

Propitious Visit

A highly endearing flair for sincerity has been remarkably shown to Bangladesh by the Philippines President Fidel V Ramos on the penultimate day of his three-day sojourn here as part of his South Asian odyssey. His frank admission to the effect that the warmth generated by his country's recognition of Bangladesh as early as in February 1972 has not been lived up to in terms of trade, investment and tourism or through active political and cultural interactions, is evidently no run-of-the-mill pleasantries or rhetoric. Quite powerfully he has forced an introspection into us, too. Heads on both sides need coming together following the first-ever, and long overdue, visit paid by a Philippine head of state to Bangladesh so as to make up for the lost time in the mutual act of bridge-building.

The tenor seems well-set by virtue of the Ramos visit with a directional thrust given to usher in a new era of what has been rightly envisioned as "reinvigorated partnership". Of foremost concern to Dhaka and Manila now is the well-being of their 2.5 million and 3.9 million migrant workers respectively, who are on jobs overseas. Their fate is in a relative jeopardy in common with that of their numerous expatriate colleagues from the region. President Ramos' initiative for an international conference on problems of migrant workers aimed at spreading a protective umbrella over them has readily struck a responsive chord with us.

The two countries have remained small-timers in trade and transactions: Bangladesh's exports in 1995-96 were worth 9 million US dollars to the Philippines as compared with the latter's five million US dollars. The market inter-penetration being that negligible, any talk of balance of trade between the two may sound amusing at this stage. Hence the urgent need for energetic efforts from governments and private sectors of the both countries to diversify, widen, and deepen their product and trade ranges.

Joint venture industries based on complementarities and shared experiences, expertise and visions can unlock dormant possibilities for increased trade and economic flows with the added benefit of the two economies' integration with the global market. The two accords, one on infrastructure-development and the other computer-related, are looked at by us as good appetisers for far greater bilateral cooperation in the near future.

Two Decent Gestures

Politics often viewed by many as a murky business here can at times transcend into an endearing exercise — exactly the way we like it to be. At a seminar titled "Prospects and Direction of the Development of Agriculture in Bangladesh" former agriculture minister and Secretary General of BNP Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan expressed his full confidence in the incumbent minister of the same portfolio Matia Chowdhury. This, we believe, is not just a courtesy but a well-earned reward for the job being done in all sincerity, and painstakingly. The expression of confidence came in response to the food and agriculture minister's call for co-operation in implementing her government's programme for the farmers. The spirit shown by the former and the incumbent ministers is what pleases us most. By acknowledging the good performance by his successor Bhuiyan has indeed gone beyond petty politics — something of a trademark here.

On the same day the Jatiya Sangsad witnessed a barrage of heated exchanges full of disparagement over the alleged assault of his personal staff by the chief whip. When the mud-slinging showed no sign of coming to an end, Deputy Leader of the House and LGRD Minister Zillur Rahman came forward to save the day for the legislators. He reminded his colleagues in the House that such exchanges were unbecoming of the MPs and did no credit to the JS. People who have sent them to represent their grievances and aspirations and concentrate on national or international issues are hardly amused by such exchange of calumnies and display of histrionics.

The sensitivity shown in both cases is welcome and there ought to be more of it. That is how reason should prevail with both the opposition and the ruling party upholding the tradition of mutual respect and appreciation where due. We have long been deprived of the political culture of niceties. Acrimonious and disrespectful politics will lead us nowhere. What we need is constructive criticism and genuine appreciation of political opponents' view-points with no love lost between the parties involved. We are happy to note a positive trend in this direction. Let this prevail. And go from strength to strength in the interest of consolidating our democratic institutions.

Tiger in Danger

The Royal Bengal tiger has long been a threatened species. The threat to its survival has become even greater by an ever increasing demand for its skin, teeth, claws, bones and even meat — all for their medicinal values — in some European, Middle-Eastern and far eastern countries. So, poachers in collusion with a section of employees of the forest department at the Sunderbans, are killing tigers mercilessly for the lure of big money.

