

Unmask Them

We are aghast. The killing of a Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal activist by masked gunmen who sprayed bullets and hurled bombs on a protest procession in Feni has once again reminded us how thin an ice we are skating on regarding the law and order as well as the political situation of the country.

What happened in Feni on Saturday is not a stray accident stemming from a spill-over effect of political rivalry at a particular pocket but a sequel of tension escalating in a sensitive area over an awfully long period of time. The place of late has witnessed worst kind of violence that reeked both medieval barbarism and incredible stupor and passivity of a civil society due to the procrustean spirit of hostility — between ruling Awami League and opposition BNP — which is presently prevailing in the country and has, evidently, touched the student fronts of these two organisations in the most perverse manner.

In fact, Feni stands as a microcosm of the reign of intensified terror the land is being plagued with now. Think of the incident that led to Saturday's procession and the subsequent killing. A JCD leader killed with his assailants perforating him all over the body with drilling machine! Civilised imagination finds it difficult to consider what incentives however vindictive could be there for such cruelty upon an enemy.

What has been going on in Feni is an outcome of the collective failure of the local administration of the law enforcing agency as well as the local leadership irrespective of political affiliation. Criminals may forfeit any claim to political affiliation but discretion on the part of political leaders can do a lot to marginalise them. Feni stands as a burning proof in this regard. While it is too early to see the vindication in the BNP chorus about the killings being straightforward instances of terrorism sponsored by the student front of the ruling party, such a possibility cannot be ruled out either because so far the JCD leaders and activists have been the lone targets of violence there. It is the onus of the ruling party to help bring the criminals to book not only to restore credibility in the rule of law but also to remove the creeping public suspicion about these violences being out and out political in nature.

Whoever might have been behind these killings, the government needs to act in a manner so that the law enforcing agency goes about unmasking them for exemplary punishment with unquestionable neutrality.

A Good Day's Work

It came late. But it is good. From now on President Shahabuddin will be the Chancellor of all the universities in the land. Hasina's directive to this effect will now obviate the malign disfigurement of a very old convention in the subcontinent. And the highest seats of learning will now formally cease to be vulnerable to political manipulation.

This directive came while the PM spent almost a whole working day with the top-brass at the Education Ministry. She has a plan to visit all the ministries in the same manner. She has done well to go early on the programme to education — for this sector has traditionally been a very low-performing one and an accumulated welter of corruption-induced inefficiency and irresponsibility has made of it a national liability. The leakages in the SSC exams were symptomatic of the anarchic situation in education.

The Prime Minister asked the Education Minister to form a task force to go into the workings of the eight education boards and give a report in three months. This is a good thought, come late as usual but potentially very promising. The remaining decisions and suggestions made on the occasion spoke of a brisk and businesslike disposal of backlog. The best of that morning's performance of the PM was an observation by her — she has already gone into the workings of five other ministries and has found everywhere ad-hocism ruling unchallenged. This must go, she said. But how will that come about? Specially in education where unaccountability is built into the system.

Education is a doubly-diseased treasury-cum-activity corpus. Schools and colleges and universities are some kind of delivery set-ups, call it impartation or whatever. This delivery network involving a million teachers and a similar number of other employees is riddled with flaw. All of it is undependable — mostly because the delivery man — the teacher — is undependable. Then comes the question of what is to be delivered. The successive governments so long have proved too much preoccupied with this but their combined exertions have only resulted in the world's poorest education package for the child and adolescent. When and how our education ministry is going to seriously engage these problems?

Eating up the second fattest allocation in our national budget can be seen as a stupendous problem by itself. The return for this money does not match the investment. This has to be remedied. There must be a good monitoring of what's the nation is getting out of this all.

Great Hopes

We shall be failing our cricket if we do not record Bangladesh's entry into second round — or last eight — of the ICC Trophy. Yesterday's 59-victory over Malaysia proved that the earlier bull-doing of the holders UAE was no fluke. The passage to second round has come with a degree of flourish so satisfying — all 10 points out of 5 matches.

