

Punish The Vandals

Once again we have been witness to vandalism by students with complaints against their imminent exam. Press photos yesterday showed how young lads armed with rods and sticks indulged in wanton smashing of windshields and windows of vehicles while passengers, helpless captive as they were to this unwarranted fit of militancy, waited coveringly inside to let the educated young members of the society spend their wrath on the heap of broken images around. A Daily Star visual indicated that even police patrol cars were not spared.

What actually sparked off this rampage? A section of the HSC examinees who have been demanding for a revision of this year's exam schedule because it clashes with the World Cup football championship tried to hold a meeting near the National Press Club but police played havoc with that revolutionary intention. And that was enough to wake up the anarchists in the scattered students who vented their anger on the automobiles in the Segunbagicha area.

Two questions spring from the whole ordeal automatically. What really are they? Secondly, are these the people we look forward to as the future leading citizens? If they are students they have no business whatsoever to carp against any date the authorities may fix for exam in order to be better equipped to appreciate a game. As for futurity, one must say things look pretty grim in the days to come.

Can we ask these mindless collegians who gave them the right to destroy property and terrorise people on the street? Let it be sounded loud and clear that they have not only brought the rest of the students' community to shame but also committed serious crime against other members of the society. For relative worthlessness of the issue the enormity of their crime is much greater than that of the uneducated agitating mass who violate law from the maddening hardship for want of access to life's essentials. As educated and responsible members of the society they must be fully aware of the consequences of their actions.

We feel the authorities would do well not to look at the matter leniently. In fact leniency to first instance of such vandalism has paved for its recurrence. We suggest the authorities make them go through whatever punishment law of the land offers for such criminality just to get right the message across: no to lawlessness and vandalism.

Eminently Belittling

To judge from newspaper reports there are dozens of prizes now being awarded to Bangladesh citizens by very many bodies. Most of these are spurious ones, commanding little respect and are hardly accepted by even the awardees as an honour. It is sad that the two top state prizes, the Swadhinata and Ekushey Purashkar, have dwindled in credibility to slide into the category of the spurious ones — thanks to the successive governments.

A prize's prestige is seldom determined by the standing of the giver. It is earned by the prize itself over years of reliably making the best choices, ignoring group interests and pressures. Incorruptible fairness and quality of choice contribute to the standing of the prize.

From the very beginning the two state-instituted top prizes, awarded by the government in power, were found wanting in whatever gives prestige and honour to such. These were used very transparently to pander to political interests. Many among the recipients of these could straightaway be identified as mediocrities, even sworn enemies of both independence and Ekushey.

This year's announcement of ten recipients of the Swadhinata Purashkar, nine of them awarded posthumously, came as a traumatic shock to all that value the Liberation War above everything earned by this nation in a thousand years. Inclusion of the four "Jatiya Neta's", leading lights of the Liberation War and martyrs all in the infamous jail killing, was the height of indiscretion. This was matched by inclusion of four others, related to the Prime Minister in the closest familial ties. If these latter four had anything to be recognised, that should have been left for others to do and not by the daughter in the house. Once in a century may one come to a case of such bad taste.

But all this is not half as bad as the insult the prize was used to mete out to Tajuddin Ahmed who even though a member of that luminous foursome, soars skies above his comrades-in-arms. Save for Bangabandhu's unique case, there is no higher achiever-fighter in the pantheon of liberators of Bangladesh. Who was he, what was he to the Liberation War? He developed the Liberation War, won it and presented an independent sovereign Bangladesh to a returning supreme leader. Awarding him this prize, along with nine others and together with countless other recipients in the yesterday's, speaks of an effort not to recognise Tajuddin for what he was and what he will continue to be to this nation. How come the AL government is heaping indignity to one that best served the mission that Bangabandhu charged him with?

Why Playgrounds?

We are disturbed at the news that urban necessity is all set to devour yet another acre of green in the city. A front page item of a national daily informed us yesterday — not for the first time though — Shaheed Park at Sher Shah Suri Road of Mohammadpur, only space for many young people of the area to indulge in sports and games for health as well as mental reasons, has been marked by the city corporation for a market complex.

