

Freedom of Press

THE Prime Minister's claim of complete freedom of the Press during her tenure of office may not be entirely borne out. Of course, Bangladesh has been enjoying more freedom than it did during the dark days of autocracy and one-party dictatorship. Speaking at the annual conference of the Dhaka Union of Journalists at the Jatiya Press Club the Prime Minister said, "My government believes in complete freedom of the press for the success of democracy." Her announcement on Wednesday has, however, strengthened our hopes in commitments towards democracy and free press. We believe that in the days ahead there would be a better environment for journalism free from undue interference and intimidation.

It will be worthwhile to cite a couple of examples where digression to free press occurred. The recent incident of a police officer bullying photojournalists of the newspapers during the half-day hartal called by the opposition is the latest case in point. The officer in question claimed he had 'orders to shoot journalists' but was never contested by the home ministry and the government has not dissociated itself from the claim of the officer by either issuing contradictions. In the case of the murder of the *Runner* editor at Jessore, who had been unmasking corruption of local criminals and administration in his paper, police simply passed on the buck.

These incidents were not evidently conducive to the growth of healthy journalism in the country. But we strongly believe the Prime Minister has meant well and she believes in full freedom of the Press in a democratic society. She ought to know and her sense of history will tell her that without free press and freedom of expression democracy cannot flourish in any country.

New Dawn in CHT

PCJSS leader and chairman of the regional council for the Chittagong Hill Tracts Shantu Larma has called Thursday's installation ceremony the beginning of a new era in the war-ravaged, trouble-torn region. It is indeed. More than two decades of bloody conflict put to rest, now is the time to get on with the pursuit of peace, and the responsibility to ensure proper implementation of the peace accord lies on Larma and his fellow 21 councilors. With the peace process set in motion, the council must address the lingering differences among the tribes first. Whether grievances of the bickering factions are justifiable or not, Larma and company have to settle the disputes once and for all. The settlers-dominated Parbatya Gano Parishad and the breakaway anti-Larma faction of the Pahari Chhatra Parishad (PCP) appear to harbour certain misgivings about the PCJSS leader's intention and doubt the efficacy of the regional council. Instead of turning a blind eye to their bickering, the newly-installed interim body must face them and sort out the differences right away. Otherwise, grievances of these groups could well lead to a severe crisis in the region and peace will once again be at stake.

Equally important is the issue of rehabilitation of the repatriated refugees. Although taken back more than a year and officially reported properly rehabilitated, there are a large section of the refugees who have not received the assistance they were promised. Some even have not been given back the property they once owned. Besides, there are complaints against inadequate assistance from the authorities to revive their vocations. Moreover, detention of some members of the now-defunct Shantibahini remains a thorny issue and these cases need to be disposed of sooner than later.

Things look anything but rosy for the former-guerrilla-leader-turned-civilian-administrator and his new colleagues. It is expected, though, the councilors have been entrusted with the grave responsibility of paving the path for peace in the area. Collective effort by the people in the region under the supervision of the regional council, we believe, will usher in a 'new era' for the CHT, an era of peace and development.

Mothers' Status

SAFE Motherhood Day was observed yesterday with a renewed resolution to halve the maternal mortality rate by the year 2000, precisely within 19 months from now. In the current backdrop of 20,000 mortalities every year, this indeed would be a Herculean task if the advocates committed to improve mothers' lot look at the issue merely as a health problem. This paper editorially suggested positive steps in favour of mothers-to-be on Tuesday last quoting a Unicef consultant that reducing maternal mortality is not just a health issue, but it should be taken up as a social issue and addressed accordingly.

Mothers at risk lead us to conclude that our attitude is still remote from turning the society into a "caring" one in which overall welfare of women is greeted with spontaneity. The mortality rate itself indicates that we are still grappling with medical statistics which can merely improve the "condition" of women, not "position". Their social status is abysmally low in terms of special care during pregnancy. One must not think that taking certain specific cares for would-be mothers is doing them a favour; attention during pre- and post-delivery period is their bill of rights.

Our mother-oriented initiatives have so far been bracketed to educate only mothers-to-be about their mental and physical realities. The males are also important components here who need to be tutored about the issue. Involving the fathers-to-be to change their mental frame doesn't require any complicated medical technology or considerable investment.

A little shift in our mindset and setup would go a long way in mitigating the problems.

