

Transfer of Tinbigha Corridor

The stage is set for the transfer today of the Tinbigha Corridor from India to Bangladesh, thus providing a physical connection to the enclaves of Dahagram and Angarpota to the mainland. Metaphorically speaking, the people living in these isolated villages now return to their homeland, Bangladesh. In other words, in welcoming the transfer of the corridor, we are, in effect, welcoming Bangladeshis living in the two enclaves to their own country.

It is our hope that the transfer will go on schedule, without any hitch, and that the two senior officials, a Deputy Commissioner of Bangladesh and a Deputy Magistrate of India, will conduct the ceremony in a manner befitting a historic moment in the bilateral relations of their two countries. They will be conscious that the ceremony marks the final implementation of the Land Boundary Demarcation Agreement signed between the two neighbours some 18 years ago, by two great leaders of South Asia, Banghabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Srimati Indira Gandhi. Indeed, the poignancy of the event cannot be lost on the people who will be participating in the transfer ceremony today.

The long delay in the implementation of the 1974 accord, modified in two more agreements in October, 1982 and then in March last, underscores the difficulties faced in the transfer of the Tinbigha Corridor from India to Bangladesh. While a cross-section of people in this country felt genuinely angry and resentful over the delay which most certainly caused hardship, both economic and emotional, to Bangladeshis in the enclaves, the opposition to the agreement among a sizable section of people in West Bengal remained strong, with the whole issue going before the Calcutta High Court and finally before the country's Supreme Court. With the Indian judiciary upholding the boundary agreement, the path was cleared for the transfer that takes place today. Here, one must give due credit to the successive governments in Dhaka and New Delhi — and, indeed, to the state administration of Jyoti Basu in West Bengal — for pursuing the matter with diligence and in a spirit of goodwill, an approach that, we believe, prevented the extremists in the two countries from changing the course of events in what was potentially a volatile issue.

After the transfer of the corridor, there may well be a period, hopefully a short one, when many teething problems will crop up, especially involving the movement of people and goods across the narrow road connecting the enclaves with the mainland. We are confident that the local officials on both sides will handle these issues with tact and patience and resist any temptation of turning any of them into a matter of national prestige.

However, to put the accord in the national context, the transfer of the Tinbigha Corridor augurs well for the future of Indo-Bangladesh relations in other fields, especially in the resolution of problems, such as the sharing of water, which have so far defied lasting solutions. Although the authorities in the two countries remain tight-lipped in providing much information on their respective positions to the media, not to mention of their future course of action, it is our belief that an eagerness exists in both Dhaka and New Delhi to take a new view of the issues which were pushed under the carpet during the Ershad regime. If this is so, let the two governments move fast in tackling the outstanding problems before extremist factions in the two countries start influencing the events — in the wrong direction.

The Change in Israel

If Palestinians in the occupied territories and their representative organisation, the PLO have hailed the victory of the Labour Party in the general election in Israel, we can also safely welcome the change in Tel Aviv. Expectations among the Arabs are high, perhaps too high, that the Labour leader Yitzhak Rabin, heading the new government, will make dramatic changes, altering the hard-line policies of the outgoing Likud administration of Yitzhak Shamir.

With a comfortable single party majority won by the Labour — official results are awaited — the new coalition is unlikely to include Likud. This would mean that the new Rabin administration which will still be a coalition with smaller like-minded parties can carry out its programme without continually seeking adjustments and compromises with the rightwing Likud.

However, how the new government will tackle its programme remains to be seen. While in opposition, the Labour had made attractive promises, ranging from providing full autonomy to the occupied Arab territories to calling a halt to what it called political Jewish settlements in Arab lands. How many of these promises will be carried out is the big question. Of course, it is in the interest of Rabin to honour his major election pledges, such as a freeze on new settlements in occupied areas, in order to secure Washington's guarantee for the massive \$10 billion loan Israel needs so urgently. Let us hope that in providing this support, the Bush administration gets a clear picture of Rabin's future plans regarding the stalemate in the Middle East peace talks. Nothing will make the Arabs happier if the new government in Israel can reiterate its commitment to the land-for-peace formula and open the door for direct talks with the PLO. What the Palestinians can do to match such moves from the Rabin administration is another matter. If, in the new climate, there is a bit more trust from both sides, with Washington playing a positive but an even-handed role, the situation can start changing fast in favour of peace in the troubled region.

In the cold northern hemisphere, the sun hides behind the cold mist and snows. The autumn harvest of hay must be completed on time. Same is true with the boro paddy crop: an early summer flood in late April or May would ruin the ripe standing crop. Timeliness is so crucial in agriculture. If not done on time, the returns tend to be zero. It is not that time is money; the emphasis is on the timeliness — not before or after.

Each and every work in agriculture has the right time and the season. Perhaps because of our basically rural background, the newly emerging business class of Bangladesh is very conscious of the very seasonality of trading opportunities. From cultivation to complex business world of corporate endeavour, in course of a life-time career is very remote from the simple world of palm trees and green grass. In agriculture, from planting to the final crop harvest is a matter of only a few months.

Exception being the tea gardens originally developed by the Britishers or rubber plantations promoted entirely within the public sector. Due to the long growth period, neither tea nor rubber became part of the traditional smallholders' agriculture. In fact when khas lands were allocated for small-scale tea and rubber plantations, the recipients lost all interests after selling the available timber on such lands. Even in case of large tea estates when ac-

quired by the locals, often the forests are denuded of all valuable trees.

It is difficult for us to forego the immediate gains. Hence our expectations from business ventures are essentially of a short-term nature. We minimize the investments required primarily because resources are extremely limited but at the same time, we tend to maximise other non-monetary efforts to profit as much as possible in as short a time as feasible, say within six months — same as a crop season. Hence numerous business enterprises many of which could be found only on the letter heads, act solely as general order suppliers or facilitators of supply orders ensuring access to the right contacts including the bank. The individuals involved in these so-called flying business if successful, possess the unique capacity to finally clinch the deals overcoming all odds that may stand on the way up front. The critical element is the short timeliness of the operation with right contacts at the right time — same as in agriculture. Therefore, make hay while the sun shines.

Most of the business in our country today are seeking 'transaction rent' from the so-called deal-making; be it the supply of cement to rural health centre under construc-

tion or the loan obtained to start a new industry. The end is the money secured — not whether the rural health centre or the factory is operational. Hence according to the prevalent business standards, it will be utter stupidity not to adulterate the cement or pay back the money to the banks. Bangladesh is the only country in the world where bank loans tend to become government grants and it is an irony of our cruel fate that the poorest borrowers from the Gramscen

experienced the so-called lucky breaks, all the same, the prolonged painstaking path of growth and development had to be followed. The founder of the Bangkok Bank, the largest Asian Bank outside Japan, was a noddle vendor in the 1920s. He accumulated his savings bit by bit, got his lucky break, made more money which snowballed into a fairly large sum, big enough to launch the banking enterprise again as a fairly modest financial institution. His sons kept up the re-

lentless painstaking work to build and expand the banking business so that after about 40 years of its founding, the Bangkok Bank has become what it is today — a giant financial conglomerate and the familiar one of the richest in Asia. Same is true of the Central Department store: a small beginning but steady growth at an increasing rate spread over three decades before attaining the huge size of today.

In Bangladesh, we do not have faith in such a small beginning but accompanied by continuous and intensive efforts for sustained high growth. This is because our trust in the future is at best marginal. We lack confidence

in the future as we carry the agricultural orientation of uncertainties induced by too much water and the floods; or too little rain and the drought. In either case, crop disaster is inevitable. The crisis of confidence emanates from our rural heritage. We lack the true urban sentiments and are continually pulled back towards our village roots where crop failures are so frequent.

The profound rural bias was vividly demonstrated when my salary bill was refused by the AG's office who noted that the bill could not be entertained because the permanent address had not been given. I could not understand because my permanent Dhaka city address was written at the appropriate place. But according to AG's office, the permanent address ought to be the village address; it could not possibly be an urban location.

The rural orientation is so complete and total in our midst although the urban population of Dhaka in particular is increasing by leaps and bounds, the people are not becoming urbanized. Hence the rural attitudes and sentiments get reflected on our expanding private sector world of trade and commerce dominated by short-run seasonal expectation of bumper profit like the bumper harvest.

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Quick gains and windfall profits are not uncommon and

implemented," they write. The existing police force can not accomplish this on its own, the report continues. Police inspire no trust among blacks because officers have long held the responsibility of enforcing apartheid laws.

WINDOW ON ASIA

Shahed Latif

Bank are the best repayers of loans.

There is a common saying in Bengal that nobody can climb up a tree by a single jump. We have forgotten the wholesome maxim. In fact one of the successful wheeler-dealers told me the other day that the most appropriate phrase in the Bangladesh context would be you have to get across the ditch in one jump. But this cannot be a tenable situation if we look across Asia, at countries witnessing the economic miracle, we will not find any parallel to the gamblers' world of paradise that prevail in this country. The big capitalists today all had very humble beginning. Of course they must have

pressed to us by lawyers and church leaders both in August 1990 (their previous visit) and on this mission.

They believe the evidence in the Trust Fed case represents "only the tip of the iceberg," establishing that the South African police worked with Inkatha and ordered the killing of innocent people to 'create mayhem, all with the knowledge of senior officers.

However, the jurists also believe that — given the right leadership — the police have the capacity to bring the violence under control within three to six months.

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Jurists Commission Blames Inkatha for Township Violence

by Stefani Langenegger

A squad of white riot police walked into the Bruntville beer hall. They searched some of the customers — not unusual for the black South African township — and asked the owner for his licence. He produced it for them.

Then, as the police were leaving, one of the officers turned around. He pointed his rifle at a customer. And from six feet away, he shot the man dead.

A week later, British human rights lawyer John Macdonald walked into the beer hall and started asking questions. The answers he heard are now part of the latest report from the International Commission of Jurists.

Members of the independent human rights commission released the report after visiting Natal and Transvaal in March. Entitled "Agenda for Peace," it says violence is the "most serious challenge facing South Africa today."

Without an end to this violence, it concludes, it is not possible for the country to hold free and fair elections, with one vote for each person.

The report places much of the responsibility for the violence on Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi and his Zulu-based Inkatha Freedom Party, saying that Buthelezi, "for whatever reason, has not used the influence he undoubtedly has to curb the violence of his supporters."

The report also blames President F W de Klerk and his government: "Law and order has broken down, the police do not protect the people and the people do not trust the police. We suspect this is mainly because the Government has failed to take effective action to curb the violence."

"It's very easy to criticise when you're on the outside," says Duke Kent-Brown, a press counsellor with the South

Township violence is the most serious challenge facing South Africa, says an independent human rights commission which recently visited the country. It places much of the responsibility for the violence on Chief Buthelezi's Inkatha movement and also blames the government and its security forces. As Gemini News Service reports, the jurists recommend an international team be sent to South Africa to monitor its law enforcement agencies before an election is held.

African embassy in London. He says that while his government appreciates the advice of reports like "Agenda for Peace," it keeps in mind that they are usually one-sided, placing blame solely on the authorities.

One of the commission's criticisms of De Klerk's government stems from indiscriminate violence on the country's commuter trains.

The trains have been the scene of more than 100 random killings since July 1990. One woman — Martha, injured during the Benrose Train Massacre on September 13 of that year, later told the jurists: "Everyone was panicking, screaming and running, some people jumped out of the window. There was blood all over me and I thought I had been wounded, but the blood was from my friend on top of me. I think she had been stabbed. A lady sitting on the seat opposite me was screaming and screaming. I think she had been shot in the stomach, there was a lot of blood. Another man came in and stabbed her until she stopped screaming."

Their first morning in Transvaal, the jurists visited a Soweto commuter station. But on that day, two days before the referendum that asked white South Africans whether or not they supported a continuation of De Klerk's reform, every passenger was searched thoroughly. Members of the South African Defence Force checked the passengers' clothes and bags, and nobody seemed to mind.

Evidence at the trial showed that Mitchell, white, had taken the four black constables to a house in which a service was being held to mourn the death of a local township resident.

Mitchell fired two shots into the house, giving a signal to attack. The court decided that he had intended to kill everyone at the service and that the shooting had been requested by senior South

African police officers. The five men have since been convicted.

What has caused more controversy than the killings themselves is the fact that all 11 murdered were Inkatha supporters.

The judge in the case thought this could have been a mistake on Mitchell's part, since the police have been accused of favouring the Inkatha. But the prosecutor suggested it was part of a strategy to stir up revenge killings between the Inkatha and rival African National Congress led by Nelson Mandela.

The jurists say that the court's judgment "has confirmed that views about police conduct which have been ex-

pressed to us by lawyers and church leaders both in August 1990 (their previous visit) and on this mission.

They believe the evidence in the Trust Fed case represents "only the tip of the iceberg," establishing that the South African police worked with Inkatha and ordered the killing of innocent people to 'create mayhem, all with the knowledge of senior officers.

However, the jurists also believe that — given the right leadership — the police have the capacity to bring the violence under control within three to six months.

"What is needed is first the political will, and second someone to monitor and make sure that the orders are being

implemented," they write. The existing police force can not accomplish this on its own, the report continues. Police inspire no trust among blacks because officers have long held the responsibility of enforcing apartheid laws.

The jurists recommend an international team, comprised mostly of lawyers and headed by someone with an established record in human rights, be sent to South Africa to monitor the law enforcement agencies.

But Kent-Brown considers it unlikely that South Africa, or any other country, would tolerate such international meddling.

"Let's not forget that South Africa is a sovereign state," he says. "I think the government is doing all it can. Certainly there are other things that could be done and will be done... (but) this is a problem that should only be dealt with by South Africans."

STEFANI LANGENEGER, a graduate of the University of Regina School of Journalism in Canada, is working on a fellowship for Gemini News Service.

OPINION

Inaction of DU Administration

Congratulations on your forthright editorial of June 8 on "inexcusable incident and inaction" by the Dhaka University authorities. While I wholeheartedly share your sense of outrage and shock at such a serious incident, I wonder whether our "democratic" government or many readers of your esteemed daily felt as strongly as you did about the criminal behaviour of some one who should not be referred to as a "student". Often your paper takes civilised and moral stands on social issues which call for prompt, decisive and tough action by the government. However, in an insensitive and to an extent brutalised society like ours civilised norms have little value and blood-chilling cruelty and inhuman injustice of man to man evoke little or no response at all.

Let me explain why the situation in Dhaka University has degenerated like this. The apparently incomprehensible "inaction of the university authorities" and the "inexcusable failure to discharge their duties" did not come about in a few days or weeks. The university turned into a coveted centre of power politics and has been falling apart slowly but surely for the last several years. And now it has lost all its past academic glory and its reputation as a bastion of protest against autocratic and tyrannical regimes, and is looked upon as a safe sanctuary for all kinds of criminals and a hotbed of bloody and partisan fighting with modern firearms.

Let it be understood by all concerned that there are two main reasons for this alarming and seemingly hopeless situation. Every government of the country wanted and even apparently the present one wants, to use this university as its stronghold and sphere of influence. They did not and do not care at all about the quality of education of the genuine students, their safety or their future. Secondly, for all the Vice-Chancellors of the university the most important objective has apparently been to remain in power. All other considerations — academic standard, safety of the students and others, honour, morality, justice, fairplay, etc turned in-

significant. The Vice-Chancellor exercises almost unlimited power over all affairs of the university and if he wants, by distributing favours and appointments, he can manage to muster the support of the majority of teachers. Public criticism does not touch him; he is not accountable to the people. Every Vice-Chancellor maintains a good relationship with the government — that is his best safety valve. And protected by the shield of so-called university autonomy, he can, if he wants, violate, misuse or abuse the provisions of the law with impunity. Like the 'successful' politicians of the country, every Vice-Chancellor seeks to or has to keep all dominant student groups happy.

The leaders of the DUCSU (Dhaka University Central Students' Union) dictate many policy decisions of the university administration. In the residential halls of the students the wishes of the leaders of the hall unions are the 'rules'. The Provosts and House Tutors of the halls are helpless and pathetic spectators of lawlessness and violation in allotment of seats, sheltering of outsiders and armed terrorists, and even detention of people in the halls for ransom.

One example of this policy of appeasement of the politically powerful "students" is that the young man who assaulted a teacher was said to have been given special permission to sit for the examination on "humanitarian grounds" three times — twice during the tenure of the former Vice-Chancellor, and once by the administration of the present Chief Executive. These special permissions about academic matters are given by the Academic Council, the highest academic authority of the university. The Vice-Chancellor is the ex-officio Chairman of the Academic Council which includes all the Deans, the Professors and the Chairmen of the Departments. An examination of the records of the A.C. would show that many of the applicants for special permission do not really deserve any consideration, but they are recommended by the respective departments and the A.C. gives them permis-

Where can the vast silent majority of people look for the elimination of this culture of violence and lawlessness? The situation seems to be becoming worse than it was during the autocratic regime of Ershad. We can only say: "May God help us."

B W Rahman
Dhaka University.

To the Editor...

Private enterprises

Sir, We live in a market-friendly world. There seems to be almost universal agreement, therefore, that private enterprise promotes efficiency. But we need to remember why and under what conditions this will be true. Fundamentally, private enterprise works better than public enterprise because, and to the extent that, it is quick to reward good decisions and punish bad ones. An entrepreneur who takes mostly right decisions earns profits, while one who takes mostly wrong decisions makes losses and at some point is driven out of business.

Therefore, private enterprise will not deliver the goods if it is coddled, if it is perpetually protected from having to pay for its mistakes, if it can keep running to the government, like a child who has fallen and scraped its knee, so that the government can "kiss the place and make it well". This is what many of our entrepreneurs seem to expect as a matter of course — "sick" industries must be rehabilitated at public cost, defaulted debts must be waived, competing imports must be banned, and so on.

I am not saying that government should do nothing to encourage and assist the private sector. But such help should be more in terms of easing restrictions, simplifying bureaucratic procedures, ensuring law and order, providing social overheads like

transport and power (but here emphasis should be on adequate and dependable supplies rather than cheap supplies), and enforcing contracts. Some degree of tariff protection and some export incentives are permissible, but even these should be moderate and temporary — the country cannot afford to support "infants" who never grow up. Beyond this, the ruthless discipline of the market must be allowed to work unimpeded if private enterprise is to deliver the goods.

I would very much welcome comments from entrepreneurs.

Abu A. Abdullah
Research Director
Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies

"No waiting room"

Sir, As student of the Willes Little Flower School, I feel it to be my duty to protect the interest of my school and protest the wrong allegations against the school authority made by Ms Shamim Hamid (in her letter "No waiting room" May 31).

I was amazed to see that the writer noticed the guardians sitting in the alley but completely missed the light pink asbestos shed adjacent to the alley just outside the school compound, built exclusively for the guardians of the students. This waiting room is large enough to accommodate as many as 50 persons very easily.

I do not see any sense in blaming the school authority if the guardians prefer to pass their time waiting in the open alley. In my view, the guardians should not be let inside the school premises during school hours as this would break the discipline of the school and also disturb the students.

Syed Tasbir Imam,
Willes Little Flower School
Dhaka.

Containing criminals

Sir, The rate of crimes has increased alarmingly in the country. Murders, hijackings, highway robberies etc have become a regular feature. People are feeling greatly insecure because there are hardly any protection for their lives and properties. The police are, perhaps, on the alert are also trying their best to get hold of the criminals, but the situation seems to be deteriorating day by day.

In my opinion, execution of exemplary punishments on the offenders in the presence of the members of general public could help effectively in reducing attitude for crime among the 'present' and 'to be' criminals. People will be aware of the dire consequences of committing crimes. And, rapid disposal of criminal cases is a must to combat crimes.

M Zahidul Haque
Assistant Professor,
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