

We Have Faith in You

Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed was sworn in at the Bangla Bhavan yesterday as the nineteenth President of Bangladesh. This is, in fact, President Shahabuddin's second assumption of the highest office in the state. In his earlier 10-month stint he set a standard for fairplay and competence that mainly fashioned the nation's first fair and free elections in eighteen years. This was a key to an elected government's ruling for its full term of five years — the first time in Bangladesh.

President Shahabuddin has no high idea about his new position. And he wasn't willing to step in. But that the state needed him — a man of proven integrity and neutrality — was appreciated in time by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina who was instrumental in making him yield to what had become a national demand. Shahabuddin's was such a name that as soon as he consented, the AL government jumped miles in credibility and deliverability.

Now that the mould is cast how will Shahabuddin Ahmed become a good President? What will he have to do for that? — going very dutifully to janazas and doing rounds of mazar ziarat, as he himself has wryly observed? It is true that, constitutionally, his should be the best illustration that the cliché conspicuous by one's absence ever could have. But is it for that we needed to have a man like him?

Shahabuddin Ahmed is a non-politician President with neither illusions nor ambitions about his office. The nation has chosen him to have a moral weight on governance. If he hasn't the executive authority to do good or evil, he has all the moral authority to exert on the government for good. How? If the government ever deviates from the path of national weal and he feels it, he will not lose a night's sleep before quitting. The AL government has, by electing him, has chosen a tough road for itself. A good road.

We wish the new President to complete his term and set new standards for his non-executive office also. For this to happen the present government must also be blemishless, at least morally if not in all respects. Shahabuddin Ahmed's successful presidency can set a welcome pattern of men of high integrity and intellectual achievement being elected as the First Citizen without needing to pandering to partisan politics.

We have faith in President Shahabuddin. His presidency will surely be another milestone in the Bengalee people's endeavours for a truly democratic polity.

Gold Haul at ZIA

Yet another gold haul within a fortnight of the biggest ever catch of the precious metal at the Zia International Airport comes as a surprise. We do not know how to greet the successive customs successes. Do they indicate that the customs officials' efficiency at the ZIA has gone up suddenly? Or, as many like to believe, the success rate is still low; only the gold smugglers are trying to bring more supplies in and thereby facing a greater exposure.

Whatever it is, there is perhaps little doubt that our airport is either used as a transit point or the smuggled gold is fulfilling a demand within this country. In either case, the smuggling cannot continue without involvement — both direct and indirect — of our nationals. In almost all previous cases of big hauls accusing fingers were pointed at some business magnates and in one particular case even to an erstwhile highest executive of the state.

It is for the first time that three big wigs of the business world have been arrested in connection with the seizure of gold on September 21 last. We are anxious to know what the verdict on the arrested three will be. A lot depends on this, because gold smuggling's domestic link has to be identified first. That there was no serious effort to nab the culprits of native origin is clear. Now we want to see a change in the situation.

We should look beyond the national boundary for help to deal with outside threats, if necessary. After all, the truth that an international network of ruthless efficiency and huge economic power is in operation has to be admitted and to match it co-operation between governments — both at the supply and receiving points — is a must. Also help from international bodies like the Interpol may be sought.

Keep it up, Please

Shakespeare has written about insolence of office. Born in the space voyaging epoch, he would have been tempted to turn that and write abuse of office. Today's world, specially public affairs and affairs of the state, is permeated by corruption, a practice arising out of abuse of office. This malady eats into the vitals of both state and society. How much are we stricken by it in Bangladesh?

Bangladesh has come fourth among the most corrupt of 54 important nations of the world, according to a survey made by US-based Transparency International. We have been deprived of higher glory by Nigeria, Pakistan and Kenya. Among the countries of least corruption New Zealand has topped Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Canada. The United States has been placed very unenviably at fifteenth on this list.

It may be a consolation for some to see Pakistan more corrupt than us. Yes, seen from a businessman's experience — which is the basis of the TI's listings, Pakistan may be a worse horror house. But then our volume of business is much less than Pakistan's. And then corruption does not involve office-holders and businessmen only.

Ours cannot be a healthy nation if we cannot curb corruption in a big way. It is our hope that by the time the present government will have completed its term, we perhaps can improve so much as to catch up with India which has been placed ninth. Reason — the recent increase in transparency and accountability of governance. Keep it up, please.

First 100 Days of Second Awami League Government

Promises to All, Hopes for Some, Realisation with Few

The first session of the Parliament was explosive but entertaining to many. The law givers were at their worst and fell just short of assaulting one another physically on the floors of the Parliament. The budget session spent more time on matters other than budget. The opposition claims that they were gagged and denied the right to be heard.

