

## Mayhem at Stadium

We protest the way police ran amok at the Dhaka Stadium on Tuesday. We denounce it in the name of the future of sports in this country. We reject it in the interest of the existence of police as an institution that helps the cause of the good rather than of the bad. We decry it for fear of this agency of state coercion reverting again to its arrogant defiance of people's rights and taking recourse to straight criminality as it did during its infamous attack on the journalists on duty and the rampage of the National Press Club. We want the police top-brass, nay the home minister, to treat the bad show police put up that evening with a modicum of seriousness that can restore trust in police even if by small degrees. The police and the government must be honest in owning that police is the last thing in the land that people look up to with a sense of love and respect and spontaneously give it friendship and co-operation and display a sense of confidence in them. Let police deny that all good men shun their association and that, in the name of curbing crime, the whole thing is now being brimming to the full with criminality of all kinds.

The above is a very poor expression of outrage we fell about the Tuesday carnage. Such mayhems are not the unknown in soccer encounters. But never around the world a cricket match has the police themselves as the perpetrators. What made them to fly to such an out-of-this-world rage?

The match of the giants was well ended although not without some disputed decisions that went against the losers — the Brothers' Union. The trophies awarded, the all-pleasantry speeches finished, the two minister gone to mind their other august errands — everything was shipshape. And then some chairs were thrown on the police contingent from possibly the Brothers' gallery.

And all hell was let loose. Countless numbers of tear-gas shells were burst and the area submerged in a thick layer of poisonous gas — as a first action. Then the gallant knights charged and beat the crowd into seeking refuge inside the Brothers' dressing room where the members of the losing side were having problems, coming back to normalcy from a state of shock. The police then fell upon the players. The dressing room by that time was reduced to literally a death trap with concentrated tear-gas posing threat of permanent damage to specially the eyes.

One thought that police presence at sporting events, specially soccer matches, was a most necessary and welcome thing if only because it could reasonably be expected to stop the tens of thousands of spectators getting involved in a free for all at the slightest pretext. The idea was never that police would make themselves one of the parties and prove what a set of goons they are — armed and with law and the whole state behind them. One of the possible reasons of the police piff expressing itself in the weirdest mastan style could be the absence among them of a responsible officer. The officer's responsibility should lie in not allowing his men to be provoked in the face of very bad challenges — not to speak of a number of chairs or beverage bottles thrown at them. The police on Tuesday just went berserk and they have no right to do so. Indeed no citizen can do so and it should be deemed a serious dereliction of duty and a piece of serious crime on the part of the police to throw a brick back to from where it came, a mob maybe. We need responsible officers on all occasions of a police posse facing a crowd only to stop policemen stooping to become rowdies.

Police can have their point in the matter but that they have drowned in the deplorable manner in which they went on the rampage. They can always say they went into the players' dressing room to prevent angry fans attacking their losing heroes. But the results say a different story. A story so shameful as may not kindly be repeated ever again.

The police must be tough but fair. It must be strong but infinitely tolerant. They must know their job and must not indulge in activity other than detailed by superiors. Woe to the country where police delight in playing mastans for a change — and there is no other way of describing Tuesday's rampage at the Dhaka Stadium.

## From Thailand with ... ?

Thailand's supreme military commander, Air Chief Marshal Voranart Apichart went to Myanmar on Tuesday on a 24-hour visit, but, according to news agencies reporting from Bangkok, officials declined to give any details on the trip. Such a visit by the Thai military chief to a close neighbour would not have, perhaps, warranted much in the way of comments or speculations under normal circumstances. Times, however, are not normal. Myanmar's refusal to acknowledge popular choice at the 1989 elections and the Yangon regime's continued detention of Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the party which recorded a landslide victory in those elections, have made the military rulers of the country somewhat of a pariah among nations. Repression unleashed by the Myanmar military on the country's ethnic and religious minorities such as the Karens, Rakhaines, Rohingyas etc has created serious refugee and security problems for Thailand and Bangladesh.

In recent weeks, the Association of South-East Asian Nations or ASEAN has begun to take a tougher stand on Myanmar. But the problem remains that if Thailand, Myanmar's closest ally, does not change its conciliatory policy towards Yangon, then the military junta may not feel the necessary compulsion to effect reforms.

