Dhaka, Sunday, January 14, 1996

**Wasting Time** 

At the very brink of the Constitutional limit of 90 days for polls, the ruling party and the opposition are talking about giving written proposals for discussions. Even on this point BNP has not made up its mind yet. Are the two sides serious about the polls? For nearly two years we have been in this political crisis. During this time our parliament has been made inoperative; it is one year that 147 MPs resigned, and general elections have already been postponed three times; yet our political parties do not have written proposals on the basis of which they could talk? It is a farce, if indeed there ever was one.

Immediately after the latest postponement of the polls this paper proposed an all party Roundtable on the political impasse. We make the same proposal again. Instead of having fragmented and piecemeal discussions that are now going on, a more serious and comprehensive effort is called for. If not at the summit level, at the level of party officials let BNP and the opposition parties sit and start a serious tete-a-tete. As we have said many times before, a lot of give-and-take has already taken place which has brought us closer to a solution. But because these discussions are not being held on a continuous basis, and not always by the same people, the negotiation is not progressing in a linear fashion. So the first thing is to put everyone together in one room, and start talking in earnest.

As to written proposals, all sides can put theirs on the table, which by necessity will form the basis of the discussion. At this late stage, for both sides to haggle about whether or not to put forward written statements on their respective party positions is totally unacceptable. Everything must be done to push a dialogue forward — and that is not being done. In fact an unbelievably slow and almost callous attitude has been adopted by both sides which is forcing us towards an inevitable crisis. We seem to have lost all sense of time and all feeling of urgency. Each time election is postponed, our leaders feel that there is that much time to waste. And at the end of the extended time we are back to square one.

What can we do, what can we say to drive home the point to our political leaders that not solving the crisis, and not going towards a fully participated elections will be extremely damaging to both sides? There is no winner from this stalemate, only losers — the biggest being the country.

Schooling Bill

The asking rates for admission to city schools are reaching horrifying heights. The major financial requirement is an auction bid like donation imposed on a parent who must pay it even though his ward has sailed through the admission test meritoriously. This hurdle of a mercenary levy somehow crossed, the guardian comes face to face with other elements of the commercial package: admission and monthly fees, and the costs of books, copy-books, stationeries, uniforms and badges to be paid at the school-designated shops. One feels more fleeced as one goes on.

Why? Because he does not get the service commensurate with the payment made. The schools are mostly run in rented houses designed as family residences and lacking in the needed facilities.

The students, especially of the English medium schools, starve of relevant textbooks, so that they make do with photostated copies of reprints in the neighbouring country India. The scenario is not very much different in other schools as far as steady supply of text-books goes.

Shortage of trained teachers is glaring in the English-medium schools. The class teachers shamelessly, it seems though, encourage students to take private tuition from them.

There should be rapid standardisation at these schools - in terms of basic accommodation, various facilities, teaching staff, textbooks and quality of class-room and extra-mural instructions. And, it is in accord with such a package of service that the fees must be fixed in slabs.

Only uniformity of standards between one private school and another, and between a private school and a government-run one, can stop the status-symbol scramble for a handful of schools which has been fuelling commercialisation to an absurd level. Then, the number of new schools to be set up in the government and private sectors can be effectively determined.

We are not certainly looking for any exodus of school-going children to a neighbouring country, triggered by over-priced school education here.

Unpardonable

The dumping ground at Mukdapara, near the Kamalapur railway station, has been nauseatingly overflowing for months. That the site had been wrongly selected for off-loading so much dirt and filth from all around cannot be in question because of its obvious location in a densely populated area of the city. What is even more unpardonable, however, is the neglect being shown in dressing the dirt heaps by levelling, sand-packing and spraying antiodour chemicals, the necessary machines for which having gone kaput.

One is at a loss to understand why the city corporation has only one of its 12 chain dozers in any working condition. Most of the mechanically defective excavators are sitting idle, too. So, the dumping work itself is badly mismanaged through a pathological lack of maintenance of essential machinery. Raising a playground by filling the low land, remains a

dream as distant as ever. The DCC must not let the people of the area and those who daily pass by the waste heaps suffer anymore. That maintenance comes low on the priority list of the DCC was proven earlier when it came to light that most of its trucks meant for waste disposal

go out of order at any given point in time. Mayor Hanif is urged to act on the maintenance side with unforgiving ruthlessness.

# Education for Whom?

Education, from the very beginning, ought to be meaningfully integrated to the relevant life and environment of the target group of students — children and adult alike.

