

On a Relieving Note

Wednesday's morning press put the death toll in Monday's elemental strike on the southern coastal belt variously. The highest was 156. People injured were estimated at five to seven thousand. These figures would sure enough rise but to where no one knows. Many points of devastation still remain out of contact. But this certainty is already here that while loss of property occurred on the old usual vast scale — 80 per cent kutcha dwellings grounded over the whole affected area — loss of life has fortunately come down by a factor of more than one hundred.

Two attenuating physical factors have contributed to this most helpfully — the cyclone struck at mid-day unlike in the past 27 years beginning with the cataclysmic November 12, 1970 strike all of which came nightly; and two, the cyclone this time visited at ebb time restricting the rise of water in spite of forceful whipping by the winds. But far more effective were the human cautionary measures.

The nineteen-hour notice, thanks roundly to the Met Office, initiated a miracle. And miracle worked. Thanks to the threatened people's responsiveness and the motivation that was given them in this respect — and to the leaderships that made it possible for large masses of men, women and children as also cattle to be evacuated in time to the safety of the specially built cyclone shelters and other refuges. And the government endeavoured, under the leadership of Prime Minister Hasina, sincerely and greatly to make most of the 19-hour preparation time.

Three questions will determine the success of this operation. Adequacy, speed and reaching the right people and hitting the right spots. Inefficiency and corruption will simply wreck it all. Vigilance must be mounted for days on end by ministers and senior officials to thwart thieving and preferential distribution. We appeal to government to see that the succour distribution does not end traditionally in making a *miskin* of the needy ones. They are going to get relief and housing things as a matter of right — that's why the state is there — and not as any favour.

Every time such a disaster strikes we should learn from it a wee bit as to how to minimise the toll. What can be the lesson of this hurricane? Housing practices in the coastal areas must be changed radically — with government encouraging by generous support a switchover to houses that can withstand cyclones. Going for reinforced concrete in other words. Why should it be an insurmountable proposition?

Neighbourly Trade

The Joint Business Council (JBC) of India and Bangladesh has favoured an action plan at its meeting in Dhaka on Tuesday aimed at meaningfully expanding trade and economic cooperation between the two countries. Clearly, the emphasis is on removing all hindrances to trade liberalisation. We appreciate the spirit and hope that the approach made by the JBC receives official endorsement soon. The current chairman of the JBC has suggested that a task force be constituted under the council with leading businessmen on both sides with the responsibility of making recommendations for strengthening trade and economic cooperation between Bangladesh and India.

As for liberalisation of trade and lifting of tariff and non-tariff barriers there should not be two opinions, specially when Bangladesh has unilaterally lowered tariff barriers and lifted quantitative restrictions on a wide variety of commodities. India also has offered some concessions but those are not enough considering the relatively more developed industrial base of that country. So here is a strong case for India to remove all non-tariff and tariff barriers, hidden subsidies and other policy variables to allow not only Bangladesh but also other three small neighbours to have access to its market. On the bilateral plane Bangladesh has a real chance of benefiting from such a measure by India.

The trade imbalance between the two countries continues to remain a sore point. Unless a radically remedial formula is applied to narrow the yawning trade deficit for Bangladesh, the one-sided dependence and unequal relations will crumble under their own pressure. The merit of developing infrastructural facilities for both easy movement of vehicles and storing of goods has been recognised. And if we go by the global trend, we will have to take advantage of our strategic geographic position not from India alone but also from other countries of the region, including China.

Not by Gallantry Alone

Sweden Aslam has been caught. Circumstances in Bangladesh have come to such that a notorious killer, nabbed in a normal discharge of police duty, gets a flashy treatment in the newspapers. This must change and terrorists of any size be reduced to what they are — despicable creatures who must either reform or perish.

We can hardly ignore the ominous words Sweden Aslam pronounced on his capture. The likes of him do not fall from the sky. It takes years and years of grooming. Those who have made him will save him. Those were his words and this was a study in obviousness. Who doesn't know this for absolute truth. The test of the present government's anti-terrorist and pro-security professions would lie in taking Aslam's challenge and proving that he cannot be saved in the fashion many had been in the past.

