

WEEKEND MUSINGS

Mahfuz Anam

Happy Birthday

FINANCIAL Express, a valued addition to our world of newspapers, entered its second year of publication yesterday. We extend our heartfelt congratulations to the editors, staff and the publishers of the Express. There is no doubt that this paper has added a new dimension to journalism in Bangladesh. There are many reasons to celebrate the first anniversary of this paper. Conventional wisdom had it that the market was too small for a financial paper to survive.

To counter this popular impression a lot of courage, imagination and persuasive power were needed. Both Mr Reazuddin Ahmed, the chief editor, and Mr Moazzem Hossain, the editor, of the paper had all of those qualities in plenty. Reaz-uddin Ahmed is a veteran journalist, whose years of experience in economic reporting, in the Bangladesh Observer and also his association with the Financial Times of London, equipped him well for the task. His role in journalist unions, and long stints in their leadership positions gave him fame and prestige that helped him with this new venture.

Mr Moazzem's dedication to the profession, and unwavering commitment to economic journalism made a critical, and perhaps the most vital, contribution towards making the Financial Express what it is today. He was the first journalist, as far as I know, who specialised in the field of economic and financial reporting, and showed us all how important business journalism was. I admire his single-minded pursuit of his profession which has helped to elevate business journalism to a hitherto unknown height and prestige. I think I echo the sentiment of many journalists, and a large number of readers, when I express my deep appreciation to the staff, the management and the owners of the Financial Express for giving us such a valuable paper. Hearty Congratulations.

Reagan Gets Alzheimer's

THE news of Ronald Reagan suffering from Alzheimer's Disease made me feel very sad. The picture of the former President of the most powerful country in the world, gradually becoming mentally incapacitated due to memory loss and impairment of judgment, reminded me of the frailty of life and of the transient nature of most things we fight so hard for.

His handwritten note was remarkable for the deep love it expressed for his wife, Nancy, and for the concern he expressed for his family. He wrote: "Unfortunately, as the Alzheimer's Disease progresses, the family often bears a heavy burden. I only wish that there was some way I could spare Nancy from this painful experience." These lines reveal a tremendous sensitivity on the part of Reagan, and speak volumes about his human qualities.

A special tragedy of the Alzheimer's setting in is that it is so predictable. It is one thing to suddenly get a heart attack and become paralysed, or meet with some other misfortune and become incapacitated. But in this case, you know that gradually you are going to become a totally dependent person, needing others even for your most basic functions. That is indeed quite frightening. In case of the Alzheimer's a patient is expected to live eight to 10 years after diagnosis. Imagine, the once most powerful man in the world becoming totally worthless.

News of Reagan getting the Alzheimer's made a special impression on me perhaps because I lived in the US during his presidency, and saw him at his dazzling best. Dazzle is perhaps the best description of his tenure — which was full of pomp and glamour. He is supposed to have perfected the use of images and impressions rather than of fact and substance, as means of running his presidency. Though his tenure was perhaps the most ideological of all post-war US presidents, yet it was mostly rhetoric, imagery, selling of dreams and fears that his time mainly consisted of.

I have personal reasons to remember his ideological onslaught because the United Nations came under the most severe attack during his presidency. It was at that time that the US withdrew from UNESCO, the organisation I worked for. The rhetoric of the "Evil Empire" was at its height, and to the American public, the UN as a whole, and UNESCO in particular, was made out to be integral part of it.

Anyway, that is not what I would like to discuss today. Coming back to Reagan's handwritten note, what struck me to be so remarkable is that the letter was so refreshingly devoid of any self pity. In fact, the letter hardly referred to himself, and was almost entirely focused on his wife and his family. This is brave stuff.

There is another admirable aspect of this handwritten note, and one from which there is a lot to learn for us. And that is, going public with such a horrible personal fact. In our culture, whenever a tragedy befalls us, the first tendency is to hide. Thus, when a child is born with some physical or mental handicap, the family's first instinct is to hide it from the relatives, and especially, outsiders. This effort is stretched to such extents that parents go into a denial mode and try to pretend as if nothing is wrong. This further aggravates the situation for the victim. This phenomenon is also observed when an adult family member

REFLECTIONS

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One day two Bangladeshis went to an American drug store. Food is also available at the drug store at modest prices. Also handkerchiefs, socks and so on are sold there. Shoe polish, key rings, wallets, belts, buttons and a host of such things are found in an American drug store.

