

Reducing Road Accidents

As it is, we are among the countries with the highest number of road accidents. In the past month the spate of serious accidents — often involving an entire family — has indeed taken an alarming turn and may have taken us to the top of that group. In the Friday's worst accident involving an auto-rickshaw and a minibus, a family of three perished. Three more people also fell victim to vehicular caprice, or better say, unrestrained movement. The day's other casualties were four policemen and a tempo driver — all of whom sustained injuries of various degrees when their vehicle was knocked by a minibus.

This is just a list of a single day — a weekend. Not that people of this city, like those in the West, rush en masse for a pleasant weekend far from the crowded city and therefore the chances of road mishaps increase manifold; rather it is the other way round. More people stay indoors on weekend here than in the week days. On this count, the holidays should give almost a clean slate, so far as road accidents are concerned. But this is more a wishful thinking than a reality. This does not however lessen the ominous prospect of road mishaps on the week days anyway. The truth is that accident does not follow any set rule or pattern except a steep line indicating a growing number of incidents.

Many explanations have been offered for the dramatic reverse suffered by the ruling party. When Brian Mulroney handed over the leadership of the party to Kim Campbell just five months ago, no one suspected such an outcome of the election. After all, as the first woman prime minister of Canada, she appeared to be personally quite popular in the country. At least, the media coverage gave such an impression. But the voters of Canada knew their mind. They spoke loudly and clearly. The danger of political instability due to the failure of any party to achieve a clear majority has been averted. Jean Chretien has a mandate to govern the country for the next five years and implement the programme that he championed during the election campaign. Most political observers believe that Brian Mulroney failed to deliver on two campaign promises which are also two basic problems faced by

Canada. The first was his failure to reduce the \$ 375 billion national debt and the \$ 27 billion annual deficit. The second failure was his inability to find a constitutional solution for Quebec — a solution which would maintain the unity of the country and yet meet the separatist aspirations of the French-speaking province.

As a direct result of these failures by the Progressive Conservative party, the regional parties have been able to make spectacular gains, with the separatist Bloc Quebecois likely to become the Official Opposition. Led by Lucien Bouchard, the Bloc Quebecois won 54 seats, almost entirely at the expense of the ruling Progressive Conservative party. It is dedicated to achieving full independence for the predominantly French-speaking province of Quebec. In other provinces, the English-speaking electorate was deeply concerned about the budget deficit and the national debt and on a platform somewhat similar to Ross Perot in the United States, a Reform party was formed. This party polled 16 per cent of the votes — again, almost entirely at the cost of the ruling party. It campaigned on a drastic three-year deficit reduction programme.

Fifty nine year old Jean Chretien is a seasoned politician. He had served in the cabinets of three prime ministers — Lester Pearson, Pierre Elliot Trudeau and John Turner. Like Trudeau, he also comes from Quebec, but he does not share Trudeau's outspoken and flamboyant style. He is as committed as Trudeau was to keep Quebec within Canada. Speaking about the prime minister-elect, former finance minister Michell Sharp commented, "He'll be a good prime minister for these times. He's no ideologue, neither on the left nor the right, which is significant for a period like this when we have practical problems such as putting Canadians back to work." Speaking about

the crushing defeat of the ruling party, Chretien explained the unpredictability of politics in a colourful way. He said, "Politics is made up of this thrill — that you skate on thin ice, yet you never know when there will be hole that will gobble you up and it's over forever."

The Liberal government immediately faces some major challenges. The high rate of unemployment will have to be addressed. The perennial question of Quebec will have to be taken up once again. Hard choice will have to be made on the budget deficit and national debt reduction programmes. There are no easy answers to any of these questions. The dilemma that President Clinton is facing in the US will also haunt prime minister Chretien.

