

Relations with Yangon

It is noteworthy that through the peaks and troughs of the Rohingya repatriation process, Dhaka's relationship with Myanmar has been more or less on a stable course. While a sizeable number of Rohingyas encamped on the Bangladesh side for years since they fled persecution of the Burmese military authorities await return to Myanmar, both the governments on Monday agreed to open border trade by the first week of September. That they were able to demarcate their borders along the Naf river and pave the way for organised official trading between the two next-door neighbours, which now is set to begin in September in terms of a duly signed border agreement, are all indicative of living up to the demands of geography.

We are having a great deal of trade with India, and the only other neighbouring country with any traditional communication link with us in this region being Myanmar it is only logical that we develop trade ties with it as we go along. Once the Chittagong-Akyub-Rangon ship liner was a thriving business, but now the traders are to remain confined to Teknaf, Maungdaw, Sittwe and Chittagong — due to the immutability of a vastly changed regional map since the British left in 1947.

The other side of the Naf river bounded by the Arakan mountain range whose only speck of a part can be seen from Teknaf, is rich in farm products including an abundance of rice. The Myanmar people there have a great demand for a variety consumer items produced in Bangladesh. The prices at which they would get the merchandise from us can be so cheap because the transport costs will be so little. This holds good for us too. The implementation of the border trade agreement is expected to not only step up supplies on both sides but also keep the prices down which is usually ruled out in the case of smuggling. With Myanmar we can have a balanced trade in view of a potential inter-penetration of goods. This is a particularly good side to trade with that country.

For the ties to be firmer we hope that Yangon authorities will not take much time to issue clearance to a list of 42,489 Rohingya refugees which Dhaka has sent to them calling for their urgent attention in the matter.

As a democracy-loving people we are looking forward to the release of the elected Burmese leader Aung San Suu Kyi who has stepped into the seventh year of house arrest.

Ray of Hope for Karachi

Karachi is still burning and bleeding. But a small piece of news comes as a silver-lining. It concerns the probable holding of talks between the government of Benazir Bhutto and the Mohazir Quami Movement (MQM) tomorrow. The change of heart on the part of both parties cannot be more welcome particularly when the commercial and industrial city of Pakistan is sliding into a Beirut-style brutalisation and massacre. As many as 950 people have been killed in that city this year, one-third of them in last month alone. Prime Minister Bhutto's hardening attitude was only providing fuel for further MQM-incited violence.

We hope tomorrow's talks will lay the foundation for broad-based negotiations involving the top leaders of both sides including the premier herself and leaders of other major parties. Tomorrow's meeting is not going to be more than the first contact between the ruling PPP (Pakistan People's Party) government and the MQM since an agreement was reached between them last year. The seed of discord certainly lies in the non-implementation of that agreement. And the government must be ready to frankly admit its failure to head off what has now become a deep crisis.

So a basis for a negotiated settlement is there and neither party should kill time by apportioning blame on the other side. That will only complicate the issue. Better it would be if the government of Benazir becomes ready to look into the grievances — many of which are genuine no doubt — of the migrated community from India. It has to be realised that the greatest failure of that country's politics is the inability to integrate these migrated people into the politico-social life. The Mohajers have had their ego-play too as against the Sindhis. The MQM is a creation of Ziaul Huq, former Pakistani president. It fitted into the scheme of his fractious politics but has proved subversive to Pakistan's interests.

For a permanent solution to the problem, therefore, the matter has to be addressed. This done, the MQM should have no reason for resorting again to indiscriminate violence. On its part, the MQM should also be ready to give up its politics of killing and violence. Pursuing a collision course, both parties have more things to lose than gain. The greatest loser will be the country called Pakistan, which neither side can allow to happen.

