

Indictment Nonpareil

President Shahabuddin on Thursday brought forth the truth of the national situation in a manner unmatched by even the best of professional watchers of our politics and society.

Yes, political parties do adopt means, matter fair or foul, to gain control of the state machinery. And they do use students, industrial work force and even religion to achieve their ends.

Being only a nominal figurehead who better not be involved even in the affairs of the armed forces, constitutionally his own preserve, as President Biswas was so foolish to do, it is a most unlikely mantle that President Shahabuddin wears when he feels pushed to it by the unsavoury realities of our collective life.

The President has spoken. Now it is first the political parties who should respond. Before they decide to try to heal themselves of powerlust, they must take care to see their defaulting stalwarts to pay the banks their due.

Soon enough using students and workers and religion for narrow party gains would all become counter-productive. These would boomerang on the users. Politicians would need a perceptive mind to read the signal.

Our Cricket

Predictably Bangladesh have not created a stir by stealing a march over the other participants in the sixth Asia Cup. Not that we really expected them to do so.

In fact, we considered the two hundred plus score against a tough and seasoned Pakistan side as a fairly commendable sign of progress. In a well made half century Athar showed how well are we informed of the virtues of a still head, sure footwork and a straight bat.

The demonstrational ability of Akram's boys had been on the course of gradual decline since then. Agreed, some of the players including as vital a member as the wicketkeeper were injured. But then how did that account for the catches, some of them being pretty much regulation ones by the one-day standard, grassed against Sri Lanka and India?

Let's not kid ourselves. We still have to go a long way in getting a few things right which will come with no amount of experience and exposure. One area as the national coach has reportedly marked out is commitment.

Rotting Pineapples

Pineapples are selling dirt cheap in the south eastern part of the country. But there is hardly anything to cheer about this spill-over-supply reality of the fruits of ananas comosus plant.

Every year, a huge amount of agricultural produce like pineapple literally rot due to either poor transportal or preservation facilities. As it is in this case where the hardy tribals of Bandarban who have been contributing significantly and quietly to the production of this highly savoury and luscious source of vitamin C, are reportedly left with the sad reality of selling two to three pineapples for Taka one only.

Given the kind of importance the present government attaches to agriculture, it will not be too much to expect that something will be done soon to ensure that the tale of rotting pineapples, for that matter all produces, will not be repeated.

HD: While There is Way There Seems to be No Will

The old adage 'where there is a will, there is a way' does not appear to hold for South Asia... It appears that we have ways to mop up extra bucks to propel Human Development but, unfortunately, these does not seem to persist a political will at all.

AVAILABLE indicators on Human Development (HD) succinctly show that, by all standards, South Asia continues to slip behind all other regions in its race for the acceleration of HD.

Why is South Asia languishing as a laggard in poverty and deprivation? How can the pace of HD in this region be accelerated? Vivid answers to these questions are given by Dr Mahbubul Huq — an eminent economist of Pakistan and the architect of Human Development Reports of the UN — in his most recent Publication: Human Development in South Asia 1997 (UPL published a Bangla version of the Report).

In particular, it is feasible to provide universal primary education, basic health care to all, safe drinking water for the entire population, adequate nutrition for all malnourished children and family planning services for atleast 80 per cent of the married couples.

First, provisions for universal primary education will have to be made for a total of 126 million children (74 million out of school in 1995 plus 52 million to join the stream during 1995-2010). The total cost estimated on this count is \$37 billion or roughly \$2.5 billion a year.

malnourishment — of 87 million children in 1995 estimate — require less than one billion dollars and finally, doubling the rate of contraceptive prevalence rate during 1995-2010 would cost \$24 billion or \$1.6 billion a year.

