

President Makes his Point

Addressing the inaugural session of the week-long "Bijoy Utsab," organised by the Sammilito Sangskritik Jote at the Central Shaheed Minar, President Shahabuddin Ahmed made a critical reference to our political culture. Indeed he could not be more correct in saying that a healthy political culture is yet to develop in the country.

On the eve of the silver jubilee of our Independence and Victory Day, the President has once again reminded everyone of the national malaise that has been our singular handicap in shaping the nation's future. The President goes to a great length to show how the conceptualisation of national aspiration and ethos has been jeopardised time and again through the intervention of extra-democratic forces and a lack of unity and consensus on the burning issues.

No wonder that the President has appealed to all, the cultural activists in particular, that they be imbued with the spirit of 1971 and devote themselves to the task of nation-building. The President does not speak of something new or unknown to the political parties. It is the conviction with which he tells about the spirit that swept all across the land in 1971 which really makes the difference.

A small country like ours must be imbued with a spirit as enduring as that of 1971 to progress and prosper.

Fertiliser Situation

Fertilisers are still continuing to be a potent source of worry for the farmers. A recent workshop on fertiliser business and distribution has revealed that farmers are not reportedly benefiting from the scaling down of urea price following the government decision to give subsidy cheaper urea.

This is definitely going to tell on the natural fertility of the soil. Besides, over-dependence upon a particular commodity can only give rise to the dark forces in the fertiliser market.

Although there is no dearth of sincerity in the present government's attitude to tackle problems plaguing country's agriculture, the time, it seems, has come for a broader and sustained approach to the whole issue. As it transpired from the workshop, a survey at the national level covering all the relevant aspects would be conducted. It is not simply a matter of streamlining the business cycle by ensuring the accountability of the dealers even though this is important at this point in time but, it also boils down to agricultural education.

As the Minister for Agriculture, Food, Relief and Disaster Management rightly pointed out, instead of sporadic suggestions the representatives of donors in this field as well the International Fertiliser Development Council (IFDC) should counsel the concerned ministry in a sustained manner. A regular review of the fertiliser situation will help the authorities to ward off the problems.

Well-done DMP

Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) has laudably zeroed in on a particular evil contributing to city's traffic congestion. It has spotted quite correctly, prefabricated arches, and stages on road-sides or right in the middle of streets as the culprit.

Although the news of the DMP going into action to remove all such traffic obstacles will be eagerly awaited with its comforting effect, the task looks easier said than done.

Apathy and appalling want of discretion on the part of politicians or other organising groups are the main reasons for such shocking "overnight constructions" at the cost of commuters' comfort. If politicians give active consideration to public sensibilities, the task of the law enforcers will be greatly facilitated. A consensus among the political parties and various other associations and groups to abide all restrictions for the common urban good is highly necessary for the DMP to eventually succeed in this drive.

The most important factor for any such road-clearing move is a no-compromise formula and active cooperation from all members of the society. Dhaka has long had a dispensable tradition of being helpless spatial victim of grandiose pontifications. The older part of the city is particularly prone to this tendency. Years of tolerance have already catapulted them as the formidable foes of city or more precisely the traffic management. A saner display of attitude and a shedding of little maudlin sentiment would be great help insofar as the public thoroughfares go.

(Continued from last Thursday) WHEN I came back to London from Bulgaria after a couple of months of deputation, the movement in UK and USA was gradually reaching a high pitch. Meetings and demonstrations continued unabated. Friendly pressure groups had already been formed in the British Parliament and in other sections of the society. Operation Omega, consisting of both British and Bangladeshi nationals, staged dramatic demonstrations and successfully drew attention of the international press and the community to their cause. Lobbying had already been initiated in some parts of Europe.

Most of these activities were undertaken under the able leadership of the late Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury, Special Overseas Representative of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. He was assisted by the Central Steering Committee of the Action Committee over Britain. Bangladeshi Restaurateurs, Students Association, Medical Association and other professional groups as well as a host of highly dedicated and active residents and visiting Bangladeshi nationals and leaders of the UK chapters of various Bangladeshi political parties the most notable of which evidently was the Awami League.

Meanwhile, Bengali officers of the Pakistan High Commission became increasingly restless. A couple of locally recruited officers had already lost their job at the initial stage. Several others were contemplating to pre-empt action by resigning beforehand. The sympathy of most Bengali officers had to be hidden in a facade of sombre sadness. Their mind was filled with deep anguish and untold misery. They sincerely attempted to help the movement in all possible way, though privately. Immediately

WITH a live sense of peace and security which are the prime issues of life in Bangladesh, we need to have social and political forces to create peace and maintain and defend it. Peace is basically a matter of human rights — the rights to live our life without fear of devastation and violence, the right to security of property and person.