We understand that in keeping with the spiralling demographic index the demand for empty spaces will increase with time. Population will grow. So will the need for places like markets. But that does not mean we have to throw everything into that flame of necessity unscrupulously. We have been trying in vain for quite some time now to impress on the city authorities that parks and playgrounds are lungs of the city. They have to be retained if the authorities care for the health of the city dwellers. And here we have the City Corporation mopping up one verdant piece after another!

We would like to remind them that it is an eminently self-defeating exercise that they are out now in the name of enhancing urban convenience. They should take serious note of the fact that urban convenience is not a mono dimensional concept of ensuring roof on people's head. It is lot more. By eating up the already rare green spots and paving the way to perch people atop in those elevated dwellings you are not doing living standard any favour, mind you. Both from the recreational as well environmental consideration you need to pull up brakes immediately.

Towards a Poverty-free World

by Muhammad Yunus

There has been a major failure of economics in understanding the poor. Poverty is not created by the poor, it is created by the theoretical framework that we work with, institutions that we built and policies that we pursued, and the norms that we created.

IN a major way economics is responsible for creating the world that we live in. Interrelationships among individuals, nations and institutions, day-to-day activities of all people are shaped in a large way by the role assigned to them by economics.

Economics as a discipline not only attempts to explain what goes on in the sphere of economic activities of people and organisations, but it has also vastly influenced these activities by making people believe in what economics says about who they are, and what they should do. Economics text-books create the mindsets, mindsets create the world.

I think economics has miscreated this world. It got us into a lot of trouble and many human tragedies. For one thing, seeds of poverty are planted firmly in the pages of economics text-books.

Labour or Human Being?

Economics has committed a strategic mistake in conceptualising a human being. It has abstracted away from the very essence of a human being. All human beings are creative beings. Each human being has great potential buried into him/her. Economics has reduced human beings to lesser beings than what they are, and consequently still lesser beings than what they could be.

Economics paid no attention to this creative aspect of human beings. It created a category called 'labour' and put all human beings, except the few entrepreneurs, under this category. Labour, as they appear in the text-books, looks more like draught animals than human beings. They have no creativity, no ambition, no sense of sacrifice, pride or accomplishment, worst of all, they have no gender. If you have to squeeze out the very essence of a human being to build a social science theory, who needs that social science? By not incorporating the difference between man and woman in them, and the basic institution they come from, the family, economics also missed out important analytical opportunities as a social science.

Economics assigned creativity only to a select, rather rare, category of people called 'entrepreneur'. Entrepreneurs are treated as royalty in economics. Economics has persuaded the world that all other human beings are born to serve under them. This idea was introduced in economics as an innocent piece of abstraction. Yet it has done very serious damage to the human society by making an individual believe that he/she is fated to serve others. It has influenced the design of institutions, framing of legislations and policies and shaping politics. Because of this misconstrued vision of the human beings, wage employment emerged as the only legitimate source of employment.

Today we have lived in a different kind of world if economics started out with the premise that all human beings are potential entrepreneurs (which they are). All that an individual needed was an opportunity. With this premise in place world would have paid attention to creating those opportunities, because text-books would have required them.

Self-Employment

As wage-employment became the only logical source of employment, economics text-book never had any use for the term 'self-employment'. Since the concept does not find a place in the economics text-book it does not find a place in our thinking, and policies. All human beings suffer for it. Women suffer the most.

If economics could imagine human beings with more options than the labour has, it would have created a theory of self-employment which would have made it easy to address the issues of poverty, development, family, population and gender. It could have enriched itself with other socially powerful theories on credit, banking and entitlement.

There has been a major failure of economics in understanding the poor. Poverty is not created by the poor, it is created by the theoretical framework that we work with, institutions that we built, and policies that we pursued, and the norms that we created. Economics never had a chance to reflect on the poverty of an individual human being in its mind. All it had in mind was a labour.

In many of the third world countries the overwhelming majority of people make a living through self-employment. Because theoretical framework of economics does not have any room for self-employment, it lumped this in a category called the 'informal sector'. Just because it does not have analytical tools to cope with this situation it concluded that this is not a desirable situation; this is a symptom of primitiveness of an economy.

