

## Pledge with a Difference

The outstanding significance of the aid consortium meet in Dhaka lay not so much in the fact that it was held for the first time away from Paris but principally because of the worst downturn in our political management that was laid bare before the 27 pairs of donor eyes. If gathering first-hand impressions of the spectacle of development with a devolutionary angle was on the aid group's agenda, they went away with a knowledge bonus of fresh insights into the stubbornness of our political parties to confront each other, eye ball to eye ball.

The multilateral financial institutions and bilateral donors have lately been a stickler for 'good governance'. And our political leaders simply gave them a handle or a stick to beat us with. So, here we are receiving a donor pledge of \$1.9b for the current fiscal year, at the same level as last year's, allowing for the appreciation in the value of dollar and yen, with the difference this time being that a political reprimand has been added to the customarily served advisory economic note.

The donors' collective pointer to the economic and opportunity costs of political strife ring familiar with their earlier individual versions on the subject. And these are also identical with what the planners and intelligentsia in the country have been refraining saying all the time. But the outstanding feature of it all is that the 'unusual statement' has been issued as a consensual verdict on the culture of political mismanagement in Bangladesh. Now the 'well-deserved' pressure that we have brought on ourselves cannot be co-terminous with conditionalities for sure; even so, what hurts the sensibility is that we have invited this reference like countries with a notorious despotic system nose-diving into a civil war situation usually do. Indeed we have been repeatedly urging the political parties to respect and heed the call of our revered President Shahabuddin Ahmed to "settle their differences in Parliament and by dialogue, and not by violence" much the same way that the aid group has issued a clarion call for. If Justice Shahabuddin had been a common choice of both the AL and BNP for the presidency in the first place as indeed he was for his transcending neutral image, then that original flash of bipartism must now be lived up to by heeding the presidential advice without ado.

We greet the donors' 'remarkable consensus' on supporting Bangladesh's efforts towards poverty reduction.

## Painting and Society

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday opened the 25-day eighth Asian Art Biennale Bangladesh. Thirty-five foreign nations are participating in the artfest. Together with Bangladeshi entries some seven hundred paintings and art objects will be on show. It has been said about the master Pablo Picasso that he was the most un-intellectual of painters, meaning that his pictures do not so much appeal to the intellect as they do to your eyes. He was the naughty one all right and had interpolated unsuspected pranks galore into his works. But that's nothing compared to the wit that gives life to all his pictures and porcelains and sculptures — wit in a purely painterly manner.

So the best thing to say about the show is to entreat one to go and see the things. Pictures mostly. About perhaps nothing particularly. But as against God's own doings spread all around the universe, these are man's own doings. Man is the creator of these visions and visuals. By going round the show one can soak oneself in a kind of frontiers of man's creativity.

After partition of India Zainul Abedin and his peers and students Safiuddin Ahmed, Khwaja Shafiq Ahmed, Anwarul Huq, Qamrul Hassan, Mohammad Kibria et al did quite a bit of roaming in the Dhaka wilderness. Abedin, apocryphally though, was asked by a senior officer to paint his name on to his umbrella. All of them landed jobs as drawing teachers in schools. The situation wouldn't improve if the Art College was not founded by Abedin. Society was totally ignorant of easel painting and its value. With time everything has changed and on a frantic pace. Yet there must be something basically wrong with the approaches to painting by the government, the intellectuals, and by the painters themselves.

Painting, together with music, must be offered in all schools and colleges as a subject of board and university exams. The process of righting the wrongs should start right there.

We welcome the unfolding of this great cultural event in our midst.

## It's a Human Problem

Saddam Hussein has an uncanny genius for coming through diplomatic dead-ends with unscratched heroics even as his people are emaciated by economic sanctions imposed since the end of the Gulf War in 1991. He had nudged the US into paying him attention by issuing two concurrent threats to Washington. First, he ordered expulsion of three American arms inspectors working with the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) on disarmament in Iraq; and secondly, he declared that American spy planes flying over his country would be shot down. The UN was pulled into the situation with its Secretary General Kofi Annan working out a defusion strategy containing two elements: one, he offered Iraq a chance to explain its demands for lifting sanctions before a UN Security Council meeting; and two, he directed three emissaries to visit Iraq and file reports to him by Friday on Baghdad's status of compliance with UN resolution on weapons inspection and their obliteration.

