

Ershad's Gamble

Ershad has asked his party general secretary, Anwar Hossain Manju to quit the Cabinet. Conveying this to the PM, he has asked her to permit Manju to relinquish his charges of the communications ministry. All this happened a few days ago. The question is why has Ershad suddenly decided to quit AL government, and if Manju saw eye to eye with his party leader why hasn't he resigned yet?

Ershad's credibility being what it is, the obvious conclusion one draws from this move is that all this is political posturing and that he is raising his stake in the coalition and is asking for more favour for his support to the government. These could be more positions in the cabinet, a bigger say in government policy making process and quicker moves to get the cases against him out of the way. It is well known that though JP was a part of the government, it was not a partner in the governance process in the sense of being taken into confidence before policy decisions were taken. Thus being inside, it always remained outside. This created resentment within the party hierarchy who put pressure on Ershad to take the position that he did. JP leaders see the alliance with AL now to be benefiting only Manju and not the party, and hence the move to quit.

Though Prime Minister made light of the JP situation — and a bit out of taste, if we may add — during her press conference last Wednesday, yet it presents a very serious challenge to her position at the moment. BNP's aim is to forge a similar major party political alliance as was done by AL while in opposition. Though a BNP-JP alliance is still a far cry given that Ershad holds Khaleda personally responsible for his five years in jail, yet JP stepping out of the government will be a big political blow to the AL as it will be seen as a sign of rising unpopularity of the ruling party. However she tackles it, Sheikh Hasina will be well advised to take the JP move as a sign of a bigger issue of non-deliverance by her government and the rising public disenchantment about it. JP may be politically bankrupt but it can still read the public mood Ershad's gamble is well calculated.

Leasing of Roads

During Khaleda Zia's government, city Mayor Mirza Abbas once revealed his plan of renting out road intersections for public meetings for a fee. Out cry in the press killed it. Under Sheikh Hasina's government, a case has come to light of the Land Reforms Board leasing out a link road for one year for Tk. 85,000. There appears to be some dispute about the ownership of the land. But the question is: without settling that issue, and without discussing the matter with any other relevant part of the government how could the Land Reforms Board lease out a road to a private person. By what authority, and under what law was this done? What sort of accounting fixed the leased amount to be Tk. 85,000 and not any other amount? On what criteria was the beneficiary of the lease selected?

The issue becomes a source of urgent concern when we see the people who have put up stalls on the leased road; stalls that carried signs of Awami Juba League and Awami Sramik League among others. In our view, it is a clear case of using the muscle power of the ruling party or the clout of its front bodies to occupy public land. In several areas of city one can see signs of this or that ruling party office which stands on roadside lands belonging to the DCC or other government and public institutions.

We are heartened by the position taken by the state minister for land, Rashed Mosharrar. But we will not rest till we see him taking action. Not only will this road have to be restored, but all illegally occupied public lands must be released. We urge the ruling party to take a party initiative to see that all its offices and those of its front bodies and are removed from public land. In many cases the central or city leadership may not know about it because they are done at the local level mainly by the hoodlums who associate themselves with the ruling party to raise money and occupy public land. If the party does not cleanse itself, then we will naturally think that it is either a partner in it, or is turning a blind eye to these activities. So be warned.

There is a rising trend of land grab in the city. The link road lease is the latest of such incidents. The government and the law enforcing agencies must wake up to this new but insidious menace.

Police Brutality

Kamaluddin, the young rickshawpuller of Savar may not pedal a rickshaw again. With the bones of his legs broken to pieces, the lone earning member in the family of seven will perhaps have to look for a new mode of living even if he survives the beastly assault let loose on him reportedly by a local police officer.

According to this brutal account published in yesterday's issue of a leading Bengali daily, Kamal was taken into police custody after a party led by the SI of the Savar police station chased a group of youth on the way. Fearing that there might be some fiery exchange between the chased and the chasers, Kamal abandoned his rickshaw and tried to flee the scene. But he was caught by the furbund police and was taken to custody where the said SI spent his wrath by mercilessly kicking the legs of a prostrate Kamal. The bones of his legs broke from the pounding of the frenzied kicks by the booted legs of the police officer.

