

## Towards More Literacy

Keeping in view the International Literacy Day on September 8, the government is launching today a nationwide literacy campaign. The charm of this year's campaign is — it is being conducted in tandem by the government and the NGOs, exactly 113 of them.

For an unorthodox radical rise in literacy, education management would need to be led and executed with an impressive amount of dynamism — which is an anathema on a government's bureaucratic straitjacket ways. And let the NGOs never be foolish enough to suffer from the delusion that they are the ones doing delivering — and not the government. Let the twain develop a satisfying complementarity in the process of working together for the same ends.

Now the government has been for a full century and more in the literacy game, with an emphasis on, as ever, adult literacy. The society does not stand to gain in any way if the government goes into a campaign kind of showy thing mounted for a week or a fortnight. It has a constant fight at hand to ensure that it gets its money's worth on every paisa spent on a teacher or other functionary and on facilities. The NGOs are new in the game but have already and happily made a mark. What do they think the literacy week will do to improve the literacy profile? As worthy field-workers their hands should be filled by better and meaningful and effective things.

Boosting the cause of universal literacy in Bangladesh many require some symbol and image building. That will call for very imaginative programmes. Why not make the Eighth September week into a national education festival with celebrity teachers of the order of say Kabir Chowdhury, Zillur Rahman Siddiqui, Abdullah Al-Muti and front-ranking poets, writers and painters like Shamsur Rahman and Hasan Azizul Huq and Mohammad Kibria going out for a week to teach the first learners? Properly developed this will, we assure the government, click and become a movement as it had been done in fabulous Kerala way — back in the seventies.

## DESA's Devilry

For about two hours at noon on Tuesday last, the Dhaka Electric Supply Authority (DESA) office felt the heat of public wrath. What happened at the utility service office in old Dhaka was an outburst of pent-up frustration and anger of a section of the people.

Though vandalism and lawlessness cannot be condoned as a response to a problem in a civil society, it is very difficult to make light of the powerful motivation for anarchy in this particular case.

Power supply reportedly remained suspended to four markets in old Dhaka for 22 days. And this suspension was deliberate. First the DESA employees violated their professional obligation to a section of the tax paying citizens by not fixing a transformer that had gone out of order. In fact, they took no notice of this glitch in the system, let alone the enormous inconvenience caused by this to thousands of bona fide consumers.

Secondly, they made this occasion of public suffering a fine opportunity to literally extort money. According to the Star report, the desperate and helpless shop owners allegedly agreed to pay DESA employees hefty demand of Taka 2,00,000 for restoring supply.

How naked and wicked have become the ways of corruption in the utilities sector became evident when the DESA officials who must have considered the shopowners as a dripping roast, dismantled the transformer and reportedly acted up their demand to Tk 5,00,000. It is this unexpected second part of their demand for kick backs that broke the last barrier of shopowners' patience leading to Tuesday's fracas and anarchy.

The question is how long the common people will have to pay for the greed of corrupt government officials? Corruption in the government agencies particularly those of utility services is having its negative impact in two ways. While the national exchequer is being continually robbed of huge revenue, tax paying citizens are deprived of the service for no fault of their own and the outburst of their anger is pushing the society towards a possible anomie. It is not only the economy that this phenomenon of pilferage garbed as systems loss is chipping away but also law and order.

We urge the government to do something immediately to cleanse the Augean stables like DESA, WASA and restore some meaning of the word 'service'.

We take Tuesday's incident as yet another example of dismantling of the public service structure something which the government is duty bound to maintain. An initiative is to be taken before its credibility is further destroyed due to its incapacity to live up to the minimum expectation of people.

## A Great Upset?

No one suspected this. But why? Most thought this was impossible, so they never spared a thought to this possibility. The logically inclined would now concede, yes this was possible. But only possible. Would they even now, after the inconceivable has happened, grudge Petr Korda his due and not say for once this was probable.

It is not that Sampras failed. It is the inertial fan imagination that has been shocked and slightly so. Pete put up a fight all right, a fight that only he can produce. A loss in the tie-breaker of the fifth set is neither here nor there. The outcome could as well be decided by lot as they do in soccer calling the gamble a penalty shoot out.

