

A Shot Across the Bows: Beware of the Dogs of War

Godspeed the Centenary Games

The greatest show on earth opens in Atlanta today. Americans, at first rather tentative and lukewarm, are now back fully behind it to make this even greater than the greatest—something unbeatable. But the fear is this may land the Olympics Centenary session on being the greatest commercial show held ever — the thing the sponsor-nation is adept in — and little more. This prospect has the risk of compromising the spirit of the Olympic Games as either held in classical Greece or as revived by Baron Conbertin. Glitter is not the end-all of anything even when it comes off true gold.

This is one world congress of nations reaching through individuals and teams of such the limits of the powers of the body. And to stand out in such a concourse, bodies have been bent for years in each contestant's case and a hundred for the nations to techniques and heights of will and application that come from pressing the mind — specially intellect — to excel interminably. And the results of all that put into the contest then require a final cathartic push — more mental than physical. It was not for nothing that the sporting sanctuary on mount Olympus some four thousand years back was started as but a place of religious rituals. And even when the Romans took over its control and kept it for 14 centuries — 8th century BC to 4th century AD — the sport and games formed only a part of a four-yearly religious festival culture of the body.

We in Bengal from very early on have believed man to be the measure of everything and put man's body almost at the centre of the universe — naming one of our glorious musical genres — *dehataitva* — the knowledge of the body. But we did differently from the Greco-Roman approach by trying to extend the powers of the body by the powers of the mind. When in 1896 Pierre de Conbertin singlehandedly brought the Games back in the First Olympiad, Athens, he did that minus the ancient religious predominance and supplanting that with a new secular religiosity about the body's express powers and a growing world paternity basing on this growing culture. For the last few Games starting in the eighties, pageantry has been becoming overwhelming and the sport too specialised and numerous. Competition, rather than bringing the competitors and their nations closer, is pushing them away further — sportwise.

And now this unabashed Atlantan commercialisation should push the non-professional and culturalistic Conbertin inspirations recede further into the background. If this be the price for something, what is that something? We wish the Atlanta Games a grand success, gameswise.

Our HDI Rating

Bangladesh has made a slight progress in terms of human development index (HDI). This is a measure that takes into account the average life expectancy, education and per capita income of people in a country. So the progress statistically established but hardly tangible — has immense value for us. Among 174 countries our ranking has gone up from 146 in 1995 to 143 in 1996. There are two ways of reacting to this: we can take comfort in the fact that we have not gone down the ladder and then again we can take the position why did we not perform still better.

Some countries have done better than us and some have been worse off compared with us. What about the global position? That is hardly comforting for anyone. Globally the rich are getting richer and the poor poorer. So the polarisation or marginalisation or both are taking place on two basic levels. First, it is between countries and then within a society. Twenty per cent of the countries have as much as 78 per cent of global resources and the rest 80 per cent of the countries share as little as 22 per cent of resources.

So the poor in a poor country have to fight against two giant adversaries — one within the country and the other beyond the borders. In such a situation it is indeed difficult — if not impossible — for them to improve their HDI rating. On that count, Bangladesh certainly has an achievement to its credit. What is even more important is the confidence that it gives. If against overwhelming odds, and despite internal squabbles, we can improve our HDI record, we stand even a greater chance to make it better. What we need is to use our resources most discreetly, develop skill of our people — particularly of the poor segment. The unequal resource distribution the world over shows that creation of wealth alone does not guarantee human development, it also calls for equitable distribution of resources. Let our efforts be concentrated on investing in the poor to get the maximum benefit out of them. That way we can rest assured of a spectacular improvement in the HDI rating.

City Transportation

A 121.7 million US dollar Dhaka Urban Transport Project (DUTP) has been finalised for implementation from 1998. Funded by the World Bank the project is expected to bring about improvement — both short-term and long-term — in the city's communication network that will hopefully help us cope with the growing demand in the sector for the next 20 years. The details of the project preparation studies, expected to be completed in three phases by 1997, will actually give us an idea of the proposed improvement. However, the areas likely to figure for action are civil works, equipment for traffic management, institutional strengthening and policy studies.

We must have different categories of buses rendering services to meet varying needs of passengers. The concept of running minibuses in the city has been totally abused and distorted. We need more wide-bodied and double-decker buses to cope with the growing number of passengers.

