

## Workers in Malaysia

The fate of some three hundred thousand Bangladeshis, who were reportedly working in Malaysia without valid documents, hangs in a wafer-thin balance. They have until December 31 to regularise their status by furnishing the papers required in terms of a general amnesty that took effect on September 1. From the new year's day, which is just six days to go, the Malaysian government is to begin punishing and deporting foreign labourers having no legal documents to show.

Questions do arise as to why the three-month amnesty period could not be properly utilised to get the papers ready, at least in the salvageable cases. Persuasion could have perhaps helped with the remainder of the job. The Nari Pakkha and Ain O' Salish Kendra who had sent out a team, led by Nasrin Haque, to Malaysia, for a study of the situation at first-hand, have put a section of Bangladesh High Commission officials on the spot. They allegedly showed extreme non-cooperation and took bribes from the ill-fated workers to "renew their passports and other documents". The allegations being of a very serious nature, we are expecting a foreign office statement on them any day.

Given where the things stand now, we seem to have no choice left but to seek an extension of the amnesty period by the Malaysian government in deference to the friendly and mutually useful relations our two countries have enjoyed since long. Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad recently met with Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad in New Delhi on the question. Even though, reportedly, the meeting did not yield an instant result, we are hopeful nonetheless of a positive outcome of the effort because the matter is yet to be declared closed.

The Dhaka-Kuala Lumpur ties are intrinsically very close. Mahathir Mohammad is a highly respected person in Bangladesh. Both governments have been quite keen on tidying up the manpower business and the related migration mess. Against this overall backdrop, it will not be perhaps too much to expect an extended humanitarian approach from the Malaysian government to the amnesty period.

Introspectively, we owe ourselves a question: Why do we fail to act before SOS calls ring out?

## KNM's Viability

A BSS-circulated news item published in different dailies, including The Daily Star, has stated the price of locally produced newsprint to be higher than that of the imported variety. This was possibly to make the points strong. That the newsprint produced by the Khulna Newsprint Mill (KNM) is still cheaper than the imported kind is well-known to the users.

However, the pathetic picture presented by the KNM is a true index of its shortcomings. The KNM's newsprint has few buyers today. That is not because its price is higher compared to the imported newsprint but because its quality is inferior. Its price may not be commensurate with quality. But when the newspapers have opted for quality paper to meet the readers' expectation level, it is immaterial to think of the difference in prices between the local and the imported varieties. Now it is the quality that counts and if the products are competitive on that score, they will have their selling point.

The KNM runs on obsolete technologies, is overmanned, and produces newsprint that has few customers. To stay in competition it has to go through the necessary process of modernisation, restructuring and staff organisation. An inefficient establishment such as the KNM can hardly fend for itself in a competitive world.

This mill should provide a lesson for us. When the rest of the world is opting for newer technologies, its authorities have kept their eyes shut to the developments outside. They did not plan for the future and now suddenly they find their products to be unsustainable in the market. To salvage the situation — as much as possible — the mill must go through some radical reforms. Otherwise, it will have to close down.

## Trouble at the DMCH

Third and fourth class employees of Dhaka Medical College Hospital carried out a two-hour work abstention programme from 9 am to 11 am on Tuesday. The trouble began when the Director of the Hospital and a sweeper had an altercation at the former's office room. Allegedly, the director kicked the sweeper.

We do not know whether the director actually kicked him, or if he really did so, what prompted him to go for this brutal treatment of an employee at the bottom of the staff structure. We condemn the incident as well as the backlash in which the director's room came under attack and the furniture and fixtures were damaged.

Nowadays running government offices is becoming increasingly difficult. The employees' unions put their collective weight behind any of their member's cause, no matter if he or she has committed a punishable offence. A 'no-work' culture, too, is promoted and protected by vested groups.

