

Pakistan's Failed Bid

In what appears to be a face-saving recantation, Islamabad has dropped its resolution at the United Nations Human Rights Commission seeking despatch of a fact finding mission to Kashmir for India's gross and consistent violations of the human rights of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. It was a prestige diplomatic offensive that Pakistan's Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto had mounted with herself making an impassioned call from the human rights commission podium in Geneva and following it up by efforts to muster support for her cause. India launched a massive diplomatic counter-offensive which included, among other things, visits by foreign ambassadors to the valley.

What made the day for India and took the wind off the sail of Pakistan's resolution is New Delhi's readiness to facilitate a visit by a group of ambassadors from Muslim countries to Jammu and Kashmir and its willingness to let the international committee of the Red Cross meet detainees in Kashmir. Pakistan paid heed to the persuasion by its Islamic ally, Iran, which led an appeal by more than ten countries that kept faith with India's readiness to receive a delegation of Muslim country ambassadors in Jammu and Kashmir.

China, in whom Pakistan must have banked, appeared to be mindful of her improving relations with India. And, the Western countries, regardless of their occasionally expressed concern over violations in Kashmir acted on the side of discretion wanting obviously not to get involved in a dispute between neighbours. Anyway, they saw the reason to believe that India was trying to be more transparent with Kashmir affairs. This is exactly where we believe India stands committed and to that extent she obligated to ensure that irrespective of what had evoked criticism in the past, from now on, her security forces in the valley would be cautious in handling things.

Narasimha Rao's government has been flayed by some commentators that whenever the Kashmir question cropped up it harped on getting Pakistan branded as a terrorist state in an escapist approach. The diplomatic victory of India in the particular sense that the Pakistan resolution was not put to vote might silence Narasimha Rao's detractors for some time.

Pakistan might not think that it has come full cycle back to square one on the Kashmir question. It has actually said as much. Islamabad has claimed having clinched a foreign policy success for the first time in 29 years by bringing the issue on to the United Nations platform. And if need be she would bring that up again. It has been basically an extended articulation of the allegations of abuse of human rights in Kashmir but it has boiled down to an exercise in testing the waters of world diplomacy. Pakistan must have emerged vastly experienced on this count that in the present-day configuration of international politics without camps and blocs, the bilateral mode of resolving issues is increasingly gaining ground. The Kashmir issue has got so embroiled it is not merely a human rights issue, there is the fundamentally more complicated dimension of a freedom movement to it.

Trouble-free Journey for Home-bound Passengers

Laws and discipline are generally compromised at the three large bus terminals of the city. A daily feature the passengers have mostly come to terms with. During the festival times such as the two Eids, total anarchy reigns supreme in those places where long-route buses start from and come back to. A vernacular daily has given a detailed account of the harassment, humiliation, trial, tribulations and cheating the home-bound passengers are subjected to. Gabtoli terminal outdoes the other two in causing suffering to the people. An unholy alliance of a section of bus employees, toll collectors, bullies and middle-men have taken hostage of the innocent and unsuspecting passengers.

Not only are the passengers made to pay double or even more than the normal fare for the journey home, they are sometimes left stranded at destinations other than their intended ones, robbed of their valuables, cash and luggages. The list of misdeeds by the dishonest elements is endless and all of this can happen under the nose of the law enforcers. It is precisely because of this that allegations of collusion are also levelled against them. Whether they have a part or not is immaterial, because the important thing is how the authority concerned looks at this disgusting and unlawful practices by a few culprits.

It will be wrong to assume that the concerned thana or the higher authorities are unaware of these routine offences being committed. The fact is that the excesses can continue by default of the authorities' appropriate measures or complicity of a section of their members in this. Sure enough, everyone has a claim to a reasonable share of the booming activities that mark the two occasions. But this does not mean that organised gangs will have to outsmart common people with their cunningness, coercion and guile. When the fares are raised double the amount, what role does the transport authority play?

Last year the transport workers did resort to all sorts of irregularities, breaking past records. This time things may go to yet another extreme. But why should the magisterial system remain so passive when innumerable numbers of people fall victim to the unholy trap? If people are forced to part with their cash and other belongings at the time of returning home, there is no chance for them to enjoy the happy occasion. Neither ethically nor from the religious point view, much less from the legal point, such practices can have any sanction. But this is allowed to continue any way. It is the duty of the law enforcing agency, along with others, to take care of the situation and ensure a trouble-free disciplined and safe journey of the passengers rushing for home. If the chaos is allowed, it gets an adverse reflection in society's other affairs.

