

Spare the Farce

We warn you this is becoming a farce, if it already hasn't. Will Mrs Sajeda Chowdhury care to find out what her previous two sincere attempts to catch the smoking vehicles came to? And she is again trying the same tack. Again, her intentions are all right but her ways about accomplishing her mission is a study in confusion.

As long as one vehicle belonging to your ministry smokes vilely, please don't come threatening others. How many vehicles do the government and its many agencies and accretions own out of Dhaka's 174,000 registered motorised ones? As long as any one of these tens of thousands emit foul air, there is no reason for Dhaka to have clear air.

Dhaka's air must be clean and clear or we shall be criminals pushing ourselves and our posterity into unhealthful lives shortened and filled with suffering by our inaction. The Department of Environment knows what one more day of this unclean killing air means. Doesn't the government — the PM and all other constituents of it, share in this knowledge? Why not? It is the government that is wholly responsible for Dhaka's unclean air and sky.

As we have earlier pointed out, ridding Dhaka of smoking vehicles is not possible by a minnow like the DoE or even by a stalwart like Sajeda Chowdhury alone. The government of Bangladesh as a whole must address the task. Anything less, we are doomed to witness the farce further.

Welcome Schroeder

Gerhard Schroeder's parliamentary confirmation as Germany's new chancellor and his formal swearing in to the office constitute a path-breaker for the Rhineland with reverberations likely to be felt in time across much of Europe.

The European integrationist view has taken on a new dimension with the left-of-centre sweep across the continent embracing Germany into its fold as Schroeder comes to power on the social welfare state plank. Germany being the largest and most powerful economy in Europe has decided to be led by someone who is not wedded to free market economy to the point of absolutism at the expense of legitimate welfare interests of the society.

Schroeder's Social Democratic Party having formed a coalition government with the Environmentalist Greens, issues of not just German interest but of world ecology, including the concern for shutting down nuclear power plants, are automatically put under the spotlight.

The SDP and the Environmentalist Greens have come to power introducing such new elements into the German national agenda that one cannot but effusively compliment the country's electorate on making, what for others is still a distant dream, come home and true. The whole world is optimistically looking forward to the German leadership's redeeming it all.

Our hearty congratulations to Schroeder and his team. May he lead the friendly German people into a rewarding next century!

Set the Birds Free

No matter how big or small is the consequence of our indiscretion and insensitivity, we simply refuse to learn from our mistakes. The report published in a section of yesterday's press on the thousands of cute, little, colourful birds now crammed in a cage at the Mirpur Zoo once again reminded of this trait. About nine thousand muntia birds were recently rescued from the airport when sought to be smuggled out of the country. The law enforcers did their job of foiling the evil design of a business concern to make money illegally by hauling rare birds from their natural habitat and exporting them but the good work looks destined to go down the drain unless something is done immediately.

Some bird lovers and ornithologists have witnessed the miserable plight of these birds and aired their concern that unless they are allowed to fly around the places of their origin they would not survive. They have even named the places where these birds are likely to survive.

Hundreds of birds of the same variety were rescued from the airport some time ago and a similar silly arrangement was thought of then, too. Only after the birds in confinement started dying in dozens that the zoo authorities woke up to the necessity of listening to the people in the know. We denounce the zoo authorities' ignorance and insensitivity and call for an immediate transfer of the birds to their original, natural habitat. And yes, we want proper legal measure against the business concern that organised this huge theft.

THE oft-quoted remarks of the legendary king of France Louis XIV, 'apres moi, c'est le deluge' (after me, there will be all devouring inundation) does not hold good in Bangladesh, despite the most long-standing and devastated floods in the living memory of its people.

The people are quite perplexed at the intra and post flood politics in the country. Nothing would be more desirable than to expect all political parties to have joined hands and to unitedly promote efforts for relief and rehabilitation of the distressed people.

Leader of the Opposition at the very outset of the floods came out with a proposal for constituting an all party relief committee at various levels to deal properly with this national catastrophe. This was unfortunately rejected by the government.

