

Thank you, President

President Shahabuddin has again spoken out against campus politics and violence. Speaking as the Chancellor of the Khulna University at its first convocation he was more straight and specific and called upon the political parties to delink themselves from the student parties. Routine good words from the political parties would never solve the problem. Students should, on the other hand, come up and resist being used as pawns, he said.

We fully endorse President Shahabuddin's call and would counsel the parties to heed the wise words of the head of our state.

There was a time when student politics was on the side of democracy and economic and cultural rights. Now regrettably, it has become a weapon for party politics. This type of student politics is not acceptable. Hence student politics, as it has become now, must stop. One cannot, however, be sure that by this one fell stroke alone universities will be healed of organised crime. But there's no gain saying that without this — the sincere and foolproof evacuation of the universities and other campuses by the political parties — nothing can bring back an education-friendly atmosphere there.

Since the days of British Raj the students have served the interest of the society as a positive political force. In the emergence of Bangladesh, students played no mean part. President Shahabuddin's call is aimed at seeing that this heroic and sacrificing section of our society is not made into a bunch of lackeys of political persons bent on reducing politics into a power game for the benefit of certain persons and groups. The students served the society best — even politically — when they were not the direct agents of political parties or persons.

Will the political parties — the AL and BNP as it stands now — respond to the call positively? It is a balance of terror that both of them are miserably tied to a kind of Frankenstein they have fashioned themselves. The first to opt out of the despicable balance will perhaps take some beating. But this would stand them in good stead with a grateful nation for long and will be endlessly rewarded by the universities being free again to turn out quality manpower to lead the nation.

Great is our fortune that the chancellor of the universities has called for exactly the thing that can revive his charges and let them again live to the glory of this nation. Thank you, Mr. President.

Future of Agro-sector

Efficiency was the key word of Prime Minister's inaugural address in the national convention of agriculturists yesterday. She urged them to rise to the millennial challenge of technical advancement so that progress in this sector of umbilical significance could contribute to the nourishment of national economy.

In view of the prevailing stagnation in our agricultural production and its dwindling share in the GDP, the executive head of the state could not have sounded any different. We have to get a move on to boost our agricultural production for, as she herself observed, though over the years agriculture has not had much of a presence in the collective index of domestic product, an overwhelming population of our labour force is still overtly dependent on agriculture. But PM's observation and the subsequent call for competent human resources falls short of the proverbial challenge of belling the cat. Where is the adequate investment any realistic message for an overall amelioration calls for? Competent human resources is a very vast term and unless we are focused on it sharply, we would only be kidding ourselves in any hope for a release from the stasis.

Incentive is not important for only those who are involved in the more immediate part of agricultural production but for those who are engaged in the research and the more cerebral part of the whole process of production. The government has to think seriously and invent ways immediately to retain country's agriculturists in the face of the recent trend of their exodus to developed countries which offer opportunities for both better living and exposure to better expertise and their application. Mere reference to patriotism is unlikely to hold water against this trend of brain drain. After all, a man cannot be desisted from accepting a lucrative offer or better opportunity. This challenge has to be met with investment with a view to creating thriving agro business that will take care of the most vital components if not all ranging from production to proper incentives that will keep the agriculturists tied to their roots. The challenge is for the PM and her party whose accent have always been on agriculture.

Courage Was Her Name

After almost seven years, the main accused of the Daisy murder case was executed last Thursday. More than the rarity of instances in capital punishment—the first in five years or for that matter the hollow satisfaction over justice being done for, there never is justice in the real sense of the word, it is the incredible faculty of man to retain courage in the most dire circumstances which this girl epitomised that haunt us until today.

Daisy, a fifteen-year-old school girl was probably the most monstrous victim of unrequited romantic ambition. Unable to win her nod over his proposal for an affair, the executed chose a way to exact revenge in a manner that can probably be matched only by, no not animals but man. On January 13, 1990 when Daisy was returning after having listened to the call of nature, accomplices of the rejected Romeo poured petrol over her and the hanged culprit completed the design of live cremation by setting fire to her doused body. Panicky and afflicted unimaginably though she was, this super model of courage, this real life specimen of grace under pressure in the Heningwayan concept did not enter her house. Had she entered, she probably would have been saved. Clearly, she did not want her near and dear ones or the house to face the risk of being devoured by the flames. The tree she stood under got burnt with this great soul in a mute solidarity with sacrifice and suffering all of which is for man and by man. In this avenue of small men, we salute the great statue of you in our mind, Daisy.

