

DOWN TO EARTH

Parents' Tribulations In School Premises

By A S M Nurunnabi



Nowadays, in most cases, a parent, be it the mother or the father, of small children reading in lower classes, has to go regularly to the child's school as an escort. If the father acts as the escort, his duty may end in the morning after escorting the child to school. His duty resumes in the afternoon, when the child's classes are over. At that time, either he or any other authorised person has to take the child back home. This is one aspect of the daily pattern of family life.

But where the father remains busy otherwise, the chore of escorting the child has to be done by the mother or any other suitable person. Problems arise if the school is situated some distance away from the child's residence. In that case the mother or her representative cannot afford to return home after the child reaches school. In most cases, owing to distance, a second trip to the school for taking the child back home in the afternoon is not possible on account of the prohibitive cost of conveyance and the time factor. In such circumstances, the mother or her proxy prefers to remain near the school premises throughout the school hours. Her tribulation usually stems from that compelling situation.

Are there any waiting rooms in schools for parents and guardians who are required to wait out the entire school hours of their children or wards? The answer is in the negative with few exceptions. In most cases, the waiting es-

corts are left to their own devices. The resultant situation is not very happy. Some of the waiting multitude take to the nearest footpath under the shade of trees, while others take shelter in open spaces nearby.

This daily vigil continues day in and day out. To break the monotony, some of the mothers or their representatives display resourcefulness. They spread out plastic sheets and engage themselves in endless sessions of gossiping on subjects ranging from cabbages to kings. Some others come equipped with pocket radios or flasks of tea or other drinks to while away the time. An atmosphere of bonhomie develops among those waiting. The dark side of the situation becomes apparent during inclement weather. Driving rain or gusty winds send them scampering to the nearest places of refuge. When they run for short spells it may seem pleasant and exciting, but when the run is a long one, they become anything but pleasurable.

Talks with some mothers who do such vigils reveal tales of silent sufferings under boring conditions. Mrs Zaker is a resident of Shyamoli. Her daughter is a student of a lower class of a well-known school at Azampur. It is a rare fortune to get admission in a good school in Dhaka city. She, therefore, bears with fortitude the daily grind of taking her daughter to school and then taking up her vigil. Because of

the distance and high cost of conveyance involved, she cannot afford multiple trips to and from her daughter's school. A similar story was told by one Mrs Azim who lives at Khilgaon. She comes with her minor son studying at a school at Nilkhet.

School buses are nowadays used only by a few schools. That provides a sense of security to the guardians. Since that system is limited in use, the worry of guardians for their minor school-going wards is understandable, particularly in view of the prevailing law and order situation.

In most cases, guardians are prepared to go long distances and suffer other attendant inconveniences if they can put their wards in a good school far away from their neighbourhoods. Lately, a crop of private schools have come up in most localities. Even there, the aspect of convenience of the guardians, who are required to wait for their children, is not given serious attention. The moot point is, it behoves the authorities of schools both in the private and public sectors who have not provided for such conveniences, to spare some thought and make such provisions in their school premises. The school authorities may also consider, as a supplementary measure, the introduction of school buses, at least for small children. This may be welcomed by many guardians even though it may involve additional financial burden for them.

Ominous signals from Huda

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place advertisements considering the "objectivity" of the newspaper, no longer depending on its circulation.

A well-meaning and said to be a powerful member of the present government, Huda should please do some rethinking on both these proposed measures.

The cancellation of accreditation of journalists, perhaps meaning reporters and correspondents, for alleged misreporting can indeed be a most drastic step which can prevent the "offender" from performing his or her normal journalistic duty, perhaps even resulting in the loss of employment.

The question is, who will exercise the authority of cancelling the accreditation? We assume, it won't be the Ministry of Information. However, if it is the Press Council which, under the new law, is empowered to take this measure, it may well be the first press body of its kind to impose such a punishment on a journalist. Much also depends on the composition of the Council. How impartial will be its verdict if the complaint of "misreporting" is made by a government agency, an individual government leader or a Ministry? There will always be questions about the Council's credibility just as there will be conflicting opinions as to what constitutes a case of misreporting, a professional lapse or a deliberate act of negligence in what we call re-checking of facts.

The copy of a reporter passes through several hands before it is published, with the Editor-Publisher taking the final responsibility for what the Council may regard as "misreporting". If the charge has been proved — no matter by what professional criterion

— it should be the newspaper and its Editor-Publisher who should be reprimanded, while the publication should be obliged to carry an appropriate apology and make other amends.