On American television, very often two versions of the same news are presented. The official, bland version, and the unofficial, more revealing one. The TV reporter would say, 'The official White House line is that it has been a good day for the President in the Monica Lewinsky affair. But privately, White House officials, who insisted on anonymity, told this reporter that it's a disaster!'

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To the Editor

Reviving our city

Sir, I am grateful to The Daily Star that I was able to avail the opportunity to participate in a conference held on 12.10.98 at the British Council Auditorium. It was organised by Young Entrepreneurs and Professional Forum and initiated by the British Council in Dhaka.

Our country has recently suffered a devastating flood that has almost ruined our economy. Every citizen's earning is at stake. So I would request the government to reduce the petrol and octane price and mitigate the sufferings of the vehicle owners.

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Apres Deluge General Scenario

If the government allowed the BNP to hold their proposed peaceful hunger strike in the suggested venue, which was away from the cricket ground and much before the holding of the international tournament, no hartal would have been called and none would have died of conflict with police and counter demonstration by the ruling party.

comprehensible for the ordinary public. As a result, an opportunity for a combined national endeavour, which is a dream of patriotic people, could not realise.

The single most infamous incident that has shaken the society terribly in the recent past is the rape of several female students at the Jahangirnagar University by fellow students. It goes without saying that such a heinous crime committed by a section of the youth, who should otherwise have constituted future of the nation, must be condemned in the strongest possible term.

Even more dangerous is the fact that all those criminals belong to the ruling party and enjoy its patronage and protection. That is why they could evade justice and only had to subject themselves to an investigation by the University Syndicate. This has set a dangerous trend. It would not be illogical to assume that parents are now

apprehensive of sending their daughters for education to that University.

The law and order situation has been continuously deteriorating. Murder, rape, women repression, child abuse and other crimes are on the rise and assumed a proportion never witnessed before. The most notorious crime of torture and death by police and in police

succeeded and how? Thanks to the accomplice police officers and constables. It appears a stark failure on the part of the Awami high command to bridle their unruly elements, who otherwise get encouraged to dominate the criminal scene unabated.

Simultaneously, some members of the law enforcing agency get impetus and engage

shining examples of such foolhardy act. Government's discrimination and policy of according undue protection to its party leaders, involved in similar circumstances, do not escape people's attention.

The claim to allow the opposition to hold rallies, stage demonstrations and even conduct a hunger strike is being persistently denied by the government. This has driven the opposition to call hartals, much against their own will as they are well aware of its adverse effects on the public by way of causing avoidable inconvenience and economic loss.

A new and highly controversial method introduced by the Awami League of defying the efforts of the opposition to put up demonstrations and to stage

a procession is to match them with counter demonstration and counter rallies with a view to thwarting opposition's action by way of force. Such method is likely to result in conflict, promote violence and cause bloodshed. The BNP during its rule refrained from staging counter processions during and before opposition rallies mainly for the purpose of allowing the opposition to protest peacefully.

Finally, it becomes quite incomprehensible for people to understand government claim that the opposition has resorted to hartals and demonstrations in order to thwart the trial of the murder of Bangabandhu. Hartals, demonstrations and fasting in protest are of the making of the ruling party as a reaction of government repression, the opposition claims. Furthermore, nobody made any public statement in an attempt to jeopardise the trial, as the matter is sub-judice. The opposition would rather like to gear itself up in a bid to force a mid-term election on account of what is termed Awami League's gross mis-governance, inefficiency, corruption and various other elements of mis-rule.

Currents and Crosscurrents

by M M Rezaul Karim

custody reached the zenith when Rubel, a University student, met his tragic end. He was brutally tortured in public and before his close relatives after having been taken in police custody on an apparently false charge.

themselves more in unsocial and criminal activities.

