DHAKA THURSDAY JANUARY 10, 2002

## Police gets poisoned again

Lack of systemic supervision is obvious N another anxiety causing instance, 55 policemen went down very sick after having a meal at the police barracks at Uttara. Since the police have been hit twice within two months by mass food poisoning--at Rangamti and now Dhaka-- it's about time some eyebrows were raised. It's certainly not enough to send them to hospitals and treat them for a cure and wait for the inevitable. The fact that two incidents of mass food poisoning affected police barracks must now be read as a sign of slack management of the force itself. The food preparation is only an indication of a bigger ailment called lack of supervision and accountability.

Obviously, food poisoning occurs due to presence of toxins but that happens when the general standards are not maintained and this has been the case. One can only hope that this time there will be no loss of life.

If one looks back at the last incident at Rangamati which occurred on November 18, the missing part of course is the promised investigation report about the cause of the incident. Tracing what had caused so many deaths wasn't followed up and the public wasn't informed because the police and other authorities probably didn't think that it was necessary to answer the people who pay for their upkeep. Once the media hype died down so did the energy to pursue the cause and perhaps take standard precautionary measures. Now within a short time, a slap on our corporate face shows what happens to the careless and the unconcerned.

The same attitude displayed by the police that led to two tragedies in quick succession may well be reflected in their approach towards managing law and order. There is a frightening lack of seriousness in our governing constructs including the police, which is supposed to protect society from civil insecurities. Given its inability to a great degree to protect themselves from harm, one may justifiably feel a little uneasy about their ability to protect the

Improvement begins with self-examination. The police authorities have shown that they need to be scrutinized. While the food poisoning patients are being healed at the hospital, let the police also consider the police system as a whole, which appears to be suffering from internal poisoning of sorts and for long.

#### New office-bearers to hill district councils We put the accent on credible

elections

"HE government has named new chairmen to the hill district councils of Rangamati, Khagrachhari and Bandarban. This has been necessitated by the expiry of the tenure of the old incumbents on December 31, 2001. The void had to be filled in by the government with nominated chairmen and members to the three important district councils we have in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The outgoing incumbents had also been nominated to the council by the Awami League government. Nomination to these bodies has had to be resorted to for want of elections. However, according to the existing law, elections to these councils are to be held within six months. With the elections being that close there could be a question or two about the justification for replacing the old hats to the councils. Detractors of the government will point out that they could be continued in their positions till the election came.

Moni Swapan Dewan, the Deputy Minister for Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs tried to give a rationale for it to the BBC Bangla Service day before yesterday. He said the government wanted people 'loyal to it' to steer the important development programmes to implementation. But he hastened to add that the new incumbents were nominated on the basis of merit and their credentials as leaders of the tribal community.

We take the position that the elections to the hill district councils should be free, fair and credible in all respects. Filling any void is a technicality that should not end up influencing the poll results in any way. The tribal leadership has been seeking a change in the voters' list. Insofar as the national elections were concerned, the Election Commission had ruled out the possibility of altering the voters' list which had been prepared with great attention to detail. Our suggestion will be that if any revision is to be at all made then it must be based on the law of the land and carried out in accordance with the CHT accord.

# Emerging equilibrium in Asia?



S H IMAM

common thread wove through Kathmandu SAARC summit, Collin Powell's telephonic nudges for an Indo-Pak dialogue and Tony Blair's persuader's mission to New Delhi and Islamabad last week. This created a tapestry of sorts that helped the Indo-Pak border eye-balling to mellow and foster a sense that terrorism in another theatre (in the conventional sense of the term) was

being grappled with after all. The SAARC summit took some of the chill off the Indo-Pak border face-off. The paths of Vajpayee and Musharraf crossed at the summit venue and in the retreat more than once. Handshakes between the Indian Prime Minister and the Pakistani President led to a brief informal chat between them. Their foreign ministers Jaswant Singh and Abdus Satter met as an 'animated discussion' followed between them which was witnessed by Sri Lankan President Kumaratunga in passing. She

let it be known to others for its obvious news value. US Secretary of State Collin

Powell's telephonic entreaties with his Indian and Pakistani counterparts to have their respective heads of government meet on the sidelines of the Kathmandu summit, or failing which they themselves had better meet (which actually happened in the end), rang out with a mixed signal to begin with. At first, it sounded as if the US emphasis was on ending the Indo-Pak ballistic

stand-off was about militancy or 'terrorism' anyhow and that some mileage could be gained through a negotiated settlement of the Indo-Pak border crisis.

