

No Winner

The feeling is one of being led up to a pasture of hope and then suddenly we find the ladder taken away. Unless the miracle happens we are lotted to fall. The complexion of the political impasse has changed into something more serious plunging the nation into a fathomless pit of uncertainty.

The despondency is greater for the fact that all this was so avoidable. The intent had qualitatively improved towards the end from what it had looked like being at one point in time playing to the gallery. As the count-down on the massive opposition resignation began, it appeared that both sides got very serious trying hard to grapple with the sole point at issue, namely, having a neutral caretaker government to oversee the next general election. That once — intractable difference was set at rest and also resolved was the last-minute hitch over the timing of the BNP government's resignation prior to the polls.

In other words, a mutually acceptable formula over all the contentious issues was duly hammered out. There was nothing more to negotiate on substantive points. It was an outcome on substantive ideally driven by the right amount of seriousness of purpose and a healthy consensus over principles, that only waited to be announced.

Then it hit a snag over the *proviso* added by the ruling party negotiators on further agitational programme by the opposition. It need not have been the absolute point to wreck the agreed outcome on the substantive issue in a take-it-or-leave-it-fashion. What could be disposed of as a technicality became a sticking point of principle.

This is a no-win situation, the major political parties have landed themselves in. There cannot be any winner in the mainstream politics, at least. The way all the good work has soured by a single stroke at the eleventh hour, one has only to suppress one's suspicion that a certain vulnerability to indiscretion, sabotage, if you will, has made so much of a negative difference.

We have the odd tendency to get stuck with a status quo even in an adverse order. It would be suicidal to get frozen in the latest quagmire. The consensus reached is still with us, it needn't be consigned to history right away. There is no-time bar for the protection of national interest.

How Justice Suffers

Human lives in the country have long become cheap. In the city they are perhaps only more so. With life becoming so cheap human dignity has appallingly been compromised. But this was not so always. People of this soil once used to value honour more than their abject existence. But today political patronage to musclemen has forced on the people a distorted set of values. No wonder, the weak and those without political or other connections are increasingly becoming the targets of the elements of oppression. In such a society women and children are more vulnerable. This explains why women and children are becoming victims of rape, abduction and trafficking at an alarming rate.

What is specially galling is the fact that the criminals, even after they have been identified, are allowed to roam freely while their victim or victims have to flee away for fear of their lives in the face of threats of further atrocities. A rape victim, Shikha Rani only in the prime of her youth, has been fated to go through such an awfully tragic experience. The incident reportedly took place on the Tongi Diversion Road under the Ramna Thana on December 3. When the police station refuses not only to act but also to accept the case, the intent of the law enforcing men cannot but be questionable. Reports have it that instead of accepting the case the thana entered a general diary first but after order from a high official, the case was finally taken. But unfortunately not to Shikha and her family's benefit.

Today the entire family of Shikha is hiding and her rapists, one of them reportedly a dealer of fensidyle and is in good terms with a few police officers of the thana, moving freely without any fear of legal actions against them. Similar incidents have been reported from different parts of the country but hardly ever from the metropolitan areas. This is exactly why people lose confidence in the dispensation of justice. Plagued by such a mortifying sense of insecurity, we as a society get diminished. Undesirable political clouts and administrative corruptions are at the root. To make society run such political and administrative aberrations must be done away with.

Bureaucratic Tangle

Transfer from one office to another is a part of a job-holder's life. However not all jobs involve frequent transfers, some even do not have any such provision. But on the other extreme, there are employees who are literally always on the run with their families and belongings. Such employees remain in constant fear of transfer orders. There is no denying the fact that such rounds of duty at various branches or offices are integral and vital for certain jobs and some office staff also welcome such changes because of the new place and environment with their special charms.

On this count the banks are quite particular to see that their employees become familiar with the workings of their different branches. Apart from those transfers that are ordered to punish an employee, most others are aimed to benefit both the office and the employee. But sometimes transfers can be befuddling. As it has happened in case of one Anwar Hossain. An order came to Bancharam branch of the Bangladesh Krishi Bank directing him to immediately join the Palash branch at Narsingdi. Apparently nothing wrong in the order. But the fact is Anwar Hossain can no longer obey this order. He died three months back.

The bank authority is not aware of the death of one of its branches' treasurer. This is how our banks keep tab on their employees and their performances. How the branch itself is doing without the service of such a key link in the banking transactions? If such a vital post is unaccounted for in the banking, the running of offices — government in particular — elsewhere can be a nightmarish experience. Both men and materials go unaccounted for. A nation has to pay dearly for such bureaucratic attitudes. Let us bring an end to such lax approach and 'no-work' culture.

