

A Happy New Year

Welcome, New Year. Do you bring us hope? Hardly. How much lost ground can we recover in the new year — let alone the dire need of breaking new grounds and on numerous fronts? But then these would be new days, throwing us anew along the one-way flow of time. Have we not faltered enough to try to rise in the new year? Hope grows from one's inside. We would not live without it. The year that was was not without a silver-lining or two in the gathering black clouds of political disaster.

One small young girl sparked the spirit of man and lighted up the entire nation with the glow of her sacrifice. Yasmin Akhter's tale of torture, rape and murder and subsequent police cover-up is not uncommon in Bangladesh. What canonized her as a little St Joan was the heroic rise of the people of Dinajpur. And the Yasmin movement, that rocked Dinajpur confirmed to all in the nation that we are not all finished yet, that the moral man lives in us and courage has not forsaken us altogether. Yasmin did lend to the nation a wonderful modicum of confidence it was badly in need of.

On December 16 Bangladesh entered its 25th year of independence. There was in the air some brilliance as the day approached. After many long years, suddenly the ambience whispered to each eager ear how good it was to be free — however may we be buffeted by evil days. To be free is a virtue by itself — and why were we oblivious of it so long?

That elan unebbing, we enter the new year. It will bring us an election. Whatever the arrangements they come to — people are now much more vigilant than before. If some quarter proves foolish enough to spill blood — it will not get its way. And in the new year the nation must go back to work — to work double shift if need be. There is still something left of the momentum created both in agriculture and industry in recent years. The new year must add pace to it before it slackens.

On to then a year of work without break, competition without subterfuges, politics with a lot of responsibility, and cooperation and a true feeling for the people.

A happy New Year for all!

Is this Satisfactory?

The satisfaction level we are latching on to in terms of economic performance sounds a bit intriguing but not altogether surprising. A review meeting, chaired by the Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman and attended by some top functionaries of the government on Saturday dubbed as 'satisfactory' the ADP fund utilisation rate of 23 per cent in the first five months of the current financial year. The so-called satisfaction is derived by comparison with the rates of 24 per cent and 16 per cent recorded during the corresponding period of 1994-95 and 1993-94.

Quite predictably, we are going to rush through the remaining months with the quality of work getting harder to maintain and jugglery of figures in sordid prospect.

The pertinent question is: how much of the under-performance was caused by political agitation and how much by governmental inefficiency? In fact, we would have greatly appreciated an authentic quantification of the slow-down suffered in project implementation rather than tossing figures like how many crores of taka were lost in productivity or national income through the strikes. We are prompted to ask for this in the knowledge that 1994-95 and 1995-96, years which were politically more disturbed than 1993-94, recorded, in their first five-month period, an ADP implementation rate much higher than that achieved in 1993-94.

We are, therefore, led to think that hardly anything has changed in the objective conditions within the government machinery to accelerate the pace of ADP implementation.

Despicable

The Dhaka-bound Noakhali Express was derailed yesterday near Tongi station during a countryside 'barricade' programme called by the three major opposition parties. While the programme was a success in so far as the nation's entire riverine, road and rail transport came to a standstill, the derailment of the train did take away much from that and in fact earned for the programme something of a moral stigma.

A train represents a system — indeed — a world of systems much more than anything does. It has, since Lord Dalhousie introduced this Watt-Stephenson transport revolution in the subcontinent about a century and a half back — become an inseparable cultural trait for us. Unfailingly stolid and reliable, it has become a part — rather a pillar — of our life. Whoever harms a train or its track, undermines the whole nation in a way not amenable to easy repair in decades. The Tongi derailment has been an act of grave crime. And its perpetrators must be caught and punished.

The culprits may or may not be opposition activists. It can be as well that criminals took the opportunity offered by the barricade programme. After all, of the 30 similar acts of sabotage done to trains and tracks in the last one year only five were traced to be politically motivated. Even if the Tongi crime is the work of non-political thugs, the dangerous loss of image is wholly the opposition's. As such, it will be wise for the agitating parties to cooperate wholeheartedly with the authorities for catching the rogues.

We expect a condemnation of the derailment as much as we call upon them to mount a vigil to prevent repetition of such despicable sabotage.

FREDERIC Forsyth must be standing up with a Gioconda-smile on his face at the news of the Purulia air-drop. And he is busy in weaving another plot for his next block-buster thriller!

