

The Book Fair

With only two days to go before the Amar Ekushey February, a month-long book fair, one of the prime events associated with the great commemorative occasion, has just opened.

The delayed staging of it has been attributed to the leaderlessness at the Bangla Academy from February 5 to 17 caused by the removal of its Director General Mansur Musa.

It seems incomprehensible also as to why some fall-back arrangement did not work during the temporary absence of a DG when the urgency for this was uncompromisable.

We are being a bit caustic in our remarks for the simple fact that Ekushey book fair admitted of no indifferent handling from the very beginning owing to its enormous significance in our cultural calendar.

A greater number of organisers and stalls are involved this time around as it is bound to be with each passing year.

Getting the Sack
The sacking of Minister of State for Housing and Public Works Afsaruddin Ahmed Khan should be considered a bold decision because it has sought to establish the dictate of reason over arbitrariness.

What takes a minister to get such an instant sack is anybody's guess. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina couldn't react promptly to the insensitivity shown by one of her cabinet colleagues.

Can we also draw the government's attention to the recent spate of fire incidents, most of them indicating arson, in the various slums.

Role of Women Leaders
The Inter-Parliamentary Union conference that ended in New Delhi yesterday made an interesting observation that women in South Asia who have been able to climb the peak of state power are not found to be specially helpful in bringing more of their kind into politics.

Shame! Shame!
Sir, The death of Seema Chowdhury has once again manifested that a sizable portion of the police department is manned with ghouls willing to feast on the helpless young women under their care!

The Masked Men
Sir, Congratulations on publishing the news item 'The masked men' about the air pollution in Dhaka.

Viruses in drinking water
Sir, Faeces of man and other warm-blooded animals are the major source of pathogens that are carried in water.

We Could Easily Do without this Controversy

IN a comic display of political immaturity and frightening disregard for facts, the ruling Awami League (AL) 'observed' 15 February '96, as 'Democracy Killing Day'.

The purpose was to commemorate the observance of the 1st anniversary of the farcical, and near one party election that BNP held last February which was boycotted by the mainstream opposition.

The event is only one-year-old. Most of us remember what happened. So how can it be that two of the largest political parties in the country have such dramatically opposing views of the same event?

What we need to do is to answer it: how was democracy killed on 15 February '96?

If AL has to choose any single day to commemorate as Democracy Killing Day, how can any other day qualify more than 15th August? It was on that day the elected and Constitutional government of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was toppled — not to mention his assassination along with that of his family — and replaced by killers who brought military into power for the first time on the soil of independent Bangladesh. It was that day that democracy died.

that as long as they shout loudly and consistently even falsehood will acquire the aura of truth. Otherwise how can these people be saying things we know to be untrue.

Once Zillur Rahman made such a public statement, BNP obviously retaliated and made its own hyperbolic claims that 15 February elections instead of killing democracy actually 'strengthened it'.

The question that AL needs to answer is: how was democracy killed on 15 February '96? Yes, a farcical non-participatory election was held which was rejected by the people, and as a result of which BNP govern-

ment got the boot. Many things can be said against that election. It was an improper and vitiated process. It made a mockery of the election exercise.

marks not only the day that Founder of our State and the Supreme Leader of our Liberation War was killed, but also the day when democracy was 'killed', representative government was 'killed' and the Constitution was 'killed'.

Well many people, especially those who are opposed to AL, may say that democracy was killed the day BKSAL was introduced. But surely from AL's point of view 15th August

election that Sattar's government won and was in power. Which election did Ershad win when he decided to take the reins of government?

However hateful AL and BNP may be of each other, neither can prefer the military to each other's rule. After all they are political parties in their own rights, and they have very large following of their own.

The ruling party must ask

The Third View

by Mahfuz Anam

PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

A Time to Fight, a Time to Unite

The Sharif regime must put national integration at the very top of its priorities, just behind economic amelioration of the lot of the masses, with a special emphasis on the less-developed and deprived regions

rarely, at the Provincial level. In effect their supporters are also disenfranchised and will remain so for the foreseeable future unless a plan is devised to reform the present electoral process.

Various parties got different percentage of votes. If we were to increase the strength of the NA by 100 on the basis of Proportional Representation and divide the number of votes (19 million cast by the number of increased seats (100), the unit of votes for each new seat would be about 0.19 million (190,000 votes).

To ensure a voice from every part of Pakistan, we would give the relatively less developed Provinces greater weightage in the allocation of NA seats.

and urban representation on a meaningful basis, we would stipulate that 50 per cent of all seats on PR basis would have to be earmarked for women and urban areas on the very minimum, the upper limit being the discretion of the political party concerned.

Working on this formula let us see what happens to PML (N)'s 47 seats on PR basis. First of all there would be at least 24 allocated to females, the balance 23 seats for males.

limit being the prerogative of the party. In case of an odd division, balance of favour should go to women and urban areas.

the electorate some voice in the Parliament, thus bringing them into the mainstream of national politics and easing the frustration that drives smaller communities to seek succour elsewhere because their representation is restricted by an imperfect electoral system.

distributed among those 21 parties having less than 0.50 vote so that the first 15 more parties have at least a single seat in the Province in which have maximum votes ie. if they do not have a seat already, if they have a seat then they have to choose one of the other Provinces in which they do not have a seat.

This would ensure representation in the Parliament and integration at the same time. It will also ensure a higher turnout in the next elections as parties realise that they must get more seats on PR basis.

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AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

Systems Loss in Bureaucracy

by Alif Zabr

The foreigners classify us as a 'bottomless basket case'. It would not be fair to link this image with our gold-plated bureaucrats, one of the best in the world as far as file work is concerned

NOW it is official: the systems loss in our bureaucratic system has been officially noticed by the Cabinet, and three of the top Secretaries have been directed to submit their recommendations on how the civil service could operate faster.

recalling the days of an eccentric officer, a departmental head, who used to open his own dak (mail), and dictate the short reports to his stenographer sitting in front, before sending the mail to the diary section, for insertion in the files for distribution.

It cannot be denied that there is one deterrent in Bangladesh which is respected internationally: our bureaucratic delays in which we are past masters and current slaves. The foundation is so solid that no regime has so far been able to shake it in half a

time is available, otherwise it is the terse 'Memo' without head or tail, and the body reminds one of a sukhtkaryi fish, which is to be boiled to get the flavour. Such missives are issued by the Secretariat (the ending 'e' is optional) long after the issue has ceased to remain topical.

This file-ful anecdote is well known, but it is a strange but true and real fact (note the use of the three synonymous words, a local fashion). The official of the AGB (Accountant-General's office) looked at the pensioner/visitor at the consoling voice, I can see you are alive and standing before me, but for the file you have to submit, produce a certificate from a Class I Gazetted Officer to the effect that you are really alive.

How do we dredge bureaucracy? — Dharti Feature

To the Editor...

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