Sweden Aslam had a price on his scalp. So had three others. Let us hope that they too would be put behind the bar. The best the Home Minister can do is to ensure that from Sweden Aslam on political sanctuary from any quarter whatsoever would be a thing of the past. To translate this into reality, active and willing cooperation and commitment would be needed across the political divide. Short of this police gallantry alone cannot do enough to wipe this crime off.

"We are Servants and Not Masters," British PM Tells His Legislators

It was pointed out that the high and mighty attitude of the Labour Party, after having won a landslide victory in 1945 over the Tory who had earned glory for Britain in the Second World War, was the primary cause of rejection of the Labour by the people of Britain in the following general election.

THE landslide Labour victory in Britain's general election took many people by surprise, no doubt. It raised many questions as to what had gone wrong with the Tory to suffer the most crushing defeat since 1835; as to what did the Labour do to earn such a glory and, finally, the factors swaying the mood and action of the electorate on the zero hour of casting vote. These issues have already been amply deliberated upon. What may now be of some interest to many is to learn how Prime Minister Tony Blair is setting his house to order.

In the cabinet that has been formed, as expected, some members who did not expect much got beyond their expectations. Similarly, high expectations of some others fell short of their expectations. Still, one should surmise that, on the whole, the guideline of shadow cabinet was adhered to.

More than the appointment of ministers, which is more or less a routine affair, people's attention was drawn to what the new Prime Minister told his fellow parliamentarians in terms of policy directive and advice. The first Labour Parliamentary Party meeting took place on the 7th of this month at the adjoining Church Chapel. The Parliament building, reconstructed after the Second World War, did not provide for a separate room big enough to hold meetings of

419 members belonging to one political party. The Prime Minister described his MPs as Ambassadors for Labour and for Government. Also, at the same time, he told them that they were not there "to enjoy the trappings of power" but to set high standards of work.

The principal advice Tony Blair gave to his fellow lawmakers was a note of caution. He warned them not to be complacent and not to deviate from the desired path of rendering service to people. "We are not the masters, people are the masters; we are the servants of the people," the newly-elected British Prime Minister declared emphatically in clear terms. It was pointed out that the high and mighty attitude of the Labour Party, after having won a landslide victory in 1945 over the Tory who had earned glory for Britain in the Second World War, was the primary cause of rejection of the Labour by the people of Britain in the following general election. The people do not like to be taken for granted and they often exercise their right to franchise to prove that point.

The other important point heavily underlined by the new Prime Minister was the need for

implementing the provisions set out by the party in its election manifesto. He called upon his party men and women to work steadfastly right from the outset towards fulfilling party promises.

Incidentally, almost a quarter of the new Labour MPs are women. The large photograph of Tony Blair with some of his 101 female MPs splashed all

over British newspapers is indicative of their mutual liking and respect.



Currents and Crosscurrents

by M M Rezaul Karim

But this liking of the opposite sex should be confined to certain defined limits, according to the Prime Minister. His address on this issue, couched by the usual euphemistic usage of words and phrases characteristic of the British, was, in reality, aimed also to his cabinet colleagues and ministers. The sex scandals of British Ministers

and MPs are widely known and certainly put many British governments to severe embarrassment, thereby tarnishing image of the party.

