government and curbed Sundarji during the small period he was left with of his tenure

The report probably purposely avoided treading the risky path because it would have meant delving deep into the secrets of the establishment on both sides and it might have annoyed some at the top. My experience is that such reports go up to a point and not beyond, although this report says that it has gone bevond. After all, the research scholars are too close to the establishment.

crore, showing a share of 47

per cent (lower than Banga-

bandhu's period but higher

than the succeeding govern-

ments), ratio to GDP was 6 per

cent (same as Bangabandhu's

and General Ershad's period

but lower than Begum Zia's pe-

riod), and the growth reached

its peak at 12 per cent

(highest among the govern-

sidered Sind. India's belief was Indian ambassador S K Singh were suspended to facilitate cess of de-escalation. It was all the movement of troops and Pakistan Air Force (PAF) also that Pakistan's stationing of was summoned to the foreign over by then. However, troops in the Ravi-Cheneb cormilitary equipment. The decided to keep its satellite office by Pakistani minister of Poverty Alleviation: Looking into the Budget Expenditures

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

T poor countries, whether democratic or autocratic, are presently predominated by the views of the egalitarian economists that development no longer means the growth of their economies, but simply the elimination of poverty: Growth means growth of the gross domestic product (GDP). Elimination of poverty implies lifting poor people out of the poverty line.

The basic theme of poverty alleviation was introduced in the First Five-Year Plan (1973/ 74-1977/78) of Bangladesh in designing and formulating such projects and programmes as would alleviate poverty. Since then these are continuing in all the subsequent Five Year Plans. In the objectives of all the four previous development plans, it was clearly spelled out to reduce poverty and ensure more equitable income distribution through rapid economic growth. Planners argued that higher growth, though essential for poverty alleviation, did not always benefit the poor who live under the poverty line. It is because the poverty stricken people do not possess the human and non-human assets viz, education, skill, land, capital, etc and for such constraints higher growth cannot bring higher return for them; and higher growth may not create sufficient employment opportunities and provide adequate real wages for the un-

skilled people. So they suggested two complementary approaches. Firstly, macro-economic and sectoral policies should be directed at improving efficiency and increasing productivity and growth in those sectors where majority of the poor live. Secondly, direct programmes should be taken to bring out the poor from below

the poverty line. The second approach generated the programmes what are now generally known as poverty alleviation programmes. These programmes have two broad dimensions. The first includes the programmes to enhance the earning capacity of the poor. The second includes the programmes to directly or indirectly transfer income to the

per cent).

The Bangladesh government expenditures through the budgets on the programmes to enhance the earning capacity of the poor are allocated in two areas. Firstly. development of human resources. This provides educátional and health facilities. Secondly, development of training and credit programmes through Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB) and Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC). This experiditures do not lessen directly the current status of poverty but make the poor capable of earning in the future by

supplying them financial

resources through credit and

by developing their human

resources through providing

educational and health care

(including family planning)

on the programmes which di-

rectly or indirectly transfer in-

come to the poor are allocated

in three areas. Firstly, in the

policies which affect the rela-

tive prices. Examples are,

price subsidies for foodgrains

distributed through Public

Foodgrain Distribution System

(PFDS), support or procure-

ment prices for crops grown

by the poor, and subsidies for

agricultural inputs. Secondly,

in the programmes which pro-

vide temporary employment

for the poor. Examples are.

Food for Work (FFW), canal

digging, and rural works pro-

grammes. Thirdly, pro-

grammes which provide food-

grains to the women and chil-

dren who are severely mal-

nourished. Example is, Vulner-

able Group Development

(VGD); it's a monthly pro-

gramme for a period of two

years which provides food-

grains to the destitute mothers

having two children and whose

categories of poverty allevias

In addition to these two

husbands are disabled.

Government expenditures

by Babul Alam

tion-oriented expenditures. the government operates relief programmes during the periods of natural calamities. Let us now look into the extent and trend of the government expenditures directed at poverty oriented programmes since 1972-73. The governments allocated resources, mainly through two types of budgets viz, revenue budget and development budget. Development budget here indicates only the Annual Development Programmes (ADPs). FFW and VGD programmes are, however, operated outside these budgets. and documented in the food

was Tk 2694 crore, and in the first half of 90s it was at Tk 4311 crore. In other words, allocation in the 80s increased by 63 per cent over the decade of 70s and in the 90s it increased by 60 per cent over the 80s. So, the allocation is increasing at a tremendous speed, there is no doubt about it. In 22 years, it grew by 186 per cent, having an annual average growth rate of around 5 per cent which is more than the economy's growth (growth rate of the GDP over the period is around 4 per cent).

