

Preserving History

A strong apathy or even antipathy seems to be at work when it comes to the preservation of the country's precious historical sites.

If we believe the version of the Department of Archaeology on the protection issue, successive governments have evaded it simply because the formalities to bring the historical sites under the government's custody involve a huge compensation.

Now here is a question of retrieving our past from illegal occupation. In this matter the government's position has to be very clear.

More to the point is the lack of right initiatives and seriousness of purpose. The sooner you take up the restoration or preservation plan the better.

A Saving Grace

When a recent World Bank report and the outcome of a cabinet meeting have waxed critical of the bureaucratic handling of development projects, it must come as some relief to top government officials that the World Bank has freed up two projects it had earlier placed in the 'risk category'.

The two projects getting a clean bill of health are: the Integrated Nutrition Project (INP) and the Third Inland Water Transport Project, the first one having to do with national, community and inter-sectoral level nutrition and the second with institutionally assisting a borrower's strategy for development in the IWT sector.

The difference in the situation has been made in a matter nine months with the implementing agencies pulling up their socks and putting their shoulders to the wheel.

In fact, the projects still considered to be in the woods relate to jute sector credit adjustment, power distribution, urban development, minor irrigation development, integrated nutrition and inland water transport parameters of vital importance to national life.

All these projects need to be bailed out quickly by staying off logistic, management and coordination problems that beset them.

We wonder if there could be regular exchanges between the World Bank's antenna-keepers and the project monitoring division of the government of Bangladesh at an operational level rather than at the post-facto academic level sometimes as it happens to be.

Poetry Festival

The National Poetry Festival, a perfectly lyrical occasion, organised by Kavita Parishad, has begun on a somewhat ironic note of discordance.

Poet Shamshur Rahman takes the view that the historical perspective in which the festival had emerged a decade ago in protest against autocracy has changed with the re-establishment of democracy in the country.

Moreover, his having declined the Jatiya Kavita Purushker, '97 which the Parishad had announced for him, a certain poignance has certainly been added to his over-all stance on the subject.

The festival organisers have recalled the names of those killed during the autocratic period seeking justice on a principled note.

They have also voiced demands for withdrawal of cases against writers, end of proscription orders against certain books and abolition of the Abhinoy Niyantaran Ain.

Such vestigial remnants are there to be consigned to oblivion. And the poets need a platform to keep vigil in the futuristic sense of the term.

The State of the Share Market

The expectation that was created, rightly or wrongly, by a variety of forces seems to have gone. Many ugly incidents ending in violence have taken place in front and around the DSE building leaving a bitter taste of share market bonanza among the new investors specially the smaller ones.

There is no doubt that the market has lost its confidence and vibrancy that one saw during the months of July to Mid-November, 1996. The expectation that was created, rightly or wrongly, by a variety of forces seems to have gone.

The "Visible Hand" of the Market

Many writers have attributed the following factors to the phenomenal rise of share prices during the July-November period of 1996 preceding the crash: popularity of the new government and its conversion to the free market economy.

There is no doubt that the new government changed its position (certainly for the better) from its historical commitment to socialism to the free market economy.

opment of capital market in the country. There is some truth in the assertion that this support has contributed to the reinforcement of public confidence in the stock market.

There is no doubt that investors, particularly the medium and the smaller ones, were looking for profitable outlets for their investible funds.

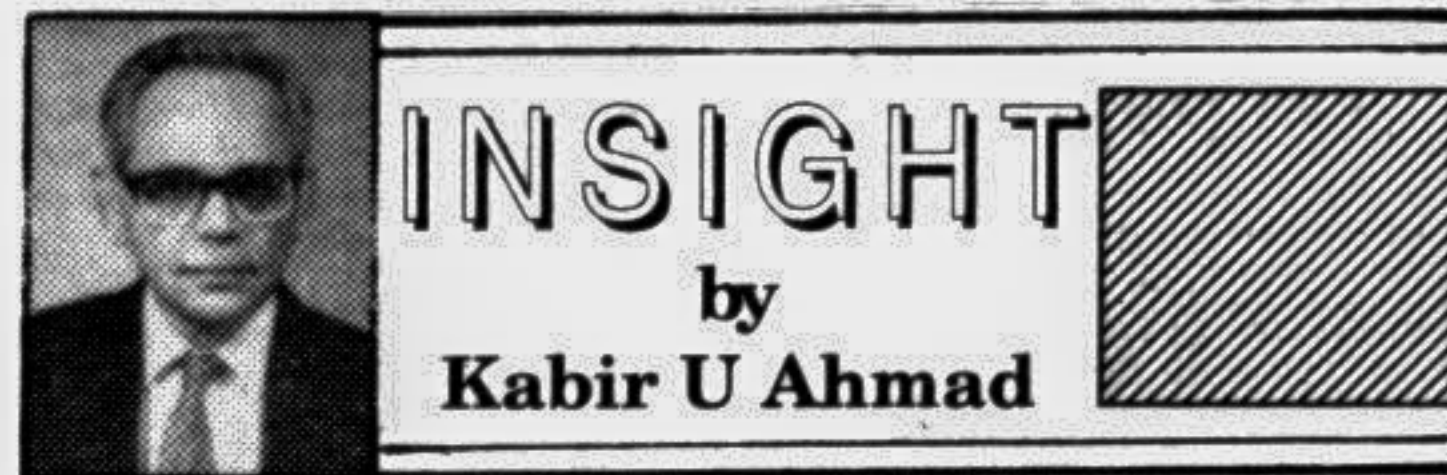
of about 98 per cent. Two points should be noted here. First of all, the sharp rise in the rates of growth of these indices began in 1994 and was somewhat accelerated in 1996.