But wasn't that what was slated to happen? The only suspense at the stage was centred on the Emirates match. The rest was nothing to be reckoned by a team all set for picking up the trophy and playing in the World Cup. Denmark also moves into the second round from Bangladesh's group. That is one team less to make the headache.

It is too early to praise the performance so far — of Gordon Greenidge, the coach and of the players. But they can roundly be thanked, not any less captain Akram, for desisting from a showing they quite are adept in — sudden unaccountable collapse. Granted cricket is a game of glorious uncertainties. But, for God's sake, not at this stage. Everything must be ruthlessly efficient and predictable on the way to the plateau of equals. Once there, the uncertainty thing can be invoked for failure — with honesty. Not now, not by any means.

This is no mean achievement that our cricketing boys have engendered in us great hopes — perhaps not quite unfounded this time.

Lessons from Silver Jubilee Celebrations

Let another twenty-five years not be wasted in self or party-aggrandisement because that would be a sure recipe not only for the intensification of poverty of the people but also for degradation of the socio-political culture of the country.

Prime Minister beside the Shadhinata Stambha (statue of independence), the graceful presence of the colourful Presidents of three Afro-Asian countries whose moving speeches touched the hearts of the audience, the Prime Minister's closing speech reaffirming the ideals of the father of the nation and the brief cultural function capturing the spirit of liberation. Through all these fanfare and reminiscences, the grateful country was paying homage to about 3 million martyrs during its nine-month-long War of Independence. It was a well orchestrated grand finale of the Silver Jubilee celebrations which rejuvenated the spirit of the liberation. The government, the planners and the organisers deserve special congratulations for this colourful event.

However, two features of this celebration deserve special attention. First of all, the 11 am function at the Suhrawardy Uddyan began with recitations from the Holy Quran, the Geeta, the Tripitak and the Bible to represent religious messages of the Muslim, the Hindu, the Buddhist and the Christian populations respectively of the country. It reflected harmony among the followers of all major religious faiths in the country (which was somewhat disturbed even during the eighties) and the secularist ideal of the past and the present Awami League governments. But it may not have gone down well with

some people on various sides of the Parliament as well as with many others in the country especially with the present and the past allies of the Awami League party who introduced 'Islam as the state religion of Bangladesh' in the Constitution. One hopes that the present government can uphold its secularist ideal through thick and thin and is not going to be compromised in any way in the future.

This religious tolerance has

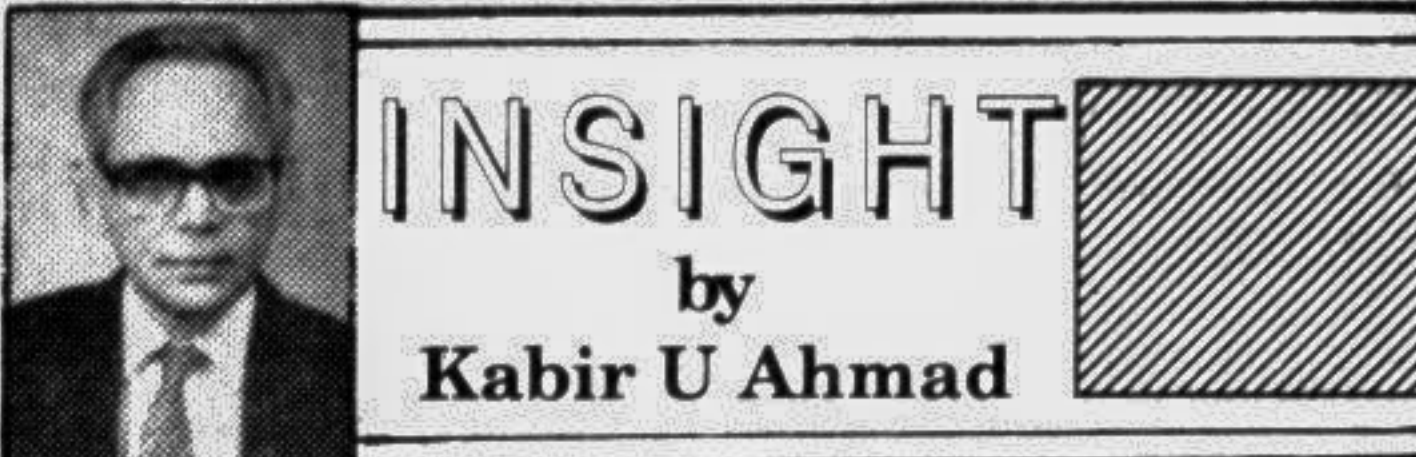
country. To dispell any misunderstanding, let it be said immediately that if someone has committed a crime like murder or maiming someone, the examples of which have littered the history of this country, then there should be no mercy or tolerance; the law of the land should deal with it. But there should be no discretionary application of the law. It should be uniformly applied to everyone irrespective of his/her status or position in the society. No one