In a realm of peace, the weak are safe and the strong are just. Peace is obviously a process of solving what crops up because of quarrels, conflicting interests and intolerance of dissent. Even in a situation of anarchy, like and dislikes, actions generally agreed upon in common interest may make the desired peace attainable, the most important point of attention in such a situation being the genuine interest in peace and self-restrained attitude towards others.

Absence of peace illustrates that peace is the prospect of creation and realization of dreams and developments. Without any fear of contradiction we may say that intellectuals, scientists, social reformers

To the Editor...

Looking back in anger

Sir, The new Saturday Literature section in The Daily Star is a good and badly-needed diversion and outlet for thinkers and intelligentists, so long walloping for decades in the varieties of political experience (a different field) — an over-spill from over-political, thanks to the masterly inactivity of our wise political leaders, who failed in their profession (statecraft) to keep themselves in power (or in the opposition) for the major period since the creation of Bangladesh in 1971.

It is time the top leaders of the society curtail the license (not freedom) bestowed benignly upon the political leaders to do what they like — and do not like. The general image about the state of politics, and about the state of political leadership, is not a secret. It is negative, and first-class first.

These masters of the masses have not been able to help either others or themselves (in that order). The country is in a mess; and how far the cult of bipolarity is going to bring about a magical solution is anybody's guess; regardless of the virtual reality endlessly being liberated through the loud-speakers. There is no life in black and white. Let there be a sign of life in the Literature page. Literature is the lesser evil — a book cannot talk back; so let the stargazers welcome it in the Star pages.

As for the composition of the Literature page, there are Great Expectations. Will the page be dominated by Sense and Sensibilities, or Pride and Prejudice? Will Deshi English literature and Bengali literature be treated on 50:50 basis? or 30:70? The former is the window to the world. Some space has to be allotted to English translations from the best in our Bengali literature for the global village. Also some space to the non-English Nobel laureates, so that we can keep up with the times.

It is hoped there will be sponsors for talent-hunting,

GLIMPSES OF HISTORY Role of Bangladeshis in UK During the War of Liberation

The sympathy of most Bengali officers had to be hidden in a facade of sombre sadness. Their mind was filled with deep anguish and untold misery. They sincerely attempted to help the movement in all possible way, though privately.

after the military crackdown on the 25th March I drafted in my flat an appeal to British Parliamentarians in collaboration with Salahuddin Kasem Khan, son of the late AK Khan. It was given to the great social worker Munni Rahmaan, so that they, along with her husband Barrister Lutfur Rahman Shahajan, could distribute it to British law-makers. Some of us also used to make clandestine rendezvous with Bengali activists.

On the 1st August, in a huge gathering in Trafalgar Square and in the presence of Justice Chowdhury, two of our diplomats, Mohiuddin Ahmed and Lutful Moin, publicly quit Pakistan government service and, for the first time in Europe, declared allegiance to the Mujibnagar government. Mohiuddin, who last held the position as Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN in New York, had been initiated into work as a young diplomat under my care. I asked him just before his defection how did he plan to maintain himself, his young wife and the newly born daughter, since joining the Bangladeshi movement was basically a voluntary action. Mohiuddin promptly took out a driving licence from his pocket and said, if needed he would earn a living as a cab driver. I was deeply impressed and recorded this episode on my subsequent return to an independent Bangladesh, at the Foreign Office, for whatever it was

worth. On the 27th August, at the instruction of the Mujibnagar government, Justice Chowdhury founded the first and the largest unofficial Bangladesh mission, outside India, in London. The personnel consisted of three former diplomats and four non-diplomatic officials from UK and abroad. The mission gradually took over the functions of the Central Steering Committee, and planned to



Currents and Crosscurrents

by M M Rezaul Karim

undertake vigorous political and diplomatic campaign for Bangladesh and for the release, from Pakistani gaol, of Sheikh Mujib, the way he was internationally known. Its functions were confined not only in the UK but encompassed the rest of the world, except India. The mission was run in the name of Bangabandhu, but all instructions to the mission came from the Mujibnagar government and, likewise, all reporting was done to the latter. It also was entrusted with the receipt of funds raised from all sources to be deposited in a central fund, the Bangladesh Fund. The entire fund raised thereby was

subsequently remitted to the government in due course.

