Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali Dhaka Saturday, February 21, 1998

The Magic Cornucopia

Whatever may take the precedence in this state's calendar of yearly events, formally - about all of those issued from the magic cornucopia of Ekushey. The true precedence is Ekushey's, carved irremovably on the hearts of the knowing and feeling sons and daughters of this soil. Our independence is a direct result of Ekushey. But rot set in soon and the elan that led our people to quest for a true identity in culture, so very true to the spirit of Ekushey, was caged and decimated for long years. We have, in the twenty-fifth year of our liberation hardly recovered from the national debilitation that set in during the successive assassinations and coups and long nights of a managed polity run through dictates. To heal wholly and wholesomely and be soon of one alive and kicking piece, this nation must, as ordained by Hasan Hafizur Rahman, go back again and again to that bedimool — the mother to all altars. The Ekushey.

The Bengalee people's national achievement, so much conspicuously political in its outer trappings, was never fashioned wholly through political doings. At the root was the growing need to find the roots and get away from the mental fetters bonding our souls to medieval bigotry and obscurantism. We stood on the precipice of being denied of our national becoming that we sculpted over aeons of time. And our resistance for survival concentrated in the focal point of the language issue, of making the language of the majority the language of the state.

Ekushey opened the floodgates of political, cultural and agitational education and motivation. Leading to the bloody and victorious Liberation War. Ekushey has given us all things that redeem our poorly existence as a state and society. What have we given Ekushey save ossifying it into repeating rituals that neither give nor take life? There still remains a myriad political benefit that Ekushey can still bestow on the society. But what can we do to keep the behests of that great culturalpolitical movement, namely, a loving care for our language, a respect and reverence for it rising from the heart, a sense of pride in having such a living legacy that holds and nurtures us and give us culture and identity. The abysmal sense of linguistic inferiority must go.

There must not be any school in Bangladesh, howmuchsoever private, where speaking Bengali is a punishable offense for the tender pupil. This is only one among thousands of ways we compromise Ekushey. Let us stop it and all such others.

Annan in Baghdad

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan is now in Baghdad with probably the mission of his life. With his ability to discover a mutually acceptable option holding key to a possible avoidance of the military confrontation, the whole world is focused on him. Annan himself is under no illusion about the unenviable assignment he has taken upon himself and dubbed it as 'difficult'. Given the little manoeuvring space Annan has, the man seems to have made light of his worry in public.

But one cannot help feeling the US-British Alliance has quite unnecessarily added to Annan's problems with their professed bellicosity. US President Bill Clinton who described the UN Secretary General's visit to Baghdad as a 'critical opportunity' made it very clear with his subsequent utterance that America and its allies are looking for fight. Their militant mood and expression even before Annan could actually set his foot in Baghdad not only gave the world a very dim view of Annan's negotiating powers but could also fray Saddam's nerves rather than cooling them. As the most powerful military power on earth, the US could have done without this ridiculous jumpiness and war hysteria:

Whether Annan would push for the proposal to have diplomats accompanying the UN inspectors on visits to the 'presidential sites' or for the other option of appointing a new group of inspectors possibly including some from the UN special commission or the man of the moment would hit upon a solution that is off the map now is something we have to wait a while to know. But we believe there is no such thing as a point of no return in any confrontational situation, let alone in one where humanity is at stake. But for a change for the better in the situation the opposing parties have to be patient and respectful to any conciliatory effort by a third party. We hope both the US and Iraq would muster enough wisdom to see the utter futility of a violent showdown and pave the way for a diplomatic solution to the crisis.