"I would have a completely free press with all the dangers involved in the wrong use of that freedom than a suppressed or regulated press," Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister, said this some 44 years ago. Even when the country went through a war against China in 1962, he never imposed any restriction on the press.

Uninformed reporting did make him unhappy. But he decided to employ a leading editor to advise the government on steps to improve official information machinery. He offered the job to S. Mulgaokar, then an inveterate critic of Nehru's policy on China. Mulgaokar did not join the government because the conditions he laid down were difficult for Nehru to accept. But Nehru did not deviate from his views: "I have no doubt that even if the government dislikes the liberties taken by the press and considers them dangerous, it is wrong to interfere with the freedom of the press."

His daughter, Indira Gandhi, was the first prime minister who, not only gagged the press, but detained journalists without trial and exerted all types of pressure on editors and proprietors to make them fall in line. She paid the price when her Congress Party was defeated at the polls.

No prime minister has dared to curb the press since. They may have shown newspapermen favours like carrying them free in their planes on foreign tours, inviting them for private briefings or even arranging for them bonanzas for Doordarshan. But never have they tried to push or pressurise their critics.

Alas, this cannot be said about the states. Most of them have no commitment to the

freedom of the press. They consider the press an adversary. And they use the same methods of threat, intimidation or even punishment that they employ against their political opponents.

In the recent past, the two states, which have been in the news in this respect, are Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh. The chief ministers of these states have been so harsh towards some journalists and papers that the press on the whole was aback. Chief Minister J. Jayalalitha is sensitive even to limited criticism. She is averse to meeting any journalist. In contrast, UP chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav has good rapport with journalists but he too does not like criticism.

Mulayam Singh is within his right to criticise the press that opposes his 'programme of social justice'. But it is also the prerogative of the press to oppose or criticise the programme. There can be an honest difference of opinion. In no case should he have asked his partymen to stop the distribution of particular newspapers. (In fact, his followers went to the extent of burning the newspapers named).

However critical, a newspaper has every right to disseminate its views so long as it does not transcend the limits of law. It is for readers to decide whether to reject or accept that point of view or whether to read or not to read that paper at all. This is what the press freedom is all about.

The Press under Pressure

The stoppage of advertisements, a step which the government often takes to punish newspapers, is a crude weapon. It matters little to big newspapers and it influences only papers of no consequence. The advertisements are paid from the exchequer, which does not belong to any chief minister. It is called the public exchequer, not the government's exchequer.

True, some in the press sensationalise events and give headlines which are provocative. The language used is also intemperate. A few newspapers in UP are guilty on that count. But the way to counter them is not to resort to halla bolo (attack them). They should be arraigned before the Press Council of India. Mulayam Singh should have been encouraged from his experience that some of the papers, which exaggerated the

spect for the views of others whether one agrees with them or not. This is how there is growth of tolerance, accommodation and social cohesion. In contrast, authoritarian rule is a lawless regime and negation of values and norms to which a democratic polity gives birth.

The stoppage of advertisements, a step which the government often takes to punish newspapers, is a crude weapon. It matters little to big

without newspapers or newspapers without a government. I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter. This does not mean that I am advocating the cause of irresponsible press. In fact, it is incumbent upon the press to be responsible and to show restraint because its waywardness can damage the society irreparably. A printed word in our country has the sanctity which no amount of government propaganda can dictate.

It is not necessary for the government and the press to think alike. It will be a sad day when that happens because those who lay the law and those who point out its violations cannot be on the same side. A society where newspapers begin to sing praises of the government loses its way in the thicket of conformity. The press should never be pro-establishment; its role is that of a custodian of people's rights. Today when politicians have lost their credibility, the public looks towards the press to reinvigorate the values and independent thinking.

I admit that some newspapers in their bid to sell more have jettisoned the high standards that the press in India has followed for years. They have become shops, peddling products, not newspapers. Many journalists too have compromised and followed the tune of the piper who pays. It shows lack of commitment. But this is a sad story of society on the whole. The moral fibre

of the country is breaking down. There is deterioration all round; the press cannot be an island by itself. This is not rationalisation but a fact which the nation must face.

The remedy is not to bribe or threaten journalists but to enable them to do a professional job. This is possible if the government gives them untrammelled access to information. Some will still fail but knowledge will come to govern ignorance. And readers do differentiate between fact and fiction. That UP government faced a crisis goes without saying. But it was too tardy to give information or too secretive unnecessarily. The allegation is that it pressurised newspapers not to publish certain incidents. A few papers in turn went to the other extreme. News agencies should be a help during such times. But one of them withdrew the version of a particular happening. The other one dismissed it in a few sentences.

