

Coloured Newsprint

We have been taken a bit by surprise at the haste with which the government changed its announced policy of supplying coloured newsprint to the print media.

We are fully behind the effort of the ministry of information in bringing some sort of clarity and transparency in this matter.

A group of newspaper owners recently met the information minister and put pressure on him to desist from implementing the aforementioned decision.

We would like to urge the information minister to hold an open discussion with all sections of the print media and resolve the question of adequate supply of newsprint to the newspapers.

What is a Gift?

Certain buses that transport students of universities and other academia carry strange legends.

There are things so petty that people do not care to react to these for fear of becoming small-minded themselves.

If these buses were cases of the PM's personal charity, her left hand shouldn't have known what her right hand gave.

Everyone tries to ignore those writings on the bus. It's a trifle after all. But when last Wednesday chiefs of six educational institutions were herded to an audience with the Prime Minister.

The Spirit of Asoka

Sri Lanka's international image has suffered irreparably because of the bloody Tamil-Sinhalese strife. But the violence-only image, forcefully buttressed by the Bandarnaik to Dissanaik assassination chain, is both unjust and untrue.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga's overtures to LTTE are showing their first encouraging results. One gets the feeling that hers may prove a regime not only of reconciliation but also of recovery.

The Daily Star on Friday published an interesting picture of two young women tourists enjoying the site of a herd of young elephants cavorting in water.

Why Can't They Withdraw Their Resignation?

by M M Sunnah

THE article 67 (2) of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh reads as follows: "A member of Parliament may resign his seat by writing under his hand addressed to the Speaker."

Based on the interpretation of the said article the Opposition parliamentarians, who have resigned recently, are claiming that they cannot withdraw their resignation letters, which were submitted to the Speaker.

The argument appears to be genuine. It is not polluted by obstinacy. One cannot expect the parliamentarians to disobey the strict principles of the Constitution.

Everybody knows that Chief Justice Shahabuddin, who was holding an office of profit, never resigned. He was holding the post of the Chief Justice during the tenure of his presidency. It was totally ultra vires of the Constitution. What happened to the defenders of the Constitution at that time?

principles always had a preponderance over our state's welfare? We get the answer if we look into our recent history.

We get the answer if we look into our recent history. In 1990, during the last hours of Ershad's regime, Chief Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed suddenly took oath as the Vice President of Bangladesh.

Let me clear the matter for those who never thought of the problem. According to article 48 (4) (b) of the Constitution prior to the 12th Amendment a person disqualifies to be a President or Vice President if he/she disqualifies to contest in a parliamentary election.

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is badly drafted, then people or judges may require to seek intention of the Parliament in other parts of the Act itself.

The framers of the Constitution might not have foreseen the full effect of the words used in it.

Obviously, they never foresaw a situation when 147 members of the Parliament would resign together.

Yet, we don't know whether the Speaker is entitled to receive such writing officially when the Parliament is not in session.

Now, we urge our leaders to look into the present crisis in a rational manner. Our history reveals that we have acted reasonably in the past in time of a national crisis.

Why can't we do it now? Since we all agree that there is no necessity for the Opposition parliamentarians to resign, after PM's agreement to resign 30 days before the elections, then let not the parliamentary process be disrupted just for a few misinterpreted words.

The author is a lawyer, and is involved in human rights movement in Bangladesh. He worked for several years with UNHCR in Malaysia as a legal expert.

The 'Monetary' Politics and the Politics of 'Money'

by Abdul Bayes

The fact that "without money nothing can be done" is, perhaps, more true and pervasive in the case of today's politics than anything else. It is being said that in Bangladesh one has to spend on average 10 lakh Taka to complete the parliamentary election, pass or fail notwithstanding.

IN our early days, we used to hear about or listen to politicians who happened to be tall order professionals like lawyers, doctors, engineers, professors, etc.

Moneyed people no doubt but the money they so earned was mostly by their sweats in court buildings, classrooms or hospitals. A large chunk of that hard earned money used to be spent in constantly feeding the constituency in terms of various social, educational and economic events.

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reported to emerge as heroes in the fight.

The Political Industry!

Suppose you are an MP. People would like to say that your earnings could be at least Tk 30,000 per month through various allowances and privileges provided to you.

If you are a little bit smart and have acquired the secrets of money making, your earning per month could be Tk 50,000 or Tk 30 lakh after five years.

The money-politics nexus depicted above is a common phenomenon in and around us. The Sunday (27 Nov-3 Dec 1994) published some interesting episodes of huge money amassed by politicians of India.

in terms of failures but, especially, not for those who have already been endowed with vast sums of "black money" that the election is supposed to make "white".

