

Fuel to the Fire

The Awami League refuses to be ruffled by 'threats' of an opposition alliance among BNP, JP and Jamaat, their four-point list of demands and the ultimatum issued upon the ruling party to meet them in 30 days or face an all-out opposition movement. In the process, facts are not being faced, that's how one tends to look at it.

The AL Presidium meeting chaired by party chief and country's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Tuesday dismissed out of hand the opposition's 4-point charter of demands and their related threats for movement and boycott, etc. As if party spokesman Telecommunications Minister Mohd Nasim's negative reactions to opposition demands on January 7, the very day these were put forward, were not enough, an 'outright rejection' had to come from the presidium, the highest policymaking caucus of the party, to signify the 'could-careless' attitude.

This perfunctory approach of the ruling party to 'a gathering storm' on the political horizon sounds not only unfortunate but irresponsible. This cannot carry any conviction with the people badly fatigued as they are by the confrontational atmosphere around them. In addition to the lack of seriousness displayed, we are perturbed by the reactionary language being freely used. The Prime Minister lashed out at the opposition in her last two public meetings saying that the four-point demand was the product of conspiracy hatched by 'vote da-coits, autocrats and Rajakars.' But didn't she herself align with all of them at one or other stage of our contemporary political history? But for Ershad's support, the AL could not have formed the government in '96. Jamaat would find it hard to rehabilitate itself and, on the positive side, were not for the AL joining hands with the BNP in 1990 autocracy would have perhaps continued.

Whereas it is for the government party to take the lead for bridge-building and national reconciliation in a heightening state of confrontation none expects to see it in the role of adding fuel to the fire.

Of the four demands, three deal directly with the work of the Election Commission. The government has very little to do with them. However the fourth one — dealing with opposition workers being harassed either through police action or through court cases — merits serious consideration by the government. We urge that talks should be initiated by the government in this regard. Our appeal to the ruling party would be to start a dialogue on the last point in order that a deeper political crisis can be headed off in the nick of time.

Stains on Sanity

The figures on incidents of rape and dowry-related murder in 1998, released yesterday by Odhikar, a human rights coalition, surely come as a severe jolt to the collective consciousness of a nation keen on gender equality and protection of women at all walks of life. The staggering numbers — 860 rapes and more than 80 murders — have a disturbing undertone: we have not done anything towards ensuring security of women in the society. Endless series of seminars and symposia has been nothing but a conscience-salving outlet used after any spite in the incidence of rape and dowry-related murders. Speakers on different occasions have suggested ways and means for protection of women yet there has not been any marked improvement in this area. We are enraged and, at the same time, sad because we believe that these numbers actually leave indelible stains on our collective sanity.

Even more disturbing is the revelation that 16 of the rape victims were violated while in 'safe' custody of police and BDR personnel. In one incident, three BDR men violated a 14-year-old girl while in another five police constables raped a 28-year-old woman. Such revelations entail obvious questions: who have we put our faith in for security? When the custodians of law, instead of punishing the culprits, become culprits themselves, who do we turn to for protection?

We hope the people who matter will take note of the Odhikar survey report and the probing questions it entails: why, despite all the extant laws for protection of women, is the incidence of violence and violation on the rise? Why the system is not working? How can it be made to work again? How can people's faith be restored in the custodians of law? If and when they have the answer, we truly believe, stains on our collective sanity will be erased by the smiles from safe and secured women.

The Ticketing Ordeal

The woes of homebound people before the Eid festival have once again hit the headlines in newspapers. For the past week or so, the press has been crying hoarse about the ruthlessness of touts, at Kamalapur Railway Station and three main bus terminals of the city where they have been going about their business of fleecing the ticket-buying home-sick public. But in vain, the thugs and black marketeers have only thrived in collusion with a section of unscrupulous railway and road transport employees. Tickets at the railway station are being sold at twice and at times thrice the normal rate. So is the case at the bus terminals.

The launch passengers are no exception either. The station manager at Kamalapur blamed the homebound passengers for not buying ticket a month before the Eid and also contradicted the display board positions of tickets. In his own way he seemed to justify the unhealthy trend of black-marketing of tickets. At the bus terminals organised gangs are allegedly controlling sale of tickets under the nose of law enforcing agencies. Since these reports and photographs have been published in the local dailies with due importance nothing has been done to stop the illegal sale of tickets and stop persecution of passengers. This has almost become an annual grilling season for the paying public and that too under the 'supervision' of the keepers of law. Isn't there any agency to stop this illegal business and save the passengers from the clutches of the touts? We would very much like to ask: who is in charge there for the safety of the citizens.