Kofi Annan's overture met with instant responses. Saddam Hussein agreed to relent on expulsion of the US arms inspectors and the United States postponed her surveillance flights. But their apparently conciliatory mood is the product of UN intervention; and if one were to plumb deeper into the objective situation one would despair of the sharply differing perception of Washington and Baghdad about the progress on ridding Iraq of weapons of mass destruction. Iraq says they are now bereft of such weaponry, but the US insists that an all-clear certification has to wait until further verification.

The human ordeal brought on Iraq due to the sanctions must come to an end at the soonest.

**K**ALENSARI is a quiet village in Indramayu district, West Java. The tree-lined road leading to the village skirts the edge of the rice field where over two hundred farmers of Kalensari and a neighbouring village till their small plots.

The rice crop of the main planting season in 1994 suffered from heavy infestation of white stemborers. How to break their life-cycle? Worried as the farmers were, they went to the agriculture office with their problem. They were advised to attack the pests and their egg-masses with pesticides. Some moths died, but still were able to spawn eggs and the pest-pressure continued.

Farmers of the village got organised. They decided to conduct their own studies and observations to understand the life-cycle of stemborers and where the larva spend diapause. Burning of rice stubble was futile as the larva thrives in dry heat. The larva, however, did not like water. But there was a problem. Flooding had to be done for more than seven days and release of irrigation water was neither timely nor adequate for covering the entire field, or as the Indonesian farmers call it, the 'hamparan'.

Farmer-researchers came to the conclusion that the nursery bed being the bridge that the stem-borers use to infest the rice-field, they would take away the bridge. Farmers and even their children mobilised themselves to collect egg-masses and keep the nursery beds clean. And in the hamparan, the number of plants lost to stem-borers was less than 5 per cent.

Farmer-researchers recognised early that such mobilisation season after season on a hamparan-wide scale and beyond could be difficult. Also if

# Heresy and Empowerment

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the operation was not a clean sweep, it would fail. So during the planting season of 1995-96, they explored other ways to keep the nursery beds clean without a major expenditure of labour.

An idea came about as the result of comparing two adjacent rice plots. The farmers working the plots had used the same variety, used the same pesticide treatment and yet one plot had heavy damage due to stemborers and the other plot had light damage. The researchers analysed the circumstances and discovered that the plot with heavy damage was planted one week before the other. Pak Warsiyah the leader and his compatriots worked out a simulation which demonstrated the interactions of rainfall, the flight-patterns of the white stemborer moth, and nursery bed planting time. They hypothesised that based on their understanding of rainfall, wind-direction and the flight-patterns of white stemborer moth, infestation by stemborer could be avoided. They tested the hypothesis during the dry season of March through July of 1996 by varying rice planting times based on moth flight patterns. Light traps were used to determine the peak of white stemborer moth flights and the nursery beds were planted at varying times (up to ten days) after the peak flight. The nursery beds were then observed and the numbers of egg masses collected from the test beds were compared. Plots planted seven to ten days after the main flight of moths appeared to have the best results.

The strategy of keeping

nursery beds clean by avoiding the danger of having plants in the field during the height of stemborer moth flights appeared viable and farmers of Kalensari set out to implement the strategy on a hamparan-wide scale during the main growing season of November 1996 through March of 1997. To implement this strategy they monitored moth flights, rainfall, and nursery beds daily and they organised the farmers of the hamparan to coordinate planting times.

Pak Warsiyah who is continuing his study on "spatial and time ecology" of white

stemborer moth, collects data on rainfall to learn about its influence on the flight-patterns of moth. To determine the peak of moth-flights he has set up lamptraps. Data about varieties planted, planting dates and pesticides used, if any, is also obtained by Warsiyah through field observation. He will then link up all this data with data about crop damage and yields. He has hung up a large piece of cardboard on the wall of his house. He charts the rainfall, moth-flights and planting times.

Pak Warsiyah puts it succinctly when he says, "Keeping our nursery-beds clean by avoiding planting during periods when beds would be endan-

gered by stemborer moth flights has had good results. What farmers are concerned about this season is the possibility of stemborers re-colonising the hamparan either through migration or by using another bridge." So field-studies continue in the paddy fields in Kalensari village, while the farmers organise further to build a broader coalition covering the entire district of Indramayu.

**Creating a Network**

After the success experienced in collecting egg masses at the beginning of the rice season in

their survival which is at stake. One recalls what US Supreme Court Justice Robert H Jackson said about government and the citizenry. Substitute government for 'scientist' and citizen for 'farmer' and the statement reads as follows: 'It is not the function of the scientist to keep the farmer from falling into error it is the function of the farmer to keep the scientist from falling into error'.