Indeed hope is mankind's and in this case, Kofi

Annan's lone aid. Welfare Bodies in NCBs

Finance Minister Shah AMS Kibria informed the Parliament on Wednesday that government was formulating a set of rules to crab trade unionism in the banks. Obviously, he has the nationalised commercial banks (NCBs) in mind, where, according to a report submitted to the government by a task force, the tyrannical tutelage of trade union activists has sent the state sector banking institution into a quandary. A recent rumpus in the central bank made us sit up and take note of a serious inroad made into the heart of the country's banking system. The government has suspended CBA activity in Bangladesh Bank after that incident. Apparently by invoking the essential services act. Banking is a serious business deal as it does with public money and the vital economic interests of the country. It would be perfectly in the fitness of things, if the banks have elected bodies entirely looking after the welfare of the employees in a purely recommendatory capacity rather than becoming vested interests virtually running parallel administrations in the banks. They have bred a sinecure culture in most banks with reportedly 25 per cent of the employees in the NCBs drawing their salaries as donothings. What a bad influence on work othics and a drag on public money are they when you lake into account the transport and the office space they use with a reckless abandon. Their connection with political parties cannot be snapped by rules alone it would take the latter's withdrawal of indulgence to them by a declared consensus. An abused right ceases to be a democratic obligation.

Ekushey's Nation-building Message

Education Will be the Greatest Wealth Producer in the 21st Century HIS is for the forty-sixth time that we are

by Mahfuz Anam

21st century will be a civilisation of the Mind, as it has never been before. If we are to be a part of that New World, we need to shift our energy towards the goals. . . I think Ekushey is the most appropriate occasion to do so.

country. Implied in it was the sure feeling that if the Pakistani state structure would not permit the growth of the natural, distinctive, and the democratic aspiration of our people, then we will have to chalk out our separate path, as we subsequently did.

The historical developments of the fifties, sixties and finally that of the Liberation War, testifies to the fact that we, as a people took the political message to heart, and acted upon it with all the force, determination and sincerity at our com-

For the next nineteen years, from 1952 to 1971, an unbroken chain of events of political struggle gradually led the freedom loving Bengalee people to take the only dignified option available within an oppressive state structure - that of independence.

The second message of Ekushey, was cultural. As the cloud of euphoria of creating Pakistan - in which the contribution of Bengalee Muslims was greater than the other communities that later formed part of Pakistan - cleared, it become obvious that there was something more to national identity than the mere affinity of religion. For Muslims all over the world, religion is of tremendous significance as it is for us. But again, like the Muslims of rest of the world, it is not enough to form the totality of our national identity.

So the question of culture

naturally assumed an increasingly greater importance. It meant that our literature, our music, our poetry, our songs all the aesthetic aspects of our existence must find the most creative and unfettered expres-

Here again, if we look at the developments during the decade of the fifties and sixties, we find that we as a people waged a constant struggle to develop our culture and create, for ourselves, a distinct identity. This process naturally set us on a collision course against the ethos of Pakistan as defined by the rulers of the day. With the passage of time we continued to develop our own cultural identity which more and more set us apart from Pakistan.

Not only in the aesthetic sense, but also as culture defined in terms of our day to day life, it became increasingly obvious, with the passage of time, how distinct we were as a people from the people of West Pak-

Ekushey's cultural message continues to be with us. It is something which is a part of evolution of any vibrant nation. As we all know, the issue of our cultural identity continues to evolve and there are aspects of our cultural life that continues to go through a process of redefinition and rediscovery. This is only natural and testifies to the vibrancy and inner dynamics of our cultural

It is the third message of Ekushey, which is the main thrust of my piece today. I feel, and do so rather strongly, that it is the nation-building message of Ekushey, which has got lost under the more immediate political and cultural struggles of the decades of fifties and six-

Here lies the irony. For it appears that 'Ekushey Agenda' of the Pakistan days seem to have dominated the 'Ekushey Agenda' of the post liberation days. Meaning, that what appeared to be of immediate and urgent need, when we were struggling against the state structure of Pakistan, did not radically change, after that state structure was destroyed. and a whole new reality emerged in December 1971.

It is my view that after the birth of Bangladesh, the nation-building message of Ekushey should have gotten far more emphasis and national attention than it got. It is our failure to do so, which is one of the main reasons why we lag so far behind in developing our poverty-stricken country. Time is at hand to change all that, if

If I may be permitted to suggest, the most meaningful way of commemorating Ekushey now, 26 years after the birth of Bangladesh, is to take Ekushey's nation-building message to be the most important and urgent one, and give it the highest national focus and priority. Among the nation-

raze hopes and aspirations.

