

### Victimising Victims ?

Continuing efforts by a group of people calling themselves the "Unislamic Activities Resistance Committee" or UARC, to forcibly evict thousands of prostitutes from the brothel area of Tanbazar in Narayanganj, have brought to the fore various socio-economic as well as legal issues related to this particular profession. The UARC is playing to the Islamic and moralistic sentiments of the people, while the prostitutes defend themselves by pointing out the legality of their profession, their rights as citizens and society's inability to offer them an alternative.

While it is undeniable that prostitution is a blot on civilisation — and not just of the modern one, as this is the most ancient of professions — and an insult to a woman's individuality, there is still more to the issue than a simple black and white case of morality vs immorality.

To begin with, can we treat prostitutes, whether of Tanbazar or anywhere else, as criminals or even wilful perpetrators of immorality? To do that would be to suggest that social conditions are such that nobody need take up prostitution, unless she was basically deviant. But that is not the case. A study of Tanbazar or any other brothel would reveal one plain fact: that women who take up prostitution do so because society has forced them down that path. In many cases, if not most, prostitutes are actually victims of a social system which still refuses to treat women as equals to men who have rights. Even on general basis, cases of women, particularly from rural areas, becoming prostitutes for no other reason than sheer poverty, abound in the brothels and streets of urban areas. In fact, poverty is one of the main reasons why women with little or no educational qualifications or other skills, find prostitution alluring: it degrades them, they know, but it also provides them with a way out. They choose to live shamefully because they have to live first. Not only that, many of them have children to support, children whose survival and upbringing are the prime concerns of the mothers. Our society does not take up the responsibility of looking after children of women whose husbands have left them, or children who were illegitimate to begin with. So, the mother undergoes degradation in order to provide her children with a future, a future society is ill-equipped or ill-prepared to provide itself.

In the present context, we would do well to keep the socio-economic realities of prostitution in mind before getting carried away by a sudden surge of morality. The UARC should ask itself what would really happen if the prostitutes of Tanbazar were simply evicted. The "vice" would then spread all through their beloved town, just as many areas of the capital now play involuntary hosts to mobile prostitutes. The Narayanganj authorities must find an alternative site to resettle the prostitutes first before thinking of clearing Tanbazar. Better still, the ministry of social welfare should look for ways to rehabilitate all 7,000 of Tanbazar in other professions. Until then, authorities should treat any attempt to evict the prostitutes as a law and order issue and deal with it accordingly. The authorities must uphold the law first, and approach the rest as a socio-economic problem.

### The Wankede Scandal

Today the much-awaited cricket series between the old arch rivals Pakistan and India should have commenced in Bombay with a one-day. What could have been a happy augury has been reduced to an ominous unfolding of rabid communalism and xenophobic prejudice vitiating the health-giving arena of sport. The Shiv Sena, the Maharashtrian extremist communal group, the other day dug the pitch at the Bombay Wankede Stadium, the venue of the opening match, compelling the Indian cricket authorities to shift and reschedule the match. The Shiv Sena hasn't stopped at that. When a mass-circulation Marathi evening editorially denounced the ugly action, the extremist bullies attacked the office of the newspaper, hurt two of its editors, ransacked the establishment and broke its windows and furniture.

This is terrorism and sport is being held a hostage to its irrationality and positive harm. It is indeed more than merely that. Terrorism is going to take a deliberate jump not to stigmatise India's, particularly Bombay's, very bright sporting traditions, it will surely enough very adversely affect the already far too delicate relations between the two countries and show India in a particularly bad light, internationally.

The Marathi newspaper's denunciation shows that some voices are there to protest and resist although it is as a rule that terrorism succeeds because a vast majority of its victims prefer to quietly suffer — and Bombay hasn't so far, in this case, been an exception to that.