We do not say this has been the case in DMCH. But we surely want to see the truth come out. If the director is guilty of mistreating the sweeper, let proper action be taken against him. But we also ask the health ministry to look into the affairs of the DMCH so that the alling people do not have to undergo prolonged sufferings. No establishment, least of all a hospital, should fail to provide regular services because its employees have abstained from work or gone for a strike on this or that pretext.

THE situation obtaining in 1971 is similar to what we are going through in 1996 except that 25 years earlier political compulsions (a) outweighed economic factors. Today we are in such dire straits economically that the political mores bedeviling the nation seem somewhat overshadowed. The ouster of the corrupt and criminal Benazir government could not have been conceived without encouragement from the Army. If the President and the Army think that the public believe for one instant that there was no active collaboration, then they are being naive and glib. Ms Benazir acquiesces to this charade of absolving the Army for her own narrow political reasons. viz (1) she would be dead politically if she acknowledges that the Army was active in her being thrown out of power and (2) she has enough horse-sense (no pun intended) to want to retain their good-will as the one institution that either can block her return to power or facilitate the same.

Fully 25 years after 1971, the Army's hierarchy does not seem to have learnt some basic lessons in politics peculiar to most Islamic countries. viz (1) that public perception and reality coincide inasfar as paramount power in any Muslim country invariably remains with the Army (2) pandering to narrow political interests rather than the overall good of the State in decision-making can invite disaster and (3) howsoever much GHQ tries to distance itself from the political process, the buck stops in Rawalpindi. Late Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto in 1971 exploited the fears of a particular clique within the Army hierarchy and fooled then President Gen Yahya Khan's sincere intention to arrive at a political settlement with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman within the framework of a united Pakistan. By the end of

**Instead of imposing martial law and debasing themselves as has been done three times earlier by getting needlessly involved in the day-to-day running of the affairs of State, the Army should quietly help in carrying out speedy enquiry as befits a military entity. Accountability has been the raison d'être of Martial Laws, once in power the aim has been diverted by the compulsions of governing.**

1971 Bhutto had accomplished both his aims, viz (1) to frustrate the majority party from taking power and (2) to emasculate the Army's influence in political decision-making. A six-year hiatus ensued till a rejuvenated Army ousted him in 1977 (in the absence of Article 58 (2) B and in the presence of a doorman for a President). Bhutto took the dynamic and prosperous half of Pakistan and by nationalizing everything in sight, he laid the seeds of economic destruction that we cannot seem to still shrug off 25 years later. While the end result was disastrous the intentions of the clique that facilitated Bhutto's ascent to power were for the most part patriotic and honourable.

The intentions of the 'gang of three' generals who along with their civilian collaborators, manipulated Benazir Bhutto into power in 1993 under the very nose of COAS Gen Waheed, were neither patriotic nor honourable, their personal ambitions were camouflaged under this flag-leaf. Their myopic selfishness was fully exposed when they fell out with each other as to who would become the next COAS. Moen Qureshi, the man who would be President (and will only reside in Pakistan if he is), had earlier been out-manoeuvred by Benazir. Their miscalculation is responsible for the enormous economic and political suffering of the people of Pakistan today, not only did we have to tolerate Ms Benazir's corrupt regime but also her greedy husband, Asif Zardari, as God's gift to mankind. Pakistan was well served by Gen Waheed in his insistence that a professional man of integrity be appointed

as his successor and to Leghari's lasting credit he faced down the tantrums of Benazir and the manipulations of her husband. As a beneficiary of merit, professionalism and seniority, the COAS Gen Jahangir Karamet emulates his predecessor in inculcating merit and merit alone in promotions in the Army, in contrast the other two Services have moved to the other extreme because their Zardari-appointed/approved Chiefs are still hanging around. Whither accountability? Whither indeed the Navy and the Air Force? Notwithstanding a deliberate effort made by GHQ to distance itself from the Caretakers, most

hanging Karamet averse to interfering in the political process, the Army has no option but to engage itself without ambiguity (pusy-footing) in the persistent public demand for accountability in an effective manner.

