

## Indefensible Act

HOWEVER self-trumpeting and fiercely righteous the government may wax on the passage of the Public Safety Bill through the Parliament last Sunday, the enactment, which now awaits Presidential assent to be a law, cannot stand the test of an objective, in depth analysis.

First and foremost, one-man tribunals have been envisaged to try the offences so that no scope is left for a note of dissent to the verdict. The concern for fair-play ought to be the central element in any juridical process, something that cannot be sacrificed at the altar of 'speedy trial'. On the contrary, the fact that the process of trial was sought to be accelerated obviously warranted safeguards to be built into the dispensation.

If bail can only be granted after investigation is completed and it has pointed to the non-involvement of the person in the crime he or she is accused of, then why do you need to grant him or her a bail? In fact, he or she should be promptly acquitted on that kind of a finding. Should not they be instantly let off the hook of unjustifiable confinement, by all canons of justice?

The other points that we cannot but have reservations on relate to acceptance of audio-video records as evidence and 'the power to consider an accused as an witness after reviewing the investigation report.' Furthermore, a pertinent question basically would be: who will take cognizance of the offence in the first place and file a case against the offender?

To judge the new law against the yardstick of necessity, we must say that there could have been suitable amendments to the Penal Code redefining some of the rampant crimes of today and adding stringency to the sections relating to grant of bail in certain cases so that this harsh law was obviated. Mind you, the law is to concurrently exist with Special Powers Act. We go along with Barrister Ishfaq Ahmed's line of thinking on the issue as reflected in his interview with Prothom Alo.

The real impediment to the rule of law comes not from lack of law but for want of proper enforcement of law or dilution of it through political influence-peddling, both overt or covert. This is where our attention should lie.

## Light at Last

FINALLY, the construction of the much-talked about Haripur power plant got off to a start at Narayanganj on Sunday. Among the salient features of this huge project is the fact that this will be the first gas-fired power plant in the private sector with an outlay of 200 million US dollars and a generating capacity of around 360 Megawatt. It is heartening to note that the plant is scheduled to begin commercial operation in October, 2001 ensuring the availability of sizable additional electricity as quantified above to the already exhausted national grid. This, we believe, will considerably improve the electricity generation-cum-supply situation in the country.

Now the question is, if a land-based power plant of such size can be built and made operational in only 21 months' time, why were we made to suffer for the last three years due to shortage of power? The government, among other things, strongly criticised its predecessor for the malady without seriously taking up the urgent matter of building power plants to supplement the dwindling capacity of the existing ones. The tussle between the site developers, the US company AES and our PDB has been all too known to the people. The same also holds good for the Meghnaghat project land which is still to be made available to the construction company.

The two new power plants will help expand the local gas market to a large extent earning profit to the gas company and PDB; because together the power houses are likely to consume around 180 mmcf natural gas per day. It is very significant that the rate offered by the AES will be much cheaper than the existing tariff paid by the PDB the benefit of which is likely to be enjoyed by the consumers. Let the Energy Ministry, PDB and Power Cell people pay more attention to Meghnaghat project.

## Movie Stars on a Mission

STARS against Acid Throwers (SAT), an association of movie and television personalities committed to fight the most heinous form of repression on women, comes at a time when the nation watches in horror an unprecedented rise in incidence of acid-throwing. We hope SAT's involvement would gradually grow from that of raising funds for treatment of the acid survivors and creating awareness among people to a leadership role directing and mobilising a social movement against the cruelest of crimes that acid-throwing is. We salute them for coming forward and committing themselves to such a noble cause. The Acid Survivors' Foundation would surely be immensely benefited from having them on their fund-raising endeavours and so would be quite a few of the victims for whom proper treatment would essentially usher in a new lease of life. We wish the SAT and the foundation all the success.

Admittedly, we have had very little success in terms of arresting the alarming rise in the number of acid-throwing incidents or meting out exemplary punishments to the perpetrators. Most of the criminals have got away with the abominable crime, thereby, in a way, encouraging similar atrocities. Also, we have failed to do anything about the easy availability of industrial acids in the market. On the whole, the balance tilts heavily in favour of the criminals and young women remain extremely vulnerable to scars being inflicted on their person and psyche. At the other end, we have also failed to help the acid survivors overcome trauma and physical disfigurement through proper treatment. While a couple of private organisations, Acid Survivors' Foundation and Monowara Hospital to name the obvious two, have come forward with help, the government has largely been inactive.