Somehow, those who occupy high positions in government labour under the belief that they — and they alone — know what the nation should be told and when. And they get annoyed if any news which they do not like appears in print. Their first attempt is to contradict it and dub it mischievous. Later, when it is realised that a mere denial will not convince even the most glib, a lame explanation is offered that things have not been put "in a proper perspective." Probably at that time, the government gets away with its version of the story. But what is not realised is that such methods only damage the credibility of official assertions. There is a case for probe into the working of information set-ups, both at the Centre and in the States.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

account of attacks on the Babri masjid in 1990, during his earlier stint of chief minister, were taken to task by the Press Council of India. It passed strictures against them.

There are also laws against inflammatory writings. The government can approach the courts. Many a time the Union Home Ministry has suggested to the states to initiate cases against such papers which disseminate hatred among the communities. But the government, which is a defender of law, cannot be the law unto itself.

What distinguishes democracy from other forms of government is that it stands for the rule of law, the right to differ and dissent. There is re-

newspapers and it influences only papers of no consequence. The advertisements are paid from the exchequer, which does not belong to any chief minister. It is called the public exchequer, not the government's exchequer.

Assuming the press is irresponsible, the repercussions of suppressing it are far more serious than letting it to be what it is. By imposing restrictions, you do not change anything. You merely suppress the manifestation of certain things, thereby causing the idea and the thought underlying them to spread further.

President Jefferson of America said: 'Were it left for me to decide whether we should have a government

Social Mobilization for Child-Women Development

by Syed Naquib Muslim

IMPROVEMENT of the conditions of children and women is now viewed as one of the important components of social development. The first category of social development includes education, health care and human resource development since these are the factors that influence economic growth. The second category of social development encompasses the development of the underprivileged groups i.e. children and women as an important resource.

It is observed that the state of children and women who comprise a major segment of a national population has not improved as was expected despite deployment of vast resources by the developing countries including Bangladesh. Experience suggests that the government machinery and functionaries alone are not adequate to achieve development of children and women who are underprivileged, deprived and disadvantaged. The need for social mobilization (SM) is therefore urgent to tackle the complex task of child and women development (CWD). Social mobilization has assumed to be a new strategy to achieve the goals of CWD-related programmes adopted either by the government or non-government agencies. In this context, social mobilization is a means while CWD is the end.

UNICEF defines social mobilization as 'the process of briefing together all feasible and practical inter-sectoral social allies to raise people's awareness of and demand for a particular development programme, to assist in the delivery of resources and services and to strengthen community participation for sus-

tainability and self-reliance'. According to Peter Adamson it requires the mobilization not just of one service or sector but of almost every other organized resources — the schools, the mass media, the religious leaders, the non-government organizations, the business community and the professional organization. The features of social mobilization are:

- It is a planned process towards a positive change.
- It has a set of agreed social goals.

Like any other commercial products, behavioral change has to be marketed and only social mobilization can help in meeting this complex goal.

- It demands an organized and a sustained information to and communication with the community.
- It requires active involvement of relevant sectors of the society and is thus based on a coordinated effort.
- It requires mobilization and marshalling of human and material resources available to a society for social development.

One of the core objectives of SM is to effect a behavioral transformation in the common illiterate people. Like any other commercial products, behavioral change has to be marketed and only social mobilization can help in meeting this complex goal. Marketing of behavioral change calls for a change in management strategy which has been successfully evolved by BRAC, a leading non-government organisation. As a part of SM activity, several hundred BRAC workers are going from house to house teaching mothers how to make rehydration solution from sugar, salt and water. They are

teaching face-to-face one person in every home this simple, affordable method. More than one million mothers have already been target of this important lesson.

Because of massive social mobilization work, Bangladesh has demonstrated a high degree of success in EPI. The success is also due to the collaborative efforts of GOs and NGOs. Both GOs and NGOs have developed wide communication network plan.

Efforts have been comparatively limited in Bangladesh. But in the case of EPI this is an exception. Other than Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, a number of other ministries have become allies for undertaking the crucial task of social mobilization. Ministry of Education has incorporated EPI into the school syllabi and involved students in a number of EPI activities. Ministry of Information has allocated 3 minutes of free prime time on radio and television every day. Ministry of Religious Affairs sent an information package to 200,000 imams (religious leaders) throughout the country and special sessions on EPI were held in various thanas. Ministry of Social Welfare and Women's Affairs instructed their staff to get involved in EPI activities through their widespread network in villages. The Cabinet Division issued several instructions/circulars to Deputy Commissioners to get directly involved in monitoring implementation of EPI through the district development coordi-

nation committee.

