The Baily Star Founder-Editor: Late S.M. Ali

Dhaka, Tuesday, November 28, 2000

Wheels of Justice

IN a country where the ratio between crime and I punishment or prosecution and conviction has been far from favourable to the ends of justice and rule of law, any news of prompt delivery of justice revives a wee bit of our lost hope in the system And it is all the more welcome when it pertains to a married and pregnant teenager's strangulation to death by her husband, his mother and sister for the former's failure to meet their oppressive dowry demand. A small piece of redemption it maybe in the overall justice-delayed-is-justice-denied scenario but it's a potential gain to the system all the same. For, we can multiply it a few times over by valuing the spirit of law over the mechanics of procedures in several other cases that have been dragged for too long to reach any solace to the aggrieved souls.

We believe that the District and Sessions Judge of Narayanganj has delivered a landmark judgement in the Mummy murder case by handing death penalty to the husband, mother-in-law and sister-in-law of the victim Mahmuda Sultana Mummy. First of all, the whole process of trial has been completed and a verdict reached in record quick time of a little over one year, which is certainly worth emulating in all such cases pending before the court of law. Secondly, the judgement has served a hugely important social purpose by pronouncing a powerful message of deterrence to the dowry-lovers' fraternity. Unmet dowry demand has even caused acid to be thrown into the wife's face, by her spouse, entailing another heinous crime in the process.

All in all, the verdict represents what we would like to regard as a trend-setting application of the Prevention of Women and Children Repression Act. 1995. This should not only serve as a referencepoint in dowry-related murder cases but also help those being tortured with persistent demands for dowry to come out in the open and seek aid for legal remedies before it is too late. There is a familial message also as far as in-law - wife relationship goes in a joint family setting.

Now we turn to other cases of repression and murder of women and children where justice wails in waiting like those of Sazneen, Yasmeen, Seema, etc. etc. Let us see it delivered conclusively there, too - sooner than any later.

Message of Ramadan

THE month of self-abnegation and prayer begins L today. Abstention from food and drink during daytime will make us feel the pinch of what hunger means to millions of starving or under-fed people in the country. Ramadan will generate an empathy in the faster's mind for the famished among his or her compatriots. Overall, the importance of food as a gift of Allah will significantly dawn on us. The month of siam also makes us conscious about the efficacy of the principles of egalitarian distribution

of wealth among members of the society. Since fasting is the antonym of gluttony, overeating has to be shunned even at iftar and sehri times. We need to be self-disciplined, austere and frugal imbibing the spirit of Ramadan. Furthermore, let those who are not fasting show respect

for those who are. This is the time when bureaucrats, doctors, engineers, teachers, policemen, industrialists and businessmen should bring to bear a greater social commitment on the discharge of their professional responsibilities. Work ethics should be followed unwaveringly. The authority must put a check on profiteering through price hikes and incidences of extortionism much that those who resort to such things shall themselves take a vow to reform. Another cause of concern remains the political strife. If we follow the spirit of sacrifice for greater good of the people there will certainly be light at the end of the tunnel. We urge our political leaders, both in the government and the opposition to start a process of communication during the Ramadan Iull. Let the purity of Ramadan sentiments stimulate a

Remaking Asia

What started at Boao is no doubt a landmark achievement, a milestone and breakthrough for Asia and in less than another sixty years it will hopefully blossom into fuller integration of Asia. If it takes about half a century for Europe to integrate, it will definitely take much lesser time for the Asian countries to come closer together for their mutual benefit and for the collective benefit of their people.

nario. Asia, where more than half of world's population live and whose landmass makes up a group of nations. Countries third of the planet, now produces around the world started to redemore than 25 per cent of the fine their relationships towards global exports, consumes about positive and mutually productive twenty-three per cent of the and beneficial collaboration in world's imports, and commands the form of regional, inter- and 33 per cent of the international intra-regional and trans-regional structured economic cooperative services. Asia is fast becoming the bodies like the integration of EU world's top growth centre (European Union), 22-nation beackoning the ushering of a new APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Asian century which promises to Cooperation). NAFTA (North make the region as the most American Free Trade Agreement). dynamic area of economic oppor-ASEAN (Association of South tunities in the world by the first quarter of the twentyfirst cen-East Asian Nations) etc as better bargaining chip and clout. " This is how the continent was