Accountability requires ascertaining (1) the crimes of individuals, (2) locating the evidence to back up the charges, (3) collating the evidence before presenting it to the Accountability (Ehtasab) Commission (4) successfully prosecuting the guilty individual and (5) attempting to recover some of the ill-gotten wealth.

While the government needed time to clean out the

ing of the suspects, investigating them, collating the evidence and trying to recover the loot? It is vital for this country's future that for a specified period of 120 days under Article 147 of the Constitution the Army would be empowered to apprehend and detain suspects for interrogation.

The circumstances are bad enough to even sanction the use of Article 245. One cannot second guess the decision-making process of the COAS and his colleagues, maybe they can take some advice from people with experience long out in the civilian cold. Maybe the COAS could tell the President, 'Mr President, the accountability process is going nowhere as the public seem to have no faith in the civilian agencies. The elections may become counter-productive if those who have looted the nation are not brought to trial. This would bring us back to square one. To make the process effective, I propose to make available to you some senior officers throughout the country having access to the Army's resources in manpower and information gathering (including help from the ISI and the MI as an required basis) to set up an 'accountability cell' to (1) ascertain who the guilty are, what are the charges they can be accused of, (2) apprehend and interrogate them so as to facilitate (3) locating and collating that evidence prior to giving it to the Ministry of Interior for vetting on the way to the Ehtasab Commission and (4) helping to recover some of the loot. These Accountability Cells may be empowered under Article 147 of the Constitution for a period of 120 days. The prosecution of individuals would re-

main the domain of the Ehtasab Commission but if required this can also be done with powers for a limited period under Article 245. Expert help will be acquired from private sector executives very quietly.

Assistance will also be taken from private investigating agencies abroad, offering them an incentive of a percentage of funds recovered as full compensation. Some additional time can be obtained within the parameters of the Constitution by implementing the '90 plus 90 formula' which would allow a 90-day period after elections before handing over power to the elected representatives. The accountability process must be completed for at least the people's representatives before 'clean' Assemblies can come into session. Since no period is stipulated in the Constitution for handing over power after elections and Article 254 gives some leeway as to time, this window of opportunity can be utilized by making a reference to the Supreme Court in the supreme interest of the country.

That the guilty must be brought to book is a very persistent demand of a very frustrated people of this country.

Instead of imposing martial law and debasing themselves as has been done three times earlier by getting needlessly involved in the day-to-day running of the affairs of State, the Army should quietly help in carrying out speedy enquiry as befits a military entity. Accountability has been the *raison d'être* of Martial Laws, once in power the aim has been diverted by the compulsions of governing. The Constitution provides legal cover for Army to be involved in the accountability process without having the taint of an actual martial law.

A beleaguered President may be up to accepting such an idea, is the COAS up to proposing it?

## AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

notably some appointments, public perception ties the Army inextricably to the President, who despite some real bloomers, remains a sincere, patriotic and honourable person. Instead of doing the King Lear act the Army should get its own act together and not be under any delusion that if the President fails, the public will lay the blame squarely on the Army for the mess and take one guess as to who will derive maximum advantage from such a situation? None other than the 'Crown Princess' of disinformation, the 'Mistress' of trans parent lies, the lady who can do no wrong and needs help, not only from psychiatrists but from specialists who can deal with foot in the mouth disease. Professionalism may make Ja

Zardari-loyalists filled to the brim (and then some) in the investigation and prosecution agencies, the agencies still do not seem to have the same will or enthusiasm to ferret out criminal facts. They have such little credibility that inquisition by them is taken to be a mockery of justice. Public confidence is shy of volunteering facts before them, being apprehensive that they themselves would be victimized. The only institution commanding any mass confidence is the Army. While there could be misgivings in involving the Army in prosecution as it could be misconstrued in martial law courts, what is the bar that prevents the Army in helping the Caretaker Government carrying out apprehend-

# Presidential Gaffes and Wit!

Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton, USA

**Just defeated Republican Presidential candidate Bob Dole has an acute sense of humour. As he announced his candidacy on the late night talk show, "Late Show with Lettermen", about a year ago, Letterman asked him why he wanted to be President. "Because I believe every nation should have a President!", was Dole's quip.**

happy with a state funeral arrangements for a deceased German statesman. Slightly embarrassed, he assured the visiting foreign dignitaries, "Next time, the funerals will be better".

