

Farewell Mr. President

Justice Shahabuddin enhanced the status of the presidency by his deeds

WE pay our sincerest tribute to the outgoing President Shahabuddin Ahmed who has been the head of the state for the last five years and part of the political scene for the last decade. Stepping in to head the country in 1990 after Bangladesh was struggling to steady itself in the aftermath of a massive political agitation and civil unrest, he successfully calmed the national sea with his own steady and steadfast management of the office including presiding over a highly sensitive election. Having completed his task in 1991 he returned to his earlier job of Chief Justice and set a precedent of dignity and honour rarely seen in our public life. He returned as the President in 1996 with the robes of legend on his shoulders and leaves office with the same intact. Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed is the most respected and trusted man in this country and has indeed enhanced the prestige of the chair, the highest in the country. We salute him.

What Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed had done was to make himself as lofty as his office and this was possible by never becoming involved in the political doings of the state. By putting a divider between the state and the government he created a space which no president had done in the past and has established a pattern in officiating which all presidents in the future will be measured against.

The President's greatest strength lay in creating the sense of neutrality, which his office demanded. Although he became President through the support of Awami League, he was equally acceptable to the BNP. He overcame all partisan perceptions and people felt he was always the man of the last resort for the nation. That sense of safety for all, manifested on many occasions, will be his great legacy. He belonged to everyone.

He received the past Opposition when there was discord and the present Opposition as well when there was unhappiness on electoral issues -- with complete equanimity and benign objectivity. He threw his official weight behind the electoral process and lent it the extra credibility that may lead to its increased institutionalization. And that is why he could override all criticisms about his activities because in the public eye he had become a personage beyond partisan scrutiny. He had become the President of the republic. He had become the President of the people.

We wish him the very best as he goes along with the well-deserved satisfaction of a life dedicated to the service of the nation. We also hope that the institutionalisation of the office that he achieved, more than anyone else who held the office, will continue. The legacy that he gifted to the nation through his office must be considered a prized possession worthy of being sustained, enhanced and handed down with every new presidency.

Zobeida Rab's dream

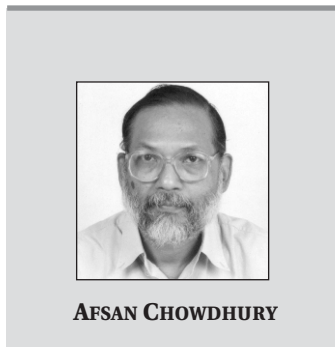
Let it inspire others onto the path of charity

IT'S individuals like Mrs. Zobeida Rab who restore our faith in the innate goodness and generosity of human beings at a time when most people are overtaken and driven by self-centricity. The 93-year-old widow of the first chairman of the National Pay Commission has donated ten apartments in one of the posh residential areas in the city to a foundation named after her that provides healthcare to the poor free of cost. The Zobeida Rab Foundation for the Bangladesh Medical College Hospital (BCMCH) would spend the proceeds from the sales of these apartments, expected to be in excess of three crore taka, on construction of two wards at the hospital.

This is not an uncharted territory for Mrs. Rab. Nearly two years back, she donated to the foundation ten lakh taka to facilitate treatment for the poor and the marginalised. There are also two free beds at the BMCH for them. The latest contribution is only a renewal of her commitment to the cause of the downtrodden. We are sure that the generous donation would help the BMCH reach out to more people who have hitherto been unattended in their times of medical emergency.

Our public-sector healthcare system is, needless to say, painfully inadequate to cater to the needs of the marginalised millions. Most state-run healthcare outlets, including the leading hospitals in the country, are beset with crippling constraints such as lack of medicine, inadequate infrastructure, poor personnel and logistic support, etc. Without an involvement of the private sector, reaching out to the poor and the marginalised is simply a daunting task. The private sector has its financial constraints as well and does need donation to keep up the research work and healthcare services. We can only hope the moneyed people in the society would draw inspiration from Mrs. Rab's magnanimity and do their bit to help reach out to the poor with healthcare.

Our readers, our letter writers and us



AFSAN CHOWDHURY

PART of my job at *The Daily Star* is to assist Sonia Kristy to do the letters. This section of our paper has simply exploded in the last few months. A lot of it has to do with the recent events like the national elections, the mayhem on the minorities and the WTC attack followed by the Afghan war. Partly, it has to do with news and editorial management and the position this paper has taken. But all have ended up as a deluge of letters. Each is read, given a minimum edit -- sometimes to take the offensive language off -- and then sent for publishing. We have tripled our space for letters and still 150 e-mail pages wait. We are getting twice the number of letters on land mail than we can publish. It's happy days when the readers respond this way but the subjects aren't exactly those which warm the heart.

