

Raid on Street Vendors

We have two views on the police swoop on the street vendors of certain areas of Dhaka last Thursday, only a few days before Eid. One view is that it was a necessary action. Anybody who has visited Baitul Mukarram, Motijheel and Gulistan areas recently will agree that footpaths no longer belonged to the pedestrians and were under permanent occupation of the street vendors. Stories have it that 'possessions' of these spaces are 'sold' to the highest bidders by the local mastans who take protection money from the users. This problem, though acute as it is, became more so during the days of Ramadan when Eid shopping reached its peak. Street vendors, in search of a place to sell their wares occupied the footpaths in increasing numbers leading to a situation that forced pedestrians to abandon the sidewalks and use the main roads for walking from one place to another.

However, there is another view on the same action. This apparently well justified action of the police has allegedly a more shady side to it. It has been alleged that the step against the street vendors by the police resulted from the refusal of certain vendors to pay a 'toll' to the police for the use of the municipal space. We would like to believe that such allegations are not true. However, the selective approach of the police in removing street vendors naturally gives rise to such suspicions. There is also the question of the timing of the move. Why during the peak shopping season?

Given the fact that a serious doubt has arisen in the public mind as to the real purpose behind these unplanned police raids, the police authority or the Home Ministry should investigate the matter and try to remove these suspicions. There is also the added question of what the police does with the seized items. Quite often we hear reports of police and Customs officials raiding shops to recover smuggled goods — the most popular being sarees. But we never hear anything as to what becomes of them. This again leads to further suspicion about these raids.

While being fully supportive of all attempts to contain smuggling and to clear up our footpaths for the use of the pedestrians, we are of the view that vendors themselves are entitled to some rights which are being denied to them. To seize their inventory is, in many cases, to make them total destitutes. Why are we turning these small traders into destitutes? Don't we have enough of them already? Then again these street vendors represent certain activities which are good for the economy. Just as, on the one hand, the present situation is quite untenable, so, on the other, the whimsical and arbitrary repressive measures against the vendors are counterproductive and unjustified. Street vending could be looked upon more positively and perhaps some sort of licensing mechanism could be set up which would reduce the number of such people on the streets, earn some money for the hard-pressed municipality and provide these enterprising people with some regular outlet for their business.

Sarees — Local and Foreign

The sporadic clashes that broke out between shopkeepers on the one side and law enforcing agencies and Customs officials on the other is far from a pleasant sight and, more importantly, a happy development. More so if this is considered against the backdrop of the sagging economy. No doubt about the Customs people's right to swoop on items illegally procured for sale in the market. The illegal procurement does not necessarily mean the shopkeepers' direct involvement in black-marketing of the banned but highly coveted goods. What in the first place is questionable is the decision to ban something in high demand in the market. The argument put forward in this connection is to provide the local factories or industries protection.

Apparently, this looks to be a step designed to protect the national interests as such. But a closer analysis shows how flawed the argument is. The contentious issue on Wednesday was the sale of sarees allegedly foreign, more precisely Indian, made. The shopkeepers stand by their claim that the sarees the Customs officials came to seize were of local origin. Whether the sarees in question were local or foreign made cannot be ascertained now, for things have taken a different turn by the time. But one thing is absolutely clear that the legal cover intended to stop smuggling of Indian sarees into the country's markets has miserably failed. Not only is there demand for Indian sarees by our consumers, but they also procure those anyhow.

All this has set into motion a host of distorting forces. But the number one bad impact certainly is non-receipt of a considerable sum of revenue by the government in the absence of legal import of the item. Smuggled as the sarees are, they just contribute to black money, putting our local-made ones into further unfair competition. Legal import, moreover, could provide our local textile industry with competition necessary for improving design, texture and quality of sarees. In this connection, it is worth mentioning that some local varieties favourably compare with the Indian-made clothes. It is not totally uncommon that sometimes the local sarees are passed off as Indian ones with a higher price tag. Therefore, it becomes quite clear that the clamour by the local mill-owners for protection from Indian rivals is based on a wrong premise. Instead of protecting our national or even local textile industry's interests we are just doing damage to both. A fair competition in open market will bring the best in our entrepreneurship and our products will enjoy as much popularity as the imported ones, if not more.