With his bumbling ways and forgotten lines, President Gerald Ford provided a bonanza for the comedians and impersonators. "In these forty-eight states", he began a campaign speech in 1976, forgetting that after the statehood of Alaska and Hawaii in 1959, there were fifty states in the USA! He would land in Indiana and express pleasure for being in Kentucky. Of course, President Ford was not without a sense of humour. Descending from Air Force One, on one occasion he missed the last step and fell to the ground. "Sorry to stumble into your town", he said sheepishly!

Never the intellectual, President Ronald Reagan charmed the audience with one-liners borrowed straight from Hollywood: "Make my day!", "Over my dead body!" Signs of Alzheimer's disease was present early in the President. On one occasion, President Reagan addressed the only African American in his cabinet, Housing Secretary Samuel Pierce, as, "Mr Mayor". (Because of large African American population in the big cities, many of their Mayors are African Americans).

In his memoirs, President Reagan has a funny story to tell about another dignitary, Prince Charles of the United Kingdom. At the end of a state dinner hosted by President Reagan, the butler offered the Prince some

coffee. Prince Charles declined, asking for tea instead. Ever the American, the butler put a cup of hot water in front of the Prince and gave His Royal Highness a tea bag! Several minutes later, President Reagan noticed the Prince playing with the tea bag in his hand, unsure what to do! It did not occur to the butler that Prince Charles probably had never needed to make a cup of tea for himself, and certainly not with a tea-bag (tantamount to sacrilege in the Royal circles)!

Queen Elizabeth herself had her embarrassing moments. Rattled by a few demonstrators in front of the Parliament building on a visit to Australia in 1977, on the occasion of her 25th year on the throne, the Queen made a mess of her first sentence in the Australian parliament: "In the 25th reign of my year...", she began!

More recently, as the province of Quebec was about to vote to stay in or secede from Canada, a radio talk show host from Montreal succeeded in breaching Buckingham Palace's security and got through to the Queen! Impersonating the Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien, the butler put a cup of tea in front of the Queen. During the 1992 campaign, Mr Quayle called candidate Clinton a "liberal". Clinton dismissed the charge shouting back, "He probably does not know how to spell it!"

There are grave consequences for serious political gaffes. Seeking to foil President Reagan's reelection bid in 1984, the Democratic Presidential candidate Walter Mondale committed one of those. During their televised debate, in a mo-

ment of moral fervour, Walter Mondale told the nation: "If re-elected, President Reagan will raise your taxes, so will I. He will not tell you this, I just did!" From then on, until his landslide defeat, Mondale had to withstand a barrage of Republican taunt: "Vote for Mondale, if you want to pay higher taxes!"

A moral lapse and stupid bravado cost Democratic Presidential candidate and front-runner Senator Gary Hart almost a certain nomination in 1988. The rules of engagement had changed for the Press since the Kennedy era. President Kennedy's philandering was known to the Press; however, in those days, a President's personal life and indiscretions were off limit. Not so any more. In 1988, Gary Hart challenged the Press to delve into his private life. They did complete with Hart's compromising photograph with a model named Donna Rice atop a yacht appropriately named, "Monkey Business". That episode spelt, "Good bye, Senator Hart!"

Americans endlessly debate the merits of performance versus morality. "Who would you like to have as a President?" so goes the argument. Someone like Kennedy, who was horrible in his personal life but great for the country, or Richard Nixon, impeccable in personal life, and with Watergate disastrous for the country?

