

Heartening

West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu's parting words following his 6-day trip to Dhaka have signified a breakthrough achieved in the hitherto vexatious matter of resolving the Ganges water-sharing issue between India and Bangladesh.

We are greatly heartened by this auspicious development which carry the intimation of the combined political will of the two governments proving to be productive, Bangladesh's urgent concern for water being addressed and the view-point of West Bengal as a key factor duly taken care of.

Since Jyoti Basu revealed the news at the airport on the strength of what had been agreed upon by both sides, one wonders why there was no Bangladesh spokesman on hand to make the same disclosure.

Basu's words fell short of divulging the quantum of water and the duration of the accord for the understandable reason that these await formal approval and consummation at the highest political level of the two countries. By some indications it appears that India is agreeable to releasing around 35,000 cusecs of water to Bangladesh, slightly above the level made available to us through the 1977 MOU signed during Ziaur Rahman's time.

Given the most favourable political climate on both sides and also the fact that so much ground has been covered through such painstaking negotiations it is widely expected here that a permanent water accord would indeed emerge in New Delhi.

Not Just One-way

Despite the steady rise in the number of one-way roads, Dhaka is not showing any noticeable sign of relief from the heavy rush of vehicular traffic. In fact, the delimiting device has given birth to points of new traffic gridlocks, albeit at different places.

The truth is, no amount of one-ways will come to the aid of the traffic-stricken metropolis unless the authorities take into consideration some vitally relevant factors related to the problem. Enforcement of traffic rules and regulations calls for adequate number of staff and the DMP is plagued with acute shortage of traffic constables.

Faulty signalling system, huge number of unlicensed rickshaws, unsound vehicles, inadequacy of parking places as well as indiscreet parking, year-round digging of the roads and thoroughfares have only made matters worse.

To cap it all, is there the lack of inter-agency co-ordination: the city corporation which is in charge of installing signals or making a road divider or traffic island, reportedly, does not consult the DMP.

A better coordination between the City Corporation and the DMP authorities would go a long way in bringing some welcome change in the overall situation in our traffic management which at present leaves a lot to be desired.

HBFC's Future

Finance Minister S A M S Kibria, in a no-nonsense exhortation under the regional and zonal managers of the House Building Finance Corporation at their annual conference urged them to meet the house-building needs of the low and middle income groups. The obvious implication is they shun traditional preference to the elite class.

The latter took a big chunk off the credit under high-rise building projects and by the sheer force of their clout before which the managers apparently caved in being oblivious of professional ethics.

The fact that HBFC has gone into the red and stands now in dire need for government subsidies means that carrying coal to Newcastle has not quite helped them to be commercially viable either. The high-income group has been a much worse loan defaulter than the rest of the HBFC loanees. Kibria has made it clear that the organisation will have to fend for itself, stand on its own feet rather than turning to the government for artificial resuscitation.

The Finance Minister has dropped a strong hint about the HBFC being brought under the local government system which is sought to be empowered with jurisdiction over fields such as housing, for one. We are all for this prospect to materialise.

ELECTIONS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The "90 Plus 90 Formula"

The "90 plus 90 formula" meets the demands of both elections and accountability, fulfilling both but not at the cost of each other, most importantly within the parameters of the Constitution, it gives legitimacy with respect to public perception.

THE Constitution requires that elections must be held for the Assemblies within 90 days of dissolution, to that end the National Assembly (NA) elections are slated for Feb 3, 1997. On the other hand, the raison d'être for seeking of a fresh mandate from the people being rampant nepotism and corruption afflicting the Ms Benazir regime, the chief practitioner of the second oldest profession being the lady's spouse and de facto PM Asif Zardari, the mass public demand for accountability cannot be ignored.

It is quite reasonable to presume that having made a pact and then some, it would be in the vested interest of the corrupt and the greedy to ensure their elections by using some of their easily earned but under-serving largesse. Money may not play a decisive part in all the constituencies, it may well play a critical part in some crucial swing ones, enough to affect the course of our future political and economic history back to the dark ages of our own Mafia Don. The traumatic experience of the past three years must encourage us to work out a pragmatic compromise formula allowing the election process to proceed unhindered on schedule while the accountability process is geared to ensuring that every person elected to the Assemblies is given a thorough going over as respect antecedents and integrity before he or she takes oath as a member.

