

## A Black Day

We won't scream but perhaps we should. More than sixty persons were killed in a bus plunge in Kalihati at midday Tuesday. This is the highest toll taken of lives in any single motor transport mishap in all memory. And as buses are a rather new introduction, it is possible that this is the worst road tragedy in all history of our land. And as nowhere in the world buses seat more than 55 passengers, this could be one of the most horrible in the history of all nations. And is this nation as shocked over it as it should have been? Will anyone grieve the loss excepting those that are the slain ones' close kins? We hardly put any value on life. The overwhelming presence everywhere of violence, cruelty and killing has robbed from this society the infinitely tender and yet steered power to value life. The nation must be pulled out of this bottomless abyss. Every death must diminish every living citizen so that the nation together knows it is inaffordable.

We have been shouting continuously and for long for the authorities to please look at the roads, where a mini-revolution is taking place, and be helpful. Please, please prevent overloading and speeding and use of unfit vehicles and drivers. To this we now add as the buses and trucks must be roadworthy so also the roads must be motor-worthy. Tuesday's unfortunate bus combined all five of these don't — it was speeding on a bad road with a double overload of nearly hundred passengers and most probably both the bus and the driver were unfit — as they usually are from fatigue of overwork. And you call the tragedy an accident?

We want to make this point for the umpteenth time, this time crying in the name of those killed at Kalihati, that this and such others cannot and must not be called accidents to give, criminally, an extra leash to wilful murderers and condone deliberate killing. Hold enquiries into all such death-dealing incidents and decide for yourself if any one of them is a pure accident with no one but providence to blame. If anything is amiss, punish the culprit. And, no doubt, in all this government is acting punishably enough. Failing wholesale in carrying out any controlling and supervisory act required of them.

Our sympathies to the bereaved. We appeal to government to please heed our counsel on road mishaps and come generously forward to the help of the families that have been struck.

## Plead for Consensus

With the election to the Union Parishads scheduled to be held in December under a new enabling law, it is the much broader question of reform of the local bodies institution that comes to the fore. The AL government has been working on recommendations to introduce a four-tier local government system comprising Zilla Parishad (council), Thana Parishad, Union Parishad and Gram Parishad. Laws would need to be framed to provide for each component of the system, so that it can be operationalised as a whole.

This is not to take away the AL's credit for prioritising the issue early in the day and taking a number of steps aimed at a thorough overhaul of the local government system. In fact, we feel the AL government is geared well in terms of its political commitment, duly authenticated by the verdict of the last general election, and by way of fulfilling a constitutional requirement (articles 59, 60), to be pursuing the course of local government reform.

Even so, for the sake of ensured universal participation in the system the AL government is so keen on introducing, and more importantly, for its continuity beyond the vicissitudes of political fortunes, it is imperative that a national consensus is galvanised behind the reform agenda.

The modalities of elections to the local bodies, their powers, functions, interrelationships and equations with the bureaucrats and MPs, are matters that require to be settled with bipartisan prudence.

As the Unnayan Parishad colloquium on "local government" on Tuesday revealed, differences exist on whether there should be any focal-point in a system that needs coordination to succeed. The suggestion of indirect elections to gram parishad to save costs cannot find favour with proponents of democracy at the grass-roots.

The local government elections are held on partyless basis and that's why a consensus should be forthcoming on an issue which is non-partisan in a systemic way.

## The Message in Mess

For a country eagerly awaiting Test status Bangladesh last Tuesday showed the kind of cricket bankruptcy in their 192 run defeat against Zimbabwe for which no explanation is just and no censure is enough. 92 all out. Bangladesh's lowest ever total. And who was the terminator? Bryan Strang. A pace bowler who struggles to make it to the first eleven when Zimbabwe's most experienced and effective pace duo Eddo Brandes and Heath Streak are available. So what led to this card-house collapse against a pretty straight forward international attack? Bangladesh manager and former national skipper Gazi Ashraf Hossain has gone on record saying there was no devil in the wicket. Only there was a hint of aerial movement. And that was more than enough to have the band played for our seasoned 'superstars'.