HE struggle of rural landless family for bare survival is so acute that just for the subsistence living, all the available time even of the children are absorbed. It is a question of living from day to day with no time to spare for anything else. Each and every member of the poor landless family including the children are short of everything, including time — which we often fail to realize. As a consequence, the children are denied of their basic right to childhood.

The few of us in a population of 112 million — lucky enough to go to school have all read; "the shepherd (rakhal) boy goes out to the field with the cattle herd. while the children give their mind to studies". In the meantime, we forget that the shepherd boy is also a mere child and he has no right to his childhood. He is destined to remain out of school, and play the flute while looking after the animals. The inequities of the so-called simple pastoral life is so well accepted that we never question the brutal implications : only the children from landed households are in a position to attend schools. Education is meant for the privileged few. The system is not at all geared to universal

literacy. The world around poor rural households militates against literacy. No immediate gain from reading and writing skills can be foreseen by them. The time spent by the children at schools often constitute opportunity foregone to support the family in the intense struggle for sur-

Children, often only 6 or 7 years old, spend the morning hours taking care of cows and goats or searching fodder and grass; and, there are so many poetic rendition of this sordid state of affair by those who never had to take care of animals in their lifetime. Not only that, children from poor families have to gather fuel for cooking and fetch water from the pond or the handpump. With increasing population, demand for fuel from biomass have increased considerably and the increased competition for twigs and

address.

UK (£)or USA (\$).

At the end of the year

1972, the Government of

Bangladesh issued a circular

symbolising the Taka (f). For

convenience, the government

also allowed "Tk" as abbrevia-

tion of Taka as no symbol of f

was available in the type-

writer. The use of computer

in the accounts was also in its

infant stage at that time. But,

astonishingly, till today there

is very little use of the symbol

f. The only place we can see

the symbol is in the Taka

currency notes. Why not we

use the symbol in our ac-

counts and other documents?

Dewan Syed Mohidur Reza.

Jungle law in

Dhaka city

city have recently witnessed

and experienced an un-

precedented horrible situa-

tion when the autorickshaw

drivers created a havoc for

consecutive three days by

damaging vehicles of all

sorts, right before the nose of

the law enforcing agencies

with a view to what they

called "to realise their de-

mands". These unruly ele-

ments did not even spare

private cars carrying women

and children who were

wounded by their wielding

sticks and splinters of bro-

programmes it has become

an established practice by the

political activists to damage

and break windshields of pri-

vate vehicles which has since

been emulated by other ter-

rorists as well. This practice

has now been perpetuated

during the present regime

due to gross inefficiency of

the administration. It seems

whenever any group resorts

to such activities, the admin-

istration succumbs to their

demand. As a result, this

practice has become an effec-

tive tool to realise demand

whether legitimate or illegit-

Therefore, it seems only

jungle law prevails in Dhaka

city and the silent majority of

the innocent law abiding citi-

zens are groaning under the

wheels of such terrorist

activities. Now the burning

imate.

To enforce their various

ken windshield glasses.

Sir, The citizens of Dhaka

MBA, FCA, FCMA

Maghbazar, Dhaka

leaves involve a great deal more time than before. There is no time to attend schools. Food must be cooked; there must be water in the house and the cattle, being a vital source of income, must be fed first. Under the circumstances, attending school gets a very low priority. Should we blame the poor for that? The school must wait. In

the brutal world of the poor landless, literacy either for adult or children have no urgency of purpose. Literacy would not automatically influence family income or nutrition. On the other hand, time out of school could be well spent — meeting directly the basic needs of fuel, fodder and water. Education has no value in poverty-ridden Bangladesh. Poverty makes the truth stranger than fic-

The question therefore

arises — education for whom? It is not yet clear if the huge investment being made to expand primary education would remain an empty class room programme or there is likely to be full capacity utilization, if necessary, through double shifts, so that global target accepted by all Nations including Bangladesh to achieve education for all will be achieved within the shortest possible time. It may be recalled that rapid expansion of school enrollment and achieving universal literacy have always featured in our development plans since 1950s. But progress remained limited. In fact, primary schools at present involve huge waste of resources because of the high drop out rate. Out of hundred students enrolled, hardly 30 to 40 manage to successfully complete the 5 year schooling period. Given the lack of use of literacy within the environment of the rural poor - a reversion to illiteracy is quite common.

