

## Towards a Healthy Market

Some time past the government was led by the erratic and insufferable situation prevailing in the consumer market to set its mind on enacting a comprehensive law protecting the interests of the consumer. This was good news for all, because everybody, including the producer and the seller, is a consumer in the first place. Unfortunately for Mr Everybody, the initiative is appearing to dry up. Are Mr Somebody's interests at work there? God forbid, that somebody isn't the sellers' lobbyist. The last thing a government can afford, in our situation, is to be vulnerable at such points. Let us hope the delay in the actual enactment of the much-needed law has been caused by factors other than such mean manipulation.

In a condition of all-pervasive seller's market economy things go through unhealthy twists and turns. The market ceases to operate as an economic market and behaves like a looter's paradise when myriad buying and selling activities are not allowed to average out to optimum value for all. Unbridled and petty profiteering is destroying a national market that was taking shape here very slowly. The mean-minded retailers' act of fleecing the buyer who cannot help buying or the wholesalers' or importers' or millers' market manipulation raking in tons of money at one stroke are dangerous anti-market things enough to stall the development of market. Such setback would result in an anarchic economic situation collapsing on itself with the multitude bereft of buying power, goods rotting unsold and famines of every kind striking the nation.

No, we are not pleading with the government to be kind to the consumer. We want to move them to action that would infuse health in the consumer market and save the economy from disaster. Small things really — standardisation or making the seller sell what he says he is selling, eliminating crimes such as selling non-iodized salt or contaminated milk or adulterated food items, ensuring that items sell at exactly the MRP printed on the package — and that all processed items come in packets, ensuring that weights and measures be stringently standard. The only item that would need exertion is to see that prices of essentials keep to a norm.

Effective consumer protection will call for enactment and enforcement of effectively circumspect law or laws plus an agency to which infringements can be taken for criminal prosecution. Again for effectiveness's sake this should be a special body different from an ordinary court of law.

It is for the nation's sake that government must expedite coming into force of the laws protecting the consumers and helping the healthy growth of market.

## Limbs of the Same Body

Just how hell-bent the ministry of shipping has become to perenniate the subordinate status of Mongla port as a pre-conceived appendage to Chittagong port now comes to glaring light. In a seeming reflection of a one-track mind meaning in effect playing into the hands of vested quarters out to structurally limit Mongla's chances to grow, the ministry is falling head over heels on a cumbersome road-cum-ferry network to bring the two physically widely apart ports closer. As if Mongla is landlocked like a piece of Nepal! And, what a terrible urgency is being attached to this project, said to be under active consideration of the government at the moment, that on a virtual war-footing even pontoons are contemplated across the difficult terrain, where required, — a piquant glimpse of the Bridge on the River Kawai movie, so to speak.

Somewhat symptomatic of the same bizarre prioritisation Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC) has been operating expensively chartered ships between the two ports. After having spent that much foreign exchange in this borrowed kind of marine shipping, for which of course, this government may not be held basically responsible in all fairness, we are now opting out of it as a foreign currency saver to go for the roads. We are not against any new link between the ports coming up in due course as a necessary adjunct to the over-all transportation network of the country but what is grossly unscientific and totally irrelevant at this stage is to adopt this as a lead measure pre-empting the independent growth of Mongla port.

Instead, why not let Mongla develop in its own right as a full-fledged port city with a self-contained harbour rather than a remote lighterage area far out in the sea. It was always potentially capable of directly serving a larger hinterland than what Chittagong port has been doing — catering for Dhaka and Chittagong divisions. A fully equipped and geared up Mongla could have covered Khulna and Rajshahi divisions and with Aricha operatively a few kilometres away from Daulatdia and Nagarbari. The Dhaka district too was well within her reach.

Now, the logic is even more reinforced to develop Mongla port as a first rate international port of calls with the Jamuna Bridge coming along in five to six years' time linking the eastern flank of the territory with the western part. The vested and parochial interests in Dhaka on this side of the Jamuna divide, need adopting an integral approach to let Mongla, which is now an apology of a port, grow into a real one.