At the rate tigers are perishing in the Sunderbans it will take not long for their total extinction. Now the question is, how do we meet the growing challenge coming from the poachers? One immediate need is to identify the employees of the forest department who turn a blind eye or willfully become a party to the extermination of a valuable species. They must be given exemplary punishment. At the same time vigil has to be strengthened to bring an end to the movement of poachers anywhere close to the Sunderbans.

Apart from these immediate and temporary measures, a long-term plan on the conservation of tigers is called for. The tiger project initiated twice — once in 1973 and again in 1992 — seems to have been abandoned. We urge its revival and if necessary let further adjustments be made to it for meeting the challenge squarely and effectively.

Bangabandhu's Finest Hour

By Mahfuz Anam

If ever a speech united, strengthened, enthused, inspired a people, and gave courage to them to become bolder and more determined than they usually are, it was Bangabandhu's speech of 7th March 1971.

It is this writer's view that the 7th March speech was Bangabandhu's finest hour. He stood far taller than ever before and with him we too stood taller. He was always known for being a powerful speaker. But that day, 26 years ago, he outperformed himself a thousand times over, and a thousand times more empowered we felt that day. During that crucial March afternoon, and especially through the electrifying moments of the speech he stood towering above the nation, singly shouldering the burden of leading an unprepared people towards self-assertion. However bravely we may talk today about those events so long ago, at that time we really did not know how things were to unfold. Yes, we all wanted our rights, and we wanted them right away. But how they were to come? Was freedom to come through negotiations or would it require us to wage an armed struggle? And what did we understand by armed struggle? We romanticised about it, but knew nothing of it. Things were becoming increasingly obvious that to realise our legitimate demands we may have to seek independence. But how is one to start an independence movement? What would be the consequence of making a declaration for it?

Though we all talked about it, and some may have even said so in public, yet it was for our elected leader to take us through that uncharted path. The man who should be the Prime Minister of whole of Pakistan by dint of his electoral victory had to take the right step at the right time. The critical question was when would the right time strike? And this is where the speciality of the 7th March speech lies. It says everything without the elements that could be used to hold responsible for breaking up the legal Pakistan. For, by then, the country had actually broken up in all other senses. To really appreciate the magnitude of this speech one has to understand the context in which it was delivered. Awami League had fought an election and won the majority of seats of the parliament of Pakistan. Following the results, Gen Yahya had declared that Sheikh Mujib would be the Prime Minister of Pakistan. It was Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and some conniving army generals who did not want to transfer power to someone whose electoral programme was to realise the legitimate rights of the Bengali people enshrined in the now famous six points. There were lots of indications about the impending betrayal of the

verdict of the December '70 elections, yet it was not till the postponement of the session of the newly elected parliament that Bangabandhu could really give a call for an all out movement. When the session of the parliament was postponed on 1st March '71, the fatal shot to the existence of united Pakistan was fired right into its chest. And it was on the night of 25th March, when Pakistani military cracked down on the civilian population of what was still then one country, that Pakistan was killed and buried. It was in the midst of this highly charged transition period, — from the 1st to the 25th — when events were unfolding at a break-neck speed that Bangabandhu had to give this speech.

And here lies the beauty and the craftsmanship of this speech, which transforms it as a classic in political oratory.

The speech had to live up to the high expectation of the people who wanted their independence and yet there should be nothing in it that could give an outright excuse to the Pakistan army to start military action against the unarmed Bengali people. In fact, Tikka Khan's hands of killers would want nothing better than to be given a publicly announced excuse

for a genocidal action. So Bangabandhu had to say everything, and yet not give the excuse that Pakistani military was looking for. He had to stand steadfast and yet keep open the doors for negotiations. Under no circumstances could he appear to be the one responsible for the breakdown of the talks. And yet he had to take his people forward and give them the right directions, maintain the militancy, ask them to take all the necessary preparatory steps, and clear people's minds about the final goal. It was a political and intellectual challenge of the highest kind, and it could be tackled only by a speech of the type that Bangabandhu delivered that day.