As for my own position, being away from London for some time, created some setback. I had earlier maintained liaison with Justice Chowdhury in company of Lulu Bilquis Baru, the highly respected freedom fighter, and it was decided that I should join the movement after the unofficial Bangladesh mission was set up. Meanwhile, the Pakistan High Commission asked all Bengali officers and staff to deposit their passports with the Head of Chancery, who was a non-Bengali, for "safe custody". I refused to comply. Distrust widened. Shortly thereafter, I received news that officials from the cantonment went to our home in Dhaka and started to keep a watch on the family. I had to send words to them to move away from their known address. It was difficult and took time. In the meantime, Justice Chowdhury went to New York to attend the UN session.

It was then in the first week of October that I was able to secure connection with the la-

laband regime and publicly owed allegiance to the legitimate government of Bangladesh. The highly attended press conference received wide coverage in international media as the defection of the highest ranking Bengali diplomatic officer in Europe. I recall with pride the conversation we had with Anthony Mascarenhas, the author of The Rape of Bangladesh which created great sympathy for Bangladesh. He and his wife came to dinner in our flat the evening before my press conference. Anthony said, inter alia, that it might take at least seven years before Bangladesh could become independent. My wife quipped instantaneously giving vent to our feelings, saying whether it took seven or seventeen years, it did not matter: there was no way to work for the monstrous military regime any further.

I had a singular advantage which could not be shared by others. As the erstwhile political counsellor of the Pakistan High Commission, I had free and regular access to the Whitehall, the seat of the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office. I also had established excellent rapport with the Head of the South Asian Division at the FCO. Ian Sutherland, later Sir Ian and much later became contemporary with me both being Ambassadors of our respective countries in Moscow. Ian told me then that he could no longer receive me at the Whitehall, but

gave me a carte blanche to visit his home in Hampstead whenever I wished. That was the way we carried our business with the British government for the next four months till British recognised Bangladesh as a sovereign, independent nation.

On the 16th December, the Victory Day, the events in the Bangladesh mission at 24 Pembroke Gardens were such that beats words to describe adequately. In the absence of Justice Chowdhury and being the senior most among erstwhile diplomats, I was then entrusted with the overall responsibility as Acting Head of Mission. We received news of the surrender of Pakistani troops in Dhaka sometime in the early hours of the morning. It came through wire service and was brought by our volunteers posted in the Office of the Guardian on the Fleet Street. As soon as confirmation was received, Bangladeshis from all over London and beyond started pouring in the mission.

Incredible jubilation and spontaneous celebrations ensued. People heaved a sigh of relief from the fear of death. Destruction, rape and arson of their kith and kins in their native land came to an end. Their dream of becoming citizens of a free, independent nation finally came true. Many of them were locked in each other's arms, tears of joy rolling down their cheeks. After all, this was the day of all days they had all been awaiting for long nine months. Even the delicious foods brought by Bengali restaurateurs became a matter of secondary interest to them and gave way to a sense of better motivation and the most sublime human feelings. My colleagues and I witnessed in great amazement and utmost delight a spectacle and derived an experience which will never fall away from my memory. (Concluded)

Political Accord for Peace

Political parties should enter upon a national peace accord in order to achieve political stability and facilities a strong base for democracy and development as has been done in South Africa under Nelson Mandela, writes Abdul Khaleque.

have generally called upon people to bridle forces and impulses opposed to peace and to banish disorder, and work for fortification of peace, and urged upon peace-loving forces of different classes and political convictions to a truly anti-disorder alliance.

The government of a country is the supreme peace-keeping institution, having at its disposal a law and order force to work with utmost professional zeal and competence and professional independence. Bangladesh has been infested with petty and big crimes which are retarding development and political stability. From the concept of democracy citizens derive certain rights, such as, exercise of free conscience, freedom of speech and expression, freedom of movement, political activity (procession, meeting, protest, demonstration, elections etc). In recognition of citizen's inherent right

to choose government and hold it accountable at the polls, political parties and organizations, political leaders and citizens in a democratic polity have to undertake obligations to refrain from incitement to violence, crime and any form of hatred, intimidation, reprisal, injury and mischief. The vitality of democracy depends upon peace and a sensitive balance between individual freedom and collective security, as distinct from illegal acts and personal vendetta.

In the context of the prevailing law and order situation, I would suggest that the political parties (big and small) of Bangladesh should enter upon a National Peace Accord in order to achieve political stability and facilitate a strong base for democracy and development as has been done in South Africa under Nelson Mandela. To achieve this goal, it would be es-

sential to set out a code of conduct for political parties and organizations as well as citizens, which will constitute the hard-core of the proposed National Peace Accord.

