

Modernise Police

With the routine and mechanical observance of the Police Week for the just-arrived year beginning from today, an odd yet very pertinent thought crosses the mind. We have always heard, almost unflinchingly and unexceptionally, the executive heads of our country harping on the need for modernising the army or for that matter any section of the services, created and maintained mainly with a view to warding off the external threats.

Sadly, similar pronouncements, pregnant with promise and proper evaluation are rarely heard on occasions involving police. It is actually more flabbergasting than it is sad. Because for all the institutional and theoretical accent on the importance of the defence personnel it is actually an efficient police force which a country like Bangladesh needs for all practical purposes, in the first place. The reason behind this growth-warp is the appalling state of the people who form the face of the police — the uniformed men at the lowest tier of the profession like constables. Without offering any excuse for the lawlessness of some members of the law enforcing agency from time to time, it can be said quite unequivocally that absurdly poor pay is one counter-incentive that must have contributed to horrifying instances of low police morale. To give police efficiency a fillip, a bottom up operation is necessary because the picture up in the hierarchy vis-a-vis facilities is starkly contrasting.

It would be an exercise in the same myopia the authorities have been affected, to say that it is only economic constraint that chips away from the force's efficiency. Administration and recruitment to be precise in alluding one area of it, seems equally care-lorn. Has there been any comparative study on the standard ratio of police population and that of criminals in the light of spiralling demographic index? Not one that the memory can dish out readily. That shows how directly we need a fresh approach for modernising police along the lines of a sustained work on need assessment. We necessarily need not boast of the best police on earth but we need to have a police force that do not strike terror in the hearts of law abiding citizens and one that people can trust. And to ensure that, some basic needs of the members of this force have to be addressed. Shall we see this Police Week break new ground to that direction?

Let Films be Films

There hasn't been many achievements in Bangladesh's past decade that can match the development here of the short film. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Thursday put her seal on the fact and inaugurated an international festival of short films. The biennial festival is a product of the Short Film Forum and the present is the fifth in ten years. All big and worthy undertakings in the poor nations of the world originate in some government initiative and involvement. As such most of these materialise more as impositions than anything else. The short film development has taken the opposite and most desirable path of a movement.

The short film headway is truly an offshoot of a film society movement that has plodded somehow, more in a dream, against constant animosity from an intolerant governmental pocket, steeped often in ignorance and prejudices. In the inaugural what the festival leaders wanted Sheikh Hasina to deliver was all patent film society demands. The most important of these was however voiced by Mrinal Sen, the auteur par excellence and incidentally the current president of the International Federation of Film Societies: The government must promote these societies rather than be nit-picking all the time and pushing these to virtual closure. No censorship, no taxes and import restrictions please.

The Prime Minister bettered the demands. A national film centre? You have it. Grants for short films? Okay. Full processing facilities for 16mm films at FDC? No problem. It would not be difficult for government to honour these pledges. The problem would only begin after that. Creativity is its name. And honesty and efficiency sans corruption can make these gifts congenial for creativity to rule the area. The Prime Minister was, however, not forthcoming on Mrinal Sen's point. And Obaid-ul-Huq's suggestion for Bangladesh to introduce honours for brilliant foreign creations in short films also remained hanging as he made the point after the Prime Minister had spoken.

The leaders of the festival has an idea of making Dhaka a capital of short film making. The aim is modest and yet lofty and the dream is eminently achievable. We couldn't become Cannes in decades even if the government bet its all on that. But short films are films nevertheless. And if they cannot be true of life and society, of history and culture, of the sufferings and sacrifices of the individual, of the greed and cruelty and inhumanity of systems and organised thugs — they wouldn't be films exactly as the movies churned out here in the fastfood manner are not. We need to have, right at this moment, film-makers who can fight and sacrifice and dream on. Let films become a vanguard in our social and national development.

