

Snail's Pace

Beyond sounding a wee bit upbeat one cannot be effusively self-congratulatory or celebrative about the three percentage-point rise in the pace of ADP implementation in the first two months of 1996-97 over the last fiscal year's corresponding level.

Reading the news of it, as circulated by BSS and UNB, one relievedly finds that the achievement has been seen as a "modest momentum" without any trace of an attempted hype on it. This is where overaccolade goes for objective news-creeding with a reflected glory shared by the news-makers in a process of maturation that must go on to its logical culmination — transparent governance with equally transparent information dissemination.

Frankly though, our appetite for more information remained somewhat unwhetted for not cataloguing in the news item the directives the PM reeled off to the ministries, divisions and executing agencies for 'expediting' the ADP implementation. Essentially it is an extended downside of the positive news that one must focus upon to place it in the right perspective. We are not getting carried away by the so-called momentum much as we appreciate it as an outcome of an intense concentration on the priority projects because of two very cogent reasons: First, we are hanging our hat on to a peg that is hardly anything to brag about; for, as everyone knows, we had had almost three successive years of notoriously low ADP implementation rates. To have inched only 3 percentage points ahead of the poor specimen of a bench-mark in the preceding financial year is hardly anything to gloat over.

In the essence, the utilisation of only eight per cent of the 12000-crore ADP allocation in the first two months puts us at a self-evident disadvantage for the remainder of the fiscal year with 92 per cent to be implemented in the highly disproportionate time-frame of only ten months. The ace in the hole, however, is the higher foreign aid disbursement rate pulsating through the ADP now. But it hinges critically on keeping political peace.

Aricha Plunge

It is many years that a bus has plunged into the river with a full load of passengers and right from a ferry. Accounts of the tragedy vary from newspaper to newspaper but in essence these say there was a problem at disembarkation which the man at the steering could not overcome. Perhaps because he was not the driver of the bus but only the helper. The driver had gone down leaving his post when he had to stop his bus making way for vehicles embarking on ferry. Some reports say the helper put the bus on back gear. God alone knows why he had to do that — as does the man himself who got away before the plunge.

A thorough investigation must be mounted and the driver, helper and as many of the survivors as may be got together must be interrogated to piece together the full true story. And punishment awarded to persons found guilty. A number of problems may also come into the open during the investigation about loading and unloading situations at the Aricha Ghat. These may need to be sorted out without delay and without fail.

There is season for our insisting on such. Automobile accidents top the list of deaths due to unnatural reason. And yet there is hardly any news of punishment dealt out to persons responsible for these. Why? Reason one, important people hardly meet with such accidents. Two, the automobiles laws provide for the lightest of penalties for even those proven to have a hand in the accident. Although these mishaps involve multiple death, the questions of possible mechanical failure and unintended human error of judgement make the losses of lives into mere deaths rather than killings and murders. So, automobile, specially bus mishap deaths have ceased to be taken seriously by police. Very few people have ever been punished against the hundreds of accidents that occur and thousands that are killed and maimed.

So let's at least have the investigations and know for sure how these happen. Bad roads, overloading, overworked and undertrained drivers having no professional ethics or obligations, speeding and road-unworthy vehicles — none of these are accidental things and these are what accidents are made of. Each of these are eminently amenable to improvement. Why do not we go for these improvements?

Verdict of Fatigue

Japan's political batteries may not have been instantly recharged by the inconclusive verdict of the just-held polls but her voters have made certain points for the future guidance of the mainstream political parties there.

The country's luckless run with coalition governments, endorsed one time too many by the electorate, is a sure sign of a profound and near-total popular realisation that while the LDP could not be trusted with absolute power, the untested political parties should neither be gambled upon just as yet. But the big lesson, of course, is directed towards the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), led by prime minister Ryutaro Hashimoto who, through his failed bid to emerge mandated with power must be sensitised to the reality of the Japanese demanding a fully reformed and revitalized LDP on the ashes of its 1993 electoral debacle. But then the party's stock of experience in running governments for most of the post-war period has not been at a disconcert: it has emerged as the single largest political party with 239 seats in the 500-seat Diet. This reflects the Japanese people's craving for political stability, an agenda being put into the hands of an organised party like the LDP which is set to lead a coalition government once again. The opposition New Frontier Party looks strong with 156 members in the lower house.

Note also the Japanese gyrations of disinterest in contemporary politics limned on the record low voter turn-out since the last Great War.