The BNP claims that the government policy of holding opposition leaders and workers behind bars on false or flimsy charges are being carried on in full jest. The arrest and detention of Obaidur Rahman, Nurul Islam Khan and Shah Mozammel Hossain as well as Anwar Zahid and others are

LETTER FROM AMERICA

West's Empty Threats Will Not Stop the Killing of Kosovar Muslims

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton

The only way to bring peace to Kosovo is to grant the province its independence from Serbia. That is the demand of not only the Kosovo Liberation Army, but of their moderate elected President Ibrahim Rugava as well. That will happen only when the cost of holding on to Kosovo is too prohibitive for Milosevic.

are buying it, and dutifully parroting those explanations, word for word.

If only one judges the West by their own dictum — "actions, not words" — the situation becomes crystal clear. Indeed, if Western words could kill, by now all Serbs would be dead! Instead, the Muslims die because of Western double talk.

Nothing worthwhile is accomplished without clear goals. The West's goals in Kosovo are fundamentally contradictory. Yes, they do not want the Kosovo

vars — who have taken to the forests to escape certain death at the hands of the Serbs — to freeze to death in the coming winter; but no, the Kosovars cannot have independence, even after the brutality with which the Serbs have savaged them. The West is asking the rape victim to go out on a date — with the rapist!

NATO, for its own dubious credibility, is taking the lead in confronting the Serbs, because the United Nations Security Council may not authorize air strikes — thanks to threats vetoed by Russia and China. Why would Russia veto? Because they do not want their Slav brothers to be punished even when they rape, murder and maim other ethnic groups.

the West have hesitated a minute if Muslims were murdering Orthodox Christian Serbs? Let us remember that the West killed 100,000 Muslim Iraqi civilians and pulverized the nation for the crime of attacking another Muslim nation.

Earlier this month, the European Parliament authorized Germany to criminally prosecute the leader of France's far right National Front, Jean-Marie Le Pen, for "belittling the Holocaust." Yet the same people

defend to the hilt Rushdie et al's right to belittle Islam.

American diplomat Richard Holbrooke's deal with Milosevic would leave 19,000 of the current 29,000 Serbian military and security forces in place to carry out terror in Kosovo. The Serb soldiers retire to their barracks during day, when the 2000 unarmed international monitors roam. At night, as the monitors rest their body and soul, the marauding Serb soldiers come out and shoot at the Albanians hiding in the forest. As long as only the unarmed monitors and the unfulfilled Western threats separate the Kosovars from the Serbian thugs, no Albanian family in their right frame of mind will dare to return to their bombed out homes.

What are Muslims to do? Never underestimate the power of outrage. Scream and holler. (The supporters of Israel in the US have transformed this into an art form to the benefit of Israel.) Let the perpetrators know that Muslims fully understand the game, although they are unable to do anything about it — yet. And most importantly, pray for those hapless Kosovars. Do not underestimate the power of prayer either.

OPINION

People are Not Confused

In his write-up captioned "People confused as political leaders trade charges" appearing in the Daily Star of Oct. 15 issue the correspondent has analysed the ethos of our political leaders that are: When piqued they stoop to any depth to proclaim themselves angels and calling others devils. People for sure know who is what. I would assure Mr Kabir (the correspondent) that although few of us may be confused about the leaders' real credentials, people, by and large, know them for what they are worth; they are not confused at all.

Alas! The silent but powerful majority get frustrated before long. They discovered to their dismay that leaders professing of different hue are but two sides of the same coin. Leaders make tall promises and announce lofty agenda on the hustings, to inter alia, allevi-

ate endemic poverty, remove illiteracy by such and such year, eradicate corruption from the body politic, ensure rule of law, establish democracy et al. They shed river of tears for their less privileged compatriots to whom their hearts seem to go out, and save whom they have, as if, no other thought.

With the passage of time the silent majority sees through the gigantic bluff. To their horror they discover that once catapulted in the corridor of power by votes cast by the former, they are ignored, abused and exploited. They also find that often ticket of an MP-ship empowers a killer, an extortionist, a rapist, a swindler, a looter of people's money to be above law. Post-haste leaders more than meet the expenses of electioneering (it is ridiculous that the Election Commission set a mandatory budget for Tk 3 lacs, whereas a child in Bangladesh knows that expenses incurred amount anything between 50 lacs and a crore taka. It is a pity the Commission did not find a single deviator of the fixed budget of 3 lac taka).

