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Clean Up the Mess

When manpower racketeering has assumed a monstrous proportion, the arrest of four fake visa businessmen by the special branch of the Police Directorate shows that the authorities are vigorously after the criminals in the trade. They have already cancelled licences of a few manpower agencies and taken some measures to contain illegal movement of Bangladeshi workers to a few countries such as South Korea and Malaysia. These are most essential steps, no doubt. But then, question remains why the government took so much time to wake up? It has come hard upon the recruiting agencies only after the tragic news of illegal Bangladeshi workers languishing in the Malaysian jail had reached the country. Earlier, our sensibilities were hurt when Bangladeshi workers had been shipped from Saudi Arabia to Chittagong Port unceremoniously.

So a pattern is discernible. Every time the situation gets messy and manifests its ugly face, does the authority become alive to the development. A flurry of activity follows only to subside soon. In the meantime, the criminal gangs return to their old ways after a pause. So what is missing is regular monitoring of and constant vigilance on the operation of the manpower recruiting agencies. The inter-government contracts — as recently introduced between Bangladesh and one or two countries — and the toughening of laws and regulations can be of some help but everything can return back to square one if their effective implementation is not ensured.

Then, the private agencies have generally earned a bad name through the wrong-doing of some of them, engaged in fraudulent ways of recruitment. This goes against the spirit of the privatisation drive. The private agencies have certainly done a great disservice to this lucrative trade. The mess created over the years has brought down the country's image as well. Consequently, the country's manpower business stands to suffer. We cannot let it happen. A fail-safe mechanism to detect fake passports and visas has to be developed in the first place. To that end, the people responsible for screening the passports and documents must undergo special training. Then they must be made accountable for lapses. In the meantime, let a thorough scrutiny be made of the recruiting agencies for determining their genuineness.

Literacy Performance

Tomorrow is the universal Literacy Day. This month we have our Education Day, too. Are these days anything special for those who govern us? Do these days have any significance for those that are governed? Or for those who are in education and on the literacy front, compiling figures and writing papers never above a degree of suspicion? One likes it or not, certain NGOs have made their mark on the literacy job and have even gone on to effectively combine literacy with education. Nothing like it. But their enterprise seldom forms any structural part of our educational dispensation. One hoped that the government would encourage the NGOs and learn from the good things they are doing. But government is government and NGO is NGO. The twain hardly ever meet.

There is a two-way quandary setting at nought some good initiatives in the area. Unless the farmer has enough to eat and labour hands to spare, the children would not be sent to school. One has no right to undervalue the labour a child gives to his or her father in the field and the mother smothered by her domestic chores.

The other fact of the quandary throws a question to the government and to us all. From literacy to where? Literacy cannot be an end in itself. It must contribute to social good as well as to the well-being of the literate. Look at the northern districts, doing specially well on the literacy front. There is hardly any job for him or her anywhere. Self-employment based on the ancestral plot of land? In the northern districts no less than 70 per cent of the village people are landless labour. Those having small holdings are victims of the desertification in that zone.

So? So, no platitudes, please! Starting from more or less the same literacy mark, West Bengal has chalked up a fairly high literacy rate.

The government's increased allocation to the education sector obliges it to keep an extra vigil on the expenditure pattern to avert misuse of public funds in a vital area.

NATO Back in Action

The NATO and the largely Franco-British Rapid Reaction Force have resumed their bombing against the Bosnian Serbs in the Southwestern suburbs of Sarajevo.

The first blast of NATO air strikes was unleashed last Wednesday on the Serbs after they had been considerably subdued by the Croats. Then followed a pause for quite a few days to allow the Serbs to move their heavy weapons away from the UN-designated 20 km safe zone around Sarajevo.

Since they were considerably cornered by the turn of events, it was expected by the Western powers that the Serbs would pull out of the restricted area by dismantling their artillery positions. This expectation having been belied now, the NATO has had to resume the air strikes from Tuesday.

