

Indictment on Doctors

The medical practitioners among all professionals in the government service have the ignominious distinction of coming at the top for irregularities and indiscipline. This is the finding of a report by no less an authoritative body than the Public Service Commission (PSC). We believe there could not be a stronger indictment on the performance by the country's physicians than this. Indeed the doctors, barring a handful of the highly ethical and devoted to their duty, have earned enough unpopularity among the public. However the Hippocratic oath-takers have by now learnt to be sufficiently insensitive to brush aside all public criticisms against them and hardly ever felt to change their ways. Now that the body that is their selecting authority for service has brought such serious charges against them, can we expect them to wake up from their long slumber?

To be identified as the number one group to be negligent of duty is particularly deplorable for physicians because their service directly relates to individual's life or death. Nowhere is it more evident than in government hospitals and that too on two levels: first they are not sincere about their job; second whatever service they render there, they do so for the rich and the influential. The common people are completely ignored. But this is totally inconsistent with the oath they take at the time of stepping into the profession.

We hold the view that the neglect shown to the suffering people is also inconsistent for another reason. This concerns the medical professionals' income through private practice or involvement with private health clinics and diagnostic centres. When they have been earning a lot of money, there is no reason why they should neglect their professional duties. Unfortunately, not only their professional ethics and integrity but also their efficiency has also been questioned by people seeking medical help. This explains why people who can afford, go abroad for medical treatment.

We urge our doctors to take note of what the public think of them, and reform themselves with a view to restoring the dignity of their noble profession.

DU Second Shift

Although no decision has been taken yet, Dhaka University authorities' reported contemplation over a possible second shift appears to be a belated dawning of the inevitable. Indeed the pressure of admission seekers in country's most vaunted seat of higher education has grown enormously over the years. Rise in the demographic index as well as in that of the education coupled with a stasis in the growth of institutions for higher education have been the reasons behind this suffocating glut in the few universities that are there. Dhaka University being the worst sufferer of them all.

Matters have been further complicated by what we have come to know as session jam or backlog. While students in the university were counting their academic life in terms of donkey's years the number of those outside — the aspiring entrants spiralled in geometric progression. Every year, students with excellent academic background are getting defeated in their bid to enter the university for higher education.

Perhaps, this annual tale of disappointment due to failed dreams of higher education would have been little shorter had the middle class illusion of education as a university degree been replaced by real understanding of it as an aid for an individual to prosper both singly and nationally.

The few private universities that have cropped up in the recent times are too young for an evaluative survey of their impact in shedding the load off the state universities. Until now, private university as a concept for promoting the cause of higher education in the country seems to be hamstrung by two factors of seminal importance: economics and quality. The one or two universities that ensure quality education just do not fit into the economic ability of a typical middle class Bangladeshi family. The majority of those with a semblance of proximity to the middle class affordability is just not good. In fact, some of them are travesties of the picture that springs in our mind by the name of a university. So, higher education in the private sector is still a dilemma between quality and affordability.

Under the circumstances, the thought about starting a second shift by the DU authorities seems to be what the doctor ordered. Notwithstanding the certain disadvantages like non availability of the transport and residential facilities as mooted to be faced the students of the second shift, the idea looks destined to serve, no matter, how infinitesimally, the middle class dream of higher education.

A New Telecom Reality

The 29th World Telecommunications day was celebrated yesterday in Bangladesh as elsewhere amidst a reality that was distinctively different from that of any such occasion in the past. It came with Bangladesh caught in the middle of her slow but inexorable preparation to embrace the latest telecommunications technology marked by welcome government initiative to remove the obstacles impeding the process.

The importance of telecommunications as an integral condition for development can hardly be overemphasised. It is a pity that although we have harped long and loud about problems like political stability and natural disaster, we have apparently given very little thought to our telecommunications reality. One reason that weakens the argument of our touted relative strength in wooing foreign investors is our poor telecommunications facility. Only after modern telecommunications is ensured along with of course, political stability that our advantage of having cheap labour will lend credence to our claim as the possible investment destination.

Apart from huge investment for the infra structural development in the telecommunications sector, an overhauling of the concerned government agency seems to be the order of the day. Because for years TNT has been a den of corruption and all sorts of anomalies, a fact that probably goes a long way to explain the general pattern of telecommunications charge in Bangladesh which is probably the highest in the world.

We hope the day has left the government with a heightened realisation of what needs to be done in this sector.