The SAARC's potential as a trouble-shooter has been recognised afresh in Kathmandu. As a sign of that happening, we hear the news of member-countries deciding to devote more time to bilateral issues in between summitry sessions. To that end, it is understood from our prime minister's press

ingratiated himself to India: "Pakistan's rejection of terrorism would be key to the solution of the Kashmir problem.'

India's third party involvement caveat on the Kashmir question was pronounced to the overtures of Tony Blair and Collin Powell in no unmistakable terms, even though these were basically designed to defuse tension along the border rather than get that long-standing issue over

India's profiling of Pakistan as a

fundamentalist swathe in his own country. May be India sees all this coming and that's why instead of sitting down with Pakistan for talks presently, she is harping on "concrete, significant and sustained efforts from Pakistan to stamp out cross-border terrorism" preferring to wait it out for the inevitable to happen. India perhaps could not stretch this approach too far without appearing to be obsolete soon in the face of a credibility shift towards

say today that as part of the antiterrorist coalition he wants a distinction made between freedom movement in Kashmir and terrorism.

character. So he is emboldened to

Pakistan has been playing the China card with an aplomb in a context where she can claim she has put a lid on religious obscuranwhich must be to Beijing's liking. After two successive visits to Beijing in less than a fortnight's time he boasted that China was hundred per cent behind Pakistan

India, on the other hand, is cultivating Israel with a great fervour apparently marking a shift from its pro-Palestine, pro-Arab stance of the earlier days. New Delhi professedly maintains a position of equidistance between Israel and Palestine when it comes to mentally dealing with a stand-off between the two. The nuances of Tel Aviv-New Delhi relationship apart, India is drawing upon not merely the missile technology of Tel Aviv but also her surveillance equipment. India is to receive unmanned spy planes and falcon radar equipment from Israel. Her 'cat-wire border fencing' is on India's shopping list, too.

New Delhi's Israeli connection could endear herself to the USA, so that an element of counter-weight to Pakistan's growing acceptance in the Western world seems built into the overall situation

SHImam is Associate Editor of The Daily Star

# JUST ANOTHER VIEW

Pakistan has been playing the China card with an aplomb in a context where she can claim she has put a lid on religious obscurantism which must be to Beijing's liking. India, on the other hand, is cultivating Israel with a great fervour apparently marking a shift from its pro-Palestine, pro-Arab stance of the earlier days.

this time.

military posturings solely because it was proving 'distracting' to the lone superpower's still unfinished war against international terrorism. Deeper down though, there has been the dread of a spectre of nuclear confrontation with the prospect for suction of other powers into the vortex rising across the horizon. What proved unfounded about the war against Afghanistan by way of a possible danger of escalation to the great relief of the international coalition could be hardly countenanced elsewhere. But then in no time, and true to the nature of things, the US hunkered

statement on return from Kathmandu that the retreat time will be expanded during future summits.

Tony Blair's visit to the region was well-thought-out and true to his British flair for clarity he emphasised that the Kashmir question has to be solved through political means and not by military devices as Great Britain herself had done relating to the problem of Ireland. The analogy underlining the feature of freedom movement common to both the Irish and Kashmir questions, India could not look kindly on this. However, while parting company with his Indian hosts in New Delhi Blair had terrorist state has met with a setback in the wake of Islamabad's raid on Laskar-e-Toiba and Joishe Mohammad, the two militant groups linked to the suicide attack on Lok Sabha on December 13 last. The arrest of 300 militants and the promise of more in the light of Musharraf's renewed fight against terrorism and religious intolerance 'in all their manifestations' do tend to impress upon the Western mind that