Congestion Continues

One of the features of Dhaka's face that has apparently ignored a new year's expectation for novelty is its perennial traffic congestion. Friday's issue of The Daily Star had a visual illustration on its rear page of a traffic gridlock at a very important city point. It is not only from the viewpoint of commuters' disadvantage but also from the consideration of the silent but substantial damage it does to the economy, that this seemingly deathless scourge calls for a condemnatory mention, no matter how ineffectual it looks in the backdrop of authorities' failure to end it. Not long ago there appeared this statistics which set the diurnal loss our economy suffers due to these traffic jams to the tune of crores. It's galling to see how these pricey consequences have failed to wake the authorities to a more result-inspiring approach in dealing with traffic congestions.

Once again, probably for the umpteenth time, this tends to write a sad commentary on the efficiency level of urban governance and the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) mayor is automatically the cynosure of all eyes in this regard. For all his charisma as an organiser, Mr Hanif has failed terribly to live up to the city dwellers' expectation. Even after the passage of the greater part of his tenure at the office, Dhaka remains as dirty, as traffic congested and as mosquito infested as any time in the past.

We have just stepped into a new year. It is in the interest of ours that we take stock of the major episodes that dominated the past year and thereafter take appropriate steps to brighten the future. Out of 25 years that Bangladesh crossed as an independent state so far, it could perhaps be presumed that the year 1996 would stand out as one of the most memorable years for a number of reasons.

First, the year 1996 witnessed a mass upsurge for the establishment of a caretaker government and finally the concept of a caretaker government was enshrined in the Constitution. In consequence, a free and fair general election was held under the caretaker government headed by Justice Habibur Rahman. An Awami League government led by Sheikh Hasina was installed to power after a long stay in the fence for 21 years.

During that year, we celebrated the silver jubilee of our independence. In a country where the average life expectancy of people is estimated to be hovering around 52 years, the chances of witnessing a golden jubilee for a person of our age remains a forlorn hope. We, therefore, deem the year 1996 to be memorable. Furthermore, the spirit of Bengalee nationalism that ignited all of us to participate in the war of

1996: A Better Year for Bangladesh

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liberation seems to have staged a comeback after 21 years in asylum.

The historic 30-year water treaty signed by the governments of Bangladesh and India in 1966 would remain as a watershed in our history. We had been waging a long political war to eke out our due share from the Ganges but in vain. The unilateral withdrawal of water by India over the years imparted catastrophic impacts on our economy. Thanks to the successful diplomatic parleys pursued by the government of Bangladesh under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina and to the government of India led by Deve Gowda for their political will to resolve this long outstanding water sharing problem. Needless to mention here, perhaps, that the warm relationship between these neighbouring countries, allegedly, was strained by the absence of any long term contract on water sharing between them. We hope that the mutual understanding would last long to resolve other bilateral problems including that of trade deficit.

The election of Justice

Shahabuddin Ahmed as the President of the People's Republic of Bangladesh in 1996 could also be considered as another milestone in our national political history. This widely respected and acclaimed Justice is considered by many as relatively non-partisan, honest and

national history, we started with a government comprising participants from more than one political party. The concept of consensus government, as it is called, could possibly be prone to many criticisms (in concept as well as in practice), but the fact remains that the idea

assets of the previous governments, including the caretaker one, during the half of 1996 could fog the true picture. Nevertheless, by and large, low prices of foodgrains, especially of rice, continued throughout the year and the level of inflation stayed much below the danger level. The economy experienced good harvests during 1996 and hence could escape a huge deficit in import of foodgrains. However, the economy, by and large, continued to remain stagnant with not much of investment in sight. The establishment of Law Commission, setting up of private EPZ and the proposed separation of Judiciary and Executive could, however, shower fruits within a year or two.

The year 1996 could also be memorable given the fact that the index in the share market reached its all-time high. Truly speaking, people of this country had never before showed so much interest in this trading. Unfortunately, the market could not sustain its peak prices due to, allegedly, a volley of factors including manipulation in

share prices by a few of the traders. Thus many lost, few gained. The innocents were slaughtered by the devils. We hope that the share market will return to normalcy in 1997 and concerned authorities would gear up necessary arrangements in this regard support strengthening the apparatus of the Share market and also in terms of punishing the culprits.