The money-politics nexus depicted above is a common phenomenon in and around us. The Sunday (27 Nov-3 Dec 1994) published some interesting episodes of huge money amassed by politicians of India.

The former Governor of Punjab, Mr Surendra Nath and his entire family was wiped out by a plane crash. But before the mourning could end, the press flashed the horrible news of Rs 44 crore that was reported to be found in the late Governor's house.

said something about the manner in which politicians and public officials are regarded today. Not only do people expect our rulers to be corrupt, they are not shocked by the corruption when it is divulged.

Newspapers also headlined another Surendra in recent months. He is Mr Surendra Jain - a successful businessman having links with top-ranking officials and politicians.

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remains that the news was not a bolt from the blue for Indian voters whose expectations from their leaders are not far away from Jain's list.

The Sauce and the Source

Where do the huge sums come from? The Sunday mentioned that defence is one of the gold-mines. Each year, India purchases defence goods worth Rs 23,000 crore.

Similarly, the power and the energy sector is a booming one where huge sums are amassed. It is also alleged that the recent privatisation and liberalisation efforts are also giving rise to some rent-seeking in terms of the timing and sequencing of reforms.

The Pots and the Sauce

Although the expenditure pattern varies across politicians, generally two types of expenses are preferred and considered as legitimate. First, the election money. Any politician willing to contest in a state assembly seat has to spend Rs 10 lakh (the permissible figure is 1.5 lakh) and that for the Lok Sabha seat, the amount heaves up to Rs 50 lakh.

capture election booths and these cadres also claim a large slice. There is hardly any way that this huge expenses could be managed following the rules of the society's game.

Besides, today's politicians are obliged to groom a dream of the richest class of the society. They like to send children outside for better education, hover the hopes of building cosy houses in posh areas and buying expensive cars etc.

Fight for the Light

It would however be naive to conclude that, by and large, politicians are species of the kind mentioned above. There are still lot of honest, dedicated and sacrificing leaders in and around us whose services could hardly be questioned.

They are struggling to eke out a living following the rules of the game but unfortunately the realities are such as to revolt against them. As days pass by corrupt politicians appear to drive honest ones out of circulation. We should continue to side with the latter and fight out the former.

The writer is a Professor of Economics and Dean of Social Sciences, Jahangirnagar University.

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.

Sylhet Division

Sir, Nearly three months ago the hon'ble Prime Minister had announced the formation of Sylhet Division. Procedural formalities are yet to be completed to commence all necessary activities of a proper division. We hope the authority will do the needful at an early date.

This, we believe, will be a testimony to the Prime Minister's declaration of Sylhet Division.

Motius Samad Chowdhury, Housing Estate, Sylhet

'The Third View'

Sir, You deserve deep appreciation of the silent majority for 'The Third View' appearing on the 6th December. Hope that other leading newspapers especially the Bengali newspapers will take the cue and project the views of the silent majority, the main beneficiary of the Constitution of Bangladesh, the Sovereign. The Constitution is their MAGNA CARTA.

sacred constitution of which they, the citizens, are the supreme authority and only they must say when and how to amend the same. The rest are only their agents. The constitution guarantees the fundamental rights of the citizens, the ultimate authority of the constitution, vide Articles 7 and 11 of the Constitution.

(1) All powers in the republic belong to the people and their exercise on behalf of the people shall be effected only under, and by the authority of the constitution.

(2) This Constitution is, as the solemn expression of the will of the people, the supreme law of the Republic, and if any other law is inconsistent with this constitution that other law shall, to the extent of the inconsistency, be void.

(11) The Republic shall be a democracy in which fundamental human rights and freedom and respect for the dignity and worth of human person shall be guaranteed.

Now let us see what is the plight of the people who are the author ('the solemn expression of the people') of the constitution and whose dignity is guaranteed by Article 11.

The opposition calls hartal during which period all shops, business establishments, etc remain shut and cars, trucks, buses, rickshaws are not allowed on the street. The effect is that our freedom of movement, freedom to earn livelihood are restrained by the opposition. Then where, is our

freedom and dignity guaranteed by our sacred Constitution. Isn't this violation of our Constitution? Should not some one go to the supreme court for a verdict? We are no longer prepared for such indignity from those whom we send to the parliament to protect the constitution and our dignity, honour and means of livelihood.

