

A Crisis Glossed over

Malnutrition, according to a report, claims as many as 23 lakh livestock each year. Of a total of 2 crore 70 lakh, three-fourths are suffering from some malnutritional diseases. It is not even a question of quality animal feed, but a shortage of unimaginable quantity of the same. Against the yearly requirement of 13 crore tons, only four crore are available. The huge gap between availability and supply of animal feed alone can explain nutritional status of the country's livestock. On an average a domestic animal needs two kilograms of hay and eight kilograms of fresh grass daily. The yearly requirement of such grass is eight crore tons but only one lakh ton is available.

Not surprisingly, our livestock population is decreasing at an alarming pace. In a country where the human population suffers from nutritional deficiencies, the domestic animals cannot expect to have a better life for them. Among some of the Asian nations, according to the UNICEF, Bangladesh is the only country to have recorded a reduced availability of per capita calories between 1965 and 1984. There is no reason to think that this country's socio-economic conditions have undergone any dramatic change since 1984 so that the trend could have been reversed. The conditions here are such that man and his domestic animals find themselves locked in a direct competition for food and land. The complementarity that brings about a balance between man and his surroundings including the livestock, is now missing.

For the human population here the picture is neither very assuring. Till now we have not been able to bring the rate of child mortality below 100 per 1,000. Two thousand four hundred children die each day in the country. So the high incidence of death or a chronic malnutrition among the country's livestock population is not quite unexpected. The situation has been further exacerbated by the increasing need for meat and milk products of a growing population. An unrestrained slaughter of cows and goats accounts for a dwindling population of livestock and poor and inadequate feed is responsible for a reduced yield of milk and meat.

All this has a negative chain reaction on the human health here. An overriding — needless to say flawed — stress on making the country self-reliant on cereals has left a lot of complementary areas of food production out of focus. The country now almost produces enough food-grains for its population but at a tremendous cost. Pulses, oil seeds and various other cash crops have been sacrificed along with the gradual vanishing of pasture lands where cattle could graze. The net result today is that we have to import dairy products and edible oil at a price beyond our purchasing capability. Our livestock will never be the same again.

The important thing is to make an agricultural plan for the country. The way rice production is getting costlier ever, there is every chance of the crop soon proving uneconomic like jute. We have had bitter experience also with sugarcane and various other vegetables and spices. If we could just put in place a sound plan, there was every likelihood of averting the import of those items at a fabulous price. A more pragmatic plan could even turn them into good cash crops for us. There is no point adhering to traditional crops that hardly leave any profit for the farmers. However the farmers cannot be blamed for this. It is a part of macro-economic planning. Today some farmers on their own initiative have been successful in producing quality soyabean but there is none to take it. The same goes for our dairy farms.

Admittedly, we have physical constraints in developing our dairies. But this does not mean we should have none of them either. A nation must have something to fall back upon, if it can afford, at a time like this, of abnormal price rise in international market. We ought to ensure a reasonable supply of meat and milk from our domestic source.

A Neglected Centenary

This present year is the centenary of one who has been very dear to the Bengalee psyche. In fact one full month and more has elapsed after his 100th birth anniversary which passed on September 12 — marked if by anything at all — total absence of remembrance. Can we indeed afford to forget Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyaya, the shaper of the mind of at least two generations of our literati? No, not without pushing our culture to a certain peril.

It is true that had he not written anything beyond his first volume, which incidentally was none other than *Potheyr Panchali*, Bibhutibhusan would have had the same elevated position in the history of our literature. What then the remaining overwhelming part of his works, or for that matter his intensely-lived life, should stand to? It is very wrong to confine him to the greatness of his *magnum opus*. For in doing so we would fail to enter the completely different world that waits for us in *Aronyak*. And as we keep trudging to the enchanted lands opened up by such small masterpieces as *Trinankur* or the ponderous *Ichha* we stumble upon riches that are there for us to take at will — riches any nation and culture would be proud to treasure. And perhaps the young ones today do not know of his *Chander Pahar* or *Moroner Donka* — possibly two of the best juvenile adventure novels written ever in Bengali. Were not these precursors to Satyajit's volumes for children — at least in one striking particular — a world mine of interesting information about the world at large and the mankind as a whole?