We should start thinking of setting up plastic surgery units here in the country to treat the victims, instead of sending them overseas. Not only would it cut down on expenditure but it would also give more victims access to treatment. We would request the government and the people in the movement against acid-throwing to veer their efforts to this direction.

## Water for Sustainable Human Development: Vision 2025

*By 2025, Bangladesh's water regime will be characterised by a high degree of efficiency and equity in the development and management of the country's water resources, contributing to such national goals as accelerated and equitable economic development and social progress, the development of the capabilities of all citizens of the country and uplifting of their living conditions, and maintaining ecological and environmental harmony.*

been carried out. The latest in the series is the under-implementation national water management plan exercise to be completed by March 2001, being carried out under the auspices of the Water Resources Planning Organisation (WARPO). But until early 1999, there was no National Water Policy so that all previous planning exercises were carried out without a unifying set of principles and guidelines to refer to.

However, lots of useful information and data were generated through those studies, which can be profitably used as background material for current and future water planning and management exercises. The National Water Policy adopted in early 1999 provides the framework for planning exercises to be coherently and purposefully carried out, taking into account the relevant realities, dynamics, and linkages.

While in the past the focus of water planning was mainly on irrigation and flood control, currently focus is being given on uses of water and flood management (rather than flood control). The various water-using sectors include domestic uses in both rural and urban areas, agriculture, industry, fishery, navigation, environment and hydropower.

Various supply and demand aspects have been indicated above. With these factors kept in view, a water vision will have to do with the availability of water matching the need for it seasonally and spatially as well as sector-wise. Flood management during the monsoon and enhancement of flows during the dry season are key concerns in this context. As noted earlier, the demand for water will increase in the future; its implications would mostly relate to the dry season. Currently, water availability in the critical month of March is substantially short of the demand and an estimate (see 1991 Water Management Plan) projects the shortage at 880 million cubic meters in 2018, which may be larger in 2025 if computed on the same basis. However, the actual need in 2018 or 2025 can be significantly less than this projected demand if water demand management is improved through such practices as conservation, water-use efficiency and recycling.

A holistic and integrated approach to water management is needed in order that all relevant

aspects on both supply and demand sides and their critical relationships can be addressed in a manner that would ensure the best possible utilisation of the waters available and maximise the benefits for all concerned. All stakeholders on both user and management sides need to be appropriately involved in water management. Special needs of such groups as women and youth should be given due attention. Mechanisms should be developed for resolving conflicts between different water-using sectors and groups, between different agencies involved in water planning and management, and between users and planners/managers. The National Water Policy provides the guidelines for developing such a holistic approach.

However, it is necessary that appropriate institutions be developed with their mandates, linkages, and coordination mechanisms clearly defined. Efficiency, transparency and

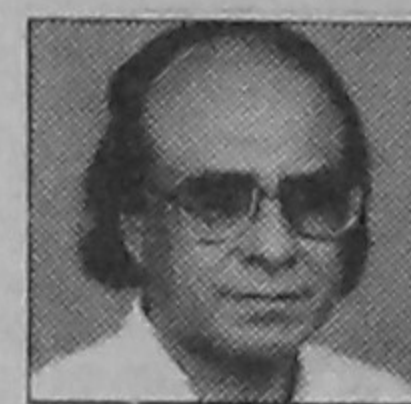
access to employment (particularly of the poor and disadvantaged), literacy rate, status of women's involvement in water management, and access to health care and sanitary facilities, and access to piped water under social ability and well-being; access to appropriate technology for efficient harnessing, distribution and use of water in various sectors, water and sewage treatment, effluent management, land reclamation and settlement, and disaster preparedness and warning under technology; water quality, drainage, salinity intrusion, flood and drought vulnerability, channel maintenance, bio-diversity, forest cover, land degradation, and air pollution under ecological harmony; political commitment, public awareness, public-private partnership, institutional framework, legal provisions, regulatory mechanism, involvement of local government bodies, and efficiency in decision-making - all concerning water management - under governance and institutional capacity; and regional co-operation in harnessing and managing water resources of common rivers, particularly in flood forecasting, warning, and management under regional co-operation.

