

Why the Same Story?

The step the Awami League government has taken to remove irregularities in the appointment and transfer of doctors is going to give rise to further discrepancies in the health sector, so suggests a report carried in a Bangla daily. An association of doctors purportedly with allegiance to the ruling party is said to be exercising an unwholesome political influence on the government in matters of appointments and transfers. Seemingly the policy remains the same, only the beneficiaries are different. Once again junior doctors will overtake their senior colleagues by being appointed to senior positions at the health directorate and on different projects.

Three specific cases have been cited to show how both the previous and present governments have given junior doctors appointments to senior positions on political considerations. Now the pressure group — which is one of the doctors' association — has gone even further to prepare a long list of doctors for appointment and promotion. We do not know whether the government will give into this partisan pressure. If the three cases are any indication, it may. We would rather it did not.

The prime minister has repeatedly vowed not to pollute the administrative functioning with party politics. All promotions and appointments, she has assured, will be purely on the basis of merit. Now what will the prime minister do? We want to know if such things happened with or without her knowledge. Are we to presume that there are scopes for her declared policies getting sabotaged at some level or levels?

That will be a dangerous trend within the government. If administrative equanimity is undermined by narrow political considerations, there is bound to be repercussions and a far-reaching negative impact on the image of her government. The rationale cannot be that the previous government practised the method, so why don't we do the same. A new government is there because people wanted it to heal the wounds. Its failure means that the widespread anarchy reigning in the medical profession stands no chance of getting solved. Medical practitioners neglecting their duties and resorting to corrupt practices may get a wrong message from all this. Please stop such miscalculated moves before it is too late.

Weeding Out Needed

Thrice-a-day power-cut is an irritant as insufferable as a droning fly into one's nostril. No matter what DESA's musical notes are with such attempted mollifications as 'accidental' or 'usual' load-shedding, one refuses to get used to it. The reason is simple: this so-called transitory power-cut obnoxiously unannounced as it has been despite the knowledge of cable-ripping through a callous road-digging exercise by WASA, comes as an insult to the injury. And just look at the timing of it! The oppressive heat and humidity that have dogs go mad in the proverbial Bangla month of *Bhadra* dreadfully brews with an acute paucity of water holding off a decent bath or wash or a helpful glass of potable water.

The sufferance is all the more gnawing when one realises that what has been pre-eminently doable in terms of reduction of the systems loss has gone away, thanks to the vested interests within the utility organisations. They have their tutelage, spherically and bottom-upwards, in a thriving, fortified spoil-system that encompasses nearly everybody in an utility organisation. You scratch by back, I scratch your back — seems to be the unwritten rule.

Be it power or water connection or a telephone line, the paper-work more often than not is a synonym for palm-greasing. But there, after all, one has gone through a procedure, but what about the subsidiary lines taken out arbitrarily from a point with a stated voltage capacity. Put together such a capillary of unauthorised connections and you have a large segment of the systems loss. Allowing for the mechanical leakage of 11 per cent, we could certainly have done away with the remaining 30 per cent waste of power if we had the political will to do so.

This is one area where the political parties can effect a convergence of opinion more easily than perhaps in other parameters of national concern. Consumers are a vote-bank in the real sense of the term, the CBA leaders, corrupt officials and petty employees only make up a dispensable one if it comes to that. There is no political card to play here, a vital national interest is crying in the wilderness for protection. The investment luck will not smile on the energy sector nor could we be proud of our elected government if the state authority is allowed to be compromised through the suzerainty of a minority of culpably corrupt elements.

Community Policing

Reeling in the distractions of tailing the ubiquitous street processions, gesticulating to clear the structurally unmanageable traffic blockages and minding the VIP duties, the short-handed and under-equipped DMP is only a fringe-toucher on the canvas of law and order.

There has to be a symbiotic relationship between the police and the community not merely to build confidence and trust in each other but also as a working necessity to ensure collective well-being of the society. It is a good tiding that neighbourhood security committees have already been formed at the behest of the DMP to checkmate terrorism. The first step has been taken but community policing is a long way off. It is a much wider concept than the security committees or ward committees sitting occasionally and determining the status of law and order or the criminality situation.

For these committees to be dynamically and diagnostically operative they must, among others, include NGO representatives and, of course, women rights activists.

The practice of mapping the criminal zones and sticking to them for surveillance ought to have a border application given that no part of Dhaka seems immune to terrorism or disorderly behaviour. The police need updating their lists of criminals with assistance from the community. The police and the local vigilantes should share the burden of patrolling the streets. But most of all, it will be the duty of the community leaders to instill in the minds of policemen that degree of fearlessness whereby they can act professionally with complete neutrality.