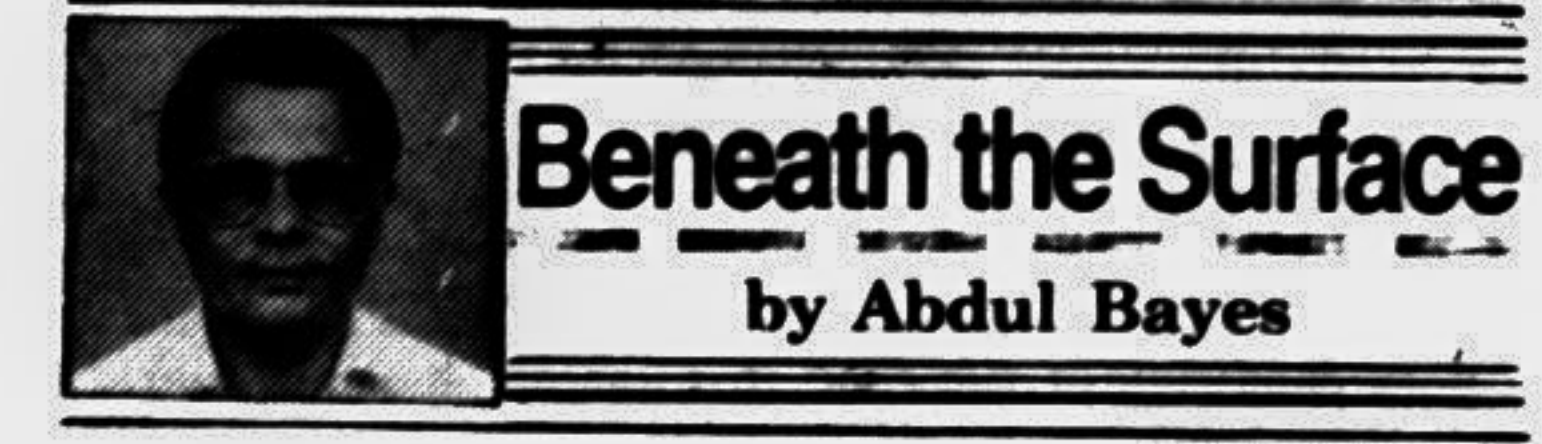
Thus, fulfilment of the targets in the package as a whole would demand a total of \$129 billion or \$8.6 billion a year during 1995-2010. On the as-

He fingered at six possible areas which could help generate enough resources for the purpose. The approach should be twofold: releasing resources by refixing priorities is current spendings and creating additional resources through judicious uses of fiscal and monetary policies.

First, a slash in defence budgets of respective countries could release a substantial

same time, enhance allocations on social action programmes.

Third, a fair amount of resources could also spring from a better management of existing development projects. For example, 10-30 per cent of the development budgets are alleged to disappear in the name of commissions and kickbacks in SAARC countries. There is no doubt that a much tighter management of development budgets is needed and that such improved management can release substantial resources for additional social spending.



Beneath the Surface by Abdul Bayes

amount of resources. To be exact, if the countries concerned agree to freeze military spending at the 1996 level in real terms, the fetched 'peace dividend' would be around \$80 billion during 1995-2010. Agreements on a 2 per cent cut per year should release \$100 billion and a 5 per cent, \$125 billion.

The moot question is: where to pull \$129 billion from? Dr. Mahbubul Huq candidly opines that what South Asia lacks is not financial resources but political commitment that would yearn such a package to meet

amount of resources. To be exact, if the countries concerned agree to freeze military spending at the 1996 level in real terms, the fetched 'peace dividend' would be around \$80 billion during 1995-2010. Agreements on a 2 per cent cut per year should release \$100 billion and a 5 per cent, \$125 billion.

Divisive Forces on the Rise Again?

by Md Asadullah Khan

When Bangladesh came into being in 1971, the new nationhood was predicated on the assumption that the country's myriad communities would be actively involved in the developmental activities. But to-day, we as a nation seem to have appointments with catastrophes only... The reverberation from incidents of terrorism, extortionism, rape and killing have rung loudly all around and even overseas.

NOTICEABLY, the country is sliding into a morass of crime and administrative breakdown vis-a-vis growing human misery. True, the government's damage control units are out on the job, but it is difficult to mask the truth: crime rate is spiralling up; population growth is still going unchecked in rural areas; much less than the projected percentage of population are literate, especially among female population — one out of every 10 girls attend school.

The rural surroundings that could once take pride as being peaceful and tranquil zone now appears to be heading towards a chaos. Politics has since not gone beyond the narrow limits of petty self-interest and extremist lines even in the district and upazila level places. The recent incidence of bringing down the national flag at Tala Mahila College in Satkhira on the Jamaat and BNP sponsored hartal day on 15th July is a chilling reminder of the extreme party line activities dividing the country most ominously. It is time the ruling party recognised the dangers of letting the extremist political groups take control of things and ride roughshod over the principle of sacrifice and the spirit of liberation war.

can be stopped from spreading into the nooks and corners of the country. In recent times, in some parts of the country meetings and processions are punctuated with such slogans as 'we'll become Taleban, Bangla will be Afghan.' Nothing could be more ominous than to take the country to the route to extremist lines. Only those countries and people who had something to gain (I) from such overtures encouraged it. It is time that danger from such intolerance is realised and our energy, resources, pragmatism and wisdom are channelled to much-needed developmental programmes. Only then can the nation that needs to have something in common hope to usher in peace and prosperity.

