

## Inter-ministerial rivalry hurting government badly

### A special cell for ministerial co-ordination may be the answer

RECENT reports say that the various ministries aren't getting along with each other and things aren't picking up because of this inter-ministerial wrangling. This applies to the policy level issues like the decision to revive the Upazila system to everyday routine activities like transfers and postings. Media reports seem to indicate that this is reaching extreme situations and one shouldn't be surprised if the administration starts emanating noise of a system grinding to a halt.

Part of the reason why this has come to such a point is lack of serious commitment to policy declarations once pitted against convenient political needs. This is one reason why the government even after making an electoral pledge to upazila resurrection is still foot dragging on it. The Committee set up to discuss the issue is split and earlier positions held on the matter have instead emerged.

While one may try to discover ideological infighting in all this, this will not be so when it comes to transfers and postings. Administrative changes do bring in shifts and switches but the present trend has almost halted the administrative functioning in many offices as people wait to be punished for real or perceived political loyalties. The *janatar mancha* syndrome is now working in reverse but at the end of the day, what we see is a stalling in decision-making which affects ordinary people.

There is always a price that has to be paid for lack of co-ordination and that ultimately translates into political price. And in the end, if people pay a price for inadequate administrative management, the contesting parties in the polls have to count coins too for having failed to live up to expectations as well.

The present government has become quite well known for the size of its cabinet, which is the largest since Bangladesh began. Part of the problem lies there. Far too many ministries and portfolios coming in the way of each other will always cause such problems. But let this not serve as an excuse for putting things off or slowing down the process of decision-making.

It is therefore in the interest of all that the government considers a new system of managing the ministries. In fact a special cell exclusively devoted to co-ordination could well be a very good thing to do. It will not just lead the government over the present bumps but introduce a better quality control mechanism for the government.

## Govt should stand by her immediately

### Rapists and those who denied her protection equally punishable

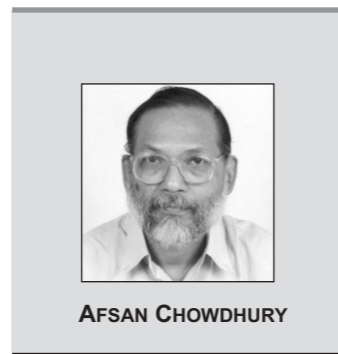
THIS is vulnerability of a woman suffering predation twice over, once in the primitive orgy of gangrape that even animals should not be discredited with, and thence when the local police on approach by the victim denied her minimum assurance of justice. How terrible must have been the sense of desperation of the 34-year-old wife of a mentally deranged man that she has turned to the journalist community in Satkhira for help. Her own physical safety and that of her son and daughter in front of whom she was purportedly raped by some armed cadres of BNP are in grave danger.

One can quite see that the courage with which she has spoken out to the press should normally attest to the veracity of her statement.

She has named the rapists and also the officer in charge of Ashashuni police station, who according to her, "recorded the case four days after the incident." It's common knowledge that physical evidence of rape is lost after two days of its occurrence so that the leads in the case might have been thrown off-gear, not to mention that she was not put through any medical test. It must all be on the records that the rape was committed on February 4 as alleged and that the police formally took cognizance of the case on February 8; the suspicion of deliberate manipulation is not easily shrugged off there. A routine scrutiny is certain to reveal the truth.

This would also seem corroborated by further allegations that the OC who had taken the victim and her son into custody put pressure on her to 'withdraw the case'. The family is living in Satkhira town, away from their village home at Ashashuni for fear of reprisal. The rapists have put out threats to them already. Let the higher civil and police authorities investigate the matter in full, order the rapists put behind the bar and penalise the local police authority's negligence of duty.

## It's another February now



AFSAN CHOWDHURY

THIS is the 50th anniversary of Ekushey February and there is something uneasy in the air. It has become a month of reluctant celebrations, the adjunct season of defining the ancient art of blood rivalry. As if the bloodshed many moons ago must be renewed with fresh vows of vengeance. Of broken thoughts and unfulfilled promises of uprisings, of joys that never come. Ultimately, Ekushey is a month to sit and reflect on our betrayal and our shame. February, brewed in blood, must succumb to the twilight colours of surrender.

