

The Daily Star

Dhaka, Friday, October 15, 1993

Return of English

As an English language daily, we cannot but welcome any move to expand the scope and improve the quality of English education in Bangladesh. But the way we are going about it raises a few questions in our mind.

We believe that the real problem in education lies not in the fact that we have abandoned English, but that we have abandoned quality education as such.

We could not agree more with the contention that the standard of English today is lower than ever before and there is a need for its improvement.

We, however, beg to differ with remedies suggested for cure of the problem in education. It is too simplistic to say that reintroduction of English will improve the skill of students in that language.

It is an absurd proposition to raise the standard of English without trying to improve the overall quality of education, which undoubtedly calls for a strong logistical base and a congenial atmosphere for education.

We conclude by saying that we welcome the awareness that English must receive more attention in our education if we are to compete in the global marketplace.

Water Contamination at Mahamuni

The world is not only getting smaller every day, it is also growing evermore environment-conscious. It will take some time before the whole of our society, mostly illiterate and unresponsive as it is, can be moved to adapt itself to the dictates of the modern-day demands of environment-protection.

The question is how can this same government manage not to care about certain of its projects bringing devastation to environment.

The problem is not peculiar to the Rauzan station. All power generating stations must have been regularly fouling up environment in the absence of government's insistence on setting up only 'clean' electric stations.

The area under this uninvited threat is Mahamuni, Pahartoli — a holy place of pilgrimage for Buddhists of this country as well as of far off lands including China and Japan.

We draw the attention of both the energy and environment ministries to do something there very urgently.

INTERNATIONAL Federation of the Blind which is presently known as the World Blind Union declared the 15th October of every year to be observed as the World White Cane Safety Day during the Conference held from September 29 to October 2, 1989 held in Colombo (Sri Lanka).

We do not know when the use of white cane was introduced for the visually impaired individuals. May be one hundred years ago or may be more.

Orientation is defined as the ability to establish one's position in relation to the environment through the use of the remaining senses and mobility is the ability to move safely and efficiently from one point to another.

World White Cane Safety Day

A Question of Widening Our Vision

by Prof Sultana Sarwatara Zaman

The five modes of travel commonly used by visually impaired persons are:

- (1) independent travel without the use of devices or any other outside assistance
(2) the sighted guide
(3) the white or long cane
(4) dog guides
(5) electronic devices.

The white or long cane is the device most widely used by visually impaired persons for independent travel.

The decision to initiate formal training in the use of a cane is made after careful consideration.

There are many types of canes, but the most common are made of aluminium or fibreglass and are approximately

1/2 inch in diameter. Some have a crook for balance and easy placement; others have a golf-club type grip.

A major factor in mobility is learning how to avoid obstacles. It has been long realized that many people who are blind are able to avoid obstacles very well.

Out of these experiments came a definitive answer. The subjects judgement came when the ears were blocked.

Situation in Bangladesh

In a country like Bangladesh where 30,000 children are becoming blind every year due to malnutrition, poverty, and Vit 'A' deficiency, training these

children in the use of cane is far from reality. However once a child becomes blind it is the responsibility of the family, society and finally the state to give the child security, protection, education and training for survival.

In Bangladesh a handful of blind people use white cane for mobility purpose. These white canes are given to the blind by our government or by non-government organizations working for the blind in this country.

At present there is only one white cane industry run by a blind person who was trained abroad. The white canes are made either with thick round Sylhet cane or with steel.

The number of blind children attending schools in Bangladesh is very small.

Braille Press in this country. One hand operated Braille Press is at present catering for printing all the reading material for the blind in the country.

Finally I would like to reiterate that the observance of 'White Cane Day' and 'Children Right's Day' needs to be continued in our country till the people and especially the policy makers become aware of the rights of these neglected population and come forward with concrete programmes to help mitigate their sufferings.

The author is Chairman, Department of Special Education, Dhaka University

Why British are So Unsure about Their Police

Jill Forrester writes from London

In 1989 English courts released four Irish prisoners, acknowledging that the police had lied and bullied them into confessing. Many thought a new era of openness and honesty was dawning.

THERE was a time when the British police force enjoyed the firm trust of the British public.

