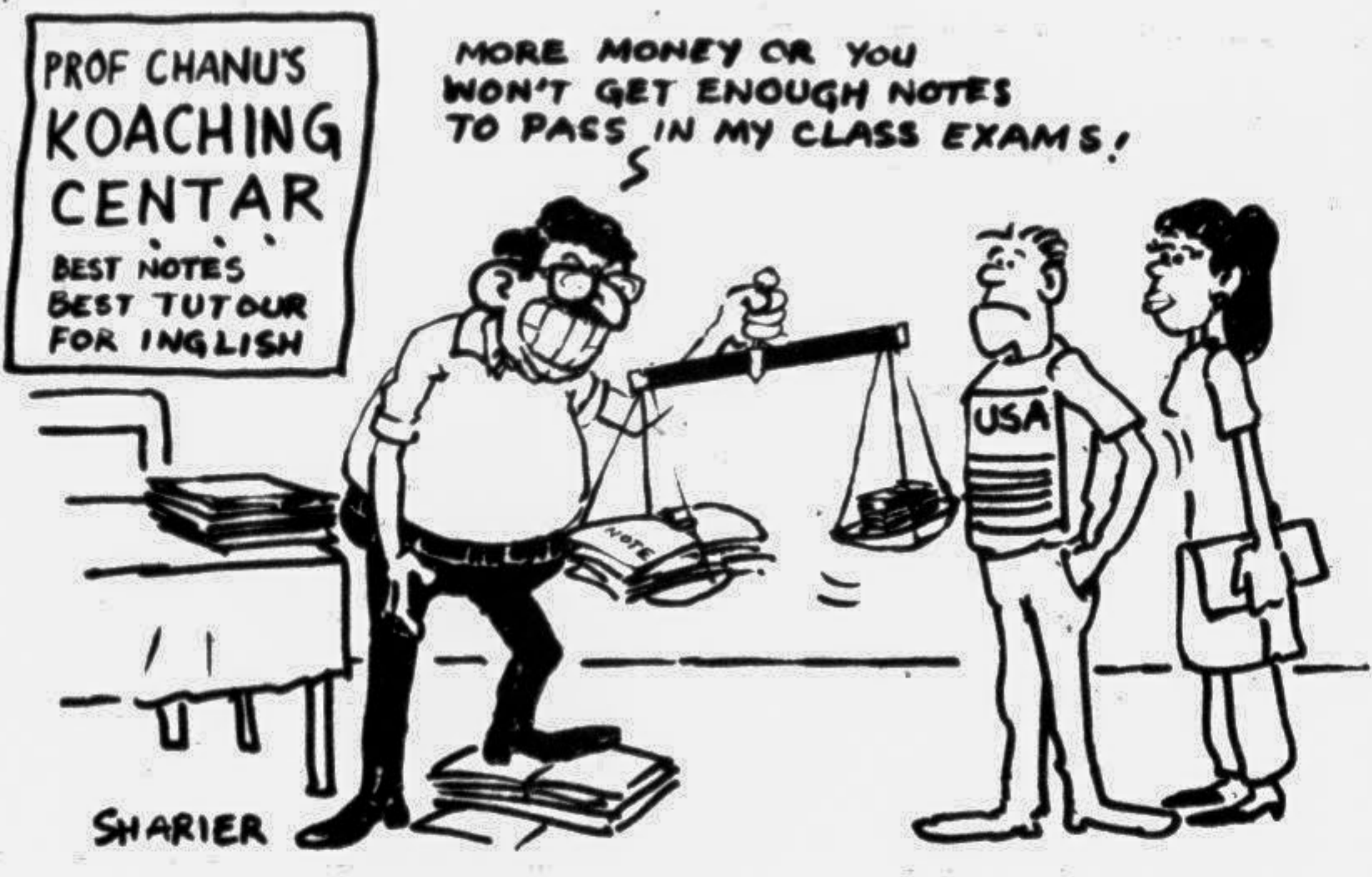


FOCUS

Do We Really Need All These Coaching Centres?

by Lavina Ambreen Ahmed



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 cities, 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' students, 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.

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Marriage Rights: What Women Should Know

by Raffat Binte Rashid

other development issues 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 songs and tunes and send 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.

"Muslim marriage is basically an agreement under which the bride and the groom has come to a common ground sharing common

