

Healing Hills

From Wednesday's horrifying revelation of twenty-eight men being butchered by the tribal outlaws, Langadu, a village in the troubled Hill Tracts, it seems, has recovered well. Thanks to the mainstream Bengalees, the one third minority population of this remote, romantic and rangy region of the country, who despite this unprovoked instance of collective killing of people of similar ethnic identity, did not indulge in any backlash of vengeance.

From the moment of this highly undesirable discovery, it was an infinitely greater challenge to the government than the local administration, its microcosm. Due to tight security system and round the year vigilance in that zone and above all, the essential limitation of the militant faction of the tribal insurgents, law and order situation was not destined to be particularly threatened even by this carnage, the biggest by the so-called Shantibahini in live memory.

But it was really a stunner for the government. In the backdrop of a nascent optimistic atmosphere, so vital for putting the Indo-Bangladesh relationship in proper perspective based on mutual benefit and respect, the pogrom in the hills must have appeared as a bolt from the blue for the months-old Awami League government. The prompt visit of the four-member ministerial team to Langadu and the immediate measure like the announcement of Taka 50,000 for every bereaved family were couple of examples indicative of positive political acumen. We would also like to commend oppositions' sensible silence and a welcome reluctance to wring out political mileage out of this mayhem.

For all the points it scored in the first round of its duel with an uncharted mishap which in all fairness, should not be deemed anything else than a stray and sorry attempt to gum up the works towards reconciliation, the real challenge that lies ahead before the government is — winning the confidence of the ethnic minorities along with the pursuance of an effective diplomacy, so that these militant elements are automatically winnowed out and are subject to legal punishment for such heinous acts just like ordinary criminals.

Students Set a Model

This was no earth-shaking news. But even earth-shakes fail to change man from within. And the small news item on the city page of The Daily Star on Friday had something to do with things that change the mind for better.

The first batch of the Dhaka Government Laboratory High School, calling themselves very confidently and may be a little ingeniously too, the 'First Libertarians,' have instituted the K M Salek Gold Medal to recognise academic merit. And on Thursday they awarded the medal to Faisal Ibne Rezwan and Shivaji Sarkar Rana. They topped the merit list of SSC exams held in '95 and '96. There is nothing unusually remarkable in this unless one knows that man after whom the medal has been named was no tycoon or any near relation of the sponsors. Khan Muhammad Salek, the greatest of our school teachers for over four decades beginning in the mid-forties, was the founding headmaster of the Government Laboratory School. It was he who, almost singlehandedly and from the word go, made his school the leading institution in the land. The 'First Libertarians' were, through the medal, honouring their mentor and instituting a memorial to him. These students were setting a model for others to emulate and proving worthy pupils of the great teacher.

K M Salek excelled as an organiser and was a standard setter in competence and efficiency. But the key to his phenomenal success lay in his abiding love for his students. Till the very end, which came early this year, he went round caring for the academic progress of the kiddies of his pupils — just for the love of it.

Teachers were till recently very enviably placed in the society. The decline started when during Ayubiana young civilian officers were made school committee heads and they would not accept a teacher unless he or she almost literally crept before them. And now teachers do not any more take to the Vidyasagar mould and would rather compete for an ostentatious life-style forfeiting the sense of awe and reverence that the whole society felt for them. K M Salek was possibly the last in the line of the great Prafulla Chandra Roy to have been both loved and respected by both pupils and society.

Why Not Here?

More often than not, an imported realisation has a better chance of knocking at the closed doors of our consciousness than its desi counterpart. From antiquity to this day, this truth has time and again been reverberated in time. Our very own Tagore has a brilliant poetic observation on this general tendency of preferring the distant, the difficult to the simple and common.

Indian prime minister's introduction of a bill in the parliament the other day seeking enhancement in the number of female representation in the lower house and state assemblies certainly carried the potential to drive in the home-truth in us, perhaps for the umpteenth time.

Undaunted by a legacy of male chauvinism in the field of politics and state management, the history of Bangladesh in the recent years has taken a stark shift towards establishing female participation in the highest executive seat of the state, let alone politics.

But despite being well into the era of country's second female prime minister, it tends to appear as a stultifying reality that female presence in the parliament is so limited and so much reliant on the discretion and convenience of the male lawmakers. The emergence of females at the executive acme of state power in Bangladesh is far from being a systematic and deserving outcome of public service. For that matter, it is hardly yet the yardstick in the case of male politicians either. Nevertheless, Devi Gowda's introduction of the bill on more female representation in systematic politics as a sequel to his pledge on India Day, can be considered as an eye opener. We do not want beautiful but fainthearted females in politics. We want women to make room for themselves in this world as they should do in other spheres of life, purely on merit. More than institutional patronisation of their cause, it is women's own urge of being in politics meaningfully which holds the key to the rise in the number of people's representatives among women.