Illegal Workers Abroad

Labour and Manpower Minister Mir Shaukat Ali told the parliament on Monday that 2,791 Bangladeshi citizens had illegally crossed over to Malaysia. Of them, 50 are now in jail. Read with another report carried in a Bangla daily yesterday on the forcible return of 1550 illegal immigrants from Saudi Arabia by ship, we get a distressing picture. The distress deepens when we recall that Saudi Arabia had earlier sent back 1998 illegal migrant workers in a deplorable condition by sea. The story unfortunately does not end there, more than 25,000 illegal migrant Bangladesh nationals are alleged to be still residing in that country.

Here we get the number of illegal job-seekers in only two countries. Similar cases are sure to be reported from other countries — from Kuwait to Japan and from Singapore to Switzerland. The compelling motive is to earn money. Nothing wrong with it as long as people can manage work permit and other relevant permissions to go abroad. When fair means are not possible, foul ones are resorted to. The lure of foreign money is so strong that people become willingly a party to such illegal means or unwittingly fall prey to the deviant ploys of the racketeers.

The government has yet to make the legal process fail-safe and put a stop to the operation of illegal manpower agents. The fact that people produce fake documents, passports and other papers is not always properly screened or detected. Otherwise, it would be impossible for so many people to leave the country just like that. We are forgetting that such a large-scale unauthorised movement of people is a national disgrace. Closer scrutiny and improved co-ordination between our country and the receiving countries would have got rid of the problem. At the same time our manpower authority should be always on the look-out to send more people abroad for employment themselves. That will partly solve the problem.

ANYBODY familiar with the day to day functioning of the Dhaka University should know it beyond any shred of doubt that almost everything in the campus — be that appointment of a peon or provost, promotion of a faculty or clerk — is highly politicized. Over the last few years, however, there had been an honourable exception — admission of students into the university was based on a relatively fair and transparent system. By admitting 20 students without admission test, the current administration of the university appears to have effectively removed the last vestige of that honorable exception.

Aside intense political games inside the university, admission of these students became a controversial issue because they had a clear choice before them — attending the government function or appearing at the admission test. These students preferred the former — apparently on the basis of an assurance from the government that "admission to Dhaka University will not be a problem." Things got complicated when it was reported that the vice-chancellor of the university gave such assurances to the concerned government officials. Unfortunately, the vice-chancellor authenticated such suspicions by actually admitting the students by an executive order.

Even only a few years ago, admission of some students into Dhaka University without proper tests would have hardly grabbed newspaper headlines or aroused severe

A tenant is a tenant is a tenant. Much as a man is a man is a man, I refrain from quoting the original sentence that pays tribute to rose, the queen of flowers. But then I must hasten to add that even a rose is a very good shelter for worms or insects. And roses too have their superior or inferior kinds apart from their different colours — some of them exotic and therefore highly prized, others just dull and commonplace. Stretching the idea only one will be able to establish any connection among a rose, a man and a tenant. As if a tenant, or for that matter a landlord, is not one of the human species!

Believe it or not, a tenant at times hardly does belong to the species. Why? Again, to many of our surprise it is all because of religion. What has religion to do with tenancy or renting houses and that too in Bangladesh that has achieved its independence through a liberation war, rejecting the basics of religious statehood? Many of us will question loudly. The message of disqualification can be brought home in an abrupt and rude manner. Just imagine it ever happened to you.

Supposing you have been looking for a suitable house for long and you got one that you could afford. You talk to the lady, the first person to open the door for you. She

High Time for Stopping All-pervasive Deterioration at Dhaka University

Why would they pollute an admission system that had been working relatively smoothly for several years now? If the pressure is so severe that they have to yield to it, why don't they let the nation know of it?

criticism in the concerned circles. Vice Chancellors, especially in the seventies and eighties, admitted many students — who often lacked minimum qualifications for admission — by using their discretionary powers. Some of those students ended up as student leaders and later, national leaders. The problem is, things are not the same any more. Now admission problem is so acute in the country that more than twenty students vie for a single seat in the Dhaka University. Admission tests are now more rigorous and neutral than ever before, and there are ample reasons to believe that those who are screened through the system are really meritorious students.

