

A Late Love Affair

Dr Innas Ali—he needs no introduction—has said that air and earth and water, in fact, everything in Bangladesh is polluted. This observation on Tuesday served as an apt curtain-raiser for yesterday's World Environment Day. Even a man of his scientific stature, as also indeed the one than whom none has for long a better bona fide in every respect, namely our universally respected Acting President, in a way, used the current spell of natural calamities affecting Bangladesh to drive home the need for environment awareness. Tying things in this fashion somewhat fudges the issues and the intended effect is lost. The repeating tidal surges, the procession of tornadoes occur as compulsions for reacting to the needs of a living healthful nature around us only very remotely—and let us not fall into thinking that if these were not there—the citizens of this land would have needed little to care for environment.

In fact, Dr Pramanik, the chief of the environment directorate-general hit on a more cogent reason for our need to be responsive to nature and environment in the same seminar. A degenerating environment and the mounting pressure of a growing population, increasing use of chemical insecticides and defiling nature with more and more wastes and effluents would rob all of our land, water included, of its generative and life-sustaining powers and reduce it to an expanse of dead sands. We want to join Dr Pramanik in reminding ourselves that this is an on-going process—well on its way—and stealthy silent thing would, if not stemmed in time, wreak ruin that even a thousand passing tidal surges or tornadoes cannot. And it is more directly to prevent that eventuality every Bangladesh citizen should start responding to the call of SOS from nature as if it were one from God Himself.

But all this approach of being made to do something under pain of some Jeremiahesque scare-warning is a poor substitute for a love for nature and the living environment just for the sense of well-being and fulfillment and serenity and a life-giving quietude that are guaranteed to be had in return. Our response to nature should indeed auger a love affair in earnest, although somewhat belated, as against the combative tenor it had ever after the exit of the predominance of the pantheistic worldview and the onset of the mechanical-dependent civilisation. And what better illustrates appreciation of that than a call to go for the trees—not with the executioner's axe but for more and more of these to grow by the billion. Although the Prime Minister's fervent appeal to each of Bangladesh's 110 million population to plant a sapling each was an unfortunate example of flimsy drafting by men paid to do a less ridiculous job—she hit on our best bet against an otherwise inexorable ethnic decline.

So then, let us have more trees—for every day unto decades galore rather than holding seminars with repeating familiar faces sitting those out—and walkathons or whatever else the townsfolk think up for their own fun. And let us have a tab—a strict one—on how Government itself goes about this planting business.

The Swedish Model

Sweden, which celebrates its National Day today, has come a long way since 1523 when Gustav Vasa successfully revolted against the Danes. Today, Sweden's importance and impact are far out of proportion to its size and supposed military prowess. A country of less than nine million people, Sweden has developed a democratic society whose human rights records are second to none. Its economy is a unique blend of successful capitalism and socialism, ensuring competitiveness of its enterprises as well as prosperity and socio-economic security of its people. Its pursuit of an independent and non-aligned foreign policy, coupled with a persistent campaign for a decrease in global spending on arms, has earned it many friends.

Sweden's friendship with Bangladesh, from the early days of Stockholm's support for our independence in 1971, is one of those rarities in international relations, being based on a shared worldview and aspirations, rather than narrow self-interest dictated by geo-political considerations. For the past two decades Bangladesh has strove, within its limited capacity, for a world where small countries could develop economically without being subjected to neo-colonialist exploitation and subjugation, and be counted as an equal in the family of nations. Sweden has stood by Bangladesh, because its beliefs are no different.

The pattern of Swedish assistance to Bangladesh exemplifies its often-stated belief in a type of development that can only be judged against the actual quality of life enjoyed by the people, rather than the mileage of roads and bridges it builds. The concentration of Swedish aid in the areas of health, education and generation of employment for poor, rural folks, bears out the philosophy.

Bangladesh has a lot to learn from Sweden, not only from its approach to development where it sees the human element as being central, but also from the northern European country's success in insuring democratic rights for its people, including long-term social security. Finally, Sweden's close economic and political interaction with neighbours stands as an example of how regional cooperation, rather than confrontation, can be to the benefit of all.

