

## Streamlining the Railway

Like sick industries, the sick railway has also remained a constant headache for successive governments over the last two decades. The causes of the chronic losses have also remained mostly intractable. Or, where they have been precisely identified, not enough remedial measures could either be evolved or implemented. Consequently, problems, instead of being solved, have mounted over the years. It is precisely such a desperate situation that has compelled the ministry concerned to go for some radical moves to bring the house in order. That it is contemplating to offer to some 16,000 railway employees the option to go on voluntary retirement is as novel as pragmatic — maybe not much to the liking of those facing the not so happy a prospect.

Yet it is the best bet — considering the obtaining messy condition in railway — that they could hope for. That they have been offered to enjoy all allowable benefits according to service rules shows that the offer is reasonable enough for the employees to accept it without demur. But it is also indicative of yet another vital point. The point is that the sector is much too overstuffed and it has spent quite a sum on a largely superfluous staff strength — and that also for much too long. It will now be interesting to see how the plan contemplated by the government is going to be implemented — whether smoothly or the move is going to face any stiff resistance from the railway employees in general.

About the merit of the move, however, there is no doubt and neither has the government any other option that could help avoid the inevitable. To streamline a losing concern like the railway, this should be considered a very good beginning. But surely, there are other pressing problems that demand to be treated equally seriously. Statistics show the railway was not always so sick. Nor were there any serious attempt to come out of the morass. The fact that the railway made profit last time in 1969-70 cannot be explained rationally. The revenue — whether it is per passenger per kilometre or per tonne per kilometre — has kept on shooting up during the eighties and over the past couple of years without bringing in any corresponding gains in railway sector as a whole. Surprisingly, even the distance travelled by the average passenger has also been shown to have increased.

All this gives an insight into the inner working mechanism of the department. Accepting that the volume of passengers has increased, one must all the same like to know at what rate and its share to the total flow of travellers by all travelling modes included in the country. We apprehend things will not quite look rosy for the railway if compared with other travelling means like buses. And here is an intriguing question relating to the loss issue. Invariably, a bus commercially run on road ends up adding a few more to make a fleet within years on its profits. How come it that the railway have to look for excuses such as high prices of diesel and other materials for the continued losses?

The problem, in fact, lies within the railway itself. The overhead cost coupled with a large-scale mismanagement and corruption has rendered the sector completely unviable. It is sad to see that the railway, instead of getting expanded, is forced to get shrunk. But it could be a completely different story if the authorities managed to address themselves to the problems and rise up to the challenges. Reduction of surplus employees will give it a major shake-up no doubt. But to make it a really profit-making concern, many more will be required.

## CIA is at it Again

The United States has become the only superpower in the world. But have the Americans become aware of the responsibility that goes with that power? It is once again playing the dirty tricks that it did during the height of the Cold War days. March 15th issue of Sunday Telegraph quotes unidentified CIA sources to report that the Agency is flooding Iraq with fake dinars to make the Iraqi economy collapse. It is being done with the help of agents and unsuspecting traders through Jordan, Iran and Turkey.

It is not clear whether Iraq's neighbours are willing partners in this scheme or unwitting accomplices. Now that the report is out the least they can do is to have the issue investigated and, if found to be true, stop its occurrence from their territories. The Iraqi government is reportedly aware of the move and is contemplating demonitising its currency and printing new notes. This step is not likely to make the Iraqi economy impervious to further sabotage by CIA because the Agency can forge any new currency notes that the Iraqis are likely to introduce.

This move by the Americans to bring Saddam down is a sign of how desperate the Bush administration has become to show a 'victory' abroad as a campaign strategy to counter its lacklustre performance at home. But doesn't the American Administration realise what a dangerous game it is. The first thing to consider is that more than one can play this game. If the Iraqis could have gone as far as they did in making a nuclear bomb under the very nose of western surveillance, they can also start their own currency printing game and create havoc in the international market with forged dollars. What happens if Iraq retaliates with a similar move against the currencies of its neighbours? Then again what about the demonstrative impact of such an example on other countries locked in rivalry?

Then again the US government must realise that by destroying the value of the Iraqi currency it will only increase the misery of the common people. It will be the poor, the lower income groups and the middle class who will suffer while the high officials, the military and the coterie that supports Saddam will perhaps never be touched.