Will the Currency King Lose Its Crown?

by A. M. M. Shahabuddin

The vigorous waves, initiated by Euro, have already crossed the Atlantic and the Pacific to hit the shores from America to Asia. A new chapter is in the offing in the world financial market.

Euro as Global Currency

THE grand show is on. It will, perhaps, be the greatest show on earth, a fascinating face-off between the reigning king of world currencies, the US dollar, and the new-born Euro, representing some 290 million people of the European Union. Euro has already shown its economic strength on the very day of entry into the world 'ring on the New Year's Day.

Let us try to visualise the ring where the championship bout will be held. At one 'corner' stands the reigning 'champion' for the past five decades or so, the US dollar. Flexing and flaunting its muscles to the applause of 'fans', it gives a mocking look at its rival, Euro, at the other corner. The infant challenger, cheered on by the patrons, gives back the look, fear nowhere in his eyes. A 'proxy war' between 'Uncle Sam' and his 'distant' cousin, Europe.

The bell rings and the first round is on. The two 'boxers' size up each other with their limbs moving almost mechanically, looking for the earliest opportunity to strike. Euro lands the first 'punch' on dollar's nose. However, dollar remains unflinched. It is a seasoned fighter. The first round ends. Euro holds a 118-100 edge over the current king. Certainly more such 'hits' and 'punches' will be traded until one bows to the other.

Euro has already made its presence strongly felt on debut, not only as an alternative international currency, but also as a strong contender to the 'reigning currency king'. Politicians and bankers across Europe are happy over Euro's 'first round' of brilliant success over the greenback. Markets have already welcomed it as an alternative to dollar. The German Chancellor Schroeder has expressed his confidence that Euro would strengthen Europe's profile in international financial market. A Japanese Insurance Company spokesman was more direct when he said, 'It is the No. 1 candidate for a global key currency, vying with the dollar,' while a German banker remarked: 'We had never had a better chance to form a pan-European trading platform.'

In fact, the three remarks, quoted above, form the bottom-line for launching of Euro — that it would 'strengthen' Europe's profile in international financial market; that it is the 'number one candidate' for a global key currency; and that it offers a big opportunity to form 'a pan-European trading platform'. This is perhaps for the first time in

years that Europe has stood united to take over leadership in international currency. Since World War II, Europe has played second fiddle to America, both on economic and political counts. But birth of Euro shows that Europe has not been altogether sitting idle. It has, all that time, nurtured a dream to regain its past glory.

A New Chapter

Of course, it has taken a long time for Europe to reach its present stage, shrugging off rivalry and distrust among each other. Signs of resurrection from an age-old inertia were quite visible on certain issues that made some 'cracks' in the European-American friendship, particularly under the NATO umbrella. Despite being close allies of America as active members of NATO, they had been bold enough to differ on issues like Bosnia, Chechnya and, last but not the least, the recent Anglo-American air-strikes on Iraq. Even when America was trying to 'force' Japan to open up its markets to US goods, European countries denounced America's 'bullying'. The recent 'banana war' between America and Europe reveals to some extent the 'tension' in relation between 'Uncle Sam' and its 'distant 'Cousin'. So what was bringing

as an under-current has now finally erupted in the form of Euro, a symbol of independent thinking of Europe as a whole. The vigorous waves, initiated by Euro, have already crossed the Atlantic and the Pacific to hit the shores from America to Asia. A new chapter is in the offing in the world financial market. A new history is in the making.

Journey into an Unknown Territory

Where Japanese were failed, Euro will probably succeed. During the 1980s and onwards many apprehended that the new economic dominance of Japan would push Euro to a new status of a global reserve currency as against dollar. The 'trade-war' between mighty America and the emerging Asian tiger — Japan — seemed to be imminent. Whereas the Japanese economy was booming, America's economic position steadily weakened. America lost its economic supremacy in 1986, when it became a debtor and Japan for the first time assumed the role of a creditor. America's trade deficit with Japan was on the rise. It jumped from 50 billion US dollars to 60 billion in 1993, almost half of Japan's world-wide trade balance then. America

tried 'arm-twisting' policy to 'gate-crash' into Japanese markets but failed.

