Dhaka, Thursday, August, 22, 1996

Terrorist Take-over of DU

The Dhaka University Syndicate at a late night meeting vesterday 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 knights. But the truce did not live to enjoy congratulation. Within six hours things were back to the precipice. And possibly worse. Armed outsiders were crowding the entrances of the residential halls making these as impregnable as possible against offensives by the other party.

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. The university administration has been virtually reduced to a non-entity and the mean complexities of the situation have been augmented substantially by, it seems, abdication of authority by the persons in charge. The VC is yet to take a meaningful and effective stand against this absolute usurpation of the campus from under his powers and discipline. One of the provosts has resigned. Why didn't the VC? What is he presiding over there? A complete surrender to the terrorists?

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. And already the government's powers have been challenged and very sadly compromised in that small pocket. If it allows the campus situation to deteriorate further, it will become as helpless as BNP was in the latter's need to save the campus from pervasive brutalisation by its student wing.

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. And results are unfortunately missing. If it is a recourse to force that the situation is warranting we urge the government to apply the same and crush campus terrorism on the lines they have articulated fairly and without any partisanship and seen by all to be so.

Violence by Lapse

Senior Division Football League, a coveted source of entertainment for an expanding footballloving section of the citizenry was soured by violence and vandalism last Tuesday. This led to the untimely death of a young man who in all probability had nothing to do with the popular soccer billing of that fateful evening.

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. The Dhaka Metropolis Football Association (DMFA) aimed at making the most of the unplayable ground conditions apparently to fill their coffers. It amounted to hoodwinking the football fans who had braved rain, mud, and many other inconveniences to enjoy competitive soccer by inducing the twenty-two players and the referee into an unannounced farce. The malignity in the motive can be traced to the fact that they did not make any prior announcement of abandonment for fear of an untoward reaction among soccer aficionados. Probably after an hour or so when the crowd would have had its competitive zeal spent and the ground appeared visibly unplayable, they had it in their minds to call it a "friendly tie." They did not have the guts to declare it in the first place and from experience it can be safely observed that it was umpteenth attempt at a traditional patch-work on the sly.

Since there is no proper system of rain check or any other way of ensuring the rights of all ticketholders 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 moneymaking 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. Arrested way back in 1993 Abdul Hannan was sentenced the other day by a Pabna court.

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. While the strength and the will of the wronged are awfully small, the wrong-doer has an overwhelming array of forces on his side - including the force of law which is, as framed by the colonial British and their language, weighted far more on the side of the prosecuted than on that of the other party.

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.

GOVERNMENT BY CONSENSUS

Widely Debated, Easily Misconstrued

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.

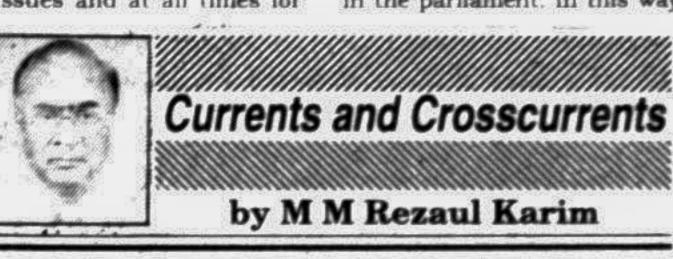
comfortably in opposition. Bangladesh is, however, not currently faced with national emergencies of the nature warranting a national government and the ruling party would perhaps not deem this to correspond to the nature and objec-

tive of its proposal The second implication of the phrase which received general support in several quarters was governance by consensus. This comes close to what the government wishes to accomplish, but would be quite impractical to ensure acquiescence by all concerned. By this method, what the government really wanted was to receive consent of other political par ties in the parliament on all, or at least major issues béfore en acting legislation and programme implementation. This is a novel idea and is extremely difficult to put to practice. 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

and degree of government's response to opposition legislative proposals. This can be achieved even without putting this method in an institutional framework and by way of setting befitting example, in the first instance, by the majority party in the parliament. In this way



various reasons, including altruistic ones. This is specially true, if some forms of dialogue is conducted previously outside the legislature to iron out differences. Such a process would tend to rob the opportunity of the opposition to effectively mould government proposals or to expose its weaknesses publicly through legislature.

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

as an added benefit, much desired confidence can be generated among members and an atmosphere congenial to or derly 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 interests. In this matter, all parties are expected to base their stand on their respective election manifestos, representing the mandates given by the people before electing their candidates to guide the destiny of the nation.

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. The consensus or otherwise that may evolve through these deliberations in

the parliament would naturally he determined by the amount of respect and accommodation that the parties genuinely manifest to one another's position on the issues.