LATE Hasan Hafizur Rahman, who edited the first volume of literary works on Ekushey February published in 1953 and one of the greatest poets of our time is barely remembered today. A man who not only wrote in and on that period but processioned and sloganned, organized and immortalized the spirit is barely a memory now. A journalist all his life, his strange ordeal began in 1972 when he became the Editor of now defunct *Dainik Bangla*. It became the most popular newspaper immediately after Independence. In 1973, when the students of pro-Soviet Chhatro Union were demonstrating in front of the USIS near Segun Bagicha, police fired on the procession and killed two students.

Hasan Bhai and Toab Khan -- now of Janakantha -- were responsible for the special issue of *Dainik Bangla* condemning the firing and the killing. Both were sympathizers of the pro-Russian Left and had no idea of the new state in the making.

By that evening Toab Khan had been shunted to another job. Hasan Bhai was luckier. He wasn't totally held responsible for that protest issue and posted to Russia as the Press Counselor. He had fond memories of Russia but in Bangladesh never ever became the same activist again. The new state cut down his February tree. He never recovered the fire inside. When he returned home the workers of *Dainik Bangla* hailed him as a returning hero but he was not hired by the paper. He did

binding shop. It was 11 at night past at night and we were trying to get the little magazine we had published stitched and bound. It was 1970 and we were all students of Dhaka College and seriously into "Ekushey Shongkolon". It was a mammoth exercise and involved collecting money, getting advertisements, getting the literary pieces from the authors, finding the press which would agree to publish it and then the rest. Every part of the process was an act of happiness. That year

to the Minar was zero. The bonding happened as the *shonkolan* was ready for distribution.

As we passed Shaheed Minar we saw the gathering. "We shall come in the morning", we screamed.

We were so sure that there would be a morning. So sure that we would be there. So sure that in the chill of the Ekushey dawn we would glimpse the proverbial future.

If I had known I would have laughed myself to death. Something did die.

tongue of the people. It was a moment of history.

Soon the flames rose.

Columns of smoke rose and belched upwards from the official buildings torched by angry mobs. What had been billed as the Agartala Conspiracy case had become a handle to stoke the fires of Bengal. Soon the case was withdrawn and it overruled all the dictates of law, order and even conspiracy. The judges escaped through the backdoor as the crowds tried to

"*desh*." We are setting up a trust to support poor Bangladeshis in the education sector. But the BNP-AL "kondol" is even here. Let's hope we can get something done.

Amar bhayer rokte rangano ekushey February, ami ki bhullite paree.

Best wishes

Rinku

Where patriotism goes, so goes the party. Which is which? Which is greater?

That never dies.

Hasan Bhai was dying. I would go to see him at the PG hospital. He was losing interest in staying alive. His heart, kidneys, liver and a host of other organs had collapsed. We were trying to send him abroad. Russia was willing to take him but Bangla bureaucracy pulled him down. Finally he did go after many a summer.

One day he said, "You will see when I die, many will come to see me. They will say great things. They will call me a great man. All this after I die. In this land only *shaheeds* are accepted."

Another day he told me that when it began to rain the night before, he felt a strange calm descend over him.

"I felt I was ready. I felt my time had come. I said, 'labbayek, allah huma labbayek.' I am ready. I have come. I am ready."

A few days later he did go to Moscow for treatment but died retching in the hospital. He returned from his beloved Moscow to his beloved Dhaka in a coffin box. Somebody had died.

It's another February again. Fifty years looking for martyrdom. Somebody dies in February.

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

## STRAIGHT FROM THE HEART

Hasan Bhai was dying. I would go to see him at the PG hospital. He was losing interest in staying alive. His heart, kidneys, liver and a host of other organs had collapsed. We were trying to send him abroad. Russia was willing to take him but Bangla bureaucracy pulled him down. Finally he did go after many a summer. One day he said, "You will see when I die, many will come to see me. They will say great things. They will call me a great man. All this after I die. In this land only shaheeds are accepted." He returned from his beloved Moscow to his beloved Dhaka in a coffin box. Somebody had died.