Therefore, the prime minister's contention that "it is not right to do politics with the admission of 20 meritorious students" does not hold ground. Because, admission to the university requires more than the SSC and HSC qualifications as a meritorious — student the deserving students have to prove that they are more meritorious than thousands of their cohorts who are seeking admission to the university. Granting admission to these students cannot be justified on humanitarian grounds either — be-

cause it will be inhuman to many others who had similar academic background but lost the chance to get into the university by failing in the admission test.

The admission of these students to the Dhaka University, therefore, can only be justified on the ground of politics and politics alone. Here again, blaming the ruling

democracy transparency and accountability — how could it defend itself once people knew about its pressure on the university to do unfair things?

Or is it the other way round? May be the government is not as responsible for messing up the university affairs as many might think. May be the university author-

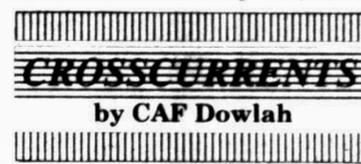
ity — Ershadul Bari by name — had joined the session. Seizing this opportunity — many believe by creating such an opportunity — the vice-chancellor got the nominees of the white group — pro-BNP panel of Dhaka University teachers — elected as the Syndicate members. This was, of course, a highly clever move by the vice-chancellor to get his people elected. Moreover, he did nothing illegal. The problem is, there is simply no reason to believe that the vice-chancellor did not know that once Ershadul Bari entered the Senate floor, 40 members of the Senate belonging to pro-Awami League Blue-panel would boycott the Senate session. It may be mentioned that the Dhaka University Teachers' Association had long been boycotting any function/meeting attended by this senator.

Yes, nothing illegal happened, but how moral or conscientious was the election? Is it enough for the Dhaka University to be just legal in conducting such affairs? What kind of example the vice-chancellor set for the university and the nation by doing such a "legal" thing? Only few days ago, the vice-chancellor told a general meeting of the teachers of the university,

"Dhaka University is like a Sun, the society will be lit by its rays, not the other way round." By cleverly manipulating Syndicate election, what kind of rays he is transmitting towards the society? Isn't he telling the people that politics can be devoid of ethics, morality or fairness? By behaving like he did, how the vice-chancellor would give lectures on morality ethics, justice, fairness to the students, teachers, staff and, above all, the nation?

Although the executive order for admission of the 20 "meritorious students" remains suspended for the time being, chances are quite high that the vice-chancellor will succeed in getting it done — his manoeuvring of the Syndicate election is just one testimony to his capabilities.

The point is, if the vice-chancellor succeeds in admitting 20 students to the university without admission test it will be, at best, a scrawny peanut compared to gross-scale irregularities, immoralities and unfairness that ordinarily prevail in the campus. Anyone familiar with the Dhaka University affairs will have no doubt that almost all decisions at the great institution are conditioned by political considerations — merit, that should have been the yardstick in an academic setting — merits little at Dhaka University. Thanks to self-defeating democratization process ushered in by the University Ordinance 1973, there is hardly any chance that the process of deterioration at the highest seat of learning in the country will ever stop.



by CAF Dowlah

power alone will be somewhat unfair and unrealistic as well — the university authorities simply cannot shrug off their responsibilities in this regard. Why would they agree to admit the students without admission test? Isn't it the responsibility of the university authorities to defend the rules of the university? Why would they pollute an admission system that had been working relatively smoothly for several years now? If the pressure is so severe that they have to yield to it, why don't they let the nation know of it? The ruling party claims its adherence to the principles of

themselves are more inclined to show their allegiance to the government. Indeed, several recent episodes at Dhaka University, that have already aroused considerable controversy among all concerned circles, lead to such conclusions? After all, if the university authorities are less inclined to maintain the sanctity of the university, who can maintain it for them?

