

Terrorist Take-over of DU

The Dhaka University Syndicate at a late night meeting yesterday decided to close the institution for three days after a six-hour-long gun fight between two rival student groups reportedly BCL and JCD.

On Tuesday the two warring sides BCL and JCD signed a 4-point truce which could offer a breather to the confrontation-choked Dhaka University.

The goings-on in the Dhaka University do not speak of there being any authority there and the whole place is anything but a seat of learning.

Does government, for that matter, exist in that Shahbagh to Plassey part of the capital city? More than the University leadership, it is the government itself that is on test in that excitable area.

The government has so far said about all the right things in the matter. But it is the results they produce which is material to the nation.

Violence by Lapse

Senior Division Football League, a coveted source of entertainment for an expanding football-loving section of the citizenry was soured by violence and vandalism last Tuesday.

No, the wrath of the fans over the unexpected setback — in the tie — of their favourite teams did not lead to the flagrant display of the destructive instinct.

Since there is no proper system of rain check or any other way of ensuring the rights of all ticket-holders for a legitimate access into the stadium when the real action takes place following the inconsequential or abandoned matches in similar circumstances, bosses schemed and the boys acquiesced in the drama of cheating which led to the undesirable evening in the stadium and the areas adjacent to it on that day.

DMFA has nothing to defend itself against the charge of disturbance originating in its money-making motive. If the ground was unplayable why the referee got on with the match sixty-three minutes behind schedule?

Nowhere in the bylaws is there any room for persuading the players into the match on a ground deemed unplayable by none other than the referee. If he finds the ground fit enough players have to play. Then, if the players dilly-dallied ignoring the referee's call why the two teams were not put in the line of some disciplinary action?

Worth Noting

There is an unusual piece of news from Pabna. Published in The Daily Star on Wednesday it says one person has been awarded six years' rigorous imprisonment for possessing about a hundred bottles of phensedyl.

The nation at present is swamped by drugs, specially by the cough syrup having narcotic properties and called phensedyl. It is difficult to remember many convictions for keeping this banned drug in its history of becoming a national drink of the Bangladesh youth.

Incidents of crime are reported to police only on exceptional occasions. Not all that is reported amounts to prosecution — it is the policeman's pleasure to take up a case or not. Of the prosecuted a miserably small part end up in conviction.

The phensedyl conviction comes to remind us of the fact that thousands of phensedyl offenders are stomping around with impunity, thanks to inadequacy of police surveillance and to shortage of judicial officers and to an ever-abiding support of the youthful addicts who may run into millions.

THE phrase, government by consensus, as it generally connotes, and what the ruling party is understood to have meant appears to be quite different. In the latter sense of the term it implies formation of a type of national government by incorporating in the governmental set-up selected members of all political parties represented in the parliament.

This type of government is generally constituted in the face of grave national emergencies as was the case of the national government formed in 1931 in Britain in the wake of the great depression. The economic and employment situation then reached the nadir in nations' history so much so that the question of even physical survival became the most serious concern for the people.

This continued till the second world war when the national government gave way to a coalition government of the Conservative and the Labour, with the Liberal saddled un-

GOVERNMENT BY CONSENSUS

Widely Debated, Easily Misconstrued

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comfortably in opposition. Bangladesh is, however, not currently faced with national emergencies of the nature warranting a national government, and the ruling party would perhaps not deem this to correspond to the nature and objective of its proposal.

The second implication of the phrase which received general support in several quarters was government by consensus. This comes close to what the government wishes to accomplish, but would be quite impractical to ensure acquiescence by all concerned.

In a multi-party democracy, in the face of active opposition in the parliament, realisation of such an unusual concept, under normal circumstances, would almost border on utopianism. All governments would, no doubt, like the entire opposition to toe its line as much as it is possible without criticism

and undue opposition. A consensus reached after consultation outside the House of Parliament is likely to be adopted in the House unanimously. Principal opposition parties all over the democratic world are not, as a rule, expected to give in all issues and at all times for

as an added benefit, much desired confidence can be generated among members and an atmosphere congenial to orderly and smooth functioning of a legislature can be created.

What the government can really strive for is to identify major national issues both on the domestic and international fronts and seek opposition cooperation to evolve consensus on these issues before legislating or taking appropriate actions on them. To be able to effect a national consensus is

surely a matter of credit for any government. Though the opposition would normally like to prevent the government to win a laurel on any issue, in the ideal democratic situation they should not oppose a worthwhile cause for the sake of opposition only and be guided by the true sense of patriotism in an endeavour to promote larger national interest.

The best and the most appropriate place to evolve a consensus among major political parties undoubtedly is a special mechanism instituted for this purpose in the parliament itself. These are parliamentary committees, which are composed of members of both government and opposition and where relevant issues are discussed threadbare before submission, with their findings and recommendations, to the full House for final discussion and decision.



Currents and Crosscurrents

by M M Rezaul Karim

various reasons, including altruistic ones. This is specially true, if some forms of dialogue is conducted previously outside the legislature to iron out differences. The cabinet and the ministry cannot usurp the power of the parliament. At the same time cooperation and harmony among the three political organs of the state has to be ensured.

