

Stem this Rot

The Islami Chhatra Shibir has gone on the rampage, once again. This time at the Rajshahi University and in the same style and pattern as they did in the Chittagong University. In the unprovoked midnight-to-morning attacks on its rival student groups, including the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), the Shibir let loose a reign of terror. No less than 50 students were seriously injured and more than a hundred others received different types of injuries in the process of fleeing from the scene. So cruel were their actions that, reports have it, they pushed students down from roof-tops of some of the halls. But they have worst record of inventing bizarre methods of torturing activists of different rival student groups. Cutting veins of hands and legs, smashing joints of the body with hammer, lashing blindfolded are some of the methods. Chittagong University saw the rise of this anti-Liberation student wing and the invention of all such inhuman and uncivilised methods of torture.

Eversince the patronage it received from the autocratic regime, the Shibir has been dreaming of flexing its muscle in other universities in line with its concentration of power at the CU. Whether this highly organised student group has taken the cue from any fascist organisation or not is a different question, but the fact remains that it is dead set to capture the universities. Only then the organisation, yet to reconcile with the idea of an independent Bangladesh, can embark on its more ambitious programme. Its activists have already set themselves the task of destabilising the educational institutions and in that they have been highly successful. The burning of our national flag by these elements is among some of the incidents they have been involved in. On every such occasion, however, the Shibir cadres could get away with their dastardly seditious act scot-free.

The blue-print chalked out by the Shibir, as reported by a Bangla daily sometimes back, seems to be quite convincing in that the organisation has poured enough resources in ensuring their command of villagers' support around. Notably, in the Sunday's attack, residents of a nearby village also actively participated. Evidently, the blue-print is working and working quite effectively. What is, however, painful is that the university administration could not — or was reportedly reluctant to — respond to the general students' call for their security. Even a large number of teachers' appeal fell on deaf ears. Now this looks quite intriguing; the police help was sought when the attackers had already finished their job. What is even more surprising is that the police allegedly rounded up the victims of attack, not the attackers. Then the delay in implementing the Syndicate decision to assign the BDR with the responsibility of the law and order on the campus has further eroded the sense of security among the general students.

But this is not the first time that the Shibir has been let go off the hook and, it seems, deliberately. The BNP government has not done much credit to its reputation by not taking the Shibir to task for its various designs against national interests. In Rajshahi, the JCD too has come under the attack. Given its most murky past, the Shibir will not hesitate to strike at the ruling party if the latter proved to be an obstacle to its design. It is time the administration took a firm resolve to deal with the anti-Liberation elements. Playing soft with or placating them will not pay in the ultimate analysis. As for the appointment of the incumbent Vice-Chancellor, it has been highly politicised and therefore controversial. The government also must share some responsibilities in the deterioration of campus atmosphere. So it has the double duty to stem the rot. As a first step, let Shibir be meted out the punishment it deserves for its irrational and criminal acts.

Good Luck to Clinton

With the resumption of conflict with Iraq, the US marines engaged in a hazardous mercy mission in Somalia and an unfolding but a somewhat uncertain strategy for putting an end to the Serbian rampage in Bosnia, Bill Clinton starts his presidency in the United States today under the shadow of grim challenges. It is almost unprecedented in the US history that a change of administration takes place on what looks like an inauspicious note, leaving the new president with no choice but to deal with one staggering problem after another right from the Day One in the White House. Clinton may have no respite, but he certainly has all the goodwill from his people at home and friends abroad, not to mention the mandate from the electorate, to handle the issues facing his new administration in the way he thinks best.

On all these issues, the approach of the Democrat leader would be in favour of continuity of the strategy laid down by George Bush, partly because of the bi-partisan nature of the US foreign policy and partly because the new administration is left with no alternatives. One only hopes that the unfinished jobs inherited by Clinton would not become more complex in coming weeks, that Saddam Hussein would not try more audacious tricks on a new untested president and that the proposed military action favoured by Washington against Serbian forces would not touch off a Balkan War.

For Clinton who had promised his electorate to pay immediate attention to the whole range of domestic problems, there is now an unexpected — and, indeed, an unwelcome — change of priorities. The US leader must accept the change in his stride, with his characteristic vigour, in the knowledge that unless the pressing external problems are resolved, the leadership of Washington in world affairs would be at stake.

Indeed, how much popular support Clinton can generate for his domestic reforms may well depend on the credibility he gains in tackling the immediate issues in foreign relations. Once he can pass the test and demonstrate his control over the situation, even when it is marked by unexpected turn of events, the Democrat leader will be on his way of earning his place among the good — perhaps even the great — presidents of the United States. May be all he needs is good luck which he enjoys in abundance, from within the United States and his country's friends abroad.