Such amorous pursuits beyond the socially acceptable and legally permissible limits have taken place in the past and, people apprehend, will continue in the future. No amount of counselling, en-

treating and warning, be those emanating from the Prime Minister himself, will deter those who are determined. Evidently, the veiled warning by the Prime Minister is suit to put a brake on such misadventures. What makes a difference in UK is the continuing and energetic vigil that the free British media exercises often causes highly embarrassing and dangerous impact on those who are involved. The British press has

earned great admiration for its bold and relentless efforts in discovering the truth and publishing it. It does not spare anyone, be that person one belonging to the highest strata of the society — a politician or even a member of the Royalty. On the contrary, greater efforts are put in to expose his or her frailties. On the domain of foreign policy, a flurry of activities have already been manifest in the implementation of Labour's policy to come closer to the European Union. Foreign Secretary Robin Cook paid his first ever ministerial visit abroad to go to Europe and to discuss issues with his counterparts and leaders in France and Germany. He made a strong plea for Britain to have a share in the European pie, pledging greater interest and involvement in European integration. His public declaration that the European affairs should, in essence, be conducted by the Anglo-Franco-German trio raised many eyebrows. Yet, this bares open Labour's policy towards mainland Europe and also that party's eagerness to assure a leading role in the next month's European Union's summit in Amsterdam poised to supplant the Maastricht Treaty. British

Permanent Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Sir John Coles, with whom I received training in London as a Foreign Service officer some 37 years ago, confirmed to me last week in London about the seriousness of the new government on this particular issue.

As for the Bangladeshi community, one witnessed immense enthusiasm during the British election. They hoped to be able to field a candidate of their own from the safe Labour seat in their habitat in Stepney in East London. The Labour MP, former Minister Peter Shore, who had made enormous contribution to our liberation struggle in 1971, retired after decades of a successful political career. Alas, the wishes of the Bangladeshi community were not realised. One of our leading compatriots in London explained to me, "You know well the nature and characteristics of our people. We will not decide on a consensus candidate and allow one of our compatriots to benefit, even if the benefit goes to someone outside the community." Accordingly, Labour's nomination went to a West Indian national who duly won the election and now represents this predominantly Bangladeshi community in West Minister. Trust, the Bangladeshi community has learnt a lesson for use in the next general election.

When Professional Ethics Takes a Back Seat

by Nilratan Halder

Anyone — who is anyone in terms of money, power or position — appears to have forgotten to be ashamed of any misconduct. The police and doctors, like many others, have done away with the sensitivity that goes along with the professional integrity

MEDICAL practitioners, officials of the National Board of Revenue and the police have topped the list according to the order in irregularities of service and indiscipline. The revelation was made by a report prepared by the Public Service Commission (PSC). Here the number of cases sent to the PSC has only been taken into consideration. The small number — 75 complaints in relation to breach of discipline were referred to the PSC — can be symptomatic of the disease but is never the disease itself. Nevertheless, the indictment on the three vital areas of government service should serve as a rude awakening for the forgetful. The malaise is endemic and all-pervasive in the country and when physicians, revenue officers and the police beat all others, it is indeed difficult to fathom its depth.

Medical professionals here have earned enough unpopularity for their negligence of duty and are making a mockery of the Hippocratic oath they take at the time of their induction into the profession. Well, there can be a few exceptions to this rule, but exceptions are always there to bring the rule in sharp outlines. But a common complaint against the physicians is that they have turned too commercial either to be serious about their profession or to de-

vote both time and attention to their patients. And they are genuinely so charged. If they had pride in their profession and wanted to defend their self-respect, they at least asked themselves the unpleasant question why people who can afford, seek medical treatment abroad. Not that our doctors have been barred from private practice nor are they worse off compared with other professionals. In fact, doctors of government hospitals earn a lot from private practice. The moneyed and the influential can avail of their service even in hospitals, but the common people are mostly ignored. Why?

Evidently, the doctors are not being honest to their profession and driven by an insatiable avarice they tend to ignore their government service and concentrate on commercialisation of their private involvement for making a fortune. That indeed leaves them with little time to give deep thoughts to individual cases of disease and consult medical books and journals to keep

them abreast with the latest developments in the area. That they are after money-making could not be questioned had they performed their duty sincerely at their workplaces and did it with proficiency and credit. Unfortunately, the reverse is true. The physicians have brought disrepute to one of the highly developed networks of medical facilities in the shape of health complexes among the developing countries.