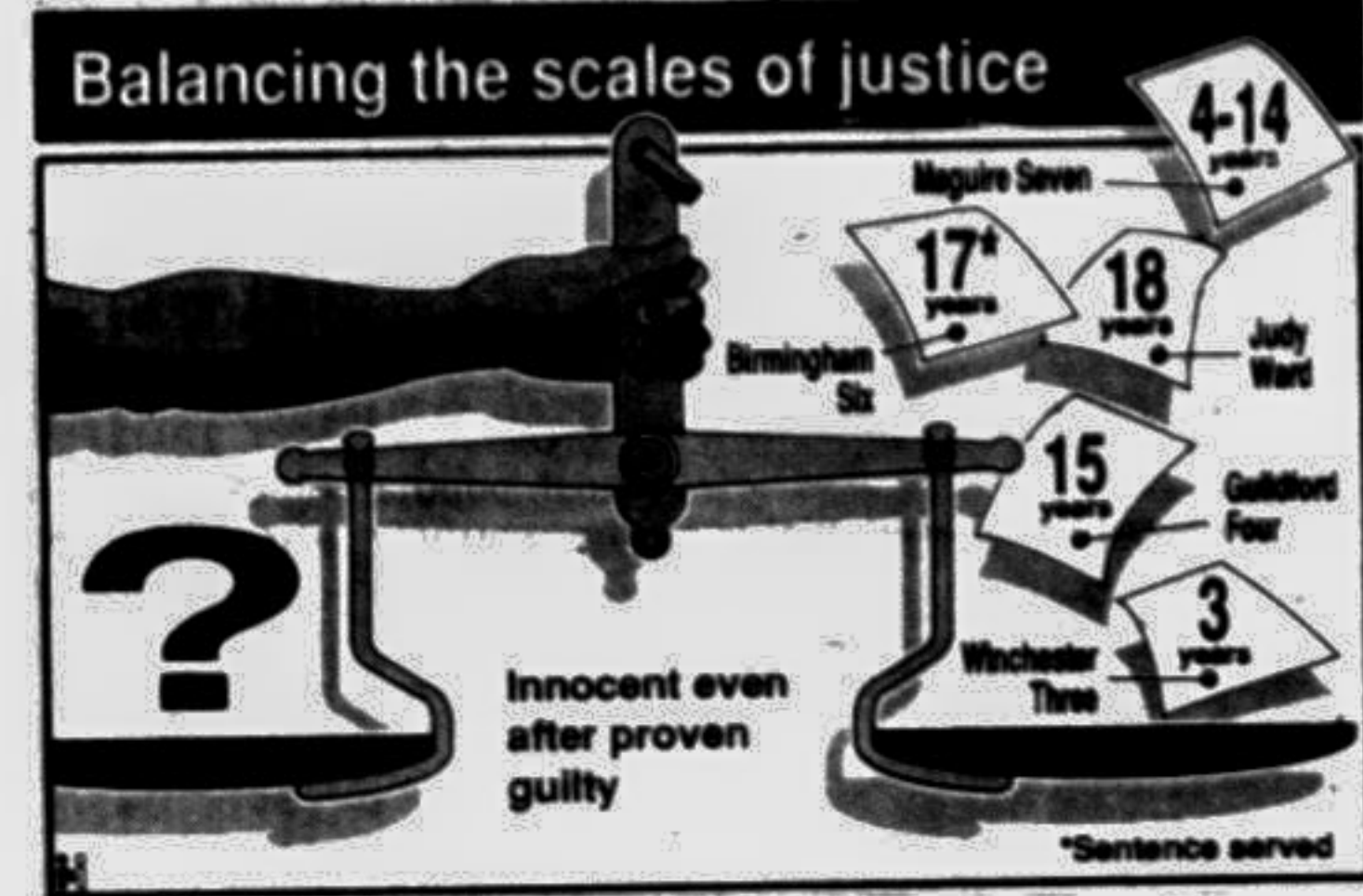
When police arrested and charged three men and one woman, later known as the Guildford Four, with causing the bombing deaths of five people in pubs south west of London in 1974, a frightened public was eager to feel that the police had some control over an alarming situation.

The four maintained their innocence, claiming that their confessions, the only evidence against them, were forced from them with threats and beatings by police. Three had alibis.

When police arrested and charged three men and one woman, later known as the Guildford Four, with causing the bombing deaths of five people in pubs south west of London in 1974, a frightened public was eager to feel that the police had some control over an alarming situation.

Their release paved the way for the overturning of five similar verdicts, freeing 16 people, including a woman with serious mental difficulties known to have confessed to other crimes she had not committed.

Questionable acts continue to take place regularly. Most recently Irishman John Matthews was arrested and accused of hijacking a taxi to drive with a bomb to the Prime Minister's residence.



Now in danger of being on an Irish loyalist 'hit list' for his alleged pro-independence activities, Matthews still claims innocence.