Soros Had a Good Day in Asia

But there were evil forces working to weaken Japan's economy and thereby cut it to its size. They succeeded in their evil designs, thanks to the 'magic wand' used by American 'financial wizard', George Soros. He brought about devastating financial crisis, by manipulating stock markets throughout Southeast Asia. There was a tremendous 'tremor' caused by manipulation and manoeuvring by Soros, who is said to have siphoned off billions of dollars out of the troubled financial waters of Asia. Asian currencies, along with stock bourses, had a painful nose-dive. And Japan's economy and its currency, yen, received a tremendous jolt. Soros, chairman of the Soros Fund Management, was earlier reported to have suffered its biggest ever loss last year of about 82 billion US dollars because of the Russian turmoil. Perhaps he realised

full 'compensation' for his big loss by manipulating Asian economic markets. What a 'genius' (may be a devil)!

The same Soros has again surfaced recently with a proposal to make the much-despised US-dominated International Monetary Fund (IMF) a central bank for the world, forecasting that a 'doomsday' is coming when 'the markets can move like a wrecking ball, knocking over one economy after another.'

'The swings cannot be avoided altogether,' he said, 'but they need to be brought under control.'

What Soros is to-day forecasting as coming economic doom, 'knocking over one economy after another' will perhaps be his 'repeat performance' of what he had done earlier in Asian financial markets.

Containing Chaos in Cambodia

by ASM Nurunnabi

Many Cambodians in touch with current developments in foreign affairs are now aware that at least part of the most powerful legislative body in the world, meaning the US Congress, think their elected leader is a war criminal... This has been a most disconcerting message for Hun Sen.

THE much talked-about political figure in Cambodian politics at present is Hun Sen, the Cambodian Premier. He has a chequered political career. A Khmer Rouge guerrilla in the 1970s, he defected in 1977 and became the premier of the Vietnam-backed regime in Cambodia for much of the 1980s. He then reinvented himself as a 'democratic' politician in the early 1990s. Now the 47-year-old Cambodian prime minister is trying to remake his image abroad, particularly the United States, by taking the stance that he's the best hope for stability in his violence-scarred country.

The problem is Hun Sen hasn't been able to convince the US Congress about his 'democratic' image. In early October last, the House of Representatives voted unanimously on a resolution calling for Hun Sen to be held culpable for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide in Cambodia after 1978, the year the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia. A similar resolution has been submitted to the Senate for consideration during the current month. If the Senate also passes the resolution, all hopes of reinstating US economic aid to Cambodia suspended in July 1997 after Hun Sen ousted co-Prime Minister Norodom Ranariddh — would quickly disappear.

Many Cambodians in touch with current developments in foreign affairs are now aware that at least part of the most powerful legislative body in the world, meaning the US Congress, think their elected leader is a war criminal. This has been a most disconcerting message for Hun Sen. He is reportedly trying now to burnish his image in Washington in an effort to stave off a Senate resolution. He has engaged a well-known public relations firm and two leading law firms in US to lobby extensively against the resolution. They are all reported to be pursuing Hun Sen's case with various influ-

ential congressmen, as well as with the State Department. It is, however, not yet certain what the final outcome of the resolution will be. But there are some aspects of the case, such as violation and intimidation during the last Cambodian elections that many legislators in Washington associate with Hun Sen's regime. They are concerned in particular with his alleged role in some 1000 killings before and after the general elections held in July last year. It is, however, felt that the supporters of Hun Sen may adopt a strategy of positioning the Hun Sen's Cambodian People's Party (CPP) to the forefront as a measure of beefing up his image, in the campaign for bringing some members of the Khmer Rouge before an international war crimes tribunal.

Many critics in Washington see such posturing as a tactic to deflect attention from Hun Sen's own human rights abuses. And, of course, an indictment of Khmer Rouge members for war crimes would be highly selective, since virtually all have already sworn allegiance to Hun Sen's government. Most of his ministers and the half of his security forces are ex-Khmer Rouge. Although Cambodia's elections last July were marred by allegations of intimidation and fraud, the US administration was quick to endorse the polls and to quickly criticise those who elected them. In November last, with Hun Sen as premier, then last month, that is December, the US supported Cambodia's immediate accession to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, diplomats say. 'The US administration wants the Cambodian issue papered over as quickly as possible so that they can get back to business as usual' says a spokesman of the CPP.