Under such circumstances, the world community, and especially regional states, cannot possibly maintain their current indifferent posture. Pressure has to be brought to bear on Yangon, including economic sanctions and political isolation in order to compel it to introduce meaningful reforms. The soft approach adopted by ASEAN states so far has obviously failed to produce results, and the leverage ASEAN has had through continued economic, political, even military links with Myanmar, has not been put to effective use. The Thai military chief's visit, if it was undertaken to offer greater cooperation, will constitute another blow for democracy and human rights. But if the trip was designed to convey Thai disquiet over the slow pace of reforms, then we may expect to see some results, as Thailand, being a close and economically vital neighbour, can expect to be heeded by Yangon.

# We Can Do without a Mid-term Poll or a New Party

THE stage seems set for significant changes in the country's political scene. By far the most important development is, high-level talks have started for the setting up of a new party which may take shape by early next year. Indications are, its composition may follow a familiar pattern, a combination of dissidents from existing major parties, especially the Awami League (AL), a couple of smaller left-of-centre parties which are ideologically out in the cold and a few new faces.

At a time when the country badly needs a stable political situation, with the parliament playing a focal role in thrashing out new policies, especially in the development field, we are staring at a possible fluid scenario.

Concerned as they are about the implications of this unfolding situation, all the major parties, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the Jatiya Party (JP), Jamaat and AL, are also studying new options to make the best of the fluid scenario.

For instance, it is reported that while a small group within BNP would like to make an alliance with the Jamaat, thus increasing the strength of the ruling party ideologically and politically, within the Jatiya Sangsad and outside, a bigger faction would prefer a mid-term poll before the political situation gets out of hand.

One party that has openly called for a mid-term election is JP. Its hope is, with no party gaining a clear majority at the polls, it may well be asked to join a coalition, perhaps with AL, on its own terms. Then, it can ask for the release of its leader Hussain Mohammad Ershad, perhaps on condition that the deposed president is allowed to go abroad "for medical treatment" for an indefinite period.

The two other major parties, AL and Jamaat, too have their own reasons to favour an early election. For AL, there is an advantage in having it before the new proposed party can split the opposition vote. On the other hand, Jamaat may see it as one more step in its long-term plan of making itself a dominant political force in the country, with or without the help of BNP.

On the face of it, all the major parties have something to gain from a mid-term parliamentary election. Yes, all the parties, but not the country.

Indeed, there can be no surer way of destabilising the situation in the country, aggravating the polarisation and raising the level of tension throughout Bangladesh than pushing the nation through an election at this stage. About the cost of the exercise and the damage it will do to the country's fragile development process, the less said the better.

## A new party or a snap election will destabilise the political situation and serve no constructive purpose

Since it is entirely upto the ruling party to call a mid-term poll, let us fervently hope that Prime Minister Khaleda Zia will reject the idea, without even giving a second thought to the proposition.

A sizable number of people, ranging from educated professionals to members of the business community, who are dissatisfied with the working of both BNP and AL should, on the face of it, welcome the emergence of an alternative. On this ground alone, the move to set up a new political party evokes a favourable response among a cross section of people in Bangladesh.

However, at this stage, a discussion on its composition, the quality of its leadership and

critical of the establishment of the Forum and, as we found out from one of her conversations with me, most suspicious of the concept of a 'third force' in the politics of Bangladesh. The setting up of a new party will certainly prove her right on one point. The Forum was possibly meant as a forerunner for the setting up of a new political party.

The job of a journalist is to report a development and to interpret it on the basis of available data. It is not to offer any advice, solicited or unsolicited, to national leaders or to political parties.

However, if I am allowed to make a departure from the well-established principle, I would say that the country can do without a

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S. M. ALI

its relationship with other major parties, especially AL, would be speculative.

Here, much depends on the socio-economic programme of the proposed party. One recent report suggested that it would have a liberal democratic orientation, an attractive slogan that has replaced the failed socialism in some countries.

But it means different things to different governments. What's more, it is yet to get off the ground in East European countries which need it most to fill the political vacuum caused by the collapse of socialism.

How the proposed new party will interpret liberal democracy in the Bangladesh context remains to be seen. In political terms, it should be relatively easy. But it won't be so when it comes to the party's economic agenda.

It is the economic programme of an opposition party, like the new one, that calls for a lot of homework, sustained research, interaction between political leaders and academicians, and seminars and workshops. This is a job cut out for a 'think tank'.

As we saw from outside, the role of the Democratic Forum as a 'think tank' had appeared a valid one, which prompted many of us to welcome it. Whether the Forum will be still there, after the new proposed party comes into being, remains to be seen. Obviously, the two cannot overlap in their functions, under the leadership of the same person, Dr Kamal Hossain.

