

Dispute at Ferry Ghats

Road communication between Dhaka and 17 north-western districts was brought to a standstill for several hours Friday by a strike at Aricha ferry ghat, enforced by the Inter-District Truck Drivers Union. According to reports published in this and other papers, the strike was precipitated by a clash at Nagarbari ferry ghat, which is the gateway to North Bengal, in which some truck drivers were allegedly beaten up by ghat workers. In protest, the truckers stamped out normal activity at Aricha, imposing a virtual blockade on the north-west of the country.

While we accept that recourse to strike action in the course of a trade dispute is a constitutionally-guaranteed right of organised labour, we find very little that was legal or constitutional with the kind of action taken by the truckers Friday.

To begin with, it was not a trade dispute. Rather, the whole episode smacked of gang warfare between two groups of workers. The only role the two respective unions could have conceivably played in this was one of mediation. Failing that, district police and administrative officials should have been asked to intervene and investigate any criminal activity.

Quite apart from the intolerable sufferings caused to innocent travellers, it is surprising how a patently illegal action seemed logical to union leaders, who are, after all, citizens of this country. We are within our rights to expect responsible leaders of a major trade union to have the broader interests of the nation high in their priorities. Instead, we witnessed a depressing display of petty group interests, in which the plight of thousands of poor and innocent men and women were of little or no consequence.

We do not have any way of calculating the kind of economic damage this action inflicted on the north, which is already suffering from decades-old neglect and underdevelopment. In any other civilised country, somebody would have been liable for all the financial damage caused as a result of this forced stoppage. Given that this kind of wild-cat actions which have no relevance to worker-management relations are likely to occur in the future as well, we feel it is time our lawmakers gave serious thought to the question of liability. To put it simply: somebody has to pay.

Another alarming aspect of the incident was the apparent inability of local administration and police to enforce law and order at such a vital communication intersection. The district administration should have been more active to ensure the dispute between the two unions got no further than the negotiating table, while the police should have made it plain that it was their job to protect vehicles and passengers using the Aricha-Nagarbari route. In view of their failure to act in the manner expected of them, the government should consider how to make police and administration more effective — within the bounds of law — in such situations.

But ultimately, it is the workers, who use the vital economic arteries of the nation, who have to show the greatest common sense and, yes, patriotism. That means tackling any given dispute in a manner which does not harm the greater economic interests of the country at such a critical point in time.

Elusive Education

It was a very heart-warming five-column spread picture on the district page of the Daily Star on Thursday. Some thirty pre-teen children, squatting on mats in four-deep rows, listening in rapt attention to a young man in the foreground in white pajama-and-punjabli holding forth evidently on some kind of class text. It seemed at the very first sight to be some kind of class going on. And it felt so good to see so many children out in the open and giving their best attention to the teacher — who was neither dosing off in a cozy chair nor intimidating his pupils with the proverbial rod. The only thing struck one as missing was the blackboard. But may be they were doing very 'oral' things, the presence in that open-air class of infants of four and less tends to indicate that.

There was nothing wrong with the milieu except for there being not even a one-foot stalk of green life anywhere. Given the trees and seating the pupils in a semi-circle would have completed a picture of the classroom Rabindranath dreamed about and materialised in Santiniketan in the first decades of this century.

However, why was this photo published with such prominence? The five-column headline that topped the accompanying story made it all very clear. It said in big black type: "Students sit on mats: No chair for teachers." There was a minor additional headline too in light smaller type: "Most school buildings in rural areas dilapidated." Seeing is believing. The photograph was there to make those points in an irrefutable tell-tale manner.

If one is crazy enough to make a note of all the educational news that come out on the pages of our national dailies — one would be struck by the frequency of and the space taken by the agitative complaining about furniture and building. Never, yes, never would there be a single line reporting the state of education — that of teaching and receiving, practising and preparing, that is, and the contents thereof. Education all mats and no furniture and all dilapidated building — and nothing besides. No education is something more than this — absentee students, non-existent school buildings, malingering and defalcating teachers. And then delayed supplies of textbooks and copying at examinations.

