

Failed Talks on Bosnia

The much-publicised UN contact group's crisis talks on Bosnia in London have virtually failed. The vulnerability of the plan the US, UK and France have agreed upon, with Russia dissenting, to defend UN-declared safe areas — Gorazde in particular — is exposed so clearly that all the high-flying talks have come to nothing.

The three powers' resolve is that they would set up an exclusion zone around eastern Bosnia and Serb aggression in that zone would be repulsed by air attack. In case air strikes fail to deter the Serbs, troops will be airlifted to fight the invading Serbs. We can easily see why the plan is likely to fail. The allies are going to create an exclusion zone, as if the UN-declared safe havens are not such pockets. If those pockets could be overrun and civilians taken as hostage, what is the guarantee that the newly created exclusion zones will be respected by the Serbs? As for the Serbian method of response to NATO air strikes, there is perhaps little doubt that more of the UN-PROFOR will be taken hostage for use as human shields against bombing from the air than before. The whole plan would be thrown into disarray once that happened.

The question is not about launching air strikes first and then, when that fails, to airlift troops. Experiences in Vietnam and also in Bosnia show that without support from ground troops, no war of this scale can be won. Both air and ground operations must go on not only simultaneously but also in a coordinated manner. The allies are not committing themselves to such a task. Thus the seriousness of their intention to defend Muslim enclaves in Bosnia is questionable. So long the West has by default become a party to Serb aggression. This move promises nothing different. Better lift the arms embargo on the Bosnian government immediately to allow the poorly equipped Bosnian soldiers to defend themselves. The Russian threat to supply arms to the Serbs and the view that it will escalate the Balkan war should not be an obstacle. For the Russians have been supplying arms any way but they must be dissuaded from doing it anymore.

In this connection, can we urge the international community, particularly the Organisation of Islamic Conference, to help Bosnian Muslims with weapons, and soldiers as volunteers. That will perhaps be a right answer to Serbian aggression and, when on the defensive, they will look for a negotiated settlement.

Lethal Brew

Flood has a way of accentuating the problem of industrial effluence in the metropolis which, even in normal circumstances, is reckoned to be dangerously hazardous to health.

One has the reason to be despairing of the scenario even more when one takes into account the fact that there is now a flood protection embankment whose flipside is the retention of water inside a sphere or a circle. So the industries within it will have to be very careful while discharging their wastes; the cautionary signal being that they de-toxicate these as much as possible before releasing them into the open.

Having made that general statement, let's us now highlight something very serious that is happening with the toxic and stenchy water of Hazaribagh tanneries. The polluted water settling down on the low-lying areas which are bounded by the main flood protection structure and a sub-embankment branching out of it at a right angle, has swelled with the spate in the Buriganga river and entered into the home-steads of the marshy outback. If the Buriganga were not in a swell, the toxic water would have mixed with it, like in the normal times. But what has reportedly happened lately is that the subsidiary embankment which should have protected the relatively higher grounds nearer the city was dug across so that toxic water has gushed into newer areas.

The lessons we ought to derive from the story boil down to the following: First of all, the water and flood control authority ought to keep a close watch on the main embankment and its ancillary structures during the floods so as to avert any fiddling with these by local people in addition to what they might have already done to the detriment of the structures. Secondly, the field employees better not alter the structure anywhere without authorisation from the top experts in the water and flood control hierarchy. Thirdly, a set of contingency water drainage and pumping arrangements must be developed in light of the current year's flooding experiences.

Avoidable Nuisance

BIRDEM, one of our very few institutional success stories, suffered a breach of peace not on a busy working day but on a holiday — last Friday, that is.

It was evening-time though when lifts on every floor help cart away diets to the various wards. And the ruling party MP, Major (Retd) Akhteruzzaman reportedly arrived about that time with his associates on the ground floor of BIRDEM and waited for a lift. Chagrined at the delay, the MP allegedly manhandled the liftman.