Therefore the CIA action is not only likely to be ineffective against those it is intended for, it is also a highly irresponsible move with the possibility of very dangerous consequences for the regional and global economy. The US administration must not let its anti-Saddam hatred get the better of its thinking and end up doing things that are just as illegal as anything Saddam may have done. If the US sets the example of "anything goes" to get at an adversary, then consider the devastating impact on global affairs when regional powers and small time dictators will begin to follow suit. The US must learn to use its new found supremacy more judiciously.

**P**AKISTAN and India have fought three wars on Kashmir and just a few days ago, a possible fourth war was averted. If the Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) had gone ahead with its declared intention to cross the Line of Control (LoC) in the disputed territory of Kashmir, in all probability, the result would have been a conflagration not between only the fully-armed regular military forces of India and the unarmed volunteers of the JKLF. The regular forces of Pakistan too would have become involved in the war. And the consequences could have been far more devastating than the earlier conflicts.

The result, however, would, in all probability, had been as inconclusive as that of the earlier ones. It would not merely be a war between India and Pakistan on Kashmir. It would be something more than that. The Kashmir issue is no longer a problem with regard to a piece of territory. Over the years it has become a pathological syndrome, bleating all sectors of bilateralism between the two neighbours. Not only that. Even the United Nations has failed to resolve the dispute in all these 45 years. Two wars were fought after the UN was able to effect a ceasefire in 1949.

The dispute has a historical background, dating back to 1846 when the British imperialists and the Hindu Dogras struck a deal known as the Deed of Mortgage executed at Amritsar. Jammu and Kashmir belonged to the Sikh Government of the then Punjab. They were defeated by the British as a result of a conspiracy hatched by some Generals and others just as had happened to Nawab Sirajuddowlah. General Gulab Singh paid a ransom of Rs 70 lakhs and got the territories. The Kashmiris did not have an opportunity to decide their own fate; others did it for them.

The same thing happened in 1947 when the sub-continent was partitioned. Then the British and the Dogras, represented then by Maharaja Hari Singh, cheated them as did Gulab Singh a century earlier.

## FOCUS ON PAKISTAN

# An Independent Kashmir Gains More Support from Experts

M J Zahedi writes from Karachi

**Analysts now suggest that even Jinnah did not rule out the option of an independent Kashmir. .. Now, Nawaz Sharif cannot put any restriction on Kashmiri people's own aspirations behind their demand for self-determination.**

This time the catalyst was the Indian National Congress and it was aided by Lord Mountbatten. That Mountbatten, a great friend of Pandit Nehru, had cajoled and unethically got some of the boundary awards changed to India's advantage has recently been revealed by Christopher Beaumont who was Secretary to Sir Cyril Radcliffe, the man who drew the boundary lines between the two countries. A recent book, "Kashmir: A Disputed Legacy 1846-1990" by Alastair Lamb has disclosed the steps Lord Mountbatten had already taken for the accession of Kashmir to India, even before Sir Cyril had started his work of demarcating the boundaries.

Thus the Kashmir dispute is clearly the end-product of a process based on conspiracy and aggression, for which the issue could never be solved until now. The result has been not only three wars between two close, almost inter-dependent, neighbours. It has marred relations between them almost beyond repair, the norms of bilateralism have been brutalised and the economy of both countries have irreparably suffered, resulting in misery and sufferings for the peoples of the two countries.

The current phase of the struggle by the Kashmiris against the occupation of their territory by India began about three years ago, on August 14, 1989. It is purely an indigenous movement, with just moral and diplomatic support among the Muslim countries of the world. For the first time in

45 years, the Kashmiris, men and women, old and young, have been fiercely engaged in an unequal armed struggle against a regular and paramilitary force of nearly half a million. Pakistan has been giving all the moral and diplomatic support it can without endangering its own security. The nationwide strike on February 5 at the call of the Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was an expression of the people's solid support to the Kashmiri people who this time have been the victims of possibly the worst oppression, torture and inhumanity by the Indian forces, including gang rapes of women.

The problem is that not only an amicable settlement of the problem is not in sight, the two countries are unable even to start negotiations in earnest. Now, in Pakistan, a new element has been added to the problem by a debate on what options the people of Kashmir have. The debate has arisen from Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's reported statement in Tehran stating that the right of self-determination for the Kashmiri people included the right to opt for an independent state.

But the Prime Minister's statement was subjected to immediate and strident criticism from the right to whom merely saying that Kashmir can be independent is akin to committing a sacrilege. Soon after the Prime Minister's statement, the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Siddique Kanju and the Secretary General of the Ministry rushed to debrief the

national as well as the international community; both said that Pakistan was not for an independent Kashmir and the Prime Minister was misquoted on the subject. Azad Kashmir's President Sardar Abdul Qayyum too has expressed himself against the "third option".

