

Science is the Answer

President Shahabuddin Ahmed opened on Tuesday the 19th Bangladesh Science Conference. As expected, he had all the best words befitting the occasion. Scientists could contribute to the augmentation of our agricultural output whose growth has been lately showing signs of stagnation. They could also develop technologies to fight environmental pollution. Science and technology should be developed integrally with the other sectors of our collective push towards a higher and better socio-economic niche. And, of course, he did not miss on the appropriate technology theme.

The organisation and management of the cultivation of sciences have not taken any useful shape in Bangladesh. The brilliant among the annual university crop do hardly come to anything enriching either science or society. The lucky ones may land teaching jobs. Where there are scopes for labs and study abroad these are abused by scholars bent on enriching themselves materially. The government simply doesn't know how to use them for the society's intellectual, cultural and materiel advancement.

There are some establishments given exclusively to doing application-oriented research. Although job security and bureaucratic predilections of those manning them dull their keenness very certainly, they do not all doze over their microscopes. Their inventions and innovations and maybe even some rare breakthrough achievements would all go to heighten the heap of useless papers at set-ups like BCSIR, Jute Institute etc. Why is the government very complacently keeping all of such organisations in a state of limbo — neither lifting them seriously to levels responding to entrepreneurial demands nor closing them down?

Past governments have not proven keen on technological development for the improvement of social conditions and strengthening of our economic sinews. A stupendous testament to this is the shut-down of the machine tools factory at Joydebpur.

The conference opened at a time this nation is moving away from the sciences in a big and broad manner. Look at the sad plight of science education as reflected in the SSC and HSC results. And look at frauds boasting of miracle healing in the national press. Cannot the scientists themselves take a persistent stand for giving the sciences a fairer chance in this society? There is no reason why science should not prove a messiah to our hapless people.

After the Surge

The system of alerting people well in advance and the awareness of people themselves about the destructive power of cyclonic storms have definitely improved in recent times. Monday's tidal surge caused by the storm was quite powerful — although not as powerful as the one of '91 — but compared to its not inconsiderable ferocity the reported casualty figure should be considered low.

Damage to and destruction of property, crops etc cannot be wished away in the face of such natural calamities and this time too there was no exception to it. But the death of only 14 people coupled with fishermen of 15 trawlers missing confirms the notion that in the area of warning and preparedness against cyclones a noticeable improvement has taken place.

This, however, is no cause for celebration. Our effort rather should be geared to reducing the losses even further. While this remains an agenda with us, prompt attention should be paid now to the cyclone-affected people, particularly those who have lost their homes and crops. A most common practice noticed after each cyclonic visitation is to distribute *lungi* and *saree* to the victims. Some people surely have use for these but what the homeless ones need badly are materials and financial support for rebuilding their hearths and homes. Agricultural rehabilitation programmes ought to follow that.

The cyclone this time has wrought destruction over a wide area. So to mitigate the sufferings of the people, a medium-term relief and rehabilitation programme will have to be undertaken.

Since natural calamities are a recurring phenomenon in our part of the world, we certainly need to keep all sorts of provision to tide over their telling effects. A quick recovery largely depends on the system of delivery and also keeping it free from corruption. We hope the administration will prove equal to the task.

New Challenge

Sumon Chattopadhyay, the one-man music show singing of pain and frustration is very vocally in town. And on Monday he sounded very close to the heart of many in Bangladesh. It may not be quite feasible to launch a resistance in Bangladesh against the all-devouring menace. Nevertheless the menace is very real. And the Bangladeshis are particularly vulnerable to what Sumon has called 'Hindi imperialism'.

The sense of nationhood based on native language and history and culture is a prized possession gained through the historic Liberation War. The rightist forces here have been persistent in their attempt to dilute Bangla language and culture as well as to perpetuate the influence on these of the erstwhile colonial sway. Now here is Hindi anti-culture come to reign not only the electromagnetic waves of the micro range but also the minds of millions. Our people will be lucky to survive the pincer attack — from within as well as outside.

There can be no question of blocking the Hindi channels. Bangladesh will now need to have multi-channel electronic-media programmes of class and culture to beat the bad shadow of the junk most of the Hindi channels telecast most of the time. And cultural activity must now be infused with new vigour.

THE Prime Minister went to New York to attend the 51st Session of the UN General Assembly. She delivered her address at the plenary. Such addresses by heads of delegation generally dwell upon a country's perception of current political and economic situation, both at home and abroad, and are designed to highlight certain domestic and international issues of significance.