Although Asian nations partic-

ipated in transregional body like

APEC, Asia as a whole lacked a

SIA is at the threshold of a

renaissance fuelled by its

A maximisation of benefits

and opportunities of the rapidly

changing global economic sce-

viewed by the Commission for

New Asia back in 1994 (the data

quoted here needs to be updated

as six years have passed by in the

meantime). The Commission in

its report made the futuristic view

that in the wake of East Asian

miracle which would in a gradual

process trickle down to the rest of

the region, Asia would emerge as

the single largest market and

growth centre not only economi-

cally, but also culturally, strategi-

cally and politically. This new

Asia would hopefully include

Asia including the Pacific rim

countries. Australia and New

Zealand would also try to inte-

Asia of the twentyfirst century.

grate themselves with the new

economic integration of Asia was

contemplated and germinated.

Then came the sudden and

unforeseen crash in the econo-

mies of the East Asian countries

in 1997. This vulnerability dem-

onstrated the need for Asian

countries to step up dialogue, co-

ordination, cooperation and

increasing interaction in main-

taining regional economic secu-

rity as well as for sustaining

healthy and stable economic

development in the region. Apart

from this, 1990s marked an

important watershed in the global

context unfolding a new era of

geo-economic competition based

on open market, free trade,

liberalisation and regional coop-

erative alliances. This is what has

come to be known as

globalisation with regionalism as

a new framework for constructive

cooperation among nations or

THE Vajpayee government

demic community by

endowing Rs. 12 crores to Oxford

University for a chair in Indian

history and culture. For foreign

minister Jaswant Singh, this was

an "exciting" fulfilment of a long-

reflects his own ignorance, natu-

ral for someone who joined poli-

tics after an undistinguished

army career. So he is using public

money to pursue a private fan-

His "dream" is worse. A major

nation with a thriving scholarly

tasy. This is reprehensible.

For India's finest research

held "dream".

has mocked India's aca-

This is how the idea of possible

viable exclusive economic forum led by Asians and guided from Asian perspectives of Asian interests and views providing the opportunity of discussing the Asian issues as well as issues relating to enhancement of exchanges, interaction and cooperation among Asian countries. and between Asian countries and other parts of the globe. This was designed not to antagonise the Central Asia, West Asia, South northern hemisphere or arouse Asia, South East Asia and East suspicion in it about the possible economic integration and interaction among Asian countries particularly in the backdrop of Samuel P Huntington's "Clash of Civilisations" where the resurgence of Islam and Confucianism (possible rise of China as the world's largest economy by 2030AD and its growing economic influence in the region and beyond) has been identified as the new found enemies of the western world. With all these as a backgrounder former Filipino President Fidel V Ramos and other Asian leaders put forward in Manila in September 1998 the proposal for establishment of an Asian Forum similar to World Economic Forum in Davos. They suggested that Boao in Hainan Province of the People's Republic of China would be the permanent seat of the proposed Asian Forum. T Wang Xiaofeng, the

governor of Hainan, gladly

accepted the idea and was too

eager to provide the initial fund-

ing for the launching of the

Forum as a non-governmental

and non-profit making corporate

body. Elaborate preparations are afoot to hold the first convention of the proposed Forum in the year

As a first step towards the formal floating of the Forum experts, academics, scholars, former diplomats, journalists and representatives of former Asian government leaders from as many as twentyfour different Asian countries gathered at Boao for two days on November 18 and 19 last. (The absence of representation from the oil- rich Arab world and from the Pacific rim countries was strongly felt and it was suggested that in future these countries should have proper representation so as to give the Forum a compact Asian look.) The second stage will be the meeting of the former senior

fora. It also elected a pro tem of the ASEAN, a career diplomat

from Malaysia. The main theme of the Forum was directed towards ways and means of reaping the maximum benefit for the Asian countries and to avoid their marginalisation out of the process of globalisation. The expert group meeting, chaired by Mr Chen Ci. Director General of Hainan Provincial Foreign Affairs Office. laboured to chart a road map or vision for what has been described as striving to become the 'premier forum' with strong Asian perspectives and promoting the business and economic integration of the Asian countries in a rapidly globalising world. The