The AL Chairperson Sheikh Hasina has been

new party or a grouping and that we will be well advised to maintain the present political alignments, especially in the parliament, instead of creating new destabilising factors.

In this context, the role of the Democratic Forum assumes new importance. What it needs most is to win the confidence of Sheikh Hasina and gain a measure of credibility in the country that it is largely non-partisan and independent in its approach to socio-economic problems facing the country. To give the Forum this kind of status, the Forum's prime-mover Dr Hossain should be even ready to step down from its convenorship in favour of a less controversial personality, but provide it with the intellectual strength from within.

It surprises me that so many intellectuals and economic experts we know have stayed away from the Forum. It can be due to one of the two reasons, if not both: The concept of the Forum has not touched a responsive chord in their thinking; and, despite their claim as independent experts, they are unable to take a non-partisan line in discussing problems facing the country.

Under the leadership of Prof Rehman Sobhan, a number of experts from various fields had done a commendable job in the preparation of reports of the Task Force set up by the Interim Government under the Acting President, Justice Shahabuddin.

In our view, the reports of the Task Force should be taken down from the shelf of the

Ministry of Planning and studied all over again from the point of view of implementation.

So, we suggest, the Minister of Finance, Saifur Rahman and the Planning Minister, Zahuruddin Khan should take a pragmatic approach to these reports and see what they offer as inputs for further consultations at various levels.

It is very much a question of generating an intellectual debate which focuses on problems facing the country, especially on the economic front, and identifies possible solutions, hopefully on pragmatic non-partisan lines.

However, the responsibility of generating such a debate does not lie with the government leaders alone. But they are certainly in a good position of taking the initiative.

On the other hand, it is important for our experts, many of whom are loosely identified with the opposition in public perception, to establish their own credibility as independent non-partisan analysts, on issues ranging from the law and order situation to the revival of the economy.

Unfortunately, an impression has been created in responsible circles that while they rightly identify the areas of failure of the BNP administration, which this paper too does as part of its normal journalistic function, some of these experts seldom see anything even mildly commendable in any government measure.

In their writings, as well as in their utterances at seminars, they see things in black and white, missing out on the grey area which lies between the extremes. As a result, they are sometimes mistakenly regarded as propagandists for the opposition or just accused of playing to the gallery.

Now, the offer by Rehman Sobhan made in his article published in the Star last Saturday to initiate a "dialogue" in his columns for the Star on four selected areas on the country's "economic malaise" could mark a turning point.

But the ball is, in effect, in the court of this paper which must bring into the discussion experts whose views may be different from those of Sobhan.

Against the backdrop of a fluid, uncertain political situation, our independent experts, intellectuals and the media must strive harder than ever to develop a constructive dialogue among a cross section of people, even involving government leaders. Such a dialogue may well lead to a better understanding of formidable challenges facing the country — and of their possible solutions. In the end, we should provide the basis for a national consensus, even on a limited scale, without which we may be only moving from one crisis to another, without any sense of direction.

## THE QUESTION OF ENGLISH, AGAIN — III

# A Concern for it Doesn't Indicate Lack of Love for Bangla

IT should be clear by now that I regard the state of English teaching now in Bangladesh is pretty bad. I think I have been able to identify what I consider to be the main reason thereof: an unduly lowered target of achievement at the end of ten years plus a less than a minimum teaching competence with which the system has had to do.

As for the lowering of the target, this appears to have taken place naturally and unavoidably. It can be seen as part of a vicious circle: Incompetent teaching leading to insufficient learning leading to poor performance by students in public examinations creating ground for reducing the standard through a scaling down of the curriculum.

Any teacher with some experience of teaching knows how intimately related these things are: the level of the teacher, the level of learning and the level of marking and assessment. All three are mutually supportive and mutually dependent. A teacher can pull up a class; the reverse is also possible though it is less likely. Contrarily, a teacher can lower the net, enabling the students to play their tennis. The lowering may or may not be deliberate; the result will be the same.

The whole process of deterioration in teaching and learning can be viewed as a part of the general decline in the quality of the nation's life beginning in the fifties and running through the sixties. A nation politically corrupted and debilitated failed to sustain all the good things it had inherited. One such legacy was the educational system which

had developed in Bengal under the British. Decline in this arena came all the more quickly as experienced and dedicated teachers working in East Pakistan migrated to India in large numbers. They left a vacuum behind them and the vacuum was filled mostly by raw hands. There was no replacement, in the real sense of the term. The entire system was affected, starting from the university — there was only one at the time — and down to the schools in the remotest villages. Academically impoverished colleges, — and the newer the college the less equipped it was, — turned out the new generation of graduates who filled the vacant positions in schools.

