

It's a Shame for BNP

Nothing could have embarrassed the BNP chief more and revealed the rot within her party so glaringly than the factional clash in Narsingdi, that led to the death of one party MP, and setting on fire of the house of another, with family members inside. The shameful event occurred just as Begum Zia was holding BNP's Dhaka Divisional Representatives' Conference at her Hare Road office in Dhaka.

At first we would like to raise the ethical, moral and legal issue of the Prime Minister using government-provided premises for her party conference. The building, the facilities available in it, and the right to use them belong to Begum Zia only to discharge her functions as the elected Prime Minister of the country. She cannot use them for her party work. It contravenes all norms of accountability and governance. It is alarming that the PM uses government office, and official facilities to plan her re-election campaign, which is what her Saturday's meeting amounted to. Some people in BNP and in the government may find our argument too small, and even petty, to pay any attention to. But it is such behaviour of the ruling party that give credence to the opposition's fear that BNP will go all out to use official facilities to influence the next election.

Coming back to the killing and arson in Narsingdi, they indicate that Begum Zia's worst fears are not too far from reality. There are several district-level bodies of the party which are divided to the extent that the central leaders have failed to name district committees for a long time. In other places rivalries within existing party hierarchy have become so intense that they can erupt into open violence any time, as happened in Narsingdi. Added to this is the complaint of the grass-roots workers that central leaders have become totally detached from them. An indication of Begum Zia's problems is exemplified by the fact that she was not able to bring about major changes at the central level during her last party convention. After an year, she was compelled to rename the same people with some cosmetic changes. Her failure to respond to the widespread demand of the BNP workers that party office-bearers should not hold ministerial portfolios indicates the reluctance of party stalwarts to solely devote themselves to party work. They all want the 'benefits' of being a minister. All this, over the last four and a half years, have led to a severe rot within the ruling party. This, many feel, Begum Zia is either totally unaware of, or has preferred to ignore for reasons best known to her. But the net result is that she is now saddled with a party which is severely torn from within. To face the next election, her first challenge will be to quell factionalism within BNP. This will be a real test of her leadership.

A Fair Deal to Workers

Today is May Day — the international workers day. That it was not instituted by any government or party or any other agency and just evolved over the years in remembrance of the 1886 Haymarket Square shooting of a number of labour hands — nothing of a world shaking nature really — has been instrumental in making it a truly universal event. An event with a cause. A cause representing the interests of the largest segment of humanity, namely, the workers.

Now that the war-cry of 'Workers of the World Unite' does not reverberate round the globe and even militant trade unionism is also on the wane — how are the workers doing the world over? In the industrially developed North they are decidedly on a good stead. This is saying it only comparatively and does not amount to saying they are enjoying a human deal. German steel workers struck the other day for wage hikes and other standard demands and automobile shop hands in India paralysed the Maruti plant to ensure that profit does not become their company's only concern.

In the developing South there are not as many jobs as there are people. Here to enter the jobs market is enough achievement for most workers — like Bangladesh's garments girls. A human deal is beyond their dreams.

Stunned first by the collapse of European socialism and stilled by the situations in the North and South — the workers seemingly are wilfully allowing the globe a kind of reprieve. But it shall of necessity be a short one. Workers are almost all of humanity, a weaver is now a textile worker and the peasant a farm hand. If this largest chunk of people do not live as man should live — in freedom and dignity and towards a life of realising everyone's potential — the world will not have arrived at any sustainably sound spot.

Healing the Unheeding Disease

Speakers at a seminar in city on Saturday called upon the authorities to act in the matter of 903 industrial units identified by government to be causing environmental pollution. They expect the government to immediately conduct an Environment Impact Analysis in these units and install effluent treatment plants there. The speakers and indeed the whole of the nation may rest assured that nothing of the kind is going to happen. The reward is so clear. In spite of protestations galore by the government and relentless newspaper denunciations not one motor vehicle has been reformed on pain of punishment not to spew black smoke.