Take the example of the election of four Syndicate members at the Senate meeting last week. Out of the 83 attending senators, 40 boycotted on the plea that a controversial member of the sen-

Subtle Discrimination that Really Hurts

by Nilratan Halder

Suddenly you feel lonely, slighted, demeaned and defeated. A puny little man lying further low. Like an out-cast you suddenly discover your human and civil rights curtailed. The shock may be traumatic.

betrays no sign of conservative streaks in her behaviour. Her husband, a man of geniality, is the next person you as a would-be tenant encounter. Your first meeting showed that both of you have a favourable attitude towards each other. During the subsequent four or five of your sittings together — including two when you are accompanied by your wife — the owners of the house ask almost everything but your name.

By the time it is known that the house belongs to three brothers and the negotiation has so far been made and tentatively concluded with the second brother. The eldest of the brothers, an M Sc from Dhaka University in the mid-70s, now steps in. You are introduced to him and he does not object to the second brother's choice of their new tenant. So the deal is made. On the day before you finally shift, the second brother asks your name. Still no problem. Happily you start moving your furniture and household goods to the new address. In the middle of this moving process comes

the summon, "We have to talk to you urgently and that before our juma prayers." You naturally cannot comply, because the labourers are lifting the heavy and fragile furniture and gadgets by then. But you feel disturbed for such an untimely urgent summon. You cannot make out what has prompted the landlords to talk so urgently at such an odd hour.

The lifting business settled, you (by now a true tenant) go to hear what the house owners have to say. It is virtually a bombshell that they explode. The elder brother declares, "We are a bit religious and our family decision is that we do not rent our house to any person belonging to a religion other than ours. So the earlier you leave our house the better." Dumb-struck as you are, you hardly find words appropriate to answer to this needless cruelty and chauvinism in the name of religion. You do not question their "family decision" but you cannot but protest the naivety they have exhibited.

You say, "O.K., why have

you not asked me then, what's your religion. My wife accompanied me and she wore conch-shell bangles of considerable thickness. You asked my son's name earlier and even my name yesterday. That should have made you understand. You have subjected me to unnecessary ordeals — first physical and now psychological."

These questions come as part of the business contracts. Someone is serving you a notice to quit on the very first day — even before you have somehow settled. And for no fault of yours. All because the tenant does not profess to the landlord's religion. In fact you may not be a firm believer but you are condemned because you have been born in another religion. No matter if you have no control over the fact. On that count you perhaps make a record worthy of entering into Guinness Book of Records by receiving the quickest notice to leave your rented house. Here nothing counts. Your education, character, integrity, professional clarity et al come to nothing. Your greatest dis-

qualification is the different religious status. How do you fare as a man is of no concern.

Suddenly you feel lonely, slighted, demeaned and defeated. A puny little man lying further low. Like an out-cast you suddenly discover your human and civil rights curtailed. The shock may be traumatic. Thoughts — some of them rather wild — start cramming your better judgement. You hate the situation that does not allow you to enjoy equal rights with everyone else in society. A helpless rage overcomes your usual normal and cheerful self. Because you know your protests will go unheard. The bizarre and irrational arguments will get priority to your well reasoned and human judgement.

In your saner mood you sometimes think of taking the landlords to court for violation of fundamental rights. Does the existing tenancy act allow anyone to discriminate against you on the basis of religion? Certainly not. But then you ought to feel allergic to catch sight of the man who has taken serious exception to

your renting his house. Let alone exchanging greetings and making social contacts with him. Well, it is theoretically possible to stay in that house but apart from a tenant you are a man also and have to be sociable with your neighbours, more so with your landlord.

With the feeling hurt and the question mark on one's legitimacy as a tenant pressing heavily on the bosom, it is impossible to live in the same place. After all, he reminds you of something you have learnt to hate — communalism. It may not be overt but certainly a covert one. Encountering this one feels uncomfortable. The best remedy is to seek an escape from this mental agony. But it hurts and will be hurting ever after. Then it should not be a cause for making a generalisation of human character.