WHEN the press is a subject, the debate is seldom objective. Extraneous considerations creep in. Owners and editors jump into the fray. Their own interests and rivalries come into play. The real point is lost.

The proposed entry of foreign press to India is one such topic that has generated a similar response. It is either too emotional or too businesslike. And the debate is unreal in the sense that the medium and small newspapers, which constitute the bulk in the country, are nowhere in the picture. In fact, the fight seems to be between one set of big houses against another.

It all began when one press baron entered into a contract with a London financial daily to start a simultaneous edition from India. A few others followed his example and made arrangements with some other foreign groups of newspaper. While the matter awaited central government's approval (it has been rejected since), one paper went to a high court and obtained a stay order on the plea that the title it had obtained from the Registrar of Newspapers of India (RNI) would be violated if a foreign paper with the same title were allowed publication in the country.

Had the debate been confined to a title or name, it would have been sorted out. After all, many papers and persons corner particular titles and fail to appear. Even when they do, they are not a regular publication. It turns out that the point at issue from the beginning was whether the foreign press should be allowed to enter India or not.

Both protagonists and opponents have made several

points. But they boil down to two. One, put forward by the supporters, is that the Indian press is afraid of competition, which is basic to any economic reform. This is a weighty argument but lacks credibility because India has nearly 1,200 dailies and many more journals of different ideology and pursuit, competing with one another. They literally fight for every inch of territory and employ all types of methods, even unethical, to surpass their rival in circulation.

The other point, articulated by the opponents, is that the foreign press will destroy India's culture. This too does not carry conviction. The 5,000-year-old heritage is not so flimsy or ephemeral that the touch of foreign press will defile or destroy it. Despite cultural onslaughts from the sky, India is holding its own. Had Doordarshan been more imaginative and less commercial, the task would have been easier. Foreign TV networks would not have had even a fraction of viewing as they have today. However, this matter is far from settled and needs to be looked into from the point of gibberish culture the youth has been exposed to in the past few years.

The real point to consider is what damage foreign newspapers and journals can do? They are already available in

the country, although at an exorbitant price. With the vast resources they have, they can provide an unhealthy competition. They can cut into the prevailing price and offer a bulkier size, which even as newspaper may be an attractive proposition for a buyer.

The latest technology they can afford may not affect the Indian press so much as the loss of talent which is inevitable because of the fat salaries and perks the out-

ing impact. It is taken as a gospel truth, particularly in the countryside where the 80 per cent people live. Should foreigners, who are ignorant about India's ethos and may even be hostile to its national interests, be allowed in the field where impressions from external influences count substantially? They may revive certain controversies which are at rest today. Their writings will be suspect and may be considered an interference

Committee on the Reorganisation of News Agencies, set up during the Janata government, found that foreign news agencies were full of propaganda. Their copy gave the impression as if they were an extension of their country's foreign office. The committee came to the conclusion that India should have a news agency of its own to cover foreign affairs so that a more objective version was available to readers. This proposal has been hanging fire for the last 15 years.

There is yet another hitch to the entry of foreign press. Article 19 of the constitution says, "All citizens have a right to freedom of speech and expression..." A citizen, as defined in Article 5, means an Indian by birth, domicile, etc. Foreigners cannot exercise "the natural rights, inherent in the status of citizen in a free country" as a Supreme Court judgment has said.

Some people may find Article 19 contrary to the spirit of globalisation. But this is as much true in the developed countries as in the third world. Rupert Murdoch, the media mogul, had to become a US national to own a TV network in America. The Sony company, which acquired a substantial number of shares in CBS, had to mollify Americans by giving them an assurance

that it would not impose the Japanese culture on them.

The argument that the press is an industry does not jell. A newspaper is not a product like steel, cloth or jute. It is a concomitant of news and views, of ideas and thoughts. It is not a process where raw material is fed at one end and to get a finished product at the other. Writing is creativity, not automation.

Journalism is a profession, a vocation requiring specialised training in a field of learning. It is an art, not science. Comparing it with the industry is to lower the mind to the level of machine. The press barons, who consider journalism an industry, realise this. Otherwise, they would not be running after the best of journalists and would, instead, be producing them in their own fancy, flabby set-up. I am not defending all that appears in our papers. There is a lot of rubbish. But you cannot throw the baby out with the bathtub.

Only recently did the GATT trade talks at Geneva reject America's demand for free operation of media. It wanted the media to be included in the intellectual property. The European powers, particularly France, did not agree to what they termed as cultural onslaught. They won.

