

Roundtable's One Liner

Eminent participants at The Daily Star Roundtable on Tuesday put it concisely that without legal and administrative reforms in place we would remain handicapped as ever in securing investments for rapid growth. So, this better happen by 1996.

It is high time we change our strategy to attract investment, both foreign and local. Quite clearly our crying hoarse over the splendid macro-economic successes including a low inflation rate, and the comparability of our package of incentives with those of other countries, has failed to win the sympathy of foreign investors.

The reasons are not far to seek. While exploring the investment opportunities foreign companies and conglomerates invariably stumble against our archaic business laws down the road. Some of these are even of the Victorian era vintage. And because a corporate culture is yet to develop in our midst, it is imperative that we have a corpus of laws that automatically ensures transparency and accountability in and of business transactions. As for seeking legal protection against an offence actually committed it is the delayed disposal of a case that needs to be taken care of.

In other words, the outmoded legal, regulatory and judicial framework will have to be made fully compatible with a free market system for the sake of both foreign and local investors. The legal system, in the ultimate analysis, is the foundation on which confidence is built. Investment cannot take place until and unless investors feel confident that their interest is protected by law.

In the overall though it is the administrative structure that has to be reformed without any further ado. This has been far too bureaucratic, regulatory and over-bearing for the growth of free enterprise in the country. Its controlling nature has to be replaced by an enabling one. Dispersal of buildings is not decentralisation nor does it consist in delegation of powers where files have still to travel up and down. One stop-service would be worthy of its name if it is time-bound. The reasons are compelling indeed for an early reform of the administrative system.

Ending Child Prostitution

Tanbazar, the country's largest red-light area, is in turmoil over various demands emanating from it. The latest twist to the clash of interests comes from the mysterious disappearance of three 'madams', known in Bangla as *mashis*. These madams are indeed a crafty lot. They engage teenaged, underaged girls in the business in collusion with their henchmen. Allegations of maltreatment of the inmates of the brothel and of mismanagement have often been levelled against these madams. The present turmoil is the result of this deep-seated discord.

Addressing the multifarious problems of Tanbazar all at a time is impossible. It is better that an order of priority be set in the first place. The Daily Star ran a series of reports on the specific problem of underaged prostitution and once again we would like to draw the attention of the authorities to the same. The fact is that this practice has gone on unabated despite occasional exposures because of insensitivity to the criminality of it. It is time that we all committed ourselves to eliminating this manifest form of social abuse. Particularly after the World Women's Conference in Beijing the government should come up with legal and practical measures to effectively deal with the problem of underaged prostitution.

In this connection let us take some inspiration from the fact that both the prime minister and the leader of the opposition are women and that they will come forward in mitigating the social malady. We also suggest that a special cell consisting of representatives from the home ministry, women police and women rights groups be formed to address the problem. Such an integrated body will indeed be able to bring a halt to child prostitution.

US Aid Shrinkage

The Republican-dominated Senate and the Clinton administration are at loggerheads over the foreign aid issue. The Senate has slashed 1.2 billion dollars from the 14.7 billion aid spending bill presented by the administration. President Clinton has threatened to veto the Republican move. So the fate of the bill hangs in the balance. But there is little chance that the president will have his way in the face of opposition from a stridently conservative Republican party.

Whatever may be the considerations of the Republicans to downsize the financial aid package for countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, we find this move to be untimely and unjustified. America has already reduced its contribution to the UN agencies and a cut-back on foreign aid to countries trying to come to terms with democracy and market economy — all that the US stands for — will deal a terrible blow to these countries' aspirations. The end of cold war has given a unique opportunity for the US to patronise and promote political and economic liberalisation trends throughout the world. The US should not abdicate its role at this critical juncture of history.

If America fails to support the cause it has expostulated so passionately for such a long time then it will amount to her taking an isolationist course to the misfortune of all concerned. America cannot allow it to happen.

Godman Clouds '65 War Fallout

India, under the prime ministership of Lal Bahadur Shastri, enunciated the thesis that the international border was not sacrosanct, the country's defence was. When India was caught on the wrong foot at Akhnoor in Jammu and Kashmir state, it tried to relieve the pressure by marching its troops towards Lahore, crossing the international border.

minister Rajesh Pilot, before his transfer from the home ministry, issued an order for Chandraswami's arrest because of his reported nexus with the underworld. Still, it is difficult to imagine that Pilot did it on his own. His transfer is a coincidence because of his hostility with Home Minister S B Chavan. It is an open secret that Chavan was never reconciled to the allocation of 'Internal Security' to Pilot.