As I wrote down, rather as I typed out the words 'passing clouds', I looked out and found a dull sky staring at me. There is news of another 'low' forming in the Bay. The look of the sky confirms this. My passing clouds, then, is to be taken in its metaphorical sense only. They, these passing clouds, will have no more than a casual, an accidental connection with the 'low' that has formed in the Bay and that had brought this dull, windy and rainy day. Monsoon, incidentally, has come this time at least two weeks too soon. According to meteorological records of over hundred years, we should expect monsoon to break in this part of the sub-continent on or about 8th June. My source of information, The Statesman (of Calcutta) in one of its issues, quarter of a century ago, I reproduce this as a piece of timeless data.

My theme today is the campus scenario. Campus scene would have been alright but I succumbed to the common temptation of using a vogue word, a jargon, a fashionable word. Now that I have used it, as I confess inadvertently, I will not recall it. Let it stay where it is and let me proceed with my theme.

The campus scene, I hope everybody will agree, is causing concern. There have been clashes on the Dhaka University campus. The latest happening, the physical assault of a political leader by a group of angry students, in the presence of, and despite resistance from, the Vice-Chancellor and a good number of other political leaders, who had all come at the invitation of the Vice-Chancellor to participate in a discussion, is but yet another

The Campus Scenario : Back to the Old Pattern Again

Special to the Star

evidence of how far things have gone wrong with the climate on the campus.

At Chittagong, the climate had been charged with violence and anxiety even before the tragic incident of December 22, and has remained volatile ever since. The university was closed by a Syndicate decision after the clash in which one student died. It has not reopened after that, because, sometime ago, as the university was about to reopen, instructions from Dhaka not to do so, forestalled reopening. This was not taken kindly by many teachers and students and the advice came under attack as an unfortunate interference in the affairs of the university which is an autonomous body. True, the government does not usually pass orders on a university either on the question of opening or of closing, but this has not been strictly followed in recent years. Sometimes directly, more often indirectly by playing a devious hand, the government of the day has interfered in such matters.

At Kushtia, the temporary abode of the Islam University, the story is a little different: not a conflict between student groups but between the administration and the rest. It may not be as simple as this but the outcome is the same. The university is not functioning at the time I write this. Some time ago, the Vice-Chancellor was the object of attack by a rightist group of political parties who had discovered in him an

enemy out to destroy the idea of an Islamic University. The idea, it should be mentioned, was the one cherished by this group. It meant virtually, a theological institute, glorified with the name and style of a university. Because the administration headed by the Vice-Chancellor, would not subscribe to this view and because some of the actions of the authorities clearly indicated a

campaign, I too became a target as I happened to hold the portfolio of education in the Interim Government. I was identified as one having something to do with all the 'misdeeds' being done at Kushtia. Imagination had run riot but we maintained a silence over this most unjust insinuation.

At Jahangirnagar, the university, despite grave provoca-

teachers have rejected the idea of student union elections for which preparations were at an advanced stage.