Share Market Scam: Thumping the Thugs

A free market economy is not all that free. It has to bow to the existing laws of the land and abide by the principles set in the market. A market should be a place where people have scope to build fortunes, not deal in people's fortunes.

An enquiry committee, constituted by the government to probe the biggest-ever share market scam in the country, at last landed with few shivery conclusions. The committee, headed by the Vice-Chancellor of Jahangirnagar University, found 42 persons and 15 listed companies and brokerage firms involved in the manipulation of share prices through 'fraudulent' means — during the bull run last year. The committee brought specific allegations against 12 listed companies — and clearly pinpointed the areas of sins and solutions. However, in the sequel, warrants for arrest were issued to 39 and police hunt began.

Just to recall, the share market index last year bulged to an inexplicable height defying all the norms of businesses and markets. Millions of people — mostly low-paid employees, students and low-income earners from urban and rural areas — thronged the DSE to add further fuel to the flame. And all it required to happen, actually happened: the share market crashed leaving the millions bare footed. What had really happened was that the 'criminals' and the 'culprits' sold shares among themselves, raised prices and allured the public to swallow the peak prices. Thus, human lives of those innocent millions shrivelled as the benefits of skyrocketing prices were hijacked by few thugs.

The purpose of this brief note is not to chew last year's sad and sordid events. We would like to thank the committee for performing their assigned duty in a rightful way and thus releasing the nation the underlying games of manipulations

that lay under the carpet of the share market. Thanks are also due to the government, first, for having left it to an enquiry committee comprising credible persons and second, for having moved against the stock market manipulators. The general belief in our society is that the governments in Bangladesh, allegedly, do not have the guts to roundup the gangsters, especially, in the event of some of them enjoying political clout in the scheme of things. En passant, one needs to remember that the latest session of the

Since inception, Bangladesh economy had been passing through a volley of fatal flaws and wrong premises: in the public sector, for example, the management and the employees tend to believe that public sector need not have to be productive but has to serve the nation in its "own way." Lack of accountability is the dominant feature in public sector ventures and rent-seeking grip the sector in the presence of various controls and cronies. The private sector, on the other hand, had been portraying its "animal

market economy is not all that free. It has to bow to the existing laws of the land and abide by the principles set in the market. A market should be a place where people have scope to build fortunes, not deal in people's fortunes. We, therefore, would like to see that (i) the stock market is overhauled through changing rules and sacking all those having even a distant finger on the last trauma; (ii) punitive actions taken against the unscrupulous dealers either in the share market or in the bank and (iii) firm political conviction and commitment shown on establishing the rule of law in the country.

A market may fail, some expensive projects might turn up to be of no worth. That hardly goes to tarnish the image of a government. The most important parameter of a government's performance is its quick and responsible response to the maladies and dealing with the cases with no political malice. We think that the establishment of Artha Rin Adalat and the recent episodes would go a long way in restoring the confidence of investors at home and abroad and of the people. Let the rule of law be laid on for all and not be laid down for a few. Let the recent steps be means to an end rather than ends by themselves. And that needs monitoring, follow up and reporting to the public, at least to the losers.

Finally, may we request our political leaders not to allow the thugs enter into their political camps and thus take shelter under their umbrella. Please get together to wage a war against those who deal in others' fortunes, tend to ruin the economy and mortgage the nation only for their own fortune-building.



Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes

parliament passed the Artha Rin Adalat Bill, whereby the task of getting the bank loan defaulters by their neck should get much easier and time-saving. From now on, loan defaulters would stand with high probability of being declared bankrupt by the court. These two consecutive steps by the government should constitute the sounding board for the signal that a free market economy is not all that free, it should have strict regulations to contain the emergence of monopolies, manipulations and menace. Even Adam Smith, the father of the economics of "invisible hand", repeatedly, warned against the rise of monopolies and cartels that might creep in to eat into the vitals of a free market economy, and thus, negate the establishment of a playing-level field.

spirit" in a manner quite inimical to the interest of the economy, and militating against the society and its people. Mistake is characterised by some as a hunting ground for private entrepreneurs where only greed should be counted and not ethics or norms. In consequence, after two decades of attempts to buttress the sector with an arsenal of quantitative and non-quantitative incentives, the sector is yet in its infancy riding on the "infant industry argument." Of course, hats off to those small, medium and large entrepreneurs who shined up the ladder mostly with their own resources and energy caring very little for government sponsorship.