Giving a damn to the laws of the land the great leaders devote themselves solely to pontificate on the floor of the parliament,

turning a blind eye to the well-being of their constituency. Many get busy greasing their palms and lining their pockets. Patriotism and welfare of the people, on whose votes they become leaders/legislators, are thrown to the wind. Interest of the country takes a back seat. Examples are galore — wasting and misusing tax-payers' hard-earned money, pressurising banks' board of directors to shamelessly bail out die-hard loan defaulters, trying to import 5000 three-wheelers flouting environmental restrictions, fixing this days either on Thursdays or Sundays so that employees are lured into staying back home to make hartal a "grand success".

It is the general public who bear the brunt of the baneful effect on the fragile economy. To overcome ill effects of leaders' wrong-doing the party in power devalues currency at routine intervals (to spur economy and to give it competitive edge) which makes this overwhelmingly importing country's goods dearer. We bleed through our nose; we are not confused.

For five years the silent majority is not reckoned with, but may be, on the day of reckoning they won't repeat the mistake. They will drive the nail in the coffin unmistakably.

Concrete Jungle

Dr. Sabrina Q. Rashid

I looked wistfully out of my window; a light breeze was playing with the leaves and petals of the blooms. How I longed to open up my windows and let the fresh, cool breeze rush into my room. But alas I couldn't! I am a prisoner in my own room. I had to convert it into a prison cell by shutting tightly all the windows throughout the day. I have no choice; I have no other way out but this. Thanks to our neighbours, that I have to go through this torment day after day for God alone knows how long — not less than a couple of years, of course.

This kind of torture is being inflicted on many innocent neighbours of many residential areas. More so in the posh areas of the city, where the house rent is high. It is only because of the sudden greed that has gripped our people, who are already rich enough to own a plot and a house in one of the best areas of the town. Added to that they mostly have highly paid jobs or good business, but still they want more. Satisfaction, nowadays have absolutely left Dhakaites, or rather Bangladeshis.

We have got this unsatisfiable hunger for more and yet more! Three or four storied houses constructed only six or seven years back are even being demolished with an even thought

given to so many neighbours getting the brunt of it. Owners conveniently rent a house a few blocks away; not to suffer what they are making their neighbours suffer — atmospheric pollution because of the dust, noise pollution because of endless hammering from early morn till late eve.

The sound is so loud and harsh that it is like hammering away one's brain! What a torture! These people should be made to compensate their neighbours for so much of discomfort and even ill health. For air and noise pollution are both detrimental to health e.g., one of the neighbours had an attack of asthma from the dust. Electronic goods and engines of all type are damaged too, even if you keep the windows closed, as the dust is so fine that it is carried everywhere. Demolishing six flats and then constructing twenty in their place is not a matter of joke.

This is going on in every next plot. The government should immediately pass an order to forbid demolition of houses not older than 20 to 25 years. In western countries the houses to be demolished are first covered by a huge polythene sheet and then demol-

ished in one go by using a new technological skill. Not hammering away for days and weeks like here. They don't even have the courtesy to put up screens of jute or polythene for their neighbours' sake.

This maddening rush for flat construction is leading to make a concrete jungle of Dhaka city. All the trees in the plot are cut down savagely as the plots have to be constructed upon from wall to wall, not leaving an inch for greenery. This is also increasing the population of a residential area ten times, thus leading to scarcity of water, electricity and traffic jams in the streets of the locality. Strangely the taste of our people who always loved greenery has also changed, for the flats go for more rent than bungalows with lawns.

People seem to prefer cement to grass! Though psychologists now say it is better for children to be as close to the mother earth as possible. Growing up in upper flats have shown some adverse effects on them. In Aberdeen when oil was first struck there was this mad rush for apartment construction. But then they overdid it and couldn't get those rented or sold! People of Dhaka city are most likely have the same fate the way multistoried flats are being erected in every inch!