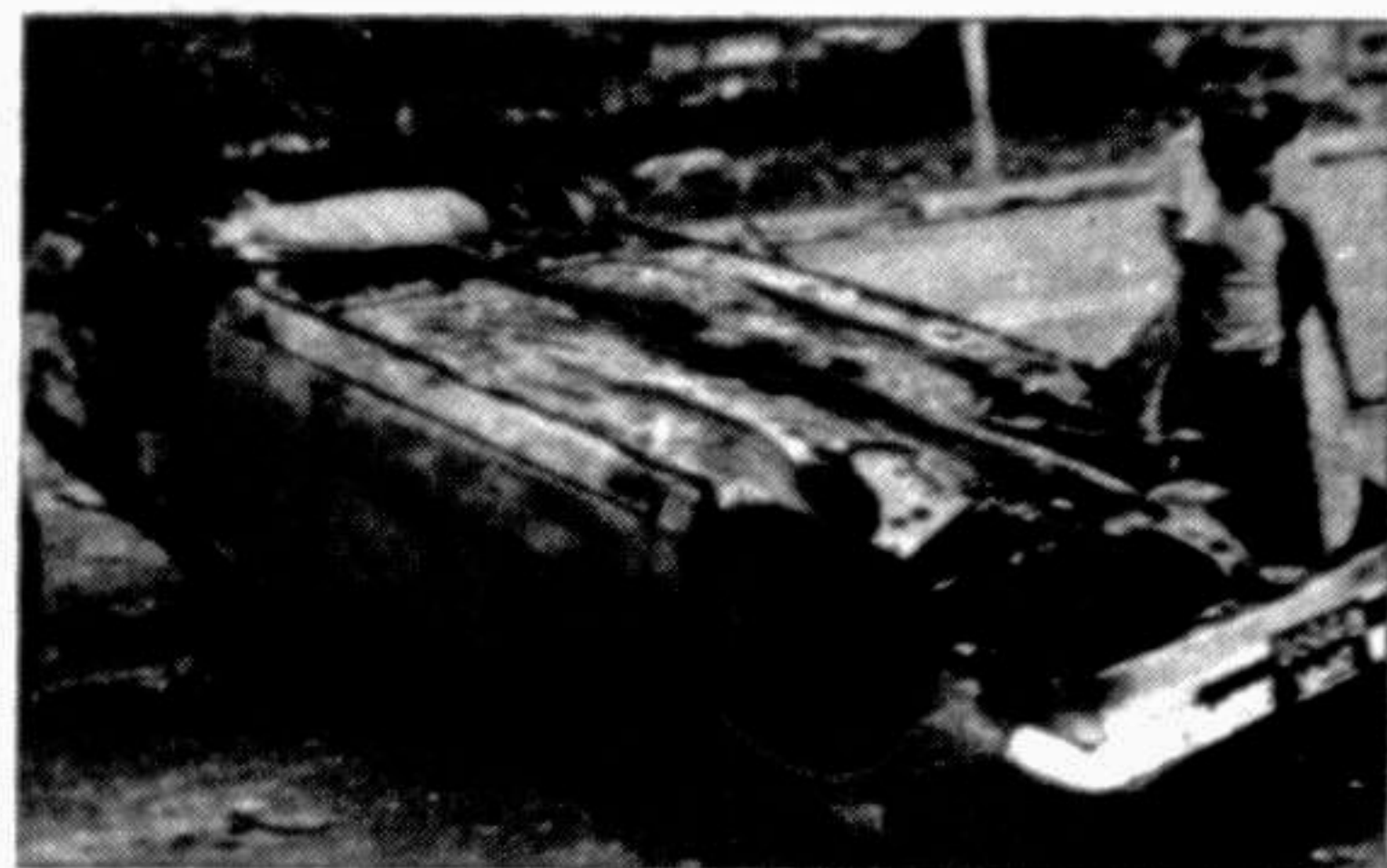
I thought that this was about all I had to say about our disturbed campuses. But the latest news brings further stories of woe. BAU, our only university of agriculture, located at Mymensingh, has hastily been closed on the eruption of armed hostilities between two groups of students. Students have been asked to vacate halls of residence. Judging from the report as I read it in today's Daily Star, the clash follows the familiar pattern, and the groups involved have ranged themselves in the now familiar pattern of JCD versus others minus Shibir. The role of the last named group is not clear, and it may not be a factor at Mymensingh.

Though everything is not clear about the conflicts and clashes on our campuses, one thing is quite clear: the honeymoon days of the anti-Ershad movement are over. Differences that were buried in the interest of that movement are surfacing again. The pretexts and excuses vary from place to place but the truth remains the same for all the cases: lack of understanding on some basic issues which divides the political parties at the national level and which continues to guide the conduct of the student wings of these parties. The unity that these wings had forged despite their senior associates has all but crumbled. This is full of distas-

PASSING CLOUDS
Zillur Rahman Siddiqui

move toward the idea of a university as it is generally understood all the world over, the rightist forces started a campaign of vilification personally against the Vice-Chan-

celor. In that vilification campaign, I too became a target as I happened to hold the portfolio of education in the Interim Government. I was identified as one having something to do with all the 'misdeeds' being done at Kushtia. Imagination had run riot but we maintained a silence over this most unjust insinuation.



