

## Eyes Are No Plaything

We are flabbergasted at the way the eyes of poor and helpless cataract patients are being played with at the Islamia Eye Hospital, once the epitome of ophthalmological reliability in the country.

Hamid Ullah and Patwari had undergone cataract operation and were supposed to be convalescing. But no, Hamid Ullah contracts fungal infection in the left eye and is *post haste* set apart for a further operation to remove his infected eye. On the appointed day, it is Patwari who is mistaken for Hamid Ullah. He loses his left eye in an operation which was quite effortlessly carried out with a never-look-behind ruthlessness. The feather in the cap of the lapse was the discharge of the victim in hot haste without the compensatory corneal grafting that was reportedly promised, free of cost, to him.

Minimal professional ethics were thrown to the winds denying him natural justice in the form of reparation for his grievous loss.

The above case of mistaken identity illustrates the height of the many-layered omissions and commissions with which the Islamia Eye Hospital (IEH) is shot through today. But the day-to-day lapses are serious enough because these yield the same mind-boggling result — the loss of eyes. Moved by a report published in a Bangla national daily to the effect that infected eyes of 25 post-operative cataract patients were removed at the IEH, last month alone, we probed further into the matter. The tally read 12 victims more from September 1 till date.

The post-operative complications are being attributed to differing factors depending on which side of the fence one is sitting. Our reporter's investigative assessment reveals: some faults in the operation theatre, use of fungi-infected surgical instruments or accessories and sweepers having carried patients to and from the operation theatre.

We have three dear-cut suggestions for the government as well as the board of trustees for the Islamia Eye Hospital. First, there should be an on-the-spot inquiry by the Health Ministry. Secondly, compensations will have to be paid to the victims. Finally, let the hospital administration be streamlined.

## Enterprising Women

Of the many and diversified programmes the Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC) has taken up, the one concerning the development of women's entrepreneurship seems to have endless potential. Already 36,136 women have received loans to the tune of Tk 12 crore 41 lakh; and the small projects in which the money was invested have employed 89,000 people so far.

What is remarkable is the rate of loan recovery. Put at 97 per cent, this can very well match the performance of the Grameen Bank's credit programme. Now here is a case that stands in pleasant contrast to the big industrial loan default and allied problems. Women have proved that they are better managers of money than their male counterparts. Add to this the case for small scale agro-industries in a country like Bangladesh and we visualise an economic miracle in the offing.

Sounds like a wishful thinking? Not quite. Here is a horizon of possibilities where, happily, different developmental parameters are actually waiting to be exploited. Women's economic empowerment is a necessary condition for realising their potentials in different areas of society. Since they are increasingly proving their worth, it is wise to invest in them rather than in loan defaulters. Women in this country have proved quite a few points deserving to be rewarded for that — and handsomely. Undoubtedly, the country as a whole will be the beneficiary of their upliftment.

With women enjoying economic independence, the gender gap will be easier to bridge. So, the Women Entrepreneurship Development Programme (WEDP) should be expanded on an accelerated basis. If for no other consideration, at least for the excellent performance they have recorded with their spirit of enter-prise.

## Policy Inconsistency

Contradictory reports on the incident notwithstanding, one thing is clear that there were troubles involving some coaching centres in the city. According to some versions, students ransacked three coaching centres while other reports pointed out that clashes ensued after the coaching centre people attacked students demanding return of their money they had deposited as coaching fees.

Without going into the merit or otherwise of the government decision to abolish admission tests, what we are very much concerned about at this instant is the administrative shortsightedness that led to such a chaotic and confrontational situation. To introduce any system or to abolish another in the education sector is a vitally important decision. Fiddling with education or resorting to ad-hocism gives rise to all sorts of problems and complications. The question-bank and the admission test episodes are a strong testimony to this.

The problem lies with the administration which shifts its policies all too frequently without serving adequate notice on all concerned for the same. To go for a new system one must be notified well in advance. Because of such policy inconsistencies some of the government moves with merit have failed to take off. There is no room for playing with policy—whether on education or anything else.

THE last time I met the late Punjab chief minister, Beant Singh, was when I carried a message that the militants in Punjab were willing to surrender before human rights activists, provided the government reviewed the cases of detention from the days of Operation Blue Star in 1984 and after. Beant Singh promised to contact me in two days' time but did not. My meeting with Home Minister SB Chavan on the same subject was also to no avail.