The entire city should be divided into blocks connected with the main thoroughfares with provision for specific types of vehicles — preferably buses and rickshaws — using specified roads. We do not know whether the plan will focus on such compartmentalised vehicular services.

The enemies of Bangladesh in the post-75 period tried in every possible way to banish the ethos and ideals associated with Bengalee nationhood. Suddenly, issues not indigenous to the soil of Bengal, nor reflecting the real problems existing in the country, were imposed on the people of Bangladesh as a red herring.

bandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to Bangladesh from his incarceration in Pakistan. Those defeated forces got into action without any loss of time to destabilise the country. A shattered economy with only \$11 in cash in the Bangladesh Bank and no gold reserve, the new country inched its way, with generous international support, towards political and economic stability. While the new leadership was fully occupied, with rehabilitating 10 million refugees who fled from their hearth and home, and providing the very basic minimum to the freed people, its enemies assembled in darkness and like in yeasts the second coming the rough beast slouched back and unleashed its conspiratorial activities throughout the country.

It is worth recalling that the new country had to contend with such terrorist actions as movement for establishment for Arakan Muslim Bengal in Teknaf/Cox's Bazar, the so-called class struggle launched by the Shabbarah Party of Bengal, the clandestine killings of Purbo Bangla Communist Party, particularly in the Jessore-Kushtia s wathe, and the anti-social activities of so-called Revolutionary Gono Bahini orchestrated by the then JSD. Thanas were being looted and innocent civilians killed.

Tragically for the new country, those anti-state terrorist activities were given moral support by some gentlemen of the Fourth Estate who were well known for their sympathies with the anti-Bangalee elements during the War of Liberation — elements who assumedly received active support, moral and material, from the enemies of the new country at home and abroad. The ground work was done by these elements, with a text book perfection, as in the military parlance, softening the ground with artillery bombardment before the final assault. Then followed one of history's worst tragedies. Bangabandhu was brutally murdered. All family members including

Begun Mujib, Sheikh Kamal, Sheikh Jamal and young Russell were slaughtered on the 15th of August, 1975. The mayhem and murder on the night has very few parallels in history — only one or perhaps two. In Iraq Nuri Assaid and the entire family was killed in the Revolution in 1958. The Young King Faisal of Iraq and even his mother with the Holy Quran on her head, were not spared. The other was the elimination of the House of Romanovs in the night of 16-17 July, 1918. Czar Nicholas II with his ailing son Alexis, wife Alexandra, four daughters, family doctors and three servants were all brutally executed by a minor Siberian communist — Yurovsky. The Tsarina's maid frantically tried to save herself with a cushion. Their shrieks still echo in the Uspensky Cathedral in Moscow



as the Sumerian city of UR, the birth-place of Abraham, holds in painful memory the blood letting of August 1958. Yurovsky's body has been consigned to the dustbin of history, as the Iraqi conspirators themselves were victims of subsequent Bonapartism in Iraq.

In Bangladesh too, the Bangabandhu Bhavan at Rd 32, Dhanmondi, stands as the living testimony to the Bengalee struggle to realise the dreams of a sovereign homeland of their own. The blood on the stairs will not dry in as much as the memory of Bangabandhu cannot be effaced from our souls. The murderers are now fugitives from law.

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nous to the soil of Bengal, nor reflecting the real problems existing in the country, were imposed on the people of Bangladesh as a red herring. Distortion of history was pursued most disingenuously. Those who actively opposed the very creation of Bangladesh were rewarded — and many who had any contribution to the War of Liberation were carefully targeted, and were either killed or removed, or retired from service on one pretext or another. Then they tried to obliterate the name of Bangabandhu. All important agencies were manned by those who didn't believe in a sovereign Bangladesh. Foreign Ministry was used as a dumping ground of all unwanted people. Those who opposed Bangladesh and actively worked for the aggressors till



December 16th, 1971 were later made Foreign Secretaries. Drumocracy replaced democracy in letters and spirit. First the school textbooks were distorted. True history of the struggle of Bengalee nationhood was suppressed. Even the diary published by the Ministry of Information between '92 and '95 distorted history. I quote from the diary published in 1995. "The national struggle of the people of Bangladesh took a new shape under Pakistani rule followed by armed crackdown on the innocent people of Bangladesh which led to the declaration of independence of Bangladesh on 26th March, 1971 by Ziaur Rahman; then a major in the Pakistani army... The distortion is of Himalayan magnitude. Even president Zia never claimed this honour in his lifetime!" By allowing this falsification

of history Begun Zia, rather trivialised her husband's contribution. Like Khaled Mosharraf, Abu Osman Chowdhury, Major Rafiq, Tiger Siddiqui, A V M Khandakar or General Osman — General Ziaur Rahman also will be remembered as a war hero.

