

A true leader

July 18 marked the 90th birthday of Nelson Mandela, leader of South Africa's freedom struggle and icon of the 20th and 21st centuries. Here we reproduce passages from *Long Walk to Freedom*, the acclaimed memoir of this remarkable man whose life is an inspiration to all those around the world fighting for human rights and human dignity. Nelson Mandela's life is a testament to the power of true leadership and how one man's courage and moral example can change the course of history and lead a nation to freedom.

There was little time for lengthy farewells. The plan was that Winnie and I would be driven in a car to the front gate of the prison. I had told the authorities that I wanted to be able to say good-bye to the guards and warders who had looked after me and I asked that they and their families wait for me at the front gate, where I would be able to thank them individually.

By 3:30, I began to get restless, as we were already behind schedule. I told the members of the reception committee that my people had been waiting for me for twenty-seven years and I did not want to keep them waiting any longer. Shortly before four, we left in a small motorcade from the cottage. About a quarter of a mile in front of the gate, the car slowed to a stop and Winnie and I got out and began to walk toward the prison gate.

At first, I could not really make out what was going on in front of

us, but when I was within one hundred fifty feet or so, I saw a tremendous commotion and a great crowd of people: hundreds of photographers and television cameras and news-people as well as several thousand well-wishers. I was astounded and a little bit alarmed. I had truly not expected such a scene; at most, I had imagined that there would be several dozen people, mainly the warders and their families. But this proved to be only the beginning; I realized we had not thoroughly prepared for all that was about to happen.

Within twenty feet or so of the gate, the cameras started clicking, a noise that sounded like some great herd of metallic beasts. Reporters started shouting questions; television crews began crowding in; ANC supporters were yelling and cheering. It was a happy, if slightly disorienting chaos. When a television crew thrust a long, dark, furry object at me, I recoiled slightly, wondering if it were some new-fan-

gled weapon developed while I was in prison. Winnie informed me that it was a microphone.

When I was among the crowd I raised my right fist and there was a roar. I had not been able to do that for twenty-seven years and it gave me a surge of strength and joy. We stayed among the crowd for only a few minutes before jumping back into the car for the drive to Cape Town. Although I was pleased to have such a reception, I was greatly vexed by the fact that I did not have a chance to say good-bye to the prison staff. As I finally walked through those gates to enter a car on the other side, I felt even at the age of seventy-one that my life was beginning anew. My ten thousand days of imprisonment were over.

On the evening of May 2, Mr. de Klerk made a gracious concession speech. After more than three centuries of rule, the white minority was conceding defeat and turning over power to the black majority. That evening, the ANC was planning a

victory celebration at the ballroom of the Carlton Hotel in downtown Johannesburg. I was suffering from a bad case of the flu and my doctors ordered me to remain at home. But there was nothing that could keep me away from that party. I went on stage at about nine o'clock and faced a crowd of happy, smiling, cheering faces.

I explained to the crowd that my voice was hoarse from a cold and that my physician had advised me not to attend. "I hope that you will not disclose to him that I have violated his instructions," I told them. I congratulated Mr. de Klerk for his strong showing. I thanked all those in the ANC and the democratic movement who had worked so hard for so long. Mrs. Coretta Scott King, the wife of the great freedom fighter Martin Luther King Jr., was on the podium that night, and I looked over to her as I made reference to her husband's immortal words.

"This is one of the most important moments in the life of our country. I stand here before you filled with deep pride and joy -- pride in the ordinary, humble people of this country. You have shown such a calm, patient determination to reclaim this country as your own, and now the joy that we can loudly proclaim from the rooftops -- Free at last! Free at last! I stand before you humbled by your courage, with a heart full of love for

all of you. I regard it as the highest honor to lead the ANC at this moment in our history. I am your servant... It is not the individuals that matter, but the collective... This is a time to heal the old wounds and build a new South Africa."

It was during those long and lonely years that my hunger for the freedom of my own people became a hunger for the freedom of all people, white and black. I knew as well as I knew anything that the oppressor must be liberated just as surely as the oppressed. A man who takes away another man's freedom is a prisoner of hatred, he is locked behind the bars of prejudice and narrow-mindedness. I am not truly free if I am taking away someone else's freedom, just as surely as I am not free when my freedom is taken from me. The oppressed and the oppressor alike are robbed of their humanity.

When I walked out of prison, that was my mission, to liberate the oppressed and the oppressor both. Some say that has now been achieved. But I know that that is not the case. The truth is that we are not yet free; we have merely achieved the freedom to be free, the right not to be oppressed. We have not taken the final step of our journey, but the first step on a longer and even more difficult road. For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and



Where are the Nelson Mandelas of today?

enhances the freedom of others. The true test of our devotion to freedom is just beginning.