The drivers listed above under any category are certainly not exhaustive. But these constitute an important set to focus on. As to goal setting concerning the drivers, some examples relating to a sustainable water regime by 2025 are as follows: population size to be contained to about 176 million, thereby containing the demand for water; per capita income to be raised to \$1200, thereby raising the ability of the people to face flood hazards and to use water more efficiently; access to health and sanitary facilities to be available to 100 per cent of the population, thereby improving their well-being; women's status to be equal to that of men in general and in the context of water use and management in particular; a high level of water and sewage treatment to be assured; flood vulnerability to be reduced to a low level; an efficient institutional framework for water management including appropriate local government involvement to be put in place; and an effective regional cooperation in flood forecasting and warning to be fostered. These are some examples of

goals that may be set concerning specific drivers in the context of a sustainable water regime by 2025. Regarding goal setting for other drivers listed in the preceding paragraph, one may consult G. K. Ahmad et al., "Bangladesh Water Vision 2025", Bangladesh Water Partnership (BWP), Dhaka, July 1999.

The various drivers belonging to different categories may evolve in one fashion or another and interact in different ways and in different combinations and the consequences depend on the way they evolve and interact. In order to achieve the vision goals, a framework for action in terms of policies and programmes needs to be designed and implemented to appropriately influence the developments concerning various individual drivers and their interactions. The instruments to be used in this context for a particular driver would depend on its current situation, the goal set in respect of it, and the best possible strategy that can be constructed for achieving that goal. Obviously, the strategy with respect to a particular driver needs to be derived from holistic considerations involving its linkages with other elements within the category and outside. And the overall framework for action embodying all the driver-specific strategies is expected to lead to a sustainable water regime by 2025. That is, by 2025, Bangladesh's water regime will be characterised by a high degree of efficiency and equity in the development and management of the country's water resources, contributing to such national goals as accelerated and equitable economic development and social progress, the development of the capabilities of all citizens of the country and uplifting of their living conditions, and maintaining ecological and environmental harmony. Towards realisation of this vision, there will need to be a strong political commitment to be underpinned by a broad-based national consensus, and commensurate mobilisation of financial and human resources in its favour.

A vision, a dream for the Bangladesh water sector has been outlined above in the context of sustainable human development. The strategic directions for creating the conditions for its realisation have also been indicated. If these could not be designed and fulfilled, the sector will be afflicted with crises of different kinds; and, as alluded to earlier, a water crisis scenario will be in prospect, with serious adverse implications for the economy and the society. Between the two options, the choice is obvious. The question is: will that choice be made and properly implemented?



## Lest We Forget ...

by Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad

accountability need to be established throughout the management system; and efficient utilisation by all water users must be ensured. In this context, a regulatory system needs to be put in place defining water rights and responsibilities of different water users concerning, for example, access, use, efficiency, and pollution control. Pricing mechanisms may also be appropriately used to regulate access to water both to encourage water-use efficiency and to raise funds to meet the costs of projects.

A vision is of course a dream. One can therefore envision that all the water sector and related problems, be they on the supply side or on the demand side or in management, will have been resolved by 2025, generating a cohesive, sustainable water regime consistent with high levels of equitably distributed socio-economic performance in the country. This is an optimistic scenario. Alternatively, the vision may be related to a pessimistic scenario, implying that the prob-

ability, improved demand management, improved equity in the access of various socio-economic groups to water, better distribution of water among various water-using sectors/users, improved ability of the people to face flood hazards and use water more profitably, improved governance and institutional framework for more effective water planning and management, and effective regional co-operation. There are many drivers. For convenience, these may be grouped under the following categories: demography, economy, societal ability and well-being, technology, ecological harmony, governance and institutional capacity, and regional cooperation.

The elements or drivers to focus on under different categories would include: size of population (water user), density of population, and rural and urban migration under demography; patterns of development, per capita income, poverty ratio, economic growth rate, and savings and investment ratios under economy; social equity,

## Bangladesh up to 2000 : A Social Analysis

by A Maher

*Over the last 29 years, Bangladesh seems to have excelled in coming to grips with the reins of materialism. As with every trend, scheme and social norm it has come across, its abundant manpower has taken to it with a glee a mechanic does to a new drill. But only as far as the mechanic; the mechanic is not an engineer who has strong control over what makes his tools work.*

This article attempts to strike that same well-beaten path to catch our policy makers in their New Year revelry.