The Presidential Suggestion

by M Arshad Ali

The election of Justice Shahabuddin on the initiative of the Leader of the House has bestowed unique achievement on her government on many counts and the leader of the opposition acquiescing to it has gained her immense credit.

THAT Shakespeare is not of a single country and particular age but of all ages and climes has once again received a renewed confirmation in Bangladesh even after long four hundred years of his demise. Though the concept of kingship has since undergone numerous changes, both revolutionary and evolutionary, over the centuries, the pith and substance of King Henry's soliloquy 'Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown' remains a tangible and efficacious as it was yore. With the establishment and functioning of the most successful parliamentary democracy in the United Kingdom, the sovereignty of the King has given way to the supremacy of the Parliament, i.e., the King has been reduced to a titular head of the state, a position far from the conception of Shakespearean England. This does not, however, mean that the King has been divested of all powers and functions, and that he has no actual influence in the governance.

In fact, the services the monarch renders are highly significant and the influences he exerts upon the course of public affairs assume considerable importance. Apart from enjoying the formal rights like being the sole repository of all executive powers during the brief interval between the resignation of one Prime Minister and the assumption of another thus maintaining the continuity of the government, the King possesses three rights — the right to be consulted, the right to warn and the right to encourage.

A wise and sagacious King who is serious enough to exercise these three informal rights of advice, warning and encouragement and who holds strong views regarding the affairs of the country may exert tremendous influence upon the policy of the Cabinet.

The King is the symbol of national unity and solidarity. He is the only man who never lands himself in party strife and always works impartially devoid of any bias and free from favour or favour. He is the judge who sees that the game of politics is played in accordance with the rules. It is in the fitness of things that such a wise non-partisan personality assumes the role of a peace-maker when occasion so demands. Elevated above strife of party politics, having no axe of his own to grind, no personal ambition to achieve, he is in a position to take a dispassionate view of national issues and form a disinterested judgement thereof. It is in this way that he

fulfils his role as a mediator in national politics and renders a man's service to the country but does not govern.

His is thus a device that forges national consensus on issues that are of vital importance to the interest of the nation. It is the exercise of these rights that makes him an astute observer of the state of affairs causing his head to be deprived of easeful rest and peaceful sleep as King Henry IV suffered from. Much, however, depends on the personality of the King.

President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed should possess similar rights and hold similar influences as being the constitutional head of a parliamentary democracy that Bangladesh like the UK is. And to our proud privilege, Shahabuddin is a man of rare personality and sagacity and of incomparable knowledge and wisdom which are demanded of the constitutional head of a democratic polity as enumerated above in case of the English King.

The election of Justice Shahabuddin on the initiative of the Leader of the House has bestowed unique achievement on her government on many counts and the leader of the opposition acquiescing to it has gained her immense credit.

A man of his stature adorning the Presidency of the country, he cannot but be concerned over issues that involves the interest of the nation. This concern of his found expression when the other day he suggested the solution of the intractable problem of campus violence that has gripped the campus putting the educational arena at jeopardy and the entire nation at that. In putting forward the suggestion of a temporary moratorium on so-called student politics which has mostly degenerated into terrorism and violence at the manipulation of interested quarters, the President has exercised his three rights of advice, warning and encouragement simultaneously. His profound anxiety over campus terrorism is a warning as to the alarming dimension of the problem which brooks no delay for its solution.

He advises as to the modus operandi of the solution that a broad-based consensus among the major political parties to dissociate themselves from their respective student wings should be arrived at. He encourages political leaders of the country to bring into play their collective wisdom to find a solution to the problem that has been eating into the very vitals of the nation in that the budding geniuses of the country are being cut in the prime of their life in the very lap of their alma mater where they are sent to equip themselves with tools of decent life in stead of being armed with weapons of grisly death as they are done to snatch away the lives of their comrades-in-knowledge. This is why in stead of misinterpreting the suggestion which is prone to be so because of past history in this regard, but the exception this time being coming as it does from a President of Justice, Shahabuddin's stature who has more embellishments than description, our leaders may decide the issue on the floor of Parliament — the proper forum for mooting national issues — to arrive at an agreeable decision in the best interest of the nation.