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many important works including editing the 15 volumes of documents on 1971 and writing some of the finer poems in Bangla but he never took his place behind the newsprint barricade again.

Did his February die?  
We were near the Ekushey Mancho on the first February after 1971 when trouble broke out at the Minar itself. We really had no idea what the trouble was but it was a big one. People were falling over each other in the scramble to escape. Suddenly someone screamed that young women were being picked up and taken away. In full glare of everyone, some victorious children of liberation kidnapped women, piled them into their car and disappeared.

I said nothing. We said nothing. No one said anything. We still don't. Someone's February died. Forever.  
We were inside the deep unknown belly of old Dhaka at the

we had collected a lot of ads and could afford a four-colour cover.

Hasan Ferdous -- who lives in New York, works for the UN and often writes for *Prothom Alo* -- was one of the members of the magazine called *Purbopatra*. Manzurul Haque, now lives in Japan and writes for Star and teaches and broadcasts there. K.M. Farabi was close and we published most of his major articles before he was slain by cancer when he had just stepped into Dhaka University. Towfique Khan Mazlish with a Ph.D. in political science serves the government education system but we never meet. Daud Haider would keep us company but he lives far away.

In our dispersal and alienation is the map of the post-independence Bangladesh.

As we raced home that midnight we felt joy and hope. People were coming out from all over the town to congregate. There was singing not just by organized bands of musicians but small groups of people who walked through a safe night in bare feet in homage to the martyrs. From that binding shop the distance

Perhaps the problem lies in the reconstruction of the dream. Or the failure to live up to it. Is our beginning is the end? Was it possible that the seeds of betrayal were sown days, months years before the bitter fruit burst forth to poison and kill?

Memories of rebellion mix with the memories of death. Dust becomes the only permanent metaphor in a world that goes through a motion of surviving just another day. It's such a long journey.  
February 1969 came running with the steps of fire and protest. Dhaka was burning and pillars of unruly smoke were painting the city skies with soot and rage. We let the procession of Sargeant Zahurul Haq's *janaza* pass us near the New Market. As the procession passed the anger and resentment of the people were being passed from person to person like a deadly baton in a relay race of defiance. It was a declaration of war against "injustice", the man who had been called a traitor in the official language of Pakistan was declared a hero by the

chase them. It was a moment when the seeds of 1971 were being sown. On both sides.

Facts were not important but freedom was.

What did we want? There were deaths and all were martyrs. And yet something else died. It was the last clear, clean, resolved moment in this people's history when historical purpose was greater than partisan rivalry.

There would have been no 1969 today. Something died. It was February too.  
Dear Afsan,  
I now find that you have joined The Daily Star. Will you settle down here, when will be your time to move from here? I thought you were still in Nepal.

We are still in the cusp of winter here. But I will travel down to Oslo to attend a meeting of Bangladeshis here in Oslo. I know you will laugh at our enthusiasm. You were always cynical. But when one is abroad, the home becomes very dear and every day is away from home. You won't understand. You never went to

## Back to friendship



IKRAM SEHGAL  
writes from Karachi

DANIEL Pearl's kidnapping hitting the media headlines notwithstanding, there is surprisingly a lot of warmth in the US about Pakistan. This is a post Sep 11 development. The quite unnecessary pronouncement by Richard Haas about Pakistan being on the way of being "a failed State" pre Sep 11 was shocking, maybe it was meant to satisfy an Indian audience but coming from the Head of Policy Planning of the US State Department it was probably meant to shock. For the record there is as much association of Pakistan with terrorism as most other countries in the world, there being a fine line between freedom fighters and terrorists. Not the fallacy India has been desperately trying to project but one must accept that we have made our share of mistakes over the years, in this day and age it is no surprise they are coming home to roost. Wherever one went, people knew General Pervez Musharraf by name, he was spoken of with admiration.