The sarcasm cannot go on endlessly without hitting a point where it will strike the caring chords inside any man — and cause tears to roll down amidst irrepressible sobs of anguish. Where is education in all this? What about that?

There is something very seriously flawed about the educational approach of our government as well as our society. The villagers or local squires do not anymore build a school, and they do not as such care for the building either. The school built by a non-present government is rather an ideal place to be abused and its furniture also coming from the selfsame government can be put to good use by domestication or better still, as fuel.

Let education grow from the bottom: then the mats will be precious seating cushions and the open air the best of classrooms. As it is at present education is the name of builders and suppliers and contractors haven and of huge money transactions inviting, believe it, more than 10 billion Taka — and not much of it having anything, to do with what a teacher gives to the student and what the student takes from the teacher. Ideally that is,

NOT all cities take possession of your mind when you visit them. Chittagong does.

I know that when I say this I am making a very subjective statement. I first visited Chittagong in the winter of '48 or '49, I am not very sure which year at this distance of time. What I remember quite vividly is the spell that the sleepy town had cast on me. For a whole week that I spent there I was in a dream. The hills, the valleys, the misty winter evenings, my lonely wanderings that often took me to paths and places away from the town, — I was almost reliving the experience of young Wordsworth in the lake districts of Cumberland. When I returned — and it was a very different Salimullah Muslim Hall, briefly Muslim Hall of those days, that I returned to — I brought back with me a conviction that there must be more mysteries and more beauties hidden away in the yet unexplored hills and forests of Chittagong. I still remember how I peered a Chittagonian friend on my return with questions about these mysteries and beauties and the smile of amusement that I noticed on his lips as he answered.

My sense of contrasts that I notice in Chittagong is of a later date. Between now and then, I have been to Chittagong I don't remember how many times. The latest visit was less than a week ago and the duration was short, a mere twenty-four hours. In speaking about contrasts, I am not going to give my latest impression of the town. I am going to draw upon my impression of the last

Chittagong: City of Contrasts

so many years, slowly growing upon me and virtually blotting out the images of my first visit.

City of Commerce

Chittagong today is, above every thing else, a city of commerce, — large and busy and noisy. Thanks to its hills, it has areas free from the usual congestion of our towns though this cannot be said about most parts of the city. In respect of size and population, it still is what it was in the year of Partition, the second city of East Bengal, now Bangladesh. Recently, we have heard something about making it be second capital but the meaning and the intention is not clear to me. Do they mean, when they use this expression, that a big chunk of the administration will be transferred to Chittagong? Or is it simply this that from now on the grievances of Chittagonians that their city has been cruelly neglected by successive governments will be removed, and money will flow for its upkeep and development. The list of grievances is long but, during my visit this time, I got the impression that the present mood of the city is quite positive toward the government. In the new cabinet of Begum Khaleda Zia, there are as many as three full ministers, from Chittagong and this has raised hopes in their minds that all wrongs will be righted in the coming days.

I hope the government is

able to do something, I do not know, but if Chittagong city is behind Dhaka in respect of civic amenities then they have my fullest support. Dhaka, for a city of its size, can boast of several things: among them, ninety per cent of its streets a nightmare for vehicles, hundred per cent of its telephones disabled for the greater part of the day, housing situation getting bad to

man-made. Perhaps the worst thing to have happened, and it was told that the process hasn't stopped by any means, is of the hills being levelled or dismembered as a result of earth-cutting. Orders or regulations prohibiting this are being freely violated. One would like to know more about this and I would expect the point to be raised in the Parliament. There must be a few members

I am not suggesting that it is only Chittagong among our cities that is both modern and medieval at the same time. Polarity as a psychic fact — from devout and unquestioning faith to rational unbelief and vice versa — is a common phenomena. Atavism is supposed to be widespread in Africa, where they have strong tribal traditions. I have noticed the presence of this trait in many characters and I have a suspicion that an average Chittagonian is more vulnerable to this than others. But I may be mistaken.