If it is a case of defamation or libel, the matter should go before the court of law, not the Press Council, if the complainant seeks legal redress. Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore once fought a defamation case against the Far Eastern Economic Review at a court in Kuala Lumpur, while Corazon Aquino of the Philippines has been involved in a long court battle against one of the best-known journalists of the country, Louis Beltran, again for alleged misreporting.

It is important for the Ministry of Information to find out what is happening in other countries before we set up a new Press Council, with enhanced powers. There is no point in looking for short cuts in the setting up of a free and responsible press in Bangladesh.

In his second announcement on the subject, the Minister has linked what he has described as "objectivity" to the distribution of advertisements to newspapers, thus discarding the principle of audited circulation which has so long determined this exercise.

We can assume, with some trepidation, that it will be the Ministry of Information — no other authority is mentioned in this respect — which will decide which newspaper is objective and which is not. It may well be a bureaucrat, with little or no journalistic background, who will settle this highly sensitive question.

To take an extreme case, it may well mean that a newspa-

per with a circulation of 1000 copies per day, regarded as "objective" by the Ministry, will be given a higher volume of advertisement than another, perhaps a non-partisan independent daily, with a circulation of 10,000 every day. This would also mean that public sector advertisements relating to tenders, vacancies for appointments or even issues of popular concern, such as family planning or environment, might not reach the highest number of readers of newspapers.

The ideal answer lies in decentralisation. Let the Department of Films and Publications (DFP) of the Ministry of Information hand over the responsibility of placing advertisements to the concerned autonomous, semi-autonomous and even wholly government, agencies ranging from Bangladesh Biman to Shilpa Bank, from the Dhaka City Corporation to the Chittagong Port Authority.

Through such a policy of decentralisation, the DFP will be freed from the obligation of settling the outstanding dues to newspapers, which, as Minister Huda told parliament on Thursday, now amount to over seven crore taka for the fiscal year 1991-92 alone.

What Huda refrained from telling the House — perhaps his Ministry has kept him in the dark on this issue — but something the MPs should know now is that a number of newspapers have fallen months behind in the payment of salaries to the staff mainly because of the dues owed to them by the Ministry of Information.

This is a dismal situation, one that should be set right before we start talking about cancelling accreditation of journalists in this country.

The Midnight File

Havel resigns Monday

PRAGUE (Czechoslovakia), July 17: President Vaclav Havel announced Friday that he was resigning, apparently giving up hope that the Czechoslovak state could be saved from disintegration. Havel's announcement, distributed by the CSTK news agency, came only minutes after parliament in the smaller, eastern Slovak republic declared sovereignty. CSTK said Havel, who had tried in vain to hold the federation together, had sent a letter to the federal parliament saying he will resign as of Monday, July 20, reports AP.

Mubarak-Rabin summit Tuesday

CAIRO, July 17: Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin will hold a summit in Egypt Tuesday to push forward the Middle East peace process, an official source said Friday. The meeting would be the first between leaders of the two countries in six years. The source, who spoke on condition of anonymity, refused to say where the talks will be held. But they were expected to be in Cairo, where Mubarak will be chairing a congress of his ruling National Democratic Party that opens Monday, reports AP.

Delhi rushes troops

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Indian People Party, which backs the radical Hindus who began work last week on the temple to their warrior-god Rama.

The Supreme Court has given the Uttar Pradesh government time until Tuesday to give a 'correct and true' picture of the temple construction drive near the 16th century mosque in Ayodhya, the centre of a growing Hindu-Muslim communal storm.

The Hindus say a temple to Rama was demolished four centuries ago by Moghul invaders to build the existing mosque in Ayodhya.

A large number of fanatical Hindus are near the Shrine and local officials have said it will be difficult to evict them without using force.

PTI says, about 80,000 'karsewaks' are expected to land in Ayodhya soon to prevent any attempt by the Centre of the judiciary to stop construction work at the disputed site the Vishwa Hindu Parishad General Secretary, Ashok Singhal said today.

Criticising the Allahabad High Court order restraining any construction activity in the land acquired by the state government around the disputed site, Singhal told reporters for 42 years, the court which had taken up the responsibility of deciding the issue, had still been unable to do so, now the Hindu masses will decide.

A banner on the boundary wall of the shrine read 'court verdicts have been violated by Rajiv Gandhi, Mulayam Singh Yadav, V P Singh, Laloo Prasad and several others'.

