

Not Just a Policy

It is good to see the education policy stealing a march on its rivals. The issue has been broached and the House briefed by none other than the Education Minister himself.

Science and technology will be headmost in the formative consideration of the would be education policy and that it will not have exhausted itself of its utilitarian rationale in fifty years. Sounds sound. Until now, our education policy has hardly experienced anything by way of effective experiment. The recommendations and suggestions of the Kudrat-e-Khuda education commission have remained by and large valid. It is a sound platform for a new beginning now or anytime in future. What this otherwise sound nucleus lacks in is the great technological advancement that has inevitably come as the handmaid of time.

It might appear profoundly peregrine to minds adept in associating all acts of upgradation or overhauling with unbearable phenomenon of expenditure but we cannot help feeling that the government should usher in wholesale computerisation in this sector. Imagine what hitherto unimaginable and unseemly doors of information will be opened once computers make their way in the village schools! Students wallowing in the pool of old books of outdated information can dip into the ocean of a data bank for so much updated information and knowledge if only they have the will and the way. For example, geography will be such an interesting subject to teach and learn if programmes like GIS (Geographical Information System) of CD ROM (Read Only Memory) can be used.

Computerisation contrary to the conventional concept is a highly feasible and cost-effective project. To make wholesale computerisation a viable project, the government should explore the possibilities of using solar energy. Allowed to work as the enhancing and complementary factor in the optimal use of each other, these two ideas can revolutionise our education policy.

TV's JS Coverage

Five notices were served on Thursday by opposition members of the Jatiya Sangsad to protest the manner in which BTV was covering the Sangsad proceedings. One of them even offered that the television better not at all telecast the opposition's participation in the proceedings rather than showing it unfairly. The Deputy Speaker dispensed with the notices by saying he would ask authorities to ensure that television coverage of the Sangsad fairly reflected the goings on in the House.

It will be futile to question if BNP has the right to seek fairness from BTV with the performance record they have of wholly monopolizing the whole electronic media for years. This wouldn't be at all helpful in bringing about a radical change in the treatment of political news by radio and TV which has been a long-standing demand of our people and to which the present government is very much committed. Indeed, we are wholly at one with the BNP stand on fairness. The point is one of principle and together with the Deputy Speaker we would ask the authorities to abide by this principle of fairness.

The Deputy Speaker, however, was also very decisive when he said five hours of proceedings couldn't be telecast in the half hour or so TV gives to live showing of the JS. This follows from his saying the obvious that such short coverage would always lend to all sorts of interpretations. There is a way out of this, however.

The best way to guarantee fairness as accepted by all quarters is to maximise the TV coverage. The small chunk that BTV allots to JS has worked wonders with our viewers. This one programme has weaned away lakhs of them from their habitual exposure to cheap and commercial channels. JS Live has been the best viewer-puller in BTV's life, barring possibly the World Cup soccer. And this has been supremely educative. We believe whatever the cost, the proceedings should be telecast in full.

If it calls for opening a second channel, just go and do it. But that will not only take money. It will take time, perhaps much time. For now we must make do with extending the evening session up to midnight and add to this 90-minute slot another chunk of one and a half hour in the afternoon. A five-hour session can be squeezed into a three-hour show time with much more satisfaction to all parties.

Our concrete suggestion is that let the whole session be recorded. One third be shown live, the rest, the following day 2.30 pm onwards. This will not clash with BTV's regular programmes.

Of Uranium and Likes

In the tide and tiding of stunning scientific advancement, we are lagging behind the world around us by many light years. Even though, science has a way of making us aware of the global dynamism around us in this respect and together with some natural emergence here and there, now and then, we are made to feel that this stasis is not all and the end, and there is something good awaiting us at the end of the tunnel.

The resumption of the aired and expected resumption of the field survey to explore the existence of Uranium at Phultala of Sylhet is one of the most recent drafts of a distant science that has visited us of late.

The report published in The Daily Star with quite a bit of preferential treatment does not hold the promise of a watershed in the discovery of uranium and the subsequent revolution in the field of atomic energy and its use but it certainly has the potential of a scientific golden dawn.