Humanity in fact reveals itself in moments of such crises of relationship between man and man. As you are in search of a shelter once again, a landlord listens to your misery compassionately. He offers his house at a considerable concessional rate. The realization dawns that not everything is lost for you. Again, this time religion is no bar for this show of grace. Man must be judged by his own values, and that is why the world is still livable.

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.

Stranded Pakistanis

Sir, We have read with great interest the letter published in your esteemed daily under the caption "New Relief body for camps of stranded Pakistanis" and we the stranded Pakistanis living in and around Mohammadpur and Mirpur camps highly appreciate the views expressed by the experienced and learned Abdul Wahab Khan, a spokesman of a group of stranded Pakistanis of Dhaka camp. The fair and fresh election is the only solution and I hope that right from the Ministry of Relief and down to the district administration will give serious thought to this vexing problem and lingering sore.

The chairman of section XI, Mirpur, Dhaka is allegedly doing whatever he likes, and does not care for anybody's opinion because he had been picked up by the administration nine years ago without having opinion of internees (stranded Pakistanis of the localities) which is obligatory under Geneva Convention.

We have learnt that at Gaibandha new Relief Committee has already been formed on the basis of one card one vote and in accordance with the Government of Pakistan and Rabita-Al Alam-Al-Islami survey and assisted by Government of Bangladesh and SPGRCA. A great frustration is prevailing in almost every camp in Dhaka and elsewhere and that everyday some sort of bickering is going on in almost all camps. We have reason to believe that there will be even clash and confrontation

among stranded Pakistanis themselves as they have become rather fed up with present committee activities, maybe more so at Section XI, Mirpur, Dhaka.

Md. Subhuddin Ahmed
On behalf of a group of stranded Pakistanis at Mirpur and Mohammadpur, Dhaka.

A new UNSC?

Sir, Recently in San Francisco the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Charter of the United Nations was observed with great éclat.

It is expected that the UNO is going to be restructured soon.

Germany and Japan the rising powers of Europe and Asia respectively are the most prospective candidates for the permanent membership of the UNSC. India is also reported to be vying and lobbying for the post.

We wonder what service would India render to the world when she has herself created a host of problems with her neighbours and is indeliberately lingering than on instead of solving those peacefully.

By becoming a permanent member of UNSC India would rather misuse and abuse her veto power to establish her supremacy and hegemony in South Asia.

We would very much appreciate if India fulfils the following requisite qualifications first and then seeks a permanent seat in the UNSC: i) Allowing trade and transit facilities to Nepal and Bhutan. ii) Stopping bloodshed in

Kashmir and holding of plebiscite there under UNO supervision.

iii) Stopping arms and ammunition supply to LTTE allegedly by Tamils of Tamil Nadu.

iv) Stopping unilateral withdrawal of the Ganges water and releasing Bangladesh's rightful share.

O H Kabir
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Bangladesh Bank statistics

Sir, The saga of misinformation continues and also Bangladesh Bank has lived up to tradition. We wonder when we would be able to take statistical releases in our country seriously and with confidence.

Having engaged in the preparation of a proposal on introduction of a Secondary Debt Market Regime in Bangladesh, I was eagerly awaiting the belated publication of the Bangladesh Bank Annual Report, which came at last but proving again so erroneous.

One of the man inputs of my study is the growth in various Saving Certificate Schemes and unfortunately I lost the Bank's report of the last few years as my source of information.

Amazingly the net outstanding investment figures in all the Schemes as on June 30, 1993 as shown in the Bank's report for 1992-93 and that for 1993-94 differ by crores, leading one to believe that may be ghosts are investing in our saving schemes.