PASSING CLOUDS

Zillur Rahman Siddiqui

worse every passing month, school places far behind the mounting needs of the city population, sanitation including water supply poor, roadside plantation virtually nil, aesthetically a jungle of mortar and bricks, socially a place increasingly under the stranglehold of thugs and antisocials. For all my sympathy for the Chittagonians I cannot imagine or wish them to be as badly off as we the Dhakans are. Still, I will proclaim my support for the citizenry of our second city, capital or no capital, and I would say that the first city's woes must not stand in the way of meeting Chittagong's legitimate demands.

Have I forgotten my theme of contrasts? No. In Chittagong there is a contrast, first, between beauty and ugliness. Beauty is mostly the gift of nature and ugliness, all of it,

in the House with some interest in environment.

Social Attitudes

There seems to be a polarity in Chittagong's social attitudes, — extreme conservatism and striking radicalism at two ends of the communal psyche. The home of the awliyas and saints have also been a breeding ground of radicals and political activists. An average Chittagonian has his moment of piety, raising his hands in prayer on holy occasions, and the next moment feeling very proud and patriotic in memory of the heroes who rose in arms against the British. The dichotomy I know is not exclusively with the Chittagonians and one can see traces of it in many of us coming from other parts of the country. In Chittagong I believe it has its clearest manifestation.

The Campus

Let us have look at the campuses. The choice of site for Chittagong university was, to put it simply, most unfortunate. Many of the woes of the University can be traced back to the fact that it is so isolated, so difficult to reach and so full of obstacles for free and easy movement even internally. This island of silence and peace has been turned into a veritable hell. Terrorism has been given a free hand and the campus now has the distinction of being the only one where medievalism is in full control of things. Modernism has been successfully driven out and has taken shelter in the more hospitable city. A city is always hospitable to liberal forces. Those who decided to keep the university safely away

from the city were no friends of liberalism. With the university hatched away into the hills, the city has suffered. It has a thriving commerce and a languishing culture. Culture, in all urban centres tend to centre round universities, and universities, in their turn, derive much of their vitality from the cities. Chittagong's growth has been striking, in many respects, but it suffers from a lack of balance for the reason stated above. The city will continue to suffer till the time when, perhaps, a private university appears on the scene and fills the vacuum. The city has enough resources to establish one and once this is done on proper lines, and with right intentions, it will flourish in no time. Despite everything, and despite the fact, the shameful fact that a city of over a million people should be without a university, the city is the hope. Outside Dhaka, it happens to be the only place where there is a sense of cultural autonomy. The newspapers, at least the two leading Bangla dailies, are readable, and there is enough local news to feed the pages. Printing is of a high order. Though national and international news take the second place, there is a justification for most Chittagonians subscribe two papers, one local and one national. Some years ago I had suggested that Chittagong, our second city, should have a festival, similar to that of Edinburgh and I still hold that way Chittagong can endear itself to the whole country.

The Party's Over for Zimbabwe Opposition

Charles Rukuni writes from Bulawayo

Political pluralism is high on the agenda in Africa as one-party states come under increasing pressure from movements pushing hard for the introduction of democratic electoral systems. But in Zimbabwe the ruling party has virtually ensured remaining in power by making a swift ideological shift that has left its fragile opposition in disarray.



