

Late but Good Start

The Prime Minister's meeting formally with the 40 chairpersons of the Jatiyo Sangsad committees was a good thing and must be repeated. What clearly emerged out of the meeting's unwieldy flow of demands and complaints were a general picture of less than desirable cooperation extended by the ministries to the committees and another of undefined lines of rights and duties between the two — neither knowing what and how far to expect from the other and how much force these expectations would carry. Some committee chiefs, feeling inadequate to supervise administrative work over the shoulders of a minister, felt they should be made privy to all that a minister is.

Although belatedly, the parliament somewhat comes into its own with the committees starting to function. The parliament from now on will not only legislate but also have a weighty say in the governance of the nation. All of the government's activity and spheres of effectiveness will now come exhaustively under the supervision and monitoring of the parliament, through the committees. And as the committees are but the parliament in miniature — the non-government members on these would participate in the governance of the state. Already one committee chief has expressed his satisfaction or indeed delight over his experience that the committee functions in a perfectly businesslike manner in an atmosphere of seriousness. This is indeed a big stride for Bangladesh where the parliamentary system itself had a very rough handling — thrown out time and again and reinstated with tailored powers and functions.

The administration, the minister plus his bureaucrats at work, that is, has a new partner in the house, one who will be watch-dogging their doings. They will need time to adjust. The committees may over-exert to create problems in the smooth and steady running of the administration. This they must avoid. If even all the rules of the new game are laid down clearly, there will be no substitute for learning and growing into ideally compatible parts as the years roll by.

While it may be good for the PM to be accosted in far spaced meetings and for her to help clear up a backlog of months, the committees will need to develop the ways about their business in constant contact with ministries and thus mature sooner than later. If the parliamentary committees function well they will be a light in a situation of engulfing gloom.

Accounting Standards

The Prime Minister had all the right words for the 13th conference of the South Asian Federation of Accountants which she inaugurated on Saturday. In a ringing endorsement of a proposal to set up a regulatory body for monitoring implementation of accounting standards in the country she made two points: good accounting is central to transparency and accountability and that we better wipe off the deficiencies in this area to be in the reckoning in a highly competitive world.

Accounting has been a pathologically neglected subject in our country. And, the neglect is the most pronounced in the government sector. Neither the ministries nor government offices keep their accounts methodically and properly in accord with the financial manual. The sector corporations being mostly perennial losers never truly like to be subjected to stringent financial scrutines. Then the ultimate power-house of audit and accounts services — the AGB — is where things can get stuck up for years, eight to nine years in many cases with the gate-keeping souring into poaching at times. More to the point is the fact that person liable for explanation of any wrong-doing might be difficult to reach because he had been either transferred or gone on retirement. AGB objections are dreaded by most government offices or personnel but it is also true that the latter might not have abided by the financial rules to give rise to some of the questions their tormentor deemed fit to raise. In any case, it is the government accounts that need updating in the first place by way of establishing transparency and accountability of governance and development activities.

Private sector accounting is in a poor shape for several reasons not the least of which is the poor fees given to chartered accountants. Such remuneration falls far short of international standards. As a result, accounting firms prove vulnerable to high-fee offers and consequently bend their auditing to the satisfaction of the industry or firm owners. They can ill-afford their staff acquiring higher training or expertise abroad given the company's inadequate income level. As we try to impart professionalism to our auditors and accountants the financial laws of the country stand in dire need to be on a level with international standards.

What More?

Has Jahangirnagar University turned into some sort of a sanctuary for criminals? Well, if the incidents reported in the press over last few days are anything to go by then one cannot be blamed for being under such an impression. It is all happening there. It started with the rape of three students on the campus followed by the universal vociferous demand for punishment of the culprits.

The sentient minds had hardly exhausted themselves of their outrage at the ridiculous strike call by BCL, the student front of ruling Awami League when the nation witnessed another extremely shameful incident: assault of a female teacher on the campus, right in front of the administrative edifice of the institution. She reportedly incurred the wrath of the attackers by taking pictures of a BCL procession that featured people alleged to have been involved in the raping incidents. We strongly denounce the incident which has symbolic significance at more than one layer of our consciousness. It is not a mere attack on a person. It is the barbaric molestation of every sacred association that the words teacher and institution evoke.