The second wave of NATO air strikes has been apparently quite extensive — over Lukavica, Pale, Mount Jahorina, Hadzici and Hresa — but there is no knowing yet as to what specific targets have been hit.

Just how welcome the NATO's reappearance on the scene has been to the people of Sarajevo can be easily understood by their having come out to the streets to greet the NATO action knowing full well that this could mean some damage to property and even civilian casualties. This is where the poignancy of the whole story lies and the world must be able to read the underlying message. The grip over the Serbs should not be relaxed till they have abandoned militarism, accepted the guilt and inexorably returned to the negotiating table.

HISTORY is witness that the sixth of September symbolizes a day of heroism and sacrifice for Pakistan, the rank and file of the Pakistan Armed Forces paying the price for freedom with their blood. When the very existence of the country depended upon their motivation and bravery, they stood up and were counted, many giving the supreme sacrifice of their lives. We eulogise their courage, without being generally aware of the chain of events that led to this near catastrophe for Pakistan. As has been the norm throughout history, obfuscation has been the order of the day to protect vested interest.

Indians occupied a few desert posts in the Rann of Kutch clearly within Pakistan territory. Para-military skirmishes turned into regular troops facing off each other. In short order, Pakistani troops in May 1965 stormed the desert posts in the supposedly oil-rich region and expelled the Indians. Among those who conducted themselves above and beyond the call of duty were (then) Lt Nadir Parvez, now PML (N) stalwart and MNA. The Rann of Kutch was a stinging Indian defeat in the first-ever confrontation in strength of unit plus level after Asalong Mouza, when Indians were expelled from the East Pakistan side of the meandering Fenil River in the Chittagong Hill Tracts in 1962. Coming after India's China debacle in 1962 the Rann of Kutch acted as a catalyst to a future all-out war in the region.

Indian PM Lal Bahadur Shastri went on record that "next time the battle will be on a time and place of India's choosing." While India was thus mobilising, Pakistani strategy seemed to have been ambivalent in so far as we expected war but were reluctant to give India any excuse. This was certainly not in keeping with the ambitious plan to 're-take' Kashmir, code-named 'Operation Gibraltar' conceived by a "Pindi Club" triumvirate consisting of so-called 'Young Turks', the Foreign Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, Maj Gen Akhtar Hussain Malik GOC 12 Div (responsible for Azad Kashmir) and the Director Military Operations (DMO) Brig Gul Hassan. As is appropriate for such operations,

very few were in the know of the plan to send infiltrators drawn from Azad Kashmir Regular Forces (AKRF) into Kashmir in fairly large groups, attack the Indian forces and become nucleus of a large-scale uprising that would expel the Indians from the valley.

In the enthusiasm of those who conceived the plan, major (and obvious) flaws were overlooked, the first being the assumption that after years of brutal Indian rule, the Kashmiri population would rise spontaneously to support the infiltrators. This led to the second and decisive flaw, the failure to plan logistical supply for the infiltrators once they were behind enemy lines. The British experience (Chindit Operations) in Burma in World War II had shown that logistics for operations behind enemy lines would have to depend upon air for some time. Without having air superiority this would be almost impossible, PAF lacking the capacity for sustained Special Operations Executive (SOE)-type night drops accurately in mountainous region.

More by accident than by design, the PAF Chief came to know about the planned operations and he sought co-ordination briefings but came away less than satisfied about the scope and concept about the plan. Like most of the others in the military hierarchy he doubted that India, smarting over Rann of Kutch, would not declare all-out war, using the incursions as a pretext.

He asked his staff to quietly prepare for war. Despite the overwhelming evidence about Indian preparations, Mr. Bhutto and the Foreign Office on the other hand convinced President Ayub Khan that the Indians would confine their counter-operations to the Cease-Fire Lines (CFLs) in Kashmir and not cross the international border. While GHQ did initiate some moves to shore up Pakistan's defences e.g. cadets at the Pakistan

Military Academy (PMA) were hurried through shortened terms to fill critical officer deficiencies, forward defences at Lahore and Sialkot were reconnoitered and in some cases temporarily occupied. Overwhelming evidence points to the most critical flaw in Pakistan's strategy, providing a heaven-made pretext for an enemy known to be mobilising for war.