The militants had made no political demand. Nor did they insist on letting off the detainees before surrendering. In fact, they conceded that those who were involved in violence need not be released. Still, the government kept quiet. Several months have gone by since.

I am not suggesting that had the offer been accepted, the tragedy of Beant Singh's assassination would have been averted. My point is that the proposal, if pursued, might have given a decent burial to the militancy already gasping for breath. It would have been a suitable icing on the anti-insurgency operation, a formal finish to a long, dark chapter of violence and murder. A few hot headed would have probably stayed back, as they have, but the curtain would have finally rung on the militancy.

All agitations in Punjab have been like an episode, which has the beginning, the middle and the end. The Punjab Suba stir did not abate until a Punjabi linguistic state came into being. The demand for the recognition of Punjabi in Gurmukhi script continued till it was given an official status and made

compulsory in schools throughout the state.

The only movement, which has been half way, is the one which the Akali Dal initiated after its government's dismissal in 1980 and which took various shapes. The initial demands were: the integration of Chandigarh with Punjab, an equitable distribution of river waters and the acceptance of the Anandpur Sahib resolution, which would entrust defence, foreign affairs, communications and one or two more subjects to the Centre and the rest to the state. The movement, like other agitations by the Akalis, remained peaceful and nearly 80,000 people went to jail to express their protest.

But somewhere in 1981 the fundamentalists jumped into the fray and the Bhindranwale cult of violence took over. It was a strange spectacle where the moderates and the extremists occupied the same platform but spoke a different language. The moderates were pushed into the background and the sword triumphed.

The military operation in 1984 scotched the challenge but the incipient militancy went on. The accord between Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Harchand Singh Longowal, then Akali chief — both are no more — should have capped the movement. It did not because the government shied away from implementing the accord. The militants were able to exploit the situation.

The Punjab problem has been suppressed, not solved.

That finale is still to come. The much-promised package by Prime Minister Narasimha Rao is yet to be unwrapped. Since the movement was started by the Akali Dal, which also represents the majority of Sikhs, the party will have to be associated with the settlement at some stage. Happily, the Akali Dal has undergone a change. It has not only accepted the leadership of Prakash Singh Badal, a liberal, but has also squarely rejected the demand for secession, which

reference between them and the Hindus.

The dying fringe of militants want attention. The Beant Singh's assassination was meant to get publicity. They want to give the impression that they still count. They are trying to create scare. But the mood of an average Punjabi is that of revulsion. He is disgusted with them.

How to cleanse the force is the challenge. Even otherwise, the reputation of Punjab police is stained. There is rampant corruption in its ranks and it is known for using extra-legal methods with impunity. The force has got politicised and criminalised. It can still be retrieved by putting into practice the rule of law and accountability. But the corrective methods are avoided, lest they should tell upon the morale of the force. Yet, if they are not adopted, the state may not get out of the vicious circle in which it is caught.

Gill is a courageous officer. But he seems to be taking things easy, of late. He has got involved in several chores which demand a lot of attention and time. He has to make up his mind whether he wants to do the police work or other jobs, which are only a digression. He also needs to shun his way of dispensing with rough and ready justice.

The real challenge to New Delhi is from the well-placed Sikhs abroad; many among them have been hurt in the last decade. Indian missions abroad have rubbed them or, for that matter the entire community, on the wrong side. They also do not know the real situation in Punjab; the fundamentalists have built around them an atmosphere which is not real. The argument that the Punjab problem is yet to be solved is unassailable. But how does a resolution in the US Senate to deny aid to India or a memorandum to the Canadian government to de-

nounce the country help Punjab?

The various governments at New Delhi have made several mistakes, which have alienated the bulk of the community. But they are the mistakes of the governments, whether headed by Indira Gandhi or Rajiv Gandhi, not of the country or the Indian people. The Akalis have begun to appreciate the differentiation. The Sikhs abroad should also be explained through arguments and sympathy.

The crux of the problem is how serious the Akalis are in fighting the extremists. Some among them have the leverage to influence the militants or bring the recalcitrant before the Akal Thakt. If Giani Zail Singh, Surjit Singh Barnala or Buta Singh could be ousted from the Panth, why not the militants? The Akalis will have to work hard to gain credibility because they have wandered into thickets of communalism and chauvinism far too long.