People in the country have been shocked to learn that President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed, the most non-controversial personality, who was invited to inaugurate the forty-year long holy Miladunnabi programme organised by the Islamic Foundation at the Baitul Mukarram premises had to abandon it in the midst of an awkward and disruptive situation created by some motivated elements acting in the garb of religious activists. No body can deny that through this indecent postures, the head of the state whose integrity and neutrality is above and beyond was humiliated beyond measure.

People, however, have not failed to notice that a storm had been brewing in the country not only on the party lines but also on other fronts. It sends chills up anybody's spine to think

that there goes a conspiracy to split the country and bring the divisive forces to the fore. But this cannot anything has got to stop. It should be brought to those self-centred politicians and zealots that this is not only undermining the Government but also the state and this is very adversely affecting foreign investment vis-a-vis national development. The surge of religion-based politics has only parallel with the situation in the Middle Ages. People also think that, apparently, the administration has flip-flopped on major policy decisions allowing the divisive forces to gain ground. History teaches that discarding reason and critical thinking in favour of fanaticism, and extremist lines, leads only to misery. Meanwhile the dream of lifting the country's backward economy by the present ruling party seems to have been battered by continued agitation, protests and also hartals. The anti-development protesters, if they have not been able to wreck it, but they have inflicted grievous damage. The value of Taka continues to plunge and foreign confidence is dwindling.

Reports carried by the media reveal that on 15th July police recovered four powerful 'chocolate' bombs from the possession of four students activists, all of them madrasah students belonging to an extremist political group in Chittagong who were inciting people to observe hartal on 15th July last. Police also recovered some cocktails from another group of student activists (madrasah students) at

the GEC terminus in Chittagong. There is possibly nothing wrong in vindicating protests through peaceful means or even by observing hartal. But none in the country could possibly take comfort when some disillusioned groups or zealots were seen busy escalating spasm and drumming up support through appeals to violence. It is not however clear whether they got the result they intended to get or how much it would help them politically. But the great majority of population were repelled by the show of audacity and deplored in series of incidents during the week covering 16th and 18th July brought to the fore the destructive forces beneath the surface. But history has shown that militancy on one side breeds on the other. People only fear if the country is heading toward a greater commotion. The unrelenting feud and skirmishes in the campuses of Rajshahi University, Islamic University at Kushtia and Chittagong University that often lead to armed fighting taking toll of vibrant and innocent young lives are indications of the deepening fissures that have developed among different ideological groups in the society.

The Quranic principle and the teachings of the holy Prophet (SM) enjoin upon the Muslims to practise tolerance even in the face of severest provocation but now suddenly that perception of tolerance seems to have been shattered. People are wondering if those now campaigning for restora-

tion of Islamic values want people to rediscover warrior virtues that was once needed in the days of the Prophet when Islam faced great assaults and stubborn resistances by the infidels. Traumatic and frightening things are happening in the country. Reports carried by the media on 8th July last revealed a sort of medieval barbarity that took place in the Joyrampur village of Magura. A housewife (32) and her daughter who was a student of class VIII were raped in presence of the house master, being kept tied in the corner of the house. Another young girl aged about 8 was sexually abused by the father of her playmate. These are first order crimes that should have drawn the attention of the fundamentalist group who along with others, espouse to establish principles of morality, ethics and justice in the country above anything else.

Day in and day out, all these reports of abuse are now coming into the open. But why all these dastardly acts should be on the rise if we have become adherents of religious principles and virtues? Things are definitely at odds between what we preach and what we practise and the dilemma starts from there. Certain extremist political groups, these days, bears the li-

their existing fiscal and monetary policies. Especially, an extension of the direct tax net to the relatively wealthier communities is very much needed in a regime of scarce domestic resource generation. And finally, Government-NGO collaboration in South Asia could add considerable mileage in this marathon race. The government should assign some of their traditional roles to NGOs who tend to bear the brunt of being cost-effective by 25-50 per cent when compared with government performance in the delivery of social services.

