Despite the disparate size of the

two countries in territory, popula-

tion, economic and military

strength, the human dimension is

strongly felt in bilateral relationship

between the two nations. The

regular exchange of visits by the

leaders of the two countries has

consolidated their bilateral ties. In

recent times French State Minister

France has been a development

partner of Bangladesh and pro-

vided assistance towards its prog-

ress and prosperity. Many of its

funds are provided to non-

governmental organisations in

projects on alleviation of poverty. A

few French firms have established

their business through

Bangladeshi agents. French annual

exports to Bangladesh vary any-

where from US\$ 150 to 200 million

while Bangladesh's yearly exports

to France are much less, amount-

ing to anywhere between US\$ 37

gladesh at the time.

visited Bangladesh.

LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA MONDAY JULY 14, 2003

Making launch journeys safe

The issue is getting the system right

HE government has responded with some tough measures to last Tuesday's launch disaster, the worst in the country's history. To begin with, it is contemplating a five-year jail term for errant launch operators; the 140 employees and officials of the shipping department and the BIWTA who were posted at the Sadarghat river terminal have been withdrawn; and some other steps are also being taken to prevent violation of navigational rules.

The reaction to launch mishaps usually follows a set pattern. As the press continues to run articles and reports on rescue operation and the victims, the government tries to address the crisis through a series of ad hoc measures; and there is some amount of playing to the gallery. But as soon as the initial gusto dies down, or is weakened by a fatalistic acceptance of what went wrong, all activities come to a halt.

So it has basically been a long tale of commitments and pledges made, but seldom fulfilled. Small wonder, the situation worsened with the passage of time. For example, there was just one launch capsize way back in 1980 resulting in four deaths, and 14 years after, in 1994, there were as many as 27 mishaps in which 303 people died.

The commitments have not meant anything in practice. Nevertheless, we welcome the steps that the government is planning to take to ensure the safety of launch passengers. However, the decision to withdraw the 140 terminal staff members at a time sounded a bit like a move meant more for popular consumption than administrative reorganisation.

What we want to drive home at this point is that the system is more important than the torrent of ideas that decision-makers might hit upon on the spur of the moment. The existing system is flawed and it must be set right on the basis of a time-bound plan.

It would be unfair to put the blame squarely on all launch operators. There are both good and bad launch operators who cannot be treated alike. What is needed now is to find out a way of adding value and credence to the highly profitable launch business, which is passing through a crisis owing to mishandling of mat-

Tribute to a fighter for democracy

The nation will miss his wise and compassionate counsel

HE thought that he is no more is difficult to reconcile with, even though he was granted a little more than the Biblical life-span of three scores and ten years. The reason is simple: he was so dynamic and involved in his chosen profession and beyond into the wider public domain that one had expected his passing away to be some distance away. He has not been in the best of health lately but that hardly diminished his natural enthusiasm to respond to intellectual discourses and involve himself in various causes of public interest.

His two terms as adviser to neutral caretaker governments in 1991 and 2001 were testimony to the impartial trait of his character. A person of incisive legal mind, he was a staunch defender of constitutional and human rights and a natural champion of socioeconomic justice and fair-play. It was an article of faith with him to be democratic; that's why we saw him being closely associated with most of our democratic movements, especially with the anti-autocracy move-

He was a classical example of how one keeping true to his profession as the first love could still be involved in so many other things of value to society with consummate

He held the freedom of the media especially of the press close to his heart. Whenever freedom of expression was threatened his loud and firm protest would reverberate from every forum he would have access to. With his demise, free and independent media have lost a genuine friend. The Daily Star lost a great patron as we benefitted often from his wise counsel whenever we needed encouragement and guidance.

We deeply condole his death and hope that the bereaved family will have the fortitude to bear the loss.