Observers noted that the US State Department pressed Prince Ranariddh to accept a political compromise so that a new government could be formed. Alleging electoral

fraud, Ranariddh'sFUNCINPEC party had denied Hun Sen the two-thirds vote in parliament necessary to approve a government. But the Prince folded as the US State Department was understood to have said: 'We will support Hun Sen with or without the Prince.' In November last, Ranariddh agreed to join a coalition accepting the position of president of the national assembly and half the posts in the cabinet for his party. The CPP, however, retained control of the most powerful ministries.

The US was reported to have used the strong-arm tactic because 'it along with ASEAN and Japan believed that the elections in Cambodia should not be squandered. There was an obvious need to cut a deal so that the government could get back to building Cambodia.'

Even with such help, though, it was felt that Hun Sen would be a hard sell on Capitol Hill. Changing his strongman image would require more than a facelift. But as remarked by some observers, 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder and to the Clinton administration it appears Hun Sen looks good enough.'

Lately some new developments have taken place which cloud the political scene. Two top Khmer Rouge leaders long wanted for genocide were greeted with handshakes and smiles by Prime Minister Hun Sen at a military base in Phnom Penh. The leaders were pardoned and pledged not to put them on trial. Hun Sen met Khieu Samphan and Nuon Chea, part of the inner circle of the late Pol Pot after cementing their defection — in essence surrender — with public pledges not to try them for genocide. At a hostile news conference later, they faced questions whether they felt any remorse for causing the deaths of as many as 2 million of their countrymen. The two elderly revolutionaries said they were sorry for their brutal rule during the 1970s and asked their countrymen 'to let bygones be bygones.'

Khieu Samphan indicated there would be no trial especially one abroad in an international tribunal. The United Nations recently sent a team of experts to weigh the possibility of such a court. In the past two years, granting pardons to Khmer Rouge leaders broke the back of their guerrilla war and gave Cambodians its best hope in decades of rebuilding. But now calls are rising for someone to be held accountable.

After a week of feting two Khmer Rouge defectors around the country, Prime Minister Hun Sen made a surprise turnaround and announced they must be tried for helping draw up the movement's genocide policies. Hun Sen said that local and international preparations for a tribunal would proceed, but he would allow the two guerrilla leaders to remain free until a warrant is issued for their arrest.

The special treatment the two ex-Khmer Rouge leaders received and the blithe calls to 'let bygones be bygones' have outraged local and international human rights groups. King Norodom Sihanouk said he would refuse to grant them or any other Khmer Rouge leaders amnesty. While Sihanouk is a figurehead, he is popular among Cambodians and his move would have delegitimised the amnesty by Hun Sen in the eye of many.

To the Editor...

The role of sex-scandals in public service

Sir, Clinton has set a new style in leadership. The bottomless baskets are trying to keep pace, and some of our universities are suspected to be enamoured of such trend. It is a dangerous trend for our political players, as the far-sighted student community will not take things lying down — they can read the message and the medium. On the other hand, adult private relationships (heterogeneous or otherwise) have to be taken (or rejected) with a pinch of salt.

This new virus at the leadership levels might have some moral significance, read along with the deadly AIDS or HIV catalysts. It is an epidemic like the traditional plague of the medieval age, caused by mice to rule over men. It all appears to be signs of global changes which will usher in the new century — the advent of the 'spring-cleaning' of the epoch. Such advent of new ages may not be dismissed lightly, considering the spate of specialist publications full of the cataclysmic influence of the so-called Aquarian Age which the current civilisation is now facing. Credit goes to Toynbee who had analysed the causes of the rise and fall of civilisations through his monumental lifetime effort in compiling the celebrated *The Study of History*, a classic of historical research. These virus-like shake-ups at the top are good for the de-cumulation and disintegrating systems of governance. Many nations would welcome the new future genres of leadership styles, free of traditional ways of hooking, booking and cashing in the clandestine opportunities, which are surfacing at more frequent intervals in this information age, and opening up

the traditional closed societies even in the Third World. It all gives an indication that mother nature is wise in secretly implanting cures within a disease (viz, snake poison has medicinal values). Evil destroys itself, after teaching truant societies suitable lessons. There are many ways of cleansing. For skin cleaning, pumice stone is used, or synthetic sponges for the those with fragile constitution (the pun is intended). For the cleaning of inner space, meditation exercises are prescribed, but in crowded circumstances, hartals are very visible. Can't advice: take you clean, because the end product is the same — nemesis.