It is also the quality of education, particularly in the rural primary schools that matters. Do these schools operate on a regular basis where all the scheduled classes are held, regular

hours are maintained and teachers put in their best efforts for pupils? This seems to be the exception rather than the rule since there is no local supervision at all of the primary schools. The parents have no voice in the running of schools. The teachers are all government employees and the supervisor, the Thana Education Officer is located at a distance and he can hardly perform his supervisory duties. It is really a free for all situation and the huge drop out rate is not only due to inability of the poor to send their chilbe able to sign their names life. and gradually acquire the capacity to read and write and count numbers. Otherwise. they cannot manage income generating enterprises ereated out of the borrowed

As a result of the supervised credit, the poor will become less poor and the value of education will be realized. The children will also acquire the right to their childhood and the earliest manifestation of it will be the shepherd boy going to the school with books and not to the field with animals. At this



### Window on Asia

dren to school but poor quality of teaching or hardly any teaching at all, including fre-

quent absence of teachers.

force the poor to realize that

schooling is not worthwhile. Education for all in the context of Bangladesh should constitute an integral component of the comprehensive poverty alleviation programme. It must follow a broad-based strategy where linkages are developed with related issues and problems faced by the rural poor. Education for All cannot be a sectoral programme. Number of teachers or class rooms

cannot determine its success. The rural poor is continuously engaged in the all-consuming task of battling against poverty on a day to day basis. His income ought to be augmented first and, for that credit is the right answer. It has been already well established by Grameen Bank. However, such credit is not only disbursement of cash. Linked to it are the organization of groups, infusion of discipline, a strong moral code and a development ethics which have to be fully realized before credit will be approved. In the process, literacy awareness is also promoted since borrowers must

stage, the pastoral flute should be replaced by something more educational.

I have mentioned earlier that shortage of fodder, fuel and water are forcing children to refrain from going to school. This is becoming a growing reality in Bangladesh. The supplies of these three basic inputs for survival should not only be increased but made available close to rural homesteads so that time and energy of children could be diverted to much more promising activities at schools.

Education, from the very beginning, ought to be meaningfully integrated to the relevant life and environment of the target group of students - children and adult alike. When a sixty-five year old women, attending adult literacy classes in the evening was asked by the reporter of The Daily Star why at her age she was attending literacy courses, her immediate reply was, "I learned about drinking tubewell water so that I can avoid many types of infections; I am old - it is important for me to know about these things". School curriculum must be useful. It should be geared to realities of daily

At the primary school level, children should not only learn but practice personal hygiene, acquire knowledge about sources of infactions and how to avoid them. Nutrition, basics of crop and non-crop agriculture - not what is passed from one generation to the other — but the rudiments of modern science and technology of agriculture should form a part of the curriculum in such a way that while ac-

quiring basic reading, writing and numeracy skills, relevant development information are also absorbed by the learners. The school programme must not be class work alone. It should, include village tree plantation, intensive rural acquaculture, livestock farming, horticulture etc.. In rural areas, primary school curricula should be geared to rural life and it should differ from place to place in the light of the agro-ecological conditions. For example, in coastal Bhola island and northern Panchaghar district, physical environments vastly differ and should be adequately reflected through revisions and adjustments of schools cur-

and practical work lessons. Another important consideration is quality of teaching. Class rooms for not only students but for teacher's

riculums, teaching materials

training are no less important. Even then, adequate supervision of schools is necessary. The world over, Parent-Teachers Associations are the standard institution responsible for the management of schools and their financing is controlled by local school Boards set up by the local government bodies. In Bangladesh, Thana School Boards should be established who should manage all primary and other schools through respective Parent-Teachers Associations. Unfortunately, we have weakened the local government structure by abolishing Upazilla parishads. Since 1971, we have not re-established the District Councils. A strong. elected local government structure is a necessary condition to promote education and health and family plan-

ning programmes. Unfortunately, our politicians crave for democracy but for themselves only. They are not prepared to share the authority of governance with any one else. The logic is very simple : a strong Thana Council Chairman would have access to resources for local development and as a consequence, members of the Parliament will be denied of the vital means to retain influence over the constituency.

Charity begins at home. Democracy must begin at the villages first. Otherwise, education for whom - the question will always remain unanswered.

# Buchwald's COLUMNI

### Where Have All the Children Gone?

few of us were sitting around the living room of Neal Grunstra's house discussing the lack of A youthful political energy in this country.

"How can Congress shut down the government twice without anybody wanting to do something about it?" Bonnie Kyte asked.