Outing the world champion and four times US Open clincher is also no decider for the extra ordinary Korda. He may fail in any of the remaining three stages. Whether he comes on top finally or not, his point has been well made. He has a good backhand, not great. And from service to other departments of the game he has little to excel the top ten. His great win on Monday owes wholly to superior game as against excellence in any component of the play. Indomitability and an well-integrated game won him the day.

The bamboo-lean man, all-humility all his life, was at times looking so comical. Against a stolid and damned serious Sampras, all-power and no-jokes, his lightness of being, taking the game with such a light touch — produced that effect. To cap it all there was his flying scissors-kick, a cathartic celebration of achievement, coming so clean against the choice of players' triumphant assertion of supremacy to the gods. Unforgettable. Pure joy, unforgettably expressed. Thank you, Petr.

## Tears for the Princess

# A Glorious Chapter Closes before it Ended

*The death of the Princess opens up many questions. The rights and responsibilities of journalists and photographers to cover the private life of celebrities have to be weighed against the right of an individual to some degree of privacy in their personal life.*

THE death bares open the good and the sublime of a person. The real value of one's own self is then fully appreciated, or otherwise. These sayings apply more to Diana, Princess of Wales, at her death, than perhaps anybody else in our times. Until the merciless sceptre of death untimely snatched the unfortunate Princess away from the world, very few knew how deeply she has endeared herself to the people of far and wide.

Princess Diana died of injuries caused by a terrible car crash in Paris on the 31st August. Her friend and companion, the Egyptian billionaire's son the suave Dodi al Fayed also died in the same crash. The chauffeur and the bodyguard are fighting hard for life in hospital. Seven of the photo-journalists whose chase of Diana prompted the chauffeur to ward them off by driving at exceedingly high speed, were taken in police custody and six of them have since been convicted for manslaughter.

The media, both print and electronic, have been all agog with detailed news and its analysis since the incident took place. The people of all faiths, colour, creed, age and sex the world over mourned the death of the unhappy Princess.

Heads of state, heads of government and eminent leaders paid her glowing tributes. Children and the diseased to whose cause she had dedicated her life wept bitterly. Many business houses and cultural institutions suspended their functions as a mark of respect. Affection, admiration and attention for her from so many people, common or noble, and from so many lands, were almost unbounded. 'Had the Princess been alive, as a feat of miracle, the sweet awareness of her immense popularity and love would have, perhaps, led her to die a second time,' a friend quipped.

What were the reasons for her portentous and amazing popularity? Was it her extraordinary charm, both of body and mind, her relentless efforts to bring succour to those afflicted by the scourge of aid and cancer, her contributions by raising funds for noble and charitable causes, her manifest love for children, her disarming smile or, above all, her service to mankind?

Or, was it due to the immense sympathy amassed for the poor wealthy girl, who having lived in plenty, in high society and glamour, failed to find happiness — marital happiness as well as the much needed solitude and privacy in life. Death occurred to her only when she was just beginning to find that enviable happiness, for the first time, through her friend Dodi. Maybe, the long-drawn interest and unprecedented commotion stirred all over and by all people were a product of her extraordinary personal qualities and the public sympathy generated by her unhappy

married life. The Princess was more beautiful than she was generally shown in the media and had a gorgeous smile. Several times we witnessed this at the Buckingham Palace in royal parties when High Commissioners and Ambassadors were invited. I recalled an occasion when, in late 1991, Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, referring to the new government in Bangladesh, asked me in jest how was it to feel to be governed by a lady! I replied smilingly, 'Your Highness, you know it better and have longer experience, I am not both in the same boat, ruled by ladies?' I said obviously also in jest.

The Prince looked up at the ceiling, nodded and laughed loudly. The brief conversation was apparently overheard by Princess Diana who was following the Duke. Her eyes twinkled and she gave us her characteristic reassuring smile. I took the opportunity of asking her informally to pay a visit to Bangladesh. She said she would like that, at a convenient time. The informal invitation was followed up later by a formal invitation from our government, but the visit did not materialise then and, unfortunately, will never do so in future.

The death of the Princess opens up many questions. The rights and responsibilities of journalists and photographers to cover the private life of celebrities have to be weighed against the right of an individual to some degree of privacy in their personal life. In any way, no amount of reasoning would justify actions that may lead to the killing or death of a human being. Then comes the question of a person (in this case, chauffeur), who par-takes drinks three times than what is legally permissible, and drives a car to death. Guidelines and directives are sought and should be deliberated upon by all concerned, advocating stern but appropriate action.

