

## Pronouncements Mocked at

A fierce factional fight within the BCL at Dhaka Government College has claimed the life of Monir Hossain, a senior Psychology Department student, the only surviving son of a family whose other sibling having lost his life to terrorism earlier on. How many families have been hollowed out at the blood-soaked altar of criminalised student factionalism which seems the acutest in the ruling party student front being fueled by the feel of power and a sense of immunity?

This is yet another example of what happens when student politics becomes criminalised. While both the BNP and the AL have gangsters in their fold, we urge the ruling party to take the lead in ridding themselves of this curse. The logic for our urging is simple — the ruling party has the entire government machinery at its command to come blazing and chasten the armed malcontent of its student front. If in spite of all this the ruling party fails to control the gun-running on the campus and its peripheries, exacerbated by internecine conflicts within its student front, then there is but one conclusion to draw. This makes nothing short of a mockery of the government or the ruling party itself. All the pronouncements from the pulpit that terrorists belong to no party and therefore there is no question of sheltering them anywhere, sound farcical.

The Dhaka College authorities must have been pooh-poohed by the sheer political muscle of the infighting, raging over construction tenders, footpath collections, and rentals from tempo stand which have been regular sources of income for students in the surrounding belt. They have staged many a bloody gun-battle over apportionment rights. The area must be a jewel in the crown of political supremos around it who seem keen on retention and expansion of their sphere of influence over a rival factional chief ready in the wings for a grab.

It is a much deeper malaise than the surficial eruptions can readily uncover. They do not just make up armed circles, they are charmed circles, too lolling in the constant lure of money, more money as President Shahabuddin aptly underlined at the Rajshahi University Convocation the other day.

The Prime Minister owes it to the nation to come down heavily on the armed factions of her own party's student cadres by first neutralising those local AL leaders who exploit them for personal political gains. This could be the right precursor of a serious move by her to draw the opposition into a consensual dissociation with their student cadres — all at a time.

## AIDS: Educate the Youth

World AIDS Day, which was observed in Bangladesh as elsewhere around the globe on Tuesday, brings a new message every year. The underlying message, that HIV/AIDS is a fatal disease which can only be prevented through behavioural change, remains the same. But this year's theme has brought the vulnerability as well as responsibility of the youth into focus. The fact that HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, is transmitted mainly through blood or semen makes the young most vulnerable. The question is, are we sensitising our youth enough about the danger to forestall an epidemic outbreak in the coming decade?

So far, the government has acknowledged just 102 cases of HIV, out of which 10 have developed AIDS. These figures look astonishingly low for a disease that is rampant in neighbouring countries, and for which there are no preventive vaccines. The government takes satisfaction from the assumption that Bangladesh's conservative Muslim society does not encourage promiscuity, thus making Bangladesh a low-incidence area as far as HIV transmission is concerned. But UN agencies estimate that there are at least 21,000 HIV-positive people in the country. The government appears to be caught in a dilemma. It does not wish to acknowledge high incidence of HIV transmissions; but it does not wish to ignore the danger either. But when the danger is as real as the threat of HIV/AIDS, then there is little room for complacency, even less for prevarication.

Protection of the youth from HIV/AIDS needs to become an overriding concern for the health establishment. While treatment and counseling of HIV-positive people and AIDS patients is prime duty of both the state and families, the focus has to be on prevention. Appeals to young people's sense of morality and warnings against promiscuity may be politically correct, but these are not enough, because it may not be realistic to expect the youth to practice abstinence. Instead, the government needs to campaign positively on the importance of safe sex. Proper counseling at schools and colleges need to be introduced to deter the youth from the path of risky sexual adventures. The question of sex education, as a vehicle of information and advice designed to promote healthy behaviour, has to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

## Dr Sharfuddin Remembered

We pay our tribute to Dr Al-Muti Sharfuddin who passed away in Dhaka on Monday at the age of 68. He was suffering from cancer. He has left indelible impressions on our minds as an eminent scientist and more still as a prolific science writer. In spite of his pressing preoccupations as an important public servant, Dr Sharfuddin found time to write on science in lucid Bangla for the ordinary people and specially for the children.

