

We Salute Him

WE salute police sergeant Ahad Pervez who has set a glorious example of bravery and commitment to duty.

On the fateful night of Thursday last, the 40-year-old Sergeant was on duty in Motiheel Commercial district as a member of an anti-mugging squad. Around 8:30 pm a tempo with about half a dozen people, suspected to be muggers, violated police orders yelled at them to stop. Sgt Ahad followed the tempo and eventually caught up with it. The muggers got off the tempo and attacked him with iron rods and machetes. Ahad, fatally wounded, fell down with a pool of blood spilled around him. He died around 10 in the night at the Combined Military Hospital (CMH).

Officer Ahad Pervez leaves behind a legacy that makes us proud of our police force. Decorated with the President's Police Medal for his bravery and sense of duty he also served as a member of UN peace-keeping force in Cambodia. He was to proceed to East Timor on 3 November on a similar assignment. Sgt Ahad had been an active member of a drama group while he was a student of Dhaka University in the 80's.

At a time when the police role comes under fire every now and then it is an officer like Ahad who lights the candle of hope. It is for dedicated people like him that some peace and sanity are still left in the society. We believe the supreme sacrifice made by Sgt Ahad in the line of duty stands out as an exemplary deed in a moth-eaten social fabric of the country. This must not go in vain. Blessed are those parents who reared a child named Ahad and proud should be his widow and the child.

We salute Sgt Ahad Pervez and implore others in the police force to emulate him. We urge the government to honour him and to look after the orphan and the widow beyond the pale of technicalities.

Menacing Outlook

THE four-party opposition alliance is all charged up for a showdown with the government on Chittagong, Rajshahi and Khulna pourashava polls, scheduled for December 6, as per a gazette notification of the Election Commission. The nomination papers are to be submitted on November 8, a Monday, which the four-party liaison committee has decided to observe as a hartal day. This will be in conjunction with November 7, a Sunday, already pre-determined as a hartal day to protest cancellation of public holiday on the National Revolution and Solidarity Day as it used to be known during the non-AL rule for 21 years. Therefore, we have two days of hartal added to the official weekly holidays on November 5 and 6 making a four-day shutdown stare in the face.

Then more is in store for December 5 and 6, Sunday and Monday respectively, by way of a resistive hartal to the motions of the three city corporation elections that get underway at that time. Preceding those two days will also be a Friday and a Saturday, so that again we are looking at a four-day standstill in the first week of December. The scenario could predictably get bleaker through intimidation, violence, clashes and loss of lives down the road in which case extensions to hartals might be expected.

As a matter of fact, the opposition as a whole are up to packing as many hartals and demonstrations they can into this brief prelude to the fast approaching holy month of Ramadan. That conjures up tempestuous times lying ahead of us.

The opposition alliance leaders must be aware of the stakes involved in the pourashava polls taking place despite their boycott of the same. That is why they have declared their intention to prevent the holding of the elections 'at any cost' making everyone palpably apprehensive of a serious trouble.

There is still time for the opposition to show a genuine willingness to participate in the pourashava polls and have a dialogue with the EC and the government for an early accommodation of their view-points on how to safeguard the fairness and impartiality of the electoral process. We understand that the CEC under some exceptional circumstances can defer a poll schedule, but for this to happen there ought to be a minimally positive signal beamed by the opposition quarters. We urge the opposition to carefully weigh up the pros and cons of the plunge they are about to take.

Y2K Woe Looms Large

THAT the country 'is yet to take up any contingency plan to cope with the potential Y2K rollover in the health sector' certainly raises a fundamental question: are we loathe to information intake in an era when the whole world has become an information superhighway? Millennium bug, as it is popularly known, has been a burning issue for quite a few years now. Millions of dollars have been spent world-wide, especially in the developed countries, to make their computer-based aviation, communications, defence, finance, healthcare, navigation and power generation networks Y2K compliant so as to avert a potential disaster. Unfortunately, we have kept open neither our ears nor our eyes to the call of the hour, let alone making any attempt to chalk out our own protection mechanism to face and fend off the high-tech glitch. With time running out fast, it seems, we are in for a real bumpy ride into the new millennium.

According to the government's Y2K Cell experts, sophisticated life-saving medical equipment with embedded microchips like emergency oxygen supply system may start malfunctioning when the clock strikes zero hours on December 31 this year. In plain and simple terms, patients, especially ones with critical ailments, at nearly 13 medical college hospitals, 20 general hospitals and a few specialised healthcare outlets in the public sector and more than 500 clinics and health centres in the private sectors would be exposed to danger.