Bibhutibhusan's life is one glorious book that merits perusal simply for its spirit questing to be one with nature and with man — in such sincerity that has hardly ever been matched in our tradition of important lives. Forgetting Bibhutibhusan would be a sure sign of our diminishing as an ethno-cultural entity. This we cannot afford.

ONE of our great editors were quite journalists in the sense of having graduated from long stints at the news desk or as a reporter or even as a kind of mini-editor doing certain pages of a journal. The great Abdus Salam followed the minimum-government principle precisely because he couldn't have done otherwise. Journalists are hardly ever intellectuals of any size and shape and Salam towered stupendously above them all lending his journal the Pakistan Observer a charmed life through his writings — almost all of which were editorials. The paper bore no stamp of his personality or preferences — if it did we wouldn't possibly have the good newspaper Observer was: Abdus Salam came from the accounts service and his great contribution to the paper could nevertheless be there even if he wrote from outside and was no editor. The extremely opposite case was Manik Mia's. He hardly wrote editorials but his Rajnaitik Mancho, written under the non-de-plume Musafir swung the whole of the East Pakistani Bengalees behind the Jukto Front. On the Bengalee people's march towards a national identity and a homeland state Musafir's column acted as the first and deep-and-far-acting catalytic agent. The litfaaq bore nothing if not wholly the stamp of Manik Mia — his was an overbearing presence in the pages. But most of this presence was neither a journalist's nor a professional editor's. Almost all of it was the owner's, or more correctly the manager's, at which job he has been excelling since his litfaaq days in Calcutta.

Zahur Hossain Chowdhury was by far the most colourful of all our editors. And of the famous triumvirate both Abdus Salam and Manik Mia lovingly and perhaps indulgently too gave in to a kind of shepherding by this third member of the team, particularly in the handling of that delicate and volatile thing — military dictatorship of Ayub and Yahya and worse dispensations prior to these from Karachi. Although he started in Calcutta as a reporter, doing his usual leg work, partition of Bengal and his forced retirement to bed until death did not allow him to be in the ranks for long. Excelling in column writing —

Where would we put S M Ali on this pantheon? First, Ali was nothing if not an editor. Or perhaps even before that he was a complete journalist, more than all of the above — the first such to take over as an editor — professional editor, in Bangladesh. There are among the lesser ones who did — and still do — climb the stairs to editorship by placating this or that political quarter or money laundering magnate. Some of them can claim to have risen from the profession but their performance do not qualify them to be brought into the august assembly of Abul Mansur Ahmed and Kazi Idris, Abdus Salam and Manik Mia etc. Of the luminaries only Ali seems to have risen from the ranks — and very strikingly indeed. Starting the fare in Dhaka and culminating his career in assignments of editorship in most parts of South-east Asia — Bangkok, Singapore, Manila — via a very formative stint in Lahore — he matured himself in every department of the profession and made successful forays into the managerial aspects of the trade at newspapers of international

Recalling S M Ali

Journalism as a Patriotic Mission

by Waheedul Haque

Darbar-e-Zahur was a shining testament to that — he was miles above as a lobbyist and *addadhar* than a professional editor.

Abul Kalam Shamsuddin and Abul Mansur Ahmed were trail blazers as editors. But their halcyon days were spent in Calcutta and moving to Pakistan or Dhaka they seemed to have parted with their literary past which was what landed them on pivotal positions in journalism. Showing a flash of his past prowess Abul Mansur veered to active politics and Abul Kalam simply petered out to non entity in the sheltered life of the Press Trust paper *Dainik Pakistan*. The best of the whole lot of our editors ever since the early fifties — who gave himself entirely to his calling without any ambition for name and fame and influence — was Kazi Mohamed Idris. Best because he was the most professional of all and as an editor his dedication and integrity has yet to be matched.