Water of Politics, Politics of Water!

About 11 million acres of land had already been damaged due to the non-availability of water in the south-western part of the country. About one-third of the area of Bangladesh suffer from agricultural hazards. Especially near the Hardinge Bridge, the reduced flow of water seriously affected the operational of the pumps of the Ganges-Kapodak barrage to adversely affect the dry-season crops of one lakh twenty thousand acres...

turned out to be short lived. A number of thorny issues began to itch the existing bilateral relationship. The most important is perhaps, the sharing of the Ganges water. There is no denying the fact that the Farakka Barrage constructed by India turned out to be the life and death question for a part of the Bangladesh economy. However, in the early 1970s, the government of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Rahman succeeded in cutting a deal to procure 44,000 cusecs of water during the dry season. It is reported that from 20 April 1972 upto 1975, India did not withdraw water through Farakka Barrage. Since 1989 dry season, however, there exists no contract of agreement between these two countries on the sharing of Ganges water and during this period, India unilaterally withdraws Ganges water through Farakka barrage (The Sangbad, Sep 3, 1996).

It has long been alleged that the construction of the Farakka Barrage was taken up to use water as an instrument to suit the political whims of the Indian central government. Allegedly, it was a politically motivated decision to dictate the politics and the foreign policy of the Indian government. To what extent water could dictate politics can, perhaps, be in evidence

from the past events of unilateral withdrawal of Ganges water by the Indian government.

It is interesting to observe that while the Bangabandhu's government could succeed in matching the supply of water with its demand in Bangladesh, the successive governments in Bangladesh miserably failed to create an environment of mutual understanding to clinch

What was needed all through the whole period is a proper diplomatic move to resolve the bilateral problems and come up with due share of Ganges water for Bangladesh. One need not have to go to the UN or move around the world crying for the due share. What is needed is the political will to resolve the crisis.

The Bangladeshis have been

Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes



the due share for Bangladesh. In the down-stream, downtrodden Bangladesh, water itself emerged as the matter of a kind of politics for many. That water is not available in the northern part of the country and that it is just because of India which wants to cripple our economy, seems to have been the most chanted political slogan for some political parties to win over people's hearts. Thus, in both India and Bangladesh water has so long been the arbiter of their respective politics

fed with the information that India wanted a transit in exchange for the water. And it is as if the so called custodians of the sovereignty did not yield to the idea of a transit facility just because it would have jeopardized our sovereignty. There may be many arguments on the grounds to reject the idea of a transit facility but the 'sovereignty' issue does not seem to hold much water. It is reported that the SAPTA agreement signed by the last government contains a clause

where participating countries agreed to provide transit facilities to member countries. Where was the sovereignty consideration then? We believe that neither Awami League nor BNP nor any other party could surrender the sovereignty of Bangladesh just in exchange for some perceived revenue generations.

We would like to withhold our decisions on the justification of the transit facility in the face of information shortage. But hope to chase this important issue afterwards. Suffice it to say that economics is the sole determinant of sovereignty. Any step that helps the economy's capacity building should be welcome. We are hopeful to note that the Indian delegation this time ruled out any possibility of raising the transit issue.

In the backdrop of the catastrophe created in Bangladesh by the unilateral withdrawal of water through Farakka, both Bangladesh and India should move fast to ensure the due share for the Ganges. According to the information provided by the honourable Irrigation Minister in the Parliament, from 1975-76 to 1994-95, 75 lakh tons of crops from about 11 million acres of land had already been damaged due to the non-availability of water in the south-western part of the country.

try. About one-third of the area of Bangladesh suffer from agricultural hazards. Especially near the Hardinge Bridge, the reduced flow of water seriously affected the operational of the pumps of the Ganges-Kapodak barrage to adversely affect the dry-season crops of one lakh twenty thousand acres...

We, therefore, hope that the Indian government would take the above mentioned costs into serious consideration and help Bangladesh to grow greener as it was earlier. We are in agreement with Mr I K Gujral when he said, "... a new chapter in our relation has opened up We should not be prisoners of the past. Both the governments do not carry the baggage of the past." However, the availability of water in the upcoming dry season should tell us whether Mr Gujral and his government meant what he said.