And now the first break
"Hello?"
"Yes, what can I do for you?"
"I wrote a letter last week but that hasn't been printed. Why so?"
"Sir, we are trying our best to accommodate as many as possible but there are many. You will have to wait."
"My letter is on a very important subject."
"So are other letters and you are the tenth person to call us. We love publishing letters."

"Then where is my letter?"
She goes on listening helplessly to this circular conversation. Happens every day.
And now let's go back to the main show
Letters occupy a democratic space in a paper. They come from outside and express opinions, comments and ideas. Appeals and complaints, hopes and anguish are all in these missives. In

about space sharing.
And now for the second break of the programme
"Hello, I'm a retired Joint Secretary of the government. Why wasn't my letter published?"
"It will be, it will be. There is a que here and we can't break that."
"But I am a retired Jt. Secretary. When I was in service, I could do whatever I wanted to, if I wanted to.

Envoy to Bangladesh, we were aware that this was going to bring in more letters. It seems that for the first time since the Vietnam war, there is a serious global wave of anti-US public opinion.
One wonders whether the US policy makers ever thought that this kind of bottled up feeling was there. I'm afraid if the US has won the war in Afghanistan it has lost the public

ful. It's too good for the letters page."
"I want my poem in the letters page." He doesn't move from where he stands.
We take his poem and mumble under our breath about the rights of the reader.
And now for the final burst before we end
The letters written by Americans show a sense of resentment and per-

The Palestine problem is kept alive by the US for a strategic friendship with Israel. Palestinians are all terrorists in the US eyes they write. That hurt feeling in the global subaltern world goes beyond CNN but the US doesn't hear that. It understands the WTC attack but not the baby killing in Iraq or the massacre in Shabra and Shatila, our readers say. Even we don't understand that, we see that in our letters.

The Americans seem to be demanding the same political memory as their own from everyone else. As Bush said, either you are with us or against us. I don't know if he really said that but it has become part of global memory. It will define the US more strongly than their PL-480 food programme.

For those who were against Osama bin Laden and wanted his end though not demise, this war is a strange sight. The Islamic radical forces have been aroused globally and they will keep hitting the West again and again. With the domination of WTO the extreme Left may rise again and shake hands with Al-Qaeda. As the West is everywhere, the targets are everywhere too. The first lesson in counter-insurgency is that you can't shoot down the enemy, you just take away his grudge which is his main weapon. The US is not exactly there and probably doesn't want to be, doesn't need to be. That is why OBL may have won a victory million times greater than he planned.

That's why the world will never be the same again. Not for us, we don't count but for the Americans who never expected uncertainty in an uncertain world.

For the moment the letters page seems the most sensible space in the world today.

Afsan Chowdhury is a Senior Assistant Editor of The Daily Star.

STRAIGHT FROM THE HEART

We publish letters which we consider that even fundamentally opposed to what Star stands for and we are quite sure about the issues we stand for. But in the end we all agree that we wanted this democratic space. We even let the readers say -- not so nice things -- about our Editor and his comments which again is a position taken in a public space. But within 200 words please.

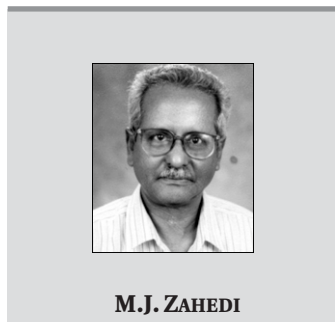
a way this part of the paper is the interactive space. As I give a final read to them. I often feel that this space isn't ours at all. Should our editorial cursor click apply here? We should leave it as they are, just as they are? Doesn't this space belong to the readers?
We argue and discuss this issue in our meeting. We publish letters which we consider that even fundamentally opposed to what Star stands for and we are quite sure about the issues we stand for. But in the end we all agree that we wanted this democratic space. We even let the readers say -- not so nice things -- about our Editor and his comments which again is a position taken in a public space. But within 200 words please.
In a way, a small way, that's how we define democracy in our media domain, the paper. We are saying, you have a right which may make us feel uneasy but we will defend that right of yours and provide you space. It's sharing of space that is happening and most of our letters are on that. The crisis in global and local politics is