Abul M Ahmad Dhaka

Explain, please...

Sir, On the first day in office, our PM was shown to be reading newspapers and was told that she spent two hours everyday doing so. It was also reported, she would continue to do so on a regular basis. But the deteriorating law and order doesn't prove so. It seems that what appears in the newspapers are not read by anyone. Or am I wrong? If not, then how come no-one ever bothers to answer the questions put to them through the national dailies? How is it that the city experiences a total disorder and the law enforcing agencies don't give a damn about it? How come the city stinks with a vile odour and the DCC is doing nothing? How come all sorts of crime takes place in broad daylight and nobody seems to care? Why and for whose benefit has school tuition fees increased from the year 1999? Why were our doctors, working in the government hospitals, abstaining from their duties,

and no action was taken? Who should we depend on for justice?

Mujibul Haque Mirpur Road Dhaka

DGAT enzyme

Sir, A research team led by scientists at the Gladstone Institute of Cardiovascular Disease and the University of California, San Francisco, has succeeded in isolating a key enzyme, called DGAT (Diacylglycerol acyltransferase) which the body uses to produce fat. This discovery could lead to new drug therapies aimed at treating obesity by blocking DGAT.

The finding has also application in agriculture because DGAT plays an important role in the synthesis of seed oils. If we could boost the amount of DGAT enzyme in the plants, more oil could be extracted. Meanwhile Dr Robert V Farese, Jr, Associate Investigator of Gladstone Institute of Cardiovascular Disease and Asstt. Professor of Medicine, University of California in a recent letter to this correspondent wrote — 'With regard to agricultural applications, the chief interest, to my knowledge, lies in attempting to genetically engineer plants to increase and/or modify seed oil production. We are beginning to have discussions with agricultural biotechnology companies that specialize in pioneering these methods.'

It is expected that agriculturalists in our country will examine the possibility of transferring the technology of isolating DGAT enzyme and its application. M Zahidul Haque BAI, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Dhaka-1207

OPINION

Recruitment of Project Consultant

Development project implementation has requirement, provision and arrangement of national and international consultant services according to the project design, nature and type of professional requirement in the relevant field embodied in the project document for execution of the project components and activities.

While the international expatriate consultants are mostly recruited during negotiation between donor and the relevant ministry in the appointment of national consultants two methods are followed, namely, (1) direct interview with the project authority, including donor representation, of the short listed competent professionals by inviting application through the national dailies and (2) recruitment through the consultant firms. In the latter case the consulting firm has to prepare both technical and financial proposals for submission to and approval by the project authority and donor wherein the technical proposal generally contains impressive CV of learned professionals (collected through contact and persuasion) in the field the firm intends to provide services for execution of the project components and activities.

As a convention, the project authority forms committee to check, scrutinise and finalise its assessment and recommendation for selection of firm(s) by the project authority who performs all the related A to Z tasks in line with the stipulated terms, condition and guideline of the project prepared and agreed by donor and the line ministry, in some cases the firm also performs as local agent of the donor who has no representation in Bangladesh. While the recruitment by direct interview leaves no scope of criticism in the consultant recruitment process the appointment of project consultants by firm(s) raises a often number of criticisms as and when it has availed obtained the programme contract offer. First, the proposed consultant is deliberately and subjectively ignored the plea of being expensive or not available. This stems from the fact that the (!) coverage margin from consultant's fee proposed in the project estimate is either low/minimal as the fee was not negotiated earlier during submission of CV. Second, even if

M Shafayet Hossain

the consultant is available and ready to work he is offered a lower if not sub-standard rate of fee in order to discourage him from joining the project. It has been observed by many a national professional that the rate of fee proposed in the project is provided at a ratio of 80 : 20 or at best 70 : 30 between the consulting firm as the employer and the professional as the consultant. Third, collecting CV of professionals and negate them when the time is appropriate and provide service to the project with persons of own choice at low cost ignoring quality aspect of the services provided. Fourth, the employee of the firm has to submit two vouchers for his monthly fee to the firm — one for the amount he receives and the other for the actual amount of the project estimate the firm would submit for bill collection from the donor/project authority. Fifth, the consultant may be engaged during the project period by the firm subjectively which is beyond any professional ethics.