## Self-rule Clock Set Back

Extension of Palestinian self-rule to the West Bank, after what has been a troubled but an essential exercise of autonomy in the Gaza Strip by Yasser Arafat, remains a far cry. This vital part of the Middle East peace process is already a year behind schedule reckoned by the original time-frame adopted by both sides. The adverse tide could not be stemmed by PLO chief Yasser Arafat and Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres whose intense negotiations for a package agreement by July 1 foundered on the rock of sharply divergent views on the points at issue.

The two negotiators were under such severe pressure from their respective constituencies, that Arafat and Peres became exhausted by locking their horns to reach a package agreement rather than a piece-meal one. Another cogent reason for this all-out approach was the volatile security situation which eventually could block the existing channels of communication. There lies the dilemma: a sense of insecurity reinforcing the demand for a package deal and without the comprehensive accord first they cannot hope to overcome the insecurity conditions either.

The prevailing confusion over the territorial extent of pull-back of the Israeli troops from the West Bank towns and Israel's determination to retain charge of the rural security are the products of anomalies left in the original accord.

The pull-out of Israeli troops should be time-bound with the Palestinian elections quickly held thereafter to put in place the autonomy council through which the transfer of powers to the Palestinians will actually take place.

I am just back from a month's visit to the United States. And I have decided that, barring extremely compelling circumstances, my wandering days are finally over. No more foreign trips for me for the rest of my days. The pains and agonies, both physical and mental, of the journey itself far outweighs the pleasure of meeting the near and dear ones at the other end. From now on, for me there's no place like home — be it infested with knife-wielding mas-tans, moronic politicians, kamikaze drivers, striking physicians, contrary bureaucrats and sundry other such hazards.

Long distance economy class air travel of today can perhaps cause more physical misery than any other mode of transportation ever devised by man. Travel in steerage could not have been worse — you were at least spared of the jet-lag. The way human bodies are packed to maximize airline revenue is a marvel of industrial efficiency. Tough luck if it maximizes your distress as a passenger. You can only get what you pay for. Still, I have a sneaking suspicion that some airlines take special economy measures not practiced elsewhere for their flights originating from or terminating in our part of the world.

What a contrast with my first journey to England in 1955 — seventeen glorious, fun-filled days in a passenger boat. It was the best holiday I ever had. Even airlines up to the early seventies would treat a traveller as a human being and not just another unit of merchandise to be transported from point A to point B. Those were the days!

Yet, far worse than the physical misery are the harassments and indignities you are almost routinely subjected to if you are carrying a green Bangladesh passport.

I have heard and read many a horror story of the ordeal in visa sections of most

# A Farewell to My Wandering Days

*I am fully aware that both Americans and Europeans are undergoing a major attack of illegal immigration phobia. Black or brown visitors are not generally welcome. But what is most galling is that even among these undesirables, one carrying a Bangladesh passport is considered as the loudest specimen.*

of the foreign embassies in Dhaka. I must admit that I have till now largely escaped this through good offices of well-wishers in appropriate places. But once I entered the departure lounge of ZIA, I was on my own — just another individual with a passport which more or less brands the holder as an international pariah.

I recount just one episode. In London Heathrow, I managed to get past the immigration, security and customs officials without any serious challenge to my bonafide. I did not mind that each of these officials took perceptively extra care and spent more time in looking at me, my passport and my baggage than they were doing in case of others carrying passports of other hues. My grey hair did not seem to impress them at all. Their close scrutiny was enough to make me feel vaguely guilty of some unspecified crime yet undetected.

I reached the boarding gate where a long queue had already formed. As I waited, I found myself witnessing a rather curious scene.

Most passengers were just showing the boarding card to the lady at the desk and walking past. Next to her stood a British Airways official. He would become active only when a brown-skinned passenger reached the desk. He would ask such an individual to produce the passport. He would generally look at it and hand it back. But if it were a green Bangladesh one, the person would be asked to step out of the queue and taken aside. Then the passport would be studiously scrutinized

and passenger let through only after a fairly lengthy interrogation.