Where would we put S M Ali on this pantheon? First, Ali was nothing if not an editor. Or perhaps even before that he was a complete journalist, more than all of the above — the first such to take over as an editor — professional editor, in Bangladesh. There are among the lesser ones who did — and still do — climb the stairs to editorship by placating this or that political quarter or money laundering magnate. Some of them can claim to have risen from the profession but their performance do not qualify them to be brought into the august assembly of Abul Mansur Ahmed and Kazi Idris, Abdus Salam and Manik Mia etc. Of the luminaries only Ali seems to have risen from the ranks — and very strikingly indeed. Starting the fare in Dhaka and culminating his career in assignments of editorship in most parts of South-east Asia — Bangkok, Singapore, Manila — via a very formative stint in Lahore — he matured himself in every department of the profession and made successful forays into the managerial aspects of the trade at newspapers of international

standing. But are these considerations very relevant to our query as to where would we put Ali beside the great editors of our nation? From within the profession yes, and most emphatically so. But editorial greatness is also to be decided possibly more on the national or even international level, on the socio-political mark an editor leaves on his nation or on the contribution he makes towards the promotion of understanding between the nations and the resulting balance.

Before independence, the press of this land, excepting the paid-to-play, Press Trust papers, was preponderantly

campaign journals contributing to the growing disenchantment with Pakistan on the one hand and to the growth of a nascent Bengali nationalism on the other. After independence, specially after the August 15 killing, press tended to fall into one of the three loose groups: a. Those going whole hog to support the powers that be, mostly for money and power, b. Others of the more conscientious turn and tune to a tradition of resisting dictations of all kind, however tactfully; and c. The papers that to avoid being pulled and absorbed by this or that political pole voluntarily chose to be

politically obscure to the point of being unmeaning. S M Ali single handedly fashioned a fourth strand without having the benefit of being decades at it. He almost forced the pace of even others in addressing both of the main protagonists of our national leadership, pressing them hard to arrive at a politics of consensus. He very clearly saw, soon after his return to his native soil after almost four decades of assignments abroad, that there was no way for Bangladesh for making a headway in anything except going for consensus first in our political conduct and then all other aspects of the our national life. This was quite the opposite of what the aforementioned third group has been practising. This positive posture of commitment came rather easy to Ali for he was the one person, — perhaps the only person who could see the whole sad Bangladesh drama with eyes sharpened in international spots where nations, perhaps once placed no better than Bangladesh, — Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia etc — have all become sterling success stories.

The reason why he felt so strongly about the politics not only of democracy but also of consensus as to bind himself to a kind of mission, can be surmised if we try to understand his decision to come home putting an end prematurely to a gloriously high achieving career abroad — against all dictates of the best of practical considerations of life. And he did not quite come back to retire really. A failing health could not deter him from doing what he had come to realise in his land of love — gifting a newspaper to this nation, one which would meaningfully address the challenges before it. And he founded The Daily Star. And died in harness giving his last bit of conscious breath to pulling his progeny out of harm's way forging it as an effective platform for national consensus. That he came-back from the rather opulent security of a life of recognised achievement and to a situation of complete unpredictability and that he put his

come back to building something eminently helpful for the Bangladesh society, sets him apart from all our great editors and yet very decidedly puts him among themselves.