A man never stigmatised with an iota of partisanship, elevated far above the petty personal motives of self-interest, given to dispassionate studies of men and manners, devoted to making disinterested judgement and pronouncing the voice of reason throughout life, it is quite possible for President Justice Shahabuddin to act as a symbol of national unity and stability. It is he who can act as

a mediator between struggling political parties on national issues and forge consensus on them. To this end he has marched forward in the right direction by offering 'Fatima' at the *mazar* of the Bangabandhu first and then at that of President Ziaur Rahman on the same day. He has called upon the political parties to sink their differences and work unitedly on the basis of consensus in major national issues.

A man of his stature adorning the Presidency of the country, he cannot but be concerned over issues that involves the interest of the nation. This concern of his found expression when the other day he suggested the solution of the intractable problem of campus violence that has gripped the campus putting the educational arena at jeopardy and the entire nation at that. In putting forward the suggestion of a temporary moratorium on so-called student politics which has mostly degenerated into terrorism and violence at the manipulation of interested quarters, the President has exercised his three rights of advice, warning and encouragement simultaneously. His profound anxiety over campus terrorism is a warning as to the alarming dimension of the problem which brooks no delay for its solution.

He advises as to the modus operandi of the solution that a broad-based consensus among the major political parties to dissociate themselves from their respective student wings should be arrived at. He encourages political leaders of the country to bring into play their collective wisdom to find a solution to the problem that has been eating into the very vitals of the nation in that the budding geniuses of the country are being cut in the prime of their life in the very lap of their alma mater where they are sent to equip themselves with tools of decent life in stead of being armed with weapons of grisly death as they are done to snatch away the lives of their comrades-in-knowledge. This is why in stead of misinterpreting the suggestion which is prone to be so because of past history in this regard, but the exception this time being coming as it does from a President of Justice, Shahabuddin's stature who has more embellishments than description, our leaders may decide the issue on the floor of Parliament — the proper forum for mooting national issues — to arrive at an agreeable decision in the best interest of the nation.

Alas for Mr Blair, his laser-like concentration on winning the 1997 general election, which is increasingly likely to be in autumn, is not distracting his own dissenters and dissidents who lurk beyond the beam awaiting their moment. The Manichean mirror-image of the Tory Right, they also oppose Europe, but because it is not left enough.

All good rough stuff. But the polls show that Europe is a non-issue as far as the British public is concerned: they are bored with all the platitudes and have almost as many misgivings about foreign politicians as they have about their own.

The inexperienced of office is a weakness for the Blair government-in-waiting (like many of his front bench he was still at school when Mrs Thatcher

was in power).

The elections in May are expected to be a melt-down for town hall Tories.

"We have to remember that Britain had its economic miracle a hundred years ago, when we were inventing machines and techniques that influenced the world. And we are still doing it."

"We need to turn the tide, but not pull the plug."

To the Editor

The ghoulish scape-goat

Sir. The Dhahran blast in the American military base was blamed on some still untraced surely fundamental group professing One God faith. And a fat tantalising reward of five million USD has been announced by the two governments, the Royal Saudi government leasing the base and the USA using the base. Who would be the lucky winner I do not know, but I am sure it was none else than the Jewish state of Israel who did it with the US President's concurrence and knowledge. I do not have the proof because international killers do not leave proofs of misdeeds but my conviction is not less than one hundred per cent.

Two instant goals are aimed at: to absolve Israeli Prime Minister Natanyahu of his bellicose anti-Muslim talks and adore him against the decedent fundamentalists and secondly, create a hitting ground for Mr Clinton to brighten up his re-election margin.

The clenched fists awing hard retaliation against the hypothetical blowers vowed by Mr Clinton and his Defence Secretary, in a land not their own show how worried they are for a quick-score. Hardly one day passed, there were loud roars of punishing Iran for the deed, even before any spot inspection was conducted. A scapegoat was to be found quickly and the goat must be capped and bearded, better if can be discovered from Iran, Iraq and Libya. Even Syria would not be welcome. Their ready US missiles can seek choice targets that will instantly swell Mr Clinton's score points securedly high.

Israeli Prime Minister's US visit in its wake and US President's hand-in-hand swing clamouring a mouthful of unswerving unitesness coupled with an exhibited ovation in the US Congress given to the cynical Jewish leader prove that Dhahran blast did have well calculated objectives. It may be noted that the fuel-truck said to have caused the blast was taken too close to the army barracks and warnings were issued only seconds before the blast. The US base could not have been so unusually guarded.