Billions of kilowatt hours of hydro-electricity can be developed in the Arunachal state of North-east India. But there are no consumers while West Bengal chronically suffers from load-shedding. It is not economic to transfer electricity through Indian territory all along the northern border with Bangladesh. Instead, electricity should be supplied to us and we in turn provide our gas-fired power to West Bengal and beyond through a second east-west interconnector across the river Jamuna which has already been designed and awaiting implementation at present. Not only that, the entire merchandise trade of Northeast India both with rest of India as well as the world at large can move at much less cost through Chittagong and Chalna for international trade and the road and railway links with India on our western borders. In return, we sell our low quality tea to India enabling India to export her high quality tea to other countries. France is both an exporter and importer of wine. We should do the same with highly differentiated commodities like tea.

There could be several such examples. In a nutshell, very many complementarities for trade and investment, therefore economic growth, could be identified between three geographic areas: North-east India, Bangladesh and rest of India. This is the growth triangle which could be promoted for rapid boost in investment, trade and, therefore, economic growth.

Another potentially very effective growth triangle might be (i) North-east India, (ii) Bangladesh and (iii) Arakan province of Burma. Rice cultivation promoted in Arakan can meet the deficits of both NE India and Bangladesh; while timber from Arakan might promote manufacture of furniture and other wood-

based products in Bangladesh for export since labour which is the other significant factor for the industry is no problem in Bangladesh. As mentioned before, the famous Assam tea finds the global market through Chittagong coming by train all the way from the gardens. This used to be the case before 1947. Why similar arrangements cannot be revived now?

Basically both Arakan and NE India are short of labour. Hence there have been tremendous pressures from illegal migrants of Bangladesh. Inevitably, it has generated political problems. The most obvious way to obviate the problem is to promote triangular trade and investment between these three areas through exploitation and development of natural and other land-based resources and generate greater value-added from them by the use of surplus labour of Bangladesh. All the three areas would grow simultaneously. Let us therefore proceed for the growth triangle in the midst of our poverty-ridden part of Asia. It is feasible provided the political leadership is bold enough to see through immediate short-run turmoils and look for long term gains for all of us to secure.

An innovative approach to triangular growth could be sought among the coastal areas of the Bay of Bengal: Bangladesh, Burma and the states of Orissa-West Bengal of India for exploitation of marine resources and off-shore petroleum; as well as mutually beneficial processing and trading arrangements. Labour intensive manufacturing production developed in Bangladesh and Burma could be linked to the deep-sea port of

Growth Triangles in Asia

Trincomalee in Sri Lanka which is yet another possibility of triangular growth and development excluding India.

Competitive Advantage

The concept of growth triangles has emerged to exploit the complementarities of geographically contiguous areas of different countries in order to gain new markets as well as competitive advantages in exports. After two decades of sustained high growth perfor-

Asia to-day. In fact, manufacturing growth can be conceived as a sequence of development which go through early intervention of the so-called footloose industries. Labour cost is the key, the triangle is the mechanism to retain competitive advantages of cheap labour within the grip of the nations by means of investment, trade and common service industries. As for example, manufacturing shoes is no longer economic in

accessories for the industry developed within the proposed so-called leather growth triangle.

Another significant growth triangle has developed involving Southern Provinces of China, Hongkong and Taiwan. It is basically the combination of three elements: cheap labour of China, technology and management of Taiwan and marketing services of Hongkong. Ethnically the same people are involved within the triangle which, in no small measure, facilitated its emergence. However, basic complementarities or comparative advantages must exist as essential factors behind every growth triangle.

There are several growth triangles at the planning stage within South-east Asia and East Asia: (i) Northern Thailand, adjoining areas of Burma and Yunnan province of China is one possibility where tourism will be very important followed by industries based on forestry, gems and horticulture crops; (ii) Thailand's southern seaboard development aims at linking the region with Singapore and contiguous territories of Malaysia in yet another growth triangle; and, (iii) the third such possibility is the development of Tumen river basin covering parts of North and South Korea as well as north-east China.

Economic Cooperation

It may be noted that the south Asian countries are all at similar stages of labour intensive phases of export-led industrialisation. Consequently, it may be difficult to identify the typical opportunities for growth triangles as is the case among the NICs and other fast growing economies of Asia.

Hence the emphasis should be on the differences in resource endowments, economic complementarities as well as locational factors which are solid grounds for economic cooperation that serve the interests of all the SARC countries.

In this connection, it is of interest of south Asia to note that North-east Asia was the battle ground only three decades back. Regardless of it, they are now planning the growth triangle. Why cannot Bangladesh, India and Nepal get together to develop such river basin development? Not only our agriculture will flourish, the immense hydel power that could be generated hold the key to our future industrialisation. The Mekong River development have created an intercountry body to promote integrated development of the adjoining regions of several countries: Thailand, Cambodia, Laos PDR, Vietnam and China. Again it may be recalled that the countries named above were fighting wars in the very recent past. We never fought a war with our neighbours, the question does not arise. So, what for is the delay? This is the great unanswered question of the decade of 1990s. In spite of being so similar, we are so different for no good reason whatsoever.