One decision of British Palace is yet to be comprehended. While presidents and prime ministers of the USA, France, UK, Japan, South Africa and a host of other countries have publicly condoled the death, with profuse eulogy, no worthwhile reaction was made available from Her Majesty, the Queen. Similarly, little or no reaction emanated from other members of the Royal family. Also, the request for a state funeral for the 36-year-old legendary Princess and mother of a possible future king, which falls within the personal discretion of the Crown, has been rejected. It is in stark contrast to the prolonged and deep popular feelings, especially in Great Britain. The situation has been somewhat salvaged by holding the funeral at the Westminster Abbey Chapel for a thousand years, and by Tony Blair's success in raising the ceremonies as close to a state funeral as possible for the departed 'people's Princess'.

## Currents and Crosscurrents

by M M Rezaul Karim



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## To the Editor...

### Princess Diana

Sir, Princess Diana's sudden death in a car crash in Paris is indeed a great tragedy for all of us. After her divorce from Prince Charles, she became restless and wanted to overcome her inner agonies and griefs by a touch new romanticism in every walk to life. Of late she became a very controversial figure in the public eye.

Yet Princess Diana will remain for ever a symbol of mystic beauty, grace, elegance and respect for the present and future generations. May her soul rest in Peace. Amin!

Abul Ashraf Noor  
House 9, Road 4, Sector 3, 5,  
Uttara, Dhaka.

### II

Sir, I want to express my sincere sense of sadness on the most tragic death of Princess Diana. The world mourns her death. We will remember Diana with fond memories of joy, sorrow and happiness which she shared with the children all over the world and particularly in Asia. We express our heartfelt condolence to the Royal family, especially to the young Princes, William and Harry.

May, Allah bless her to rest in peace.

Abid Reza  
Paribagh House  
Dhaka-1000

### III

Sir, We have no words to express our insurmountable sorrow and grief at the shocking, untimely and needless death of Diana, Princess of Wales. Even after days after death, even after the constantly on every TV channel and radio station, we still cannot believe she's no more... it can't be true. This whole tragedy seems to be some horrific nightmare, which cannot belong to somebody as beautiful a person as our beloved Princess. Yes, she was everybody's Princess.

Diana, you shall never be forgotten. You still live in our hearts, and forever. The tears will never dry, for the heart will never stop weeping. God bless her soul, and give her the peace she never had.

Ayesha Farzana  
Dhaka

### When the purging phase will end?

Sir, It is understandable that when a new regime comes into power, there is a purging phase of political cleanliness and neutralisation. The present regime is also expected to go through this ritual up to a certain extent taking a certain period of time.

But there is no direct or indirect indication that this phase is phasing out. In fact, it is being extended into new areas. The rate and strength of the pursuit is an indirect indication that the pending list is rather longer than anticipated, may be due to the long gap or absence of two decades. This settling of score is taking a toll indicated

by the dissipation of energy into several directions, and the diffusion of the main goal into several ad hoc activities.

Is there also a mopping up stage? Where there is a will, there are many ways of demonstrating the determination that the definition of truth could be more important than the truth itself, philosophically speaking. Here, political philosophy is locally based. Let others explain what it means.

The latest area was what could be termed as politics inside and outside the mosques, against groups vaguely suspected to be, against national interests. The situation has lately suddenly changed with the backing of the main opposition party to defend against any 'injustice' or 'zulm', looking with political eyes.

It is a familiar game to the veteran local citizens, baptized in fire and mini holocausts. Our politicians or politics, it seems, lack originality. There is a price for stoniness, and it comes in several forms: it is not scary situation, the art of contemplation on a belly half-full, or half-empty. Hence the next target will be forage into other areas not yet defended by the main opposition. Otherwise, there may be immediate confrontation. The political parties all the time manoeuvre for positions, as on a chess board. Planning is good for a rusted brain, and smooth for an used one.

The game plan is more or less straightforward. The opposition is consolidating the base and the parleys, and may be planning for the tit-for-tat treatment when the preparation and the time are right. Their opponents may try for an preemptive strike (nip it in the bud).

