

Apology for juvenile reformatory

Let's have a real one attuned to the times

THE correction centre for juvenile delinquents at Tongi, which was set up with a view to giving the errant under-aged a positive direction to their lives, is not serving its purpose. It has virtually become a den of criminals where variegated immoral activities are taking place.

Matters came to a head a few days ago, when some inmates of the centre attempted to commit suicide by inflicting injuries upon themselves. They were apparently protesting the raw deal they got from the authorities. They complained about virtually everything -- poor quality and quantity of food, no recreational facilities, very cruel treatment by the teachers, and so on. The boys were perhaps trying to be hospitalised with injuries on their person on that particular day which might have given them a chance to get away.

It is not precisely known what drove the young inmates of the centre -- most of whom have a criminal record quite unbecoming of such tender age -- to resort to such extreme measures. But one thing is very clear: the centre is not doing what was expected of it.

The social welfare directorate which runs the centre probably envisaged a steady recovery by the juveniles from an abnormal state of mind, which made them delinquents. The hoped for recovery would have been possible had the correction process been designed to meet the needs of the young boys, most of whom had seen some ugly aspect of life rather prematurely. But ruthless corporeal punishment coupled with meagre supply of food and arrangement for vocational training cannot bring about the desired changes.

After all, if ordinary criminals become hardened ones after spending some time in the centre, there might be reason enough to conclude that the project has failed miserably.

The government has constituted a one-man probe body to look into the wretchedness of the existence of those condemned to confinement at an early age. It is highly imperative that the situation at the correction home improve and its inmates get an opportunity to return to normal life with some new skills acquired and delinquent mentality shed. Let's develop the three reformatory centres we have, along the lines of reasonably good penitentiaries overseas.

Unsafe launches still plying!

A case of lessons unlearned again

IT is a tale-tell throwing of caution to the four winds. On September 5 evening, MV Nabik was loading passengers unmindful of its bottom having ruptured to let water in. Thank God, a mobile court appeared on the scene and in no time detected the fault-line. Thus, the rivercraft was saved from an impending disaster.

Exactly two months back, a task force of the inland water transport authority carried out a survey among 10 per cent of 1500 passenger launches supposed to be plying our river routes. They found at least 100 unfit for navigation or of substandard quality. In reports, filed to the ministry, they put 57 of them in D category calling for their outright withdrawal from operation. Forty launches were placed in C category meaning that they were of low quality but could resume operation after necessary repairs have been carried out.

Unfit among the surveyed launches have not been ordered off the river routes nor has there been any safety upgrading of the launches placed in C category. So, it has been rank incorrigibility about setting things right. But what obviously puts the foot in the mouth is that only 10 per cent of the launches have been surveyed leaving out 90 per cent whose conditions we remain completely in the dark about.

Even by the standards of shipping ministry's low intensity law enforcement, isn't it baffling that despite pinpointing the exact number of defective and unfit launches no heads have rolled nor punitive action taken against anybody. The only explanation can be that the authority has been acquiescent before the powerful coterie of launch owners.

Whenever an inspection campaign gets underway or mobile courts sit, the tendency towards overloading passengers and cargo appears to be kept on hold. The enforcement or vigilance exercise over, it becomes business as usual. The behaviour on the part of the authorities to be hyper-active in the wake of launch disasters must be shunned. Inspection should be a matter of routine, instead of being a seasonal affair that eventually smacks of playing to the gallery.

The owners and operators owe it to the nation to upgrade the safety standards of river journeys more than ever before. Why? Because on the 8th of July this year, as many as 800 passengers died in a single launch disaster. That horrendous toll added to the 3000 lives having been already lost through 300 launch accidents, big and small, since the independence of the country.

M. SHAHIDUL ISLAM

While many think both India and Israel are occupation powers, the two nations feel they're victims of global terrorism. The observers have the extravagance to say whether the glass is half-full or half-empty. The reality, however, propels one into believing that they are arming themselves to the hilt for wrong reasons.

Historically, all ethno-centric nations tend to have heightened threat perceptions. India under the BJP is turning a Hindu state while the Jewish nation of Israel prides itself being the flag bearer of the world Jewry.

This is why Ariel Sharon's visit to New Delhi in early September included 40 arms traders and manufacturers in a 150 member strong entourage. The visit aimed at building over the progress made in defence cooperation during the January 8, 2002 meeting between Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes and Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres.

Sharon's visit also marked the climax of over half-a-century old India-Israeli relations, which began with Jawaharlal Nehru's declaration in the Indian parliament in August 1948 that, 'the state of Israel is a reality and India accepts it.'