dark nights in their nations struggle for freedom. Nelson Mandela has finally won his people's demand for dismantling the Apartheid that condemned the blacks to a subhuman existence and for restoring freedom for both blacks and whites of all shades, but Yasser Arafat is still struggling for an independent state for his people. The one common thread that binds these two personalities and their peoples with those of Bangladesh is their common sharing of sufferings in the hands of the tyrants for decades after decades and their valiant fights against those oppressors. The oppressed people are the same wherever they are, whichever language they speak and whatever their colour is. It is this bond of solidarity born out of untold human sufferings and struggle against the oppressors that united these leaders on the platform of the Silver Jubilee celebrations of Bangladesh. Let it be remembered and let this feeling of solidarity out of profound sacrifice of human lives guide the future political-economic behaviour of the leaders of this country and towards learning from others experiences.

Finally, Nelson Mandela had a hard-earned experience, or one can say, a profound lesson from his life to offer to the Bangladeshi politicians. At the end of his written speech after the President's banquet, he said that before they started negotiating with the enemy they de-

cided on three principles: (a) That from their negotiations the country must benefit first, and not the individual political parties although his own ANC was the majority party, (b) that there are good people in all political parties: black, white and Indians, and no party should be rejected out of hand and (c) that the small parties joining the government must be heard and be given due importance. What is most significant was that South Africa lost no time in using the freedom in laying the foundations for a better life and has been working with increasing effect towards that goal.

Bangladesh has lost twenty-five years in killing, murdering, abusing and misusing power, practicing corruption in every sphere of the administration, getting rich overnight, criminalising the political process and in trying to establish the hegemony of one or the other party giving little or no benefit to the people. The greatest benefit of the Silver Jubilee celebrations of Bangladesh's independence would be harvested if the political leaders reflect, draw right conclusions and try to set examples by acting accordingly from the most valuable lesson that the great hero of South Africa has left for all of us. Let the interests of the wretched and the poor people of the country be held above every selfish, group and partisan interests. Let another twenty-five years not be wasted in self or party-aggrandisement because that would be a sure recipe not only for the intensification of poverty of the people but also for degradation of the socio-political culture of the country.



INSIGHT
by
Kabir U Ahmad

some implications on the political and social behaviour as well. It would not be too far from truth, to say that most of the political troubles of the country stem from intolerance, deep-seated hatred and mistrust among the major parties. If the stated example of religious tolerance can be extended to the political behaviour as well, which rational behaviour would demand, then the country will most certainly be placed on the right political track and can move ahead in its democratic practices. That would be a great gift that the politicians could give to the

should be above the law in a democratic system.

The second most important feature that impressed one was the presence of the three Presidents: President Nelson Mandela of South Africa, President Yasser Arafat of Palestine and President Demirel of Turkey. Apart from President Demirel, the other two personalities were the embodiment of extreme human sufferings and life-long fight against tyranny and injustice of the worst kinds in modern history. Both of them have remained the beacons of light and courage for their fellow compatriots through long

Why That Nice Mr Major is Facing His Armageddon

IN the half-century since the end of World War II, Britain has seen three political somersaults: the left-turn victories of Clement Attlee in 1945 and Harold Wilson in 1964 and the right-turn triumph of Margaret Thatcher in 1979.

