

Health Policy

The committee responsible for shaping a draft national health policy has, in its first meeting on Tuesday delegated duties to five sub-committees it formed on the same day.

In this connection we can draw the health policy committee's attention to our existing network of thana health complexes, which is one of the best compared with what most other Third World countries have infrastructure-wise.

Clearly the objective of the health policy is to bring about a qualitative improvement in the country's medical service — both public and private.

Private Mud Public Disaster

The only road connecting Dhaka to its international airport and its only air outlet to anywhere was clogged for all of the forenoon peak hour on Tuesday.

And why? Because the authority developing a housing project in the vicinity did not care to keep their earth dumpings within the project area and let these flow like a lava-spread after the Tuesday morning drizzle and eat up the most important part of that vital road.

Of course, the person responsible for the gooey spell of the road as well as for the inattention to the urgent problem should be punished.

Luckily for us all, not many vehicles skidded off the road or into other vehicles and structures and living things.

A Deplorable Failure

A consignment of Saudi pushback victims have arrived at Chittagong port by an Egyptian ship. The 912 distressed ones stripped of every earthly thing and forcibly sent back to Bangladesh have been dubbed as deportees include many working in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia quite lawfully.

Admittedly, there are many illegal entrants to KSA from this nation too — along with many other nations. But their entry did not materialise without Saudi collaboration. The manpower operators in Bangladesh act as only their agents.

The Promise of Future Parliamentary Cooperation

The ultimate credit goes to the leaders of the two principal parties, along with their chief negotiators, for having taken the final decision, but the immediate laurel is worn by the Speaker.

THE decision of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party to return to the parliament after a five-week abstention constitutes an important breakthrough in resolving the first major political impasse that was being developed since the new government took over power.

The incident is more important than what it outwardly transpires to be. It is significant on three broad counts. Firstly, it has averted a very potential danger in the political arena of the country and saved the nation from another possible disaster.

written agreement on any issue between the two principal political rivals of the land. And finally, it augurs well for the future of the parliamentary democracy in the country.

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After the '91 election, which was the best and the fairest election the country ever witnessed, people were happy that the days

of autocracy and dictatorship were gone forever from the land. This was the outcome of a combined and spontaneous upsurge of almost the entire people and parties who wanted restoration of democracy.

demands were abridged to 3 points. The 4 agreed points of the two sides generally covered all the BNP demands, including assurances given verbally by the Treasury bench.

so-called demands, in fact, represented no new demands. These were merely an attempt on their part to vindicate and occur their legitimate rights as members of the parliament as enjoined under the rules, regulations and procedure that are currently in vogue.

A section of the ruling party thought that it would be to their advantage not to persuade the BNP back into the House. This would allow them an easy sailing in matters of legislation and in carrying out other functions inside the Parliament.



Currents and Crosscurrents

by M M Rezaul Karim

the imprudence of our political leaders. The June 1996 election also provided another opportunity to the nation to resurrect the ailing form of democracy.

in resolving differences. The ruling party's Whip will henceforth consult his opposition counterpart in matters of formation of Parliamentary Committees.

No More Partisan Conflicts, Needed Solution of Problems

People are tired of the way politicians have played with their life and living and cry for a halt to the acrimony and animosity that only invites misery and suffering for them, writes Md Asadullah Khan.

THE announcement by the leader of the mainstream opposition party at the Manik Mia Avenue congregation on 7th January almost stunned the nation and raised grave questions about the future of democracy in a land that has suffered under successive military rule.

In a blistering attack the mainstream opposition party had charged the present government of inefficiency, liquidating the sovereignty and bartering the interest of the country through signing of an unequal water treaty with India.

And why? Because the authority developing a housing project in the vicinity did not care to keep their earth dumpings within the project area and let these flow like a lava-spread after the Tuesday morning drizzle and eat up the most important part of that vital road.

The present government, since coming to power, its each and every move to bolster trade, and bilateral relations with India has come under attack.

day by day, crime becomes rampant and a spirit of chaotic violence engulfs the whole country in absence of growth of industries and non-functioning of the existing ones.

Another casualty is the badly needed market economy and foreign investment. Despite the fact that the country has abundant cheap labour and enjoys excellent climatic situation, foreign investors are wary of venturing into an 'inflammable' area that this country now unfolds.

Safety and justice seem to have taken wings and misadventure and chauvinism have taken over the political fold.

words that "they will not see each other's face". The doctrine of non-violence and forgiveness espoused by Bangabandhu in the early days of 1972 seem to have been cremated.

people in this part of the world that past enmity of the European nations now turned into a meaningful co-operation of a stable market of 400 million people. The same could be achieved in this region under the umbrella of SAARC.

at the same time people feel inclined to ask the votaries of SAARC to cite specifically how this impoverished country has benefited from the SAARC membership during the last 15 years?

people are tired of the way politicians have played with their life and living and cry for a halt to the acrimony and animosity that only invites misery and suffering for them.

Mainstream opposition party in the Parliament is opposing the idea of sub-regional trade relationships among the closest neighbors like Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and North eastern part of India on the plea that such trade relations would allow foreign hegemony and expansionism gain over the country.

To the Editor...

Do we really need the DSE?

Sir, A recent issue of The Economist of London questions the need for poor developing countries to have stock exchanges and wonders whether the desire to have stock exchanges has more to do with status and to exhibit a free-market profile rather than to ensure real benefits to the economy.