His response to the call of patriotism would by itself come to mean very little if this was not accompanied by a very exacting demand of quality and probity, to be realised through the best professional and technical practices of journalism available in the world. To attain this he held rounds of meetings, six days a week, covering the whole manpower strength of his newspaper. Unrestrained to such insistent counselling and at times proddings, the boys and girls joining the Star mostly from other papers, would tend to find these tedious and unrewarding. Some may well even have thought that Ali was playing at editorship and enjoying it — all at the expense of the journalists' easy ways about the business. For these and for many others Ali was a punctilious *sahib* unwilling in his gentlemanly politeness and somewhat western sense of decency — who avoided giving decisions and ordering about underlings and took everyone, even his pen, as his colleague, making things rather inefficient. No, by the end of a year, their minds were changing perhaps in spite of themselves. The whole team was on the threshold of being initiated wholly into this new kind of journalism "from within" when Ali fell. S M Ali so much wanted to infect his whole team with an awareness of the realities of the present day world and to see that everyone tried to benefit this poor nation with the lessons of that awareness. What a gigantic heave he attempted to put Bangladesh journalism into a modern and truly international frame. He was denied by Providence to realise all this by himself. But surely the seed has been cast.

Journalism as a patriotic mission was what our forebears in the nineteenth and early twentieth century prized and practised. Passing all but his last three years abroad doing a journalism without personal commitment, S M Ali came to give his best and utmost in the fashion of Harish Mukherjee of the last century, which is very hard to come by in these days of journalism as a job — only a job and no more.



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.

Promoting art and artists

Sir, Your editorial on September 27, 1994 draws my attention to an urgent requirement for selection of works of art in order to promote the finer aesthetic sides of life among the present generation and the posterity. The Shilpakala Academy must be fair and judicious in respect to the selection of the pieces of art by our young and promising painters and sculptors belonging to all the parts of the country and not from Dhaka alone.

We know there are many painters and sculptors of repute who don't get the scope to show their talents at home and abroad. If Shilpakala Academy could constitute an impartial national committee to select the various works of art for preservation, it would go a long way to enhance the image of the budding talents in the field of art who could easily arrest the attention of the art connoisseurs and critics abroad. Let us hope that Shilpakala Academy decisions be based on the principle of excellence and not on that of favouritism for the ultimate good of the nation.

Prof Abul Ashraf Noor  
Pabna

They and us

Sir, In our country there was a boat disaster near Chandpur a few weeks ago. It is now probably forgotten after a declared abandonment of the search for the unaccounted persons and the vessel! For a few evenings we saw and heard about the accident and nothing was heard afterwards. The issue was perhaps officially closed.

Who was responsible for that accident? What action was taken against the owner of the boat? Was it overloaded? How many passengers were there? How many survivors and how many dead bodies were found? Several corpses were found in the coastal areas soon after the incident.

Possibly there was an enquiry committee but will we ever hear about this again? Scores of questions can be raised. But are we interested to ask ourselves any question? Specially, the people who live in cities and boast about their position and status in the society. Are we not civilised enough to care for our own kinds even in this modern time? Then we hear about a ferry disaster in the Balkan Sea.

Thanks to modern communication technology — we see how in the stormy weather and freezing temperature all available resources are engaged to undertake the salvage work. They fail to save a lot of people. But that does not stop from doing what should be done. Prime Ministers of three countries sit together and answer the questions of the journalists. Other officials are also there to answer any question that the journalists or the relatives of the missing persons could care to ask. We learn from them what accountability really means. There was also the declaration of a national mourning day on that account. People in Europe have shown how different they are from us. Should we then grudge over their progress and superiority over us?

A Reader  
Dhaka

Washington-Baghdad Tension

Sir, While Iraq has deployed a large number of troops all along the Kuwaiti border and Kuwait has kept her armed forces prepared to meet any eventuality, it appears that the present dilemma in the Gulf is a mere show of force between Baghdad and Washington and it is a by-product of Iraq's displeasure and anger against US's hostile attitude towards Baghdad rather than a Kuwait-Iraq head-on collision.

Iraq had made a blunder when she invaded Kuwait in August 1990. The former had to expiate her crime within seven months when she was not only ousted from Kuwait but completely beaten back, defeated and humiliated by the US forces in February 1991.