The delay is due to our deep seated compromise with poverty. In south Asia, the only sub-region of Asia which is not growing, one tends to come to the fatalistic conclusion that we are poor because we are poor. A new movement to deliberately promote trade and economic co-operation is necessary. It cannot be at the government level. It must be started by the private sector. Let them start a new initiative for the south Asian development and the governments must follow it as the fait accompli.

WINDOW ON ASIA

Shahed Latif

manage, per capita income of Singapore has now reached five digit figures; labour-intensive manufactured exports cannot be sustained there any longer, Singapore has now turned into a capital-rich, labour-short economy. But in adjacent Indonesian island of Riau on the one side of Singapore, and the southern part of Malaya peninsula on the other, labour is cheap; industrial sites are plentiful and the respective governments have come up with the necessary investment to build the required infrastructures like electricity, telecommunication, roads and ports, housing etc. So Singapore entrepreneurs and its service industries take care of investment, design, management, marketing and other financial services while actual manufacturing production facilities are spread out on the adjoining regions of Indonesia and Malaysia.

Such manufacturing based growth triangles are also feasible linking Bangladesh economy with south-east and east Asia. As for example, very high quality leather can be produced in Bangladesh from the available goat skins while increasingly high wage economies of East Asia are becoming uncompetitive as centres for manufacturing shoes and other leather products. Therefore it should be feasible to locate tanneries and low-scale leather industries in Bangladesh; while high quality shoes and leather goods are manufactured in Thailand and Singapore provide design, marketing services as well as

Abuses Against Journalists in Mideast, S Asia Reported

WASHINGTON: The threat of Islamic fundamentalism has increasingly been used by governments in the Middle East as a justification for restricting freedom of the press, according to a report released March 16 by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). The report also states that violence against journalists in South Asia is on the rise.

"Attacks on the Press: 1992," documents 1,625 attacks against more than 1,300 journalists and news organizations around the world — the highest number of abuses ever recorded by CPJ since its founding in 1981.

Many of these attacks are related to "ethnic, religious or linguistic conflicts" throughout the world, Anne Nelson, executive director of CPJ, said during a press briefing at the National Press Club.

The release of the report was held in conjunction with the National Press Club's Freedom of the Press Day. The National Press Club awarded its annual International Freedom of Press Award to Taher Shriteh, a Palestinian journalist working in the Gaza Strip. Shriteh is a correspondent for Reuters and has worked as a stringer for The New York Times, CBS News, the Voice of America and the

British Broadcasting Corporation.

Shriteh has been arrested three times by the Israeli government, the most recent arrest coming days after the announcement of his winning the International Freedom of the Press Award. Accepting his award during a luncheon reception, Shriteh said he hopes the award "sends a message to the Israeli government to stop harassment of Palestinian journalists" in the West Bank and Gaza.

CPJ documented 251 cases of attacks against the press in 17 countries in the Middle East and North Africa, including detentions, legal actions and killings. At least 40 journalists remain imprisoned in the region, CPJ reports.

The threat of Islamic fundamentalism "has increasingly been used by Middle Eastern regimes to justify heightened repression, delayed reform, postponement of elections, and limits on press freedom," the CPJ report states.

The governments of Algeria and Tunisia have arrested journalists and suspended independent papers as part of crackdowns against Islamic fundamentalists, CPJ reports. "These developments were especially disappointing because the governments of

by A Special Correspondent

Algeria and Tunisia had been encouraging press liberalization and political reform in recent years," the report states.

In Egypt, the assassination of Dr Farag Fouda, a columnist and outspoken secularist, by Islamic extremists, "was used as a pretext for drafting an anti-terrorism law and escalating the government's war against its Islamist opponents," the report states.

CPJ reports that journalists in the West Bank and Gaza Strip "remained targets for censorship, harassment, beating, detention, and threats by soldiers." Improvements in press freedom in the occupied territories "were offset by the government's reaction to the escalating violence of the armed Islamist opponents of the peace process," according to the report.

"Conditions for Palestinian reporters covering the unrest deteriorated considerably," CPJ reports. Taher Shriteh said the Israeli government "is aiming to stop these people from reporting. . . . They want to stop the flow of information from Gaza to the world."

