

PM at the UN

As Prime Minister, Khaleda Zia heads for New York to address the 48th session of the United Nations General Assembly, the entire country will be one in wishing her godspeed. Her presence at the august assembly is significant for a number of reasons. As head of her government, this will be the first time that she will be participating in a General Assembly session. Apart from representing a country that has time and again come through trials and tribulations, that has known the finest moments of victory, a supreme sacrifice, she will have to bear the added responsibility of representing, along with others, the Third World to which Bangladesh belongs.

Therefore, we expect her to set the tone of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs). That way she can represent Bangladesh even better because the countries at the bottom share a common destiny. A welcome departure her speech can mark if Begum Zia does not resort to rhetoric — as most other leaders blithely do — but instead put forth some concrete suggestions concerning the UN role in development, particularly in a world that has fundamentally changed after the collapse of communism. Begum Zia should also refer to the need for a more active role the UN is expected to play in ensuring peace in the absence of cold war. In this respect, she should specially point to the inadequacy of the UN or international community's part in stopping the carnage in Bosnia.

With only one superpower left, the UN can no longer afford to play the second fiddle. Under the present arrangement, however, the premier international body can hardly do better. What it has done in Cambodia has exposed the body's shortcomings as well as indicated its potential as a peace broker. The shortcomings are because the mission has drained the UN's resources. In Somalia also it has failed and the mission has put severe strain on its material resources. Unless the UN goes through radical transformation, the body cannot match the challenges it will be confronting. Particularly, the small countries following an independent line are expected to come under intense pressure. The UN must be urged to protect them under its wings in such cases.

It is exactly at this point that Begum Zia will serve a much-needed purpose by weaving a vision for the Third World countries, with special emphasis on that of the SAARC (South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation) ones. As chairman of the South Asian body, she has to promote the cause of the region and must pronounce what it expects of the UN. Even though the world has become a global village, without regional amity and cooperation the relations with the world at large cannot be based on equality and free from friction. Begum Zia is carrying a baton for a region which is home to more than one-fifth of the world population. If she can do justice to the vision, the SAARC will command the respect it should.

Then again, at this point the intriguing question of raising the water dispute with India at this forum comes. Press reports are not categorical if she will or not touch the issue. We would like to add that before internationalising the issue, we needed to do a lot of home work. Without an exhaustive preparation and doing everything possible to give a last chance for the bilateral and regional approach, raising the issue at the UN can be embarrassing. We would hope Begum Zia has gone at extensive length in working out details before opting for the move. Let her shine at the forum.

Daniel Bull

What shall we call John Bull now? For the first time in 250 years John as the name of a boy child slid way down as the most likely one in Britain. Well, according to a recent survey, the plunge is to the fortieth place. And imagine who takes John's place. No, Tommie is a wrong guess and so is Dick. In fact, there are two, evidently a single contender being not powerful enough to egg John out. So in stride Mathew and Daniel. How could public whim drop the easy and Biblically quite elevating monosyllabic John in preference to lesser saints with polysyllabic names no doubt to be shorn in no time into the diminutive Mat and Dan.

Can one hope to get any socio-psychological indication of a certain change in this? It would be decidedly an act of gearing and a bit foolish too to hazard that. Still it is very tempting to posit that the British have doffed the peculiarly English John — so aptly shown by the Prime Minister and the leader of opposition, both Johns — to don more European sounding names. Unluckily for British imperial prestige the new favourite names smack so unmistakably of things French and Fair Albion is in need of all our sympathy on this count.

The favourite names, for the new-born girl child in Britain are Rebecca and Charlotte — as British and as Biblical as can be. But whatever happened to Maggie for Margaret and Betty for Elizabeth? Have the British found a new love for the classic and the archaic?

Once upon a time Bengali wits used to deride British names as being full of improbable reminders of peculiar trades and even unloved animals. The Bengali people have picked up so many weird and inane names in the recent decades that can shame any other nation while the Hindu Bengalee names were distinguished by their caste-indicating second names — ending with the Brahminic Chatterjees and Banerjees or more specifically so Sanyals and Maitras or the Vaidya Dasguptas and Senguptas — there was no need for a second name at all for the plebeian masses, either Hindu or Muslim till the turn of the century. Muslim names for the Bengalees of early this century betray a history of 'christening' by persons well versed in Arabic and the Islamic scriptures. Whole breeds of Hugs and Rahmans and Islams outgrew the simpler Arabic names beginning with Abdul or Mohammad and ending quickly with a Jalil or Khaleque or Sobhan and where the God's name was not invoked, with Hussein or Ali. Pakistan put an end to that and Bengali Muslims started taking on Bengali words specially for girl's names. As the War of Liberation neared, Bengali nicknames became part of the official Arabic ones for both men and women. When all that became a thing of the past, one suddenly discovered that Pakistani favourites of Ishrat-Ismat-Iffats and Shakil-Kalim-Tanveers have tarried back in the patent Pakistani tandem style which must have travelled there from UP, India.