When 'Green' is Not Good

"With appropriate government policies and investments, institutional development and agricultural research, there is no reason why agricultural development cannot simultaneously contribute to growth, poverty alleviation and environmental sustainability."

needs of increased food production, allegedly, have become 'heaven' for the rich and 'hell' for the poor so much so that income inequality increased over time and malnutrition and hunger still haunt many countries. Second, increase in agricultural productivity needs to be sustained in the wake of population growth and rising per capita income. Disconcertingly, however, empirical evidences point to a decreasing trend in yield growth rates and limited prospects for further expansion of cropped and irrigated areas. Third, (most importantly) the so-called 'Green' has not been so good since past agricultural growth that caused the revolution sparked-off serious environmental hazards. These environmental problems, if unchecked, could kill future growth potential as well as impose heavy costs in terms of health and environment at the national and international levels.

In this context, let us attempt to identify the types of environmental problems associated with agriculture. One needs only to recollect that the seemingly successful breakthroughs in productivity, mostly, look place in more favoured agro-ecological zones with better infrastructural facilities for the supply of the fac-

tors of Green Revolution (e.g. fertilizer, irrigation, pesticides etc). Allegedly, there has been over-use of these modern inputs — attributed to mismanagement — to worsen environmental problems. Thus, favoured ecological zones with government policy patronages intensified production efforts and the degree of intensification depended on the availability of those modern inputs. Lack of knowledge on the optimal doses of,

forestation went to destroy environment. Thus, both favoured and non-favoured areas contributed to environmental problems from the point of two separate considerations. Forestry and Fisheries are said to be the victims of the so-called Green Revolution apparently referring to the notion that all Green are not always Good!

Admitting all such costs, we should explore the possibilities and paths to stem the rots. The



Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes

say, fertilizer and pesticides greased the over-use and environmental degradation. On the other side of the fence, lay the neglected areas which lacked policy patronage to intensify agricultural production. These unfortunately 'backward' areas failed to embrace modern technology. But their population growth continued to worsen poverty and hunger related situation and thus drove them to expand cultivation into less favoured — but environmentally fragile — areas (e.g. forests, hillsides and wetlands etc). De-

past policies of agricultural growth were mostly based on the general notion that 'necessity knows no law'. People were starving, famine was knocking at the door at regular intervals, budget constraints on food imports etc stood as stumbling block to consideration of environmental factors. That Green Revolution could be so disastrous for environment had not hit the minds even of the 'Greeners' in early 1960s. However, as it appears today, continued agricultural growth could be a 'necessity' — not an

Of Day-Dreaming and Wild Comparison

by Kazi Alauddin Ahmed

The formation of another Jatiya Party by the old guard Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury and Anwar Hossain Manju in the position of Chairman and Secretary General respectively is yet a very interesting sequence of events making serious inroad in Ershad's party followings.

a summit of the leaders of four parties remains an uncertainty. Begum Zia is yet to give the green signal because she knows that her party leaders, particularly the old guards are divided over the issue. And away in the district bodies of BNP the leaders and workers in many places have already expressed their consternation at seeing Ershad in the alliance. The pro-liberation forces in BNP on the other hand, find it extremely difficult to join hands with Jamati Islam. At this point of time, though almost uniform in nature, the four parties are putting up their programmes independently. The road march of May 16, is a case for example. However, BNP or for that matter, Begum Zia herself is in the lead and despite the liaison committee she seems to have been dictating the terms of every bit of a programme.

Generally speaking, Ershad appears to have received a big jolt in the state of his self-complacent mind. He pretends to be undaunted and even unconcerned. The formation of another Jatiya Party by the old guard Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury and Anwar Hossain Manju in the position of Chairman and Secretary General respectively is yet a very interesting sequence of events making serious inroad in Ershad's party followings. Anwar Hossain Manju is indeed a great organizer. The new Jatiya Party

has committed itself to set in a new political trend aimed at building the nation through 'honest, collective' endeavours. It had already a council meeting in the Paltan which instantly reversed the gross irregularities perpetrated by Ershad having had no council meeting for years together. By and large, the new party has organized district committees in an absolutely democratic manner.

