

Stoppages that must stop

Nation-sized work stoppages affect the whole nation — that shouldn't have been more than a dull tautology. In point of fact, these are far more than that. There are at least two opposing parties to such actions designed to promote sectarian interest. While one party stops work and the other makes of it a war of attrition — or just sits the stoppage out — both forget completely about one thing — the nation. No, not with a capital 'N' but each and all of the 110-and-odd million people — suffering, as Tolstoy had said, each in his or her own unmatched way, because of the stoppages.

There seems to be a complete lack of understanding of the main issue at stake in national stoppages of the kind of the recent transport or the teachers' strikes or the one now being threatened by the primary teachers. The stake is far more than the government's exhibition of how much it can ignore and withstand and the striking party's bravado in pressing the government until it yields. The two parties work in unison to sap the nation out of all its vitality — perhaps strangulate wouldn't have been an inept description either — and neither seems to care. How could otherwise all movement in the nation be made to stand still for five long days — and schools and colleges for more than a month specially at a time when examination were scheduled? This is unfit to be called a civilised way of running a society or even allowing it some furlough, if these can be taken for such.

And why should such fits of sheer madness — mindlessly cruel to boot — visit the nation every now and then — and at times one on top of another? These stoppages tend to stretch into unknown number of days and months. The nation which is held a hostage in such occasions has the right to know what comes of its suffering. But it doesn't if only because no one cares for its rights. And it may quite well be that the press doesn't know about it either for otherwise things would have leaked to public knowledge. It is a fair guess that the parties at war do not know anything of the outcome. The only sure thing to come out is the cessation of the stoppage. But that is seeing the problem too superficially. Be it the teachers or be it the transport or textile workers or other collectively employed people — when they go back to work, they do not — they cannot go back even to the poor amount of work ethic that was there when they stopped at their job. The teachers, in spite of so many gains by their action as touted by their leaders, do not become either better or sincere teachers — patently because teaching has in the meantime become very secondary to action aimed at furthering more mundane and tangible ends. And as for the bus people, they would continue to kill people and degrade and dehumanise the insides of sardine packed busses — with renewed vengeance for they too have been given to understand that they had won — bullying had won.

And in both the cases — perhaps in all such cases — government certainly made concessions it can hardly keep and such that it could give on the very first or second night of the encounter. It never was a hard job to pull that off — because there are more than semantic problems involved in what the two parties take for as being consecrated by — well, we don't know what these are — a contract or an MOU or some new way out of impasses that threaten all the time to leave no escape route except ignominious and dishonourable ones.

As things are, the government's understanding of the settlement will prevail and workers would again resort to stoppage thinking that they have been cheated. At least that will be what the workers will be told.

This is the moral that comes out of the press reports on the culmination of both the teachers' and transport operators' strike. And this must be undone if the nation has to live.

Feast of Cricket

Another cricket extravaganza got underway at the other end of the world — from where we stand, it certainly is the other end — Saturday morning last. The fifth World Cricket Cup, with nine teams and 39 matches is the biggest in the competition's 17-year history, and it also promises to be a tense affair with more nail-biting finishes in prospect than ever before. Mouths are already watering at the prospect of some tough competition where the form book may count for nothing and the stability of world cricket order may get seriously threatened.

For cricket puritans, any One-Day or Limited-Over game is an anathema, as it goes against the grain of everything cricket is all about. After all, cricket is supposed to be played over two innings and five days. The occasion, including the dressing-up, the leisurely lunch and tea, and the finer points of technique and individual skills and post-match camaraderie always mattered more than the end result. Those days, alas, are long gone. Now, the thoroughly professionalised game is evaluated by results and financial fall-outs (or the lack of it, as the case may be).

The world cup, with its crash-bang-wallop variety of One-Day cricket, provides the kind of instant and nerve-racking entertainment loved by sports enthusiasts across the cricketing world. Little wonder then, that this competition has emerged with a level of international appeal that is surpassed only by the old favourites, the Football World Cup and the Olympic Games.

Unfortunately in Bangladesh, we are still left to cheer somebody else's team. Our failure to make much of an impression on even the One-day scene — let alone the Test arena — means that this cricket-crazy nation is deprived of that one supreme joy — that of watching its own boys go out and take on the best in the world in the greatest single cricketing event. In the past, hopes had flickered here and there that Bangladesh might just make it, but only to see Zimbabwe stroll past us.