Evidently, the opposition's response to government legislative proposals would generally correspond to the nature

Reconstituted JS Committees: Promise for a Glorious Sovereign Parliament

THE decision that ministers would not head the parliamentary committees on various ministries is a step in the right direction.

It is one of the many steps that need to be taken to make a balanced division of power. The Prime Minister's initiative to reconstitute the parliamentary committees reminds us of the French philosopher Montesquieu who promulgated from the very nature of things power should be a check to power.

The following steps may, therefore, be considered by the parliament: 1. Whenever a function is performed there is of course the need for a power to perform that function.

2. Adequate support by a separate and efficient staff is needed to make the various investigations, scrutiny and recommendations about the ministry and departments.

3. Adequate funds are required to continue its deliberations over time and produce the recommendations and reports within schedule.

4. A committee of experienced and enlightened members of parliament who are advocates of parliamentary sovereignty might be entrusted to make the preliminary selection of the members of the various committees.

5. There could be a mix of

by AM Alimuzzaman

committee members who can initiate and perform towards the goal with the team spirit in tact. They are to be creative, imaginative, pragmatic, big thinkers and team thinkers.

Committees in UK: We may have a flash-back of the functioning of the parliamentary committees in the 'mother parliament'. The modern committee system was evolved in England in 1882. The house of commons became too much congested with business, moreover there were established procedures and formalities to be observed within the House of Commons.

Cabinet dictatorship: As our experience shows, the state power, through the cabinet and the presidency, can doom the desired missions of achieving parliament's supremacy.

National consensus on sovereignty of parliament: The redeeming feature in Bangladesh is that the initiative has come from the cabinet itself to make the parliament play its vital role. Hopefully the opposition might render support.

It may be noted that parliament's function is to legislate.

Civic Journalism May Invigorate Democracy

A new movement called 'civic' or 'public' journalism is sweeping through US newsrooms.

Journalists are being asked to spend more time listening to the problems of ordinary people and trying to understand the basic forces underlying social change rather than spending their time reporting only the day's political statements made by competing factions.

In 1992, the Wilmington (Delaware) News Journal commissioned a poll to identify crucial issues for the state of Delaware. After reporting these issues, the newspaper called for meetings to identify barriers to economic growth.

A summarizing report stated that the project's goal had been to identify, gain citizen input on, and track key issues and to "provide a forum in which economic issues" affecting ordinary people "could be discussed" frankly.

In 1993, the Des Moines (Iowa) Register instructed its news reporters to conduct at least four face-to-face interviews with ordinary citizens to find out what was on their minds. These interviews, which totaled 600 — were supplemented by a telephone poll; and the results were published as a five-part series, "Voice of the People".

In 1993 and '94, the Indianapolis (Indiana) Star commissioned a major poll on racial attitudes of citizens in the region and spent a week reporting on the results. The fol-

by Paul Malamud

low-up series of stories, according to a report on the project, "reflected citizen experience, rather than relying on expert opinion, a major departure for the newspaper".

One impetus behind such projects is that newspaper readership in the United States is declining. Some journalists feel the best way to get people to read newspapers is to get them interested, and involved, in significant community issues.

The American news media have always struggled against political influence and government pressure — and have secured the constitutional right to report freely and impartially on all issues. To some, then, it seems a contradiction that some newspapers are now "getting involved" with local politics as quasi-actors rather than dispassionate observers.

Those involved, doubtless, would acknowledge that such newsroom trends have not brought an end to America's many social problems. And, it is worst, "civic journalism" practiced in this context can have the aura of a publicity stunt, or an attempt to give therapeutic expression to a public concern.

Nonetheless, Jay Rosen and David Merritt, Jr., in a series of

papers, "Public Journalism: Theory and Practice" point out that in a nation segmented by race, class, and cultural barriers, and by a polity absorbed in the vicarious experience of television rather than community activity, "strategies to recapture readers will always be incomplete without another sort of strategy aimed at reengaging citizens in public affairs and the life of the community."

Journalists, they argue, must attempt to strengthen "civic culture" by helping citizens of a democracy realize that the "system" is theirs — "public property" rather than the playground of insiders or political professionals. "Nothing that the American press exhibits an aggressive independence," Rosen adds that the worst "political threat" in a democracy may not be government interference, but public apathy and cynicism that causes ordinary citizens to turn inward to relatively secure lives — and distance themselves from community affairs.

To the Editor...

Shantinagr Waterlogging

Sir, Shantinagr area is flooded with knee-deep water after the moderate rainfall. This situation has been going on for years altogether. My question is: what the nation's are engineers doing? Why have they not been able to solve this problem?

Our engineers make a bee-line when it comes to going to America or to the Middle East, but I don't know what they do there. Being able to solve Schroedinger's Wave Equation is not enough, I would like to request the Engineers' Institution to please take up a project with the DCC to find the permanent solution to this problem.

Saleem Rahman 99 Azinpur Road, Dhaka 1207

Mr Harun's Oh, My Padma

Sir, Mr Harun's letter to the DS of 6.8.96 has prompted me to write this letter. His contention that the Ganga flows up to the Indian border, not inside Bangladesh, is not hydrologically, geographically, geologically or historically correct. The names of any geographical or geological features are not distinguished by a political boundary. In particular, a river is known all along by the channels of its main flow.