It is a pity that although the uranium ore was first detected way back in 1985, nothing worth mentioning has been achieved so far. This 'no headway' reality is the result of repeated suspensions of the project.

We feel it is about time these types of stoppages and closures of matters related to national development became a phenomenon of past once for all. There can rise only anger and consternation in a mind with a semblance of patriotism when one looks ahead in a reverie about the scientific development Bangladesh could have attained with proper survey going on and a discovery or two taking place, particularly when huge deposits of Uranium have been found in the lim-tropic areas in neighbouring India. Even if there are not any uranums in store, let these surveys go on in all times and in all circumstances.

An Economist with a Difference

Professor Sobhan starts with the promise that in a country like Bangladesh, the public sector has a pivotal role to play in economic development. He had always been an ardent advocate of growth with justice — one might disagree with his thesis, but the fact remains that he presents his thesis with lots of arguments which sometimes are difficult to refute.

PROFESSOR Rehman Sobhan, an eminent economist of this country, cut the birthday cake to celebrate his stepping into 60. As one of his former students, I would like to congratulate Professor Sobhan on his 60th birthday and wish him a long and active life. When we were his students at Dhaka University, in 1969 to be precise, he was just in his early 30s. As an young economist in the 1960s Rehman Sobhan emerged as one of the ardent proponents of the famous two-economy theory before the liberation of Bangladesh. He used to teach us the course on "Pakistan Economics" where the economic disparity that existed between the then eastern and western wings that used to dominate his presentations. As a teacher, he rarely missed any class. His presentations to the students on disparity were loaded with statistics and to make those statistics juicy, Rehman Sobhan used to pour out a lot of humour in the presentation. In fact, his remarks on the then Pakistan economy made many of us tilted to the cause of this part of erstwhile Pakistan and left us imbued with the spirit of independence. His theoretical lectures were followed by empirical research, and taken these two together, we were evaluated for in our examinations.

Rahman and Khan later moved on to the international agencies. However, when the War of Liberation began, Professor Sobhan and others joined the Liberation War and began to espouse the cause of independence in different capacities. Their contributions to our freedom struggle are recorded in history to imbibe future generation of economists to fight for the cause of their motherland.

It may be mentioned here that, while we began to grow up with the knowledge of textbook economics via the marvellous teachings of professors

need exists for further development of capital. In fact, the former West Pakistanis used to play the capital/output ratio as a "political football" to deprive the then East Pakistan from getting more allocations. Like this, there were a volley of interesting and humorous stories that Professor Sobhan used to tell us to drive home his hypothesis and to arouse our interest in the subject.

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BIDS enjoyed its peak days of research, policy advice and international reputation. Just as Grameen Bank is associated with Professor Yunus, so used to be BIDS with Professor Sobhan. With his departure from BIDS, this citadel of economists rarely flicked to get public attention.

Second, Professor Sobhan is currently heading an institution called the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD). The CPD under his able guidance already attracted attentions of academics in home and abroad. The centre produced a report on the reform experiences in Bangladesh — the first ever in Bangladesh alone. However, the greatest contribution of the CPD is initiating dialogue among donors, active ministries, academicians, business community etc. Hitherto dialogue was the most conspicuous item in the agenda of our national leaders with a handful of such attempts, we began to realize that every action by the government or any policy changes instituted by a government need to be based on dialogue among the agents involved. This assures transparency and credibility to the ongoing policy packages including reforms.

Some of Professor Sobhan's former famous colleagues and students brought out a book titled "State Market and Development" and dedicated it to his 60th birthday. We would like to thank all of them who took the initiative. As one of his former students unfortunately neither famous nor of many order express my deep gratitude to this titan teacher of our time. I wish him godspeed and long life.

Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes



Rahman and Khan, Sobhan introduce us to an almost unknown world of economics called the Political Economy.