An assessment of the achievements or otherwise of the first hundred days of a new government in a democratic system is carried out as a matter of convention in the United States. This practice is also being followed in many other countries assiduously.

The exercise in our country may not be as objective as one would like it to be. Firstly, the period of assessment is short and therefore, it is fraught with the concomitant risk of miscalculation. Secondly, in the absence of absolutely reliable statistics, a set of information is more often challenged by the opposing party than not.

Nevertheless, a good deal of analysis has already been undertaken in different quarters. Besides morning showing the day, people can also surmise and bring out some common elements.

The ruling party of Bangladesh promised a lot before the election. The party manifesto is replaced with those. Pre-election speeches added some more. TV statement, *pari passu*, included solemn pledges not to repeal past follies of the party, beseeching voters to give them a try again. The people, forgetful and forgiving as they generally are, complied.

The first and foremost priority of the ruling party, resounded repeatedly, was to establish law and order and to control terrorism. Numerous speeches were made, meetings of high and subordinate officials took place but no improvement ensued. On the contrary, law and order situation

deteriorated. Some alleged terrorists were arrested and, by a strange coincidence, they generally belonged to the principal opposition party.

The Dhaka University campus turned into a battleground and the residential halls were forcibly occupied by the ruling party's student wing. The law enforcing agencies did not find any armed intruders but shot the top opposition student leader at point blank range with a tear gas shell. Medical Colleges were off and on closed. Campuses of other educational institutions in and outside Dhaka witnessed similar gun battles from time to time. It is unbelievable but true that a member of the Parliament went in disguise to the Eden Girls' College to instigate riots among inmates.

Also came the demand for governance by consensus. In that bed, support from the third largest political party in the Parliament as well as from the lone MP from the JSD was solicited and received. In return, two Ministerships had to be dispensed with for the two political parties. The mainstream opposition stayed away from what it regarded as a coalition government. To them, consensus evolves mainly on specific issues among political parties, who thereafter generally follow their own paths and pro-

grammes. The first session of the Parliament was explosive but entertaining to many. The law givers were at their worst and fell just short of assaulting one another physically on the floors of the Parliament. The budget session spent more time on matters other than budget. The opposition claims that they were gagged and denied the right to be heard. The Speaker was

even visually found to be blatantly partisan, causing walk out by the opposition and severe criticism against him personally. The pledge of transparency and accountability was met only by the standards set by the pledge givers themselves. The rampant transfer of government officials in such a short period of time was unprecedented. This was done as a measure of reward or chastisement. The policy of partisanship has been witnessed in dispensing

with the services or only in various sectors whose only crime having been appointed to their office by the former regime. They were promptly replaced by fellow-partisans or party sympathisers. The by-elections held under the government spark volumes about the nature of impartiality. The opposition accused massive rigging in two constituencies, Luxmipur 2 and

similar funds for the next year; in fact, a bit more by \$1.04 billion. The Finance Minister boasted to have wrested non-conditionality by donors. On the contrary, the latter demanded continuing reform programmes and less privatisation. The Prime Minister, on the other hand, made a commendable appeal in Hong Kong, urging more foreign investment in Bangladesh.

The achievements of the present government may be somewhat discernible in the domain of foreign affairs. Prime Minister's visit to Saudi Arabia and China are steps in right direction and reflect bipartisan nature of country's foreign relations in some areas. The endeavour to maintain cordial neighbourly relations with India is also shared by the BNP, but not by sacrificing vital national interests. If the present government is able to secure legitimate share of Ganges water, it would no doubt be in the overall public interest in Bangladesh. One has to wait and see.

Finally, the ruling party is yet to redeem its out repeated assurance for filing returns of income, assets and relevant information by Ministers. If such returns are made applicable to MPs also and are held them safely with public access, as in many countries, the nation would be saved, to a great extent, from the scourge of corruption. Democracy would then flourish and the Awami League would wear a laurel again after a quarter of a century.



Currents and Crosscurrents

by M M Rezaul Karim

Chittagong 1. Consequently, they boycotted the last one in Habiganj 2 and raised serious questions about government's credibility and opposition's participation in future.