As Richard Nixon was preparing to make his second bid for the US Presidency in 1968, he visited India and Pakistan. According to Dr Henry Kissinger's memoirs, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi treated him badly. As Nixon walked in

to meet the PM, Indira Gandhi looked at her watch and asked an aide in Hindi: "How long is he to stay here?" Nixon turned red. Indira treated Nixon the way a Professor treats his slightly retarded student, according to Kissinger!

As the US President, Nixon paid India back in kind. During November, 1971, at the height of Bangladesh's War of Liberation, Indira came to Washington to explain India's predicament. Nixon was totally unsympathetic. The only favourable public comment Nixon would make to Indira was: "This is a beautiful sunny day. We in America call it 'Indian summer'." Here too, Nixon was deceitful. American expression 'Indian summer' (warm days in November) has nothing to do with India! It refers to 'American Indians', or 'the Native American', as they prefer to be called.

No political commentary is ever complete without some reference to the late British statesman Sir Winston Churchill. Meeting secretly during World War II, American President Franklin Roosevelt asked the British Premier, "What is on our 'schedule' (American pronunciation of the word 'schedule') today?" Churchill corrected the President: "the word is pronounced 'schedule'. 'Really', President Roosevelt was incredulous: "Why did they not teach me that in my school?" (the pronunciation of 'school' following the same logic!) At another time, a reporter asked Churchill: "If you were not an Englishman, what would you have like to have been?" Puffing with English pride, Churchill deadpanned: "If I were not an Englishman, I would have liked to have been an Englishman!"

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## To the Editor...

### Plagiarism galore!

Sir, Please refer to the article titled 'Jute Geotextiles: Success out in Versatility' published in your esteemed daily on 7.11.96. The article was written by a Joint Secretary to the Government and Director (Marketing) of BJMC.

Surprisingly, this article is a true copy of the speech Dr. S D Ramaswamy, ex-Professor of National University of Singapore, delivered as special guest in a workshop on jute geotextiles held in JJO headquarters in Dhaka during end September '96. A copy of the address by Dr. Ramaswamy may be checked up with JJO secretariat in Dhaka.

The workshop, I am sure, was arranged by JJO to promote the jute geotextiles and for that matter the cause of jute, a natural fibre — globally which is now facing stiff competition from synthetics. It is expected that persons attending workshops update their knowledge to be able to contribute more in their fields. But this gentleman (the joint secretary in question) has found a shortcut for his personal betterment. By simply copying a speech (deleting few lines) he published an article to enrich his own bio-data.

What this country can expect from such a Joint Secretary? It needs no explanation why Bangladesh jute is losing ground in the world market. Would the authority in Bangladesh care to take appropriate steps against such person

(s) on the charges of plagiarism? And would JJO be bold enough to bar such person (s) from joining any future JJO activities?

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### The guide for high-speed drivers

Sir, There is a popular belief, though misconceived, that a fast driver is a bad driver. A fast driver is only a "bad" driver when recklessness comes into being. There is nothing as bad as a person who shows off high-speed driving capabilities when the controlling of the vehicle becomes the least priority. As a matter of fact, high-speed driving can and will save lives from very difficult situation. This guide is for those who prefer to use high-speed driving as techniques learned but only used in an emergency. Those who wish to use this guide as a tool for impressing their mates, I suggest you skip to the last paragraph right now.

Unfortunately though, the materials included within this guide does not include 2-wheeled motorised transportation. A manual shift equipped vehicle will serve the best purpose and seat belts will come as an added bonus. Whenever you drive a vehicle, always remember to buckle up. The manufacturers do not include this just to bump up the price tag and neither it is there as a fashion ac-

cessory. It is there to save lives. Your life as well as those who will be your passengers. Bangladesh roads are not designed for high-speed driving.

In Autobahn (German Highway) there is a minimum speed restriction, because there both the vehicles and the roads are designed to perform and sustain high speed driving. In our country, the highways are ruled by killer trucks and drunk buses who think they are finishing laps in a Formula 1 Grand Prix circuit. So I will try to stick to within the city limits.