The government has become, over a surprisingly short span of time, adept in turning a deaf ear to all demands and clamour for action. And government must be healed of this disease lest the state should itself be harmed beyond repair.

The Daily Star is at present developing a campaign: *Save Dhaka*. Unless our governments, this and the next ones, commits their whole attention and turn their full power to addressing the challenge of saving Dhaka, the nation would certainly be shrunk by a cataclysmic disaster. The government, for the moment the present one, must imply its ears and for a start begin to listen to what people feel and say. With this present campaign, one in a series of many, we also embark on a mission to make government not only to listen but respond as well.

We want to test how far government imperviousness can withstand such soundings on its ear. We are confident that as a necessary part of open and transparent government, this all important political institution will also begin to be accessible.

HERE has been a fresh spurt of reports in the newspaper media lately about framing of a new consumer protection law. Besides, the World Consumers Day had been observed just a few weeks earlier. Here is a topic that would do nicely for the next weekly column. I thought, So I sat down at the typewriter, hoping that it would be spitting out strings of words and *voilà!* The write-up would be all there, ready for the newspaper desk!

Alas, words failed to flow from the keyboard. Fidgeting about, my eyes fell on the wall calendar. May be the taciturn typewriter brought on the twiddle and made me look around. Anyway, there it was on the calendar. If my regular weekly column does not get dislodged from its usual slot then it would come out on May Day. It would look odd to talk only about consumer rights on a May Day, the typewriter, the sole companion and keeper of my conscience for the moment, seemed to insinuate.

Now, all my working life I have been fairly enthusiastic about May Day. Not so much for reasons of significance of the day. I would confess readily. Rather, the spirit rose because it would be public holiday — a release from the daily grind. Other than that, I knew precious little about May Day.

To start with, May Day used to mark (still does perhaps) an important European festival, said to be originating from pre-Christian fertility ceremonies. Celebrations on the occasion would include erection of painted/maypole — decked with flowers, round which the revellers would dance — election of May king or queen, burning bonfires. As it happened, the first day of May also came to be designated by the Second Socialist International

What exactly are the rights of consumers? Experts generally agree that the consumer has a right to safety and predictability of product. The medicine that he buys must save rather than harm life. The oven that his family uses must not leak gas, causing a conflagration. . . Adulterated edible oil, laced with machine oil, must not be palmed off as the genuine product. . .

as the day honouring labour. This May Day came to be recognised as the international labour holiday. Apparently, this is the May Day we celebrate.

Before proceeding further and even at the risk of sounding slightly pedantic, I ought to delve a little into the history of socialism to clarify the matter a bit. The First International — the Workingmen's Association — was established in 1864 under the leadership of Marx. The aim was to unite workers and achieve political power. The First International was dissolved in 1876 after conflict with anarchists. The Second or Socialist International was established in 1889. It was dominated by Social Democrats who generally advocated socialism within democratic framework, adhering to evolutionary means of achieving power. The Second Socialist International broke up during World War I. However, May Day survived.

This, indeed, is only a cursory glance at the history of socialism in Europe but would do for now to answer a little bit of curiosity about the May Day we have learnt to observe. There is yet another May Day (a single word, mark it) which serves as international distress signal of ships and planes. Derived from the French *m'aidez*, meaning help me, the word lends an impression of disaster to May Day.

So here is May Day burdened with at least three meanings. A May Day that traditionally has stood for a festival in honour of spring. A May Day that honours workingmen and socialism. And a May Day

that signals distress and calamity.

So much for May Day. The World Consumers Day is relatively recent origin. It's a post-World War II phenomenon really, marking the year of adoption of the Guidelines for Consumer Protection by the United Nations. It was the 10th anniversary of the occasion this year.

The event is also known as World Consumer Rights Day. The main theme this year was "Know Your Rights." The May Day we observe is also basically concerned with workers' rights. Besides, workers are consumers too. Concerns on

dried fish — all these posing health hazards.