Ershad was totally disillusioned in his bid to meet the people. In this he wanted perhaps to test his popularity at Mathbaria — the stronghold of Anwar Hossain Manju. He was welcomed there with black flags by hundreds of Manju supporters. He had eventually taken police shelter to hold a public meeting there on condition that he would not say a single word against Manju.

But, at Gaibandha, under greater Rangpur district and hitherto said to be Ershad's own area, he had a very shocking experience. Violent protesters pounded upon his vehicle damaging it and forcing him to quit the place hurriedly. His supporters at Netrakona had no idea when he crossed the area quietly without being noticed even. Prior to all these incidents he had to face angry mob — evidently supporters of the new formation of Jatiya Party led by Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury and Anwar Hossain Manju. These supporters, led by JP MP Jhantu fought pitch bat-

les in the streets of Rangpur with Ershad's supporters. It may be recalled that a few months ago Ershad threw a challenge to Jhantu that the latter would not be able to live in Rangpur with his family. Jhantu is very much there in Rangpur taking good care of the new party on a solid foundation. He doesn't appear to have any problem in holding on to his own citadel founded upon his personal popularity. Ershad's threat is yet to be of any consequence to him.

At this point, a proud Begum Khaleeda Zia comes on the scene. Her 'Road March' on four wheelers from Dhaka to Panchagar in Dinajpur ended without any untoward incident at any place on the way. She appeared to be very happy to have been able to make this 'historic' trip through the Bangabandhu Jamuna Bridge. Initially the government announced a prohibitory order forbidding use of the bridge for the Road March due to security reasons. It was however, withdrawn following assurance given by BNP leaders to Home Minister Mohammad Nasim in a meeting not to hold any meeting on either side of the bridge. The BNP Chairperson termed the withdrawal as 'wisdom' of the government in her first reaction. Later she said that the government was 'compelled' to withdraw the order. Well, she has every right to see it in any way she deems fit. But when, at

the height of her satisfaction or rather, infatuation about the success of the road march she likened the huge onlookers along the route and attendance in her meetings at different places on the way with the spontaneous congregation of muslims in the Biswa Jitema, one feels inclined to think over.

I do not know if her words on this score could be a complement to the muslims coming to

and (d) driven by productivity enhancing technological change

There is a view that policy makers and agricultural development experts in 1950s and 1960s were too much preoccupied with 'Is for agricultural growth; Innovation, Infrastructure, Inputs, Institutions and Incentives. The 'Is seem to have helped agricultural growth and reduction in food deficit but at the cost of growing inequality and environmental problems. The lessons that can be learnt from the flaws of that era are that in addition to the five 'Is' six 'equity modifiers' to agricultural growth are also required. These are, for example: broad-based agricultural development, and reform, investment in human capital, women's participation in farming, participatory development in rural development and development of non-farm activities.

The new priority that emerged in the 1990s suggests that agricultural growth, poverty reduction and sustainable development can only be ensured if the 'equity modifiers' are included in addition to the thoughts that prevailed pervasively in 1950s and 1960s. With appropriate government policies and investments, institutional development and agricultural research, there is no reason why agricultural development cannot simultaneously contribute to growth, poverty alleviation and environmental sustainability.

Art Buchwald's COLUMN

American Know-how

IT seems that more American consultants are getting involved in political contests all over the world. They are now being hired to bring American know-how to such countries as Israel (where James Carville and Arthur Finkelstein are at work) as well as to clients on every continent where elections are being held.

In some countries that are not as familiar with the democratic process, problems arise. Let us say that Jim Florczak has been signed up to handle the election of Marshal-General Lawrence in Lovelost-by-the-Sea. The general tells Jim he's willing to follow any American advice he can get.

Jim says, "You've got to hit your opponent hard."

The general agrees. "Exactly my thoughts. I'll have him killed."

"Not that hard," Jim advises. "The elections must be free of violence."

The general replies, "I understand. I'll throw him in the dungeon on No Hope Island with hardly any bread and water."

Jim warns, "That is not a democratic solution, particularly since delegates from 34 countries will be monitoring the election. What we have to do is challenge the opposition to a television debate."

"We don't have television."

"That's a good issue. You can ask on the radio why Lovelost-by-the-Sea doesn't have television when all your neighbours do."

"I don't want my people to watch 'I Love Lucy.'"

"OK, but we must start fund-raising immediately. No one in America ever has an election without money. Let's give a dinner to celebrate your birthday."