A fourth is in the making. Only Prime Minister John Major, whose father was an acrobat, really believes he can perform an electoral miracle and keep his Conservative government in power on 1 May. In his more contemplative moments, even he must realise he faces a thrashing.

If opinion poll predictions are to be taken at face value, Labour will return to parliament with a whacking majority of 245 seats. That is unthinkable, but even half that would mean a majority of more than 100.

In the last general election in Canada, the once-mighty Conservative Party ended up with just two seats. That will not happen in Britain, yet the Tories — who once under Thatcher had a majority of 144 — may be hard pressed to hold on to 200 seats in a House of Commons being expanded this year from 651 to 659 MPs.

In Britain, big majorities are not welcome, even to the victorious party. They can lead to arrogance in power, complacency in a government which can do almost anything it likes, and open splits within the ruling party.

However, little or no majority also produces dissension. In the past few weeks, Major has been in a minority and still his MPs have been fighting each other like ferrets in a sack. Government has been paralysed for months.

Yet the British economy is in better shape than for years and

British Prime Minister John Major has run to the end of his term and is now stumping the country trying to save the government that opinion polls predict will be decimated in the May general election. Yet the country's economy is in better shape than for years, and some people find it hard to understand why he should lose. Derek Ingram from London offers an explanation.

many Tories find it hard to understand why they are so unpopular.

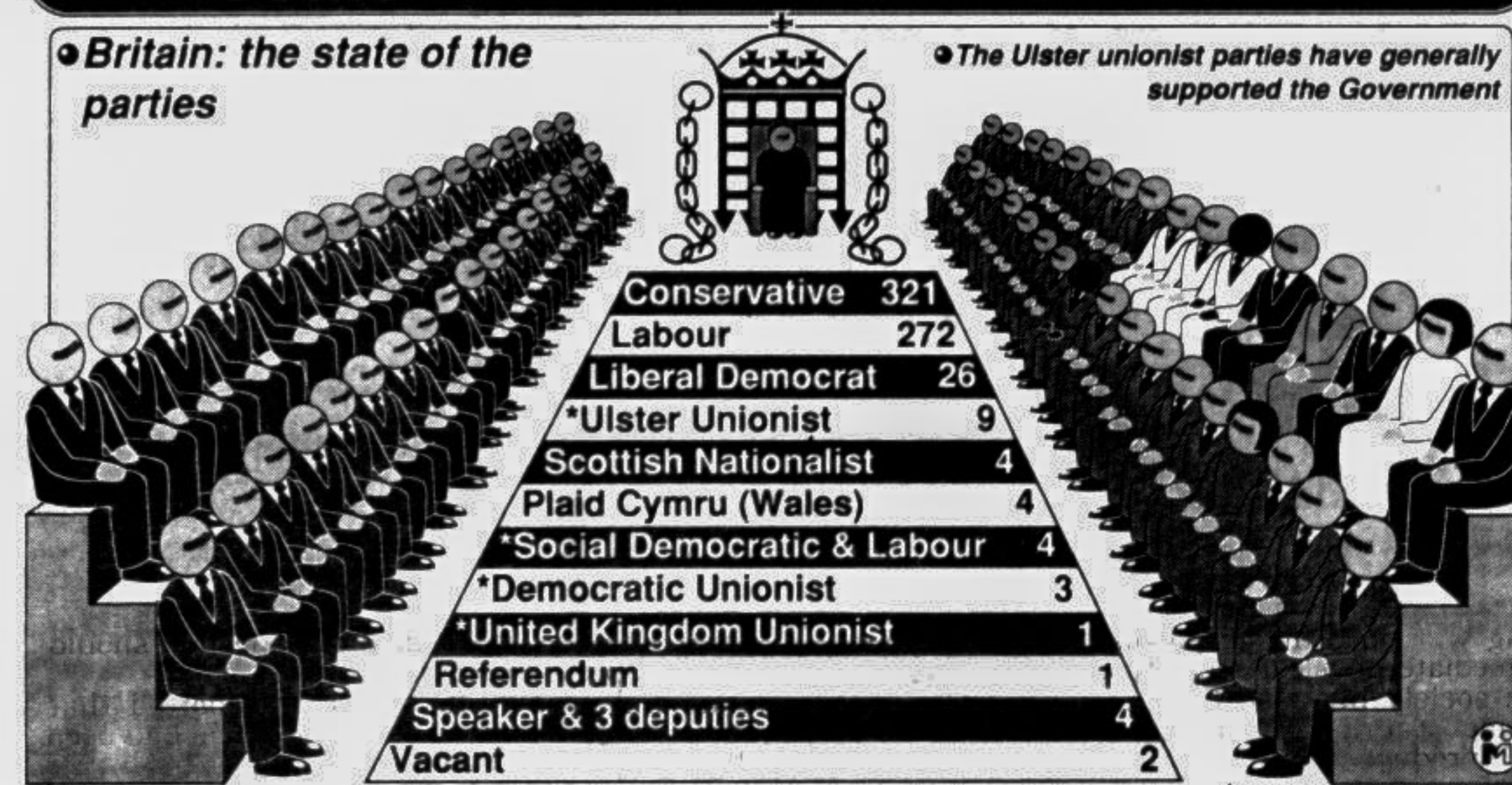
They will lose the 1997 election quite simply because, every 20 years or so, the British decide they are fed up with the old faces and because the government becomes exhausted and runs out of ideas.

