

Increasing freshwater fish production

Consumer preference is for freshwater fish. Thus, successful completion of the project, and protection of Halda, to increase production of freshwater fish will be welcomed by all, irrespective of religion, caste or creed.

A.B.M.S ZAHUR

FISH is the main source of protein for the common people in Bangladesh. Rivers, canals, haors, tanks etc. offer unique opportunities to develop inland fisheries. On the other hand, marine potential has opened up new vistas for augmenting total fish production and exploitation. Despite this, our planned development efforts could not make much headway in increasing production in the past. Much will have to be done in the areas of coordination, water resources development programs, and production and distribution of fingerlings and fish fry.

Average per capita fish consumption in Bangladesh for the period

1984-86 was estimated at 7.4 kg/year (FAO 1989). Fish ranks second to milk as a source of animal protein and is vastly more important than other sources -- poultry, mutton, eggs, or beef (FAO, 1985).

River Halda, famous for freshwater fish, is situated in Ramgarh upazila of

the district of Khagrachhari of Chittagong Hill Tracts. It is regrettable that despite an on-going project to save the Halda river at a cost of Tk.140 million, we are terribly worried to know that no visible sign of the expenditure can be traced so far (cf. special report of weekly *Saptahik* dated December 3, 2009). As per the report, instead of development of the project, officers of the department of fisheries and the local NGO workers are making fortune from the project. The river is under full control of four syndicates.

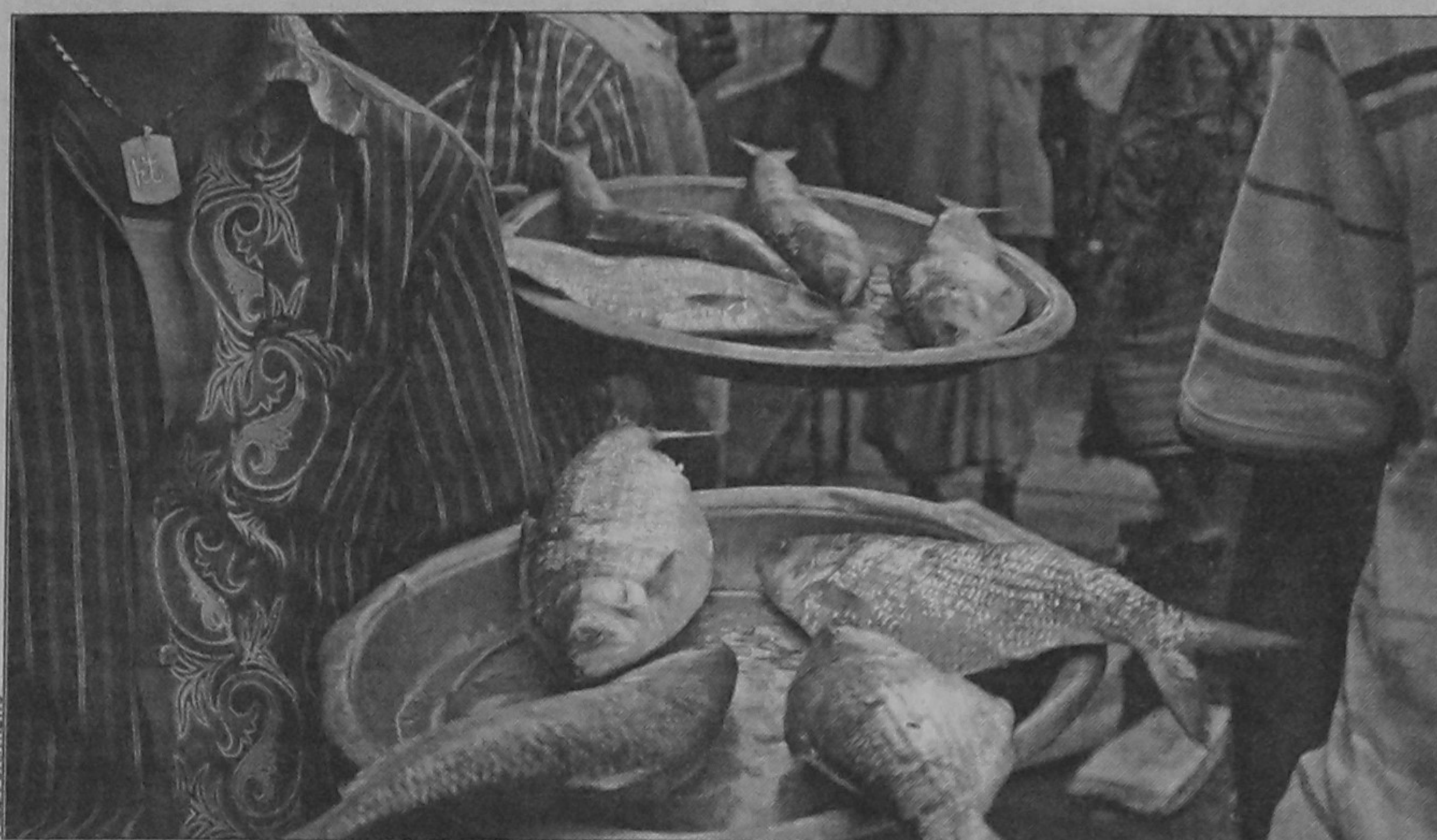
As per estimate of the project, one hundred and twenty thousand fish fry would be strewn yearly. From the statements of local leaders (appeared in the same report of *Saptahik*) only 5 hundred fries were strewn. The former project director, however, claims to have strewn 21 thousand fish fries. The local members of the Committee on Protection of Halda state that the main culprit is the former project director, who has gone on leave preparatory to retirement (LPR) to avoid proceedings against him.