Why can't you?"
"Well, because I am not a Jt. Secretary."
"Is that an excuse or an admission?"
"It's a give-up. I give up. I resign."
She puts the telephone down and looks at the "Wanted" column and weeps.
And back to the programme again
The letters on e-mail coming from outside have a strangeness about them. They are both distant and far, like a telephone call where the man is next to the ear but million miles away. Yet the versimilitude is fascinating. It's like a window on the world of people who are here and there, both places.
Those living in the West are almost overwhelmingly against the US attack on Afghanistan. It's a bit of a surprise to all. All the years living in the West hasn't taken away the sense of the unjust that this war arouses in them. In the hundreds of mails we get from commentators and columnists from all over the world as well, there is almost no cry of support for the US. When we posted the protest letter from the US

opinion of ordinary people everywhere. Even in India which offered support, public opinion is against the US. In Pakistan, which has ended up as an unwilling ally, the situation is even worse. And less and less people are buying US public opinion on the media every day. The Taliban, since the first day of birth, now gets cheers in Bangladesh, a place it had only marginal support. But the Taliban has been forced or otherwise to stand up to fight the US and that seems to make them "brave" in many eyes. I think they cheer the underdog everywhere.
The present support it enjoys is almost a surreal thing to watch. The space between a "monster" and a "hero" is only a few B-52 raids away.
Another quick break before we get to the final part of our programme
"I have written a poem on the global crisis."
"That is excellent but the literature page is on the floor below."
"But you have published poems in your letters page, haven't you?"
"Yes we have but this is very beauti-

plexity. "Didn't we feed you?" refrain is there every time and in every voice. It's the never-ending claim of the western world which believes that charity wins hearts not mutual respect. Quite simply it doesn't and charity itself has been proven to be a fraud. It's like the World Bank saying that they were pro-poor and then having to discover that no one including the Bank believed that.
They can't understand why people won't support them if the visa application line at the embassy is so long. "We let you come, we are generous". When they say this, the "melting pot" seems like advertising copy and not the metaphor for a new world.
The US doesn't seem to understand how powerful is the geography of poverty and aspiration. For most, the US is a land of either escape or a place of economic security. One goes there to be better off not be free or happy. There are few happy migrants and that is something not understood by the US, our readers say.

Declining demand restrains industrial growth



M.J. ZAHEDI

THE signing of a big loan agreement with the Abu Dhabi fund for development was big news in Pakistani newspapers last week. It was first page news in every paper. Some newspapers also commented editorially on this agreement which one newspaper said was a significant development. The US\$265 million loan is perhaps the first such agreement signed after the September 11 events that led Pakistan to join the international coalition in the fight against terrorism.

Although the USA and some other western countries have promised liberal flow of financial assistance during the last one-month, actual transfer of resources is still awaited by the country. Formalities with regard to the cash assistance of \$100 million by the US have not yet been completed. Other countries and institutions

have made similar announcements but the necessary agreements are still to be finalized and signed. Therefore, signing of the agreement with the UAE is considered by many as a significant development.
The UAE delegation that visited Pakistan last week was led by information minister Shaikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan and the agreement was signed, on behalf of

The country presently is facing an acute shortage of irrigation water --- the supply is expected to be about 51 per cent of total requirement in the forthcoming harvesting season. The government has already allocated funds from its budgetary resources to meet the initial expenditure on more important small and medium dams and power plants. The availability of financing facility from the Abu Dhabi Fund for

interest. The loan has been given at 2 per cent interest while the repayment period will be 15 years with a grace period of five years. This is for the first time that an institutional foreign loan is being given at such exceptional low rate of interest. The only exception, of course, is the IDA loan that carries only 0.5 per cent service charges. However, unlike Abu Dhabi, IDA is an institution, not an individual country that provides loan monies from its own

market demand has led to low production in 14 major industrial sectors. These sectors include trucks, buses, jeeps, steel products, fertilizers, and (to many a good thing though) cigarettes. The figures are for the first quarter of the current fiscal year. According to an analytical report of the Ministry of Industries and Production, the overall growth of 38 large-scale manufacturing items remained at 3.7 per cent during the mentioned

sheet, bicycles, pig iron/H metal, cast/rolled billet, CR coils, galvanised products, jeeps and trucks and buses.

The reasons for decline in production of the items as explained by the relevant industries are: cigarettes, market fluctuation is the main reason; jute goods, shortage of raw materials; chipboard, more rainfall than last year; ammonium nitrate and di-ammonium phosphate, periodical maintenance of the factories, limitation of nitric acid, cleaning of dry part circuit; fertilizers, increase in import cause of phosphoric acid due to devaluation of the rupee against the US dollar; glass sheet, due to the observance of strict quality control, according to one factory; bicycles, lack of advance orders, according to one manufacturer; trucks, falling sale of trucks due to smuggling as well as low demand, and jeeps, lower purchase by government organization because of economy drive.

