

## Performance in Parliament

A beleaguered caretaker government and an embattled Election Commission gave us a good election, perhaps better even than the model Shahabuddin election. How could they do it? Because it was our people who actually delivered such a clean election. Their heroic performance is being paid back by what kind of a Parliament really?

If the opposition is out to wreck this Parliament for their own good and very transparent reasons, the nation is at a loss to understand why did government head straight for the trap and try to outmatch BNP in a competition of vituperation and irrelevance and throwing the day's work away — after making a wonderfully cool and accommodating start of hands extended in the best of goodwill. What harm to BNP was done by Khaleda Zia's *be-dab* antic has largely been lost to people's memory by AL's taking the cue from the BNP's indecorous showing.

If it is a civilised society we constitute, August 25 should go down in our history as a black black day. Many were the unprintables that were bandied about that day defiling the sanctity of that sovereign House. That House is sovereign but not its individual members. Foul language and bad manners constitute privilege for no one, the more so for a member of the Sangsads who is supposed to lead not only his constituency but the whole nation. Not all Sangsads members are equally and invariably educated but that cannot be a licence for many of them to indulge in an open exhibition on the floor of gross indecency. Bangladesh's independence owes its emergence very largely to the Bangalee people's love for and loyalty to their language — and lo! what a use of the Bangalee language they are making each working day of the Sangsads!

No, our people deserve a far better parliament. To the Opposition we say don't deliberately wreck the Parliament. For it will be wrecking the state and the independence of Bangladesh. It is only through giving a better account of yourselves — as gentlemen and a dependable and decent lot — that you can hope to regain your lost ground — and not at all by intensifying your campaign of irresponsibility. To the government we appeal to stick to the promises it showed for tolerance and accommodation and striving for consensus in everything. It is good governance and radical resolution of long standing national problems — and not the present tendency to be bogged down in quagmires of opposition filibuster — that they will keep their covenant with the people.

## Rural Finance

The World Bank has strong arguments against the way the rural financial sector has been operating in the country. Its report titled "Bangladesh Rural Finance" is easily the best analysis available to-date of the highly under-developed rural financial market in a totally ironic contrast to agriculture being the mainstay and poverty alleviation the number one priority of the economy.

Between the exploitative informal money-lenders still dominating the rural scene and the highly successful membership-based institutions like the Grameen Bank and some 'minimalist' NGOs, we have Bangladesh Krishi Bank (BKB) and Rajshahi Krishi Unnayan Bank (RKUB) making a mess of themselves, let alone serving agriculture. Brought into existence to curb the tyranny of private money lending BKB and RKUB are virtual losers to it having snatched under the dead-weight of mismanagement, political interference and unrecovered loans all rolled in. There cannot be any second opinion about the WB's finding that our financial markets are too fragmented and inadequate to meet the demand for financial services in the rural areas.

The World Bank's recipe for a turn-around in the situation reads like this: restructure the public sector financing institutions to make them viable or just close them down, replicate the Grameen Bank-type success in terms of outreach, cost-benefit ratio and sustainability, depend less on donor funds and finally develop a self-propelled rural financial market.

Our financial sector reform agenda remains basically confined to the domains of banking, corporate or company laws and the stocks and securities market. The entirety of the rural financial sector has been largely overlooked and must now be pushed to the centre-stage of the economic reform agenda. We are fully aware of the types of financial services required by the rural people in pursuit of their normal vocations or the self-employment projects that are becoming popular. What is needed now is to meet their demand for finances in an institutional manner.

## Logical Invitation

Foreign observer groups are welcome to monitor the by-elections to 15 Jatiya Sangsads seats scheduled for September 5. The Foreign Ministry has done well to have written to the foreign embassies in Dhaka and overseas missions extending the invitations to observer groups. Since the process of inviting them began some time ago we are hoping that they would find it convenient to arrive in some strength to observe the polls in logical extension of the monitoring they had so wonderfully done over the June elections.

The reason why they are doubly welcome is because this is an elected government as distinguished from a caretaker government under which the polls are being held. They ought to take a keen interest in seeing whether the transparency they had observed in the conduct of the June elections is now lived up to or not. But obviously the stage is set for equally good elections for two simple reasons: first, it is the same Election Commission which is holding the polls with similar code of conduct and ancillary rules as before; and secondly, this is also being done under a government which is the product of a much-acclaimed free and fair general election.

Still, we are all for the observer groups to turn up in sufficient strength and monitor the transparency of the remainder of our electoral process.

## Flood : Action Plan Needed

by Amjad Hossain Khan

If we look back we find that from 1955 to 1995, we have done studies only. None of the government in last 40 years did take any positive action to solve the flood problem.