Following hot on the heels of a truly inscrutable demolition at the hands of hosts Kenya on the first day of the tournament, this latest defeat comes to blare out that the days of ICC triumph hang-over are well and truly over. The present crop of cricketers have exhausted their potential. The nation is thankful to the ICC success. But that was yesterday. Tomorrow is a new day. The bitter truth is Bangladesh will have to face the music in international cricket for quite some time. So, why not use the interregnum in planning properly to ensure that the pipeline of talented youngsters never dries up. We have nothing at stake for the 1999 World Cup. So now is the time to start all anew. Our West Indian coach Gordon Greenidge is absolutely right in his observation that a wholesale change is the order of the day. Besides, as the great Sir Garfield Sobers has recently remarked it is always wiser to try a new combination when you are in a rut.

THIS year India and Pakistan have been celebrating their fiftieth year of independence coinciding of course with the departure of the British from the subcontinent in August 1947. Newspapers and electronic media of these two countries and of Britain have been preoccupied with this topic and the occasion has been marked by speeches, discussions and seminars galore. The government authorities of these three countries have attached considerable importance to the occasion.

The present state of Indo-Pakistan bilateral relations leaves much to be desired. Yet some enthusiasts even suggested that Prime Minister Gujral and Nawaz Sharif lead the joint celebrations of this occasion on August 14 and 15 in Karachi and New Delhi respectively. Karachi, because Prime Minister Gujral, a young man then, was there in August 1947, where his father was a member of the Pakistan Constituent Assembly. Born in 1949, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif is a post 'midnight' child and the much older Gujral and he span two generations of the subcontinent, representing as it were, experience of the past and hope for the future. The idea of the joint commemoration did not materialize but Queen Elizabeth's visit to India and Pakistan underlines the historicity of the British withdrawal from the subcontinent.

When the British quit India in 1947, the Labour Party in power there. The party which can justifiably claim some credit for handing over power in the subcontinent fifty years ago, is back on the saddle after a good seventeen years in the wilderness. It has understandably scored some political mileage out of the occasion, but then there has been marked enthusiasm in celebrating the golden jubilee in non-governmental quarters as well.

Today the business communities in both India and Pakistan sincerely desire good relations, for they are aware of the consequential benefits. They would like to see Britain act as a catalyst in this. Then there are the large communities of Indo-Pakistan expatriates who are conscious of the economic benefits that may flow out of friendship and unity. The intelligentsia of both the countries have an attachment for things British and strongly feel that both these countries, atomic powers now, have developed a scientific and technological base with considerable absorption capacity. But for the Kashmir issue, India and Pakistan could indeed have presented themselves to the outside world as reasonably fast-developing like-minded economic and cultural entities, representing

ing, like China, a market of a billion people.

Recently at a seminar entitled "India and Pakistan at fifty", held in Wilton Park in southern England I met a large number of Indo-Pakistani participants, attending it, as I did, in their personal capacity. Bhabani Sengupta, the renowned Indian columnist and political thinker, A M Ahmed, the recently retired Chief Justice of India, BJP leader Jaswant Singh, retired Indian Foreign Secretary Salman Haider, Pakistani ex-Ministers Rafi Raza and Javed Jabbar, Pakistani Muslim League Senator Akram Zaki, retired Foreign Secretary Niaz Naik, eminent Pakistani journalist Malika Lodhi and many others were there. Sir Nicholas Fenn and Sir Christopher Macrae, who till recently served as British High Commissioners to New Delhi and Islamabad respectively, initiated the discussions in the seminar which was also attended by luminaries of Indo-Pakistan business communities, both national and expatriate. The discussions, which were of the record, were free, frank and forward looking. There was of course difference of opinion, at times even sharp, but this did not affect the constructive outlook, the spirit of cordiality and bonhomie that pervaded throughout our five-day discussions in very pleasant surroundings.