Pakistan is only expected to go the whole log with it, because Musharraf has burned the boats

he is sincere and means business

law of evidence earlier on but had to relent before cleric pressure as he was politically weak at that time. He has come a long way since 11 September. He is on record having decreed that madrassahs should keep themselves confined to religious studies alone. What is of central importance to

Musharraf has had an anti-

fundamentalist streak from before.

he having tried to reform the shariat

his current standing in the western world is his credible image of a partner in the international coalition against terrorism. The Afghan problem not truly over yet,

# 2001-- a year of triumph, tribulations and trial



M. M. REZAUL KARIM

■ HATEVER may have been for others, for a Bangladeshi most of the year 2001 passed off as a period of hope for some, despair for others but suspense for all. The people in general were keenly interested in witnessing the political wrestling that went on throughout the year between the feuding political parties. Their bout centered primarily over preparation for the upcoming general election on 1 October which had kept on receding like the fleeting golden deer of the legend. The promises made by the ruling Awami League for a mid-term or even an early election were not kept. The League stretched its tenure to more than the maximum allowed in order to prove it had not yielded to the Four-Party Alliance's movement to topple the government. Prime Minister Shaikh Hasina resigned and handed over power, as per provisions of the constitution, to the immediate past Chief Justice, Latifur Rahman, as Chief Advisor or

The Awami League high command was fully confident that they would return to power. They had undertaken painstaking efforts to prepare and implement plans to ensure it. In realizing their master plan they had devised strategy to choose and place well-disposed government officials and members of the law enforcing agencies, estimated to be around 1500 in last two months, in vantage positions able to influence the process of election. The mainstream opposition, led by the BNP, made serious allegations that the governmentsupported muscle power and huge resources obtained by corrupt means were to play an important role for the Awami League to help win election. The Awami leadership's confidence was almost absolute. But to their chagrin, the confidence turned into a hopeless selfcomplacence. History proved once

Head of the caretaker government.

more that nobody learnt from history, especially leaders surrounded by psychophants.

The principal opposition political party, the BNP, derived the advantage of forming an electoral alliance with three other opposition political parties, namely the Jatiya Party, the Jamaat-e-Islami and the Islamic Oikya Jote, dismissing reservations of many about the propriety and usefulness of making formal alliance with some of those, who had opposed the liberation movement of Bangladesh. But the act of alliance was a strategic necessity for the

Party Alliance with more than twothirds of parliamentary seats to its credit. A silent revolution was staged by the people and was triumphed, demonstrating their right as the real and ultimate source of state power, as they had done before through elections. Yet, the Awami League having secured more popular votes at the polls than the BNP, the two major political parties have to work sincerely to evolve a truly two-party democratic system to be proven by their deeds and not mere words.

A very important chapter in the history of the year relates undoubtmade for a universally rigged election. Even members of the Armed Forces, who were deployed to help maintain the law and order situation on the eve and the day of election was not spared from the rage of the defeated ruling party. These allegations represent figment of frustrated imagination and ridiculous efforts of a defeated political party, which found it difficult to reconcile with the evolving political situation. What motivations did these eminent persons have to help the BNP win and the Awami League lose the election? One cannot conceive of a

and actions of these eminent persons vividly substantiate their fairness, impartiality, democratic spirit and patriotism. I had the privilege of meeting them one to one and was left with no doubt about their integrity and determination to make all possible efforts to hold an impartial election. This applies also to the other members of the caretaker government. Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed in giving up his pent up feelings against the Awami League's allegation of being a hypocrite and a treachurer revealed on 4 January that the Awami League