Apart from the former project director, four syndicates are controlling the fate of the project. It is said that these syndicates in collusion with some officials of the department of fisheries dictate the sales of fish fries. The chairman of the Chittagong Hatchery Owners' Association and a researcher of Halda project have been threatened with murder by syndicate members for protesting against their misdeeds.

Illegal brickfields and sand dunes are appearing around the river. The effluent of Asian Paper Mills is rushing into the river profusely, causing the deaths of the bovine population and goats. No effluent discharging plant exists for the mill. Apart from this misuse, Tk.16 lakh of public money meant for increasing public awareness has been wasted.

The Halda river project appears to be one of the miserably managed and monitored projects, with no provision for interim evaluation. It indicates that the implementation, monitoring, evaluation division is not looking after such small projects properly. We would advise our planning minister to be more attentive to the implementation of Halda river project because, though relatively small, it is vitally important for our national economy and peoples' welfare.

Bangladesh is a poor country in which 40% of the population lives below the poverty line. As per Human Development Index of UN 2008,



Bangali's favourite food!

Bangladesh occupies the lowest position (140) in South Asia. It has lost eight positions within last nine years due to decrease in food energy intake (FEI) and direct calorie intake (DCI) during the period. Thus, we should be careful about the quality of food.

Freshwater fish is a particularly

preferred item in the cuisine of Bangladesh. It is deemed desirable to consume fish at least once daily, together with rice. In the interior rural areas, fish is of a major dietary importance and may be consumed with all meals (FAO 1985). Consumer preference is for freshwater fish. Thus, suc-

cessful completion of the project, and protection of Halda, to increase production of freshwater fish will be welcomed by all, irrespective of religion, caste or creed.

A.B.M.S. Zahur is a former Joint Secretary.

Wistful memories and unfulfilled promises

I wish the reunion well but I hope they will find time to reflect on the unfulfilled promises and how best to redeem ourselves and our beloved school.

MUSHFIQUR RAHMAN

FAUJDARHAT Cadet College (FCC), my beloved Alma Mater, will be celebrating its golden jubilee in the final week of December. Throngs of Old Faujians are expected to arrive from home and abroad to partake in this historic commemoration.

To go or not to go has been a heart-wrenching decision for me. By sheer coincidence, I will be reaching Bangladesh on the eve of this event and my timing would appear to be nothing short of serendipity. To add to the enticement, the old boy's network is now headed by a batch mate, a close friend for whom I have utmost respect and whose reputation for honesty and integrity during his illustrious civil service career is the stuff of legends.