Everyone seemed to know that he was engaging in sweeping reforms at great personal risk. They held him out as an example of commitment to do the right thing. What they were surprised to hear was that the process of change had been

initiated earlier, only the speed had increased manifold. More of a pleasant surprise was that Pakistanis of all ilk were united in the premise that Musharraf not only represented Pakistan's best hope, he in fact was their last hope. Used to the edifying sight of a divided Pakistani community abroad, the contra elements were drowned out of contention and became a fringe element. The President's visit came at a good time for Pakistan, for a

moment the Patriots walked into the stadium, one instinctively knew they would win. As opposed to the Ram's Superstars being presented to the spectators one by one, the Patriots chose to be introduced as a team. And they played like a team, to win in a dream finish in the last seven seconds of the game, they countered the Ram's offensive brilliance by pure genius in defence play. India's diplomatic corps personnel actively seek appointments for

carry the ball by himself, and all the time? Americans love underdogs, particularly those who stand up to bullies. In the last few months, India has overplayed its hand, we are like David against Goliath. Against India we are the underdogs, even though we are failing to exploit tremendous opportunities by way of the media because of the selfishness and individual agendas of our foreign policy and media prima donnas, no wonder they sometimes find it

platoon each of 1 Baloch and 15FF) who got the American soldiers out, the movie shows it very grudgingly and sparingly. Incidentally Garrison had not thought it fit to even inform US Maj Gen Montgomery, Deputy Force Commander of the UN, about his mission before launching the operation. The way Ridley Scott has portrayed it in the movie, instead of gratitude the sense is of delay on the part of the Pakistanis in getting to the scene and evacuating them to the

they did the world over 40 years until the Soviets ceased to exist. Where is the justice that they should command the attention of the US. Or do they? Is it because of geo-political compulsions that they now seem to pander Indian interests at the cost of our own? Well, there is a hometruth that the US now belatedly recognizes, we are a geo-political compulsion also and this man Musharraf has brought Pakistan centerstage to US attention that our geographical location makes us a linchpin that if removed will result in the many dominoes in the region go tumbling down.

For a military leader to receive the attention and respect he got in Washington DC was unprecedented, particularly in this day and age. The world's democracies give a short shrift to dictatorship, it is the stuff of destiny that less than 30 months from taking over from a "democratic government" Pervez Musharraf walked into Oval office of the White House, "ground zero" for the leadership of the world. By any measure that is a remarkable achievement, both for the President and for Pakistan.

Ikram Sehgal, a former Major of Pakistan Army, is a political analyst and columnist.

## AS I SEE IT

For a military leader to receive the attention and respect he got in Washington DC was unprecedented, particularly in this day and age. The world's democracies give a short shrift to dictatorship, it is the stuff of destiny that less than 30 months from taking over from a "democratic government" Pervez Musharraf walked into Oval office of the White House, "ground zero" for the leadership of the world. By any measure that is a remarkable achievement, both for the President and for Pakistan.

change there was a receptive audience in USA for a Pakistani leader. Since the rest of the world does more or less at this time what the US wants, one expects a very positive fallout from his presence in the world's capital.

If Pakistanis who matter in the decision-making process at levels below the President stop trying to be individual prima-donnas and play as a team and for a team, we will be unbeatable. In American Football's Superbowl played this year in New Orleans, the favourites were the St Louis "Rams", almost no one gave the New England "Patriots" even a semblance of a chance. Expert after expert appeared on TV on all the channels to explain why the "Rams" would win and win big, mainly because their offensive line was unstoppable, the major betting was on the margin of victory. But the

Indian media personnel on different TV channels and/or print media, our diplomatic personnel on the other hand are actively engaged in sidelining Pakistanis so as not to lessen the number of chances for their own appearances. And being diplomatic, they can lie through their teeth. Moreover their commitment is suspect, it is usually for private agendas.