Successive regimes at the pin-

nacle of power in Bangladesh

grievously used the basic insti-

building tasks lying ahead for us, the one that suits the spirit of Ekushey most is that of Human Resource Development, expressed precisely in terms of Education for All. Therefore in my view, the best way to commemorate Ekushey now would be to make it the centre piece, the converging point, the centre of gravity for all the governmental and non-government efforts in spreading education

throughout the country.

As I had said in a recent piece, and at the risk of appearing to be repetitive. I would like to suggest that our professing respect for our mother tongue sounds hollow when more than 70 per cent of our people cannot effectively read or write the language. What sort of a pride in Bangla are we talking about when we have failed to create conditions which permit, the greater majority of our people, to acquire the most rudimentary level of the language skills.

The magnificent beauty of our poetry, the excellence of our literature, the world class stature of our plays and short stories remain confined to a microscopic minority. The vast majority of our people remain unexposed to it. These people are confined only to the oral tradition of our language, and as such deprived of the superb literary achievements of our authors and thinkers.

The massive intellectual poverty amidst which we force the majority of our people to live, is creating a dangerous

long term impact on the growth and regenerative capacity of our culture. If the majority of our people cannot either contribute to, or enjoy the fruits of literacy and other creative achievements, then obviously our literature and language will so be extremely poor. It may in fact become bankrupt.

The nation-building message has become a far more urgent issue today, than it ever was before simply because the rest of the world is moving so very fast. The information technology (IT) revolution has made the possibility of catching up with easy. But simultaneously it has raised the cost of failure. In other words whatever we may have missed by not focusing on nation building earlier, we are going to miss a thousand times more if we continue in the same track now.

The future belongs to knowledge, far more than it ever did before. Human creativity will be the real producer of wealth in the 21st century, which can only be given full play with edu-

On the occasion of the 46th anniversary of Ekushey, I cannot emphasise enough how urgent and necessary it is to redirect the spirit of our Language Movement into a massive struggle to remove illiteracy. provide universal primary education, impart skills training to our educated youth and launch an all encompassing human resource development programme.

21st century will be a civilisation of the Mind, as it has never been before. If we are to be a part of that New World, we need to shift our energy towards the goals as suggested earlier. I think Ekushey is the most appropriate occasion to do so. (This is a revised and updated version of an article written earlier)

hangs around the case of

putting Bengali as state lan-

guage and in placing our na-

Amor Ekushey: The Restorative Spirit

Let us on the day of Amor Ekushey accept the truth that Ekushey agenda is yet far away from realisation.

Mere rituals on this day and little following could do more harm than good.

VERY year we observe Amor Ekushey with due Amor Ekushey with due solemnity. In the dawn of this day, we sing songs in honour of those who shed their in 1952 in their impeccable vow to see Bengali as state language. We place wreaths at the Shaheed Minar and pursue certain other programmes in remembrance of the martyrs of 1952. The most pertinent question that invariably should haunt each and every citizen of this country is: are the martyrs honoured duly for the blood they shed just by throwing glowing tributes on this particular day of the year? To answer the question, one needs to delve deeper into the basic promises, promises upon which the Language Movement was launched and in response to which the then rulers of Pakistan triggered

L commemorating the

Ekushey — our Language

Movement Day, marking the

sacrifice of our student martyrs

to establish Bangla as one of the

two national languages of the

then Pakistan. Following the

event in February '52 commem-

orating the occasion became for

us a way of life and a way of

emerging as a nation. What was

ostensibly the occasion to pay

respect to the departed souls of

the language martyrs, was in

reality our way of mobilising

the nation behind the struggle

to establish Bangla as a state

language, and intensify the

movement to gain, for our-

selves, the right to self-govern-

ment. Out of the 45 times

(excluding today's) that we have

commemorated this great

event, 19 times we did under the

then Pakistan, and for the rest

26 times we did so in the sacred

soil of independent and

fact, is because I think there

should have been a qualitative

difference between the way we

observed the occasion in the

then Pakistan, and the way did

so after our victory in 1971. As

far as I understand it, there are

three distinct messages of

Ekushey. The first and the

foremost is political. The sec-

ond is cultural. The third mes-

sage is that of nation building.