The figures show povertyallocation/GDP ratio of around So, we have four sets of a 6 per cent which is more than

now try to find out the political dimension of the poverty alleviation programmes under the different governments. We shall exclude the periods of President Mustague and President Sattar. These periods were so brief that no statistical evaluation would be tenable. For the technical reason in the availability of data on a fiscal year basis, we shall consider only those full fiscal years which the governments had enjoyed. The periods are like these: Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib's period (1972-73-1974-75), General Zia's period (1976-77-1980-81). General Ershad's period (1982-83-1989-90), and Begum Khaleda Zia's period (1991-92-1994-

ments and the period since independence). The average rate of allocation increased further to Tk 2695 crore under the period of General Ershad, but its share declined to 39 per cent, inducing a lower growth of 4 per cent, managing the ratio to GDP to remain at the level of 6 per cent like Bangabandhu's and General Zia's periods. Up to 1994-95, under the

period of Begum Khaleda Zia. the average rate of allocation accelerated to a massive size of Tk 4.476 crore having the highest ratio to GDP at 8 per cent: the share also increased from the period than in General Ershad's to 43 per cent (though less than Bangabandhu's and General Zia's periods) and the growth also doubled to 8 per cent (though less than that in General Zia's period).

All the figures used here are at constant market prices of 1984-85. It is only because igures at current prices (i.e., nominal prices) of different vears are not comparable and cannot be aggregated accordng to the law of economic theory; only real figures (i.e., igures at constant prices of a certain year) are comparable and can be aggregated.

To observe the extent and trend of the poverty programmes, the author had the intention to deal only with the budgeted data, neither the revised nor the actual ones. It was in line to see the commitment of the allocations. However, for some years, budget documents were not available to the writer and hence in those cases actual figures were

The writer is a Research Officer of the Planning Commission

In the revenue budget, poverty oriented programmes during the last 23 years, on an average, shared 34 per cent of the total budget allocation. The highest share was in 1972-73 (64 per cent) and the lowest in 1975-76 (21 data on the poverty alleviation expenditures. The first in-

curred on the revenue budget. the second on the ADP, the third on FFW and the last on VGD. Poverty alleviation data under the revenue budget includes expenditures on education, health and family planning, agriculture lincluding fisheries, veterinary, and cooperatives), relief, labour and training, social welfare, irrigation, public health, sanitary and water supply and subsidies. Data under the ADP includes expenditures on education and training, health and family planning, agriculture (including crop, fisheries, forestry, livestock and all the input subsidies excluding irrigation), rural development institutions (including BRDB). and flood control and water resources (including irrigation subsidies).

It appears from the data that during the period 1972-73 through 1994-95, on average, an amount of Tk 2896 crore per year was allocated on the poverty alleviation programmes. The highest allocation was in 1994-95 (Tk 5042 crore) and lowest in 1974-75 (Tk 988 crore). During the 70s, the average allocation was 'Tk 1660 crore, in the 80s it

the non-tax GDP ratio of the economy. In other words, it means that, of the total revenue earnings (tax and nontax) of the government, more than one of its elements earnings go into the allocation of poverty oriented expenditures. In the revenue budget,

poverty oriented programmes during the last 23 years, on an average, shared 34 per cent of the total budget allocation. The highest share was in 1972-73 (64 per cent) and the lowest in 1975-76 (21 per cent). The average share was 36 per cent in the 70s, 32 per cent in the 80s and it again reached 36 per cent in the first half of 90s. It implies, more than onethird of the revenue expenditures is being allocated for the poverty alleviation programmes. Its implications are noteworthy on the ground that financial domestic resources are very scarce in the econ-

Under the development budget, over the span of last 23 years, on average, 40 per cent resources was allocated for the poverty oriented programmes. The decade of 70s enjoyed 42 per cent allocation. the 80s enjoyed 38 per cent and first half of the 90s enjoyed again 42 per cent. Let us

crore, indicating a share of 54 per cent in the total allocation, 6 per cent ratio to GDP and having a negative growth in the allocation. The share is highest among all the governments. the ratio to GDP is at par with General Zia's and General Ershad's periods, but the average rate of allocation is the lowest and there was no growth in the programmes. Here, one point should be made fully clear that the period of Bangabandhu does merit for the research, because not only the time span was too short for any kind of statistical analysis but the delinitions of the items were different and the programme like VGD did not develop at all and FFW programme was taken only for the last year with a little coverage, and also the period should simply be considered as rehabilitation period.