Once the winning candidates are gazetted by the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC), the

Speakers of the respective Assemblies can call the Assemblies to session so that the Members can take oath, thereafter whoever has a majority in the Assemblies can form the government. This period normally takes about 10-20 days after the elections. It is important to ensure the credibility of the democratic process by staying within the Constitutional parameters defined. While the Constitution is quite clear about the time frame for the elections process, it has not really laid down such a time frame for handing over power post-elections. Conceivably the Speaker could call the National Assembly into session after an extended length of time, maybe even 90 days without violating the Constitution. This God-given window of opportunity can be exploited in a positive manner for the good of the nation under the "doctrine of necessity".

Once the winners are notified by the CEC, the only remaining formality to their sitting in the Assemblies is the oath of office. Once a member takes that oath in public perception he or she acquires legitimacy, it becomes more difficult to carry out accountability, more so of the ones seated on the Treasury Benches given the political compulsions of the government-in-power that is then subject to blackmail to maintain their majority. Besides blackmail on a very personal basis by her husband Ms Benazir was the target on a political basis by a vast number of politicians leading single-digit parties. The accountability process can be made into an effective roadblock by making the time frame for its completion slightly more flexible. The possibility of certain elimination due to accountability pre and post-election will dampen their enthusiasm for allocation of

party tickets thus easing pressure on the party leadership, a sort of a self-accountability that frees political parties to accommodate credible candidates rather than the less-than-desirable personalities. The "90 plus 90 formula" really means that while elections are held on schedule within 90 days, the Assemblies are not called into session for another 90 days in order that the accountability process for at least a majority of the elected representatives is complete. Either the President can make a Reference to the Supreme Court for adjudicating a time frame of 90 days post-election or the Caretaker Government can ap-

We already see in some of their pronouncements hints at possible acquisition of "immortality" in extending their tenure, as such their time frame in office needs to be adequately defined to a 90 days post-election period lest we see a repeat of late Gen Zia's 90-day promise that became open-ended in time till death parted him from absolute power. There is an unholy nexus between those who do not want to face elections, being afraid of the verdict of the electorate, and those who do not want elections to be held because they are getting more comfortable with the trappings of power. Luckily for us both these groups are in a

that sloppiness and inefficiency (lubricated with money) that allowed the likes of Zardari to escape retribution for crimes committed during Ms Benazir's first tenure. As Minister Shahid Hamid had said, the investigating agencies needed "decontamination". While weeding out clearly ineligible candidates, the list of those found eligible for elections should be sent to the Chief Election Commissioner, who in exclusion to everything else must concentrate on early processing of the electoral candidates, ensuring that those against whom there is fairly conclusive evidence are eliminated pre-elections. This process of accountability will then have 60 days pre-election and 30 days post-election for completion of the process for the balance of electoral aspirants.

We must not undercut the genius of the people who are fed up with the way they have been treated by the elected representatives over the past 10 years.

Ours is an imperfect democracy, that needs to abandon elections on the "first past the post" system and opt for the more credible "run off" election, between the first two candidates if any one does not obtain a majority of more than 50 per cent of the votes cast. The distribution of votes allows corrupt electoral candidates to make it to the Assemblies, mainly because of their capacity to use their illegally acquired wealth to influence elections. The Supreme Court could well instruct that the Election Commission should not gazette the elections till the Chief Election Commissioner has had a chance to complete the accountability of the winning candidates. With a much shortened list for immediate disposal, the Chief Election Commissioner should not take more than the 60 days or

so stipulated post the elections to do the needful. The remaining 30 days before the Assemblies are called into session may be used to carry out bye-elections of the seats declared vacant because of disqualification of candidates due to the accountability process. Given the limited number of cases to screen, there should be no reason for non-completion of this requirement in the 90 days post-elections, if not completely but at least for 80-90 per cent of the candidates. A preponderance of candidates duly screened and thus given a clean chit would allow the session to be called by the Speakers so that the democratic process may go on.

There is great apprehension that unless the accountability process is complete, those who would have been elected but fear accountability will frustrate the process by using public pressure, anybody opting for the streets in the post-election 90 days period should be automatically disqualified. The "90 plus 90 formula" meets the demands of both elections and accountability, fulfilling both but not at the cost of each other, most importantly within the parameters of the Constitution, it gives legitimacy with respect to public perception. The major opposition to having elections on the scheduled time will come from Ms Benazir who has enough cunning left in her now quite visible schizophrenia to realise that 1) despite the hate she carries for the Army (knowing fully well that they were behind her ouster) she has to avoid offending the Army in her diatribes and 2) that she will get a massive drubbing at the polls if elections do take place. For all her rhetoric to the contrary she will resist both elections and accountability. If such an "escape" from the impending nemesis of accountability by the will of the people is allowed by the power-that-be this country will pay a far greater price than it has already for the luxury of sustaining the likes of Zardari.

AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

proach the Court for the relief, with the provision that ordinances enacted by the President during this period will not lapse till 30 days after the Assemblies come into session. There is a temptation for having more than 90 days but while it is necessary to give some time it must be for a very limited period so that those who have got power temporarily i.e. the Caretakers do not get used to it and try and make it more permanent "due to the doctrine of necessity" as per "the will of the people" a la late Gen Zia. Most of them are dedicated to their limited mandate given to them but the democratic credentials of some are rather suspect and the headiness of being in power has its own dynamics that seem to evoke latent ambition. Some of the Caretakers would have been never tasted such power except in such special circumstances.

minority at the extreme ends of the spectrum, the broad mass of the people in the middle want elections and accountability, both within a limited time frame.

The Chief Election Commissioner is geared to launch his own prosecution involving important political personalities in the next few days, the CEC will also play a major part in the accountability process as the documents and brief of the prospective candidates will be screened by the Election Commission of the NA and the PAs. It is also extremely important that the bringing of evidence before the Chief Election Commissioner should be deliberate rather than hasty. The last time around hard evidence was destroyed in the hurry to bring culprits to trial this country cannot afford a repetition of

Promises to Keep

The consolidation of victory is definitely more important and demanding than its gaining. That is what has made the Prime Minister assert her determination of embarking on a virtual odyssey. The voyage, long and arduous, offers no leisure, no sleep, but 'to strive, to seek, to find and not to yield', writes M Arshad Ali.

THE Prime Minister recently during her impressive speech at a grand assembly in Harvard University quoted the memorable lines from Robert Frost, "I have promises to keep/And miles to go before I sleep."

This betrays a very exceptional phenomenon in Bangladesh politics — that of not being oblivious of commitment to people when the leader and his or her party is on election campaign and seeks popular mandate to ascend to the seat of power. The commitment is made through, among others, election manifesto, public meetings, party congregations, radio and television broadcast. Once seated in power the party and its leaders are often not fail to fulfil the pledges given to the people while seeking their supports and votes in the pre-election days. The expectations of the people are belied, their hopes disillusioned and purposes frustrated.

People's mind get a serious jolt when they find their leaders going back on their words. It is these leaders on whom they pinned very high hopes. It is these leaders whom they have not only voted themselves but motivated and induced others to vote for. It is these leaders who raised their awareness to a level whence they could gaze at their own problems, and prospects with the strength of a greater focus. Had they not been made aware of their deficits and of not too unattainable possible solutions thereof, they could at least live in an ascetic happi-

ness or a bliss of ignorance. It is these leaders who bestirred the people to action in course of which they have bestridden insurmountable obstacles in the way of the former's betrothal to power. Paradoxically enough, their appointment sets in the process of their alienation with the people.

The Prime Minister's speech has, however, actuated us to believing that this time the people are blessed with a government that will go miles to realise the hopes and aspirations of the people. The ship of the state will not run aground and the people will not be marooned nor will they be left in the lurch. Her pronouncement of the commitment before the world assembly has embellished people's trust with special significance. She has not only renewed her commitment but also rededicated herself to the betterment of the lot of our people. Now her pledges have transcended the boundary of Bangladesh and have become the property of the people not only of the country but also of the world at large — Harvard being the hub of international intelligentsia with galaxies of talents flocking from all parts of the globe and the message of the Prime Minister being spread thereover by these unofficial

ambassadors of their respective countries.

The inventory of the property makes not too short a reading. At the top of it comes the establishment of the rule of law because of its assumption of paramount importance in the management of the democratic dispensation, long cherished for by the people languishing in inequality and injustice. In the conspicuous absence of the rule of law people's desire to be their best selves remained unfulfilled and the consolidation of democratic institutions tantalising.

Then comes the pledge to ensure good governance through accountability and transparency in all government decisions and actions so that the government ceases to be the source of patronage, nepotism, corruption and inefficiency. The constant endeavour of the government will be to seek to establish and consolidate democracy for the sake of peace and justice, freedom and development.