Bangladeshis had their lunch meal of soup, boiled eggs, marmalade coffee. Already, they had difficulty with the waiter about ordering boiled eggs. The waiter knows boiled egg as just 10 seconds or 15 seconds or 20 seconds and so on. At the drug store, which is also a restaurant, 10 seconds or 15 seconds or 20 seconds means egg boiled for 10 seconds or egg boiled for 15 seconds or egg boiled for 20 seconds. "Egg" is understood. One need not utter that term to confuse the waiter.

However, after they finished their meal, the guests wanted to pay the bill. They called the waiter and asked for bill. The waiter was surprised. He told the guest he will give the guests a cheque (not a bill) and the guests will give him the bill. They guests were puzzled. They were anxious to get out of the drug store. They said, "Give us anything, we like to pay."

Habib believed in plain, decent living and thinking like the skylark flying high in the sky with the gaze fixed on to the ground below. He had the simplicity of a child. He was fond of spending leisure with friends in his house (he visited friends at their homes also). There were many many occasions when stimulating anecdotes, jokes, arguments and counter-arguments on issues and matters of public interest filled the sessions.

Typical American terms like "moonlighting", "shutting the stable doors after horses have escaped", "gerrymandering", "million dollar question", "sub-poena", "imprimatur" and so on laced such sessions with fun and entertainment. That was not all. "Champs d'Elysees" in Paris, "Munich" city of Germany, "Yorkshire Pudding", the old names of Stalingrad and Leningrad, nationality of Karl Marx, Popocatepetl, Urjaba, black caviar and red caviar, Cheddar cheese and Kraft cheese, Oxbridge and many many like these stimulated the quiz contests.

Mrs Rahman who was a bank officer herself was always ready backstage making sessions enjoyable with tea, coffee, sherbet, kabab, kofta, paratha, luchi, zarda, firni, samosa and so forth. He was a good conversationalist himself and knew the art of getting others to take part in conversations.

A QUESTION OF QUOTAS

For 'Reverse Racism'

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creasingly diverse ethnic make-up of the country itself. Enhancing the purchasing power of previously marginalised groups by giving them access to higher-paying jobs is also seen as sensible economics.

Affirmative action has indeed been instrumental in expanding the ranks of the African-American middle-class during the past two decades. Women, too, have seen their earnings increase substantially during the same period — due again, in part, to government-mandated efforts to redress historic inequalities in employment.

But females and racial minorities remain systematically excluded from the upper echelon of the US corporate world. White males still occupy well over 90 per cent of the top salaried positions.

Affirmative action has also had little effect on the poorest Americans. Depending on which surveys are consulted, the proportion of blacks living in extreme poverty has either remained constant or increased significantly since 1970.

A few African-Americans who have risen to positions of prominence meanwhile denounce affirmative action as demeaning and counter-productive.

Particular attention has been paid to the writings of Shelby Steele, a black professor who previously believed that African-Americans should be compensated in this way for historic injustices. Steele now argues that "one of the most troubling effects of racial preferences for blacks is a kind of demoralisation, an enlargement of self-doubt."

Because of affirmative ac-

tion, he contends, successful African-Americans are plagued by the notion that their achievement is not based entirely on merit.

Steele further opposes affirmative action on the grounds that it neglects "the hard business of developing a formerly oppressed people to point where they can achieve proportionate representation on their own."

Steel's views are rejected by most black leaders. And despite the sizable opposition to affirmative action among African-Americans in general, it is not about to be eliminated by the country's courts and legislative bodies.

Limits were placed on the scope of affirmative action during the Reagan era, but Congress and the Supreme Court have repeatedly indicated that the 30-year-old policy will remain in place for a number of years.

KEVIN J KELLEY is a freelance American journalist.