EDGAR TEKERE His party split and crumbling based and has survived. Apart from opposing the one-party system, which the

ruling party espoused, and capitalising on getting rid of the corruption exposed two years ago by the "Willowgate" scandal over black market dealing in cars by government ministers, the opposition had little else to offer. The fragile opposition now consists of the Zimbabwe Unity Movement, which has two seats in the 150-member Parliament, and ZANU (Ndonga), with one seat. The only other political party that still claims to exist is the United African National Council, which was the ruling party before independence in 1979. Gone are a whole string of parties: the Rhodesia Front, which later changed its name to the Conservative Alliance of Zimbabwe; the National Front

of Zimbabwe; the United National Federal Party; the United People's Association of Matebeleland; the Zimbabwe Democratic Party; the National Democratic Union; the Independent Zimbabwe Group; and the National Progressive Alliance. By abandoning the idea of a one-party state and introducing gradual free-enterprise through its phased economic structural adjustment programme, the ruling party has left what little opposition exists practically naked. Their only hope is that the petty disagreements still existing within ZANU-PF will perhaps still persist until the next general election — a forlorn hope with the ruling party now accepting realism rather than rhetoric.

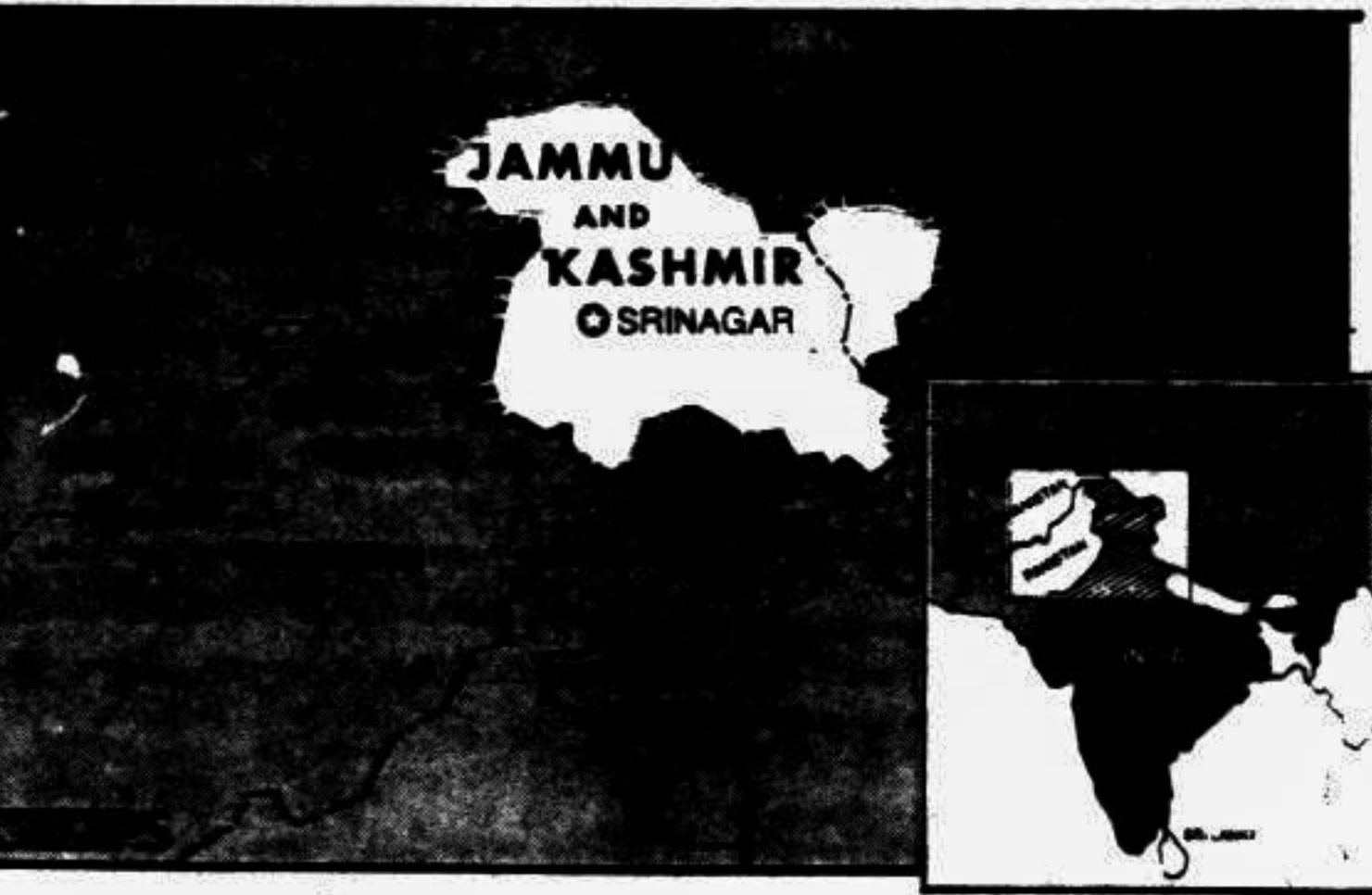
The situation has been worsened by a split within the Zimbabwe Unity Movement, reducing the crumbling movement into a political nonentity. Neither of two factions — one led by founder Edgar Tekere and the other by former vice-President Emm-anuel Magoche — has anything left to offer. Politburo members of the ruling party, such as minister of state Eddison Zwobgo, now openly say that the time has come to let the people govern and that it is not shameful to have wealth if it is honestly accumulated. This effectively removes another bone of contention, the leadership code, which the opposition had used to discredit the ruling party for not