The live telecast of 23 matches this time will undoubtedly generate even greater interest in the game than exists at present. The question that will have to be answered is this: will the ministry of sports, the cricket authorities and the business community follow that up with the kind of facilities and funding necessary to build the game up from school-level upwards?

PAKISTAN'S most powerful politician, a former lieutenant of Mr Z A Bhutto, a former Governor of Punjab and one of the most powerful men of the time, is again in the news.

For several years after Bhutto's fall Mr Ghulam Mustafa Khar was living in self-exile in London but suddenly came into limelight because of one of his ex-wives' very private (and also daring) revelations. Ms Tehmina Durrani, the ex-wife and now a (seemingly dissatisfied member of the Pakistan Muslim League IS THE daughter of Mr Shakrullah Durrani, a former Governor of the State Bank of Pakistan and Managing Director of PIA and the Investment Corporation of Pakistan (just when Bangladesh was formed).

Early this year Ms Durrani published a book, My Feudal Lord, in which she narrated her few years as the wife of Mr Khar. The book created a sensation for its utter frankness and uninhibited discussion of the couple's marital relations and certain comments about Mr Khar, not all of them confirmed of course.

Tehmina said how she fell in love with the swank, young and rich Bhutto aide, how they got married, produced several children in quick succession, the role she played during her husband's incarceration. She even commented on their sex life, hinting at her husband's highly-developed libido as depicted by his desire to make love to her during a meeting in jail, and finally of her disillusionment when Khar started neglecting her for her younger sister.

However the sensation created by the book died as suddenly as it had begun. Rumours began circulating that Tehmina was not the real author of My Feudal Lord but it

FOCUS ON PAKISTAN

Khar is Back in News, this Time with an International Scandal

was ghost-written for her by the intelligence agencies to supposedly expose Mr Khar who, the authorities thought, could be a threat to the IJI Governments in the province as well as at the Centre.

The imbroglion now Mustafa Khar finds himself in is of a different kind, more legal and political, than personal, in nature. This time it is not a story of feudalistic escapades but a real cloak and dagger story with international ramifications. The story broke after officials of India's Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) came to Lahore and interrogated the one-time Governor of Punjab, obviously with the consent of the Pakistan Government and reportedly at the request of the Interpol.

The questioning was about Mr Khar's visit to India in September last year and his alleged secret liaison with an Indian businessman named Ravi Chaudhury. It is said that after the Ravi-Khar meetings in New Delhi, four big diamond merchants of India were kidnapped. They were released (or escaped?) after two weeks, but not before they had collectively paid Rs 60 crores as ransom to the kidnappers, said to be Ravi Chaudhury and his men. The families have, of course, denied the payment, presumably out of fear of the Income tax department. But the fact the families could pay the large sum cannot be in doubt because all those

M J Zahedi writes from Karachi

'kidnapped' were at the top of their profession. One of them is said to have spent only two years ago RS 60 crore on his wedding, the five thousand individually hand-painted invitation cards (no two cards were said to be similar) alone costing Rs 5 crore.



Ghulam Mustafa Khar

circles in Bombay and Delhi as well as certain diplomatic sources in Islamabad have described this case to be one of the largest scandals of the century. More big names (it is not clear from which country) as well as other foreign investigating agencies are said to be involved. Ravi Chaudhury, the lead character, is said to be a Pakistani (though the name suggests otherwise) who had

migrated to the USA many years ago. He came to New Delhi in August last year posing as the representative of a reputable American diamond house. He stayed at Oberoi and wrote to leading diamond merchants about promoting their trade in the international market. He also rented an office in a posh locality of the



Ms. Tahmina Durrani

capital on payment of three years advance rent of Rs 14 lakh 40 thousand.

Mustafa Khar enters the play here. He arrived in new Delhi, accompanied by wife Ayesha, a brother and a PPP MNA and his wife. They also booked in at the Oberoi, and were given rooms right across Mr Ravi Chaudhury's. The Khar's ostensible purpose of going to India was to visit

Ajmer Sharif and, according to him, the visit had the blessings of President Ghulam Ishaq Khan.

It has been said the Khar and Ravi Chaudhury met at the hotel and became so close friends that when Khar and party went to Ajmer they left their luggage in Chaudhury's room. But it has also been said that he two had known each other from Khar's London days. One report also said that although bus tickets were bought for the party to go to Ajmer, Khar did not really go out of Delhi and for those few days stayed in hiding in either Hotel Marina in Connaught Place or Hotel Surya Sofitel, under an assumed name. On September 8 the Khar's came back to Pakistan. The diamond merchants started disappearing from September 15.

