

On to the Second Quarter

We carved a state of our very own in 1971 with a price seldom... if ever paid by any other people.

The silver jubilee celebrations have very nicely been heralded by a congenial political change in the land and the first big success in engaging the stupendous physical problems facing this country.

The Bengalee people of this time fought a very unequal war in 1971 — and won the bloody encounter through heroism and bravery, patriotism and sheer power and willingness to undergo the ultimate of sacrifices.

At this moment of commencement of our new journey, we remember the founder of this state Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman for his glorious achievement, sanctified the more by his death as a martyr and Tajuddin Ahmed who shaped and led the Liberation War and was to follow his dear leader into martyrdom on the 80th day of Mujib's gory parting.

WTO Does it Right

On the face of it, the first ministerial conference of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) has been a success. A package of measures aimed to liberalise trade through investment, fair competition and government contracts under global trade rules has been adopted by the 128-member world trade body.

While some progress has been made in the area of simplifying investment rules, preventing anti-competitive business practices and root out corruption in lucrative government contracts, the more controversial issues such as labour standard and environment have been skirted around for the sake of a compromise deal.

Regional trade bodies such as the European Monetary Union, North American Free Trade Agreement etc. are created basically to protect member countries' interests. Reprieve of tariffs and other mutual concessions within such trade blocs can surely frustrate any hope of least developed countries and even other developed countries from a different region to have access to the bodies' market.

Gas Crisis

The gas crisis that has severely hit Chittagong is an example of how bad management of a resource abundantly available, can be a cause of needless suffering. The indication of a shortage of gas was received well in time but the urgency to address the problem did not match it.

The question therefore is: if the political agitation halted the work, why was not the construction work taken up with double urgency? Why was the pace of work further slowed down? Now that the Chittagong Urea Fertiliser Limited and Raozan power plant had to be closed, we can count heavy losses on our national exchequer.

We must learn to plan for the future. Think of gas supply all over the country coming to a halt all on a sudden because nobody monitored it, nor gave a serious thought to such a scenario.

It is a proud and jubilant nation that celebrates the Silver Jubilee of its independence. It is a young and vigorous nation that wants to tell the world, once again, that it will deliver on the pledges of our Liberation War.

As we celebrate the 25th year of our independence, we once again feel extremely proud of the fact that years ago our men, women and the young together waged an armed struggle to gain our independence from Pakistan.

There is no denying the fact however, that much of the gains of our hard earned freedom were quickly lost. Conspiracy won the day. The assassination of Bangabandhu along with his family members began our slide into military dictatorships which led on a wholesale distortion of our history.

Now on the 25th anniversary we have to regain what we had lost during the years of military and quasi-military rules.

It is a pleasant coincidence that West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu came on a six-day visit to Bangladesh, from November 27, 1996, when year round celebration of Silver Jubilee of independence and liberation war was reaching its climax.

It has not been an easy sail for Jyoti Basu to achieve this breakthrough, even the West Bengal Congress opposition leaders have raised questions on his visit, as reported in the press. In Bangladesh, we know very well, a section of self-seeking politicians always nag at the relations between the two closest neighbours.

Jyoti Basu is one of the senior-most politicians of the sub-continent, having his ancestral home at Baradi, a village in Sonargaon thana of Narayanganj district. After the partition in 1947, Basu and his family migrated to the Indian state of West Bengal.

It was not water issue only though Biman's rates are cheaper, people who can afford it, for several reasons, often avoid flying Biman. Has Biman ever ask itself: why?

Biman should at first do their homework and then try to be competitive. The way they are trying it at present calls for the competence and behaviour of their managers into question.

If the government really wants to attract foreign investment, it has to get moving with their homework. Businesses, NGOs whatever, they are all facing persistent problems on various issues, such as visa (4-6 months seems to be normal), customs clearance, a telephone/fax line (sums up to Tk 20,000 have to be paid).

