

Problems of Street Vendors

The love-hate relations between shop-keepers and hawkers who encroach upon the pavement or even pay rent for the open basement of the shops tend to disrupt, more often than not, the status quo so painstakingly maintained. That the two sides refrain from jumping at each other's neck is perhaps guided by the ultimate concern that their businesses are kept moving. But not always. The broad understanding sometimes fails to contain rage from escalating and ends up in sad incidents. What happened last Wednesday at Baitul Mukarram market involving the merchants and hawkers there is one such flare-up of pent-up passion. But then it was more than a mere reaction on the spur of the moment. It was, to say the least, a well calculated move by the Baitul Mukarram Market Merchants' Association.

Now the question is: what objectives did the big merchants want to realise from the seemingly unprovoked attack on the poor hawkers? Did they want to teach the hawkers a lesson for any deviation from the agreement; or, are they bent on evicting the less fortunate ones from the pavements for good? Reports published indicate that it was more an attempt to drive out the hawkers than just teaching them a lesson. And look at the method employed to serve the purpose! Hired musclemen were engaged to do the dirty work for the big shop-keepers. Now the question that follows: who are they to take upon themselves the responsibility to evict the hawkers from where they have been selling their merchandise for quite a long time now? True, the law enforcing agency have been doing the job erratically but quite in line with their performance elsewhere.

What prompted the shop-keepers to take law in their own hands should be a point worth analysing. The policemen cannot apply a uniform yardstick for several reasons, chief among them being the absence of any sound planning for an alternative arrangement for the hawkers and street vendors. To set aside separate spaces for them would not be easy but considering the mounting pressure from an ever-growing population of the metropolis, this has to be done anyway. The members of the law enforcing agency also have their own stake in the matter — if left uncared for — and come to an arrangement suiting their need. This is why the situation turns from bad to worse.

It should be recognised that footpath vendors conform to the law of demand and supply. They can sell their commodities because there are enough consumers to buy those. The problem today is that the hawkers' wares have been spilling over the pavements to whatever open space is there. To add to the affliction of the footpath users, they leave scattered a whole lot of rubbish — mostly by the fruit vendors — on the footpath and all around. So the use of the footpath has to be discreet and the dumping of rubbish should strictly be ascertained at a place reserved for the purpose. Better it would be if some makeshift arrangement can be made for them to sell their goods at different city points and on streets preferably on different days of the week. One such market used to be held at Bangla Motor but for unknown reasons this has come to a close. The need definitely is to arrange for more such markets for the hawkers instead of bringing about their premature closure.

UPI Awaits a Miracle

They said only a "miracle" could save United Press International (UPI) from going under this time. The 85-year-old US-based wire service, once a mighty one with 5,000 newspaper clients and over 6,000 employees, has been in deep trouble since before founder-publisher E W Scripps sold it for a dollar to a couple of Tennessee cowboy businessmen in 1982. It went bankrupt three years later, changed hands twice more, and filed for bankruptcy protection again last year.

The news agency, which has often been credited with revolutionising wire service reporting by allowing its staff more elbow-room as far as style and content were concerned, was put up for sale at an auction house in Rutland, Vermont, USA, May 13 last, and a former evangelist preacher-turned-media tycoon named Pat Robertson was the lone bidder. In addition, to being an ultra-conservative politician, Robertson also claims to know a thing or two about faith-healing. The fact that Robertson has put in a bid for the whole of UPI's varied operations shows he certainly has faith in himself and the wire services future prospect. But whether his undoubted business skills and knowledge of the media market would be enough to do the miraculous healing job necessary, is a different matter altogether.

Robertson was quoted last week by Reuter, a wire giant which is not in trouble, as saying that his conservative political and religious views did not mean he would interfere with UPI's editorial decisions. Translated, that meant he would not try to turn UPI into a battering-ram for Christian evangelism or a world-wide "ban abortions" campaign, which should be music to the ears of the 500 or so staffers still left on the agency's payroll. The supreme irony of the situation seems to be that the US, despite having the most liberal of laws regarding the media, has only one major news agency. Over the years, the Associated Press (AP) has become the sole voice of America to the outside world. This is not a healthy state of affairs as monopoly, particularly where flow of information is concerned, is decidedly a bad thing.

There is at present a move world-wide to discourage emergence of monopolies. In this context, UPI's struggle for survival may hold good lessons on how failure of competition can, inadvertently, hand over monopoly power to others. In the final analysis, it is not so much whether UPI survives in its present form or not which bothers us, but it is a question of availability of news from as varied a source as possible.

In the Third World countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, particularly those countries which are heavily dependent on aid programmes of multilateral financing agencies like World Bank, IMF, ADB, OECF, EEC etc., the terminologies such as market economy, deregulation, privatisation, transparency, accountability, poverty alleviation etc. have assumed the importance almost similar to Biblical commandments.