At least that is how one would like to part wings on imagination. A sleepy and somnolent hamlet in West Bengal was instantly put on the world-map. Strategic centres around the globe and inner sanctum of the think-tanks in all South Asian countries pencilled a red-rubric around the name Purulia.

On December 17 more than 300 deadly, high-precision AK-47 and AK-56 model assault rifles, 15 mm pistols, 9 rocket-launchers, anti-tank grenades and a huge cache of ammunitions and a good number of parachutes were dropped from a Russian-made MIG-21 Antonov aircraft. According to press reports, the AN-26 flew from Karachi on December 17, landed in Benaras and hopped to Calcutta en route to Phuket (Thailand). On the return mission, the aircraft refuelled at Madras and while the plane was zig-zagging its way towards Karachi, two Indian Air Force jets scrambled to intercept the AN-26!

As AFP reports, of the seven crew members, five were carrying Latvian passports, while the sixth, identified as Peter Beach, a Briton, and the seventh crew-member, a New Zealander and owner of the carrier, dodged the Airport Security cordons and made good his escape! Most of the weapons are of Bulgarian origin and the parachutes used to drop them are South African.

The aborted gun-running had all the earmarks of a mystery-thriller. But the Mission Impossible was checked-mated not because of the security alertness of the state,

but, perhaps, big default or could it be because of the ham-handedness of the organisers of the Mission of Death!

The air-drop worth 10 million dollars harken back our memories to the flourishing gun-running underworld of the '60s and '70s in Africa and Latin America. As for South Asia, rumour-mongers have done brisk business in floating stories, and gossips, not substantiated, and sometimes deliberate disinformation have been purveyed! Purulia saga, however, brings about a gravitative change in the dimension of the undulated terrain of gun-running in the region. As reports suggest, these assault rifles are commonly used by the militants in Kashmir, they have also been seen in use earlier on by the Khalistan partisans in the Punjab, according to the same reports.

To add to the high drama, some experts are suggesting that the arms-drop was destined for the cult-group Anand-Marg (Path of Peace), active in the '70s against the establishment — and banned since then.

The bathos and drama of the Purulia saga closely parallels the advisory bequeathed for the young probationers at Grosvenor House by Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations Arthur Bottomley in which he asked the young diplomats to always take religion, aristocracy, sex and mystery for postprandial speeches! A starry-eyed neophyte pondered seriously and acted on it while making his maiden-speech — "Good God! said the Duchess, "I am pregnant. Who did it!"

Way back in 1981-82, an ad hoc committee was set up for drafting an international

The Dogs of War

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convention against the recruitment, use, financing and training of mercenaries, in the UN. New York. Ahmed Bedjaoui, then Algerian P.R. in NY, and now a judge at the Hague International Court of Justice, was the first chairman of the committee. I was elected Rapporteur till my tenure was over. This committee prepared the Draft Report and Convention for submitting to the General Assembly in 1985.

The mandate of the committee was drafting of an international convention against the recruitment, use,

the quantity of ammunition found in Purulia till today do not appear to be massive — but it was big enough to give a band of determined terrorists or adventurers sufficient muscle to create problem. Let us not forget that it is small arms which have been the instrument of most of the 150 or so wars that have been fought since the Second World War. What with Lebanon and Biafra, Yemen, or Kataya, Namibia or South Africa, Somalia, Rwanda, and lastly in Bosnia have all been fought with small arms and machine guns. And small-

made impossible forever. Alfred Nobel was certainly an honourable man and a man with vision. After all, his Nobel Prize foundation has elevated the line of 'civilisation' to a great height but he forgot Plato who said: only the dead enjoy eternal peace!

The mosaic of small arms used in this century makes an interesting story. British steno guns used by the French Maquis during the Second World War were dropped by parachute. American grand rifles were first exported to Germany in the fifties, then they were re-exported to Jordan in the late sixties. They were later transported to the Philippines. British Enfield rifles were used by the Americans in Vietnam. Belgian Mausers were brought over to Taiwan by Chiang-Kai-Shek!

While government-to-government arms transfer has certain level of accountability, the merchants of death or pejoratively known as the 'unhallowed Ambassadors' like Basil Zaharoff are more comfortable with the shadow world of spooks and adventurers: the new breed of operators known as mercenaries stack this world in search of new preys and pastures. They followed their mercenary calling and took their wages and are dead....