Vehicle burned on the campus..... When it's going to cease?

Star photo

"Rambo" Diro Stirs Row in Papua New Guinea

David Robie writes from Auckland

An attempted invasion of Bougainville has jeopardised the Honiara peace agreement. Papua New Guinea's deputy prime minister, Ted Diro, has been linked with the invasion. In addition he is facing 76 violations of the country's leadership code and has been suspended following allegations of corruption and misconduct.

THE tough former chief of Papua New Guinea's defence forces, Ted Diro, has been suspended from official duties as deputy prime minister after being charged with 76 counts of alleged misconduct and corruption in office.

Diro — known to his critics as "Rambo" — rejects the charges, which were made following an investigation by the Ombudsman Commission, and Prime Minister Rabbin Namaliu has defended Diro's decision not to resign.

The leadership tribunal chairman hearing the case, Judge Arnold Amet, has asked for legal argument over whether charges relating to the previous Parliament which ended in mid-1987 can be heard. If not, 49 of the 76 charges will be dropped.

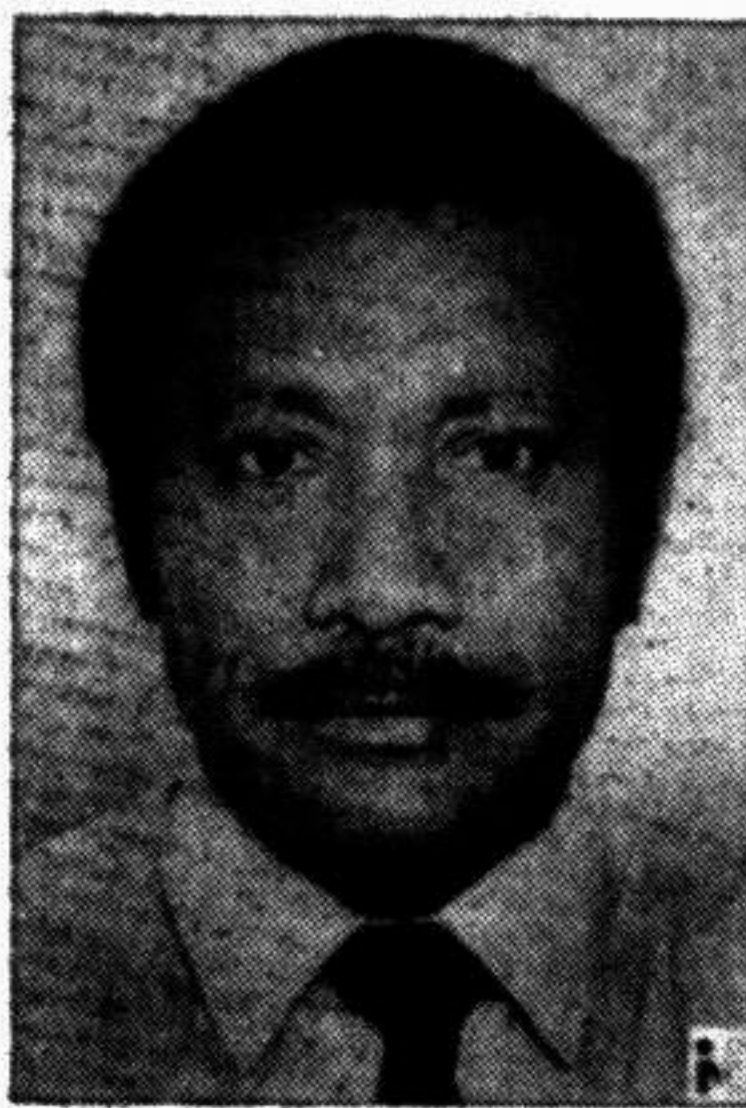
Diro is also linked to allegations over the secessionist rebellion in Bougainville. He is being accused for a second time of instigating military moves designed to undermine peace accords while the prime minister was out of the country.