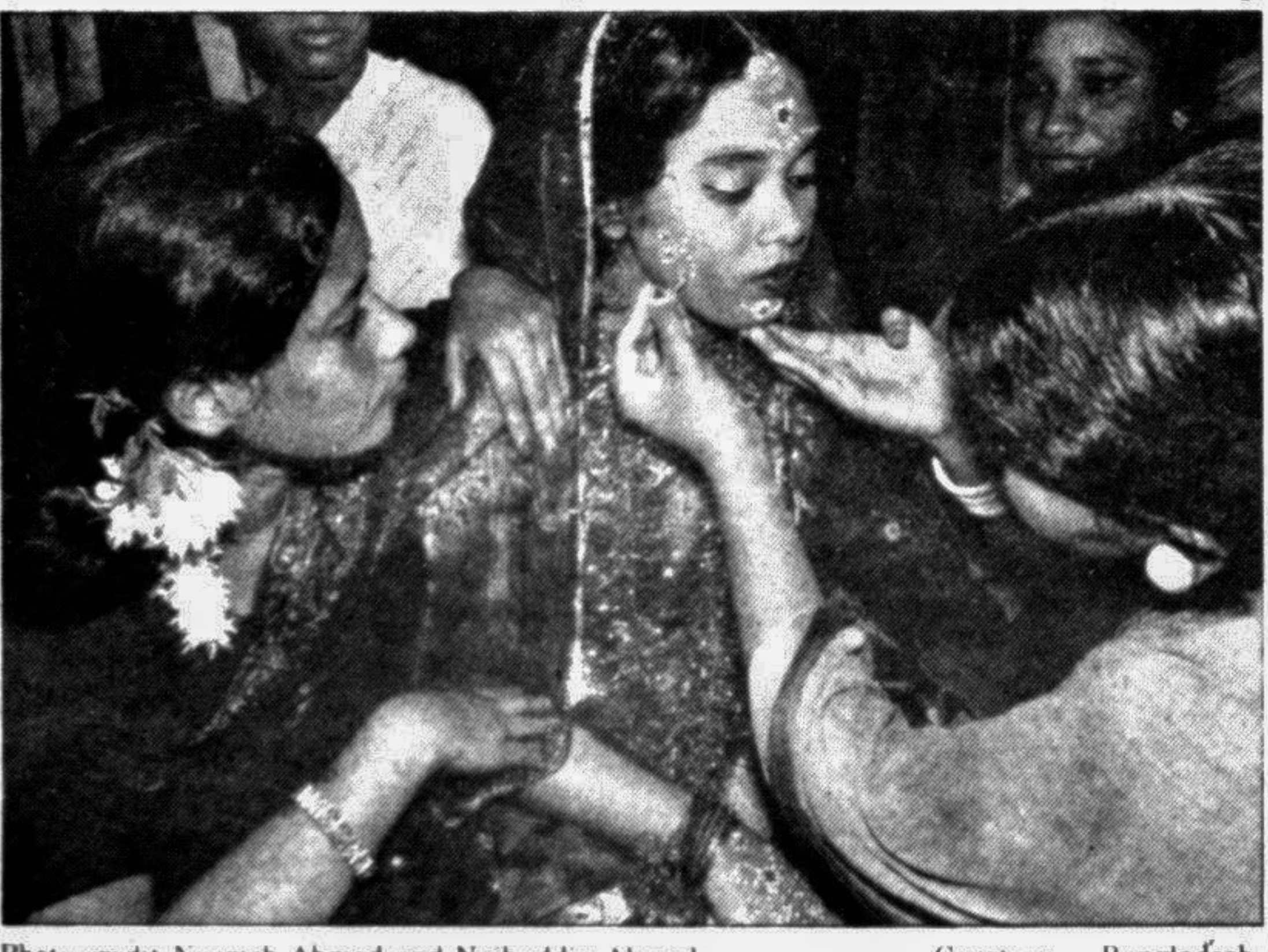


Photo credit: Nozish Ahmed and Naibuddin Ahmed. Courtesy - Bangladesh Media Institute.

Lankan Government Having Second Thoughts about Free Press?

by Mallika Wanigasundara and Harold Pieris

It demonstrated recently outside the Sri Lanka Broadcasting 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, citing 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 Correspondents Association.

giving ceremony pictures. Out of curiosity, I attended one such function of a well-known coaching centre with a 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 monopolised half the show's time by bragging about the institution's achievements. Modesty is a rare virtue these days.

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.

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 tough again.

THE Kenyan government is losing its tolerance of dissent—brought about by a two-year suspension of balance of payments support by Western donors—following completion of negotiations over funding pledges from Western governments and international agencies.

President Daniel arap Moi's government is getting tougher on critical journalists and non-government organisations (NGOs). But some foreign governments—including Britain—say they are increasingly disenchanted with the administration's poor implementation of aid projects and want instead to channel more funds through a core group of NGOs.

A hint of the problems that such a policy could create came with the German government's withdrawal of funding for a KSh 8 billion market because of government refusal to adapt the plans to vendors' requirements.

Non-government organisations are believed to already handle up to 40 per cent of 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 compulsory registration in 1991.

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."

Clarion head Professor Kivutha Kibwana, who is Dean of Nairobi University's law faculty, accused the government 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 Nyong'o and Kiraitu Murungi—was designed to fight restrictive laws.

Despite a successful appeal

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 Dorothée 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 chaired by Moi himself.

"It is imperative that the state understands and accepts us as partners in development rather than competitors," says Jaffer.

Only about 400 of an estimated 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.



One Good Man

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

Dan Coughlin reports

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 believe."

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

Today, Rockwood remains 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."

THE pending military court case of US Army Capt. Lawrence P. Rockwood lacks the drama of the murder trial involving former US football star 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 Port-au-Prince where he believed the Haitian military was abusing prisoners.

Rockwood was blocked by 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