

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.

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.

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.

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?

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 meritously.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

THE 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.

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 survival.

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 renditions of this sorry state of affair by those who never had to take care of animals in their lifetime.

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

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.

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.

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 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.



Window on Asia

Shahed Latif

dren to school but poor quality of teaching or hardly any teaching at all, including frequent 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.

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.

be able to sign their names and gradually acquire the capacity to read and write and count numbers. Otherwise, they cannot manage income generating enterprises created out of the borrowed money.

As a result of the super-vised 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



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 woman, 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

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 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 address.

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 them.

Taka symbol

Sir, After the liberation of Bangladesh, I started writing in the newspapers for symbolisation of Taka in the same way as has been done in the UK (£) or USA (\$)...

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 'Nakshatratr Ratri' could not be written by him. This serial often reminds us of ZTV's comedy serials Dillagi and Grialakami Ka Zinn. Its contents are such, even a person of mere commonsense does not understand what the writer intends to say.

Jungle law in Dhaka city

Sir, The citizens of Dhaka city have recently witnessed and experienced an unprecedented horrible situation 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 demands'. These unruly elements did not even spare private cars carrying women and children who were wounded by their wielding sticks and splinters of broken windshield glasses.

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. I am overcooked by our politicians. Both the sides — the ruling and the opposition — are in short of tolerance.

question is who will protect the poor and innocent citizens of this city?

Md Ataul Hoque Mohammadpur, 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.

Whither a free press?

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 faithful guard against all sorts of injustice — both social and political.

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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 dishied 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 are.

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 University of Dhaka

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.

"Cars," 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 demonstrating 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 generation 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?"

By arrangement with Los Angeles Times Syndicate and UNB

Art Buchwald's COLUMN Where Have All the Children Gone?

A 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."

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OPINION 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 clarification.