It is difficult to understand why it is so, why Pakistan is against the idea of Kashmir becoming independent but can only decide to accede to either India or Pakistan. The UN resolutions do not forbid them from doing so. Granting that the UN resolutions are not specific on this point, what should be realised that the situation in Kashmir today is not the same as it was 43 years ago when the resolutions were first adopted. Secondly, the position that exercising the right of self-determination does not exclude the people of Kashmir from choosing an option other than accession to either Pakistan or India is not contradictory to the UN resolutions. Rather the two positions are complementary.

It is being pointed out that even Mr Jinnah did not say that this option was not there. A statement issued by him on June 17, 1947, has been quoted by an analyst, in which Jinnah had said: "Constitutionally and legally, the Indian states will be independent sovereign states on the termination of paramountcy and they will be free to decide for themselves any course they like. It is open to them to join the Hindustan constituent assembly or decide

to remain independent." The Indian states Mr Jinnah referred to surely included the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

The matter is rather touchy at the moment and it may take a long time for it to gain strength. But the Prime Minister's view, though denied now, merits serious consideration in the context of the present situation in the Indian-occupied Kashmir. Nawaz Sharif, wittingly or otherwise, has dropped the hint to the international community that Pakistan's position in this respect was not absolutely inflexible. While internationally exposing India's violation of human rights in Kashmir, he cannot surely put any restriction on the Kashmiri people's own aspirations behind their demand for self-determination.

As for India, she must now realise, particularly in view of the nature and scale of the present uprising in the occupied territory, that the present position cannot hold for too long. Pakistan does not covet the territory of Kashmir now under Indian occupation. Once the Kashmiris are allowed to exercise their right of self-determination and if their decision is other than the one expected, the three can surely work out the modalities of relationship among them.

## Nightmare at Moscow's Food Shops

Popular discontent greeted the first week of price liberalisation in the formerly centrally planned Russian economy as huge price rises jolted Russians living on meagre rouble incomes. Judi Buehrer and Yuri Senatorov report from Moscow



"It's a nightmare come true," gasped an elderly pensioner as she eyed the "premium" sausages priced at 500 roubles per kilo at Moscow's state-run Yelisevsky Gastronom on Tverskaya Ulitsa, where prices rose to unbelievable heights last week.

"How can we live? My pension is only 350 roubles," said Maria Petrova angrily. "We have driven one skunk out, but the other is left."

The "skunks" in question are former Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev and Russian Federation President Boris Yeltsin, whose price liberalisation policies have been a jolt to Russians trying to survive on meagre rouble incomes.

Yeltsin lifted state-imposed prices as the decisive step towards creating a market economy on Jan. Prices increased scarcely at all many stores the first few days. Then they suddenly rose at alarming rates: beer from 1.55 to eight roubles a bottle, ginger-bread cookies from 30 kopecks to 2.88 roubles, butter from 132 to 240 roubles per kilo, potatoes from 15 to 50 roubles per kilo, tomatoes from 60 to 150 roubles per kilo and Marlboro cigarettes from 25 to 100 roubles a pack.

Though some products — fruit juice, chicken, milk and eggs — could be found at prices equal or close to pre-liberalisation levels, the price of services have increased. Hair salons are charging 115 roubles for women's haircuts that previously cost 45 roubles. And at hard-hit Aeroflot, the state-owned airline company, tickets for domestic flights doubled and international flights increased by five times.

Bustling crowds packed Yelisevsky's sausage counters to survey the five different varieties of sausage on sale (just one type had been available the previous week). Several shoppers seemed stunned by the prices. A few laughed cynically, as if someone had played a ruse joke.

Nicholas, a 43-year-old "speculator in vodka," said he anticipated sausage selling for 170 roubles per kilo, but never imagined it reaching 500. He said he had enough supply of sausages at home and did not plan to buy more, "especially at these prices."

He had made several trips the previous autumn to villages 400 kms from Moscow to buy cheaper food, such as meat for 20 roubles per kilo.

"But you cannot do it anymore," he said. "The authorities turn away drivers of cars with Moscow licence plates."

Nicholas said he had bought enough food to last his family of five "for two or three months". Eying the busy state-run Gastronom, its marble pillars and graceful sculptures etched in gold leaf, he mused: "Only rich people can buy in these shops now."