The Peace Accord must have clearly defined principles and mechanism for implementation and monitoring the crucial task in the process to restrain disorder and maintain peace. The principles may be:

- (1) That in a state of peace and national harmony social and economic development can be achieved, other things being favourable.
(2) That it is the responsibility of political parties to create a climate of peace and democratic tolerance and to desist from preaching violence, intimidation, injury, mischief etc against another party.
(3) That it is apprehensible to harbour and protect party members and supporters to the prejudice of the process of law and justice.
(4) That it is unbefitting in a democracy to make false allega-

tions against political opponents and tell lies, even in parliament, against political opponents, and to obstruct political gathering, procession etc.

(5) That political parties must tolerate opponents but must not tolerate illegal possession of firearms, explosives and lethal weapons.

(6) That political parties must desist from interference with police and security forces in the performance of professional duty.

For a proper implementation of the national peace accord it would be necessary to constitute a national peace council permanently with eminent persons from judges, lawyers and journalists, to be nominated by the political parties by consensus, for a tenure of three years. The Chairman (the Judge) and other members shall be entitled to suitable honorarium and reasonable facilities.

The National Peace Council shall have responsibility such as:

- (1) To investigate immediate

and remote causes of violence and armed conflicts and crimes, and devise ways and means of dealing with the causes, and to investigate particular incident and bring home to the Prime Minister and the political parties the results of investigation. Such investigation, however, will not debar any legal process.

(2) To monitor peace-keeping functions of the police and other security forces.

(3) To resolve political tension by way of advice, discussion and persuasion.

(4) To convene periodical assembly of signatory political parties for review of the peace situation and in case of necessity to negotiate and conclude further articles of accord.

The National Peace Council shall have power to require any person and political party to put any document or evidence at its disposal for the purpose of investigation. There may be regional Sub-Council to be constituted on the model of the National Council, with functions and powers to be prescribed by the National Peace Council. The National Peace Accord may have its legislative basis for fulfillment of its aim and purpose. (The writer is a former Inspector General of Police)

OPINION

Restructuring the Administrative Cadre

AT Rashid

Reform of the civil service, though long overdue, is unlikely to come in our life time because the existing colonial system serves the interests of the politico-bureaucratic coterie very well. The present system allows the bureaucrats to enjoy whatever small comforts this poor country can offer without having to face any question for inaction or even wrong action. The politicians have found it very convenient to leave the management of the affairs of the state with the bureaucrats and engage in total politics which also includes, as alleged, collection of forage. The previous government arranged a mock play of reform by sending four secretaries abroad for studying the civil services of other countries. The UNDP provided funds generally to make the pleasure trip very comfortable.

It is not surprising that Mr Hedayet Ahmed (DS 12-10-96) had proposed restructuring of only the administrative cadre of the civil service. But sorry, we could not agree with his proposals regarding this matter. He had virtually proposed another elite service similar to the erstwhile CSP. Unfortunately, we do not have a pleasant experience about this particular cadre. Its members, though talented and initially dedicated, could not deliver any good for the people. All along they have behaved like masters not only of the people but also of the officials of other cadres. They are on record for consciously serving the interests of the political and military power groups that have been ruling the country. Those with practical experience know that the so called efficiency of the CSP is but a true reflection of capability and dedication. It is the weight of their unchallenged power that has always acted in their favour. Most of them are more arrogant than persuasive and inspiring specially to their subordinates. The claim of Mr Ahmed about the competence, integrity and loyalty of the members of the cadre is a matter of the past.

With due respect to the honest ones, I am sorry to say that many members of the cadre have also degraded and per-

verted themselves. These people have realised that power is not enough, money is more important for remaining at the top of the society. Mr Ahmed had suggested a lucrative economic package for the members of the reconstituted cadre. How is it possible ignoring the other employees of the republic?

There are other reasons for not supporting an elite administrative cadre. This is an age of complex technology and the government functions are extended to multifarious development activities. For this reason the top policy level people must have technical background in their respective fields. The best talents are needed in those areas of activities that offer the prospects of economic progress of the country. Planning, research, teaching are some of these areas. The elite bureaucrats have failed to deliver any innovative idea from which the country benefited substantially. The stunts like canal digging, self-sufficiency (Swanirvar) advocated by some bureaucrats proved abortive. The country needs humble, creative servants, not proud, arrogant rulers. A person of any background having some commonsense can do the type of jobs that the senior bureaucrats are doing now. The so called talents that they are claimed to possess are used for purposes other than the service of the nation.