Most incomprehensible is the total and deliberate disappearance of the negatives of picture showing Bangabandhu on various history making occasions.

The new government elected to power is planning to write the true history of the War of Liberation. In this endeavour, they must be careful and avoid the mistakes of the past regimes. Recognition must be given to each and every individual regardless of party affiliation. Into exactly 24 days of the new government in office, there are disconcerting signs of polarisation. Licensed and unlicensed guns handed out to known terrorists of the country are now coming home to roost. All on a sudden there is a spurt of violence, hold-ups and daring daylight dacoities. Those at Chittagong, Mirpur and Khulna show a certain kind of similarity in the modus operandi. One need not be panicked but conscious citizens of the country must get together and nip the hydra-headed monster of terrorism in its bud. This kind of terrorism is redolent of activities of those underground organisations in the early seventies. The two main political parties ought to work towards finding a modus vivendi. BNP may not like the call of a national consensus government. They can certainly play the role of a constructive opposition in the Parliament. It is not to be forgotten that Nelson Mandela's consensus government in South Africa worked. Mandela also invited his jailers at his inauguration ceremony, thus setting a shining example of democratic tolerance. When Begun Zia decrees any effort of water sharing agreement with India we are really not circled. During her visit to In-

dia in June '92, she did not even raise the issue of Farakka with Premier Narasimha Rao. Foreign Minister Azad's remarks on the whole gamut of our foreign policy objectives including his emphasis on economic diplomacy together with Farook Sobhan's exchange of views with his — Indian counterpart on relations with India seem to give us a good start.

Politicians are known to be economic with truth, but when they play with the national interest of the country through sophistry and political brinkmanship, they are certainly answerable to the people.

A time has come when all the major political parties must rise above partisan interests and find a common ground to save the country. Number one priority is curbing terrorism and rid the academic institutions of mastans and terrorists. The government would do well to consult the opposition. July 20 round-table meeting is a step in the right direction. If circumstances demand, the government may consider seeking the assistance of FBI, Italian Carabinieri and Scotland Yard. As a matter of fact an agreement was reached with Carabinieri for developing cooperation with our police force in 1992 but it seems to have withered on the vine. It is to be remembered that with concerted efforts terrorism can be contained without any special law. Don't forget that the Red Brigade of Italy was controlled under the existing law of the land.

Terrorists are nobody's friends. They not only destabilise the existing system. They also create conditions for other anti-social elements to raise their heads. Political parties must agree on this simple fact. Infamous terrorist Indu was captured in 1981 from the house of State Minister of then BNP — it seems to have withered on the vine. It is to be remembered that with concerted efforts terrorism can be contained without any special law. Don't forget that the Red Brigade of Italy was controlled under the existing law of the land.

The part of the article "Government of National Consensus: Some Thoughts" is held over due to unavoidable circumstances.

Finance Minister's Pre-Budget Deliberations

by Kabir U Ahmad

THE new Finance Minister Mr. Shah AMS Kibria has recently held informal discussions with the country's distinguished economists and journalists on the major issues of national economy before preparing and presenting his new budget to the parliament. Inviting such an informal participation of the high level professionals and media representatives, and getting their feedback, is a commendable gesture which reflects the democratic attitude of a popularly elected government. The finance minister deserves congratulations for such openness, participatory attitude and confidence building.

However, the economists have expressed their views on giving subsidy to agriculture, reaching consensus within the government on reform programmes, formulating action agenda by the government instead of relying on the donor-sponsored ones, giving priority to the power sector and having pre-budget dialogues with representatives of people at different levels. There is no doubt that these are important issues to be taken note of before formulating the budgetary policies.

On his own part, the finance minister has assured the participants that the government wanted to achieve "inflation-neutral" high rate of growth to make a dent on the poverty level; social justice; high rate of domestic and foreign investment, and an enabling economic environment. All these are laudable objectives of the present government's economic policies which needed to be spelt out early on in the life of the new administration so that all the ministries, especially his own, can redesign the existing policies to meet them. Whether these are achievable simultaneously in the short run or sequentially in the medium-term over the next five years is a question that needs to be answered by doing a careful quantitative analysis.

