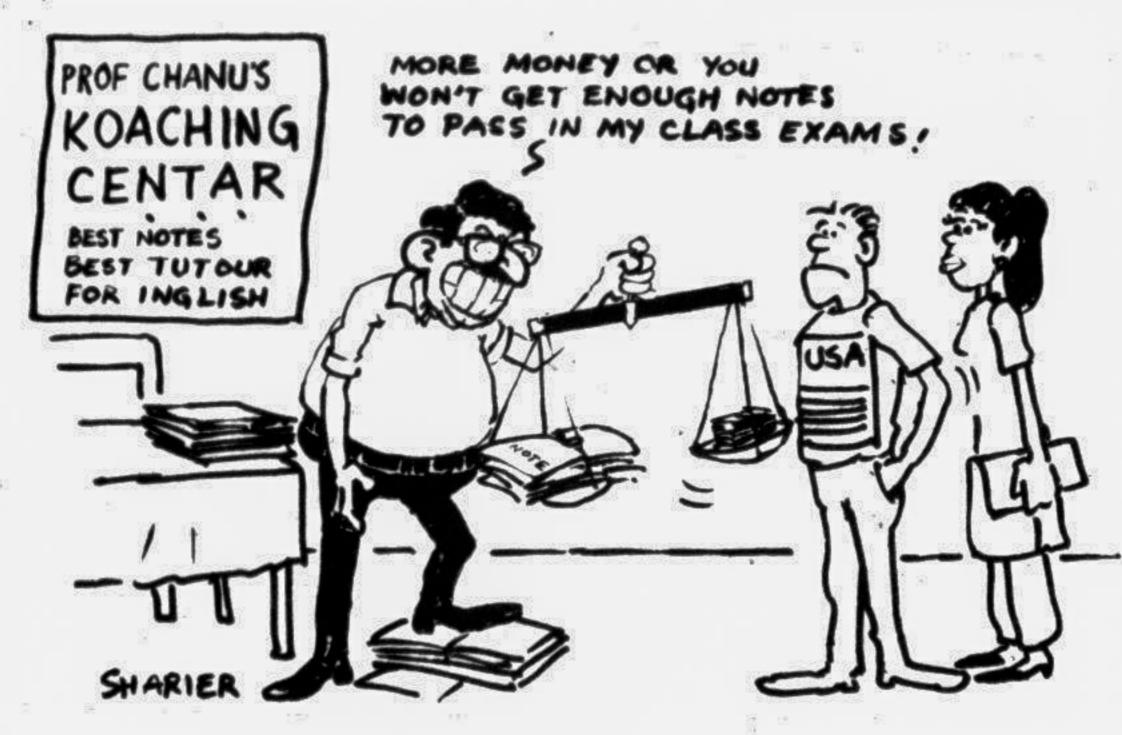
HESE days getting an education' is easier said ■ than done. The SSC examinees having just completed their exams have another worry. No, not only about their results but the bigger problem regarding college admission. Thanks to the objective part introduced in the SSC exam system, the passing rate is, higher than ever. Scoring 800 or above is not much of a big deal now. Whether students are actually learning any better is another question. Competition is really strong Perhaps keeping this in mind or rather taking advantage of the situation, 'concerned people have set up coaching centres. For the worriers, they seem to be the answer to their prayers guaranteeing admission into the college of their choice...

However, coaching centres are definitely not new in Dhaka. In the last ten years or so they have carved a niche for themselves, along with the millions of food joints, private schools and other commercial enterprise. But, even a few years back, these centres mainly provided BUET, Medical College and University admission coaching. Then, business was strictly restricted to a 'particular season'. Hence, they introduced the college coaching programme. Today critics state that there are more coaching centres than colleges in the city.

Perhaps one should not be too critical about their motives. After all the enrollment in these institutions is staggering. What is more interesting is the fact that hopeful students from all over Bangladesh show up at these places in the belief of getting better education. Not that it is always necessary, as the popular centres have spread their branches in all major ciDo We Really Need All These Coaching Centres?

by Lavina Ambreen Ahmed



ties, as well as boasting 3-6 divisions in the capital alone. They keep reiterating how impossible it is to contest a college seat in this competitive age, without trained academic guidance. True, that rivalry is fierce between the college admission seekers, but its equally fierce among all the coaching centres. Each has its own special 'baits' to catch gullible learners.