The 'informal sector' is the creation of the people, not of any economic theory. This is people's effort to create their own livelihood, own

enterprise. Anyone with a minimum understanding of people and society would have come forward with hope and excitement to build upon what exists, take it to higher levels, bring more vitality into it, rather than pull the rug under it. What a shame! Instead of supporting the creativity and energy of the people by creating enabling and empowering policies and institutions, economics becomes eager to fit people into boxes it created.

Credit

Economics completely disqualifies itself as a social science when it comes to its treatment of credit. It is very surprising that economics never understood the social power of credit. The fact that credit creates entitlement to resources could have immediately triggered the thought that in the social context it could surely play a very significant and sensitive role. Amazingly, economics failed to grasp it.

Since credit creates economic, and hence, social power, the institution responsible for deciding who should and should not get credit, and who should get how much credit and at what terms, becomes very important socially.

That's exactly what has happened. This institution by deciding that it can do business only with the rich, literally has created financial apartheid. When it announced that the poor are not creditworthy it was almost pronouncing death sentence on the poor for no fault of their own. Economics went along with it.

As a social science economics should have recognised credit as a human right and promoted creative efforts to deliver credit to all. If we can redesign economics as a genuine social science, we can be firmly on our way to creating a poverty-free world.

Social Consciousness-driven

Enterprises

Somehow we have persuaded ourselves that the capitalist economy must be fueled only by greed. Since economics persuaded us that way, we all believe that way. As a result it became a self-fulfilling prophecy. Only personal gain-seekers go into the marketplace and try their talent. Those who are not interested in accumulating personal wealth and income do not find the marketplace very attractive. They use their talent elsewhere.

Marketplace is open for everyone, even for those who are not interested in personal gain, such as, people who get inspired by the prospect of social changes for betterment. Social goals can replace greed as a powerful motivational force. Social consciousness-driven enterprises can be formidable competitors for the greed-based enterprises. Social consciousness and urge to do good things to people and the planet can be as burning, even more burning a desire than personal gain in an individual. Why not encourage socially motivated people to come and play in the marketplace? Instead of grumbling about how a pharmaceutical company makes filthy money by charging unreasonable prices, why don't we create our own companies and sell good quality medicine at profit-free prices, or at prices with low profits? I think social consciousness driven entrepreneurs can be an effective force in the marketplace.

Before the world surrenders itself to the current interpretation of free-market, that is, recognising market as the playground of the greedy business people only, we must seriously engage in examining the strength of social consciousness-driven enterprises as players in the same market. Social consciousness does exist in people. But it can be further promoted through creating supportive legislation and social reward system. If we leave no room for this human quality in our theoretical framework, as we have done in present-day economics, we'll be transforming ourselves into the human beings that we imagined, i.e., human beings without social values.

Economics must incorporate within itself that the marketplace is not an exclusive playground for the blood-thirsty profit-seekers, it is a challenging field for all good people who want to set the world in the right course.

New Economics Text-books

If we can create a right framework with right conceptualisation, I see no reason why anybody should remain a poor person. Poverty should be a matter which will find its place in the poverty museum. It will be a part of the history of human indifference to their fellow human beings, and human arrogance about their so-called knowledge. The sooner we can write new economics text-books, the closer will be the day when we'll have a poverty-free world.

(From the speech given by the author at the Bangladesh Economic Association and International Economic Association Conference that ended in Dhaka yesterday.)

OPINION

BTV News : Lack of Professionalism

Watching the BTV news during the decade of the '90s, one question pops up time and again: how much freedom do news professionals enjoy while processing and preparing the news bulletins, and thereafter presenting it for the viewers of all shades of political opinion? A lot of compromise can be detected by all levels of viewers, observers, critics and media specialists. In spite of protests, the subjective format is not changed — in the name of democracy!

Apart from this glaring aberration, there is another boring aspect: no change of the menu. All restaurants and hotels change the menu at regular intervals to provide variety, simply because variety is the spice of life.

BTV's fixed and rigid presentation schedule goes something like this: the coverage of the Prime Minister for about 10 minutes, regardless of the professional priority; followed by the activities of the ministers. The shots are centred around the use of the microphone, meetings, addresses and ceremonies. The speeches, apart from some fresh policy matters, are the usual hashed clichés with which the listeners are very familiar. There is an overdose of sermonising, and hardly anything at peer level. How far the listeners are wiser after the listening is left to them to analyse.