How does one revitalize the economy with a conservative budget? Boosting public spending will inevitably add to the

budget deficit and the national debt. Another issue that will require a defeat touch is Quebec separatism. He will probably begin negotiations with the Quebec separatists but negotiating with a group which is formally committed to secession will involve much soul-searching on the part of a truly national leader who happens to be from Quebec. Obviously, the federal government is not planning to use force to maintain the integrity of the nation but it is going to be an uphill task. It should also be noted that the English-speaking provinces have become impatient with the separatist demands of Quebec and they may not like to put up with the current situation much longer. Perhaps one should also look around the world to see, how national and sub-national aspirations are surfacing every-

where. Against this background it is not certain if the uneasy unity of Canada can be maintained for long. However, the economic integration of Quebec with the rest of the country is so deep that the French-speaking people will have to pay a heavy price if they opt out of Canada. A point to remember is that the Liberal party, for the first time, secured less votes than the regional party in Quebec. Commenting on the election results, the New York Times said, "Canada's voters have made one thing clear: They want no more of the Conservatives for now. But by splitting their support between east and west, English and French, they have mapped out a fractious political landscape."

NAFTA is another question on which Jean Chretien will have to take a position urgently. A lot of Americans are asking the question: Will the tri-

umphant leader of the Liberals try to overturn the agreement? A lot of American politicians in Congress who oppose the agreement are hoping that he will block NAFTA. At least he will, they hope, reopen the issue and spare them the necessity of voting against the agreement. But the actual situation may be somewhat different. Jean Chretien will not oppose the agreement in its basic goals but he will definitely seek to rewrite some of the points which, in his view, would be harmful to Canada. Most observers believe that the agreement will be subjected to intense and stubborn re-negotiation by the Canadians but they will not defeat or block it.

The Canadian election has demonstrated the vigour and health of democracy in that country. It has also shown that

Canadian Elections: No Room for Smug Certainty in Politics

the electoral does not forgive leaders who forget campaign promises. While the Canadians do not put their defeated leaders in the jail, they have certainly given a harsh verdict on the ruling party and consigned it, perhaps not to political oblivion, but at least to a state of political limbo for the immediate future. With only two members in the parliament, the leaders of the ruling party — including the outgoing prime minister Kim Campbell — will have lots of time to think about the fickleness of political fortune and to plan a comeback.

ON THE RECORD

by Shah AMS Kibria

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Whose Passion was Journalism

THE brightest star on the horizon of journalism has fallen. Certainly, without S. M. Ali the nation is poorer to-day. Those who had the fortune of enjoying his presence know that only he was his comparison. We are still very near to the incident of the tragic and untimely departure of a man who was the guide-philosopher of the profession of journalism and a tireless trainer of many young and promising journalists. Although I was never a working journalist, by a sheer stroke of luck I became his colleague in the erstwhile Pakistan Observer in 1951. In those days none could think of passing a day in the Observer House without the presence of the tall handsome amiable and most dynamic journalist of his time. And, through this small write-up I am paying my sincerest and humblest tributes to a long-ago colleague and a 'far-away' friend, who taught me what is a news. But he would not go for a stereotyped example that when a dog bites a man it is not a news but when a man bites a dog it is a news. One day while using my type-writer for his story, 'Ali Bhai' taught me what makes a 'news'. His example was: Everyday you find a traffic jam on Nawabpur rail crossing for five to ten minutes but it is not a news. But if on any occasion the traffic jam continued for an hour or so it will at once make a front-page news.

IN MEMORIAM

Whose Passion was Journalism

— Abdul Kader

Like many of his close associates words are failing me too. My brief acquaintance with him have been a life-long treasure for me. At last when 'Ali Bhai' finally settled in Dhaka there occurred more chances of meeting him on different occasions. My sense of gratitude for a man who did not forget me even after a long span of four decades, forced me to recall the episode of our teacher-student relationship. But the all-time great journalist (with due respect to the memories of Altaf Hossein and Abdus Salam) visibly felt embarrassed to find that an elderly person of his age publicly recognizes him as 'guru'!

S. M. Ali, who attained great fame abroad as a journalist, wanted to share his experiences with his professional colleagues in Dhaka. 'The Daily Star', his greatest gift to the nation, and the greatest success of his life-time, have had the privilege of being a 'classroom' for many of our journalists under the able stewardship of S. M. Ali. alas now dead! As one lamp kindles another, so S. M. Ali also kindled many a lamps of the profession who are now fortunately trying to repay the debts by writing touching obituaries. He has left behind a legacy for the posterity.