Take for example the content of the speech. In it he gradually builds up the whole rationale for the movement that has been going on. He argues, cajoles, pleads, demands and finally warns, not to take lightly the demand of a people who have realised their strength through struggle. He talks of peace and yet gives clear signals that peace cannot come at the cost of capitulation. He talks of sacrifice, but not in terms of a helpless people who are suffering because they are weak, but in terms of a courageous and bold people who have knowingly taking upon a task which they know to be arduous, and for which they are ready to face any consequence. There was superb cleverness in the construction of the speech by which he said all that he needed to and yet the enemy could not hold him responsible for having said anything which was illegal.

The voice in the speech is one of its most magnificent aspect. It was so bold that the whole nation could, and in fact did, take strength from it. There was an unhesitant enunciation of everything that needed to be said. There was such appropriate modulation of voice that every word uttered seemed irreplaceable. Throughout it all the strength of the man came out and touched all those who heard him, drawing all close to him and making all trust and repose faith in him.

If ever a speech united, strengthened, enthused, inspired a people, and gave courage to them to become bolder and more determined than they usually are, it was Bangabandhu's speech of 7th March 1971. If ever one single speech became the most effective motivational weapon for a nation at war then this was it. If ever a speech of a leader became the constant companion for young freedom fighters facing an enemy known for their proficiency and ferocity, and which acted to link us all in a spellbinding string of words and sounds, then this speech was so for all of us, the freedom fighters, spread throughout the nook and corner of what was then our enslaved motherland.



7th March '71: "struggle this time is struggle for freedom..."

Bereft of Ideas

The old and tired leadership that India has is the reason why political parties cease to inspire or the appeal to the young.

The Central Hall of Parliament is a barometer to measure political climate in India. The more the pressure, the busier is the hall. It is indicative of changes. Whenever a crisis has developed in the past, the place has overflowed with MPs, some sitting in knots, some standing but all lost in animated discussions. Today the place is deserted. No leader shows up. There is an atmosphere of ennui that comes from having no occupation or interest.

The budget should have brought to the fore the contradictions that plague the ruling United Front from within or without. But it has silenced critics. It is like the worst of things and the best of things. Still political parties appear reconciled, if not happy. Whatever their rhetoric, they do not sound unsatisfied. The halting, puffing United Front has another bowl of energy. The talk of its fall is suddenly over.

Even otherwise, the political scene has come to be dominated by such elements in parties and outsiders as are interested in consumerism and showy life. They are vocal, they control the media and they are the ones who set an agenda in political parties, whatever the ideological mumbo-jumbo. And in any case, the political leadership is so old and so tired that it has lost its elan and even the will to differ.

I am reminded of Congress leaders on the eve of independence. They were so exhausted by satyagrahas and agitations that they did not want to start another movement against the British, who offered a divided India as a solution to the sub-continent's problems. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad has admitted it in his writing. But others were keen on power, a few of them sincerely motivated by the desire to serve when they were left with some years of active life.

The old and tired leadership that India has is the reason why political parties cease to inspire or the appeal to the young. It is not that the budget is an ideal one; it is the cosiness of status quo that saps their activity. It is far more comfortable to agree than to express dissent. The budget is only an example.

The Bhartiya Janata Party, the largest bloc in the Lok

Sabha, has huffed and hawed for record. Otherwise, it feels that its clothes have been stolen by Finance Minister P Chidambaram. Urban middle-class, its main stay, believes that it never had it so good. The party does not talk about the suudeshi, which has been attacked by drastic cuts in the import of foreign goods. It says the defence budget should have been higher. What a profound statement to make! Every sector of government activity would want more allocations. Congress is conspicuously quiet because Chidambaram has left Manmohan Singh miles behind on the road of economic liberalisation on which he has set out five years earlier.

preferences is still for communal forces, as Punjab has shown or for such desperate elements as have only power the end, like the Samta Party in Bihar. But the BJP will soon discover, if it has not done so far, that its kind of politics does not go down well either in the south or the east. But then if it gives up the Hindutva, which its mentor, the RSS, will never accept, it has no appeal to attract.