The Partition left a legacy of disturbed and disoriented institutions in what is Bangladesh today. From 1972 to the end of 1990, we have had a rough journey, politically speaking. Keeping pace with a swelling population, schools and college have increased in number. But generally speaking, these have been poorly manned. No sustained effort was ever made to develop an army of trained teachers.

Education as an academic discipline has been consistently ignored. If there is another discipline which has suf-

fered worse neglects, that is library science. If you take a close look at the hierarchy of institutions devoted to teacher training — Dhaka University's Institute of Education at the apex, next the Teacher Training Colleges and the Primary Training Institutes at the bottom — you will see that the idea of training exists. It is an accepted concept that

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Zillur Rahman Siddiqui

training of teachers at the primary and secondary level is essential. What is not so well realised is the fact that for training to be meaningful, the basic education is a prior requirement. Subject specialisation at the B Ed level will be empty of content if the subject/subjects supposed to have been learnt at the degree level were not learnt at all.

I have heard it said that many B Ed students with subject specialisation in English did not have English in their B A. It means that their English was of the HSC level. This in its turn means that their English was below the level of Matriculation of pre-1950 days. One can imagine that the B Ed level specialisation was built on hollow grounds.

Under the older system the course structure ensured that a Pass graduate had acquired a certain level of competence to teach in secondary schools in the subjects he had read for his Pass degree. A teacher training course will have increased his professional competence. By contrast, the same training will be wasted upon his modern counterpart, the graduate of today, who has gorged on his note books and has hardly ever handled a test book proper. Make a probe into the readings of today's graduates and you will see that I am not exaggerating.

Once you realise that degree level education has been reduced to a sham, you will admit that compulsory English, which has been discussed by the Parliamentary Committee, is essentially a rear-guard action and cannot be expected to produce results.

Leaving aside the system in its totality, let us for a moment concentrate on English. We have assumed that English is relevant. We are clear in our minds that a concern for

English does not indicate a lack of love or loyalty for Bangla, our mother tongue. Let us admit, in passing, that despite our loud professions to the contrary, we have not paid as much attention to Bangla as we ought to have. But that is a different story. At one stage in our national life, we had denounced English, because it was foreign, because it smacked of colonialism. We have by now freed ourselves from these complexes. Now we, most of us, want our children to really learn their English. That is why we, those of us who can afford, send our children to private schools charging high fees. That takes care of a fraction of our schools going generation. What thoughts have we for the majority?

I do not believe in a panacea, and I don't think there is any. The whole system is sick and restoring health and vitality to it will be a long process, involving correct diagnosis and correct remedial measures. We should be wary of putting too much faith on half measures, like the one which has occasioned this piece. Tinkering with the degree course, however well-intentioned, is going to raise objections. Courses are framed by universities, at this level.

Government can very well ask the University Grants Commission to look into the problem. The UGC in its turn can form a committee. The committee will suggest remedies.

In India the NCERT (The National Council for Educational Research and Training) combines in its precincts all the study and research related to school education. The range of activities represented by this single institute is dispersed among half a dozen (may be more) institutions in Bangladesh, without much coordination amongst them. NCERT's advisory role vis-a-vis the Government of India is ensured by law and confirmed by practice. It is not clear if our government seeks any advice from the fragmented institutions we have here. It is not clear whether enough trust has been reposed in them to instil a sense of responsibility in them. May be we have reached a stage when a review should be undertaken to examine their function, their interrelatedness, and their output.

Raising an alarm over the state of English is fraught with the possibility that it may start a chain of reactions and a wave of reverberation of the wrong kind. Let us look at English in its proper context, in the context of the whole system. I started with this cautionary note, and I would repeat it at the conclusion. The system, in its degeneration, has nullified the possibility of teachers teaching at schools. Regenerated, the same system may give us teachers. More than half the battle will be won. *Concluded*

## 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.

### Senile ramblings: MPs, Atanu and trees

Sir, Even though the BTV cameramen are, perhaps, directed to take their shots from the most favourable angles, it must be evident to all viewers that the Jatiya Sangsad is usually a deserted place with rows upon rows of empty seats. May I, therefore, propose some changes on behalf of the taxpayers: (1) MPs, as proponents of a market economy, derive benefits of MPs on a basis consistent with their attendance and productivity. (2) Any MP failing to total a minimum attendance record (say 75% of JS sitting days per annum) should automatically cease to be an MP and to be succeeded by his closest rival. (3) The central air-conditioning be automatically switched off when the quorum falls below 75%, since there will be less hot air. These and other guide-lines may be agreed to. A number of persons