Mercenaries are 'economic' with their loyalty; their operation breeds corruption much more than normal transaction in arms. The celebrated Saudi middleman Adnan Khashoggi is reported to have said in 1976: "If one offers money to a government to influence it (buying arms), that is corruption. But if someone receives

money for services rendered afterwards, that is a commission." Senator Percy almost immediately retorted: "Corruption is going to do more to bring down democracies around the world than almost anything else."

But some merchants of death through their tools have become legendary. Sir Basil Zaharoff was reportedly sent to Germany during the war, to discover certain things that Lloyd George wanted to know as a Bulgarian doctor! Lloyd George kept his friendship with Sir Basil and visited him in his Chateau de Balincourt in Monte Carlo, after he lost power.

While the countries of South Asia and other world chancelleries are keenly watching the unfolding drama of Purulia air-drop, the moral dilemma involving mercenary, gun-running is getting more and more heightened. Pessimists think that the 'soldiers of fortune' have come to stay while critics recommend stringent measures to control the world of the shadowy transactions. In this crusade against the Zaharoffs, Maxims or Krupps or Henry Kusses, they seek the strict enforcement of UN convention against mercenaries and cite George Clemenceau's indignation and the historic paragraph of the Covenant of the League of Nations inspired by Woodrow Wilson. The members of the League agree that the manufacture by private enterprise of munitions and implements of war is open to grave objections. The bleeding-heart Liberals even quoted Bernard Shaw's Major Barbara to demonstrate the central dilemma of economic prosperity dependant on the manufacture of means of destruction.

..... Cry 'Havoc!' and let slip the dogs of war....!



Waliur Rahman

financing and training of mercenaries, which was considered a threat to international peace and security, particularly to the stability and security of small member-countries of the United Nations and their democratic process. Article I of the draft convention reads: "Mercenarism is a crime under international law which must be prevented and punished." Article II described mercenarism as 'organising, financing, supplying, equipping, training, promoting, supporting or employing in any way military forces consisting of or including persons who are citizens of the country in which those forces will be operating and who act for personal gain in the form of a salary, wages or any other kind of remuneration.'

The number of arms and arms coups in Comoros lands make boring reading. Who doesn't remember the name of Sam Cummings, who reportedly owns the biggest private arsenal in Europe — in a warehouse in Manchester? In his classic book, Antony Sampson describes Cummings as a philosopher, like a Greek chorus, who has discovered the secrets of human motivation; the arms business' Cummings thinks, is founded on human folly and it will go on forever! To make it more palatable Cummings told Sampson: "All weapons are defensive, and all spare parts non-lethal."

Alfred Nobel, the Swedish inventor of dynamite, used to say that he would like to invent a substance or a machine with such terrible power of mass destruction that war would thereby be

He did so by placing an advertisement in a newspaper in Ukraine, the country of his grandparents. He had learned some Ukrainian in a bilingual programme in his school, and sought to test his skill. Within two months, he had received more than 2,000 replies — many from child cancer sufferers, whose illness was caused by the 1986 nuclear disaster.

Almost 700 cases of thyroid cancer linked to fallout from the wrecked reactor at Chernobyl have already been confirmed among children in Ukraine, Belarus and Russia. Many are aged 10 and under, and became contaminated when they were vulnerable infants.

Doctors now fear that thousands more will fall victim in the years ahead. Sufferers can survive if the damaged thyroid gland is cut out,

but they then become dependent for life on regular doses of the hormone thyroxine.

Healing though humour is one of Mark's aims. It took him and his father, Andy, several months to sort through and select the material. One of Mark's favourite jokes included in the compilation is:

Airline pilot announces to passengers, "All the engines are out and there's only one parachute. But please don't worry — I've taken the parachute and gone for help!"

At the UN, Mark entertained reporters with his "best bits" selection, but became serious when a correspondent asked him what he hoped to achieve in Ukraine, where the clean-up fund is several hundred million dollars short of requirements, and nuclear experts say problems are getting worse.

"Picking up a banana skin in the street helps," replied Mark with conviction. "Everybody must do what they can."