He has been able to make a capital out of his transfer because many disgruntled Congress MPs, after the recent cabinet reshuffle, have taken the opportunity to voice their unhappiness. The opposition has also been cheering him to defy the prime minister. But Pilot is no hero, however ambitious he may be.

Coming back to the 1965 war, its fallout was wide. East Pakistan realised for the first time that it had to fend for itself. West Pakistan was too far and too absorbed in its own defence to spare forces for Dhaka. Mashtur Rahman, a front-rank leader in the then East Pakistan, lamented in the National Assembly at that time what would have happened if India had attacked East Pakistan. The government's reply was China would have defended it. He shot back: "If China is to defend us, why do we need West Pakistan?"

Pakistan's confidence in China turned out to be misplaced. No doubt, Beijing gave New Delhi an ultimatum (September 16) "to demolish certain structures on the Tibetan-Sikkim border, return some lost sheep and yaks or face fierce consequences." But India did not take the ultimatum seriously. A long telegram by its Charge d'Affaires Jagat Mehta from Beijing had assured it that no action would follow. His argument was that China had never interfered in such matters as did not serve its national interest. He proved right.

China behaved in the

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

same manner during the Bangladesh war in 1971. It gave threats but never opened a second front for India as Pakistan expected Beijing to do. Lt Gen A A K Niazi, heading the operations in East Pakistan, was assured that China would intervene. But the expectation never came true. Niazi said so during the interrogation, which India conducted after the surrender. He said he was convinced that help would come in time. He went on repairing a number of aerodromes until the last moment for keeping them in readiness for foreign assistance.

The invariability of international frontier proved to be a myth during the 1965 war. India, under the prime ministership of Lal Bahadur Shastri, enunciated the thesis that the international border was not sacrosanct, the country's defence was. When India was caught on the wrong foot at Akhnoor in Jammu and Kashmir state, it tried to relieve the pressure by marching its troops towards Lahore, crossing the international border.

Pakistan's top military brass did not expect Shastri would do that, a person smaller in stature than his predecessor, Jawaharlal Nehru. That may have been precisely the reason why Shastri did not bother about the technicalities of international boundary.

I wonder what Nehru would have done in the situation. I once asked Indira Gandhi about it. She said that her father would have done exactly what Shastri did. According to her, the crossing of international border was on the advice of military commanders; her father too would have followed their advice. However, my feeling is that Nehru, who was particu-

lar about his image abroad would not have crossed the international border, fearing the annoyance of world opinion.

This takes me to the nub of the 1965 war. It began with the entry of infiltrators to the valley, first by irregular and then by regular troops of Pakistan. (Altaf Guahar's book on Ayub Khan gives a blow by blow account) It was primarily the idea of the late Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, then foreign minister. I checked this with Ayub Khan in 1972, then living a retired life at his home in Islamabad. When I asked him what prompted him to send infiltrators, he said it was Bhutto's idea and I should ask him why. Ayub said that he had warned Bhutto that if he knew anything about the mentality of Kashmiris, they would not rise.

This, of course, has been proved wrong because the same Kashmiris, who informed the Indian army about the infiltrators in 1965, went to Pakistan in 1989-90 to get training and arms, a process which has not stopped since. There is no doubting about the Kashmiris' defiance and their struggle for independence. Bhutto's prophecy came true 25 years later.

When I met him in Rawalpindi in May 1966, he did not deny his role. His reasoning (I retain the tape) was thus: "There was a time when militarily, in terms of the big push, in terms of armour, we were superior to India, because of military assistance we were getting. Now, the Kashmir dispute was not being resolved, and its resolution was also essential for the settlement of our disputes and as it was not being resolved peacefully we had this military advantage, we were getting blamed for

Breaking Icons and the Minority in Bangladesh

by Nilratan Halder

Mandirs came under attack here in the past in the same way religious processions of Muslims in India have come. But what makes the two cases different is not in the attack as such; it constitutes in the mentality of those attacked

Bangladesh, who have not even the slightest similarity with the worshippers of monkey God or Ganesh God, fell victim to that black religious passion. Call it a backlash or onslaught if you please, but the largest minority of Bangladesh have been facing an even bigger problem for long. And that has little to do with the Babri Mosque demolition.

Mandirs came under attack here in the past in the same way religious processions of Muslims in India have come. But what makes the two cases different is not in the attack as such; it constitutes in the mentality of those attacked. In India, the Muslims are not cowed down, they defend their cause with courage and pick up where they left. In Bangladesh, the Hindus have lost the last line of their defence. They feel alienated in their own homeland. The physical attacks they are occasionally subjected to assumed a psychologically overbearing proportion a long time ago. Only during the liberation war and for a brief spell after independence did they overcome that psychological condition. But once again they were relegated to the role of no better than second-class citizens. How?