The British Elections: Do We Have Something to Learn?

by Dr Khondakar Quadrat-I Elahi

The political culture we observe in the advanced democratic countries is not the result of the magnanimity of their political leaders; it is the achievement of strict practice of democratic principles and values. How are we going to make our political leaders practise democracy in their parties? We must find an answer if we do care about our welfare.

THE Parliamentary Election in Britain has put the Labour Party in power and by that has set the stage for a new era in the British politics, ending 18 years of continuous Conservative rule.

Two historic events took place in the British election. First, the Labour Party won a landslide victory: of the 659-member House of Commons, it captured 419 seats while the Conservative Party managed to secure only 165 seats. The Labour handed the Conservatives their worst drubbing since 1932 as BBC political analyst Anthony King says, "Landslide is too weak a word. I would offer you a metaphor: it's an asteroid hitting the planet, destroying practically all life on earth."

Second, Tony Blair, the 43-year-old charismatic leader of the Labour Party, became the British's youngest prime minister in 185 years.

In Britain, two things change very quickly after a Parliamentary election: one is the government, if defeated and the other is the leadership of the defeated party. The poll ended at 10 pm on the 1st of May, and the Prime Minister John Major tendered his resignation to the Queen next day at 11:30 am. In just an hour's time, Mr Blair was sworn in as the new Prime Minister of Britain.

In accepting the Election results, Mr Major stated, "We have been comprehensively defeated." On the one hand, he congratulated Mr Blair in his post and offered his help in running the government; on the other, he asked his party leaders and workers to reflect upon the defeat and suggested them to select a new leader to lead them forward in their reflections.

Had the Labour Party failed to win the election, Mr Blair, in all probability, would have to resign. This is the British political culture.

The British elections perhaps carry little value for us, because the nature and outcome of the general elections in our country are fundamentally different: they neither represent our conscious desire of changing the government and its policies, nor they bring any relief to our troubled life and provide any hope for the future.

However, this election in Britain has given us an opportunity, an occasion, to reflect on our situation, to reflect on what is wrong with our political system.

Accepting the verdict of the people by conceding defeat and congratulating the 'victories' party is supposed to be a political courtesy in a democratic system. Unfortunately, this political courtesy does not exist in our country. We had a truly fair Parliamentary election in 1991 under the caretaker government of Justice Shahabuddin, the present President. Awami League Leader Sheikh Hasina, the present Prime Minister, could not accept the election to be so fair; she, therefore, accused of a 'stakeholder' (a subtle manipulation) taken place in the election. Few people in Bangladesh really understood what she had meant by this phrase. Whatever was the meaning of her accusation, she did two things: First, she created a precedent of not welcoming the results of a general election that is appreciated to be fair both at home and abroad. Second, she unconsciously questioned the integrity of Justice Ahmed, as the election was conducted under his leadership.

BNP's political position is not at all different from that of Awami League's. Before resigning, it concluded an election in which no other political party participated and was disappointed overwhelmingly both at home and abroad. BNP, however, claimed their one-party election to be both fair and constitutional. On the contrary, they declined to accept the results of the general election conducted by the second caretaker government. Currently they have refused to participate in the by-elections and demanded to remove the Chief Election Commissioner. Their accusation is that elections would not be fair under him; an accusation that few people in Bangladesh can understand.

In democracy, the sovereign power of the state belongs, theoretically, to the people, which they exercise in the general election. People exhibit their approval of a political party by electing its leaders to run the

government. Accordingly, the failure of a political party to form the government amounts to people's disapproval of its leaders. In Britain, if the party in power is defeated, its leader resigns and a new leader is elected by a leadership convention. If the opposition party fails to win the election, a similar political process takes place.

In our country, the outcome of a general election has little effect on the party leadership. This indicates that the people, the presumed sovereign authority of the state, have little influence, let alone control, on our political parties and their leaders. In turn, this reveals the nature and extent of poverty in our political system. The question is, why our political system is like this?

Moudud Ahmed, in his highly publicised book, *Democracy and the Challenge of Development: A Study of Politics and Military Interventions in Bangladesh* has identified three factors responsible, in his words, for the crisis of democracy in our country.

The first factor is the factionalism that has been causing fragmentation of our political parties since independence. This, in turn, encourages the formation of new parties. The ultimate outcome of this process is the mushrooming of a large number of parties with poor organisational structure and little public support. The second factor is the profound role that the political heritage and the family background have been playing in determining the leadership of political parties in our country.