By now the Indians were playing a waiting game though they were certainly surprised at the size and level of infiltrator crossings. Their own invasion plans (centred at capturing Lahore

readied for implementation. Surprisingly this task was given to GOC 12 Div (the rationale used was that this was his area). Abandoning the conduct of operations of the infiltrators, Maj Gen Malik moved from his static HQ at Murree (with responsibility stretching from Leh to Akhnur) to his Tactical HQ (GSO-1 and ADC) at Kharian. Troops for "Grand Slam" were also drawn from 7 Division (10 Brigade and 13 Lancers) brought in from Peshawar. The 102 Brigade (commanded by Brig Zafar Ali Khan) supported by 13 Lancers and 11 Cav quickly overcame enemy opposition

Brig Khurshid Rabbani, then Col Staff 7 Div, is a living eyewitness who says Yahya Khan was reluctant to take over so as to avoid changing horses in midstream but when it became clear that Gen Musa, the C-in-C, who had flown into the operation area with Brig Bilgrami, was right in insisting about the immediate changeover (Akhnur's capture slated on 01 Sep was already way off schedule), he took over on midday 02 Sept.

There is a school of thought that still believes that Akhtar Malik was deprived of command just when Akhnur's fall was imminent because (1) GHQ wanted to boost Yahya, Ayub Khan's supposed favourite, with the actual victory and (2) Akhtar Malik was a Qadiani. On the other hand his detractors believe that by remaining incommunicado at a critical period (away from his tactical HQ and even his ADC) and by delaying the handing over he lost valuable time and momentum which could never be made up. There is always the ridiculous dark hint about a deep-laid Qadiani conspiracy to drag us into war over Kashmir (though it is true that the debacle within Kashmir in 1965 put back the Kashmiri independence movement almost two decades).

About one thing there is no doubt it was the considered opinion among the so-called intellectual bureaucrats, of which Bhutto was the political mentor, that the army could only be brought to heel if it was defeated in the battlefield (somehow one gets the same feeling today). This conspiracy theory is further given credence by Bhutto's sudden (and still unexplained) flu in the face of the Polish Resolution later in 1971 and miraculous recovery once the Pakistan Army surrendered in East Pakistan on December 16, 1971.

The Indian Army crossed the international frontier in the early hours on September 6, 1965. Nowhere were our defences in any shape,

Brigade. Commanders in Lahore like Brig Aftab believed war was so imminent that he asked GOC 10 Div Maj Gen Sarfraz on the evening of 05 Sept 1965 to be replaced if he was not given permission to deploy his troops in the forward defensive localities of Lahore (FDLs) immediately (Maj Aziz Bhutt, Nishan-e-Haider obtaining Shahadat at Burki along BRB). Similarly Maj Gen Hamid's ragtag 11 Div (raised in haste) was moving to its FDLs along the BRB canal from Bedian to Kasur (i.e. Bengal repulsing repeated Indian attacks from early morning 06 Sept along UBDC where it meets BRB at Bedian). After an initial setback at Sialkot, the troops turned the tables on the invading Indians, (then) Brig Abdul Ali Malik (Akhtar Malik's younger brother) stood like a rock at Pasur, in the desert (then) Brig K M Azhar's Desert Hawks captured a lot of Indian territory in sustained operations. With proper plans already laid out the PAF immediately gained air ascendancy over the battlefield by a superb performance.

Blissfully unaware of anything till operations commenced in earnest, the Navy made a symbolic raid at Dwarka. Air superiority as well as a tremendous artillery performance put the Indian offensive into disarray. Pakistan infantry and armour which came into contact with the enemy fought extremely well at the unit, company/squadron and platoon/troop levels.