goals within the first 100 days of its rule. The opposition has been emphatic in denouncing the government on what they termed government's failure to control crimes against the minorities, repression of the opposition and violation of human rights. The ruling party vehemently denied the allegation and tried to take all possible measures to curb crimes, irrespective of party affiliation of the alleged criminals. The BNP's student wing, Chhatra Dal's operation was suspended and its president, also a member of the Parliament, was sent to jail and denied bail in order to demonstrate government's commitment and sincerity. The economic, financial and commercial health of the nation inherited from the previous government, despite its disputed claim of a high GDP figure, attainment of food autarky and higher literacy rate, was found in ruination by the new government. The latter inherited a bankrupt economy and a dangerously low level of foreign exchange reserves aggravated by the continuing sloth in global economy. Over and above these, the Awami League decided not to join the Parliament in violation of its pledge made during a series of negotiations with BNP leaders brokered through leading Ambassadors and High Commissioners from 3 to 18 October during which the BNP fulfilled all the five conditions demanded by the Awami League. The latter decided to carry on their anti-government movement and the upcoming political situation appears grim, to say the least.

One silver lining around the storm cloud in the political horizon of the nation was paradoxically found in the aftermath of the infamous terrorist attacks on the twin towers and the Pentagon on 11 September. In response to a request by the US government for using Bangladesh's airports, seaports and air-space in possible anti-terrorist operations, both the Awami League and the BNP held identical views with the caretaker government in favour of rendering positive support. It was an extra-ordinary happy political situation in which general consensus on a major national issue was arrived at. Why, people wonder, this cannot happen among major political parties on other national issues?

M M Rezaul Karim, a former Ambassador, is a

baby food and stopped the provision

of importing tinned milk as baby

food. So today you see the powder

milk mostly in packets. This had the

positive impact on our dairy industry

and today Aarong is marketing milk

produced by our farmers in addition

to government owned Milk Vita. In

addition private agencies have also

invested in dairy production and it is

emerging as a successful industry. If

we are to support the growth of

Bangladesh, then we have to tighten

our belts and adults will have to do

the children. Most consumers of

powder milk are the relatively

advantaged people in our society

and we can afford to adjust our

budgets so we drink tea without milk

and buy cow's milk for our children,

pregnant women and breast-

feeding mothers. This prioritisation

of resources is good for the health of

our children and their mothers and

Priority for milk should be given to

# CURRENTS AND CROSSCURRENTS

In response to a request by the US government for using Bangladesh's airports, seaports and airspace in possible anti-terrorist operations, both the Awami League and the BNP held identical views with the caretaker government in favour of rendering positive support. It was an extra-ordinary happy political situation in which general consensus on a major national issue was arrived at. Why, people wonder, this cannot happen among major political parties on other national issues?

RNP to win election, as the combined voters' strength for the 4-Party Alliance would and did heavily tilt the election results in its favour. Even the subsequent betraval and severance of Ershad's Jativa Party from the Alliance did not harm it. As a matter of fact. Ershad's act proved a blessing in disguise for the rest of the Alliance by way of depriving him of a possible role, like in the 1996 election, of being the king-maker, if not to be the king himself

The outcome of the 2001 election was viewed by many as more of a defeat for the Awami League than merely a victory for the BNP-led 4-Party Alliance. The public in general were so much disgusted with the mal-governance, corruption, terrorism and blatant favouritism indulged by Awami League leaders that they badly wanted a change in administration. They were concerned about safety and security of their life and property and hardly reposed confidence in the pious wishes and unfulfilled pledges made by the political parties. They were, indeed, most fearful of the prospect of the Awami League to rule for another term of five years. It was thus the negative vote against the ruling Awami League, according to many political analysts, that decided its outcome in the election. More unfortunate for them was the unexpected landslide victory of the 4-

edly to the period of the caretaker government's rule for three months till 10 October. They did a highly commendable job of discharging their constitutional responsibility of holding a free, fair and impartial election in a fairly peaceful atmosphere. This was the judgement of impartial political and electoral observers both at home and abroad. The Awami League Chief found the outcome of the election as a veritable bolt from the blue. The very next day she declared the election having been totally rigged all over the country, rejected the results and demanded fresh elections in all the seats, including those won by her own candidates. She later called a general hartal in protest, flagrantly violating the pledge made earlier by her not to resort to hartal even while in opposition. She was dismayed by witnessing no response to her call for hartal and put the blame of the Awami League's debacle at the polls squarely on a conspiracy hatched by the Caretaker government, the Chief Election Commissioner and even the Hon'ble President, who had allegedly worked together for securing victory for the BNP-led Alliance.