How India would keep its sporting records from being sullied by such mean acts of prejudice and gross misdemeanour, will be fully India's headache to devise. But we of the subcontinent and specially in the SAARC cannot but feel concerned at such developments that run counter to regional co-operation and understanding. Sport is traditionally an effective instrument in fostering amity between peoples and building bridges of understanding between nations. No one can afford to this to be injured by the very forces sport is aimed to overcome. Although there are disquieting reports from other venues of the India-Pakistan cricketing encounter, we are confident that the Indian authorities would be able to contain any repetition of the Wankede scandal in the best interest of sporting activity of the region as also indeed of the overall relationship between the SAARC partners.

LIFE is not a repudiation of youthful hedonism. Neither it is austere living full of agonizing miseries. Reality is utter boredom of routinized living. Any high level government bureaucrat should think of himself exactly like this. Get up in the morning, cup of hot tea, bath and off to the office. "Fortunately", there is ample time to read the morning newspaper in the office rather than at home — again with a steaming cup of tea.

The telephone starts ringing, first from home and then friends drop in; the telephone rings again. Promptly the reply goes, "Sahib is busy in a meeting". If such is the time, how can the lunch be far behind.

This is of course not the way of the bureaucrats all the time. Sometimes may be, and relaxation is necessary for the arduous task of decision making. The inevitable "Adda" termed as meetings on the telephone break up for serious business of attending to the piled up files, papers under disposal, summary for the Cabinet etc.. Lunch is still far away which is usually a quick affair within the office room. Officials do work no doubt. But the thoughtful reflections on issues and problems, the enquiring mind to probe deep into the matters of concern are lacking or at least not visible to the extent desired. The bureaucratic system is such that it does not encourage innovative thinking and welcome the organised routine and repetition of decisions made in the past. Precedents have a tremendous influence and "as proposed" is what the senior bureaucrats often write on the file. This is the reality which is indeed utter boredom of routinized living.

#### Electronic Data Communication

Such realities are however the death knells of development administration. One of the serious limitations is the utter lack of development of a government information system. In the age of computers and electronic data communication, the administration has been left far behind sleeping at the post. Take for example, September-October period in the Ministry of Agriculture and what the responsive information system could do. Aus crop has been harvested, transplantation of aman is complete and the monsoon water levels are

## Government Information System and Bureaucratic Decision-making

in the high marks. Given this scenario, computerised information system should enable the ministry to reflect on HYV aus acreage, its yield, why area has increased or declined, reasons for low and/or high yield and what has been the acreage under mixed aus-aman which if less than the previous years is good for the coming rabi crops since more land would be available for pulses and oilseeds without any reduction of paddy production. Aus in pure stand would yield as much as combined aus/aman. By the end of September, the acreage under transplanted aman can be finally determined, and what are the water levels — to what extent flood levels affected the transplanted HYV aman acreage. From upazilas such data should be directly transferable to the mainframe computer located at the Ministry of Agriculture while the required programme already fed to the computer should automatically prepare the spread-sheets, charts, graphs and pie-diagrams at any desired level of aggregation. Thus the computerised information would provide very timely analysis of outputs of aus, prospects of the main aman crop, land likely to be available for the dry season crops — for example, irrigated boro rice, wheat and the traditional rabi crops; fertilizer and seed requirements as well as the preparatory actions to be taken by November for the maximum irrigation coverage during the 1991-92 irrigation season.

As regards the 1992-93 agriculture year, significant highlights for immediate programming purpose could also be obtained at this time. There are already on record the land capability survey maps in terms of potential HYV aus and aman lands classified according to land development units. The computer can immediately indicate the lagging areas in terms of potentialities yet to be realised. Field investigations should then concentrate on those upazilas where greater efforts are necessary and identify specific actions to be taken for the purpose. Thus a disintegrated programming approach could be adopted. More

supplementary irrigation may be required in one area, at other places shortage of critical inputs should be removed or it could be shortsupply of agricultural credits in certain other areas. There could be numerous factors, each of varying degree of importance at upazila level. It is of utmost importance to identify them adequately and address them with specific actions in order to maximise production in the next year.

