

Trade Union Maturity

In a breath of fresh air, our top trade union leaders have lately started showing a marked degree of domestic maturity and a healthy sense of internationalism.

They have come to realise they cannot cope with the challenges posed by globalisation of the free market economy if they remain divided by affiliations to political parties and recurrent personality clashes within the trade unions. So it is that at a two-day city conference of 15 leading trade unions early this week they decided to present a united front to handle the workers' problems in a vastly changed labour environment of today. The desirability of their disassociation with political parties in purely professional matters and of having a single trade union for each industry, business concern or corporation, has been under discussion whenever the issue of reforming the existing trade union or labour laws surfaced. Now that the top 15 trade unions of the country have opted for a single platform to articulate labour interests, the basic tenor is set for the pending labour reform measures to get underway.

Resolutions adopted at their moot held under the aegis of the Asian and Pacific Regional Organisation of the Brussels-based International Confederation of Free Trade Unions reflected a robust global understanding of the issues involved: (a) 'unequal trade agreements posing a threat to the very existence of industries in Bangladesh'; (b) the new technologies and restructuring of industries ought to have 'a human face'; and (c) a deeper commitment is needed to social safety-net for displaced workers including re-education and re-training for their alternative employment.

At the national level, tripartite consultation among the employees, the employer and the government has been advocated. The accent put on 'fair treatment' to migrant labour at home and abroad is a very timely approach taken to a matter of very serious international concern at the present moment.

Our trade union movement will be our pride of possession the day it has linked wages to productivity.

Saving Dhanmondi Lake

Dhanmondi Lake has once again turned into a veritable filth-pot. Thanks to its connection with the storm sewerage at Shukrabad point. The sewer carries sludge containing toxic waste, according to a report. Usually the sewerage releases the effluent to the Balu River but flood waters from low-lying areas this time has pushed back toxic sludge into the sewerage system itself, ultimately releasing it into Dhanmondi Lake. Last year the lake also had its water similarly fouled up. Another sewerage line passing through Shukrabad area is reportedly leaking.

So the message is: Dhanmondi Lake will continue to get contaminated whenever the sewerage overflows for this or that reason. Fish in the lake have been dying in a large number. Then the foul water is a constant health hazard for the residents of the area. Considering all this, the source of contamination of water needs to be plugged. This can be done in two ways: a) either by sealing the mouth of the sewerage to the lake at Shukrabad point; or b) by stopping the effluent at the factory or industrial level.

As things stand, perhaps there is no scope for sealing the mouth of the sewerage. Because that might invite other attendant problems like overflowing and even bursting of the sewerage resulting in submerging of some city roads. So the other alternative is to ensure safe disposal of toxic waste from factories and industries. This calls for — in most cases — using costly devices.

What is the way out then? Perhaps not everything is lost yet. Even within our limited budgets, the waste disposal system can be greatly improved through conscious efforts and by following a few basic rules at the factory or generating point. What we need to do is to say goodbye to our callous and chaotic habit both at the individual and industrial levels. To avert serious health hazards, we must make it mandatory for the factories and industries to procure devices to ensure a safe disposal of effluent, costs notwithstanding.

Peace in Chechnya

When separatist movements almost everywhere dragged on for years and decades, that in Chechnya seems to have come to a rather meaningful pause within a relatively short time. This does not, however, mean that the conflict is over or it has been free from occasional flare-ups. Even when the two sides were engaged in a session of peace talks the other day, a few armed men in Russian military uniform killed some unarmed Chechen civilians. Amidst such provocations and set-backs, the negotiators decided to carry on their quest for a solution. This is amazing, specially against the backdrop of the bitter animosity between the Chechens and the Russians.

The world will be happy to know that, as of this moment, both sides have agreed to broad autonomy for Chechnya. Self-determination for the Chechen people without undermining Russia's integrity looks like a remote possibility at the moment. But if we are to believe a report just published, it seems that both parties are working towards that end. It is certainly not easy to determine the future status of Chechnya. Perhaps some sort of compromise will have to be made by the Chechen people to enjoy a near-sovereignty.

Whichever way the details are worked out, the process is bound to take time. Happily the two parties are continuing with the negotiation through the odds. This spirit and the will to reach an agreement are what really matter. Every conflict of such a nature the world over has ultimately been settled across the negotiating table. Both Russia and Chechnya have been wise to see the virtue in resolving their differences through negotiation.

