

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 beadab 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 banded 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 Sangsad who is supposed to lead not only his constituency but the whole nation. Not all Sangsad members are equally and enviously 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 Sangsad!

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 strivings 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 Unniyan 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 smarted 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 remain 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 Sangsad 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 deviation | | +69 per cent |

| | | |
|----------------------|-------------|--------------|
| Ganges | Normal | 351.0mm |
| Actual | 391.9mm | |
| Deviation | from normal | +40.9 |
| Percentage deviation | | +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 | 651.8mm | |
| Deviation | from normal | +341.8mm |
| Percentage deviation | | +110 per cent |

| | | |
|----------------------|-------------|----------------|
| Ganges | Normal | 281.0mm |
| Actual | 421.2mm | |
| Deviation | from normal | +140.2mm |
| Percentage deviation | | +49.9 per cent |

| | | |
|----------------------|-------------|---------------|
| Meghna | Normal | 439.0mm |
| Actual | 428.5mm | |
| Deviation | from normal | -10.5mm |
| Percentage deviation | | -2.4 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

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 Family | 200 |
| Affected Population | 14,66,174 |
| Loss of Human Lives | 71,91,395 |
| Crop Damage | 3,42,752 Acres |
| Affected Houses | 5,74,783 Acres |
| a) Full | 1,56,329 Nos. |
| b) Partial | 5,27,295 Nos. |
| Loss of Livestock | 256 Nos. |
| Affected Educational Institution | 2,686 Nos. |
| Affected Roads | 1,342 Km. |
| Affected Bridges/Culverts | 9,705 Km. |
| Affected Embankments | 1,528 Nos. |
| (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 Sangsad 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 dependent 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 IBRD 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 1988 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 diluted.

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 pattern and specific responsibilities 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

TODAY, Turkey is central to the expansion of trade relations between the nations as the growth pole for the diverse regions which she borders the Balkans, the southern states of the former Soviet Union, the Middle and Near East, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

Turkey led the formation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Region comprising Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Ukraine and Turkey, to promote practical trade links between the countries involved. Turkey has also been involved in reviving the regional trade alliance between Turkey, Iran, Pakistan and the Central Asian States, called Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). All these steps symbolise the growing internationalisation of the Turkish Economy.

Turkey with a population of 70 million is already a market worth 170 billion USD. With Turkey's entry into the customs union in 1996, Turkish firms will be able to reach a market

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

Turkey has already a high standard and capacity in textile 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 produce 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 Chamber 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 apparels 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 ties between Bangladesh and Turkey with mutually beneficial agreements.

The world has and is going through a consumer revolution, with advent of free information flow ushering in new expectations and opening new markets. In the wake of this changing nature of global competition and the institutionalization of a new structure to govern trade and commerce, Bangladesh needs to develop a viable plan to regulate, control and safeguard the interest of her people. Striking joint venture agreements with Turkish entrepreneurs can be one of them. With Turkey's technological advancement, high production capacity, already established huge consumer market, efficient marketing network complemented by cheap available labour in Bangladesh, all in the picture of cooperation between Turkey and Bangladesh looks rosy. But with the opening of some joint venture installations providing Bangladeshi products a 'spring-board' into the huge market consisting the EU, the ECO and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Region, relations can truly begin to blossom.

To the Editor...

A bird's eye view of "success"

Sir, Looking up a commercial building somewhere in a posh residential area, one may see an array of airlines GSA (general sales agency) displayed under one banner. This indeed is a very unique feature — so many feathers on one single cap, some old and some very recent.

As the saying goes "nothing succeeds like success" and thus an analysis of the elements of such 'success' can be the source of inspiration to many an entrepreneur and may bring about a revelation that might serve as an eye opener for many including our government in formulating their policies.

The track record of GSA history reveals that at some point Biman Bangladesh Airlines was holding, the agencies of some airlines. Today it is not — but why not? Obviously it may not have been very comfortable with whom did these agencies go? Logically the last thing these airlines would like is to be associated with those very individuals who constituted the Biman's hierarchy while Biman was holding their agency. Yet looking around one wonders — how the chemistry works.

It is opened found that when a company directly or indirectly had a minister or senior government servant involved as a shareholder, it could reap lots of success. In the matters of GSA nothing can be more ideal a situation if the incumbent is in charge of the civil aviation ministry. After all he remains at the helm of affairs when the air services accord or bilateral agreements are signed or when traffic rights and flight frequencies are negotiated! This statement is not intended to cast any aspersions on anybody, yet it could be interesting in the backdrop of the recent political changes to explore such possibilities — particularly in respect of what can be termed as 'new accords'.

A bold headline interesting front page report had appeared in a Bengali newspaper —

Dainik Khobor — on 10th November 1994. The report which also into the inner pages lashed out openly in chronological order how a minister in connivance with a Bangladesh diplomat could set about to pocket a GSA utterly misusing their office.

Strangely though, there was neither any rejoinder nor any legal recourse for defamation sought by any of the parties concerned. Even the foreign ministry kept mum. All one witnessed subsequent to this front page report was a swapping of ministers.

The bottomline for success in Bangladesh, seemingly, is not always professional talent or the fruit of hard work rather success lines in one's ability to grab for himself the opportunities and power that comes with the 'chair'.