The promise of making the principal government media, the radio and the TV, non-partisan has been fulfilled in so far as a Commission to work for this purpose has been constituted. In practice, these have been turned into ruling party's mouthpieces. The initiative of holding TV interview of the

to give more importance to its function of nominating a panel of three persons for appointment as the Vice-Chancellor. Professor Zillur Rahman Siddiqui has himself mentioned in one of his recent articles published in the daily *Bhorer Kagoj* that this function of the Senate is not even mentioned in the main list of its powers, i.e. Article 22 (p. 16) of DUO 1973. It is well-known that according to Article 11 (1) (p. 10) of DUO 1973 the Chancellor appoints the Vice-Chancellor from a panel of three persons nominated by the Senate. The whole nation now knows that this has become a

contentious political election-contest between the two major political parties. The idea of nomination has been borrowed from the Dhaka University Act (DUA), 1920. But we have made it a 100 per cent political exercise. In the process the academic question has been completely overlooked and this has presented us VCs who work like political party leaders.

Therefore, it is our opinion, that the University Senate is neither legally nor practically a competent body to set up a commission for an objective assessment of the current state of affairs at the university. Although the Senate is legally competent to set up such a committee, from practical point of view it is also incompetent, why? Because the Senate members are also elected or nominated like political party representatives. It is also now a political platform of the two major political parties of the country. We have already mentioned the powers and jurisdiction of the Senate.

It is, however, unfortunate to note that on many occasions the Senate has been involved in political discussions. This is not only beyond the lawful authority of the Senate, but it is also beyond the lawful authority of the university itself. The powers and the jurisdiction of the University are described in Articles 4 (pp. 4 to 6) and 5 (p. 6) of DUO 1973. It is sadly observed that the Senate has been engaged in discussions much beyond its own authority. However, this is not my main point. My contention is that a political platform like the Senate of Dhaka University cannot be expected to set up a commission to make an objective academic investigation into the current state affairs at Dhaka University and to suggest remedial measures. The University Senate has long before lost its academic character.

These days the Dhaka University Senate has been found

Oxford of the East: Living with a Myth

What is Wrong in the Prescription of Professor Zillur Rahman Siddiqui?

by Dr A K Monowar uddin Ahmad

I have read the article of Professor Zillur Rahman Siddiqui with great care. I am in perfect agreement with him regarding the current state of affairs at the University of Dhaka. I also deeply appreciate his concern for the oldest university of the country. One cannot but wholeheartedly support his conclusion: "we have had lot of platitudinous talks, the need of the hour is some hard thinking followed by tough action." Professor Siddiqui has, of course, recommended some action to start with. Thus he says: "The Senate should itself set up a commission of inquiry, with the purpose of a thorough check-up of its present state of health. Next, it should indicate the measures to be adopted, with the aim of making it academically viable."

In my considered judgment Professor Siddiqui has however, committed not only a practical, but also a great legal error by suggesting an inquiry commission to be set up by the Dhaka University Senate. Why? The answer is very simple. I would like to take up the legal point first. According to Article 22 (p. 16) of the Dhaka University Order (DUO) 1973, the powers of the Senate are: "Subject to the provisions of the Order, the Senate shall have the powers to appoint committees for such purposes as it considers necessary provided, however, that the reports of such committees shall be considered by the Syndicate before action is taken in connection therewith unless the Syndicate in any particular case otherwise direct."

It is, therefore, clear that it is only the Syndicate that can set up such a committee. By this I only mean that the written provisions of law have empowered the Syndicate to appoint a committee for this purpose if it wishes to do so. Whether such a committee appointed by the Syndicate would be able to achieve its goal or not is itself a separate question. The constitution of Dhaka University, i.e., DUO 1973 and its First Statutes do not empower the Senate to set up such a committee as conceived by Professor Siddiqui.

Let us now examine whether the Senate can in practice objectively set up such a committee and achieve its desired goal. The desired goal — if I have understood Professor Siddiqui — is of course, the improvement of the academic health and overall environment of the university. The DU Senate is completely incapable to achieve this. Why? This would require a careful examination of the current composition of the Senate, and its actual functioning. According to article 20 (1) (p. 14 to 15) of DUO 1973 the total number of members of the Senate is 104. They are: the Vice-Chancellor, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor, the Treasurer, five government officials to be nominated by the government, five MPs to be nominated by the Speaker, five distinguished educationists to be nominated by the Chancellor, five representatives of research bodies to be nominated by the Syndicate.

five principals of colleges to be nominated by the Academic Council from among the principals of the affiliated and constituent colleges, ten teachers of colleges to be nominated by the Academic Council from among teachers of the affiliated and constituent colleges. The Chairman of the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education, Dhaka, twenty-five representatives of registered graduates to be elected by such graduates from among themselves, thirty-five representatives of teachers of the university to be elected in a special meeting of the university teachers, and five representatives of the students to be nominated by the University Central Students Union.