Congress still has an advantage because Beant Singh, despite the corruption of his ministers and misdeeds of his grandsons, is associated with the finishing of militancy. The Akali Dal changed later, not before. Badal is gaining the confidence of the Hindus. Yet he cannot go far if he approaches them through the Bhartiya Janata Party. He must contact them directly. But what will win him their support is the confidence that he is out to eliminate the fundamentalistic elements in the Akali Dal. The ethos of Punjab is pluralism. The extent to which Badal can strengthen it will be his strength and that of the state.

# After Beant Singh What?

The dying fringe of militants want attention. The Beant Singh's assassination was meant to get publicity. They want to give the impression that they still count. They are trying to create scare. But the mood of an average Punjabi is that of revulsion. He is disgusted with them.

## BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

The extremists were once bent upon forcing on the Dal through the Akal Thakt (supreme seat of the Sikh religious order). Some may still doubt the bona fides of the party but it has learnt the lesson.

Those who say that Punjab may lapse into violence again are giving vent to their fears and anxiety. What they do not seem to realise is that the back of militancy has been broken. The militants are only a handful now. More than that, they have no support in public. The Sikhs have themselves turned their back upon them. The community has fought them in homes and hamlets because it has realised how it was led astray in the name of religion. When it came to murder, rape or extortion, the Sikhs witnessed there was no dif-

ference between them and the Hindus.

Akalis have also spoken out. Never before have their leaders been so unequivocal in condemning the violence as they have done after the assassination of Beant Singh. The disconcerting part is the involvement of some insiders, who might be quite high. It was not merely a "security lapse" as Punjab Director General of Police, KPS Gill, has said. It was complicity. This is what the N N Vohra report on criminalisation of politics brought out in the case of Bombay blasts. The report pointed out that politicians in Maharashtra and at the Centre went along with the criminals knowing well that what they were doing was anti-national. The same inference is available in Punjab. The fact is that the Punjab police has been penetrated.

## "La-warish": When shall it Stop?

by Dr A K M A Quader

THE fourteen year old Yasmin of Dinajpur is a Joan of Ark of the twentieth century Bangladesh. She embraced martyrdom at the hands of some members of law enforcing a agency while resisting submission to their animal desire to violate her.

Following her death the brave citizens of Dinajpur took to the streets, to voice their protest and anguish and demand punishment of the culprits. The police reacted violently and seven protesters were killed by firing. That did not bring the brave people of Dinajpur to submission to the boots. Newspapers followed the developments closely and exposed the ugly side of the story and its villains.

Before dealing with the Yasmin case further, I wish to remind ourselves a few important things.

The bodies of the *bhasha shaheeds*, Salam and Barkat and others were buried at Azimpur graveyard as *la-warish*.

ish *lash*. Lies deceipts and distortion of facts were used in the government press release to vilify the cause of the language movement and its martyrs.

Following the shooting down of Asad by a police officer in 1969, during the great mass upsurge, the government Press Note portrayed Asad as a dacoit, thug, mugger, etc., and more than one criminal case were already lodged against him with his home police station Shibpur. Who was shaheed Asad? What was his family background? Asad himself was an enlightened young student enrolled at Dhaka University in the department of General History. His father was the headmaster of Shibpur High School. One of his brothers who received his dead body was then a member of faculty of Dhaka Medical College.

The last one is concerned with members of the family of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, his rela-

tions and associates murdered in the early morning of August 15, 1975. Except Bangabandhu, all those murdered on the day were buried at Banani graveyard as *la-warish* *lash*.

Making the dead *la-warish* who die at the hands of the law enforcing agencies and, issuing untrue press notes of such death to cover-up the misdeeds has become a tradition. Let us stop it.

The three police personnel who took Yasmin into their van to take her to Dinajpur from Dash Mile Mor (ten mile corner) caused her death. The thana police of Sadar thana who recovered Yasmin's body from road side attempted to cover up the death. The doctor who performed the first autopsy on Yasmin failed professionally when he had ignored the reality that the rape or attempted rape could have caused the death of the

teenager. Finally, declaring Yasmin *la-warish* and handing over the body to the Anjuman-e-Mofidul-Islam for hurried burial was absolutely brutal. When the people of Dinajpur came out in thousands on streets, to protest Yasmin's death, the Deputy Commissioner along with the magistrates and superintendent of police decided to enforce law and order in a colonial style that reminds one of the Jalianwala Bagh incident. The police were out in strength and number to hide the crime of their colleagues and to break the morale of the protesting citizens.