Nehru's declaration was followed by the Indian recognition of Israel in 1950 and the opening of an Israeli consular office in Delhi after the UN accepted Israel's membership in September that year.

Strategic impetus

The fact that India seeks strategic preeminence in the region is unmistakable. This has led India in quest of cutting edge defence technology. Three Phalcon Airborne Warning And Controlling Systems (AWACS), an unspecified number of Arrow Anti Ballistic Missiles (ABM), 10 Barak Anti Missile Defense Systems and other weapons worth \$ 1 billion will soon join the Indian armoury to meet that urge.

Both nations moved a long way to strike such a deal. A high water mark of their relationship occurred in 1956 when Israeli foreign minister made a visit to Delhi, despite Israel then being a Cold War ally of the US and India of the USSR. The two nations also embarked upon nuclear collaborations, and, in 1962, chief of Israel's atomic energy commission visited Delhi.

But the two nations could not

make much headway in economic fields until recently. India-Israel trade was worth only 20 crore dollar when formal diplomatic ties were established between the two in 1992. By 2002, bilateral trade reached 100 crore dollar. With the latest shopping list, the trade figure will jump further upward.

Strategically, India and Israel share a common vision vis a vis India's neighbours. The protracted Indo-Pak rivalry drew India closer to Israel while the brewing Indo-China rivalry of the early 1960s added further impetus to that bond, resulting in the signing of a military treaty between the two in 1963, soon after the 1962 Indo-China war.

The nuclear collaboration between the two remained a muted one initially, but it became an international concern in 1974 after India conducted its first fission test. Meanwhile, Israel's nuclear secret

offices to mend fences with many of Israel's neighbours with whom it has political and economic leverages. In the 1960s and 70s, India became ever closer with Egypt in the wake of the Non-Aligned Movement that was led jointly by the trio of Tito, Nehru and Nasser. Besides, trade and remittance fetched India over \$16 billion a year from Israel's Muslim neighbours.

Pakistan too is an ally of the US in the global war on terror. But the Pakistani Foreign Minister, Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri, reacted to Sharon's India visit by saying, 'India and Israel are trying to destabilise strategic balance in the region.' Palestinian president Yasser Arafat said, 'Sharon's visit to Delhi will fuel India-Pakistan tension.' China, characteristically, preferred silence.

Arafat's and Kasuri's remarks notwithstanding, both Pakistan and

While the 'gun or butter' dilemma is equally applicable for the poverty stricken India too, Low Intensity Conflicts (LIC) will keep both India and Israel ever in the look out for arms and equipment to defeat the unconventional warriors in Kashmir and Palestine... And, until these two protracted conflicts are resolved to the satisfaction of the aggrieved parties, India and Israel will remain poised not to change their policies in the near future.

too was exposed in 1979 following the US army's contribution of W-4 nuclear warhead to Israel's forces.

Both India and Israel never signed the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and their possession of nuclear arms destabilised the prevailing balance of power in the Mid East and sparked a frantic Pakistani search for the same in South Asia.

Geo-political significance

The impact of enhanced Indo-Israeli military collaboration is profound for China and Pakistan, both of which had fought wars in the past. The arms purchase by India will raise concern in Pakistan about the prevailing balance of military power in South Asia. For Bangladesh, it would act as one more instance of the US working diligently to draw other nations closer to Israel.

This US stand is significant. For, when Israel decided to sell its Phalcon Air Defence System to China in 1998, the US intervened, perhaps under Indian prodding. This time, the sell to India is learnt to have received a positive nod from Washington due to the US' changed perception of India as a strategic partner.

The US also seeks India's good

Bangladesh refrained from forging diplomatic ties with Israel until now. Dhaka and Islamabad are unlikely to move toward that direction unless Israel vacates its occupation of Palestine and the Palestine emerges as an independent state.

Israel, however, is fearful of Pakistan's long range missiles that can hit Tel Aviv with impunity. Israel is aware that the money for the Pakistani nuke came from many Arab countries which are desperate to restore some semblance of strategic balance with Israel using Pakistani nuclear deterrence.

Fear of a first strike

Washington, India's strategic importance stems from its ability to checkmate China which is rising fast -- economically and militarily and might challenge the US' preeminence in the future. US also sympathises with India's trouble with Islamic militants in Kashmir.

The India-Israel relationship has had a Washington nexus due to the sheer predominance of military collaborations as such relations cemented. "We're always glad when our friends make friend with each other," commented Richard Boucher, US state Dept. spokesman, during Sharon's India visit.