The autonomy of TV and Radio — a commitment of the present government during the last general election — is yet to come by. Of course, the government formed a committee to look into the matter. The law and order situation in 1996 was all but fair although the situation seems to have marginally improved at the end of the year. There were a number of campus violence that seemingly frustrated all those who believe that the government is keen to arrest the rot.

Looking back, it appears that we have comfortable scores on the credit side of our ledger. However, two fundamental problems should assume top-most priority to the government viz. (a) the law and order situation and (b) stagnancy in the economy. The present government should take a vow to finish the year 1997 with serious onslaught on these two fronts. That only could give us another good year to rejoice with.

Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes



very much bettering for the post he was elected to. The government of Sheikh Hasina deserves thanks for choosing a non-political entity for this post and we would also like to thank the opposition parties for accepting the verdict with due grace. The selection of Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed could pave ways for keeping this position beyond the mark of any political bites in future. For the first time in our na-

tionally, we started with a government comprising participants from more than one political party. The concept of consensus government, as it is called, could possibly be prone to many criticisms (in concept as well as in practice), but the fact remains that the idea

Sharing of the Ganges Water

The Treaty Opens up a Vista of Opportunities

by Md Asadullah Khan

Because of the unilateral withdrawal of the Ganges water by India for such a long period, people have experienced the increasing effect of salinity in the southern region besides the desertification process spreading in the northern region... In the backdrop of such a gloomy scenario, should a section of our leaders be pleading that the just concluded treaty has bartered away the interest of the country?

THE signing of the water treaty for a thirty-year period between Bangladesh and India with regard to sharing of the Ganges water is indeed a landmark in the development of relations between the two countries. Dispelling all speculations, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of Bangladesh and her counterpart in India Deve Gowda pledged to commit themselves to a historic advancement of the relations between the two countries over a contentious issue that soured relations between the two closest neighbours. It must be brought home to all factions and parties that friendship and not enmity can foster development and progress so vitally needed for both the countries.

The signing of this treaty at the first instance is supposed to bring an end to the adverse influence of Farakka in the south-western region of Bangladesh that triggers catastrophic situation, including desertification of vast crop lands other than the fact that it would now facilitate taking up proper planning in the use of indigenous water resources. Without a contract, the then Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia's speech at the UN in 1993 only helped deteriorate relations between the two countries. Paradoxically, now the major opposition party BNP made a dramatic observation, saying they "are neither accepting the treaty nor rejecting it."

Sheikh Hasina's observation on the occasion of signing this treaty is worth recalling. She says, "The treaty marks a moment of high emotion for me since it will influence the cause of our bilateral relations in future."

Understandably, during the forthcoming visit of the Indian Prime Minister Deve Gowda, the two countries would discuss other bilateral issues including trade, communication, enclaves, insurgency in both the countries and Chakma refugee problem. At the Home Minister, Major (Retd) Rafiqul Islam, said in an interview that there were a total of 132 enclaves along India-Bangladesh border and the issue had been a major irritant in the relations between the two countries.

Topping it all is the Chakma refugee problem that soured relations between the two countries. Topping it all is the Chakma refugee problem that soured relations between the two countries threatening peace

and outside the parliament. Ironically true, some parties that were in power in the recent past could hardly think of being off the power base. In their quest of public office and the pay-offs of power, they have inflamed passions and used every trick to promote their gain.

The remarkable feature that marks this treaty significantly different from the past is that the guarantee clause incorporated in the 1977 accord and that was later withdrawn in 1982 memorandum of understanding (MOU) has been re-introduced in the new treaty enabling Bangladesh to draw 35,000 cusec (cubic feet per second) of water during the leanest period (April 21-30) at Farakka, ostensibly a larger quantum than that of the 1977 accord under which Bangladesh used to get only 27,600 cusec. As revealed in the accord, Bangladesh would get the lowest quantum of 27,633 cusec from April 11 to 20 which is also 33 cusec higher than the minimum quantum provided in the 1977 accord.