Now in this Bangladeshi tower of Babel how one longs nostalgically for Anwaras and Monowaras and the names freshly coined by our writers and poets. If only Guinness knew about this, Tagore could have been crowned with crowding his works with the highest number of people and his would have been the honour of minting the most names, new and shining and evocative of so many things.

Ministers vs Governor: The Importance of being Bhandari

S ELDOM officials are asked to leave in the midst of central cabinet meetings. When that happens it means that ministers want to discuss something which they avoid doing in the presence of others. One such occasion arose the other day when the cabinet took up informally Governor of Tripura, Romesh Bhandari's attempt to implicate in a pay-off scandal three union ministers, Ghulam Nabi Azad, Balam Jakkhar and B Shankaranand, and former minister H K L Bhagat's son.

Azad was most vociferous because he was supposed to have accepted Rs 50 lakh in London. Jakkhar and Shankaranand, allegedly paid Rs 30 lakh each, were equally agitated and wanted to know why a person like Bhandari had at all been appointed as governor. All the three — and some other cabinet ministers who supported them — demanded immediate action against him. Prime Minister Narasimha Rao, wearing his usual expression of injured innocence, kept quiet. But when pressed, his laconic reply, again typical of him, was: "Give me three, four days."

Rao left for China and South Korea soon after. He has been back for more than three weeks now. Three, four days have already spanned three, four weeks. Rao has reportedly not mentioned anything to Bhandari so far, although reliable sources confirm that the two have discussed "some other matters" on the phone.

Rao's expression of "three, four days" is not taken seriously. In fact, it has come to mean 'no action'. He knows that the three ministers and Bhagat's son are up in arms against him but he also knows

that they cannot do anything. He expects they will gulp down their anger in due course as other estranged ministers have done in the past. Time, he believes, resolves fixed positions. He has not been proved greatly wrong.

Both the Congress and the opposition were highly upset over Law Minister H R Bhargava's observations against his colleagues and others in a TV interview, the objectionable part of which was not used. During the debate on the no-confidence vote, Rao gave the impression that he would take necessary action against the minister in the course of a week, if not "three or four days."

Bhandari is thriving, much to the chagrin of those whom he had run down. It is apparent that if the prime minister were in a position to drop Bhandari, he would not have appointed him the law minister when Vijay Bhaskar Reddy quit the position to head the Andhra Pradesh government. He has admitted that the appointment was under pressure.

Picking up the Bhandari episode, he had secured two affidavits from an obscure Swiss national, Franco Sartori, supposed to be a manager of Harshad Mehta, the Bombay broker in the bank scam. One affidavit alleged that Sartori paid money to L K Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi and some other Bharatiya Janata Party leaders "from the accounts in Switzerland on the instructions of Harshad Mehta." The other affidavit mentioned pay-offs to

the three ministers and Bhagat's son. Fortunately for all of them, The Statesman spilled the beans before the affidavits could be used to defame them. The paper published their texts and told how Bhandari had employed all dirty tricks to obtain them.

Bhandari's ire against Bhagat is understandable because he considers Bhagat as his rival in the Delhi Congress politics. But why the three ministers? He has no personal

grudge. It looks as if the government had to pack off Bhandari immediately because some in the press had got a clue about the affidavits.

In an earlier frame-up, when V P Singh, the Janata Dal leader, was sought to be involved in a fictitious foreign account at St Kitts, a haven for fraudulent deals, it was Rajiv Gandhi who was at the back. He wanted to defame his political adversary at that time. Rao has himself admitted in parlia-

ment that he authenticated the documents implicating V P Singh at Rajiv Gandhi's instance.

Who told Bhandari to get the affidavits is the question. True, he is more loyal than the king because he has been cooling his heels for years at the Congress foreign office cell for some job. But he is a cautious man who, during his 35 in the Indian Foreign Service, must have learnt that one does not put one's hand in fire without purpose.

Still more unexplainable is why no newspaper, except The Statesman, divulged the scandal. I know that news agencies are prone to pressure but why newspapers knuckled under is beyond my comprehension. There was not even a follow-up

when The Statesman was at Bhandari's story for five days. The angry reaction by the BJP, the Janata Dal and the Communists to Bhandari's doings was also ignored by the press.