Leads the women's charge

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candidates but insists it will happen under the present, rank-and-file system.

Lawrence sees the 35 per cent plan as the beginning of a historic drive which will build on Australia's good record on women's rights.

But some party members have doubts about its implementation.

If it is enforced as a quota, the plan could involve forced early retirement for some male Labor MPs — a move that could turn nasty. Lawrence's critics believe she is not facing up to this possibility.

They warn that moves to involve more women in politics could have an adverse effect. Should a political party decide that certain seats should be allocated to female candidates — even if there are more experienced and popular males prepared to stand — then the basic structure of equal opportunity and freedom of choice for the voters becomes non-existent, critics charge.

Lawrence is seen as a potential future prime minister — a possibility that worries some on the party's Left.

Born in 1948, Lawrence was the first woman to hold a state premiership, winning the 1990 election in Western Australia. Earlier this year, Keating convinced her to switch to federal politics and in March she won a by-election and was immediately promoted to the front bench.

She recently denied she has her sights set on either of Labor's two senior positions, those of prime minister or deputy prime minister.

"I'm pleased in a sense to be at the forefront of moving more women into politics, breaking down barriers," she said. "But I see myself as making the changes rather than necessarily being the one to take up the reins."

"I'm always looking for opportunities to improve the status and standing of women and I'm always willing to meet a challenge." In the wake of Labor's move to get more women into politics, National Party deputy leader John Anderson told his party to set a target to increase the number of women in Parliament. The Nationals do not have any women MP.

Anderson dismissed a set quota of women MPs degrading and demeaning, because it could mean people were chosen on gender rather than on merit.

"One of the best ways to correct the perception that we don't properly encourage women is to focus on one area where I think we are lacking — our federal parliamentary team," he said.

"I believe we quite seriously should consider setting ourselves objectives and possibly even a target to work towards."

JEFF CURRAN is a Sydney based freelance journalist.

Backwards Go Forward

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constituencies were reserved for scheduled caste and tribal candidates.

But by Singh's dispensation, 49.5 per cent of people from both categories, or over 70 per cent of India's 900 million people, are now guaranteed placement in most educational institutions and assured government employment at all levels.

Initially, the Mandal Commission had wanted a quota of around 52 per cent for 3,743 other backward communities in addition to the existing 22.5 per cent for untouchables. But since the Supreme Court had already set a 50 per cent ceiling on reservations, the Commission recommended a 27 per cent quota for OBCs.

Singh's decision to implement the new reservation policies led to country-wide demonstrations in which scores of people were killed by police and some upper-caste students, suddenly finding themselves discriminated against, even burned themselves to death in protest.

The army was called in to restore order in numerous towns, including New Delhi, but the protests burgeoned, leading eventually to the fall of

Singh's government.

Implementation of Singh's affirmative action policy was shelved. But it was not long before other political parties recognised the potential electoral advantages of implementing it. With cosmetic changes, it was eventually adopted and implemented in 1993 by the current Congress government of Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao.

According to Rao's plan, 27 per cent of jobs in all central government and public sector enterprises are now earmarked for Indians belonging to around 1,200 identified socially and economically disadvantaged groups. The same applies to those seeking admission to any federal educational institution.

Opponents of the policy say these groupings are arbitrary. For example, an underprivileged, low-caste person may be eligible to benefit from affirmative action in one state while another person from the same caste grouping is deemed socially privileged in another state.

The caste system — a complex Hindu social order in which certain groups are elevated above others — originated thousands of years ago

It divides society into four general castes, with thousands of sub-castes. Members of the highest, or priestly caste, are known as Brahmins, the lowest, manual labourers, are called Sudras. Between are the Kshatriyas or warriors and the Vaishyas or traders.

Outside these four castes are the Untouchables — out-castes generally associated with "unclean" jobs such as removing human waste and scavenging.

Caste cannot be changed except through the endless cycle of death and re-birth. And this, too, is dependent on Karma, good deeds during a life-time.

While polite society tends to downplay the pervasiveness of caste, the caste system defines social arrangements such as food habits and decorum. Newspaper advertisements for marriage partners always state preferences for caste.