However, the recent police raids, thus, should clearly forestall the premise that a free

Shall we Learn from Mandela?

by Nilratan Halder

At least for the sake of people's trust reposed in the leadership, the politicians must develop a culture where the opponents have to be given time enough either to prove their failure or success. Otherwise, it will be a non-stop process of opposition for opposition's sake. Where will such an engaging confrontation lead us?

Friction and synthesis. Friction inimical to Bangalee nationalism and the principles that went into the making of the country, in league with international powers, took advantage of the situation and captured power. The army rule made a mockery of the spirit of independence and for years politics had been corrupted to the core, leaving hardly any scope for it to regain the prestige and respect it enjoyed. The nation was first confused and then suddenly discovered that it was helpless in the face of relentless corruptibility of society. A generation devoid of any ideals, patriotism and dedication was created. Educational institutions started churning out mastans and thugs in an increasing number. No wonder, we are heir to political intolerance and aberration. Today muscle and fire powers rule the social roost. Social justice has been seriously compromised, thanks to the proliferation of gangsterism that has taken various forms.

Society on its part has expressed vociferous objection to the infiltration of gangsterism culture but the influence of political corruptibility is so pervasive that the staying power of our society is giving in to decay. It is exactly for this reason that a refined and courteous culture in politics has not yet developed here.

Issue-based politics is absent and the political languages and practices are laden with crudity, absurdity, obscurantism and communalism. No political party should mislead people, taking advantage of their ignorance and simplicity. Some parties wedded to religious fun-

damentalism cannot be prevented from doing this. That is granted. But what about the Bangladesh Nationalist Party — the largest opposition in the country's history of parliamentary democracy and once a ruling party?

It had once the opportunity to put the record straight. That would have given the party an image of unrivalled sincerity and truthfulness to history. It cared for none of it, nor does it now. So it has embarked on a medieval campaign of sort against India and all the forward-looking programmes of the government. Once a prime minister and now leader of the opposition, Khaleda Zia is out to sell an idea that Bangladesh has been sold to India. We do not know if any politician of any standing anywhere in the world could utter such irresponsible words. If people — even a fraction of them — buy this, we are sure to be in trouble.

And look at the ruling party's reaction to this. It has, without understanding the underlying psychology of the BNP politics, gone on the offensive to counter their campaign. The street demonstration, it perceives, must be met with street rallies through a show of strength. What a folly it was on the part of the Awami League to observe the fall of Khaleda Zia's government! The two large parties brought out the best in them as political entities when they fought together to dismantle the Ershadian autocracy. Now they no longer require to triumph over each other in the show of force. It has to be an absorbing and gripping exercise of ideas and policy concepts where one can beat the other by the sheer power of intellectual arguments

and merit. For the ruling party, the task would be dual. Without dragging it into the controversial position, it can siglemindedly go for implementation of the policies and programmes proving beneficial for the nation. At the same time, it needs to woo the opposition to a point where its programmes are not affected and at the same time an image of a semblance of national unity is projected. When national reconciliation appears to be a distant proposition, at least there has to be an understanding between and among the parties for a working formula for governance. The political parties have no right to cheat people over and over again. At least for the sake of people's trust reposed in the leadership, the politicians must develop a culture where the opponents have to be given time enough either to prove their failure or success. Otherwise, it will be a non-stop process of opposition for opposition's sake. Where will such an engaging confrontation lead us? Please question yourselves.

If we lack Mandela's vision, that is none of our fault. But he has enlightened us on an issue that is immensely significant for us. Ours is a divided nation. Mandela, despite his short stay here, could spot the weakness we suffer from. A South African-type of national reconciliation we may not have achieved but we will surely be clever enough to have our version of a political relationship based on progressive thoughts so that the nation is not left to languish in the back yard while the international community goes far ahead beyond a striking distance.

To the Editor...