In essence, it is evident that the principal aim and wisdom of many a consulting firm is economic interest to mobilise fund from the project and build fortune consequently at the cost of professionals' (irrespective of recruitment by choice or as proposed) knowledge, expertise and services. Even a layman can understand that there is no associated cost on the part of the firm in hiring the consultants for a project. But once the consultant is recruited by the firm he has to pay for their establishment cost, administrative overheads and hidden cost, if any. Is it rational? If yes what are the factors that advances a consultant to pay all these costs directly out of his labour and effort and if not why they should not be some standard norms and rules by the appropriate authority of the government to administer and regulate the consulting firms? I draw here the kind attention of ERD of the government for future measures in recruiting national consultants by consulting firms in donor assisted development programmes. This write-up is based on a recent fact on my part where a consulting firm collected my CV one year back through persuasion for a seven-year assignment in a development pro-

gramme of the Ministry of Agriculture funded by an international donor, then availed and obtained the programme contract offer, but did not open a dialogue with me and excluded my credentials subjectively to recruit another person of their choice. Besides, I was assured by the firm of the job and also advised not to undertake any long term assignment for which the firm obtained a written undertaking from me. Seeking redress of the issue an approach through the donor though futile was undertaken by me. The donor was represented by another consulting firm in Dhaka and they simply didn't intimate me anything. Nevertheless, my question to all concerned is, why there should be any double standard treatment for project consultants by consulting firm(s) because consultants are professional, not laymen.

In the above backdrop of national consultant recruitment by the consulting firm(s) in development projects for execution of donor assisted development programmes, I appeal to and urge upon the concerned authority of the government including the ERD, the donor community and the line ministries that while development projects be further implemented by consulting firms all parties concerned should strictly adhere to the norm of appointing the consultants proposed with CV in the technical proposal submitted and recommended by the Evaluation Committee. The practice by consulting firm(s) to collect CV of competent professionals for technical proposal preparation and submission and then negate them subjectively once the programme contract is availed of must be stopped where the government line ministries, ERD and the donor community have a positive and significant role to play. This will bring about the consultant recruitment in development programmes and save them from humiliation, maltreatment and exploitation. The best practice and approach to overcome all pertinent issues in this regard is, however to adopt the direct interview method by the project authority through advertisement in the national dailies which is still very much adhered to by many projects funded by donors. The writer is a Credit Consultant.



Art Buchwald's COLUMN

Pickpocket's Paradise

THE city is busting this Christmas. The warm weather and money in people's pockets bring out shoppers all over the country. Not only are the stores doing fabulously but also the pickpockets.

I got into a conversation with one at the skating rink at Rockefeller Center. He was counting money in a wallet he had just snatched. "Business good?" I asked. "It's never been better," he said. "People are spending, and they are carrying around cash. With the warm weather no one is wearing a coat so the snatch is twice as easy and we've been able to double our picks. We're up 15 per cent from last Christmas."

"Is Rockefeller Center a good location for pickpockets?" "The best. People are jammed together and everyone is looking at the tree and no one is paying any attention to what strangers are doing to them. I tried Broadway, but except for New Year's Eve, I'll take this place any time."

"Do the purse-snatchers also work here?" "It's a little more dangerous. You take a lady's purse and she starts screaming bloody murder. Pickpocketing is a quiet crime, and people don't know they've been fleeced until they get home."

The pickpocket counted the money from the wallet. It came to \$110. "It's not a fortune," he said, "but it gets me to Florida." "I imagine Christmas is the best time for pickpockets." "We do 50 per cent of our business during the holidays. This year has been exceptionally good because of the economy. We're even getting wallets with Microsoft stock certificates in them."

"Would I be correct in saying that with things so good pickpockets don't want to impeach President Clinton?" "They don't as long as the country is booming. The only thing pickpockets think about are their pockets, and not who the president wishes to dally with in Washington."

"Well," he said, "I guess I have to go back to work. I may not see crowds like this again."

"One more question. Have you ever thought of going into an honest profession?" "I was thinking of becoming a lawyer, but I was afraid everyone would call me a crook."

I saw him fade into the crowd, his deft fingers brushing against the breast pocket of a man's blazer. Only in America could one person get that close to another without getting caught.

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