Copper-rich Bougainville island has seceded from the rest of PNG after a two-year guerrilla struggle, in the course of which Panguna mine, one of the world's largest, was shut down.

During Namaliu's recent visit to China, PNG troops were landed on the north of Bougainville and a special operations force blasted Manatali bridge, cutting the island in half and preventing Bougainville Revolutionary Army militants from moving northwards.

Namaliu ordered an inquiry on his return and the government reprimanded Colonel Leo Nua, but his troops have remained on Bougainville.

"The bagman of the PNG government, Ted Diro, has once again displayed his aggression by ordering the



TED (RAMBO) DIRO Favours a military solution to Bougainville secession

troops to launch an attack," said Moses Havini, envoy of the Bougainville "republic" interim government. "Bougainvilleans can now only prepare for further attacks from the Diro Rambo. Once again Papua New Guinea has driven peace further away."

The Endeavour Accord signed last August was torn up when PNG troops seized Buka Island off the northern tip of Bougainville, under the pretext of being a "relief" operation.

Now, as a result of the latest action, the Honiara Accord, which was signed in January, is also under threat.

Under the Honiara Accord, named after the Solomon Islands capital where it was signed, PNG Foreign Minister, Sir Michael Somare, pledged that PNG troops would not return to Bougainville.

Bougainville's representatives are seeking establishment of a multinational peace-keeping force and Moses Havini and another envoy, Mike Forster, were in Vila in April lobbying for support from the Vanuatu government.

But PNG Defence Minister Benais Sabumei claimed that plans for an outside neutral force were unlikely to be necessary, and his view is apparently endorsed by Namaliu. The Prime Minister believes that a "hearts and minds" campaign could succeed.

New Zealand and Australia are also reluctant to support the idea of a peacekeeping force. In any case, the Bougainvilleans do not want Australian forces taking part. They accuse Australia of supporting PNG soldiers during alleged human rights violations on the island during military occupation.

Bougainville leaders believe Diro, who is seen by many Papuans as having a good chance of becoming PNG's first Papuan prime minister, wants to torpedo the Honiara Accord.

Suspicion of a high-level PNG link with the military landing on Bougainville provoked Provincial Affairs Minister, Father John Mommis, himself a Bougainvillean who heads the Task Force set up under the Honiara Accord, into making a strong condemnation.

He protested against "this trend of developments where the disciplined forces are even allowed to work against the policies and directives of the collective and democratically-elected government." He was

expressing a widely-held belief that the PNG government is being sabotaged from within.

The latest military landing on Bougainville parallels the "military solution" to the Bougainville rebellion preferred by Diro. In the past, he has argued strongly for dividing Bougainvilleans and encouraging a civil war so the PNG forces could seize the island during the ensuing chaos.

The charges against Diro include accepting a political "gift" of US\$139,000 from Indonesia's then armed forces chief, Major-General Benny Murdani, and seeking a donation of \$145,000 from a company wanting a logging licence. In fact, about two-thirds of the charges are the result of a commission of inquiry into the forestry industry, conducted by Supreme Court Judge Thomas Barnett.

Other charge involve allegations of accepting "benefits" such as air fares, abusing his ministerial expense account and failing to disclose interests in private companies.

Diro was forced to resign as minister without portfolio after the forestry commission report found him to be "disgraceful and dishonest."

However, Diro has a powerful political base which is crucial to the survival of the Namaliu government. The People's Action Party which he leads, draws most of its support from the 700,000 Papuans who make up a fifth of the PNG population. His party

is in a coalition with Namaliu's ruling Pangu Pati.