Democracy in Bangladesh

Sir, I was associated with politics as a student under the banner of Muslim League in 1944 when I was in Class IX. I worked during British regime to gain a separate homeland for Muslims. I participated in Sylhet referendum. I was in the front line during the Language Movements. I left politics in November, 1955 when I passed my MBBS examination. Politics was in my blood but I did not like the dirty politics for which I bypassed the political parties in July 1970 when I retired from military service. Bangladesh became an independent state on 16 December, 1971. The beginning of the new government with Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury as president and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as the Prime Minister was reasonably good. A blunder was made when Bangabandhu changed the democratic system to one-party BKSAL system. Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury retired from the post of president. General MAG Osmani and Barrister Moinul Hossain resigned from BKSAL. After '75, the next regime by a General initiated a multi-party democratic system, but that government also did not practice democracy in the true sense. After assassination of then president Ziaur Rahman by another power hungry group,

the situation was tackled by acting president Justice Abdus Sattar. He was elected president and was trying to establish democratic norm in our country. He was forced to resign and the power was taken over by the then army chief.

In the present-day situation the dictatorship is not liked by the people. The General continued autocratic rules for about a decade. Vigorous movements by the political parties followed by bloodshed forced him to hand over power to a caretaker government headed Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed in December 1990. A democratic government was installed after free and fair election in 1991. People expected true democracy in the country but they failed to prove as an impartial government. They were surrounded by corrupt police, musclemen and toll collectors. It was more or less the office of that party.

The present AL government came to power after a long time. We expected a correct practice of democracy by them but within this 7/8-month rule, we found that they are also not impartial in their intention. In a real democratic system, people in service should be allowed to complete their tenure. Like former president Abdur Rahman Biswas, the vice chancellors, the Governor of Bangladesh Bank and others should have been allowed to complete their tenure. By this gesture the democratic norm

should have been encouraged and we could prove ourselves as patriots.

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note of this and take steps for removing this problem.

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"Govt Employees' Image"

Sir, We had an opportunity to read the article written by Kuldip Nayyar titled "Govt Employees' Image is Way Down" published in your paper on the 15th February. The experience of the writer is also applicable in our country. It is no doubt a fact that the standard of ICS, CSP and BCS officers are not same.

After 1971, our officers and officials have got more and more liberty. Now the officers are helpless and work in the mercy of the officials. Because, the officials have their own union and trade groups with CBA etc.

As a result, officers have nothing to do but to obey the command. But now the present government is very strong and determine to restore law and order in the country.

So, we request the Administrative Reforms Commission to suggest the government to take action for a good government service structure.

M Ali
Dhaka

Dhaka Day by Day

A Dedicated Guru and His Disciple

by Ekram Kabir



Amin at work and Abu Sayeed Talukder (inset).

Playing with clay is a passion with Abu Sayeed Talukder and Nurul Amin until it reaches the point of perfection. Surrounded by shabby and noisy Mirpur katar factories and inside a 'pottery studio,' these two men spend a long time working, almost forgetting the outside world. They give chunks of clay various shapes of earthenwares at the studio — one with his experienced hands, and the other, with his learning zeal.

Coming from a humble family of Netrakona to study at the Charukala Institute, Amin found a dedicated dominion in his Sayeed Sir and has been assisting and learning at the studio since '93. Says the BFA student: "I thank my stars that my eagerness was noticed by my Sir; I've learnt much more working under his instructions here at the studio than I did in my classroom." And Sayeed Talukder, now the departmental head of Ceramics at Charukala, found a real heir of his craft in Nurul Amin.

Educated both in Bangladesh and China, Talukder set up this studio in 1991 at his own initiative. He comes here every afternoon from his Elephant Road residence and keeps on experimenting to his and his pupil's satisfaction. "Although I have done some commercial works, most of my creations are now pure experiments; and through such making and re-making, whatever I achieve, I teach my students at the department.

Amin in this regard is more than cultivated, for he says, "I hope to be much ahead of my contemporaries, because of my

close-knit to Sayeed Sir's lexicon. Amin is a devoted artist, he has dreams of taking up 'ceramic art' as a profession. Even if Amin fails in Dhaka's rat-race, he has a plan to go to his home-village and establish a studio and work full time.

The earthenwares made at this studio are fascinating — both in terms of utility and skilled finesse. They make a lot of things for everyday use — from coffee mugs to tea sets to rice bowls to table lamps and a host of other household materials. Even an off-hand work — an ashtray for example — will impress a non-smoker. The colours Talukder uses on all the wares he moulds, are a garden of his esthetic mind.