It appears from the statis-

tics that during the period of

Bangabandhu the average rate

of allocation was Tk 1449

It is presented here only for the sake of statistics. But still then, the commitment for the poverty oriented programmes was there. Data says like that.

During the period of General Zia, the average rate of allocation increased to Tk 2014

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.

Where the lids go?

Sir. Volumes have already been written on the open manhole menace. But who cares? WASA feels sick and tired in replacing the stolen manholes. But is it so?

Why can't the law enforcing authorities pull up the night guards? Or is it within the purview of DMP/DMC? Why the miscreants are not brought to book? Why this hide and seek game? Why stolen manhole lids are so much in demand allegedly? Is it because it has got underground market where it gets a very good price?

How long shall we run the risk of stumbling into the open manhole and succumb? This question must be answered by

the authorities concerned. And, of course the government owes an explanation to us for this flagrant lapse.

Flt Lt (Retd) Mohiuddin Dhaka-1206

Slum in BAI

Sir, 'Slum problem' is one of the major problems inside the campus of Bangladesh Agricultural Institute (BAI). Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka. Many unauthorised people have been living inside the BAI campus by creating slum areas. Due to these siums, the overall social and security situation. inside the campus is deteriorating day by day. The BAI

administration, teachers, stall and students through different committees have been trying to remove the slums but due to some legal and technical problems, the move has yet to be successful.

The legal process for evicting the unauthorised people is very much complicated which needs approval from a number of authorities. The technical problems on the way to containing the slum problem include - absence of well-protected gates on the college's entry points, non-completion, of the boundary walls, lack of enough security staff, etc.

it is, however, heartening that the Ministry of Agriculture is processing a pragmatic action plan towards resolving the slum problem once for all.

Now what is invariably needed is the cooperation from all the quarters including the VIPs. M Zahidul Haque

BAI Teachers' Association.

General Secretary

Dhaka

Paper crisis

Sir. A crisis of paper conthues to persist in the country for the past one year while the fertiliser crisis is at its peak but there seems no hope to overcome the crisis (of paper) irr the near future.

Magura Paper Mills, said to be a joint venture project of the Govts of China and Bangladesh, is yet to be on stream though shares and debentures were issued during the time of caretaker government in January '91. It is abnormal in the context of issue of initial public offering of shares that a joint venture could not be in production though enough public money was raised more than four years back.

Only recently Al-Baraka Bank, principal office, has reportedly sued BCIC, eight directors and two share holders of M/s Eastern Pulp and Paper Products for a sum of Tk 23.61 crore said to have been borrowed from the bank. If so, doesn't it seem evident in the above background that some

'talented' countrymen continue to manage siphoning off share holders' investment along with bank loan while students are in great difficulty due to exorbitant price of paper?

Sadiq Alee 120/1 Maghbazar. Dhaka-1217

Status of working women

Sir, It seems that in Ban gladesh today we hear a new proclamation from the religious activists every day. The other day they said women are meant to stay at home and work under their husbands feet. Recently they said that all women working for poverty alleviation under NGOs are up for grabs, basically there to be violated by any man (I fear for those NGO women working in The fields). No one said a word How come our female headed government allows all this abuse against working women. in fact any women, continue and gain ground? Have we lost the rule of law in this country? One wonders if fatwabajs can say what they want, why

couldn't Taslima Nasreen? Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could banish the latwahajs to the Scandinavian countries as well?

Outraged Dhaka

Democracy grows on responsibility

Sir. Congratulation to the ex-Industries Minister Mr A M Zahiruddin Khan who had resigned on April 04,1995. claiming to take the 'moral responsibility' for the fertiliser crisis, because democracy grows on responsibility. The ex-Minister Mr Khan had opened the gateway to sow the first seed of democracy by claiming to take the moral responsibility for the fertiliser crisis in the country We, the readers of the newspapers. would believe that his example shall be followed in the future and the country shall see a bet ter tomorrow without much problems stage by stage.

Andrew D'Costa 46 Hemendra Das Road. Dhaka