

To Clear an Augean Stable

It is good to hear Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina repeat her commitment to separate judiciary from the executive making the former truly independent.

While pinning our hope on Hasina's words, we cannot but wonder what will happen to the mountain of cases, both civil and criminal, that have piled easily qualifying for a place in the Guinness Book of Records — even after an independent judiciary is here.

There is no question of this backlog being ever cleared with the judicial system continuing as it is. Cases will only continue to pile up.

If the government separates judiciary, it will go down in history in enviable colours. But can the government clear up the backlog substantially?

Urban Poverty

Urban poverty has assumed an alarming proportion. A seminar on urban poverty organised jointly by the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) further exposed the contour of this long gathering problem with some shocking but unassailable statistics.

Bangladesh, like her fellow developing countries in the Third World has long been exposed to the problem of urban poverty. The rate of population growth in its urban zone has been more than six per cent in the last thirty years.

Not only the migrated people are making poignant discoveries every day that the great source of hope and betterment they thought the towns and cities to be was actually nothing but mirage but they are also causing enormous pressure on the urban infrastructural system.

These are ominous signs of an impending disaster. Unless the tendency to migrate to the urban areas from rural ones is stopped now, urban poverty will only increase.

Of Bangla Academy

Poet Shamsur Rahman has hit the nail on the head. Where does the President of the Bangla Academy stand in the civil list? Who is the controlling authority of the Director-general of Bangla Academy?

The leaders of Bangla Academy or for that matter of the Shilpakala Academy could be those who the President and Prime Minister could salaam in all respect — if only the academies were organised in a different, truly national level.

The government must free the academies and help them grow into organisations embracing the whole of the nation's mind and its creations — of past, present and future.

THE largest concentration of Bangladeshis anywhere outside Bangladesh in 1971 was and has still been in the United Kingdom.

As for the Bangladeshi officials assigned abroad, the agony at the successive development of events was deep. Their sympathy and support for the cause of liberation, under the constant vigil of their superiors, could not be made public, at least at the initial stage.

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Following the barbaric events of the 25th March 1971,

Role of Bangladeshis in UK During the War of Liberation

GLIMPSES OF HISTORY

Even before the commencement of the Liberation War, the Bangladeshis in the UK were conscious about and closely followed the political developments in the East Pakistan.

The movement spontaneously was transformed into that for independence. It had full support of all the expatriates, except for a small number of diehard unionists and fundamentalists.

A very suspicious thing for the Bangladesh movement happened during this period. Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury, while he was Vice Chancellor of the Dhaka University, had come to Geneva to attend meetings of the Human Rights Commission.

He decided to resign from his job and to take up the cause for liberation of Bangladesh. He was then made the Special Overseas Representative of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and was

entrusted by the latter to lead our Liberation struggle abroad, with the prime base in London. He was also appointed as the Head of our unofficial delegation to the UN General Assembly.

Numerous groups of Bangladeshi nationals to propagate and seek support for independence of East Pakistan grew up like mushrooms all over the

British Isles. They found in Justice Chowdhury the quality of leadership they direly needed — an eminent person holding a distinctive position in the society and endowed with firm conviction and unflinching dedication for the noble cause.

Justice Chowdhury went to senior British government officials and held meetings with Ian Sutherland, later Sir Ian, to apprise situation of the genocide being perpetrated in our land and to seek diplomatic and material support for the people struggling for independence.

His appointment as the Special Overseas Representative of a government not yet recognised

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Currents and Crosscurrents

by M M Rezaul Karim

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patch to the Foreign Office in Islamabad, with or without recommendations. The High Commissioner, during the meeting, sought to establish the point that all that had happened in East Pakistan were more reactions to acts of saboteurs and these were but another ploy of India to divide and destroy its adversary Pakistan.

I was already deeply frustrated to hear a bundle of lies seeking to justify the most despicable acts of an unpardonable crime against humanity to our people. Like any other Bengali, I wanted these despicable acts to be known widely all over the world so that international help and cooperation for promoting our cause would be made available.