Uncertainties Bug Them the Most

by Md Asadullah Khan

Dhaka:

With a flood of new arrivals from all over the country, Dhaka city's population has swelled to an estimated 90 lakh at present from its previous mark of 10 lakh in 1960. But as the size of the Dhaka City's population has added to urban delights it also magnifies a myriad of social ills. Terrorism, hijacking, rape, murder, extortion, looting and dacoity either on the street or market places or even in the safe boundary of the house have plagued the city dwellers. Added

to this is the surge of drugs and other violent crimes that the administration seem utterly unable to combat. Dhakaites are now prone to believe that the city has spun out of control and the deadly violence, once mostly confined to certain crime-ridden zones is now lashing out randomly at any one, any time, even in areas once considered relatively safe.

As regards the accumulation of garbage on the road, the condition is totally appalling. Garbage bins are overflowing awaiting clean-up for a long time. A news item recently ap-

"They can put up with dirty streets, poor schools and cramped city traffic and shortages of all amenities but they cannot take such uncertainties and risks to their lives for all time to come."

pearing in the newspapers asserted city dwellers of nocturnal service in garbage lifting. But things as they stand till now, to every one's dismay, pose severe challenge and threat to free walks, living and health. Pavements, street corners and road side drains are stinking. People are tiptoeing through the pavements and places adjacent to roads in front of the kutchia bazaars. The pavements on both sides of the entry point of the city marketplaces are clogged with mud, garbages and urine. Street children are relieved themselves in the clogged drains of these roads and many others of the like in the whole urban area stretching from Gandaria to Mirpur.

Dhaka city, embodying the idea of innovation and achievement in a dazzling range of human endeavours captures the mind of the people living here and those streaming into the city in ever increasing number. With the city's skyline thrusting up aggressively and the sprawling marketplaces bustling with grandeur, people with each passing day seem to be growing drunk with opulence. But behind this blinding glitter of the city in some posh areas, it was failing its citizens on major parts. The street pavements stretching from Saidabad to Mirpur have become public resting berths for the floating population. But even with its filth, dirt and squalor Dhaka city remains a beacon for the brightest and bravest from all over the country. People from all over the country stream into this city to test themselves against the toughest competition and to reinvent life that perhaps seems stale and dispirited in any other setting outside

here and there. Some residing close to the Uddyan premises near the mazar of the Three Leaders reportedly have chosen a ditch inside the Uddyan for dumping garbages of all varieties. The walkers must carry a handkerchief doused with perfume which must be pressed in the nostril to ward off the unbearable stench coming from these places.

City Corporation should

construct public toilets at suitable locations on the side of the roads within a suitable commuting distance as well as at the railway stations, bus terminals and market places in an effort to give a cleaner and healthier look to the city. If the cleaning-up of these toilets becomes a difficult job by the Corporation itself, these can be leased out to prospective entrepreneurs on a tender basis. In Beijing this job, it is learnt, is handled by the Beijing Tourism Administration (BTA) in an effort to boost tourism. Toilet attendants from across the city are drawn in a rally to launch a clean-up competition. Several prizes amounting to the tune of \$500, almost one year's salary of an attendant, are given to the most diligent washroom workers. Other than this, inspectors of city corporation are running spot checks of public toilets and they are under obligation to report on conditions.

As the tide of new arrivals continue unabated, Dhaka city is faced with problems to preserve its pristine glory. The city's open spaces that would have catered to the need for recreation has given way to housing trusts or shopping centres. The influx of people in the city, although has ushered in a vibrant society, but not without dire effects. Smog from the increasing number of vehicles of the streets has been fouling the air. The mushrooming population has imposed new strains on resources, especially land and water. This has also brought in clogged traffic over ever greater commuting distances as city dwellers now move farther and farther, say from Narayanganj to Savar on one side and far up to Gazipur on the other side from the urban cores in search of affordable

houses. Open space, deemed to be enhancing the quality of life, is becoming scarce with such a mushrooming population growth seeking sort of housing in the city and that is also choking the sewage outlets to the peril of the dwellers.

On the other hand, the Dhanmondi Lake seems to be threatened by tide of wastes, raw sewage and other forms of man-made garbage. Threatened by pollutions, the lake's water looks dark and its aquatic life, namely fish, seems to be on the verge of extinction. Civic au-

thorities, it does not appear, have taken an effective step in controlling the lake water from being invaded by pollution so menacingly. The situation, as it stands today, speaks of official incompetence in checking waste disposal into the lake, bringing in its wake a natural beauty spot being damaged to slowly.

To bring about a change in the daunting circumstances,

OPINION Plagiarism — a Layman's Observations

Prof Abul Kalam Elias

Stealing from the writings of others is called plagiarism.

As a nation we had to groan under the yoke of imperialism and colonialism for almost two centuries. British did not introduce proper education in our society in order to perpetuate their domination over the rank and file. Colleges and universities were nothing more than the clerk-machines.