The improvement of law and order also figures aiming at dealing a death blow to terrorism, extortion, hijacking and all such crimes that have posed serious threat to life and property of the people. The inventory encompasses the whole

national life to enlist the popular demands of rapid industrialisation, privatisation of the sick nationalised industries, restriction of child labour, freedom of the press and autonomy of the electronic media, empowerment of women and cessation of their repression. Just as it aims at eradicating illiteracy, so also it seeks to turn the institutions of higher learning into centres of excellence existing in peace and harmony that hold sway over them.

Removal of poverty and attainment of self-reliance and development of human resources through mobilisation of talent, labour and capital run hand in hand. The low and the high, the humble and the sublime — all will be at the heart of the government. Not that humble life of the farmers, carpenters, potters, weavers etc., will have a new lease, also the noble scientists, researchers and scholars will find ample scope with the modernisation of their centres of research and provisions for facilities. Not that science and technology will be applied to shape our state into a modern one, also indigenous systems like those of medicine and arts and crafts will receive the attention they deserve.

Importance to be attached to

gearing up foreign policy to the new global realities will not make the government uncaring of reforming and strengthening the local government system. Development of inland water resources will receive due attention just as the solution of the Ganges water dispute and sharing of water of other international rivers. At home the judiciary will be separated from and made independent of the executive organ while "friendship with all and malice to none" will be the cementing force abroad.

All these are not prolixities but sincere programmes of action couched with meaningful words. The PM was indeed beaming with self-confidence and honesty of purpose as she spoke as the leader of 120 million people who have reposed their sacred trust in her by way of an electoral mandate to lead the country to the 21st century. The elections were indeed won because these promises made in the manifesto captivated the imagination of the people who saw them run parallel to their hopes and aspirations. But could this manifesto or even a better one alone would have been powerful enough to win the election battle? The dedication "deeper than ever plummet sounded" of the workers of the

AL — an organisation spread throughout the length and breadth of the country played the magic wand to crown it with victory. Now that the Prime Minister has rededicated herself to giving 'a local habitation and a name' to the language of the manifesto, it has become imperative on the rank and file of the party to prove themselves a stronger match for the tasks designed and projected once again before the grand assembly of world intellectuals.

The consolidation of victory is definitely more important and demanding than its gaining. That is what has made the Prime Minister assert her determination of embarking on a virtual odyssey. The voyage, long and arduous, offers no leisure, no sleep, but 'to strive, to seek, to find and not to yield'. Hence not languid relaxation but relentless exertion is the need of the hour for the party if it is not willing to invite a serious blot on the escutcheon of the leader and pejorate her position not only within the bourn of the country but beyond. The people also owe a duty to perform. This they can faithfully discharge keeping themselves true to their respective assignments. This, however, necessitates the creation of a congenial atmosphere which is only possible with the cooperation of the opposition who are committed to extending it. Let us see how all this works.

The writer is Inspector of Colleges (Offg), University of Dhaka.

To the Editor...

Some of our girl students

Sir, Everyday I go to my office in Banani from my residence in Shyamoli through the road parallel to Chandrima Udyan. Almost everyday I see girl students in uniforms with books roaming around in school & college hours with their boy-friends inside the Udyan. Certainly, they pass their time in the Udyan instead of attending their classes. They are increasing in number. I am sure their parents are not aware of this. This situation cannot be accepted by anybody. This is a matter of grave concern.

I hope the authority concerned will pay due importance to this matter.

Motius Samad Chowdhury ABC House, Banani, Dhaka

To Bangladesh Television

Sir, Television viewers have become very disappointed by the sudden change in telecasting by Bangladesh Television. In the past, dramas, magazine programmes and other items which people loved to watch, used to start timely and end before the ten-o'clock English news. But recently we see that those programmes are not telecast in the usual time, so they cannot be through before the English news and the remaining parts are shown after the news. It is very annoying and viewers lose interest because of the long break.

Bangladesh Television should understand that to attract people they must consider

people's views. Most persons have turned to cable TV. If they do not improve BTV's quality and system of the telecasting, those who still like a few of its programmes will also become dissatisfied and turn away from it.

Nur Jahan East Nasirabad Chittagong

Ensure justice for all

Sir, It has become quite common in Bangladesh that when a common person wants justice from the law enforcing agency he or she is continuously threatened by a powerful group of people who has got high connection either with the government or with the respective departments. The victim is definitely the distressed people who have no connection at all. "The law will take its own course" therefore makes no meaning to them. A recent example can be given to support this statement of a poor widow who has lost her husband but now has been trapped under the hoodlums of these strong culprits. Mrs. Akter Jahan, wife of the late Mubarak Ali Mondal, of village Tarakandi, P.S. Dhunat, District Bogra, lives a sleepless night fearing that she might be killed any moment by these so-called mastans of the same village.

