

## 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 lottoed 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 fenside, 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 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 Banchharam branch of the Bangladesh Krishni 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 exercised 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 bananazas for Doordarshan. But never have they tried to push or pressure their critics.

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

# The Press under Pressure

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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 A 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 transgress 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.

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-

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.

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