Here one cannot help asking as to why we in Bangladesh have opted out of commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the end of British colonial rule in the Subcontinent. Admittedly we do not accept August 14 as our independence day and independence indeed came to us a quarter of a century later. But then, in a sense, neither the Indian National Congress nor the Muslim League, got in 1947, the independence they wanted. To India, independence came to India on August 15, 1947, not "wholly or in full measure" but "substantially", and Jinnah's Pakistan was "moth-eaten" and "truncated". In the political chess game of the time, the Muslim League demanded the partition of India and when the chips were down the Congress went for the partition of two major provinces, viz. Bengal and the Punjab. Subsequently the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha firmly rejected the proposal for an independent United Bengal. Bangladesh was achieved by our taking, as it were, the Pakistan route. What would have otherwise happened

## SOME RANDOM THOUGHTS

# The Subcontinent, Britain and the Commonwealth Conference

*The people of the area that now constitutes Bangladesh took a leading role in anti-colonial struggles. Thousands suffered hardships and imprisonment and many sacrificed their lives. Belonging as they did to different religions and political parties and persuasions, they were the forerunners of the ultimate struggle that brought us independence. We owed it to them as a nation to recognise their contribution and to pay homage to their memory.*

to Bengali nationalism can now only be a matter of conjecture and need not occupy our mind. The point is that when the British left, no party got what it wanted. One therefore finds it puzzling as to why when the other two countries commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the event, Bangladesh has been reluctant to join.

The people of the area that now constitutes Bangladesh took a leading role in anti-

Bangladesh Liberation Movement. That would be taking a myopic view of history. We were indeed obliged to undergo another political change culminating in our liberation when Bangladesh metamorphosed into its present political form. But this is not to say that 1947 was not a milestone in Bangladesh's past. In fact the contrary is true.

It was from Bengal that the English language and literature

raising and nourishment of secular values among Bangladeshis.

There is another reason why there should be a resurgence of interest in Bangladesh in both the British withdrawal in 1947, and in the association with the English culture. Once Bangladesh was achieved it became the only unilingual State in the subcontinent. Unlike India and Pakistan, English was not required as a conduit among national groups. Today Bengali is the established language here and rightly so — because national genius cannot find fruition in a foreign language. Yet the status of Bengali having been restored, there is now a return to the idea of the importance of English. In an interlinked global economy, in these days of emphasis on international trade and investment, English is increasingly seen as a bridge to the outside world. Hence there is a renewed interest in English and consequently a renewed interest in English historical linkages. Our reluctance to join Britain, India and Pakistan in commemorating 1947 seems to run contrary to this perception.

In fact joining the Commonwealth, in recognition of our ties with Britain, was one for the first foreign policy decisions of Sheikh Mujib. On August 2, 1973 which addressing the Commonwealth Summit in Ottawa, which incidentally was the first international meet he attended as the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Bangabandhu said, "The importance that Bangladesh attached to the Commonwealth was evident from the fact that after liberation, one of its earliest acts was to apply to become a member".

One was happy to learn that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina would be attending the forthcoming Edinburgh Commonwealth Summit. We did not participate in the last Commonwealth Summit held in Auckland, New Zealand in 1995 at the Prime Ministerial level and Sheikh Hasina's participation this time will also underscore our continued interest in that organization. What with the question of expansion of its membership, the organization is passing through a crucial stage and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's input in discussion on this question may be relevant. This Summit is likely to pay particular attention to Trade, Investment and Development and the Prime Minister will get an opportunity to exchange views with her counterparts in the light of her government's thinking on the matter. It is good that Finance Minister Kibria has been invited to address a presumpt meeting in London organized by the Commonwealth Business Forum. The Commonwealth Heads of Government, in recent times, have been paying a particular attention to the NGO movement in member countries. Prime Minister may wish to tell her Commonwealth colleagues about the supportive role that NGOs in Bangladesh have been playing in the government's development efforts in various fields. Bangladesh has been taking a leading role in the fields of microcredit, non-formal primary education, adult education and female reproductive health. Prime Minister might wish to share the experience of the Government in these crucial fields of Human Resources Development.

There is a general perception that the democratic post-1991 Bangladesh has so far failed to play the role expected of it in the Commonwealth. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's participation in the forthcoming Commonwealth Summit will hopefully remove that.

