

Finding the Centre

In a report, focused on the lackadaisical promotion and development of the private sector, the World Bank has put forward a package of suggestions for a turn-around in the situation. Three of them are purely in the nature of an organisational recipe and by the same token concrete and palpable while two have to do with changes in the current pattern of emphases.

In the first category fall the recommendations for a separate ministry for the private sector, transfer of the state-owned enterprises from the ministries of commerce, industry, textiles and jute to a single ministry, and formation of a prime minister's advisory council comprising key ministers and secretaries and top business leaders representing both the economic sectors and the territorial regions. The last two suggestions are for: (a) ensuring orchestration, accountability and user-friendliness in the workings of various organisations involved in private sector development, especially the BOI, EPB and BEPZA; and (b) establishing a process of consultation between the government and the private investors to bring to bear private sector participation on policy formulation.

The World Bank's prime concern has been the 'snail's pace' in the implementation of the privatisation programme. The rationale for this priority is the abysmally poor performance by the state-owned enterprises and their consequent loss accumulations that run counter to the principle of competitiveness which is key to free market operations. To address this focal point of the WB's concern what we need is finding a centre for the right approach. The centre lies in not only mustering but also applying an appropriate political will. Whether it is a question of disinvesting the loss-making public sector enterprises or making the retained ones efficient and useful, political will is the central necessity.

If that be so, then the World Bank's advocacy of a prime minister's advisory council ought to take precedence over all other suggestions it has made including that of a new ministry for the private sector. If the key ministers and secretaries, and leading businessmen, regardless of their political affiliations, work in the council with the Prime Minister presiding and the relevant parliamentary committees providing political will to it there is no reason why it cannot act as a super-ministry. Proliferation of ministries cannot produce a breakthrough, but a compact, coordinating body like the one suggested by the WB most probably will.

Vanishing Act in Japan

It's a shame that Bangladesh had to be told — in writing as well as in person — of the abominable practice of trainees sent to Japan by government disappearing altogether. Didn't the government know of our trainees regularly abusing the host country's hospitality at the cost of good state-to-state relationship?

Now that the worst has happened, the government must act without fail and delay. The three-day annual consultation session between the governments of Japan and Bangladesh began in Dhaka on Sunday and the Japanese delegation did not lose time to formally complain about the vanishing Bangladeshi trainees. This they did with an unmistakable touch of exasperation. Steering clear of rudeness they, however, made their message unambiguous saying that the disappearances would tell upon the Japanese capacity to entertain trainees from this land. If our government cares for the fitness practised in the intercourse of nations, it would know the ultimate in shaming has been reached.

If the government has no power to ensure proper conduct abroad of persons sent out by itself, it should better give up training people overseas. Experience says this should apply not only to government employees but also cover athletes and teachers and the motley job-seekers.

And if we must send people out for a meaningful import of technology, the government must prove to itself and to foreign governments that it can make its people overseas behave. There are so many ways open to government to do this. After all the truant Bangladeshis do not disappear with their parents and kins and property back home.

We want the government to set about with determination to get the problem over with without needing much of a reaction time. The fact that Japan is the biggest of bilateral donors to Bangladesh's development is quite beside the point here. We should be responsible for our citizens' conduct abroad irrespective of their temporary domicile.

In the Zoo Alone?

The British Royalty's timely and profound pronouncements on nature, wildlife preservation and trends in architecture have been almost proverbial in their reverberations across the receptive circles around the world. While the Queen's spouse Prince Philip is the dour defender of wildlife, their son, Prince Charles, the heir apparent, has been an outspoken champion of architectural purity in the masonry world.

At the Berlin conference of the World Wide Fund (WWF) For Nature, Prince Philip was at his characteristic best, so far as we are concerned, when he observed that preservation of the Sundarbans was needed not for any particular country but for the sake of the beauty of the world nature. His worry stemmed from the fast depletion of the tiger and deer populations in the longest-ranging mangrove forest in the world.