The government's apparent indifference makes the situation look graver. 'I hope Bangladesh would be able to have a smooth transition to the next millennium because Bangladesh's hospitals are yet to use that type of sophisticated equipment,' so said the state minister for health and family welfare. What if his optimism is proved wrong? Our suggestion for the government will be to strictly follow the ADB contingency plan for the health sector. This is something where there is no place for administrative whims.

Lip Service and Leap Frogging

To meet the challenges of the 21st century, politicians need to think of leap fogging to lift people out of pervasive poverty. We have no extra land, no natural resource worth the pride. But we have a vast human resource which, if properly trained, could face the challenge.

Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes



ever, human capital development would hinge not only on the quantitative flow of resources to education and health, especially in rural areas, but also on the quality of such services. The advent of computer facilities, we suppose, can only add a little to that recalling that the current status of Bangladesh in this sphere is barely encouraging even when compared with neighboring countries.

Successive regimes declared market economy as an avowed objective. One needs to remember that only a good governance especially an application of the rule of law in its true spirit can help development of market economy and privatization process. The most important missing link in the area of market economy is the lack of a good business environment to lure people to investment and business. Unfortunately, there are both government and market failures to jeopardize any attempt to move forward.

To meet the challenge, a successful transition to a liberalized system is urgently called for. Liberalization of agricultural input and output market and also liberalization of food-grain imports — as some studies have shown — impinged posi-

loans based on political rather than economic considerations. But again we need more for a leap fogging in the financial sector. Our banking system based on collaterals seems to have failed. Only 8-10 per cent would avail of such opportunities but to default with. Cannot integrity, intelligence, and innovative ideas constitute collaterals? In the coming millennium, we should explore whether these three T's could open our eyes, albeit differently, as far as lending and borrowing is concerned. We can learn a lesson from Grameen Bank, if necessary.

The heart of the heat to be generated by the next century is going to be the rural areas. Development of rural infrastructure including communication technologies so far seems to have indicated positive outcome. Markets are now more integrated than before. In the 21st century, Bangladesh needs to drift away from rice-based agriculture to multi-crop based agriculture. We mean to say that a crop diversification scheme should be undertaken in full earnest. That would require, among other things, proper marketing facilities and storage arrangement for perishable products. If necessary, subsidy on the consumption of agricultural inputs should be increased with emphasis on electricity, purchase of seed etc. The government needs to devote more resources on agricultural research and extension in coming years.

It is generally argued that a good governance is the gift of a

government. Therefore, more often than not the government is being blamed for the 'bads' that tend to go in the name of governance. We agree with the premise but not fully. It is true that a government has to ensure (a) separation of judiciary from the executive; (b) freedom of media, especially of the electronic ones; (c) speedy privatization process; (d) workable democratic institutions. While admitting that the onus lies on the part of the government, the totality of 'politics' — its nature and composition — should never be lost sight of. We strongly feel that the role of the opposition is to force upon the government to make sure that those vital elements are ensured for the society. The politics of 21st century needs to be different from that of the preceding one.

When in power, our governments see everything as 'leading' under their dynamic leadership. The opposite view is held by the opposition i.e. everything is lagging. In between, only lip services towards development seem to be leading and the vision for leap fogging seems to be lagging. To meet the challenges of the 21st century, politicians need to think of leap fogging to lift people out of pervasive poverty. We have no extra land, no natural resource worth the pride. But we have a vast human resource which, if properly trained, could face the challenge. Both the sides of our politics (government and opposition) should sit together and try to find a consensus on contentious issues. We cannot vest our future in the yard of the politics that we are presented with. Please leave the confine of lip service and live with the idea of leap fogging.

Will Indonesia's New Rulers Succeed?

Wahid, known for his pragmatic views, is likely to strike a balance in running the government, while Megawati is expected to do her best as well. Wahid and Megawati will have big challenges as both are inexperienced and problems are galore.

MATTERS AROUND US

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury



the students at the vanguard forced him out of power.

The TIME magazine in a cover story had estimated the fortune of Suharto's family to be around 15 billion dollars. Although he has protested this and sued the magazine for the report most people believe that his ill-gotten wealth is simply enormous.

Wahid's election as the president was somewhat unexpected as his party came third in the election for the 700-member consultative committee in June this year while Megawati Sukarnoputri's party came first by winning 34 per cent of the total seats. Megawati, daughter of nation's charismatic architect and first president, Ahmad Sukarno popularly called 'Bung Karno' (Brother Sukarno) — rode the crest of popularity because of the nemesis of her father and she was widely expected to win the presidential elections chosen by the elected people's representatives. But she could not ally herself adroitly with other political parties for the presidential polls and secured 313 votes

interim presidency of Habibie following the resignation of Suharto culminated in the presidential and vice-presidential election. Megawati, coupled with people's disillusionment over the state of political, social and other decay created a sordid situation for the otherwise resourceful Indonesia. The problem in the East Timor and the issue of regional feelings in many of its countless islands is additional source of worry. But the Indonesians are happy that at last a democratic setup has taken up the reins of the country.

