

Trade Show

We welcome the news of the inauguration of the three-day 5th annual US trade show in the city. The organisers — American-Bangladesh Economic Forum and US Embassy in Dhaka — have a full measure of our thanks. Their unflagging zeal to make it happen through the political uncertainties has reinforced the impression of the increasing eagerness on both sides to elevate their partnership for progress to some tangible new heights.

A trail of successes is behind the present show. The annual event has gained in popularity and strength with the result that the US Trade Show '96 shows a 25 per cent rise in the number of firms representing, 14 per cent in terms of exhibitors and 34 per cent in terms of booth occupancy as compared with the figures of last year. A wider range of products being on display with the corporation executives on hand to do the needful, we might see a record number of contracts made out of this show.

The balance of trade is favourable to Bangladesh with her exports to the US reaching 1.1 billion dollars in 1994 as against imports from the US at 233 million dollars. Significantly, both sides are dealing in a limited number of goods so that there is scope for trade diversification. The US has been a sheltered market for Bangladeshi garments, something it will not remain after the quotas are phased out by 2005 AD. The US entrepreneurs can help Bangladesh establish some backward linkages to her RMG sector. The US corporations could think of investing here taking into account not only the demands generated in Bangladesh but also those existing in the adjoining markets of Asia. This fits into the American concept of Asia emerging as the new economic centre in the 21st century.

The US must be keenly watching the progress of Bangladesh's privatisation programme and the growth of her infrastructure and free market potential to make up its mind about investing more in Bangladesh.

It is time our private sector map out with the US entrepreneurs areas where there can be collaborative projects.

Railway Shock

The country's railway is smarting under the shock generated by the year's first major train accident at a place between Hajiganj and Mether station in Chandpur district. After the tragic train accident near the Hili station this one comes within a year to expose the danger our railway is fraught with. Reports indicate that the accident might not have occurred due to any mechanical fault. Human negligence and error appear to be responsible for the tragedy. Those who were in charge of giving clearance to the two trains involved in the accident failed to do their duty by ignoring the precautionary steps they should have taken. If the telephone wires had been stolen causing a disruption in the communications between the two stations, it was an act of criminal negligence on the part of the station masters to have given green signals to the two trains.

Three probe bodies have been formed to pinpoint the exact cause of the accident. We hope their findings will be made public soon. Let those not be shelved permanently. While this is important, there is another aspect that needs to be borne in mind. This concerns the authorities' refusal to accept responsibility for accidents. What is obviously missing is accountability to the people. As if the authority could not care less. It is this syndrome of unconcern that emboldens the staff down the order to take their duties without seriousness. That the probe committees' reports do not get published is part of this lack of concern and accountability. Let the right precedent be set at the top level so that everyone down the ladder becomes conscious of his or her duties and responsibilities. Lapses causing accident and loss of life must be seriously taken and appropriate punishment meted out against persons committing these.

One Light Less

He was as self-effacing as any worthy civil servant should be, and perhaps more. He came from a family of remarkable achievements and served to the longest at the acme of his profession and yet bore it all more lightly than many a one of renown and coming from less than similar background.

Alamgir MA Kabir seemed never to know respite. Eternally wedded to harness that was he. Joining Indian Police Service in 1935 and retiring as IGP of Bangladesh, he took upon even more responsibility and a bigger load of work after retirement — as the chief of a number of high performing public organisations.

What made him tick for so long — and so effectively and usefully — had perhaps something to do with culture. It would easily be seen that the scions of this family from Kamarpur, a village like any other and a stone's throw from Faridpur, were all imbued with work-culture. But there was something else in them which sustained them in their unceasing cultivation of literature and related arts and pursue life as decent human beings, modest even though gripped all around by insolence of office.

So Kamarpur is one light less now. We would expect new ones to be kindled there. With Akbar Kabir still there and the unextinguishable Rokeya Kabir, although a daughter come from another illustrious home, and the steady Khushi Kabir bedecking his flanks, this is no idle hope.

Our condolences to late Alamgir Kabir's bereaved family members.

CONTROVERSIAL decisions always evoke complaints against the court. If the recent judgment by the Supreme Court on corrupt election practices has raised eyebrows, it is understandable. The verdict's commendation from the quarters like the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) also does not come as a surprise.