Talking about South Asia, regardless of where you happen to be — India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal or Sri Lanka — economic discussions invariably gravitate between market economy, deregulation and privatisation. These are not merely subjects of academic discourses at coffee shops or political fora, but very serious ones because they form the neo-economic foundations upon which national economies of these countries are now being structured. Without much exception and difference either in dimensions or emphasis, the inherent conceptual thought process and implementation strategies are almost identical throughout the region. For the first time in history, over a billion people scattered over five sovereign and independent countries in a great landmass, are now marching, hand in hand, towards achievement of the same economic goals with the same strategic plans under the same command.

Make no mistake. The command or the battle plan has originated not from the great leaders of SAARC. This organisation is now in deep slumber. These have come from the World Bank. The battle plan was conceived, developed and approved in Washington and the field commanders were briefed and given assignments at Paris Consortium meetings. The support machinery is provided by the never-ending streams of foreign consultants. The machinery to monitor and adjust tactical plans are taken care of by the frequent visits of expert teams from the head office in Washington.

The battle plan envisages pretty well the whole spectrum of national life — political, social, economic, intellectual, defense and security and the lot. Nothing of importance is left out. Plans, methodologies, time span, financing, are all provided by the World Bank. The only thing left to the national Governments is execution and implementation. Even in this sector priorities, short and long term methodologies to execute and implement are spelled out in the Instruction Books which in the circle of plan executives are apparently known as 'Bible'.

On the face of it, there is no great problem with these concepts nor are they totally alien to this region. At the level of ordinary people, they had more or less been used to free economy from time immemorial provided they had enough purchasing power. There were and still are, of course, social and religious barriers between man and man but on the economic front, people generally were left on their own to fend for themselves without too much intervention from the State. As the level got higher and higher, one became more and more exposed to rules,

MARKET ECONOMY, DEREGULATION AND PRIVATISATION

It's Time to Clear up Confusion over Future Direction

by Jamal Uddin Ahmad

If countries having the highest economic development are allowed to have limitations imposed on the management of their economies, why the poor countries of South Asia be made to accept a prescription which is totally market oriented and deregulated? One wonders if the meaning of "public interest" has different connotations for different countries. If subsidies

contributed to the general well-being of the people? Dissatisfaction and anger were manifest all round, even among the classical socialists, about the criminal mismanagement of economic resources, rampant corruption and graft, bureaucratic and politicalisation of economic sectors.

Neither the promised massive growths were achieved nor the hopes and aspirations of the people fulfilled, nor the equitable and distributive justice ever got beyond the politicians' slogans. The so-called development syndrome of 45 years involving many thousands of billions of dollars pretty well came to a naught.

This phenomenon coupled with the sudden collapse of socialism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, like a house of cards, left no option for the countries of the region which have, by this time, become totally dependent on the financial doles of World Bank, but to accept its prescription for their survival. This prescription meant, in a nutshell, a complete departure from public ownership to private ownership — lock, stock and barrel. The time frame? Quickest possible time, no more than three years is apparently an unwritten time-table.

In Bangladesh, the reason for moving away from the past economic experiments is understood but what is not understood is the haste in making a full circle swing without adequate research, debate and understanding of the issues involved. Just because public ownership of national economy was bad, it does not automatically mean that private ownership is the panacea. Before making decisions, there should be thorough discussions at national levels as well as in our Parliament to set objectives and directions of national economy. It is profoundly regrettable that both the treasury bench and the opposition in the Parliament have totally disappointed the nation. They are in the Parliament to provide guidance, direction and leadership but these are precisely the areas in which they have failed miserably.

Market economy, deregulation, privatisation are components of a capitalistic economy. Neither these components nor the capitalistic economy itself are new concepts. The world including the poor countries of South Asia have experienced some form of capitalism at some time or another. However, no country, even in today's context, can claim to have had undiluted or uncontrolled economy totally subservient to the market. Within capitalistic economies, there

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have always been restrictions, regulations, limitations imposed by the Acts of Parliament, Ordinances, Charters etc for 'public interest'. The restrictive list of such regulations in the USA and Japan, the two countries most exposed to market economy, is quite formidable. This does not, however, mean that these countries have compromised with the fundamental concept of capitalism. What it means is that whilst the adherence and commitment to the concept of capitalism are total, some adjustments considered vital were legislated for better management of economies, to provide greater service to the people and to achieve better distributive justice.

If countries having the highest economic development are allowed to have limitations imposed on the management of their economies, why the poor countries of South Asia be made to accept a prescription which is totally market oriented and deregulated? One wonders if the meaning of "public interest" has different connotations for different countries. If subsidies to agriculture is a norm in developed countries for "public interest", why should it be prohibited in poorest of the poor countries? If restrictions on imports are permissible to protect the markets of richer countries, why the same flexibility be denied to the poorer countries? These are vital questions of national importance which should be frankly and freely debated. As said earlier, conceptually there are no major differences of opinion. But opinions vary on how, to what extent and to what time frame these are to be implemented? Enough confusion has already been created. It's now time to clear them.