The invasive human habitations have led to the shrinkage of foraging grounds for the animals. Many of them having been driven out of their natural habitats crossed the Rubicon in search of food thereby exposing them willy-nilly to human settlements or thereabouts — out to the water-fronts. While some of them turned man-eaters inviting the hunter's gunmanship the rest panted in the rigours of attempted foraging. The salinity of the water has been as repelling as it has hampered vegetation forcing the deer on to a path of gradual extinction.

The canine and the elfin are giving birth to cubs in the Mirpur Zoo. Are we to see them in the zoo alone and not in their natural habitats?

"A Recognised Palestinian State..." — President Chirac

WITH the signing of the Peace Declaration in Washington in September, 1993 Israel made an irrevocable commitment to peace and consequently to establishment of the Palestinian State without which there could be no peace at all in the Middle East. Once real peace is established, security will automatically follow. There could be no security without peace. This is what President Clinton said when Benjamin Netanyahu, Arafat and King Hussein visited the US to attend the hurriedly arranged summit. This has also been forcefully put by President Jacques Chirac during his visit to Israel. President Chirac very rightly called upon the Israelis while addressing a gathering at Haifa to accept the existence of a Palestinian State. He said, "A recognised Palestinian state will provide Israel with a true partner. Only such a partner will be capable of making, and adhering to the commitments that are necessary for the security of Israel. His call for a 'recognised Palestinian state' was followed up by his visit to West Bank and he formally addressed the Palestinian legislature at Ramallah. This apparently signifies France's readiness to recognise the Palestinian state when announced because head of the state of the UN family addressed only a recognised assembly of law makers — law makers of their own state. Indeed, President Chirac said while addressing the Palestinian legislature that he was 'greatly honoured to be the first head of state to be invited to speak before the first assembly to be freely elected by the Palestinian people on its own land.' The statement is very precise and clear in terms of Palestinians' own land and the 'freely elected' legislature — Palestinian land. Thus Chirac's visit to West Bank and his formal address of the Pal-

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Muslehuddin Ahmad

stinian Legislature virtually gave encouraging signal towards Palestinian State. Indeed, the initiative was earlier taken by King Hussein of Jordan who piloted his own helicopter with Arafat as his passenger to make first visit of a foreign head of state to the land of Palestine — the land that his kingdom administered before losing it to Israel in 1967 war. Now, Palestinian state is a fait accompli. Yegiel Amir killed Rabin but not Palestinian State. Netanyahu may for a while wobble around but in the heart of hearts he knows that he would not be able to stop Palestinian State. Rabin by a stroke of pen completed the deal in Washington. What Netanyahu may be trying to do is to squeeze out maximum from Arafat in terms of security and he will be within his rights to do so as long as he does it without disrupting the peace process. He is using 450 Jewish settlers in Hebron for the purpose, but it seems to be a wrong strategy to find an exclusive settlement for 450 Jews with full security under Israeli police in the midst of about 100,000 Palestinians. Israeli security forces within Palestinian land would always remain as provocation. Instead, the strategy should be to find full commitments of security from Palestinian police forces initially under the supervision of international peace force or even US security force. Over a period of time the anger could subside and the settlers could continue to live as neighbours provided the settlers also accept Palestinian rule as Palestinians in Israel accepted the Jewish rule. Arafat correctly said — we are brothers,

Spotlight on Middle East
Muslehuddin Ahmad



Benjamin Netanyahu

clents cannot be ruled out but there should never be any provocation from the recognised authorities of both sides. Israel also must not close the borders on any pretext which creates extreme hardship to Palestinians as well as to Israelis who employ workers. All these lead to hatred and extremism. Therefore, for the sake of peace, both sides must behave sensibly and responsibly.