Dr Mahbubul Huq firmly believes that, within the next 15 years, the South Asian countries would be able to land on a point where basic health care to all, universal primary education, safe drinking water for entire population, adequate nutrition for malnourished children and family planning services for four-fifths of married couples could easily be ensured. This would enable them to graduate from most deprived and to relatively less deprived stage to gainful development stage. The old adage that 'where there is a will, there is a way' does not appear to hold for South Asia. Rather 'where there is a way, there is no will' seems to be the current situation. It appears that we have ways to mop up extra bucks to propel HD but, unfortunately, these does not seem to persist a political will at all. The recent increased budgetary allocations for defence, especially in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh quite in neglect of the suggestions put forth in the report by Dr Huq, tends to kill that 'will'.

on's share of the blame for the calamity that has overtaken the country. Some self-centred fanatic political groups have stoked a spasm of hatred among the country's largely poor and illiterate populace to advance their political cause — tactics that have increasingly paid off. And sure enough, exploiting religious sentiments of ignorant masses often have its desired effect, at least immediate. When Bangladesh came into being in 1971, the new nationhood was predicated on the assumption that the country's myriad communities would be actively involved in the developmental activities. But to-day, we as a nation seem to have appointments with catastrophes only... The reverberation from incidents of terrorism, extortionism, rape and killing have rung loudly all around and even overseas. As the economy of the country teters, as extremists agitate, as bombs blasts and pistol shots tear at the social fabric, and as civil authority stands helpless, rescue by one or a few committed leaders may be asking for too much. The Prime Minister as well as a vast multitude of people in the country suffered a lot through the loss of their near and dear ones, hearth and home during the liberation war of the country. People can't bear to see that this country that attained its independent status through so much of blood letting will go into shreds again through machinations of some self-styled, self-centred ideologues. The writer is Controller of Examinations, BUET

OPINION Intellectuals, Politics and Religion

Abul M Ahmed

The opposition leadership has criticised a section of our intellectuals or thinkers for set polarisation, and a DS editorial has expressed concern over the mindset of the politicians representing the major opposition party.

This game has been going on, and will continue for generations. The playing field will not cease to exist in the future, only the mores and the players will change from time to time; as we have seen since the 1940s.

Political evolution is a continuous process, and each generation has to make contributions to refine the political culture and update it to suit the time, within the acceptable moral and ethical limits. Therefore, it is noted that there would always be variable or changing factors in the three areas, namely, the input, the processing, and the output of political gamesmanship (Question: the intellectuals influence the politicians more, or is it the other way round?). The situation is dynamic all the time. Nothing in nature or culture is static.

Other political parties are also grooved into similar ways of thinking and react in the same manner, which are revealed in the usual mud-slinging exercises resorted to in the politics of newly emerging nations and budding world super powers, where the so-called 'democracy' has not taken root. This budding period is part of the build-up exercises to establish the correct political culture in a developing society.

What happens when the intellectuals become biased or polarised? The transparency of the intellectuals is more important and critical than the behaviour of the politicians, at any point of time, as no other group can decisively influence the trend of politics, without participating in politics.

Governance looks easy because all can imagine and have visions of the utopia. It is not difficult to draw up a checklist of objectives and goals, over which there could be a broad consensus on the basis of established principles. The differences arise over the processing of the implementation phases. Besides political polarisation amongst the intellectual, there is another extremist tendency: religious 'fundamentalism' is being attacked by the moderates with undeserved vehemence, suspected to be contaminated with political virus. What is the definition of 'normal' practice of Islamic principles in daily life? There is silence on this point at the higher levels. Silence is not golden in this case.

During a recent seminar the harmful effects of western culture via satellite and cable TV and imported videotaped programmes have been rightly pointed out by anxious guardians of homes and the society. The regime should not be shy to encourage or support day-to-day Islamic practices, to avoid misgiving in conservative circles. A devout Muslim is not necessarily a fundamentalist. Pick on whom?

It would be better if the state stand is clarified in no uncertain terms, to remove misgiving, and the polarised intellectuals may also clarify whom they mean when they launch non-political attacks on Muslim 'fundamentalists'. Religion is a matter of the heart (faith), hence the head (logic/rationality) should be applied with care, when treading sensitive areas. Why do not the intellectuals hold seminars and invite the contestants to a series of debates, for transparency and public information and clarification?

To the Editor...

Kaiser Rasheed Chowdhury

Sir, Brilliance does not necessarily mean that one has to be 1st class first in all his examinations. It is a gift from God that comes from within and the inner glow radiates on his face. In a crowd of thousands he would require no announcement. People could spot him out. His charm was irresistible — no complex (superior or inferior) — He could meet Mahmood (the king) and Ayaz (the slave) at par with equal grace. That was Kaiser Rasheed Chowdhury.