In Vanuatu, Bougainvillean envoy Mike Forster attacked Diro for his attempts to sabotage the Bougainvillean "republic." Forster, a fourth generation white Bougainvillean, accused the PNG military of treating Bougainville as a colony rather than as part of the nation: "Bougainville was seen as the PNG piggy bank and our people were the pigs."

"Because of this neo-colonialist attitude we are justified in insisting on our right to self-determination as guaranteed under the United Nations Charter."

The PNG government's

trous implications and this has been underlined by the ugly incident that happened the other day in the office room of the Vice-Chancellor of Dhaka University. I do not think that this could have happened with APSU still functioning.

The divisive forces are again at work, both outside the universities and within, destroying the peace and harmony of these institutions where leadership for the future is nursed and tended. The universities must be saved if we wish to protect our future. But are the universities ready and capable of being saved, as they are now constituted and managed? The issue is a sensitive one and we have waited all these years for the moment when the question can be addressed, without risking the autonomy of the universities. We had resisted proposals for reform, doubting as we did the honesty and credibility of the people proposing reforms. With the return of democracy and the establishment of a government which will, hopefully, be answerable to an elected Parliament, the stage has been set to ask some very uncomfortable questions which we have deliberately evaded in the past, and of which I have already given some indication. I have simply raised the issue and I hope to return to it when I write next.

A distinguished educationist and writer and a former Vice-Chancellor of the Jahangirnagar University, Prof Siddiqui recently served as the Adviser on Education to the Interim Government of the Acting President. He has now been appointed as the Convener of a seven-member committee to enquire into the problems of "session jams" in the universities. Prof Siddiqui will be writing this column, "Passing Clouds", regularly for The Daily Star.

relations with the news media have continued to deteriorate as Port Moresby becomes increasingly sensitive to how the Bougainville issue is portrayed internationally. Sir Michael Somare said Australian, and to some extent New Zealand journalists, were reporting on PNG events with "derogatory and racist imputation," and two Australian TV networks are banned.

A six-member Australian Council for Overseas Aid team recently visited Bougainville and members said they were "highly disturbed" by what they had seen.

"People are dying at an alarming rate from preventable diseases," said Denis Tamplin, the team's spokesperson. "The blockade has had a severe effect on the health of the people. Services need to be restored quicker."

— GEMINI NEWS
DAVID ROBIE is a New Zealand journalist specialising in Pacific and development issues.

OPINION
Income Tax and Private Savings

Newspaper reports indicate that the government and the chambers of trade and industry are extremely worried about the fast declining trend in domestic savings thus putting a heavy strain on means for financing productive activities.

Some of the measures thoughtlessly introduced by the previous government are greatly responsible for the decline in private savings. In the budget for 1990-91, the then Finance Minister imposed 8% tax at source on profit earned from Fixed Deposits (FDs) and Savings Deposits invested by private individuals in banks. This measure was not withdrawn, despite severe criticism in the national media and by the public in general including the chambers of trade & commerce. As was thought, this measure proved counter-productive. A good number of persons withdrew their savings investments from the banks, and diverted that to purchase of gold and real estate, on which direct tax is non-existent or minimal. Besides, such persons found that, while value of money erodes through rising inflation and cost of living, value of investments in gold and real estate appreciates.

It is advisable to remember that, if those, who can afford to not invest their savings in banks to avoid the irritant measure of direct taxation, even normal banking operations would get greatly squeezed, which in turn would cause myriad problems for trade, commerce and industries, for lack of ready cash to finance transactions. It is also to be noted that bank deposits are utilised for purposes which open up new and additional sources for increasing government revenue. In that sense, private investors in banks also contribute to government revenue and to national development.

If the 8% tax on profits from Bank Deposits is withdrawn, it will surely encourage

the private cash investors to save in banks again and thus help growth of domestic savings for utilisation in the productive field.