Her only fault is that she has three daughters but no son to stand by her. Her first daughter was married to one of her relatives who now wants to capture the property which her husband left for her as a support. The first daughter's husband Abdul Latif and his cousin Deedar

Mondal are continuously conspiring to grab the property. They even threatened to kill the second daughter's husband Rafiqul Islam. The worst part is that the law enforcing agency works for these culprits even when Mrs Akter Jahan herself filed a case against these mastans. These hoodlums changes their political grounds according to their necessity and basically put a bad name on the government whoever is in power. We feel that our government should be strong enough to punish whoever is unlawfully using their name to meet their self-interest. The police should play a faithful role in this duty to bring out the truth. If this is not done certain quarter will always put up their strong hand to those who has little or no strength of light back.

Rashida Begum Sadar Road, Mohakhali Dhaka

Hygiene education

Sir, Health education may be defined as all activities aimed to change attitudes and behaviour in order to break the chain of disease transmission associated with inadequate hygiene and sanitation. As such, hygiene education is part of the wider concept of health education which is a combination of learning experiences that facilitate voluntary adaptation of behaviour conducive to health. The knowledge of hygiene is very poor among the common people of our country. Therefore, water and sanitation-related diseases such as various types of diarrhoea,

worm infestations, skin and eye infections, and vector-borne disease account for most of the morbidity and mortality in Bangladesh.

Schools have a role to play in imparting hygiene information and altering hygiene practices. However, in our country school hygiene education is still far from being a regular and integrated component of primary school curricula. Primary schools do not usually set hygiene behaviour goals. School hygiene and health education is often treated as "curriculum" and thus are not reported or tested. Lack of priority has sometimes led to school hygiene education achieving less than what might be expected. Yet in practice only very limited time is spent on hygiene education. Lack of trained teachers is still a serious limitation to effective school hygiene education.

Ideally, school hygiene education should be carried out within the broader context of hygiene education programmes and integrated into other school subjects and activities in order to increase its impacts. For the development of school hygiene education, support from the ministries of health and education is required to arrive at not only clearly defined policy and inter-sectoral cooperation, but also for curriculum development, including teaching aids, training and evaluation.

M Jahangir Alam M Phil, Research fellow, Dept of Microbiology, DU and Mrs Khurshida Begum RAJUK UMS College, Dhaka.

Black money and industrialisation

Sir, I would like to draw your kind attention to the recent announcement by the Finance Minister that anyone who invests in a new industrial set-up will not be asked to disclose his source of income. This step, in my opinion, is not a right one. This would in fact open the floodgate of legitimising black money and may contribute little towards national industrialisation which the government aims at.

Those who are in the habit of making money in the easy way will find no reason to get involved in industrialisation which in fact exposes the entrepreneur to a hard way of life. The step would therefore only discourage those individuals who have embarked upon industrial endeavours through their honest earning and hard labour.

There is no short-cut way to success in life — be it personal or national, even if it be the industrial success of a country.

Nurul Bashir Khilgaon, Dhaka

Separation of Judiciary from Executive

Sir, There can be no two opinions on the advisability of the separation of the Judiciary from the Executive. The question, however, is, will this separation make any difference in the quality of justice as it is being administered now? For one do not think that it will, unless simultaneous steps are taken to

provide the Supreme Court with the necessary wherewithals in the form of qualified manpower and a fully equipped secretariat for monitoring the administration of justice in the various lower courts in the country. To support my view I will cite only one example. In recent years I had to pursue a very simple family affairs case in the lower courts in Dhaka. In a developed country, a similar case would have been disposed of, at best, within a few weeks and, at worst, say, developing country within a few months. In the case in point, the aggrieved did eventually get justice by going to the highest court of justice. The time taken was long eight years. The physical and mental cost was beyond measure. The financial cost was beyond the reach of 99 per cent of our population.

If the separation of the Judiciary from the Executive is to be really meaningful for conferring the desired benefits on the poor multitudes, the Supreme Court should be so equipped as to be able constantly to monitor the activities of all lower courts in the country and take appropriate steps when ever deemed necessary, corruption or otherwise utter incompetence. For instance, should there be any unnecessary delay in disposing of a case without any acceptable justification or any fundamental error or omission, the superior courts should take severe action. For, one knows justice delayed is justice denied.

A. Koyum 69 Gulsah Avenue Dhaka-1212