The answer to this vital question cannot be simple and straight because it is related to a country's politics, its cultural and socio-economic aspirations. Yet state policy which is a product of that country's polity appears to be a deciding factor. A developed society at its higher stages of development acquires the quality of tolerance in all areas of life. Religion — however important it may be in an individual's life — is not allowed to intervene in the mundane business of politics. In politics of underdevelopment a situation contrary to this is encouraged — both overtly and covertly. Instead of exposing people to scientific, secular and open education, they are bent towards religious obscurantism and bigotry.

All this, needless to say, goes against the principles of a democratic and secular polity. It is like creating a monster of Frankenstein's proportion which when starts dictating terms, the pillars of a civilised society also begin to crumble. The Babri Mosque has been focused, and rightly so. But the slow process of mental devastation wrought on the Hindus here has not been brought to light adequately. So whatever religious persecution and atrocities are committed in the abode of 'religious harmony' are minor stray incidents — that the government feels free to dismiss. This comes as an eyewash because the administration's policy of appeasement directed to win over the fundamentalists sets in motion opposing forces.

The monster created through internal policies pressurises the administration to chew more than it can swallow. On the other hand, pressures from international community, donor agencies, human-rights groups take extreme reservation to such religious discrimination. In the ensuing clashes anything between a constitutional amputation to a fundamental

backlash can take place. If Bangladesh ends up with a constitutional decimation, Egypt and Algeria witness the violent rise of religious extremism.

In such a situation, Ayodhya-type provocation can lead to a demolition spree of temples of the rival community. But even in time of peace, a distorted view, thanks to a state policy of religio-political admixture, can find it expeditions to carry out attacks on the minority community.

Politics of tunnel vision misinterprets or encourages to misinterpret religious scriptures and brings in tensions, frictions and untold sufferings in society. The Indian Muslims know till today that the country's Constitution guarantees their equal rights, but in Bangladesh that constitutional guarantee has been reduced through distortions of serious legal implications. One can derive strength to defend one's rights from such a sacred charter and the other shrinks in fear knowing the government's caprice to fiddle with the charter. That indeed gives clue to the relative disadvantage of the minorities in Bangladesh. Even though the criminal act was committed by autocratic regimes, the democratic government or the opposition has not made — or should we say dared make — it an election issue. Such is the political environment in Bangladesh. And it is no surprise that a madrasa student will lead a mob to destroy images of Durga.

The Hindus abstained from celebrating the ritual all over Bangladesh in 1993 protesting against demolition of their temples. Did it shame the government? Or, was it able to give the conscience of the society some bad time? In the answer to this question lies the more important reflection as to how Bangladesh will fare in terms of a multi-religious and multi-cultural entity.

So it would, as a patriotic prudence, be better to say, all right, let us finish this problem and come to terms, and come to a settlement. It has been an unfortunate thing, so that is why up to 1965, I thought that with this edge that we had we could have morally justified it."

The 1965 war is probably one of those rare wars which both sides claimed to have won — Pakistan because it did not allow Lahore or Sialkot to fall into the hands of India, and India, in turn,

because it rebuffed Pakistan's intentions on Kashmir. Lt Gen Harbaksh Singh, India's hero of the 1965 war, succinctly summed up the outcome in his report to the government: "Although we did succeed in whittling down Pak's fighting potential, especially armour, and occupied chunks of her territory, most of our offensive actions, however, fizzled out into a series of stalemates without achieving any decisive results."

The Chandraswami's rise and fall is important to understand the low depth to which Indian politics has fallen. But the 1965 war is a reminder that we still have to settle our differences with Pakistan.

OPINION

"When the Police Blatantly Break the Law"

Prof Rokeya Rahman Kabeer

These days, can we not rely on the law-enforcement agencies of this country to keep any of the promises that they so lightly make? A notice (no. SHA MA/PU-2/6 RA KA E-2/92-638) issued by the Home Ministry in May 1992 (published in The Daily Star, and presumably in other papers as well, on May 26) clearly states that the requisitioning of vehicles owned by private individuals, non-government organisations and businesses is prohibited. Yet just a few days ago, our organisation's car was requisitioned without any notice or explanation.