Jacques Chirac

in order as long as it remains European. Even the US, the principal sponsor of ME peace process, did not reject the idea outright; indeed it spoke of no exclusive zone of interest or influence in the Middle East. The US has apparent weakness for Israel because of domestic politics and this seems to be the main reason for failure of the last Washington summit. Therefore, the US would indeed do well by accommodating Europe's role which would enable US to overcome the uphill task it faces now in pursuing the peace process. President Clinton appears to be in a dilemma — too much of pressure on Netanyahu may antagonise Jewish voters in the US, though Bill Clinton needs a breakthrough in Hebron negotiation before US election on November 5 to claim administration's success in ME peace process. Therefore, Europeans should not be left out in such an important peace negotiation because Israel does not want participation of the Europeans. After all, European allies give support to the US practically in all its actions and operations in the Middle East including fighting alongside with men and materials. Europeans participation would really widen the facilitators support base including aid support and fill in where US falters due to domestic pressure. This will not in any way diminish the dominant and important role of the US in the peace negotiations. The rebuke and advice delivered by President Chirac on Netanyahu and actual departure by Dennis Ross for the airport after having abandoned the negotiations on Hebron pullout were too much

for Netanyahu to bear and these apparently led Netanyahu to give a call to Dennis Ross on mobile phone and request him to return to facilitate the negotiations. Undoubtedly, the US has done a great job so far but as the negotiations have reached a critical stage and the present Israeli rightist government is virtually opposed to Israeli withdrawal from the remaining occupied land. It is high time now to involve European allies with a view to creating enough international pressure on Netanyahu who thinks, probably depending too much on Jewish in the US lobby, that Israeli interest can be protected with US as the only facilitator.

For the US also, ME peace is a must. Just for Israel America is 'Satan' not only to Iranians but also to many in the Middle East. Therefore, it must continue to do everything to turn Netanyahu around towards real peace which would require Israel to cede occupied Arab land to the Arabs and accept the establishment of Palestinian State which would facilitate the way for full diplomatic relations with the Arab states. Indeed, peace will ensure full security to the people within their recognised borders. Regardless of what is written in the PLO Charter the idea of destruction of Israel will automatically vanish from the hearts of Palestinians once Israel accepts Palestinian State. This is most crucial and everything depends on this. The issue of Jerusalem is of course, very sensitive, but the degree of sensitivity is directly linked to the acceptance of Palestinian State. A 'balanced agreement on the status of Jerusalem' as put by President Chirac may be possible as soon as the issue of Palestinian State is amicably, effectively and finally settled and here lies the dominant role of the US and also active participation and support of the European Union.

The Value of "Spine"

If one reflects back on the history of Bangladesh, we have blamed "rycophants" or "spineless people" for doing damage to all our leaders. Now people are writing and talking about the growth of a new bunch.

IN FOOL'S PARADISE?

by Nadeem Qadir

Tall started with an unworthy person always getting the best perks his company offers, while some deserving ones missing the bus. But why? What special quality the man has that he beats everyone when the company offers the perks. "Oh! he is spineless," commented one. Another added: "He wags his tail whenever he sees his superior and that's his quality." What has been happening in Bangladesh since its birth is a story of "spines". The ones with a real spine hardly has a happy story to say and those only physically having it, without any use, no sad tales for us. What is a spine and what is it for a man? I asked some. Here are few of the answers: "It is the most essential part of our body, but we have to make it flexible because of different reasons... but please note I have a strong spine," said one government official requesting anonymity. University student Naweed thought his strong spine has begun to hurt and said, "I am wondering if to make it flexible or get rid of it." However, the real spine — the stretch of 32 vertebrae from the bottom of our head ending at the edge of the hip on our back is irreplaceable and one must take good care of it, he said. I asked my young journalist friend Sobel Manzur to define spine. His answer "Spine is what helps one to stand strongly on his own feet." And what he thought of spineless people? "Spineless people are those who are afraid of saying or doing things they think of. They gain in the short run, but lose in the long run."