The Editors Guild of India discussed the entry of foreign press the other day but could not arrive at any decision. It was felt that a fuller discussion would be required. Perhaps the government should appoint a press commission to look into this and other aspects that torment the press. Still better will be a media commission because the foreign onslaught is affecting all fields of information, not the press alone.

Entry of Foreign Press

Unlike radio or TV, something fleeting, anything that appears in the press has a lasting impact. It is taken as a gospel truth, particularly in the countryside where the 80 per cent people live. Should foreigners, who are ignorant about India's ethos and may even be hostile to its national interests, be allowed in the field where impressions from external influences count substantially?

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

siders will offer. It will be a brain-drain within one's own country.

All this is not so important as the havoc the foreign press can create in domestic politics. Some of them have their own axe to grind. Their attitudes are seldom favourable to our country. Even in straight reporting on the third world, they have a point of view to sell. A newspaper or a journal in India wields a lot of influence over the people, their thoughts and behaviours; it guides them.

Unlike radio or TV, something fleeting, anything that appears in the press has a last-

ing impact. It is taken as a gospel truth, particularly in the countryside where the 80 per cent people live. Should foreigners, who are ignorant about India's ethos and may even be hostile to its national interests, be allowed in the field where impressions from external influences count substantially? They may revive certain controversies which are at rest today. Their writings will be suspect and may be considered an interference

Even otherwise, somewhere the line has to be drawn. It may sound jingoistic but the responsibility of moulding opinion has to rest with the people who are involved in the country intrinsically, not just financially. Indeed, there never has been a demand that foreigners should have the freedom to start political parties in India.

Foreign news agencies are not above board. The

Japan vs US: Is "Trade-war" Inevitable?

by A M M Shahabuddin

former Soviet Union. But it is not the same old economic giant, or even a giant political force as it was in the post-war period. Its both wings — economic and political — have been much clipped since then. During this period, a new Europe, along with the rising Asian giant — Japan, have come up as big challengers both in the political and economic fields. So the US should reevaluate its global position vis-a-vis other confronting forces. In the post-war world, its economy had produced half of the world's goods and services, which has now pathetically shrunk. Between 1950 and 1983, the US economic growth rate was 3.5 per cent, while during the same period Japan grew at 7.87 per cent. Actually, by mid-eighties, the USA had lost its world economic superiority. In 1986, the US became a debtor country for the first time, while Japan replaced it as the world's leading creditor country.

Therefore, what has surfaced today as the US-Japan trade fiction was inevitable to come. The rot has begun long ago. It was just brewing underground. Sometime back the former US President Jimmy Carter and former Japanese Prime Minister Nakasone, in a joint report, warned that a "global chaos" could be triggered if the "growing mistrust" between the two nations was not ended. So they stressed a "constructive and co-operative" relationship between the two countries for a stable global economic future. This fear of a "global chaos" in the economic field has now been further accentuated as the ties between the two countries have "worsened" due to the failure of their trade talks. Even Japan's half-hearted participa-

tion in the Gulf-war efforts was far from satisfactory to the Bush administration. One of George Bush's senior aides was reported to have said that "getting aid from Japan during the Gulf War was like getting blood from a stone". Such blunt remarks by a US official was bound to have adverse effect on the relationship between the two countries, when an anti-Japanese feeling in America was fast growing out of proportion. According to Western Press reports, "It is no secret that many senior US officials now see Japan as the main threat to national security." The US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the "invisible government" of America, is reported to have proposed "spying on Japanese companies to help the American firms."

A recent CIA-sponsored report, "leaked" in some western Press, had created great consternation in Japan and abroad, although both the CIA and then Bush administration had dissociated themselves from the report. The alleged CIA report on Japan was said to have described the Japanese as "creatures of an ageless, amoral, manipulative and controlling culture", who are "intent on world economic dominance." So what haunts the US today is "yellow threat" and not the "red threat" of yesterdays.

The adverse effect of the "leaking" of the CIA-report on the two economic super-powers was tremendous, fuelled by two publications which appeared more or less at the same time. One of them is the most controversial best-selling American book titled, *The Coming War With Japan*, and the other titled, *The Japan*

that can say no. The first book forecasts that the economic competition for markets between world's two largest economies "will almost certainly end in war". Japan, according to the book, "will try to force the US out of the Western Pacific". The book further says that the US will see this as "Japanese aggression" and, as in 1930s, both sides will engage in a cold war "eventually flaring into fighting." The conclusion of the book seems to be too far-

fetched and pessimistic but cannot be dismissed with totality as rubbish. But the storm-centre seems to be elsewhere as the Japanese author of the second book argues that Japan could "sabotage" American military might by "withholding the delivery of crucial microchips."