We demand the culprits be meted out exemplary punishment immediately. All those present at the spot saw who assaulted the teacher under whose instructions. Press reports on the incident and the official complaint lodged by the victim also suggest there should not be any problem in identifying the culprits. Judging by the sheer audacity with which they have tampered with the code of civility and norms of decency it is not unlikely that these same people were probably behind the rape incidents. Sunday's incident should go a long way in helping the probe committee to find the real criminals. The nation waits to see if the JU authorities can live up to the demand of justice or surrender abjectly to the forces of brutality.

Hate the (Corrupt) Politicians — Not Politics

by Nurul Kabir

The politicians should get a message from the younger students' distaste for politics. Whenever they have an occasion to address young people, the politicians invariably make an obvious statement: The country's future depends on the younger generation. But the younger generation, especially its brighter representatives, simply do not trust them.

SERMONISING his followers, Jesus Christ once said: 'Hate the sin — not the sinner.' But when it comes to a rotten political culture, the suggestion, of course, should be either way round: Hate the (corrupt) politicians — not politics.

The slogan becomes important as the brighter section of the country's young student community is getting fed up with politics as a whole vis-a-vis the corrupt practices of a section of politicians.

The young students' distaste for politics was evident when the boys and girls securing brilliant results in the last SSC examinations were recently interviewed by a couple of Bangla language dailies. In separate interviews they clearly said that they had no plan to join politics, while some of them clearly pronounced detest for the pursuit.

Most of the students in the merit lists of the country's five education boards, however, expressed their intentions to contribute to the progressive development of the nation. But none of them even remotely believe that politics could be a means of delivering things to the nation!

Those having a little sense of history — and aware of the means of social and economic developments — would not fail to understand that it is basically politics that could build and destroy a nation. A doctor, an engineer, a scientist or even a social worker — however committed to the people's welfare/s/he is — has to work under certain rules set up by the politicians. The technocrats — however powerful they may be — have to act under certain laws enacted by politicians. An economist, no matter how big a pundit he is, has to formulate policies in accordance with the directives coming from the political party in power. Even a teacher has to teach things guided by a curriculum formulated most of the time by people having certain political convictions, that aims at nurturing the process of producing and reproducing certain ideologies. There is, therefore, no way for anyone — including the students with good results — to ignore politics. It is, therefore, better to try to change the mode of politics, instead of hating the profession.

Enlightened people aware of the ubiquitous role of politics might think that the students in question would also some day understand the significance of politics and abandon their

negative attitude towards it. But could the students be present distaste for politics be explained only by their naivete or political immaturity? If it is so, then, what about the specific complaints the students have come up with against politicians?

Explaining their dislike for politics, the students commented that the country's politicians had no moral standard. They also accused them of hypocrisy, intolerance, irresponsibility, backwardness and so on. They even went to the extent of questioning the politicians' patriotism.

These are definitely very harsh words against politicians. May be the criticisms are not applicable to the politicians in general. But who would oppose the criticisms when they are directed against most of the leaders of the parties controlling the country's state machinery since independence?

The country's top economists have been asserting for years that the practice of bank-loan defaulting has to be stopped to save the decaying national economy, especially its banking sector. There is none to publicly oppose the idea. But in practice, there is no effective steps to stop the rot. When marginal farmers are being exposed to unthinkable harassment for their genuine inability to pay in time the interests of small scale agricultural loans, the big defaulters have been receiving warm treatments over the years from the parties in power — not to mention repeated exemption of interests on the loans they have consumed earlier. How could it happen?

The answer could be found in the huge election expenditures by the politicians having no legally announced source of income, in their high standard of living, in their spending of tons of money after holding public rallies round the year and so on. It is believably the big bank loan defaulters and smugglers who provide money to the politicians — be s/he a leader of the ruling party or the opposition. The corrupt businessmen buy the 'right' to misappropriate public money from the politicians controlling the state

machinery in turns. The higher echelon of bureaucracy, another section of people whose standard of living is visibly disproportionate to their official income, is a significant player in this dirty game.