#### Performance Evaluation

Another significant dimension of the computerised information system would be its use to design the appropriate performance evaluation system for the field extension staff. Simultaneously, there must be a system of compensation and reward for those staff who have

months of August through October. Data on water levels, rainfall including prospects thereof in case of late monsoon in particular, should enable determination of the priority water control programmes during the forthcoming dry season beginning November.

Preparations of work orders for digging channels, building protective embankments and water control regulators should all be issued by October so that limited work days of the dry season are fully utilised and wastes are minimum due to early rains during Monsoon 1992. In this respect, computers are very useful in preparing the civil engineering designs, tender specifications, analysis of quotations offered and timely issue of work orders. More significant is the fact

useless or obsolete. Its effectiveness could be seriously determined. Here computers can provide invaluable support. Programmes can be developed with built-in safeguards for automatically correcting the errors. No doubt modern information technology is of decisive importance for our onward journey from LDC to NIC. Not only data and information can be communicated from upazilas in matter of seconds, errors can also be detected so that sources are immediately advised to check and recheck in order to come up with the corrected inputs. Thereafter, compilation processing and analysis are activities carried out by the computers in matter of minutes. Thus timeliness is ensured and at the same time, quality decisions are possible these days.

#### Hypothetical Example

Let us consider a hypothetical example — suppose the September-October analysis of state of the crop agriculture reveals not a very happy aus harvest, delayed aman transplantation so that yield would decline and HYV aman could not expand due to relatively high water levels. Immediate decisions for the open market sale of government food stocks, stock-taking of available irrigation equipment, re-ordering levels for their spare-parts, orders for fertilisers and fuel to factories and refinery, import orders for pesticides, seeds — all these decisions could be made in preparation for the intensification of crop production during the hazard free dry season. This is not advance planning but timely decision making.

A dilemma faced by the government is whether to import more foodgrains or the irrigation equipment for greater irrigation coverage and produce the foods ourselves. Obviously, any nation geared to achieve self-reliance would support the second alternative. In Bangladesh we had however in the past adopted the first option — the path of least resistance or the soft option fully satisfying our aid dependency syndrome as well as our narrow perceptions to generate

the counterpart funds in order to support the budgetary shortfalls. The information system that is being discussed here would be in a position to analyse the implications of the alternatives in a very thoroughgoing manner, leaving no option at the end but to adopt the self-reliant approach. Lack of analysed information is the prime cause of the conspicuous absence of correct and growth inducing decisions.

#### System Must Change

Inevitably, the existing system must change. Perhaps the most significant management neglect-to-day is the conspicuous absence of any regular macro-economic management system which monitors the changes in the critical economic variables like savings, investment, merchandise exports, imports, foreign exchange rates, prices, interest rates etc., on a continuing basis. Not that these informations are not collected; they are available but may not be on time and most important, analysis of the information to ascertain the state of the economy at regular intervals are not carried out.

There should be macro-economic management team, perhaps the general economics division of the Planning Commission could be renamed and assigned the task of weekly economic analysis for the consideration of the economic Committee of the Cabinet; or perhaps the full Cabinet should be apprised of the state of the economy on a weekly basis. Political authorities must not only know but they should be fully exposed to the realities of the state of the economy which is more often rather bleak than bright.

Government information system is a continuous, ceaseless operation and it strengthens decision making capacity in a continuing manner. The accumulated information for short-term decision would over time open up the vital opportunities for medium to long-term projections and refinement of decisions. Informations are like the flow of water in the river — ceaseless and everlasting — over which should sail the boat of progress and economic growth. The world has graduated from the industrial to the information age — why should we be left far behind?

### From LDC to NIC by Shahed Latif

done better through salary increase and/or cash rewards. A system to generate the enthusiastic response of the field staff is critical for the growth of the agriculture sector.