Although I cannot agree with The Economist on its approach to many issues, the article did make me think about what the DSE, as it stands today, has contributed to Bangladesh economy. The purpose and objective of any stock exchange is to channel funds from the public at large to companies in a manner which will contribute, on the one side, to the healthy and dynamic growth of the companies in question, and hence the national economy, and on the other side to a long-term appreciation of the investing public's money.

Is the DSE performing according to this purpose? If the answer is yes, then nothing further needs to be done. To my mind, however, the DSE is not functioning anywhere near its objectives. The present state of affairs is a disaster and needs to be addressed urgently, otherwise it will affect both the actual state of the economy and the private sector's perception of the economy.

Asian Highway

Sir, Some valuable information regarding a vital national issue has come to light only recently, thanks to The Daily Star's interview with the ESCAP director and the ESCAP-CPD seminar.

The original alignment of the Dhaka-Yamoung section of the proposed Asian Highway via Cox's Bazar-Teknaf, which has the advantage of convenient terrain, minimum distance and maximum traffic potential, has been changed, reportedly, at Myanmar's request and with the approval of the BNP government.

There is no permanent friend or foe in international relationship. So the present government must leave no stone unturned to revive the original route of the highway. The Tamabil-Assam Hills detour may, however, be retained as an additional linkage in the ALTID network.

A Ahmed 75/2 Indira Road, Dhaka.

Anarchy at Mirpur 10

Sir, Absolute anarchy is let loose regarding fares of public transport modes: mini-buses, tempos, auto-rickshaws etc. Mirpur Circle 10 area seems to have fallen in to the clutches of hooligan-like imposers who conduct the transport services from Mirpur to different areas of Dhaka city.

"Direct" buses (mini) stop at every strand, charging the passengers a fare prescribed by the drivers and conductors themselves. Tempos here in Mirpur were easy mode for the poor and

the fixed income people for travelling to main part of the city, especially to Farmgate. Six months ago, the tempo-fare from Circle 10 to Farmgate was Taka 3. Now, it depends, and has become volatile, on their wish who operate this service on this route.

During the rush hours when office-goers are in a hurry to reach their destinations, the tempo operators charge Taka 5 without showing any reason as to why and when the fare (or the price of fuel) has been increased by the "real" authorities.

Interestingly enough, a host of traffic policemen, with their hand-bags grapple around the Circle, waits only for the trucks to stop. The thirst for bribes (sorry to say the word) is quite telling on their faces.

E Kabir Mirpur, Dhaka 1221

Religion

Sir, There is a column in the application forms to mention religion. In many cases, it is a must. One should write in that place — Muslim, Hindu, Christian and the like.

So, the above provision should be relaxed so that one can fill up that portion with 'human' religion, or leave it blank according to his/her wish.

Israt Malek Bepartara, Sirajganj

OPINION "Politics Must Change"

A Husnain

While agreeing with Shahed Latif (column, Jan 14) that 'Politics Must Change', it is hoped that in a subsequent column he would undertake an analysis of the state of democracy inside the two major political parties in the country.

The objectives of the sub-regional cooperation ventures now being prodded look all right on paper and theoretically, but there is a big bug in the whole academic argument: one of the partners in this council is a very big 'brother', namely, India, and as per past records since the break up of the Indian Raj, it is a bit difficult for the small neighbours to bestow the benefit of the doubt on the big neighbour.

Some analysis has been offered on the 'nationalistic' political cross-currents operating in the country, but there is little on how India should behave with the small states. Until the Ganges accord was signed with Bangladesh last December, India's foreign relations with her neighbours cannot be said to have been enviable.

There's always a tomorrow.

However, it also dawned on the Prime Minister that no amount of talks and cajoling would succeed in successfully invoking foreign investment into the country and restore confidence of the international community, unless political stability is ensured.

The British Prime Minister, during his recent visit to Bangladesh, impressed upon this point emphatically.

We have observed some recent events in mature democracies. President Bush, following defeat in general election, warmly congratulated the victor, Bill Clinton, immediately. Khaleda Zia did that to her adversary Sheikh Hasina promptly after the June 1996 election, though the latter had done just the opposite after the 1991 election.

Could one dream that, following the next parliamentary election, our two leaders also would behave similarly — the victor awarding something similar to the vanquished? We are well aware it would ever remain a dream. One had wished, if only genuine democracy were true, democracy will be firmly embedded in our land.

now become rivers of hope and opportunity in the context of the changed circumstances. It is worth mentioning that the two sides have already expressed their desire to share the waters of all the common rivers on a permanent basis. What can be more appealing and heartening to learn that the bilateral relations under the aegis of the Joint Working Group, would henceforth tackle the issues related to cross border insurgencies, Chakma refugees and Shanti Bahini, most notably the repatriation of Chakma refugees who were now languishing in different camps at Tripura?

But with partisan conflicts on the rise and tensions between the BNP and Awami League at an explosive level, can democratic governance hold, paving the way for meaningful solution of the country's problems?

People, however, feel that when this new opening in bilateral relations has started in a friendly environment, there is hardly any scope that the move will fall through and the suspicion lurking in some quarters about the motive of such advancement of relations that remained stalled for almost two decades.

People are also trying to have a look at achievements of the past regime. The party that ruled in the recent past brought the country's health, education and industrial sector to almost a crippling stage and created an economy that was rather teetering on the verge of a collapse.