But a long line snaked from the cashier's booths through the store, where the previous week's sparse counters were now brimming with cheese, butter, instant coffee, wine and vodka, frozen potato patties, fish, hotdogs, chicken cutlets, beef and pre-cooked dinners — the list went on. There were twice as many products as there were on Jan. 2, when price controls were lifted.

Ludmila, a Russian who earns hard currency as an interpreter for a French firm, said: "I can manage all right, but I cannot imagine what will happen to those who do not earn hard currency. They cannot afford to live at these prices."

Henrich, 76, a pensioner who receives 340 roubles a month, is at the other end of the wage spectrum. He and his wife seldom go to the big stores. But he came that day to trade a jar of imported instant coffee and a jar of homemade mayonnaise for potatoes. With a wry smile and little conviction, he said "perhaps prices will dip down again and stabilise."

Not everyone is critical of the new economic policies, however. At a state store on Rozhdestvensky Bulvar, Dmitri, a 45-year-old factory worker, said "all shops must be privatised, we must have free prices and private shops."

He said he hoped his factory would be privatised soon, though he noted there was no mechanism in place yet.

Dmitri recalled that when he was a child the shops had a lot of food though his mother couldn't afford to buy much. "You can see that I didn't die," he said with a grin.

Leaving the Yelisevsky with her purchases — 200 grams of salty cheese — the unsmiling white-haired, fur-hatted Maria Petrova blamed Gorbachev, Yeltsin and Moscow Mayor Gavril Popov for giving in to Western pressure to introduce measures that will "destroy the Russian people."

Inside the store, another elderly babushka decided journalists: "My pension is 340 roubles a month. Look at the prices. What can I buy?"

"I was here defending this building in 1941 during the war. Now they're all democrats and bureaucrats — why did we defend them?" — IPS

## Lest We Forget

# A Versatile Personage

by Obaidul Huq

**The author, former editor of The Bangladesh Observer, and himself a renowned journalist, pays tribute to one of the outstanding figures in our literary, political and journalistic fields — Mr Abul Mansur Ahmad — whose 13th death anniversary is being observed today.**

**T**HIS country produced a good number of distinguished persons who have given unerring evidence of their talents in any one of the learned professions. But not many are known to have made their mark in more than one field of life. Late Mr Abul Mansur Ahmad can at once be identified as one of those who did. He earned such distinction during the eightieth meaningful years of his life (1898-1979). He was by turn a journalist, a legal practitioner, a political figure, and always a powerful writer.

He obtained the degree of law in 1929, but instead of joining the bar, he opted for journalism and was associated with the Soltan, Mohammadi, The Mussalman (English), Khadem, Daily Krishak, Daily Navajuga, The Ittehad in various capacities — sub-editor, assistant editor and as the editor.

After a brief spell of law practice at Mymensingh in 1958 he returned with remarkable success to journalism. During the 20-year brilliant journalistic career he developed a taste for politics which he thought, was absolutely necessary for public service that could not be use-

fully rendered from a distance for from the seat of political power. Therefore he joined the Congress, the Krishak-Praja party, the provincial Muslim League, became a member of the Provincial Assembly, twice a provincial minister and finally a central minister.

Whether as a journalist or as a lawyer, or as a politician, or as a writer, he was always guided by a deep sense of social obligation rather than by an inordinate desire for personal prominence or self-aggrandisement. He believed that a true journalist or an honest politician must necessarily be a vigilant watchdog and a bold defender of public interest. He never deviated from this belief in dealing with issues of public concern.

But I feel that literary pursuit was his chief interest in

life. It was of the view that the Bengali language of East Bengal (now Bangladesh) should retain its particularity, its own syntactical features that make it somewhat different from the Bengali language of the Calcutta kind. As an apparatus for verbal and literary communication our language should be so developed as to ensure lucidity of our literary style without imitating others. This may remind one of Whitman's observation: "Language is something arising out of the work, needs, ties, joys, affections, tastes of long generations of humanity, and has its bases broad and low close to the ground."

His publications (more than 21) include fiction especially mordant satire which, he thought, was the most effective form of expression for stimulating public opposition to su-

perstitions, corruption and social injustice. In this connection it will be profitable to remember that Al doux Huxley also came to think that fiction was the finest medium in which to express philosophy saying, "Dostoevsky is six times as profound as Kierkegaard."