The treatment of Irish people has been noted by human rights organisations such as Amnesty International and Liberty.

Terrorist atrocities are often followed by mass arrests. Trials take place in a highly charged atmosphere amidst strict security and there is evidence that authorities may have coerced media interest in certain cases to increase the chances of obtaining convictions.

are indeed designed to check police and protect the public from further miscarriages of justice.

Others, however, were made to strengthen the powers of the police, who feel increasingly restricted by the growing number of regulations and guidelines imposed in recent years.

The Commission proposes, for example, to continue allowing confessions unaccompanied by other evidence as sufficient for a guilty verdict.

The government responded in 1991 by ordering a Royal Commission on Criminal Justice to recommend ways of preventing future miscarriages and restoring shattered public confidence in the system.

Two years later the Royal Commission has published 352 recommendations. Many have received praise, but they fail to show a way out of the confusion that surrounds the British justice system.

miscarriages occurred, or made sufficient recommendations to prevent further miscarriages.

One strong critic is Chris Mullin, labour politician and author of Error of Judgement — the Truth about the Birmingham Bombings.

The Commission proposes, for example, to continue allowing confessions unaccompanied by other evidence as sufficient for a guilty verdict.

While the Commission recommends that police, scientists and prosecutors certify in writing that they have revealed all evidence, but Mullin would like deliberate failure to disclose evidence to be a criminal offence.

Roger Ede, of the Legal Action Group, argues that the system must make "the fruits of investigation belong to both sides" rather than just the prosecution.

The central failure of the Royal Commission's report... is that it has not analysed why these

strategy, greater understanding among its various parts is necessary. "It's all horribly atomised," she says, with everyone measuring success in different ways.

Police, for example, measure their success in the number of convictions they get, while the courts often see prison as a last resort.

The Howard League is presenting its own series of proposals to the government for increased opportunities for communication, training, and strategic planning within the system.

Police generally accept the recommendations, but warn that changes like the installation and operation of video cameras without extra funding will put the already demoralised and underfunded police force through great strain.

While the recent releases of prisoners and the publication of the Commission give the impression of change, many are shocked at the capacity of some police officers and politicians to deny a problem exists.

In the past few years, many had reason to hope that the new openness would bring and new sense of justice and fairness.

A commentator says: 'In matters of morality, the British have never been more unsure of themselves. Certainties have collapsed.'

JILL FORRESTER is a London-based Canadian freelance journalist.

To the Editor

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

"... a good move badly handled"

Sir, You deserve special thanks from the members of the public for your editorial on Insurance Cos which appeared in your esteemed daily on 21.8.1993. You aptly pointed out that the insurance companies have been tardy in meeting their legal obligation.

on the basis of the amount of declared dividend and so on, after, of course, giving two months time to each. In other words, a roster of the defaulting companies in the descending order of the amount of dividend declared during 1991 and 1992 may be drawn up and the companies rather be compelled to offer shares to the public in that order, each within two months time.

The members of the public would have got some dividend if these companies floated their shares in time. Deprivation of the public in the matter of dividend is more in case of a company which declared higher dividend than in the case of a company which declared less dividend.

A S M Faruque Shahjahanpur, Dhaka

Gano Forum

Sir, I would like to extend hearty thanks to Dr Kamal Hossain and his associates for introducing a new direction in our country's political trend.

materialisation of his hopes and aspirations.

At the moment the Gano Forum has chalked out one of its major activities as to work against terrorism. In fact if the root of the individual problems are deeply looked into, and gradually controlled in a systematic process, the nation's major problems will be solved.

Motius Samad Chowdhury, Phulata Tea Estate, Sylhet

Traffic jam at Jatrabari

Sir, Jatrabari is one of the busiest traffic points in Dhaka city. It is widely believed that the number of various types of vehicles passing through this point in a single day is the highest in the country.

tween the northern region of the country and the port city Chittagong is also maintained through Jatrabari traffic point. Besides the inter-district vehicles, a large number of inter city vehicles of various types also run through this point.

At present, the huge number of vehicles that pass through Jatrabari always face traffic jam and it has become a permanent point of traffic jam.

At present, the huge number of vehicles that pass through Jatrabari always face traffic jam and it has become a permanent point of traffic jam.

bus stop). The buses of separate routes make separate rows on the road to maintain their separate serial numbers and thus they almost close the whole road.

It is necessary to take some measures to make Jatrabari crossing a traffic jam free area for easy movement of the large number of vehicles.

At present, the huge number of vehicles that pass through Jatrabari always face traffic jam and it has become a permanent point of traffic jam.