SHENZHEN was a typical agricultural region located across the border from Hong Kong on the Pearl river estuary of Guangdong province of China. As recently as 1978 about 30,000 farmers and fishermen comprised the population of Shenzhen. Today the population is approaching half a million. By the turn of the century, the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone (SEZ) would be a huge manufacturing metropolis of over a million people. This is Shenzhen style: create special economic zones as the major centres for export manufacturing and it would propel the rest of the economy forward onto the rapid growth path.

In 1978, the China State Council issued a directive to authorize establishment of few special economic zones in Fujian and Guangdong province. Following this, decision was taken in 1980 to turn Shenzhen along with two other coastal areas into special economic zones representing a unique approach to foreign investment, technology transfer and economic development. A common characteristics of these selected coastal areas of China including Shenzhen being developed as SEZ is that good deep-water port facilities can be developed from where trade with rest of the world could be easily conducted, while at the same time the SEZ should remain isolated although enjoying excellent transport and communication infrastructure but independent of the monetary, fiscal, trade and labour policies applicable to the rest of the country. In addition SEZ must be primarily geared to attract direct foreign investment bringing in new management skills and providing the major conduit for technology transfer to the country. Often it is combined with state investment, indicating complete Government back-up support to foreign investors.

The SEZs of China represent a carefully deliberated step, first in regional development and second in opening several economic sectors (industry, tourism and agriculture) in specific geography areas to foreign involvement of various types. As a result, the transformation into a market oriented economy in its full vigour of growth, technology acquisition and development of corporate management skills will be tried out in selected coastal areas long exposed to all sorts of modern influences through the Chinese outposts of market economy (in particular Taiwan and Hong Kong) as well as overseas Chinese capitalists, most of whom originally came from southern coastal provinces of China. Thus an unique strategy of marketisation and growth is being successfully carried out, avoiding the chaos and anarchy of a wholesale transition of the economy as is the case in

with special privileges to attract direct foreign investment; while, SEZ involves setting apart a portion of the country's territory as a sort of separate economic entity and therefore such SEZs could be physically isolated so that their economic growth is independent and sustainable. In Bangladesh context such economic growth independence is very relevant if we wish to attract direct foreign investment. No foreign investor is going to tolerate either load-shedding and waterless taps, the hartals and mastans. The zone must remain free of the influences of day-to-day political turmoils, while at the same time exerting strong economic growth impulses throughout rest of the economy which in turn should favourably influence the course of future political development. EPZ near Dhaka or Chittagong will always be too close to the sources of political anarchy in the country. Unfortunately for the political leaders, economic growth requires stable environment: direct foreign investment will run away if 'chanda-wallahs' repeatedly clamour for contributions — genuine or otherwise.

Essential Difference
An essential difference between EPZ at Chittagong and SEZ at Shenzhen is the critical difference in the scale. EPZ is basically an industrial estate

Eastern Europe and former USSR.

Capital Construction

The first phase of SEZ development involved a major commitment of Government to capital construction, particularly investment in infrastructure. More significantly, foreign loans, assistance (funds and foreign investment are accepted by the Government in order to prepare the infrastructure as well as to import machinery, complete plants to achieve modernisation targets as quickly as possible. It was realised that the role of domestic spending is critical to modernisation because Shenzhen is basically intensive regional development with substantial foreign involvement.

The Shenzhen SEZ covers an



area of 327.5 sq. Km. and is bounded on the east by Dapeng Bay, on the west by Shenzhen Bay and the Pearl river estuary and on the south by New Territories of Hong Kong. The Shenzhen SEZ outline social and economic development programme is the basic framework in which industrial development has received the major emphasis. However, the main objective is a comprehensive SEZ where industry will develop simultaneously with agriculture, livestock, tourism, housing and construction.

Shenzhen SEZ is intended to be a multipurpose zone where integrated regional development will take place. Accordingly, the central part of Shenzhen SEZ comprising about 11 per cent of the total usable area has been designed to be the major business district of the Zone where all commercial activities, for example, financial services, are concentrated along with limited spread for light industry but many research and development centres would be eventually located here. The

western part of Shenzhen includes the deep-water port of Chauwan eventually capable of berthing ships of upto 10,000 tons and yearly handling capacity exceeding 40 million tons. The port area is also designed to provide support facilities for exploration and exploitation of oil resources of South China sea. Next to the port and within the western part of Shenzhen SEZ is the Shekou industrial zone where, in addition to light industries,

heavy and capital intensive steel and aluminium plants are located. The western part also contains the Yili lake district being developed as a centre for tourism. The eastern part comprising 58 per cent of the usable area of the SEZ is primarily devoted to residential development followed by agri-

culture and fishery, tourism as well as mixed areas for commerce, industry and housing.