(miscareants, maybe) reportedly gave little Atanu a traumatic experience. There is no doubt about that, but has the matter been swept under the carpet since? One person has been detained, but many questions remain unanswered. (1) Where are the others, who were they and what was their motive? (2) Why did not the guards at No 32 intervene at a palpable crime being committed in front of them? (3) Did the rescue party of police find Atanu all alone in No 32? and most important, (4) Why has not the Awami League high command come out with a more plausible explanation on an embarrassing incident committed on their precincts?

On 18/10/92, BTV weather prophets announced that 'the Sw Monsoon has withdrawn from Bangladesh'. On the 8 pm news on 19/10/92, BTV broadcast a report on tree planting in Dhaka city. The Mayor proudly announced the planting of over 50,000

saplings, which were shown complete with bamboo gubbons on city streets. The question is: Is there no one to advise the Mayor that tender saplings planted in mid-October face more than six months without adequate moisture and thus little hope for survival? Will the Mayor and all those using public money to plant trees in October, kindly let us know, say about end April 1993, how many of these have survived and if they have not, who will be responsible for the lakhs wasted? *Quazi Akhlaque-us-Azmem, Anderkilla, Chittagong.*

### Democracy

Sir, Recently two bye-elections were held for the members of parliament in our country. What didn't go unnoticed was, just like the general election, they were also held peacefully, justly and democratically. All concerned deserve praise. In the '91 general election, people of Bangladesh proved their maturity in politics and sincere intention for democracy by participating in an election that would go down in the annals of our history as unprecedented. Let this be the beginning of the new trend and milestone to the path of

democracy. As this continues and the political parties join in with mutual tolerance, understanding, respect of each other's views and necessary reconciliation, our process towards democracy is sure to succeed. The temptation to waver off the main track is too much, but for our economic, social and political survival, we should check it.

I congratulate the people, the government, the opposition and above all the election commission for making me proud of my country once more. *Akku Choudhury, West Nakhla, Dhaka*

### Mosquitoes and DCC

Sir, Pestering persistently and perennial, the mosquito menace is more than real. These minuscule but mighty creatures invade our households with ever heightened vengeance and vendetta and with a never failing regularity. Despite cries from the suffering populace to mitigate this misery, the city fathers seem to be too busy to concentrate to do anything realistically against this scourge. Surely, the unclean city offers the mosquitoes every opportunity to increase easily.

Garbages littering here and there is evidently a negative aspect. The city fathers may blame the citizens of not keeping the city clean but it is simply a move to shift the blame. The city fathers cannot deny the charge that it has been actually their responsibility to teach the citizens to keep the city clean through setting examples; they can help the citizens to learn thereby that the uncleanness provides the favourable breeding ground for the mosquitoes. Garbage collection and disposal system is fully erroneous.

The complaints against the city fathers do not end there. What's about applying anti-mosquito sprays at the very probable places where the mosquitoes are born or are sure to be found? In the past, the sprays of the erstwhile Municipal Corporation used to spray mosquito-deterrent liquids. Now-a-days, the DCC does not send any spraysman. People allege of clandestine connections between some unscrupulous DCC officials and private mosquito-spray importing agencies and manufacturers. Reportedly, these imported anti-mosquito sprays have been found to be of very little use against the mosquitoes. The mosquito coils are also found to be impotent against the mosquitoes. These rather pose

threat to the health of the inmates of those households who use these sprays and coils. The desperate users are doubly cheated.

The electronic media also seem to be silent about this malpractice by the relevant authorities. People would have liked to see the mediamen making a strong issue of this instead of airing the advertisements for sprays and coils. Like the ban on the advertisements of cigarettes, a ban on the advertisements of mosquito sprays can be imposed.

The DCC Mayor often expresses his determination to give a new lease of life to the municipality of the embattled citizens of this city. Now that over-congestion is whittling away nearly irredeemably fair chances of getting those promised amenities, the DCC fall even the minimal credibility as a public-serving corporation. Perhaps it is time the Prime Minister herself intervenes and corrects all those who make all those high-sounding promises and do a negligible little. It is strongly believed that only she can bring a sense of duty, to these public servants.

*Hubert Francis Sarkar, Dhaka*