The suspected Khar's link with the incidents because of a phone call that Chaudhury had made for the hotel to a non-Pakistani bank in Karachi through which, it is said, the ransom money was transferred to a bank in Singapore.

Where Khar fits in this jigsaw puzzle, perhaps only the parties involved or the investigating agencies know. There has been no statement from either of the two governments. There has only been an unsubstantiated report in the daily Frontier Post (published from Lahore) that then Pakistan Federal Investigation Agency

(FIA) deliberated at a recent meeting to arrest Mr Khar for formal questioning. The Lahore FIA was said to have in its possession of an audio cassette containing conversation between Mr Khar and Mr Chaudhury 'who is involved in terrorism and espionage in Pakistan.' But so far nothing has happened.

Only Khar and his former consort, have exchanged angry Press statements. Ms Tehmina minced no words in saying that her former husband was an Indian agent and the New Delhi Government conspired with him to smuggle a large quantity of arms and ammunition to Pakistan 'to weaken then Pakistan Army.' She had made the same allegation in her book also.

Khar has threatened Tehmina that if she continued maligning him, he would expose her real person. The Ravi Chaudhury case he described as a disinformation campaign against him 'by spending official secret funds.' He wanted the present Chief of Army staff or a retired General to hold an enquiry into the affair. He thought this was an attempt to divert the people's attention from the various scandals the Nawaz Sharif and the provincial governments, particularly Punjab and Sindh, like the co-operation scam, general lawlessness, dacoities, large-scale corruption and the Veena Hayat case.

But does the government really need diversions to sidetrack the people? Haven't the people become immune to such infractions? As it is, public memory is proverbially short. And by delaying the whole process of investigation the authorities only help people forget the old scandals and move on to new pastures.

Ghanaians Want Change after a Decade of Rawlings

TEN years ago, on December 31, 1981, a young retired air force officer, Flt. Lt. Jerry John Rawlings changed the course of history for his country when he led a group of soldiers to overthrow the then constitutional government.

Rawlings made his first appearance on the Ghanaian political scene in June 1979. As the leader of a group of junior officers and other ranks, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council, which overthrew another military junta, the Supreme Military Council, he supervised the return to constitutional rule in September 1979.

He showed an indication of his desire to come back when he warned that the new regime, headed by Hilla Limann, was on probation. The period of probation lasted only 27 months.

Rawlings' 10 years in office make him the longest serving head of state in the history of this West African Republic which was awarded its independence in 1957.

Surviving this long has been no easy task. There have been several abortive coups d'etat, at least a dozen during the Rawlings decade.

His opponents say he survived all these attempts by passing several oppressive laws which allow the government to detain opponents without trial. Another law has suspended Habeas Corpus.

The government has also imposed tight controls on the state-owned media. A newspaper licensing law passed in 1989 ensures that the privately-owned press keeps down its criticisms.

A special report issued by the London-based Amnesty International accused the Rawlings regime of violating human rights in the last 10 years.

Amnesty says the Ghana government has over 100

Kabral Blay-Amihere writes from Accra

Jerry John Rawlings, who has dominated Ghanaian politics since 1979, has completed 10 years in office, making him the longest serving head of state in his country's history. Surviving this long has not been easy. Six abortive coups and abuse of human rights have marred his decade in power. However, citing his economic achievements, Rawlings says he is the best thing that happened to the West African republic since independence in 1957.



JERRY JOHN RAWLINGS
A decade of mixed record

political activists in detention, a charge Interior Minister Nana Akuoku Sarpong denies as vile propaganda.

The ruling PNDC says it is the best thing that ever happened to Ghana, citing its achievements in the economic field as most outstanding.

Indeed, both the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, as well as many Western countries, have hailed Ghana's performance as a success story and recommended Ghana as a model for other Third World countries.

In 1983, the PNDC, under the pressure of a severe drought and shortage of essential commodities in the country — aggravated by the deportation of over half a million Ghanaians from Nigeria — abandoned its leftist rhetoric

and adopted an IMF-backed structural adjustment programme.

The U-turn seem to have worked a miracle for the Ghanaian economy. Today almost every commodity is displayed in the once-empty supermarkets.