During the visit, Prime Minister met a number of world leaders, as it is customary, and a large number of our nationals. She addressed a group of American investors which, no doubt, reflects her genuine desire to attract foreign investment into the country. Her proposals in respect of global environmental measures have evoked due interest. Her announcement that Bangladesh would contest for a seat in the UN Security Council at the advent of the next century will earn praise for the country, provided we succeed in the contest. It may be recalled that President Zia had earned that laurel for Bangladesh for the first and only time within a few years of our membership of the United Nations.

The lead story of the Prime Minister's speech that appeared in our national press related generally to world peace. Her speech, I was told, was not covered in American national dailies, perhaps the international community did not find anything of relative interest in its content. Anyway, it is good to express concern at the plight of the suffering people in Bosnia, Middle East Africa and in other trouble spots. She is

likewise quite at home to speak about peace at home. Unfortunately, peace at home is receding fast, as the law and order situation is deteriorating further. Death in police custody added further to people's worry. She also spoke of the positive contribution made by Bangladesh peace-keeping forces in the international arena. It is again during the rule of Khaleda Zia that more contingents of our brave soldiers were sent far and wide and in greater number than ever before. They earned for Bangladesh high international commendation, despite their inadequate supplies and sub-standard equipment, on account of their sheer skill and valour.

The Prime Minister chose to spend a good deal of time for reminiscing the past misrule of 21 years and on what should have been done than what needs to be done in future. She was quite oblivious of the fact that democracy started flourishing long before her assumption of power four months ago. On the contrary, it is well known that democracy was stifled by the establishment of an autocratic one-party BAKSAL system during the first Awami League

regime. The 80 member entourage of the Prime Minister appears unprecedented in the history of Bangladesh — the type of extravaganzas an impoverished country can ill-afford, to say the least. May be it is a natural sequel to the insatiable desire felt over a long period of 21 years. One may recall that the size of a 42 member Bangladesh delegation under the former



Currents and Crosscurrents

by M M Rezaul Karim

Prime Minister to the Copenhagen Summit two years ago came under criticism by no other journal than *New York Times* itself. The paper must have abandoned its efforts this time.

The sharing of the waters of the Ganges was not touched by the Prime Minister. In her printed prepared text, there was no mention of it. As a second thought, a reference was inserted. At the time of delivery, that too was discarded. Indecision galore! The explanation

available was that the present Bangladesh government does not want to internationalise the issue, the subject is currently under negotiation with India and that raising this issue at the UN would jeopardise possibility of reaching a settlement. This outwardly appears quite logical. But a closer scrutiny will reveal its fallacy.

A mere reference to an unresolved issue, which is of vital national interest to us and causing us enormous national loss, is not interpreted as raising it in the world body, unless it is so inscribed on the agenda.

causing us enormous national loss, is not interpreted as raising it in the world body, unless it is so inscribed on the agenda. The former Prime Minister did bring to the attention of world leaders in the UN in 1995 the serious plight of the people of Bangladesh due to continued unilateral withdrawal of waters at Farakka. lest they forget existence of such a problem. She, however, deliberately did not put it on the agenda and to invoke a debate since negotia-

tions were still being carried on at official, Foreign Secretary's level.

Prime Minister's decision might have been viewed as an exercise of extreme caution which others might see it to be a manifestation of sheer lack of courage for voicing the truth and raising it above whisper level. We have already gone to West Bengal's Chief Minister with folded hands for water. If we have to fall on our knees for getting the same, some would argue — why not, in order to get some water? Others will contend — we must get our legitimate dues through amicable negotiations, but not at the cost of our national dignity and not by compromising the principle of sovereign equality. Our people have to make a choice for themselves.

The visit of the leader of opposition to Saudi Arabia also came under serious attack from some quarters, attributing it to be a political visit. It was basically an Umrah visit to the two holy mosques in Makkah al Mukarrama and Madina al Munawwara. If it is claimed that she had made any political speeches in these two cities, it would be a travesty of truth. She did not. There was, however,

tumultuous welcome accorded to her on her arrival in Jeddah and a large number of our nationals went to meet her in Riyadh and other places.

If on these occasions, a former Prime Minister spoke to her nationals about the prevailing political and economic situation of the country and some of the burning international issues facing them, how could one blame her? After all, those are the people who wanted to avail the rare opportunity of hearing a popular leader of their country. One should also take note of the fact during her talks with nationals, she called upon them to strive for greater exports from Bangladesh and urged them for increased investment to their own country. If it was wrong, she must have committed grievous wrong.