Secretary General of the Forum and the obvious choice was Ajit Singh, the first Secretary General ness communities in Asia. Its strategies included conven-

ing conferences and workshops on a regular basis to discuss important issues relating to Asian development, trade and investment in the context of globalisation as well as to develop and promote closer interrelationship between the Forum business communities and the governments. Identification of and dissemination of information on emerging business and investment opportunities, serving as a clearing house for promoting joint ventures among business communities operating in Asia, undertaking feasibility studies and providing consultancy services to business communities, serving as an early warning system for the business communities on the impact of global trade and investment liberalisation measures, turning the Forum into a global centre to undertake research and impart training to equip business communities with better management and technological capabilities and complementing the regional initiative underway to intensifying collaboration between the governments and the business communities on trade and investment issues are the other notable strategies iden-

tilled by the experts. What is so very notable is that representatives from Bangladesh. India, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka, who belonged to SAARC, now in limbo due to unending bitter rivalries between the two giant south Asian neighbours India and Pakistan spoke in one voice at the forum expert group meeting. This demonstrated that at the rulers' level (in South Asia) there might be differences, but at the civil society level there is a common aspiration for economic liberation of the teeming millions in Asia through joint effort and increasing interaction. Noted analyst Bhabani Sen Gupta has rightly said that for India to become a viable regional power, as it is long striving for, it must first come to terms with both China and Pakistan. Boao Forum for Asia provides such an opportunity for the trio China. India and Pakistan to cooperate.

the advent of colonialism there had been business interactions and interchanges among Asian countries and Asia as a whole reached the zenith of progress and prosperity. Asia had been the home of great civilisations like that of Hindu . Buddhist, Confucian and Islamic. Asia was the melting pot of diverse cultures . There was free mobility and borders had been no barriers anywhere in Asia. But long subjugation under the yoke of colonialism had created the current great divides and suspicions among the Asian countries. The time has now come for them to integrate and make the Asia-Pacific century a reality . Asian voices should be clearly and collectively aired in the international fora. The Boao Asian Forum is definitely a good beginning in this regard and will act as a catalytic agent in bringing the countries of Asia together on one single platform. It will be the precursor and manifestation of the Asian Renaissance about which Asian think tank was speaking for a long time. The Baoa Asian Forum aptly reminds what Noble Laureate the great poet Rabindra Nath Tagore had prophesied in his last public address in April, 1941 'The new dawn will come from this horizon. from the East where the Sun rises, and unvanguished man will trace his path of conquest to win back his lost heritage". This lost heritage that Tagore so eloquently spoke of is a completely secular Asia where all irrespective of language, race, religion, sex, creed, caste, colour and nationality will happily converge as they used to do in the precolonial days.. At long last the first rays of that new dawn and vision of a happy and prosperous new Asia has started to glisten in the horizon from the east, from Boao in China, as Tagore had dreamt of sixty years ago. What started at Boao is no doubt a landmark achievement, a milestone and breakthrough for Asia and in less than another sixty years it will hopefully blossom into fuller integration of Asia. If it takes about half a century for Europe to integrate, it will definitely take much lesser time for the Asian countries to come closer together for their mutual benefit and for the collective benefit of their people. Peace will then reign in the continent and the present trouble-spots will disappear.

History recorded that before

HEART OF THE MATTER Mansoor Mamoon

government Asian leaders in the fourth week of February 2001 to be known as the Preparatory Committee Meeting for the convening of the full dress meeting of the Boao Asia Forum (BAF). From Bangladesh former state minister and ruling party MP Syed Abul Hossain, who is also a leading businessman, has been included in the preparatory committee. As suggested and proposed by him this incumbent writer was invited to participate at the recently concluded Expert Group Meeting of the Forum. The meeting adopted the draft declaration, organisational structure of the secretariat, intellectual support for the forum from the think tank, formation of Asian Institute for conducting research on Asian issues, draft agenda for the preparatory committee meeting. mission, vision and objectives of the forum as well as explored the avenues of turning the Forum into a self-sustaining body with supports from the Asian business communities and international

