

Ctg citizens protest

The message is loud and clear

THE token strike observed by the residents of Chittagong city on Thursday must have gone a long way to making their point. They are seriously worried over the ever-deteriorating law and order at the port city which is also supposed to be the commercial capital of the country.

Their concern is based on some harsh truths. The businessmen of Chittagong feel insecure as abduction has become a regular affair. Police have not succeeded in resolving the cases. And it is not clear how the kidnappers could escape arrest when the law enforcing machinery has apparently been activated with a sense of purpose.

So the citizens rightly felt that they had to do something to protest the slide in law and order, which also means a slide in trade and commerce and disruption of normal life. However, instead of going for a total shutdown, they preferred a 10-minute token strike which, we believe, was a forceful way of getting their message across to the right people. They avoided a day-long strike and it was a welcome departure.

The token strike called by Chhatgram Nagarik Forum, a citizens' platform, drew spontaneous support from Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and people in general. Obviously, there is a strong resentment among citizens who do not know whether police will be able to effect a breakthrough in the cases of abduction. There is ample reason for them to feel threatened.

Press reports suggest that police have gathered information about the possible locations of the hideouts of kidnappers. But for some reason or the other they could not arrest the criminals. It seems there is some flaw somewhere in the way police are chasing the kidnappers, or claiming to be doing so.

If the law enforcers believe that kidnapping has become an organised crime with a wide network in the region, they have to adjust or change their strategy to contain it. They should take note of the fact that the businessmen have already demanded deployment of the army to counter the crime. So the efficiency of police has been questioned directly, and it is now their duty to give a better account of themselves in handling the situation.

Transport strike called off

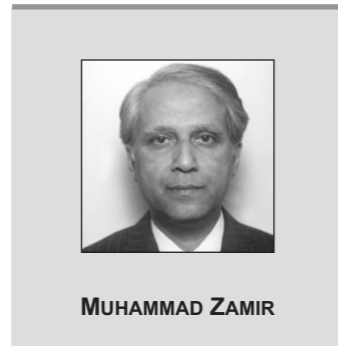
Both govt and transport leaders show good intention

CALLING off transport strike after fruitful discussions between the transport sector and the government is good news, especially for the passengers. But it probably wouldn't be exaggeration to say that it was also a good sign of an effort that finally bore result. The government reportedly agreed to meet almost all the demands made by the transport leaders. What has impressed us is the government's preemption on solving the crisis before it actually began. Usually what we see is the stubbornness of both sides during such strikes completely ignoring the sufferings of the passengers. It is only when the media and the affected people themselves begin to shout about their plight, do the government and the striking side sit down for a solution.

But this time we have witnessed the opposite. We hope this would be a good example for others to follow in the future. The government has agreed to provide adequate security for the transport owners, assured them of forming a welfare fund for the workers, among others. But could the government and the transport leaders together ensure the facilities deserved by the passengers? Because it's them who become victims of dacoity on the highway, it's them who suffer inordinate delay thanks to traffic jam on the highway, it's them who die in the most inhuman manner when buses and trucks are driven by unskilled drivers. Both the government and the transport leaders have equal responsibilities.

The government would need to ensure that their assurances are implemented; the transport leaders could only justify their demands if and when they can ensure safety and other facilities. We don't want to lose hope. Just as we are hopeful that the latest meeting and its successful outcome would not be short-lived. The manner and ambience in which the talks ended have only raised our hope. Our main concern lies with the safety of the passengers. They are paying for a service and they deserve a good service at that.

South-South dialogue: Possibilities and problems



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

SOUTH-South cooperation is more than a desirable objective; it is a necessity. Indeed, in many respects it is already a reality as evidenced by numerous examples of regional social, economic and political groupings and also through the presence of regional banks.

Progress may currently be more limited at the inter-regional or inter-continental level but blueprints exist and efforts are being made for enhanced cooperation. Political organisations such as the Non-Aligned Movement and coordinating or negotiating groups are further evidence of concerted action in the mould and drive of South-South cooperation, in pursuit of collective self-reliance and the harnessing of the complementarities of the economies of the South.

The world economy continues to be characterised by the prosperity and economic hegemony of the North on the one hand, and the poverty, exploitation and economic backwardness of the South on the other. Tragically, the trend more recently has been for growing rather than diminishing polarisation of the North and the South instead of reconciliation or convergence of views. Multilateral action is increasingly being subordinated to bilateralism and to growing instances of unilateralism.

