

## Rly guard's tragic murder

Authorities must re-vamp system's operability

THE train service screeched to a halt on Wednesday after the brutal murder of a railway guard, Bashan Chandra Aich (50), the night before. The killer(s) had reportedly strangled him in the guardroom of the moving train somewhere between Dhaka and Bhairab in the dead of night. The ill fated guard was only conscientious with his duties. The spread of the tragic news at the day-break sparked reaction among railway employees leading to an abstention from services that lasted nearly eight hours.

The stranded passengers have had their tickets bought and paid for, schedule of the journey finalised and the works in hand ready at the destinations. Mothers with children had limited food or drinks while professional people were on leave from work for a specific period of time.

A valuable day of these commuters was laid to waste by the reaction of railway staffers seeking spot justice of a crime that needed to be death with at law enforcement level.

While the criminality of the grisly incident deserves appropriate punishment and the authorities' response in compensating the deceased's family is laudable, the actions of the employees causing hardship to so many commuters all over the country can hardly be condoned.

Railway service is an integral part of the essential public services of the nation. Under no circumstances, such services should be allowed to be imperilled.

Meanwhile, the railway authorities must re-vamp their operation system to ensure that, even when indispensable employees make spot decisions to launch a strike on any pretext, a contingency plan is in place to keep the system going.

Aich's death has forcefully underscored the need for beefing up security for railway employees, specially guards on running trains. His killer(s) must be apprehended, investigated into, charged and tried as per the law of the land.

We mourn the unfortunate death of the guard and join his aggrieved family in sharing their sorrows and pains.

## New move by health authorities

Doctors' commitment to society should be unquestionable

IT is heartening to learn that the government has decided to be tough on the truant doctors. As part of its plan to ensure regular attendance of doctors in hospitals, medical colleges, and healthcare centres, the health directorate is conducting surprise visits to the hospitals. Not surprisingly, the directorate got a dismal picture of healthcare at the field level after its officials visited some hospitals in the northern districts. Doctors were not found in hospitals during the duty-hours.

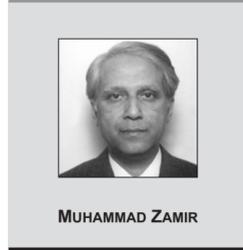
Not that the story is a new one. People have long been complaining that the absence of doctors in the rural healthcare centres makes it impossible for them to get medicare facilities worth the name. So one has the feeling that the move to ensure attendance of doctors in hospitals should have been made long ago, considering the sufferings of patients.

The health authorities have identified a major problem since delivery of health services is not possible as long as doctors remain absent from hospitals. However, supervision and inspection of hospitals should not be a seasonal affair. The authorities have to evolve ways and means of making sure that doctors perform their duties with a sense of commitment. Of course, the doctors themselves must be aware of their responsibility towards society. We believe the associations of doctors can play an important role in setting things right in the health sector.

Even a sound primary healthcare infrastructure will fail to attain its objectives if doctors are not found in hospitals.

A World Bank report has apparently awakened the decision-makers to a reality which was far from a secret. Obviously, it is difficult to believe that they were not aware of the problem arising out of poor attendance of doctors in hospitals. However, we hope they will make some determined efforts to solve the problem on a permanent basis.

# Post-Cancun development agenda and trade policies



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

AFTER five days of wrangling, negotiations aimed at changing the face of trade recently collapsed in Cancun. A race against the clock failed to produce a compromise between the perceived needs of the developing nations and the demands of the developed countries. Billed as being crucial for the success or failure of the Doha Development Agenda (DDA), it has ended without any significant agreement. The question of continued subsidy to agriculture and lack of specificity appears to have scuttled the talks. The sensitivities of the developing countries have not been taken into consideration. A new axis of developing countries has been formed but the Least Developed Group appears to have been marginalised even further.