Advani is wrong in concluding that the BJP has benefitted from the 'secular logic' that has brought 13 regional parties together. In fact, if they had not done so, lines between communal and secular forces would not have been drawn so clearly as they are today. If the realisation

on a larger formation with the Janata Dal or, for that matter, the United Front. Former Maharashtra chief minister Sharad Pawar's name is being mentioned in this context. What is coming in the way is the Congress wishful thinking that it, being larger than any of the UF constituents, would lead the coalition. Even if it were to stop, insisting on that and wanting to join the government, several claims of Congressmen for the ministry would not be easy to reconcile. And then one does not know how the communists would react. They wear their hostility to Congress on their sleeves.

True, there are certain elements in the UF who want to jettison the communists to join hands with the Congress. Many busy-bodies have gone from one camp to another in the recent days. But they are also afraid of disturbing the appeacart. Something tells them that if they were to do so, the whole structure could collapse, making a mid-term poll inevitable. None in the Janata Dal or for that matter, in any political party wants that to happen.

Prime Minister Deve Gowda is sitting pretty, having brought a budget which has caused confusion in the ranks of opponents. He finds himself more entrenched than before February 28, the budget day. He also knows that it is well-nigh impossible to build another coalition, without rocking the boat — a situation which none of the UF constituents wants. Advani has talked of immediate dangers to the Gowda government. But Advani is the person who, a few days ago, said in an interview that the UF government would 'survive for some more time' and that there was no prospect of 'mid-term poll' in the immediate future in the emerging scenario.

The Deve Gowda government's problems are within. But for three, four ministers, the cabinet is that of passengers. Non-performance is bad enough but some of them are guilty of misperformance. They may not be bereft of ideas but their ideas, especially their actions, are harmful to the country. The Janata Dal, which invokes Jayaprakash Narayan's name, cannot be found compromising with ethics or moral standards.

Dhaka Day by Day

It's All in a Name

by Lavina Ambreen Ahmed



Are books secondary?

— Star photo

What's in a name? Apparently a lot. At least that's the impression one receives at the Ekushey Bô Mela. By intentionally choosing catchy names, the stall owners demand the visitors' attention. People grumble that the annual book fair is quite disappointing — the same set of books is available at every book stall and other booths selling terracotta and cane trinkets, posters and tapes are also pretty run-of-the-mill. One could hardly be blamed for coming to the conclusion that stall-owners show ingenuity, only when it comes to naming the stalls. This year, it seems that they let their imagination run wild, competed with one another and have come up with some really bizarre, wacky and hilarious names.

Let's begin with food stalls. 'yan thhun khai zan' might sound like a Chinese restaurant, but it actually means come and eat here in Noakhali dialect. Then take for instance the one called 'Fu dia kha', the man behind the counter of the food joint, justifies the name with this remark: 'Our food is always fresh and hot. People have to wait a while before taking a bite.' Now that makes sense, doesn't it? The most-of-the-time-empty stall 'Ruchi Nai' perhaps discourages many visitors with the name. 'Cholo jai, chame kha' is a bit confusing. 'Cholo jai, where?' Hmm, makes the skeptic wonder whether one has to rush elsewhere after trying food there! 'Khabo, khabo, duniya khabo' alas, has very little to offer.

On the other hand, names like 'Bipode achi' 'Kamon korey bolbo', 'Ki kore bol' and 'Dukkho' try to arouse public sympathy apparently without much success. 'Shesh cheshtha' and 'koshitha' — amader shesh nibedon are probably the stall owners' last attempt at making a few bucks at the Ekushey Bô Mela. By the way, don't be surprised to discover a stall

called 'Country Music' at the bô mela premises. What does it sell? Not Shania Twain or Vince Gill tapes. Just plain and simple deshi stuff. Nearby 'Design Chhoro' is decorated with a splash of colours as if to defend the name.

Contrary to the name 'Kana machhi bho bho, jake pao, take chho' doesn't seem to take an extra effort to walk by. The name of chand nama, akta cassette hobe nama? Taken from the well-known band-LRB's song: 'O chand mama akta chakri hobe mama' is a stall selling what else? Tapes obviously. But then, don't be disconcerted to discover a good number of Hindi cassettes at the Ekushey mela. 'We simply cater to popular taste' the unconcerned sales people merely shrug.