The very presence of an elected member of parliament at a public place should have, we believe, prevented any tiff developing into a riotous situation, far less one raging for hours as it did. We are not sure as to what role the ruling party MP played to be a sobering influence on his surroundings. He claims that on his taking up the grievance of the people waiting for the lift the assault came on him from the irate BIRDEM employees. Surely the delay or misconduct on the part of the liftman or any BIRDEM employee could be taken up with the hospital authorities. Likewise, the employees need not have instantly retaliated against the MP. Instead they could have sought redress through a proper channel.

Then an armed group sped to BIRDEM on motorbikes and a pick-up van and ransacked the hospital outdoor unit. They broke transports and glass panes and went away leaving some hospital employees, including the Deputy Director, Dr Delwar Rana, according to some reports, wounded.

This was another avoidably small thing snowballing and going out of hands as people took law into their own hands. How long are we going to be a laughing-stock for such unspurring heroics?

A ten-day visit is not long enough to write about a country, even about a mini-state but I have been visiting Singapore since 1967 and have had the opportunity to witness over the years the impressive progress of the island country. Despite its spectacular economic development, the country has more than its share of critics. I happened to have been there recently when a controversy was raging in the Straits Times about the invitation extended by Williams College of Massachusetts to the Prime Minister of Singapore, Mr Goh Chok Tong. He is an alumnus of the Williams College which is planning to confer full academic honours to him at a convocation this fall. American liberals find it too galling that the head of a government, which in their view is dictatorial in character, is receiving honours from a reputed American College. Their objections underline the fundamental questions being raised about the absence of democracy, human rights and freedom of expression in Singapore. Many people abroad (and perhaps some people in Singapore as well) are wondering: Have they achieved this spectacular economic development at too great a cost in terms of human rights and individual freedom?

Curiously enough, the American liberal standard has been raised by a well-known conservative columnist, Mr William Safire who regularly writes for the New York Times. Whether one agrees with him or not, Mr Safire has the capacity to attract and retain the interest of his readers. Some people may find his style too combative and adversarial but I always enjoy his columns. Mr Safire's column in the New York Times of July 10 criticized the Williams college authorities for inviting the head of a "dictatorial" government where, as he said, you get a thousand dollar fine for chewing gums in a public place and where sharing a Marijuana cigarette invites

Face Lifting of Government Offices

As government officials, we are constantly haranguing the common man on the need for order, discipline, neatness, cleanliness, hygiene, etc. We also do the same with our children and other younger members of our families. However, if they had free access to our offices and dared to speak out their minds, they would have surely put us to shame by pointing out the yawning gap between our words and deeds. Following are a few instances of how things are now in government offices.

I have visited government offices in a number of least developed countries (LDCs), and I can vouch that among LDCs, Bangladesh has perhaps the most unclean and smelly toilets in government offices. Take the example of the Secretariat, the seat of government, and hence representative of government offices in Bangladesh. Walking through the corridors of the Secretariat in the company of foreigners, I have often felt terribly embarrassed as we passed by the general toilets. Perhaps one reason why the general toilets in our offices are so unclean is that the Bara Sahibs all have their attached bathrooms. Indeed, had they been forced to use the general toilets, they would have perhaps ensured a minimum standard of cleanliness.

Secondly, when the whole world has taken a strong stand against smoking, our offices continue to be chimneys, with bidi and cigarette ash and butts littered all over the place. Only the PM's office could be declared smoke-free, thanks to the passionate persuasion of Professor (Dr.) Nurul Islam. I am afraid even this would not have happened if the PM was male, because in all likelihood a male PM would have been a chain smoker, or his buddies would have been chain smokers whom he would never be able to dissuade from smoking in his office. Now, the only way to get rid of this nuisance is to ban smoking in government offices. Since the next PM is also going to be a lady, whether BNP or AL wins in the ensuing general elections, this is perhaps the right time to pursue the demand for a ban on smoking in government offices, and have it implemented. The only concession that may be granted to the smokers is to earmark for them an open space outside the main office building to enjoy their poison. However, in the context of Bangladesh, the ban cannot be restricted to smoking alone. It must also be extended to betel leaf chewing in offices. You realise what a filthy habit it is, once you find your office walls and floors tainted with the dirty red colour of betel leaf juice spat out in all directions by the betel leaf addicts.