People in the country want to be led by enlightened and sane leadership and want to invest good will in their leaders as long as the leaders are accountable to the people. People are fed up with misguided leaders that are adept in shrieking about their rights and patriotism but often shirking their responsibilities.

It is heartening to hear our leaders rail against exploitation but who talks about the country's real problems like alarming population growth, unemployment problem, loss of production in mills and factories, corruption in all spheres of life, as well as efforts to rid the country of power shortages, step by step effective distribution of fertilisers to the farmers and above all ensuring a proper climate for investment opportunities? Without spreading canard and skepticism, political parties could have debated the weaker and fragile parts of the accord both inside

and outside the parliament. Ironically true, some parties that were in power in the recent past could hardly think of being off the power base. In their quest of public office and the pay-offs of power, they have inflamed passions and used every trick to promote their gain.

They are often trying to exploit and manipulate the sentimental and religious weaknesses inherent in a social fabric that Bangladesh has now, to advance their arguments against the treaty.

The most important aspect of the treaty, as Mr Mahfuz Anam, Editor of The Daily Star observed in his commentary, "Historic Breakthrough" that appeared on 14th December, 1996, "is a position arrived at after taking into consideration the needs of both the countries and not their wishes." The need of a country may be enormous. But this need must also be assessed not on the basis of what was but on what is available today.

Political parties that are supposedly committed to protect and uphold the interest of the country must examine this treaty in the light of the fact as to whether the fundamental interest of the country has been properly protected or not.

The just concluded treaty opens up a vista of opportunities and possibilities of rendering a large part of the country into blooming fields of crop lands that turned out to be barren and dusty because of the unilateral withdrawal of water at Farakka. Over and above, this would bring about a lasting impact on the economy of the country fostering development, rejuvenation in agricultural and industrial production and employment opportunities especially in the northern region of the country. Fish resources that almost dried up would now have a fresh lease of life because of the increased supply of water in the rivers, streams and rivulets. Strikingly, because of the unilateral withdrawal of the Ganges water by India for such a long period, people have experienced the increasing effect of salinity in the southern region other than the desertifi-

cation process that spreads in the northern region. The only mangrove forest — the Sundarbans — was getting denuded of trees, plants and other forest resources. The other deadly effect, the arsenic pollution in the entire northern region of the country, inhabited by about 40 million people, became markedly visible as underground layers of water went down and aquifers ran dry. The ecological disturbance that this lean flow of Ganges water had caused, could better be felt than described. In the backdrop of such a gloomy scenario, should a section of our leaders be pleading that the just concluded treaty has bartered away the interest of the country?

Farakka barrage constructed at 16 km downstream of Murshidabad in West Bengal has been posing a severe threat to the life and living of the people in Bangladesh for the last 25 years. Ironically, the then Pakistani rulers went into an agreement with regard to sharing of Indus water in West Pakistan in 1960 but these rulers, despite the fact that they knew about the construction of the Farakka barrage in 1961, kept silent, only triggering anti-Indian feelings, resentment and acrimony among people in the then East Pakistan. Political parties that capitalise their issues on communal politics have opposed the signing of the water treaty. And shockingly true, these parties have kept the anti-Indian issue alive rather in dis-

Table with 2 columns: Availability at Farakka, Share of India. Values: 70,000 cusec or less, 70,000-75,000 cusec, 75,000 cusec or more.

regard of the national interest. It hardly matters to them if the rivers go dry, vast crop lands get parched, vast green fields turn into deserts and the economy teeters on the verge of collapse.

Sadly true, the trauma of religion-based politics in 1971 in this part of the country cost the country heavily taking a toll of

Table with 2 columns: Date, Country. Values: Jan 1 to 31: Bangladesh, Feb 1-28: India, March 1-31: Bangladesh, India.