Brahmaputra	Normal	338.0mm
	Actual	572.7mm
	Deviation	
	from normal	+234.7
	Percentage	+69 per cent
Ganges	Normal	351.0mm
	Actual	391.9mm
	Deviation	+40.9
	Percentage	+12 per cent

Floods in the later part of September is rare. But in 1995, the greater districts of Rajshahi, Rangpur, Dinajpur and Bogra came under severe floods during the period from 28th September to 15th October. During September, the Brahmaputra basin received about 82 per cent and the Ganges basin about 49 per cent more rainfall than normal for the month.

Basinwise Rainfall in September 1995

Brahmaputra	Normal	310.0mm
	Actual	653.8mm
	Deviation	
	from normal	+253.8mm
	Percentage	+81 per cent

Ganges	Normal	283.0mm
	Actual	421.2mm
	Deviation	
	from normal	+138.4mm
	Percentage	+48.9

Meghna	Normal	419.0mm
	Actual	428.5mm
	Deviation	
	from normal	+9.5mm
	Percentage	+4.7 per cent

In the history of floods in Bangladesh, 1987 and 1988 floods were catastrophic in nature. The cause of 1987 flood was high rainfall in August and September in the Ganges basin while the 1988 flood was due to heavy rainfall in the upper catchment in association with synchronisation of peaks of the

Basinwise Rainfall in August 1995

three main rivers and tidal effect from the Bay of Bengal.

The floods of September 1995 in northern region of the country devastated life and properties, washed away developments, economic achievements and growth. It destroyed the standing crops, houses and belongings, and transportation. Flooding reached unprecedented levels particularly in Naogaon district during September 1995.

The 1996 flood in Bangladesh started in June and continued till July. According to the Ministry of Relief and Disaster Management, the damage caused by flood of June, 26 to August 16, 1996 is given below:

Damages caused by flood of June 26, 1996 to August 16, 1996

Affected District	46
Affected Thana	200
Affected Family	14,66,174
Affected Population	71,91,395
Loss of Human Lives	47
Crop Damage	
Affected Houses	
Loss of Livestock	
Affected Educational Institution	
Affected Roads	
Affected Bridges/Culverts	
Affected Embankments	
(Source: Ministry of Relief and Disaster Management)	428 Km.

Floods are not yet over. Recently all the rivers are again rising and this second wave may continue for some time depending on heavy rainfall in the catchments and within the country. The rainfall this year in the country is erratic and has exceeded the monthly normal in most of the rainfall stations in Bangladesh. We may not be surprised to get third and fourth waves of floods in September and October as said earlier. We may have to reassess the flood damages after October for preparing a comprehensive re-

habilitation programme.

In this connection of statement of Minister for Agriculture, Food, Relief and Disaster Management in Jatiya Sangsads for post flood rehabilitation is encouraging. (The Daily Star, 19 August, 1996).

The Minister said that under the rehabilitation programme steps are being taken to arrange easy availability of seeds and fertilizer for the flood affected marginal farmers. Tubewells now out of operation in the flood hit areas will be repaired free of cost and new tubewells sunk on emergency basis where necessary.

During the last 25 years, a large number of tube wells were

spare parts not any effect made to help develop pump industry in the country.

About 4,000 deep tube wells are out of order for long time due to lack of repair and maintenance.

It is, therefore, encouraging to note the statement of Begum Matia Choudhury, Minister for Agriculture, Food, Relief and Rehabilitation that the government will take immediate measures to repair the tube wells free of cost.

It is suggested that monitoring and evaluation of all tube wells in the country may be made early. As we are depending more and more on tube wells, the availability to manufacture spare parts of pumps this will save some valuable foreign exchange.

The flood problem of Bangladesh has a history of its own. It started in 1954 and 1955 when the country was devastated by flood for two consecutive years. A series of consultants of international repute including the then East Pakistan government prepared reports on Flood Control Plans. A Master Plan was prepared in 1964 followed by IIRD report in 1972. A national Water Plan was prepared in 1986 and 1991. Flood Action Plan completed its studies in 1994.

If we look back we find that from 1955 to 1995, we have done studies only. None of the government in last 40 years did take any positive action to solve the flood problem.

After 1966 flood, Bangladesh expected a solution of this chronic problem. The world community was sympathetic about our flood problem. The G-7 summit held in Paris in 1989 decided:

We stress urgent need for effective, coordinating action by international community in support of the government of Bangladesh in order to find solutions to this major problem which are technically, economically and environmentally sound.

It is a matter of international concern that Bangladesh, one of the poorest and densely populated countries of the world, is periodically devastated by catastrophic flood.

Much of the 150 million dollars were spent on studies and most of the money was si-

phoned back to the consultants of donor countries. Even the concept of Flood Action Plan as adopted by G-7 summit was adopted.

The present first wave of flood in the country may not be alarming. But if the rainfall in the areas of three basins continued including heavy rainfall within the country, we may expect serious flood problem. The situation will get worse if the three rivers, the Ganges, the Brahmaputra and the Meghna start rising simultaneously and their peaks coincide.