"My birthday is in December."

"June is close enough. We will promise political favours to anyone who buys more than two tables. If they make a donation to your numbered Swiss bank account they get to sleep in the Monsoon Room in the presidential palace."

"I like it. Once I get elected I'll make the other party sorry they were ever born."

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To the Editor...

Wrong location

Sir, The name of Dhaka Stadium has been changed to Bangabandhu Stadium, the PCMR has been upgraded to Bangabandhu Medical University, the Jamuna Bridge is called Bangabandhu Bridge and now Osmani Udyan is being turned into Bangabandhu International Conference Centre. Osmani Udyan is located in the heart of the city in a congested area of Old Dhaka. The roads, streets, footpaths and the Osmani Udyan are overcrowded and traffic jammed. The Old Dhaka can no longer bear the brunt of over population and mad rush of vehicular traffic. In fact Osmani Udyan is not at all a suitable place for building a colossal Bangabandhu International Conference Centre for holding the NAM summit in the year 2001.

We strongly feel that within next few years the fate of the proposed international Conference Centre would be the same like Shabistan Cinema Hall at Armanitola or Lalkuthi North Brook Hall Road. The International Centre would fail to meet our future requirements for holding international conferences due to its bad and defective location.

Why not we build this Conference Centre worth of millions of dollars in a spacious and open place like Gazipur, Savar or at least in old airport Tejgaon area of Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation Complex or Army Museum.

If our Ministry of Works has finally decided to go ahead with the proposed construction by destroying more than 1200 grown up trees let the authorities concerned shift the Central Jail and the Bangabhaban from Old Dhaka first and make the Dhaka City more spacious, neat, and clean without environmental pollution and free from traffic jam.

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"Getting Closer to Tipperary"

Sir, I am more than grateful to A R Ahmed (25 May), for reading my article "Getting Closer to Tipperary" so seriously. I might add a bit too seriously. Mr. Reza-e-Karim and Mr. Raisuddin are two of the most unsung heroes in our cricketing heritage. Privately and publicly over the years,

more than most, I have always insisted as much. These two gentlemen, who know me for over two decades or so, I hope, would never harbor the thought that at least, I would be writing anything to demean their contributions or their stature.

Their services and contributions to the Bangladesh Cricket Board have not received the appreciation they deserved. Those will have to be on record surely. Unfortunately, "Getting Closer to Tipperary" was not meant to be that forum. The article was basically about how the cricketers came to terms with themselves when they played their first international match. There was no attempt to detail the role of BCB. The article was about sacrifices the players made at the time.

There was no attempt also, to glorify any individual either, in that article. If A R Ahmed may have had between the lines, there was even an element of sarcasm ingrained. However, the fact that A R Ahmed mentions that Mr. Karim wrote to Robin Marlar to contact ICC rather than request ICC directly himself does indeed prove the point some "tadbir" was made. The fact also that Robin Marlar should write an article "Whither Cricket in Bangladesh?" without having been anywhere near this country, and that Syed Ashraful Haq, was in London during that period, I will of course put down to sheer "coincidence". The fact also that this "non-entity" was consulted and involved in many activities of the Board without being a member at that time, and his assistance sought on more than one occasion on matters international, I would ascribe as "accidental".

I only bring these up, because I agree with A R Ahmed that no one should distort facts. The only element in this article I am apologetic about, was missing out on the name of Dipu Rai Chowdhury, one of the best fast bowlers we have had. As with the other issues in the article here too, there was no malice intended.

Once again my sincere thanks to A R Ahmed for projecting certain facts, which although not particularly germane to my article, would nevertheless put in proper perspective, the contributions of certain individuals, who also with several others in later years, have made significant contributions to Bangladesh cricket, all of whom, I deeply respect

and admire.

Shakil Kasem
Dhaka

Failure of a luxury venture

Sir, According to a press report, (dt 30/4/99) four dogs of the much talked-about dog squad in their first drive on April 29, had frustrated their handlers by failing to nose out any narcotics at a city slum where the police conducted a raid. Such performance of the 'trained-dogs' has also disappointed us because these dogs were imported from London last year under a Tk 5 crore project which sounds a luxury venture for a poor country like ours.