South-South cooperation has become vital today. Adverse trends in world trade continue as the share of developing countries in world trade generally continues to decline and their terms of trade, deteriorate. Trade gaps continue to widen as export earnings of developing countries fall far below import requirements and debt service. Issues of money, finance and trade are interlocking and creating an

adverse effect on the poor and the weak and this clearly calls for concerted action.

As time unfolded in the recent past in the international scene, the San Jose Plan of Action on South-South Trade, Investment and Finance, adopted in 1997, was followed by the important step of re-engaging the international power-brokers through the Bali Plan of Action on Regional and sub-Regional Economic Cooperation. This was adopted in 1998 and focussed its endeavour on promot-

resources among developing countries and forging common positions in international fora on issues of concern to developing countries.

The question that many are prone to ask is whether all these efforts coming out of a talk-shop are proving to be relevant after all. Many believe that these attempts are really not achieving the targets they have set for themselves.

It is to counter such cynicism that the South set up the Intergovernmental Follow-up and Coordination

South-South cooperation.

The political leaders and economic support groups in the South today recognise that sub-regional and regional arrangements seem to be the most effective means for expanding trade amongst its members. It is also agreed in principle that the Global System of Trade Preferences (GSTP), as an inter-regional mechanism, is an effective tool in promoting trade among developing countries. It has consequently been decided that the South should consider further deepening

powerful development tool for economic and social development programmes.

There is however a serious problem that the South is facing in this regard. It is the question of costs and collateral conditions that presently stand in the way of such transfer. This has been recognised as an obstacle but is not seen as insurmountable. Discussion, it is being hoped, will pave the way for a satisfactory resolution of this issue.

The following can be identified as existing constraints-

of trans-national corporations and their interests and are instead able to exploit their natural resources according to international law and customs.

Strategic partnerships are being created in various fields, be it energy, pharmaceuticals, information technology or agriculture. I am an optimist by belief, and will focus on some of the areas of success till now-

- many countries of the South have now reached self-sufficiency in food production and are cooperating successfully in technology transfer;

- a common approach has helped the South in winning some of their objectives pertaining to health and drugs requirements (TRIPS) within the multilateral process;

- LDC countries have managed to overcome tariff and quota restrictions in trade. This is facilitating their economic performance and assuring for them a better social agenda, and

- a significant number of developing country firms have been able to enter various segments of the international IT markets owing to the important opportunities for world-wide sourcing of IT products (both hardware and software) made possible by technological advances. There is on-going cooperation among the South in the competitive electronics industry and this is paying dividends in terms of creation of economic opportunities and accumulated experience.

I believe there will be difficulties. However, they can and will be overcome through both bilateral as well as multilateral efforts. Inequitable distribution of the benefits of globalisation will continue to create problems, but full and effective participation of developing countries, given common political will, can resolve such issues.

This is an interdependent world, where both development and environmental crisis have to be addressed collectively, comprehensively and with a sense of urgency. There has to be a mutually reinforcing partnership.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

POST BREAKFAST

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ing consultations between and among regional and sub-regional economic grouping of the South. It also underlined the importance of developing a supportive network, institutions and human resources with the aim of enhancing the role of regional and sub-regional economic grouping in the acceleration of development. It also recommended the strengthening of South-South cooperation in the areas of transport and communications. The plan also re-stressed on the need to revitalise South-South cooperation in trade, industry and finance in order to enhance inter-regional and intra-regional cooperation. Significantly, it was also pointed out that there was need for promoting the participation of private sector and civil society and in strengthening South-South cooperation. This was to be in addition to the involvement and support of the UN system and funding institutions.

Then came the Havana Programme of action adopted by the South Summit in 2000. It recognised that South-South cooperation was a crucially important tool for developing and strengthening the economic independence of developing countries in the global economic order. It also underlined the imperative role of South-South cooperation in exchanging

Committee (IFCC) on ECDC to monitor the pace of development in the dynamics of agreed programmes. The 10th Meeting of the IFCC held in August, 2001 in Tehran reviewed on-going efforts and recommended that a realistic and objective assessment was required of Plans and Programmes of Action and the status of their implementation. It was also decided that a strategic overview of the new global environment and its inter-linkages as well as of changes in developing countries were relevant and required. This has helped in identifying new areas of cooperation that can be fruitfully undertaken keeping in mind the ever-increasing factors of globalisation and interdependence.