The grave truth is that the judgement is a disappointment to those who were looking towards the court for a clearcut enunciation of what constituted religious propaganda in a secular society. Instead, we are told that "the context and the composition of the audience to which it is addressed are all significant."

It is like saying that nothing is bad, only thinking makes it so. Unfortunately, certain things are bad *per se*; good in tensions do not lessen the odium. Hindutva, from the days of Vir Savarkar, the Hindu Mahasabha leader, who coined the phrase in 1924, has come to represent *Hindu Rashtra*, the state based on Hinduism as are the states based on Islam or Christianity.

The court's reasoning has brought into doubt the traditional meaning of secularism. Its reasoning has created confusion over such questions as what is Hinduism. That it is not confined to contours of religion is an idealistic approach. So is the argument that Hinduism is related to more lives of people in the subcontinent than to narrow limits of their religion.

The fact is that Hinduism is a religion. It is the faith which 82 per cent of Indians follow. They have their own

A Flawed Judgment

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beliefs like the trans-migration of soul. They have their ways of worship and their own images and symbols. Religion is very much the path of Hindus' daily life.

During the census, Hindus are counted as such, a separate religious entity. The column for religion is in every form or application to which the government seeks answer. The word, Indian, will not be accepted in place of Hindu. It is like writing Islam in place of nationality.

The constitution itself accepts Hinduism as a religious entity when it explains in Article 25: "... The reference to Hindus shall be construed as including a reference to persons professing the Sikh, Jain or Buddhist religion, and the reference to Hindu religious institutions shall be construed accordingly." (Italics are mine).

Again, when reservations for the scheduled castes were accepted, the constitution makers were particular to give concessions only to the lowest caste, Harijans among the Hindus, not if and when they embraced another religion.

Indeed, the entire thrust of BJP's propaganda is that Hindutva is a cultural appellation because Hinduism stands for Indianism. If it is so, then why not replace Hindutva with *Bharatiya*. This will be more in consonance with the secular polity that India is.

The BJP is the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (Italics are

mine), not Hindutva Janata Party.

The reasoning that Hinduism is equivalent to Indianism would have force if the minorities, constituting 18 per cent, were to feel the same way. Do Muslims, Sikhs, Christians and Parsees believe that Hindutva is no more than a cultural entity? That is the test. In a pluralistic society, the minority is as much an integral part as the majority, the numbers do not matter.

All religions claim to be generous and accommoda-

tional struggle and preferred secularism. This was in the fitness of things. Leaders like Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad had fought by the side of Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Patel to out the British.

Many things have happened since and the image of secularism has got smudged. More recently, the telecast of the *Ramayan* and the *Mahabharata* was questionable because the effort was to obliterate the distance between religion and culture. The state could not be a party to it.

Still more objectionable is the visit of President Shankar Dayal Sharma to the Somnath temple to preside over the celebrations on its completion, the construction of which began in 1950. At that time, Nehru had made clear to Rajendra Prasad, then president of India, that he could visit the temple as a private person but not as head of the state. Sardar Patel, then home minister, who laid the foundation stone, was admonished by Mahatma Gandhi on his return. He told Patel that as home minister of a secular party, he should not have associated with the reconstruction of the temple.

The intensity of communal violence has increased manifold from 1989 when the concept of Hindutva had begun to be re-emphasised. Deaths went up from 259 in 1988 to 802 in 1989. In 1990, when L K Advani, the BJP supreme, staged a *Rath Yatra* in the name of Hindutva, the figure of dead went up to 1,246.

A union home ministry's survey 'considers' the year 1992, when the Babri Masjid was demolished, 'the peak year during which the loss of lives and the number of persons injured was the highest, during the last three decades.' New pockets of communal violence emerged in many states like UP, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Assam.

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When the subcontinent was partitioned, India could have declared itself a Hindu state because the division was largely on religious lines. But India stuck to its those of na-

tionals. Hindus are not debarred from appealing in the name of religion so long as they do not criticise other religions. The judges reject the thesis that it amounts to mixing politics with religion to gain political mileage. But imagine the effect on the minds of simple religious-minded Indians when the political parties invoke the name of Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism or Christianity.