INDIAN politics has once again hit a patch of listlessness and uncertainty. There is return of the 1973 and 1983 days when the ruling Congress had declined in appeal and when no clear alternative had emerged. If anything, corruption has increased and political paralysis deepened.

A Gandhian, Jaya Prakash Narayan, was able to change the atmosphere in the beginning of 1974 by placing before the nation a moral option against tainted Congress rule. The issue of cleanliness in public life he raised transcended the boundaries to which the opposition parties were confined earlier. Together they defeated Mrs Indira Gandhi at the 1977 polls but fell apart subsequently to facilitate her return.

In 1983, her non-performance disenchanted the electorate, Congress was as good as defeated. But her assassination saved the party. The tragedy created such a flood of sympathy for her son, Rajiv Gandhi, that Congress swept the opposition on the rocks.

Any miracle is possible between now and June next year when the country goes to the polls. But there is no JP on the scene to rivet an alternative, nor anyone else to show mirror to the nation. Political parties are pegged to the same slogans, the same leaders — and the same tricks. People's reaction is that of exasperation; hence, the mood of cynicism and a morose of contempt for politicians.

Yet, a new process of churning that has followed reservations for the backward classes in services and educational institutions may throw up something unforeseen.

Sonia's induction is, however, dependent on one factor: she wishes someone like N D Tewari to be the president of the united Congress. She is reconciled to Rao's continuation as the prime minister till elections but wants him to hand over the Congress president's baton.

India is a peculiar basket-case where the caste and the class are co-terminus. It has its compulsions and contradictions: Reservations and the growing gap between the rich and the poor have intensified internal struggle. Will it affect only the election outcome or go beyond is yet to be seen.

UP chief minister Mayawati is not a manifestation of social change. She is an outcome of calculated political game. She can occupy the office, but the Hindu society will never treat her as equal. The BJP installed her as chief minister to oust rival Mulayam Singh before the Lok Sabha election (UP has 85 seats), not to span the distance between the lower and the upper castes. The dalits can see through the game. But they are too weak to revolt against their traditional leaders and the entrenched classes. Therefore, they will have to be content with the flappings of power and not challenge the apparatus of oppression and discrimination.

Against the backdrop of such helplessness, the dalits and others are more concerned with power than programmes. Political parties are trying to be everything to every group. Any slogan that can attract the electorate is all right. Any path that may take a party to Delhi is worth traversing. Means or methods do not count. Only the net should be wide enough so that it would entice the catch.

Take Congress first. It wants to draft Sonia Gandhi for the electioneering. The

impression among partymen, who have held informal opinion polls in their areas, is that she can change the sour mood of the people and win them over. It is difficult to say whether she will click as a vote-catcher because the attention she has received so far is as Rajiv Gandhi's dutiful widow who lost her husband at an early age. If she does not project herself, she may have an appeal.

In any case she will be far better than battered Narasimha Rao who has no charisma. Congress lost all

acceptable to Rao. Even now he may be under some formula which does not humiliate Rao. But he is opposed to the return of Arjun Singh, without whom Tewari is not willing to come back.

Developments in Congress are changing so fast that Rao may not have any option if he would like to stay as the prime minister. Some 160 Congress MPs have already avowed allegiance to Sonia Gandhi. Some are even wanting her to be the prime minister or the Congress president. When Amitabh

kickbacks. (The Italian connection is proved without doubt). This does not seem to deter her.

If Sonia Gandhi is a new factor for Congress, the back pedalling of Hindutva is the BJP's. The party has shelved the mandir issue — and so has the Hindu Vishva Parishad — at the behest of the RSS, mentor of both. The party wants to retrieve its ethical plank which gave it attention in the first instance. It is, however, finding it difficult because the Congress five-star culture has contaminated the BJP as well.

The BJP members are pushing one another for the spoils of office. The struggle for supremacy in the party is no less than among others; the groupism is also a familiar sight. The BJP is a typical example of a set-up that turns its back on values even on the thought of brush with power. It is not surprising that some important BJP leaders went abroad to escape heat. The latest is that the party will have an electoral understanding with former Defence Minister Bansi Lal who, on the orders of Sanjay Gandhi, had unleashed a reign of terror in Haryana and elsewhere during the emergency.