Bastille Day and its significance



HARUN UR RASHID

N July 14, all French men women celebrate Bastille Day, their National Day. The Day commemorates the fall of the Bastille, a prison (the Bastille was a fortress built in the 14th century and later used as a prison until its destruction in 1789) that symbolises freedom from autocratic rule. The King's response of vacillation and threats excited the common people in nearby Paris and they stormed the Bastille prison on 14 July that led to French Revolution with the cry, *Liberty, Equality and Fraternity.*

In 1789 the King Louis XVI of France faced extreme discontent because of the severe economic crisis and the bourgeoisie sought more political power and the landowners resented the hugely increased tax. To control the situation the King called a meeting in May at Versailles of the formal representative body (Parliament), consisting of 300 nobility, 300 clergy and 600 commoners that had not met since 1614. He could not pacify the people and was overthrown. The rest is history.

The causes of the French Revolution are the subject of endless debate. Europe during the eighteenth century was going through stress and strain and France was both a participant and a witness to this phenomenon. Historians believe that France, facing political paralysis, proved less capable of standing up to the crisis than her European neighbours. The revolution broke out in France because monarchy was more detested and more easily destroyed than else-

Impact of French Revolution

There is a universal quality about the French Revolution. Indeed this

was the event which gave the word 'Revolution" its full modern meaning; that is, it was not mere political upheaval but the complete overthrow of a system of government together with its social, economic and cultural foundations. In 1789 Paris was the capital of a dominant European power and the centre of an international culture. The changes brought about by the French Revolution had affected people far beyond France and far

The impact of French Revolu-

eyond mere politics.

Another significance of the French revolution is the creation of a modern republic. In 1792 France became the first large republican state in Europe. The invention of republics as nation-states has left a profound legacy in the modern world. Although republican gov-ernments had existed in the West since classical antiquity, modern nation-states with elected Presidents took shape in Europe discarding monarchies after the French Revolution. Historians and

citizenship within a state. This concept did not emerge from a philosopher's study or a laboratory experiment. Instead it was shaped decisively by the French Revolution in providing the meaning of citizenship with its rights and duties. The creation of a new kind of citizenship with its rights and duties has been the bedrock of democratic governments throughout the world. It means that the ultimate power remains with the

France recognised Bangladesh

relationship

On the observance of the French National Day, it is appropriate to briefly dwell on the depth and dimension of Bangladesh-France relationship. During the Liberation War French people and media lent their wholehearted support to the just struggle of Bangladesh people in 1971. Many Bangladeshis took refuge in France during the difficult period of their lives

on 14th February, 1972 and was

people. For instance Article 7 of the 1972 Bangladesh Constitution

Many Bangladeshis appreciated the bold stand adopted by the French President Chirac against the Iraqi war without UN authority. France appears to have become a voice of moderation in world affairs and supports the central role of the UN in peace keeping, peace making and peace building in international troubled-spots. Both Bangladesh and France recognise that international disputes must be settled peacefully under the terms of Article 33 of the UN

BOTTOM LINE

tion was immeasurable and significant throughout the world. The slogan -- Liberty, Equality and Fraternity -- has been subsequently claimed as benchmarks for human rights. Each concept has given rise to distinct categories of human rights. Liberty represents

civil and political rights, Equality corresponds to economic, social and cultural rights and Fraternity implies an international order that guarantees the right to development and to good environment.

Each concept has been elaborated in the 1948 UN Universal Declaration of Rights and much later two Human Rights Covenants in 1966 came into existence. Article 1 of the Declaration states: " All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood". Mrs. Roosevelt, who pioneered the Declaration said after its adoption by the UN General Assembly: " We hope its proclamation by the General Assembly will be an event comparable to the proclamation of the Declaration of the Rights of Man by the French people in 1789." What is important to note is that the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration found their way into the Constitutions of many nations including that of

political scientists have continued to reflect even this day on the transition how the republic was reinvented following the success of the Revolution.

An aspect that merits attention is the invention of the concept of

states that: " All powers in the Republic belong to the people and the exercise on behalf of the people shall be affected only under, and by the authority of, this Constitution".