Eversince, the JIS-initiated UN economic sanctions against Iraq has crippled and paralysed the economy of that country and millions of people in Iraq are undergoing inexplicable inhuman hardships and sufferings.

We wonder how long would the economic sanction against Iraq continue and how long the people of Iraq would continue to pass their lives in this sub-human condition without any access to adequate food supplies, medicine and essential commodities, import, export, trade and any other meaningful contact with the outside world?

This is worsening the present deteriorating situation in the Middle East and it may lead to a violent volcanic eruption of rancour and hatred all

on a sudden. We feel that Iraq has suffered too much. It is time that the economic sanctions against her be withdrawn forthwith on humanitarian grounds for the sake of peace and stability in the whole of the Middle East.

We have observed that whenever the UN Security Council discussed the question of lifting embargo against Iraq, the USA always opposed to it. This may throw the future of Middle East into uncertainty and jeopardy and the US-Arab relations may become very complex and volatile.

We are of the opinion that in pursuance of the US policy of US-Japan friendship after World War II, US-Russian friendship, Israel-Palestine friendship, US-Vietnam friendship and the new world order, Washington may kindly take positive steps to normalise and to improve her relations with Iraq. We strongly feel that Iraq is anxiously waiting for a renewal of friendship with the USA and peaceful solution of all Middle East problems.

Iraq would be committing her greatest mistake if she attacks Kuwait again after the former's crushing defeat in February 1991. We also feel that the USA would also be committing a serious diplomatic error if it continues economic sanctions against Iraq even after easing/withdrawing economic sanctions against Serbia/Yugoslavia, Vietnam and Haiti.

We strongly believe that love and friendship is the only solution to all our problems. Let Washington and Baghdad sit together, have dialogue face to face and resolve their difference across the table instead of using Kuwait as a tool to show and express their bitterness.

OH Kabir  
Dhaka 1203.

Disgrace beyond border

Sir, It seems our 'need' (or greed?) for making money (by any means) has crossed the national boundary. This time our beloved members of Armed forces reported as involved. It gave me tremendous shock to see a news item in the prestigious news weekly 'The Economist', September 24-29 issue. The Economist under the heading 'Somalia Closing-down sale' talks about mismanagement and wrong doing of UN forces based in Somalia. It cited an example 'The list of scams and fiddles by UN peacekeepers include Nigerians flagging security passes and Bangladeshis' the fuel oil of their own vehicles.' What a disgrace! Is any one from the Defence Ministry or Army aware of it? Razee Choudhury  
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

OPINION

In Memoriam : S M Ali  
Long may You Glow

Salahuddin Akbar

Comes that October. The autumn winds blow balmy across the serene sky. If winter is an etching, spring a water colour, summer an oil painting, then autumn — a mosaic of them all. But for some of us the autumn winds blow chilly and cold like that of a deep and dark December when we come to remember a man who left us just when we needed him most. He promised to be home by 20 October. He kept his promise (though promises are made to be broken) and didn't keep his distance — yes, he returned on 19 October but in another form.

He set the Star which has become the brilliant star, like the autumn full moon, that lights our way. There followed a series of speculations even to the extent that whether the Star would go to be a 'falling star' after he had done his work. A few lapses also began appearing. The day he was laid to eternal rest, the heading of a financial news item on page 6 was transposed with a foreign news on page 5. Its fate was pondered to be precarious. A wait of few months with stolid fortitude through dismal days and neurotic nights the Star people's talent and devotion (brought forth by its founder) rather proved it a dawn breaking the night — a promise of morning light. A mode of conduct and treatment, a standard of courage, neutrality and integrity have done a great deal to make the Star what it is now.