Goods sold to the consumer must be predictable with respect to quality and standard, weight and measure. The services rendered to the consumer must be of the requisite grade. A physician has to heal the patient rather than make him suffer more. An amateur public transport operator could cause an accident, resulting in loss of life and limb of his passengers as well as other road users. The consumer has a right to claim that professionals who render service to him must have the qualification to do so. Likewise,

brand name. It usually devolves on the manufacturer to ensure safety and predictability of the goods marketed. That perhaps is one of the reasons why counterfeiting worries makers of brand-name products. Counterfeiters not only cause them immediate economic loss but also hurt their reputation which affects future income streams.

Then the consumer has the right to choose the product or the service he prefers. He deserves to try to obtain the best value for his money. The consumer should be given as wide a choice as possible to select the item of his preference from a range of competing products. Restrictions on commerce, restrictive trade practices, monopolies, would tend to interfere with the exercise of choice by the consumer. Misleading advertisements also could lead the consumer astray, denying him the best value for money. Nor would it do for professionals to form cartels, barring the consumer's access to services of his choice.

For obtaining satisfaction on all such concerns, the consumer also needs a right to protest. This calls for a legal framework which would permit the consumer to register protests, in a legitimate way, against the wrongs done to him, real or imaginary, and claim redress.

As for the price of a product or service, the situation is rather hazy. The consumer has a claim to fair price. However, it also depends on how free he was in exercising his choice.

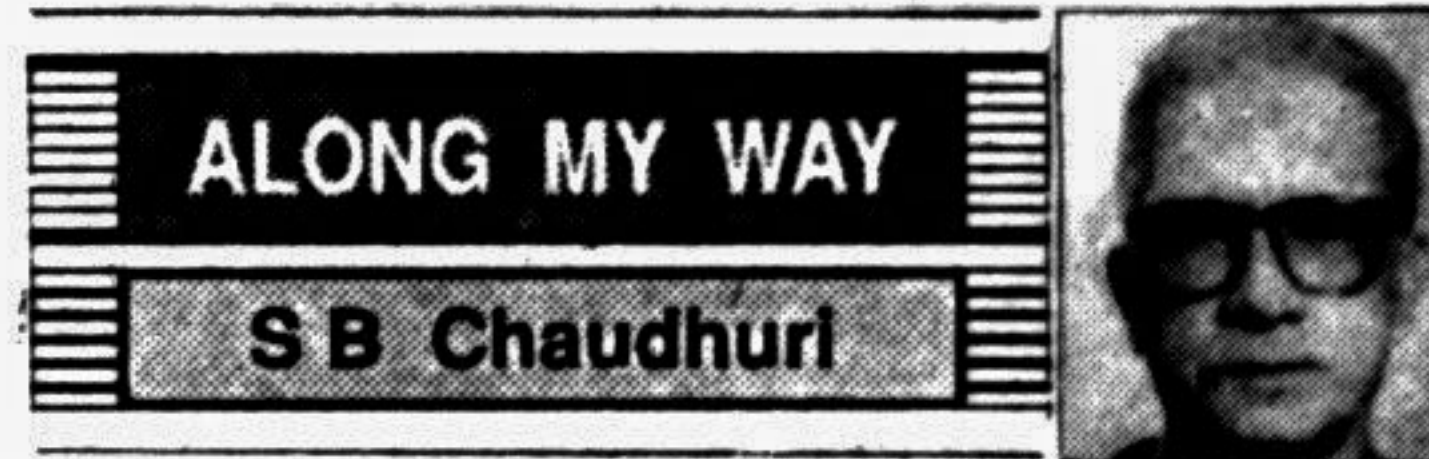
For instance, the consumer could be held partly to blame

for buying a counterfeit product in consideration of "unbelievable" low price. The consumer is a victim of the fraud all right but he could also have walked into it with eyes wide open.

Society recognises the need for a bulwark against infringement of consumer rights. The proposed new law for consumer protection might work just that way if it can bring speedy justice. The law could also help teach the consumer his rights. The initiative would perhaps serve its purpose even better if informational and educational programmes are simultaneously taken on hand to heighten awareness of consumer rights.