One will fail to take this seriously after knowing the entire system in Bangladesh. Probably most of us have seen the advertisement which frequently appears in the Newswave, The Economist etc. — Discover Bangladesh and let your business boom! followed by reasons why one should consider it.

One of the many examples is the KLM, which clearly shows how reluctantly and carelessly the government officials messed around with these issues. A reputed, strong and healthy company like KLM will not suffer that much, since they have lots of other opportunities.

The greatest achievement of our great leader Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is the freedom of then 75 million people of Bangladesh. He always

Pledge for a Better Future

by Mahfuz Anam

As we celebrate the 25th year of our independence, we once again feel extremely proud of the fact that years ago our men, women and the young together waged an armed struggle to gain our independence from Pakistan, a country that had started a genocide to crush and destroy our dreams.

The most important edifice required for the Bangladesh of our dreams is of course democracy. It has been proven over and over again that whenever democracy was destroyed in our land, all sorts of evil forces gained ground.

We note with regret that BNP appears to be following the path of the previous opposition party in boycotting the Parliament. It must be mentioned that Awami League did not start its boycott till well after three years in Parliament, and that it did unitedly with other opposition parties.



is due to absence of opposition names — can greatly strengthen the supervisory role of the elected representatives. With all its present flaws, Parliament still provides the best chance for an accountable and transparent government.

For far too long divisive politics has monopolised the centre stage of our national politics. This must be replaced by development politics. Though it sounds like a platitude, however the bottom line is that unless we can bring about a drastic

change in our growth rate, and do something about taking care of our bottom fifty per cent of our population, all talk about democracy and the future will amount to nothing. As far as we are concerned, in today's context patriotism has only one definition — national development. All our energies will now have to be directed to one goal.

Silver Jubilee to Augur Well for Development

Since the people have realised that good 'neighbourliness' is a pre-condition of development, the political parties also should come to a consensus in this regard, argues Muhammad Quamrul Islam.

that was discussed in course of the visit of Jyoti Basu and his entourage. Basu has suggested to reduce the galloping trade imbalance between Bangladesh and India. His sincere feeling and concern for Bangladesh were quite apparent in his speech at Shilpakala Academy.

A section of our intellectuals are perhaps wrong to suggest to consider the growth model of Indian state of West Bengal, while planning and implementing our five year plan and ADP, in the prevailing situation. Let us have a glimpse of history. Before partition of India in 1947, the position of West Bengal was at the top in India on various counts.

governance West Bengal is again in the forefront of the Indian states in many respects — education, culture, agriculture, industry. At present, education up to 12th class is free. Every year students get books free of cost, up to class V.

In the country side, where majority of the population reside, socio-economic changes have occurred in the right direction. Through 'Panchayati Raj' project, rural people have been organised at the grassroot level, to meaningfully decentralise power at the local level.

In the industrial sector also West Bengal forged ahead under the Left Front Government. Earlier, it was lagging behind other Indian states. The work started with cottage and small industries. In 1991, when central government relaxed strict controls over the states, the state government took up quick industrialisation programme, by foreign investment, to combat increasing unemployment and despair.

an investment-friendly environment was built up to draw them in. Infrastructural facilities, availability of raw materials, and skilled manpower have expedited the process of industrialisation. Calcutta-Shilliguri Express Way, World Trade Centre, Bengal Airways, Food Processing Park have been built.

In this very state of West Bengal, during 70s, industries were getting sick and closed one after another, or moved out to other states. There was extreme dissatisfaction among the workers. There was critical shortage of electricity, without which industry cannot be kept running.

These unprecedented overall development has taken place under the guidance of government in an integrated manner. Three components of which are — government initiative, private sector and joint approach. West Bengal Industrial Development Corporation Ltd. and West Bengal Electronics Industry Development Corporation prepared the stage of take-off. West Bengal has set an example of communal harmony, which in turn has contributed

to development. The honesty of government leadership is beyond dispute.