S. M. Ali's 'My World', which was autobiographical in nature, contained anecdotes and episodes with a human touch and gave his readers utmost pleasures. Perhaps it would not be out of place to mention here that S. M. Ali by virtue of his being a student of English literature, he was well-versed with the art of blending literature with journalism. His success as an editor and columnist largely depended on this quality. S. M.

Ali was the culmination, if I am permitted to say so, of a tradition and heritage of a 'culture' and ideology that were nurtured carefully for nearly a century by his family members, notably his two illustrious uncles, Syed Mujtaba Ali and Syed Murtaza Ali. The satirical vein in S. M. Ali's writings reminds one of his uncle Syed Mujtaba Ali's immortal writings. The 'Round-Tables' on various burning issues and long interviews with eminent persons of national stature quenched the thirst of decyphering readers. Sympathy was never in his blood. His editorials were bold and enhanced the worth of editorial institution. Even when bitterly criticising the faults of the ruling party or the opposition he had the most appropriate words at his command. Even his 'threats' to the powerful quarters were very clear and minced no words to ask them to read the 'writings on the wall'.

For the sake of pleasure of sharing his feelings, on a number of occasions this writer commented on his 'My World' and would like to recall here how at least on one occasion I disagreed with him. In 'My World' (26.5.92) he lamented: "I have stopped guessing about other people's reaction to what I write in this column." I wrote (Daily Star 12.7.92): "Sir, your 'unusual' reaction must have been shocking to many of your esteemed readers. The reason for your 'annoyance' (permit me to use the word) is understandable. But if I can recollect well, in the very first issue of your esteemed daily, you yourself disappointed certain quarters by the fore-warning that none should take 'The Daily Star' for granted. May be, your candid observations and 'biting comments', however justified have displeased the present hierarchy. Yet the fact remains that 'The Daily Star' with a group of select, dedicated and experienced contributors, have been striving hard to tell the nation that it is in utterly bad shape and needs through overhauling and right direction to clear the mess in almost every sector of national life." If 'Ali Bhai' were living today I would have told him that his sacrifices did not go in vain. Through his writings he told the slumbering people about the worth of eternal vigilance to protect their civil fundamental rights. S. M. Ali, besides being a great journalist was also a finest of gentleman of this country. His gentle manners and "disarming smile", as one of his friends aptly remarked, belied the trust he was capable of dealing with his mighty pen. I wish Ali is born again with the same mighty golden pen!

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Recounting from Fading Memory

by Md Ahsanuddin Sheikh

THE Ahmed brothers were twinkling in the horizon of Bengal around the time the Ali brothers were shining in the firmament of India. The records of both are replete with instances of extreme sufferings and extraordinary sacrifice for the independence of India and welfare of the society. The pair that performed on the centre stage understandably stole the limelight and most deservedly at that. But 'justice' does not seem to have been done to the other, born and brought up among us in the east end of India.

We all know of the Ali brothers — Maulana Shaikat Ali and Maulana Mohammad Ali — but sadly enough the Ahmed brothers — Maulana Afsaruddin Ahmed and Moulvi Shamsuddin Ahmed — seem to be fading out from public memory.

The initiation of all the four men in public life was through active interest in the operation of the Congress. Don't get started at that! That was precisely how Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Sher-e-Bangla Fazlul Huq, Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani and many others began their long and eventful political careers.

The two brother pairs came to play leading roles in the struggle for independence, and civil disobedience and Khilafat movements and suffered long terms of imprisonment.

To make the comparison more apt one of each pair turned out to be of much greater consequence. And who can forget the prophetic wish of the younger of the Ali brothers — Mohammad Ali — made during the Round Table Conference in London: "I would prefer to die on the soil of a country which is free rather than return

to a slave country." He did not really return; he died soon after and was buried abroad.

As the death anniversary of one of the Ahmed brothers — Moulvi Shamsuddin Ahmed — a leading hero of his time,