It appeared to many of us for the first time that economics is not just a subject to be taught in the classroom only, nor it is the domain of economists only. Politics has a dominant role to play in moulding economic issues. For example, capital/output ratio is a pure and simple economic concept but could be used as, using Sobhan's terminology, a "political football" by politicians to discriminate allocate resources for a particular region. If it is high, capital so diverted would turn out to be wasteful and if it is low, no

ardent advocate of growth with justice — one might disagree with his thesis, but the fact remains that he presents his thesis with lots of arguments which sometimes are difficult to refute. In the independent Bangladesh besides his academic pursuits, he had been deeply involved in various movements that swept the country. He made two other important contributions which need mention. First, as the Director General of the Bangladesh Institute for Development (BIDS), Professor Sobhan attempted to pull together the brightest economists of the soil and he largely succeeded in his venture. During his tenure, it may be recalled, the

Cacophony of Frustration!

by Kazi Alauddin Ahmed

IF you want to continue the democratic trend you have to allow opposition to express their opinion in Parliament — so said Begum Khaleda Zia in her 'meet the people' appearance at Bogra on July 21, 1996. This she said, perhaps to clarify her two walkouts in three days of the Seventh Sangsad session. Besides, she may have made a renewed attempt to tell her listeners how much she feels for democratic trend. In the course of her deliberation she did not forget to allude to the 70 per cent time of the House which was given to the opposition in the 5th Parliament.

It is indeed good to observe that she has maintained an updated statistics of JS timings while in session. But, she seemed to have totally forgotten that, as the Leader of the House, she could not apportion to herself even 3 per cent of the 30 per cent time which she claimed to have retained for her Treasury bench. This was because she could not afford time to keep herself present in the parliament in the manner expected of a Leader of the House, let alone her scanty and none too impressive participation.

In the same public meeting under reference she has made another interesting revelation, rather, a belated and eerie discovery that the Awami League-Jatiya Party coalition in the current Sangsad is rooted back to 1982 since when the two parties are having a sort of 'clandestine' relationship.

Like all her party mates, she too does not understand 'consensus' which Sheikh Hasina professes. As in the past when she did not understand what a 'non-party caretaker government' was, she seems to have been considering her 'ignorance' as a bliss and disposes it off as a folly to be wise. On the other hand, the Awami League Chief and the Prime Minister predicted on the floor that sooner or later the required 'wisdom'

shall dawn on the opposition leader.

As of now, there is no sign that the prediction of the Leader of the House shall come true. Nevertheless, it may be pertinent to note that, despite the debatable bickering over the alleged 'one-eyed' treatment of the Opposition bench by the Speaker Humayun Rashid Chowdhury, it was not the ruling party that gave BNP the maiden shock. It came all the way from their own party stalwart and outgoing Speaker Sheikh Razaque Ali whose firm refusal to admit an adjournment motion by the opposition dished out to them an unpalatable recipe. The first walk-out was the eventual outcome of such a hard decision of Sheikh Razaque Ali.

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The scenario prior to the first session of the seventh parliament on July 14, 1996 shall also come back to our vision for a review. Consequently their defeat in the 12th June election, the BNP leaders started loud protests claiming that their victory was 'snatched away' by the caretaker government. Election Commission, District Administrations, law enforcing agencies combine. Contrary to such claims, all the national and international observers, journalists, polls monitors etc. acclaimed the whole process of election as free and fair and congratulated everyone who was connected with the conduct of the election.

Still then, some of the leaders (like Anwar Zahid) rejected the acclamation as 'biased' and 'motivated' and the top notches went further stating that they would have won 111 seats more to add to the 116 they could bag. Thus they

would have formed the government with 227 MPs on their side. Such an ambitious but audacious contention would have instantly conjured up a scene depicting the biggest and most organised party from the grassroots level, the Awami League, and the otherwise sizeable Jatiya Party sucking their thumbs. Such an imaginary situation would even have bracketed these two parties with the Jamaat-e-Islami Party which had eventually, tasted a slashing defeat bagging only three seats as against 18 in 1991 election.