The political message of

Ekushey February is obvious

and one that we, as a very polit-

ically conscious people, seem to

have understood instinctively.

and acted upon wholeheartedly.

state structure of Pakistan will

have to be forced to accept

Bangla as one of the two state

languages as the first step.

Then, subsequently to force the

state to give Bangla and the

Bengalis, their due importance

in running the affairs of the

The message meant that the

The reason I mention this

sovereign Bangladesh.

their shots — against the growl. Ironically, establishment of Bengali as state language is generally portrayed as the basic aim and objective of the Language Movement. Thus, to this effect, an evaluation of Ekusheu February more often than not tends to hover around as to whether and to what extent Bengali has replaced other languages in our national correspondence, curricula etc. Grievously, we fail to realise that the frontier of Ekushey spirit expands much more beyond the border of mere language issue. It was, in fact, a war against misposition of minor-

ity view on the majority. Bengalees of that time, constituting more than half of the Pakistan's total population, were forced to surrender their due share on more than one accounts. Bengalees were routinely ransacked on socio-economic and political fronts.

They won elections but never could sit on the citadel of power: In the general election of 1990 Awami League, led by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, emerged as the majority party to rule Pakistan. The aftermaths are well known. People's verdict was "hijacked" by the guns where weapon of language had to yield to the language of weapon. A war of liberation was imposed on the people of this part of the then Pakistan. However, the only time Pakistanis surrendered to the Bengalees was on 16th December 1971. Thus the movement that was sparked off in the name of the language, in consequence, landed with liberated war and an independent

Bangladesh. The basic tenet of Language Movement is protest against deprivation, destitution and deuced motives that the Pakistanis attempted to impinge on Bengalees. An evaluation of Amor Ekushey should, there-

fore, hinge on whether we could establish a society where three 'Ds' do not exist at all or whether, to say the least, their pervasive presence could be contained? Amor Ekushey should be a day of mourning as well as of monitoring. Each

tutions to suit their personal needs and thus disdained any institutional . development worth the salt. Pyromaniac year on this day the party in politics was used for seizing Beneath the Surface by Abdul Bayes

power should present to the nation an account as to how much of the pledges and promises of the martyrs could be respected and if not, why.

One such modest attempt at evaluation was made by a series of research articles compiled in a recently published book: "Bangladesh at 25 - An Analytical Discourse on Development. The remarks on the performance of our economy society, politics and culture that came out of the analytical discourses converge at the conclusion that since independence, achievements were far short of expectations. The performance record does not at all ravish rather, disconcertingly,

power rather than pursuing democratic routes. Successive governments heavily barked on

bureaucracies for achieving

their socio-economic goals. Since independence, Bangladesh was under military or quasimilitary rule for about two thirds of the period. The economy grew at snails pace of close to four per cent per annum. Almost half of the population groan under poverty — a level that runs higher than even that of early 1960s. Democratic governance of the society languished in the absence of people's representation at all levels. Needless to mention that all the above mentioned failures go to mock at martyrs of the Language Movement and Liberation

achieved tidings on positive development hopes for moving ahead. By and large, what Bangladesh is not only a crawling movement as it did over the years, but gallops to catch up with the 'tigers.' That would necessitate a sincere and aggressive effort at mobilising the population for accelerated development. The country strengthen the institutions that are supportive to growth and development. The bells are chiming for a pragmatic entry

into the next millennium. One could argue that a much larger satisfactory performance

Dhaka and Chittagong. This is

no doubt an awe-inspiring ex-

perience for the people of

Bangladesh. If an 18-month old

government can do so much

then what will happen if this

trend continues, and there is, at

least for the time being, no rea-

son to believe on the contrary,

for another three-and-half-

years of this popular govern-

ment's tenure. To crown it all,

we may as well believe that with

such an unassailable record,

they will be returned to power

in the next elections for another

5-year-term and the success will

inspire them to follow the same

policy of industrialisation with

more vigour and zest, and, if I

may be permitted to say without

any malice, each and every

home in this backward country

will be an industrial unit. I am

not very good at arithmetic but

any layman like me can see a

growth in geometrical

progression in this vital sector

of economy as Malthus saw the

tional language in the spheres of all communications. We would like to put forth a point to ponder. The spirit that the use of mother tongue, as elsewhere in the world, could help economic development does not seem to be abhorred by the larger section of the educated community. Thus some of those mourning in the morning of Ekushey February are found to send their children to English medium schools. They seem to relish a English way of life. Many of us are convinced that teaching and learning in Bangla precludes job opportunities at home or abroad. We all seem to run after English as a vehicle for our socio-economic uplift. All these funs and fouls are not at all in consort with the spirit of the Ekushey agenda. A nation that wants to survive and thrive can hardly shore up its failures in the face of humiliation to and hypocrisy with mother tongue.