South-South cooperation is currently focussing on trends pertaining to increasing trade liberalisation and new trade and investment opportunities in developing countries. Efforts are being made to not only enhance trade but also promote investment since market size is one of the important determinants for attracting foreign direct investment (FDI). This is being done because of the increasing importance of sub-regional and regional arrangements in the South which are expected to provide a powerful dynamic for enhanced

and expanding of the GSTP in order to enhance its effects through rationalising the process of GSTP negotiations presently underway.

In New York and in Geneva, where most of the economic work gets attended to, members of the South are examining ways and means as to how to promote intra-South investment. This is being done with the belief that South-South cooperation can play a pivotal role in exchanging resources and forging joint positions in the international forums on issues of concern to developing countries including in multilateral trade negotiations.

The South today is also aware of the value of partnership and networking that could be put in place or further strengthened with regard to use of technology for development. It recognises that the persistence of endemic poverty and deprivation in the South constitutes a potential threat to security and prosperity of the world. It has also been noted that the prevailing gap between the North and the South in the scientific and technological field was not only still growing but that the access to science and technologies had not reached most areas of the South. To remedy the existing situation, information technology has been recognised as one of the pillars of technological revolution and a

- resources constraints arising out of competing demands from various sectors;

- scourges of underdevelopment, poverty, hunger, illiteracy, disease and debt;

- continuing soft wars, political instability and violence among many countries of the South which is diverting valuable resources from progress in development, and

- inability in many countries to properly exploit their natural resources, including water resources, to best serve the economic and social needs of their populations.

The question that now arises is what the South is doing about these problems. To overcome them, the following are being attempted-

- increasing efforts toward funding for education, science and technology;

- urging the international community to adopt urgent and resolute actions to assist the South in overcoming the plagues of underdevelopment and to establish international economic relations based on justice and equity;

- persuading nations of the South affected with violence to resolve their disputes through dialogue and peaceful means and

- ensuring that poorer countries of the South do not become victims

Guantanamo: U.S. must reform its prison system

RON CHEPESIUK

ONE of the most contentious issues in the U.S.'s War on Terrorism has been the status and condition of the prisoners at the U.S. Naval Station, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. We still don't know for sure how many are being held there or even who they are. The Bush administration considers the inmates to be prisoners of war. So the law of war permits it to detain them as enemy combatants for the duration of a conflict.

Human Rights advocates counter that that some of those at Guantanamo are being held there by mistake. The Bush administration has warned that some of those being brought to the prison were so dangerous that they would "gnaw through the hydraulic lines" of their transport plane to bring it down. Yet 36 of them have been released as of the first week of June, including one who claimed to be 100 years old. The advocates say international law is quite clear. If there is doubt about a prisoner's status, the Geneva Convention requires that the prisoner gets a hearing before a competent tribunal.

Lawyers for the detainees charge that prison conditions there are horrendous. Stephen Kenny, lawyer for accused Australian Taliban fighter David Hicks, charged that prisoners at naval base were incarcerated in wire cages, had almost no exercise and were subject to "stress and duress" torture (a combination of sleep deprivation and sensory overload).

The world does not know what's going on behind the prison walls at Guantanamo Bay, but the issue reflects the deplorable status of an institution that American patriots like myself want to see reformed: the prison system. Our prison system and our attitudes toward the incarcerated don't shine brightly on the ideals we profess as a nation. Further it doesn't make much sense for the federal and state governments to foolishly spend billions of dollars on the construction and maintenance of prisons while they come up short on their budgets and when the crime rate is falling.

The embarrassing fact for us true patriots: The execution of children, sub-human prison conditions,

sexual abuse of women prisoners, the economic exploitation of prisoners, brutal incarceration of refugees are some of the human rights violations for which successive US presidential administrations regularly have taken the moral high ground and condemned other countries. But since the 1990s, much to our discomfort, critics have charged that, while we have set ourselves up as the self-proclaimed arbiter of the world's moral standards, we really have no business criticising other countries about the abysmal state of their prison systems while our own laws and criminal justice practices remain out of line with recognised international

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The law is also not protecting the rights of the incarcerated at Guantanamo. The terror tribunal that are being put in place to prosecute the detainees contain such extraordinary restrictions on counsel that the National Association of Criminal Defence Lawyers has advised its member not to act as counsel for them.

human rights standards.

Let's compare how the U.S. stacks up against the rest of the world on key prison issues.

Prison population: The numbers continue to rise globally, but nowhere more quickly than in the US. Human Rights Watch (HRW) puts the world inmate population at between eight and 10 million; the US is responsible for up to 25 per cent of the total. When compared to the global community, in fact, the US figures are starkly disproportionate to its population. Europe, for example, has a population of 330 million, but only about 300,000 prisoners; India, with a population four times that of the US, has about 500,000 prisoners.