## Frankly Speaking...

by Faruq Choudhury

colonial struggles. Thousands suffered hardships and imprisonment and many sacrificed their lives. Belonging as they did to different religions and political parties and persuasions, they were the forerunners of the ultimate struggle that brought us independence. We owed it to them as a nation to recognise their contribution and to pay homage to their memory. This would also have been a reminder to our present generation of the sacrifices of their forefathers. Also Bangladesh's participation in the commemoration of this occasion would have made our substantial expatriate community feel an oneness with the Indo-Pakistani expatriate communities, would have brought them closer to each other in their pursuits abroad and in the long run it is Bangladesh that stood to gain by this. Instead, we disavowed the facts of history, distanced ourselves from the mainstream of the subcontinent and deliberately, it would seem, deprived the succeeding generations of a legacy of which they should have been proud.

The British came into contact with India mainly through Bengal. The battle of Plassey is a painful yet an integral part of our history and of our ethos. And when the time came to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the undoing of the battle of Plassey through decades of struggle, in which we had no part, we curiously abstained.

There may have been a mistaken notion in some in this country that observing the British withdrawal would diminish the importance of the

spread across India. In the subcontinent we had had the longest association with the British and the positive aspects of our association with them is still keenly felt. Our political institutions resemble the Westminster model, although it may not always appear to be so when our "Jatiyo Sanghad" is in session. In fact the attempt to introduce a different model led to mass upsurges and there was a consensus for a return to the parliamentary system. The use of and exposure to English language and literature have considerably strengthened and enriched our own literature. The mental and intellectual affinity with the British ethos has helped create liberal thinking among our intelligentsia and provided us with conduits and bridges to the outside world. These ideas have helped the

## OPINION

## Is Moghbazar an Appropriate Site for a Cricket Stadium?

Dr Abdul Matin

At a public reception accorded to the Bangladesh cricket team at Manik Mia Avenue in Dhaka, following their victory at the ICC Trophy final, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina announced amid applause that a stadium would be built at Moghbazar.

It was a rare occasion for the government and the main opposition parties to agree on a single issue: a cricket stadium at Moghbazar. The reasons for this consensus is understandable. Cricket has become a very popular game in Bangladesh and our national cricket team rightly deserves an exclusive cricket stadium, particularly after their historic victory in Kuala Lumpur. The demand for this stadium became so popular that the two major political parties could not afford to differ with each other on this point.

I would like to make it clear at this point that I have nothing to say against cricket. In fact, I like cricket not just because it is an exciting game, but because it is a clean and well-disciplined sport whose main theme is fairness which is embodied in an English expression, "This is not fair," meaning that this is not fair. (I wish we and our national political leaders, in particular, could follow the rules of this game in our/their daily life as much as we/they love this game). Since I like cricket, I can't object to the idea of an exclusive cricket

stadium. My only objection is, however, against the selection of the site at Moghbazar.

First of all, the proposed site consists of a natural ditch which has to be filled up to build this stadium. Such natural ditches should be a matter of principle, never be filled up. These should, instead, be developed as lakes to help recharge the underground water reservoirs which are being depleted due to excessive pumping by numerous deep tubewells in Dhaka city. If the underground water reservoirs are not recharged annually, there is every possibility that Dhaka will start sinking like Bangkok and Mexico. In addition, according to some experts, the probability of contamination of the underground water with arsenic cannot be ruled out. Both these effects may have dangerous consequences for the residents of Dhaka. On the other hand, the development of these ditches and other water bodies into beautiful lakes, with gardens and walkways around, will not only beautify the city, but will also provide facilities for recreation for the residents if properly maintained and managed. A few months ago, we read a media report about a decision by the DCC not to fill up any water body in Dhaka, but to develop new ones in order to recharge the underground water reservoirs.

Surprisingly, the announcement by the PM to build the cricket stadium at Moghbazar was made soon after the DCC decision was published and no reaction by the DCC to the PM's announcement was made public, perhaps for good reasons! Loud protests came from various quarters when a plan to fill up the Gulshan Lake for construction of commercial and apartment buildings was announced, but such quarters maintained a conspicuous silence on the proposed construction of the stadium at Moghbazar.

Secondly, Moghbazar is a congested area with a serious problem of traffic movement. The traffic through Tongi Diversion Road (can't DCC give a better name for this road?) is likely to increase dramatically after the completion of the Ja-

muna Bridge in 1998. I wonder if this road or the nearby Sonargaon Crossing can take any additional burden of traffic if a cricket stadium is built in the area. With our sad experience of movement of traffic around the Dhaka Stadium, should we repeat our mistake by building another stadium at Moghbazar, which already suffers from a serious traffic problem?