There is nothing new about the Janata Dal except that it wants to go it alone. At its conclave in Bangalore, it decided not to open its doors to the breakaway groups, neither the Samta Party of George Fernandes, nor Chandrasekhar's Samajwadi. Bihar chief minister Laloo Prasad is

opposed to Mulayam's entry and the parliamentary party leader Ram Vilas Paswan, Mayawati.

The Janata Dal is a confused lot. It is none the wiser after the Bangalore conclave. Lonely Ramakrishna Hegde goes on promoting a coalition between the Janata Dal and the Congress. But there is no taker in Congress. Had Narasimha Rao agreed to a coalition with the Janata Dal, offered to him at the beginning of his tenure, things would have been different for him, the Congress, the Janata Dal and the country.

The communists who count more than their number, are once again putting together the discredited leaders on one platform. Is the fact of coming together more important than issues or commitments? The communists should at least be talking about a joint, time-bound programmes to lessen the afflictions of poverty and the authoritarian law and order machinery.

India should get an inspiration from a statement that a number of leading economists, intellectuals and human rights activists have issued in Lahore. They have stressed the need for new political efforts with alternate leadership and fresh agendas to save the country from the clutches of lawlessness, depravity and bankruptcy. They have appealed to upright and patriotic citizens to come forward and raise their voice against corruption, lawlessness and poverty. A letter circulated by 90-year-old Dharma Vira, who has held high positions in the government, has talked in the same vein. Any action by people other than politicians will evoke optimism and lessen boredom.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

the constituencies he visited Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka during the recent state assembly elections. He cannot get the party more than a double digit figure in the Lok Sabha if he leads it to the polls. This is what one hears in the Congress circles. The split in the party has reduced at least 15 per cent of its votes — crucial in the many-cornered contests that are expected.

Sonia's induction is, however, dependent on one factor: she wishes someone like N D Tewari to be the president of the united Congress. She is reconciled to Rao's continuation as the prime minister till elections but wants him to hand over the Congress president's baton. Till the other day Tewari was

Bacchan, a filmmaker, told a marathi newspaper the other day that she would be the prime minister, he was representing feelings of a large section of Congress. It is difficult to imagine that she will accept any office. She was the unanimous choice as the Congress president after the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. Still she said 'no'.

She realises that being an Italian by birth, she may provoke a debate between desi (local) and videshi (foreigner). At least one major opposition party is waiting in the wings with the slogan: Rome Raj versus Ram Raj. Narasimha Rao's men are spreading that before long the government will disclose the names of those who received the Bofors gun

WITH the fall of Srebrenica in the hands of Bosnian Serbs, it almost appears that the final solution to the problem of Bosnian Muslims, is being enacted in front of the World's eyes. In this day and age of instant TV flashing pictures in our living rooms, this is hard to believe but true.

During the three-year old Bosnian crisis, which is a simple case of well-armed and more numerous Bosnian Serbs uprooting and, if possible, physically exterminating numerically inferior and firepower-wise very much weaker Bosnian Muslims, Bosnian Serbs have added rather a new world to the English lexicon — ethnic cleansing. We have witnessed horrendous pictures of Bosnian Muslims tortured, maimed and killed by the Serbs — compatriots of yesterday and today's mortal enemies. The world has watched this horror film and sometimes it has been so nauseating that people have turned away from the TV screens. And all this in the heart of Europe, the centre of modern day civilisation.

The Security Council of the UN has been fully engaged in the situation arising out of the break-up of Yugoslavia, and emergence of new states. It is the insatiable appetite for territory of the numerically superior Serbs and worse still their bitter hatred of Muslims of Bosnia,

Bosnia-Herzegovina : Never-ending Crisis

by Arshad-uz Zaman

This high drama where Bosnian Muslims are fighting a heroic battle against superhuman odds, has traumatised the Muslim world like no other event in recent times. Double standard of the West is the most commonly used expression. Yet on a popular level the Islamic world dearly wants to see some action to save the beleaguered Muslims of Bosnia.

that the world has been confronted with the problem called Bosnia.

Bosnia has brought to the surface all the contradictions that the international community suffers from. Along with efforts towards peace making a UN Force has been placed on the ground, who has remained more a helpless spectator than an active participant. The latest glaring case is Srebrenica in Bosnia. This so called 'safe area' created by the UN melted away before the advancing Serb forces as the UNPROFOR stood by. The hapless Muslim civilians by the thousands became refugees as have become so many of their kith and kin.