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Participatory and interactive science in the field leads to two-fold solidarity for the practising farmers: first, with earth and water and all the creatures therein, and second, among themselves. Solidarity and the spirit of caring and sharing grows out of community ownership of agro-ecological knowledge.

Solidarity based on ownership of knowledge enables the farmers to stand up to the powerful establishment outside their control. Pak Madamin, a farmer leader of Kalensari, puts it with conviction when he says, "Looking back at what we did to try to achieve clean nursery beds in our hamparan, we thought it would be more effective if we could reach a larger scale than just our own hamparan. We wanted to help farmers in other hamparans to resist the kind of pressure we were resisting from industry, extension and other agriculture workers, and some local government officials to use pesticides. We thought it reasonable to try to establish a network among farmers, like myself, that would help keep us informed about alternatives in managing our fields, why those alternatives worked, and the successes that farmers were having in resisting the use of pesticides."

The understanding is successfully improved as the farmers practise and experiment in their own fields; analyse and observe; and discuss and debate among themselves. They are open to new ideas and innovations brought in by knowledgeable outsiders, but these must be tested, adapted or rejected in full partnership and in locally specific ecologies. Only thus common wisdom is created through a mutual and dynamic learning experience in which no single participant has monopoly of interpretation.

Within this group-learning process, there is no privileged position. If there is any, it is for the farmers. Because when environment is threatened, it is

## OPINION

### Mother Teresa and Princess Diana

by Moin Chisti

A comparative study by Dr Fakhruddin writing from Princeton, USA, on Mother Teresa and Princess Diana (DS Oct. 11) appeared to me a little odious, but interesting. Diana, a Princess by marriage, was a near-perfect model of glamour, grace and beauty. Her sensitive good looks and amiable style had brought her admirers from all over the world and her sudden and tragic death was a shock almost too much for many to bear. There was hardly an individual anywhere who was not affected by her sad and untimely demise.

Princess Diana was unique in combining those personal qualities of charity, human concern and gentle behaviour with her routine and often stony Royal performances. A life inside the Buckingham Palace with all its glitter and colour, pomp and pageantry could not satisfy her yearning for a freer life outside, perhaps more in meaning and greater in purpose. She was almost born with a restless compassion, a deep-down feeling that would take her continuously near the sick, the disabled and the needy. She appeared like a person in conflict with herself and in constant struggle to get out of a sterile, almost cloistered existence. This out-of-step role of the Princess catapulted her to an unassassable height of popularity and public adulation. She became an instant celebrity, a darling of the media and a respected figure among the charity organisers only because this is exactly the role that the British people expected her to play in the era that is to arrive in the coming days.

The British Royalty, traditionally, had a magic about them, almost mystic in quality, much of which is now on the wane. There was no doubt that the Royalty to which Princess Diana was married had learnt to change with time. The fact that Prince Charles, heir to the British Throne agreed to marry

international playboys, the rich and the famous. Such was Diana, sand dunes in the day, charity bazaars in the evenings, with homeless in the mornings, wild parties at night.

But anywhere she went she stood above all, shoulders high, riding at the crest of popular acclaim. Such were the powers of her dynamic presence that she could draw the best out of a permissive society. The world did not seem to mind and was quick to accept whatever was there in her pursuit of a glamorous fast life. The extent and scope of her popularity could not be understood at the frenzied height of her popularity and the tremendous grief at her death. Anything in her name became an instant best-seller. The now famous disc "Candle in the Wind" broke all-time records in sale, in just few hours. Today, two months after her death the world continues to mourn for her in the same intensity as when she died. Given this scenario, I think it was indeed not much of significance if royal protocol deviated slightly in lowering the flag and the Queen making a touching speech on the Princess.

The world had stood up in unabashed admiration for a white Catholic nun, Mother Teresa, working among the poor and the wretched in Calcutta slums. Emaciated and frail, far away from her birthplace in Albania, the mother was probably the best that mankind could ever imagine. Year through year, the mother went on giving up all her worldly comforts in caring for the down trodden, the needy, the sick and the underprivileged. With the determination of a Messiah she dedicated every drop of her blood and every ounce of her energy in the service of the poor. In a world full of strife, war, avarice and greed Mother Teresa was like a beacon of light, an inspiration and an example how life could be dedicated entirely to the selfless service of inflicted mankind.