The terrorism on the weak, helpless and poor by the so-called guardians of law is nothing new. It is just an addition to an already embarrassingly long list. Bewildered as we are, at this unending tale of maniacal police behaviour, we place this question before authorities again: when will police stop behaving like mentally sick or paranoid people? What is in the uniform that makes them so unfeeling and cruel? Why police forget that they are friend of people and not their enemies and that they are there to protect and not persecute people?

We urge police administration to look into this case of gross violation of human rights and let the faltering cop have his comeuppance so that the would-be uniformed terrorists get the message loud and clear.

Thank God, We're Not Westerners

Our right to information does not mean that we want to know everything about the private lives of politicians, ministers or other celebrities. A person like Princess Diana would have been safer in India.

HE was the caption of the chapter which I advised a publisher to withhold from the book on Indira Gandhi that MO Mathal, the late assistant of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, wrote after the emergency some 20 years ago. The chapter never appeared in print. The reason for my suggestion was the bad taste that the contents reflected. I believed it was an intrusion upon Mrs Gandhi's personal life, whatever the truth.

Indian press and publishing outfits, by and large, have never transgressed the limits of decency. They have respected privacy of people in the limelight. Magazines and columns relating to the film world have not come up to such standards. But even they do not pursue actors and actresses wherever they go at any time of night. The stars are justifiably incensed over the gossip and the concocted news which appear in print about them. Yet journalists or photographers have seldom chased them to their shower or swimming pool. I know of nobody who has gone under water in the sea to take pictures of a celebrity bathing. Jacqueline Onassis Kennedy's nude pictures appeared in responsible papers and magazines in America and Great Britain.

Western media, particularly the tabloid, has no compunction in seeing through keyholes. It justifies such journalism in the name of press freedom. Thousands of pounds are paid if a photographer gets to have an intimate pose of celebrities. We may be prudish in such matters. But we will not print those pictures even if given free. We do not cross the limits that the decency has demarcated. There is a sense of balance in matters of privacy. Some years ago, photos of the late Jagjivan Ram's son with a woman were distributed among newspapers and magazines. None used them. No editor thought that they made news. Maybe, our laws of obscenity are stricter than those in the West. But even if there had been no law, Indian press would behave the same way as it does today because of our abhorrence to indecency, something is at the back of our mind to stop from trading in something unbecoming.

Comparisons are odious but in contrast the western media looks irresponsible. On the basis of my 40-year experience in the field of journalism, I can say that we follow a code of ethics, an unwritten one, while publishing stories and photos about the celebrities. We have natural inhibition and we are careful when we print anything about people living in the glare of publicity. Partly, it is because of our culture and, partly it is because

him — whether a journalist or a photographer — that he rejoins the flock. Restraint comes to prevail. Personal lives are sacred to us, indeed. I recall an European journalist made Sonia Gandhi the topic of discussion with me. He said if she had been in the West, as a young widow of a prime minister, she would have been pursued and harassed and never left alone. How come there were no reports on her travels, her friends, her activities and on her personal life, he asked. I told him that Indian press respected her privacy and saw to it that limits are not crossed. He appreciated our ap-

used for the letters. Still the matter has remained a subject of conjecture. Never has it become an issue in the country, which accepts that certain things are not for public consumption. When I was India's High Commissioner to the UK in 1990, I asked Lord Mountbatten's grandson to comment on the relationship. He said: 'There is spiritual love.' The journalistic itch asked me to probe but the curbs of decency stopped me from going further. The paparazzi is the word used for an aggressive photographer or reporter who pursues celebrities wherever they go. He and his colleagues have a point when they argue: 'We are small players in the drama. The market is there. People buy the magazine. They have the taste and the editors push it. There is a whole chain, owners, editors, readers. It's just the silliness of human nature.'

Such considerations are not before us. There are odd cases which I cannot defend. For example, former India captain Mohammad Azharuddin has gone on record as saying that his life was made miserable by some journalists and photographers, who intruded into his privacy before he married to film star Sangeeta Bijiani. There are other cases of public disapproval where film star Mamta Kulkarni and a Delhi lawyer who appeared topless on the cover of certain magazines. The horror of people can be judged from the furor it created. But they were never pursued to the extent it happens in the West.