"The Ball is Now in Their Park"

by Rashid Suhrawardy

We are moving into the most delicate period of our democratic process. The law and order situation is at the very core of our future and prosperity. Unless this situation is addressed effectively all the resolutions and intentions of this Government will fall by the wayside. In that light how can it be in the Government's interest to exacerbate the prevailing problem?

Karim as observations based on mere sample surveys.

As a student of psephology since the 1954 Jukto Front elections I am lost in wonder how the manipulators, corrupt officials and party musclemen participating in the thousands of rigged centres in general elections and the hundreds in bye-elections, always seem to practise their nefarious machinations when there is no one around to spot them. They have a sixth sense that borders on the miraculous.

I feel that if Mr Karim had contacted the CEC as indeed I did, to ascertain the facts he would have saved himself the embarrassment of inaccuracy. Firstly Mr Hena, the CEC categorically assured me that at no time and in no circumstances did he state that he had visited more than three centres out of the seventeen about which Mr Moudud Ahmed had complained of the occurrence of irregularities. During the day of the bye-elections the CEC visited 3 centres in Bogra, 2 in Sirajganj, 3 in Laxmipur and 3 in Mirerashari. With this itinerary it would have been impossible, unless he donned Superman's cape and costume, to have visited all seventeen of Mr Moudud's centres, where complaints of malpractice had been lodged.

The DC of the area reported

to the CEC of 12 centres complained of by Mr Moudud. The CEC contacted Returning Officers from those centres and received reports from Election Enquiry Officers, all of which negated Mr Moudud's assertions.

In some centres no BNP polling agents, supervising the women's polling booths, were to be found and upon further enquiries it was found that there had been no agent present during the whole day. After investigating a number of cases alleging that Awami Leaguers had resorted to impersonating BNP polling agents it transpired that in many cases the alleged masquerades had been exactly the same polling agents, who had been on duty on June 12th!

I suppose no one has stopped to think that the voters of Laxmipur were perceptive enough to judge Mr Moudud Ahmed on his peripatetic track record. He has been involved with more parties in his chequered political career than a Chelsea-deb at the height of the Debutantes. Coming out season in London, Rezau Karim makes a very naive statement, which I can only justify as political sophistry, that seats gained or lost by the Government party in the first bye-elections following a general election must somehow be commensurate with the

record of its success or failure between the general elections and the bye-elections.

For a start let us not forget that in the general election the electorate voted for the actual party leaders viz Khaleda Zia 5 seats, General Ershad 5 seats, Sheikh Hasina 3 seats, together with front ranking leaders such as Mohammed Nasim, Anwar Hossain Monju, Tofael Ahmed, Abdur Razzak and Oli Ahmed.

It does not therefore, follow that in a bye-election the electorate will automatically elect a less established candidate from their original party choice. It is interesting to note, however, that two wives, one brother and one first cousin were returned in the bye-elections!

Secondly and more importantly, since no Government in a matter of ten weeks is going to move the earth in the implementation of its policies the psychological trend of voters will always shift towards the ruling party. By mid-term you can bet the shirt on your back that the ruling party, whichever it is, will find it difficult to win or hold on to a marginal bye-election seat. That is why Magura with an 80,000 swing in favour of the BNP Government in the mid term of its regime, when it had just suffered humiliation in the Mayoral elections

in Dhaka and Chittagong, was such a disastrous miscalculation of rigging.

We are moving into the most delicate period of our democratic process. The law and order situation is at the very core of our future and prosperity. Unless this situation is addressed effectively all the resolutions and intentions of this Government will fall by the wayside. In that light how can it be in the Government's interest to exacerbate the prevailing problem? I ask you, in all honesty, which party is gaining from the intensification of terrorism?

In the Sangsad we have already during the inaugural session of this Parliament witnessed the Opposition's perambulatory tactics. It has given due notice that it is ill-disposed to attend sessions presided over by the Speaker. Let me warn you that it will be only a matter of time before the Opposition will attempt to malign the Deputy Speaker and walk out during his presidency of Parliamentary sessions.

The strategy is clear — boycott the Sangsad and return to the streets. If the BNP following this campaign — really thinks it will win the support of the people of this country, who were made to suffer untold calamities for two whole years and who came close to

loathing all politicians, then I suggest it had better return to its ABC manual of politics.

If it feels that for its own vested interests it can disrupt the workings of government to such a degree that it will bring about a political upheaval and change the organ of Government it will be doing a total disservice to our beleaguered people and bring nothing but opprobrium upon itself.