The hidden complexities associated particularly with the achievement of "inflation-neutral" high growth rate, poverty alleviation, and social justice by

using monetary and fiscal tools when the economy is stuck with huge resource constraints, wasteful public expenditures, rigidities in the tax collection system, widespread inefficiency in the public sector industries and poor infrastructural facilities are quite formidable. Nevertheless, one wishes the finance minister best of luck in his efforts in achieving his objectives.

Facing the Twenty-first Century

The purpose of this short article, however, is not to criticise, condemn or deride anyone but to inject a new dimension into the pre-budget deliberations on the desired

ahead of the opening of the borders of the trading countries.

The present administration is the only one which will have to undertake this difficult and unpleasant task. There doesn't seem to be any significant and serious national awareness in the country to adopt any action-programme on this vital issue while its competitors are quietly bracing themselves up for this "brave new world." As far as one can see, it is the honourable minister of finance in cooperation with the minister of commerce and industry who are the right persons in the new cabinet who have to come to grips with this difficult problem and its various ramifications affecting every sector of the economy.

infrastructure will have to be modernised and expanded, and human resources will have to be retrained and developed on a massive state-of-the-art technology in production, management, communication and marketing. From these perspectives, Bangladesh seems to have a long way to go.

The Present Scale of Resource Wastage

If one examines the government budget allocations, one is struck with the levels of resource wastage. Only a small number of items will be pointed out here.

In the first place, education and Religion gets the highest amount of allocation of Tk 3753.71 crores accounting for about 16 per cent of the total

about 225 SOEs (grouped under 38 corporations) which are in operation, about 154 of them in the manufacturing sector. The total losses of all the SOEs now come to about Tk 2.5 billions which when converted into US dollars at the current exchange rate amounts to about \$620 million. This is sometimes covered by government's infusion of capital, and at other times by write-offs of the banking credits. Whichever way it is financed, there is no doubt that it represents a financial hemorrhage to the economy. However, if one calculates carefully all the losses inside and outside the budget allocations, it will come to about \$1 billion a year.

Finally, the current GDP of Bangladesh is about \$24 billion while its current external debt is about \$15 billion. The annual interest and capital repayment eats up about 25 per cent of the country's export earnings. Once the grace period of the past loan is over, which seems not too far away, the payment burden can increase at almost an exponential rate. Hopefully, the country doesn't reach a stage when it will have to borrow to pay its international debt obligations.

It would be appropriate to conclude by raising some questions. Is it possible for such an inefficient, debt-ridden and loss-bearing economy to grow at anything more than its historical rate of around 3.5 per cent to 4 per cent? How long can such a poor economy bear such a colossal loss of national resources every year? Doing out such a huge amount of tax-payers' money to maintain a group of unproductive workers and managers satisfy the criteria of social justice? Should it continue decade after decade? Shouldn't something drastic be done to eliminate injustice from the budgetary and non-budgetary allocation processes? If nothing is done to restore economic efficiency and allocative justice, very little improvement can be brought about, and the country will remain a "sick man" of Asia while others will be marching ahead in the ruthlessly competitive world that is emerging in the early years of the next century.

The very first thing that needs to be done is the restoration of productive efficiency in every economic activity quite mercilessly. That means, all the distributions of largesse maintained over decades directly through the government budget and indirectly through public sector industries and banks as well as by showing leniency to corrupt practices of the officials which are euphemistically called leakages and pilferages from various systems, will have to be cut out

What has to be Done?

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In addition, new productive capacities will have to be created both in export and export-related industries, new exportable products will have to be developed, banking and insurance institutions will have to be streamlined, the entire

Revenue and ADP budget. On the surface of it, it is laudable to give the highest amount of budgetary allocation to nation's education sector. (Incidentally, if one adds all the items under various heads in the Demand for Grants, one finds that there are other items of budget expenditures which get larger allocations). If one looks closely at the sub-heads under Education in 1995-96 budget one finds that Primary Education gets Tk 953 crores, Secondary and Higher Education gets Tk 890 crores, Technical Education gets Tk 44 crores and University Education gets Tk 164 crores while Other Secondary — Educational Services get Tk 91 crores. In this perspective, see the amount of direct grants given to Non-Government Madrasahs (religious schools) sector in 1995-96. It has been Tk 200 crores. It is not an exceptional year of such allocation. The revised budget of 1994-95 shows the same amount of Tk 200 crores and the actual expenditure in 1993-94 shows an amount of Tk 163