missions of the forum comprised: (1) generating, through high level interaction between government and business leaders, strategic initiatives for augmentation of trade, investment and technology partnership in Asia: (2) developing an enabling environment through creating Asian business synergies for comprehensive and sustainable economic progress; (3) promoting region-wide strategic alliance to seize trade, industry and investment opportunities emerging from a globalising world: (4) nurturing the concept of intra-regional institutional networking and identifying the global trade and investment opportunities in the context of global digital revolution; (5) providing intellectual leadership for developing capital and conducting research on areas of special importance to the region and its international partnership and, last but not the least, (6) enhancing inter-cultural understanding and fostering a deep sense of

social responsibility among busi-Prestige via Oxbridge? Kissa Kursi Ka!

Praful Bidwai writes from New Delhi

Governments should not make bequests to foreign universities to promote area studies, languages or culture. If these are worthy of serious attention, the universities concerned should promote them. Many indeed do. Endowments are best left to the expatriate community. An Oxbridge professorship is no longer what it used to be in prestige or providing leadership.

institutions, this may be a nightmare. This contemptible search for false prestige distorts our bequests to foreign universities to even pay University Grants Com- education ministry. And the National Centre for the Arts, education priorities. It does not show the "new" confidence of a "resurgent India", but just the All the government has done is Many indeed do. Endowments than a chaprasi, well below the tenterhooks is unvarying: there's are best left to the expatriate minimum wage. buy up a chair. This won't be the

first India-related chair at Oxford. There already exist five positions. Some have been occupied by distinguished scholars, including Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. So Mr Jaswant Singh's claim to have created the first India chair

particularly deplorable for the disproportion between the government's generosity to Oxford and the way it treats Indian universities. Today, the average budget of each Indian university, cannot forget my disgust with its with hundreds of teachers, is less functioning. For years, it operthan Rs. seven crores.

community shouldn't have to buy chairs abroad. Here, New Delhi is three times the budget of the toilets. following its own bete noir Pakistan. Bhutto and Zia-ul-Haq also Indian Council of Historical made endowments to Oxford and the budget of the Indian Council Cambridge. But Bhutto was an Oxford alumnus, whereas the Singhs and Vajpayees had humbler education, which they are

compensating with vaulting institutes have no assured funds petty bureaucrats, who relished Grants Commission, National to pay even salaries. Many live telling us we would get no money Museum, Indian Institute of Governments should not make from hand to mouth. Most can't from the sole funding source: the Advanced Studies, Indira Gandhi promote area studies, languages mission-scale salaries. For ICSSR is an "autonomous" instior culture. If these are worthy of instance, ICSSR senior researchserious attention, the universities ers, with a doctorate, earn Rs. concerned should promote them. 1,250 per monththree times less ICSSR institute directors on Research.

An Oxbridge professorship is tutes have been plunged into no longer what it used to be in bankruptcy under the new chairprestige or providing leadership. man's "austerity" measures. Today, any Oxford teacher can Acclaimed scholar Partha get a "titular" professorship for Chatterjee, director of Calcutta's Centre for the Study of Social However, the present case is Sciences, has threatened to ity was to organise BJP president work. Their highwater-mark is a resign unless the grants are

horribly depressing. As a former JNU, without consulting its aca- contrast, India's Left-liberal Governing Council member, I still ated from a sadistically main-The Oxford endowment is tained building without usable The ICSSR is also funding a

Research and more than one-half attended by India's topmost national and global agenda," no debates, physically attacking social scientists, we were never less. of Social Science Research, to once served a hot meal comparawhich 27 institutes are affiliated. ble to what students eat. Worse, into higher education, reflected in seminar in Montreal, closing Grotesquely, most of the 27 we were routinely insulted by its takeover of the University exhibitions as in Delhi's National

no money. Strangely, however, abroad is a pitiable attempt to Most ICSSR-affiliated insti- under chairman M.L. Sondhi, it is gain a figleaf of intellectual setting up new institutes. The respectabilitysomething it has latest are "Shyama Prasad always craved but never Mookerjee Gateway of Social achieved. Sciences", "Deen Daval Upadhyaya Centre for Social existence, its ideologues have Welfare" (whose sole major activ-Laxman's talk) and "Centre for few tawdry pamphlets full of the Study of National Secu- venom against secularism, social The ICSSR headquarters is rity created in collaboration with

rate with numerous institutes sociology and political science. arbitrarily chosen by Mr Sondhi. gigantic "SP Mookerjee Interna- methods to combat their At the Council's meetings, tional Conference" on "the opponentsraucously disrupting