Bangladesh-France

one of the earliest European countries to do so. French intellectual, author and former Minister of Culture and Information Andre Malraux visited Bangladesh soon after its independence and the visit had boosted the standing of Ban-

and 50 million. Cooperation in cultural field has been steadily growing. The Alliance Française in Bangladesh has been very active to strengthen

cultural ties by sponsoring variety of cultural exhibitions in the country. Many Bangladeshis join the Alliance to learn French lan-guage which is desirable for a job in many international organisations. A number of Bangladeshi young diplomats are sent to France to learn the language.

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Bangladesh has found a dependable friend in France. On the occasion of Bastille Day it is hoped that relations between the two nations will be further strengthened on the basis of mutual understanding, respect and benefit.

Barrister Harun ur Rashid is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

and hoardings. In this, the BJP

imitates the Congress in its worst

Mr Vajpayee revels in is lining up

the whole Cabinet to see him off on

his foreign trips. Nehru discour-

aged this when international air

travel was far less frequent and

much riskier. Such practices are

repugnant to a democratic culture.

A particularly obnoxious ritual

dynastic phase.

AMMEDIO. I DON'T SEE ANY WMDs!

Shooting itself in the foot: BJP's leadership fissures



OR many Bharatiya Janata Party supporters, one of its major attraction used to be its image as a relatively cohesive and disciplined party driven not just by power, but by ideology too. After its five yearslong rule in New Delhi, this image has been badly dented.

The party has become notorious for its venality and opportunistic alliances. It has developed a stake in big-time corruption. Its sister organisations oppose its policies. Indiscipline is rampant in the

Now, the image of the BJP's toplevel leadership has also taken a serious knock owing to party president M Venkaiah Naidu's tooclever-by-half attempt to project his mentor L.K. Advani along with Mr Vajpayee as the BJP's "twin

The abject manner in which Mr Naidu withdrew the proposal is equalled only by the wicked way it was madeduring Mr Vajpayee's

absence from India. This wasn't as a storm in the teacup, but a significant crisis. It passed only after Mr Vajpayee threatened to "retire" and then resorted to blackmail by declaring that Mr Advani would lead the party in the next election. All this highlights personality clashes and fissures within the

Mr Naidu ate humble pie, and the Advani campof which he is a leading memberabandoned its crude attempt to stage a palace

Mr Advani's followers have marginalised the NDA's non-BJP parties and strengthened its Hindutva component. Proof for this comes from the latest Cabinet reshuffle, discussed in this Column two weeks ago

Mr Vajpayee has yielded ground to the Advani brigade partly because he lacks the stamina for day-to-day party affairs. But he has never conceded there's room at the top for two leaders.

Ultimately, however, they know they need each other for the sake of party and government. This sometimes clashes with short-term moves dictated by power ambi-

One cannot understand the Vajpayee-Advani relationship through factional dynamics. Accurately speaking, they aren't faction leaders. The BJP isn't democratic enough to have factions based on ideology, social base or regional affiliation. insecure personpoetic pretensions notwithstanding. Whoever has confronted him in the Jana Sangh/BJP has been brutally punishedright from Balraj Madhok in the 1960s to Mr Govindacharya and Kalyan Singh recently.

Mr Vajpayee is vindictive, and Mr Advani cunning. When Mr Kalyan Singhthe BJP's biggest-ever asset in Uttar Pradeshcalled Mr Vaipayee a "tired leader led by retired bureaucrats", he was

The BJP cannot easily deal with gles. It doesn't freely debate differences. Its cadres obediently take their cue from the top bosses.