This reunion is a once in a lifetime opportunity to immerse myself in the wistful memories of my youth and to soak in the soft glow of fellowship and camaraderie. However, I have searched my soul about the meaning of such a festival. Our collective ambivalence about our role and obligations has gnawed at my conscience. The hollowness of such merriment is so deeply incongruous with the unfulfilled prom-

ises of FCC that I can find no joy in such well meaning but empty celebrations. I won't go. It is a bridge too far.

As I look back, I am overcome with a flood of nostalgia. To be transplanted from a village school to a dazzling exclusive establishment, oozing with class and privilege, was a surreal experience for a boy who had not yet turned twelve. It was like Alice in Wonderland. When I arrived in early 1959, the place was humming with construction activities. Located in an idyllic strip of land on the footsteps of low undulating hills, we could hear the echo of sea waves crashing into the not too distant shores. A large part of the infrastructure was still being built while my mates and I went through our rites of passage.

The Faujians of my era have a unique perspective of the school as we bear testimony to the sound of giant bulldozers levelling the grounds and concrete mixers working overtime. In course of time, right in front of our eyes, the school edifice gradually metamorphosed into shape. The sprawling complex consisted of nearly a dozen full-size playgrounds, lush residential amenities interconnected by a web of covered pathways and state of the art library and classroom facilities.



There is more that they can do.

We woke to the sound of a bugle, military style, to begin our activity-filled days. In my previous school, the best dressed student was our dhobi's son who used to wear a laundered shirt every day, presumably not his! Now I went through five changes of uniforms every day, one to suit each activity. Food was served in a gleaming white dining room adorned with sporting trophies and Navy crests. There was an air of colonial ambience as we unfolded our starched, fresh white napkins while waiters wearing crisp white uniforms served our meals; it was a far cry even for the most sleek city boys.

Awestruck I might have been by my new surroundings, Faujdardhat had its egalitarian touch. A fair, competitive entry system ensured that boys from every nook and cranny of the country were selected for this extraordinary journey. The resilience of youth broke down all barriers and distinctions as we drank from the same cup of innocence. Over a period of six years, we played hard and worked hard. By the end of the journey our friendships were forged in a crucible of camaraderie and we parted as brothers. FCC was etched in our hearts and minds with indelible ink.

Why then, with such wonderful mem-

ories, do I not wish to participate in this gala event? Sadly, I have come to the conclusion that FCC and similar schools have simply failed to live up to the aspirations and expectations of the nation. The festivities of the jubilee celebration will be focussed on us; the music will play to our sense of entitlement as the chosen few. The unfulfilled promises will have been forgotten.

Let me not sound ungrateful. I have benefitted enormously from my FCC experience. However, a true cost-benefit analysis made from a national perspective will reveal some unpleasant truths. The huge investments have simply not delivered commensurate results.

The long list of FCC alumni success stories is quite impressive, but an objective appraisal would suggest that return on investments have been rather modest. Other dirt-poor institutions may not have produced Rhodes Scholars like FCC but they have produced a longer list of chiefs of staff, professors, VCs, secretaries and acclaimed professionals. If the department of education was run as a business venture and performance was measured by return on investment then Cadet Colleges would seem to have fared badly.

The fundamental issue here is optimal allocation of public money for maximal national benefit. Given finite public resources, it is entirely justified to re-examine current funding policy and whether the existing FCC structure meets national goals. No one in his right mind

will recommend pulling down the fine infrastructure, but it is legitimate to ask whether the school should be re-purposed to achieve a greater output. For example, in spite of having a dozen playgrounds, FCC has not yet produced a national cricketer. Should these ample facilities be made accessible to others in an equitable manner? Many other more profound structural reforms are feasible.

Fifty years is plenty of time to evaluate the success of a program, and FCC has simply not measured up to the grand visions of the founders. What is most disappointing is the lack of any "public service" oriented activities by FCC alumni who were expected to carry the torch of leadership into the broader national arena. FCC's distinguished graduates have done well for themselves but they have not banded together in any national cause, attacking illiteracy and poverty, or spearheading relief, rescue and rehabilitation at times of natural disasters like floods and cyclones.