Mr Ahmed's final factor is the totally autocratic management of the political parties. In his own words, "Each major party is headed by a person who is omnipotent in the management of the party, including the formation of the central and executive committees. The party structures and committee are filled by nominations and not by elections. Council meetings and annual meetings are not held regularly and parties are run at the dictate of one person without any process of consultation or discussion. Loyalty to the leader becomes more im-

portant than loyalty to the party or the country."

Mr Ahmed has indeed identified the true factor responsible for the crisis in our political system. This factor is that our political parties are undemocratic in the true sense of the term; they hardly practise organisational rules and principles. If they did, political parties would not have fragmented due to factionalism and more importantly, political heritage and family background would have played truly productive role.

Both Sheikh Hasina and Khaleeda Zia were dragged into politics with the express purpose of saving their parties from being disintegrated. The assassinations of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Ziaur Rahman created vacuums in the top party hierarchies of Awami League and BNP, respectively, which the central leaders failed to fill through political process. Sheikh Mujib's daughter and General Zia's wife were brought into the picture to halt the eminent disintegration. Once they were in, they could not be sent back, because there were powerful groups for keeping them in power. However, none of such situations would have developed if these parties were run and managed democratically.

The political culture we observe in the advanced democratic countries is not the result of the magnanimity of their political leaders; it is the achievement of strict practice of democratic principles and values. The Iron Lady, Thatcher was forced to hold leadership convention and finally resign from the party leadership during the period of her premiership. John Major had to go through the same process but luckily survived.

How are we going to make our political leaders practice democracy in their parties? We must find an answer if we do care about our welfare. There is, however, one thing that we can be certain of beyond any shadow of doubt: we would never get true democracy in our country if our political parties tend to be undemocratic.

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WINDS OF CHANGE Labour Loosens Reins

With Labour Party installed in power after long 18 years, Britain is all set to see winds of change sweeping across the land. Scotland may soon have a parliament of its own and Wales too is likely to have a provincial legislature. The House of Lords may also see certain adjustments. And the European Community will have a more amiable Britain in its ranks. Irtiza Nasim Ali, Chief Editor of Probe News Agency, returns from London and reports on the devolution promised by Mr Blair's government.

AMONG other things, Labour promises devolution and a separate Scottish parliament within a year. It will also consider one for Wales. Although it is yet uncertain what form this devolution will take, it implies that England will no longer be synonymous with the United Kingdom. Labour is also considering introducing proportional representation in England.

There are two things which are quite fundamental. Labour Party has said, quite remarkably, power must be devolved. The only way to keep United Kingdom united is to weaken the power of the unitary state. All power must not come from Westminster. Labour will hold a referendum and devolve political and economic authority. There will be a Welsh assembly, which will be a provincial legislature. And Scotland will have a proper parliament, a Scottish Parliament which will have the authority to raise revenue.

Basically what they are saying is that a unitary state is too difficult to hold because there are a lot of local grievances which Westminster has not handled well. And the Labour Party's view is that it is more democratic to restore parliamentary authority to Scotland, which is a distinct nation. England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales are four separate nations in Britain. They have their own separate flags.

With respective parliaments of their own, they would be able to raise taxes. They will of course get money from the centre, but will be more locally autonomous.

The Tories oppose this view. They say that this decision is the first step to separate Scotland from England which, in turn, will lead to the destruction of the United Kingdom.

The people of Scotland did not vote in a single Conservative MP from Scotland. In Wales there is not one Tory MP either. This goes to show that the local nationalist forces have rejected the Tory principle completely.

So UK will become a more federal structure, looser and more united by voluntary will rather than by force. These unions were made 500 or 700 years ago by war.

Another big constitutional change that Labour might go for is to curtail the power of hereditary peerage. The probable changes may weaken the power of the House of Lords to a certain extent. That will be a major shift from the present state of affairs.

And Britain's chilly attitude towards Europe is likely to warm considerably. Tony Blair has been cautiously in favour of an integrated assimilation into the community. He is prepared to respond positively to the call for a single currency, not, of course, at the cost of British interests.

The Lessons of Muharram

by M Arshad Ali

that God enjoins upon the faithful — and he was found equal to discharging it with the utmost sincerity and greatest sacrifice. A little bit of compromise on his part might have saved his life and the lives of his family and companions, may be he might have waxed and waled in the feudal luxury that could well ensue from his surrender to Yazid — luxury and debauchery incarnate along with all the attendant vices. Had he resorted to so doing, an abysmal degradation would have been his lot. He could not have succeeded in the trial that tested his allegiance to God as well as to the nation and the faith. Temptation for worldly happiness could not stand in the way of fulfilment of his duties ordained by his Creator.