The justification for keeping Indian Council of Philosophical The sangh parivar's foray

National Council of Educational

Research and Training, and

In the 75 years of the RSS's failed to produce any scholarly reform and the minorities. By scholars have produced world-

The new Centre will collabo- class work in history, economics, No wonder Hindutva proponents use extra-intellectual conferencesICHR's chairman This is part of Hindutva's foray B.R. Grover recently disrupted a Gallery of Modern Art, and banning books and films.

The only time I was heckled and prevented from speaking against nuclear weapons was on May 16, 1998. The heckler was Mr Sondhi.

However, it is extremely doubtful if reputable Western institutions, which respect academic freedom, will bestow legitimacy upon sanghi academics. A case is the Hindujas' early 1990s effort to establish a chair in Vedic studies at Columbia University. The faculty refused to entertain this even with a changed title ("Indic"

So overbearing was the Hindujas' interference in syllabus and personnel selection that the project collapsed.

The Hindutva agenda means subverting rational norms of academic functioning, including balance and democratic decency values alien to the parivar. But because many Western universities are turning mercenary, there is a danger that their resistance to Hindutva's depredations will weaken. This must not be allowed to happen.

One final point: The Hindujas have been charge-sheeted in the Bofors scandal by the Central Bureau of Investigation on new evidence in Swiss courts. The government must have no track with them. And all academic institutions must sever their

To the Editor ...

genuine sense of welfare for the people.

The politicisation of BCS posts

Sir. As a citizen, it is very disturbing to read the DS front-page report "PSC influenced by ruling party?" about alleged unauthorised infiltration of freedom fighters and political party candidates with dubious certificates hastily obtained at the last moment or arranged previously. The opposition had also complained publicly about the erosion of this public institution. It appears there are no democratic practices in the country. The standard institu-

tions are being ruined. It means that the standard of politics and political culture are deteriorating in the country day by day, and we are reminded of similar unethical practices in vogue during the early years since independence. The question AZ arises who will and can control the ruling politicians? The formation of strong public opinion is still weak in the evolving society due to poverty and lack of economic sustaining power.

Many leaders and vested groups of the society are taking advantage of the weak infrastructure of protests, condemnation and peaceful demonstrations, in

thriving. The forthcoming elec- govern the country for five years with phoney propaganda. tions have no meaning, as the atatime. right type of potential leadership would not be available to the masses. When what is right has no priorities, then what to do with the leftovers?

are at loggerhead, namely the Executive, the Judiciary and the political system. The image of the politicians is at the lowest ebb. and firepower, might, muscle and black money dictate the proceedings of the day. The governance is passing through a crisis:

The nation has to wake up and start a cleansing movement. Appeals to good sense have no meaning. Who will save us from this frustrating state?

The patterns of inefficiency

Sir, Our airports and seaports have a similar pattern of inefficiency; which is now being spotlighted in the print media through investigative journalism. At the

a situation where the rich are apex is the political inefficiency, and remain in the limelight, while as helpless as it was before, or richer, and the poor are poorer, as the politicians, as the elected and bank-loan default culture is representatives of the people,

With the return of the so-called democratic and representative form of governance since the beginning of the 1990s, the per-The three pillars of the society marked improvement, except in unable to deliver) the coming ad hoc and contingency cases. The lack of political will and dysfunctioning of the parliament have been identified in the media as two of the main causes of the poor governance of a poor country. When the political leaders cannot unite on common national causes, how the country is expected to project a united front in the sphere of development activities?

> The lax civil service encourages corrupt practices, with the controlling ruling politicians feeling rather helpless, or abetting for personal gains. The rich class of the citizens is beyond administrative control and this lawlessness and disregard and disrespect for the authority trickles down to the lower levels of the society, creating mass state of frustration, despondency and

the corrupt rich and the hidden even worse. godfathers divert the attention

Now with more black money in circulation, it attracts more customers of the wrong kind, upsetting the rules applied in the playing fields. Under the circumformance has not shown any stances (the politicians are national elections bring no ray of hope. Then why the political pundits are harping on the elections? Who will elect whom and what for?