The fall of Srebrenica has produced a different and more sinister kind of reaction among the international community and Muslim world should better wake up to this new development. The 'safe area' has fallen in the hands of Serbs, whose aggressive ways have become so well-known throughout the world. In the past an event of this magnitude

would at least evoke a military response in the shape of air strike by NATO forces under the leadership of the US. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the US as the sole Superpower, any action in the international arena is unthinkable without US participation. The cunning Serbs have tested everytime the waters before taking the next step. Thus in the past we have seen them take a step back faced with NATO air strikes. This time around the only harsh language has been uttered by the recently elected French President Jacques Chirac.

Meanwhile the Bosnian Serbs are reported to be moving towards the next 'safe area' called Zepa. The fate of Zepa and for that matter other half a dozen 'safe areas' appears to have been sealed.

These dangerous developments for the Bosnian Muslims point to one and only one conclusion. The Serbs are hell bent to do what they declared long ago — ethnic cleansing, meaning wiping out the Muslims of Bosnia. They have conquered Bosnian territory and today occupy 70% of Bosnia-Herzegovina. They have played for time and pretended to negotiate with important personalities representing the UN and European Union. The presence of UN Forces has made not an iota of difference for them. Even to carry food and medicine to the Marooned Bosnian Muslims the

UN has to beg and cajole the Serbs. The only time the Bosnian Serbs have paid any heed to the international community is the NATO air strike under US leadership. Yet this action could not be carried to its logical conclusion because the US will not commit ground troops.

This high drama where Bosnian Muslims are fighting a heroic battle against superhuman odds, has traumatised the Muslim world like no other event in recent times. Double standard of the West is the most commonly used

expression. Yet on a popular level the Islamic world dearly wants to see some action to save the beleaguered Muslims of Bosnia. Islam reached Bosnia at the height of Ottoman power in the sixteenth century. There has been peaceful co-existence between the religious and ethnic communities of now splintered Yugoslavia. Old Yugoslavia is dead and gone forever. Bosnia-Herzegovina is one of the successor states. The extermination of an entire community by brute force by the larger community is something that the international community should not allow to happen.

Those who are shaping the destiny of the world today should deeply ponder over this matter. The scar will never heal. And the Muslims all over the world are keenly watching the unfolding of events.

To the Editor...

Agonies of deaf youths

Sir, I am a deaf youth. For deaf people like me there is little opportunity for higher education nor there is any prospect of a job in Bangladesh. There is none to support me. I have no such relation who can come to my help. I have no land either and there is no means of livelihood, to support my wife and our only child. My small family is beset with so many problems.

I am out of job and all my attempts have gone in vain as everywhere deaf people like me are avoided. But it is the duty of the State and the society to carve out a way so that we can live and lead a meaningful life without being a burden on others. But no such endeavour has been made from any quarter as yet. The deaf are not useless anyway. I am playing in a drama twice a year regularly. I successfully played the part of 'Mama' (mime theatre) in the drama 'Sonal-Madhab', sponsored by 'Nirbak' and staged at Bangladesh National Federation of the Deaf auditorium on 29 April. All the characters of the drama were played by deafs like me. The audience was charmed and praised us profusely.

So I would like to flash the mental and social problems and fate of deaf people through your esteemed newspaper so that the citizens of this country can realise the condition in which we are passing our days, in the hope that the government and kind hearted peo-

ple would come forward to help and rehabilitate us in this country which we do belong to.

A S M Rahmatullah
70, Sukrabad, Dhaka-1207

Let good sense prevail

Sir, The Bangladesh Expatriate and Repatriate Welfare Association hails the address of the president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce & Industry early this month in London's Borough of Tower Hamlets. Our expatriate manpower earned praise abroad. The same people cannot prove their quality at home. Why? he asked, while addressing the Bangladesh business community there. The answer, perhaps, is the upper level ill-management and political manipulation.

He hoped that we must effectively participate in the race of economic advancement in Asia. He went a step forward, proposing to set up a 'cell' to supply required information/data to our expatriate brethren which would minimise numerous hurdles in the way of their participation in economic fields in the line of Japan and Korea.

The advice and assurances of FBCCI chief projected abroad, reminds us of his previous assurance made at home — 'Bangladesh can earn prosperity within three years' time, if political stability is there.' He very correctly mentioned that our poor and self-

centred leadership projected us as a poor country, where no hopeful thing can happen. The country has been turned into an aid dependent one. But it cannot be so for long.