Judged in the context of the above scenario, the Clinton Administration's latest move to revive the much-criticised US weapon, of "Super 301" trade law, for use against Japan seems to be more dangerous. Japan, along with other na-

tions, has already bitterly complained saying that this law would allow the US "to bully them to make them trade concessions under threat of punitive tariffs."

As they say, coming events cast their shadows before. The shadows are already there, rather lengthening swiftly. With smoke comes the fire. Actual events are yet to come. Till then let us watch the 'shadow boxing' and wait for the shape of things to come. Let wisdom dawn on both the conflicting parties to find a way out through amicable settlement, to save the world from another global chaos.

The writer is a retired UN official.

OPINION

The Choice of a Vice-Chancellor

Abdus Sobhan

Professor Zillur Rahman Siddiqui is a respected academic and a distinguished citizen. His views on such matters as "Choosing a Vice-Chancellor" (*Star*, March 1) deserves serious and careful consideration. This is particularly so because Professor Siddiqui was himself a Vice-Chancellor for eight long years at the Jahangirnagar University and knew the craft well. Incidentally, Professor Siddiqui was not a 'panel' Vice-Chancellor. He was appointed Vice-Chancellor by a military government in 1976 and his tenure was renewed for the second term by General Zia in 1980. The 1973 Act and its 'panel' system was made operative after the expiry of Professor Siddiqui's term in 1984.

In his essay Professor Siddiqui put all the blame for the ills of the universities squarely on the government's desire to control the university. At the same time he asserts that the government is already in "undisputed" control of the university. He exonerated the teacher-politicians in the campus, glossed over or minimised their misdeeds. In fact, he does not find any role of the teachers in the ills of the universities. Further, Professor Siddiqui, by implication, denounces the old system through which he himself was appointed Vice-Chancellor and defends the panel system of the 1973 Act. At the same time, he deplores the lowering of the dignity of the office of the Vice-Chancellor and accuses and holds responsible the present government and the government preceding it i.e. Ershad government for selecting VCs on "non-academic considerations." Interestingly, Professor Siddiqui probably forgot that those Vice-Chancellors were selected from the panel elected by the teachers under the 1973 Act and the government's choice was strictly limited to that panel and if there was a non-academic person there, the choice was the teachers'. One can recall that the Dhaka University teachers once chose an insignificant college teacher on the panel to be their Vice-Chancellor — thanks to the 1973 Act — and it fell upon General Ershad to save the nation, by a rare example of mercy, from the indignity that the Dhaka University teachers were going to inflict upon that premier institution.

About the control of the university, Professor Siddiqui rightly says that the Vice-Chancellor cannot act without the approval of the Syndicate. In fact, Syndicate is the most

powerful body in a university. Now, who controls the Syndicate? Professor Siddiqui says that the government controls the Syndicate because "the Syndicate has members directly nominated by the government." It is not enough for the government to have some members on the Syndicate. In order to exercise control, the government has to have a majority in the Syndicate. One can take the example of Jahangirnagar University with which Professor Siddiqui has long been associated as a teacher and a Vice-Chancellor. Among a total membership of 18 — actually it is 17 as the government did not care to appoint a Pro-Vice-Chancellor, thus showing the nature of its desire to control the university — the number of 'directly appointed' government members are only four. The rest are either teachers (currently nine) or nominees of teacher-dominated bodies. Of these four members, two are busy government secretaries, one is a journalist and one is a very busy neurosurgeon. These members are most often than not absentees and their absence is, on many occasions, ensured in many subtle ways often holding meetings at odd times. Even if they are present, they are a permanent minority. So, it cannot be said that the government controls the university. Rather, it is the teachers who control the university. The fact is that a number of teachers in the campus has made it a profession — thanks to the 1973 Act — to manipulate the elective provisions of the Act to turn the university into a mini-union council. They use their position in the Syndicate to suppress opponents, reward adherents and recruit followers by using wide ranging powers legally or illegally in the appointment and promotion of teachers, appointment in administrative posts such as provosts and house tutors, tender committees etc. etc.