Rudra Sangshad's booth greets customers with the well-known lyrics 'Bhalo, achhi, bhalo theko, akasher...'

Interested ones can get the late poet Rudra Md Shahidullah's books and tapes. The Shine Pukur commercials have tempted some people to name their stalls 'Becche nao' and 'Chok bondho bechhe nao'. Becche nao? Fine. Unfortunately, like its seen in the ads, the choices at the mela stalls too, are quite limited.

One also gets to read cryptic names such as 'Ting Ding Dis Tik, Lajhum Vik Vik, 0=2, Bou kotha kou. And that's not all. There are plenty more — Bekardar athash din, Ai adda mart, Change Utha, Bhalobasha jeo na haryie, Bhoyoukon Nisheddaga, Bhobhai ki debo etc. etc.

So, is the use of weird offbeat names an effective publicity stunt? Do they really attract more customers? Here's what an ardent bô-mela fan has to say: The enthusiasts would visit the mela every year, no matter what. Catchy names are just one of the interesting features of our popular bô-mela.

Who Says, "What's in a Name?"

Talif Ahmed Chaudhuri (Noni)

It was possibly in the late 1960s that a peculiar practice began among some people in Bangladesh — that of adding a nickname to the tail-end of a full name. As a result, thenceforth we have been coming across some very strange names such as, Vikharul Islam Bhookha, Kabilur Rahman Kaboo, Habibur Rahman Haaba, Babur Islam Boba, Bakhtiar Hossain Bokha, Bilkis Banu Billi, Zulnat Ali Zuloom, etc.

Now, although the choice of a person's name is a sort of basic human right, yet the question perhaps may be raised as to whether or not the aforesaid practice is conformable to good tastes and a high culture. Could it not also be feared that the nickname of a person thus incorporated with his/her full name might some day in future be mistaken for a family name? Is it this consideration that recently led member of the parliament to clip off his long-nurtured nickname from the end of his full name? I congratulate him in any case. A nickname is after all a pet name — supposed to be used with affection within the family or friends circle. Why drag it out to the open?

That reminds me of an incident that took place some years ago in London. One of my friend's wife's name is Rawshan Begum. She works in a London clinic. One day, my friend took me along to see his wife at her clinic. As soon as he disclosed his intention at the reception-counter, word was intercommed inside to send over Mrs Begum quickly to the reception room as Mister Begum was waiting there for her! Although in this particular case Begum was not her nickname, a catastrophe nevertheless could not be averted and the damage was done.

Now, consider the case of our imaginary Mr Vikharul Islam Bhookha (the word Bhookha means underfed or hungry in

Bangla). At any social function in a western country, he is most likely to be introduced briefly as Mr Bhookha. His wife, if present, would be known simply as Mrs Bhookha. How would that sound to a Bangla-speaking guest at the function coming from, say, West Bengal of India? Apparently, in the above case, Mr Vikharul Islam Bhookha's nickname had been confused by his host with his family name, owing to its position at the end of his full name. We cannot, however, blame the foreigners for scandalous errors such as the one just mentioned.

Moreover, if that gentleman with a queer name were to rise to international fame in course of time, he would, in all probability, still go down in history or live in the public memory simply as Bhookha — just as Bhutto, Jinnah, Nehru or Gandhi are remembered by us by their short family names. Imagine Mr Vikharul Islam Bhookha becoming a member of parliament and, during a heated debate in the parliament, an opponent MP saying to him over the microphone: 'Honourable MP Mr Bhookha, you're talking nonsense, and you look ever so 'bhookha' (underfed) and confused. Please come to the cafeteria after the session and allow me to treat you to some nutritious food!'

Readers must have noticed that most Bangla nicknames sound more or less funny. Also, either they have funny meanings or no meanings at all. So I think the question in hand is one of a very serious nature — demanding our urgent intervention. This shameful practice or disgraceful nickname culture should be abolished from Bangladesh through voluntary efforts, of course. However, if anyone must use one's nickname along with the full name, then one may perhaps put it there under brackets, to make its appearance sensible.