Bangladesh Television (BTV) under the guidance of Ministry of Information is regularly disseminating useful information or message on nutrition and also imparting knowledge on ORI, diarrhoea control, use of iodized salt, use of low-cost contraceptives, value of breast feeding etc. Continuous education through TV or radio on the use of vaccination and oral rehydration therapy is important because

these lost-cost interventions not only prevent at least half of child deaths, it can also have far-reaching effects on the quality of children's future life. BTV is also telecasting educational feature programme to sensitise the public on female education, birthspacing, safe motherhood, danger of early marriages/pregnancies, adult education etc. Many of these programmes are sponsored/financed by the local NGOs like BRAC and donor agencies like UNICEF which are working to gear up the social mobilization process. Special short films like 'Meena' are also being produced and exhibited in the rural areas to upgrade the knowledge of illiterate mothers on maternal and child health activities.

Primary and Mass Education Division (PMED) has also come forward for mobilizing the rural community in sharing knowledge and information on the important aspects of their lives. PMED has opened in 79 thanas of 64 districts 'Village Education Meeting Centre'. These cen-

tres are similar to Community Centres for learning introduced by the Philippine government for mobilizing villagers in welfare activities. These centres are equipped with journals, magazines, dailies and books. Pictorial posters with important messages on family planning, health, forestry, literacy, livestock are distributed among the villagers. Each centre has one set of radio and television for those who do not have access to these facilities.

Every year government

through its relevant ministries observes World Health Day on August 25 and Literacy Day on September 9. The relevant ministries with the aid of the district and thana administration organise rallies, seminars on the importance of CW health and literacy. Rallies are joined by the concerned ministers, local administrators, school teachers, students, union parishad 'chairmen/members. These rallies attract the attention of the common people and in this process a demonstration effect occurs. To encourage and intensify community participation, district authorities are organising these rallies. This year (1994), under the leadership of Abdul Matin Khandaker, Deputy Commissioner, Tangail boyscouts, school teachers, health workers, local public representatives, administrators have organised one of the biggest rallies in the country to give widest possible publicity on the importance of literacy in economic development and of raising health consciousness of mothers and children

among the common people. Booklets, have been produced in Bangla language, posters were printed, large banners were displayed, stickers were fixed on the government and public vehicles, and supplements in national dailies were published to disseminate important messages on CW health.

Inter-ministerial collaboration and cooperation is a prerequisite for achieving mobilization at the government level. For example, for prevention of iodine deficiency-related diseases of children and women, a salt committee was formed in 1983 through a gazette notification dated August 20, 1989 involving officials of various ministries/agencies like Ministry of Food, Ministry of Industries, Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Local Government, Ministry of Health and Institute of Public Health. Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare is the chairman of the committee. The committee meets every six months to formulate policies, instructions, and recommendations regarding manufacturing, distribution or marketing of iodized salt throughout Bangladesh.

Ministry of Education, Ministry of Women and Social Affairs, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Ministry of Industries working in the similar field are regularly holding inter-ministerial meetings to reinforce their efforts to meet the needs of the clientele. In these meetings, the areas of priority are identified and measures for effective implementation of CWD schemes are adopted.

The writer is Thana Nirbahi Officer, Tangail Sadar, Tangail.

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.

'Why Newsprint Crisis': A clarification

Sir, Our attention has been drawn to your editorial 'Why Newsprint Crisis' published on 27th Dec '94. We give herein under our factual clarification to the same:

The Khulna Newsprint Mills Ltd is the only newsprint producing factory in the country. The annual production capacity of the factory is about 48,000 MT. Since inception the Mill has so long met the total requirement of the country. After meeting the total requirement of the country the Mill exported quite substantial quantity of newsprint to India, Nepal, Pakistan, Burma etc. up to 1992-93.