In the Second World War, Churchill needed to sink one American passenger ship to drag the USA to his rescue. The USA has sunk many such boats to engage it mammoth military

muscle for destroying potential antagonists, in Gulf of Tonkin, in Beirut, in Kuwait and now in Dhahran. There is a third man expecting to gain from these Churchillian bluffs of American making, the Catholic Pope. He visualises a Christian Arab land and the American Israelis as his Cross comrades.

Mohd. Ehyi
120, Lok Vihar Bodells
Vikaspuri, New Delhi-110018

Save public roads

Sir. Dhaka is perhaps the only metropolitan city in the world having miles-long of open-air garages for buses, trucks and rickshaws on the public roads. With problems like traffic jams and rehabilitation of hawkers and vendors remaining unsolved for indefinite period it appears that the day is not far when the people of Dhaka would be required to travel from one place to another only on foot and the use of public vehicles would serve no purpose any more.

There is total anarchy and no law and order on the public roads. We wonder why our government spends crore of taka on construction, repair, re-carpeting and maintenance of public roads when it fails to honour, protect and ensure freedom of movement of the people of Dhaka as per Article 36 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh?

We strongly feel that Dhaka City Corporation is not rightly and efficiently performing its duties and responsibilities. We also feel that Dhaka Metropolitan Police has been rendering its services to a handful of public leaders, ministers and bureaucrats and not the members of the public.

It is better late than never. We would request the Deputy Commissioner of Dhaka, the Mayor of Dhaka City Corporation and the Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner to kindly seek immediate aid and assistance from our Prime Minister, Home Minister and Minister for Local Government and Rural Development to help eliminate manifold civic problems of eight million people of Dhaka Metropolitan City which is going to be a megacity in the coming century and to save the millions of people from chaos, confusion and untold sufferings.

O H Kabir
Wari, Dhaka-1203

Let Battle Commence

Neville Stack writes from London

Britain is continuing its recovery, but from a woefully low industrial and moral base. Social policies of both parties are focused on creating, or re-creating, One Nation. But the wounds of anxiety, insecurity, negative equity, family breakdown and degrading and debilitating unemployment will not be healed by slogans.

As in all the best battles, the opening shots in Britain's election campaign were fired with precise aim and deadly intent. But soon the verbal bullets were flying wildly in all directions, inflicting collateral damage on friends as well as foes.

No wonder, when the contest is between the Untested and the Untrusted.

Both the governing Conservatives and the wannabes of Labour are, in effect, coalitions of disparate and sometimes conflicting schisms. To keep the peace, prime minister John Major is performing a balancing act worthy of his late father, the celebrated American comic tightrope walker.

With tactical skill and a confusing mix of boldness and timidity, Mr major is holding his party together, albeit at the price of conceding some of his instincts. But with a majority down to three and falling, he is preparing to fight for his political life.

He and opposition leader Tony Blair used to be quite friendly, but the affable Blair grin is becoming more tigerish by the day, while Mr major's appears a trifle wan.

In order to pacify his right-wingers, Mr Major fired a broadside against the European Union and some of its institutions, to the dismay of those in his own cabinet as well as the back benches who see enthusiasm for Europe as the only practical hope for the future.

However, regardless of what the other member-states may do, the European trumpets remain unblown on this side of the Channel.

Seeing all this as merely crude populism, Mr Blair and those of his cohorts who can understand what he is getting at, redouble their efforts to convince the voters that "stakeholding," a form of neo-corporatism that has been around for decades, is the way to reunite and, more importantly, re-enthuse the nation. All this, and Europe too.

Alas for Mr Blair, his laser-like concentration on winning the 1997 general election, which is increasingly likely to be in autumn, is not distracting his own dissenters and dissidents who lurk beyond the beam awaiting their moment. The Manichean mirror-image of the Tory Right, they also oppose Europe, but because it is not left enough.

All good rough stuff. But the polls show that Europe is a non-issue as far as the British public is concerned: they are bored with all the platitudes and have almost as many misgivings about foreign politicians as they have about their own.

The inexperienced of office is a weakness for the Blair government-in-waiting (like many of his front bench he was still at school when Mrs Thatcher

was in power).

The elections in May are expected to be a melt-down for town hall Tories.

"If we get the timing right to catch the public mood of cynicism with all politicians, they will see this referendum as a move to escaping from the straitjacket and moving to a consensual system. We are

con-

vin-

ce-

re-

lief-

in-

re-

he-

re-

al-

re-

al-

re-

al-

re-

al-

re-

al-

re-

al-