The picture perhaps adequately substantiates the allegation of immorality against politicians and their administrative partners — the top level bureaucrats.

When in government, the politicians impose taxes on the people, want that the citizens maintain their accounts properly and ask the officials concerned to make sure that the citizens pay taxes. But what about the income and expenditures of the politicians? Do they ever keep any record? Is their any way of their accounts being audited? — Never. This is double standard.

Perturbed about campus terrorism and subsequent destruction of academic environment, the patriotic citizens have been making repeated appeals to the major political parties to take steps to save the country's education, especially the higher education from abyss. Busy giving lip services about it, the major political parties have practically been doing nothing to restore peace in the educational institutions. Rather, the big political parties do not mind their student wings using non-student hoodlums to capture dormitories, ousting the helpless general students. The politicians even encourage, both directly and indirectly, the adventurous young students to get armed with illegal weapons and chase away politically rival groups from university and college premises.

The situation could improve dramatically, if the major political parties just abstained from sponsoring the professional criminals and crime-prone young boys physically controlling the educational institutions. But they refuse to stop patronising campus terrorism, contributing to lowering of the standard of education every day. Why should then one expect the young students to consider politicians to be responsible elements, when the latter prefer to turn their ears to the sensible appeals of the people

who pine for standard of education?

The students have questioned politicians' patriotism. This is a very serious allegation indeed. How do the political leaders defend themselves against the allegation, for instance, when the government signs contracts over exploration of natural gas with foreign companies sacrificing national interests? While signing production sharing contracts with the foreigners, the government has agreed to buy gas from them at a price more than 100 per cent higher than the local rate. By such agreements, the nation would not only be giving away its hard earned foreign currency for years, but the manoeuvre would definitely have an adverse effect on our day today life as well as our industrialisation potential. It is not unpredictable that the government, while selling gas at the local market, would also double the price that would eventually double the amount of expenditure on fuel to be borne by common people and increase the manufacturing cost of the country's industrial products. An increase in the production cost of the locally produced commodities would further limit their ability to compete with imported goods.

People aware of the background of signing the contracts attribute the national loss to the inefficiency of the bureaucrats concerned and corruption of the government leaders. The opposition parties that criticise everything that the government does have shown little enthusiasm in criticising the government for sacrificing the national interest in this case. Is not it really difficult, under this circumstance, to blame the young students when they question the politicians' sense of patriotism?

Another common complaint against the country's politicians, especially top politicians, is that they are intolerant of opposing views and political rights of everybody in the realm. The height of intolerance could be understood from a single instance: The leader of Parliament and Prime Minister

Sheikh Hasina and the leader of the opposition in parliament and former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia have not spoken to each other for last several years, when a good working relation between the two leaders was essential to reconstruct the fate of the country's toiling masses. No sound mind can accept, especially in a parliamentary democracy, that two top leaders of the country would not have even talking terms between them. The repeated allegation of framed cases against opposition activists and supporters could largely be explained by vindictive attitude.

The young students were also of the opinion that the country's lawmakers did not know how to speak in parliament. None can probably defend the MPs against the allegation, when they often make irrelevant statements inside the House, frequently hurl abuses at one another and sometimes get even physically violent.

Backwardness of the politicians? — Most of the political leaders are now busy proving their religious loyalty to the electorate, while many of them had worked hard to maintain their secular image only the other day. The governments these days do not hesitate to show reluctance to deliver a uniform education policy that could effectively contribute to producing modern secular citizens — paving ways for actual development of the society. Instead, the politicians feel more comfortable in allocating huge amount of money towards madrasa education every year.