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Woe of a telephone subscriber

Sir, I run a small professional firm having one telephone No 409871. But unfortunately, the phone has been out of order since 12 August 1995. After constant verbal complaints (at 18, complaint box and camp office) the phone was put into order in October 1995.

Although I cannot use the phone for my necessity, the phone bills are coming at a higher rate due to cross connections. I made another attempt for the phone on 18 July 1996 by registering a complaint at One Point Service Centre (Sl no 16) but as of today no redress has been done.

As ill luck would have it my house phone No 406575 also suddenly went off in the morning of 1 July 1996; and on 18

Brahmaputra), there it is known as the Padma up to the meeting point with the Meghna at Chandpur to assume the latter name till finally flowing into the Bay of Bengal. The name "Padma" may be colloquially used above Goalando but with no toponymical significance. To substitute the name "Ganga" — an international river inside Bangladesh as the "Padma" will be nothing but geopolitically and geographically hazardous for obvious reasons. We should put logic before emotion!

Dr K Maudood Elahi Jahangirnagar University, Dhaka.

Tax counseling centre

Sir, Thanks are due to NBR for a circular published in The Daily Star under the title honest persons are also honest taxpayers on August 12, 1996. This circular is timely as the Finance Minister has announced to widen the tax net to collect more revenues.

The NBR should widely publish this circular daily in the leading English and Bengali dailies.

More official circular should be sent to the different ministries for strict compliance under their control. Return forms without cost, should be supplied to the officials of government and semi-government corporations, banks, etc., with the help of local income tax officers to detect more tax payers locally.

Radio and Television talks and discussions should be widely encouraged.

M Ali, Rajshahi.

OPINION Education System Needs a Change

My attention was drawn on the important topic Education System Needs a Change — written by Anwarul Kabir in The Daily Star dated July 25, and was criticised by Bina Zaman in a recent opinion dated Aug 18, 1996.

As this is a very sensitive issue, I would also like to participate in giving my views. I have read both the write-ups and could very well compare one with another, the captioned that the writer Bina Zaman has given "Regarding Mother Tongue" itself is contradictory because Mr Kabir had said, "We must give importance to our mother tongue (Bangla) no doubt, but not by creating difference between two groups of people".

And I also stand by the writers thoughts in having a change in our education system. Bina Zaman seemed to be more politically motivated than by giving an honest opinion. Regarding English medium schools, I agree with Mr Kabir, as my brother was then reading in St Joseph's High School and was just about to give Cambridge examinations had to stop and was forced to appear in SSC exams for the then government school with high tuition fees.

They also wanted them to have the exams in Bangla which they had to fight for quite sometime till they can at least give the SSC exams in English. Schools like St. Gregory High School, Holy Cross, St Joseph's, Vigarunnessa — all came under attack of the then Awami League government, as some so-called law-makers

Dilruba Alam

wanted Bangla in all respect. This was not at all necessary and can never be justified. If we talk about these few English medium schools which were cornered at that time, I would request Bina Zaman to have a talk with the teacher where they themselves agree that beside English text-books they are teaching with other higher level English books so that the base of a student in English is strong.

These teachers confessed that they cannot cope with the standard now, as most of the good teachers go for the higher salary which is with the private individual schools. I have one son reading in an English medium school (a private school of 'O' and 'A' level) and I can very well imagine what Mr Kabir meant when he said these schools are for the elite class and higher income group of people.

To be honest we wouldn't treat ourselves as an elite class but thinking of the future of my son, and also by knowing that all the higher level books are in English, I am bound to send my son to an English medium school with high tuition fees. If I consider the employment which Mr Kabir has tried to explain I am truly shocked and surprised how can a person in his right mind ignore the facts of what he has tried to explain? Ms Zaman explained misleadingly about the employment at the lower level of the government service and said all of them are the product of Bengali medium schools. — is this

statement at all correct? The writer seems to be more happy with the boundary that she is confined with (Bangladesh), but she has little or no knowledge about the outside world.

She seems to be circling around more on the government sectors or government services totally ignoring the other sectors of our employment. The writer again mislead the readers when she referred to the best son of the soil are mostly from Bengali medium schools. Please look around, in the government, the medical institution, the engineering institution, almost all of these sectors the top ranking officers or teachers are not only from Bengali medium schools, but English schools was well. For example, most of the secretaries to the government (which you seem to be more interested with) are still the ones who have given the Civil Service (in English) of the then East Pakistan (CSP). They are still the ones who get first preference where promotion is concerned.

Please do not get me wrong, just as Mr Kabir explained, gradually we will be drifting in so much Bangla (in an unannounced manner), that we will definitely face problem in the future. There can be no substitute to our mother tongue and nobody intends to do so, but like other developed and developing countries where they have higher level books in their own language, we should also change gradually in a planned manner. As we have highly appreciate the views of Mr Kabir and I congratulate him for his constructive opinion.

Paul Malamud is a USIA staff writer.