I have nothing against the hartals but let it be free from coercion and threat. Let it be the means of voluntarily expressing ones likes or dislikes, protests or approval. Enough damage has been done to the country by various political movements but real achievements for the benefit of the people have been very few.

Let us not be treated like cattle driven at will into the pens for limited periods to graze and drink. Let us protest en masse and find out a real leader, there must be one somewhere. Time has come for the leader of the silent majority to come out and take hold of the banner and rush to proclaim that enough is enough and mobilise forces against the cattle ranchers.

Let us not miss the opportunity that is coming for us to live in dignity. Let us for once be serious and try for national conciliation. Let us remove all controversy of the past and forge a unity which can only be

done by removing the irritants that are inhibiting our every day life.

Let us analyze a little: There was a time when the ryots or prajas were under the clutches of the money lenders and the zamindars. Sher-e-Bangla Fazlul Huq who was Chief Minister of the united Bengal fought for the emancipation of the ryots from the clutches of the Mahajans and was successful inspite of the opposition from vested interests, and enacting Debt Settlement Boards in Bengal.

Sheikh Mujib who was Muslim League in pre 1947 days stood up against the conspiracy of West Pakistanis and finally mobilised the East Bengales against the conspirators under the banner of Awami Muslim League (the world 'Muslim' was later dropped after the abolition of separate electorate). Indeed Sheikh Mujib was the major force behind the movement. Another Muslim League Maulana Bhasani was staunch east Bengal Nationalist who splintered from Awami Muslim League and formed National Awami Party. So all of them have played important roles in history of Bangladesh.

If I am not wrong, in 1954 by an enactment of the East Bengal Assembly by the way if I am correct the province and its Government was named as East Bengal and remained so till the two unit system was introduced) the Permanent Settlement was abolished removing all feudalism from East Bengal (East Pakistan) now Bangladesh.

What I want to say here is that whatever we have achieved here in Bangladesh has been possible due to the cumulative effect of certain positive measures taken over the years. It has not been a day's work and no single person or party can claim the whole credit. So why don't we

accept the history and recognise all our predecessors irrespective of their political beliefs?

Why do we squabble over petty things. Let there be an all-party grand national convention to sit down with smiling faces and recognising all the leaders of the past, and burying the hatchets, take sacred steps for a forward march into the new millennium.

A reader Dhaka

Political deadlock

Sir, What next in Bangladesh politics? Our esteemed and patriotic opposition members have abandoned the Parliament, a place which they could use as an ideal venue for realising their noble ends!

Meanwhile, I would request both ruling and opposition parties to re-consider their stands giving priority to the national interests and the welfare of the people. Whatever the lapses might be, the current democratic government has indeed succeeded in introducing democracy in Bangladesh and in gearing up the socio-economic development process - the achievement is significant.

I honestly hope that all the sides would demonstrate true patriotic norms and values in containing the present impasse through dialogue. If some mediator is needed, please do not go for foreigners but form a mediator-group taking representatives from among our mehnati manush (working people). This idea may sound ridiculous but this is, I believe, what we should do. Let this mediator group's opinions help in taking our future political decisions.

M Zahidul Haque, Assistant Professor, BAI, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka

Man of the year

Sir, I am very pleased to read that The Daily Star has elected Dr Muhammad Yunus as "The Man of the Year". You have selected him very carefully and intelligently - where impartiality acted upon the issue. As a development worker at the grassroots level, I visited the Grameen at several places of rural Bangladesh and found 'the disadvantaged and poor women and the landless have got an identity to survive on their own feet. Grameen in Bangladesh is the silver lining out in the dark clouds.

In true sense, Dr Yunus does not merely work. He works with a TEAM (T-Together, E-Everyone, A-Achieves, M-More) approach (cited from the John Hopkins University/ Centre for Communication Programmes) which can be treated as SMART (S-Specific, M-Measurable, A-Attainable, R-Reasonable, T-Time bound) efforts for the rural Bangladeshis.

Realising the fact, I would like to appeal Dr Yunus and his team to take initiative for the slum dwellers in the city areas of Bangladesh. Development efforts of different quarters for the slum dwellers appear to me as cosmetic. Dr Yunus and Grameen - both are special in implementation of real and sustainable development. May this new year be filled with special memories and wonderful moments and may Grameen always find happiness for the disadvantaged in the years ahead.

I would like to see Dr Yunus as the Secretary General of the United Nations one day, to take the lead role for alleviating poverty and ensuring welfare of all races and cultures of the world. Gopal Sen Gupta, 32/3, Sukrabad (4th Floor), Dhaka 1207