The game is 'on', and should be settled quickly, for the sake of the country (the third party between the two warring factions). This cynicism may be appreciated, before condemning it, as we citizens are politically weather beaten, and exploited to the full by the regimes, past, present, and the future! Certainly we are not the main culprits, but it is our fate to act as the beast of burden and carry the golden load of others, for allegedly — the common good of the common people.

A Husnain  
Dhaka

### The benefit of the doubt

Sir, Veteran columnist ABM Musa is entitled to his valued political views (DS Sep 1), especially the way he looks at BNP; but it seems he may be playing up too much the visit of the Bangladesh Opposition Leader to Pakistan, and the speculation created, perhaps abetted by the major party opposing BNP (the party in power has declared to probe the Zia assassination).

In the same mould, the overstay of the Prime Minister (the name does not matter) in the USA cannot be explained away as easily as her supporters believe. Here is another teaser: the Indian C-in-C and the Indian Defence College team visited Bangladesh recently in quick

succession, after a long, long gap. What is there to read into these friendly visits? Imaginations as the saying goes, could be creative, or destructive.

Now the Awami League has opened another front — against the so-called Muslim fundamentalist citizens of Bangladesh (they are Bangladeshis, aren't they?) who are also suspected to be anti-national or anti-liberal (the difference has to be explained by the cunning politicians).

The Islamic world, as usual, is monitoring what is happening in every Muslim-majority country all over the world; hence keeping a watch over Bangladesh is routine. The AL may also closely watch what the Muslim world thinks about AL's policy stands on many issues, religious and regional. The citizens' right to criticise is fundamental, even in a regimented society.

If a confrontational attitude is sought or created by one or both sides, it has to be faced and justified by the people, watching the players from the gallery. A political stand can't have it both ways — eat the cake and have it too.

A Sensitive Citizen  
Dhaka

### "BTV Bangla film show"

Sir, This refers to the letter published in your esteemed daily on August 18, 1997 under the above caption. Mr OH Kabir has argued against the present timetable of showing Bangla film on BTV.

According to him, if the Bangla films are screened on Thursday night, then when would the children and family members go to bed? He proposes to show Bangla films on Friday afternoon for the convenience of children, elders and the service holders.

But I do not agree with Mr OH Kabir as I find no logic in his proposal. Most of the people are accustomed in going to bed at midnight. According to present timetable the Bangla film show ends before or at midnight, thus not hampering the sleep of the viewers. So present timetable is not inconvenient to the Bangla film viewers.

On Friday, people have to maintain various types of programmes which cannot be done on working days. On Friday, employees of all levels and other people generally pay a visit to their relatives and go out shopping along with their children. For this reason, many of us cannot sit before the TV set on Friday afternoon. So, Friday afternoon is under no circumstances an appropriate time for telecasting Bangla film.

On the other hand, Thursday night, that is present timetable, is a convenient time when one can enjoy Bangla film show without being disturbed by anything. I would like to thank the authority concerned for changing the former timetable.

MD Abdur Rahim  
Assistant Teacher  
Comilla Zilla School, Comilla.

## Bureaucratic Corruption

# How Can You Live in Rome without Becoming a Roman?

*Corruption is so common, so conspicuous and so dominant in our day-to-day life that denying its pervasive existence in the society would be an act of sheer madness — if not an exercise in impeccable fantasy.*

LATELY, there have been some spirited discussions on corruption in our public discourse. In fact, a kind of finger-pointing is going on to claim that some sections of the society are more corrupt than others. An opinion poll, for example, recently came up with some figures pointing to the customs and police officials as most corrupt segments of the society. Prior to that, the President of the country — in a public speech — pointed to the politicians as the most corrupt segment of the nation.

Of course, Bangladesh is an essentially corrupt society. Corruption is so common, so conspicuous and so dominant in our day-to-day life that denying its pervasive existence in the society would be an act of sheer madness, if not an exercise in impeccable fantasy. Indeed, it has taken such a systemic character that hardly anybody raises eyebrows when some official asks for bribe for some reason or somebody readily offers bribe to get something done.

Of course, the rich and powerful — doesn't matter whether they are in power or not — are almost always immune from the official rent-seekers. This, however, doesn't mean that they don't pay bribe to the government officers. Perhaps, they pay the most — of course, in most sophisticated manners and through the most refined means.