For the Ministry of Food, the estimated aus production, stocks in hand and prospects for aman should determine the amount of rice and wheat to be released for open market operations till the main aman crop arrives into the market beginning late November or early December depending on the transplantations already completed, and information in that respect is already available in the computer. The daily price data collected from 60 leading markets of the country is another valuable source of information which the computer can analyse, as directed, in order to project future price trends and the extent of government intervention desired at the market place. September-October is the lean period in terms of food supply in Bangladesh. Careful analysis of price and supply data would enable determination of the desired procurement price of aman paddy beginning December each year.

#### Water Control

Rivers in the country are in the grips of high flow in the

that computers would not accept any bribe. As a result, illegal bias that have been built-in could be avoided. Moreover, by means of simple hook-up, several computer work stations could be exposed to the same outputs and entries for the purpose of control and cross-check as well as integration of the work being done in piecemeal at several locations is feasible.

Computers are therefore powerful tools for decision-making. A great deal of data get collected by various agencies but they are never analysed in a manner useful for decision making. It is now high time that a responsive and widely used government information system is developed without any further delay. In the planning from LDC to NIC, information is the most decisive factor and it is not only collection of information but its quick and timely analysis that should efficiently provide the various options for decision-making.

Decision delayed is often decision denied. It is not often realised that timeliness is more important than perfect accuracy of decisions. If delayed, perhaps all the errors could be avoided but such delays might render the decision

## Phillippines: Left to Ponder Glasnost

The downfall of Soviet communism may finally bring out into the open a long simmering internal debate over strategy and vision within the Communist Party of the Philippines. Ramon Isberto of IPS reports from Manila.

regimes in Eastern Europe and Soviet Union.

"These events have placed all socialists on the defensive," said Randolph David, who chairs Blasig, an alliance of socialist groups which have opted for open, parliamentary political activity.

For the CPP, the ideological and political dilemmas posed by events in the Soviet Union have come to them in a round about way.

Established in 1968 by a group of young leftwing students who rebelled against the leaders of the old communist party, the CPP was heavily influenced in its birth by China which was then in the throes of the Cultural Revolution.

It adopted the Maoist critique of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) as a revisionist party which was furiously restoring capitalism in the Soviet Union.

For CPP leaders, the Soviet Union stood at best for a badly flawed socialism. To them, the CPSU's downfall is the inevitable result of its revisionist policies.