95. There is a regular loss of Tk 90 crores to Tk 100 crores every year under Railway only. Further, one sees a Lump Provision "Non-Sectoral Allocation of Tk 4781.02 crores (Revenue expenditure) of Tk 3896.58 crores and ADP expenditures of Tk 890.44 crores) in 1995-96 while the corresponding revised estimate figures for 1994-95 was Tk 4323.31 crores (Revenue expenditures being Tk 3750.68 crores and ADP expenditures being Tk 572.63 crores). Where have these colossal amounts been spent? Were these spent productively? Finally, there was an item of Unallocated Expenditure of Tk 200 crores in 1995-96 budget (only in the Revenue expenditure) and the corresponding 1994-95 amount was only Tk 18.05 crores. Here again the same question arises: was it spent productively?

In the second place, one has to draw attention to the annual amounts of losses incurred by the State Owned Enterprises (SOE). There are

To the Editor...

Time-Bangla Trust

Sir, The government has recently announced privatisation of the four trust newspapers, viz. *Dainik Bangla*, *The Bangladesh Times*, weekly *Bichitra* and fortnightly *Ananda Bichitra*. A meeting of the Central Coordinating Council comprising Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalist (BFUJ), Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ), Bangladesh Newspapers Press Workers Federation and Bangladesh Journalists Employees Federation have expressed their concern at the announcement of the Prime Minister to disinvest the four newspapers of Time-Bangla Trust.

As a regular reader of all the four publications, and a conscious citizen, I would request the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to kindly consider the

following points before privatising those newspapers:

- i) In the context of Bangladesh, at least one or two newspapers should be kept under government control for ensuring dissemination of information pertaining to government plan and action on various developmental issues on priority basis, ii) All the four publications have so far achieved reputation as standard publications keeping national values, iii) many journalists, employees and press workers would lose their job which is a great humanitarian point of consideration.

Under these circumstances, it is sincerely expected that the government will change its decision and take some pragmatic steps for further improving the standard of these publications and for raising their credibility as effective communication media.

M Zahidul Haque, Assistant Professor, BAI, Sove-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207.

Politicisation of Administration

Sir, While addressing a meeting of the officials of the Bangladesh Secretariat, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina declared that her government would not politicise the administration like the previous governments.

Officials who addressed in that meeting were seen to express their solidarity with the so-called "Janata Mancha" — platform erected by DCC Mayor Md Hanif who is also the president of the Dhaka City Awami League, during 'ashoh-oj' of the then opposition parties. So, it is apparent that those officials — has already

made themselves politically involved with a particular party. Being flanked by them, was it not contradictory to say what she has said? Sakot Hassanain, Green Road, Dhaka-1205.

Charity begins at home

Sir, New Home Minister has taken an endeavour to rid society from terrorist activities whatever may be the forms and hues. In fulfillment of his great task he wants to reach general consensus on the burning issue of our land in these days. The Home Minister has described his ministerial task to the same as the role and task of a freedom fighter in 1971. We appreciate his approach. It is general belief that nourishment of terrorist-by

political leaders the mischievous culture if they can shun, then solution as is not far off. Charity begins at home. We want to remind all political leaders this famous proverb before reaching general consensus to make our country free from terrorism.

Bose Asoke Kumar, House # 413, Road # 10, Block-B, Chandnagar R/A, Chittagong-4212

'Composing' in Khulna

Sir, Who says that our society is not technology-oriented enough? Yesterday for three long hours, I relentlessly tried to get a few pages of my library book photocopied but failed. It was because all photocopier shops (about nine shops that I visited at various parts of the

city) were overworked with HSC examinees 'composing' their answers for the examinations on the next day.

The HSC examinees adopting unfair means have given the size reducing photocopy mechanism the pet name 'composing' and the photocopy shops are putting up advertisement of 60-200 per cent composing (reduction).

These HSC examinees are swarming around various photocopier shops with their notebooks to reduce them to their pocket size. Their shameless and unwhary faces surely prove that our society is indeed getting the highest benefit of the cutting edge of modern technology.

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