Meanwhile, consumers go about protecting their rights the best they can. Talking of recent events, there was this report of consumers in a district town staging a hartal to protest against sale of spurious edible oil. Newspapers also spoke of the Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers' Association (BELA) going to the court of law to seek redress against ecological damage and health hazard posed by emissions of lead-laced gas from automobiles and the use of audible signalling devices, presumably referring to the high-pitched sound of motor-horn.

As for happenings abroad, Reuter reported from Tokyo the other day that hay fever sufferers in a city nearby were suing the government for nearly half a million dollar compensation for over-planting cedar trees which, they said, had caused their allergy. They were holding the government responsible for the scattering of pollen caused by the clipping of the trees' branches. All these may sound a bit fanciful to us but well, that's the way consumers at times sally forth to protect their rights!



both these occasions seem to intermingle.

What exactly are the rights of consumers? Experts generally agree that the consumer has a right to safety and predictability of product. The medicine that he buys must save rather than harm life. The oven that his family uses must not leak gas, causing a conflagration. The boiler that he bought to produce steam must not be such that it could explode anytime, bringing death and destruction. Adulterated edible oil, laced with machine oil, must not be palmed off as the genuine product. Harmful additives must not be used in food stuff — urea for puffing rice, DDT as preservative for

a product must be what it professes to be. It must be exact in quality, weight and measure. The product also has to conform to its description, not a counterfeit or of sub-standard quality.

The quest for safety and predictability confers on the consumer the right to know in advance the quality and contents of a product. At the least, the vendor should have an obligation to tell the buyer what the product contains or how good its quality is. Where the product bears a liable, that should spell out clearly what it contains, the standard it lays claim to, safety risks, if any, and the weight or measure. Where the product carries a

May Day — for Whom? Who Celebrate?

by Muhammad Quamrul Islam

1st May is a government holiday. Will the workers be able to enjoy it? How many of them can get a paid holiday? 'No work — no pay' is their lot. Government employees will no doubt enjoy it in varying proportions. Most workers of our country are not even aware of May Day and its significance. But, it is their day!

and IV employees, under the Government, comprise public servants. They are accountable, as much as the Minister is; no doubt the degree will vary according to administrative hierarchy and span of control. But, at no stage accountability can be 'zero', even if he is a class III or class IV employee of the Government. Still then, frequently we come across statements from the sufferers and honest trade union leaders that public servants behave like public lords, and look at them spitefully! It appears that the Ministry of Establishment and its different Training Institutes have not taken cognizance of this awful situation. There must be defects somewhere, either in the training model or trainee's aversion to humane behaviour. Whatever it might be, the powerful Administrative Training and Management Centres/Complex/Academy can take a serious view of the matter, undertake an in-depth analysis and find a way out, to give some solace to the workers and the people, alike. After all, it is a constitutional obligation and public servants should not scorn the public, who pay for their salary and allowances etc.

It would be in the fitness of things to recall historic events of May Day. It is a labour day, which is internationally observed; to commemorate the martyrs of the labour movement for 8-hour work a day, at Chicago in the United States of America on May 3, 1886. On that day, police opened fire on the labour rally and demonstrators, who were demanding 8-hour instead of 12 to 18-hour work a day, and killed six workers. On the following day i.e. May 4, 1886, police again fired on the peaceful protest meeting and killed five labourers on the spot. Many were in-

jured. They arrested eight workers on the charge of alleged attack on them. The labourers of America and European countries lodged protest against the killing at Hay Market Square of Chicago, and demanded release of the arrested workers. But, the then ruling Elite of America ignored the international demand and sentenced them to death in 1887. Later at an International Congress in Paris in 1889 it was decided to observe May 1 every year as labour day, international workers solidarity and demand day.