Today we have nice and even imposing infrastructure of such health centres but inside it is a story of deception and dishonesty. Apart from two or three doctors, their colleagues stay away from their duty stations and return there at the end of the month to collect their salary package.

The doctors have been rightly detected for violation of their service rules and codes but the problem is so deep-seated that its impacts can hardly be assessed. So is the case with the police. The officers of the revenue board — indeed, the PSC had the opportunity to comment on the 1st and 2nd grade

staff of the three categories of service — also impact the social life but not so much as the doctors and the police do. Any irregularity and/or corruption by them directly relate to the government and the rich or the very rich. Their involvement in the unapproved practices is aimed at fattening their own pockets and many more besides them resort to similar methods. All weaken the state and the government but it is the way here.

So it is better to concentrate on the third professional group, police that is, from the top. A society is known by the way its police behave with its common people. On that count possibly our police have nothing much to rejoice about. The police were supposed to be the protector of the weak and innocent and an effective deterrent to the oppressive and unlawful exercise of power and influence by the rich and the outlaws. What a shame the police who should have set the example for regularity and discipline are now accused — and that too on the fact of it — of breaching those! With such an image can the po-

lice be expected to serve society and one that has taken a long stride on the road to democracy? This question must need be asked both by the police themselves and, more so, by the administration.

One misconception about the performance of the police was that the transgression or deviation occurs at the lower level because the members of the law enforcers there are least educated and suffer from various inhibitions and lack of development of their personalities. Now we come to know that the better educated and exposed too are equally at fault. This indeed is a cause for serious concern. We must think how the interactions between the police and the public can be improved. The country's politics is to blame to a large degree. But now that politics is increasingly being feared, with democratic values we have to come out of the shambles. Our doctors, revenue officers and the police are certainly a creation of the unhealthy politics and social bankruptcy, no doubt about that. Yet the legacy cannot be carried on for ever. We must bring an end to this culture. In Japan, both politicians and lately the bureaucrats have been put on the dock for failing

to rise up to the national expectation. Yet the system there continues to work because officials and public representatives are amenable to public frowns. Instead of brow-beating the public, they tend to quietly leave the stage.

In our case, anyone — who is anyone in terms of money, power or position — appears to have forgotten to be ashamed of any misconduct. The police and doctors, like many others, have done away with the sensitivity that goes along with the professional integrity. Sensitivity is what makes one proud of the work put in. A physician's job — because of its compulsive necessity for patients — and a policeman's service — because of its proximity to justice — cannot be treated like any other job. A lot depends on the way each of them performs the job. Physicians in Calcutta in particular took their profession to the height of commercialisation, now they have admitted their mistake and doing their job to the best of the patients' satisfaction. The point here is that even commercialisation cannot be devoid of professional competence. Our doctors must take note of this. However, the difference between them and the police is that they can restore sanity and dignity on their own if only they wish to, but the police service, related as it is in a complex web with very many bodies and quarters, must come through an institutional reform before proving their competence and integrity.

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

The government and the people

Sir, It appears that whoever is in power in our country, most of the people's elected representatives, MPs, ministers, bureaucrats and government officers of higher echelons do neither bother to perform their functions and duties faithfully, honestly and sincerely, nor do they like to shoulder any responsibility for errors, lapses and irregularities committed by them. Rather they feel proud in shifting their faults and failures to others, the previous government or government servants of lower cadres and clerks. They want to prove that they are always innocent, superb and indispensable. It is however very strange that each and everyone of them do claim and realise their each and every penny of pay and allowances from the public exchequer.

Sometimes, we wonder whether we have a government of the people, by the people and for the people or we have a government of the handful few, by the handful few and for the handful few.

Truly speaking, when we compare ourselves with our standard of living, politics, democracy and economic administration of the country — with those of the USA, we feel ourselves standing thousands of miles away, hundred of years behind the people of the United States.