The allegations made against the three most distinguished top functionaries of the state and members of the caretaker government were as serious and unfounded as those plausible answer. Justice Shahabuddin was brought to the Presidency by the Awami League Chief at the threat of holding fast by herself. The BNP was not apparently happy and bovcotted the newly appointed President's inaugural address in the Parliament. The Chief of the caretaker government was appointed, as everyone knew. as a matter of choice of the Awami League government in contrast to the latter's lack of preference for the previous Chief Justice. The BNP had nothing to do with it. Similarly. the Chief Election Commissioner had also been appointed by the same Awami government, ignoring the protest of the BNP, albeit on a matter of procedure. The Chief of Army Staff was also Awami Chief's own choice over a number of other officers. It, therefore, appears clear that the major crime committed by these eminent persons were their sincere efforts and success in creating a peaceful and congenial atmosphere for holding a free and fair election by securing an impartial administration and preventing terrorism during polls. There exists, therefore, no justifi-

able grounds to sustain such ridiculous allegations against so many distinguished personalities and such attempts only lower the image of claimants in the eyes of the general public. Numerous statements been admired for his balanced and restrained words and deeds, to come out with a public statement such as this. I recall a meeting I had with him a couple of years ago when he discussed the possibility of making a rapprochement on fundamental differences between the two major political parties. He also evolved a formula and I promised to broach it with the BNP Chairperson. The next day, Prime Minister Shaikh Hasina called on the President following her return from a foreign tour, and the following day she chided the President publicly and advised him to refrain from dabbling in politics. That was the end of the noble effort of a noble man. The new Alliance government

had made an unconstitutional

demand to annul the election and to

hold a fresh election under his

Presidency. He went so far as to

state that if he had acted according

to the wishes of the Awami League.

he was to be treated as an angel:

otherwise to them he was a devil.

One should thus gauze the depth of

frustration and humiliation of an

Hon'ble President, who had always

assigned priorities to a number of issues chosen from among those incorporated in the BNP's election manifesto. Combat against terrorism was among the first. The government selected a number of issues and decided to achieve their

member of BNP's advisory council

## TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

#### A Pakistani's false allegation?

This is in reference to the letter "Pakistan and Islam" (January 7) by Mr Khaled Hossain. Mr Hossain in his letter alleged that during the crisis of 1970, unruly mobs attacked the SM Hall of Dhaka University, dragged the Non-Bengali students out of their rooms and beat them to death. He also claimed that his brother, who was a student of SM Hall was killed and he could not get the body as it was badly mutilated and beyond the state or recognition.

The above statement, as all students of Dhaka University of that period would know, is utterly fabricated and full of falsehood. No such incidents ever took place before 25<sup>th</sup> of March 1971 in any residential halls of Dhaka University

Incidentally, I was the vicepresident of Salimullah Muslim Hall Students' Union during the period of 1969-1970 and 1970-1971. I would request Mr Khaled Hossain to provide me with the name of his brother, the he was studying and his room number. I can testify under oath and

would any student of that period that no such incidens of attacking Non-Benglai students ever took place before 25<sup>th</sup> of March, 1971, Whatever wrong doing that have been engineered by the then Pakistan's military intelligence to destabilise the social harmony had also been uccessfully foiled by the students.

For the kind information of Mr Hossain, Mr Nazzu Mia, the ever smiling Pathan darwan (guard) of SM Hall was in his duty even in March'71, a decorative turban adorning his head all along.

I do not care about the original debate regarding 'Pakistan and Islam' because to me Pakistan is a demonetised coin and its brand of Islam is a hoax Let me conclude by saying that no

amount of fabricated stories and propaganda shall be able to diminish the extent of Pakistani genocide in Bangladesh. Mr Hossain may contact me in my e-mail aruque@hotmail.com if he feels shy about coming to this page again. Please, Mr Hossain, mine is a statement of facts and no malice intended towards anybody.