It is understood that the Bangladesh delegation tried to push their agenda and that of the LDC in areas of duty-free and quota-free market access, special and differential treatment, capacity building and free movement of semi-skilled labour forces, but failed to register themselves effectively in the face of sustained attention by the bigger boys on issues like protectionist agricultural trade policies and associated subsidies. Then too, there was the continued insistence by the developed countries on the need to discuss further the Singapore issues – investment, competition policies, trade facilitation measures and government procurement. The brew of contention will be discussed again in December at the Ministerial level, but right now traditional factors of dominance have prevailed.

Cancun has been a setback of sorts but this should not be construed as having undermined the WTO process. Despite this setback, WTO is essential for easing global poverty. This must be understood. There will be criticism leveraged against the World Trade Organisation, but WTO is still the most adequate format for addressing the need to ease global poverty through international trade. It would be counter-productive not to support this indispensable organisation and any other forum that allows for discussion of the sensitive but necessary issues pertaining to trade and poverty. The enthusiasm, optimism and momentum that came out of the Doha Round, needs to be upheld to ensure essential progress.

The Doha round was a major test of the commitment towards easing poverty on a global scale. To many who believe in multilateralism, the

Cancun meeting has been a disappointment. To restore their confidence, the EU and other relevant powerful countries will now be obliged to prove that even a collectivity of states can find consensus.

It was the WTO's "raison d'etre" to integrate countries into an open trading system, as "an illustration of an open world." This concept not only needs to be upheld but the individual positions also need to be given due consideration. In this context it is important that we achieve a broadening of the range

with respect to market access. Cancun has cleared the air somewhat but most of the points made by the developing countries have been ignored. The agreement reached on TRIPS has been a step forward but there are still complications in the move toward compulsory licensing and other measures, which will need to be ironed out. There is anxiety regarding formulation of WTO policies governing cross border investment and the possibility of existing regulations being advantageous to multinational corporations at the

globalised world would be an immense burden if government and business in developed countries do not step up with more intensive technical assistance and resources. It also has to be understood that progress will not be speedy or uniform.

Every country needs to be sure that international standards are not merely impositions, but a necessary way to reinforcing responsible national control of the local economy. This understanding is fundamental to the success of the Singapore package issues, particularly to the development of non-discriminatory rules for investment.

Foreign direct investment (FDI) has a fundamental role to play in alleviating poverty and offering prosperity, but this implies that these funds are controlled by a set of rules or regulations, which ensures stability, transparency and equality. Sensitivity for the habits and thoughts of different societies should be the basis for business investments in developing countries within an international framework.

Participants in Cancun have underlined the necessity of achieving progress through greater understanding of the needs of developing countries on implementation, agriculture, special and differentiated treatment, trade and transport. It has also underlined that progress on non-agricultural goods have to be made, and more flexibility made available for developing countries through appropriate mechanisms pertaining to import liberalisation. Preferential treatment has also been highlighted by the ACP Group as a means to offset their loss competitiveness. One hopes that these issues will now be addressed with some degree of openness.

Four key points have now become obvious after Cancun. First, not all development is positive: resources for developing countries remain problematic and further assistance is needed. Secondly, fairness extends beyond the trade realm in open markets, for instance with respect to migration. If development and liberalisation are the basis, then human movement as an economic and social factor must also be examined. These tensions have not been resolved and need to be tackled. Third, there needs to be fairness in the results of increased development. This is currently not the case. Finally, there also needs to be even-handedness in the architecture of the system. There needs to be increased linkages established between the WTO, the WHO and a future world environmental organisation to interlink structurally the issues of trade, health, environment, labour and others. Such an inter-linkage would increase global understanding.

After Cancun, governments and businesses need to approach the Singapore issues "in a spirit of reassurance." LDCs cannot be expected to take on new issues, while implementation is still insufficient and their resources are stretched to capacity.