Scores of young Bajrang Dal supporters donning red bands on their foreheads have joined 'karsewaks' at the disputed site following yesterday's appeal by the VHP.

Meanwhile, the BJP today decided to observe July 20 as 'hands off Ayodhya day' throughout the country to mobilise public opinion on Ramjanambhoomi issue.

The decision was taken at an emergency meeting of the party executive convened to discuss the Ayodhya issue in the light of the developments in the past several days.

Briefing newsmen after the meeting, the party president, Dr Murli Manohar Joshi said the BJP government in Uttar Pradesh would discharge its constitutional duties and at the same time fulfil the mandate of the people.

To a pointed question how the party propose to achieve both, Dr Joshi said it was left to the Uttar Pradesh government on how it went about it.

Earlier, Prime Minister Narasimha Rao told the Lok Sabha today that the Centre was awaiting reports of 'actual compliance' of the High Court order restraining construction activity.

Replying to a three-day discussion on the no-confidence motion against his year-old government, Rao said that the latest information received from the state said that the Court order could not be conveyed to the district authorities because of failure of fax machine.

Ultimately a special messenger was sent to Faizabad by the state government asking the concerned officials to implement the Court order, the Prime Minister said.

The Indian government would stand by the Constitution and not allow any flouting of the Allahabad High Court directive to stop construction work at the site the Home Minister, S B Chavan assured the agitated members in the Rajya Sabha today.

'We have sent communication to the Uttar Pradesh government to stop construction forthwith at Ayodhya as per the High Court ruling,' Chavan said adding that the UP government had sent a fax message saying it had ordered compliance of the High Court orders restraining any construction activity.

The Home Minister's intervention came as both the houses witnessed uproar and charged scenes which led to adjournment of the Lok Sabha for over 50 minutes.

Non-BJP members demanded the dismissal of the BJP government in Uttar Pradesh for 'disrespecting' court verdicts the issue was raised immediately after the House assembled and several Congress-I, JD (S), JD, Communists and Janata Party members stood up and demanded a statement from the government on the exact situation in Ayodhya.

Some members including, Yashwant Sinha, JD (S) wanted the suspension of question hour to take up the matter and demanded immediate response on the matter from the senior ministers present in House, if not from the Home Minister.

It was a government of collective responsibility, Sinha said and asked 'is the government so helpless and ill informed so as not to respond?'

Jaipal Reddy, Janata Dal, said the government could remain a 'mute spectator' to what was happening in Ayodhya but 'we can not remain a mute spectator.'

Clinton
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found Clinton leading Bush by 23 points.

Significantly, the data showed Clinton winning back Democrats who had defected to Perot. Clinton also was viewed by the electorate as more likely to change government than Bush.

"It's a long way to November," Clinton said as he left the podium — mindful that Michael Dukakis left Atlanta four years ago way ahead of Bush, only to lose in a landslide.

Gone is Perot, whose decision not to run shifted the turbulent 1992 political terrain yet again, and left the millions in his volunteer band without a candidate.

"I am well aware that those who rallied to his cause wanted to enlist in an army of patriots for change," Clinton said. "We say to them: Join us — together we will revitalize America."

The USA Today-CNN poll found that among Perot supporters interviewed, Clinton held a 53-35 per cent lead over Bush.

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Rao
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mosque in violation of Court orders.

"I await further reports on actual compliance," Rao said. Parliament had adjourned in pandemonium earlier today after deputies demanded that Rao dismiss the state government for apparently flouting the Court order.

Rao said his government believed the dispute could be settled by negotiations. "If no negotiated settlement can be found, the Court should be allowed to decide," he said.

Rao held talks on Thursday with leaders of a BJP ally, the fundamentalist World Hindu Council, but they refused to stop their campaign, spokesmen for both sides said.

Rao said his year-long programme of opening up India's economy had paid good dividends. Foreign investment in India had totalled dollars 900 million during his rule, against dollars 100 million in the previous five years.

"I think it is good progress, to put it mildly," he said. "Instead of us calling on them for investment, we had the pleasant surprise of them calling on us."

He refused to comment on a one-billion-dollar financial scandal in which bank funds were diverted to India's booming stock market.

Visit to promote trade ties, says FPCCI chief

A 19-member delegation of the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) led by its president Mian Habibullah arrived Dhaka yesterday on a five-day visit to Bangladesh, reports BSS.