In a report it released last June, The U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics revealed that the prison population just keeps mushrooming. It rose to more than 2.1 million in 2002, a 2.6 percent increase even though other states showed a drop in the crime rate.

So, what accounts for the US's huge prison population? Unlike many other countries, most prisoners in the US are nonviolent offenders, meaning they're in jail for offences involving neither harm nor the threat of harm toward a victim. "Credits" for work on drugs for that

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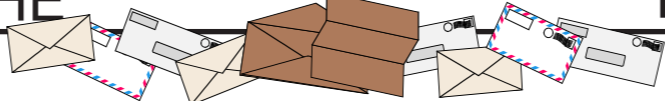
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TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

The Two-nation Theory

I read the column of Mr. Kuldip Nayar published in your esteemed daily on August 11th on the subject.

The Two-Nation Theory brought the partition of India. No power could stop Mohammad Ali Jinnah on the creation of Pakistan. Although he was offered the first premiership of undivided India not only by the Congress, Mahatma Gandhi, even by Lord Mount Batten, the last Viceroy of India, Mr. Jinnah was uncompromising to his stand. Finally Pakistan was born on August 14, 1947.

On Aug 11, 1947 Mr. Jinnah delivered a master piece speech in the Pak Parliament in Karachi "You will find that in the course of time, Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the state."

In this sub-continent Muslims were comparatively more poor and weak. Mr. Jinnah wanted a separate platform enabling them to live together with Hindus on equal footing. Now same situation prevailing in the Western Europe. West European Nations fought centuries against each other. Now

they have separate flags but same currency, no restriction on movement from one place to another place. No restriction on business or in employment. People have all the liberty. Mr. Nayar has correctly narrated that in the Two-nation Theory proposed that the Muslim majority areas would together form Pakistan and rest would be India. What happened afterwards is India conquered Hyderabad the biggest state on Sept 11, 1948, the day Mohd Ali Jinnah died. India conquered Junagarh and sent her troops to Kashmir, the Muslim majority state.

UNO brought a resolution to hold plebiscite in Kashmir. India refused to honour her own commitment as soon as Indian soldiers were settled in Kashmir. Thereafter arms race continued. As a result, this sub-continent today has proportionately more illiterate and half-fed people than what it had in 1947, plus riot, killings, rapes and what not. We could not build what Western Europe did. We miserably failed to understand what the big powers want. They are here for their own interest, own benefit; they have no ethics, and they force us to forget our ethics. If Mr. Nayar feels that Mr. Jinnah's Aug 11 speech has a correct sense of direction for

Hindu-Muslim unity then I must say still there is a time for India to honour her own commitment on plebiscite issue in Kashmir, the core issue, and that may bring long lasting peace and harmony in the sub-continent.

Syed Moazzem Hussain
Motijheel, Dhaka

Launch disasters

This refers to Mr. Sakhawat Hossain's views published in the letters column of DS, August 3.

The objective review of the long and persistent tragic saga of our launch disasters with very concrete recommendations by Mr. Hossain must be appreciated by all. His

reference to more than 100 years passenger service operation in our vast network of river transport system/coastal belt by IGN-RSN and later by EP Shipping Corporation without any major accidents of the type now happening is most significant to ponder on the part of all in this context. Repeated pointer to this very fact of important and almost trouble free/safe example of navigation in the same waterways in the past must be taken into serious consideration. Mr. Hossain is absolutely correct to say that the definite cleaner record of the past river transportation was possible due to the ships' high standard of construction with appropriate degree of stability to work under

worst conditions. It is also a fact that reasonable care/attention by the operators were ensured by the owners of that time as they were made accountable for their actions/performance. All the suggestions in the letter including the World Bank findings together with those steps put forward by its expert team as early as 1994 (as stated) must be implemented immediately. First action for the authority ought to be the formation of the ISSA (Inland Ship Safety Administration), one single body replacing the current so many agencies responsible for the same task thus providing scope of blaming each other for failures at all times. It should be the job of ISSA

with appropriate personnel/power, resources to organise itself with a target set by the government to bring in a positive change and improvement to the present casualty record (since it will not be possible to achieve absolute safety). Let us not keep ignoring or be indifferent with such readily available course of actions apparently recommended by the World Bank engaged team of experts while death toll goes on increasing year after year in launch disasters. **Z Rahman**
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