One way forward in the ongoing debate on the addition of these new issues to the negotiation might be to decouple them. Trade facilitation and transparency in government procurement might be easier to tackle for developing countries than the more complex, contentious and sensitive issue of multilateral rules on competition. It must be remembered that few developing countries have the experience or the legal and administrative infrastructure to meet the obligations of tackling anti-competitive business practices and rooting out cartel formation. To demand this from countries struggling to define their market presence in a

## POST BREAKFAST

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of issues by involving the NGO community and civil society.

Beyond the 'hard' trade issues at stake in the Doha Round, Cancun also dealt with moral and development issues and whether economic growth leads to security. We must understand that measures to enhance economic growth and prosperity have to be anchored in sound moral principles and values. People, increasingly cynical about governments' willingness to fight poverty, have pointed out in Cancun that combination of trade and development, now on the upswing, can still produce good results on a rules-based trading system. However, these have to be the right rules.

In this regard, we have seen the concerted effort on the part of Oxfam to raise public awareness of trade related issues and its work on emphasising the moral and political questions behind the liberalisation of agriculture, TRIPS, market access and the new issues in the Singapore package.

Cancun was helpful in many ways and one of them was the opportunity for participants to reiterate the adverse effects of export subsidies in obstructing free trade and development. It is unfortunate that the developed countries were not really receptive to criticism regarding the dumping policies in the EU and the US in the sugar and corn markets. African cotton farmers are among the most cost-effective cotton producers in the world and yet their products are not allowed to compete fairly on the world market, due to the four billion dollars in subsidies pumped into the cotton market by the US, bringing the overall prices down to a record low. This has threatened the survival and livelihood of African producers. If the US wants to deal with poverty and unemployment, they need to pay attention to these factors.

We all know that trade is not a panacea, but it is still very important

expense of local industries. Investment has not been approached through the right format by the WTO, particularly with regard to multilateral FDI agreements. Investment alone is not enough. It needs to be backed up by agreements that ensure a balance of investor rights and investor privileges. This is still not there.

Developing countries have also very correctly expressed their reservations about the business perspective and the elements contained in the Singapore package. Businesses need to be sensitive to the needs of developing countries. Every business must recognise the need to reconcile the proper demands of free trade with the equally proper concerns of nationhood and diversity. This has particular reference to the utility business sector. It should not be difficult to understand government concerns as they are inextricably linked in the minds of many to the powers of the state and the exercise of independent sovereignty.

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Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

## US Presidential Race

# On the nomination trail

## Is Wesley Clark for real?

Anything can happen in 15 months and with the Bush administration in effective control of the news cycle, you had better keep your fingers crossed. But unless and until he falters, Clark is the most threatening candidate that the Democrats could have produced.

ZAFAR SOBHAN

IS Wesley Clark for real? That's the question on everyone's lips following Clark's tossing of his 4-star general's cap into the ring by announcing his intention to run for the Democratic nomination for president on September 18. Since then he has moved quickly to launch a smoothly put-together professional campaign performed very credibly in his first televised debate with the other potential nominees, and has in general acquitted himself with the assurance and aplomb worthy of a future president. In a recent CNN/USA Today/Gallup poll, he was the most popular of the Democratic candidates by a margin of almost 10 per cent and outpolled President Bush in a hypothetical head-to-head by 49 per cent to 46 per cent.

The immediate popularity of Clark's campaign indicates more than anything else the US public's hunger for a brand of leadership that it feels it is receiving neither from the current administration nor the nine other Democratic candidates. Recent polls have put Bush's approval ratings below 50% and there is growing evidence that the public has grown weary of his administration's feckless stewardship of the economy and ham-fisted performance in Iraq. The problem for the Democratic candidates is to overcome the public perception of the party as soft on national security and dovish on foreign affairs. It is the only card Bush has left to play and rest assured that the issue will be front and centre of the 2004 election campaign. Bush was always going to be vulnerable to a Democratic nominee with serious foreign policy and national security credentials and it is into this space that Clark has stepped.