I have walked that long road to freedom. I have tried not to falter; I have made missteps along the way.

But I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb. I have taken a moment here to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds

me, to look back on the distance I have come. But I can rest only for a moment, for with freedom comes responsibilities, and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not yet ended.

Rice haves versus rice have-nots

The main losers are poor people who live in cities in developing countries, who are facing higher prices for imported food with low incomes. Food riots from Haiti to Indonesia are causing increasing political instability. The World Bank says that the high price of food could lead to developing countries missing international poverty targets. That is a price that most of us, especially in Bangladesh, cannot economically pay.

MIR MAHFUZ UR RAHMAN

ONE of the basic necessities of a commodity's availability is trade. Adam Smith, in his seminal work in 1776, had shown that comparative advantage of nations through trade was the key to increasing the economic wealth of all nations.

Rev. Thomas Malthus put forth the idea of a future world where a majority of the people starves due to lack of food. Given the circumstances of the world in the past two years, Rev. Malthus may be considered a sage even though he himself, as a man of God, may not have been happy about the reality of his prediction.

When the commodity is rice, which has global demand, the continuous globalisation of international trade in the commodity will bring about price parity between supply and demand. Rice prices are running at 10-year highs.

It is said to be the breakdown of the "Goldilocks era" for global commodities -- a period stretching back more than 30 years, during which the prices of basic foodstuffs had been neither too high nor too low, but remained relatively constant. For most of this period, the cost of staples such as wheat, corn, and soya had actually fallen in real terms. And food buffer stocks are at an all-time low, as countries saw no need to accumulate them.

Many developing countries are heavily dependent on imported rice, and volatility in international commodity markets creates serious problems for them in terms of trade. As rice prices are exploding, developing countries are facing the enormous problem of having to export much more to pay for a given volume of imports. The worsening in the terms of trade will adversely affect living standards in these countries.

This is even more exacerbated

when there is a direct restriction in the trade of rice by the producing countries themselves. Many of those countries have cut back on exports due to fears of shortage. Recent articles in the global press have pointed out a division of the world based on the "rice haves" and the "rice have-nots."

This is especially true of Asia where, as a region, the "rice haves," where domestic production is enough to feed the population, and "rice have-nots," which consistently rely on imports, have the ability to control food and its trading.

Given that Asia is overwhelmingly dependent on rice, the lack of trade in this staple will create the basis for Asian hunger and starvation in a manner almost too cruel to imagine.

The decline in possible rice exports by 33% reveals a huge gap in the "rice-have-not" countries, which are hardest hit by the price rise crisis. Countries such as North Korea, Philippines, Malaysia,



Rice Haves	Export FY07 (million tons)	Export FY08 (million tons)
Thailand	9.4	8.75-9.0
Vietnam	4.5	3.5
India	4.0	Minimal
Pakistan	3.3	2.8
China	1.4	1.1
Cambodia	0.45	--
Korea	0.50	0.50
Australia	0.60	--
Total	24.15	16.9

Some have it, some don't.

Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka are holding the short end of the stick carrying the rice bowl.

Rice exporters Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar have discussed a proposal by

Thailand that they form a cartel. Ostensibly, their focus was not to raise prices but to address concerns "to contribute to ensuring food stability, not just in an individual country but also to address

food shortages in the region and the world," in the words of Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen.

However put, this sounds quite like an oligopoly in the most important resource in Asia. Government regulated hoarding, in an era of rising demand, will inevitably lead to higher prices. The main gainers are farmers in rich and emerging market nations like the US, Brazil, Argentina, Canada, and Australia, who are getting record prices for their harvests.

The main losers are poor people who live in cities in developing countries, who are facing higher prices for imported food with low incomes. Food riots from Haiti to Indonesia are causing increasing political instability.

The World Bank says that the high price of food could lead to developing countries missing international poverty targets. That is a price that most of us, especially in Bangladesh, cannot economically pay. That is a price that most of the world, especially the global "rice haves," cannot morally ask us to pay.

Mir Mahfuz ur Rahman, a student of economics and international relations from Johns Hopkins University, is a merchant banker.

Return of the tainted?

The people generally know the corrupt bigwigs. Many of them have been accused, apprehended, prosecuted or convicted. Are they going to stage a "hero's come-back?" Many of them may be already harbouring such thoughts, and are only waiting for the chance. Should that happen, and the convicted are rehabilitated other than by way of due process of law, the consequences would be anything but imaginable.