Role of Government

The preparation of Shenzhen SEZ involved large scale land development and capital construction. This includes electricity, water, telecommunication, roads, railways, ports and so on where total investment exceeding one billion US dollars by mid 1980s came from several sources: Government budget, official development assistance, commercial bank credit and; most important, investment by the multinationals who obviously intended to operate the infrastructure services on commercial terms. Role of the Government, however, was paramount in infrastructure development which included creation of a completely new urban area in the central part of Shenzhen for commerce and light industry, in addition to high-rise commercial and standardised factory buildings for long-term lease or sale.

The Chinese Government has shown its commitment to

only for the physical infrastructure; the actual setting up of the foreign enterprises has been facilitated by the public sector Shenzhen SEZ Development Co. assigned to play a significant part either as the provider of all support services to wholly foreign owned enterprises or as the joint venture partner. Another innovative approach has been adopted for the Shekou industrial zone on the western part of Shenzhen SEZ where China Merchant Steam Navigation Co. Ltd. has been authorised to raise funds for industries at Shekou. The company is either the joint venture partner or render management support services for a fee to all the industries set up or being established at Shekou.

Hong Kong Duplicated

The Shenzhen style is a new approach to capitalist growth intimately intertwined with the global economy but as separate island within the centrally planned economy of China. The deviations from prevailing practices or even national economic sovereignty has been simply unheard of in the past; for example, at Shekou Industrial Zone, even the salaries are paid in Hong Kong dollars rather than Chinese Yuan. In a nutshell, Shenzhen is Hong Kong duplicated where nothing but money is the game being played non-stop at an ever increasing speed. Economically the SEZs are kept isolated so that rigidities and constraints of state control could be totally bypassed for relentless economic growth through investment expansion.

Bangladesh is not a centrally planned economy. Government is trying to promote market friendly competitive forces of economic growth. Unfortunately, the efforts are not bringing in the desired results in terms of inflow of investment — domestic or foreign. Newspapers are full of well thought out articles blaming it to Government inaction or lack of stability in its policy decisions, labour trouble, cheaper smuggled goods, and above all, poor infrastructure where public investments

are not forthcoming because donors' conditionalities could not be met. However, we must probe deeper beyond the immediately visible shortfalls. In fact our whole culture seemed to be anti-development. Bureaucracy is suspicious of the private sector which is again not unfounded given its past misdeeds. But deep seated jealousy and rivalry in not allowing private individuals to prosper is a factor we must not ignore any more. It is extremely unfortunate that nobody gives any credit to the few capitalists who from very humble beginning have been successful in setting up large business enterprises regardless of the fact that they might be owing money to the bank.

Talking to the decision-makers of the country under informal circumstances, one even gets the impression that perhaps those who are at the helm of affairs have no confidence that we could ever become a newly industrialising country. The vitiated atmosphere is so uninspiring. We are poor and we are bound to remain poor — that seems to be the dictate of our culture of poverty.

To Eliminate the Ills

It is futile to expect that the huge system loss of PDB, colossal subsidies paid to public enterprises or smuggling from across the border — to quote a few of so many ills that we suffer from — could be eliminated within the short span of a year or two. An efficient bureaucracy, responsive to the compulsions of an NIC, can come about only in the long run — after sustainable rates of industrial and investment growth have already been achieved through other means. And, that 'other means' is the Shenzhen style of a new approach to industrialisation and growth, away from the 'Hartals and Mastans' inhibiting the progress of the country but spreading the gospel of growth for everybody to see and learn.

Perhaps that is also the way for Hartals to cease and Mastans to vanish.

Tough Labour Laws Upset Kiwi Unions

Derek Round writes from Wellington

Workers can still ask a union to negotiate a contract with the employer on behalf of the worker, but the agreement is essentially between workers and employer and not union and employer

NEW Zealand's once-powerful trade unions have taken a hammering under the National Party Government's controversial new labour legislation aimed at making the country more competitive in the international marketplace.

Unions once negotiated tough agreements with employers, holding out for high penal rates for overtime and weekend work. Industrial disputes were frequent and employers and National Party politicians complained that high labour costs were making New Zealand uncompetitive beside Asian countries. Potential investors were being scared off by union demands, they claimed.

In 1991 the National Government's Minister for Labour, Bill Birch, successfully pushed through Parliament the Employment Contracts Act which left the industrial movement and opposition Labour Party politicians reeling.