That such a relative unknown has instantly rocketed to the top of the field and is also outpolling the president speaks volumes of the public's disenchantment with its present leadership. Most Americans know little about Clark beyond the fact that he is 4-star general and if they recognize him at all it is from his presence on CNN as a military analyst. But what they do know

is that he is a Democrat who opposes the direction Bush is taking the country, and that, together with his reassuring military bearing and background is all they need.

The question is whether the more the public sees of General Clark the more it will like him. In times such as these, there's plenty to like in a thrice-decorated 34-year veteran of the US military who rose to the positions of Supreme Allied Commander of NATO and Commander in Chief of the US European Command. A handful of peaceniks are accusing him in a half-hearted way of sundry war crimes in his prosecution of the Kosovo War but the charges have little merit and in any event probably only serve to bolster the tough guy image Clark is projecting. But Clark is an impressive candidate beyond his military credentials. He is smart its not everyone who finishes first in his class at West Point and studies PPE at Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar - and comes across as very thoughtful, incisive and capable presidential, one might even say. He handled himself well in his first debate and has put forth a number of well thought-out and well-received policy initiatives including increased spending on national security, relief for struggling state governments and a tax credit as an incentive to employers to hire new workers.

Clark's candidacy is the president's worst nightmare and Karl Rove and his team of presidential advisers are scrambling to mount a counter-offensive. So far all they have managed is a whispering campaign that Clark was not well liked in the army and that his entire candidacy has been engineered by Bill Clinton neither of which will probably have any more impact than the accusations of war crimes (which even the Bush administration doesn't have the audacity to level). This is not to say that Bush can't beat Clark. Anything can happen in 15 months and with the Bush administration in effective control of the news cycle, you had better keep your fingers crossed. But unless and until he falters, Clark is the most threatening candidate that the Democrats could have produced.

# Concept of Durga Puja

RABINDRANATH TRIVEDI

FROM the days of remote antiquities Hindus worshipped the creator of the universe in two aspects, first as the 'father-mother', the sole primordial existence 'elan vital'. Secondly, from the Vedic period (4000 BC), Hindus discovered that phenomenal world is ruled by a Divinity that shapes the destiny of man and of the objective world. Only one 'Being' exists always and fills the eternity that is, Brahma, who gives life to all and who dwells in relation to man. The text of the Vedas has come down from remote antiquity by the process of oral transmission, a unique phenomenon in the cultural history of the world for such a large body of literary materials. The eternal message of Hinduism which came down the time of the Vedas is: 'Ekam sad vipra bahudha vadanti'. Truth is one sages describe it in many ways.

Hinduism believes in one Ultimate Spiritual Reality or universal spirit Who is self luminous and manifests Himself in many worlds and dwells in all living beings as their under-ruler. This Ultimate reality is the supreme God in Hinduism. It also believes that though God is one, He has various manifestations in many gods and goddesses, any one of which may be worshipped as a form of the supreme God (Brahma). In Hindu community,

there was a general conflict between the believers in the formless, nameless, and qualityless Brahma and the worshippers of personal god (*estodevata*) with name, form and quality. This is the historic conflict between the religion of the absolute formless (*nirakara*) and the religion of personal God (*eistodevata*) with forms (*sakara*). This is known as the conflict between *Saivism* (Siva), *Saktism* (Kali, Durga) and *Vaisnavism* (Hari, Visnu, Rama and Krishna).