There was no glamour, no show in her life, or in her work. She was just a founder member of the Missionaries of Charity, yet there was no dearth of publicity for her, and she was as well-known as any world class celebrity, including Princess Diana. Mother Teresa was so magnificent in her work that she made the work of missionary a passion for everybody. In fact, what is only passing fancy for many she made it into the single most motto in life. The world responded by awarding her the Nobel Prize for peace, the highest any person can aspire for. It is not everyday that the world has someone like the Mother, who would so easily give up a life of ease and enjoyment to take up a life of hardship and self-discipline. In her passing away, the Mother would be mostly missed by those poor, homeless and suffering children of Calcutta, the leper patients in hospitals and those who place human values and human dignity above everything else.

We all have lessons to learn from the Mother's life. A lesson is how to rise above personal needs and to commit oneself to the service of the humanity so much in need of care, love and sympathy. The like of the mother does not come about so easily. It would be long time indeed before those unloved children of Calcutta slums find another one like her. She would be remembered as much as Princess Diana would be, but the absence of the Mother would shatter the lives of those whose life stories are never written except in tears. If a life without the Princess here on earth is a life without cheer, then a life without Mother Teresa is a life without hope. But then, of course, that is what life is all about.

It bothers me because I don't own a lot of homes around the world — I don't even have a yacht. It's not easy to spend a billion dollars, even in good times, particularly if you shop at a discount grocery.

Once you buy a power lawn mower and a pair of Nike sneakers, there's nothing left to spend money on.

Ever since the list was published, I've been getting calls from people who were on it. They all call to say how sorry they are that I wasn't included. They are treating it like a major tragedy.

I also got a call from a credit card company spokesman who said they were cancelling my credit card because I was a risk. I told them I couldn't care less.

I only mention all this because I don't want the readers to think that my omission from the 400 list means that I am flat broke.

I could buy and sell Ross Perot and Rupert Murdoch; and day, but I don't want to as billionaires hate competition. Besides, there's plenty of room on my private 747 for all of us.

Years until the next election. Then the people on their own will elect you. Meanwhile, please prove you can do constructive work for them.

Raiyan  
DOIIS, Dhaka.

## On the return to JS

Sir,

While agreeing to Mr

Mahfuz Anam's plea (Nov 1) to the Opposition to sit in the JS, the party in power has made it more difficult by reducing one more sensitive issue, namely, the proposed peace pact in the CHT, as not suitable for discussion in the JS before signing. The PM's clarification at the press conference is not transparent enough even to the observer-citizens not involved in active politics.

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political party without taking the opposition into confidence. The issue cannot be hurried on the plea of non-cooperation from the other side. For example, AL in opposition would have objected to BNP (in power) signing a pact without AL's concurrence.

It is a sensitive national issue, on which the citizens have to be properly briefed through extensive debate in the Parliament. Therefore the coming truce may be packed with future problems. A national consensus is imperative if the pact is expected to last and be effective and practical in the years to come. How it can be guaranteed with the background of political polarity we are witnessing today?

Lastly, the very basis of democracy as practised here is being questioned. Even the Hon President has pointed out, as others have done, about the absence of democratic practices within the political parties. Therefore mere display of good intentions and policies based on dubious propaganda are not good enough to appease the public sentiment. Hence the benefit of the doubt may be withheld by a section of the voters, in the same manner as both the major political parties are displaying it with respect to each other.

A good solution can work only in a clean environment. It is for the politicians to provide the climate of good governance (it includes the opposition).

A

Zabur

Dhaka

## "How about Introduction...?"

Sir, I am a regular reader of Mr C A F Dowlah's column Crosscurrents in your paper and I was captivated by his argument for public financed parliamentary elections in Bangladesh. In his well-articulated and well-researched article titled "How about introduction of public financing of parliamentary elections" on 22 October, 1997, Mr Dowlah made a plea to the policy makers to consider public financing in order to eliminate unfair means and untoward incidents in the parliamentary elections.

I believe, caretaker government has helped a lot in reducing unfair means in the elections. If unlimited expenditures of the candidates can be checked and public financing can be introduced, this will further increase possibly for fair

elections in the country. I hope readers will come forward to give their opinions on this issue in *The Daily Star* and thereby will make it a national issue.

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## "BNP Should Return..."

Sir, I have liked the comment of 01 November — BNP should return to the Parliament — very much. I believe that it is time to speak out.

We must transform our nation into a civil society. In this grand and difficult task, the role of intellectuals is crucial, because it is their responsibility to remove all confusions surrounding the economic, social and political issues by making the truth clear and obvious. As Rousseau says in his Social Contract, "The strongest man is never strong enough to master all the time, unless he transforms force into right and obedience into duty".

The political parties are working against our interests because the general people are confused. If we can clear out all the clouds, I believe people do not have to come forward to subdue the oppressors — the oppressors will back down.

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