Gen G N Chaudhri's invitation to the Indian Army officers to have a "chota peg" in Lahore Gymkhana on the evening of September 6, 1965 could not materialise. Faulty strategy and disastrous implementation was more than made up by others on the tactical plane, paid for in blood by rank and file from generals down to the common soldiers. This is the heritage the country must never lose, the ability of our soldiers to rise above and beyond the call of duty for the sake of the country. Churchill's words can be paraphrased (with apologies) for our heroes of 6 September 1965, "never in Pakistan's history has so much been depended upon by so many on so few."

AS I SEE IT Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

and Sialkot) were put off schedule by a few weeks while they mopped up the infiltrators, who, despite some initial success, were worn down both by the lack of logistics support and the supposed spontaneous uprising of their brethren.

Operation Gibraltar was a Russian-Roulette type of gamble in keeping with Tariq's burning of his boats after landing at the rock of Gibraltar. Our youth was sent into a cauldron to die without taking into consideration that nearly two decades of Indian rule had demoralised the Kashmiri population so that while support was forthcoming, it was not to the level required. There is a continuing conspiracy of silence here where we refuse to accept facts as they stare us in the face and lack the courage to ask who is responsible for the flower of our youth lying in nameless graves in the Kashmir Valley and mountain sides?

Operation "Grand Slam" the plan to take Akhnur and thus isolate Kashmir from India, had been re-hashed for years before being finally

upto the River Tawi with great ease.

However, beyond Tawi the leading troops (28 Baluch and 9 Punjab) found the going harder, as 9 Punjab was among the first wounded by enemy shelling as the unit advanced up the valley. GOC 12 Div went to HQ 1 Corps Artillery with his Rover Jeep only so as to use their communications with GHQ and/or his field command (12 Div had World War 2 vintage British sets, the troops from 7 Div had modern US origin equipment). Brig Amjad Choudhry Comd HQ 1 Corps Artillery, was out visiting his units so GOC 12 Div was temporarily incommunicado for almost 24 hours from morning 01 Sep 65. This lack of communication, command and control resulted in such lack of information and confusion (HQ 15 Div congratulated HQ 7 Div on 01 Sep for taking Chamb whereas this was news to the 12 Div's attacking 102 Bde) that GHQ ordered GOC 12 Div to return to his original static command at Murree and hand over to GOC 7 Div, Maj Gen A M Yahya Khan.

Preserving Old Records and Documents

It is quite possible for the Bangladesh Government to collect and preserve its valuable records and documents almost free of cost, and in the process maintain the heritage of a people who rightly claim to be a new nation, but with a long past.

THE Government of Bangladesh is perhaps not aware that it possesses a gold mine in the form of valuable old records and documents. Indeed, these are of immense importance, not only in understanding our past, but also in delineating the path we should follow for the future in the quest for emancipation of our teeming millions. These records are to be found in various places, such as the District Record Room, confidential offices of Deputy Commissioners and Superintendents of Police, district level offices of various development ministries, old files and reports of different ministries, departments and corporations (including the office of the Intelligence Branch), local government bodies, police stations (for example, the Village Crime Notebook-VCNB), Sub-Registrar's and Tehsil offices, etc.

Unfortunately, these are now lying in these places in a most chaotic condition. These are also being destroyed as either old and useless papers or through the action of nature. The latter is particularly pernicious, given the hot and humid climate of our country. I would also not be surprised if some rare 1856 Thakbast village maps have already been sold as old papers and converted into "thongas" (paper bags). There is not the slightest attempt for any systematic record-keeping either. For example, if you happen to enter a

District Record Room, you'll invariably find it in a complete mess, with stacks of papers and files scattered all over the place and enveloped in dust, damp and darkness from all around. The so-called Record-Keeper generally knows nothing about the papers being 'preserved' here, because unlike the old times, he is now probably an incompetent clerk who cannot be put to any other use and hence has been posted here as a last resort. Senior officers simply cannot be bothered to inspect the record rooms. The academic community, eager to use these materials for carrying out in depth research, is obviously unable to do so under the existing circumstances. There is also the petty bureaucratic tangle of obtaining "necessary permission" which inhibits the use of such materials by those who are willing to put up with the horrible state of record maintenance.