When my turn came, I could not help asking him politely (in fact, it had to be extra polite) — I just could not risk being stranded in Heathrow or perhaps even worse fate! why he was singling out Bangladesh passport holder for this special scrutiny. He was somewhat taken aback, but gathered himself quickly enough to say that he was just making a few random checks. Both of us, of course, fully knew that there was nothing

brave people." Of course, I was flattered and thanked him. Then, like everybody else, I made a move to open my suitcase. He intervened, "No, you don't have to open anything. This is the first Bangladesh passport I have seen, and I must honour it." He wished me good luck and waved me through.

Well, I mused with nostalgic sadness, that was another day! Frankly, it is not the western countries alone from whom Bangladesh passport holders receive special treatment. In recent years, even our Asian neighbours seem to be treating us no better.

Last summer, my daughter was working as an associate (a reasonably senior professional position) in the Hong Kong office of an American invest-

ment bank ranked among the top half-a-dozen in the world. It is very active in major Asian countries including the NICs in putting together investment packages for sectors like energy, telecommunications, high-tech industries etc. Her job required visits to these countries in connection with such deals. But every time she applied for a visa, the invariable response would be, "Oh, Bangladesh passport! To get a visa, you have to go to Bangladesh and apply to our embassy there." Those more helpful indicated that they have to refer the application to capital and perhaps she can expect a decision in a month's time. Even formal request by her employer could not overcome the liability of being a bearer of Bangladesh passport.

In sheer disgust and exasperation, her American boss asked her rather rhetorically, "Is your passport any good for visit to any country other than Bangladesh?" He told her quite plainly that she would be the last Bangladeshi he would employ in a professional position. What good all the ability or brilliance can be if one cannot undertake routine business travels!

And all these are happening despite all the "cementing of friendship" and "enhancing the image of the country" that have been going on by the unrelenting efforts of our diplomats, and frequent trips, accompanied by plane loads of hangers-on, by our highest dignitaries. What is most galling is that twenty-five years ago quite a few of these countries were hardly any better than us in terms of education or economic condition.

## Another Voice

Kazi Fazlur Rahman



random in his selection process.

I am fully aware that both Americans and Europeans are undergoing a major attack of illegal immigration phobia. Black or brown visitors are not generally welcome. But what is most galling is that even among these undesirables, one carrying a Bangladesh passport is considered as the loudest specimen.

As the plane flew over the blue Atlantic, I sat brooding over the memory of my first journey to the US carrying a mint fresh passport of independent Bangladesh. It was March 1973.

I was travelling from Jakarta to Washington DC via Hong Kong. Honolulu was the US entry port. In those days, Bangladeshis travelling to the US by that route would have

launched — were recently sized by the Indian security forces from the militants. "These things do not grow in the orchards of Kashmir," he says with a wry smile.

Ordinary Kashmiris are fed up with living under the guns of the Indian security forces and the militants. "Bread and butter issues are taking over politics," says Dr Ali Mohammed Khuroo, a former economic adviser to the Prime Minister of India and a distinguished academic. After a recent visit to Kashmir, he says that the militants' hold is slipping.

"It is true that every militant in Kashmir is a Muslim but not every Muslim in Kashmir is a militant," says the soft-spoken Khuroo, himself a Muslim.

He predicts that the Kashmiri Hindus, generally better educated than many of the state's Muslims, will return to take up new jobs in

the expanding private sector which forms part of a government plan to revitalise the province.

Khuroo is optimistic. He believes that given the democratic nature of India, once the political process gets going, things will start sorting themselves out.

New Delhi is keen to hold

My daughter is eligible to obtain a foreign country travel document. Out of a sense of patriotism (or pig-headedness as some of friends of Bangladesh origin termed it), she had clung to her Bangladesh passport. I suspect now she has changed her mind. Can anyone blame her?

Couple of years back, I was told of a Bangladeshi lady who, notwithstanding the fact that her husband is alive and well, declared herself to be a widow and a dependent of her son — a naturalized citizen of a foreign country. Thus she obtained her own citizenship of that country. I was truly shocked. How despicable, I thought.

Now, I think that perhaps I had judged her too harshly, perhaps it was sheer desperation that made her take recourse to this subterfuge. Her three children live abroad and I can well imagine, burdened with a Bangladesh passport, what ordeals she had to go through just to visit them.