Table with 2 columns: Date, Country. Values: 67,516, 57,673 and 50,154 cusec (ten days period), 40,000 cusec, 46,323, 42,859 and 39,106 cusec, 40,000 cusec, 35,000, 35,000 and 29,688 cusec, 34,419, 33,931 and 35,000 cusec.

three million lives. The callous manipulations of cynical politicians who sided with Pakistan left the country in a trail of disaster from which the country could not yet recover. Now the politicians must come to terms with the truth that those who use extremist philosophies that provoke anti-Indian feelings as an argument for stability, peace and progress leave a legacy far more volatile than the conditions they seek to cure. Institutions that could lay the foundations of grassroots democracy could never be fully developed by pursuing the politics of parochialism. One may look towards Pakistan, Algeria, Afghanistan and even Libya to comprehend the disaster that narrow politics could spawn.

The full text of the treaty has been made public and Mr I K Gujral, the Indian Foreign Minister has made it abundantly clear that there is no "secret clause" in the accord and there has been no "trade off" of any kind between the two countries. The arithmetic of the treaty just signed vis-a-vis the accord reached earlier in 1977 and in 1982 that are cited here would dispel all confusions and bickerings mounted by the major opposition parties.

Table with 2 columns: Share of Bangladesh, Balance of flow. Values: 50%, 35,000 cusec, 40,000 cusec.

Interpreted more precisely, shares available for Bangladesh and India stand as: For a cut off at 65,000 cusec, with availability of 65,000 cusec or less, Bangladesh will get 50%, India 50%. For 65,000 cusec to 72,500 cusec: Bangladesh will get 32,500 cusec and India will get the balance of flow. For more than 72,500 cusec: India will get 40,000 cusec and Bangladesh the balance of flow. Sharing of water at

Farakka, from Jan 1 to May 31 appears to be a critical period every year. Based on availability corresponding to average flows in the period 1949 to 1988 the implication of the formula in Annex I for the share of each side is:

After two decades of impoverishment, hunger and almost a slow death, people finally dare hope for a brighter future. They cannot psychologically, emotionally or physically endure any more; they cannot stand being exposed to any further insecurity. Millions of people from the northern region of the country have been virtually forced to flee their home because of the desert-like conditions prevailing over roughly half the land masses. For the 40 million people in the northern region who see their fertile land being transformed into arid or sand for such a lean flow of water in their once famous rivers, the signing of the water-sharing treaty at the behest of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in just about five months after taking over the reins of the administration, of course, heralds a new era of peace, stability and also generates a sense of confidence in democracy.

Did we ever care to see that as these fields and pastures becoming no man's land, they add to the tide of ecological refugees who have already swollen the rolls of unemployed and destitute in the growing slums of the country's towns and cities? More alarming, no longer able to feed themselves, they place new strains on the limited food supply and create a tinderbox for social unrest.

In this age of globalisation, we can hardly take a course that alienates us from the rest of the world. At the same time, if political chaos and economic deterioration accelerate, the centrifugal forces of, say, religion-based politics, may prove to be too powerful for any national government to withstand. The country's path toward a progressive future that has been charted with clarity, foresight and vision must not be obstructed by petty or narrow politics that leads to perpetual misery. So long it was just the navigation that was lacking and surely Bangladesh had been so badly let down so long by many of its leaders. Let not the bells of doom ring anywhere anymore.

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Electricity of Dhaka

Sir, It appears that Dhaka Electric Supply Authority, so to say, Power Development Board, is playing ducks and drakes and following two diverse and incongruous policies towards the electricity consumers of old Dhaka and new Dhaka. While there are frequent failures of electric supply to War, Armanitola, Gandaria and Jatrabari areas etc, there are less electric failures at Baridhara, Gulshan, Banani, Uttara etc.

It is also alleged that whereas most of the houses in new Dhaka are equipped with air-conditioners, deep-freezers, refrigerators and dish antennas, in old Dhaka these luxury items are almost non-existent. But on an average the amount of monthly electricity bills of the residents of new Dhaka are very little compared to those of the residents in old Dhaka.