There is no reason to object to necessary expenditures on religious education and theological researches when it contributes to the social and spiritual development of the citizens. But no governments have so far taken any effective step to 'modernise' madrasa education, although all of them have promised it when in the opposition. As a result, the curriculum of madrasa education remains counter productive for the society as a whole. But for the politicians, it is one of the easiest ways of getting political dividends — votes — in a backward

society like ours. Least bothered about its future implications, they politicians take the easiest way for their immediate gains. The phenomenon also justifies another complaint of the young students that the politicians are a big obstacle for a progressive transformation of our society.

Hypocrisy is another ingredient of the country's rotten political culture: Governing parties refuse to implement programmes they had once demanded for while in the opposition. The opposition parties demand things to be implemented what they had refused to do while in power.

However, it is not very difficult for an one to further expand the list of the vices or limitations of the country's leading politicians. But what is more important is to get rid of the problems.

Resurrection of student politics led by the brighter section of the community would be the most significant step towards positive changes in the present political culture. In defence of the proposition, we would refer to a golden period of the country's political history — the politics of the sixties. The national politics of the time had largely been dominated by the student organisations, while it was the brilliant boys and girls who led the student bodies across the erstwhile East Pakistan. And it was eventually the student movements that ousted the most notorious general of the time — Ayub Khan — from power, ultimately paving the way for the war of independence in 1971.

Had the country's student politics been able to keep up the spirit, the nation's post liberation history would have been different. It is not difficult to understand that the meritorious people with good souls could only deliver a good political culture. Ignoring politics by the brighter citizens would rather worsen the situation.

However, the politicians should get a message from the younger students' distaste for politics. Whenever they have an occasion to address young people, the politicians invariably make an obvious statement: The country's future depends on the younger generation. But the younger generation, especially its brighter representatives, simply do not trust them.

It is, therefore, high time the politicians polish their image.

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LETTER FROM AMERICA

The United States Has the Right to Go After Osama Bin Laden

Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton

What America ignores, however, is its inconsistency and inherent unfairness in exercising its foreign policy. America's real enemy is not Bin Laden or the Taliban; it is this inconsistency and lack of fairness.

another mistake, if they let Afghanistan de facto rulers and Mr Bin Laden's protectors, the Taliban, set the agenda for them. With the curtailing of women's rights to practice their God-given talents, ban on books and the electronic media, Taliban is pushing Afghanistan back to the dark ages. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) had said that a mother was three times more important than the father, not his slave. Educated Muslims are astonished to discover how consistent the holy Quran is, in light of their newly found knowledge. Doesn't the world-wide telecast of the Hajj touch every spiritual chord in the heart of the devotees? The Taliban would ban all that. The intolerant Islam that the Taliban preaches, is not what we derive from reading the holy Quran.

In his address to the nation in the aftermath of the bombing, President Clinton stressed

that the attack was not against Islam, but only those terrorists invoking the name of the "great religion". President Clinton has been very sensitive to the "Islam-bashing" that follows every terrorist act in America. After the Oklahoma City bombing in April, 1995, when news media were going wild with a Middle Eastern connection, Mr Clinton chided the nation "not to rush to judgment". As it turned out, it was Timothy J McVeigh, now sentenced to death, who was responsible. The Clintons have been very friendly to the American Muslims. Hillary and Chelsea Clinton had invited the Muslims to the White House a couple of years ago to an Eid Party. Nevertheless, in spite of President Clinton's goodwill, the speech did draw "negative attention" to Islam. In fact, had the American policy towards the Islamic world been benevolent, references to Muslims in his speech would not have been necessary.

There have been innuendoes, even from Republican Congressmen and Senators, that President Clinton timed his missile attack to divert attention away from his Monica Lewinsky sex scandal. Others hinted comically, that after two days of hearing about it from Hillary at their Martha's Vineyard "vacation", Clinton could not take it anymore and had escape go to Washington, DC for some relief! The truth is, the preparation for missile attacks was set in motion immediately after the Kenya and Tanzania bombings. After the preparations were completed at a much lower level than the President, the Presidential approval was sought, which the President granted.

Some Americans believe that the reason for the terrorism by the likes of Bin Laden is that some angry Muslims see globalisation — with Mickey Mouse ears, Pepsi and Coke, Big

Macs, IBM and Windows 98 — as Americanisation. They see it as a threat.