Let us revamp the restorative

Why's PSC politicised?

Sir, The Public Service Commission (PSC) is a highly respectable and responsible constitutional institution in Bangladesh. Unfortunately. over the years, this body, which is supposed to work neutrally. has been polluted by political appointments. Successive governments has targeted this institution for political favour distribution. Some professors of soil science have been appointed as chairmen of the institution, and some other persons of such dubious backgrounds were appointed members of PSC.

All these people, whatever their professional background may be, are highly political persons and are unfit for the functions of PSC. By placing these people at the helm of the PSC, successive governments had violated the constitutional character of this institution and undermined its sanctity. This trend will soon lead to a total collapse of this institu-

tion's respectability. May we ask the government to appoint neutral personalities, such as retired judges or retired secretaries as the chairman of PSC from now on? Please stop using PSC as hotbed of politics. A Concerned Citizen Dhaka

River-dredging

Sir, At a seminar on 26.7.97, Minister for Food and Agriculture Matia Choudhury declared that she had been fighting for dredging the rivers instead of embankment through the foreign aid agencies. Certainly, we profusely appreciated her

But after about eight months, we see only half-hearted efforts in river-dredging. We know the river Jamuna's water current requires at least 2

km width, not the present aver-

age 5 km. Therefore, large scale dredging of the Jamuna would help both effective navigation and building substantial cultivable land on the banks by deposition of the dredged soil.

The Meghna at Chandpur made a half-circle from the Padma confluence to the river port by engulfing vast land of Matlob and Chandpur areas. The western straight main basin has been shallowed due to siltation. If the old western river-basin is dredged for more water flow and navigation, the crores of taka project to protect Chandpur port will not be re-

Smaller rivers also require dredging. For example, the rivers Buriganga, Turag and Balu are being encroached illegally by self-serving people from both sides. Siltation gives

the culprits more opportunities. The government must arrange for river-bed survey and large-scale dredging for protecting the riverine ecosystem, controlling flood and easing navi-

M A S Molla Member, BAAS, Dhaka

Northern Bengal pays more

Sir, Northern Bengal is paying more for travel and for imported goods due to the crossing of the river Jamuna by commercially-run BIWTC ferry. The ferry in other road crossing is run by Roads & Highway and the toll charge is minimal. In Iraq, for example, the price of imported goods is same all over the country. Can't we follow the same system so that the people

other for the imported goods? The people of northern Bengal expected that with the completion of the bridge over the river Jamuna the fare for travel and transportation will be similar to that of other parts of the country. But the tolls for crossing the bridge approved by the

of one region pay more than the

Cabinet recently appear very high: bus (small) Tk 830, bus (big) Tk 1350, car, jeep Tk 410, motor-cycle Tk 30, truck (small) Tk 740, Truck (medium)

Serajul Islam

Chittagong" Sir. Thanks a lot for your editorial Crimes in Chittagong published on February 13, 1998 Your suggestion — "Put Chittagong under special consideration. Home Ministry should form a task force to look into the factors abetting or sustaining the major criminal phe-

"Crimes in

ransom" - is very wise. But we are utterly surprised that instead of re-enforcing the police force, we learned from 15th February issue of a Bangla newspaper that the government has withdrawn 150 armed police and 150 armed Ansar from Chittagong and posted them

nomena like holding people to

We are stunned by this nonchalance of the government. How could a government whose duty is to protect people, act like this?