To elicit public opinion in favour of a desired consensus one should resort to the universal method of organising fora where various groups of people and organisations in the society would be able to express their views publicly. This would help reinforce claims of political parties in support of their respective position on an issue and are expected to influence relevant parliamentary deliberations to form national consensus.

So far as the major political parties are concerned, the appropriate and universally recognised platform, therefore, is the floors of the parliament. This practice is in vogue in democratic countries and is universally recognised as such. Powerful voices have been heard also in our land, extolling virtues of opposition in sustaining democracy. Furthermore, it corroborates the defnand and aspiration of the present governmental party while they were in the opposition, to the effect that the focal point of making deliberations and taking decisions on major issues by political parties should be no place other than the sovereign parliament itself No self-respecting political party is, therefore, expected to reverse its stand overnight and

Reconstituted JS Committees: Promise for a Glorious Sovereign Parliament

HE decision that minis-ters would not head the parliamentary committees on various ministries is a step in the right direction. But it is just one of the many steps that need to be taken to make a balanced division of power. The Prime Minster's initiative to reconstitute the parliamentary committees reminds us of the French philosopher Montes quieu who promulgated from the very nature of things power should be a check to power, if liberty — or law itself — is to endure. No doubt Montesquieu's philosophical writing led the US constitution to separate the executive from the legislature.

HE phrase, government

by consensus, as it gene-

rally connotes, and what

the ruling party is understood

to have meant appear to be quite different. In the stricter

sense of the term, it implies

formation of a type of national

government by incorporating

in the governmental set-up sel-

ected members of all political

parties represented in the par-

liament. In that event, there

could be no effectual presence of

an opposition in the legislature.

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 sur-

vival became the most serious

concern for the people. The

three major political parties.

namely the Conservative, the

Labour and the Liberal all

buried their political hatched

and decided to join together in a

government under the mini-

mum common programme of

national survival. The inter-

arose occasionally, were con-

fined only to the cabinet room

in contrast to the floors of the

ond world war when the na-

Conservative and the Labour

with the Liberal saddled un-

tional government gave way to

coalition government of the

This continued till the sec-

parliament

party differences, which albeit

This type of government is

Powers and composition of the committees: But to reconsti tute the parliamentary commit tees without minister as the head would be counterproductive if the remaining steps are not taken by amending the rules. With minister as the head a committees gets the strength of the minister and support of the ministry without the minister the committee could be like an orphan unless it is given ample powers.

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. The committee need therefore have power to call the Minister, the permanent secretary and other officers and staff ments and evidence.

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 commit-

5. There could be a mix of ment's function is to legislate.

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. Hence the selection may be based on merit and not just on loyalty.

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. Committees can function more informally, frequently and Flexibly. There were various types of committees such select committees, the specialist committees and so on. In 1980 Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's government with the support of the opposition Labour party brought about a radical change in the committee system. Twelve select committees were established and the existing select committees were phased out excepting the public accounts committee and the propean Legislative committee. These committees consist of nine to eleven members selected by an all party group of nine members of parliament. These commit to attend its meetings and give tees are endowed with investigathe required information docu- tive powers and can keep constant control on the working of the department to which a committee is attached. In the United States of America, the committees can compel ministers to attend their meetings. In UK it is voluntary. Minister however do not refuse to attend once invited to attend. There is pressure upon the government of UK to give more powers to the committees to which the government is committed if deemed expedient and necessary. In Bangladesh nothing can be left to conventions. There has to be written rules and constitutional provisions as our experience indicates.

It may be noted that parlia-

ministry's function is to execute and cabinet combines both

These are the political organs the state. But to make these or gans equally valid and effective their functions have to be differentiated. The cabinet and the ministry cannot usurp the powers of the parliament. At the same time cooperation and harmony among the three polit ical organs of the state has to be ensured. Parliament is responsible to the people. The cabinet is responsible to the parliament Ministry has to act efficiently in other words, responsibility (parliament) implies represen tation and accountability. Efficiency (ministry) implies exper knowledge and transparency. make these organs act harmo niously and unitedly. The select committees can play a very vita

and positive role. Cabinet dictatorship: But a our experience shows, the stat power, through the cabinet and the presidency, can doom the de sired missions of achieving par liament's supremacy. Thus Ram say Muir observed that the growth of cabinet dictatorship has, to a remarkable extent, diminished the power and prestige parliament. Sir Arthur Saulter remarked that "The British parliament has a past glory, present frustration, a luture uncertainly."