Did you know that (a) these short term knowledge homes are run exclusively by meritorious 'board stand' stu-

dents? (b) they have years of teaching experience behind them and the success cases are outstanding? (and what about the failure instances?) (c) They promise to supply brilliant notes of HSC students? (d) last but not the least, they hand out computers and even airline tickets to the lucky ones who manage to clinch the top positions of the top colleges? And, sadly, the kids do fall for such temptations. One teenager returned home everyday, during her exams with her hands full of coach-

ing centre prospectus' and booklets deciding with her friends where to go, even before the exams were over. Reluctant parents often give in to their recalcitrant child's pleas and jump on the bandwagon of coaching centre (CC) patrons. The prospectus' by the way, could have been quite amusing if it wasn't so disquieting. With the aforementioned salient features dominating 95 per cent of the information material, what's left, mainly the cover and the back flap are filled with prize

friend. I was bowled over by the lavish arrangements; with food, live music, minister's speech and attractive prizes it really turned out to be a grand affair! But the garrulous founder-director practically

Out of curiosity, I attended

one such function of a well-

known coaching centre with a

monopolised half the show's time by bragging about the institution's achievements. Modesty is a rare virtue these

The public probably would give them the benefit of the doubt, if there weren't certain disturbing aspects about the centres. First of all, there is the teacher issue. The 'teaching staff' normally consist of shy and awkward or overconfident university freshmen, barely out of colleges. Honestly, do only two to three years older 'excellent' students make 'excellent' teachers?

All said and done it is perhaps a little hypocritical that we actually question the coaching centres' existence and never hesitate to find faults with them yet, at the same time, help to sustain and perpetuate their business. Maybe a psycho-analyst could explain our conflicting sentiments or maybe the explanation is simple. A genuine, good student with or without CC's aid, will do well anyway. But, how can we believe that? Our kids have relied on private tutors since school days and if possible would continue to do so for higher studies. In today's uncertain, degenerated society, the first priority of the guardian is usually to send their children to good colleges. Who wants to take risks or analyse what's good or bad, necessary or unnecessary? Perhaps it is simply safer to enrol them into a coaching centre.

development expenditure and are especially active in rural areas. But the government seems wary of their influence and spending power. Earlier this year it struck an organisation off the NGO

register for the first time since

the introduction of compul-

sory registration in 1991.

tough again.

HE Kenyan government

▲ dissent— brought about

by a two-year suspension of

balance of payments support

by Western donors - follow-

ing completion of negotiations

over funding pledges from

Western governments and in-

Moi's government is getting

tougher on critical journalists

and non-government organi-

sations (NGOs). But some for-

eign governments - including

Britain - say they are increas-

ingly disenchanted with the

administration's poor imple-

mentation of aid projects and

want instead to channel more

funds through a core group of

that such a policy could cre-

ate came with the German

government's withdrawal of

funding for a KSh 8 billion

market because of govern-

ment refusal to adapt the

plans to vendors' require-

Non-government organisa

tions are believed to already

handle up to 40 per cent of

A hint of the problems

President Daniel arap

ternational agencies.

is losing its tolerance of

John Etemesi, chairman of the board which supervises NGOs, accused the Centre for Law and Research International (Clarion), a group of academics involved in research on contemporary Kenyan affairs, of disseminating "distorted material that damages the credibility of the

government through workshops and newspaper reports which have proved harmful to certain sectors."

Partners Fall out as the

Honeymoon Ends

Pamphil H M Kweyuh writes from Nairobi

Under pressure from its Western financial backers, the Kenyan

government relaxed its tough approach to opposition and dissent.

Now, reports Gemini News Service, the administration is getting

Clarion head Professor Kivutha Kibwana, who is Dean of Nairobi University's law faculty, accused the gov: ernment of misusing legislation on NGOs to throttle the life out of them. He challenged the government to take him and other researchers to court to prove its charges.

Eight NGO representatives stormed out of the NGO Board meeting at which the banning decision was taken.