Professor Siddiqui also mentions that Jahangirnagar University was closed recently thrice in a row. It is true. But as everyone knows that at the bottom of the problem lay the greed of a group of teachers to occupy the office of the Vice-Chancellor. Thanks to the 1973 Act, if an incumbent could be forced out of office, a new panel could be floated and new aspirants could occupy the coveted post of the Vice-Chancellor. So, the race is on and the tension continues. But a sitting Vice-Chancellor can be forced out only if the cam-

pus is destabilised. This can be done by his opponents in the Syndicate by creating a situation of non-cooperation using the provosts who are the Syndicate appointees and providing the students such provocation as creates anarchy and confrontation in the campus.

So Professor Siddiqui's conclusion that the villain of the ills of the universities has been 'located and identified' — i.e. the government — is not only very simplistic, to put it mildly, but simply one-eyed. He simply put a blind eye to the defects of the 1973 Act. The panel system of the 1973 Act has given us Vice-Chancellors whom very few have heard of. This is because the kind of politicking that goes with it creates a situation where 'bad money drives good money out of circulation'. When the choice is left to the government, the government, even a military government, acts with some responsibility and shows circumspection in the choice of Vice-Chancellors. Professor Mahmud Hussain, Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury and Professor Zillur Rahman Siddiqui were direct government choices. Who could say that they were not the best choices? To the argument that of late the government too has made mediocre choices in non-Act universities, the answer is that the panelwallahs have shown the examples and the government has simply imitated them. Otherwise, the government would not have dared to make such appointments.

We feel that much of the current ills of the universities could be traced directly to the panel system of the Act. It must be made clear that universities are run by people's money, not by the teachers' money. Teachers are appointed to teach and not to engage in electoral combats or to vie for the VC's post. Academic autonomy means permanent tenure, freedom of speech, writing and research. Electioneering and vying for power have nothing to do with academic pursuits. The truth is that the 1973 Act has given rise to a number of professional 'teacher' politicians in the campus often with low academic calibre, whose only business seems to be politics. Their influence is vitiating the campus. This must be done away with, if we are to save higher education in this country. It is in this context that the provision 11 (1) (appointment of Vice-Chancellor) of the 1973 Act needs to be done away with.

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.

Khulna Newsprint Mill

Sir, To meet the demand of the newspaper industry, Khulna Newsprint Mill is the only one in our country. And gewa-wood is the raw material. This gewa-wood is collected by professional people who go deep inside the Sunderbans in search of the same. Now these gewa-wood collectors are reluctant in their pursuit since numerous miscreants and toll-collectors are allegedly harassing and pressing them for toll money, otherwise they are not allowed to collect the wood.

When there were no toll-collectors and mastans, these gewa-wood collectors used to freely get the wood from the Sunderbans and regularly supply it to KNM. The production at that time was 100 metric tons per day and part of this also used to be exported. But since the set-back arising out of the hindrance by these toll collectors, the production has come down to 80 metric tons per day.

And now comes yet another shocking news that due to frequent power failure, the production has been adversely affected. The mill lost 40 tons of

production everyday due to power disruption. If Power Development Board fails to ensure proper supply of energy, the production in the KNM will be seriously affected further aggravating the present newsprint crisis.

We would therefore urge the PDB to take immediate steps to ensure regular and steady supply of power while the government should take measure to provide protection to the gewa-wood collectors against the illegal toll collectors and mastans.

N H Sult
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Biman's indifference

Sir, I wish to draw the attention of the high-ups of Biman — the national carrier of Bangladesh — to an important issue which may put one day the reputation of the airline at stake.

I am a visitor here and some time ago travelled to Sylhet by air for sight seeing. I noticed Biman's sort of 'step-motherly attitude' with passengers of Dhaka-Sylhet-Dhaka

route. I was told that not a single flight to Sylhet was hardly on time. My flight, the last flight of the day, was delayed by two hours for reasons not known to passengers. There was no apology on the part of Biman for the delay.

This was not enough. On board, passengers found their seats occupied. Then it was revealed that the aircraft had been changed and the boarding cards did not match with the seat numbers. This put the passengers as well as the crew members in an embarrassing situation. Indeed a rare kind of hospitality on board the Biman.

Moreover, a confirmed passenger may not find a seat. It is a wonder, when it is claimed that Biman is really helping the government in promoting tourism.

So far, I have travelled on Dhaka-Sylhet route and had bitter experience. If the same situation persists on other domestic routes as well I foresee a bleak future for Biman.

Taking this opportunity, I would suggest Biman to replace ATP aircraft with F-28, because this aircraft is totally unsuitable for carrying passengers. This could be ideal for cargo.

I would like to believe that Biman will definitely look into these matters with due seriousness and improve the passenger service.

A Departing Tourist
Dhaka