What is wrong with us? Why can't we march forward even an inch after twenty-five years of our independence? We believe that there is no alternative to democracy to overcome our manifold problems, difficulties and hardships. We have got to institutionalise our democracy. We therefore strongly feel that side by side with the institutionalisation of democracy, we must also simultaneously apply and implement the theory of "survival of the fittest" like the USA for the sake of our existence, welfare of the people and the prosperity of our beloved motherland.

We therefore suggest that we may take some necessary changes and modifications in

the structure and pattern of our parliamentary form of government consistent with the requirements of time and situation in the interest of our nation.

i) After each general elections to be held after every five years an MP enjoying the confidence and support of the majority members of the Jatiya Sangsad may be elected as Prime Minister to form the government.

ii) The Prime Minister may appoint cabinet ministers not necessarily from the members of the parliament. But any citizen of Bangladesh may be appointed as minister. The ministers would remain in office as long as they enjoy the confidence of the Prime Minister.

iii) Appointment of ministers, ambassadors and high commissioners would be subject to approval of the JS.

iv) The ministers may take part in the deliberations of the Jatiya Sangsad but the non-MP ministers should not have the right to vote in the Parliament.

v) The Prime Minister should be responsible and accountable for success and failure of the ministers.

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Friend of the people?

Sir, I want to say something about the duties and responsibilities of our police personnel. Now-a-days, we are continuously observing how our police friends are losing their morality. It is said a policeman is a friend of the masses. But it is a matter of great regret that at present in Bangladesh this saying has no significance at all. The policemen are now, here, seem to be butchers — in my words.

No sooner had we overcome the Yasmin chapter, the alleged rape of Seema in police-custody took place. It is not yet proved whether Seema was raped by the police or not but we have to remember that Seema died in police custody as to why it is not rather unusual to think of some physical torture that Seema might have endured.

In this circumstances, it is

extremely necessary to reform our police force immediately. We have to take utmost punitive measures against the depraved guys. Otherwise, it would be, in the future, an arduous task to maintain discipline of the police force. What is our government thinking about this matter?
Md Moshir Rahman
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Life's like that

Sir, Like all engineer officers, I had my tenure at the Kara Koram Highway during 1969-71. The building of the road under the Frontier Works Organization (FWO), vividly described in an article in the Reader's Digest, Nov '80. The building of the incredible "KKH" and also a map of the route is available in that article. Frontier Pakistan, had its own extraordinary experiences, being undisturbed in nature and coming close to resilient tribesmen whom the British overloads of the subcontinent for nearly 200 years, could not subdue.

The 479-mile road, having strategic and economic importance for both Pakistan and China, passes through rugged and craggy concentration of mountains, the Himalayas, Kara Korams and the Hindu Kush, along the borders of Afghanistan, CIS countries and Indian-held Kashmir, took over 20 years and lives of many brave soldiers and local tribesmen.

There, once in every 3-6 months, the battalion doctor would check to state of health of every member of the unit. It so happened that he once failed to locate the heart of a 'sapper' at its normal left heart. A through check-up revealed that his least is at the right side since birth — a rare case indeed. It was an experience of my lifetime!

However, the man would swear placing his hand on his left chest everytime after a mishap and would get away easily.
Mirza Shafi
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may be discontinued, and/or substituted in kind or service for several years (or lifetime) to benefit the family members in some way.

Most of the genius of the society come from humble economic background (e.g. middle-class) and could do with a bit of extended help, facilities, or amenities.
A Zabr
Dhaka

Voice distortion on TV

Sir, I was stunned to read the statement of the State Minister for Information that the speech of the leader of the opposition in the House on the night of 11th of May was telecast without any 'distortion' of her voice. This, to me, is absolutely false. I heard the whole speech on the TV like thousands of other viewers that night and her voice was greatly distorted. It was amazing to note that Communications Minister's voice, and voice of the Deputy Leader of the House were very clear.

I would suggest that the State Minister should see the tape again.
A TV Viewer
Dhaka

All is not lost

Sir, On 7/5/97 morning at about 8.30 am while on my way to pick up a colleague for office the front wheel of my microbus got stuck up in an open manhole which was not there before. All efforts to get it out failed while a large crowd looked on enjoying my predicament.