Dark oblivion, that could have engulfed him in the event of his failure to prove himself equal to the task he was assigned to, itself proved futile. He emerged out victorious and that is why the great poet and philosopher Iqbal is found chanting 'Islam zinda hota hai karbala ke bad' (Islam emerges victorious after every incident of the dimension of Karbala).

Hussain's sacrificing spirit demonstrates the inherent invincible spirit of the faith of Islam that enjoins upon its followers to do right, being an example to others to do right and exercising to see that right prevails and eschewing wrong, being an example to others to eschew wrong and exercising to

see that wrong and injustice are defeated.

With every advent of Ashura many people are found mourning the colossal loss indulging in lamentation over the poignant tragedy and diabolical sufferings that befell Imam Hussain (R), his family and compatriots in the battle of Karbala. The emulating part of the sacrifice remains uninculcated, and therefore, unadhered to — the exemplary teaching of Hazrat Hussain that galvanises people to wage the struggle between truth and falsehood, between right and wrong between good and evil even if it demands of man the greatest sacrifice of laying down his most precious possession which he calls life. It is a struggle that is as old as humanity. Hussain's is an example that provided sure stim-

uli at different stages of history. Our freedom fighters were inspired by example of the kind to become deathless by courting death in our liberation war — the war for justice against injustice, for moral elevation against depravation, for right against wrong as represented by them against the occupation forces of Pakistan.

The noble sacrifice of Hussain (R) will continue to activate people in their struggle for establishment of the rights of the deprived usurped by the immoral elements of the society for all times to come. It is in this perspective that the rebel poet Nazrul Islam calls upon us not to bewail but to sacrifice: 'Tyag chat marsia krondan chah'.

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Cruelties Can't Kill Values

by Kazi Aulad Hossain

THE tragic events connected with the unequal fight at Karbala and the martyrdom of Hazrat Imam Husayn inspire all people irrespective of caste, creed and colour. Hazrat Imam Husayn's was an unprecedented self sacrifice. He preferred to lay down his life and face all eventualities for a just cause. Now the question is why there was such a confrontation between Imam Husayn and his small party, and Yazid and his army including a 4,000 strong cavalry led by Umar bin Saad and the sycophant Obaidullah, the local governor. The reasons are not far to seek. They were nothing but lust for power — power to be retained by hook or by crook, power that would perpetuate from generation to generation to rule an empire without let or hindrance.

It may be worthwhile to discuss here briefly the genesis of the tragedy. Consequent upon the martyrdom of Hazrat Ali (RA) his elder son Hazrat Imam Hassan was elected the Caliph of the Islamic state. On hearing this news of election governor of Syria, Muawia invaded Iraq and the invasion obliged Caliph Hazrat Imam Hassan to take prompt action and he sent troops to Iraq led by Quais to suppress Muawia. But a false death news of Quais changed the course of the war and the Caliph's soldiers revolted against him. Realising the gravity of the situation Caliph Hazrat Imam Hassan relinquished his office in favour of Muawia on certain conditions, two of which were (1) Muawia would not nominate any one during his life time as Caliph after his death, and (2) after Muawia's death Hazrat Imam Husayn, the younger brother of Hazrat Imam Hassan, would become the Caliph of the Islamic state. Prima facie Muawia agreed to fulfil the said conditions but in the long run he fla-

grantly violated them. Muawia nominated his son Yazid to become the next Caliph after his death and thus deprived Hazrat Imam Husayn to become the next Caliph as per terms and conditions of the agreement.

This is how Yazid took power after Muawia's death and became the ruler of the Islamic state. As has been stated above he had not only the lust for power; since he wanted to perpetuate his power as ruler of the state, he adopted all sorts of cruel and illegal methods for achieving his goal. When Hazrat Imam Husayn learnt that such a person (Yazid) had taken the charge of the Khilafat he declined to owe his allegiance to him for obvious reasons. Meanwhile, the people of Kufa being oppressed by their provincial governor Obaidullah Kabin Ziad, invited Hazrat Imam Husayn to Kufa to deliver them from the governor's tyranny and misdeeds.

As and when the gracious Imam was thinking to help the oppressed people of Kufa some of his friends advised him not to proceed there as they apprehended danger during his stay in Kufa. At this Imam Husayn dispatched one of his relatives, Muslim, with instructions to send back a correct situation report. On receipt of a favourable report from Muslim the Imam left for Kufa with a small band of soldiers and members of his family. But while in Kufa he heard the sad news of Muslim's assassination and this obviously embarrassed him very much and he decided to stay in Kufa in order to fulfil his mission for which he had been there.