AFP news agency staff Baker Chowdhury who is also a student of homeopathic medicine, explained: "The spine helps keep balance of the body and to stand straight. There are two kinds — vertebrae and invertebrae." Thus, he went on, "it is impossible to move around independently by an invertebrae." "Wow, that is medicine and practical experience put together in one thought!" Then I thought I must ask someone who could not or did not have the wish to finish his school — my office copy boy Mohammad Samad: "A man with a spine is a self-reliant man," he said without blinking. But what about one who is spineless? "A man cannot be without a spine and if this valuable part of our body is injured he cannot work normally... basically he is handicapped."

Talking of the man and the company, this individual has managed the best wages and perks because he is a pet of the boss and suspected of being a private eye keeping watch over his colleagues to report obediently to his superior. In this case it is a matter of convenience. They both need each other for something, I am told. Well, come to think of it, I guess every human is interdependent. On the other hand one who is described as spineless is not considered human. If we can distinguish from a man with and without spine, why can't we also give them distinguishing AWARDS. For the spineless — hanging from a string to get the chain of vertebrae straight as well as active!

OPINION
Excesses Must Stop in Afghanistan
Mohammad Kamal Nasser

Afghan capital Kabul fell to Taliban forces on 27 September, and much of the country has gone under the grip of the fundamentalist forces. Although fighting among the opposed factions (Masood, Dostum) is on the increase and nobody knows what would be the future of the country, it is now being governed by different farmers (decrees) promulgated by the Taliban. Their excesses have already started worrying the conscious section of the society. The activities of the Taliban were protested in a number of world capitals, even in Peshawar.

Even the photographers of newspapers have been ordered to take photograph of inanimate things i.e. everything other than human beings. The absence of rule of law, hanging without any trials and deprivation of basic human rights is now a very common feature in the day-to-day life of the Afghan people. Dr Najibullah a former communist president was dragged out of his shelter in the United Nations before he was hanged in public for the offence of bearing a different opinion. His body was put on display in the streets of Kabul.

Different women organisations in Bangladesh have already blasted the Taliban activities and expressed their dismay over the prevailing situation in Afghanistan. The farmers as being promulgated by the provisional government headed by Mullah Muhammad Rabbani are in agreement with the fundamentalist views which naturally lack modern ideology and norms. All the farmers of the Taliban, in fact, are leading to curtailment of human rights and repression on women.

However, the United States is pressing hard the ruling Afghan faction to work towards national reconciliation. The US is also raising concern in respect of human rights, women's rights, international terrorism and narcotics trade.

The Taliban administration is the provisional government. But since its taking over, as per its commitment it has enforced Islamic or Shariah law. Not only the Taliban are compelling the Muslims to offer prayers even during travel by road when one must stop the car near a mosque and offer prayers right there but earlier through another decree, males were ordered to grow beard and not to trim it.

Reflecting growing alarm in Russia over the victory of the Islamic militants in Afghanistan President Boris Yeltsin called for a regional summit and had talks with his foreign minister. The secretary general of the UN warned the Taliban saying that the gender discrimination could seriously affect the UN relief operation and ongoing relief programmes. The United States had also warned the Taliban against curtailment of women's rights and human rights at large.

According to Islamic rules education is a must for women and is not limited for either men or women. The caretaker deputy foreign minister Sher Mohammad Stanzakai was quoted to have said. In agreement with strict Islamic laws, they have banned taking photographs of people.

Afghanistan under Taliban is marching towards such a destination which cannot be supported by conscious and sensible people of the world. Therefore, it can rightly be said that it is the high time to do something concrete to compel the fundamentalist Taliban forces to halt their excesses in the name of religion. Such distortion of Islamic ideals and values, according to analysts, should immediately stop for the greater interest of not only the Afghan people but for the freedom and democracy-loving people all over the world, and, of course, the religion itself.