M. SHAH ALAM

POLITICS and its accompanying episodes have of late taken a significant turn. This was visibly heralded by the temporary release of Sheikh Hasina on parole for her treatment abroad, and more so by the special attention given her by the caretaker government (CTG).

Irrespective of how things may develop in the next few months, the change in the attitude of the CTG seems to be the right response to the call of practical need. What has really provided hope is that the CTG is making thoughtful attempts to take into account the ground realities and people's concerns. The CTG can also hardly ignore the international eyes on them in a globalised world.

The CTG's changed attitude and subsequent tactics employed are already being reflected in some other cases of political figures' detention and temporary release, as well as in overall relaxation of the regime's rules.

In the emerging scenario and context, every conscious citizen

of the country would likely be confronted with the question as to whether or not, with such relaxation, the country would again see those who brought the nation to near catastrophe at the helm of affairs.

There were lots of writing in the press, lots of discussion in the electronic media and, of course, lots of words spoken and feelings expressed among the people themselves that the CTG over-acted to extend its agenda, and would do good to limit itself to specifics; first of all, to hold free, fair and neutral general elections. To do that, reforms are definitely necessary, which the CTG has endeavoured to accomplish.

Fighting corruption and dealing with politically and administratively influential corrupt people was necessary, not only to prepare a level playing field for free and fair elections, but also to relieve the nation of this menacing vice, which has long blocked every avenue of our development. The people enthusiastically welcomed and supported the CTG's anti-corruption drive.

Unfortunately, our politics was tainted with corruption of

unprecedented scale and dimension. It had to be cleaned because ultimately the politicians and the political parties, not the professional groups, would rule and run the country.

It was said many times that the so-called minus-two formula would be an interference with two main political trends of the country, and this could lead to political chaos and vacuum, because the two netris have become sort of symbols of underlying currents of thoughts or ideologies of their respective parties.

It was never expected that the campaign against corruption would put politics in jeopardy, which it turned out to be when the two netris were put behind bars. Now that the CTG seems to be coming to terms with the realities, can it be done without negative fall-out?

While the CTG's apparent policy of letting the two netris come back to their parties and be with them in some capacity seems rational and corresponds to realities, the government's success in apprehending and prosecuting the corrupt ought to

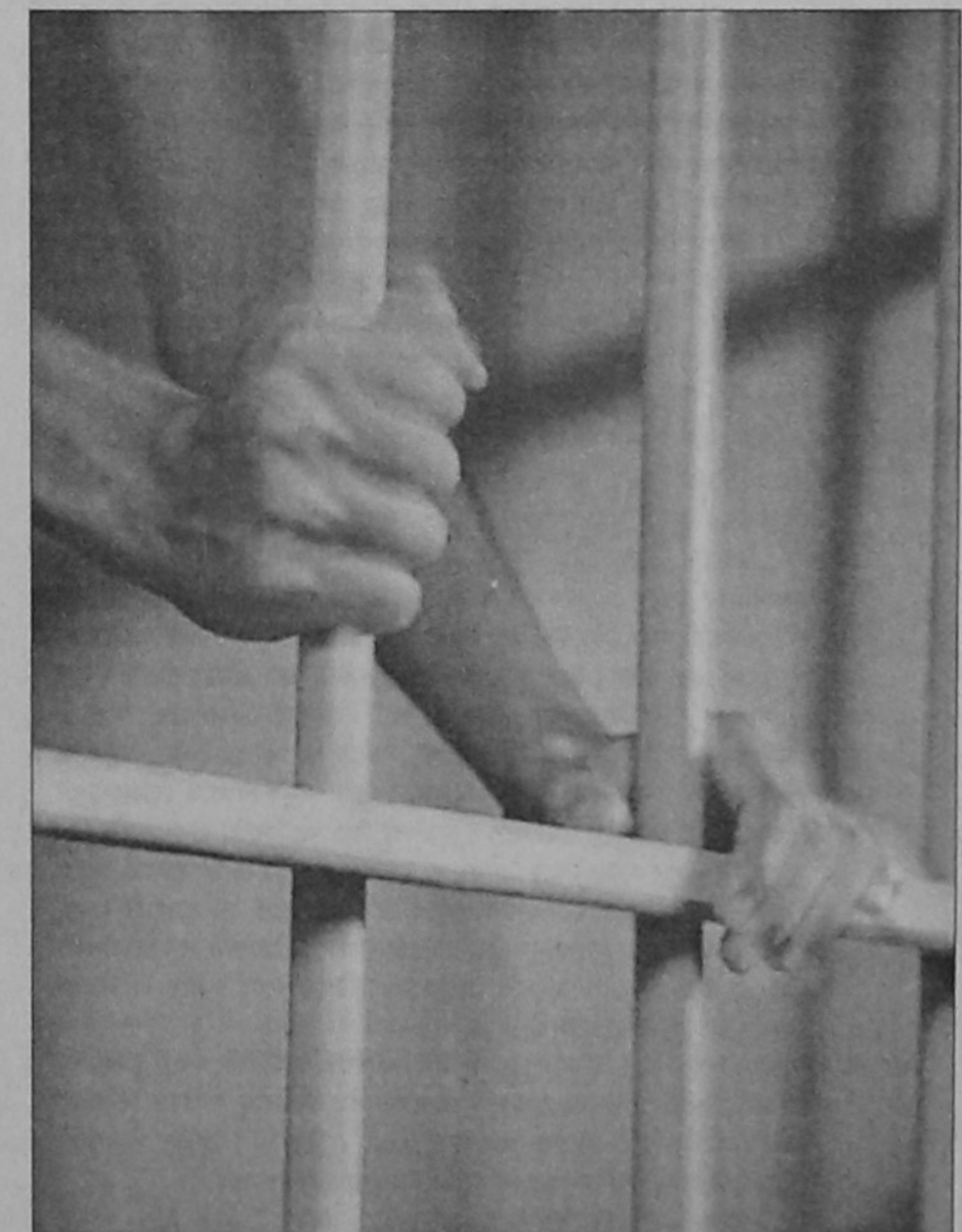
be sustained.