Despite all the barriers being put up and all the indignities being heaped upon the head at every step, thousands upon thousands of our people are leaving home for countries abroad — east and west, near and far. For the vast majority of them, this is a decision forced upon them. They seek those bare essentials for existence as a human being — education, medical care and, above all, jobs which the country has failed to provide.

And we cannot expect to be treated with dignity by any country if we are always the supplicants. Things have got to change within the country before we can hope for bare modicum respect abroad.

Anyway, till things change — of which I see very little prospect in any foreseeable future — best foreign vacation for me shall be a book, a renewable ticket to all possible exotic destinations. I shall be able to go where I want and stay as long as I like. And it will be painless, both physically and mentally.

# Caught in the Crossfire between Militants and Military

by Daya Kishan Thussu

*For nearly half a century, Kashmir has been a bone of contention between India and Pakistan. Despite strong local opposition, India has administered its only Muslim-majority province by direct rule from New Delhi. Caught in the crossfire between Indian troops and the militant Islamists is the state's tiny Hindu minority, most of whom have been forced to leave. Gemini News Service reports on a little-known aspect of the Kashmir crisis.*

THEY rarely figure in the international human rights reports on Kashmir or in the world media's coverage of the disputed border state between India and Pakistan.

The more than 300,000 displaced Kashmiri Hindus are the largely unseen and unheard victims of the Islamist insurgency.

They have been forced to leave their homes and hearths and live in appalling conditions in refugee camps in Jammu, says Dr Shiban Durrani, president of the Indo-European Kashmir Forum, a British-based lobbying group for Hindu Kashmiris.

Since the insurgency began six years ago, more than 1,600 Hindus have been killed and another 6,000 have died in refugee camps in the adjoining region of Jammu, many unable to cope with the heat there. Fewer than 20,000 Hindus remain in the Kashmir valley.

Shailendra Aima, a founder member of Panun (Our) Kashmir, an organisation in India of Kashmiri Hindus which highlights the problems of displaced Kashmiris, says his community has been subjected to "genocide and religious cleansing" by the militants.

"Their property was destroyed, their houses occupied. How do you expect the Kashmiri Hindus, traditionally teachers and intellectuals, to deal with gun-wielding militants?" asks Aima.

Kashmir has a history of religious tolerance and co-existence, but in the eight years since the last elected government of Kashmir was dissolved in 1987 the province has seen serious political disturbances, leading to a Hindu exodus and a clampdown on militants by the Indian security forces.

The conflict in Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority province, tends to be seen as a clash in with Islamist militants are fighting against a Hindu India. But nearly 100,000 Kashmiri Muslims have also fled the valley to escape living under the shadow of the militants' guns.

Until 1947 Kashmir was an independent princely state. Within months of the parti-

tion of India, under attack from Pakistan-inspired Kabalis (militias), Maharaja Hari Singh signed the "Instrument of Accession" with Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

Himself a Kashmiri, Nehru, promised to hold a UN-decreed plebiscite. But it never took place. After the 1971 war Islamabad signed the 1972 Simla Agreement which said, among other things, that the Kashmir issue would be resolved bilaterally and not internationally. However, Pakistan has tried to internationalise the issue.

Kashmiri militants claim they are fighting for Azadi (freedom) from Indian rule. Some want to create an independent state of Kashmir, others desire to become part of Pakistan.

New Delhi argues that to grant Kashmir independence on the basis of religion would undermine India's secular society, which would bode ill for the country's Muslim mi-

nority. There are more Muslims in India than in Pakistan.