'We argued in vain for logic to prevail and for strict adherence to procedure," says Murtaza Jaffer, chief executive of the NGOs Council, "but it appeared the majority of government representatives had in fact decided that Clarion had to be deregistered."

Says Elkana Odembo, chair of the Council and chief executive of World Neighbours (Kenya): "The action militates against repeated assurance from the highest levels of government that the official policy towards NGOs was in fact that of participation and partnership rather than control."

Shortly before the clash over Clarion, Attorney-General Amos Wako said he was banning the Mwangaza Trust, a think-tank of leading opposition politicians, church leaders, academics and human rights activists.

The Trust, a brainchild of three MPs from the opposition Ford Kenya party - Paul Muite, Peter Anyang 'Nyongo and Kiraitu Murungi - was designed to fight restrictive

Despite a successful appear

against the banning order, police searched the Trust's offices and briefly detained Muite and some of his colleagues.

The axe also fell on Mwangaza's campaign publication, Nuru, which appeared in eight languages and on Inooro, a weekly newspaper published by a Catholic priest in Murang'a about 65 kilometres north of the capital.

Other recent evidence of a clampdown includes the deportation of Dorothee von Berentano, African head of the German foundation Friedrich Neumann Stiftung (who had helped fund the Mwangaza Trust); the arrest, charging and withdrawal of cases against several journalists; and an announcement that private broadcasting would not be allowed.

Jaffer says that the government's real attitude was laid bare when it invited NGOs only at the last minute - more as an after-thought to an anti-poverty conference chair-ed by Moi himself.

state understands and accepts us as partners in development rather than competitors," says Only about 400 of an esti-

"It is imperative that the

mated 1,000 voluntary agencies have been registered so far, largely because of the cumbersome procedures which required approval from the Directorate of State Intelligence and of District Commissioners.

An alternative has been to operate as trusts, companies, institutes or societies, but the government has now tabled a bill to block this approach.

The author is a Nairobi-based Kenyan journalist

## Marriage Rights: What Women Should Know up fake documents showing other development issues cerned is not willing but is

had an ideal home. A loving husband, five children; not that she didn't problems, but those minor ones she could easily deal with. Until one day her rickshaw merchant husband Shamsul Huq Majhi (60) decided to get a second wife, of course without Sajeda's consent.

Thus began the usual conflict and an unusual life that Sajeda never thought could exist. After years of marital bliss she is left with only her five children and Tk 2,200 as dower money [Denmohor]

There are hundreds and thousands of such examples of poor, ignorant women being cheated, mistreated by their husbands. These illiterate women are always in the dark, they never actually have the courage to question their male guardians and husbands. Just being able to sign or even read and write letters is not enough, a woman has to know her rights, her legal stand; women like Sajeda should know ways to help themselves in such dire situa-

"A woman should be aware of her legal rights, her marriage laws before tying the knot," says Advocate Salma Ali Executive Director, Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association (BNWLA)." We are continuously working on such important yet neglected issues." Creating awareness about Muslim marriage norms among rural girls, their parents and Kazis is one of BN-WLA's top priority.

They give para legal training to NGO activists or workers and work with NGO's in

these people try to educate poor women about their rights. ""One of the simple but viable way to make the girls understand our points, is to compose parodies of popular

messages through them. Most of the marriages in the rural areas are carried out, simply by calling a Moulana or Kazi with a few witness at the most. There is no written document, registration or proof of the marriage.

songs and tunes and send

"Muslim marriage is basically an agreement under which the bride and the grown has come to a common ground sharing common by Raffat Binte Rashid

rights," Ali explains the entire act of agreement and facts about marriage. Under the Mohammadean Law a Muslim marriage's prerequisites are: the age of the bride and the groom should not be less than 18 and 21 respectively. (Child marriage is prohibited but it is not altogether considered as illegal)

The two parties, most importantly the man and the woman concerned should give full consent to the proposal. Under the Muslim Shariat Law if any one of the con-

forced into marriage, that agreement can be considered cancelled and not acceptable. Den Mohor or dower money should be fixed before the final registration.

Under the Muslim Law this dower money is a wife's special right, which she acquires through her marriage. It can be a piece of property or a certain sum of money, which any Muslim groom must pay his wife anytime she claims it.