Did the US leave Pakistan in the lurch by allowing Israel to come militarily closer with India? Many Pakistani think that to be the case. The Pakistani perception rests on a postulation that, any conventional arms race that might irretrievably tilt the prevailing military balance between India and Pakistan will increase the risk of a nuclear first strike by the weaker party in any future hostility.

Such a scenario will endanger the safety and security of nearly two billion people of the region, including those in Bangladesh. India, on the other hand, is trying to capitalise on the Israeli desperation to sell weapons to 'friendly regimes' due to the economic mess in which it finds itself, and, the US not being able to cope with Israel's financial needs amid a myriad of other global commitments.

The programmes include the Arrow Anti-Missile Defence, Mobile Tactical High Energy Laser, Lightning 11 Targeting Pod and Bradley Reactive Armoured Tiles. India is simply sharing the fruits of this US-Israeli military collaboration by buying off those high-tech gadgets.

Human rights

Concerns for the changed balance of power aside, opposition to this arms race also springs from Israel's and India's atrocious human rights records. Even the US State Department claimed in its 2002 report that 'Israel's overall human rights record in the occupied territories remained poor, and worsened in several areas as it continued to commit serious human rights abuses.'

The report cited Israeli killing of 990 Palestinians in 2002, including innocent bystanders. It said Israel engaged in 'targeted killings in

crowded areas when civilian casualties were likely.' Put it simply: the US taxpayers are subsidising the cost of Israel's aggression against innocent Palestinians while India faces similar stigma of human rights violations in Kashmir.

Impact of Kargil, Kashmir and 9/11

The Kargil battle of 1998 had disillusioned India to the necessity of acquiring high-tech military gadgets to spot intrusion of saboteurs along the high-altitude mountains that straddle India-Pakistan borders in Kashmir. With that aim, L.K. Advani visited Tel Aviv in 1999 and obtained laser-guided missile system.

This was followed by a visit to New Delhi by Shimon Peres, former Israeli foreign minister, in 2002. The Peres' visit having occurred in the aftermath of 9/11, he declared in New Delhi on January 8, 2002 that the "World is no longer divided between East and West."

He added, "The new division is between countries that harbour terrorists and countries which fight them." Peres' comments sounded music to India as it came just after India troops endured massive casualties in the Kargil battle.

Consequently, India decided to install the Phalcon system in the Russian made IL 76 fighter jets, to make it as efficient as the US made AWACS. IN local currency, the entire system will cost 129 crore dollars while the Arrow Missile System will cost another 250 crore dollars.

Add to this the cost of 10 Barak Anti-Missile Defence System, which is slated to go with the existing 7 that India now possesses. Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) will cost another 650 crore rupees.

That aside, two weeks ago, India budgeted another 10 crore 50 lakh dollar to upgrade war vessels with high-tech electronic surveillance capability. This huge sprucing-up follows the inclusion into the Indian naval fleet of three new patrol boats in recent months.

All of the above excludes the budget for anti-terror war which comes from a separate head. India and Israel agreed to sign a separate agreement of defence purchase worth 3 crore dollar to combat terrorism only. The list will include 400 Trevor Special Assault Rifles, 300 Sleeper Rifles and night vision equipment.

India will also train 3000 of its soldiers in Israel to master the art of unconventional warfare and the use of the new gadgets against insurgents in the Kashmir Vale.

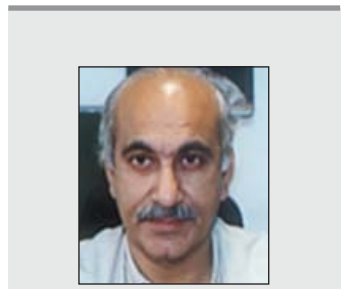
While the 'gun or butter' dilemma is equally applicable for the poverty stricken South Asian nations too, Low Intensity Conflicts (LIC) will keep both India and Israel ever in the look out for arms and equipment to defeat the unconventional warriors in Kashmir and Palestine.

And, until these two protracted conflicts are resolved to the satisfaction of the aggrieved parties, India and Israel will remain poised not to change their policies in the near future.

Unfortunately, this alarming arms race in South Asia too is attributable to the failure of the global leadership to defuse tension and establish rule of law in running global affairs.

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Two sides of one coin



M.J. AKBAR

MUMBAI: A new Bollywood tear-jerker about love and hate between Indians and Pakistanis has a fundamentalist villain who looks exactly like Burhanuddin Rabbani, one of the more bearded lions of the Afghan Jihad. This is not an accident. Caricature laced with vitriolic suspicion of Muslims is now a staple of Mumbai-centric popular cinema, lapped up by audiences who have witnessed relentless terrorism in the name of "Islamic" causes. The bomb blasts that ripped through resilient Mumbai on 25 August were part of a chain that travels back three decades on a volatile, inter-linked subcontinent.