The cause of bettering the lot of lower castes via direct government patronage is one no politician would publicly criticise for fear of losing votes. They reason that affirmative action equals votes to ensure their continuance in office. The resultant violence, to them, seems incidental.

RAHUL BEDI is a freelance Indian journalist based in New Delhi.

Rather than Flattered

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leaves. Is that some companies set employees up for failure by hiring people not qualified for a particular post. "And if those people aren't making it three months down the line, then it destroys (opportunities) for every black person."

If the private sector — which began implementing affirmative action programmes long before the first all-race elections in April — is finding the changes tough, the situation is exacerbated among the country's 1.2 million African-dominated public servants.

Here, Mandela has to grapple with a series of contradictory arrangements negotiated

in multi-party talks before he took office. While he has guaranteed job security for the bureaucrats of the apartheid era, he has committed himself to addressing gender and racial discrimination without increasing public spending.

"Keep those who are there — add other people who are black and women — don't increase the wage bill. How do you do that?" asked deputy President Thabo Mbeki in an address to the Cape Town Press Club.

The new government's answer seems to involve letting nature take its course. While the old guard maintains its position, the natural attrition of

retirement and resignation is intended to make space for new appointees drawn from the ranks of the previously disadvantaged.

Mandela's supporters, however, may not want to wait that long. The civil service already has received a staggering two million applications for 11,000 existing vacancies and voters are impatient for Mandela to fill his pre-election promises.

Such pressure ultimately may force Mandela to introduce legislation making affirmative action compulsory rather than voluntary within the next few years.

ARLENE GETZ has just completed a stint as southern Africa correspondent for Australia's 'Sydney Morning Herald.'

Parity in Millionaires

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on the NEP's other pronounced objective to 'restructure society to abolish the identification of ethnicity with economic function, especially to create, expand and consolidate the Malay capitalist and middle classes.'

Sundurum argues that the strong interest in ownership in the modern corporate sector, although involving only a small minority of the population, reflects "the dominance of capitalist interests in defining supposedly ethnic or communal interests."

"As officially interpreted, restructuring is not meant to abolish or change socio-economic relations between classes or economic interest groups; in practice, it mainly seeks to increase Bumiputras capital ownership and personal

shares in the more attractive occupations."

Political scientist and human rights activist Chandra Muzaffar adds: "Resolving the problems of Malay poverty is quite different from creating a Malay capitalist."

In terms of affirmative action in favour of the Malays, the statistics are similarly contentious. Official statistics put Malay ownership of corporate equity at 19 per cent, well short of its 30 per cent target, while placing non-Malay and foreign ownership at 35 and 25 per cent respectively.

In general, Malay wealth increased, but the rise was concentrated in a few hands. Although poor Malays did not benefit as much as promised, the creation of a Malay capitalist class decreased Malay tensions. But the Chinese and Indians, particularly those in the middle-class, felt unappreciated and concerned that they were losing opportunities.

Not only was favouritism shown towards Malays, but many Chinese and Indian initiatives for their own communities were smothered by the Malay-dominated government.

The inability to get university places forced many non-Malays to pursue education overseas, resulting in a foreign exchange drain estimated at RM2 billion a year.

Promotion based on race rather than merit also affected the economy, resulting in inefficiency in the Malay-dominated civil service.

Sociologists argue that affirmative action under the NEP contributed to a "subsidy mentality" among Malays, placing them at a further disadvantage in relation to the other groups.

Overall, therefore, the NEP reduced disparities between racial groups and helped cool racial tensions from their

1969 boiling point, but fell short of its ambitious aims of cementing national unity.

Having achieved its objective of creating a Malay capitalist class, affirmative action now forms only a minor part of the NEP's successor, the New Development Policy (NDP). The country's attention is focused on the goal of industrialisation packaged within Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's "Vision 2020."

Malays continue to seek to expand their control over the economy. At a recent seminar of the Malay Chamber of Commerce, industrialist Abdul Khalid Ibrahim pointed the way forward, calling for increased support for Bumiputras entrepreneurship and internationalisation.