Now the question is: why the dog squad failed to show its expected performance? It may be mentioned that the British Police which are said to be the best in the world have been effectively using dogs and horses for various police work. Their operational dogs are well-trained and naturally non-aggressive. These dogs can catch criminals, track and search for people and small objects and help with crowd control. Most of the British police dogs are Alsatis because this breed can be well trained to take orders from only one master. Usually most police-dogs live with their masters or handlers.

I think, Bangladesh Police authority should take up the matter with the British Police to correct the trained dogs' behaviour towards desired standard.

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Rajuk at work

Sir, RAJUK, with the help of police, has been very religiously demolishing illegally established shops, slums on vacant plots besides roads, lanes and bylanes for many years. Yet, it does not find it necessary to monitor if those shops and slum dwellers are relocating themselves in other places of the same area.

We cite a very good example of such relocation in one of the entry lanes from Rd 27 Dhan-

mondi to Lalmitia. It has been subjected to RAJUK's bulldozer over ten years. Four/five weeks back the illegal food-stalls, tea-shops and paan-cigarrette vendors were evicted once again from this lane. Some of them have already returned again. Surely the eviction in the bylanes of Uttara Model town will have similar result.

Why are there no proper mechanism adopted by RAJUK to bring a stop to such illegal act, without harassing people from time to time? Who is greasing whose palm?

Zaraazra
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OPINION

World Order in Disequilibrium

A Husnain

The UN system has been hamstrung by the lone super power, and the latter is trying to mobilize indolent NATO into polarised action, in the face of non-consensus stands (with scanty support from the EU; with the latter not united enough to turn the union into an union).

The gap across the Atlantic is widening, akin to continental drift. The UN Security Council is imagined to be bugged by Russia and China. There is no patience for the veto; once the fluttering flag of democracy, the super power has a micro leader over ethnic minority control. The jig-saw puzzle does not fit together.

Russia is trying to divert attention from its internal eczema into forceful external stances, however hollow or hallo. The physical ailment of Yeltsin is likely to prevail over his will power. The time has come for him to retire, either gracefully, or under pressure. His opponent, the current Russian Prime Minister, has not the mental reserve to back the ground support for sustainability, in a global political environment of disharmony and distrust, generated by disintegrating forces lurking or peeping in different corners of the world. Since nobody is happy, the sum total cannot be positive.

Banking on democracy brings no consolation. The world's largest democracy (across our border) is suffering from one-vote crisis; considering the fact that a general election would cost over Rupees six billion.

NATO's indecisiveness in handling the Kosovo genocide issue is a severe test of the organisation's 50th anniversary, now being de-celebrated in low-key. NATO suffers from lack of internal empathy (regardless of the power arsenal, which of course can neither feel nor think).

The apt slogan for the UN is "The UN is dead, long live UN". Humanised global institutions ride and fall with the changing of Nations and the UN, on both sides of the World War. One and Two. Human nature is constant in its inconsistency (if there is any consolation from such cliches). Today civilization is at the cross-roads, and is under the threat of being subjected to re-definition. Why such a moral issue should crop up today is the billion dollar question.

Weaknesses coincide and reinforce one another, perhaps for some divine errand (when its time comes). Take, for example, the lack of global leadership we are experiencing today. The uncertainty has filtered down to smaller countries in the Third World. Hope does not linger, and there is no safe haven. Leaders can't lead, and followers do not follow.

How to treat conditional friends, and hidden enemies? Let us not blame the speed of the Information Age. It is a tool, not the decision maker or the user. We are familiar with the modern term 'user-friendly'. How about user-responsibility? Today responsibility is divided, and comes in bits and bytes, even where mega solutions are required for the greatest good of the greatest number. Quantity and quality are two distinct and separate concepts. Now, with fuzzy logic in operation, there is no reason why quality should be confused with quantity. It is a dangerous trend in modern thinking, and needs to be watched carefully.

Leaving aside the UN and the NATO, another apparition has appeared across the horizon, the formidable and menacing WTO (World Trade Organisation) based on materialism and consumerism. Both the latter terms have neither any impact nor any meaning for the starving billions in the Third World, half of whom live below the poverty line. Today open market is high politics; and the LDCs find it difficult to join or be left out.

One of the hidden beauties of democracy is that it leaves one with background options. What is life there were no choice? The problem facing the millennium is not technological, political or economic — it is a moral issue. What is the incentive for survival? Even survival has become a bugging issue now. What is left?