Abul Mansur Ahmad's 'Aina' 'Food Conference', 'Asmani Pardah' 'Gulliverer Safarnama' show that words can be mightier than bullets in eliminating the ills that afflict the society. Abul Mansur Ahmad's Rajnitir Panchashabachar reveals one of the great critical and analytical minds of the age. If as Carlyle said, "biography is the only true history" Mr Ahmad's autobiography 'Atmakatha' deserves to be read and re-read as the history of the times he lived in. Incidentally, I was acquainted with him by courtesy of a friend who lent me his (Mr Ahmad's) popular book 'Aina' in which I could see the social picture of the time particularly the reflections of some familiar characters — crooks, frauds, cheats, hypocrites who pose as and pass for leaders and also the image of the author himself — alive, alert wise, witty. Mr Ahmad will be lovingly remembered for all this and more.

German or Latin and should be developing with the advancing civilization while maintaining cultural individuality so as to generously contribute to the multinational humanity. Likewise, national identity may be preserved by practising and promoting the language and cultural traits intensively in national affairs.

M Rahman  
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## To the Editor...

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.

### Rickshaw or walk?

Sir, Reference is made to the letter by Mr M A Hoque published on March 10, which is commendable. I would like to also recall the Friday morning programme of Bangladesh Television by a health-conscious gentleman for physical fitness and his slogan "Aktu Hata Hata Karun, Aktu Bhalo Thakun, Aktu Kom Khan" (walk a bit, keep better, eat less).

All medical professionals now-a-days insist for at least 45 minutes walk per day to keep healthy and fit. One of the secret of the Japanese Management success, so revealed in many seminars, advocates for walking exercise. Some companies purposely advise their staff members to have minimum one hour walking exercise before coming to office. Some big companies in Japan maintain jogging tracks on the ground and roof tops and instruct the staff members to walk in the early morning before attending the office.

I myself practice minimum one hour walking exercise everyday in the morning for which I feel always fit at the age of 50. I feel very bad on the day when I could not walk for some reasons.

By removing rickshaws from main roads and busy thoroughfares, not only we can avoid ugly traffic jams but we can also force the office staff and general public to get accustomed to this essential and easiest physical exercise which will no doubt result into a healthy workforce fit with more efficiency and productivity. Besides, pulling rickshaw is an inhuman act calling for an unhealthy and ugly national identity.

The government and the national planners should be able to come up with the solution to find employment for these rickshaw pullers. It is a fact that you cannot find rickshaws in other capital cities of the world.

S I Dewan  
Lalmatia, Dhaka.

### High tuition fees

Sir, It has been observed that high charges and fees are being realised from students of private schools of urban areas, specially the cities. As a result many poor parents have already stopped education of their children out of frustration. For the sake of educating majority of the people realisation of high tuition fees should be stopped. Government action towards controlling the high charges of education in the urban private schools/colleges is so much needed.

M A Motin Majumder  
Survey of Bangladesh, Dhaka.

### Bangla

Sir, Diplomatic missions in Bangladesh paid homage to the martyrs of Bangla Language Movement on 21st February. The date is remembered for the bloodshed of Bangalees for recognition of Bangla as a state language of erstwhile Pakistan.

Over 200 million Bangalees worldwide today owe their heritage to the language that won Nobel Prize for Literature in early 20th century as well as to the nationalistic struggles until 16 December 1971 when Bangalees became known to the world as a free nation again after over 200 years.

Bangla has yet to be an international language as important as English or French or

German or Latin and should be developing with the advancing civilization while maintaining cultural individuality so as to generously contribute to the multinational humanity. Likewise, national identity may be preserved by practising and promoting the language and cultural traits intensively in national affairs.

M Rahman  
Zila School Road, Mymensingh

### Tracing out a friend

Sir, Recently a Pakistani gentleman, Mr M Yousuf Shahabi sent me a clipping of my write-up on "UNESCO" published in "The Pakistan Times" and requested me to help him in tracing out one of his close Bangladeshi friends, Mr Quazi Ghulam Ahmed, Instrument Engineer who used to live in the Sukker district of Pakistan till 1970. Later on, sometime in 1979, Mr Shahabi met with his friend in London. Since then he lost contact with him. Mr Shahabi is keen to get in touch with Mr Ahmed. I am writing this letter in this column with the hope that Mr Ahmed will see it and contact with his friend in the following address: 443-Altamash Road, Multan 60000, Pakistan.

M Zahidul Haque  
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