There are other factors: the Major government has built up an image of scandal and sleaze with, every now and then, what some would call serious corruption.

Perhaps the relentlessly nosy tabloid newspapers are now forcing into the open what was always there. But never have there been more cases of ministers and MPs caught with their physical and political pants down.

People were genuinely shocked when they found that

Seats in Parliament at dissolution



in the so-called mother of parliaments, Conservative MPs were being paid by lobbyists to ask questions. Then there were weapons-deal scandals, the arms-for-Iraq investigation, the business affairs of Thatcher's son, Mark, and inquiries into the ethical behaviour of civil servants and politicians.

Major has managed to keep himself above these battles with remarkable political skill. He came almost from nowhere to succeed Margaret Thatcher, and was for years consistently underestimated. Even when he pulled off the election victory of 1992, he was still seen as a nice but ineffectual Prime Minister.

He retains this image as a "decent" man, although it has become clear that he is also politically wily, if not devious.

Certainly, he is tougher than anyone thought. Even after seven gruelling years, he shows little sign of wear and tear.

He has won a reputation for being at his best when he is in a corner, which is why the Tories see him as their only hope of snatching victory at the polls, as he did in 1992. Major has certainly become a great campaigner.

Much has been made of the fact that the opinion polls got it wrong last time. They forecast a hung parliament. In the end, the Tories won an overall majority of 21 (since reduced through by-elections to nil). This time Labour's opinion-poll lead is so huge that it still difficult to see how the Tories can win.

Labour leader Tony Blair is the acceptable, attractive new young face of what he has elev-

erly dubbed New Labour. It is impossible to know whether he will make a good prime minister because he has never held any office. The problem with one party holding power for so long is that when the opposition finally becomes the government it has no more with any experience of running a ministry.

None of Blair's colleagues has ever been in cabinet. Only one or two were once junior

ministers in former premier James Callaghan's day. It will be one of the main points of the Tory election campaign that Labour is not fit for office because almost no-one has had experience in government.

The argument is ridiculous. If you keep people out of government for two decades or more, how can it be otherwise?