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. By the performance of our past governor-generals and presidents we may reconstruct our aspiration like this: Bangladesh parliament has a past frustration, present uncertainty, a future glory. Let our present and future govern ments succeed in restoring the promise that unity is to be at tained and that responsibility of the government to the ulti mate sovereignty to be focused and secured through the parlia-

Through this process of unity by the committee system the concept of national consensus may find new allies.

Civic Journalism May Invigorate ·Democracy papers. "Public Journalism

new movement called "civic" or "public" journalism is sweeping through US newsrooms. Jour nalists 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 addition — having tried to figure out what is wrong in their local communities - some newspapers are offering forums, even supporting civic action organizations where people can discuss solutions.

For example - 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. Following a series of local meetings where such issues were explored by citizens, the paper helped sponsor a two-day "economic summit meeting" of 25 local business leaders. Those who attended the summit vowed to undertake actions that would improve the

Delaware economy. 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"

— In 1993, the Des Moines (lowa) Register instructed all 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". The newspaper organized a public meeting to discuss the issues that had emerged, and has continued to organize meetings between citizens and newsroom staffs, in order to link its coverage more to the preoccupations of read-

— 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-

OPINION

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". Subsequently, the Star sponsored a community forum to discuss racial attitudes, which drew 500 people, and planned several more fol-

low-up forums The goal was "to get members of the community talking about race relations issues." It was "not to advocate any specific action, but to encourage citizens of the community to seek solu-

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 signifi cant 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.

However, proponents of "civic journalism" insist that the idea is not to advance a partisan political agenda; rather. the idea is to make news coverage less superficial and sensational — to provide a kind of communications matrix where ordinary people are able to articulate and acknowledge the issues that concern them., Frequently, the second stage is a kind of forum (possibly electronic in the form of an Internet "chat", or real-life meetings) to discuss ways to grapple with these problems.

Those involved, doubtless, would acknowledge that such newsroom trends have not brought an end to America; many social problems. And. it 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 Davis Merritt, Jr., in a series of

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

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."

citizens in public affairs and

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.

The basis of "public journalism," Merritt adds, should be to provide "information relevant to the clarification of core values" and "write clearly about the competing beliefs and priorities that underline each public problem. The public journalist's newspaper," he adds, 'would view a problem - public safety, for instance - not merely as an opportunity to report what is happening but as an obligation to promote a discourse that leads to solutions; to act as a conscientious citizen

would act. Noble words. Much of this has always been implicit in the best American journalism which has often consisted of "muckraking" -- exposing social or governmental evils, and urging that corrective action be taken. And, of course, public opinion polls and focus groups are nothing new - they've been a journalist's tool for years.

Nonetheless, in an age obsessed with superficial images - the antics of celebrities, and the latest scandals - a new focus on a average people and their everyday concerns may well end up reinvigorating the press as well as civil society in America.

Paul Malamud is a USIA

Shantinagr Waterlogging

Sir. Shantinagar area is flooded with kneedeep water after any sort of 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 beeline 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 Azimpur 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 chan-nel of its main flow. The main flow of the Ganga cuts across international boundary between India and Bangladesh, that is, the main channel of the Ganga runs up to Goalando where it meets the Jamuna (the name Jamuna covers up to the confluence of the Tista - beyond which it is known as the

Brahmaputra), there it is known as the Padma up to the meeting point with the Meghnaat 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.

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. Since that month, the telephone is working but cannot be functioned properly as most of the time it is found connected with other lines.

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

July 1996 a complaint was lodged with One Point Service Centre, but so far the phone has

remained dead. In case of both the phones, bills are always being paid regularly and it is clear up to June 1996. Will the benign authority who are at the helm of the affairs kindly look into the grievance of this neglected subscriber and do some good, it possible at all?

Badrul Alam 78/E Purana Paltan Line (2nd Floor) Bijoynagar, Dhaka 1000

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 tax yers' on August 12, 1996. This circular is timely as the Finance Minister has announced to widen the tax net to collect mare revenues. We like to add the following points.

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 offi-

cials of government and semigovernment 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.

Education System Needs a Change Dilruba Alam

My attention was drawn on the important topic - Education System Needs a Change wanted Bangla in all respect. written by Anwarul Kabir in This was not at all necessary 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 "Not Ignoring Mother Tongue" itself is contradictory because Mr Kabir had said. "We must give imporwith the standard now, as most tance 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, 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 wouldn't allow Cambridge or any other school graduation

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, Viqarunnessa — all came under attack of the then Awami League government, as some so-called law-makers

other than SSC.

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

of the good teachers go for the higher salary which is with the private individual schools. 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 sent my son to an English medium school with high tuition fees. If 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 would. 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 unplanned 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 a mother I highly appreciate the views of Mr Kabir and I congratulate him for his constructive opinion.