Last but not least, all surface water bodies serve as reservoirs for storm water during the rainy seasons. Once the water bodies are filled up, the city becomes partially water-logged every time it rains unless a well-planned storm-water drainage system is built. We have noticed recently that many areas in Dhaka already suffer from this water-logging problem. The proposed stadium at Moghbazar is likely to aggravate this problem.

Under the circumstances explained above, I would humbly conclude that Moghbazar is not the appropriate site for the proposed cricket stadium. It should, instead, be built at a place away from the congested areas of the city, firstly for environmental reasons and secondly to ease the city's traffic problem. I refrain from making any suggestion for a new site, but I believe it should be decided by an appropriately constituted panel of experts.

I guess my proposal is unlikely to be appreciated by the majority of the cricket fans in Dhaka since a search for a new site will obviously involve a delay in the implementation of the project. On an important issue like this, it is, however, advisable not to jump to a quick decision ignoring important environmental issues and basic principles of town planning. I would, however, welcome a rational and objective evaluation of my proposal by the competent experts in town planning, environment and city transport and also by conscientious citizens. The government is well advised to take their views into consideration before they start construction of the proposed cricket stadium at Moghbazar.

The writer is a former Chief Engineer of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission.

## Watery Hell

by Dr Sabrina Rashid

the maximum! They show no concern for doing the work properly or to the optimum standard. But how do their sub-standard works get passed by the government officials is also a mystery or rather quite obvious to the Bangladeshis only!

Who had to pay for this sub-standard work? The poor residents of this city, who else? What a misery they were in, only they know. So many major roads had become completely non-functional, leading to traffic jams everywhere resulting in wastage of time, money and means. Dozens of vehicles of all kinds had broken down because of the water getting into their engines. And many due to this fear were using the by-lanes, but alas! the by-lanes are in such deplorable state that it is simply a torture

to go through them — they are so narrow, so dirty, so crooked and so ill-planned.

Why doesn't the government make a rule that all by-lanes through private residential areas should at least be wide enough for two vehicles to cross easily. If such a rule is passed, it will save a lot of sufferings to the poor residents and the by-lanes can easily be used at the times of such emergencies, hantals etc.

In Bangkok such heavy downpours occur and therefore they have a special system of drainage in which there are big depressions in city centres and road-sides into which the water quickly gushes in at the time of the heavy downpour, when the ordinary drainage system cannot cope. Our engineers can go there and learn about their system to help us out of this watery hell!

## Pruning or preening the jungle of city roads?

Sir, The recent drive of DCC to remove unauthorised structures from roadside DCC-land is a praiseworthy effort. Especially when city roads are having horrendous traffic jam. At last, the City Mayor has kindly tried to come out of his Chimera image. We support him wholeheartedly. We also wish him grand success. But, his success and failure would depend on the motive behind it. We remember, in martial law (from Gen. Ayub onwards), they irrespectively removed the unauthorised/superfluous structures from thoroughfares. They used to make sure Municipality (now City Corporation) to perform their "duty" to do it. So, then the city looked orderly, also spick and span. No hassle, no two-way thinking who would do whose job and when. The deployed aid-to-civil administration force only oversaw whether city being maintained the way Cantonment Board looked after a cantt. In those days, we had regular road sweeping and garbage clearing, bleaching powdering, spraying, scrubbing and washing all over the city at the same time and from the same resources (money/manpower) of Municipality. Military only ensured the right use and timely use of those resources.

Thus, for vacating foot-path/unauthorised occupants (makshif office, basti, makshif stalls, shop extensions as display, movable display boards, construction items, vehicle and tire workshops, welding and brazing yards, furniture displays, truck stands, vehicle parking etc), DCC has to take in hand all simultaneously, so that, none can point out, why others have been spared. Once a police commissioner of Chittagong Metropolitan City did in the said way. There he is still remembered as a maverick figure.