Unchain Madhu please

Sir, On Oct 5, '96, The Daily Star published a photograph on Madhu, a rhesus monkey in chain near the science faculty of the Dhaka University. Thanks a lot to Shehab Ahmed and Enamul Huq for drawing attention to the matter. On 15 October while passing through the same faculty I found a rhesus monkey in chains. I don't know whether this was the same Madhu. I was very shocked to find a Madhu still in chain even after passing away 10 days since the photograph had been published. The authorities concerned probably do not go through the newspapers or they think it matters little to chain a mere rhesus monkey even though the law states that it is illegal. Probably in the Indian city Bangalore, snake charmers gamet to make a religious festival for goddess Monasha. For this they caught hundreds of snakes. But the Indian authority cracked down on the snake charmers and freed the snakes. The Indian authority showed the courage to free the snakes. I think our authority need not hurt anyone's feeling. Just apply will-power and unchain the Madhus, please.

An animal right activist Room No-108 Dr Fazole Rabbi Hall Dhaka Medical College, Dhaka

Matia please open your eyes

Sir, I am not a regular writer to the newspaper letter columns. I wonder whether the letters in this column at all concern the authorities under such a typical situation now prevailing in Bangladesh. Since I am a great well-wisher of the present government, I could not remain silent over a matter which may bring a total disaster for the whole country. I have every respect for the dedication and sincerity of our Agriculture Minister. She is a tested leader and she has come to this position after many struggles and sacrifices. That picture of being dragged away by the BNP police is still fresh in my mind. Even her talks in the present Parliament have been appreciated by many. Now the question is whether there is a gap between talks and deeds. Al has always emphasised on the importance of agriculture.

Happy Bijoya

Sir, Happy Bijoya to you and all the readers of The Daily Star. We cordially accept your Bijoya greetings. Thoughtful writings in The Daily Star and other dailies can create healthy environment in the society in blooming different faiths and thoughts. This is of course not an easy task. Triumph of justice over injustice and darkness is a universal truth. Bijoya gives us that lessons.

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Students/teachers politics

Sir, Thanks to President Shahabuddin Ahmed for the bold statement he made recently to stop students politics. It is a very long-awaited decision. Anyway, it is better to be late than never. I am very much hopeful that a man like his calibre and character will be able to become successful in this great venture to save the educational environment and thus the country as a whole if there is sincere and whole hearted co-operation from all concerned quarters. This issue does not require any discussion. If one look closely and sincerely then it is not difficult to realise that the beneficiary of student politics is only a very small group of people at the cost of many innocent ones. It not only pollutes the environment of education but also costs many valuable blooming lives who could have contributed to the society with their valuable knowledge and skills. Their untimely death not only bring a profound misery to their most loving near and dear ones but also to the nation as a whole. Unfortunately, knowing fully well all these consequences of student politics only a few people of our society for their petty selfish gain exploit our future torch bearers. Our students nowadays are getting more encouraged in politics than building their career by their teachers. By indulging in politics teachers are not only losing respect of their disciples but of the nation as a whole. I would like to request them to give a serious thought on this issue and refrain from in-

BTV's role

Sir, The pre-election "promise" of Awami League that BTV — which includes the whole electronic media — would be given autonomy. But BTV's arranged Sabonoy Jiggasa programme on the occasion of completion of Awami League's 100 days in power has created doubts and pessimistic views among the people about the standard and quantum of autonomy that BTV is going to enjoy under a new organisational set-up which is under consideration of the present government. It appears that the image of our Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has been tarnished due to pretentious, ostentatious and poor BTV programme — "Sabonoy Jiggasa" — of October 1, 1996. In our country many of our political sycophants and bureaucrats surround our head of the government, misguiding him/her, hide truth from him/her and always try to please the head of the government for their personal interests and gains. This has been amply proved by the organisers and participants of "Sabonoy Jiggasa" programme. If we compare — and contrast between — Anisul Haq's "Sabonoy Jante Chai" programme under caretaker government with Dr Rajib Humayun's "Sabonoy Jiggasa" programme under present Awami League government we feel that the former would secure 70 marks out of 100 and the latter would get only 30 marks. We would be grateful if our political leaders as well as BTV officials perform their duties and responsibilities in a state of self-consciousness in the greater national interest. O H Kabir 6 Hare Street Wari, Dhaka-1203