Born to serve the humanity with all his humble modesty, Kaiser Rasheed Chowdhury would never hesitate for a moment if he could render any service or help to any one in need of, irrespective of cast, creed or nationality. When I saw him in Karachi, there were more people from outside Sylhet who received favours from him in cash or kind, he was always above being parochial. He was the best of men rather prince amongst men who did good to others — in the hearts of all those who knew him he would remain immortal.

A M F Quadri Dhaka

Hartal: What for?

Sir, It is really sickening to see some sick-minded people attacking the most sensitive point of any person of faith. We all condemn the recent action of Israelis for harbouring such a sick game of attacking Muslims of the world with their sick minded dirty poster against our Prophet (SM). They are really playing with fire. I believe that the present government of Israel does not care for peace in the middle east.

Hopefully, one day the world will find a solution to this problem without going through a bloody war. I also believe 100 per cent of Bangladeshis are against naked aggression of Israel and the Zionist attack on Muslims. We all condemn it and pray to Allah for peace and winning of the truth and Islam.

But playing politics on that issue is equally criminal and disgusting. Jamaat called for a hartal in entire Bangladesh and BNP supported it to protest Israeli action against Muslims. Hartal? Against whom? How has this hartal in Bangladesh helped the Muslims and hurt the Israelis? This is really disgusting to see our politicians could think people are just so gullible that they would accept anything they say. I think people of Bangladesh should take stern stand against calling such stupid hartal on such issues.

I understand Jamaat is playing every tricks for divisive politics since their birth. What about BNP? Are they going crazy just like they went crazy before holding the election of February 15th? Being the largest opposition party in Bangladesh, we expect more responsible action from BNP. In fact it is hypocritical for the leadership of BNP to call for any hartal since they said so many things against hartal while they were in power.

If they at all had to call for hartal, they could have found a better reason. Surely, you need not try to paralyse a country that is supporting PLO and the Muslim world since its birth. We all have a difference of opinion in politics. But one thing is true that we are 100 per cent against Israeli aggression on Palestine and Muslim ummah in the world. Let's not play dirty politics on that. Muslims need to be united on this issue if we want to face Zionism at all; not destroy our own economy just

so that we can score some point in politics.

It appears that current government of Bangladesh has been doing a good job of attracting foreign investors so far and hopefully it will bring good result in near future. We just cannot afford these impeding hartal anymore.

M F Islam, Customer Support Engineer, SDSATA Corp, Richardson, Texas, USA

Gordian knot

Sir, The bureaucrats were given a hard knock by columnist CAF Dowla (DS, July 9). Looks like we also now need a Family Planning programme in the civil service. It is a strongly bonded, healthy and hungry family which eats up 15 per cent of the GNP, as the growth rate of the bureaucracy exceeds that of the national population! There is a naughty idea to break the Gordian knot: allow the civil service to sit over and debate the modernisation and slimming down exercise before the live TV camera; or, rather, anonymously before the radio microphones, to be relayed nationwide for one hour only once.

Since this suggestion would not be in public interest, there is an alternative. A secret poll may be conducted by allowing each Cadre to respond to a carefully drafted questionnaire on administrative reorganisation. The questionnaire should ensure anonymity, and it may not be drafted by the bureaucrats. This may not work!

The broadcast of the JS debates have created intense public interest in democratic mechanisms and institutions (the medium affects the message — note how the MPs have changed tactics!). It is not a bad idea to elicit the views of the

service associations before the members are commanded to abide by the approved changes, when it for these finally come. The flywheel effect is a strong deterrent.

A Zabr Dhaka

Rajuk flying high

Sir, Part of mighty 'landlord' RAJUK may also be demolished. Before RAJUK undertakes to demolish the unauthorised constructors in Dhaka (as reported in the press). Ironically, RAJUK is also the approving authority, more approachable through the back door rather than the front. Sitting in self-judgement, with the government just watching?

Three government departments have achieved notoriety for many years in three sectors — power, land and telephones — due to the usual supply and demand marketing situation. Since all the previous regimes had miserably failed to introduce transparency therein, there is only conjecture, or abatement. The latest hot story is the construction of the concrete high-rise jangle around the Gulshan lake/s by a foreign consortium — not for those living below the poverty line.

The next session of the JS should be lively, with wild charges and mild denials. Choose a career in governance or marketing? The majority might choose the latter. Gloomy omen for the political parties — there might be shortage of political workers, as in the garment industry (DS, July 11). Money drives, and bad money drives faster. The days are coming when the compound interest in politics may evaporate fast.

Abul M Ahmad Dhaka