Let us now turn our attention to the Press Note issued on Yasmin. It was no exception to other such press notes. Even if in the eyes of the police personnel, Yasmin was a *bhashoman patita*, are the police personnel in

Bangladesh allowed by the law to make indecent advances to a *bhashoman patita*? And if she dies in this process, could she be declared *la-warish*?

In order to honor the soul and body of Yasmin and the sacrifices and bravery of the citizens of Dinajpur, let there be a special public trial covered by TV and Radio live to try a) the three police personnel who took Yasmin into their van from Dash Mile Mor; b) the sadar thana police personnel who recovered Yasmin's body and prepared the *surat hal* report; c) the doctor who conducted the first autopsy on Yasmin; d) the personnel who declared Yasmin *la-warish* and processed related papers; e) the Superintendent of Police, the Deputy Commissioner and the concerned magistrates for the death of seven citizens of Dinajpur while protesting Yasmin's death; f)

the people who once more made two citizens killed in police firing *la-warish* and hid their bodies; g) the officials who dictated, drafted and issued the untrue press note; and h) the Home Secretary and Inspector General of Police for evading responsibilities for everything that happened in Dinajpur following Yasmin's death.

For the future and for all our sake, let us institute a 'Citizens' Commission' to examine the processes of issuing of government Press Note and declaring our citizens *la-warish*. Let us make an honest effort to establish truth in our life, in the government and in our thoughts and perceptions. Let there be no need for press note, let there be no more *la-warish* *lash*.

The writer is a professor at BUET, Dhaka

## To the Editor...

### 'A Chat with Altaf Hussain'

Sir, Ikrām Sehgal's story about Altaf Hussain published by your esteemed daily on 31 August makes an interesting reading. We would however like to put the record straight on some observations made therein. Cases like Fauzi Kazmi's duty free shops had formed a part of a plethora of suits officially filed against Mr Asif Ali Zardari by the previous government. These were all dismissed by the courts of the country. The allegation that lists of Sikh militants were provided to India by the first Benazir government also remains an unsubstantiated hearsay.

Muhammad Hussain Malik Minister (Press) High Commission for Pakistan Dhaka

### Political impasse: Gravity of situation

Sir, In the interest of the nation it was hoped that the law-makers of both the Government party (the Bangladesh Nationalist Party) and the opposition parties (the Awami League, the Jatiya Party and the Jamaat-e-Islami) will be able to come to an agreement on general election issue. It was understood that "ethics" perhaps was not something completely divorced from law or jurisprudence. The Oxford dictionary gives meanings of "ethics" which are "relating to morals, treating of moral questions, science of morals, moral principles and rules of conduct and the whole field of moral sciences". These show the relationship between "law" and "jurisprudence" on the one hand and "ethics" on the other.

Now I have great doubts if the Jatiya Sangad remained a legal body after the MPs of the three opposition parties

had resigned en-bloc.

The other day I heard over the television that out of some 100 bills, only four or five have become Acts, while some 96 or 95 are ordinances. If the Jatiya Sangad is not lawful because of this resignation of 147/148 opposition MPs, I am afraid that most of these ordinances will be declared illegal eventually.

In The Daily Star of 30 August, Barrister Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed said that, if politicians wished to rid the nation of the crisis, which again was their own creation, they could consult the Supreme Court. He continued, "Through the President, the Supreme Court can be requested for a reference regarding a possible way out from the crisis the nation is running through. If the Supreme Court so wishes it can give the reference." Further, both the government and opposition parties should look for a precedent from the constitutional history of the countries where parliamentary democracy functions. In the absence of a solution of the present problem, the country is inevitably poised for a crisis whose consequences, I am afraid, will be deadly for the nation.

Prof M T Haq Pallabi, Dhaka

### SSC results

Sir, The results of the SSC Examination of Dhaka Board have been published recently and the marksheets have also been supplied to the schools. According to the authorities, this year's results are much more satisfactory than those of the past. But there are some suspicious things that need to be explained. Many of the students found out that their marks in the objective part of the English second paper exam were quite poor. This sorrowful thing has happened to those students who had

given their objective tests of English second paper in the 'Set B' question. Later on, it was also found that these answeres secured not more than 38 marks in that very paper. This seems quite suspicious, because this happened not only in case of the ordinary students, but meritorious students also fell prey to it. Some of the students, who gained places in the merit list also had this misfortune.