Syed Ahmad Farugue 56, Dilkusha Commercial Area

"Pakistan and Islam"

In response to Mr. Zubair Anam, you have merely reinforced my point. Of course, all Pakistanis are not rapists and murderers. But then, neither are they angels just because they're Muslims

Saying that all Pakistanis are responsible for the 1971 atrocities is just as idiotic as saying that they will not harm the Taj because it's a "Muslim artifact" Shabnam Nadiva

### Green Road, Dhaka "Bangladeshis not fit

This is in reply to Mr. Ashraf's-- a gentleman of Middle Eastern descent-- letter (January 9) regarding our debates on the hijab. Debating the Hijab proves not

to be Muslims"

that we find Islam "as an ossified document", on the contrary we

should be proud that in Bangladesh unlike some of the countries of our Muslim brethren, we here have a forum and the right to have an intelligent (or otherwise) and open argument about a divisive issue without being censored

And what is this about our "brothers" in the US taking the hijab! MA. on e-mail

Damaging Kali statue We are highly distressed by the

news of a person damaging the statue of Kali at a temple in Shankari Bazaar. Display of such a level of intolerance is not acceptable. We demand the judiciary to give exemplary punishment to the person involved. The BNP government

has been long giving sermons of religious tolerance, let it show through fast action that it means what it says. Just imagine what would have occurred had there been an incident of this type in a mosque in India.

D.K. Das

Our rikshaw-pullers

## and their family

Our government is taking steps to keep rickshaw off major streets and a majority of the well-off people will welcome the decision.

But what will happen to the rickshaw-pullers and their families? Before banning and gradually getting rid of rickshaw from Dhaka City. I think we ought to think seriously about the rickshaw-pullers' fate. Because then it will become a guestion of survival for them.

In order to survive they may get themselves involved into illegal activities such as hijacking, robbing and so on. The crime rate will increase and it will create a major set back for the government's intention to curb crime.

I myself don't want to see rickshaw taking 80 per cent of the street space, creating a miserable traffic jam but at the same time I don't want the rickshaw-pullers to become job less and get involved in serious crimes.

Let's all talk about this issue and follow up on that. Let's create a panel comprising of people from all sectors and put this problem into perspective. AAhmed, on e-mail

Opposition politics From time to time Sheikh Hasina

makes ludicrous comments about our judiciary. Recently in a press conference she implied that Mr. Moudud Ahmed writes all the decision for the High Court. Even a 5year-old kid would laugh at this comment.

Barrister Moudud Ahmed is an officer of the Court, a gentleman and one of the top lawyers of the country. I doubt he would have the audacity to tell the High Court judges "Hey..I don't like your judgement...from now on I will write it for you!" Please give me a break!

What else will it take to make Sheikh Hasina understand? How many contempt of court suits need to be filed? It is very clear that she has no respect for the judiciary and never will. She believes that her word is the last word. Well, it isn't. Not anymore at least and thank God for that Ariful Islam

University of London, UK

#### Milk is not essential

EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

In your editorial "Duty levied on imported milk as luxury item," (January 8) you stated that "milk is essential for most human beings." As a nutritionist I know this isn't scientifically true.

Milk is essential only for infants and children. It is an important food for pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers. In 1967, my parents visited China. After a meal they asked for milk at a restaurant. They were told politely that in their country, all milk was reserved for children When my mother revisited China 28 years later, much had changed and milk was available for adults as well The reason, milk production had

increased in China. In the past, our dairy producers were in a bleak situation due to the import of powder milk as baby food with only 15 per cent tax. Powder milk imported in bulk and packaged locally had to pay 45 per cent tax. That is why ten years ago, it was more common to see powder milk in

aware that breast milk is the ideal

In 1992, the government became

also for the nation. Nasreen Hug

most of the tightening

Dhanmondi, Dhaka