Another instance is not so blatant but somewhat similar: the bulk of the press did not use the cover-up by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) of a hawala transaction. In the course of investigation against a person, who was channelling foreign funds to the Kashmir militants, the CBI came to possess certain documents and diaries, which carried the names of beneficiaries, including some ministers who had served in the governments of Rajiv Gandhi, V P Singh and Chandra Shekhar. The amount disclosed is Rs 52.34 crore.

The CBI has said in a statement that "the question of hushing up anything just does not arise." Had this been the case, the CBI would not have exerted pressure on newspapers and news agencies not to use the disclosures. They were made available to the press, supported by the photocopies of the diary. A video magazine, Kachakra, which has pictorially traced the entire case, has not been passed by the government-appointed censors. And the arrest of a CBI director general of police (DIG), who was in charge of the case, has made the government's role suspect.

The pressure on the media in the Bhandari case and the CBI's cover-up raises serious questions, not only about the

intentions of high-ups in the administration but also of those who run the newspapers. Why the information was sought to be suppressed? One explanation available is a "note on the national media policy," which the Information and Broadcasting Ministry has circulated among members of its parliamentary consultative committee. Somewhere in the 25-page note, it argues that "... the right of free expression is derived from the responsibility for the common good."

Who is to define the "common good"? During the emergency (1977-79), we experienced what Indira Gandhi meant by the "common good": the press was gagged, authentic information blacked out and effective dissent smothered. The very thinking that there has to be a media policy, an idea peddled by the government more than once, means a restricted approach. When you have a policy, you automatically have some outline, going beyond which will amount to violating the boundary indicated.

Ideas or expressions are neither commodities nor commands. Any attempt to fit them into a particular mould will defeat the independence of media and the right to say. In a democratic society, information must remain free so as to stir free response.

True, the Rao government has too many skeletons in its cupboard. Despite its best efforts to hide them, some scandal comes to dangle at one place or another. But why put pressure on the press? It is already too nimble-pnimble, too nice, altogether too refined to leave out. The government should not ask for more.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuidip Nayar writes from New Delhi

scores to settle with them. Apparently, he has acted on someone's behalf. Who could that be? Bhandari is close to godman Chandraswami, who has the distinction of driving in and out of the prime minister's house without being checked. But why should Chandraswami be so set against Azad, Jakkhar and Shankaranand when they do not pose any threat to Rao?

It is, however, significant that Bhandari's appointment was as much in a hurry as his departure from Delhi. Tripura chief minister Dasareth Deb was never consulted about the appointment and he had come to know about it only when someone rang him up on Bhandari's behalf that at least two mercedes should be sent at the airport for the governor-des-

ment that he authenticated the documents implicating V P Singh at Rajiv Gandhi's instance.

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PAKISTAN ELECTION PREVIEW-II

Manifestos and Promises : Do They Influence Voters?

M J Zahedi writes from Karachi

Irrespective of whether manifestos have influence on the voters, the major political parties have gone through the ritual of preparing and releasing manifestos. 'Promises, promises' was the headline of a national newspaper on an analytical piece discussing the manifestos of the PPP and the PML(N).

Nawaz Sharif's stands on issues have not changed much from the ones he had adopted as prime minister. It is basically the continuation of these which are figuring in his campaign. He is promising voters that if returned to power he will continue to give people yellow taxis, yellow buses and yellow tractors. And now he has added yellow houses to the list of yellow allowances.

However, going by the manifestos, PPP's is the only one which is a relatively clearer, direct and goal oriented document. For example, while both the parties seem to agree on decentralisation of power, only the PPP has given a blueprint for balancing it through what it terms a new social contract. Its plan, reminiscent of the upazila system of Bangladesh, is to introduce effective local government through setting up district legislatures to be headed by a governor elected by the councilors (the provincial governor will be called governor general). The governors will have cabinets with ministers for various subjects like law, police, finance, population, education, health etc. The governors will be accountable to the electorate. The deputy commissioner will be secretary to the governor.

On restoring the supremacy of the parliament, too, the PPP is more explicit. It intends to balance power between the president and the parliament and elaborates how it will be done. It feels that the power to appoint the armed forces chiefs should remain with the President but his powers to dis-

solve the assemblies, appoint governors and judges of the higher courts should be handed over to the prime minister who will nominate people to these posts in consultation with the leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly.