The Board authorities claim that the fault of the students to fill up the circles properly in the answer sheets is responsible for this. But if it were really so, it should have affected their marks in the objective part of the other papers too, which did not actually happen. In all other papers, they have got 80 per cent, even 100 per cent marks. On the other hand, those who had the good luck to have had given their English tests in sets A, C or D, seem to have quite easily scored 50 out of 50 in most of the cases. This arouses suspicion of the students who have suffered the grievous circumstance. It is suspected that some sort of fault in the computer programmes that checked out the answer sheets is responsible.

Quite the same thing happened in case of the students of Cox's Bazar district. At first, they were shocked to find out that they had all got plucked for having failed in the same subject. But later on, on the protest of the students, Comilla Board rechecked their answer sheets and corrected the fault, which made the students to pass. Some of them even had their place in the merit list. The incident that had occurred in case of Dhaka Board seems to be the same as the one mentioned above.

This mischief can lead the life of a student to ruins, because the Government has

recently decided that students should be admitted into higher educational institutions on the basis of the marks secured in the SSC and HSC exams. And in these days of competition, even one mark means a lot. So, this 'little' thing can affect the future of a student very badly. As the future citizens of the nation, we, the students, demand an exact explanation to this. We also demand a solution to this problem as quickly as possible.

Jarir, Apu, Mitun, Nipu and others on behalf of the affected students.

### City problems

Sir, The letter from Mr Kazi Nasim Ahmed in your 5 September issue was a timely one. It is true that we have enough of our own talents to solve most of the problems facing our beautiful city today.

In addition to the points suggested by Mr Ahmed, I would like your esteemed readers to consider the following: a) Establish parking meters on the commercial areas and busy roads. b) Prohibit parking of all cars strictly during office hours in the busy centres and commercial areas. c) Construct multistoried car parks in and around busy and commercial areas to provide car parking on payment. d) Enhance registration fees road tax and motor vehicle tax etc in line with cost of road maintenance and development. e) Ensure repair, road cutting, surfacing and holding political meetings after office hours. f) Ensure justice and equal enforcement of legal provisions to all citizens irrespective of position, cadre and party affiliation.

These, I am sure will go a long way to reduce the traffic jams in Dhaka City.

A N A H Siddiqui Motihel C/A, Dhaka

Art Buchwald's COLUMN

## Radio Hate

In ordinary times a civil libertarian like Mark Fuhrman would be considered a non-commercial commodity.

But these are not ordinary times, and bigots are much in demand.

As soon as the Fuhrman tapes were released, vice presidents of many of our hate radio shows went on alert.

Rabbit Warren of WSICK was one of the first to try to get through to Fuhrman. The line was always busy.

Rabbit told me, "The man is a natural for a talk show. He has personal problems with everyone, regardless of race, color or creed. The phones will light up when he does his ethnic number, and heaven knows what the ratings will be when he tells his audience how to get confessions out of blind people with seeing eye dogs."

"Guys like Fuhrman don't come along every day," I said. "If nothing else, he could become another Gordon Liddy."

"Bigger than Gordon Liddy. Fuhrman will appeal to every right-wing crazy in the country. There is a huge audience out there that has difficulties with African Americans, Hispanics and Jews. They really look up to a talk show host who's beat the hell out of someone in a police station basement. Advocating torture can raise a programme's Nielsen ratings. I want to talk to Fuhrman before the other shows get to him. He would be perfect for the 6-to-10 morning spot when people are driving to work. They'd love to know what it was like to use a chokehold on Buddhist monks."

I said, "Talk radio has changed a lot since Arthur Godfrey."

Rabbit replied, "You don't create an audience by telling people how to grow green tomatoes. Audiences are dying to hear Fuhrman's thoughts on policemen, not to mention the homeless whom the cops use as punching bags because they are ripping off the government. The ratings skyrocket if you keep saying that you want to sock someone in the nose."

"It looks like Fuhrman is going to make a few bucks by being a muddsinger," I told Rabbit.

"If I sign him, I'm going to offer T-shirts with bloody gloves painted on them. We'll also have baseball cards featuring the swollen faces of the people he has arrested. I'm willing to offer Fuhrman a million dollars to go on the show."

"Is that more than Gordon Liddy gets?"

"Yes, but Liddy is a tired act by comparison. Fuhrman is still enjoying his 15 minutes of fame."

By arrangement with Los Angeles Times Syndicate and UNB