As for the hospitality of the Saudi government, I can claim some personal knowledge. I had the unique honour of being the first Bangladeshi to taste Saudi hospitality when on 8 January 1976 I went there as the first Head of Mission of Bangladesh and brought the Bangladesh flag for the first time to the holy Kaaba. During my tenure, the first Bangladeshi labour went to Saudi Arabia, the first economic aid agreement was negotiated and the first visit of a Head of Bangladesh Government, Ziaur Rahman, was arranged. Begum Zia has been to Saudi Arabia a number of times since then at Royal invitation. This visit also took place in response to a gracious invitation by His Majesty the Saudi Monarch himself, who, I am confident has derived due satisfaction to host the honoured guest.

Come Out of the Cocoon of Stagnant Thoughts

by Kazi Alaaddin Ahmed

It may be recalled that the members in the opposition benches in the Jatiya Sangsad (fifth parliament) had offered all out support to the BNP government in the matters of implementing their pre-election commitments to the people.

BEGUM Khaleda Zia, as of now, appears to have at least partially realized what should be her or her party's role in the wake of a vibrant, palpable popular confidence to have a revamped national economy. She has promised not to go for any agitational programme that, in her own words, would jeopardize the economic development and progress of the country. In her expression, faint traces of her mental preparedness to support the efforts of the present government are discernible. Indeed, this is a good omen that fits in well with a national leader of her stature.

She would, however, let her words pass without the usual slandering of the party in power now. While casually denigrating her view point on national economic development, she did not forget to allude to the role of the opposition during her time in power. She recounted that the erstwhile opposition had frequently taken to the streets, called hartals, blockades and non-cooperation damaging the national economy severely. Though she did not tell us, it could be guessed that her current expression has been an instinctive outcome of her beaten conscience that she did not proffer a fair deal to her political adversaries during her time.

Still then, one would agree with her that a poor, developing country like Bangladesh can ill afford to have frequent negative programmes like hartals, blockades and a state of non-cooperation that would make irreparable inroads in the limping economy. It is equally true that the party in power should not also indulge itself in the luxury of self-infatuation that its governance is qualitatively far better than any government of the past. It is also fraught with the danger of being routed unceremoniously if it does not realize that the mem-

bers of the opposition can be equally patriotic.

It may be recalled that the members in the opposition benches in the Jatiya Sangsad (fifth parliament) had offered all out support to the BNP government in the matters of implementing their pre-election commitments to the people. Begum Zia had promised unequivocally to bring a bill for a neutral caretaker government which would conduct all future elections. There was also a clear understanding that the infamous Indemnity Act would be repealed through a bill. Besides, the Special Powers Act of 1974 would be scrapped. On the matter of corruption charges against some of the ministers of her government, Begum Zia and her party MPs agreed to the formation of a Parliamentary committee. The committee was constituted as an eye-wash and it died automatically after one or two inconclusive meetings.

On the first issue of a non-party caretaker government and their expert commitment, the BNP leadership continued dilly-dallying. At one stage, Begum Zia made a critical observation that the idea of a non-party caretaker government was the brain-child of mentally deranged people or that of a small kid. She continued mocking and jeering at the protagonists till such time she found herself consigned to a dead end. Scarcely did she realize till then that her purposeful cold-shouldering the opposition was preparing the ground for her fall.

It was however, a belated realisation that roused her to act subsequent to the hoax of February 15, 1996 election for the short-lived 6th Sangsad.

Before that, her credibility had receded to the lowest point. The country had witnessed severe draught in congenial political thinking and continued with its economy being the perpetual casualty.

During this brief period the idea or the concept of a neutral caretaker government, hitherto described by BNP leadership as a product originating in an insane brain or child's plaything, came into being a reality. And the eventual election on 12th June, 1996 for the 7th Sangsad proved all the more its effectiveness. For BNP, however, it was counter productive because it could not come back to power. With the initial results, BNP expressed its bitter dissatisfaction besides challenging the validity of the results of at least 116 seats which, in their words, Awami League had stolen from them. Unfortunately, they could not substantiate their claim with any acceptable documentary evidence demanded by the reelection tribunals. Soon they were stuck into sullen silence seeing their queer attempts at creating a confusion having been pitifully aborted.

In the subsequent by-elections to 15 seats both BNP and Jatiya Party had lost to Awami League a number of seats which they won on June 12, 1996. Both could not realize that personal image and stature of the top-most leaders of the respective parties could not be matched by their lesser nominees. And so they lost. In recent times the seeds hitherto won by former Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao in his own home constituency in Andhra Pradesh and later vacated by him retaining his Orissa seat,

could not be bagged by Congress in the by-election. This is the grim reality no matter one accepts it or not. Rao and his Congress accepted the results in good grace while in our case BNP leaders turned it down on grounds of 'rigging' 'vote dacoity' etc.