Wahid and Megawati are political rivals but friends at personal levels and bound through family links. Wahid's father was also a respected figure who was religious minister in Sukarno's cabinet. The contest for presidential post, notwithstanding, both are expected to work in a cooperative spirit. This is a good side and likely to cast a sobering effect on running the government even though both were rivals for the top position. Reconciliation and spirit of understanding demonstrated at this stage is remarkable. Wahid is at failing health as he suffered two strokes. He may not be able to

complete the five-year term for political reason and in such an event the vice-president is likely to take over. They have already chosen a cabinet that is a blend of some distinguished civilians who are up to tackle the economic crisis and other problems. The military has found five positions in the 35-member ministry — the lowest in the history but this has also asked sections of students who want to see lesser participation of the armed forces in running the government.

There has been a civilian defence minister for the first time in four decades. Wahid and Megawati will have to ensure that the military remains within its domain and spectre of any take-over does not loom large. For the time being, the prospects of lengthy civilian rule after a long spell of undemocratic one look very bright with people remaining solidly cheerful behind the new setup. Wahid, known for his pragmatic views, is likely to strike a balance in running the government while Megawati is expected to do her best as well. Wahid and Megawati will have big challenges as both are inexperienced and problems are galore.

However, the democratic setup has been widely welcomed in the country and this is the main source of strength for the new administration.

World Thrift Day

Importance of Savings

by Sheikh Rezaul Karim

Mobilisation of internal resources is vital for national development. There are two alternatives — voluntary savings or compulsory savings through taxation. The more we generate from voluntary savings, the less dependent we are on taxation.

THRIFT perhaps is the most valued of virtues for securing prosperity and material well-being. The more one saves the more security will be ensured for both the individual and the society. Thus the traditional role of savings providing the economic history of our development and progress.

An old English proverb says that it is easy to earn money but difficult to spend it. We know that we often spend money on things that we do not actually require. We often forget that we must not live beyond our means. More than 80 per cent of our population lives in villages and we can take lessons from the economic history of our peasantry. It is very pathetic though. Many peasant families of Bangladesh lost their land and homesteads and turned into landless agricultural labourers simply because they mortgaged their land and took high-interest loans from 'mahajans' in order to meet the expenditure of either marriage ceremony or their daughters' or sons' festive wedding.

Time has changed the scenario of rural economy, but still many people expend extravagantly on such occasions which can easily be avoided. In the capital it is a common practice that hundreds of guests are invited and costly 'pandals' decorated on the occasion of marriage, 'khatna', special parties incurring huge expenditure.

Every year on 31st October World Thrift Day is observed to remind people to be thrifty for the welfare of the family and the nation as a whole. The representatives from savings banks the world over held their first world congress in 1924 in Milan and resolved to celebrate the Day every year on 31st October. Since then, it has been observed internationally by the savings banks with a view to calling public attention to the importance of thrift and sav-

ings. In Bangladesh we see the Directorate of National Savings observe the day every year to inculcate the idea amongst the people through different media.

The importance of thrift and savings is immense in the realisation of development schemes and attainment of self-reliance. The role savings can play in the development effort of a country hardly needs a reminder in the situation of Bangladesh today. In any national economic development under modern concept savings has a part to play. But in a situation now obtaining in Bangladesh in particular, where there is tremendous pressure on domestic resources for taking on the twin challenge of reconstruction of the economy and its growth for the ever increasing population, a minimum mobilisation and subsequent utilisation of savings deserve to be regarded a national obligation, if a semblance of self-reliance in economic development is to be maintained. We shall have to motivate people to save and mobilise savings not merely to supplement the enormous needs of domestic capital for development efforts, but also with a view to maintaining regulatory control on the inflationary situation within the country. No less important is the consideration that people should be led to learn to live with enough austerity and thrift that would permit savings by individuals.

Austerity should be a consideration everywhere. The so-called high-cost-loss is allegedly an euphemism for mismanagement in our public utility sectors. Pilferage and other illegal activities, it is complained, are the main reasons behind the rising costs. It is a sort of prodigality prevailing over frugality! Similarly natural gas is not a renewable resource. It has taken thousands of years to form under the earth, and yet we are often misusing this valuable resource by

leaving burners on in household kitchens, and industrial plants. Roads, bridges and other public property are not maintained properly which causes huge expenditure from the government exchequer every year. If we are careful and alert we can save huge public money from these sectors.