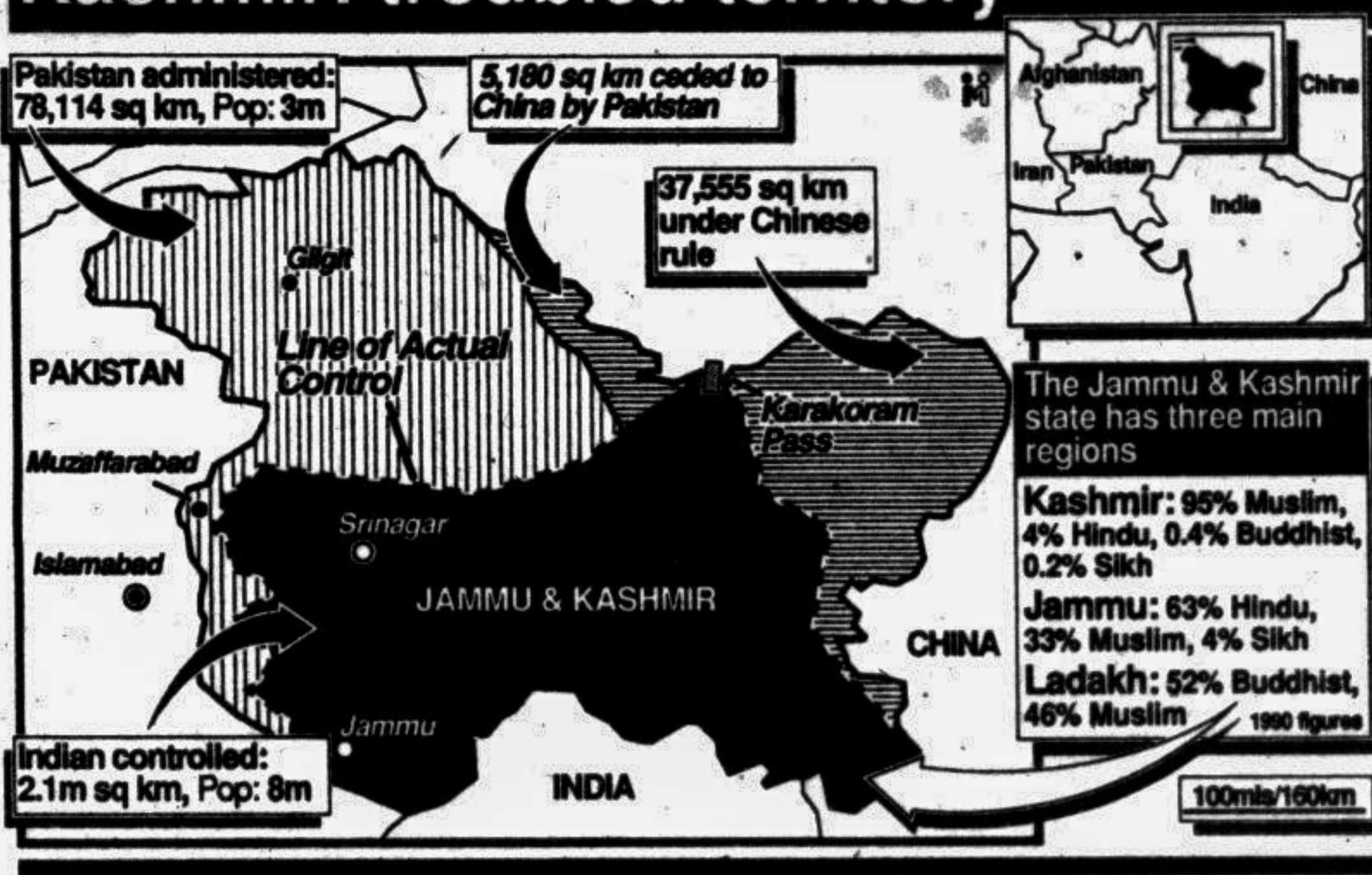
Maharaj Krishna Rasgotra, a former Indian Foreign Secretary, who in his own words, has "four decades of experience in dealing with the Kashmir problem," has a novel plan.

He points out that only a small minority of Kashmiris want to be part of Pakistan. Rasgotra suggests that the governments of India and Pakistan should agree an "orderly transfer" of this militant group to Pakistan, funded partly by international institutions such as the World Bank.

Rasgotra says that Pakistan is aiding and abetting the insurgency in the valley by running training camps from Azad (free) Kashmir, the area of Kashmir under Pakistani control. "Pakistan is at war with India in Kashmir," he asserts.

Rasgotra says a large amount of arms and ammunition — including rocket

## Kashmir: troubled territory



## To the Editor...

Biman clarifies

Sir, The notice of the Biman management has been drawn to an editorial published in your reputed daily on 29th June, 1995. The editorial was based on a report that had appeared in a vernacular daily earlier.

We wish to inform you that the report in a vernacular daily upon which your editorial, published on 29th June '95, was based was grossly inaccurate and far from the truth.