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.

"Stunning Revelations"

Sir, This letter is written in response to Nazma Yeasmeen Haque's letter under the same title printed in your esteemed daily on Monday, July 17, regarding a survey carried out in English-medium schools last month.

Since the validity of the survey has been challenged, we feel it is best to explain now how it was conducted. Students of different English-medium schools were approached informally or school grounds with a previously set questionnaire. The students questioned were chosen on a random basis and were generally of classes between 9 and 12. In no school was the principal approached before a survey was conducted because we did not want to be presented with a group of students who had been "taught" all the an-

Ten Days in Singapore: Reflections on Democracy and Development

One wonders when and how we will be able to break out of the vicious circle of low growth, low saving, and low investment unless we can create the right environment for investment and economic and social development in the country.

the death penalty. Students in Singapore are prohibited from "waving political banners." For me this was like reading a fairy tale. In Bangladesh our brave students proudly wave, not the old-fashioned political banners, but their automatic weapons. We must be some light years away from Singapore in terms of the concepts of law and order and political and social discipline. Mr Goh reportedly justified his government's policy in the following words: "If you allow the students to do so (wave political banners) then the workers will begin to do so over the slightest grievance, and if you have several such demonstrations, right away the impression is created the government is not in control of the situation that the place may become unstable, and that will have an impact on foreign investors."

Thus what is important for the Singapore regime is foreign investment, economic growth and development. They do not conceal their willingness to sacrifice such luxuries as freedom of the press or the right of dissent for achieving these goals. Mr Safire's attack on the former prime minister Mr Lee Kuan Yew (who is currently holding the post of senior minister) was really harsh. Whether Mr Lee is planning to establish a dynasty by ensuring the succession of his son after Mr Goh's term ends, is a matter of conjecture but there can be no doubt that Mr Lee Kuan Yew has presided over the most remarkable transformation of a very ordinary and rather sleepy port town into a thriving and throbbing metropolis of Asia with an

of living to a level which is almost at par with those in the developed countries of Europe and America. Mr Lee's competence is difficult to question. A Cambridge graduate, he has steered the nation with efficiency and single-minded dedication and established it as a shining example of economic success and political and social stability. In the process his government seems to have denied the people the political and intellectual freedom that goes with a genuinely multi-party system and imposed rigorous state control on the society. However, the economic policy package must have been right. Not only political stability (too rigid by Western liberal standards) and sound economic policies but absence of corruption in the government, high priority to education and skilful use of

its geographical location and wise handling of inter-racial relations seem to have contributed to the steady and rapid growth achieved by the city-state.

The leaders of the ruling party — the Singapore Action Party — have set a high standard of integrity and competence in running the government. I was told they are very generously paid. Indeed, Singapore government's salary scale, both for ministers and civil servants, would be an object of envy in

most Asian countries. Their salary scales are reported to be one of the highest in the world. Without going into the ethical question of paying such fabulous salaries to public officials, one can see that this has attracted really top class people to government service. Politicians and civil servants have found it worth their while, financially speaking, to serve the government. Such high salary is believed to be an insurance against corruption. In fact, corruption has been dealt with by the leadership ruthlessly. As a result, the government machinery really functions as it should function. The airlines are run efficiently and it makes a big profit; the public transport system functions smoothly; there is no shortage of electricity or gas; the telephones work; both the public and private hospitals are effi-

ciently and professionally run and the streets are clean and safe.