Syria and Iraq continue to exercise complete control over all media, CPJ reports. While prisoner amnesties in Syria included the release of several

journalists, "they were quickly replaced with newly imprisoned journalists," the report notes.

In Iraq, Uday Saddam Hussein, the president's son and owner of the newspaper daily Babil and weekly Al-Rafidayn, was elected president of the Iraqi journalists association. This development "symbolizes the absolute repression of independent journalism by the Iraqi government," the report states.

Kuwait holds the largest number of journalists in prison in the region, the report states. "At least 18 journalists remain in prison in Kuwait, the second highest number in the world," after China with 28 journalists in prison, CPJ reports.

Many of these journalists worked for Al-Nida, the official organ during the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait. While CPJ "does not condone a propaganda organ, it does not condone how these journalists have been treated," Avner Gidron, Middle East expert at CPJ, said during the press briefing.

Violence against journalists is "on the rise in South Asia," CPJ states. India is "one of the problem spots coming along" in this regard, Anne Nelson, executive director of CPJ, said.

Attacks against journalists in India are not part of a clear policy of government repression," Nelson said. For the most part, journalists have been attacked during the recent sectarian violence and riots throughout the country, she noted. However, the police in India have demonstrated a "stance of passivity" in regards to these attacks, Nelson said.

"The police will stand by and do nothing," she said. While CPJ "is not accusing the authorities of direct action, passivity is a form of abuse in itself," Nelson said.

In Kashmir, Punjab and Assam, journalists confront both government forces and separatist militants; each side wants to control the media," the report states. Journalists have been attacked with grenades, beaten and brutalized, and the director of All-India Radio was beheaded by Punjabi separatists, CPJ reports.

While journalists continue to be attacked and harassed in Sri Lanka, CPJ reports that journalists also "began to mobilize to demand the right to work in an atmosphere free of intimidation."

CPJ states that government pressure on independent publications in Pakistan has increased and that security forces have attacked journal-

ists reporting on former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's activities.

Anne Nelson said CPJ plans a fact-finding mission to South Asia in 1994. CPJ "is eager to establish additional contacts with the local press" in India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, she said. She encouraged journalists in these countries to form local press freedom associations and document incidents of attacks against the press.

Addressing the awards reception, Terry Anderson, former Associated Press bureau chief in Beirut and a long-time hostage in Lebanon, stressed the importance of a free press and noted the part international journalists play to promote this freedom.

"There is no more important principle or freedom in the world than those twin freedoms — speech and press," Anderson said.

"These freedoms "must be fought for and paid for," he said. Noting the CPJ report on attacks against the press, Anderson said local journalists working throughout the world are the "front-line troops" for fighting and paying for these freedoms.

"These journalists "are a vital part of the change from autocracy to a democratic and open society," he said.

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

B Com (Pass) course

Sir, The students of B Com (Pass) course appear to be neglected by the university authorities. As a student of this course, I do not find any appreciable reason to the points stated below for kind perusal and appraisal of your esteemed readers.

SYLLABUS: Our syllabus is short and traditional. This can only need students to memorize, very few questions demand library work. And, as such, many students know that 4/5 months' study can well earn them a second class, while regular full-fledged study from the beginning even may not earn one a first class.

Questions are made in such a form that does not justify the point whether the students do understand the subject, rather it encourages them to memorize only parts of the whole thing for the answer.

We do not study many items as that are not taught in Preliminary though Honours students study those. Example —

- 1) Accounting: Amalgamation, Absorption, Reconstruction are not included. Company chapter is also very short.
- 2) Cost Accounting: Marginal Costing, Budgetary Control, Cost Control etc. are not included.
- 3) Statistics: Probability, Sampling, Distribution, Test of

Significance are not included. Stat. I Sc or I Com syllabus is broader than B Com's.

4) Auditing and Income Tax are one paper in Pass course though these are two separate papers in Honours.

This type of syllabus is making poorly qualified 7/8 thousand commerce graduates each year. Will not Bangladesh gain if these students were properly taught?

EXAMINATION: Our examinations never start in time, and always after 7/8 months later than schedule. Why?

Duration of our exam is about 4 weeks and college teachers take 4/5 weeks to return the exam papers to the university. But to announce the results, university takes another 20 weeks. The reason behind it is university teachers take papers to scrutinize, put those perhaps in their drawers and forget to return them in time, maybe for being busy with seminars, foreign trips and consultancy. My Principal, who is a famous teacher, told me. Once I asked a high-ranking officer in the Registrar building about it, he answered that if Controller, Head Examiners and teachers work sincerely result can be announced within three months instead of seven months.