The court has a point it says: 'Hinduism is a tolerant

Rules of Business and Relations between Minister and Secretary

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responsible for its administration and discipline and for the conduct of business as signed to it:

(iii) The Secretary shall also be the Principal Accounting Officer of his Ministry, its attached Departments and Subordinate offices, and ensure that funds controlled by him are spent in accordance with the rules laid down by the Finance Division or any other law for the time being in force;

(iv) The Secretary shall remain personally responsible to see to it that all cases which are to be decided by the PM are actually submitted to the PM and no action is taken on them without a prior directive from the PM;

(v) No officer below the rank of a Joint Secretary shall take the initiative in approaching a Minister in connection with official business. A Minister may, if he so desires, call any officer of his Ministry for discussions.

(vi) The Head of an attached Department, whenever he holds discussions with the Minister, shall communicate the points made during discussions to his Secretary at the first possible opportunity.

In recent times, the above responsibilities were challenged twice. The first time was in 1987, when Ershad appointed a nine-member committee led by one of the Deputy Prime Ministers to recommend appropriate changes in the Rules of Business. The second time was in 1991 when a Minister's

Committee headed by a senior Minister was appointed for the same purpose. Both the times, substantial changes were successfully resisted by the civil servants. Several arguments were put forward in favour of curtailing the Secretarial responsibilities enumerated above. First, by making the Secretary 'official head', duality was being nurtured in the leadership of the Ministry, although overall responsibility lay with the Minister. Second, why

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and Pakistan. The existing Rules of Business are based, to my mind, on four sound public administration criteria, namely ensuring continuity, maintaining balance, keeping the chain of command intact and finally providing protection to the office of the elected Minister. The Secretary represents the features of permanence in the state machinery, whereas the elected Minister expresses the changing will of the people in the running of the same. Therefore, between the two, both continuity and a fine balance need to be maintained. Otherwise, disorder and chaos would prevail as in many 'soft states' in Africa. Any disruption of the chain of command would also be counterproductive. It will pave the way for indiscipline across the board. If the Secretary remains the so-called 'official head' or 'chief accounting officer', it is ultimately to the advantage of the Minister, because this arrangement requires the Secretary to bear the ordeal of facing the Public Accounts Committee or summons and write from the courts or a public enquiry.

Indeed, any reversal of the present position would only

put the Minister in jeopardy, particularly after he is no longer a Minister. Would that be desirable for a person in public life? It is not a fact either that there is no control over the actions of a Secretary. Section 3(x) of the Rules of Business clearly states that 'the Secretary shall keep the Minister-in-charge informed of the working of the Ministry/Division and shall work under his supervision.' Also Section 4(iv) spells out that subject of the PM's overall authority, the Minister shall be responsible for not only policy matters concerning his Ministry/Division and for the implementation of policies adopted, but also for conducting the business of the Ministry/Division in the Parliament. Finally, the Secretary is required to distribute work among officers in the Ministry because it is an operational matter falling on him naturally within the chain of command, and he is also more familiar with the background of various officers in the Ministry. In any case, in practice, even these matters are discussed with and approved by the Minister on an informal basis.

In both India and Pakistan, the Secretary is the principal accounting officer and official head of the Ministry/Division. In Pakistan, both these functions are specified in the Rules of Business in India. In short, there are no major differences among Bangladesh, India and Pakistan in the manner in which government business is conducted at the highest levels. Thus, on the basis of the scrutiny conducted above, it would appear that there is no case for any departure from the existing Rules of Business. Indeed, actual practice also shows that these rules have not, in any way, impeded the 'transaction' of government business. If there are problems, these lie elsewhere and not in the laid-down relations between the Minister and the Secretary.

should not the Secretary's authority to distribute work be subject to the approval of the Minister? Thirdly, since the ultimate responsibility lies with the Minister, he/she should also be the 'chief accounting officer' of the Ministry. Fourth, the Minister should have greater maneuverability to deal directly with Departmental heads and junior officers in the Ministry. Finally, the Rules of Business did not provide any adequate mechanism of control over a Secretary's actions.

Let us now test these arguments in the light of both rational principles as well as experience in two neighbouring countries with similar background, namely India

and Pakistan.