The members of the FPCCI delegation during their stay in Dhaka will hold meetings with their counterparts, Bangladesh Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Besides calling on the Ministers for Commerce, Finance and Industry the FPCCI delegation will also hold talks with functionaries of Bangladesh Tea Association and the Tea Board.

The purpose of our visit is to promote trade and economic relations between the two brotherly nations, the FPCCI president told newsmen on his arrival at the Zia International Airport.

Mian Habibullah said he and

the delegation members were carrying specific proposals in the field of engineering, readymade garments and other areas of textiles and shipping for talks with their Bangladesh counterparts.

"Our current two-way trade volume is not at all satisfactory and there is lot of potential to expand the trade volume," he said and added the delegation intends to make specific suggestions for trading in each other's item.

The FPCCI chief said Bangladesh had done well in developing readymade garments industry and Pakistan had all the potential to provide backward linkage to improve it further.

He said the delegation members were also interested in buying tea, jute and many other items and would have discussions with the businessmen dealing in these items.

Office bearers of FBCCI and Pakistan High Commissioner Anwar Kemal were present at the airport to receive the delegation.

Reinstatement of Shahriar Kabir demanded

The National Coordination Committee for Resistance to the Killers and Collaborators and Realisation of Spirit of Liberation War has demanded reinstatement of Shahriar Kabir as Executive Editor of Weekly Bichitra terming his removal unreasonable, undemocratic and conspiratorial.

Kabir was shown the door allegedly for his association with the 'anti-Golam Azam movement' but the termination letter issued by the paper's management cited insolvency of the large circulation weekly.

His removal came after he refused to bow down to the threatening postures of Information Minister Nazmul Huda. Kabir told The Daily Star.

The journalist said that he had been summoned by the minister prior to the June 30 programme of the National Coordination Committee and was threatened with termination should he continue his association with the body.

"Choose one — either the Nirmul Committee or the Bichitra job", Kabir quoted the minister as telling him on June 28.

"I did not face such a situation even during Ershad days despite my involvement in the anti-autocracy movement", the journalist claimed to have argued before the minister.

"It's a case of sheer political victimisation", Kabir, who received the order Thursday, said last night.

The minister could not be contacted till late last night to verify Kabir's allegations.

Bichitra is a state-owned weekly and run by the Times-Bangla Trust.

Many other socio-cultural and political organisations have condemned what they said the undemocratic and autocratic act of the government.

The organisations include Bangladesh Chhatra Union, Ganatantrik Biplobi Jote, Bangladesh Chhatra Federation, Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal, Samajtantrik Chhatra Front, Projomna 71.

Leaders of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) and Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ) yesterday protested the removal of Shahriar Kabir, Executive Editor of the Weekly Bichitra, and demanded his immediate reinstatement, reports BSS.

In a statement the journalists leaders termed as 'illegal' the removal order by the Acting Chairman of the Trustee Board.

They said, the Acting Chairman is a government official and has no legal right to appoint or sack anybody. They said only the Editor, the chief executive of the paper, could exercise this right.

The leaders observed that democratic system and freedom of the press had been established after a bloody struggle and expressed their determination to face any situation for protecting the press freedom.

Truce in Bosnia

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali minutes before the news conference asking him to explore how this should be done.

Mate Boban, leader of Bosnia's Croat community, said he and the heads of the other two factions had agreed to a two-week ceasefire.

"We have signed a statement", Boban told reporters, "We have agreed to a total ceasefire of 14 days."

Boban said, "We have also agreed to attend further talks on the future constitutional arrangements in Bosnia on July 27 in London."

"We must do all in our power to ensure that a ceasefire is existent."

"A document has been signed," Adrian Bedford, Executive Secretary of the London talks, said. "This round of talks is over."

Conference sources said the document called for:

- A 14-day ceasefire starting at 6:00 P.M. local time on Sunday;
- UN supervision of all heavy weaponry;
- The return of all refugees to their homes;
- Further peace talks in London at the request of Lord Carrington, chairman of the EC-sponsored peace conference.

The sources said Boban, Serbian chief Radovan Karadzic and Muslim Foreign Minister Haris Silajdzic signed the document separately.

The truce agreement included putting all Serbian positions in Bosnia under UN supervision, the conference sources said.

It also recognised the principle of free passage for civilians in and out of war zones in Bosnia as well as the principle that all refugees should be allowed to return home.