When, in a spirit of good will, the Government asked the Opposition to join hands with it, in order to tackle the evils and ills inflicted upon our nation, the Opposition summarily dismissed the offer as an attempt to restore the BKSAL system of Government. Without going into the pros and cons of that system it is an undeniable fact that BKSAL did not allow for opposition parties in the Sangsad. Here, in the spirit of resolving the innumerable problems facing our nation, we not only wanted but, more importantly, needed the Opposition's co-operation.

If by giving that the Opposition felt that somehow it would compromise its efficacy as an opposition then it should have responded in that vein and not condemn the offer as cynical manoeuvring on the part of a Government, which attempted to seek all-party co-operation to expedite the resolution of a number of priority problems. If I may take a leaf out of Mr Karim's book — here is an opportunity to be won by the Opposition. The ball is now in their park. Play with it in the Sangsad or play with it in the streets. The choice is theirs.

Military Tries to Force Genie Back in Bottle

M G G Pillai writes from Kuala Lumpur

Demonstrators deaths, torched buildings, troops confronting thousands of protesters — Indonesia's not mally carefully-guided politics have shifted on their axis. A Gemini News Service correspondent examines the situation.

I F writer Mark Twain was right when he said that no army on earth can stop an idea whose time has come, Indonesia is due for change. The idea in this case is that after 30 years of power — 25 as elected leader — President Suharto must make way for a new leader.

The situation has echoes of events in 1965, with the failure of subtle pressures on President Sukarno to retire gracefully. In the abortive coup that followed and subsequent anti-communist backlash, between 500,000 and a million people were killed.

The murder of six generals and the consequent rise to power of General Suharto ended Sukarno's 20 years of post-independence rule.

A sense of déjà vu strikes those who were around at the time of the earlier confrontation, as I was. There will be no bloodletting on the scale of 1965, but the accusations against Suharto then, and, with slight modification, Suharto now, are familiar: corruption, misuse of power, enrichment of associates and family members.

One criticism made then but not now was the dominant role of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). Today, the presidential family's dominance and influence in the national economy is a major issue.

The 'idea' for change crystallised unexpectedly. The ABRI military sees itself as the guardian of the state. Muslims account for more than 90 per cent of the country's 190 million population, but the ABRI wants the country to be secular.

Although it would not pub-

licly admit it, with the PKI effectively neutralised, the military regards Islamic groups as the biggest threat to the state. The ABRI does not want the Islamists to challenge Suharto in elections due over the next year and a half.

In Indonesian culture, particularly for the dominant Javanese people, the leadership is accorded respect and rarely challenged. Once a challenge is made, however, the incumbent gracefully withdraws or is ejected.

So the military harassed and squeezed the Muslim groups, making it difficult for them to operate, as Malaysia has done with the Darul Iqam fundamentalist Islamic movement.

The Islamists are not ready to challenge the President openly, but would like their nominee to succeed him.

One man who might fit the bill is the Technology Minister, Professor B J Habibie, who has developed Indonesia's technological capacity in a series of high-flying and much-publicised projects.

The military quietly blocked him, and felt that the President's unopposed re-election was all but assured.

If Suharto had any reservations about standing after the death of his wife in April, he had overcome them — when, to the surprise of everyone,

Megawati Sukarnoputri, daughter of the first President and leader of her father's Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI), burst onto the scene.

The ABRI forced PDI to elect a leader more amenable to its candidate for the presidency.

That was unexpected enough. But ABRI was even more surprised and shocked by the outpouring of national support for her. The bloody riots in Jakarta on 27 July were the worst for more than 20 years. And the more pressure the ABRI has put on Megawati, the more concentrated her support has become.

The ABRI will find it difficult to withdraw its pressure without losing face, but clearly wants to avoid a serious challenge by Megawati and the PDI. Already, however, Suharto's supremacy is flawed as a result of recent events.

A pre-election withdrawal would be an inconceivable enormous climb-down, but he could opt to stand for re-election and then retire after a respectable interval. A people's assembly, which is itself only partly-elected, picks the president, and his defeat by a challenger in this chamber would be highly unlikely.

In such a scenario, his successor would probably be Javanese, and a general. Possible candidates include General Try Sutrisno, vice-president and

former defence minister; or Suharto's brother-in-law, ABRI commander General Faisal Tandjung. But given the increasing vociferousness of complaints about the way members of Suharto's family are acquiring wealth, an in-law would be a poor choice.

Whatever the outcome, however, the ABRI looks certain to

remain in control. Its influence reaches into every corner of the administrative and political structure. It still dominates Golkar, the principal political party.