A month or so ago, in a private party in Islamabad, I personally heard a senior Foreign Service official rail against the ISI for our Afghan problems, with such characters around India does not need to do propaganda. He did not even know that the ISI is not a career service and that none of the DGs ISI had ever served in the ISI before being appointed to this post. We are very lucky that Musharraf has developed into a media star, but can he

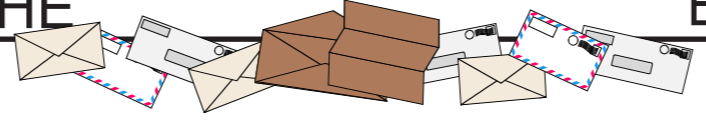
imprudent to buck social acceptability in reciting facts as they are. This in the face of Indian foreign and media experts who have made it into a living by reciting facts as they are not.

Very coincidentally, a new movie in the States "Black Hawk Down", is very representative of US-Pakistan relationship over the years. Set in Somalia in 1993, based on an ill-fated mission in Mogadishu, to capture Somali strongman Mohammed Farah Aided and his top lieutenants, a Black Hawk helicopter is downed. The US Special Forces and Ranger units sent to rescue those pilots are trapped themselves in the maze of streets. As a last resort, the US Commander, Maj Gen Garrison, turns to the Pakistan units of the UN to arrange a rescue mission. Actually it was the Pakistanis (a squadron of 19 Lancers and a

Football Stadium where another Pakistani unit was located.

Sound vaguely familiar in real-life? We are the ones who conducted and fought the proxy war in Afghanistan against the Soviets. And it is Ahmed Shah Masood's Northern Alliance who during this war repeatedly negotiated a local truce with the Soviets, at least for three years. Then he took over Kabul from Soviet surrogate Najibullah thanks to turcoat Rashid Dostum and his Jumbish militia who till then was a Soviet-paid force. Masood's short sightedness and lack of governance resulted in anarchy that brought about the creation of the Talibaan, the Northern Alliance is now allied to the US and desperately trying to change history. And all this while it is the Indians who supported the Soviets in Afghanistan against the US as

## TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



### "Wrong wording in a Rabindra Sangeet"

I am a regular reader of the "Letters to the Editor" page of *The Daily Star* and I find much interest in this page because here, I find so many readers expressing their diversified comments/opinions/arguments, which I believe is a healthy sign for a democratic country.

In response to Mr. Nazmul Karim's letter (February 06), the diversified opinions and opposing views, judgements and attitude by a variety of readers yielded quite an interesting and purposeful deliberations on a "wrong wording in a Rabindra Sangeet" sung by Rezwana Chowdhury Bannya.

I have thoroughly and with much interest read all the letters on this subject and though many had expressed opposing views, no one has ever debated on the capability of Ms. Bannya as a singer. In fact every writer have praised Ms. Bannya as a singer.

The most interesting part of the debate is that the writer who has expressed highest admiration, commended and applauded Ms. Bannya as a Rabindra Sangeet singer is Mr. Nazmul Karim himself,

the initiator of the debate. Nafeeza Yasmin Dhaka University

This is in response to the letter of Mr. Nazmul Karim (February 06) followed by many others including the one from Ms. Sharmilee Banerjee (February 17) from Switzerland. I must say in all the letters written on this subject, no one has ever questioned Bannya's capability as a singer. No one has ever asked Bannya for a clarification regarding the mistake pointed out by Mr. Nazmul Karim. No one said that Bannya is not an asset. No one advocated that Bannya should apologise for the "wrong". No one has instigated any war against any one.

I fail to understand how Ms. Sharmilee Banerjee suddenly was conceived that the readers want Bannya to publicly apologise and that too by calling a public meeting at Manik Mia Avenue? What is more surprising is that Ms. Banerjee has suggested *The Daily Star* to stop publishing any more letters on this subject because according to her "otherwise readers may 'wrongly' be forced to believe that it is not the

writer Mr. Nazmul Karim but it is *The Daily Star* who has instigated a war (Tagore: War on a word) against Bengali culture."