The writer, a former Deputy Prime Minister, is currently the President of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Bangladesh.

How Clinton the Persistent Rose to Challenge Bush

Kevin J. Kelley writes from Washington

Bill Clinton, governor of the US state of Arkansas, looks set to win the Democratic party's nomination for presidential candidate. He is a complicated, sometimes elusive figure who had an unusual childhood. Gemini News Service profiles the man tipped to be George Bush's main challenger for the US presidency in November.



BILL CLINTON
A crafty chameleon?

touted as a rising star in each of the last three decades.

It was in 1978 that the former visiting Rhodes Scholar at Oxford University was first elected governor of Arkansas. He was 32. Voters removed him two years later, mainly because he had pursued an agenda too liberal and too ambitious for one of the country's poorest and most conservative states.

Then in an early display of doggedness and adaptability, Clinton won back the job in 1982 by promising to move more slowly toward reform. He has since been easily re-elected.

Last year, in a poll of all 50 state governors Clinton was rated the most effective of their number. Journalists and politicians who have closely monitored his tenure in Arkansas generally give Clinton high marks, especially in the areas of education, financing and health care policy.

Many state business leaders also hail his record, which features tax incentives intended to help diversify Arkansas' economy, long dependent on the poultry, paper and natural

gas industries. Environmentalists are less enamoured of his performance. One group ranks Arkansas 48th among the 50 states in its "green index".

More than anything, it is Clinton's ability to win elections in a Southern state that earned him notice among Democratic kingmakers.

They note that Southerners headed the party ticket only twice since 1964 when a Democrat was elected to the White House. Desperate to revive that formula, Democratic bosses began re-arranging the presidential primary schedule eight years ago with the explicit aim of smoothing the way for a Southern nomination. To an important extent, Clinton owes his success so far this year to the party's move to concentrate early contests in the South. His candidacy has also been greatly helped by the absence of a black challenger particularly someone with the appeal of Jesse Jackson.

Clinton has overwhelmed his rivals by adding a large portion of the sizeable Southern black vote to his base among working-class whites in the region. If he can keep this inter-racial coalition intact, Clinton may well defeat Bush in November.

Despite his clear vulnerability, the Republicans probably will not make the mistake of underestimating Clinton if he emerges as the Democratic standard-bearer. Throughout his life, the Governor has overcome long odds in a determined quest for success.

Clinton was actually christened in a Baptist church as William J. Blythe IV. He was named after his father who died in a car accident three months after his birth. Clinton's early years were spent in the care of his grandparents, his mother being at nursing school in New Orleans. The widow remarried an alcoholic car dealer who often

abused her and once fired a gun in the family home. Clinton eventually took the name of his stepfather, who died of cancer in 1967. His half-brother was jailed for a year in the Eighties for selling cocaine.

These difficult circumstances led Clinton to strive for perfection in his own life. He was greatly aided by his intellectual talents, which took him from Arkansas to Georgetown, to Oxford and eventually to Yale Law School where he met his future wife, Hillary Rodham.

Hillary, a committed feminist and a much-respected attorney, continued to use her own name until it became apparent that her refusal to call herself Mrs. Clinton had begun to damage her husband's political standing in Arkansas. They have one child, an 11-year-old daughter.

The Bush campaign team has surely taken note of this impressive biography. Just as

surely, Clinton's strength of character will not deter Bush from attacking him on a personal and political level.

The President can be expected to harp on his putative foe's lack of foreign policy experience. Clinton has no record in that realm, other than occasional statements on international issues.

He did seek, early in the campaign, to develop a critique of Bush's actions abroad. Having tepidly supported the Gulf war, Clinton now faults Bush for abandoning the Kurds in their revolt against Saddam Hussein.

He also accuses Bush of continuing to "coddle" the repressive regime in China. And he has been at pains to suggest he differs for dovish Democrats by declaring: "To protect our interest and our values, sometimes we have to stand and fight."

In the domestic sphere, too Clinton often straddles the left-right divide, to the point

where The New York Times called him "self-consciously centrist."

He enunciates traditional liberal positions on many social issues even as he stresses to need to encourage "self-sufficiency" and "a sense of personal responsibility" among poor people dependent on public assistance.

Economically, Clinton takes some stands usually associated with conservatives. The centerpiece of his campaign, for example, is a call for tax relief for "the forgotten middle class."

This entire political package, along with the smiling and quick-witted manner of its presenter, causes some critics to view Clinton as a crafty chameleon who will take on any guise in order to win favour. His enemies in Arkansas deride him as "slick Willie."

Barring some late-breaking scandal, US voters will probably be asked to decide in November whether this complicated, sometimes elusive figure should be entrusted with the responsibilities of the Oval Office.

KEVIN J. KELLEY is an American freelance journalist, and editor of Toward Freedom magazine.

OPINION

Unfolding Strengths of Creativity

Problems are an undeniable part of life. There are different sorts of them — personal, social, national, international. If subjectively segregated, it may be economic, political, ecological, ethnic disharmony, discrimination and so on. Present days, the problems are more discussed than ever before and initiatives are taken to address them. It is widely observed that these problems in totality form a chain. As for example, a personal problem affects social milieu of the locality, then it gets national status and in the long run that assumes the monstrosity of an international problem. Again an economic problem in turn may give rise to ecological problem which again may create a political problem and so on. Therefore, each and every problem deserves attention and possible solution from relative organs of the forces that govern a country.

In essence, an individual and his problems should be seriously noted and steps be taken to resolve the problems in no time. In the present world, amid moral degeneration and dwindling value system, people are continuously suppressed and deprived of recognition progressively increasing frustration and depression. Frequently a person with high potentialities, high performances is little justifiably rewarded, whereas an average performer even an idler is excessively rewarded. It is more often that commitments, sincerity, aptitude, experiences are ignored. On the

other hand, a person without requisite qualities is provided facilities and privileges enormously. Thus heart-burning and frustrations are created to many deserving persons. The peace is resolutely disturbed. Some of such victims, often, try to form an organised movement to protest against injustice when others accept it as bad luck.

In summation, deprivation is very much agonizing and traumatic for the victims. When the strives towards stopping or at least minimizing the injustices and deprivation is on, still there is enough hope for life and one should instead of brooding, take to such means. The creative instincts if nurtured in proper way, may serve as a means of expression of inner, pent-up dissatisfaction and upgradation of quality of human living.

There is an ample number of ways to express oneself, thus relieving of frustration and depression. Evidently, the creator has some special purpose for creating each man, any form of life or material. If incumbents hold their spirits high and transform their real, often hidden potentialities into strengths instead of simply cursing the fate upon being deprived, they can take a special drive and undauntedly direct their energy towards creative endeavours. They may devote themselves to writing, singing, participate in sports and taking part in leading social issues. There are examples that such efforts brought out outstanding-self of a person to the world.

This sort of activities give the person concerned self-satisfaction. It is true that everyone wishes to live worthily. It will drive away the devil-like agony and melt heart burning into tranquility. On the other hand, the world may be gifted with some masters of arts and civil living. In some forms, the less fortunate and under privileged people shall be assisted and helped out. These endeavours may not bring one some big accolades but this is the way one recognizes one's own self. And this will ensure a better world with greater number of happy people. This is in turn an accolade one may feel as worth pursuing.

Life is a journey through 'thick and thin' — constantly moving forward towards an 'endless end'. An individual is licensed a life by the Divine Provident not to waste away in disappointment but to conduct a creative life thus living as a co-creator. Creativity is a compelling force existent in our hearts, without letting it out, we cannot rest in peace.

It is not a big name, but a satisfaction of utilizing the forces we have within us, that is too in a constructive way, that matters. Our optimality lies in our satisfying participation in the positive changes of the world. In this world nobody is immortal, again everybody is immortal. The life, we live today is a compilation of all humans those who have treaded this planet till date.

Jerome Sarkar
Singola, Dhaka

To the Editor...

Communication gap

Sir, It is necessary to stress a point hinted at by Mr S M Ali, in his commentary (Star, May 13), that there might be some communication gap between Begum Zia and her team, and Sheikh Hasina and her team of advisors; and that both these leaders might be rather isolated, and are not getting freely the needed feedback so valuable in national interest.

In party interest or at the national level, teamwork is vital for implementing the pending works at high speed. The nation today badly needs the consensus for the combined effort in development work. To

achieve this priority, some compromises have to be made in national interest by all parties, groups, and individuals; not only in all the sectors, but also in personal and private life.

The other term for this dedication is sacrifice. What we see today is something quite different — a free-for-all atmosphere.

The Government do not appear to be very clear, quick or communicative with its policy-making decisions; and are lax with the implementation of the announced policies. The actions must be fast and strict, so that the result are visible quickly at all levels. For psychological impact the keyword

is 'action'. Decisiveness is a deterrent for the indiscipline.

A Mawaz
Dhaka

Inadvertence

Sir, I regret to say that in my article under the caption "Shelaidah estate: where a history hums" which appeared in your paper on 8 May, Surendranath Tagore was inadvertently mentioned as Rabindranath Tagore's brother. In fact, he was nephew of Rabindranath Tagore.

Mohammad Amjad Hussain
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