401 Goofy Jokes for Kids has two beneficiaries other than the Chernobyl children: the bilingual school programme in western Canada and another project from

Mark's region. Junior Achievement, that teaches young people about business.

"It gave me the push to think, to dream and achieve," says Mark. He credits Junior Achievement and his parents for encouraging him to press on with the project.

Asked about his family, Mark says his father is a lawyer and his mother a health worker. Grinning, he adds: "Obviously, I didn't get my comical side from them!"

ELVI RUOTTINEN is Gemini News Service correspondent at the United Nations.

Fun-loving Peacekeeper Packs a Punchline

Elvi Ruottinen writes from New York

While the United Nations is busily trying to reconcile warring factions in places such as the Balkans, a Canadian schoolboy has sought UN help to launch his own campaign to unite children of the world through laughter. Gemini News Service reports.

western Canada.

The UN General Assembly declared 1995 the Year of Tolerance, and while there were not many takers among the member nations with their ethnic animosities and traditional rivalries, the idea found fertile ground among Mark and his friends.

The book contains jokes, cartoons, riddles and puzzles contributed by hundreds of children from Canada, Ukraine and the United States. Governments of the three countries co-sponsored Mark's UN press conference to launch the venture.

He told journalists that the book project was a contribution to laughing together and getting along together from all those who participated. Love of laughter bound children together from around the world. "I wished to demonstrate this," he said.

He did so by placing an advertisement in a newspaper in Ukraine, the country of his grandparents. He had learned some Ukrainian in a bilingual programme in his school, and sought to test his skill. Within two months, he had received more than 2,000 replies — many from child cancer sufferers, whose illness was caused by the 1986 nuclear disaster.

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To the Editor

Woes of our economy Sir, The performance of economic activity of our country largely depends upon the spontaneous flow of investment. The larger the volume of investment, the greater will be the pace of economic programmes of that country.

But the fact is that investment originates from savings. And savings in turn create as well as mobilize capital for investment. In a nutshell, savings and capital, capital and investment, investment and production, production and employment and people's standard of living are all correlated phenomena.

The disappointing performance of our economy is due mainly to the deplorable conditions of savings and capital formation necessary for investment.

Very low domestic investment along with various shortcomings of economic and social nature has made our country extremely dependent on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Our country is often said to have the most liberal investment and industrial policy in the Asia Pacific region. Nevertheless, we have miserably failed to project our country as a favorable and attractive land for FDI. According to the Asian Development Bank, Bangladesh is unfortunately the lowest FDI receiving country within this region. Interestingly enough, the agricultural sector of our country failed to attract even one per cent of the FDI.

There is no denying the fact that labour unrest, political instability, bureaucratic tangles, deterioration of law and order situation, lack of

infra-structural support are the major factors hindering the desired flow of FDI into Bangladesh. These factors tend to severely damage our image abroad as a nation prospective for economic development.

In this connection, we feel sorry to mention that whatever woes our economy has at this moment, almost all seem to have stemmed from unfair practices adopted by a number of our established politicians and their stooges.

Nitin Roy North Bashabo, Dhaka

Need for dialogue

Sir, It appears from the recent development in our political arena that all the political parties are now actively thinking to resolve the prevailing political crisis through dialogue.

We would sincerely call upon all the concerned political fronts to sit in the dialogue and settle their political disputes by demonstrating true spirit of patriotism. It is to be noted that a poor country like Bangladesh cannot sustain so much political disturbances. Political stability is a must for the very survival of our dear Bangladesh.

M Zahidul Haque Asst Prof, BAI, Dhaka

Culture shock in Canada, etc.

Sir, This refers to the letter captioned as above published in The Daily Star on 24 December, 1995. I apologise for a mistake I think I have made in the letter. It was Mr B C Roy and not Professor S N Bhadra, who was both teacher and colleague of Dr Syed Sajjad Husain, who went to a Munshiganj college

for a teaching position after his retirement, and walked back to Dhaka without answering an 'outrageous' question asked by the interviewers.

However, Prof S N Bhadra was also a teacher of Dr Syed Sajjad Husain about whom he had many fond memories to tell. Prof Bhadra was a direct student of Oxford tripos Arvind Ghosh brothers who studied Homer and Virgil in Greek and Latin respectively. Prof Bhadra introduced Dr Husain to Greek literature when he was a student of second year honours, for which Dr Husain praised him highly and also accused him personally why he did not tell him about Greek literature when he was in the first year honours class. The learned Professor enjoyed to be accused by his dear student.