By any criterion it was felt that the economy of Bangladesh would move fast after attainment of independence, the Silver Jubilee of which is celebrated now. As an independent and sovereign republic, it has all the Ministries, including Foreign Ministry with embassies abroad, and representations in the UN system and other international bodies. The international support was forthcoming. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has said that Taka 1 lakh 6 hundred 51 crore has been spent on account of development during the last two decades. But, expected result has not been achieved.

The reasons are obvious. In the absence of clean politics and sound administration, we have seen rampant corruption, miss-management, inefficiency and wastage. There is no use to blame one regime or the other; the net effect on the people has every time been painful. The permanent bureaucracy and foreign trained officials could not be of any use to the country. Hardly ministers, bureaucrats and other employees suffer punishment for corruption! There has been all talk about transparency and accountability. To

that of improving the lot of our masses. As we aspire to take our place in the comity of nations, we must realise that a great force of change is sweeping the world. Technology is opening up all new possibilities which is already changing the way we do things. Changes that are on the way, will fundamentally alter the way our lives, societies, and nations are organised.

Can Bangladesh do the same? If our politics continues to be a prisoner of the past, if our thinking remain backward and if our governance and implementation of policies continue to be as archaic as they are, then the answer is a resounding NO. With the existing system we cannot be a part of the global change and as such take advantage of the opportunities that are bound to come our way.

On the 25th anniversary of our independence, our strongest plea would be to all, to be aware that the world is undergoing a drastic change, and we must be a part of that process. Business-as-usual approach will marginalise us. To prevent that from happening we have to make significant investment in democracy, good governance and human resource development. Let that be our resolve on this auspicious occasion.

cleanse the Augean stable, examples of honesty will have to be set at the top and accountability enforced from there, to start with.

It is also necessary to ask as to why so much difference between Bangladesh and West Bengal. We can't accept that Bengalees are incapable of doing constructive works. If West Bengal can progress, why can't we? A cursory glance will reveal that our backwardness is due to the selfish aggrandisement by elite group and not lethargy of common man. A sub-group of the elite who changed their lot, say by alleged grabbing of Hinch property under the cover of Vested (Enemy) Property Act, etc. will always be on the look out to fish in troubled water, by what is called inciting communal politics; and as such, can never be an aid or partner in national development. To facilitate development of the country, it is necessary to repeal the aforesaid black law, at the earliest convenience. Else, the general mass will groan in poverty here and the elite few may find a mode in developed countries without caring for them!

We feel the people have become aware of the precarious situation, for which they have effected a political change on 12th June, 1996. Incidentally, the visit of Jyoti Basu has brought to the fore various development issues. On the Silver Jubilee of Victory Day, let us vindicate our common goal for development, for which good neighbourliness is an essential pre-condition. Will the mainstream political parties arrive at a consensus in the regard? After all, if the country does not prosper, what is the use of their politics. Let us raise the 'image' of Bangladesh.

The writer is an economist and advocate. Bangladesh Supreme Court.

To the Editor...

KLM/Biman and business

Sir, After reading the reports of the Biman and KLM affair, I want to make some general comments on doing business in Bangladesh. The lack of qualification and carelessness of the so-called managers are no doubt two of the several reasons for such failures.

One will fail to take this seriously after knowing the entire system in Bangladesh. Probably most of us have seen the advertisement which frequently appears in the Newswave, The Economist etc. — Discover Bangladesh and let your business boom! followed by reasons why one should consider it.

One of the many examples is the KLM, which clearly shows how reluctantly and carelessly the government officials messed around with these issues. A reputed, strong and healthy company like KLM will not suffer that much, since they have lots of other opportunities.

The greatest achievement of our great leader Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is the freedom of then 75 million people of Bangladesh. He always

stood like a rock, like a mountain and he sacrificed his everything for the people of Bangladesh. Bangabandhu never compromised or surrendered to Pakistani rulers in the greater interest of the country.