That view continues to be

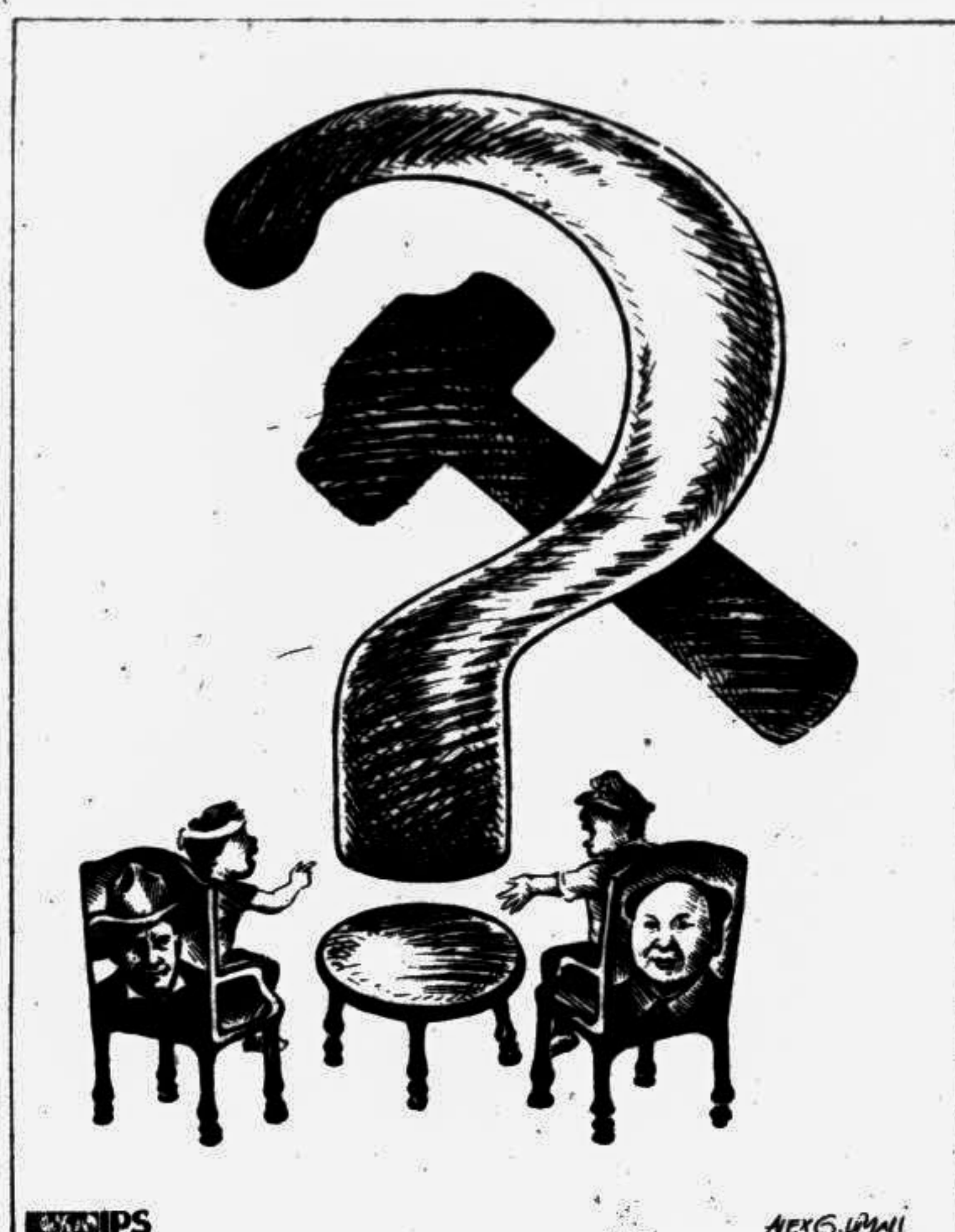
voiced by Jose Ma Sison, the CPP founding chairman who now lives in exile in the Netherlands.

"Since 1956, the USSR has been a centre for propagating capitalist-oriented reforms, starting from Khrushchev who made a breach in the communist system," Sison told IPS.

"After the coup, Gorbachev came out as anti-communist and as bourgeois as (Boris) Yeltsin," he added. "His plan was to liquidate anyway the revisionist communist party and turn it into a social democratic party."

That view, however, does not seem to have full support within the CPP. In its January-February issue this year, the Ang Bayan (The People), a publication of the CPP central committee, the paper's editors said there two points of view on this question.

Aside from the "restoration of capitalism" school of thought, the CPP paper said another view was that the crisis of socialism has been caused mainly by "the Stalinist distortion" which created a



"thoroughly bureaucratized state and party machinery governed by a privileged stratum." The same issue of the paper was remarkable for its openness, announcing a new editorial policy the paper would

Socialism Failed?) and the final section of the 22nd CPP founding anniversary statement which dealt with developments in Eastern Europe.

Slovo was supportive of Gorbachev's policies of "glasnost" and "perestroika", while the CPP statement was highly critical of them."

Informed sources say the Ang Bayan editors were later reprimanded for implementing such a far-reaching shift in editorial policy without clearance from the central committee.

Analysts say the paper's foray in to glasnost journalism was sign of how strongly the winds of debate are blowing within the CPP.

Party leaders have been hotly arguing over various issues since the CPP committed the blunder of boycotting the 1986 snap presidential elections which isolated the party from the popular movement that unseated Ferdinand Marcos and put Corazon Aquino in power.

One such issue was the proposal of some party cadres to revise the CPP's strategy of seizing power through a protracted guerrilla struggle in the countryside in favour of a more urban-focused, insurrectionary-style strategy.