FCC was not meant to emulate Harrow and Eton, iconic schools funded and frequented by the British aristocracy. FCC is funded by the public purse and the public has a right to be paid back. I wish the reunion well but I hope they will find time to reflect on the unfulfilled promises and how best to redeem ourselves and our beloved school.

Mushfiqur Rahman is a FCC graduate from the class of 1965.

Obama, Faulkner, and the uses of tragedy

"The poet's, the writer's, duty is to write about these things. It is his privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honour and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice, which have been the glory of his past. The poet's voice need not merely be the record of man, it can be one of the props, the pillars to help him endure and prevail." That, like Obama's, is a tragic vision to believe in.

JON MEACHAM

SPEECHES have a terrible time with middle age. In the moment, a powerful address can move a crowd or a wider audience. In the long run, too, oratory often offers insight into the mind and motives of those who came before us. Most major addresses by public figures, however, are doomed to obscurity once their immediate impact has faded and before they are rediscovered by posterity -- if they ever are.

President Obama's Nobel acceptance speech may suffer the same fate, but I doubt it. The remarks he delivered in Oslo did what memorable speeches do to achieve memorability: they were consistent with, and codified, the long-term language and vision of the

speaker.

We remember "with malice toward none" and "we have nothing to fear" and "tear down this wall" because the words embodied the essential Lincoln, Roosevelt, and Reagan, respectively. Obama's Nobel speech cannot be summed up in a similarly pithy quotation. Taken all in all, though, it is likely to endure because it is the testament of a man whose tragic view of the world is deeply and authentically held. Obama may well become the first president since Lincoln to lead the nation in a running meditation on the ways and means of fate.

Tragedy has been thought of in different ways at different times. In its purest sense, "tragedy is a form of drama exciting the emotions of pity

and fear," said Aristotle. "Its action should be single and complete, presenting a reversal of fortune, involving persons renowned and of superior attainments." For classic tragedians, the death of a farmer in his bed is sad; the death of a king in his palace or of a general in battle is tragic.

Aristotle was defining a particular thing in a particular context -- he was writing in his Poetics, and was thus concerned with tragedy as a literary and dramatic form. Anthony Trollope once argued that tragedy was embodied in a blind giant, a creature haunted by the memory of his former power. In the 1930s, Reinhold Niebuhr said, "The history of mankind is a perennial tragedy; for the highest ideals which the individual may project are ideals which he can never realize in social and collective terms."