The Mother cult was very much prominent in ancient India. The objects unearthed at the prehistoric sites of the Indus Valley prove the prevalence of the cults of the Father-god and Mother-goddess among the pre-Aryan peoples of this subcontinent. A prehistoric terracotta seal form Harappa contains the goddess.... There is also a pair of tigers towards her left, standing and facing each other and this reminds us of the association of the lion with the Mother-goddess and of the Father-god's association with animals, says DC Sircar, a renowned archaeologist. The fundamental idea of the Mother-goddess cult was the belief in a female energy as the source of all creation. The fact is that the cult of the Mother-goddess was originally unknown to the Aryans who were patrilineal people unlike the matrilineal aboriginals. 'Certain Sections of the Mahabharata and

the Puranas like the Markandeya' no doubt suggest that the Mother goddess conceived as the consort of Siva, was nearing the front rank about the age of the imperial Guptas. "In the 5th century AD the Maukhari chief Ananta Varman established the images of Mother-goddess overpowering the demon Mohisashura" says Dr Nihar Ranjan Roy in 'Bangaleer Etihās'.

In Bangladesh, Durga Puja is the celebration of this protracted battle with the forces of evil, simultaneously she is the benign mother and consort who comes visiting her parents' home. She is goddess and woman (source of creation) in one, containing within her all power and all sweetness. Some may condemn image-worship as idolatry. But they do not know that in the so-called image worship what is really worshipped is not the material image, but the living, conscious God invoked and infused into the image. Since Mahalaya celebration mounts to excitement till the tenth day, 'Bijoya Dasami', the day of victory. When the puja is over, the victory complete, the visit of a married daughter to her parents' home concludes, a fresh year of receiving and parting is born anew.

How old is Durga Puja in Bangladesh? This has never been conclusively answered. Dr Sashibhusan Das Gupta says, "During Akbar's time Raja Kansha Narayan of Taherpur, Rajshahi first initiated the

festival. There had been also other socio-cultural changes. In the old days the images were all placed standing in the same panel 'Akchala'. Today action has crept into the poses. The noted Bangalee satirist Kaliprosanna Sinha says in his book 'Hutum Penchar Naksha' that "... the Babus of bygone days merely to exhibit their wealth and entertain their white masters. Religious fervour had seldom been the forte of Puja organisers." In those days of 'Babu' culture, it was the Dhakis who stole the show.

Unfortunately for Hindus in Bangladesh they have been facing the music of great declination in respect of politico-economic and social status today. If religion is to be true to itself it must stress the worth and dignity of human personality. They should rise to the occasion and call a spade a spade. Fundamental rights of the Constitution must be extended to all communities. In sociological terms, Man is the total circle including both the centre and circumference. He is both self and not-self. Lord Krishna says, 'Samoham sarva bhutesu, na me dvesyasti na priyah I am the same for all beings: There is none whom I hate none whom I favour' (The Holy Gita-ix/29). Brave one proudly proclaim, "I am a Hindu, a member of the great civilisation."

Marking the beginning of the Durga Puja 'Markandeya Purana' commonly known as Shri Shri

Chandi is recited from Mahalaya day:

"Many dark, primordial moons ago when evil went stampeding through the heavens in the form of Mohisashura, the buffalo demon, the gods in their hour of need turned to Shiva and Vishnu. The pitch dark of wrong doing and heedless ignorance were threatening to swallow up the steady glow of light in thinking and knowledge. The might of the gods, the Devas, was in danger of being snuffed out by the misuse of the Ashuras, the demons. The light was going out their lives.

"It was an impassioned plea, Shiva and Vishnu listened with rising concern and mounting disapproval. It was not an unfamiliar situation. Evil existed alongside good, knowledge beside ignorance in an eternal tantalising tangle. And the universal scales were rarely still in the perfect balance of opposites.

"Mahisashura's way was to strike at the very roots of existence. The cosmic structure was very near collapse. The radiance the powers, the energies, the Sakti of Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva met in a flash of creation. The darkness that had settled on the world burst open in a dazzle -- and of the effulgence was born the sound and fury of blazing wrath that is Devi Durga, difficult to attain destroyer of all evil. Fiery red in hue, clad in the blue of the firmament her many arms fanned out to fill the sky as she received the

martial equipment that each god separately created out of his own special weapons -- a trident from Shiva, a discus from Vishnu, staff of death from Yama, a club from Kubera, a battle axe from Vishwakarma, a thunderbolt from Indra and many more.