The scenario I was talking of in preceding paragraphs has had another intriguing aspect. Having thus lost their throat-power, BNP Chairperson and her illustrious colleagues went on creating yet more dramatic sequence of events.

The first bid on these counts was to set in a confusion in the public mind indirectly making the winner Awami League its target that, unless due amends were made in the so-called 'unfair' gamble by the caretaker government and its combines, BNP would have to re-consider taking oath by its MPs. Their pretentious absence on the pre-set date spoke eloquently on their intentions. Fortunately, awesome manoeuvres were of no consequence as, ostensibly, they found themselves trapped in their own snares.

And again, when they had ultimately opted for taking the constitutional oath, they did it minus their 'charismatic' leader. Curiously enough, she was very much present in the oath-taking ceremony with her band of MPs, she did not take the oath which was reported

to have been on grounds of her 'physical indisposition.' She or her party men apparently did not realize that the credibility of such 'indisposition' could be jeered at and that her 'physical appearance' at the scene would have abnegated their claim.

To the members of the public it was another vicious attempt to make the situation all the more cloudy. Begum Zia chose another day to take the oath and in the meantime, allowed herself to be persuaded to accept her defeat by a 'far-away telephone call'. The contents of such call were though not made public, it was not very difficult to understand that the news of the call itself was again a sordid manipulation of the makers to impress upon her political adversaries of the great 'pull' she still enjoyed abroad.

But, nothing could change her position as the Leader of the Opposition even though she appears to be caught in an abyssal quagmire of frustration. Naturally, she has been in dire need to have a sort of distraction in order to overcome her wounded feelings and shattered hopes.

Hence, she has been on a mass-contact spree playing the old, broken record. While the venerable Chairperson has been scared of her political opponents who, in her words, were up to destroy the 'nationalistic forces', her new Secretary General, a former labour leader and also a minister warns the 'nationalist, democratic forces' to be alert against the 'unholy alliance' meaning AL-JP-JSD (Rob) whom he consider as 'the enemies of democracy.' Such an insidious aspersion, particularly on Awami League, behoves people infesting the political arena of Bangladesh originating from military rule. They must remember their own past and refrain from claiming that democracy is the monopoly. They must also take lessons from their defeat in the last national election and mend their own fences.

To the Editor

"Concert for Bangladesh"

Sir, I read with a lot of passion the article of Mr Asrarul Islam Chowdhury under the caption, "Children of the Nineties. Look at What We've Done", published in your esteemed daily in the Teens and Twenties on 2nd August. The Concert raised a lot of awareness in favour of our Liberation War among the international community.

I must confess that I was really ashamed when I was "officially" invited by one of the organisers or singers of the concert during the last 25 years since our independence. This is really miserable. I am sure that many others also feel the way I do. I would thus like to attract the attention of the present government to act in this regard. The demand is more justifying as we should have done so a long time ago.

As the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has already shown in deeds and not in words that she is enthusiastic about establishing a qualitative change in politics, may be this is another opportunity that she should not miss. Finally, a word for Mr Asrarul. I try to read most of your writings and I personally like your style especially the way you use mu-

sic in your writings. Dr A S Karim, 227 New Elephant Road, Dharmadai, Dhaka - 1205

Sabinaye Jante Chai

Sir, Almost all the political parties, like Bangladesh Nationalist Party, Jatiyo Party, Jamaat-e-Islami and even Awami League brought allegations of vote rigging of 12th June '96 election, though in 1991 election only one political party has brought the allegation of (Sukho Karchupi) subtle rigging.

This is some of the political party has brought the allegation of "Pukur Churi", "Sagar Churi" etc. However, how far the election was fair and impartial and how far the Chief Adviser and Chief Election Commissioner were impartial and sincere to their responsibilities should immediately be judged. Nobody is above the law and as such they should be immediately questioned in TV's Sabinaye Jante Chai programme about their activities.

television programme "Sabinaye Jante Chai" for at least one hour and they should be questioned by the leaders of the major political parties.