But the PML(N)'s proposals for the economic sector are more concrete. Basically, it proposes to continue its past policies — further intensification of privatisation and deregulation. The PPP, on the other hand, has come up with the idea of public-private partnership i.e. the state helping small business to achieve full potential of market forces. In privatisation, it proposes to broaden the base of public ownership rather than create monopolies.

The two parties' position on Islam is also different. The PPP says it believes in *Imna*, repudiates religious oligarchies and stands for an Islam which does not discriminate against women and minorities. The PML(N) talks about following the principles of *Hujatul Wida* and *Meesaq-i-Madina*. Both parties however raise a voice against sectarianism.

On a key issue like population planning the PML(N) has nothing to say. The PPP, on the other hand, proposes to bring down the over 3 per cent growth rate to below 2 per cent by 2000 A.D. Similarly, on minorities, the PPP has the concrete proposal to restore joint electorate system along with reserved minority seats.

On the whole, more thinking seems to have gone into the PPP manifesto. Though it is unlikely

that either of the two parties will be able to realise the utopias they have painted, at least the PPP seems to be clearer about where it wants to take the country, and how.

The rightist parties, on the other hand, are faced with the dilemma of the right in a post-Cold War Pakistan. Qazi Hussain Ahmed has taken his party out of the left as well as of the anti-PPP struggle and is in the process of muscling in on the PPP's former territory of the dispossessed and the disadvantaged. He has even toned down the Jamaat's religious rhetoric, choosing to concentrate on more appealing socio-economic issues.

His PIF has a two-pronged strategy: it rejects Nawaz Sharif being as bad as Benazir, accusing both of compromising on Kashmir and a nuclear policy, of kowtowing to the US and of betraying the process of Islamisation.

It has also reduced the emphasis on Islam. Though he derives inspiration from Islamic principles for his populist rhetoric, Qazi Hussain Ahmed's enunciated policies are very close to those of the PPP, though the differences have not been clearly explained.

Thus both Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto as well as their common opponent, Qazi Hussain Ahmed, are all caught in a dilemma: none can do without taking recourse to Islam, yet all are forced by the exigencies of election politics to de-emphasise it. If the Qazi manages to make a strong showing, he may as well be

leading the way to a major reversal of roles: the pro-religious forces implementing programmes formerly associated with the left and the pro-secular forces associated with the economic conservatism of the right.

One very interesting feature of this year's election is the entry of late Mr Bhutto's son in the contest. Mr Muratza Bhutto is living in self-exile in Syria for the last several years. There are many cases against him on charges of terrorism and he may be arrested if he comes here. The most interesting fact is that he is not contesting as a candidate of the PPP, the party his father had founded and his mother and elder sister are now leading. This has created big differences in the family. Mrs Bhutto is wholeheartedly

backing her son although she is a co-chairperson of the PPP while the other co-chairperson, her daughter, is indirectly opposing him. Muratza will be contesting in three NA and six PA seats.

Already four candidates, one for the NA and three for the PA, have been declared unopposed. All of them belong to the PPP. One of them, Makhdoom Amin Fahim, has already started angling for the Sindh chief minister's post which is also being claimed by Muratza Bhutto, with his mother's strong backing.

Another new feature in the elections is the involvement of the armed forces. About 150,000 armed forces personnel will be deployed on election duty while the majority of the 375,000 other election officials will come from the judiciary. The number of registered voters is 52.3 million, for whom there will be over 34,000 polling stations with 116,000 booths and 150,000 ballot boxes.

(Concluded)

OPINION

In Praise of the Star

Being a retired university professor, I have the time and inclination to read all the major English dailies; as I feel it is important to keep abreast with what is happening in my country and the world outside. As such, I am appalled and outraged to learn that the current government which calls itself a "democracy" discriminates so blatantly against "The Daily Star" in the way it allocates its advertising budget.

In my considered opinion, "The Daily Star" fits the honourable Minister of Information's criteria for distribution of advertising to the tee as being "totally objective" in its presentation of both Government and Opposition platforms. This is very clear to readers of its balanced editorials (which are also informative) and highly enlightening commentaries, not to mention its news reportage. Yet, "The Daily Star" gets such a meagre portion of advertising support from the government.

AMIC — a much respected non-profit, regional organisation, based in Singapore, charged with the task of doing research in mass communications — has done a truly commendable job in drawing our attention to the unfair and discriminatory policy of the government where advertising for "objective" and quality newspapers is concerned. It is obvious to anyone who can read that both the "trust" newspapers (supported in reality by taxpayers like me) are at the bottom of the list when it comes to "objectivity" and yes... "quality". As for credibility, a vital element in a "real" newspaper, the less said about it, the better. Yet, they are showered with huge monetary patronage from the powers that be. Please do not underestimate the readers' intelligence and ability to distinguish quality from sheer mediocrity.