"The gods watched in wonder and belief as she went riding on a rampant lion to battle, her dreadful laughter mingling with its roar the three worlds echoing with the sound of fury as she made her way to the Vindalayas to seek out Mahisashura. In a final burst of triumph, she pinned Mahisashura down with her foot drove the trident into his heaving chest as he strove to hold back his escaping life-breath. Thus the demon met his doom, gazing into her frenzied eye, for the glance reared his doom -- and his deliverance". (Goddess of Goddesses: Shym Lal, TOI, October 1980).

The conception of which Devi Durga is made is the stuff of eternal challenge and fight and panting victory over the ugliness and terror that forms the morass of the world out of which like the lotus of slush the beauty of the good arises.

Rabindranath Trivedi is a former Press-Secretary to the President and Addl Press Secretary to the Prime Minister.

# 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.

## CPA and Bangladesh

The CPA (Commonwealth Parliamentary Association) conference will start from October 4th. It will be attended by 522 delegates from 154 parliaments of 48 countries and Bangladesh is proud to be one of them. But the recent stand that the Opposition has taken to boycott the conference is indeed objectionable. A parliament consists of MPs from the ruling party and the opposition. And the parliament cannot function properly without the latter.

In our country we have witnessed time and again, that whoever is in the opposition bench, do not bother to address people's issues in the house. The issues are discussed in the streets.

We say that we believe in democracy, yet we do not follow democratic values. The existing situation will hamper the country's image immensely. In this kind of scenario all the political parties should join hands and work for the progress and prosperity of the

country.  
Syed Muntazir Zaidi  
LACC College, LA, California

## High-rises in rise

This is in reference to two articles published in The Daily Star (September 29).

The first article in the Culture section covers a concert by eminent singers at the newly inaugurated Spectra Convention Centre. The second one in the Star City supplement entitled 'Towering Menace' features the newly built high-

rise, Silver Tower, near Gulshan DIT Circle 1.

Spectra Convention Centre is located not very far from Circle 1 in one of the inner roads of south-west Gulshan that is still predominantly a residential area. How can the DCC authorities allow developments such as this convention centre without proper parking facilities? It is interesting to note that in one column you target one development (Silver Tower) for the "menace" it has created to the already burgeon-

ing traffic problem of the area and in another column you subtly insert a propaganda for another development (Spectra) under the guise of a concert review, whereas the latter is as guilty as the first for the same problem of lack of parking facilities.

In this context, may I also request that you exercise higher standards for the reviews of art exhibitions, recitals, and concerts by requiring your reviewers to give a proper critique of the event and not just a re-hash of factual information?

Dilkash Ahmed  
Gulshan, Dhaka

## "Post of MLLS"

This refers to letter of Md. Saqueeb Hussain, Dy. Manager (Admin), TSP Complex Ltd, Chittagong (Sept 26).

My heartfelt thanks to the writer as he has brought to our notice an age-old office terminology, which has been frequently used at the government offices till date. I have seen the term 'MLSS' in many

government advertisements.

Willingly or unwillingly, Mr. Saqueeb Hussain didn't let us know the meaning of MLSS. We may please note what it stands for. Owing to my personal inquisitiveness to know the elaboration of this term I asked one of my known government official that what does it stand for. He informed me that MLSS stands for: Member of Lower Subordinate Staff.

We are using this much old office terminology from the colonial era that needs to be changed in the

context of modern system. Really the connotation is vague and absurd. People who bear this designation perhaps do not know the meaning of this typical term. However, this may be changed as 'Office attendant', 'Office bearer', 'Office caretaker', 'Office messenger' etc but not like 'Office peon' or 'Service peon' as proposed by Mr. Saqueeb because the term peon is also undermining human values.

MH Bari, Khulna