Suddenly, a tall youth with glasses came forward asked politely: "Can I help, Uncle?" At my hesitant nod a half-dozen more teenagers joined him and with their combined help the micro-bus was literally lifted out of the hole.

Before I could even thank them the whole bunch melted into the crowd and vanished. This incident took place at Green Road very near to St Jude's Int. School.

The newspapers now-a-days are full of the most discouraging news about our youth so I thought it my duty to write to you about this insignificant incident which does prove that all is not lost. These teenagers are a credit to their school, their parents and to their country. If any of them reads this letter, I hope they will accept my thanks and appreciation.
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OPINION

Triglyceride and Cholesterol

Sudhir Adhikari

This refers to the editorial on Hilsa fish printed on 5 May 1997. It is very encouraging to note that people are getting more and more health conscious and moving in the right direction as regards to understand the quality of food and respect specific needs. But there are many misunderstandings about some food items and their minor constituents. Fats and cholesterol are well-known, but not well-understood by many people.

For examples, oil of all sea fishes cut down fat in human body. It (Hilsa) is rich in triglyceride which is almost a poison to human body, the chemical (cholesterol) helps human blood to coagulate etc. These statements are confusing, misleading and unrelated or remotely related to the normal functions of these substances. Sea fish oils do not cut down fats in human body. Triglycerides are not almost poisons and cholesterol helps to form plaques and can clog the blood flow.

A little attention may clarify these and some other misunderstandings. Fats and oils belong to a class of compounds known as 'lipids'. There is no difference between fat and oil. They are called oil when in liquid form at room temperature and termed fats when solid or semi-solid. Oil is composed of two substances, one is fatty acid and the other is glycerol and because of their combination, oil is also known as glyceride. One molecule of glycerol (commonly known as glycerine) can react with one, two, three molecules of fatty acids forming mono-, di- or tri-glycerides. Fatty acids are many. Fats having no double bond in the chemical structure of their fatty acids are called 'saturated fats' and having one or more double bonds are called 'unsaturated oils'. In nature, both saturated and unsaturated fats or oils are found in mixed compositions.

Fat, irrespective of source, is the most concentrated form of energy, having about twice the energy value than carbohydrate or protein. About 25-30 per cent

of calories from our normal diet should come from fats or oils containing at least two per cent essential fatty acids (EFA). These EFAs (linoleic, arachidonic acids etc.) are structurally unsaturated which our body cannot synthesise but essential for metabolism and growth, so must be taken through appropriate diet. The best sources of EFA are vegetable oils. About 2/3 of total fat-intake (including EFA) should be unsaturated. Much violation of this simple diet rule may cause excessive accumulation or depletion of fat in the body leading to problems. Carbohydrate or protein intake, age, sex, physical work etc., are some other factors to be considered.

Cholesterol is a soft waxy substance, a sterol, structurally a cyclic solid alcohol. Cholesterol is extremely essential in certain quantities for our normal body functions, as a precursor of various steroid hormones such as sex hormones, adrenal corticoids, vitamin-D etc. Major part of the cholesterol in our body is synthesised by the liver. It is also widely distributed in nature specially in meats, egg yolk and dairy products. Fruits, vegetables and vegetable oils (mustard, sesame, palm, groundnut, soybean, rice bran, sunflower etc.) do not contain cholesterol for practical purposes. Plants synthesise very little cholesterol but our body produces about 2 gm daily for our needs. This substance may be dreadful to a person with imbalanced diet and inadequate physical movements.

Healthy arteries in our body are elastic, flexible with very smooth inner surface for free flow of blood. But when diet contains too much saturated fat and cholesterol, formation plaques may occur on the smooth surface. As this plaque builds, arteries thicken, lose pliability and the consequences include heart attack and stroke. Adequate unsaturated fat in the diet helps to form High Density Lipoprotein which can act as a scavenger to deplete the formation of the plaque in the artery.