Thrift and savings are prerequisites in attaining self-sufficiency. Savings is a human instinct. It is inherent in all rational beings. There is a propensity in human nature to strive to earn and save to spend. The archaeological discoveries lead one to believe that even thousands of years ago people had well-developed sense of savings and self-preservation. In rural areas, in spite of some people's extravagant and lavish expenditure, ordinary womenfolk are yet perhaps in a better position to preach on the wisdom of savings for hard time. The housewife's lifting of fistful rice from everyday's ration, to be put away before it is cooked, is indeed a symbolic act.

Mobilisation of internal resources is vital for national development. There are two alternatives — voluntary savings or compulsory savings through taxation. The more we generate from voluntary savings, the less dependent we are on taxation. There will be a greater participation in the act by the people if they are made aware that it is their own savings which can build the roads and bridges, provide irrigation and navigational channels for them. And with which the essential agricultural inputs can be supplied to increase productivity of their land; schools, colleges and hospitals can be established where their children would get education and thousands of sick and the disabled get relief. The service-oriented organisations may come forward to start a movement throughout the country on this issue without delay.

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Changing mores

Sir, India had three general elections in as many as three years. The trend is unusual, and significantly, in this age of changes, that the conservative voters are groping their way around with experiments, signifying vague and elusive uncertainties about the current and future philosophies of life. Once again its heterogeneous mind could not charter a sense of direction for its future generations. Since there are cyclic changes in nature, periodical core changes in human governance need not be condemned or brushed aside. This is the age of new teething troubles.

Today the Indian voters are at a crossroad, a trend not unfamiliar in the third world. New regimes are finding it more difficult to settle down. The information technology has reduced the global communication gap, thereby opening a new kind of Pandora's box. When strangers nestle closer, the interaction can neither be ignored nor brushed aside. 'We have to live with it,' as the saying goes.

Man is a social animal, and he cannot live in isolation. Today the social veneers have been reinforced and made more glossy; but at the same time porosity has to be maintained to enable osmosis to take place, a vital life process at all levels of the existence of all living creatures.

Another philosophical question crops up: keep religion in the background, or make it play in the foreground, in the full glare of modern publicity techniques (talking about inter-religious interfacing)? In the earlier centuries religious sensibilities were of a different kind; now its indirect influence could be overbearing. It is not the glowing ember now, but pockets of over-heating can be detected.

Today religion is more mobile, and is porous to land frontiers. It has shed its passivity, and has entered the arena. Since it is a matter of faith, it is tricky to handle it logically. Diplomats avoid referring to it directly, and the fundamentalists are getting bolder. The majority of the current conflict centres spread globally bring religion to the fore.

There is another weakening area, looking at the international scene: the lack of good governance, in more locations than one. The political standard or ethics has eroded, due to recurring patterns of instability. Perhaps it is a vicious cycle, but the erosion of both these tools cannot be denied. Political activities have dominated the daily life of nations, and it has become difficult to rope it in to the routine level, to make daily life bearable.

All these trends point to one basic deficiency: the lack of quality global leadership, facing the millennium.

A Husnain
Dhaka.

Solid waste and garbage collection

Sir, A seminar held on 9th October at Sheraton Hotel, Dhaka, in the day-long seminar, the participants expressed their concern about solid waste of Dhaka city which is a serious threat to civic life and suggested that the pollutants inorganic, organic and toxic in nature require extensive treatment before disposal.

While inauguration of the Science and Technology Seminar, M Fazlur Rahman urged the experts to minimize the weakness of management and adoption of modern technologies to tackle the problem of

solid waste. He referred to BC-SIR experiment with solid waste bio-gas production system near Jatrabari.

Forest Secretary Marghub Morshed urged the experts to solve the problem of solid waste in the capital city which is growing with the rising population and which has already turned acute. He however added that waste can be turned into resource, and kitchen waste may become composite if solid waste management is practiced properly in the country.

Municipal solid waste and its disposal in Dhaka city poses threat to civic life compared to that of Chittagong, Khulna and Rajshahi. Dhaka has become a mega city with the mushrooming garments, screen and dying factories, tanneries, pharmaceutical and many other industries and factories in the industrial areas and other parts of the city. The tanneries — for the greater interest of civic life, were supposed to be removed from Hazaribagh. This decision was taken a long time back but still awaiting of proper implementation.

MA Salam-Azad
Dhaka-1205

"Problems and solutions"

Sir, With reference to the letter titled 'Problems and solutions' by O H Kabir published on Sept 17, 1999 in The Daily Star, I would like to add a few words opposing his views to solve the road traffic jam.

The writer emphasized on ousting all unauthorised vehicles, shops, establishments etc., to restore a healthy environment in the city. It is, of course, a timely initiative. But before doing this, shouldn't we take account of how the people related to these unauthorised establishments will survive after being evicted from there? If not so, another new problem would arise to solve one.

Prakash Biswas
2/7, Malibab
Dhaka-1217