Indeed the people can go anywhere in the city without the fear of mugging or snatching or robbery. They can sleep at night peacefully. Singapore is a port city but its description as a park city would not be an exaggeration. Carefully tended trees and shrubs and green lawns and parks on all sides was most soothing to the eyes. Foreign investors must have found these aspects as attractive as the policy package. While in other developing countries, the foreign investor can bend the law by paying kick-backs to corrupt officials and politicians, in Singapore they don't need to pay under the table but they must abide by the rules. Obviously, the investors love to invest in a country where the rules of the game are not only well-known but are scrupulously respected. I have heard some people say that Singapore could become the entrepot of Asia due to its location but the point to note is that the island's leadership has been able to take full advantage of its location.

The dedication of the leaders to the welfare of the people was evident everywhere. Just for the sake of curiosity, I made a note of the 7 o'clock news on the TV. Unlike the BTV which begins with an image of the prime minister on the screen, the Singapore news started with the question of registration of primary school children. The picture of bright little faces registering for school greeted the viewers. The second item was on the Singapore bus service, the third dealt with a government sponsored project

for the care and rehabilitation of disabled children and elderly people. Foreign news came much later, after such items as waste recycling and home ownership.

One may of course say that given the basic economic policy package, Singapore would have made rapid progress even if it permitted political dissent. One will never know if such an assumption is valid but critics like Safire are attacking the regime with such venom that one wonders if it is only the love of democracy or human rights which are behind the campaign. One may take the view that a somewhat slower growth rate may have been preferable if it could be combined with a more liberal political and social system. I am inclined to favour such a view because the absence of the right of dissent seem to take away something fundamental and most valuable from the life of the people even if they enjoy great material affluence. We have seen this phenomenon in the socialist regimes. Certainly the people of Bangladesh would never compromise on the question of democracy and fundamental rights nor would I suggest that they do so.

At the same time one must ponder: How long are they going to live with poverty, lawlessness, incompetence, corruption and squalor? One wonders when and how we will be able to break out of the vicious circle of low growth, low saving, and low investment unless we can create the right environment for investment and economic and social development in the country. A political culture which will ensure political stability as well as social discipline seems to be an indispensable condition for progress. While we may not like the political system of Singapore, we can certainly learn a lot from them in other fields.

approach to handling meetings. Sixthly, as a part of the facelifting effort, greater emphasis needs to be placed on genuine public relations. Relevant posters, photographs, charts, graphs, etc should be displayed on boards both at the office entrance as well as in the conference and waiting rooms, not sporadically but in an organised, sustained and innovative manner. Finally, I do not think we have as yet exhausted the potential for planting trees in the office premises, despite the good work that has been done in this regard during the last three years. There is still scope to plant a lot more saplings and ensure that they survive and grow up as healthy and mature trees.

Fourthly, when most government offices are well guarded and located in relatively secure areas, why should there be graffiti on the outer walls? It is again a disgusting sight, destroying whatever architectural beauty these office buildings are supposed to display. Have we ever tried to punish these perpetrators of de-aesthetisation of our society? Have we properly briefed the night watchmen and security personnel against them? It is indeed hard to believe that nothing can be done against graffiti writers in Bangladesh when in Singapore even an appeal from the US President could not prevent the punishment of a young US citizen for a similar offence.

Fifthly, could we not have more waiting and conference rooms in our offices, so that loitering the corridors may be reduced, and one does not get the impression of a fish market in government offices? This is possible if bosses decide to have smaller rooms for themselves. In that case, they could hold their meetings not in their offices but in the clearly designated conference rooms. This would give them greater privacy and a more organised

spicacious sight, which should be forthwith dispensed with.

The suggestions put forward above for facelifting of government offices do not demand additional commitment of financial resources or manpower. Neither does their implementation require orders from above. On the other hand, if implemented, there would be a definite physical improvement of the workplace, which would not only boost morale and working conditions, but at the same time restore our collective aesthetic sense which seems to have largely eroded during the last few decades.