Class differences remain hidden by the racial perspective, an interpretation reinforced daily by the media, educational institutions, and social and political organisations.

Tensions between ethnic groups remain, but are softened by tolerance and the common goal of getting rich via the current economic boom. Today, they live in relative peace and harmony.

Mahathir once said: "... in trying to redress the imbalance it will be necessary to concentrate your effort on the Malays, to bring out more Malay entrepreneurs and to bring out and to make Malay millionaires, if you like, so that the number of Malays who are rich equals the number of Chinese who are rich, the number of Malays who are poor equals the number of Chinese who are poor and the number of unemployed Malays equals the number of unemployed Chinese. Then you can say that parity has been achieved."

PREMESH CHANDRAN is a Malaysian journalist.

Viewing Video

by Lenin Gani

AFTER saving his family and the British royal family from a group of IRA extremists in *Patriot Games*, CIA analyst Jack Ryan

alias Harrison Ford now takes on the might of the Colombian drug cartel and even the US Government itself in Tom Clancy's latest best-seller *Clear And Present Danger*. The top brass in Washington DC acting on the authority of the President of the United States of America have made plans for a 'secret war' against the Colombian drug lords by sending an elite group of mercenaries to infiltrate the country to assassinate the powerful barons. Jack Ryan is unknowingly caught up in their elaborate scheme. This forces him to question to whom does he owe his allegiance — the president or the country?

Ryan gets a further shock when his mentor and longtime ally (James Earl Jones) passes away after a prolonged illness. So, Ryan on assuming the office of Deputy Director of the CIA is determined to bring down those responsible. After shutting their operation down and saving the trapped soldiers Ryan's investigation ends at the very 'seat of government'.

Personally, I found Clancy in trying to give an insight as to the goings on in the 'corridors of power' paid too much attention to details. This could have been avoided. Because for the first couple of minutes, it took me some time to realise what was going on. This was not the

case with *Patriot Games*. Nevertheless the plot is good and Harrison Ford gives another immaculate performance.

Bill Cosby is a retired spy now teaching French at a college. But is forced to come back to the agency after twenty years when he learns his only daughter has been training to be like him and will be sent on a mission with his friend's son (Robert Culp).

Like any responsible parent, Cosby tells Culp that he made a serious error in judgement and it was essential he (Cosby) went to protect his daughter. Culp reluctantly agrees. The mission the young rookies have been assigned to perform is to guard a Russian scientist and his wife in Austria before they defect to the West. It is supposed to be a routine operation but it turns into a real comedy of errors with first the young pair being kidnapped by a man who wants to sell the scientists' secrets to the Iraqis. Then the two pros Cosby and Culp who has come on incidentally to protect his son are themselves caught and have to be freed by their wards. There is also a high-speed car chase through the streets of Vienna.

After all their troubles, it is the wife that almost has the last laugh but for the quick-thinking of the two novices.

I Spy Returns is a thoroughly enjoyable comedy-action that the whole family can watch. Cosby and Culp having a go at each other is a real treat.



ENGLISH		
NAME	TYPE	CAST
1. Clear & Present Danger	(Thriller/Action)	Harrison Ford/James Earl Jones
2. Something In The Shadows	(Action)	Chuck Norris
3. Rookie Of The Year	(Comedy)	Daniel Stern/Thomas Nicholas/ Gary Bussey/ Hall/ Amy Morton
4. White Terror	(Adventure)	
5. Striking Point	(Action)	
6. Chambers of Shaolin	(Martial Art)	Lauka Fai
HINDI		
NAME	TYPE	CAST
1. Udar Ki Zhdegi	(Social)	Jeetendra/ Kajol/ Rohit
Dir: K V Raju		
Mus: Anand Malind		
BANGLA		
NAME	TYPE	CAST
1. Mahabharati	(Social)	Dipankar/ Kaushik/ Soma Chatterjee/ Rajeswari
MUSICALS		
1. Songs of Akshay Kumar & Saif Khan		
2. Saiya Ke Sath Mari Mein	(Romantic melodies)	

Source: Film Fair Video & other clubs.