One hundred nine years (1886-1995) have passed by and the impact of May Day has been felt far and wide. International Labour Organization (ILO) is working around the world; 8-hour work day has been internationally acknowledged. Naturally, inquisitiveness arises as to what is happening in Bangladesh? We have Ministry of Labour and its Agencies i.e. Directorate of Labour, Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training, Labour offices abroad, Inspector of Factories, Minimum Wages Board, Labour Court, National Wages and Productivity Commission. There is no scarcity of fund to meet the revenue and development expenses of the Govt. officers and staff in those organizations. But, then, what is the output? What benefits workers are deriving from the Government out-fit? We have tried to find answers to these questions from the up-to-date publications, bulletins, workers' and labour leaders' (whose credibility are not at stake) met by the by. It is found that most workers of our country have not yet received the benefit of 8-hour work a day. Still the impact of May Day has not been felt in our country, by way of appropriate working hours, wage, compensation, welfare and security.

There has been a welcome influx of female workers, out of sheer necessity to survive, but their problems have remained out of sight of the policy makers, ministers, bureaucrats and labour leaders. Most of the female worker work about 18-hour a day and frequently their wages are less than their male counterparts. There are also different types or harassment of the toiling female workers, whether in factories or outside. They do not get due remuneration to maintain themselves at seven subsistence level, not to speak of rest and recreation. It seems neither time nor taka is available to them. They are working in mills, garment factories, cottage crafts etc. As day labourer, foot path shop-keeper, domestic servant and vendor of low priced commodities also a large number of women try to earn their bare livelihood.

1st May is a government holiday. Will the workers be able to enjoy it? How many of them can get a paid holiday? 'No work — no pay' is their lot. Government employees will no doubt enjoy it in varying proportions. Most workers of our country are not even aware of May Day and its significance. But, it is their day. Those who arrange seminars, meetings, processions, raise full-throated slogans for the workers, are not labourers. They have little connection with labour. And their commitment and promises are not beyond question. It is seen that those workers who came with placards and festoons, on the instruction of the leaders to attend May Day rally etc, can hardly read and understand what are written thereat. They are illiterate. Can it contribute towards improving the lot of the workers?

This year some organizations are observing May Day in

protest of killing of 17 workers recently. What was their demand? The private sector workers and employees are not getting minimum salary according to the recommendation of Wages Commission. The salaries of the Government officers and employees have been increased by 10 per cent. In the pre-independence period, there was virtually no difference between Govt. and private sector. In jute and textile sector, wages were determined through collective bargaining.

From 1991, the minimum wage in the govt-owned enterprises is Tk 950/- monthly and that in the private sector is Tk 560. Is the demand for Tk 950 monthly unjustified, considering the present price level and need of the family? Okay, some might say about

low productivity and profitability of the enterprises. But, are the workers only responsible for it? What about the ministers, bureaucrats, mill owners/management, who control and run the affairs? Surely, it will be immoral and unjust not to fix any responsibility on the employers. It is also fact that labour fronts of the political parties mar the working and productive environment of the mills, etc. The coalesce of mill authorities often with immoral so-called trade union leaders to plunder and loot the properties are reported time and again in the newspapers. For instance, sugar mills are incurring continuous losses for such corruption. The price of sugar is higher in comparison with that in India. But the govt is not weighing the matter.

Let May Day usher in new realization and removal of selfish aggrandizement wherever it is — in leaders, govt. and non-govt enterprises, trade union and federations etc. Let our workers get a living, at least of the level that are in our neighbouring countries.

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Bureaucratic Mystique in South Asia
A K M Jalaluddin

What the CSPs were Taught - V
A Colony Called East Pakistan

IT was the beginning of 1967. We had spent the new year's eve dancing the old year away in the Lahore Gymkhana Club (membership was compulsory for all CSP/PFS probationers). Those who could not dance, watched it for sometime. I met Kasuri in the party.

Almad Raza Kasuri was a friend of my colleague Imtiaz Javed. Kasuri greeted me warmly and said: "Thanks to East Pakistan — whatever freedom and democracy now exists in Pakistan is because of East Pakistan." I was pleased to hear it. But complimentary remarks about East Pakistan or Bengalis were not very common those days. (Kasuri later became well-known as his father was cruelly killed by Bhutto which led to this execution in 1979)

The six-point charter of demand was first announced in February 1966 in Lahore. Interestingly, both the 'Pakistan Revolution' and 'Bangladesh Plan' were first announced in Lahore. The whole country was bleeding under the jackboot of Ayub's autocracy.