However, unfortunately during his life-time some of the Indian leaders rather made a breach of agreement and withdrew the Ganges water unilaterally and arbitrarily depriving millions in our country their rightful share of an international river. The Indian leaders also took control over our territory, Berubari, but in exchange they refused to hand over our rightful territory of Tinbigha.

The Muslims of what is now Bangladesh established their first independent government in 1203 under Bakhtiyar Khilji. From time to time since nineteenth century the New Delhi rulers like Pathans, Moghuls, British, and later the military rulers of Islamabad had been alluring and attempting to deprive the people of their independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity and their socio-economic and political rights.

Undergoing many trials and tribulations, agonies and woes of the last 800 years, we declared our independence on 26th March 1971 and after nine months of fierce fighting and making colossal sacrifices we achieved our independence on December 16, 1971 following unconditional surrender by the Pakistani marauders.

Unfortunately due to some deep-rooted conspiracy hatched

in the country, we lost our faith of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on August 15, 1975.

We are a sovereign and independent country. With our faces radiant and heads erect we stand proudly and blissfully today among the civilised nations of the world. We still have a long way to go in building a happy and prosperous Bangladesh. Let us all forget and forgive our past differences and bitterness and march forward optimistically to ensure a better tomorrow for 120 million people of Bangladesh.

We strongly feel that controversy about the father of the nation, if any, may be done away with and all the MPs irrespective of BNP, AL, JP or JI in the Jatiya Sangad in a consensus of opinion may declare Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as father of the nation without further loss of time in the greatest interest of unity and integrity of our people inside the country.

Would our Awami League, BNP, JP and JI leaders kindly respond to the voice of the millions and move in the right direction?

O H Kabir, 6, Hare Street, Wari, Dhaka: 1203

logical methods for upgrading the standard of living of the people. In Bangladesh whatever resources we have are being utilised without least consideration for economy. We are producing newsprint at a much higher cost than that of other international producers.

We are producing sugar, eggs — and even cultivating crops and fishes — at a much higher cost than in neighbouring West Bengal. As far as our productions are concerned we are capable of producing but as to make them cost-effective we are incapable of keeping it within any reasonable limit. The result is: the more we produce, the more we lose. By any international standard, our production cost is unreasonably high in any nationalised sector of industry. Similarly, utility-oriented services like supply of electricity, gas and water are also registering high cost. But why?

The answer is flat and blatant: Plundering by those entrusted with the responsibility of the affairs. Of course, everybody is not a thief, but thieves have attained unwritten consensus much earlier to be at the helm. Political leadership had been exploited for conducting waste of national economy. Labour unions, employees unions, officers associations etc., had been unitedly dictating the country's power politics.

Unconfident administrations of autocratic governments lacking popular support were exploited by the cunning and ambitious leaders of associations to cover up their misdeeds and continue building up their own fortune. Thanks have

Determination and commitment

Sir, I have been monitoring the systems loss in the power sector for about one and a half decades. The job of an engineer in broad sense is to utilise natural resources economically by applying scientific and techno-

reached a state where democratic governments find it very difficult to bring back control on these leaders. Our superior service cadre officials stepped in where army officers used to roam about in the past.

Perhaps ex-president Ershad showed them the path at the cost of maneuvering national election results. They are now set in the game.

Would the aggression from inside continue unabated? Attack on power sector by its own employees and some greedy consumers under the cover of systems loss should be addressed and cleared up right now without disturbing anyone. If the government is sincere and determined to eliminate plundering which is prevailing in the sector, I, as an elderly, am ready to provide ways and means without any remuneration. As a son of the soil, as an electrical engineer who has been witnessing the gradual degradation of the power sector and serious hurdle in the way to industrialisation, one can no longer sit idle, provided that the government wants to use his ability and method for the cure.

Elimination of systems loss would give birth to a healthy power sector that would neither face apathy of donors nor beg foreign blessing in the form of relief import of electricity. Perhaps, joint venture with other countries including India on equitable term might come up in the region.

Engr. Mahabubur Rahman, CES-DIB/Ref No: 126, Gulshan, Dhaka