But the debate over socialist models goes deeper. And analysts say the CPSU's fall from power is likely to make that discussion even more lively and more public than ever.

### To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

#### "A Synthentic Extravaganza" — a clarification

Sir, I would like to draw attention to a report "A Synthentic Extravaganza" published in the column "Dhaka Day by Day" in the October 9 issue of your esteemed daily.

We do appreciate your report on our '91 FABRIC SHOW in Bangladesh, held from 8th to 10th October at Hotel Sonargaon. Since the show was first of its kind in the country, your report conveyed the detail of it to the readers.

However, we would like to draw attention to particular two informations which were inadvertently made by mistake or by misinformation.

Here in, for easy understanding we rather specify those information: (1) In the very lead sentence of the report it was told that Daewoo Fabric Show had been sponsored by the "Inter-speed". The fact is that the show was absolutely our own sponsored and it had been planned and organized by Daewoo Corporation. Inter-speed, as an advertising agency was only assigned to complete the interior decoration, "by our given detailed design". (2) In one stage (second last sentence of the seventh paragraph) of the report another misinformation had simply pulled down the established stature and repute of our organization. It was stated that in Bangladesh, Daewoo had been operating since 1978

#### Students and crime

Sir, In the recent past we were having to read much about the sudden activities carried out by our Police force in the name of curbing 'social crimes' committed by the 'student community'. So far as we know quite a large number of students have been taken into custody. Our belief is that most of such 'students' who are guilty of real crimes being carried out in the country specially in Dhaka city are moving around freely while the innocent ones are at the mercy of the law makers and law enforcers. What justice can we expect when the innocent students are not allowed to utter

a single word in defence nor they know how to act in situations like that! For example, on October 3 in the morning the Farmgate Road was closed to public. Police arrested some young boys allegedly for collecting 'tolls'. These boys were reported to be the students of Tejgaon Degree College. So far so good. But at around 7 in the evening a surprise visit by a body of Police was made at the College itself. The College was having its night shift classes then. Three students who were found to be playing carrom at the College's common room were picked up. They were remanded to jail after having spent one whole night at the Tejgaon Police Station. After two days, their relatives reportedly having spent more than a thousand Taka for each, the students were set free on 'parole'. The real 'case' brought against them is to start sometime next month.

In the meantime, to cut a lengthy case 'short', the students have been advised to 'plead guilty' by their lawyers. In the court house they were

warned not to deny the charge brought against them because then that would mean challenging the 'authority' and that may anger them and force them to make further move. The helpless boys had nothing to do but agree. And sooner than can be imagined they shall become 'convicts of criminal acts' which they have not done! This is one 'novel' way to get 'undelayed justice' indeed!

Now the question is: Are we not trying to force a larger number of innocent people to turn criminals? I do hope and pray the Ministry of Home Affairs will act accordingly if we are to expect a healthy society in future.

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#### Golam Azam's blessings

Sir, Presidential candidates seeking blessings from Golam Azam had created storms in the demarcated corners of Bangladesh political arena. In

fact, it was an unexpected and strange affair to many who had employed all out effort to expel Golam Azam and his party from the soil of Bangladesh. Cancelling citizenship, branding him great collaborator of Pak army, calling him Albadar, Razaker and virtually waging an undeclared civil war against his party — they did their level best to eradicate his ideology followers from this Muslim dominated land.

Now visit by Presidential candidates to Golam Azam's residence for his favour, of course, is a thunderbolt to his arch political opponents — an insulting, uncomfortable time for them. But they have perhaps forgotten a cruel truth — there is no enemy in politics forever. It is the hard realities of the Bangladesh politics that compelled the 'learned' Presidential candidates to seek Golam Azam's blessings. He is no controversial personality now, rather a vital factor in Bangladesh politics which has been proved through the recent political events. *Rajia Sultana, Hqdarpara, Brahmanbaria*