He very correctly reminded the expatriate business community that the country is not leased out to the professional politicians, rather she belongs to all. But the image of Bangladesh faces serious problem abroad, in fact which has been our own creation.

The Bangladesh Expatriate-Repatriate Welfare Association feels rejoiced to note the maximum similarity between its line of thought and that of the FBCCI. To have a convenient and safe media of investment of their own in industry, trade, agriculture and co-operatives at home, this Association is contemplating for establishing an 'Expatriate-Repatriate Bank', besides educational institution and insurance company.

Let good sense prevail upon all.

am to be precise), the sense of one of our respected ministers flabbergasted me as I saw his car crossing the red light in front of Dhaka Sheraton, without paying any heed to it, while we were all kept waiting as poor law abiding citizens. The minister was supposed to stop before the signal. The traffic policeman stared helplessly perhaps because he knew his attempt to enforce the law would result in his losing the job. There were about ten to fifteen vehicles. Indeed, we all could do nothing but gape, as the minister's white sedan sped past the traffic light. His car went to the extreme left, in front of the entrance to Dhaka Sheraton, and crossed all the vehicles. I thought the car would turn left for which no signal was needed but surprisingly his car turned right. In Britain, members of the Royal family are fined for breach of traffic rules but in Bangladesh the policeman seemingly has a two way choice!

I don't know what plan is being executed in the country when the minister himself does not comply with the simple traffic rules. If the ministers do not comply with the law, how can we expect this from the common man. We must understand that time is of equal value to all and that enforcement of law should be strict. Has the gap between words and deeds brought anything to our country after nearly 25 years of independence?

Faqiqur Rahman Choudhury
Lahurani, Dhaka-1207

Art Buchwald's COLUMN

If I were a Rich Man

THE good news for America is that Forbes Magazine has just come out with its list of the 10 richest men in the world — and the United States has produced No 1 and 2. Bill Gates, who owns Microsoft, is worth \$12.9 billion, and Warren Buffett, the Omaha investor, is listed second with a fortune of \$10.7 billion.

I felt so sorry for Warren Buffett. How would anybody react to coming in second in the 'richest men' list and have the whole world snickering? I can't call myself a close friend of Warren Buffett, although I do wear Hathaway shirts, drink Coca-Cola and eat Mrs See's chocolates — all products in which Warren has large investments. But I am sure that he must be hurting over the fact that, wealthiest, he is No. 2. Americans don't like to finish second in anything.

Ten billion dollars is nothing to sneeze at, but it's chicken feed compared to Bill Gates' piggy bank. At this very moment Warren has to be wondering where he went wrong.

Some may ask what solace, if any, can Warren take from this list?

Buffett, whose credit card rating is now in question because of the Forbes second-place ranking, still has certain advantages over Gates. Bill has all his dough tied up in software, while Warren owns Capital Cities/ABC Inc., a lot of Salomon Brothers and chunks of newspapers all over the world.

If the bottom falls out of the computer market, Gates' worldly goods would go up in smoke, while Warren could live on Mrs See's chocolates for the rest of his life.

A group of us on the porch of the Vineyard Haven Yacht Club was discussing the advantages of being the No 1 billionaire and the drawbacks associated with coming in No 2.

Stuart Weisberg said, 'I have a question. When they go to lunch, does the richest man in the world pay or does the second richest?'

Jim Ayres replied, 'The second richest. If Gates picked up the tab it would look as if he was patronizing Buffett and hinting that Warren couldn't afford it.'

'What about the wine?' I asked.

'Since it's Buffett's lunch he would pick the wine, from one of the better vineyards, to prove to Gates that as far as he was concerned money was no object,' Stuart explained.

Jim said, 'Would either man bring up his fortune during the discussion?'

The answer from Ken Machlin was firm. 'No. One of the unspoken rules of being the richest men in the world is never discuss how much money you have. Multimillionaires do this sort of thing all the time, but billionaires prefer to talk mergers and acquisitions and the odds of the Japanese going broke.'

I said, 'Despite being friendly in each other's presence, there must be tension between the two men. When you're No 1, you're always looking over your shoulder to see who is coming up from behind. On the other hand, when you're No 2, you spend all your time explaining to your family why you failed.'

By arrangement with Los Angeles Times Syndicate and UNB.