Overall, constant decline in the market has been identified by analysts as the main reason behind the declining production in these 14 products. If the demand remained as low, it is feared, it would lead to further drop in the production of these commodities.

M J Zahedi is an eminent columnist in Pakistan and formerly the Editor of the *Khaleez Times*.

LETTER FROM KARACHI

Constant decline in the market has been identified by analysts as the main reason behind the declining production in 14 major industries. If the demand remained as low, it is feared, it would lead to further drop in the production of commodities.

the UAE, by the managing director of Abu Dhabi Fund for Development Saeed Khalfan M. Al Rumaithi. The loan has come at the right time and will serve as a timely financial support for the implementation of some of the country's important development projects in the water and power sector. These include construction of small and medium size water reservoirs/dams. Work on these will have to be expedited in view of the unpleasant controversies that have arisen between the provinces over the construction of large dams, particularly the Kalabagh Dam.

Development has thus ensured smooth execution for these projects, which include besides three hydroelectric generation projects in addition to the Gomal Zam dam. The greater water supply scheme for Karachi has been pending with the Sindh government for quite some time due to lack of foreign credit facilities from multilateral institutions and consequently the people of Karachi have been facing a severe shortage of drinking water supply for over a couple of years.
The loan from the Abu Dhabi fund is significant for yet another thing, that is the very low rate of

resources.
Observers hope that the loan facility from the UAE will serve as an example for other rich countries to follow suit in their policy of financial assistance to countries like Pakistan. It is also encouraging to note, wrote 'The News', that Pakistan's expectations that it would be able to obtain financing facilities from the friendly countries and international financial institutions on very soft terms were not too optimistic to be realized.
Meanwhile, an analysis of the production of 38 major industries of the country has shown that poor

period.
Major industrial items which have shown increase in production during July-September 2001-02, as compared to the same period of last fiscal are raw sugar, cotton yarn, cotton cloth, paper, paper board, soda ash, caustic soda, urea, nitro phosphate, super phosphate, cement, motor cycles, motor tyres, motor tubes, coke, HR oil plates, cars, light carriage vehicles and tractor. As against this, production of 14 industrial items declined. These are cigarettes, jute goods, chip board, ammonium nitrate, di-ammonium phosphate, glass

OPINION

Should we export gas?

MOHAMMAD MUJIBUR RAHMAN

NO sooner had the Indians expressed their intention to import gas from our country than a myriad of persons, oil companies and even states desperately made statements in press and on platform, emphasizing the need for exporting gas. Following up the rear is, now, the hon'ble Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman.

It may be recalled, a committee formed by Sheikh Hasina's government for sectoral plans and vision statement for gas sector said that there was a total initial recoverable gas reserve of 15.127 TCF, so far explored. Of the said recoverable gas reserve, 4.1 TCF had been produced and consumed upto 31 December 2000, leaving a balance of 11.027 TCF. According to the same committee, estimated gas requirement from 2001 to 2050 will be 63 TCF. The annual gas demand will rise from its current level of 332 BCF to 1.137 TCF by 2020 and to 2.015 TCF by 2050. Accordingly it has been calculated that current known recoverable gas reserve will sustain production until 2020. After that we will have to import petroleum oil unless new gas fields are discovered.

An officer of Petro Bangla told me on condition of anonymity that we have 50 per cent possibility to find 32 TCF recoverable gas and 90 per cent possibility to find only 8 TCF.

Under the above circumstances it will be stark madness if gas is exported, unless by the stroke of great good luck we unexpectedly find huge gas fields in the country.

I am unable to subscribe to the views of the hon'ble Minister, that, "a resource is no resource until utilized". Even if we cannot utilize our gas resource due to reluctance of foreign companies (which want quick money and quit) to invest in gas sector unless we allow them to export gas to India, the resources very much will remain hidden in our land (and not in India) for our posterity, who will in future utilize the resources by using local expertise, money and technology.

Again, the hon'ble Minister has himself admitted that no decision by the cabinet has been taken. Why, then, M Saifur Rahman, holding a respectable post in the government would make a pre-emptive statement is not readily intelligible to us.

It will be not incongruous to state here that it was Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman who was instrumental in drastically liberalising our import policy during BNP rule of 1991-96, and our imports from India increased drastically, widening our trade gap with India from \$157 million in 1990-91 to \$647.4 million 1994-95 -- now about \$1 billion.