Saptagram Nari Swantinvar Parishad is a non-governmental organisation, which has been working with poor rural women through a variety of programmes since 1976. This car belongs to our silk centre, and was in Dhaka to pick up silk yarn for the 300 workers at our silk centre to use for embroidery and weaving purposes. When the driver was taking the car to our office in Purana Paltan at nine-thirty pm on September 23rd, he was stopped by the police, who took away his car keys and forced him to go with them to Rajarbagh Thana.

Despite his protestations, the driver was only given a standard receipt to acknowledge that the car had been requisitioned, allegedly for purposes crucial to the well-being of the general public. The receipt is a photocopy, so hazy that we cannot even make out the receipt number. What it does show is that the car was requisitioned under the Dhaka Metropolitan

Police Ordinance, Act 103 (KA). It is also worth mentioning that the police made no attempt to contact us to provide an explanation, and we only found out what had happened when the driver called us from a hotel near the thana some time later.

For the last three days, the car has remained in the hands of the police. The driver of the car has been on duty from seven a.m. to as late as four a.m. the following day. Meanwhile, three hundred workers at our silk centre have been sitting unemployed, and production has come to a complete standstill! How can this be justified? And who is going to compensate the workers for the income they have lost, and us for the losses we have incurred in this time? Despite our best efforts, we have been unable to secure the release of the car until yesterday (September 26, '95).

When the police are the ones who so blatantly break the law, are we to be surprised at the current state of the country? On behalf of our women workers and our organisation, we demand an explanation, an apology and a guarantee that such occurrences will cease immediately. Or, is it the case so soon after their highflown speeches at the Beijing women's conference, that the government are finding yet another way to go on exploiting the women of this country?

The writer is Executive Director, Saptagram Nari Swantinvar Parishad.

Art Buchwald's COLUMN

John, Meet Sharon

ITS rare that a newspaperman gets an opportunity to be witness to a rumor that almost shocked the world.

It concerned the news that John F Kennedy Jr and Sharon Stone where a romantic item.

I was on Martha's Vineyard when the couple met and was present during the entire exchange, from beginning to end.

Sharon was a guest of the Rollinicks for the weekend, and they asked me if I would escort her to a restaurant for dinner at Gay Head, overlooking the ocean.

I responded, "What are friends for?" I was quite pleased to be in the party, particularly since Sharon turned out to be a very nice person and someone to write home about.

I suggested that she stay for the summer, but she told me that she was going to Pittsburgh to make a film called "Diabolique." She promised that if she ever came back to the Vineyard to stab somebody she would call me.

After dinner we strolled over to the lighthouse and by sheer chance ran into John Jr pedaling his bicycle.

He stopped to say hello, but despite what the papers said he did not kiss Sharon's hand.

Sharon gripped my arm tightly and said, "Is he for real?"

"Of course, he is," I told her. "What you see is what you get."

"Why does he turn me on, and you don't?"

"Because," I told her, "my beauty is real. His is an invention of George magazine."

We chatted some about the Vineyard. John said that he loved it very much, and Sharon said that she loved it a lot, and Bill Rollinick said that he would return next summer, and I complained that the island was filling up with too many good-looking people.

I observed no chemistry between John and Sharon. As a matter of fact, and I don't want this to sound self-serving, every time he talked to her she turned her back on him to look at me. She whispered, "If he offers to show me the lighthouse, think of a good excuse why I can't go."

I assured her that John was not that type of guy.

Then John announced, "Well, I've got miles to pedal and promises to keep. Goodby, everybody, and may the wind always be at your back."

After he left I asked Sharon, "Did the earth move for you?"

She said, "It takes more than a man on a bicycle for the earth to move for me."

That's the story — the whole story — of the historic meeting between Sharon Stone and John Kennedy Jr.

Once again, the gossip columnists are barking up the wrong tree. As for the ring John reportedly gave Sharon — it was nothing more than a beer-can top that he had pulled out of his bicycle tire the day before.

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To the Editor...

Our culture

Sir, Nowadays dish antenna has become a very popular entertainment channel in our country, but it poses a question that it will destroy our culture.

A section of people are saying that dish is destroying our culture. But it's not true.

Our culture is not the product of one day. And it became rich after a many years of practice. The present state of our culture is the contribution of many honourable persons of our country. So our culture which is the product of the contribution of many noted persons in the region can't be destroyed by the in-

road of multi-channel culture borne by dish.

There is always a crisis in every culture. Once the British wanted to destroy our culture, then came the Pakistanis. But no one succeeded.

A day will come when everyone will be dejected by

watching dish because our culture is still ingrained in our own heart. A nation's culture is the product of many years cultivation. So there may be a temporary deviation by the new source of entertainment 'Dish'.

Ashfaq Khanam Helen Dhaka