What about the supply side of shares in the DSE? The number of securities in circulation increased over the same period from 214.4 million in 1994 to 325.5 million in 1995 and to 375.3 million in 1996 registering a 37.5 per cent average annual rate of growth of shares in the market.

government's political commitment.

The role of the insiders' price manipulations has been analysed in an article by this writer in these pages on January 5th under 'Loopholes in the Stock Market'. Some data released by the DSE on weekly share transactions published in The Financial Express show that there were about six major players in the DSE who bought and sold large blocks of shares among themselves at high prices which set the trend for high price escalation.

To compound the situation, as it were, there came the reports of involvement of some members of the SEC in these scandals whose contracts have been terminated and who have been replaced by newly appointed members.



INSIGHT by Kabir U Ahmad

This is indicated by over-subscriptions of the Initial Public Offerings (IPOs) of private companies and corporations in recent years. While such over-subscriptions were only about 15 per cent in 1992 and 7 per cent in 1993, they reached 484 per cent in 1994, 454 per cent in 1995 and 505 per cent in 1996.

If one looks at the secondary market in the DSE one finds that it was showing a strong upward trend in terms of both volume and value. Without going into great details, the total turn-over in the DSE went up from 11.6 million in 1994, to 25.9 million in 1995 and to 71.6 million in 1996 registering a 258.6 per cent average annual growth rate.

quite clearly that the rate of growth in demand for shares was 2.6 times faster than that of the shares in circulation. These calculations indeed show that a boom-like situation in the stock market was going to come about in the near future.

Letter from Ankara

From Here, There and Elsewhere

by K Gajendra Singh

It was not very clever of Yilmaz to support Parliamentary enquiries into corruption charges against Ciller (as if PM Deve Gowda supported Parliamentary enquiries against PVN Rao on Pathak allegations, St Kitts forgery case etc soon after being sworn in).

coming the PM. Some hoped that Rafah will make a mess and become discredited, while others, many in Europe and some in USA thought that perhaps, Rafah, the most moderate of the Islamic parties in the world, might join the mainstream and play by the existing democratic rules.

While in the opposition, Erbakan had talked against NATO, opposed Customs Union with Europe, decried Operation Provide Comfort, which facilitates the Gulf coalition powers to monitor No Fly Zone in northern Iraq to protect Kurds, opposed defence cooperation with Israel (vehemently opposed by Arab countries). He used to talk of creating an Islamic Common Market and an Islamic Dinar based on Shariah.

An attempt has been made to bring together major Islamic countries under the umbrella of D-8 (Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Egypt and Nigeria) on the lines of G-7 (as a counter-part) and G-15 (Trade and Industry affiliate, Musiad organised an international Business Forum on Global Business Network among Muslim Nations in the 3rd week of November).

Iranians, and Indonesians were somewhat enthusiastic. It is planned to organise a ministerial meeting and a summit of D-8 early next year.

The key ministries like Home, Defence, Foreign Affairs are with Ciller's DYP (finance being shared sows confusion). In matters of crucial importance Erbakan has followed the Constitution and accepted centrist policies, externally and internally. Defence agreement with Israel is not only being implemented, but another one has been signed. But the most difficult act has been to gulp down the recent decision of the Supreme Military Council to dismiss a large number of military officers, mostly for their alleged religious affiliations and inclinations, causing much resentment and heart burn in the radical wing of Refah party.

Operation Provide Comfort was extended till the US felt that it could be modified. It reminds one of a story of 1977, when the newly appointed Indian Foreign Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who in opposition had held hawkish views on India making the nuclear bomb, was asked for his views then. He had laughed it off by stating, "Well, then I was in the opposition".