In the last 24 years of its actual functioning of the Dhaka University Senate, we have seen that 35 University teachers and 25 registered graduates are elected purely in a political style. These elections are nothing but political elections of the two major political parties of the country. The nomination by the government, the Speaker, the Chancellor, Academic Council and the DUCSU are also made on 100 per cent political considerations. As a result, the Dhaka University Senate has turned into a full-fledged political platform of the two major rival political parties of the country. We have already mentioned the powers and jurisdiction of the Senate.

It is, however, unfortunate to note that on many occasions the Senate has been involved in political discussions. This is not only beyond the lawful authority of the Senate, but it is also beyond the lawful authority of the university itself. The powers and the jurisdiction of the University are described in Articles 4 (pp. 4 to 6) and 5 (p. 6) of DUO 1973. It is sadly observed that the Senate has been engaged in discussions much beyond its own authority. However, this is not my main point. My contention is that a political platform like the Senate of Dhaka University cannot be expected to set up a commission to make an objective academic investigation into the current state affairs at Dhaka University and to suggest remedial measures. The University Senate has long before lost its academic character.

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to give more importance to its function of nominating a panel of three persons for appointment as the Vice-Chancellor. Professor Zillur Rahman Siddiqui has himself mentioned in one of his recent articles published in the daily *Bhorer Kagoj* that this function of the Senate is not even mentioned in the main list of its powers, i.e. Article 22 (p. 16) of DUO 1973. It is well-known that according to Article 11 (1) (p. 10) of DUO 1973 the Chancellor appoints the Vice-Chancellor from a panel of three persons nominated by the Senate. The whole nation now knows that this has become a

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deration: 1) The present system of election of a panel for appointment of the Vice-Chancellor must go. The Chancellor should appoint the Vice-Chancellor through a search committee. The service conditions of the Vice-Chancellor should be like that of a judge of the Supreme Court. 2) All student politics at the university must be made illegal. 3) All teachers politics at the university must be made illegal. 4) Political meetings, demonstrations etc., on the campus should be made illegal. 5) Office hours of the university teachers should be introduced. 6) Election system of the different bodies of the university should be dropped.

Professor Zillur Rahman Siddiqui has made a significant contribution by drawing our attention to an important problem. I fully agree with him that an inquiry commission should be set up to examine the current state of health of the oldest uni-

versity of the country. I have tried to explain why neither the Senate nor the Syndicate can really set up such an effective commission. Then the question is: who will bell the cat?

For all practical and legal purposes it is the Chancellor who can set up such a commission. How? The DUO 1973 was promulgated, in pursuance of paragraph 3 of the Fourth Schedule to the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, and in exercise of all powers enabling him in that behalf, the president was pleased to make the DUO 1973. Therefore, it is our opinion, that it is the Chancellor who is the only competent authority to set up the commission proposed by Professor Siddiqui. Finally, I must say that it is for his inspiring article. I sincerely appreciate his concern for my institution where I studied and now serving as a humble teacher.

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OPINION

Rich Magazines and Poor Buyers

Andaz

The Dhaka Day by Day feature (Sept 28) on local sales of foreign papers and magazines in the city is timely. Such regular readers are well aware of the relevant background provided.

As a middle-class reader with single limited income (no side, black, grey, additional, income, commissions, or *bakshish*) I can hardly afford to buy current issues of foreign periodicals. Sometimes I buy back-dated copies from the Nikhet second-hand market.

Decades ago, when the prices were much lower and the purchasing power higher, I used to subscribe at one time or another to *Life*, *Time*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *National Geographic*, *RD*, *AWSJ*, *FEER*, *Economist*, *Proshati*, *AB Patrika* and *The Weekly Statesman* (while abroad).

There are several problems in the developing countries: a) high cover price of the foreign papers/journals; b) overcharging by the local agents (local price not related to the official foreign exchange rate), although printed materials are not taxed as per Unesco convention (the Indian publications are the main offenders).

Now that the Unesco have opened an office in Bangladesh, can it do something to make available some reputable papers and journals in the LDCs at subsidised subscription rates to individuals and libraries (not for free sale in the open market). Of course Unesco book coupons are available for buying books from abroad. We want printed materials at the prices we pay for our ready-made garments!

One welcome trend is the satellite-e-mail-computer local printing of the *PC Magazine* USA sold at the counter at Taka 100 only (Black price Tk 300+).

Can be the Press Club Reading Room do a public service by allowing interested members of the public to browse through the papers and magazines, in return for a small entry ticket of, say, Taka five, the proceeds going to the PC welfare fund? There are few public libraries in the mohazas (localities) and these are poorly equipped. Others are not easily accessible. The British Council have increased the annual subscription for non-students to prohibitive level (and the rickshaw fare). The Unesco Reading Room

would be an ideal place, provided Uncle Sam would release the \$1.6 billion. Unesco, what about the Third World's "Right to Read" slogan?