That way, we are different. We do our own thinking, profiting by the example of others but essentially trying to find a path for ourselves suited to our own conditions. For the West, there are no shades, there is only black and white. It is not the approach of tolerance, of feeling that perhaps others might also have some share of truth. That is the reason why we have escaped totalitarianism and fundamentalism. We are agitating for the right to know. And the government has promised to legislate the freedom of information act so that journalists and others can ask how and why a particular decision was reached or a contract awarded. This is to assess whether the deal was above board or whether it was tainted by corruption. But our right to information does not mean that we want to know every thing about the private lives of politicians, ministers or other celebrities. A person like Princess Diana would have been safer in India.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

of our innocence in the somewhat-may-happen world. This may well be the reason why we are so concerned over the invasion from the sky. Nothing we can do about it but helplessness is no ground to accept it willingly. The question is that of decency, our sensitivity that intrusion upon anybody's private life can hurt him or her deeply. For the sake of Princess Diana's photo with her companion Dodi Al-Fayed, the chasing photographers or journalists killed them. The two sped to escape them. The car, with a drunkard driver, had no chance to survive the accident. Had the journalists and photographers not been chasing them, Diana and Al-Fayed would have driven normally and the car would have avoided crashing on to a tunnel's concrete wall as it did.

I can never envisage a similar scenario in our part of the world. We may not be developed countries but we follow certain norms to draw the line. Once in a while, someone strays from the flock but there is so much criticism and pressure against

To the Editor...

"Rural Budget and Development Strategy"

The management committee sent the draft report for comments to: Drs K Shahabuddin (BIDS), Mahabub Hossain (IRRI) and Ruhul Amin (USA). All of them praised the report and one of them Dr Hossain even recommended the report to be published as a book. [All papers are available on request]. So the dubious attempt to publicize that apparently something went wrong is not borne out by actual facts. These answers were given to him several times even in writing. I think this time he would kindly stop pulling (my) legs.

Abdul Bayes Savar, Dhaka

US Open coverage

Sir, I thank The Daily Star for the excellent coverage on this year's US Open tennis tournament, a strait from Flushing Meadows, New York. This year, in Wimbledon coverage too The Daily Star had done the same appreciable job. For the tennis fans it is a kind of pleasure to read such informative descriptions.

Let me congratulate Mr Tawfiq Aziz Khan for his excellent job.

Dr Alia Hossain BIRDEM, Dhaka

Diana and the British Press

Sir, A news item appeared in an esteemed newspaper on 2-9-97 has intrigued me — "Libyan TV accuses Britain of killing Diana and Dodi". The twisted unrelenting media-publicity given about Diana and Dodi by the British Press subscribe to the view expressed by Libyan TV. The British media and the Christian fundamentalist do not like to see a Muslim marrying a Christian princess of a royal house. To break the passionate romance they have brought Kelly Fisher as Dodi's fiancée just as they did during Imran Khan's marriage to another British blue blood. The Christian fundamentalist and the British media could never digest coloured people, especially a Muslim marrying a blue blood.

As such they are head over heels to undo a romantic marriage which ended in a great tragedy. Their involvement and complexity along with other intelligence services resulted the royal tragedy of the century. At last, they have succeeded at the cost of losing the princess of millions.

G M F Abdur Rob Gark Rd, New DOHS, Dhaka

Princess Diana

Sir, I was shocked that the demise would come in such a manner of a beautiful woman like Diana, who has won the hearts of everyone. Since her marriage to Charles, she did not find a single moment of solace, satisfaction and happiness. Since her divorce from Charles she tried to build her life again. She had a couple of men in her life, who were young, rich and famous. But last of all, she found satisfaction in Dodi Al Fayed, and spent the last few weeks of her life with him, which may have given some satisfaction to her tattered life.

Divided We Sit

by A Husnain

We are going round and round in vicious circles, and cannot get out of the orbit of confrontational and agitational politics.