To set the record straight we present the factual position here. Biman has spent Taka eight crore ninety-eight lak thirty-two thousand on different transports hired from 1985 to 1995 and not

Taka one hundred twenty crore as reported. This includes the actual cost of presently hired twenty buses, two mini buses and twenty-eight microbuses as well. This system has resulted in considerable savings for the Airline.

We provide you with this information to set the record straight as the aforesaid report not only misled the general people but your esteemed daily as well.

Nafes A Imruzuddin  
Manager Public Relations

## Of defaulters

Sir, This refers to the front page news appeared in your daily on June 18. Thanks to

The Daily Star for its courage to expose the truth and bring the facts to light. We know that the money deposited with different scheduled banks is people's money. If this money is virtually looted to the tune of hundreds of crores of taka on the basis of fictitious projects and fraudulent documents which remained suppressed and unrealised for a long time, then it is a matter of great disappointment and regret.

And the business houses reported to have taken such undue loans are two leading groups of industries!

Although the figure was shown in Star report as over Tk 400 crore, some say the

figure would be much higher than that. This is undoubtedly the highest grade of fraudulence and, surprisingly enough, by those whom people used to take in high esteem. Whenever these houses floated shares they were highly subscribed.

If people's money is robbed in such a fashion then their faith in the banking system itself is bound to erode and common man's belief in the democratic system of governance also not less diminished.

Emtiaz Hossain,  
Nurjahan Road, Mohammedpur, Dhaka

## Art Buchwald's COLUMN



## Remember Pearl Harbour

Because I played a pivotal role in World War II and was the only person who told President Roosevelt not to invite the Japanese ambassador to the White House for Christmas carols, I am very nervous about the snarling that is going on between our two countries.

We became involved in World War II over trade problems with Japan. I am therefore anxious that this should not happen again, especially during the year when we are celebrating the 50th anniversary of the end of the Good War. For this reason I call Pearl Harbour by phone every Sunday morning.

"Is anything going on?" I usually ask a Navy lieutenant. "Nothing unusual, sir. It's very peaceful, and the officers are still asleep."

"Get them up," I shout. "Right now."

I can't do that on a Sunday morning. They all went to the club dance last night, and they are very tired. Is something wrong, sir?

"I have a hunch. Our government is thinking of banning the import of all Lexus cars, and the rumour is that the Japanese will boycott McDonald's French fries. Look outside your window. Do you see any airplanes coming in from the west?"

"No, sir. It's an uneventful Sunday morning in Pearl Harbour, and if we thought otherwise we would have everyone on alert."

"Where are the naval vessels?"

"All lined up in the harbour, neat as a pin."

"Take them out of there right now."

"I can't do that. Half the crews are on leave, and if we pulled them out they wouldn't be able to find their way home."

"Where are the fighter planes?"

"Lined up on the runway

→ exactly two feet apart, just as the Pentagon manual requires.

"Spread the planes out in bunkers."

"I can't do that, sir. The Air Force likes to line up its planes methodically."

"Lieutenant, have you ever heard the expression 'Tora, Tora, Tora!'?"

"Is that a car or a TV set?"

"It's a code word. That's what Japanese businessmen say to each other whenever they feel that they have lost on a big Toyota deal. The next thing you know, every salesman jumps into his bomber cockpit and flies to Pearl Harbour."

"Have no fear, sir. It couldn't happen here. We are constantly on alert. Last Sunday a bunch of Japanese tried to break through by dumping Hyundai washing machines on the base. Wait a minute. I think I can hear plane engines. Oh my word! There are a lot of them, and they have rising suns painted on the side. They're not supposed to be here."

"Then shoot them down."

"I can't sir."

"Why not?"

"Most of the officers here drive Infinitis, and they're not going to fire on their only source of spare parts."

"Lieutenant, our very way of life is threatened by the trade negotiations. There is now talk that if we ever boycott them, the Japanese will close down all the movie studios they own in Hollywood, which would mean the end of movie violence as we know it. Get the troops out of bed and destroy anything that fires on you. You owe it to the Navy. Remember the Day of Infamy."

"I hate to tell you this, sir, but I don't even remember the Bay of Pigs."

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