Another state nuisance is pilferage of magazines coming in by mail through our foreign post. I am a seasoned victim, and have stopped foreign subscriptions. Sometimes the postman delivered the Book of the Month Club packages from the USA against a signed receipt.

Now, alas, I have no more NRB foreign exchange, but have managed to build up an interesting private library. I strictly maintain an issue Register for close friends and broad defaulters. Poor demand, I regret to report. Money rolls, but books pile up. Few are fortified enough to face the cold rows of books. The unpopularity can be explained: you can't argue with books, as at a Bengalee *adda*.

Now for some bright news. Non-textbook book shops for the general readers (bibliophiles and those who have personal libraries — to read, not to display) are now opening up in Dhaka. The Indian books are cheap, including the foreign titles (and best-sellers) printed in India. Another new trend is that the book buyers are allowed inside the new-trend bookshops and approach the shelves for browsing before purchase, in contrast to the traditional "student bookshops" where the customer has to face two formidable barriers: the wooden counter, and — the wooden salesman.

"Which book you want please?" "I don't know. I'd like to have a look at your 'latest arrivals' and then decide."

The books on computers are mostly for the students and newcomers; nothing for the bibliophiles with more depth and breadth, beyond the textbook flavour. Tutorials should not last a lifetime — when do you enjoy the pleasure of reading!

I guess it is boring to continue this academic grumbling. If our MPs cultivate the small pleasures of life, then we bookworms could perhaps snuggle up beside them (in good faith) for a chit-chat. One is reported to have two book manuscripts ready. That is the biggest non-political image of the formidable Sheikh Hasina! Let us hear of some such balancing acts by the other leaders.

To the Editor...

PM's live question and answer

Sir, Thanks to the Prime Minister for her excellent and unique appearance before people after her 100 days with the state power. Enthusiasms and expectations were high regarding this programme, but I am sorry to say that it was in most part unrealised. Despite all its deficiencies, we should try to find out some positive things from this session.

The closest tears from both outside over telephone and inside by the selected guests, present at the venue. A question that found up to the mark was from Mr. Atiar Rahman, economist. While questioning to the Prime Minister he reminded her election pledge to get rid of country from terrorism. In a similar question answer session arranged by BTW before 12 June election she pronounced her pledge. He cited action of caretaker government on close monitoring, on the actions that were being taken against the terrorists by the advisers to Mr. Habibur Rahman. He emphasised by asking the Prime Minister

whether her government has any semblance activity by ministers other than home minister in a coordinated way to monitor actions against terrorists. We think this should be followed as a regular practice by the cabinet.

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Water-logging in the city

Sir, Water-logging in Shantinagar, Kakrail, Bijnayagar and other parts of the city is causing immense suffering for the people of those areas. The main cause of this water-logging is 'not to clear the drains in these areas and removed the garbage by the conservancy department of the City Corporation for more than last 18 months. Previously the drains used to be cleaned and the garbage used to be removed regularly. Before the onset of the monsoon all garbage accumulated in the drains were cleaned and the accumulated garbage in

the drains were taken out and removed by the City Corporation trucks. Officers of the conservancy department of the corporation used to supervise the drain cleaning works. The former Mayor also used to visit different areas of the city to see the work done by the conservancy department of the City Corporation. But with the present Mayor of the City Corporation the position is very different.

The Mayor of the City Corporation has failed to make the Chief Conservancy Officer of the City Corporation and other staff of the City Conservancy Department, particularly those who are responsible for cleaning the drains and removing garbage from Zone-4 of the City Corporation, to do their job.

Unfortunately, the Mayor is now trying to evade his responsibility and his failure to keep the city in a habitable condition by taking the plea that, as the WASA has not been able to complete construction of the 'Box Culvert', due to a mosque in Fakirpool road, the drainage of storm water has been blocked. This plea is totally wrong and untenable.

I think it would be a step forward in the right direction if the Mayor does place the conservancy department of the City Corporation under the control and management of a 'dynamic' person who would be hard-working and capable of making all other officers and staff to discharge their duties and responsibilities efficiently and honestly and to clean the drains by removing the accumulated garbage and sludge which were created due to negligence for a long time after the present Mayor took charge.

I think the Mayor should occasionally come out of his air-conditioned office in the Nagar Bhaban and visit the city as his predecessors used to do. I would request the Mayor to see the condition of the drains to the south and west of the Pioneer Credit Society office in Bijnayagar and take action against the staff whose negligence of duty has created this condition. The sludge accumulated on the roads should also be removed without delay.

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