A Husnain

A big chunk of the valuable minutes of the news bulletin is devoted to anniversaries, of this and that event, day in and day out, some national, some political, few social; and most are accorded higher priority than the event deserved — a serious professional lapse, not seen in reputable foreign overseas broadcasts. There are more additions than subtractions. Editing is on the basis of black and white — there are hardly any grey areas. Life is mostly grey! BTV is very modern and up-to-date with latest hi-tech known as Virtual Reality.

The prime time slot is devoted to the public sector activities, severely down grading the private and social sectors. The news staff are aware of these professional shortcomings of such slanted presentation. If the editor or the producer has his way, he would use his professional judgement to present the news bulletin in a manner which would be universally acceptable. But this is too much to expect in the Third World countries in different stages of emergence or development.

This phenomenon has been defined by the professional analysts as 'illiberal democracy'; or, in other words, controlled democracy, however subtle or crude. That it exists cannot be denied as the communication mass media is always exposed,

whether factual or propaganda, or a mixture of both.

Since this is the not the weakness of one single regime, it could be classified as a transient culture of communication. This transitory period, being unstable, continues indefinitely, and the distorted culture is picked up by the successive regime; but not seamlessly. The usual protests continue. In the traditional manner, and the vicious circle revolves merrily. Thus the under-developed nations carry two negative images; one that of the 'bottomless basket', and the other the 'inability to get out of the vicious circle'. The escape velocity or the centrifugal force cannot be obtained, sometimes in spite of genuine effort.

Now comes the broader question: how far political pressure dominates over professional ethics, and subdues professional judgement? This is a universal question, which can be applied in any part of the world. A lot is written and talked about the freedom of the mass media. Nobody opposes the principle, but still the output or the performance leaves much to be desired. There are hidden agendas, the discussion of which is taboo! Discussions on neutrality and objectivity make good reading and listening, but the proof of the pudding lies in the eating.

There we are, back to square one. "This is Bangladesh Television. Here is the news."

Gathering of Black Clouds on Russian Horizon Is a Crisis Brewing in the Capital of the Largest Land on Earth?

The dismissed Prime Minister, Chernomyrdin, has already put his hat in the ring of contest. He expects endorsement and support from his erstwhile boss, Yeltsin also likes to keep him in good humour, dangling some amount of hope.

THE vast expanse of land masses stretching from the European Baltic to the East Asian Bering Sea, interspersed by eleven time zones, appears again heading towards trouble. When Russia is in trouble, unless it is nipped in the bud, the trouble becomes really big. Russians adore everything big. They have penchant for it. It is an unmistakable trait of their national character. Their land is big, even after having been truncated from the erstwhile Soviet Union. The people are big, in size and volume. They eat big, loud and often bragging. Their enterprises and establishments are big, show pieces to others. Their farms are big, due still largely to collective ownership. Their ports are big, as only the top two carry bulk of the loads. Even their pride, the pool of cultural heritage, the Bolshoi Theatre, is big not only because it was built big, two hundred years ago as Petrovsky Theatre, but the word, Bolshoi, in Russian language means big. A smaller theatre by the name Malinki, literally meaning small, was built by its side to effect a towering contrast in order to add greater glory and lustre to Bolshoi.

Such are the traits of a people who had been long and widely misunderstood by many during the cold war. Only a sincere and deliberate attempt can reveal the presence of a sensitive, witty and intelligent mind, endowed with a keen sense of humour, that ordinarily betrays the outward facade and the mask of a common Russian. At the same time, they can be, as

they had been in the past, crude, ruthless and barbaric. The adventures and misdeeds of Ivan the Terrible, whose wrath did not spare even his own son, is but an example of cases that fill the Russian history. The severity of climate has made people tough and contributed to mould their physical idiosyncrasies and social habits to suit their environment, no doubt. Thus, all these have to be viewed ensemble and to be taken in their strides. My almost three-year-long diplomatic assignment in that all-pervasive land and study of their formidable sounding, yet beautiful, language left me with no other impression.