The people generally know the corrupt bigwigs. Many of them have been accused, apprehended, prosecuted or convicted. Are they going to stage a "hero's come-back?"

Many of them may be already harbouring such thoughts, and are only waiting for the chance. Should that happen, and the convicted are rehabilitated other than by way of due process of law, the consequences would be anything but imaginable. Corruption would no longer be regarded as corruption. It would mean total legitimisation and institutionalisation of corruption.

Such fears are disturbing the citizens' minds, because the government has done substantial damage to its credibility by unnecessarily extending its agenda as well as by ignoring political realities.

Many good works often lose their credibility when accompanied by "no good work." There are fears, because the CTG's good work runs the risk of being obliterated by the way it may be attempting to undo some of its overdoing.



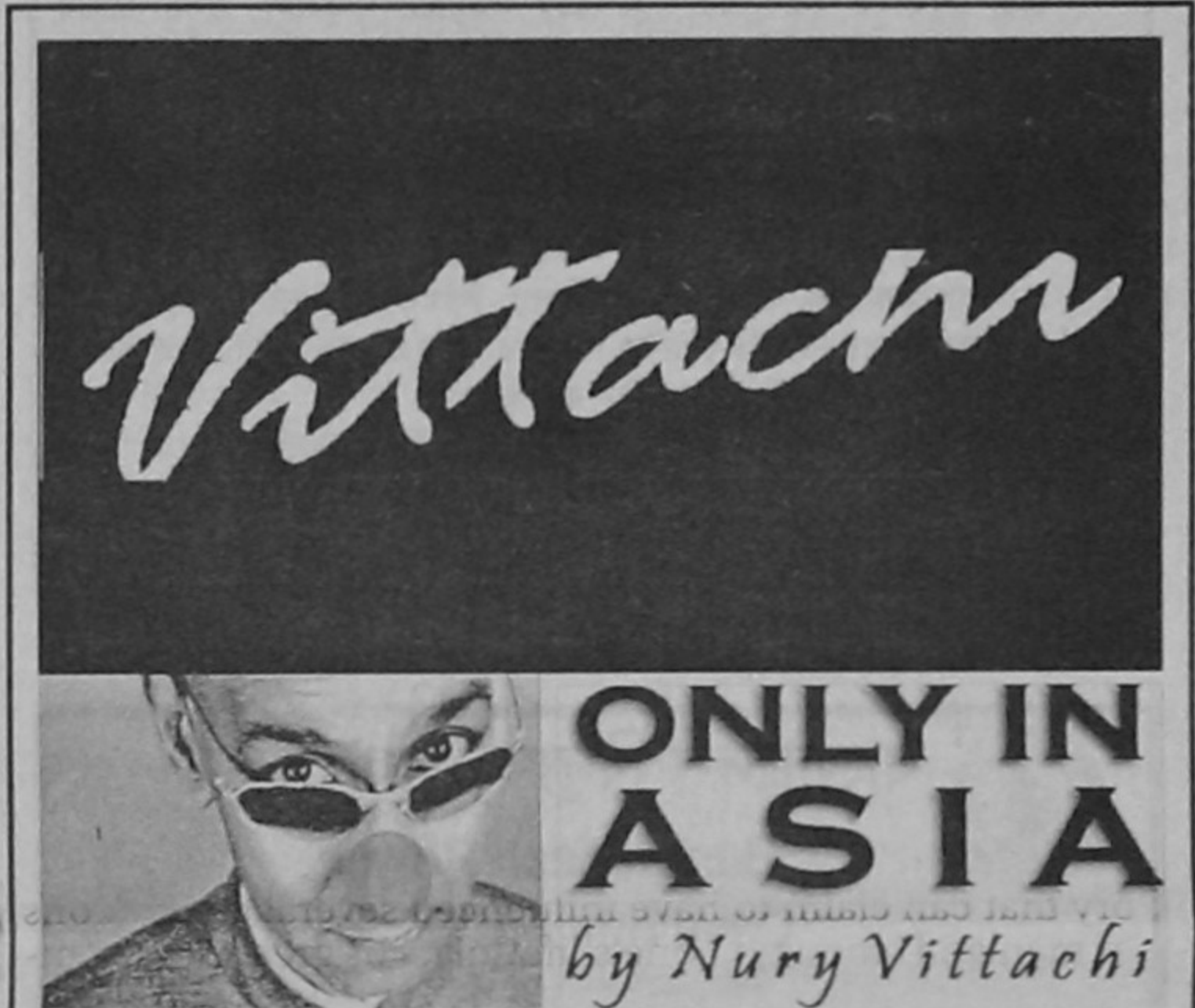
Planning a comeback?