OUR two national political leaders toured the United States recently, and addressed the Bangladeshis there. From the news reports it is gathered that overseas we are as divided as we are at home (unity in diversity). The polarisation is so acute that separate meetings were held, and all the Bangladeshis did not attend the sessions of both the leaders. This is our image abroad, thanks to the split-personality syndrome in our politics. We like politics, but we apparently cannot handle it (it is difficult to handle very small babies).

Political consensus is like a ball. Cut the ball into two, and the properties of the ball are gone. The ball can roll only when the two parts are joined together. Our powerful batsmen (batspersons?) hit the ball hard, but no runs are scored. The wicket is sticky, and there are too many googlies. It is the 'wrong one' most of the time. We are quite capable of playing cricket without any umpires. At home also the picture is as depressing as the monsoon weather. All the sectors are divided, including the professionals, the bureaucrats, the academics (both the teachers and the students), and the intellectuals (and the fundamentalists). Therefore the check-and-balance forces in the society are not operating, and no non-political group can influence the politicians (the latter run the state). The politicians thus are allowed to enjoy too much liberty, encouraging its misuse. Both vice and virtue have to be contained.

It looks like that hardly a sizeable percentage of the citizens are neutral, meaning one persons will praise one party and criticise the other. Discussing politics in general has become an unpleasant pastime in the drawing rooms, as objective analysis (apart from criticism, which is a separate discipline) is blissfully ignored.

Opinions enter during the interpretation of an analysis. Immediately the passion takes over, and the result is acrimonious debate, exactly as we see in the parliament. This is trickle-down political culture from the heavens above. The hate campaign is on in full swing — for the love of the country!

As the Hon President reminded us so pointedly, the two big parties go into opposite directions almost all the time! The resultant of two opposing forces 180 degrees apart cannot go 90 degrees forward. Hence the

major portion of the development thrust is missing, and we are progressing marginally, skirting the periphery, slowly and uncertainly, since we earned our independence 26 years ago. Like the centre of the sun or the earth, the political core is too hot. Do we have the energy to maintain this white heat year after year, after 50 years, since British India broke up?

We are still unable to set our house in order. The sense of direction is playing a hide-and-seek game. We are going round and round in vicious circles, and cannot get out of the orbit of confrontational and agitational politics. We use our heart when the head should be used, although we are the fertile ones in more senses than one. Hatred is the order of the day, day in and day out, since 1991, when the elusive 'democracy' was supposed to be restored by the overthrowing of the autocratic regime. When the voters got their rights back is probably still debatable.

These days, we cannot afford internal political squabbles, as the world is getting smaller, and foreign powers are showing unholy interest in regional set-ups and covert control of the same. In a market-dominated world order, regional groupings are necessary for internal bonding in the interest of the region.

Today, in Bangladesh, divided we stand, and divided we sit, and divided we roam the streets, united in the elusive search of the western type of democracy, backed by 70 per cent illiterates and 50 per cent living below the poverty line, and headed by charismatic leadership, which shines but does not deliver. It all looks so quizzical — one is reminded of the exploits of Don Quixote we read about in the school textbooks.

We are suffering because may be we are not yet qualified to enjoy the fruits of independence. Our leaders are always trying their best to restore sense and order, and we the followers are trying our best to be useful according to many shades of definition.

OPINION

Two Great Ladies

Dr Sabrina Rashid

Princess Diana and Mother Teresa were alike in a way, though each of them belonged to a different world — far apart. One lived in palace, in style and fashion, with the royal family while the other lived in a monastery close to the very poor and very sick — the rejected ones. But that is where they were alike — they both were close to the sufferers, in their hearts and therefore in their actions too. They had the capacity to love beyond themselves.

We all have the capacity to love but mostly our love is self-centered — it is for ourselves and for our families only. It does not go beyond that limit, but for them, it did and that is what made them super-human beings — to love others who are complete strangers and outsiders but human beings. That capability and sensitivity to love others overcoming the barriers of caste, creed, religion and country is what makes a person unique which these two ladies were. And that is the sole reason why the whole world is mourning their death, though majority of the world's people never even met them.

But human beings are very sensitive to love, they could feel that these two ladies had that universal love for all human beings and so that love was universally returned overcoming the barriers of nations and boundaries. People around the world even shed tears for them. It proves that how deeply they felt for these two ladies who had felt the same way for them.