'terrorist'. Ms Benazir Bhutto's government has branded MQM a terrorist organisation. This reflects a sort of 'Apartheid' policy of Pakistan towards the Mohajirs who are no lesser citizens of the country.

Israel had declared PLO a terrorist organisation before but has now started warming up with Arafat. So are England with Ireland and the Philippines with her Muslim segments. Nelson Mandela was jailed for 27 years but came out with flying colours. These historical facts inspire confidence in the Mohajirs of their ultimate success. Moreover, they have proven track record of the sense of supreme sacrifice and patriotism in the making and saving of Pakistan.

In the modern political world order, politics of confrontation has no place. Rigid and constricting ideological dogma or personality-driven politics leads to triggering of chain of disturbances, collapsing of economic infrastructure. Political issue is settled with reconciliatory gesture and sitting together. Rhetoric of peace without political will is oxymoron.

Situation in Karachi is like Rwanda which demands peace. The Prime Minister of Pakistan cannot escape herself from the blame. These cataclysmic events and human holocaust probably define the characteristic of her tenure — a much touted democracy. Vendetta and revenge become political culture — a very sad syndrome indeed.

Unfortunately the Mohajirs are treated as second class citizens that pushed them to the utter confusion of their national identity. So they call themselves 'Mohajir'. But they, too, have been struggling for their 'Rights'.

Politics means 'unity' —

uniting people of all colours, faith and race within the country. Days of 'divide and rule' are over. Nineteen ninety-five with all blood and tears rolled by. Let us hope 1996 will be a year of peace and prosperity in Pakistan.

Z H Ansari
"B" Block, Halishahar
Non-locals Camp, Chittagong

May good triumph over evil

Sir, Nineteen ninety-six, the first year of the last five years of this century is on. With every new year, people look forward to a happy and prosperous life, but people of our country are afraid even to hope. The events of '95 have made them very pessimistic. What a time we have gone through! Accidents, political violence and criminal activities broke the record of all previous years. We don't know what is in store for us this year, will it be the same or even worse?

Talking about the political unrest, the leaders could easily put an end to it, if they really wanted to. and we expect their good sense will come to the rescue.

Peace and prosperity of Bangladesh lie in the hands of every single person. Acting justly, discreetly and controlling evil impulses, we could make it a heaven on earth.

May the black cloud roll away and nineteen ninety-six become a happy year for all.

Nur Jahan
East Nasirabad, Chittagong

Art Buchwald's COLUMN

Write Me a Letter

ATTENTION must be paid and the desk must be cleared. Take a letter, Ms Jones, to O J Simpson. Thank you for offering me a role in your video giving your version of the story. But I'm tired of your playing the good guy and my playing the bad guy all the time, so I'm going to have to turn you down."

Drop a note to Newt Gingrich. President and Mrs Clinton want you to join them on an Air Force One trip to Jackson Hole. They have an extra seat in the back, and they will meet you in the baggage area when you get off the plane."

Send a fax to Gen. Colin Powell. "If you won't be president of the United States, you could still serve your country in an important capacity. How about becoming a gambling commissioner of New Jersey?"

To the president of the Nicky Tobacco Company. "Thanks for telling me through your ads that it's my choice whether I want to smoke or not. The last time someone gave me a choice like that was when a Golden Gate toll collector said it was solely my decision whether to jump off the bridge or not."

Feed this one off right away to freshmen Republican congressmen. "Congratulations — you did something not even the Russians could do — you shut down the US government. Would you like to try for a vowel?"

To the head of Paramount Pictures. "Would you be interested in a remake of 'Coming to America'? I'm sure I could get Harrison Ford to play the prince."

To Sen. Phil Gramm. "Sorry I can't send you any more money, but perhaps you could raise some by appealing to the big givers in the Texas welfare program."

To the Right to Life people. "I know a family with nine kids and they can't feed them. The mother and father would like to have a tenth. How many children will your movement support before you send the parents to a Planned Parenthood Clinic for counseling?"

To Prince Charles. "If your mother keeps yelling and hollering pots and pans at you, you are welcome to stay in our house."

By arrangement with Los Angeles Times Syndicate and UNB