Major roads have been built, industries such as gold mining have been rehabilitated and electricity extended to many parts of the country. The government has an ambitious plan to extend electricity to all parts of Ghana by the end of 1992.

Finance Minister Kwesi Botchwey always quotes the country's annual growth rate of 5 per cent and a reduction of inflation — from a 1983 rate of 113 per cent to about 12 per cent — as his biggest achievements. The successful clearance of more than \$600 million of external debt and payment of all short-term loans are the government's other important achievements.

But critics say the high international acclaim of the PNDC's economic policies do not reflect in the lives of the people.

Says Akoto Ampaw, of the Movement for Freedom and Justice, one of the groups critical of the PNDC: 'The PNDC's policies may look great in the books but it is harsh for the people.'

The low salaries of workers and the high cost of living confirms this view. The average Ghanaian worker earns just about \$50 a month.

Says one worker: 'We are still alive because we have all

become magicians.' The so-called magic of Ghanaians, according to sociologists is nothing but the widespread corruption that enables underpaid workers to survive.

Local industrialists are not too happy with the government's liberalisation policy which has flooded the markets with all kinds of imported goods that sell at cheaper prices.

Where the government is criticised most is its political programme. Rawlings says party politics is bad and banned all parties when he came to power in 1981. He set up in their place Cuban-style committees for the defence of the revolution and non-party-based district assemblies.

Rawlings also set up public tribunals because he believed poor people could not get true justice and a fair trial at the traditional courts.

But the tribunals and district assemblies have been condemned as rubber-stamp institutions for the government. Nana Addo-Aikins, Chairman for the Appeals Board of the Public Tribunals defends them as bastions for freedom and justice.

Critics also faulted the regime for marginalising many Ghanaians from the political process, but after years of resisting demands for a return to constitutional rule, the Rawlings regime has agreed to return Ghana to constitutional rule by December 1992.

A 258-member Consultative Assembly to draw a new con-

stitution has already been established.

But while they await the outcome of the work of the

Consultative Assembly, Ghanaians of all walks of life are assessing what the Rawlings decade has done to their lives.

Says one political observer: 'It was not the best of times, neither was it the worst of times, but we could do with a change.' Most Ghanaians hope 1992 will be the year of change. — GEMINI NEWS

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OPINION

Dignitaries and Traffic

The traffic department and for that matter the police department, responsible for controlling the traffic, is not a success story in Bangladesh. The citizens, at the mercy of the traffic department have resigned themselves more or less, to accepting the situation. But what the ordinary, law abiding citizen finds very difficult to either understand or accept, is the total lack of common civic sense of the police departments and the total disregard to the convenience or inconvenience of the public.

It is a common courtesy in all parts of the world, to show respect to visiting dignitaries by escorting him/her around a city or town with police. But perhaps nowhere in the world is the public more inconvenienced by a visiting dignitary than in this country. The police, at the blow of a whistle, will happily stop the traffic for an hour at a main intersection of the city — being totally oblivious of the utter and absolute disastrous traffic consequences. It is not only that the traffic is stopped for an indefinite period because the dignitary will be passing that way but the horrendous traffic

jam that builds up as a result, seems to be none of the traffic police's business. Because he is promptly up and away as soon as the dignitary has passed, leaving the traffic to sort itself out for hours on end. It is not only the honourable dignitary for whom the traffic is stopped, it is also halted to let the 100 odd cars accompanying him, pass 'smoothly'. Surely they are not all dignitaries?

We are not advising the police not to stop or halt traffic along the route the dignitary will take, all we would like to request the relevant traffic department and the police concerned, is that they put a small notice in the newspapers, informing the public that the road will be shut to the general public for such and such period. And make an announcement the day before on television and radio, advising the public of their plan. It will save the public so much hassle and bother. Surely the tax-payer has this right? So, wake up, traffic department.

P. Haque
Dhaka

To the Editor...

PM's declaration on salary

Sir, Reports published in national dailies show that the salary and privileges of the Prime Minister have been raised along with that of the President, Speaker, Deputy Speaker and Ministers. The Prime Minister, however, had declared earlier that she would not take salary and that would be donated to various educational and other institutions and in fact reports appeared that her salary was donated to some such educational institutions. Since the necessity of enhancing the salary structure has been examined by a special parliamentary committee to meet the growing disparity in view of rise of living expenses there is little to object to that. When there was a general demand for revision of salary and privileges, the case of Prime Minister could not be singled out from consideration in view of her earlier decision. If the Prime Minister chooses to keep her earlier decision in tact, even in that case also the revision of salary and privileges is a must, for such salary and privileges are very much attached to the post and not person.