Mother Teresa once came to our medical college (DMCH). She was no great orator but the simple words she said touched us so much that tears rolled down our cheeks. It's because the words she uttered came straight from "her" heart and therefore went straight into "our" hearts. That is what touches us most — something said or done with love and feelings, not for show or praise. Even a simple smile when given sincerely is charity, for it warms the other person's heart and that is why Diana gave liberty to everybody even when she herself was heartbroken and suffering. That is what made everybody love her so dearly for she did not think of herself only, but reached out to others, ignoring her own grief.

Most of us, ordinary people, would have done the opposite. We would have shunned the world and sit with our sorrows! Because all we think of is ourselves and our families — how to give them more comfort and luxury, by any means, right or wrong. We have no thought or feelings to spare for others — our countrymen or the fellow human beings. All of us have a lesson to learn from these two ladies — to be more compassionate to others, beyond our own selves.

Learning English on Easy Method

MA Laís

I had the opportunity of going through the book, "Learning English on the F M Method", written by Prof Md Feroz Mukul. Prof Mukul has introduced a new scientific method through this book, using Bengali language for convenience of learning fluent English by all strata of Bengali speaking people, specially at his institution — The Genuine Tutorial, at Indira Road, Siddeshwari and Jatrabari of Dhaka, and in Chittagong. The attractive aspect of his Method is that, Prof Mukul, and his well-trained teaching staff, teach the students fluent English, within a reasonable time, by using Grammar in a new form, and translation, tactfully avoiding the rigour of 'Tense' which often appears as an obstacle in learning English in the traditional system. Now, any student of average calibre, can easily learn fluent English at his institution, without facing the 'Tense-problem'. This, surely, goes to the credit of Prof Md Feroz Mukul and his intelligent teaching staff.

I have noted, interestingly in the book that Prof Md Feroz Mukul had approached the previous Government for obtaining recognition for his institution and also for inclusion of his F M Method in the curriculum of the existing teaching system of the country's universities and Govt colleges. However, his book and other related papers were referred to a 'bo-

gus' committee to examine the feasibility; the response to which was negative on the plea that, his book for teaching English was written in Bengali. I don't want to enter into controversy with this committee on the matter, because, it is their affair. But, I may oppose the move, made by Prof Mukul, for inclusion of his Modern F M Method, in the curriculum of the universities and Govt colleges for reasons given below.

Our University-campuses, student-halls, and Govt colleges have become the centres of gun-fighting among the rival student-groups, backed by the major political parties. The University of Dhaka — onetime 'Oxford of the East' has now turned into a 'battle-field of the East'. As a result, many innocent, brilliant boys coming from distant village areas to the city's universities and Govt colleges for study are, very often, seen going back to their poor parents as corpse. When such is the situation, does the question of inclusion of F M Method or any other teaching method in the curriculum arise?

However, the importance of English, being an international language, in the modern world, can never be overlooked in our country. Now for a lucrative job of any category even in our country's Dhaka EPZ, Chittagong EPZ, and in the local and foreign NGOs operating in Bangladesh, a candidate must have to be well-conversant and fluent in English. So fluency in English is always a top-priority not only for going abroad, but also for a dignified stay in the country, as well. It seems the Genuine Tutorial has taken up this challenging responsibility.

To have any institution, Govt or private, functioning smoothly, provision of adequate fund is a pre-condition. Government recognition with financial assistance is essential. I would, as such, suggest Prof Md Feroz Mukul, not to be disappointed on the failure of his first attempt. He should, rather, remain firm and steady, and keep on trying, again and again, in a more determined way, until he becomes successful in convincing the Government of his noble mission. It is encouragingly learnt, that, both the present President, and the present Prime Minister are very keen about development of education in the country. If it really be so, I am sure, they will certainly be convinced, when they will find in the book, that, one 'maid-servant' was able to get a dignified job in a foreign NGO, by learning fluent English through F M Method and the Genuine Tutorial, they will not hesitate to accord Govt recognition with requisite financial support so that, this institution can go on functioning independently, with its modern teaching programme.