I would therefore implore Prime Minister Khaleda Zia to be very careful while taking a decision on gas export. However,

my humble opinion is not to export gas but keep it for the posterity as the Americans are doing.

It may not be too out of place to mention here that in a section of press recently (20-10-2001) Mr Ali Sarwar made a funny statement that "oil and gas reserves surprisingly go up after they are used". It is needless to say that gas, oil, coal gold etc. are exhaustible resources, and their reserves go down after each extraction. For example there is no more gold in the mines of India. Mr Ali Sarwar has been himself caught in the whirlpool of his own chicanery when he inadvertently quoted the example of the United States. According to him in the United States the total gas reserve is 175 TCF which is about 10 times our present recoverable gas reserve. Why then is it importing gas through pipeline from Canada, as stated by him? Instead it should export gas to India in liquefied form and thereby multiply its gas resources to say 1,000 TCF as suggested by Mr Sarwar? Are the Americans all foolish fellows?

According to a 1996 statistics gas reserves of important countries are: Russia 1700 TCF, Iran 741 TCF, Qatar 250 TCF, UAE 240 TCF. Mr Ali Sarwar and other personalities who seem to be very keen to help Indians with our gas export should advise them to import gas from Iran, instead, through pipeline.

Importance of research

ABDUR RAKIB KHAN, ABDUR RAFI KHAN, DR RAFAT A QUYYUM KHAN

SOMEHOW or other, it is now fully implanted in our minds that we cannot survive without depending on other countries for aid in some forms or for export or for security, and so on. Can we not by ourselves develop our country as have been done by many countries in the world?

The USA with its resources has gone so high; India with its resources lags far behind; Japan without any resources is among the topmost developed countries in the world. These are not isolated examples. There are innumerable other examples like the above. Many big countries are far behind whereas Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan etc are far ahead. The issue, we believe, is not resources or being big. The issue is the spirit of the human beings making up a particular nation. This has been the reality from the beginning of mankind to this day. Without anything then existing, human beings have come to this stage of development by their own ideas and efforts. Although we may benefit by aid or export to other countries etc, our basic philosophy should be that we shall by ourselves develop our country and make it prosperous. This must be implanted in the minds of the people and this should be our basic philosophy of development.

Progress of human beings in the world as a whole and in different countries has been through finding out new and newer things. People discovered fire, learnt to sow crops, discovered medicine, invented

planes, and travelled to the moon. In the USA, in the modern age, some philosopher-presidents had handled the affairs of the state quite successfully. On the other hand, men like Andrew Carnegie, Thomas Edison, Henry Ford, Nelson Rockefeller and others had new ideas, made efforts, transformed the ideas into realities and helped the country to become exceedingly prosperous and wealthy. Even the apparently simple idea of cola drinks when transformed into reality gave prosperity and jobs to millions in the past, does so in the present, and will probably do so in the future. In Bangladesh, the idea of bottling water (though copied from other countries), has, so to say, made a sort of revolution by establishment of factories for the same and thereby creating jobs for thousands of people.

Unfortunately in our country, research and development is almost absent. Research in every field of life should be one of the highest priorities of the government as well as private companies. Research cells should be established in every department and for every field of knowledge and technology. People in general want to avoid research. Therefore, to overcome the general inertia in research, appropriate persons should be selected and given no other work to do except undertaking research, and their remuneration should be accordingly high. It is well known that Bangladesh has made significant progress for finding out new things in the field of Agriculture. This success needs to be replicated in every field.

Let us take the case of police in Bangladesh. People have lots of grievances against them. But has

any research in the real sense ever been undertaken to learn why the situation is like this? It is alleged that many of the police personnel have to pay money for getting their jobs and also for transfers! If our policemen start their career like this, can we expect that they will remain honest? Also, have the issues of their responsibility, power and pay ever been really examined from the point of view of research. Just asking people to be honest may not hold water. Some mechanisms need to be found out to ensure that people can and will remain honest. That is why some countries invented the idea of public service commission for appointment to posts, be it at a high level, mid-level or low level. We must continuously engage in research to come up with more such mechanisms to solve the problems we face.

Similarly, the problem of unemployment should also be examined thoroughly from a research angle and practical ways need to be found out to cope with it.

Our philosophy should be that we have to develop our country by ourselves and we can do it. And for this, we shall undertake research everywhere and in every field to bring to light new and newer ideas. Our ideas and our products will then be in high demand from other countries of the world. The Grameen Bank concept of micro-credit is being implemented not only in developing countries but also in many developed countries of the world. So no more to despair; we must prepare our minds to achieve success by ourselves and we can and will achieve success, progress and prosperity by our own effort.