As for the other English dailies, they don't hold a candle to "The Daily Star" when it comes to "objectivity" — unless

one defines the word as "kowtowing and praising the government endlessly" — known among discerning voters as "sycophancy". Yet, they enjoy greater monetary patronage from the powers that be. Such arbitrary behaviour seems to me, a page right out of "Alice in Wonderland" world.

Our society which often sees undesirable characters escape from law and sometimes even change sides whenever personal gain enters the picture, surely needs something like "The Daily Star" which stands for all things decent, compassionate and worth saying. Witness the countless articles championing the causes of the poor and downtrodden, highlighting the awful fate of oppressed women and street children. Who has not read the heartwarming story of Manjira, a woman from the remote countryside catapulted to Europe's highest strata of society, and not be moved by feelings that "lie too deep for tears"? Which of us among the "thinking" sector of the populace have not been stimulated by "The Daily Star's" Round Table discussions on subjects ranging from the role of computer technology in our modern world to BRAC's far reaching rural development programmes to bring education to all by the year 2,000?

Isn't it about time the present government wake up to reality and live up to its claim of being a "democracy" — i.e. give justice and fair play a chance? After all, newspaper readers do exercise their votes when election time comes. The powers that be can start by allocating more of our hard earned tax payments to genuinely "objective" newspapers such as "The Daily Star".

Just as Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin said recently: "Enough of blood and tears", I say now, "Enough of unfair discrimination!"

Pro bono

Dhaka

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.

Bus for girls' colleges

Sir, There are six or seven girls' colleges in the metropolis. Thousands of female students are studying there. Most of them do not have their own transport and have to attend college from distant places. In the absence of college bus they have to face untold suffering.

These days Government is attaching high priority to female education and very rightly so. It is said that you teach a man, you teach a person and you teach a woman, you teach the whole family.

It would serve the cause of female education well if the government could donate at least one bus to each of the girls' colleges in the city. May I, therefore, appeal to the Prime Minister and the Education Minister to look into the matter and do something in this regard? That will fulfil a long felt

need of the female students of the city.

Saleh Ahmed Chowdhury
Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka

Drugs — a social menace

Sir, The young generation of our country, like their counterparts in many other countries have become hostage in the hands of drugs. Drug addiction is simply destroying the future of our country. Young boys, maybe unable to cope with the failures of life, take drugs to calm themselves and perhaps, to ease frustration. But instead of taking drugs they can actually face up to the problems of life like the brave. Taking drugs may make them feel good for a short period of time but surely paves their way to an early grave.

Not only out of frustration, boys often take drugs in order to follow their western stars,

specially musicians. For instance, Jim Morrison and his band The Doors have become very popular among the young for their distinctive style in music, but the worst part is that Jim Morrison was an addict and his end is known to all. Yet many boys of our country take drugs in order to follow Jim Morrison. Listening to western music is not harmful but often following one's favourite musician may not bring pleasant results.

Often boys take it as a style to take drugs and feel that it improves their status. But they are totally wrong. They are slowly killing themselves.

Why take drugs to keep a problem out of your mind? Why not face the problem and try to solve it? Why not watch a good movie, go out with a friend or listen to music to forget the problem?

Drugs systematically destroy a person's brain, his/her capability of doing things and worse — makes the addict an anti-social person. The young generation should be taught and — convinced about the hazards of drug addiction. Programmes reflecting the outcome of drug addiction should be shown on TV and published in the press. Seminars, should be held. Students of all levels should be

provided with ample information on the harmful effects of drugs and drug-addiction — by saving the young generation — by providing them with proper knowledge, we can steer the country towards progress.

Touheed Perwez
New DOTS, Dhaka

Politics and people

Sir, Your editorial published on 22nd August, under the heading "Al's New Programme", took my fancy, and I was greatly moved with your straight cut opinions about the ongoing destructive trend in our politics. What hurts the country, what bleeds the nation, what makes people poorer, cannot be a part of our politics.

You wrote people are rejecting it (the hartals), and, of course, they are. People are entirely fed up with frequent hartals. You see, common people had to lose a lot in the past and they are now have-nots. They want no more to lose what they have earned so far. So, the political parties, in my opinion, should stop such kind of politics if they really want to do something good for the common people.

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