"Why would anybody do anything about it if it doesn't involve O J Simpson?" Carolyn Ehrler said.

Grunstra claimed he knew why there was no one in the streets. "Our children only go out to find a movie. They won't march on Washington or stage sit-ins in the Capitol. They can't stand pain."

Michael Kappaz agreed. "When the Vietnam War became ridiculous, all of us in this room were screaming for the President to quit and the Congress to resign.

"There were riots, arrests and protest banners hanging from buildings. Our government heard us loud and clear. "Now the legislators shut down their own capital and

there isn't one kid screaming for their hides." "Why?" I said. "Why?" At that moment Cara Bobchek walked through the living

room with a Walkman plugged into her ears. "Cara," Neal asked, "why won't your generation go out in the streets to protest the government shut-down?"

She looked puzzled. "What government?" Neal yelled, "The American government. It's been shut down, and in most countries the youth would be demon-

strating in the streets and calling for their leaders' heads." Cara said, "I can't do that. I have to listen to the new Beatles CD.

Joanie Bishow said, "Doesn't your generation care about

anything but yourselves?" "Of course, we do," she replied. "We care about having a

car. If our parents won't give us one, then we'll have something to demonstrate about." Rick Bishow said, "In France the students were in the

streets and they forced the prime minister to cave in on economic reforms. The least you could do is raise some hell when your representatives don't know up from down." "I would, but I have to go to a party at Russell Eckel's house. His mother has invited a bunch of girls home from

Sweetbriar for the holidays," Cara explained. Bonnie said, "Well, I guess we can't count on your gen-

eration to save the country." "Why should we go out in the streets and demonstrate

when we can stay home and do it all by e-mail?"

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## OPINION

fication.

### Government Clarifies

In an editorial published on 8 Jan '96, this newspaper demanded that the government must publicly clarify its position on the issue reported in a Bangla Daily on 6 January '96. The Press Information Department (PID) has given the following clari-

The government has noted the news story and the editorial regarding the purchase of two helicopters for the Ministry of Relief and Disaster Management. The helicopters were purchased from the own resource of the government. Those were not bought from the donation of the International Committee for Red Cross (ICRC). So, question does not arise about the violation of International

Red Cross Charter. The fact is that the Government of Bangladesh decided to purchase two MI-17 helicopters for the needs of post-disaster emergency relief and recovery works. Considering the early experi ence and technical knowhow, the responsibility for the purchase of two MI-17 helicopters was given to the Defence Purchase Directorate. The directorate after completing all formalities and following the approval of the concerned cabinet com-

The responsibilities of operation and maintenance of

Bangladesh Air Force. It has to be mentioned, the cost of an MI-17 helicopter was USS 4.2 million in 1990 and now has been purchased for US\$ 2.1 million. That means, two helicopters have been purchased for the cost of one The main objective for

those have been given to

purchasing the helicopters is to help the emergency relief distribution and recovery works in the remote areas of the country. In one helfcopter, there are facilities to visit and carry passenger for looking after relief operation in affected areas immediately after the disaster. This helfcopter has been prepared for multi-purpose use.

The helicopters were collected as per the supply schedule made after the charter of the purchase agreement. There were no irregularities in this regard, M/S Aviaexport supplied the MI-17 helicopters from the manufacturer. M/S Aeroserve is a UK-registered company, which failed to give the centificate of the manufacturer and their rate was much higher than that of M/S Avia-

export. The government hopes that the confusion regarding the purchase of the helicopters will be dispelled folllowing this clarification.

#### are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and

question is who will protect Taka symbol the poor and innocent Sir. After the liberation of citizens of this city? Bangladesh, I started writing

Letters for publication in these columns should be

addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed

with double space. For reasons of space, short letters.

Md Ataul Hoque in the newspapers for sym-Mohammadpur, Dhaka bolisation of Taka in the same way as has been done in the

#### A BTV serial and BTV

Sir. We are great admirers of Humayun Ahmed. Indeed, he is a popular novelist and TV serial writer. His former serials were highly praised by the viewers. Probably his popularity has made himself overconfident. Otherwise, a ridiculous serial like 'Nakshatrer Ratri' could not be written by him. This serial often reminds us of ZTV's comedy serials Dillagi and Grihalaksmi Ka Zinn. Its contents are such, even a person of mere commonsense does not understand what the writer intends to say.