It looks like the legacy of journalism S M Ali has left behind is being mostly upheld by his successors. In a country of numerous daily newspapers Star truly stands as a daily newspaper. As did their mentor, they let any important issue not slip away. There always appeared timely commentaries on national issues — from parliament crisis to street agitation — seeking opinion on the issue of caretaker government. Instant editorial on the plague (someone may feel like rereading the long-forgotten 'The Plague' by Albert Camus), suggestive editorials for both opposition and the government, round-table conference on subjects of issues as varied as from Jute to Banking. Moreover it has added pages and supplements like *Teens* and *Twenties* (wish I was in that age again!), *Computer Specials* which should be appealing to its target readers, and worth glancing for others.

Often there follow some fine feature writings with required or surprising interviews including the ones in the district page. Letters and Opinion columns show how greatly it has created a number of avid and serious readers. It has been able to keep a score of contributors, who are quite well-known in their professions, engaged in writing for it which should be beneficial for all one way or another. However, it has its weaknesses too. The reporting perhaps still needs to be strengthened with more in-depth and investigating stories. The most coveted weekend Magazine pages often appear less interesting. Well, 'My World' is not replaceable. But Weekend Musings too is not bad altogether. The only trouble is it is not there every weekend. Still it is better if it comes naturally once in a while. The novelty of 'My Patches of Disquiet' is somewhat pedantic and ethereal like its very own title. Distant drums' sounds like the way it suggests/should be! Television has been surely the poorest. Like its editions the Star Television could play a constructive role in its review of TV programmes with a note of suggestiveness. 'The Passing Show' by Chuckles is often passed by without a chuckle. If poems are printed why not inviting short stories regularly? Once short stories added appeal to this page but for a while. If Dhaka Day by Day can contain a piece every single day then it is hard to believe that Star cannot get to manage contributors in this direction. Matters of the Heart is no substitute for Write to Mita. The latter was really helpful and could ease our pain and predicament. Can't Mita be brought back? Other pages like Living, Women on the Move, Development, Environment, Business, Sports, as well as special articles, interviews are definitely praiseworthy. It is no more a sheer surprise to discover any newness in the Star because it has already reached a certain stage. Any novelty there remains as only expected and deserving. Some people have a wonderful presence; others have wonderful absence. It's just been a year S M Ali smilingly said good bye to us fulfilling his promise and completing his journey. His absence seems to have it worked out equally what it would have been with his presence. The team spirit

he instilled now appears capable enough to make the Star constant as the northern star.

What else could be more than this kind of solace, attainment and tribute? But what S M Ali often pined for must be thought deeply. While others now take the Starviews to consider — it is perhaps only political activists and leaders who still remain unconcerned of what comments and suggestions are made in the Star or, may be, wrongly they interpret the Starviews on political situations and national crisis thus leading another crisis which calls for rejoinder and counter rejoinder! They don't have to truly understand the writings meant for them in the Star for the sake of paying tribute to S M Ali but they should do so just for the love and benefit of the country which was a genuine concern of Ali.

Complacency doesn't mean resting in a static state but it is a fleeting state of happiness; a combination of ambiguous victories and vague defeats — with few moments of clear peace. Complacency sets our mind rocketing highward like a balloon drifting seaward in a bright blue sky. But the essence of the spirit is a continuous strive for perfection to reach the excellence. We the Stargazers are here often to remind the Starmakers you've got your reasons to feel complacent but also remember the plentiful possibilities of a better tomorrow. As the deserving successors of your mentor S M Ali you have a hopeful future already memorized.

In the grim and horror tragedy of 'The Duches of Mall' during Jacobean period of decadence, finally there comes at the penultimate Act an assertion from villain Bosola — 'look you, the stars shine still' (which seems to suggest inevitable fate and man's baffled quest for knowledge). In our confusing and disheartening surroundings we expect the Star will help us to step out in a quest to seek out the fundamentals and eschew the incidentals. The autumn winds will once again blow for us the way it does. Because we are already able to come on strong echoing the Jacobean assertion in a singular number — 'The Star shines still!'

The writer is Deputy Director, Department of Films and Publications.