As a consequence, within a few weeks I received instructions to leave London immediately for Bulgaria, on deputisation, to open up a diplomatic mission there. The work in the Bulgarian capital, Sofia, was purely administrative and non-political. There were none from our part of Pakistan. The obvious purpose was to keep me away from the sensitive political work and not to allow me to establish contact with and to cultivate political activists of the Bangladesh movement in London, at least for some time.

Nobel Peace Award Winners Boost East Timor's Struggle for Independence

The Nobel Peace prize may help to prove that a nearly-forgotten conflict in East Timor does not have to be a lost cause, writes A S M Nurunnabi

FORMER Portuguese territory of East Timor declared itself independent as the Democratic Republic of East Timor in 1975. It was then invaded by Indonesian forces and annexed. The claim was not recognised by the United Nations. Indonesian move into that territory aroused considerable international protest as well as triggered a massive revolt that was led by a guerrilla movement called Fretilin.

Observers tend to feel that Belo remains much more of a neutral figure than Ramos-Horta. The bishops' moral authority as the territory's most prominent Catholics invites respect from all sides.

According to observers, by awarding the honour to Belo and Ramos-Horta, the Nobel Committee had done for Timor what it did for Tibet and Myanmar with awards to Dalai Lama and pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, respectively.

Indonesia's government complained about the award to Ramos-Horta, calling him "a political opportunist" who "has incited the people of East Timor to separate from the unitary

Republic of Indonesia." Jakarta did not criticise the other winner, Bishop Belo, who has a reputation for resisting pressure from government and guerrillas alike.

The challenge facing Belo and Ramos-Horta now is to build on the Nobel momentum to cement improvements in human rights for the Timorese. The Indonesian government faces an even greater test: breaking the current diplomatic deadlock without appearing to cave in to international pressure.

The attitude of Ramos-Horta, who lives in exile, is far from conciliatory. "We are going to intensify the resistance in East Timor, in Indonesia and the international arena. We will not surrender. The Indonesian government should not harbour any illusion of winning this battle," he declared.

Apprehension was felt in some quarters that the Peace prize might spur violence in East Timor. For those harbouring deep opposition to Indonesian rule, the Peace prize is a powerful vindication of their beliefs. Particularly for a younger generation radicalised by the army killing of protesters in the capital Dili in 1991, round-the-clock surveillance and continuous reports of torture, the prize remains a powerful symbol that the world has not forgotten. Some fear that the prize's potential to revitalise youthful resistance might lead to more arrests consequent on more demonstrations by the youths despite the risks.

Rather than succumb to such fears, activists outside the country cling to hopes for a significant breakthrough. In course of his recent trip to the

United States, Ramos-Horta urged the Clinton administration to play a more aggressive role in bringing peace to his troubled homeland — East Timor. He made an appeal that the United States should also

work with Europe to push Indonesia towards democracy and do more than just express concern about human rights in that country. He outlined a three-stage peace plan that he believes will bring stability to his homeland: withdrawal of Indonesian troops from East Timor followed by the establishment of self-rule and five years later negotiations on the final status of the disputed territory.

Some observers make optimistic predictions for East Timor to the effect that change may come when the reign of Suharto who is now 75, ends in his death or retirement. In that case, the Nobel Peace prize may help to prove that a nearly-forgotten conflict doesn't have to be a lost cause.

Suhrawardy — A Founder of Democracy

by Prof Roushan Ara Hoque

TODAY, December 5, is the 33rd death anniversary of Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, a champion of democracy in this part of the world. He was a great political leader of this region who left his mark in history as an undaunted statesman, a highly charismatic speaker and a political Messiah of the neglected teeming millions of Muslims.

Born in 1892, in an illustrious Muslim family at Midnapore, Suhrawardy inherited liberal and humanitarian ideas from his family and dedicated his life for the political liberation of his own countrymen. As a Deputy Mayor of Calcutta under C R Das he worked hard to establish the fundamental rights of the workers of the Khidirpur Dock area. He found him as their saviour and elected him in 1921 as their representative to the Bengal Legislative Assembly.