> Both the police and the politicians have failed, and there are rampant corrupt practices in the industries and business circles. There is no honesty in academic sector and the PSC is now being suspected of adopting unfair means. The judiciary's image is already at stake. What remains? What the mayors are doing are more negative than positive.

Nothing works, whether in the secretariat, offices or in the city streets. Unless the style is changed, announcing official measures will not impress the public. We have to get out of the vicious circle, but there is no team to get us out of it. No use gloom. The small fries get caught approaching the government, it is

Abul M Ahmad Dhaka

Approach road to Rayer Bazar Monument

Sir, We thank the government for building the long cherished monument at Rayer Bazar, Dhaka in memory of the martyr intellectuals of 1971. The monument, by now, is a part of our national heritage. It is, hence, of immense importance to bring the monument to limelight, which can be done by linking the site with the city road system.

We, therefore, propose for construction of a paved road from Satmasjid Road Physical Training College point to the Monument site. This can be done acquiring a small stretch of land from Physical Training College and Commercial College without using much of private land. We. therefore urge the authorities concerned to take necessary steps in this regard.

Kazi Zillur Rahman House#80, Road# 2 Mohammadpur, Dhaka-1207

Looking at Greatness

TYOTI Basu (87) retired as Chief Minister of West Bangal and admirers would not let him go (that nagging feeling of uncertainty in the minds of the faithful followers at the loss of leadership). Now he will continue to guide from the back room, freed from executive responsibilities.

To be able to influence (public or private opinion), it is not essential to hold position of power. Today's materialistic world is power-hungry. Paradoxically, when power is sought, it is not available. To hold it, is elusive. Modern political leaders today believe more in power than in service; more in mundane ideologies than in moral principles.

What is timeless, survives. To rule a society (with voluntary support and backing) of 50 to 80 millions for two decades is a rare example of the subjugation of the ego and ignoring the sycophancy attached with power and influence. It means that greatness does not depend on external support but is self-sustaining from within.

This internal containment is missing from today's global leadafter more than two decades ership. There are rings and layers of superb, dedicated active public of surrounding defensive fortifiservice; visible only a couple of cations, based on human and times in a century (greatness is materialistic resources, which that rare). A fitting tribute was cannot stand the test of time, and paid by New Delhi columnist ultimately crumble with the Proful Bidwai (The Daily Star of gravity of time and circum-November 6). Jyoti Basu wished stances. The other negative factor to retire earlier, but his workers is the doggedness to cling to power, even when the tide is turning, and the writing is on the wall. Let go when the time arrives. All have to face the cycles of autumns and winters. In undeveloped and uncultivated minds. the winters of discontent reign

supreme. Leaders must respond to the signs of change and be in tune with the philosophy of change. What are left behind are not physical monuments and signboards, but the acceptance of sound principles deep in the hearts of more than one generation. Advertising cannot increase greatness, or the lack of it diminish its value and place. Emphasis in Nature is at the routine level.

Greatness in leadership is more than mere belief in fond isms and ideologies, and rigorous implementation of the same for a period of time. That explains why many of the global political leaders who reigned for two decades or more in different nations had to wearily fade out, as victims of

time and change. There is no greatness without empathy. It is different from sympathy and support. Great leaders create eras, not waves. Thereafter comes stagnation, because the right gardeners are missing; as the messages stop, due to communication gap.

Genuine leadership needs inner and outer space, for proper elbow room and mobility. Without accommodation there cannot be dynamism. The synergy has to come from within, rather than extracted and collected from an exploited society. First the basic issue concerning approach to greatness has to be faced: who supports whom? Greatness

withers with external aid. The Bengalees are capable of producing some great leaders at odd intervals. For the Bangladeshis, the time is ripe for another to emerge. This sprouting and identity will follow its own course, and it cannot be imposed by human groups in a planned

When the time comes, the master appears", is told and retold in more than one book of wisdom. For qualification, there are automatic self-tests for the society to fathom out. Till then, chaos will take its time to settle down to a conclusive focus.

manner.