honouring. The government now has a free hand to campaign for its structural adjustment programme, which more people are interested in at the moment than mere politicking. They were even able to experiment with internal democracy by allowing people to have a free choice of candidate for the August local elections. The only organisations that now matter are those that promote people's special interests, like the Consumer Council and the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions. By their very nature, these groups can never take on the role of the opposition. Their role will, however, be crucial because more and more people are now concerned about bread-and-butter issues. — GEMINI NEWS

CHARLES RUKUNI, a freelance journalist, was the Harare editor of *Moto*, a Zimbabwean weekly, and later deputy news editor of the *Bulawayo Chronicle*.

Kashmir Insurgency Cripples Tourism

The war being waged by separatist groups in the picturesque Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir has all but crippled the tourist industry, the single biggest source of income for the state's six million people. Astri Ghosh of IPS reports from New Delhi



Hindu newspaper. "The ground seems to be fertile for secessionists to thrive, and it is for the administration to correct the state of

WHEN the mercury soars in the summer, people who can afford to take a holiday escape from the scorching heat in the plains to the Himalayas in northern India. But this summer, not many vacationers have ventured into the picturesque valleys and mountains of Jammu and Kashmir state. For the third successive year, houseboats on the idyllic Dal Lake in the state capital of Srinagar are empty, putting up 'to-let' signboards, and the carpet shops are closed. Few foreigners and fewer domestic tourists are risking travelling to one of the most beautiful parts of the country in this the 'Visit India' year. Curfew, imposed by both government and militants, has made Srinagar a city under siege. Gun-toting security forces are often the only people to be seen on the streets. Visitors have been frightened off by a series of abductions, both of Indians and foreigners. The Kashmir Valley has been the scene of bitter clashes between paramilitary troops and well-armed separatist groups fighting for independence from India. New

fighting for independence, while others want to secede and join Pakistan. Insurgency has, however, crippled the state's once vibrant tourist industry which was the single largest source of income for its roughly six million people. Over the past two years, thousands of frustrated Kashmir youths have crossed into Pakistan to carry arms and explosives, back into Kashmir to join the war against New Delhi. Some militant groups like the Muslim Janbaz Force which earlier this year kidnapped two Swedish engineers, have 12-year-old members who are trained to use Kalashnikovs. Kashmir topped the agenda in recent talks in New Delhi between India and Pakistan which ended inconclusively. While India insists the issue must be settled bilaterally, Islamabad has been trying to internationalise the problem. Most India observers believe insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir can only be solved if New Delhi and Islamabad include the militants in the peace process.