Take the Gujarat massacre. Mr Vajpayee called the killing a "black mark" on April 4 last year. BJP leaders agreed. Exactly *eight days* later, in Goa, Mr Vajpayee exonerated Mr Narendra Modi and his vile Hindutva, and vilified Muslims. No

BJP leader questioned him. For decades, the RSS would mediate BJP power struggles. A key to this was the distance it kept from the nitty-gritty of politics. But today, the RSS soils its hands to the point of taking sides in BJP power-

Riven by unresolved differences and bitterness, the BJP is headed for more turmoil and incoherence. Its cadres cannot come to terms with new tensions, aggravated by the coming state elections. Now, the BJP's *political credibility* is set

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

The BJP cannot easily deal with internal tensions and power struggles. It doesn't freely debate differences. Its cadres obediently take their cue from the top bosses...Riven by unresolved differences and bitterness, the BJP is headed for more turmoil and incoherence. Its cadres cannot come to terms with new tensions, aggravated by the coming state elections. Now, the BJP's political credibility is set to take a beating.

coup. The party realised that Mr Vajpayee is indispensable for the National Democratic Alliance's survival and the coming elections.

Mr Advani is a seasoned apparatchik (organisation-man). But he's no vote-catcher. His elevation to Mr Vajpayee's level isn't acceptable to NDA constituents. Mr Vajpayee remains the BJP's sole acceptable public face.

The "two-mascots" formula was a blatant, but not a new, attempt to alter inner-party power balances. Last year, Mr Advani was promoted to Deputy PM, and Mr Naidu to party president. This group now totally controls the party apparatus and BJP-RSS relations.

Mr Advani can rise in importancebut only at Mr Vajpayee's pleasure. This is a paternalistic relationship typical of the sangh parivar, which sets great store by ekachalak-anuvartitvathe RSS "principle" of authoritarian, absolute rule of a single leader.

Both men deeply are deeply rooted in RSS culture. They have a personal equation, but it's skewed. Both are under pressure from their respective loyalists to demand their "rightful" share of power. According to people who have been privy to their personal conversations, neither hides his ambition nor his (sometimes unflattering) opinion of the other.

Many party managers see the BJP in *pre-modern* terms as a Hindu Undivided Family, in which the *paterfamilias* (Mr Advani) holds absolute power. Internal differences scare BJP

cadres. They always deny or cover them up. They blame Mr Vajpayee for plunging the party into crisis by threatening it. In their eyes, he is Instead of factions, the BJP has power-centres based on personal

loyalty. When these get assertive, Mr Vajpayee sulks or threatens to quit. Mr Advani gives in, but creeps up to a higher level of influence.

Mr Vajpayee is an extremely

axed for saying he's a mukhauta

It's supremely ironical that the RSS should warn the BJP against the "cult of personality". The RSS bases itself on that very "cult", in which sarasanghachalak or Supreme Leader is worshipped. All former and current swavamsevaks pay him gurudakshina. In this secret society-like organisation, there are no elections; all appointments are made from on top.

Yet, "cult of personality" describes the BJP's culture accurately. Everyone must speak reverentially about Mr Vajpayee. His face must appear on *all* party posters to take a beating.

OPINION

Time to launch a new transport plan to phase out launches

MD. MOSHARRAF HOSSAIN

HERE was a time when the latest model rivercraft or steamers used to ply all over the country criss-crossed by the mighty rivers Jamuna, Padma, Meghna and their innumerable tributaries that make a network of waterways. The famous IGN and RSN companies of the British India did import beautiful passenger friendly boats made in the shipyards of Scotland which were not only safe from the traveling point of view but also allowed passengers to conveniently enjoy the scenic beauty along the routes while traveling from Assam to Goalando via Sirajganj or from Goalando to Chandpur or Narayanganj and elsewhere. Steamers used to ply from Calcutta to Khulna, Barisal and even up to Chittagong with, so to say, royal pride. The majestically pedalled through the rivers at ease with thousand of passengers and tons of cargoes without making occasional headline of disasters.