Talukder has entrancing track-record of his creations: Bangladesh Scene, Louis Sullivan Cornice and Temple Frieze terracotta murals at the US Embassy in Dhaka; fabrication of a mural painting by Syeed Jahangir in ceramics at Janata Bank head office etc. His latest work should rank him with the frontline artists of the craft. It is the Smriti Falak commemorating the Shaheed intellectuals of '71 in front of the VC's residence at Dhaka University and was initially outlined by Rafiqun Nabi. His translation of the outline into an artistic whole — a magnum opus — was composed right in his ceramic studio in which Amin, the disciple, was of considerable help. In fact, one has to see to believe what slight of hand the duo are accomplishing while practising studio pottery.

OPINION

Going Gets Easy, but

Wasif Islam

Water: Now that the euphoria of the much extolled and much eulogised water treaty has settled down, reality seems to be preparing us for another jolt. Some newspapers reported recently that gullible Bangladeshis even took a trip to the Harding Bridge to take photographs of the promised torrents of water which was supposed to gush over to our side in April. Sorry, reports say that the water level was at its lowest level ever.

Have we been taken for a ride by our neighbours? Or was the government in on it from the beginning? Anyway, we want to see some tough negotiations by our water experts/diplomats so that our thirsty and parched northern Bengal can be satiated. Because no one likes to be taken for rides.

Education: I do not remember in recent history any leakage of SSC question papers. Can we have a true report on the findings of this unholy incident? No white(lies) papers please. Just give us the truth.

Electricity: Are we in Dhaka or are we in Calcutta of the past? Why this sudden spurt of black-outs all over the city? They call it loadshedding. I am nursing a suspicion for a while now, which I would like to share. Are we having more than our share of loadshedding just to instil in our minds the import of electricity from our neighbours? If the water treaty is any indication, we would like to say: thanks, but no thanks.

Share market: Amidst a lot of gusto the government went public on the so-called share scam. The whole thing bordered on the theatrical. 15 of our best corporate businesses have been fingered. Fledgling stockbrokers and security traders have been identified as the monsters behind the debacle in the stock market. All based on a report which at its best is very super-

ficial in its findings. Besides the VC of the Jahangirnagar University, a respectable personality indeed, need not be whiz at stocks and shares.

The report needed to be scrutinised by business experts, then the legal ramifications also needed ironing out. This reeks of immaturity.

Let us admit it, that the capital market trading is a new thing in Bangladesh. It was the government that started the ball rolling. Did they start the game first and then thought about writing the rules. This is the BIG LEAGUE, rookie players will get their fingers burnt. If sharp international stock traders saw loopholes in Dhaka's trading rules and made millions overnight, who is to blame? If our brokers are charged with 'indications of manipulations', I charge the SEC as accomplice before the fact. What control mechanisms such erratic bull runs? Did they have early warning systems installed? Why were they caught with their pants down?

The whole thing looks like a cover-up by the government, to hide their own incompetence as far as controlling the stock market is concerned. Again, have we thought of the effects in the international scene? Such coercive behaviour will only shy away foreign capital. International stock brokers will ignore the Bangladesh market much to our loss and discredit. We may already be heading for a crash due to the rash efforts of the government in handling a very delicate issue.

Every child knows that most government officials have a cut in every pie. We would like a peoples committee investigate such connivance by government officials as well in the above 'scam'.

Leaky Exams and Morals

Pre-Partition Graduate

The recent wholesale leakage of school exam papers is scandalous for the controlling and supervising authorities. Nothing surprising, as this attitude of indiscipline is the mood of the times. This defiance culture started in the 1990s with the political agitation in the streets; and repeated in 1994-95 by the Opposition. Now the present regime (the winners) is the victim of its own methods.

While a school student in British India, I used to hear stories about the steps taken to maintain secrecy of the exam question papers — the questions were speculated to be printed on the high seas in the kala pani area near the Andaman Islands; and the whereabouts of

the cruising ship was kept a secret (there were no helicopters in those days).

We Bengalees are open-hearted — we cannot keep a secret, including the signs of hatred and animosity. We are so open that we like to conduct politics in the open streets and not inside the Parliament. We like changes; with one contradiction: we do not change the bad leaders quickly enough. Our constancy is our inconstancy, or vice versa, take your choice!

Why take written exams, when there is no moral difference between the teacher and the pupil, philosophically speaking?