The production and monthly demand of Newsprint are as under:

Production	Quantity
Daily (Avg.)	135-140 MT
Monthly (Avg.)	4000-4200 MT
Yearly (Avg.)	47000-48000 MT

Monthly demand:
Newsprint Industries (As per ABC report) 4100 MT

Industrial buyers	960 MT
Govt. Semi-Govt.	
Organization	400 MT
Dealers (770 Nos.)	1540 MT
Total Monthly demand	7000 MT
Monthly Prod.	4000 MT
Monthly Shortage	3000 MT

Out of the monthly production of 4000 MTs, 3000 MTs are being distributed to only newspaper industries. Rest 1000 MTs are being supplied to NCTBB, Department of Mass Education, Publishers and other buyers. After supplying 3000 MT to newspaper industries, priority is being given to Mass Education and NCTBB in distributing newsprint. Newsprint is also being supplied to all the educational institutions of the country through Dy. Commissioners of the districts.

It may be mentioned here that considering the huge gap between the production of and demand for newsprint, Government has withdrawn the import ban on newsprint and any importer can now import newsprint without any hindrance.

We would like to point out that the production of newsprint remained normal as per

capacity of the Mill and this year also the KNM will produce 48000 MT of newsprint as per production target. So your allegation of sharp fall in production is not based on fact.

Further, it may be mentioned here that the selling price of newsprint is only Tk. 19880/- per MT which is by far the lowest in comparison with the price of newsprint in any other neighbouring country, although the cost of production is much higher than the selling price.

Mirza A. Matin
Sr. General Manager (PR)
BCIC, Dhaka.

Tokai

Sir, Most of us hear or read about tokais/urchins. We see them almost everywhere in the capital city. It can be said that they are not primarily responsible for their lot/situation. The society and the system cannot disown the responsibility for their condition.

While we often hear about the negative aspects of tokais, the positive side is rarely talked about, like — keeping watch over the cars, carrying the load of shoppers at bazaars, pushing rickshaws on steep bridges and so on.

Recently two pictures of tokais came out in local English daily newspapers. One picture showed them playing on a traffic-free wide city

street on a hartal day. The other picture showed a tokai being rounded up by a policeman on a hartal day — his offense not mentioned.

Your second editorial 'Stop this child bashing' on 14.11.94 was very well-meaning and thought provoking. Let the society, the well-off citizens, City Mayor and NGOs think about initiating some programmes to bring about improvement in the life and lot of the tokais. We may also give them some names other than tokais/urchins which would reflect a more positive, rather than derogatory, attitude towards these disadvantaged children.

Habib Sadat Chaudhury
Hs. 11 Rd. 14, Gulshan, Dhaka-1212.

STAR TV

Sir, Since April '94, The Star (Satellite Television Asia Region) TV has launched satellite broadcasting and by now nearly 53 countries in our region — nearly half of the world population — are receiving 24-hour coverage of news, music, sports, entertainments from India, Pakistan and Myanmar and Chinese language programmes simply by using satellite dishes which have also become status symbols to some by now.

With Asia Sat 1, STAR TV's transmission satellite, beaming

signals from geostationary orbit high above the equator, dishes are also sprouting from roofs of remote farmhouses besides those on urban apartment towers, gathering information and entertainment so far not available. Thanks to the democratic government for not blocking the services in the name of unknown/new influences.

The 'STAR' is serving as a pioneer in challenging the regulatory restrictions that bind Asia's hand and foot in terms of the free flow of information and entertainments, though still under some sort of restrictions in Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia. But the Star is born over Asia and there is no denying the fact that the people of Bangladesh in general desire to see the programmes and if possible the programmes of the latest one — the Star Movies — even by paying for its distribution via cable, microwave or satellite master antenna.

Our lives are rather spoiled by infighting among ourselves, poor economic restrictions, bad-blood between many a group — some political, other religious. We have very few places to go for entertainments and so many other odd situations. So why not have the pleasure of viewing at home what are available!

Col (rd) Mirza Shafi
Banani, Dhaka

Early schooling

Sir, We notice that since the past one decade the flow of early schooling of infants between the age of three to three and half years of age have fast crept up. Is it advisable to put infants of that tender age to school? Will it not be a burdensome mental and physical stress on the poor little infants?

We understand, that in the developing countries, most parents work and so, they are obliged to leave their infants at a day-care centre, where infants usually play around at their free will and learn of poetry, rhymes and alphabets and are by no means pressurised. But things are not quite the same with us here where parents rush their infants at 'play groups' where actual schooling begins. Infants of that tender age are forced to memorise poems, rhymes and alphabets and even attentions are seriously looked upon. In our days, say three to four decades back, we normally started school at the age of five to six years that is when a child is grown enough to accumulate lessons without too much of a stress.

Now the question is: have we really taken the ideas of the developing countries of early schooling without knowing the facts or was not the earlier system wiser?

Khawja Viqar Mohtuddin
Dhaka.