We wonder whether some unscrupulous employees of Dhaka Electric Supply indulge in malpractice. We would request the authorities concerned to kindly look into the matter and ensure that no discrimination is made towards the residents of old Dhaka. Every measure should be taken to check and avoid the so-called systems loss. It would also not be irrelevant to mention here that for the first time over the last six months, we have been continuously hearing reports about possibility of import of electricity from our neighbouring country to meet our shortage in electricity.

But we are surprised that there was no scarcity of electricity in Dhaka on the occasion of Victory Day of December 16, 1996 when innumerable buildings, roads and streets, and ceremonial gates were profusely illuminated with electric

lights. O H Kabir, 6, Hare Street, War, Dhaka-1203

"President Makes His Point"

Sir, The above captioned editorial in The Daily Star dated 12.12.96 has drawn my attention. As was said in the editorial that President Shahabuddin made a critical reference regarding our political culture on the "Bijoy Utsav" organised by the Sammilita Sangskritik Jote. It is assumed that he took much pain observing the present political situation in our country.

It was also said that our country's politics has become a prisoner of the past. Well, I think it would have been better had it been said that our "past has been prisoner to the present". We the general people, so long waited for the present and it is the usual aspiration of the nation to wait for the present and not for the past. But we observe that we were, as if, waiting for the past. All our hopes and aspirations are nestled in the past and we are rather a past-sheltered nation instead of futuristic one. The past could have been

negated if the present was better than the past.

Is present better? How? Are we not passing our days witnessing the similar events like fertiliser crisis, rapes in police custody, raping of disabled girl by the same people, cyclonic share market disaster, vote bizarre in Laxmipur and Habigonj, poisoning of tigers at Dhaka Zoo, dual killing of brothers by gunmen, and boycotting Parliament again by the opposition? May be, many more new political events will come across our life to smear the face of our nation. It is not unknown to anyone that in the recent past, just after the President became the President, he made an invitation call to abolish student politics. Did any political party honour it? Instead, they opposed it.

A popular partner of our present "consensus government" was seen crying, while he was president, for stable government and urged everybody not to go for hartal that deters country's progress. But the political parties continued it until he stepped down from power. Our past regime, the government of Khaleda Zia, invited everyone to participate in the development activities for the country. Did anybody listen to it? Nay, rather the government was dashed to roll down to the

ditch like a tempo hit by a speedy truck on the Dhaka-Archa road.

As regards culture and spirit of 1971, we have heard much about 'spirit of this', 'spirit of that' and so on. I think we should come to a consensus of spirit of necessity and neutrality. Can we not treat everyone of this soil as the "citizen of Bangladesh" forgetting the terms pro-independence or anti-independence? Then the political difference will throw no burning dust, and a lovable President like Shahabuddin will have no cause to feel pain for his people.

Nur Hossain, 151, Bangshal Road, Dhaka

Relaxation of marks

Sir, We many of the HSC examinees, could not secure required marks for getting admission in Honours in English due to hard and critical questions set up in this year's English question papers. As a result, not being qualified to apply, we are becoming frustrated if the authority concerned relax the marks for 'applying', we would try our best to get ourselves admitted into

English department and be benefitted.

Afsana Chowdhury Emu, S S Road, Stragjanj

Solutions!

Sir, There could be learned solutions to KNM's plight with its surplus newspaper brood — turn the Newsprint Mill into a Bookprint Mill, for producing paper for text-books, not as films as the politician's promises. But our school text-books are printed across the border on borrowed paper.

If the Shanti bamboos are beyond reach, KNM could feed sumptuously on Dhaka's mammoth garbage through recycling.

The systems loss in KNM is human, if not humane. Drown the corrupt into the pulp bin, and save on caustic soda.

This letter is written on KNM paper, the surface as uneven as Dhaka's roads; the ink spreads, and the ball-point sticks like a leech — only a 2B soft lead pencil provides mobility.

From export to sell-off — the price for developing politics in our society!

A Z, Dhaka