In the national budget for 1990-91, some more harsh Income-Tax measures were imposed, which have been widely resented by honest taxpayers. The earlier-exemption of income from bank deposits upto Tk 15,000, from Income-Tax, was withdrawn. This worked as a set-back for cash investors in banks. Besides, a surcharge of 15% on Income-Tax, otherwise payable, was imposed — thus further increasing the tax-burden. These measures were considered very unreasonably harsh by those who do not resort to tax-evasion. At the same time, these provisions might have encouraged the habitual tax-evaders to work out new ways and means to avoid the additional tax burden. Such steps on the part of the government would be self-defeating in the long run.

The present democratic government would be well advised to allow the earlier exemption of upto Tk 15,000/- or perhaps a higher amount, of Bank Deposit Income from Income-Tax and also withdraw the surcharge of 15% with a view to boosting up savings in bank deposits.

A good Finance Minister would not resort to increasing direct tax burden on the citizens. Rather, he would try to augment revenue from hitherto untapped indirect sources and from luxuries and non-essential items, both imported and indigenous.

One would hope that, in the national budget for 1991-92, to be presented by the new democratically elected government, people of Bangladesh would find a return to reason and pragmatism, and a farewell to the egotistic shortsighted policies of past nine years.

Abdul Hye Khan
Dhaka

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.

Brave displayer

Sir, A recent news item in your esteemed daily (May 27) shows the picture of a person who has two scorpions crawling on his face and head.

The particular view was a part of a display in a park in Malaysia. This person had been able to control himself and be calm and poised during the time, when he allowed the scorpions to crawl over him.

It is not unknown to us, as to how poisonous and deadly these creatures can be. At best one or two bites from them is good enough to put a human being to sleep forever.

Therefore, we admire the courage and fortitude shown by the displayer. But at the same time, we once again are puzzled by the unpredictable nature of human beings. It is difficult to understand why a person would want to do so dangerous a thing, where a small

mistake might end his life! This is of course not the first time, when man has been seen trying to perform difficult and extraordinary feat. There are cases when men have tried to sleep or spend time with equally or more deadly snakes.

So as much as we admire their strength of mind, we would request them to be careful, and if possible, refrain from such acts, as we must not forget that we only live once.

Ayesha Ahmed
Khilgaon, Dhaka.

An appreciation

Sir, With great enthusiasm I have been watching the emergence of 'The Daily Star' and I believe a time has now come when many more readers like me would be surely thinking of according this daily a grand welcome and a heroic congrat-

ulation. This appreciation is genuine and spontaneous. Surely, the Editor, management and everyone associated with this newspaper deserve this for their noble and tireless task of bringing out the beautiful English daily and giving it a real professional touch.

The wide coverage of national and international news, reports on variety of events and performances plus the fine tuning in its editing has made it worth reading and made it an object of rapt attention and continued curiosity for the readers. Let it bloom in full to give us more feeling of confidence and generate more eagerness among us for peeping into its pages every fine morning.

Anwar ul Mohsin
Jigatola, Dhaka

Oversimplification!

Sir, While accusing "some bureaucrats of conspiring to destabilise administration" the General Secretary of the B.C.S. Coordination Committee told your Correspondent that "due to bureaucratic conspiracy" Ayub Khan and Ershad could take power by ousting elected governments (Daily Star

26.5.91). This is perhaps oversimplification of a grave issue. It is difficult to believe that both the powerful Generals staged coup d'etat just acting on the advice of the so-called secretariat 'quill-drivers', some of whom are no doubt good conspirators but their conspiracies are limited to the file-work only. About how they do it, a senior bureaucrat once remarked that the bureaucrats know only two rules, namely, 'Yes Rule' and 'No Rule'. When they want to do something positive for someone they initiate notes applying 'Yes Rule'. And, when not to do anything for anyone they apply 'No Rule' formula. Only the other day, a local newspaper reported how a top bureaucrat put up a 'false' note to the Highest Executive of the country. I know of another bureaucrat, now lies buried in the Banani graveyard, who in collaboration with another (both held the rank of secretary) 'shelved' for ever a significant 'query' made to a cabinet minister by the then Highest Executive, who is also now dead. But the memories of such 'bad' bureaucrats still haunt me with agony and bitterness.

Abdul Kader,
Purana Paltan, Dhaka.