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Muktijoddha Trust to be placed under Relief Ministry

The Defence Ministry has proposed that the Muktijoddha Kalyan Trust be placed under the Relief Ministry for the smooth functioning of the welfare trust, official sources said, reports UNB.

The trust for freedom fighters, established in 1972, was under the Relief and Rehabilitation Ministry until 1982 when it was placed under the Defence Ministry. The then Army Chief and CMLA Lt Gen H M Ershad became the Chairman of the trust.

Ershad made the order to place the trust under the Defence Ministry on the plea of alleged corruption by officials of the Relief and Rehabilitation Ministry.

Secretary of the Ministry of Defence Anisur Rahman in a letter to the Ministry of Relief gave the proposal recently citing reasons for shifting the trust to that ministry.

The Defence Secretary in his proposal made it clear that although the trust is under the Ministry of Defence, the freedom fighters, martyrs' families and crippled freedom fighters were receiving relief materials and financial help from the Relief Ministry.

He further said that welfare of the freedom fighters and their families are the main objective of the trust, which can be effectively carried out by the Ministry of Relief.

Delhi, Calcutta

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morrow. He said that another couple of rounds of talks might be necessary on the exchange of enclaves, before the Indian government took a final decision and followed it up with the Bangladesh government.

The next round of discussion was likely to be held in Delhi, Krishnamurthy added.

Krishnamurthy said that while 119 Indian enclaves, with 40,000 people, were still in Bangladesh, as many as 72 Bangladeshi enclaves, with a population of nearly 23,000, were in India, mainly in the Jalpaiguri and Coochbehar districts.

The Chief Secretary said that the meeting was also attended by senior officials of the BSAP and the Survey of India, besides the District Magistrates of Coochbehar, Jalpaiguri, Nadia, and Malda.

It discussed the actual position on the ground in terms of the enclaves, the 'adverse possession areas' relating to these enclaves and the steps required to safeguard India's national interests in process of the exchange, the Chief Secretary said.

Tk 23.60 crore BAU budget

MYMENSINGH, July 17: Bangladesh Agricultural University has announced Tk 23.60 crore budget for the current fiscal year (1992-93). The budget was approved by the university's syndicate at a meeting on Wednesday with Vice Chancellor Prof M Ashraf Khan in the chair, said a press release Friday, reports UNB.

'Write history of liberation placing FFs in true perspective'

Lt Gen (Retd) Mir Shawkat Ali MP, here yesterday said greater Sylhet district had been liberated without the help of Indian army, reports UNB.

Ali, Commander of Sector 5 in the Liberation War of 1971, was speaking at a reunion of sub-sector commanders, group commanders and freedom fighters of the sector at a local hotel in the afternoon.

He said 12,000 youths fought the war in this sector comprising Sunamganj, Chhatrak and Balaganj of Sylhet while 650,000 youths participated in it countrywide.

The BNP leader stressed the need for writing the correct history of the Liberation War to evaluate the supreme sacrifices of the freedom fighters.

Flood engulfs 200 villages in Assam

GOUHATI, July 17: Nearly 200 villages in Saikhowa and Sadiya areas of upper Assam have been submerged as flood water continued to gush through the breached embankments of the Naodehing river, following week-long torrential rains in the catchment areas, according to latest official reports, reports PTI.

The reports said today that the floods had disrupted road communication at various places, besides affecting human habitations and cropland at Dirak, Dhola, Kaitiya, Gujjan and several other areas. Tea bushes were also inundated in some tea gardens.

Road communication to adjoining Arunachal Pradesh had been affected as flood water overtopped the national highways 37 and 52.

Myanmar to resume talks

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troops were moving across the border.

"This is not true. What I have said is that Myanmar has agreed to bring in more immigration officials to the border to deal with the refugees when they are repatriated," Islam, reached by telephone, said.

During the June 8 repatriation talks Bangladesh had proposed to Myanmar that there should be more civilian immigration officials on the border since the refugees don't trust Lunthun, Yangon's border security force.

"There is nothing called immigration army troops in Myanmar," Islam said.

Bangladesh is eager to start the repatriation before the

monsoon worsens the refugees' living conditions in their camps, which are clusters of tin-shed huts and canvas tents.

But relief officials working at the camps fear that attempts are being made to sabotage the repatriation process.

"Some international NGOs are organising the refugees against the repatriation," said one official.

The government has tightened security and restricted the movement of NGO volunteers within the camps. But the international relief workers don't often abide by the restrictions, government relief officials said.

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