This part of their regular business expenditures for some part of regular income of a segment of government officers.

This is not a problem for the bureaucrats concerned or the business people. Their relationship — most often than not — is based on comparative economic advantage. Suppose, a businessman has to pay one million taka as customs duty for a shipment of imports, a friendly customs official charges him just a quarter of it in exchange of another quarter for him as bribe. The businessman, thus, reduces his customs duty by fifty per cent. No deal could be sweeter than this. Who needs to fight with the government to reduce the customs duty?

Take an example of the income tax officials. Suppose, a businessman or a home-owner has to pay Taka two hundred thousand as income tax under existing laws of the country. A friendly income tax official asks him to pay just fifty thousand in exchange for another fifty thousand as bribe for him. When the deal closes, the concerned tax payer saves fifty per cent of his money. Who needs official tax breaks, tax holidays or other concessions from the government when he can obtain similar benefits from a friendly tax officer in exchange of a paltry graft? No wonder, recently the country's top tax collector had been praying to God — in public — for the honesty of his officials.

Bureaucratic corruption, however, is not limited to these branches alone. Other branches are less corrupt not because they are more honest. Fact of the matter is, they have less power or opportunities to become more corrupt. Take an example of the judges. They can exploit only those who are involved in litigations. Moreover, they don't pass out numerous judgements everyday, and in most cases their judgements can be appealed in higher court. Therefore, they have less opportunities than the custom officials or the police in illegally exploiting the people.

So the bottom line of corruption lies with access to raw power and regulatory thickets that provide opportunities to harass hapless people. The more a government agency will have control over these, the more it will succeed in unbridled rent-seeking. The problem, however, is that although the rich and famous are capable of dealing with the menace quite comfortably, the poor and the ordinary people often lose out everything to such blood suckers. Often, they can hardly avoid the network of the rent-seekers.

Take an example: suppose a local influential person wants to harass his rival or enemy in a rural area. The easiest way for him to do it would be bribing the local police to get his enemy arrested, and the police can arrest anybody, anytime, and

anywhere in the country. No segment of the government can beat them in terms of manipulating evidence, harassing the innocent and patronising the criminals. Of course, such a case will eventually end up with magistrates. Then, how honest are the magistrates? Thousands of examples can be found throughout the country whereby influential people easily buy up the magistrates. Money makes everything smoother, smoother and unchallenging.

Millions of similar examples can be found in every other branch of the government. Every contractor knows — be that a tender for local school or jumbo jet, a bid for a road repair or building a power plant — a certain percentage must be set aside for officials involved in the process, no matter what party rules the country or what purpose is served by the project.

Anybody who ever borrowed money from the nation's commercial banks knows for sure how much of the borrowed amount must be spent in the corridors of the banks. Nobody ever bothers about the contribution of the bankers in promoting default culture in the society.

Often the bureaucracy doesn't spare its own members from its own rent-seeking character. If reports are any guide, educational administrators are routinely sucking money from government teachers in this or that pretext. BDRs are acquiring postings in Border

Check Posts by

spending hundreds of thousands of taka, traffic police are obtaining postings as if they are bidding for lease-contracts, foreign investors are desperately trying to convince the government officials that they are not donors but businessmen, and smugglers having good time all around Bangladesh.

In such a society, it perhaps makes a little difference in knowing that one segment of the bureaucracy is more corrupt than another. Moreover, what's the point in pointing fingers to some segments of the society as corrupt, while other segments can hardly claim to be free from dishonesty? Yes, bureaucracy is corrupt, then what section of the society is not? Yes, politicians are corrupt, then what profession is above corruption?

Moreover, how honest are those people who are blaming others for corruption? A police or custom officer is corrupt when he accepts bribe, what about the person who is offering it?

How many people are there who refuse to pay bribe to the police or customs officers at the risk of exposing themselves for harassment? If a taxpayer is forthright in paying the taxes, how a tax officer can become corrupt? No, how do you live honestly in an essentially corrupt society? How can you live in Rome without becoming a Roman?