It is difficult to see how change will come without more violence.

The military's actions to force the genie back into the

bottle came as foreign investors — apart from the Japanese, who generally take a longer view of such matters — watched events with growing concern. Now even the Japanese are worried, both by the riots and by the high-profile activities of three of the President's sons in the car industry. Japan is heavily involved in Indonesia and its concern helped prompt the ABRI to spring into action. It may have entered the fray a little late.

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OPINION

Thoughts on Literacy and Development

Isaac Baroi

International Literacy Day was observed in Bangladesh as all over in the world. It is very important to look into the real value of this day. Millions of dollars have been spent in the name of elimination of illiteracy. But often it seems that all went in vain. We have a big weakness: we often run away from a situation which demands full-time attention and struggle.

In Bangladesh, the percentage of literacy has not yet improved, as we have got normal data: in 1985 literacy was 33 per cent in Bangladesh, in Sri Lanka 87 per cent, in India 43 per cent, in Bhutan 24 per cent, and in Nepal 26 per cent. But it has been recently discovered (or alleged?) that our present literacy rate is much lower than that! — we are never sure.

All these statistics in third world countries never support the argument of development, nor can we use them with confidence. Statistics must be correct otherwise they can only be a fantasy. It is said that the United States has two cores of illiterate people, the UK has more or less the same number. But there is one thing that does not mean the same thing as in other countries. Actually 'illiteracy' is a term coined by colonial powers for the natives. 'Third world country' and the above refer to a country like Bangladesh, but they have perhaps forgotten that to 'keep' someone illiterate is a crime; and yet worse is to downplay someone's gift or skill.

In our country, when we talk of illiteracy, we often forget to evaluate the inherent talent of the people, their work, their skills. To mark someone as illiterate is rather inhuman. Illiteracy means that one has walled the road of development. Illiteracy could be a problem in reading or writing, but it never means 'uncivilised' as the west conceived of the 'illiterate' in the third world.

In Bangladesh we never have any statistics on the skills of the people — skills of good

farmers, fishermen, labourers, weavers, blacksmiths, potters, sculptors, carpenters, mechanics, etc. Because, they are illiterate people. We have the statistics of the educated — the professionals. We have the enumeration of intellectuals and the percentage of illiteracy minus the skills of illiterate people. So, it is better to avoid the statistical explanation of illiteracy, because, we avoid the inherent gifts and traditional skills of people, which are the real strength of our development even today.

In our country the issue of development is a very dry subject. The problems are so acute that simple human hearts cannot pass through this dryness. And it is an irony that those who call Bangladesh backward make our development work more complicated and confusing with their 'lofty' ideas and funny analytic gestures.

Perhaps they want to indicate that the more incomprehensible their ideas are, the wiser they are. They often speak things which the poor people never wanted to hear, because, all their words are not friendly, nor linked with the daily life or struggle of the people.

This is the difference between academic and practical life in Bangladesh. So, specialists' approach needs to be changed. Otherwise, their ideas would be useless for the people, only making the normal situation more confusing for them. Our road and direction must be discerned from our people's life. Yes, from 68,000 villages, not from academics or donors' offices.

A few years ago reportedly some university professors wrote a book for illiterate people. Before writing it they must have analysed the entire Bangladesh situation, characteristics of the poor, the psychology of the village people, the statistics of Bangladesh etc, and examined several dozens of adult literacy textbooks. Yet the

book they prepared spending, believably, crores of taka, and taking more than two years, remained an 'iron bread' for the target illiterate.

The same may be said about total development. The European history provides plenty of instructive lessons. Freedom, equality and fraternity, proclaimed by the French Revolution and enforced rather by division, finally turned into rhetoric, into a dream with which the capitalist society of the 19th century had nothing in common. Freedom cannot be gained by the separation between literate and illiterate; fraternity cannot be achieved without sharing the life of people unseparably; justice cannot be done through ignorance of one's neighbour's pain; and real development cannot be achieved without a deep inner motivation.

However, it is not to blame intellectuals anyway. Actually, we have a gulf of difference between the prescription of intellectuals and specialists, and the receptibility of the people. So in real life development, specialists often shout to the poor: 'We played wedding music for you, but you wouldn't dance! We sang funeral songs, but you wouldn't cry!' But, again in real life, they actually played wedding music for themselves — they happened to be the actors and the audience at the same time.

NGOs are receiving money from their donor partners abroad but it is very important that we should work according to our people's need and will. Otherwise, we would be speaking about development in tongue which our people do not understand, because it is not their own. Bangladesh will develop in spite of its illiteracy because, our people have hundreds of skills of work, they are the most gifted people in the world. We have many things to be proud of. And a right literacy approach should add to their pride discarding nothing.