From this incident Dr Husain made it a point that in future when he would be a teacher, he would never fail to keep his students abreast of all facets of knowledge that he was aware of.

Mohamed Abdul Mutalib Onnesha College Dhanmondi R/A, Dhaka

A ray of hope

Sir, We are happy indeed to learn through newspapers that Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina is willing to discuss with Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia about the formation of a caretaker government if it is aired through radio and television live. In the past, she had refused any sort of discussion unless the Prime Minister had agreed to hold the next general election under a caretaker government. We are looking

upon this change of heart as a good sign. If there is decorum to be observed we think Sheikh Hasina will be gracious enough to do it for her country and Begum Khaleda Zia will accept it gladly.

People of our country have passed through a very disquieting period and at long last are hoping for some peace and sanity. We are sure that our two leaders, through discussion, will strike upon a solution which will ensure the participation of all political parties in the next general election.

Nur Jahan East Nasirabad, Chittagong

An appreciation

Sir, Prof Roushan Ara Hoque's two articles entitled, 'Recalling Sher-e-Bangla, the Legendary Hero of Politics' and 'Hussein Shaheed Suhrawardy — a Champion of Democracy', published in The Daily Star on 26th October and 5th December, '95 respectively are of scholarly standard. Such well thought-out and impartial analyses of the contributions of our great leaders of the past are extremely useful for our younger generations who often get distorted facts in their text books. We would request Prof Hoque to contribute more and more such articles so that we can be benefited by her erudition.

In this context our hearty congratulations to her for getting the Shaheed Suhrawardy National Award for her contribution to education and literature. Shaqiq Ahmed, Dhanmondi, R/A, Dhaka-1209

OPINION "EC Seeks Active Army Role in Holding Polls"

Md Azizul Haq

THE Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) sought active cooperation of the army, navy and air force for holding free and fair elections and ensuring voting rights of the electorate. It is simply unwarranted and uncalled for. The present Chief Election Commissioner also in the meantime has become disputed to an extent. However, neither he nor his predecessors could be compared with TN Seshan of India. Very recently, proposal of the Prime Minister of India for holding election in Kashmir has been turned down by TN Seshan showing various plausible reasons. But unfortunately the very wisdom and courage of our Chief Election Commissioners have always been lacking in exercising whatever powers available within their jurisdiction.

The way the present CEC is seeking active support of the armed forces for conducting the ensuing election has got no prima facie basis. It may be further mentioned, perhaps, that Election Commission, seemingly, has not given any prior thought to the matter before proposing for calling in army during the ensuing Jatiya Sangsad election for supervision rather our armed forces are being brought in in such an issue where there is possibility of their being blamed and be disputed by the losing party/parties.

In Pakistan and Bangladesh, on the plea of narrow political squabbles, economic crisis and law and order situation, the armed forces took over the administration. But ultimately they floated political parties, under whatever guise it may be, and ruled for some years and left power putting the country in disarray and dismay. They just cannot solve the problems of the people rather, in the process, they

often create enormous problems, and their ordinance, proclamations etc become constitutional hazards for the future.

Both in Pakistan and Bangladesh contexts, we can see historically that hardly a civilian government had survived full term without being intervened by the armed forces. However, civilian institutions are blamed off and on that they cannot run the country in an effective and democratic manner. But it is continuation of the process that matters. In England, Conservative and Labour parties, and in America Democratic and Republican parties had taken proper shapes through hundred years of practice. Even in India after practising democracy uninterruptedly for about 45 years, they even call for so-called family rule but do not seek army intervention. In the words of late President John F Kennedy, democracy comes through experience and experiments; it may take years together to give it the correct and appropriate shape.

In 1991 fortunately we achieved a democratic government and they are going to complete five years very shortly. But calling armed forces to supervise the ensuing election seems unfortunate and unwarranted. Whatever power conferred upon the Election Commission, till today they have not exercised that independently, assertively and courageously. Otherwise the present crisis would not have arisen at all. So sensible people should understand that the Chief Election Commissioner may not be doing the correct thing at the present critical juncture of the state affairs by calling armed forces to supervise the ensuing election.

The writer is an advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh.