

Dhaka, Friday, October 23, 1992

A Signal to India

The Jatiya Sangsad has sent a strong signal to India protesting against the so-called Operation Push Back, New Delhi's drive against what it has arbitrarily described as illegal Bangladeshi immigrants, rightly termed the move as "unfriendly, unneighbourly and contrary to the UN Human Rights Charter." The signal which comes in the form of a motion approved by a majority in the parliament on Wednesday, represents the voice of the nation in full measure. The resolution, the first of its kind to be passed by the country's legislature on a foreign policy issue, says exactly what the media, including *The Daily Star*, has argued all along since India launched the move, without any warning, not to mention of any consultation, that it is totally against all diplomatic norms and is certain to damage the prospects of regional co-operation in South Asia, timed as it is, deliberately or otherwise, with the preparation of the SAARC Summit scheduled to be held here in early December. However, the resolution which has called upon New Delhi to call a halt to the drive is firm and hard-hitting, without being bellicose, thus leaving the door open for consultation between Dhaka and New Delhi.

In this context, we have noted that a section of the Indian media and, indeed, responsible leaders in the state government of West Bengal have also taken a critical line against the move by New Delhi, understandably in a much milder tone but without hiding their concern over the consequences of the unwarranted exercise.

We regret that the JS resolution eluded unanimity. But let not this fact give any satisfaction to New Delhi. For one thing, all the speakers, from the treasury bench as well as the opposition, took the identical line in criticising the Indian move in the strongest possible terms. Again, while the Jamaat-e-Islami voted for the treasury bench resolution, the two major opposition groupings, the Awami League (AL) and the Jatiya Party (JP) moved their own resolutions "condemning" the Indian drive, resolutions which were far stronger in tone and contents than the official one. The defeat of these two opposition resolutions or the inability of AL and JP to vote for the one which was passed was due to the differences over the interpretation of the Clause 11 of the Joint Communiqué signed by the prime ministers of India and Bangladesh during the visit of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia to New Delhi last May. The reference to the "large-scale illegal immigration of people across their borders" has been interpreted by AL as an admission by the Bangladesh Prime Minister of the presence of illegal immigrants from this country in India, an interpretation that has been strongly denied by the government which has argued, in the words of Foreign Minister A S M Mostafizur Rahman, that the controversial clause should be read with clauses 12 and 13 which highlighted the problems of the Chakma refugees and of their speedy return to the homeland.

There is little doubt that the ambiguity in the badly-drafted clause 11 of the communiqué gave New Delhi a handle "to stop illegal immigration of people across the border by all possible means", as the communiqué put it. In this sense, the position taken by Sheikh Hasina on clause 11 of the communiqué has substance. But we do not see how a portion of a communiqué signed by prime ministers of two countries can be revoked, as demanded by AL, unilaterally by one country, even by its parliament. Besides, such a move would have added new complications to the Dhaka-Delhi relations at a time when both sides should tackle their bilateral relations with understanding and farsightedness, a message that also came out, loud and clear, through the two-day parliamentary debate on the so-called "Operation Push Back."

An Emperor Goes to China

The visit of Emperor Akihito to Beijing, beginning today, opens a new chapter in the chequered history of Sino-Japan relations. It is a history marked by a decade long Japanese aggression against the Chinese mainland, followed by a long period of cold war hostility between the two countries, but eventually leading to normalisation of diplomatic and economic relations between Tokyo and Beijing. The trip of the Japanese Emperor to China, a history-making event in itself, clearly suggests that both Tokyo and Beijing are determined to go further in developing and strengthening their ties. It is the direction of this development that remains a little unclear. In some ways, it is also of some concern to the rest of the world, especially to other Asian countries.

In immediate terms, it is the economic relations between the two which will get the boost, although the Emperor himself will not discuss such a mundane issue, beyond giving it a gentle royal nod. The bilateral trade between the two countries reached a record \$22.8 billion in 1991, and Japanese investment in China continues to increase. The Chinese leaders are determined to show that despite its slow pace towards democratisation, the country can be economically affluent. In this exercise, Beijing needs co-operation from Tokyo just as Japan remains anxious to penetrate China with its investment and joint ventures. In time, the two may form a powerful economic bloc of their own, without either of them joining any form of regional grouping.

There is some speculation that in longer terms, Japan and China may emerge as political rivals, looking for their own areas of influence and putting in more and more funds into their defence budgets. The alternative to this competition lies in the two countries looking outward, to the rest of Asia, reaffirming their commitment to the international community — and to the developing world. Let us hope that the Japanese Emperor's visit will lead to the renewal of this commitment by both Beijing and Tokyo.

THIRTY years ago, newspapers dated October 21, carried the story of Chinese attack on India in the northeast and the Ladakh side. It was played down. More prominence was given to a crisis in the Uttar Pradesh Congress Party over a land tax proposal before the state legislature.

I was then Information Officer to Home Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri. I am narrating here what happened at that time, not to go into the merits of India-China border dispute, but to tell how the ill-prepared New Delhi was distraught, disorderly and demoralised.

The attack was at 5 am in the eastern sector where the sun rises early and 7 am in the Ladakh area where day light is late. New Delhi had no idea of the attack. The report by the Intelligence Bureau (IB) was that the Chinese, although six-division-strong in Tibet, were too tied up with the revolt of Khamvas, the Dalai Lama's followers, to spare men for the border.

In about an hour, an Indian brigade of 3,000 men at Dhol, commanded by Brigadier JP Dalvi, was vanquished. He had not stationed his men in a defensive position was the comment of General PN Thapar, chief of the army staff. "The men were sitting ducks."

Jawaharlal Nehru, then prime minister, felt so much let down that he did not know what to do. He still expected the Chinese forces to stop after the initial push, Shastri said that Panditji (Nehru) had trusted the Chinese too much. So was the general feeling.

After receiving the news about the fall of the post at Dhol, Thapar went straight to

Mrs Indira Gandhi said that she and her father found some faint signs of Chinese aggressiveness over the border issue in 1954 when they visited Beijing. But, as she rationalised, the choice was between postponing economic development, which her father thought was the immediate need, and stepping up expenditure on defence, which he believed could wait for some time more.

Krishna Menon, then Defence Minister. The Chinese soldiers were rushing down the hill into what was then known as the NEFA, north-eastern frontier agency. Seeing Thapar, Menon, brooding over a cup of black tea, remarked: "How could have I known that they would come like an avalanche?"

Thapar told the defence minister that the Indian forces should now fall back and hold out at Se-lia, a pass about 40 miles inside India from Dhol. Menon sarcastically remarked: "General, why not Bangalore?" They conversed very little after that and waited for the meeting of the defence committee, over which Nehru presided.

Thapar wanted to withdraw a division from the Pakistan front. This was opposed by Menon, who said that "Pakistan was making preparations along the border. Thapar said that the Indian army had no such information. Nehru conceded to Thapar's request. After the meeting he took him aside and told him that henceforth he should take a decision purely on military considerations. This was meant to convey to him that he did not like Menon interfering in matters of strategy.

Back in his office, Thapar saw another report from the front, describing how the soldiers were ill-equipped, ill-shod, ill-equipped and ill-trained. The outmoded .303 rifles of the Indian troops was inadequate against the automatic

weapons of the Chinese. Thapar had submitted to Nehru through Menon a note on India's unpreparedness. It had not reached Nehru.

Nehru had already recanted from his earlier statement where he had said that he had ordered the army to throw out the Chinese from the Indian territory. Action had been fixed for some time in 1963 summer. Nehru had realised that it was no use getting the men killed if it was not possi-

ble to evict the Chinese immediately. The home ministry felt gratified that it had been proved right. It had opposed the suggestion of BN Mullick, then the IB director, to establish posts wherever it could even behind the Chinese lines to register the claim on the territory. The ministry had warned that the posts with no support from the back would fall like nine pins. Indeed, they did. 41 of them, when the Chinese administered the first blow.

Ministers openly said that Menon had let the country down. Some of them approached Shastri, close to Nehru, to tell him to drop Menon from the cabinet. Many Congress MPs talked about

punishing him. Shastri felt the same way but did not want to hurt Nehru, who was already a broken man.

Nehru himself assembled some of the critical Congress MPs to appeal to them that "this is no time for a post-mortem." Explaining his earlier statement that "adequate arrangements" had been made to protect NEFA, Nehru said nobody thought that the Chinese would throw in 30,000 troops. "This can hap-

pen in a totalitarian state but not in a democracy," which had to make every possible saving for welfare purposes. Not that it convinced the MPs. But there was no choice except to accept what Nehru said. They knew that the people, however aggrieved or hurt, were still behind him. However, some of them wanted an early session of parliament and Nehru agreed to the suggestion.

The first message from abroad was that of Khrushchev from the Soviet Union. He hoped that the conflict would be solved by peaceful means on a mutually acceptable basis in the interests of the Indian and Chinese peoples. Nehru was disappointed because he was expecting support from Moscow. He also did not like Khrushchev equating India with China.

He was, however, overwhelmed by a message of sympathy and support which the UK prime minister MacMillan sent. Nehru immediately replied: "Your kind message and the assurance that you will do everything in your power to help us have further heartened us in our determination to resist this blatant Chinese aggression."

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Here was Nehru's line. He, as his writings show, believed that India 'developing through democratic means' was a challenge to China which was pursuing a 'dictatorial path'. The attack on India, he mused, was part of a larger design to humiliate it and create discord among non-aligned countries. He still did not appreciate the gravity of the situation. He told his colleagues that he would be writing to the heads of state to acquaint them with the full story of the Chinese aggression. But he was not yet prepared to sound the West for

Ironically, New Delhi received a cable from the Indian delegation to the UN seeking instructions on how to vote on a resolution which the USSR had sponsored to seat China. And, as before, the delegation was asked to support the resolution. The late-night news from the front was bad. The Chinese forces were cutting through our defences like a knife through butter. Things looked gloomy. What tomorrow held, nobody knew.

Premadasa. With terrorism reducing voter turnout to 55 per cent from the usual 80 per cent, Mrs Bandaranaike lost. She has challenged Mr Premadasa's election in a petition to the Supreme Court.

The subsequent general elections saw Mrs Bandaranaike reentering Parliament as opposition leader in 1989. Since then she has struggled to keep the Freedom Party intact and to fight the incumbent President, a long-time bitter opponent. Party insiders say her private wealth often goes to maintaining party coffers.

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Around, too, she remains perhaps the most well-known among Sri Lankan politicians. Many foreigners are unaware that she is no longer in power. — *Depthevus Asia*

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

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Quest for New Leader Lankan Opposition Starts

Harold Pieris writes from Colombo

She made strides and passed tests that would have topped those of lesser mettle. But now Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike, the matriarch of Sri Lankan politics and current Opposition leader, may have to step down

SIRIMAVO Bandaranaike, the world's first woman Prime Minister, is approaching the twilight of her career. This has put in question the future of Sri Lanka's main opposition party, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, which she has headed for over 30 years.

At 76, Mrs Bandaranaike still has the toughness she showed when she, a political innocent, assumed her country's leadership in 1960 following the assassination of her husband, the revered Prime Minister Solomon Bandaranaike.

She continues to be the rallying point for the fragmented opposition to the ruling United National Party. In a Joint Opposition rally last May, over which she presided, Mrs Bandaranaike stood on stage for about five hours to receive thousands of well-wishers and supporters.

She is a colossus not only with her own party but also with the Left and left-of-centre political activists in Sri Lanka.

But she looks frail especially following a suspected stroke last year. This has sprung moves to seek a new leader for the SLFP.

The successor must be someone who can bring the party out of its 15-year stay in the wilderness — an entire generation has not seen the SLFP in power. Among the contenders are two of Mrs Bandaranaike's children, son Anura and daughter Mrs Chandrika Kumaranatunga, who do not agree on which

way the party should go. Anura, a Member of Parliament, advocates more rightist policies and has the support of majority of Freedom Party MPs.

Chandrika, whose husband Vijaya was killed by Marxist extremists in her presence in 1988, is the darling of the Left and is reportedly favoured by her mother. She only recently rejoined the Freedom Party after feuding with it for nine years.

Other names mentioned are those of Mahinda Rajapaksa, a human rights activist and Parliamentarian who has led many opposition campaigns; and Thilak Karunaratne, a young "upstart" who has chartered his course within the party independently of the Bandaranaike factions.

Whoever comes out will be the main challenger to president Ranasinghe Premadasa, who may call for presidential elections by year's end although he may stay in office until 1994.

Looming over the aspirants is Mrs Bandaranaike, who does not seem to be contemplating complete retirement although her health may eventually force her to do so.

Persuaded to take the party helm after her husband was killed, housewife Sirimavo was immediately dismissed by her

detractors as having no ability to rule the country. She was, of course, to prove them wrong.

During her 12-year rule from 1960 to 1965 and from 1970 to 1977, Mrs Bandaranaike passed tests that would have topped those with lesser mettle. She thwarted a coup attempt by senior military officers in 1962 and crushed an insurrection by the Marxist extremist People's Liberation Front (JVP) in 1971.

When the JVP insurrection broke out, she promptly went on radio vowing to "fight this movement from village to village."

In one by-election campaign in the early 1960s, Mrs Bandaranaike asked an aide what the UNP was saying about her. She was told that the UNP thinks Sri Lanka had gone to the dogs ever since she came into power.

Immediately she relayed this in her campaign speech, telling the crowd that "by dogs, the UNP is referring to you poor people who elected me."

Pursuing a left-of-centre economic policy and tying up with leftist groups in Parliament, her government took over a majority of schools then run by Christian missionaries (Sri Lanka is predominantly Buddhist). She also na-

tionalised the Western oil companies and foreign insurance companies.

During her second term, she introduced land reform which imposed a land ownership ceiling of 50 acres. Her own family and her husband's, both belonging to the upper class aristocracy, were affected.

In 1973 she brought under state control the largest newspaper group in the country, the Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd., and closed down the Sun Group of Newspapers — undemocratic acts which are now rebounding on her. The Associated Newspapers, still under state control, are attacking her and her party vigorously.

Mrs Bandaranaike lost in the 1965 general elections after several of her key ministers, identified with the SLFP's right wing, joined the Opposition and defeated her in Parliament.

She then took the role of Opposition leader, after which she returned to power in 1970 with a landslide victory capturing two-thirds of the Parliament seats.

But what came next was the worst period in Freedom Party's history — following years of severe economic hardship in the country, it was de-

To the Editor

Embarkation fee

Sir, This refers to the embarkation fee paid by all passengers boarding on flights from any airport in Bangladesh, which presently is collected by Civil Aviation from booths located inside the departure hall. This is normally done after the passenger check in with the airline and gets his boarding card. A further check whether the passenger has paid the embarkation fee is made by the staff of Civil Aviation at the time when the passenger enters the immigration area for immigration and customs check. The Civil Aviation staff then deface the embarkation fee receipt by tearing the same so that this may not be used again.

This procedure has worked very well and, therefore, the proposed change whereby the embarkation fee is to be levied on tickets at the time of issuance and then deposited along with supporting documents on the third day of the following month is not quite understood for many reasons, some of which are enumerated below:

(1) Airline tickets are not only sold by airlines but also by dozens of approved travel agents located in various places in Bangladesh. The airlines may be able to comply with the Civil Aviation procedure in theory but they may have difficulty to ensure the same on large number of travel agents authorized to issue airline tickets.

ditional travel procedures, large number of passengers transit Dhaka on various airline tickets, in which those staying for less than 72 hours will be accepted for boarding by the airline without reconfirmation. In such cases, where the passenger has been ticketed outside Bangladesh, no airline will be able to assume full responsibility for collecting the embarkation fee, whether or not the airline has an office of its own in Bangladesh.

(3) Furthermore, the passengers occasionally have their tickets reissued which may further complicate the collection of embarkation fee.

(4) Airline tickets are freely interchangeable/endorsable, the embarkation fee will be collected by the issuing airline although the passenger travelling a different airline from Dhaka will have accounting problems in regard to embarkation fee unless the airlines themselves undergo complicated and lengthy procedures.

(5) This procedure will complicate in preparing Bangladesh Bank passage statement of airlines as embarkation fee can never be considered as their income or fare and also there is no such column in exchange control manual to report such fee.

The above will show the unpracticability of associating ticket issuance with embarkation fee, which in most countries is done at the time prior to boarding, and is the system

here ever since embarkation fee was first introduced in Bangladesh. In case Civil Aviation insists to implement the new system effective from November 1, 1992, it may stand to lose considerable revenue as it would be impossible to administrate timely collection of embarkation fee from airlines, both online and offline, travel agents and individual transit passengers whose tickets are issued abroad.

Last but not the least, the new procedure may involve airlines/travel agents in hiring additional staff to implement collection, checking and making timely deposits of such embarkation fees, and reporting to the authorities, at a time when the travel industry as a whole is facing severe crisis — when there is almost a complete freeze in hiring of new staff.

The existing procedure for collection of embarkation fee has worked very well and I do not consider it worthwhile to change this arrangement.

Should the Civil Aviation authorities so desire, they may further streamline the existing procedures in consultation with the operating airlines, instead of introducing new regulations which may prove as much harmful to Civil Aviation as to the travel industry itself and affect overall projected revenue collection of the Government.

M S Iqbal
Mirto Road, Dhaka

Allottees of RAJUK plots

Sir, Sometime back a report appeared in the newspapers that an honourable member of the parliament enquired about the handing over of plots of land allotted in the 'J' block of Baridhara residential area.

The minister's reply which was briefly reported in the papers appeared to be more of a political score than an earnest effort to solve a problem. It may be mentioned here that the allotment was made more than six years back.

A recent enquiry, after the parliament question-answer, disclosed that RAJUK does not consider itself responsible for the handing over, though it has already realised the full price.

They are smugly waiting for the district land acquisition authority to take possession of the land and give them the same for development etc. The said authority is not known for prompt action unless as allegations go, inspired in a special manner.

When their elected leaders take resort to a mixture of truth, half-truth and less than half-truth in the duel of words, the frustrated allottees can expect little redress to their woes!

An allottee

OPINION

Euthanasia — Gentle and Easy Death

A Qayyum

According to the Oxford Dictionary, euthanasia means "gentle and easy death; bringing about of this, especially in case of incurable and painful disease." There is a great deal of misconception about what euthanasia is and its application to a terminally ill person. Euthanasia is a humane way of allowing a person suffering from an incurable and painful disease to die a gentle and easy death with dignity. When euthanasia is voluntary and a person suffering from an irreparable and excruciatingly painful disease and the person in his or her full senses expressly desires to be relieved of pain and suffering, application of euthanasia by physicians and surgeons, i.e. by stopping any further treatment, cannot in any way be termed as unethical. The same arguments also apply to a person who, by the natural process of ageing, progressively loses all his or her physical and mental faculties and lives a vegetative life and there is absolutely no hope of the process reversing. On ageing, a great man said as long as AD 65: "I will not relinquish old age if it leaves my better parts intact. But if it destroys my faculties one by one, if it leaves me not life but breath, I will depart from the putrid and tottering edifice."

Excruciating pain from an incurable disease strikes terror in the heart of a patient. The knowledge that he or she will have to bear this torturing pain and there is no hope whatsoever of having any relief, gives rise to certain other contributory and equally debilitating factors, such as physical and mental isolation and the agonising thoughts of dying a slow and painful death inch by inch. In such cases, application of euthanasia is the only sensible and also humane alterna-

tive so as to bring relief to the patient who so desperately needs it. Similar relief is also bound to be welcome by a vegetative person whose all physical and mental faculties have forever ceased to function and who is no more than a mere piece of furniture where the person simply breathes, not lives. When the inexorable time has come to make mere physical existence totally meaningless, prolonging life by artificial means can only mean prolonging agony and death, not life.

For a terminally ill patient whose illness is irreversible, application of euthanasia is an act of grace. For those helping the patient to die a gentle and easy death by allowing no further treatment, is an act of compassion. On the part of the relatives of the patient, it is an act of supreme sacrifice deserving of praise for losing a dear and near one. Euthanasia is now, therefore, being practised in many countries of the world.

In an article published a few years ago, the world-renowned surgeon, Dr. Christian Barnard, the pioneer in heart transplant surgery, wrote: "When my mother suffered what can only be called a terminal stroke at the age of 80, it was not a difficult decision for me to allow her treatment to stop. I did not kill her. I gave her dignity in death."

Death is inevitable. When it is considered by all counts that the time has come, it is better to allow a patient to depart with grace instead of prolonging death. A few years ago, an eminent Judge of the Supreme Court of India opined that as everyone has a right to a good life so should everyone have right to a good death.

The writer is a life member of Voluntary Euthanasia Society of UK.