Peremptorily, BNP made, as usual, a virulent row over the issue making direct accusation of partisanship against the Chief Election Commissioner Abu Hena. They even went to the extent of attempting a seizure of the Election Commission and simultaneously demanding Mr. Hena's resignation or removal within a pre-set date.

Now, reverting to Begum Zia's commitment to give a 'fair deal' to the present government as long as it works sincerely towards overall economic development of the country and people's welfare, one is intrigued to find that the other part of BNP leadership is engaged, tooth and nail, to cook up concocted stories of oppression, repression, harassment and even killing of BNP leaders and workers all over the country. They were initially talking loudly about the so-called corruption cases against Begum Zia herself, her son, brother, other ex-ministers and MPs. Sadek Hossain Khoka, on being selected as the new convenor of the city unit of BNP, was entrusted to declare in the first public meeting after his installation replacing Mr. Shawkat Ali, that the whole country would be stuck to total immobility if any charge of corruption was brought against Begum Zia. Perhaps he wanted to display his leadership facilities and potentials besides a palpable but overt attempt to pamper the chief.

And away in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia to perform Holy Umrah and also offer Fateha at the holy shrine of prophet Muhammad (SM) in Madina, Begum Zia seems to have a third item on her agenda. Bangladeshi citizens working in KSA made a simple courtesy call on her and in the course may have presented some of their grievances. Begum Zia seized the opportunity to do a little bit of politics reminding them vis-a-vis Saudi Government and the people how the opposition (oblique reference to the present government) had opposed sending of Bangladeshi troops to Saudi Arabia during Iraqi annexation of Kuwait in early nineties. She did not tell them that the opposition stance at that time was only to forestall involvement of our country in a clash between two Muslim nations. That was exactly the spirit and there was no politics in it. It was also grossly inaccurate when Begum Zia discovered KSA's 'displeasure' over the matter which, in her words, damaged the established good relationship with the desert Kingdom.

However, it may be considered as an overt expression of gratitude to King Fahd for his having arranged visit of Begum Zia and her family members to Saudi Arabia. It could be an instant acknowledgment with an eye on the future.

At home, her party leaders, chiefly the Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan keeps on his half-hearted drum-beating, now on two specific counts. While declaring that there was no scope for BNP to contest any election under the present government

(apparently defending its decision not to contest in Habiganj-2 by election) he demanded issuance of I.D. card and removal of the Chief Election Commissioner Mr. Abu Hena. On the other hand, the deputy leader of the opposition in the Jatiya Sangsad Professor Badruddoza Chowdhury made some vituperative remarks in a public meeting in Chittagong against the present government. He had selected three queer words to accuse the government. The words were 'Munafiq', 'Dhokabaz' and 'Mamlabaz'. He did not, however, elucidate. The first one presupposes a promise made but not fulfilled or done otherwise. Amongst others, the government made a promise of transparency which it has already fulfilled. The second being synonymous with the first does not require further elucidation. And the third relates to the normal course of law. If Dr Chowdhury made an oblique reference to the upcoming specific cases of corruption of BNP leaders while in power, it would be premature to make any comment. And if no truth surfaces after the initial investigations by the Bureau of Anti-corruption and subsequent proceedings in the court of law, then only his diagnosis would hold an acceptable ground. The government is bringing up a bill to separate the Judiciary from the Administration. Hence, every one shall be better advised to refrain from making such preemptive and obtrusive utterance. Ironically, Dr Chowdhury is totally oblivious of the innumerable charges of corruption brought by BNP government against almost all the ministers of JP besides H M Ershad and Begum Ershad. How would BNP hide its wild vindictiveness while Begum Ershad and all the Jatiya Party ministers are now free. So, let us allow truth to play its role, let honesty have its day again.

To the Editor...

Say 'no' to plastic bags

Sir, I am writing this letter to express a major concern of mine. I have lived in Dhaka for over fifteen years and the rate in which the pollution has increased in the last two or three years in the Banani, Gulshan and Baridhara areas is frightening.

There are many ways in which an individual can help. One way is to say 'no' to plastic bags. Does one really need that extra bag? It takes about 100 years for one bag to decompose. Instead one should go shopping with a jute bag. Another way to start helping is to make sure our household garbage is being dumped in a cemented garbage dump. One should try to encourage all the families in his/her area to keep the area outside of their house clear of garbage.