Abdus Salam, Naya Pallan, Dhaka

Kindergarten kids

Sir, These days most of the kindergarten school children are caged like chickens in small and crowded dark rooms without sufficient natural air and light. There are no play grounds or out-door spaces in the school compounds for the children to play. This is because there is an acute shortage of land. Land is very costly and most of the schools in the private sector are running on commercial basis.

It appears that like the garments factories the owners of which want to get-rich-quick with earnings of more and more profit the owners of most of the private schools are also running after money. It is true that we are pursuing an open market economy. But it is also true that our children also need open air and healthy environment to build up themselves. Would our Minister of Education and MPs kindly visit

some of the kindergarten schools situated in every nook and corner of Dhaka city?

O H Kabir, 6, Hare Street, Wari, Dhaka-1203

Highway robbery

Sir, One of our state ministers was travelling to Dhaka and his car was stopped by a group of dacoits on the Mymensingh-Dhaka highway.

The minister ordered his escort police contingent not to open fire when the miscreants fled away recognising that the car they shopped belonged to a minister and not to an ordinary hapless taxpayer. Why the minister did not allow the members of the law-enforcing agencies to act as per law and as per the training they received to become a police officer?

Is this the way the government is going to improve law and order? At least the arms the dacoits were carrying for use could have had been recovered. Let the state minister and the home minister speak out. We want to know. Nasreen Jahari, Road 8, Baranji, Dhaka

And the Tradition Continues

by Sayed Talat Kamal

AS they say "morning shows the day," and if the axiom is true, then we can look forward to some much needed change in government and government policy. It appears that things aren't all that bad under an Awami League government.

It is funny that some people, this writer included, were rather apprehensive of an Awami League government. But the fact that they are here in the first place is the democratic process in action, and to show respect for the process actions must follow. We should all therefore respect the change and if the results of the change are good, as they appear to be, we should respect the change even more.

It is unfortunate that not everyone who screams for democracy respects the process. Although, regardless of the results, it was expected that there would be one party or the other screaming about esewed results due to vote rigging or terrorism or both.

Now that the much needed elections are finally over, and the new parliament sworn in, is it possible to get on with development? Or exercising political opposition without strikes and hartals that has proven near fatal to the economy? Optimistically speaking it would seem to be the case, or that is at least what one could hope for. However, reality would probably be harsher. The one thing that the politicians have in common is their blatant nonchalance for the obvious. Already the BNP has begun walking out of parliament at the slightest provocation.

With the Awami League in the seat of government, the parties that are in the opposition have all had held the highest office in the country at one time or the other (except for the Jamaat-e-Islami, which in the recent elections have proved to be not such a major party). Therefore they should all be aware of the economic devastation left in the wake of a series of strikes, hartals or gheraos (or whatever seems to be in season).

No patriotic political leader, who is in the game for national gain rather than personal gain, can call for a stoppage of work or start rampaging and pillaging in the name of political opposition. This is the time for democracy to work, and political fights fought out in parliament with debates and rhetoric. The country can ill-afford to relive the last two years all over again.

It is apparent that the Awami League is trying to bring some change, it is also apparent that the Awami League is getting caught up in the petty issues of change. The putting up of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's portrait at BIRDEM is the most recent and by far the most highly criticised.

The mainstream opposition, the BNP, has sadly proved rather disappointing. Begum Khaleda Zia in the five years that she has served as prime minister has never been reported sick, yet the day progress when the MPs were sworn in she was allegedly unwell. If it's not a question of skepticism it is a question of a fantastic coincidence.

Even more disappointing is that the flood aid has always been a point for political battle. Throughout the years the ruling government has always been unable to relieve the distress of the people. Begum Khaleda Zia, fresh out of power and fresh out of a flood disaster should know how difficult it is to hand out aid given that corruption in the ranks. No report has been published in the papers that Begum Zia has offered her help, or advise for that matter, in aid distribution. It is a given fact that there will always be inadequate aid to meet the demand of the affected people, and it also appears a given fact that the opposition will always blame the ruling party for this inadequacy.