On the face of it, the policies of Britain's two main political parties are now so close that there is not much to choose between them. On Europe, foreign policy, privatisation and even welfare, there is a closer identity of views following Labour's drift to the right under its former leader, Neil Kinnock, and then Blair. But on such issues as the devolution of Scotland and other parts of the United Kingdom, the reform of the House of Lords, and reduction of the powers of the centre, the gulf between the parties is huge.

What Labour is proposing amounts to a revolution in the way Britain is to be run. Sparks are set to fly in the weeks of campaigning ahead. Gemini News

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OPINION

Downsizing the Bureaucracy

Kazi Golam Towsif

Though lately and despondently, I came across some specific recommendations of the World Bank, made to downsize the administrative machinery of Bangladesh. The World Bank, being one of the assertive donors of Bangladesh suggested the abolition of seven government departments and re-assessment of some other departments to cut administrative spending from the revenue budget. A recent report published by the World Bank has initiated these recommendations that were put forward for consideration to the government. The World Bank has suggested to abolish the Department of Cooperatives, the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training, the Department of Printing and Stationery, the Meteorology Department, the Departments of Soil Survey, Supply, Marketing and Intelligence. The World Bank has also suggested to downsize the Registration Department to reduce budgetary expenditure.

The Bank report, published recently, alleged that the government of Bangladesh has to spend Tk 100 crore per annum for these (seven) departments which is not essential either for the state or for welfare of the people. The whole amount of such expenditure is met from the revenue budget, grossly which can be called the taxpayers' money. If the revenue expenditure does not bring any good to people at large, then why such mammoth amount is being incurred each year? one might ask. It is not the very first time that existence of any government department is being questioned. Even the electorate might raise their eyebrows to such tilt in the near future questioning the erroneous allocation of fund from the revenue budget.

To deal with the problem, the government ought to have a pragmatic, performance appraisal system for its departmental servants as well as the civil servants who run the organisation.

It is obvious that the performance appraisal system introduced in the public service by the British Raj has now become obsolete. As a result, the performances of government departments are not being appraised from a utilitarian perspective. Scope for ensuring accountability of the government has reached the rock bottom can be the concluding remark in the like state of affairs.

Time dictates we ought to change our attitude towards the public service. It is a whole new world we are living in. Global economy has reached the magnitude to coerce any of the sovereign entities to comply with its dictum, i.e. the commercialisation of economy. Bangladesh can bring adverse allegations against the World Bank, one of the chief advocates of commercialisation, for having in their credit innumerable precedents of mismanaging the economy. The mismanagement in gas sector is one of the cases done in the World Bank's prescription. But accusing any party or partner doesn't bear any significance unless we storm the brain to address our problems and reach to a sustainable solution.

Very recently, I had a talk concerning this issue with Mr David Clement, once the Under Secretary for British Treasury (Reforms in Budgeting and Expenditure Control), a financial sector reform project. Mr Clement regretted his trip to Bangladesh saying, "It would have been better if I weren't here and you (Bangladeshi national) could meet all your development needs." I was astounded to think of the incapability to address our very own problems. Can anyone tell me when we will be able to prove Mr David Clement's observations to be untrue?

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To the Editor...

"Facing the Reality, Not Political Gimics, Please"

Sir, I have gone through the article "Facing the Reality, Not Political Gimics, Please" written by Nadeem Qadir in the editorial page of your esteemed paper of 21 Jan '97. I am very saddened by his logic in the last para of his article where he indicates that we have to be subservient to India to gain empathy from our big 'elephant' neighbour.

I would just like to draw the attention of Mr Qadir to the fact that if smaller creatures do not remain alert, they have every possibility of getting trampled by the bigger counterpart. For our own sake, we must remain ever vigilant to protect our sovereignty and independence. Without giving instances, I would just like to remind him that past behaviour of India should be enough eye opener. Even Bangabandhu was cheated when India continued operating Farakka Barrage after the 1974 MoU ended.

Japan is a smaller country compared to China. Same is the case when we compare Vietnam with China. Israel is an example in the Middle-East. Are they subservient to their bigger neighbours? They are not, and they don't need to be. If we want to develop ourselves as an independent and sovereign nation, we must be proud and prudent but not subservient. People like him are doing damage to our national advancement. I can only say that a subservient nation cannot prosper and stand up.