Doraiswamy, a senior Indian official who was set free in Srinagar by the Ikhwan ul Muslimeen rebels after 55 days in captivity, offered to mediate for peace. Describing his captors as "misguided youth", Doraiswamy has appealed to the government to talk to the rebels who he believes can be won over "with love and affection." But George Fernandes, the opposition Janata Dal MP and former minister in charge of Kashmir affairs, asserts the time is not ripe for initiating negotiations. "We have not prepared the ground for talks with the militants," he told IPS. An incipient revolt has long been brewing in India's only Muslim-majority province which was partitioned during the first Indo-Pakistani war in 1948, and has since been a bone of contention between the two South Asian neighbours. New Delhi has not been successful in dousing the separatist fires in Kashmir, where some militant groups are

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Fat salary appointments

Sir, There was an interesting letter in your newspaper of 28th August, on NGOs. If any one joins an appointment with a fat salary in any United Nations agencies like UNDP, FAO or any other international or multinational organization or for that matter an NGO, the hearts of many of us would burn. The authorities interview the candidates, evaluate them and then appoint. They do not pay just for the chubby beautiful face and immaculate dress. They pay for quality of work and the mettle inside. Let us think of the spiritual side of it. The "rizq" (sustenance) is entirely in the Hands of Allah and "He gives in abundance to him whom He so desires" (Holy Quran). We have seen many instances where very highly qualified persons fail to earn more money than what an ordinary matriculate earns. It is the sheer blessings of Allah which no one can claim as a matter of right. To talk of heart burning in such cases is not only the pettiness of mind but a grave sin. We should shun it, seek His blessings and forgiveness.

The writer appears to discourage inflow of Foreign aid

because, he thinks we cannot absorb "such input within the stipulated period." What are our own contributions to help the country in this regard? We should devote more time to our vocation and work constructively to help the country. It we are not working let our brain remain idle and be a devil's workshop. It is for the government to work on how best it can utilize time and money. Mere criticizing is, not enough if it is not a constructive one.

A. Moulta
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Citizenship

Sir, Father R.W. Timm is a familiar name to many among us. Father Timm is prominent as a teacher, social worker, NGO expert, etc. This highly qualified American gentleman has been living in Bangladesh for the last several years and rendering valuable services toward our socio-economic development. He is also associated with the Commission for Peace and Justice, Bangladesh. In recognition to his social service, Father Timm was awarded the prestigious International Magsaysay Award in 1987.

Father Timm loves Bangladesh and its people. He decided to live here permanently. And he applied for Bangladeshi citizenship. But the previous government did not settle his case, assumably because Father Timm along with his colleagues in the Commission for Peace and Justice revealed the news of mass rigging in some of the elections held during the autocratic regime. However before the holding of the last election, Father Timm received assurances from both the major political fronts that they would favourably consider the case of the citizenship

after the formation of a new government. I sincerely hope that the new government would consider citizenship to Father Timm which may allow him to work more for the welfare of the people.

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Industries in Rangpur

Sir, Rangpur is one of the most important northern districts. But it has not been developed industrially. Due to repeated floods, river erosion and drought the agricultural production of the district has gone down. The people are gradually becoming landless and poor. These people could be absorbed in industrial units. But unfortunately no industrial unit other than one sugar mill at Shyamgar has been established. Rangpur produces jute, sugarcane, potatoes etc. in abundance. The previous govt. promised to establish a paper mill, using jute cuttings jute using as raw materials in Rangpur and a sugar mill somewhere in Nilphamari district to create employment opportunity for the jobless youths.

But after the fall of the govt. which did not materialise the programmes, we do not hear anything now about the fate of the programme. We would request the present government to go ahead with above industrialisation programme to create employment opportunity for the poor in the northern districts.

Mahbubul Haque Choudhury,
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