make it to the helm of affairs.

The people also expect the government to appreciate the stakes involved. The CTG must find the sagacity to combine fighting corruption with ensuring healthy politics to leave behind a

healthy legacy. The CTG must preserve the gains so far achieved, and ensure that the next elected government preserves them too.

M. Shah Alam is Professor, Faculty of Law, University of Chittagong.



The colonial club is alive and well, but still won't let me join

So there I was, applying to join a swanky, high-class leisure club with leather armchairs and stuffy waiters. Me? Elitist? No way. I have the utmost respect for the people who live around me, even though most of them are low class, smelly rabble with foul, uncouth habits typical of the poorly bred.

But I'm sure you understand that every man has a need in the deepest part of his soul to be able to say: "I shall be dining at my club tonight."

These clubs, styled on the British gentlemen's clubs from colonial days, exist in most major cities in Asia these days.

Anyway, I got the application papers to the one nearest my home. But reading the small print, I was horrified to discover that the club had racial quotas. Waiting lists for some races were much longer than for others.

I was about to be horribly outraged when staff told me would be on a shorter-than-average waiting list. Why?

Because I would be classified as "Indian Race" despite the fact that I am not Indian and have no connection with that country, other than having a passing resemblance to Mahatma Gandhi if you catch me posing in an over-sized diaper in very, very low light.

Learning this changed things. While I couldn't estimate exactly how long each applicant would have to wait, I reckoned I would get in only 20 years after my death, while some would have to wait 30 years after they were dead. You can't turn down an advantage like that!

Further investigation revealed that American applicants and French applicants were classified as separate races. At this point I changed my opinion about the club's membership policies. They seemed to me unusually perceptive and

insightful.

Intrigued, I did some more research and found that the current policies, odd though they may appear, are actually a modernised version of earlier club constitutions, which I found in a drawer in the back office.

Those specified quotas not in general terms ("X percent Chinese, X percent Indian, X percent British" etc.) but in precise numbers of individuals from each country.

In other words, it said things like: "The club shall have three Norwegians, two Israelis, and a small Sri Lankan." In those days, whenever a member died or left, they had to search for a replacement that precisely matched the vacancy.

This was tough for the membership secretary, who was forever writing notes, which said: "Membership is open to everyone, providing you are an overweight Latvian married to a left-handed Bangladeshi."

Now it's obvious to me that clubs with these sorts of arrangement are anachronisms and won't be around for much longer. But until someone important notices and makes a fuss, these little oddities will exist in all corners of Asia.

So what happened in the end? The bad news is that I didn't get into the club. But my wife is a different race, and her application went through speedily and successfully.

These days, she kindly allows me to visit as a Member's Spouse. The only problem is, the sentence I have been waiting all these years to say has been adjusted slightly, and just doesn't sound quite so impressive anymore.

"I shall be dining at my wife's club tonight, if she'll let me."

If you like hanging out with weirdos, try out columnist's website: www.vittachi.com.