In the past, useless cosmetic changes were made in the civil service and those were passed as reform. If a serious reform is intended, it should be done in its totality. My idea about reform is as below:

- 1. The whole government should be reorganised into 25 ministries. Any change in this number should require the approval of the parliament.
2. Ministers should be the executive heads of the ministries. There can be deputy ministers for the big ministries.
3. All officials of the republic (both government and autonomous) should be grouped into the same number of cadres as there are ministries. Each

cadre will have the required number of sub cadres. There should be a number of feeder cadres like administration, audit and account, planning etc.

4. The secretariat should be abolished and replaced by ministerial. Each ministry should be manned by its own cadre of officials. The present nonsense of appointing an officer of the customs cadre as an additional secretary (Planning) of the ministry of education, for example, must go. The administration and audit/account cadres will deputise officials to different ministries and their subordinate organisations. The ministries should be small and their functions should be confined to the following: a) Policy formulation and planning; b) Co-ordination and monitoring of the activities of subordinate organisations; c) Inter-ministry liaison etc.

5. Functions of the ministries should be decentralised as far as possible.

6. The organisations under the ministries should also be restructured and reduced in size.

7. The ministries may be divided into the appropriate number of divisions, each headed by a cadre official of the rank of a secretary.

8. The ministers will be accountable to the cabinet and the parliament for all activities of their ministries.

9. At the district and thana levels, elected representatives will be the heads of administration and personnel of the administrative cadre will act as co-ordinators/facilitators.

10. Details of the proposed system should be worked out in consultation with all interested quarters. The myth that the country will collapse if there are no powerful administrators at every tier of the government machinery is no longer acceptable. The public representatives should shed off their hypocritical evasion of responsibility and come forward to shoulder the task of making the government an effective machine for the progress of the nation. Let the hollow slogan 'People are the source of all power' acquire some meaning.

Golden streets of Dhaka

Sir, Are not the streets of Dhaka littered with gold? Round-the-year road construction and repair works, construction of bridges, underground passes, demolition and rebuilding of islands, road digging, carpeting and recarpeting are going on in full-swing without any break or halt.

What amount of public money have we spent on repair, maintenance and cleanliness of public thoroughfares, roads, streets and foot paths of Dhaka since 1947? Not less than Taka twenty-five thousand crore approximately. Where has all the money gone? It is alleged that sub-standard of work and inferior quality of materials used in development works have helped the road contractors mint gold from the weak, dirty and damaged roads filled with hundreds of pot-holes.

It is not true that any contractors, engineers, law enforcement personnel, hawkers, vendors and mastans are earning crores from the streets of Dhaka? Though we are a very poor country our small capital-city roads are perhaps the costliest in the world.

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Animals? Fine; but what about humans?

Sir, From observing various incidents happening, I have got the feeling that we are indeed living in a very strange country where lives of the animals are more valuable than human beings. In the recent past, a number of tigers mysteriously died at Mirpur Zoo in Dhaka. Prompt

action was taken to unravel the mystery, a report was prepared within a few days and it was confirmed that the animal died of poisoning. The order was issued to take stern action against persons responsible for this crime.

On the other hand, almost everyday we hear news about human murders and other crimes. In most of the cases, investigation is very slow, and sometimes after a short time, investigation totally stops. In some other cases, where there is no doubt about who are the murderers or who are behind it, no action is taken and they roam freely.

When there is doubt about an unnatural death, that it might be suicide or murder, utmost effort should be applied to bring the truth to light. But we see the opposite — valuable time is wasted which may destroy important clues and even the viscera report could not be obtained after a very long period of time, and this could even happen in cases of very popular persons.

This is disheartening and frightening. How can people expect justice if it goes on like this?

Nur Jahan, East Nazrabad, Chittagong.

State of affairs in public offices

Sir, Thanks are due to Mr. Ahmed for his timely letter on the affairs in public offices as he wrote in The Daily Star on 2 December 1996. Here we would like to point out some more facts:

- a) The office time is from 8 am to 2:30 pm in Dhaka. But if you visit offices, you will find none of the officers doing office in time. This is our national loss in terms of "time economy".
b) The other day, one minister returned to his residence from the airport due to delay of Biman flight.
c) The persons who are known and reputed as corrupted are still in public offices.
d) The last but not the least point is that we do not know the name of the minister who controls the administration. So we urge the higher authorities to control the snake before it bites. M Ali, Rajshahi