"In most of the cases ignorant women are cheated here. as they have no written document proving their marriages or amount of dower money. Husbands like Saieda's bring



remote areas. Along with Photo credit Nouzish Ahmed and Naibuddin Ahmed Courtesy - Bangladesh

either her signature or thumb sign that she fully agreed to his terms and conditions. And women, like Sajeda's are given meager amounts like her 2200 taka and most of the time nothing at all," says Ali. Besides this such an agree-

ment should have appointed advocates from both sides witnesses and above all the entire act should be registered. "If all these conditions are not met the marriage will not be considered illegal but if certain important issues are overlooked then it is punishable under the law," she emphasis.

"Moreover, a Muslim girl cannot have the power to divorce until her husband gives her the power in their 'kabin nama or registration paper' The column 18 of a Kabin Nama which gives the above right should also be filled," she points out.

Marriage is a life long agreement between two partners and therefore 'the sharing' should also be on equal terms. Women need to be aware of her legal rights just as men - and not just be kept in the dark and thrown into the streets like Sajeda.



HE pending military court case of US Army ▲ Capt. Lawrence P. Rock wood lacks the drama of the murder trial involving former US football start OJ Simpson, but it has human rights activists hanging on to the edge of their seats. Rockwood's case, say legal

experts and activists, underscores the continuing problems with Washington's refusal to disarm Haitian paramilitary groups and, more generally, to dismember the old repressive networks in the Caribbean country.

A 15-year army veteran and scion of a military family stretching back to the US Civil War, Rockwood held a sensitive intelligence post on the staff of Gen. David Meade, then the commanding officer of US ground forces in Haiti. But his decision to put the human rights of Haitians ahead of Army protocol may land him in prison.

The 36-year-old officer faced with what he deemed the criminal negligence of the US Army in not stopping human rights violations after US troops landed in Haiti last year, had apparently decided to take matters into his own hands.

On Sept. 30, 1994 (the third anniversary of the coup ousting President Jean-Bertrand Aristide Rockwood loaded his M-16, put on his combat gear, and went to the National Penitentiary in Portau Prince where he believed the Haitian military was abusing prisoners.

the warden from inspecting the prison, then arrested by occupation forces for failing to follow orders after informing US military officials where he was. He was shipped back to his home base of the US

## One Good Man

The United States presents itself as a champion of human rights around the globle, but a US army officer stationed in Haiti challenges that claim.

Army's 10th Mountain Division in Fort Drum, New York. Seventy two hours later, he was told to resign or face court martial

Rockwood refused to resign. He wrote Gen. Meade: "I decided to take (the) action in order to avoid the continued inexcusable loss of human life even though it would mean the end of a 15-year military career and a possible court martial."

Rockwood's trial was ex-

pected to begin this month. He faces up to ten years in military prison on charges that include disobeying orders and dereliction of duty. But he has gained widespread support among US-based human rights groups, and the former US Attorney General, Ramsey Clark, has taken up his defence.

"This is a case of enormous importance for the US Army, Clark said at a hearing to determine whether a court mar tial against Rockwood should be held. "Does the army really want to be identified with court martialling a man who made a personal effort to protect human rights in a country that has one of the worst human rights records in the hemisphere over the past 30 or 40 years?"

More recently, human rights activists have attacked Washington for "recycling" former members of the Haitian army into an interim

police force and stressing reconciliation with pro-coup forces instead of justice for the victims of the coup.

Top US officials have ar gued that these steps are necessary to preserve stability in the country and have moved to preserve elements of the Haitian army and police. But this policy has alarmed even the Aristide government and UN officials who say the old repressive apparatus needs to be fully dismantled to prevent Haiti's nightmare from repeating itself

This is not lost on Capt. Rockwood's lawyer. "You have to assume that the military was embarrassed that a US Army officer would act to protect human rights," Clark said in the preliminary hear

The US army concedes Rockwood had "good intentions". But army prosecutor Capt. Chuck Pede says the officer violated military discipline and good order by acting on his own. "Peacekeeping Rockwood style," argues Pede, cannot be ignored.