But more and more Western leaders are showing willingness to talk to Erbakan or his confidantes. His government seems to be the most stable in the last two years and seems secure for the time being. According to the coalition power sharing agreement, he is to hand over power to Ciller in mid 1998 only, an eventuality not likely to give Refah a near majority. It will then need only a small party to form a government. As it is Yilmaz to get Ciller out of power is begging to form its coalition with Erbakan. But to reach 30 per cent vote Erbakan must move further to the centre.

mand and authority.

As it is, Rafah's ministers are reputed to be more honest and efficient. Publicly Rafah's mayors in Ankara and Istanbul, which they had won in 1994, more efficient and honest than in the past. Previously Istanbul's mayors have often been tarred with overlooking corruption. Rafah mayors have also tried to look after the needs of the poor and needy by providing medical aid and cheap bread etc. Shades of BNP; its honest and efficient running of Delhi and other Municipalities and earlier administrations in the states. At the October party congress, first time as a member of the ruling establishment, Rafah unlike in the past, did not fly only party flags, but flags of Turkey and displayed large photographs of its founder Ataturk and his slogan 'Peace at home and peace abroad'. Erbakan even talked of true secularism (like BNP's LK Advani). Like BNP, Rafah also has Mosque problem. The magnificent Byzantine St Sophia Church, constructed in 6th century AD was transformed into a mosque with the addition of minarets in 1453, after ottoman Sultan Fethi had conquered the city of Constantinople from the last Byzantine Emperor. After the abolition of the Caliphate, Ataturk had St Sophia mosque converted into museum. Rafah agenda has its conversion back into a mosque. Some ambivalent statements were made after Erbakan became the PM. When I had asked

one of his close confidantes the position of his party and the government on this recently, he had distinctly looked uncomfortable and had said that they were not pursuing it then. Most secular Turks believe that the change back to the mosque will not be allowed as it would be a major blow eyeing a smaller mosque (not orthodox) in Bodrum (birthplace of Herodotus).

On the economic front, apart from deficit promoting steps like increase in the salaries and wages of government servants and workers, with an eye on the elections, nothing seems to have been done. (Fiscal) deficit now runs at 13 per cent compared to India's 5 to 6 per cent the annual inflation in Turkey runs at 80 to 85 per cent compared to India's 6 per cent. There has been a vague talk of massive privatisation to cut the deficit. But the past record is not very encouraging. But then, the Turks have been living beyond their means since early nineties and except for a thwarted but valiant austerity package by Ciller in April 1994, no one has dared to annoy any section of electorate. Turkey continues to borrow internally excessively. The fact is that the West, with which Turkey is linked through NATO, OECD, Council of Europe etc and in January 1996 also entered into Customs Union with Europe, will not let it down. Even after the break up of the Soviet Union, Turkey remains a western bulwark in a turbulent and hostile region.

process will ultimately settle the truth of these charges.

It is clear that the 'Invisible Hand' of the free market which was supposed to bring the market to equilibrium to the benefit of all parties seems to be very much 'visible' in this case.

How to Avoid these Mistakes?

The government has set up a Commission to investigate the charges brought against the persons involved in the scandal. Hopefully, the Commission will be able to unearth the real reasons for the crash and bring to light the extent of price manipulations done by whoever they are. Unless the stock exchange is placed on a clear slate, confidence will not return and the capital market will not be able to play its constructive role in raising capital for industrial development of the country.

Finally, it is good to see that the government is going to establish a National Stock Exchange (NSE) in the near future.

It may take about two years before it can be made functional with all the modern infrastructure and trained manpower. In the meantime, the government would do well to make the existing stock exchanges efficient and corruption free by taking whatever steps necessary. Similarly, the government should try to run the NSE with professional managers vested with some degree of autonomy and accountability rather than with government bureaucrats. Otherwise, it will eventually be turned into another State Owned Industry (SOE) with all its present characteristics. The government should also understand that the country's capital base is too shallow to have more than one or at most two stock exchanges. It will be a waste of time, energy and resources to have a few more private stock exchanges in the country.

India and Turkey, after the two found themselves on the opposite sides of the Cold War and Jawahar Lal Nehru's ill-timed visit in 1960, a few days before the coup-d'etat, the Turks maintain that they took the initiative to normalise bilateral relations, when Prime Minister Demirel sent his Foreign Minister I S Caglayan to India in 1968 (also to soften India's support to Makarios on Cyprus, as Turkey's relations had not improved enough with the Arab and other Muslim countries on the basis of religion and economic exchanges; OIC had yet to materialise). But within a decade the two countries became engrossed in their own affairs. In mid 1980s, during a transit halt in Bombay, PM Turgut Ozal while returning from Far east was very charmed by a short drive along Bombay's Marine Drive (most Turks fall in love with it as it reminds them of Istanbul's Bosphorus) and was very taken up by the young and dynamic Maharsa Maharajadhiraj of Protocol. Ozal looked at his Ambassador and said, "Perhaps we have neglected this country". At his meeting with Rajiv Gandhi at the gathering for UN in New York, the two leaders took to each other and he was duly invited to visit India, which he did in 1987. Next year Rajiv Gandhi was in Turkey and President Kenan Evren was sent to India in early 1989. President SD Sharma came to Turkey in 1993 and President Demirel returned the visit in January 1995. In the last year and a half, the two countries have been embroiled in elections and with uneasy coalition governments had little time for each other except for a path-breaking first ever visit by Turkey's Chief of General Staff.