Will the Secretaries Committee, headed by the Cabinet Secretary please do something about these suggestions?

very own YUNUS & CO's GRAMEEN BANK programme. As Bangladeshis, we feel immense pride that the mighty (or is it almighty?) World Bank has finally acknowledged what Yunus has been pushing all along — that effective credit to the really poor is the surest and most efficient way out of the LDC status.

Our politicians and bureaucrats are getting hoarse shouting for "Direct Foreign Investment" and nobody seems to be listening. I would ask them to get some help from Yunus. It may hurt their pride a bit but if the World Bank can swallow its pride why not they?

GRAMEEN was not built by one person for sure. Along with Yunus, the GRAMEEN team, some Bangladeshi politicians and senior bureaucrats and international donors and perhaps the Clintons played various roles in developing and publicising the GRAMEEN way. They deserve our congratulations and gratitude for the GRAMEEN solution to world poverty.

Thanks GRAMEEN for giving us something worthwhile to celebrate!

Where have we heard of this before? Sounds like our

Mahbubul Alam Gulshan, Dhaka.

ON THE RECORD

by Shah A M S Kibria



pers stacked on his table. But, meanwhile, good management all over the world has made the boss's room functional and his table smaller and neater. Unfortunately, in our part of the world, new ideas from the West spread like a wild prairie fire only if these relate to a decadent life style, such as pop music, drugs, nudity, etc. Another undesirable feature of the boss's office in Bangladesh is the tendency to stock his room with all the important books and reports relating to the Department. Since he has hardly any time, he cannot even "browse" through, let alone read and absorb, them. However, no one else in the

office will even dare to touch these books and reports since these belong to the boss's office room. In all propriety, this monopoly should be smashed and these materials should find their way to a library in the office. This arrangement will, on the one hand, make the boss's office a little more spacious and neater, and on the other,

provide for a more rational use of relevant books and reports. Then, there is this peculiar towel hanging culture in most boss's offices. I have never quite understood why a long towel, which in all fairness belongs to the toilet, should be found hanging from the top of the boss's chair? Is it to save the chair from the oil oozing out of boss's hair? If I am aware of the present trend, the days of using Jabakusum oil or scented coconut oil or even Bircrylam are long gone, so why this improvised antimacassar? And I have also seen completely bald-headed officers following the same practice. Anyway, most sensible people find this towel hanging a de-

spicacious sight, which should be forthwith dispensed with.

Making Government Work

By Analyst

We hope that the foreign minister will convey the news to their respective heads of states. We cannot but express our deepest sympathy to the Bosnian victims. The news in your paper of the 16th instant on page 8 read "UN failure in Bosnia infurates anguish, anger worldwide." This inhuman activities of Serbs should be immediately stopped.

So, we urge Washington not to wait for the Europeans for decisions and take sharp action. World opinion will go for USA.

M Ali Rajshahi.

In defence of Moudud Ahmad

Sir, Mr Moudud Ahmad, the author of the book "Democracy and the Challenges of Development" is being subjected to unfair criticism for his candid remarks on some politicians. He wrote this book as a keen observer of the socio-political-economic currents and cross-currents of Bangladesh in the contemporary background.

In doing so, his role was of a historian, and not that of a politician. Readers of his

book should make a distinction between Moudud, the Jatiya Party leader, and Moudud the author. He narrated in the book what he has observed as a politician.

His boldness in revealing the truths he has observed as a politician is commendable. By telling the truths, he took a calculated risk of losing his high place in the political party. He preferred truth to political expediency. For his courage, he deserves thanks from all non-partisan readers.

A reader

The Grameen way

Sir, Bangladesh can now proudly celebrate that we have given the World "the GRAMEEN way".

I was thrilled to learn from a July 17th BBC news summary that the World Bank has announced a multi-million dollar programme to provide credit to small entrepreneurs in the Least Developed Countries (LDCs). The news caster went on to say that a loan could amount to as low as \$100 and the programme would benefit many people in these countries.

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