The globalisation of Jihad, sponsored by America, was too strong and unstable to lay itself down and go to sleep after victory in Afghanistan. It scrounged the world for existing and potential wars, enthused by the departure of Moscow not only from Kabul but also from a string of Muslim nations in Central Asia colonised by the Tsars in the 19th century. The Jihadists were enthused by a sense of heavy invincibility. They thought India would be a walkover. Hostilities opened in the Kashmir valley at precisely the moment that they ceased in nearby Afghanistan. Fifteen years later, they have discovered that the Indian Army is a shade tougher than the Soviet one, but that is a story that has been reported daily in print and television.

The second agenda has received less attention. America did not have

the eyes, or the interest, to recognise it when it started under the cover of the conflict against the Soviet Union. Saudi money began to finance a wide range of madrassas, front organisations and revivalist movements that looked beyond Afghanistan towards the armies of the future. The foot soldiers of the 21st century were created from the children of the final decades of the 20th with Saudi money, local collusion and international indifference. Money flowed into madrassas in Kashmir as well as elsewhere in India, and organisa-

tion within India and a permanent war situation between nuclear neighbours. Nor has the exercise of democracy in India been an unrelieved virtue. The politics of communalism has created a growing divide between angry-suspicious Hindus and angry-aggrieved Muslims. The death of innocents has traumatised both communities, and politicians goose-step across the chasm in search of votes.

Muslims have been doubly betrayed, for the Congress Party, once their natural ally, has manipu-

lated them as viciously as their natural opponents maltreated them. From the early Seventies, the Congress slowly began to hand over the leadership of the Muslims to a growing cabal of fundamentalist and hysterical fire-breathers, while marginalising nationalist leaders who could have ensured a rational and secular direction to Muslim politics. It was a short-cut ride to vote banks that has been repaid by a bitter long-term dividend. Today, the rational voice has been minimised; obscurantists have become the self-styled voice of the community. In the process, legitimate minority demands have been replaced by divisive rhetoric over non-issues. These leaders have wooed hotheads among the young by preaching that violence is the only solution to despair. In that sermon lie the roots of the Mumbai blasts.

It is a message that has waited a long while to arrive. The box office will tell us, soon, whether such a theme still has resonance in bomb-scarred Mumbai.

KOZHIKODE: It takes a while to realise that every waiter in Kozhikode is not on first name terms with the beleaguered secretary general of the United Nations. When he mentions Kofi, he is only offering you coffee. A brew by any other name doth smell as sweet. The coffee is splendid, but then so is everything else touched by nature in

Malabar. I am staying at the Kadavu Resorts. Below the spacious verandah a river slips through with varying degrees of laziness during the day, muddy with the silt from the wet hills on either side. Ahead and above, the hills teem with fruit and foliage: not high enough to be mountains, not low enough to remain crags. The undulating bed of earth is periodically covered by changing sheets of rain. The sky is perforated like a mammoth sprinkler: each time the weather turns too hot or sultry, nature switches on a fine, sharp shower that restores the magic of Malabar.

The history of the region is known, if not always well-known. The local royals, the Zamorins, fought back the disciplined cruelty of colonising Europe. Vasco da Gama, Albuquerque and their successors came with their guns and demands, and while other Rajas along the coast compromised, the Zamorins fought before they yielded. They were not resisting trade; they were resisting domination. How could they deny trade, for trade was the sustenance of this seaport.

tensions that once cascaded into the Moplah violence have eased. Why?

The answer lies in the thousands of children walking, tripping to and from schools created by all three communities.

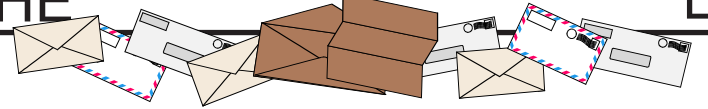
An hour's drive out of Kozhikode takes you to yet another unassuming town of a very urban state. We are in the Muslim-majority district of Malappuram. This small town has one remarkable feature. Set against a hill are a series of buildings, including one still under construction. In 1965, some half a dozen successful men decided that it was time for them to give something back to their community. They set up the Muslim Educational Society. In four decades, the schools and colleges of the MES have become the pride of Kerala. The curriculum is sophisticated, the range of disciplines extraordinary, and the campus has an easy, unrestrictive atmosphere. Admission is sought anxiously. Since it is a minority institution, 50 per cent of the seats are reserved for Muslims, and the large number of Muslim girls who are using education to discover a

new future is a particularly exciting aspect of the campus. Each year the ghetto of ignorance is destroyed a little more.