The English people wanted to create a class who would play second fiddle to them. They did not impart such knowledge and light as can bring out the best in man and goes a long way to the self-realisation and self-consciousness. They did it for their vested interest and self aggrandisement.

Foreigners and colonizers did not want us to develop our dormant faculties and potentialities. As a result, original thinkers, scholars and men of letters are very few and far between in our country.

Dynamic personalities and outstanding figures like Rabindranath Tagore, the poet, Satyendra Bose, the scientist and rebel poet Kazi Nazrul Islam are but honourable exceptions.

Blind imitation of other is not only disgraceful but stands as a stumbling block to the progress of a nation.

It cannot be gainsaid that we have been maintaining slavish mentality and legacy of foreign rulers in many matters — starting from education down to bureaucracy even to this day. This is why new creation, novelty and originality have become scarce these days.

Who does not know the hearsay of machimara keran (ly-killings) who made frantic efforts to catch up to be fastened with paste in his true copy.

Plagiarism among our writers, composers of songs, film makers and painters has become the order of the day. This plagiarism is going on in full swing. In respect of painting the critics call it foreign influence or modernism. Our film makers, novelists and song writers do not hesitate to borrow ideas and very expression of idea is from the writings of others. This sort of plagiarism is detected only by experts and connoisseurs who are well-read and well-informed.

Therefore when the green light is on, opposing vehicles are cleared to move towards each other on a collision course. Fortunately however nobody is yet taking the green lights seriously. But if anyone decides to do so, can the traffic police stop him legally?

In this connection, I can remember about a get-together of a novelist of our land with some of the Dhaka University students in TSC seminar room in recent memory. As far as I recollect, a student reader and admirer drew the attention of the novelist to one of his novels

where the plot is the carbon copy of an Indian writer. Strangely enough, our writer did not admit his fault. He told the audience that it was coincidence.

Borrowing is sorrowing — says Shakespeare. Intellectual bankruptcy has overtaken us. We have seen, and still witnessing, in dismay how hopelessly incompetent people imitated others blindly. Their brains move in fixed groves like a railway engine on the rail line.

In a poverty-stricken country you cannot blame a person who steals to keep the wolf away from the door. But when a song-writer composes song not only using the words and idioms but also the very expression of the masterminds of music, then it is all the more condemnable.

I know many who have become well-known only by stealing other's ideas and dictions.

Some plagiarist lyric song writers hankering after wealth and honour have deprived the ardent listeners of radio and TV from listening to the inspiring and spirited devotional songs and ghazals of poet Kazi Nazrul Islam to the annoyance of countrymen. Plagiarists are reaping harvest of royalty and fame at the cost of others.

These days radio listeners are tired of listening to ill-written, borrowed, fake songs that remind us of their original sources.

I think, anomaly as well as inefficiency, nepotism and favouritism is responsible for this sorry state of affairs.

Plagiarism in arts, literature and music of a country speaks volume for its intellectual decay. This is not a sign of progressive society.

The whole nation looks forward to the time when a new era of creation and inspiration will emerge and everybody will turn over a new leaf.

In a nutshell, plagiarist writers are object of pity. They are doing more harm than good to the country.

Plagiarists want to make a parade of their learning. But they become laughing stocks. None can ignore truth. Truth prevails in the long run. Besides, plagiarists suffer from self-deception and self-delusion. They belittle themselves at the estimation of others. They should be disillusioned for the greater good of the country and the people. Do they think, 'the best of the arts, provided it remains undetected'?

The writer is professor at Bbaria Degree College.

To the Editor...

A woman rickshawpiller

Sir, A mother of three children, according to a report, after being tortured by her husband has resorted to rickshaw-pulling to earn living. The labour market for uneducated women is very limited in our country. Of late, a good number of women have been provided job in the garment industries. Many uneducated women work in the farmland of the country-side. The women are now working at the rice mills and construction firms. Many are engaged in soil extraction.

The educated women are working as car drivers. There are women pilots. Women are also joining in police forces. So, women can do every work at par with men. When we express sympathy for any woman for any unusual work, I think we do not do any justice to the women. This type of news will attract some donors to help them to stop them from doing anything. This type of news will make the women discourage to do anything which they can do with the men.

Rickshaw-pulling is equally labour some with that of other works — she is already doing in the farmland and construction fields even in the households. In the developed countries like China and other European countries, women are attending

office riding bi-cycles. Bicycle is a two-wheel paddler, and rickshaw is three-wheel paddler. We should encourage women too to pull rickshaw side by side with males. The women pullers will carry women passengers. What we need to do is that we must ensure safety of these women. That women are not harassed and ill-treated should be ensured.

Maribul Haque Chowdhury, 153, Lake Circus Kalabagan, Dhaka

Balaka — flying into