

The Missing Ship

A Bangladeshi owned cargo ship with 24 Bengali crew has been missing in the China sea for 45 days and all that our government could say is that some faxes and telexes have been sent and that we are awaiting reply.

We would like to clearly state that sending a few faxes and telexes is far from adequate. Government must take a far more active role.

The nationality of the owner, and of 24 members of the crew imposes, however, a special responsibility on our government.

Regional Free Trade

At the two-day meeting of the SAARC commerce ministers four member states have made a strong case for removal of all forms of tariff barriers.

The SAPTA was worked out with the intention of increasing trade co-operation and coordination among the SAARC members on a rational basis.

In a situation like this, export from countries like Bangladesh to India can hardly be competitive. The purpose of a preferential trade agreement was to give the member states some sort of relief from the high tariff as applicable for international goods of import.

Death of a Visionary

France's longest-serving president had a quiet exit from power. Equally quietly did he take his leave from the world.

The stark contrast with his successor, Jacques Chirac, whom he beat twice, is also indicative of the difference in the styles of governance.

The president had long been fighting with the deadly disease with that quiet courage he was known to possess abundantly.

Passing Thoughts Invited by the Impasse

by M Asafuddowlah

(First of a two part article on the current political situation)

SINCE the resignation of all the members from the fifth national parliament except those belonging to BNP.

The stalemate is triggering public discussions that are primarily a reworking of the memory tape.

Since independence of Bangladesh, those who governed the country with or without public consent had non-conventional exits.

This hero ruled for nine years and was overthrown by the people, helped by the refusal of the then army command to be used to suppress the wishes of the people.

do the right things if one could free himself from the paranoia of ambition, self-perpetuation and amassing of corrupt fortune.

Has the past ever served to teach us any lesson? When the present government came into power it was blessed with great public empathy.

We should rewind our minds and identify why there is so much stake in the power politics of this unfortunate nation.

Today, politics has lost its selfless dimension. Politics is an investment now. And, necessarily therefore, there is a calculation of return.

International isolation of the nation, the total uprooting of the local government bodies, the conversion of the country into a warehouse of Indian goods.

We should rewind our minds and identify why there is so much stake in the power politics of this unfortunate nation.

It was only the Muslim League government of the erstwhile East Pakistan which held a free and fair election.

government becomes the condemnation and persecution of the supporters of the previous regime.

One is the front of intellectuals - teachers, lawyers, literateurs, artists, etc. Another is a forum of journalists and yet others are the labour unions.

holy conjunction form the basis of an enduring entail. The corporate character of the state gets lost and an outlook, completely proprietorial, emerges.

The criteria laid down for selection or prioritization of a project are peremptorily ignored. These investments, made out of tax payers' money.

of state persecution. Finally comes the arrests of political supporters of the opposition parties and arming of the government party supporters.

Having set the stage with the impresarios in position the curtain is lifted for enactment of the final drama.

At the outset of this article I have raised a number of questions that were closely interrelated.

Look-ahead to 1996

Political Illusionists Conjure Up Peace

Michael Jansen writes from Amman

PEACE in '96 is the New Year's greeting going round the Middle East.

Until recently, Israel was unwilling to pay the price for peace with the Arabs.

New Israeli Premier Shimon Peres seems determined to take up that offer in the first half of 1996.

However, Peres will have to conceal any Israeli concessions to placate uneasy electors.

The first illusion they have created is that there is a "new tone" or a "new atmosphere" in traditionally hostile relations between Israel and Syria.

To pursue peace in the Middle East, governments are engaging in what diplomats call "constructive ambiguity" - evasions, half-truths, concealment.



After months of insistence that talks should be only on a military level, and that Syria should accept Israel's demand for ground-based early-warning stations in the Golan Heights after withdrawal.

rael has agreed that talks can also take place on a political level and that all issues are negotiable.

The second illusion is that Peres is now making Damascus an offer it cannot refuse - "full withdrawal for full peace".

However, Peres has injected new meaning into "full peace", demanding comprehensive peace with all the Arabs as the price for full withdrawal from the Golan and southern Lebanon.

The Arabs, though, insist the final status of the occupied Palestinian territories must also be settled.

Peres has admitted as much. While making clear to

Golan settlers that they may have to leave, he says that in exchange for a withdrawal from the Heights, Israel will retain large portions of the West Bank.

And Yossi Beilin, Peres' deputy, tells Israeli settlers that most of the 140,000 colonists in the West Bank will remain after a final settlement with the Palestinians.

"There is no problem of settlers," Peres says, "only problems between people", which can be resolved in a neighbourly fashion.

Promoting the notion of paying Syria's price at the expense of the Palestinians creates a third illusion.

Arab-Israeli conflict.

Meanwhile, Assad, the "Sphinx of Damascus", has created an illusion of his own by remaining silent on the sensitive issue of what full peace would entail.

Despite this necessity for illusion - or "constructive ambiguity" in diplomatic parlance - peace would seem to be on the way.

Senior Palestinian Ambassador Samir Abu Ghazallah told Gemini News Service that a text would be signed in May in Washington.

Lebanon and recognition by Israel and the West of a Syrian "special role" in Lebanon.

Israel sources give three years as the period required to negotiate details and for full implementation.

Peres says the signing ceremony will involve not only Israel, Syria and Lebanon, but also Gulf and North African Arab states.

Illusionists and optimists believe the sight of Israeli leaders standing among Arab kings and presidents will create irresistible momentum for peace.

MICHAEL JANSEN was born in the US, lives in Cyprus, and has covered the Middle East for many years.

To the Editor

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space.

Unfortunate northern part

Sir, The Northern part of Bangladesh is an underdeveloped region. Almost all the government establishments have been set up in Dhaka and Chittagong.

desertification process is continuing unchecked. The Brahmaputra and Jamuna are shifting westward causing bank erosion and displacing a large number of people.

Communication between Dhaka and northern part is hazardous, expensive and time consuming.

munication since independence. Saidpur and Parbatipur railway workshops capable of manufacturing wagon and coach are underutilized.

Industry cannot grow with load shedding, fuel scarcity and communication problem. Hosiery industry of Pabna has died down due to faulty policy of the government.

imported and locally produced goods. But they are not getting the adequate price for their agricultural produce viz paddy, sugarcane, jute, potato, ginger, mango, litchi, watermelon, tobacco, cotton, etc.

General elections 1996

Sir, We are proud and feel greatly honoured that we fought our liberation war and won our independence in a record time of nine months after a stretch of 190 years of British colonial rule followed by 24 years of neo-colonialism of Pakistan.

grossed in a controversy over 'caretaker government' or 'no caretaker government' at the cost of untold sufferings of the people and wastage of time and energy of the nation?

We are constitutionally bound to hold general elections between 4th January and 4th April 1996.

Let us stop into the next century with foresight, wisdom and patriotism and march forward with hope, determination and inspiration and build up a happy and prosperous Bangladesh without fail.

people is above all. Let us look into our mistakes, lapses and sufferings. When the peoples of the different countries of the world are looking forward to enter into the 21st century with hope and inspiration for a bright future why an ominous threat of political catastrophe is hovering over our heads like a dark cloud?

We are confident that whichever the political party emerges victorious in the general elections under a 'caretaker government' would be able to serve the cause of the people, democracy and the country more smoothly, efficiently and effectively.

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