The opposition have always been great at pointing out the obvious problem, but have always reserved the solutions for when they come to power. Meanwhile a population suf-

fers, or isn't the plight of people important until next elections?

This election was a crucial turning point for the country. It would still be so, even if the results were different. This is the time for collective development, the political parties behind the scenes. What difference can there be worth holding onto if the final aim of all the parties is to develop the country? How come then do the parties not use every opportunity to discuss and come to a compromise as to the general direction the country must go?

It is probably not an easy task to come to a compromise or discuss the agenda thoroughly, but attempts have to be made to try. The first reaction of the opposition is to criticise without actually offering a reason. The opposition must collectively police the ruling party and protect the interest of the people, they must also collectively support any plan the ruling party has made in the interest of the people. Opposition parties, and all other major political parties in the country who were at one time or the other in the opposition, have done the contrary and have opposed for the sake of opposing.

There is no evil forest work here. There is just a personalised 'cold war' in action. So it seems, the two ladies in the seat of their respective political parties have made the battle for the seat of government very personal, and it is the general mass who subsequently have to pay the price.

It is a disgrace that the one item on political agenda that gets full attention is a barrage of allegations and accusations thrown at each other. The pointing of fingers; the passing on of the blame; the idea that only person accountable is someone else. All this must stop for the sake of progress.

The country has been independent for over a quarter of a century, a political system has to be developed. A system of checks and balances that keeps everyone under control, inside government and outside government; accountability for the leaders' actions; a respected judicial operation; more power to the people to decide; more civil rights; and less willful power to top authority figures, be it in government hierarchy, political party hierarchy, the judicial system or the civil defense system.

The current prime minister promises a 'continuity and stability in economic policies' and hopes to achieve it through initiating 'political order'. The only problem with this sentiment is that she must realise that she cannot ensure political order without the consensus of the opposition, namely the BNP. To arrive at a 'broad consensus on governance' she must be willing to sit with the opposition and come to an understanding.

Once she has initiated a forum and actually has an opportunity to discuss the problems and hopes to achieve a mutually beneficial solution will true progress start. However, she must remember that when the previous government had tried to initiate a similar forum they were not extended cooperation. A basic "tit for tat", "eye for an eye", retaliatory politics. Someone must relent; not lose face but relent for the sake of the people whose welfare they all seem to be bleeding for.

There are no saints in this country; there aren't any anywhere else in the world for that matter. The politicians that are running the country are our very own, and they have to understand that the road to good governance is through consensus and understanding and through a collective cooperative development policy. One party cannot be busy thwarting the attempts of progress another party proposes.

The mornings was bright, but someone has to notice the clouds overhead and prepare for a 'might-be' storm. It is easy to forget that when the day comes to an end a political era ends, not a country. If the country ends, what good is the promised dawn?

OPINION

"BIRDEM Affair"

Thanks to Mr Mahfuz Anam for his article 'News analysis: BIRDEM I and II' published in The Daily Star on 27th and 28th July respectively.

I have experience in running big teaching hospitals for many years and in that light I enclose the following observation for your perusal.

1. BIRDEM should not be touched by government. Dr. F. Mahtab, Major General A R Khan and Dr Azad Khan are very efficient persons to run the organization of late Prof M Ibrahim.

2. There is an order of Establishment Ministry that no class III and IV employees will ever be transferred from their place of appointment. This group creates problems in every institute and hospital.

but now with 'black number plates' in government vehicles, there is constant misuse of the same.

4. Most of the senior government officers have houses/flats at Dhaka but they are residing in government flats till retirement.

5. Family planning will never be successful if simple male operation is not introduced as a male can ejaculate sperm till death even at his 90 to 100 years of age.

No promotion, increment or other benefits in government/non-government office will be allowed if the incumbent has more than two children without consideration of male or female issues.

Association (BMA) and Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council (BMDC) are the two institutions who till date did not punish any criminal doctor. A group of young lawyers may visit different hospitals at Dhaka/districts and sue against negligence and by that they may help themselves and the society.

Dr A Rahman, Baranji, Dhaka