The report of brewing political troubles in Russian capital, therefore, automatically makes people veer round to watch the developments with interest. The sudden and unexpected dismissal of the entire cabinet by the charismatic President, Boris Yeltsin, represented the first salvo of the battle. Strangely enough and contrary to one's normal expectation, the salvo did not only hit the dismissed Prime Minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin, but went over the Kremlin and landed at a distance, at the white marble palace, the seat of the Russian parliament. This White House of Russia has a chequered history. It came to the limelight in recent times first when in front of it, riding on a tank, Boris Yeltsin wrested power from his erstwhile mentor and later arch rival, Gorbachev, heralding the collapse of Communism at its very birth-place and citadel. A few years later, the same Yeltsin bombarded that White Palace into submission by its legislators in a struggle for power that left a hundred people dead.

What really prompted the unpredictable President Yeltsin to act unpredictably again this time is not very difficult to surmise. Yeltsin is an enigmatic personality — a jovial, boisterous person with a quick mind who would not bat an eyelid to give his instant reaction to a present situation, irrespective of the brief prepared by his aides. I have had the privilege of meeting him on several occasions till 1989 — as Mayor of the city of Moscow, as an alternate member of the omnipotent Politburo and finally after he was stripped off his powers as a crest-fallen rebel. Gorbachev had first used him as the mascot of his reforms programme, *Glasnost* and *Pere-*

stroika, then failed to keep pace with the machine of his creation, and finally forcibly sought to put him to disuse. The machine sprang up like one jack in the box and dealt the fatal sting of a serpent to Gorbachev at an opportune time.

Differences between President Yeltsin and Prime Minister Chernomyrdin were being noticed, of late, by foreign observers. The last straw on camel's back was, according to some reports, the awarding of a big contract through local tycoons. A special feature of post-Communist Russia is the mushroom growth of pseudo-capitalists, creation of a large number of business and industrial tycoons with high connections and powerful alignments, and the appearance of a host of extortionist and mafia organisations. Most jumbo deals, which are plentiful in Russia today, have to have the blessings of a worthy promoter to conclude. Prime Minister reportedly approved one big deal about which the President may have had other plans. Although the Prime Minister was within his competence and possibly acted in good faith, Yeltsin may have had a different notion. His dismissal of the cabinet was officially explained due to failure of the Prime Minister to deliver fruits of the promised economic reforms. He appointed a 35-year-old technocrat, former Minister of Energy, Sergei Kirilenko as the new Prime Minister.

Here comes the crux of the crisis. The appointment of a new Prime Minister by the Russian President must be endorsed by the lower house of the parliament. In the event of a refusal

by parliament, President is eligible to send his nomination two more times to the Duma for reconsideration. If the Duma turns down President's proposal for the third time, President is empowered by constitution to dissolve the parliament and order a fresh election.

Duma, on the other hand, is dominated by the opposition, communist and radical foes of the President. Already, Gennady Zuganov, leader of the largest political party in parliament, declared that he would not endorse Yeltsin's candidate as Prime Minister. He publicly scoffed at the idea of the absurdity of a young 35-year-old juvenile-faced Kirilenko, who became a minister only 6 months ago, to lead the complex Russian nation and be trusted to carry and operate Yeltsin's nuclear briefcase.

True to his name and character, Yeltsin retorted promptly and sternly. He warned the legislators of dire consequences, if they failed to comply with his wishes to endorse his candidate. He, in fact, threatened them to wield his constitutional authority, if needed. Leaders of other political parties in the Duma are yet to come out in support of Yeltsin. The time limit for the first phase for the crucial decision of the Duma is tomorrow. One awaits with interest and concern the outcome of the first round of the bout. The sceptre of the military bombardment of Duma, into submission by Yeltsin in the past always looms large in the background of one's mind.

Another facet of these developments in Moscow was revealed about Boris Yeltsin's plan for contest in the next Presidential election scheduled to be held two years hence, in the year 2000. He appears to have ruled out the idea of fielding himself as a candidate a third time. The dismissed Prime Minister, Chernomyrdin, has already put his hat in the ring of contest. He expects endorsement and support from his erstwhile boss, Yeltsin also likes to keep him in good humour, dangling some amount of hope. But the latest comments of the President, referring him as one highly competent to manage the Presidential campaign, reduced the hope of the new aspirant and rendered his grim face grimmer still. Thus, the Russian scenarios that will unfold itself in the coming days will be a matter of interesting watch by all political observers.

To the Editor...