No, no suggestion is being made here that rampant corruption must go unchallenged. If any message this article conveys that would be this that corruption is simply a systemic phenomenon in the country — avoiding it or fighting against it would be awfully expensive — if not an obvious exercise in idiotic absurdity. The corrupt forces are so dominant — in offices, neighbourhoods, and in every formal and informal organisations — that chances are quite high that the challenger to corruption would be branded as the most corrupt person in the respective bodies or entities.

Of course, lots of brilliant ideas are all around to combat corruption in a society. Some say the edifice of corruption can be dismantled by establishing an accountable, transparent and responsive administrative system. Some say, the solution lies with eliminating raw power and extensive discretions of administration. Some say the solution lies with social sanctions. Still others say, only a robustly growing economy can take care of the problem. Of course, all these are good ideas, and they are complementary to each other. A basic problem, however, remains — where are those golden sons of the soil who will translate these ideas into concrete actions?

# Better Pay for Better Living

by Omar Khalid Rumi

A beggar do not and cannot expect more than he generally receives from a person. He is used to that. If by any chance, he receives an unusual amount of money, it might either make him rich or throw him in the gutter. But this phenomena is rare in this part of the world. And this person in question also never gets rich. Similarly, if the same person is treated with three square meals a day instead of one he is used to, he would end up either in disaster or things might turn out the other way round.

If a person bringing an usual pay-check home regularly gets a bonus from his employer, he generally queues up behind others in the market to buy surplus things for his house or he keeps the money for a future purpose e.g. a plot of land or may be he would end up being a business partner and so on and so forth. That means this surplus money is always being used by this person to create a positive change or result, creating a lot of surplus activity which is economic, thereby affecting the whole society with a positive result. In fact, there are two fold effects on the society, especially on the market, one from the buyers point of view and the other from the sellers. The buyers with a pay-check plus bonus will obviously target a bigger purchase than usual and the sellers will vie for their products to be sold in larger numbers than usual.

If the people of the society are benefitted by this extra or surplus money in their pockets, the whole society as well as the country is benefitted by this economic activity. An otherwise inactive market starts to thrive as if it is charged with a new life. And with this new life infused, people are also charged with anticipation and ambition.

Slowly the whole society gathers momentum towards a prosperous standard of living. Only then, a society/country can be called a developed society/country. But on the other hand, if the people of a country do not want a pay-check and remain happy and contented with whatever they have, we can call that a 'dead society'. There are may be thousands of villages in the underdeveloped countries,

including ours, where the 'time' remains still and no change has come upon those villages as far as the tradition, custom, living standard etc., are concerned. Compared to that, what is happening in a city is an entirely different story. Cities are changing as the economic activity in these areas are helping and egging them on to change.

Therefore this change, or economic change, is inevitable in any country. But this change comes in two ways. One is from within the society and the other from outside it. When the change or economic change/flow becomes stagnant within the society, the flow must come from outside. In fact, flow both from inside and outside are responsible for any economic growth in any country. And as stated before, economic growth, or economic change, within the perimeter of a country can be effected by infusing monetary benefits to the people of that country as well.

Average pay cheque of the people of a developed country is extremely high as compared to an underdeveloped country. And therefore, it is imperative to note that the pay cheque is a true reflection of a country's development. As the raising of the pay automatically makes people conscious of the standard of life they are living, it enhances and opens up opportunities for the people to raise the standard of living individually, resulting in a rise in overall standard of living in a country. And since development embodies standard of living, standard must be raised at any cost in the name of development.

Inflation is a word for the old Pythagorians as well as the graph makers, so it should be shunned. And only then the Pay Commission people should put their heads together and find out ways and means as to how the pay raise could be effected in the country. Keeping in mind the bare that its always the pressure of population that puts a leash and slows down any development a country, we just cannot sit down and watch all sorts of corruption increasing at an alarming rate in our country in order to eradicate all these unwanted economic activities.

On the other hand, if these people in question are given a good pay as well as a good working environment, the face of the entire nation would be changed. The corruption would slowly vanish, moral would go high energising the people with a new life. And in the end the standard of living will automatically rise, improving the overall economic atmosphere.

Thinking on that line a mere 7 or 10 per cent rise in the pay would neither guarantee improved standard of living nor it would serve the purpose of a real pay-rise as the rise in market price would diminish any hope of a slim benefit within a month's time. Therefore, the hike should be to the tune of 30 to 40 per cent at least so that the margin of benefit remains healthy and steady.