Our country follows the UK system, meaning driving on the right side of the road, which is the reason why all our steering wheels are placed on the right. That is why we are only allowed to overtake vehicles from the right as well. Some drivers I have noticed become too impatient and overtake from the left side. This might prove fruitful by gaining an extra few seconds or to manoeuvre in such a way as to scare off the driver just to express their anger. Overtaking from the left is illegal in our country simply because it is downright dangerous. When a driver is overtaking from the left, there is no way of knowing whether or not what sort of traffic lay ahead. Meaning the moment you are on the left hand side, you are on the slower lane.

That means there will be slower modes of transportation. You might be in a situation where you have already turned left and halfway over-

taking the offending vehicle when you suddenly realise there is a taxi, or a rickshaw or worse still — a pedestrian waiting to cross the road. Leaving aside the response of that panicked pedestrian you will be faced with a no-win situation. Because either you have to slow down rapidly just so that you don't hit the slower vehicle or risk hitting whatever was coming right behind you or you can move further to the left and risk whatever is on that lane too (probably a bi-cycle) or you can move to the right side colliding with the then-offending vehicle, because now you will be the new-offending vehicle driver. Just close your eyes and imagine a situation like that. Scary, right? Believe me, I know.

If you are driving on an empty road with no traffic whatsoever with a huge velocity what to do when you face a not-too-sharp curve? DON'T slow down, you never know what is behind you. In case of rapid braking, it's best to check your rear view mirror just to make sure that both your rear as well as the lane on your left is empty enough for you to move in. Only then, you indicate and turn and slow down. If there is no traffic ahead of you, I suggest you let off the throttle (the pedal on the right) and slide the car to the left most corner lane if the road is turning left. If not, then the centripetal force will pull you to the right while turning. This might cause your wheels to skid. And that is a situation you

wouldn't want to be in. If on the other hand, the road turns right, it's best to slow down, because then the force will pull you leftwards, and you never know what lies ahead of you in the slower lane. If you can't see what is beyond the curve, then it's best to slow down. Because while turning if you notice that there is an approaching vehicle with great speed, then it'll be too late for either of you to slow down. If it's night time, use the dipper to signal any incoming vehicles and in the day time there is no other way but to use the very crude method of signalling in our country-horn.

If you are driving fast in a curved road and you notice glass, debris, sand or water — SLOW DOWN. The glass particles might easily slice open the tires or puncture a hole. And trust me, a punctured tire hole while the vehicle is in great speed is not a pretty sight. Sand or water can act as lubricants and make your vehicle go into an uncontrollable spin. And once the vehicle is in a rotation and sliding motion all you can think about then is whether or not you're properly insured. There is nothing you can do then. The vehicle will take you anywhere and everywhere. In the West those who are interested can get lessons on skid control. Unfortunately that system will take a very long time to come here. Until then, all we can do is be alert. NO matter which speed you are driving at, it's best to switch off your dipper (high beam) the

moment you see another incoming vehicle, especially at night time. Because that night will irritate the driver in such a way that attention on the road will not be possible any more. Then either if you are lucky enough, the other driver might swerve away from you and hit a rickshaw, or it might come and hit you. There is very less chance of survival by a frontal collision of a vehicle. It's also best to drive slowly in rainy or misty condition and remember to switch on the side lights or fog lights (if you have any).

If the visibility is down to zero then it's best if you don't drive. If there is no other way, then keep your speed to a minimum and keep your full beam on depending upon the condition. Always wear a seat belt while driving. Never use the stereo system just to let the vehicles 10 metres away from you know that you have the latest version of CD. Never put the seat too behind or too front, that will slow down your reflexes. You should place the seat in such a way that your arm is a bit curved. Using side mirrors is a good practice. Accidents cannot be avoided. It's not possible for all the drivers to have your type of mental alertness. Accidents can be caused by others. So in case the worse comes to worse and an accident does happen then please KEEP CALM. A lot of lives can be saved by using your head in a cool manner. So, buckle up and drive safe.

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