If results are announced earlier, the students will be able to study CA, CMA, MBA earlier.

ROUTINE: We have only one optional subject. So there is no possibility for a student to have two exams in a day.

We need a minimum gap between papers but the routine is made without any gap between papers and with a long unwanted gap between the subjects. In any kind of degree exam, time is four hours for a paper and there is a minimum gap between two papers.

Such syllabus and exam system only discourage students to pursue knowledge sincerely. Now who is responsible for this? Why university does not change this traditional, unyielding system? What can we expect from the country's highly educated teachers?

In conclusion, I like to inform the esteemed readers about an autocratic sudden decision. Earlier we could apply for MBA exam as 'appeared' and that was the only chance to reduce our session gap. But last December, university withdrew this opportunity without thinking of the problems of the concerned students and without any prior notice. Last year the government suddenly changed its exam policy about SSC students. At that time these teachers criticized the government as 'irresponsible'. Now, what can we say about their own decision?

A B Com examinee

Holiday
Sir, Friday is our weekly holiday. This year the holiday on account of Independence Day coinciding Friday (26.3.93), we are deprived of that holiday. Moreover, as per normal rules, the day preced-

ing and day following the Eid day are observed as closed holidays. In all probability 25.3.93 will be the Eid-ul-Fitr day this year. So we will be deprived of the holiday on 26.3.93.

Now 22.3.93 is closed on account of Shah-I-Qadr. In view of what is stated above, it is requested that the government may kindly, on special consideration, declare 23.3.93 as a closed holiday to enable numerous government and private employees celebrate both the occasions of Eid and Independence Day befittingly with their near and dear ones even at their district homes.

Md Solaiman
9/2 Motijheel, Dhaka

Bus parking

Sir, Indiscriminate and haphazard parking of buses, halage at prescribed 'bus stop' in rows of three to four, their 'U' turn, maintenance works in busy and crowded public roads, notably in Gullistan area, and on a part of Dhaka-Narayanganj Road from Nawabpur Road/Old Railway Crossing to Mawa Bus Stand at Folder Street, Wari have become serious traffic problems and the sufferings of the people, especially those living in the southeastern part of Dhaka city at Jurain, Jatrabari, Gandaria, Narinda and Wari know no bounds.

True, with the increase in population the traffic problem in the metropolitan city of Dhaka is getting from bad to worse day by day, but if our law enforcing authorities and the traffic police continue to remain silent spectators, fail to take preventive and stringent measures and do not check,

control and supervise the situation the day is not far off when all the public roads, footpaths and the locality streets would be totally lost in the wilderness.

We would request our public leaders, Dhaka District Administration and Dhaka Municipal Corporation to look into the matter, restore discipline on the public roads and ensure plying of vehicles and movement of the pedestrians without any hindrance.

O H Kabir
Dhaka-1203

Turkish minority in Greece

Sir, Every year, religious officials from Turkey visit Western Thrace, on the occasion of the Holy Ramadan. This year four Muslims who have gone to Western Thrace as guests of the Muslim minority in the region, during the holy month of Ramadan, have been deported by the Greek authorities.

Whereas the Muslims had gone to the region to deal exclusively with religious matters and to help the local Muslims live the holy month of Ramadan in the morally most beneficial manner, the Greek authorities have once again blatantly violated the religious and moral rights and freedoms, guaranteed by the Treaty of Lausanne of 1924, of the Muslim minority in Western Thrace.

In perpetrating this act of religious intolerance, the Greek authorities went as far in distorting the facts as to

claim that the Turkish government had prior knowledge on the decision regarding the expulsion of the Muslims.

This arbitrary attitude of the Greek administration is rigorously at odds with a number of international instruments including the Treaty of Lausanne, the UN Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination based on Religion or Belief, the UN Declaration on Human Rights, the UN International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, the UN International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights, as well as a number of other documents and resolutions on human rights, signed within the framework of the CSCE process, all to which Greece is signatory.

Although the Greek orthodox minority in Turkey enjoys perfect freedom of religion and conscience, the Greek governments have always systematically attempted to force the Muslim minority in Western Thrace to immigrate and have hampered their right to education in the minority's own language, have precluded the minority's right to elect their own religious leaders and have impeded the functioning of the Vaqfs.

The attitude of the Greek authorities is a flagrant violation of the freedom of religion and conscience. This act of total intolerance constitutes another vivid example of a totally unacceptable breach on basic human rights.

Embassy of Turkey,
Dhaka