I must say *The Daily Star* has opened a new avenue for the "readers right to comment". All my praises for *The Daily Star* for publishing Ms. Sharmilee Banerjee's letter. Abid Hossain Colorado, U.S.A.

### Nine mobile phone a major news?

It was disturbing to see a news item on your esteemed daily saying that Bangobobhan officials have been provided with nine mobile sets (February 16). Is this a news?

Does the President of the republic have no discretionary fund to provide his staff with nine mobile sets? How could this information be a front-page matter?



Mobile news

ter? Areader Dhaka

### "A question"

I agree with the points of the Junior Officer ("TV size and army mess", February 15). Civilians like me will support the armed forces while persons like Mr. MA unjustly criticise our armed forces.

Sumit London, UK

### Coco Report

Instead of harping on about the repression of minorities, Sheikh Hasina should take up this example of governmental cover up as her raison d'être.

But will the Leader of the Opposition actually take up a real cause? No, she'll keep on going on about the Spirit of '71 and such.

MA Dhaka

### 800 branch closures

This government should try and not persist with the failed command economy type model, where the

Ministry of Finance dictates what is profitable and not.

Rather all the nationalised banks should be given freedom in operation and the independence to operate as businesses and not as the personal banks for politically well connected men and loss making SOE's. Dorji Dhaka

### Nothing entertains more than Bangladesh Police

I refer to the report "Massive BDR-Police raid fails to net top terrorists" (February 16). It is really funny and frustrating that our police force always fails to net the terrorists. Even if they manage to succeed, the terrorists soon manage to get free. But we can in no way deny our police force's skill in harassing and victimising innocent civilians. They are really good at it and proved it again on the night of February 15.

We are pleased to know that 2600 law-enforcers, divided into 215 groups, conducted a block raid and arrested 291 persons. Reportedly 48 of them were identified

terrorists. However, we do not know about the rest. And none of the 23 top terrorists listed by the Home Ministry, or the nine godfathers were arrested.

But, the police successfully arrested general students of DU, two DU Correspondents and six on duty employees of Surya Sen Hall. This was really a bad show after a "climbing over the boundary wall" raid. Anam Dhaka

### "English as second language"

This refers to the letter "English as second language" by Mr. Ajja (February 15). The importance of English as a language can't be underestimated in Bangladesh. In the late '60s we have experienced a surge in the love for Bengali language and culture in the form of protest against the Pakistani rule. Ekushey February became a day of national revivalism. We broke English signboards to express our anger. That was right at that point.

After the liberation there was a deliberate negligence towards the English language. While Bangla

was promoted, English was shunned in the national life. Now it is time to recognise the importance of this language. English must be taught as a mandatory subject. The most awful effect of this negligence can be seen in Bangladeshi expatriates in Europe and America. There are many people though having Masters and Bachelors degrees have a very hard time in constructing a complete sentence in English. They can't go for good jobs nor can mingle with the mainstream society. On the other hand the Indian immigrants do much better than ours. Their command over English is very good and their employment prospects are much brighter. The lower quality of education in Bangladesh is directly responsible to the Bengali medium education system. It is high time that we took urgent corrective measures to improve the situation. Akbar Hussain Toronto, Canada

### On book fairs

I found it interesting to go through some criticism of the book fairs. The planners and organisers have to go deeper into the concept, after two decades of experiments, to provide a global window to the local world of

books, writing and reading. In this age of IT, the world is becoming smaller, and the print media has to compete for attention outside the country. It is not propaganda, but the publicity abroad for creating awareness about Bangladeshi writers and writings. Why are we chary about foreign readers? Is there a national foundation for our translation and website service?

What is missing is the regenerative atmosphere to attract international attention. Today we feel cosy and snug cocooned in our own local orbit of mutual admiration groups. On the Internet also, Bangladesh's presence and image have to be strengthened. Besides the government, the NGOs and the private business sector have to be involved.

Communication through the print media is more than publishing-- how is the message to be carried abroad? We cannot live in isolation. Language is no barrier, as there are options. Some public debate might help in the formation of the right attitude. AMA Dhaka