But things started changing

later on. Not only the river routes started declining as a result of manmade obstruction of flows upstream but also the river transport system faced uneven compecles with increased number of roads coming up reducing the distances between the destinations. The river transport system has systematically been erased out of the transport system in Bangladesh; the only remnant part is the southern districts of the country. It is thus greater Barisal, Khulna and Madaripur which are still dependent on this old mode of transport. But the horror stories appearing every now and then on capsizing of boats are probably sounding the death knell for this age old system of carrying passengers and cargoes in this riverine

The repetition of launch disaster in Dhaka-Barisal or Dhaka-Chandpur routes are too glaring to overlook. Each time a launch sinks in the treacherous water of Meghna the allegations become

audible against the river traffic regulation, faulty design of the medieval type launch, overloading, inadequate safety appliances, nonexistence of signalling system,

desh is probably an apology of rivercraft. It has been proved time and again that this type of vessel is highly unstable and not capable of returning to the equilibrium once and accommodating huge load of passengers and cargoes. Only well designed flat body type with higher water resistance or catamaran type of vessels can probably ensure

where, are more stabilised and better facilities on board are available compared to launches. The numbers of accidents news is therefore less than what is reported

Considering the state of affairs in our waterways it will not be out of place to suggest that launch system should be abolished from Bangladesh. No one has any right to play with the lives of the people. A transport system which is not safe cannot be allowed to run commercially.

meagre weather forecasting, improper training of the crew and what not. Lots of condolences appear, promises are made and then every thing settles down like the calm stream of the river itself till a repeat accident occurs elsewhere. The horrendous repetition of such accidents have made it imperative now to ponder whether one should allow such risky system to continue unabated or alternative improved transport system to

be in place for the southern population of the country. Launch as it is termed in Bangla

the centre of gravity is disturbed. The very basic principles of rivercraft designs are impossible to adjust with the diversified demand factors that are placed by the launch operators. The compromises on technical parameters lead to construction of a hybrid type craft which due to further manipulations by the operators simply make the lives of the passengers on board risky.

In short it may be said that with the present inputs it is impossible to design a launch which will be light, capable of attaining speed

proper buoyancy. But these types of vessels will need higher horse power to attain a speed that would be comparable with the same of the present day launches. So one has to compromise between the safety and the speed, if both are desired then the naval architect would be left with designing a vessel which may cross the budgetary limit of Bangladesh operators.

In fact launches as are seen in Bangladesh are not usually found elsewhere. Rivercraft in other countries are better designed. The ferries, as these are called elsein Bangladesh.

Considering the state of affairs in our waterways it will not be out of place to suggest that launch system should be abolished from Bangladesh. No one has any right to play with the lives of the people. A transport system which is not safe cannot be allowed to run commercially. Since the launch system has outlived its utility like the two stroke auto rickshaws it is high time that these deathtraps are withdrawn from the transport

Of course, it will not be fair to

withdraw launch immediately without making proper arrangements for travel by the people of southern districts. The alternative would be to improve the road transport system and introduce of railways for the southern districts. The construction of Padma Bridge is of paramount importance for reducing the traveling time between Dhaka and Barisal, Madaripur, also a part of Faridpur and Khulna. With laying of railway track from Faridpur to Barisal via Madaripur and then joining Khulna with Barisal a modern transport system will be in place. And this will pave the way for an integrated smooth modern transport network for the country.

Opening a new deep water port at Barisal will justify the railway link up to the area with rest of the country; such planning could be made on a regional basis as well. Further extension of railway, also the road links, from Laxmipur of Noakhali through Bhola, Barisal up to Khulna will usher in a new concept of transport sector within the

country. The proposed railway may be electricity operated and set up in private sector.

Launches will be utilised in the countryside where water ways are available to connect the far flung locations, growth centers away from the railway or road systems. Of course these launches should ply during day time only.

The mighty rivers are now-adays used to transport cargoes on a limited scale. Such uses may further be encouraged through introduction of incentives to make the system competitive with other modes of transport. On the other hand the treacherous but powerful flow pattern of rivers at the confluence may be profitably utilised by harnessing for electricity generation. It is a fact that millions of cusec of water flows to the Bay of Bengal without its tremendous potential utilised for irrigation and power generation. These aspects need to be looked into, too.