## Some Weaves of the Political Fabric

It is an arguable fact that what has been happening in Bangladesh during its 'restive' periods of autocratic rule and after independence did not set off the trends and boom of what we have brought with us to the new century. There was not a sudden change into overly capitalistic markets or a sudden increase in the circulation of money among the middle class. After the 1990s we have seen several changes that have snowballed into dictating the present trends in today's local markets. Go out to any market now and you will see customers buzzing like never before. What are the reasons for this? To a layman it would definitely mean some improvement (actually a drastic one at that) in the overall economy of the nation. Politicians have had their role to play here no doubt; democracy has to be given its place as well. As the corridors of power widened after the fall of the autocratic regime, decisions went through more heads and sections of society leading to somewhat uniform reflection of pressing issues. Sweeping changes however were not seen because of the traditional 'Bangali' temperament towards the new administrative system. Rewarded with so much flexible power and self-moulding

law in the name of democracy the ruling parties rather replenished their coffers, both corporal and emotional, at the stake of the country. For many, the 'state' of the country was a term they had given birth to under the impression that it could be nursed whenever the need arose, so importance was not attached. For the policy makers selfishness was not even a secondary thought with the new taste of administration and authority being handled in a primitive manner. Returns on a national scale became visible only after the first term of the new breed of pro-democracy leaderships, or to be completely honest, a few years after each party came to power. It was true for both the major parties that have featured in running the nation, both grappling with inexperience crippling obligations and irresponsible emotions.

The price of democracy was probably to forfeit its luster as sacrifice and deny the only to future beneficiaries of its fruits, but it was one which no one was prepared to pay.

That was one trend difficult to see off until all had reaped their rewards. By the end of the current term of the ruling party there would hopefully be some balance and maturity in the political arena. From then on, the price of democracy would be crucial to emphasise on the correct wielding of a lawmakers' power in the development process; the step can even begin far earlier as many have already, rather harshly,

visualised the results of selfish misrule on the society. Many other 'new' aspects of administration and state are looming in the future as with the transition of any developing nation into a developed one, all subject to analysis in history but only to those literate in the field. The lesson to be learned here is not to be overwhelmed by emerging concepts in such primitive manner as a child does with his new toys, sometimes even breaking them. The culture to learn from the past has only come to facilitate material decisions; it has not incorporated itself deeper as a philosophy as to why this learning is at all needed.

## Learning about Education

Education is another crumbling social domain which has been used ruthlessly for all purposes other than a foundation of knowledge. Its link with politics is well experienced, the helplessness of leaders without student support, conflicting considerably at times with the state blueprint. The Dhaka University, considered the central seat of learning bears testimony to a devastated student culture. From 'persuading' political opponents to grabbing lucrative tender bids, 'student leaders' have defined a new term. All now know that there is little higher education in the country, with those unfortunately graduating sucked into unemployment.

Decisions to this issue have been made with all the wrong foresights, if there was any foresight at all. Quite to nature, a country fresh from independence could hardly be expected to push for a sector like education, where millions of people had come from the aftermath of war to a lost homeland. And that is where Bangladesh invited disaster. Long term planning meant the state machinery would be fed in around 15 to 20 years with intellectually trained bureaucrats who could then take on the reigns more naturally from their pioneers. Naturally, because the new education system was based on a fraternity of their own with no intervention from any other political, social or bureaucratic quarter. Such haughty thoughts aside, the academic foundation of the country began leasing itself to financial possibilities in an effort to revive the infrastructure right after the 1990s. During the last three years, institutions with foreign funding have sprung up in every corner of the capital blaring credible decrees

and attractive curricula which is another deterrent to the proper recuperation of a recovering or fallen system. During the initial stage of any reform there should not be any external influence on the system else there may form harmful mutation in the core.