According to historian Ronald Steel: "The Russians and the Chinese were supposed to be the revolutionaries. But America today is the most revolutionary society in the world. For the rest of the world, we are wild, crazy revolutionaries, with rings in our nose and paint on our toes, overturning cultures and traditions wherever we go. We believe that our institutions must confine all others to the ash heap of history. We lead an economic system that has effectively buried every other form of production and distribution — leaving great wealth and sometimes great ruin in its wake. The cultural messages we transmit through Hollywood and McDonald's go out across the world to capture and also undermine other societies. We are the apostles of

globalisation, the enemy of tradition and hierarchy." In short, America tells the world: "our system is better than your father's", and the world resents it. Perhaps, What America ignores, however, is its inconsistency and inherent unfairness in exercising its foreign policy. America's real enemy is not Bin Laden or the Taliban; it is this inconsistency and lack of fairness. It cannot allow one set of rules to govern its relationship with Jewish Israel for instance, and another set for Muslim Palestine, Iraq, Iran, Sudan and Libya. It cannot promote the independence of Christian Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, and oppose that of Muslim Chechnya and Kosovo. America cannot send missiles with Bin Laden's name written on it, and not send missiles to hunt down the Serb butchers, Milosevic, Karadic and Mladic. The danger America faces from the terrorism is its possible loss of credibility as a fair arbiter. If America is scrupulously fair in its dealings with nations, and promotes no favourites like Israel, terrorists do not have a chance!

To the Editor...

Let us mend our ways

Sir, In today's Bangladesh no girl or a mother is safe. A son and the husband can be picked up at any time. We are in one bottom place of the Human Rights scale. When I bring out my green passport, the immigration officer gives a look of suspicion, and double-checks my document. At one time when my wife was travelling, she was separated from the other passengers. Then taken to a room for a thorough questioning.

In 1978 Bangladeshis were not required to have a visa to enter the then West Germany including West Berlin. But very soon due to our own fault, visa restrictions were imposed.

Permit me to make the following two quotations. Macaulay said, "what horns are to the buffalo, what sting is to be, what beauty according to Greek song is to women, deceit is to the Bengalee. Large praesent, smooth excuses, elaborate issues of circumstantial falsehood, chicanery, perjury, forgery are the weapons, offensive and defensive, of the people of the Lower Ganges." In a similar way Rudyard Kipling stated "when a Bengali criminal is working a fraud of the sort he loves, he is about the cleverest sort, you could wish for."

We are one of the rudest and unhelpful people in the world, and the characteristic start off as soon as we land at the Zia International Airport.

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Police Perversity!

Sir, Saluted to The Daily Star for the captioned hard hitting editorial on 11-8-98 which should be a grim reminder to those who think time will be the healer, i.e. minus those god-fathers feigning sleep, while the nation bleeds. Nevertheless, the myriads of allurement that fare the police towards corruption are so attractive, especially Section-54 which confers on an ordinary police officer unfettered powers to detain, try and they use and abuse to their hearts contents.

The aforesaid medieval law should be annulled forthwith, and only then, should the government follow with the civilised path of "police reforms", otherwise it will be like placing the cart before the horse.

Salahuddin Jamal
Firozshah, Chittagong

An appeal

Sir, I like to draw the kind attention of Honourable Prime Minister and Education Minister to the following facts.

I am rather a victimised lecturer in Botany, now serving as Education Officer in Primary Education, Dhaka Division, Dhaka.

I joined as Demonstrator in Botany at Comilla Victoria Govt College in 1968 and I was an employee of Mujibnagar in 1971 for which I should get two years seniority as per Govt orders but the DG (SHE) has not sanctioned it till now.

I authored two research pa-

per which were published in Bangladesh Journal of Botany in 1979 and 1980, respectively. One short communication was published in 1981 in Chittagong University studies. I completed one research project under professor Dr Q A Fattah of Dhaka University in 1981. I did my M Sc in Botany during 1981-82 session and secured class. My last research paper was published in 1987 from Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council, Dhaka.

