dance at the end. I am very sorry. I apologise – it was my fault. But can you understand how easy it is for the organizers of the whole programme in a big event, to forget about your particular item? Organizers have the whole thing to think about and it is very easy to miss the individual items that are so important. How awful!

Please understand, that it is OK to remind organizers, if you think we might forget. You can do this quite politely and people should not mind. Maybe you can whisper in someone's ear, "Remember the dancers at the end!" or write a little note and pass it along the table. "May I remind you to ask the audience to stay for the final item which is the dancing!" By the time I remembered, most of the audience had gone. I was very upset. No one had reminded me. So now we have to wait until the Bengali New Year to see the rest of that beautiful dance but we shall give you a very big clap.

We all need help to remember – your diaries are to help you remember – what you should do for homework, what lessons you have the next day, what books you need. We should not be ashamed of needing a system to help us to remember – but we must all work hard to make that system work properly.

God bless you.

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MARTYRS – FOR THE BENGALI LANGUAGE

Assembly 27 – February 23rd 2003

We had a very good time last Thursday, didn't we, with our little Ekushey ceremony in our lovely new space upstairs. I am very glad that you were so happy, but I was not so happy that you were so NOISY. We are all very glad that this is a happy school and SOME of the noise is because you are happy and doing

interesting and creative things in your classes – talking and working together and doing drama and singing etc.

But some noise is because you are just out of control and, out of that noise, there is a small proportion of noise from pupils who are very aggressive. When the class is left alone, we have a few pupils who need to scream rude things at each other and fight! This is not acceptable social behaviour. This is not being happy – this is being a pest.

Please, teachers, go to war on all noise that is a sign of pupils being out of control. This week, I want us to focus on tiffin-time. Please, when you have got your food, either from the canteen, or from your tiffin-box SIT DOWN – and do not get up, until you have finished. When I am half-way through my food, I do not get up and think, "I must walk around now and find someone I can shout at and fight!" That is the way for everyone to get indigestion! Do not get up until you have finished eating. Eat calmly and think nice thoughts – and your food might do you some good.

When you have finished eating and drinking, screw the top on your water-bottle and EITHER put away your tiffin in your bag OR take your plate back to the canteen. THEN – and only then - think about some relaxation and exercise. Because so many of you are walking around during eating, tables are getting bumped and food and water are getting spilt on the ground. Our lady helpers are spending too much time, cleaning up your mess and they and we are getting cross about this unnecessary work. So please, let us try to make our school a place with more controlled behaviour.

Today and tomorrow, I want us to think about martyrs. At this time of year, we are thinking about the men who died at the time of the demonstrations of devotion to the Bengali language. They refused to accept their language being treated as second-class. It had to be the official language of the Bengali people. They died for their pride of language and country and we give them due honour.

As I see pictures and statues of your martyrs, however, I am concerned that you young people should have a bigger understanding of what is a martyr. Bangladeshi martyrs of recent years tend to be young men, in the streets, often carrying guns or other weapons – and they die violent public deaths, fighting.

But martyrs die in many ways. They are those who are prepared to die rather than accept something evil. They stand up for truth and goodness and for others. Martyrs know that you cannot let evil have its own way – you have to confront it – and that always means a risk. This takes a lot of courage, even in small and personal ways. If you are the only person in your class who speaks up for someone or something and all the others are laughing at you, it is not easy. It takes courage. And, in some situations, if you stand up for your beliefs, you will die, that is, you will make the final sacrifice. To build a character, to build a society, to build a nation – takes the courage of people who are prepared to stand up for what is right and know that this can mean suffering. This week, I want us to think of some of them, including some that I have read about in the newspapers, since I have been in Bangladesh – people of real courage who laid down their lives for something that was good and true and honest. God bless you.

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SOME MODERN MARTYRS

Assembly 28. February 24, 2003

Let us continue to think about martyrs. The word 'martyr' comes from a Greek word for 'witness' – when someone dies for what they believe in, they are witnessing to that belief. I told you yesterday that some martyrs were indeed, men with guns and other weapons, fighting in the streets for their country and its

language. But the word 'martyr' can be given to many other sorts of people, who witness to what is right and good in more personal and lonely ways – and suffer for it. I find their stories more challenging because they are nearer to my own life.

Every nation and every century has its official martyrs but I have here a few stories of Bangladeshi men and women whom I read about in our newspapers here. They all died because they chose to confront evil rather than surrender to it and run away.

In a village called Nasingdi, the people had been troubled by thieves so they appointed a guard. His name was Farid Ali and he did his job well. He caught many thieves and handed them over to the police. In May 2001, he was killed by thieves, who did not want him to do his job well.

Again and again, there are stories of girls and women who suffered crimes against themselves, reported them to the police, gave the names of the criminals and they were killed so that the case could not go forward and their persecutors could not be brought to trial.

A businessman was one day asked by extortionists for a toll. He refused and was shot dead.

A young trainee dentist was visiting his parents in their village home. It was attacked by thieves, and, trying to defend them, he was killed.

None of these people wanted to die but they were ready to take the risk of dying rather than do nothing in the face of evil. A martyr does not want to die. In the early years of the Christian era, there were a few Christians who decided they wanted to be glorified by the title of 'martyrs' and threw themselves in front of the Roman soldiers, saying, "Kill me, for Jesus' sake!" What could the church do with such people? The leaders of the churches met and decided such people could not be given the name of 'martyr' because people who wanted to die were not normal or healthy people – they were unbalanced. Life is good.