Most of the main characters and their behaviour are far removed from reality. Some of the leading characters are continuation of his former serials. Specially Abul Hayat's crackpot posture and Dilara Zaman's ever dyingdiseased-character. New addition to these is a crazy

brother-in-law. The most obnoxious and irritable characters are a pimp and a callgirl played respectively by Enamul Haq and a new actress. We are surprised how BTV has permitted screening such a serial. We want to know whether BTV has any vetting system or not. Television is a family media. And as a government media, BTV has some commitment to its viewers which should not be overlooked to please any socially irresponsible person.

Nazmul Alam and Sultana 14/3, Savar Bazar Road. Savar, Dhaka

#### Interference from God

Sir, Your writing under the caption 'Now is the time for a historic compromise appearing on January 4 impressed me highly. You've reflected my outcry and the same of the nation. Nowadays, I am very much fed up with our politicians and their activities. I am not enjoying my rights as a citizen. I am a victim of political instability. am overcooked by our politicians. Both the sides - the ruling and the opposition are in short of tolerance.

They are talking in favour of the people. But it seems ironical to me that our politicians do not think for the nation. They are working for their self-interest. We do not want to be victimised by

in the name of establishing democratic rights, our politicians are paradoxically violating our fundamental rights. If our politicians had a simple respect for our people, they would have made compromise among themselves earlier for the nation's sake. We do not want to live in anarchy, we want to live in peace. We do not understand the Constitution very much, we do not understand any caretaker government, we want a simple life where we

can live peacefully. My country now seems to be a hell because of ill politics. I am so frustrated that I even do not think there is any necessity for my going to the poll centre.

We do not want to see any confrontation. We want to take lessons from the politicians, they can only save us by making compromise and by showing tolerance.

I want to see a reconciliation between them. If nothing works out, I hope for an interference from God will. My appeal to the politicians: "For God's sake, hold your anger and let us live." Md Mostafizur Rahman Mohsin Hall

### Whither a free

press?

University of Dhaka

Sir. There is no denying the fact that a free press symbolises a free nation. It is the press that can ensure true democracy and thus help it flourish. Newspapers are the laithful guard against all sorts of injustice — both social and political.

Realising this fact Napoleon the Great had to comment that hostile (that is outspoken) newspapers are more to be feared than a thousand bayonets.

cally, the newspapers are seldom allowed to speak out freely. Whenever a newspaper stands against an autocrat and begins unveiling his/her misdeeds, it has to lose its existence and its editor or the writer concerned is punished or jailed. One can still remember the horrible days when all of the country's newspapers except the four state-owned ones were gagged. What bad days our

press is still imprisoned. The

Still our editors and writers are arrested - arrested like the criminals. Still, with a democratically elected government in power, books like Nari are being banned.

These are, no doubt, the misdeeds of the powerful; but what shall we call it when the newspapers themselves do the same? A number of newspapers painfully lack in objectivity. They are fond of making exaggerating reports. Some of them even suggest to welcome a military ruler like Ershad.

In recent days, I am'sorry to say, a number of newspapers are acting as mouthpieces of some parties. It seems that all the news and articles are dished out shamelessly partial.

These sorts of newspapers are causing a great harm to our press and objective journalism. The journalists of these newspapers are eating into the reputation. At present, over 100 dailies and a remarkable number of weeklies and other categories of newspapers are published regularly, but how many newspapers are there we can wholeheartedly trust and thus pick up as our good information suppliers? The more newspapers are coming out, the more befooled we

Razzak Raza S M Hall University of Dhaka

#### Over-bridges in the city

Sir, Three of the much awaited over-bridges have recently been completed and opened to the public. These are: extension of the existing over-bridge at Farm Gate, one near Ananda Cinema and the other at Shyamoli Cinema. Thanks to the laudable effort by the city corporation.

However, it is found that quality of construction work of the bridges has been extremely poor. Plastering of the stairs and the floors of the bridges have already worn out to such an extent that it is difficult to realize whether plastering has at all been done or not. Has the city corporation engineers checked this? The city Mayor would do well to visit the bridges, if he has not done so

Besides, no body cared to clean the bridges before opening them for public use. Construction dirts are there all around. Stairs of the bridges are so narrow that two persons can hardly walk side by side. Especially women would feel embarrassed to use the bridges during rush hours. An extra amount would make the bridges more comfortable for the users.

M. Husain Shymoli, Dhaka

But ironically and histori-

press had to see! And, needless to say, our

military rulers did a lot to destroy it. Even now after 25 years of our liberation, the press is not fully free - netther in theory, nor in prac-