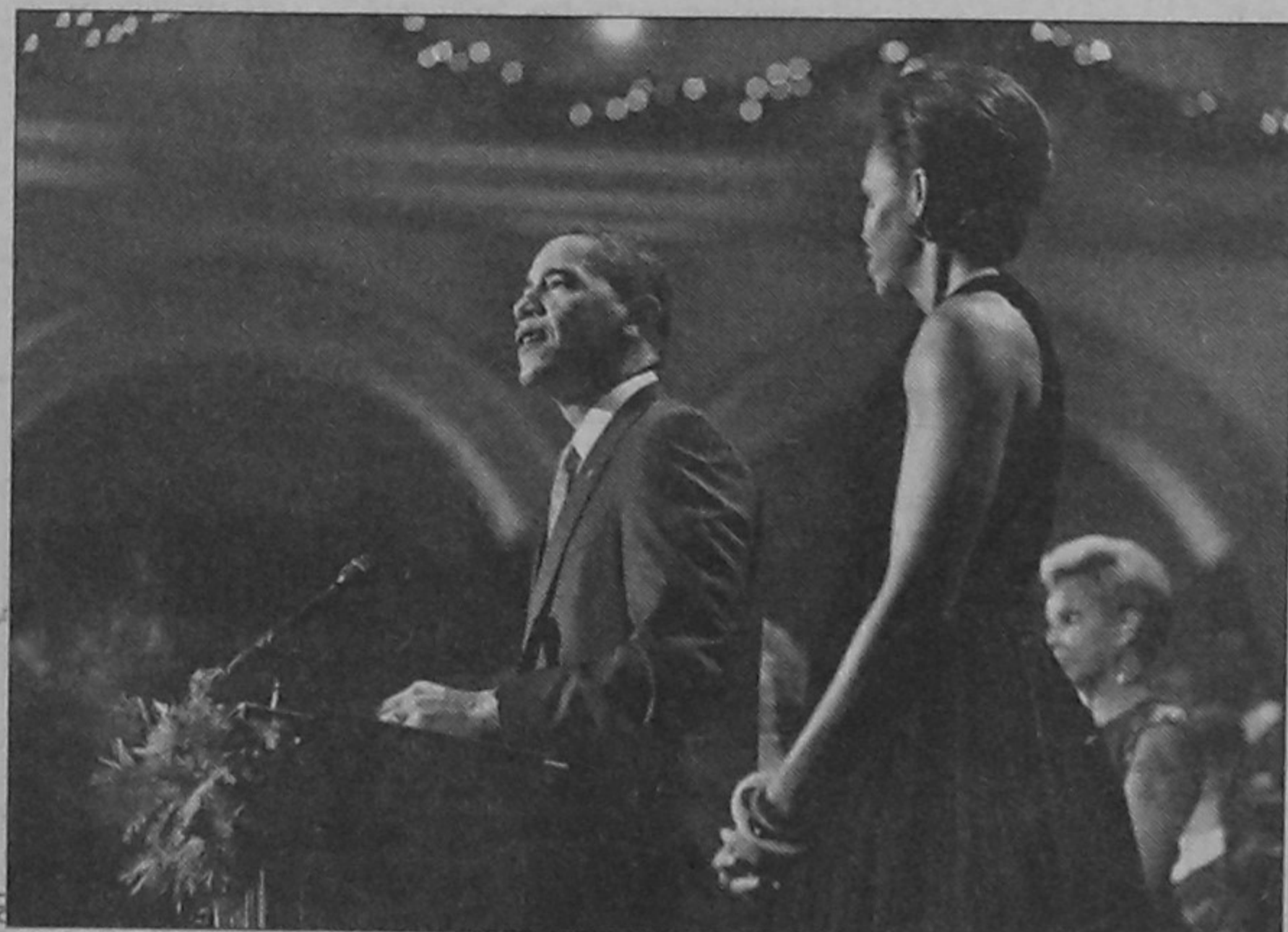
It is this last insight that informs Obama's thinking: tragedy as the acceptance of the fact that the world will never fully conform to our wishes, and that even the noblest human efforts will fall short of our highest aspirations. "We must begin by acknowledging the hard truth that we will not eradicate violent conflict in our lifetimes," Obama said in Oslo. "There will be times when nations -- acting individually or in concert -- will find

the use of force not only necessary but morally justified ... I face the world as it is, and cannot stand idle in the face of threats to the American people. For make no mistake: evil does exist in the world ... To say that force is sometimes necessary is not a call to cynicism -- it is a recognition of history; the imperfections of man and the limits of reason."

Politicians tend not to speak this way. It is more fun to inspire than to warn.

Obama is no nihilist, however. Like others who see the world as it is but choose the slow work of trying to make things better than they were before, he believes the fight worth fighting. Listening to the president in Oslo, I thought of another Nobel speech in another field from another era: William Faulkner's remarks on accepting the prize in literature in December 1950. It is worth quoting at some length.

After noting that the great question of the nuclear age was "When will I be blown up?" Faulkner said: "I decline to accept the end of man. It is easy enough to say that man is immortal simply because he will endure; that when the last ding-dong of doom has clanged and faded from the last worthless rock hanging tideless in the last red and dying evening, that even then there will still be one more sound: that of his



Warning, not inspiring.

puny inexhaustible voice, still talking. I refuse to accept this. I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance.

The poet's, the writer's, duty is to write about these things. It is his privilege to help man endure by lifting his

heart, by reminding him of the courage and honour and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice, which have been the glory of his past. The poet's voice need not merely be the record of man, it can be one of the props, the pillars to help him endure and prevail." That, like Obama's, is a tragic vision to believe in.

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