The effective management of flood/disaster which cannot be controlled lies in gearing up preparedness in advance. The preparedness programme focuses on plans to respond to any disaster when it threatens to occur or has actually occurred. It involves assessment of damages, emergency needs and resources to meet the requirements. Contingency action plan prepared in advance outlines the preparedness, response patterns of various administrative units.

Bangladesh has developed a strategy for comprehensive disaster management programme after the 1988 flood. The overall disaster programme is coordinated by the national Disaster Management Council headed by the Prime Minister. The council has the task of evaluating the general preparedness of the relevant ministries and agencies before the disaster, monitoring the actions during disaster and supervising actions of various agencies after the disaster.

We have wasted 40 years in discussing the flood problem and how to mitigate the problem with concrete measures. We all admit that flood is a life and death problem and only its solution will alleviate poverty and attain prosperity of the country. Bangladesh alone cannot solve the problem. Nepal, India and Bangladesh are affected by floods every year. So far response from other co-riparian countries is not encouraging. Bangladesh should prepare her own plan for mitigation of flood and give the people the security they need for food, fibre and living.

Flood is a national problem. A consensus decision is urgently needed to decide the issue. The people of Bangladesh cannot wait indefinitely for a solution.

The writer is ex-chairman, Bangladesh Water Development Board

## Prospect of Joint Ventures between Bangladesh and Turkey Looks Rosy

by A. Murshed Anam

of 600 million people. This raises the expectation of the Turkish Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association (TUSLAD) of Turkey's export increasing four to five fold within a few years time.

Turkey has already a high standard and capacity in textiles and garments production, glassware production, food processing and packaging industry and construction related industries in the world. As due to the customs union Turkish manufactured goods enter the EC duty free, Turkey's exports are bound to rise, thus her need to increase production.

But it has to face stiff European competition as well. It is in this context that the Turkish industrialists are considering to relocate their labour intensive industries to countries like Bangladesh to take advantage of low cost production base to make their products competitive in Europe. Impressed by the provisions for wide range of incentives for foreign investors

and the fact that Bangladesh has preferential access to the SAARC members of one billion consumers. The Turkish Chambers of Trade and Industry has already decided to review its investment plans in Bangladesh considering it as one of the cheapest production bases in Asia. The Turkish investors are keen to set up industries in cement, steel and composite textile sectors in Bangladesh utilising their experience and expertise to take the advantage of the geo-regional position of

Bangladesh. Turkey is genuinely considering relocation of textiles production, at least upto the yarn level, to Bangladesh to give their textile and apparel industry an edge in the world market. Now it lies with the industrialists, investors and businessmen of these two countries to come together for exploring long term possibilities and knot the trade relations between Bangladesh and Turkey with mutually beneficial agreements.

who are not employed in the urban areas of the underdeveloped Third World countries, are facing starvation and they mostly survive by eating out of garbage dump or by living on stale food. They do not realise that by making handful of employed children unemployed they are making the suffering of the working children more and pushing them to 'gutter existence'. It is sheer nonsense trying to ban the products of the small-scale industries mostly in the Asian countries in order to stop child labour.

We feel it will be an act of grave injustice to the child labour if he or she is thrown out of employment without making any suitable adjustment. The bulk of street children are victims of child abuses and they live in an abyss of darkness and despair. The minor girls land up in the brothels and the boys turn into criminals indulging in anti-social activities. It is much better if they are employed to learn some sort of skill than to lead a life of a street urchin.

One housewife bought a bottle of local-made soya sauce by a food company. At home she read the label carefully, to find that it was "Soya Sauce", and the list of ingredients did not mention soya bean or extract. This is deception, if not cheating.

One office executive complained that he tried three brands of rubber-stamp ink, and found all so diluted (price Taka five each, that the stamped message could not be read (no contrast). On

complaining to the shopkeeper, he got a tip: use a few drops of glycerine to thicken the ink. A 64,000-taka question: how to thicken honesty?

AZ  
Dhaka

Budget 96-97: Can the F M ...

Sir, This refers to Mr. Walid Rahman's article "Budget 96-97: Can the F M Chase the Bears and Magpies to Their Pit?" published in your paper on August 6, 1996. Mr. Walid Rahman has said that Adam Smith was an "Oxford Economist", which is not true. Adam Smith was a professor of Moral Philosophy to begin with and later turned into an economist in the University of Glasgow, Scotland, where he remained until his death.

Kabir U Ahmed,  
Baridhara, Dhaka

Humour in JS tidbits

Sir, While the Parliament is in session, 'parliament tidbits' generally happens to be an interesting piece in your esteemed daily, and like many others, I am an avid reader of the item. This might be because in the otherwise, generally uninteresting proceedings of the House, this piece often provides interesting insights into the personalities of our legislators, and we sometimes smile, not infrequently at the expense of this or that legislator.

But I felt rather amused

when your correspondent on

August 19,