Nur Jahan East Nasirabad, Chittagong

Gingrich on BBC

Sir, On Feb. 2, '98, the BBC broadcast an interview of Mr Newt Gingrich, the speaker of the US House of Representatives, a very powerful Republican leader. Inevitably during the questioning the interviewer asked Mr Gingrich his opinions on President Clinton's recent predicament concerning the allegations of sexual misconduct with various women, particularly with Monica Lewinsky. But each time he declined to be drawn into the controversy stating merely that facts and proofs must be weighed before

coming to any conclusions. It is quite well-known that Gingrich is an unrelenting critic of Clinton but the way he supported the President was simply amazing. There was no indication that he would be happy to see Clinton impeached and ousted from the White House, even though the occasion was opportune for making some caustic remarks about the

lapses of a Democrat President! Mr Gingrich's behaviour should lesson for our political leaders. But the pity is that our leaders don't learn anything from examples! They would simply turn to any forum, at home or abroad, to give vent to their malicious feelings. The image of the country means nothing to them. That is why the present-day political leaders of our country would never qualify for a place in the history. At least many people would presumably agree with this assessment! Abul Mohsin

41, Siddheswari Circular Road Dhaka-1217.

Let's do some real diplomacy!

Sir, Our attention has been drawn by a news item on 12-02-98 titled, "export trophies to be distributed today, government unhappy over bureaucrats' performance in attracting FDI. In the report, we found the words "economic diplomacy," "onestep-service", "our own industrial park", "stronger taka" "real autonomy of EPB" etc.

It was stated that most of the commercial and economic councilors abroad are not capable of promoting trade. The last but not the least remarks was that the High Commission to Canada failed to detect importers involved in a fraudulent case using quota of Bangladesh etc. Now the responsibility lies on ministry of commerce and ministry of foreign affairs. M Ali Dhaka

War. They could only sleep in peace when a sizeable portion of the agenda for which they sacrificed lives could be

The list of failures should not, however, hide few of the that Bangladesh reaped home over the years in the fields of economic liberalisation, population control, foodgrain production, electoral process and transition to parliamentary form of government. The achievements, thin and mild though, should not escape notice since they could inject some would need in the coming days needs to

The sooner we realise this reality, the better it is.

Let us on the day of Amor Ekushey accept the truth that Ekushey agenda is yet far away from realisation. Mere rituals on this day and little following could do more harm than good.

spirit of Ekushey.

OPINION Industries Galore

Rubab A Khan

From what the commerce horrifying growth and industries minister disclosed at the parliament the The figures were presented other day, we are almost certain on the floor of the House. And that this country is going to be anything disclosed in the parthe most industrialised one in liament is supposed to be "the truth, the whole truth and noth-Asia, if not in the world, very ing but the truth". Out of this soon. During the question-answer period in the Parliament imposing number, 19365 were on 9 February '98, the minister categorised as "cottage indusin charge of industries Tofael try". Now, the definition of a Ahmed quoted fantastic figures cottage industry may vary. A for around 18 months from potter's wheel can fall into this June 1996 when his party was category so can the newborn's voted to power. The growth of quilt-making house. But do the industrial sector during this BSCIC have the experience or period, as backed up by figures the logistics to record each and has been staggering. According every cottage industry in the to Ahmad 22,042 units of induscountry? As far as I know these tries were established throughcottage industries do not reout the country during June '96 quire any permission from to December '97 by the tireless BSCIC or any other government efforts of the democratically department or agency. These elected government. The list of neither require any imported achievement does not end there. machinery nor any raw mate-Another 2224 new industrial rial. So, how could the minister be sure about the exact number units have been registered with the Investment Board under the of such industries? Prime Minister's office and still We know the figures are supfurther 23 new units were established under BEPZA in

plied by the relevant government offices and agencies. They can only provide information relating to registration and permission. But can these offices say with any amount of certainty that so and so unit is functioning properly after six months or a year after its establishment? Perhaps not. But this is the age-old system followed by all previous governments and relevant ministers gave similar statements or replies in the Parliament. Tofael Ahmad is also no exception. But before doling out such unbelievable statistics couldn't he ask his conscience whether he was doing the right thing? That he was neither misleading the nation nor cheating on

himself? If anybody goes by the figures and try to draw his or her own conclusion about the number of new industries being set up during the tenure of this government he will come up with figures that can baffle even the genie of Aladin's lamp.