Municipal management courses

Sir, The cribbed, cabined, and confined residents of Dhaka 'dirty-polis' would like to hear of some good news in municipal administration and management, considering the helplessness displayed publicly by the Hon Mayor DCC.

The DCC management has to be beefed up, with a series of in-service orientation courses and workshops; and expansion or introduction of Municipal Management (academic) courses at certificate/diploma and degree levels. Does the DCC have any training centre?

The UN, donor, and environmental agencies can lend a helping hand with technical and indirect funding assistance (in kind, not cash) for the enhancement of the human resources in managing the growing cities in the developing countries. We produce less garbage than that in the developed countries, but we cannot manage with less.

Some data and stories on this training side during the last decade may be published by the authority for public assistance. The greater participation of the hundreds of NGOs in the country may be tapped for extending Workshops and exchange of views. Nowadays 'city-keeping' has become more critical than housekeeping (not a reflection on the housewives who are coming out to help the nation's offices and work centres).

As for moral training there is only one way to start the campaign — right from the top. The fastest way to influence is through actual demonstration. How to make the intangibles visible?

I have no idea.

A Zabr
Dhaka

fake playground, a plot to garb a large area of KWT land in Narayanganj. Similar plans of land-hungry interests are not new in this country but an organisation like KWT should not be subjected to or saddled with such situation if our law enforcing authority goes by the recent statement made on the floor of the JS by the Home Minister.

May we, therefore, expect the minister's immediate intervention in this matter?

Fazal Raihan
75, Karnal Ataturk Ave.
Banani, Dhaka

Punish them quickly

Sir, We are horrified and deeply troubled by the incidents of child abuse in our country. In the span of 19 days four small girls became the victims of perverse lust of devilish males.

What is happening in our society — why these sorts of abnormal acts are rising? Persons are being compared with animals when they perform degrading acts but I think it would be an insult to the animals if these acts of humans are referred as 'animalism' because even animals will not stoop so low.

I feel deeply for the unfortunate little girls, what a frightening and sorrowful experience for them! I wonder if this nightmare will ever erase from their minds and they will be able to lead a normal life.

It is most disappointing that the government is not taking any fruitful steps to protect our children. If the guilty persons had been punished swiftly with suitable punishment then others would not dare commit such a crime.

Nir-Jahan
East Nasirabad, Chittagong

Attempt to harm

Sir, Kumudini Hospital Complex and Bharateswari Homes perhaps need no introduction to the people of this country.

Bogra is one of the important districts of the northern Bangladesh. It is known for its historical sites like Mahastangadh, Behula Sundari's place. There is a motel in Bogra

Bogra Parjaton Motel

Sir, With the opening of new motel at Kuakata, a long felt demand of southern Bangladesh has been fulfilled. Bogra is one of the important districts of the northern Bangladesh. It is known for its historical sites like Mahastangadh, Behula Sundari's place. There is a motel in Bogra

also. But this motel is very old and outdated. The motel was built to provide accommodation to small number of tourist quite a long time ago.

The opening of Jamuna bridge will increase the number of tourists in this area. While spending a night at the motel I could learn that their is no plan to renovate or modernise the motel.

I think Bogra motel deserves consideration of renovation or modernisation.

Mahbubul Haque Chowdhury
General Manager
Agrani Bank, Rajshahi

Bold decision

Sir, I want to congratulate the Prime Minister for coming up with such a bold and decisive move at just the right time when the entire country was being choked without energy. The change of the Energy Minister was a very thoughtful idea that couldn't have come in a better time. But, as always, a forced resignation is never good. In the West politicians resign themselves when they fail to keep their word. But here, 'self resignation' is unthinkable. The PM promised for a change, and we did see it the very same day.

Masroor Ahmed Deepak
Dhaka

World Opinion Triumphs

Sir, The editorial titled "World Opinion Triumphs" on 25 February, 1998 is a unique piece of writing for the victory of the world opinion to end the tension on the question of military action against Iraq.

Mr. Kofi Annan's diplomatic stroke has proved beyond doubt that the sincere will of the UN Secretary-General can do miracles in international politics. We only wish that the US Administration were wise enough to take into account the feelings of the world's peoples.

If the present trend is kept going on in the international arena of politics and diplomacy, it would certainly help the nations.

Abul Ashraf Noor
Uttara, Dhaka