Can a garden be weeded out just by removing few shrubs and sparing the proliferating thousands? In no time, others will turn into jungle with more vigour. Alexander the great and Robert Bruce followed nature, before they became successful. I hope the Mayor would also take lesson from Mother Nature. Recently, while coming to my work, I saw a newly-planted sign board in front of a basti grown in a forest of Dhaka (Road, 17, Blik-C, Plots between Banani Sub Post Office and UAE Maitree Complex, and in front of other poah houses of Banani Model Town, DCC). "Bangladesh Bastuhara Samity-Bhola Basti Unit, Ward

Number-19" is written on this board.

A R Choudhury  
Uttara Dhaka.

## Tobacco and sports

Sir, Smoking is a major cause of death and hence tobacco manufacturers are all merchants of death! Why then, I ask, are these merchants of death allowed to carry on their morbid trade so blatantly? Why are they allowed to sponsor sports events? When tobacco companies are permitted to blazon their logos at momentous sports events like the World Cup Cricket, it gives the erroneous message that smoking and fitness mix!

Through your esteemed daily I fervently condemn the sponsorship of sports events by the tobacco manufacturers. It is my sincere belief that every conscious citizen of the world would join forces with me and voice his/her protest against this unethical practice.

Mushfiqur Rahman  
(By e-mail)  
North South University,  
Dhaka.

## Foot-bridge needed

Sir, Divided into fourteen sectors, Uttara Model Town is fast becoming a vital part of the capital. Adjoining sector No. 7 of the model town, Azampur bus stop is an important junction serving thousands of people round the clock, and thus has turned into a real busy point. In the near past, several tragic road mishaps occurred at Azampur involving pedestrians, including school children. But unfortunately, despite repeated request by the inhabitants of Uttara Model Town no steps have yet been taken to construct any foot-bridge at Azampur crossing.

Thus it is an earnest request to the authorities concerned to set up a foot-bridge at Azampur to facilitate the pedestrians and help reduce chances of mishaps and traffic congestion to a large extent.

Aziz Amirul  
Uttara Model Town  
Dhaka-1230.

## Will the Civil Aviation Authority respond?

Sir, Recently I went to Zia International Airport on a weekend. My family was with me. We parked our car in front of the "waterfront" restaurant, where many cars were parked, and went in to spend some time over there.

When we returned to the car

we found that somebody had tied an iron-cage like thing to one of the wheels of the car! I looked around to see if anybody was there. No police or others in uniform was in sight. Then a teenage boy came along and pointed to a lung-clad boy about 13 years of age — with keys in his hand. He did not wish to come forward so I called him to ask who had done it. His reply was that he acted upon the command of his "boss". He pointed to a tin plaque nailed to a tree with the words "No Parking" written on it. Who has issued that order was not mentioned at all. It was not a No Parking Traffic sign put up by the police. I told him to call his "boss" so that I could "release" my car. To this he replied that his boss wouldn't come so I had to go and see his "boss" instead. I was naturally annoyed but since my family was with me I did not wish to prolong this fiasco any further. I decided to go and find out who his "boss" was.

I was amused to find that his boss was a 30-35-year-old man in charge of collecting money for the parking lot just in front of the domestic terminal. He politely explained that I must pay Tk. 50 as fine for parking my car over there. Naturally he would not give any money receipt for that nor would he manifest under which authority he is entitled to collect fine from the citizens.

Well, had it been 10 years earlier with my emotions in full flow, I would have broken his nose right there! But as it is expected of a "decent" 40-year-old "gentleman" in this country, I struck a deal with him instead and settled for Tk. 20 which he politely accepted and immediately ordered his "pichchi" to "release" my car.

It was evident that the lessee of that parking place is collecting money by means of "matani". You call it extortionists' blackmail. Now may I ask the Civil Aviation Authority if they are aware of this fact. If so, then what action do they intend to take against those involved in this kind of extortion? To the best of my knowledge none other than the judiciary or the bona fide person of law enforcing agencies can impose a fine on anybody in this country. Even that can be challenged in the court of law. So it is a clear violation of civil rights of a commoner. And Civil Aviation Authority is responsible for it by tacitly allowing it to happen right under its nose.

I hope the authorities concerned will look into this matter.

A A Karim  
(By e-mail)  
Dhaka.