Being a humanitarian leader Suhrawardy opposed the Whipping Bill of the British government by arguing that Indians are not animals and that they were as good as the British. He also compelled the Congress to enter into the Bengal Pact of 1923 by which the Muslims got the majority in Bengal with the principle of separate electorate, equal representation and appointment in all elective bodies of Bengal. In those days of British rule these were regarded as great achievements of Suhrawardy.

During the disastrous flood of North Bengal in 1931 Suhrawardy being shocked at the untold sufferings of the affected people personally visited the inundated areas and arranged to alleviate the sufferings of millions. As a representative of the Muslims of Bengal Suhrawardy attended the Round Table Conference of London held in 1932. In 1936 Suhrawardy was selected as the Secretary of the Bengal provincial Muslim League. His great popularity was proved when his party secured 36 out of 116 Muslim seats and he himself was elected from two seats. As Minister of Labour and Commerce under A K Fazlul Huq he passed the Labour Welfare Act and the Bengal Tenancy Amendment Bill of 1938. As a Minister of Civil Supply under Khawaza Nazimuddin he saved the lives of millions of famine-stricken people by opening ration shops in all cities and setting up gruel kitchens in all villages and establishing auxiliary hospitals in many places.

As a great expert in Law, Suhrawardy formulated the first Constitution of Pakistan. His convincing argument as a spokesman for Bengal delegations compelled the west provincial leaders to pass The Lahore Resolution as proposed by Sher-e-Bangla in the Muslim League Conference of Lahore in 1940. Due to his great popularity in Bengal, Muslim League won 114 out of 119 seats. He became Chief Minister of Bengal on 24th April 1946 and his first act

was to release all political prisoners including the convicts of Chittagong Armoury Raid. As a mendicant of Gandhi Peace Mission and as his devoted follower Suhrawardy travelled the entire riot-torn areas of Noakhali in 1946 with Gandhi at the risk of lives of both and was successful in mitigating the troubles.

As a true believer of British type of democracy Suhrawardy laid the foundation of the democratic process in this country. As a check to one party rule of Akbarul Haque he formed the Jinnah League at Karachi and within a very short time his party became very popular.

He united his Jinnah League with Pakistan Awami League of Bhasani and named the new party as Awami Muslim League in 1949 for which the Pak leaders called him a traitor and an Indian agent. In spite of all the oppositions he dedicated his life to achieve equal political rights for the then deprived east Pakistanis. Gradually, the party became very popular as a strong opposition both at the province and at the centre. In 1955 the party was made secular by withdrawing the word 'Muslim' from it. He then toured the length and breadth of the country in convincing the people of its policy of striving for the equal rights of both the wings on the basis of parity of rights as framed by him in the constitution.

The regional individuality as stipulated in the Five-States-Principle and Parity of Rights as framed by him in the Constitution paved the path of demanding provincial autonomy in future. As Prime Minister of Pakistan Suhrawardy tried to elevate the status of Pakistan in international arena and to give democracy a fair trial. He fully realised that without democracy and ensuring equal rights of both the wings by doing equal justice to the neglected regions the unity of Pakistan could not be maintained. Therefore, he convened a session of Parliament at Dhaka where Joint Electorate Bill was passed and equal rights were guaranteed. To fulfil the 21-point programme of Awami League he abolished the Public Safety Act, released all political prisoners,

tried to remove disparity between the wings, to maintain balance of trade and to distribute foreign earnings equally between the east and the west wings. In East Pakistan he established the Film Development Corporation, the Jute Marketing Corporation, the D.I.T. the Chittagong Development Authority, the Inland Water Transport Authority and the Water Development Board. Thus he became very popular. He was being jealous of which, Iskandar Mirza dismissed him on 16th October 1957 in a dictatorial way. Then on 7th October 1958 Ayub Khan disqualified him from politics under the Electoral Bodies' Disqualifying Ordinance (EDDO) and on 30th January 1962 he was arrested on false allegation of anti-state activities. Thus this great politician was rewarded with dishonour by the military rulers.