It was natural that the simmering discontent of the country would find its expression in the academy. Farshuddin and Mahmood Ali were the strongest fighters for the Bengali cause. Brilliant economists, they marshalled their facts and figures and fought the battle in the academy that was being fought throughout the length and breadth of East Bengal. But it was not the single issue that dominated our lives. We came across the attitude of the Pakistanis who, in exasperation said, if you

insisted on things like this, you might as well drown yourselves in the Bay of Bengal. We are not going to accept your absurd demands."

With the benefit of hindsight, I could say that the split was already visible. You only needed eyes to see them. I must say that, individually, all the West Pakistanis at the academy were delightful and fascinating persons but in issues as divisive as inter-wing parity or disparity they belonged to the mainstream of Pakistani emotions as we did to the Bengali sentiments.

The separation of the country being of foregone conclusion we had no problem about cracking jokes on the subject. Tariq Siddiqi once joked that those who did not like the climate of East Pakistan should not opt for Foreign Service because they might have to serve in East Bengal which was going to break away from Pakistan anyway and become a sovereign country.

That East Bengal was being treated like a colony, all agreed. They did not know what to do about it. Syed Azmat Hassan was one of the most cultured and sensitive human beings you could meet. I grew to admire and respect Azmat Hassan tremendously for his straightforward manners and intellectual honesty.

The word 'colony' was used so often that it had ceased to hurt. So when we arrived in Dhaka in January 1967, Azmat Hassan told me good-humouredly (certainly without any malice and with a friendly tone) "Let us have a good look at our colony called East Pakistan. It was his first visit to East Bengal

To the Editor

Motor workshops blocking public thoroughfare

Sir, Part of former Dhaka-Narayanganj railway track in the centre of the city has been merged with Toyneebe Circular Road, Captan Bazar Road, Jai Kali Mandir Road and Folder Street, Wari.

The said part of the old railway track which now forms Dhaka-Narayanganj Road has been turned into open air garages wherein innumerable buses are parked haphazardly for hours and days together for carrying out all types of repair works, vulcanizing, welding, body manufacturing, body painting and overhauling of the engines.

This makes terrible traffic jam in the area, the entry and exit of millions of people living in the old part of south-east Dhaka are blocked and their sufferings know no bounds.

We wonder how and when the Dhaka City Corporation issued trade licences to the motor workshops owners to run their business on the crowded and busy roads?

It may also be pointed out that many a time DCC constructed a road divider from Nawabpur Road-Gulshan old railway crossing point to Jai Kali Mandir Road point. But it is found that all the times the motor workshop owners in collaboration with bus drivers and conductors broke and uprooted the road divider in many places for carrying out their 'business' as well as making 'U' turn and parking of the buses etc.

Now again the DCC is constructing a new divider at the cost of the public money. Our question is, how long would the new road divider remain safe and undestroyed and moreover what purpose would it serve in face of haphazard

parking, repair and maintenance work of the buses on this busy and crowded public thoroughfare?

May we request the Mayor of DCC to kindly personally visit the area and help remove the sufferings of the city dwellers?

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"Mati-O-Manush"

Sir, The 'Mati-O-Manush' programme of Bangladesh Television has been playing an important role in bringing about development in the country's agriculture sector. Lately the programme has launched a campaign to motivate the rural people to instal domestic bio-gas plants. This is indeed a very encouraging move. Bio-gas is very important for the conservation of our

forests and for protecting environment against degradation. The compare, producer and others associated with the programme deserve our thanks.

Meanwhile I would like to suggest the authority of 'Mati-O-Manush' to examine the scope for setting up a Mati-O-Manush Viewers Club/Forum with genuine farmers and rural residents. This, I am sure, will help in implementing various projects relayed and recommended by the programme. Such a forum will also contribute in strengthening the feed-back system. The Thana level office of the Department of Agricultural Extension may be involved in forming and co-ordinating the activities of such a forum.

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