The predicament intensifying over the years, all the governments and decision makers in power then failed to address them with the correct approach. More and more students became involved in destructive and anti-social activities or the frequency of such incidences increased. All administrative quarters defended their inefficiency by stating that the students were not serious. A small number of students were responsible for the majority of crimes and violence. The role of the press here may also be denounced for not acting as a guide to the leaders or attempting to mould a national outlook. A series of editorials from different sections of the press covered student related incidences admirably but an equally long series of analysis on how to bring about a change in the 'culture' would have yielded visible results. The authorities, government or the opposition were always the one reproached without an insight into the cause-effect behavioral aspect of the student community. This arrogant eye brings to view a rather fundamental aspect of human attitude - that if the students had something better to do they would not pursue politics. That with a tactic to divert, the problem could be handled easier. All have failed in this area either missing the whole idea or not focusing on the right issues. Some social scientists have suggested the youth community are in great need of basic amenities like health, entertainment, recreation, basic social services, etc. to lead a civic life without pent-up frustration which could turn violent.

## A Trend of Cultures

From the end of the period referred to as 'restive' for Bangladesh, another paradigm of human mindset has worked its way unconsciously into the new millennium. Dhaka became prone to the wail of different 'cultures' from the early nineties, which saw people invest money and effort to make their habits news and a part of national policy making. We first began seeing the rise of the real estate business with everyone suddenly interested with buying themselves snug accommodation; the automobile

business followed suit taking advantage of down-to-earth taxes on imports - the effect of that buying spree is now felt strongly in the present state of the clogged traffic management system. Meanwhile the garments industry, one of the chief foreign exchange earners, had crept into local markets distributing the national income more among the middle class (in the sellers) and also increasing material resources among them (in the buyers).

These were the economic changes shaping the Dhaka society into a volatile hub-bub of activity and national boom. The general public were obliquely aware of the changes but did not think them to be worth a mental exercise or a topic for the living room. What shook them out of the shopping shock was a plunging law and order situation making Dhaka a lurking nightmare. A series of rapes, disorders and mugging changed the general perspective at which people used to look at life. The heinous rape of women and children were almost in proportion to the number of new laws and bills passed against them. Police were number and could not alter the figures, they themselves had some numbers to contribute to the list. When institutions like the state vigilantes collapse it ushers the crumble of the society's had become an everyday phenomenon people woke up to. Observers were quick to crack down on the visual and news media for generating explicit coverage of the wrong things. Satellite television channels were blasted but remained cosy in the investments of leading industrialists and continued transmitting the waves of alien culture. Again a dearth of healthy social services seemed like one of the causes. The government once more cracked down on the physical forces at play displaying power with some quick arrests and hauling in suspects. Topics contributing to the rise in the crime were not addressed as its continued. As usual people saw people working, but the measures not producing results.

Over the last 29 years, Bangladesh seems to have excelled in coming to grips with the reins of materialism. As with every trend, scheme and social norm it has come across, its abundant manpower has taken to it with a glee a mechanic does to a new drill. But only as far as the mechanic; the mechanic is not an engineer who has strong control over what makes his tools work. Fifty the politicians, that judgement and the onus of tinkering a scorned societal essence called the mind is what has been so cruelly heaped upon their responsibilities. And the engineers in the corridors of power have only been too happy to play with the drill of that mechanic.

## To the Editor

## "A splendid convergence"

Sir, The above mentioned editorial in the DS issue of January 30, 2000 contains a word "Convergence" which is not found in the English Dictionary. Does it mean coverage? However, the message of the editorial is very good indeed. Unless one achieves divine discipline in his life, his existence on earth is meaningless. It is also applicable in the case of politics.

The Akheri Munajat on the last day of the Bishwa Ijtema is very meaningful for various reasons: the chief being the safety and security of Muslims' lives. Let us hope that our political leaders may take part in the Munajat and seek divine blessings in order to save the country from many ills and

"spare the people of confrontational politics" for the good of the present and future generations.

Abul Ashraf Noor  
House#09, Road # 04  
Sector#05, Uttara  
Dhaka-1230

## The expectations

Sir, When we think of our predicaments at the end of our quarter and plus years of the century of our independence, it is not what our freedom fighters opted for at the cost of their lives. Some of those are still living in sub-human conditions. The price they paid for an independent Bangladesh was too exorbitant but the return they see is abysmally dismal. Mirza Ghalib may have foreseen this, as he wrote:

Syed Waliullah  
Dhaka