I have more than once raised this matter with senior officials who really matter in this regard, but unfortunately I could never interest them in taking action to help preserve these valuable materials. To them, this was a petty academic matter of

Making Government Work

little consequence and hence found no place in their agenda of priorities. But obviously this state of affairs should not be allowed to continue for the sake of posterity at least, if not anything else. I would, therefore, venture to propose a few simple suggestions in this regard for the consideration of all, including the Government of Bangladesh. To start with, the Prime Minister should constitute a small national committee headed by the Cabinet Secretary to oversee the collection and preservation of all valuable government/semi-government records and documents within a clearly specified time frame. This committee should include a few noted outside experts who have firsthand knowledge of such papers. The Director-General of the National Archives should be its member-secretary. For the time being, records and documents relating to only the pre-1971 period should be collected, so that no one can raise the issue of compromising state security. This committee should draw up detailed guidelines to identify what is valuable and hence should be collected. Similarly, the committee, through wide-ranging consultations, should also identify the offices and organizations which are to be explored on a priority basis for collection of valuable documents and records. In each and every organization thus selected, a small committee should be formed with the head of the organization as its chairman to actually undertake the work of identifying and collecting these materials within a time frame on the basis of guidelines provided by the national committee. A few non-officials with relevant expertise should also be included in such committees. Members of the national committee should be required to undertake extensive tours in order to provide on-the-spot instruction and to monitor progress. Once the records and documents

are collected, they should be swiftly transferred to the National Archives for safe-keeping, proper cataloguing and use by members of the public.

The major costs in this whole exercise would cover honorarium and travel allowances for committee members and their assistants, transportation of collected materials to the National Archives and the additional space, furniture

and cataloguing services to be provided by the National Archives. There is no need to hire a single new staff, and if necessary the surplus staff of the government, who are now drawing salaries without doing any work, could be utilised in this exercise. In other words, it is quite possible for the Bangladesh Government to collect and preserve its valuable records and documents almost free of cost, and in the process maintain the heritage of a people who rightly claim to be a new nation, but with a long past. What is required is a little "heritage consciousness" and "will power" on the part of those who matter in this regard.

To the Editor

Easing Congestion at ZIA

Sir, No sooner a passenger reports for departure at ZIA airport he is confused on seeing a large crowd blocking the entrance gate of the airport terminal. Among the crowd there are many who come to see off their near and dear ones but this also includes many thugs and cheats who mingle with the crowd and victimise the passengers.

To lessen the gatherings and harassments of passengers at the terminal building the possible way out is for airlines to open check-in counters inside Dhaka city and transport their passengers to ZIA airport by their own coaches. Particularly the airlines catering to labour traffic can offer this service to the poor and illiterate passengers who become easy victims of the unruly crowd at the airport. This will also decrease the number of people going to airport to see off their near and dear ones.

With the advent of computerised reservations and check-in system, it should pose no problems for airlines to coordinate check-in at the

city and airport counters. Civil Aviation Authority and airline representatives in Dhaka should jointly sort out this problem of surging crowd at ZIA airport and bring some relief to the passengers.