India is our big neighbour all right, we would like to look towards her as our friend and not as a big brother. I only pray that conscious people like him do only contribute towards building a productive and mutually beneficial relationship with India.

As Bangladeshi nationals,

we should take advantage of opportunities that help us, who cares whether it hurts India or Pakistan or for that matter any other country. We are an independent and sovereign nation.

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Special Powers Act

Sir, I am deeply disturbed to learn that the Government of Bangladesh has decided not to revoke the Special Powers Act (1974). The government argues that since previous regimes found it indispensable, this law must be essential for the functioning of the business of the state. That past regimes have used a grotesque legislation to oppress, threaten, intimidate, detain, and harass men and women, under the guise of "actions necessary for reasons of state," is the most spurious ground to perpetuate repressive and evil powers that allow bureaucrats and politicians to detain innocent people, impose curfews, and use excessive force in the name of law enforcement.

Under the Special Powers Act, innocent people may be held without trial or charges for extended periods. The suggestion that such laws are necessary for national security or to combat crime is hollow because there are relevant laws of the land which provide appropriate means of dealing with such issues. In case there are deficiencies in current laws, new legislation can be introduced to address the inadequacies.

Special Powers Act has been used by the state as an instrument of abusing the political and personal opponents of the government under all previous administrations. Hence, revoking laws such as the Special Powers Act, that contravene fundamental human rights and administration of justice is the first step towards creating the

conditions for a democratic society. As a conscientious individual and civil liberation, I appeal to the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh to reverse its decision to retain this malignant law. Issues of human rights and civil liberty are extremely important to public well-being.

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Tuberculosis awareness

Sir, Tuberculosis is largely due to the facultative intracellular bacteria, Mycobacterium tuberculosis, that grows extremely slowly. M.tuberculosis infects about one-third of the world's population and kills about 3 million patients each year and so is the single most important infectious cause of death on earth. Tuberculosis is present worldwide with an extremely high prevalence in Asian countries, where 60-80 per cent of children below the age of 14 years are infected.

In many parts of the world, underprivileged population still suffer from death rates 20 times those of industrialised nations, and indeed high-incidence pockets of infection are found among the poor in the most affluent societies. The prevalence of tuberculosis increases with poor social conditions, inadequate nutrition and overcrowding. About 5,70,000 infectious cases currently exist in Bangladesh and the disease kills about 80,000 people per year here.

There is a high incidence of tuberculosis in patients infected with HIV.

Individuals with AIDS develop the disease at much higher rates than do healthy persons and are more likely to transmit M.tuberculosis to others.

Pulmonary involvement is

still the major cause of tuberculosis morbidity and mortality. A further grim aspect of tuberculosis is the emergence of highly drug-resistant strains. The great majority of cases respond to present-day chemotherapeutic measures unless the disease is very advanced, the organisms are resistant to conventional therapies, or intercurrent problems such as diabetes mellitus, AIDS or amyloidosis complicate the outlook.

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Cropping vs shopping

Sir, This is the countrywide peak cropping season for major rice cultivation undercontrolled irrigation system where tens of thousands of both shallow and deep tube-wells operate. With expansion of rural electrification most of those pumps are run by electric power. But due to acute power shortage, those pumps could not be run properly during hours of loadshedding. Except some major cities, the entire country is now in the grip of loadshedding.

Recently, in a meeting of Power Development Board held in Dhaka with all the field level high officials to find out ways and means for solving this power crisis and it was resented that when the country's irrigation pumps could not be run due to loadshedding, about 1000 mega watts power is luxuriously consumed in the Dhaka city where all the shopping malls are nicely and beautifully illuminated. All the shopping centres of the city remain open till dead of the night which is exceptional in the world. It could be stopped for the sake of running irrigation pumps. I appreciate the steps the government has initiated recently.

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