It ended compulsory union membership and replaced collective union agreements with individual contracts. Workers can still ask a union to negotiate a contract with the employer on behalf of the worker, but the agreement is essentially between worker and employer and not union and employer.

The labour market changes, coupled with New Zealand's 1 per cent inflation and low interest rates, have made the country significantly more competitive and in a stronger position to attract badly-needed foreign investment, particularly in tourism and forestry, supporters of the reforms argue.

"The reforms to our labour market have given New Zealand one of the most dynamic industrial relations systems in the world," Finance Minister Ruth Richardson enthused recently. "At last our industrial arrangements help rather than hinder our ability to trade competitively and create new jobs."

The Employment Contracts Act is now recognised as a fundamental pillar of the country's economic recovery. Ms Richardson said. She pointed to a recent survey which showed 81 per cent of company directors approved of the legislation.

The same survey showed 81 per cent of employees reported either a pay increase or no change to their pay. But a Labour Department survey

showed that overall many employers were making changes to workers' pay, particularly penal and overtime rates.

Of all the businesses surveyed, 40 per cent had abolished or reduced weekend pay rates and 25 per cent had done the same to after-hours pay rates.

Twenty-nine per cent had removed or reduced other special allowances or payments for workers. In some cases the loss of penal rates had been compensated for by increases in basic wages.

About a quarter of employers negotiating new employment contracts for staff were cutting trade union rights in them, the Labour Department survey showed. Fifteen per cent of businesses had stopped providing time off for workers to attend meetings of employee organisations and 7 per cent had reduced the time allowed.

Twelve per cent had abolished or reduced the right of employee organisations to enter the premises.

"There is no doubt that these figures bear testimony to

the tougher working conditions in which unions must now operate," the report says.

Service Workers Union organiser Tim Rochford says wages in the hotel industry have plummeted under the new laws. The former minimum wage in hotels was NZ\$8.49 (US\$4.47) an hour — now the going rate is NZ\$7 (US\$3.70). Qualified chefs are earning less than NZ\$20,000 (US\$10,526), considered a low wage here.

Mr Rochford claims employers adopt a raft of measures to reduce wage bills such as employing workers for a three-month trial on NZ\$6.80 an hour. At the end of the trial they do not get a permanent job, and another person is hired on trial pay rates.

Opposition Labour spokeswoman Helen Clark says the Employment Contracts Act is promoting a low-wage approach which is undermining living standards.

Angela Foulkes, Secretary of the Council of Trade Unions, New Zealand's top union organisation, complains: "This is the first government this cen-

tury which basically does not believe unions have a legitimate role in social, economic and industrial life."

But Labour Minister Birch denies this, arguing the labour laws are "an out-standing success," with 74 per cent of employees satisfied with the outcome of contract negotiations. Average pay rates in-

creased by about 3 per cent in the past year — a higher rate than inflation, he says.

The Council of Trade Unions, in a policy document just released, has called for workers and their unions to have a wider role in economic and industrial decision-making. It urges a radical change from the government's hands-off approach to economic management and industrial relations.

And it calls for new labour legislation that gives greater protection of working conditions. — *Depthnews Asia*

OPINION US Law and Child Labour

It is good to know that the abuse of child labour in Third World countries has stirred the conscience of American people and politicians. But alas they should not be hasty in expressing their concern by taking punitive measures against foreign industries employing children. Such an action will only hurt those very children the Americans seem to be concerned about.

In Bangladesh, there are over ten lakh working children between the age of 5 and 15 years scattered in the urban areas. The likely reasons why these children are working on and off the streets are: they have run away from their village home either to escape the tortures inflicted upon them by a step-parent or hoping to live an exciting and freer life in the city or, of course, out of poverty seeking jobs so that they can contribute to the meagre income of their families.

Employers take advantage of their situations and recruit them with very low wages and long working hours. Most of them have no weekly holidays or medical leave. If a child is absent from work for a day she/he will either have that day's salary deducted or lose her/his job. In a country where cheap labour is abundant, hiring and firing a person is of no consequence. And those who have jobs in factories and industries are considered very fortunate because the rest are even worse off — scavenging, vending, begging etc.

The likely scenario one can envision if the US Law against child labour is passed is: most of the children in export-oriented industries and factories will lose their jobs. These children who have set a certain standard of living for themselves will seek other less unsuitable means to maintain such a standard; prostitution, and the likelihood of AIDS will be on the increase; exploitation of child labour in the informal sectors will be at its peak; physical and mental abuse of children at home will

increase due to their inability to contribute to family income, and will increase many more social problems.