We need to make our environment healthy for not only ourselves but for our future generations. If everyone does it today, it will make a difference. Mrs Ahmed American Int'l School Baridhara, Dhaka

Lack of information

Sir, I was taken aback to see the ADB's Dhaka office 'comment on the appointment of new VC of the Open University' ornamenting the front page of The Daily Star on October 7, 1996. It represents ADB's poor wealth of information and ignorance to our country's administrative matters. Let me exhibit its poor wealth of information. First, Mr M Aminul Islam is not a teacher of the Soil Science Department, DU. He is a professor of the Department of Geography.

Attracting foreign investment

Sir, The former BNP government tried its best, and now the Awami League government is leaving no stone unturned attracting foreign investment

in Bangladesh. But we find that the foreigners feel shy to make large-scale capital investment in our country due to the various reasons including labour unrest, bureaucratic red-tapism, wide-scale corruption in government offices and lack of efficiency.

The Awami League government which has already completed 100 days, and propagating and claiming many achievements to its credit in economic, political and administrative fields, has in fact failed to write any story of success on any subject.

We all, irrespective of government or opposition supporters and the neutrals, strongly believe that we have few alternatives to foreign investment in our country, to do away with our ever mounting poverty and sufferings of the people.

In this connection, we would like to mention here that many industries in our country are closed for a long time. Further, many of those are on the verge of collapse due to lack of new equipment, materials and want of capital. Can't we revitalize and reactivate those dilapidated, worn-out and outdated industries with foreign investment under joint venture system?

We strongly believe that if our government undertakes a scheme and takes an initiative in the matter we would be able to attract huge foreign investment easily and quickly. Would our Ministry of Industries, Trade and Commerce, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, our diplomatic missions abroad kindly consider the matter and do the needful?

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Whither justice

Sir, The former prime minister of India has been summoned by the additional session judge of Delhi on 30 September '96, in connection with alleged bribery scandal of US dollar one lac given by Lakshobhai Pathak. Several ministers resigned in view of CBI reports involving corruption during the prime ministership of Narasimha Rao. These news continue to occupy important position in the local dailies while BTV has just showed the arrest of the former telephone minister.

It reminds me that our present Commerce and Industries Minister challenged in the floor of JS session indicating that he would resign from JS membership in case he could not prove the corruption of the former Agricultural Minister of BNP regime regarding fertiliser distribution. Unfortunately, no corruption case has been filed by our anti-corruption department though BNP is no longer in power. Besides, I am ashamed to point out that a parliamentary enquiry committee on fertiliser scandal was formed at that time but the Speaker could not frame the terms of reference on this issue and nothing was done. The present PM is busy in formulating policies for an effective administration by the people as often uttered in the all possible fora.

The trial of Dhaka Jail killers has started but a good number of killers need to be tried too. The Deputy Speaker of the then East Pakistan assembly was killed in 1958 within assembly premises as described vividly by Abul Mansur Ahmed in his book '50 Years of Politics' but he has not mentioned the name of anybody in the book.

Again, I would mention here that a dozen honest officers of Chittagong Steel Mills were suspended in August '75 in the name of transparency by the government as preached by all the governments in power. Recently a high official of BSC got his job back after a decade as the court maintained that ministry had no power to sack corporate officials.

Under the above facts it would be just to practice justice. The fertiliser scandal of BNP, killers of Shahed Ali, Industries Ministry's illegal order of suspension, Shipping Ministry's scandalous order etc., all should be looked into in the name of justice!

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Transit facility and import of electricity

Sir, The government's stand on the transit facility and importing of electricity issues are really puzzling. People from all walks of life are protesting against giving transit facility to India and importing electricity from it, apprehending that it may be harmful to our country. The government must not ever think of justifying the demand of India for transit facility as it is most unreasonable and also a threat to our sovereignty.

As for the power issue, we should try to improve our capacity in that sector, not make the country dependent on another country. One should try to stand and walk with one's own feet. If it had been weakened temporarily and we know that perseverance will bring the expected result. The government is saying

Congratulations!

Sir, I am really delighted to see the news of forming the 'Bankers Club' by the managing directors of various nationalised and private commercial banks in our country. As a banker I expect this club will play a vital role in the context of banks and development of the career of all the levels of bankers. The banking profession is now facing multifarious problems and in such a time this club may consider to initiate the proper 'development packages' for bankers. My heartfelt thanks to the president of the club Mr Lutfur Rahman Sarker, Managing Director, Prime Bank Ltd. Congratulations to all the members of the club for making this club a reality. I expect this club will produce excellent achievements and high quality results in near future.

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