In Bangladesh almost 90 per cent of the designated associate professors and professors of government colleges do not have any publication.

My promotion was due in 1989 but the then DG (SHE) and other officers concerned delayed it for four years. Who will be responsible for this loss of time? My promotion should be counted from the date of passing M Sc in Botany with published papers.

Painfully though, I am an exceptional case among the government college teachers. I have taken practical classes of Honours and M Sc in Botany at Eden Girls' Colleges for the last nine years. My job experience is as long as about 30 years in different renowned government colleges including Comilla Victoria Govt. College, M C College, Sylhet, Eden Girls' College, Dhaka. In the last 26 years no demonstrator of government colleges has any research paper to his/her credit.

I also got chance for higher education in Ph D at Delhi University for Ph D degree. I applied for permission of study leave without pay. But the then DG (SHE) did not grant the study

leave. Under the circumstance, I appeal and want that my promotion be counted from the date of M Sc degree and benefit of two years seniority and more than four and half years delay be given without inflicting on me the pain of any further waiting.

As I have been serving for long 30 years in different renowned colleges, my students have become Associate Professors and Assistant Professor, so how can I serve in colleges under their control? I as a member of cadre service (Edn) would like to transfer my service directly to the Ministry of Education and posting may kindly be given to education wing of any embassy.

Jayanta Bhushan Deb
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Only one?

Sir, Thousands of cases are lying pending in the high court causing tremendous suffering to people concerned. Days are shooting by but there is no sign of speedy disposal of the cases leading to the reduction of the same rather the volume of the unsettled cases are increasing day by day.

It is pity to note that a poor country like ours having more than 120 million people has got only one high court in the capital city of Dhaka.

Md Abdul Latif Khalifa
Jessore

Hillary should forgive Bill, say Indian women

Hillary Clinton should forgive her husband U.S.

President Bill Clinton for his extramarital affairs, a majority of the married Indian women have said in an opinion poll published here on August 23. Nevertheless, almost half the women interviewed vowed never to forgive their husbands for the same misdemeanour, the opinion poll, which appears on the front page of The Times of India, revealed.

As many as 59 per cent of the women said that Hillary should forgive Clinton, according to the poll. The pie chart accompanying the poll had a caricature of a sullen Clinton with lipstick marks on his face.

Just 36 per cent of the 650 respondents advised America's First Lady not to forgive her husband. Only married women aware of the Monica Lewinsky episode were interviewed in three metropolitan cities: Delhi, Mumbai in the west, and Bangalore in the south.

But the women seemed to be almost equally divided when asked if they were ready to forgive their own husbands if they admitted to having a sexual relationship with other women. While 47 per cent said they would not pardon their spouses, 45 per cent said they would.

However, a larger percentage of women — 53 — were ready to forgive their husbands if they promised not to repeat the mistake.

Apart from providing an inkling of what married Indian women feel about the husbands' extramarital affairs, the poll also showed that values differed from one city to another.

Among the three metros where the poll was conducted, women from Mumbai came out to be the most liberal with 66 per cent of them advising Hillary to pardon Clinton. In Delhi, a lesser 50 per cent felt Clinton deserves his wife's pardon. On the question of forgiving their own husbands for sexual misdemeanours, the opinion in Mumbai was evenly balanced, with 47 per cent replying in the affirmative and 46 per cent in the negative.

Delhi came across as the most forgiving city, with 54 per cent of the married women saying they would pardon their husbands' sexual infidelity. Bangalore wives appeared to take a more serious view, with only 33 per cent willing to forgive. A much higher 52 per cent of the wives ruled out any such reprieve. In reply to another question, only 11 per cent of the married women in Mumbai and Bangalore were prepared to "go on with life as if nothing had happened" even after their husbands had committed adultery. The figure for Delhi was a much higher 32 per cent. But on the possibility of divorce or separation in the circumstance, the difference between the metros was much narrower: only 25 per cent for Delhi, 23 per cent in Bangalore and 19 per cent for Mumbai.