When a particular portfolio is allocated to a person engaged in the same line of trade pertinent to his/her portfolio, it seldom benefits the country, rather paves way for that person to further 'success'. So, owner of a travel agency or manpower business should not be made a civil aviation minister or the owner of a garment industry, as textile minister and so on and so forth.

The bottomline for misuse of power may be 'success' but in the short run. And no matter who he or she may be and whether it is a rose-water or a good 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

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 state 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 urchins.

Al-Haj S M Khalid Choudhury Dhaka

Rose-water by any name

Sir, A certain type of racket is the imitation of popular brands of consumer goods. One shopper reported that he surveyed the market and detected four different companies imitating the label of a well-known brand of rose water famous for 15 years.

One housewife bought a bottle of local-made soya sauce by a local 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 Waliur 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 W 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, 1996, in the said regular piece quoted in translation two famous lines by poet Rahindranath Tagore: 'Nadir epar kohe chharita nishwa operae sharbo shukh aamar bitwa' (from the poem entitled 'Moho' (illusion) in his famous anthology 'Kanika'), and called it a 'Bangla proverb'. Is it supposed to be another way of humoring the readers?

Ali Ahmed, First Secretary, National Board of Revenue.

OPINION

Indian Sarees, Bangalee Ladies and the Police

Abdul Latif Molla

As far as I can recollect, I entered the saree market in early 1975 for the first time when I, in the term of my 'Bhai' became quadrupled. However, since then I know that Indian sarees are available in our markets and those are sold surreptitiously, being contraband. But the contraband item is available in huge quantity, obviously defying the relevant laws! Even these are reached at the doors of the households like newspaper. These are in great demand among our ladies and many of them purchase in numbers beyond their requirement, or purchasing capacities to raise a safety stock. On inquiry many ladies including my better half tried to convince me with realistic arguments rather than putting up sentimental reasons of lucid attractions towards contrabands or exotic items.

They are of the opinion that a similar Bangladeshi saree costs twice and lasts half. Designs and prints of Indian sarees are superior. It gives comparatively a more charming appearance of the wearer. Though contraband, but there is a condoned guaranty that the colour of the sarees would last to its rags vis-a-vis though indigenous and costly, the colour of Bangladeshi ones would fade away after two or three washes. Then, saree is automatically discarded. Indeed, I have scanty experience of the subject to refute those points and put up strong arguments in favour of our own sarees. Those who have enough experience may come forward.

Meanwhile, I shift to the most intractable but apparently invincible point. As I knew it from 1975, I also knew that our police was continuing a crusade, sincere or insincere, I do not know, to gauge the sales and movements of Indian sarees inside our territory since then. Raids were launched in the markets, hideouts and huge quantities were seized. Sometimes those were burnt, sometimes distributed among the destitutes and sometimes disappeared. These activities delivered a sense that our police was engaged in a 'jee-had' as it is often termed against our ladies over this contraband but defeat seemed to be their constant companion till today.

Since 1986, I have been shuttling between Dhaka and Comilla sometimes three to four times a month by different modes of transports. I travelled by train, bus and private car and observed a very peculiar activity of our police in an effort to stop the inflow of Indian sarees from Comilla to Dhaka. Among the transports mentioned above, I observed that only Dhaka bound buses from Comilla in the afternoon were

their targets for searching and apprehending some poor ladies with few sarees in their possession. Trains, morning buses and private cars are not in the purview of their targets. I don't know if it is a regular feature but most of the time I returned from Comilla by an afternoon bus, the police stopped the bus at different places between Daudkandi and Kanchpur for checking Indian sarees. Most of the time they spoiled the valuable time of all with no avail. Seldom they could find one or two poor ladies with a few sarees and would get them down. To be specific on this matter, on 3rd August, '96 between 2 PM and 3 PM when I had been returning from Comilla by a bus named 'Asha', the police stopped it just after crossing the Meghna bridge. They nabbed three poor women with few Indian sarees and boarded them in a police van. Many of the passengers informed me that the police had no orders to do like that but they were doing so 'galgali'. But the driver of the bus, when asked differed with the passengers. Who was correct and what happened to those poor women is the matter of the appropriate higher authorities to delve out and do the needful if deemed necessary. But this sort of police actions appear to be futile exercises trying to dry up the Bay by bailing out water with a snail's shell.

It has adverse effects on many things. Public money is being apparently squandered on an ineffective measure involving transports, man hour etc. On the other hand it is a great loss to the general public in the form of time and money. The police personnel take unusually long time to check one bus and I have the irksome experience of waiting in the queue for more than an hour. And on that day I missed my train to Jamalpur and my train ticket became invalid. This sort of unkind things might happen to many of the passengers every day. If it is a game to the police personnel, it is a great loss to the public both the ways.

In fact many people including the police know who deal with this contraband, how it enters the country, where is its safe haven and who uses it? Then does it not appear to be throwing dust on public eyes carrying out such futile exercises on the roads instead of striking in proper places?

The expensive crusade continued for two and a half decades with no sign of victory. Now it is time for the other side i.e. our ladies to realise that this huge amount of money, time and energy are being squandered only due to their love for the particular contraband. If they discard this 'awful' thing as there are many others in the markets, they are likely to come out victorious without any casualties.