As per the 1992-93 report, net outstanding investment in 3-year Savings Certificate as on June 30, 1993 was Tk 823.92 cr whereas, as per the 1993-94 report the figure on that date was Tk 1276.37 cr! Even the 6-year Bonus Savings Certificate, discontinued from June 3, 1992, had outstanding investment of Tk 67.81 cr on that particular

date as per the previous year's report as against Tk 74.66 cr on that very date as per the latest report. The list goes on to include the 8-year Defence Savings Certificate, 5-year Bangladesh Savings Certificate and even the Wage Earner's Development Bonds in the puzzle and the net total difference between the figures of the two reports from the same institution on that particular June 30, 1993 amounts to Tk 432.94 cr, enough to finance the Rupsha Bridge construction!

Nobody expects this kind of flip from the Central Bank. Would they care to come up with an explanation?

Yaver Sayeed
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Railway fare

Sir, A press release of Bangladesh Railway says that "Sulav" class is being upgraded to "Shovan" with immediate effect. And fare of "Shovan" class will be reduced to take one hundred only for Dhaka to Chittagong route and vice-versa. This is a very pragmatic step taken by the Railway department and the concerned ministry for which they deserve appreciation.

Of late due to comfortable bus service between Dhaka and Chittagong, Railway was increasingly losing passengers with resultant loss of revenue. It is expected that present pragmatic policy will go a long way in enhancing revenue of the Railway. But this policy should be extended to other routes specially Dhaka-Sylhet which is a good source of revenue for the Railway.

I congratulate the Communications Minister and the Communications Ministry for their wisdom and dynamism. It may not be out of place to mention here that so far as utilisation of budgetary allocation is concerned, the Communications Ministry is at the top. They have not only utilised the entire allo-

cation in fiscal 94-95 but could utilise an additional amount of roughly eight hundred crore Taka while many ministries failed to utilise their allotted amount. Hence other ministries may take a lesson from this and exert themselves to attain their respective targets in fiscal 95-96.

Saleh Ahmed Chowdhury
Dhaka Cantonment

Save Dhaka

Sir, You deserve gratitude of the people of Dhaka for arranging the Save Dhaka seminar which may have started a ripple among those who attended it and among those like me who read your esteemed newspaper every morning and feel a day wasted if they do not get The Daily Star on holidays.

But the ripple will die down or has already died down and forgotten by those who competed with each other in their oratory while speaking on the subject.

Mr Editor, since you have started it, the burden now falls on you to lead it through in to a successful movement to get every one of this city involved, the students, the Bengali print media, the Radio and the TV, the service clubs, the social clubs, the Chambers, the Dokander Samity, the Hawkers Samity, the daily workers, the drivers, the rickshaw drivers and the pedestrians, the domestic servants.

Let there be one slogan everywhere: Save Dhaka — Save Dhaka from garbage, Save Dhaka from destruction of lakes and parks, Save Dhaka from poisonous fumes, mosquitoes, Save Dhaka from noise, Save Dhaka from irresponsible construction.

Let these slogans be on every one's lips. Distribute thousands of leaflets, badges

B G Muhammad
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Focus on budget

Sir, In his erudite article, published in the Focus page of your esteemed daily on June 28, 1995, the erstwhile Deputy Prime Minister, in-charge of the Ministry of Industries, Mr. Jamal Uddin Ahmed, while finding fault with the budget-speech of the Finance Minister, diagnosed some shifty syndrome in his convictions and actions. At the same stroke of pen, he very rightly stated that we had to live with the bleeding SOEs (especially the state-owned industrial enterprises) for unknown period of time.

While making such comments, he must have taken in view, our queer characteristic — forgetfulness of past events of trials, turbulence and agonies. But, incidentally, we do remember that it was during his tenure of the high political office that the unfortunate plundering of public sector industrial corporations commenced subsequently continued unabated, gulping the state given autonomy of the corporations and rendering its leadership to servitude, thus dragging the SOEs down to the present state of national curse. One, who one way or other allowed something to go on while in power should rather not preach differently, when out of it.

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