Under such circumstances, one would suggest the US Government to seriously consider the socio-economic realities in TWCs before they take drastic measures to clear their conscience. What alternative will be made available for these jobless children? Education on a starving stomach is not the answer. Neither is more foreign funds or foreign NGOs coming into the TWCs to help resolve the social problems perpetuated by a foreign government the answer. There is no need to make countries like Bangladesh more dependent on foreign money than they already are.

In fact, if Americans or the developed countries are really concerned about child abuse then they should pass a law which will greatly improve the working conditions of children in the various formal sectors. They should have higher wages, short working hours, time-off for education, medical leave and allowance, weekly holidays, hygienic and safe working environment etc. This would of course mean that recurring costs of the employers would increase which, in turn, may increase the price of exporting items, affecting the US/foreign importers. The question is, will the American people/Government pass such a law — irrespective of whether it improves the life of thousands of working children in the TWCs — which may slightly affect the US business sector?

One is not propagating for child labour but the elimination of it overnight will create unsurmountable social problems. It is a long process and can be achieved through a well planned programme of the concerned international community.

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To the Editor...

Corruption

Sir, Congratulations to Dr M T Haq for all troubles taken to put some of his experiences of life in the wonderful and the suggestive write up on "Corruption" published in The Daily Star on December 22 and 23 last. However, some of the following observations could be added: the theory "Do to the other people that you would them do unto you," can save us only.

1) Mr Kuldip Nayar before he had joined the diplomatic appointment, used to write in a different style, in my opinion.

Now he has lost the past style and the glimmers and hence he could write (a) "In a fledgling democracy there cannot be black or white." (b) "The approach has to be of tolerance, of feeling that perhaps others might also have some share of the truth." Now should any one make a study on these two sentences in relation to Benazir's demand for the dismissal of Sharif's Government by the same President who had dismissed Benazir, Mr Nayar has tried to give the diluted condition of "democracy", "tolerance" and "truth" to the readers in a convincing style overlooking some of the following factors that could certainly contain the seed of corruption accepted by the

readers as the "dicta" formulated by a reputed writer of the past: i) After 45 years (1947 to 1992) the sentence (a) above is not acceptable. Furthermore "black" is always black and "white" is always white... This is how "love, justice and the logical peace" are destroyed by the leadership and some of the intellectual writers of any given country and thus the common people are betrayed. ii) "Tolerance" (b) above cannot be the work of one side only; "some share of the truth" has left a big gap for the advantages of the mistrust and the misuse of the authority in the name of "fledgling democracy" and thus the common people are betrayed without any benefit during the last 45 years.

This is how corruption starts to grow through and from top of the government and the human society and the common people actually get nothing.

2) Now Dr Haq will certainly find that the corruption of which he has carefully described has the similar picture in Bangladesh and it is being carried out in the same style of the past, only some of the points may seem to be different. a) Two budget years (1991-92-93) are sufficient to make the beginning. However, during the last two budgets no new investment has shown be-

yond the promises, while the purchasing and the saving capacities of the people are decreasing (India has 21%, Pakistan has 10% and Bangladesh has 4-5% saving capacities) as per the statement of the honourable Finance Minister as the chief guest on the World Savings Day) and consequently investment in Bangladesh shall be slow. b)

The present Government of Bangladesh has overlooked some of the factors of corruptions: i) The "meeting" and "chief guest" syndromes are growing fast, wherefrom all sorts of corruptions, violences etc get the origin at the expenses of the public fund... Analyses of the language used by the leaders, as reported in the newspapers, radio and TV, will prove them, and consequently our leaders have now changed some words and have started to ask for "co-operation", "suggestions", "make my hands strong" etc, while perhaps, they neither mean anything through the uses of such nice terms nor do they accept anything that does not serve their direct purpose nor do they have time to take care of the administration.

River flows from the top of the mountain, so also corruption through so-called cooperation from the top grows in every country sadly in the

name of democracy and development.

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Life of the poor

Sir, I think the art of doing literature with the life and living of the poor people is a sort of luxury on the part of those who write such novel, drama, poems etc. Even we who read, watch or listen to these arts are also extracting a sort of undue pleasure out of the poor and distressed peoples' inhuman living. For instance, often in some BTV dramas we find well-dressed ladies with fashionably arranged hairs portraying the roles of poor housemaids, rural women, construction and other workers which seems to me as if we are making a satire/fun of the real workers' poor plight!

Drama is obviously a reflection of the real society but while producing a drama particularly on the poor's life, careful attention should be given on sets, costumes etc. so that the drama may not become funny show hurting the sentiments of those people who are playing the drama's roles in their real life.

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