Suhrawardy was highly esteemed by the people of this wing, his arrest was vehemently protested by the public and student community who called strike and hartal throughout the whole country. The demand for his release gained such a momentum that Ayub Khan was compelled to release him on 19th August, 1962. This detention in jail for six and half months caused serious heart trouble to him. Being uncompromising to accept defeat he continued strong movement against military rule. He taught the people that the voice of the people is the ultimate source of power and that any decision taken with the consent of the majority could never be wrong. Thus he laid the foundation of the democratic process but he did not live long to see the success of his movement. Immediately after his release, Suhrawardy came to visit East Pakistan. He was given a historical reception by a mammoth gathering to whom he appealed to remain united and oppose all conspiracy against democracy. By his charismatic speech he mesmerised the people so much that they took him as their political messiah and gathered around him. His enchanting personality and appealing tone created a great fervour for the return of democracy based on universal adult franchise. But the continuous movement broke down his health. So he went to Zurich for treatment. There in a solitary hotel room this great leader breathed his last on 5th December 1963. The news of his death plunged the entire nation in deep bereavement. On their behalf Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman went to Zurich and brought the body of the leader to his beloved land. He was buried in the High Court compound of Dhaka.

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To the Editor...

Acting on intuitions

Sir, The two top political positions of our country are occupied by women. Earlier Begum Khaleda Zia was the Prime Minister and Sheikh Hasina, Leader of the Opposition — and now, Sheikh Hasina is the Prime Minister and Khaleda Zia, Leader of the Opposition. I really feel very proud of it, and am sure that women of Bangladesh share the same feeling.

Women are naturally kind-hearted, forgiving and understanding. Cruelty, revengefulness and being hard-headed are the speciality of males. In intelligence, judgement and commonsense, women are not inferior to men in any way but it is very unfortunate women are deprived of the opportunity for some reason or other.

So, it is my earnest request to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, as she has got the opportunity, she should avail it by taking decisions which she thinks will help the country and its people. Women's intuitions are much better than those of males, so the Prime Minister should act on her intuitions and should not waver from it by suggestions put up by male members of her Cabinet. It is regretting that there are only a few women, and she is surrounded by males and it seems that every serious suggestion is

given by them. I don't think that males are well-wishers of females, so they may mislead the Prime Minister and give harmful advice.

I hope Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will notice this letter and consider it as the utterance of the women of Bangladesh.

Nur Jahan East Nazrabad, Chittagong

The image problem of Bangladesh

Sir, A few months ago while discussing the investment climate in Bangladesh, Grant Figgitt, the consultant of the Trade and Investment Promotion Service, said that the distorted image of Bangladesh abroad was the major factor and holding back foreign investment in Bangladesh. He also said that Bangladesh was known abroad as a place reeling under flood and disaster. Though he rated Bangladesh as a lucrative destination for foreign capital where the authority had done all ground works for long-term investment. He also praised for our cheap labour force who were dedicated to their profession.

In my view, our main task for drawing the attraction of foreign investors should be to

get rid of the country's poor image abroad. Because Bangladesh is known as a land of calamity to most of the foreigners.

But it is pitiful that no one seems to bother about changing the image. Both the government and the opposition don't think much about this issue, specially our Embassies don't seem to have taken any initiative to change the country's 'bottomless basket' image. It's their duty to uphold the country's image and convince the foreigners not to be afraid to invest in Bangladesh.

Masud Ahmed Sanzu 293/C Tally Office Road Rayer Bazar, Dhaka

Telephone teasing

Sir, Someone uses to poke, a few looking for in a frantic fashion and someone is adamant.

All this hotchpotch will be received by an innocent phone keeper.

This is a regular teasing. You can't escape from this trouble. If you have a sister, wife or any other lady in the house, they will be very embarrassing for them. This is ridiculous. Authority should take care of it.

Mostafa Sohel Banani, Dhaka