The writer is a retired ambassador of India to Turkey.

OPINION

Taming Dhaka: Lop-sided Priorities

Alif Zabr

About solving Dhaka's overcrowding and jams, we read and hear more about the proposed solutions, than see what is actually being done physically (action).

One suspected area of weakness appears to be the approach to the planning concepts to be adopted, before the detailed project planning is taken up for budgetary estimates. There are two basic areas to tackle: human aspects and the physical infrastructure (development project).

To cite an example, we hear a lot about the proposed construction of a number of pedestrian overhead crossings or bridges. The other is the flyovers for vehicular traffic. What is more urgent is to clear the footpaths first for use by the pedestrians; by removing the impediments on the crowded pavements (hawkers, shop extensions, vendors, temporary blockages, unauthorised use, etc). This is the human problem. The political decisions naturally go slow on this aspect (due to popularity, and facing unpleasantness). For good governance, the popularity syndrome has to go. Get tough (morally also).

quicker method is level zebra crossing (some zebras in Tokyo are 100 ft in depth; the width depends on the road). Going up to cross a road has psychological barriers; and many try short-cuts (therefore the road fences are put up to a great distance, to take care of human frailties).

Another example is reduction of the vehicle density on the roads. According to surveys, a large percentage of the vehicles are unauthorised, and the majority of the drivers have no authority to drive. What the authority or administration are doing? Practically nothing — there is black-out on these measures! How many thousands of vehicles and drivers have been prosecuted, and barred from using the roads? No satisfactory figures, and no campaigns several times a year.

Another area: enforcement must be enforced forcefully, for visible and deterrent results. Who supervises enforcement (the inspectors don't work, we know), and what are they doing (we are aware of the limitations)? The respect for law has eroded, as sense of duty has evaporated. Why and how? How to bring it back? Ask the politicians!

clans and the bureaucrats, who run the show. How acceptable are the efficiency and the standard of the civil service? We are using British-based rules and regulations. Some may be outdated, but the quality is time-tested for centuries. The law must be re-made deterrent ("If I can get away with it, I will do it").

The congestion will be dramatically and visibly reduced if the human factors are tackled first. Why political decision-making is so lop-sided? On the other hand, solutions are sought in physical solutions. Pervading indiscipline is being ignored. Who brought about this taste for indiscipline? Touch my heart — ask the politicians! Of course, development projects have to be taken up for the expanding cities (urban migration), but how about first things first? Crabs crawl sideways, why should we?

To the Editor...

"CDNS"

Sir, The criticism contained in your paper's editorial of 8 January 1997 about formation of the Council for Defence and National Security (CDNS) in Pakistan is premature and seems to have been made in haste.

The Council is purely an advisory body created by the Cabinet to serve as a forum for discussion and to advise the Government on important matters of national economy and security.

The Council is neither a prelude to Martial Law or Presidential system nor the military has been dragged into politics by the creation of this body. CDNS would rather be a forum which will help strengthen political stability and ensure con-

tinuity of vital reforms in the country.

Abdul Hayee Qureshi Minister (Press) High Commission for Pakistan (Informations Section) Dhaka.

Arsenic poisoning

Sir, In recent days, 'arsenic poisoning' has become a matter of great concern in Bangladesh. According to some reliable statistics, at least 15 million people in the country's northern and southern districts are exposed to arsenic poisoning. Those who have so far been identified as being affected by arsenic contamination used to drink tubewell water. Arsenic poisoning causes skin disorders which may eventually lead to

cancer. The medicine for treating arsenic patients is costly and is not available in Bangladesh. Hence it has been suggested by experts that necessary precautionary measures have to be taken to check this contamination.

Meanwhile Mr Dipanker Chakraborti, Director of SoES opined in an article that "the arsenic calamity of Bangladesh can only be brought to control if withdrawal of ground water is restricted and proper utilisation of surface water is made. Bangladesh needs a proper 'Watershed Management'; if this is not done, Bangladesh has to face a serious consequence with respect to arsenic problem."

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