While proceeding further a tribal chief named Al Hora along with his cavalry blocked Imam Husayn's way as a result of which he changed his route and encamped with his small

party at Karbala, a desert plain situated on the side of river Euphrates, some 25 miles away from Kufa, on the first day of the lunar month of Muharram. The provincial governor Obaidullah, however, did not like the Imam's movement and his encampment in and around Kufa and as such sent a 4,000 strong cavalry under the command of Umar bin Saad for siege with additional instruction to block the way leading to the river so that no one from Imam Husayn's party could have any access to water.

Thus Hazrat Imam Husayn and his small party were entrapped and it was out and out a conspiracy carefully designed to remove the lawful claimant of the Khilafat from the way of Yazid. It is an irony of fate that Imam Husayn, the worthy son of the worthy father, and the worthy grandson of the worthy grandfather, that is Prophet Muhammad (SM), and his party were completely cut off from the outside world. No food, no water could reach them from any quarter for keeping their body and soul together. Considering the gravity of the situation and finding no other alternative Hazrat Imam Husayn proposed to the cavalry commander to the opposite side that he (Imam Husayn) and the party could be allowed to go back to the place from where they came or proceed to Damascus for discussing the whole matter with Yazid face to face for finding a just solution. The proposals were rejected although they were in consonance with Surah Consultation of the Holy Quran.

The fearless Imam decided to fight the unequal fight that started on the day of Ashura, the tenth of Maharram, in the midst of wailing of the women and children. The tender lips of Imam Husayn's infant child could not be soaked with a drop

of water. The child was having temperature and when an arrow from opposite side struck him he embraced martyrdom in the lap of his affectionate father (Imam Husayn). Arrows struck Hazrat Imam Husayn too and he became very weak. Finally when a spear pierced his body he fell on the ground and quickly the cruel heartless Shimar did the last job by beheading the beloved grandson of the holy Prophet (SM) on behalf of the cavalry commander and also obviously on behalf of the local governor and Yazid.

And this is how the conspiracy was hatched and the unequal fight fought. The suffering of Hazrat Imam Husayn was unthinkable and unbearable, yet he fought to the last for a just cause and also for the cause of Islam. About cruelties perpetrated on Imam Husayn the renowned historian E Gibbon says: "In a distant age and climate the tragic scene of the death of Husayn will awaken the sympathy of the coldest reader." (Gibbon: Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.)

But the cruelties as referred to above or any other kind of cruelties can never belittle the pristine glories and basic principles of Islam as were preached and propounded by the holy Prophet (SM) and the first four pious Caliphs. There may be temporary setbacks in certain periods or in certain areas of the world, but as a chosen religion of Almighty Allah, the basic principles of Islam and the values will ever remain unchanged and they will thrive forever. Cruelties can never kill them.

Hazrat Imam Husayn's great sacrifice teaches us if he could lay down his life for a just cause, then we should also be prepared to sacrifice at least a portion, a small portion, of our wealth, time and comfort for a just cause and also for the indigent people around us.

To the Editor...

Letter to our PM by Peregrine Chairman

Sir, I have gone through the comment by Mr Mahfuz 29th in The Daily Star dated 29th April regarding the letter written by Mr Philip Tose, Chairman of Peregrine Investment Holding based in Hong Kong to our Prime Minister. Really, the language of the letter was insulting. Being the Chairman of the company, Mr Tose has every right to protect his employees. But the way he has chosen to save his employee is not befitting. If the government has taken any legal action against Managing Director/Director of his company, he should fight legally and in that case he may seek permission from our government to allow him to engage his chosen lawyer. But he cannot threaten the Prime Minister of a state. Moreover, he has circulated the copy of the letter to the embassies in Bangladesh

which aims at damaging the image of our beloved country to other foreign countries. I feel Mr Tose dared to write such letter as he was allowed to host conferences in Hong Kong and New York for our Prime Minister. This job should have been done by our embassies. Rather our ambassadors should not have allowed such organisation to perform as their duties. This should be the duty of the embassy officials to know the consequence for allowing hosting of such conference for the Prime Minister of the country.

We should learn lesson from this incidence. In the future hosting of any party, manager and conference for the Prime Minister or President should not be allowed to host by any such organisation except our embassies abroad.

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