To my mind a fresh announcement from her side is necessary if she holds the said decision even after the revision. If the decision still holds good, the increased salary will go to the greater benefit of the suffering institutions. People would very much like to be apprised of that.

Siddique Ahmed Khan
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Crime: As I see it!

Sir, Since time immemorial, one question has vexed the humanity: How can crimes (and this includes every illegal activity from spitting on the pavement to cold-blooded murder) be controlled, discouraged and eventually completely eradicated. Laws, penal codes, jails, police armed forces, Amnesties, torture, bribes, violence etc. etc. have all been tried all over the world from time to time with little effect and like weeds in all ill-kept gardens crimes continue to thrive and flourish.

I believe, I have the perfect answer to this perennial problem. The basis defect in our thinking is to treat crimes as illegal and forbid them. This has precisely the same effect

as that of the little boy, forbidden to smoke, going into a shed with his *bidai* at the first opportunity. One cannot, after all, change human nature and showing 2 fingers to authority is embedded in our genes! The answer is ridiculously simple. Let us, in rapid succession legitimise, then institutionalise and finally nationalise crimes! The object being — you can commit any crime, provided you obtain permission beforehand from the Controlling Authority say, Bangladesh Eradication of Crimes and Restoration of Sanity Corporation — BECARS Corpn for short.

In spite of all safeguards, possibly some conscientious incompetent might actually approve some applications and some crimes may actually be committed. This should not discourage us in the least. BECARS will simply divide Bangladesh into, say, 14,000 zones of 4 sq. miles each and in each, would appoint one person to confess admit to all crimes to be committed in his/her (BECARS will be an equal opportunity employer) zone at any time. BINGO, all crimes solved 100%, which should get us to the Guinness Book of Records' and make our

Police Force redundant. Readers should not think this unjust, unconstitutional or an infringement of one's human rights. There is already an age-old precedent very similar to this. Persons more knowledgeable and experienced in such matters than me are invited to add flesh and blood to this skeleton of mine.

S Sikander Ahmed
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Rohingya problem needs immediate solution

Sir, The Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh is a man made problem a result of the genocidal policy of the Burmese government toward Muslims who were being forcibly evicted from their homes where they have been living for centuries. The situation arising out of the Burmese action poses a serious threat to the peace and security of the region. The refugees, who are now in the most woeful and pitiable condition, have bitterly complained of inhuman treatment and atrocities perpetrated on them in their native land.

The Burmese junta and its hand-in-glove Magh commu-

nity together vacating the whole Arakan of Muslim to turn it into a pure Magh Buddhist area. Some of the Magh literature states, that there were only 2% Muslim living in Arakan. It is learnt that they never admit to recognise the Muslims as ethnic Rohingya even against that incredible 2%. Maghs are at double edge in genocidal design as only they are administrators in Arakan. Muslims are neither in administration nor in defence, although, indeed there are two major communities — Rohingyas and Maghs — living for centuries in Arakan. It is, thus, the Rohingyas are firstly the victim of Maghs and secondly of the ruling junta. We wonder, how Maghs were being infused abhorrent design against the Muslims by Burmans so that the two communities could never unite against the Burmese junta rule. The Rohingyas appear helplessly against the misguided Maghs of Arakan and Burmans who jointly conspire to depopulate Arakan of Muslims. The Rohingyas are thus discriminated, persecuted in all spheres of life, nay, they were treated as worse than slaves.

According to recent reports, the local Maghs are be-

ing armed by the military rulers to implement their Muslim expulsion plan by any means. Newly more than 620 village had been destroyed, and the unfortunate Muslims have nothing left to keep their existence.

It is, so, not a case of only discrimination and persecution but a great genocidal act and a human problem of international concern. Exodus of refugees will not end until a permanent solution and international safeguard for Rohingyas is reached. The problems is not at all similar to those of other indigenous national groups of Burma, fighting against their central government. They have no ethnicity, entity and racial questions with Burmese government. For Rohingyas, who are treated just as nomads, it is a question of ethnicity and existence. A solution, and repatriation, must be based on resolving the fundamental issues.

And the requirement for the solution must be met soon, once and for all, so that these unprotected human beings are ensure safe existence with their entity and honour in their own homeland.

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