Ziauddin Ahmed Motijheel C/A, Dhaka

New Beggars

Sir, I would like to draw your attention to an outrage against humanity being committed right under the nose of our so-called educated and highly cultured citizens of Dhaka. I refer to the sudden appearance of a group of emaciated, skeletal and scar-infested beggars at the traffic-light intersections of Kemal Ataturk Avenue and Airport Road, Mirpur Road and Manik Miah Avenue, to name but a few places of the city. The shocking aspect about this is that these beggars who do not possess even the strength of locomotion, and cannot make the slightest effort even to lift their heads, are carried around like babies by stout, healthy touts of either sex. I have even seen the same heavy-set woman (who certainly looks like she puts

away three square meals a day) carry around, on three different occasions, three different persons of the aforementioned skeletal physique with scars and burn marks.

It is obvious to anyone with the most average common sense that this is an extortion racket of the most heinous type, a business with human lives as the commodity, designed by sick minds to assault the senses of all passers-by and attempt to extract conscience-money from them. And this also under the very nose of our traffic police, who, conveniently or otherwise, choose to look the other way. Can they not trace the source of this rig of criminal, inhuman extortionists, and mete out swift, adequate justice?

But, of course, to expect such justice, one is operating under the assumption that our law-makers possess the moral sensibilities to be aware of the problem in the first place. Have we really descended to such depths of unconcern and insensibility to make this assumption null and void?

I appeal to you, sir, to your sense of morality, to join me

in my outrage at this travesty of human rights and do the utmost in your power to correct this evil, by drawing the attention of the authorities.

Zehra S Islam Mohakhali, Dhaka

"Appeal to the three Prime Minister"

Sir, I read the captioned letter written by Mr A Ghani in your esteemed daily of August 28. Many thanks to Mr Ghani to request our Prime Minister and other women PMs of Muslim countries to make a strong, meaningful and unified effort to stop merciless mass killing and gang raping in Bosnia.

Strong personalities of the Muslim world could try their best to immediately stop the middle age sort barbaric acts in Bosnia. Our Prime Minister had already asked the President of Mali on his recent visit to Bangladesh to kindly arrange an OIC meeting on Bosnia issue.

We do hope that our Prime Minister would take the lead and we wish her all the best to make the task a great success. Motiur Samad Choudhury Phultala Tea Estate, Sylhet.

Art Buchwald's COLUMN

The Pink Slip Business

ONE of the beneficiaries of a giant merger such as Chase and Chemical Bank is the "pink slip" industry. Every time two corporations in the United States take marriage vows, thousands of people have to be laid off, and the victims will be issued pink slips.

The Guillotine Pink Slip Company is one of the largest in the country. It is located in Greenwich, Conn., and looks more like a Colonial mansion than an office building.

William Stud, a jovial man, greeted me in his office, which overlooks a pond filled with swans. "Things must be good for you," I said.

"They have never been better. The companies are laying off workers left and right, and they have to come to us for reliable pink slips — ones that would not turn into sawdust when put in the washer by mistake."

"Can I see where you make the pink slips?"

"We don't make them in the United States. We print them in Korea."

"Korea?"

"Yes. You see, when the Guillotine Pink Slip Company merged with Red Ink Inc., we had to lay off 90 percent of our work force to pay interest on the junk bonds. So what we did was contract the manufacturing end of the business to Korea. They make fine pink slips, and when we hand them out, most Americans who receive them have no idea they were produced in the Far East."

"Did you feel bad letting so many people go?"

"We would have if we had been here. But all the executives flew to Florida for a sales meeting the week the slips were handed out."

"I suppose corporations can't have a merger without pink slips."

"The antitrust people in the Justice Department insist on it. They won't try to prevent a monopoly, but they are going to make sure all the employee firing is done by the book."

I said, "I suppose when it comes to Wall Street people don't count anyone."

"That's not necessarily true. When two Wall Street brokerages or investment house merge, at least 50 percent of the employees have to be pink-slipped. It causes a lot of heartaches, particularly when the merged companies not only take away their jobs but also cancel their subscriptions to the Wall Street Journal."

"When you pink-slip someone, is there any way to ease the pain?"

"Well, some companies used to give away free turkeys at Thanksgiving. But they stopped doing it when the employees they fired didn't even have the grace to say,

"Thank you."

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