He had served on important committees and commissions and was actively associated with organisations ranging from Shahitya and Lekhok Sangsod to Kochi-Kanchar Mela and Bangladesh Shishu Academy. He was twice jailed for his involvement in progressive student politics but he could not be shaken from his beliefs in freedom, fair-play and justice.

In his many splendid career Dr Sharfuddin received a number of prestigious awards including the Ekushey Padak, Bangla Academy Award, Shishu Academy Award and the UNESCO Award for his contribution towards enriching our literature and for popularising science among common people. He made a contribution to the field of journalism by editing a book on Bengali language in newspapers.

A brilliant student of the Dhaka University Dr Sharfuddin excelled in whatever field he wanted to tread. In this era of mediocrity that has cast its ominous shadow over the society, the death of Dr Sharfuddin has created a vacuum that will take long to be filled in. While paying our homage to the departed soul we send our heart-felt condolences to the members of his bereaved family.

THE next Commonwealth summit in South Africa is less than a year away, but this meeting is more important for Bangladesh than usually is the case. The organisation itself is important enough, and the bi-annual CHOGM or Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting provides a unique opportunity for leaders of 54 states to build close rapport. But it is the election to the post of the Commonwealth Secretary General that Bangladeshis would be most keenly watching.

However, the keen watchers are already detecting something that is not wholly in tune with the task at hand. The decision to nominate former foreign secretary and current executive chairman of the Board of Investment, Farooq Sobhan as Bangladesh's candidate has not caused too many eyebrows to be raised. But eyebrows are certainly being raised at the apparent lack of institutional efforts to secure the election.

Although there is still a year to go before the summit, these months would pass pretty quickly as Commonwealth leaders, like anyone else, are embroiled in various domestic or regional issues. Fall out from South Africa's recent foray into Lesotho may occupy Nelson Mandela's mind for the months ahead. Mahathir Mohammad is too embroiled in economic and political crises at home to keep abreast of news about Commonwealth candidatures. The point is that these leaders and others have to be convinced about the seriousness of the Bangladesh candidature, and that conviction has to be sustained.

The only way such a conviction can be achieved is through skillful lobbying by diplomats, positive projections in the international media and personal appeals by the Prime Minister to her counterparts. The last part is critical because, unlike any other international organisation, in the election to the post of Secretary General of the Commonwealth, the heads of government themselves cast the votes. In a way, their votes are personal votes, as well as being votes of their respective governments. This means the lob-

# Glimmer of Global Leadership Beckons Bangladesh

*In the complex world of international organisations, it is difficult for a developing country, particularly a least-developed country (LDC) like Bangladesh to contest an election for a major post. The humiliation in Rome four years ago bears ample testimony to what might happen when the wrong candidate is nominated at the wrong time for the wrong job.*

bying has to be conducted both at the official level from the foreign ministry, and at the personal level from the Prime Minister.

Now that the flood emergency has gone, the Prime Minister can be expected to give the matter more time and energy.

But the ground for her personal intervention needs to be prepared by the foreign ministry, through dispatch of special envoys, campaigns in the international media etc. These things are not, as yet, happening.

Sobhan is currently on a three-week trip to the Caribbean where he is meeting regional heads of government. But this campaign cannot be left to the personal initiative of the candidate alone, because he is not his own candidate. The government of Bangladesh has nominated Sobhan, and any slackness in the foreign ministry's efforts would be tantamount to willful disregard for the national will.

The decision to nominate Sobhan may not have gone down a bomb in the country's notoriously fractious and jealousy-ridden bureaucracy, but few objective observers doubt that he is the right candidate, at the right time and for the right job. It may even be argued that Bangladesh has rarely, if ever, put forward a candidate with such high realistic chances of success, because of the candidate's own credentials, but even more due to the nature of the organisation itself.

So far, the Bangladesh candidate has received highly positive feedback from African and Asian members of the Commonwealth. India is yet to decide whether it would put forward a candidate or not. But in the post-nuclear environment, India is not exactly the Third World's darling. New

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