Importance of Insurance

Gopal Chandra Pal

Insurance is a modern invention by which people can protect themselves from the worst evils and perils that arise from many uncertainties of life — a loss or damage of wealth, the mind of affected people from anxiety of death and loss of wealth or property.

The establishment of several insurance companies — both life and general — represent a bold initiative by a group of dynamic entrepreneurs to infuse the spirit with vigour and to introduce a new dimension in the field of insurance. There is scope for both public and private sectors to expand insurance companies.

The administration of the insurance companies is manned and managed by a group of highly qualified, dy-

namic and seasoned insurance people with years of experience and flawless professionalism to their credit. The prime emphasis is on service with security of the highest order to the people, particularly to the valued clients and customers. The service above everything else shall be friendly, fast and instantaneous. Our specialised knowledge, long experience and some financial standing will make us a most dependable and trustworthy protector of the risk of any dimension.

The prosperity of a country depends directly upon the development of industries, insurance and banking are the part and parcel of industrialisation. The facilities and services of insurance and banking constitute collectively the infrastruc-

ture of an economy, and development of these facilities is an essential precondition for increasing industrial production in a country.

Expansion of branches of the insurance companies and banks, goes hand in hand for business. Apart from the quantitative rise in the insurance business, it is important to note the qualitative changes also. Setting up of more insurance companies in the rural areas is to solve the acute unemployment problem prevailing all over Bangladesh. So the government should come forward to encourage the private sector to set up insurance companies for economic development of the state leaving aside foreign aid dependence. We should remember, 'Self-help is the best help'.

To the Editor...

"Sept 5 By-elections"

Sir, The opinion given by a 'Friend of Democracy' in *The Daily Star*, dt 9/9/96 on June 5 election caught my eyes and I would like to suggest few words to our so-called true democratic friend. The perso's signature as 'a friend of democracy' is a great laugh because whatever he/she has written is completely politically-motivated one. The person is a great fan of Awami League which is good, but please do not give biased opinion to the readers as your statement does not have any logic in it.

The people of this country has accepted the June 12th election (though there are few cases pending, and one never knows whether this will get any notice or not) but your statement on Sept 5 election and the logic that you have set up by explaining Sept 5 election is completely

What is a 'Bir Uttom' medal worth?

Lt. Col. Quazi Nooruzzaman (ret'd) B U, one of the few remaining Sector Commanders of our Liberation War, is 71 years old as of Friday, 13th September. Let me tell you about him, for he has lived a glorious life. Believe me when I say that, there are very few who at 71 can proudly declare, 'I have not compromised with my conscience'. He is one of them.

In March 1971, an already retired army officer, he scarped the Moudhupur Jungles to offer his services to the little group of men who had decided to revolt. As early as late December 1971, his duty to his country done, he had the courage to return to his modest civilian life. Since then he has vociferously told one and all to address him as Mr Q N Zaman, without a *Bir Uttom* at the end. But that is not why I admire him.

At the root of the social movement against 'Religion in Politics' lies this valiant Freedom Fighter. For that is our real War for Freedom. Very few

know of the hours he spent with the late Jahanara Imam convincing her about the need, and the moral duty to be the head of this movement. This movement which later became known as the 'Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Andolon'. Very few know that the first meeting for this movement was conducted in his tiny little apartment.

The movement once having gained a voice, and when one and all were joining it this man alone distanced himself. His work had been done.

He is one of our forgotten heroes.

On 12th September he was admitted into the Armed Forces Combined Medical Hospital (CMH). Not too serious an ailment.

During my visit to the CMH, I accidentally climbed to the 2nd floor and saw a row of VIP and VVIP rooms, and wondered, 'Who are Bangladesh's VIPs?' I thought of this frail, old man in the dank and dark room downstairs and asked myself, 'What is a *Bir Uttom* medal worth?'

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"Take Time to Think"

Sir, I am sure there is considerable doubt in the minds of some of us (who take the time to think) about the authenticity and practicality of our existing education system. Corruption seems to be the basic criteria of the system. Time has come to give a new dimension to the present education system. Values and morals have to be incorporated in order to achieve better results.

The education system, as it exists today, has not changed much over the last 30 years or so, and the goal remains to produce people who can work as subordinates. There is no scope for innovation and originality. The curriculum should be made more practical and should provide opportunities to develop one's 'self' and the ability to think independently. Only then will the system be freed from the shackles of immorality and valueless teachings!

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