Rockwood says he was following the "primary mission intent" of US President Bill Clinton to stop brutal atrocities in Haiti. He also says he was abiding by international law laid down at the Nurem berg trials of Nazi Military officers that required him to prevent human rights viola-

Some 70 reports crossed Rockwood's desk in Haiti daily, describing abductions, beating, rapes, robberies and murder in what one of his colleagues said was "very, very graphic detail."

Feeding Rockwood's concern about prisons was a Sept. 27 account from US forces in Les Cayes, a town on Haiti's southern coast. It told of dozens of emaciated men, some with skin falling off their backs and shriveled testicles and buttocks, locked in one tiny cell.

Realising US forces could stop the abuse as they did in Les Cayes, Rockwood repeatedly asked his superiors to take some action at the penitentiary.

Not only did he not get support, Rockwood learned his reports detailing human rights abuses never reached his superiors. His commanding officer also told him to "keep things in perspective about Haiti. One hundred percent of what you hear, don't believe, and 50 per cent of what you see, don't be-

Rockwood then filed a formal complaint with an Army investigating body charging his superiors with "criminal negligence" and "subversion" fore neglecting to carry out Clinton's intent regarding human rights. When that failed, he took direct action at the National Peniten-

Today, Rockwood rémains convinced it was his duty as soldier to protect the human rights of Haitians. Citing the Nuremberg Tribunal, he notes," Complicity in the commission of a crime against peace, a war crime or a crime against humanity ... is a crime against international law."

## Lankan Government Having Second Thoughts about Free Press?

by Mallika Wanigasundara and Harold Pieris

It demonstrated recently

RI Lanka's ruling People's Alliance (PA) of President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga seems to be backtracking on its election promise of a free press, a campaign line which generated enough public support to enable it to end the 17-year reign of the United National Party (UNP).

After being known as a champion of press freedom, the PA now realizes that expousing the cause while still the opposition is much easier than when one is in power.

Of late, the media have become critical of the government and Ms Kumaratunga's luxurious lifestyle. Her chronic tardiness and absenteeism have figured in political columns, some of

which are spiced with gossip. The Free Media Movement (FMM), which backed the PA in the last elections, have been staging demonstrations and mass rallies against the government's media pol-

outside the Sri Lankan Broad casting Corporation (SLBC) and rallied at Nugegoda, a town just outside Colombo, to protest against "certain sections in the government blocking its election pledge to ensure the freedom of the mass media

The group alleged that certain sections in SLBC are averse to free broadcast, cit ing interferences in its education programmes.

It also protested the recent assault on the editor of "The Sunday Leader", Lasantha Wickrematunga, and his journalist-wife Raine; the threats two reporters of the Sinhala language newspapers "Divaina" and "Lankadeepa" and the interrogation of the editor-publisher of the

"Peraliya" Faced with a barrage of criticisms, Ms Kumaratunga angrily hit back at journalists when she addressed a recent gathering of the Foreign Core spondents Association.

She condemned some sections of the press for being irresponsible and threatened to impose restrictions on media like those existing in other democratic countries.

She said: "We think the media freedom we have given is beings abused in an unac ceptable manner even within a democracy ... There is utterly irresponsible journalism going on the moment in some parts of the press."

Ms Kumaratunga has created a Ministerial Committee to draft a Code of Ethics for the Media, which the FMM teels should come from the journalists themselves.

The government has also tormed five separate commit tees to recommend: the repeal or amendment of existing legislation affecting media freedom; the provision of facilities and privileges to journalists, tax changes for media institutions and the equitable distribution of government advertising to all media; the establishment of a Sri Lanka

Media Institute; the improvement of the economic conditions and status of journalists; and steps to broaden the ownership of the stateowned Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd, or the Lake House Group.

Since the PA came to power in August 1994, there has been a greater sense of freedom in the media. Even the state-controlled newspapers criticized the govern-ment. The private television channels are allowed their own newscasts and some of their talkshows even attack the government.

In the 1994 polls, Mr Ku-

maratunga said her dream was to establish a society where dissent was tolerate and human lives were sacred. During her campaign, she

promised the media would be free of state control, a major reason why people voted for In her policy speech made in Parliament in January this

year, President Kumaratunga said: "A primary condition for the solution of national problems is the existence of robust and healthy public opinion. This presupposes a virile and independent mass

Depthnews Asia

Rockwood was blocked by

Dan Coughlin reports