But the key lies in the other 50 per cent of the seats, for which Hindus and Christians bid and fill. And you see how the stereotyped image of Indian Muslims is destroyed by such schools and colleges. Now, when a fellow Malayali thinks of Malayali Muslims, he does not see only a mosque and a beard; he also sees science, medicine, engineering and the liberal arts. In so many parts of the North, a Muslim denotes a mosque, a madrasa and perhaps the butcher shop. Muslims in the South -- not just in Kerala -- are doing themselves a service by their commitment to education, but they are also destroying the notions that help breed misunderstanding and perhaps bigotry. In the example of the South lies the future of the Muslims of the North. In the West, social leaders like Dr Rafiq Zakaria have set up similar educational movements, but the North remains sadly comparatively barren. A morning spent with the teachers, principals and administrators of the MES indicated just how different the mood of the community was. It led me to an assertion that was not universally liked, but one which the community yet needs to ponder over: the Muslims of Malabar have liberated themselves from the "minority" trap. They are equal, and proudly so. The "minority" trap does not mean that you stop being a minority, or that the vital opportunities extended by the Indian Constitution to minorities need to be finished. It is only this opportunity which has enabled the minorities to stop feeling like second-class citizens. India has begun to arrive, today in small, hidden corners; by tomorrow's generation, across the broad plains as well.

MJ Akbar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age.

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.

Khulna is in danger

Political murders are continuing in Khulna. The murder of Khulna city Awami League leader Monjurul Islam caused unrest across the country including Khulna. Recently, another political activist of Awami League was murdered in Khulna.

These incidents indicate that we are losing our ethics and sense of morality day by day. I do not know what has gone wrong with our police? Why are they failing to do anything about it?

We know that there is a banned political party named Purbo Banglar Communist Party, which is operating its activities throughout the country

from the south-west region, like Khulna, Jessore, Jhenaidah and adjacent areas of these districts. But I think they are not the main problem. In my opinion the main factor is the corrupt local administration, the police force along with the political godfathers of those areas. So the government should take proper and quick initiatives through the armed force along with the general people of the Khulna. We don't want anymore murders in Khulna.

Saumitra Sarder Piklu
LL.B final year, Jagannath Hall, DU

Which one is right?

Of late, the opportunity of doing various complicated medical tests has increased tremendously. Now, one would find a diagnostic lab/centre even at one's residential lane. The physicians who are much eager to dispense exact medicine to their patients can do that after due confirmation of their diagnosis.

But unfortunately in many cases, it has been found that different diagnostic labs show different results, often contradictory to one another. Even the leading or reputed labs also exhibit such variance in the test results.

Recently, the result of a haematological test of one of my colleague's done in three to four reputed diagnostic centres misgued the physicians to diagnose the actual disease. They had to draw the conclusion that the patient had leukaemia or blood cancer. However after the last test by a more reliable lab, it was revealed that all the previous test reports were misleading and the patient didn't have leukaemia.

In another case, I have seen that some labs had given contradictory results of a patient's urine C/S. One bacteriological report suggested certain antibiotic sensitive against the isolated bacteria while the other

showed the same antibiotic as resistant!

I don't know why variances occur in test results at different diagnostic lab/centres. Is it due to the carelessness of the technicians or the inappropriate chemicals used, or due to computer error or something else? Meanwhile, I strongly feel that the government should fix a standard for setting up and running a diagnostic centre while the management of the already established ones should get re-confirmations whether their men and machine are functioning in perfect order.

Zahidul Haque

Associate Professor, Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University, Dhaka

IAEA and Iran

The IAEA is taking a tough line against Iran's nuclear programme. But it is mysteriously blind about India, and specially Israel. It appears that no Muslim nation, let alone Iran, will be allowed (!) to take nuclear programme, although Iran is probably the next target of USA. So, we can see that like the UN, the IAEA has become another puppet of the American club.

Kamal Parvez

One-mail

Business and private TTCs

Education is now a business in our country. Now there are only 11 government Teachers' Training colleges (TTCs) in Bangladesh. But, only in Dhaka there are more than 50 private TTCs have been established in last few years. They offering BEed degree. The private TTCs have also been established in other regions. And except a few, the other TTCs are only providing certificates to the students.

A large number of students are

getting first class from these private TTCs, though they hardly attend the classes. These TTCs are taking more money from the students.

For the development of a school, trained teachers are an essential. But, that is not happening.

So, I would like to draw attention to the authority concerned to consider the matter and establish more government TTCs. They should also ensure better training in the private TTCs.

Tofazzel Hossain
Rajshahi