

Root out Extortion

Businessmen laid a barricade on Dhaka-Aricha highway for an hour and observed a day-long hartal in Nayarhat Bazaar in protest of illegal toll collection and intimidation by some student activists there. At the same time they have issued an ultimatum that unless the extortionists were arrested within 72 hours, the businessmen would go for an indefinite barricade on the highway from February 15. This is not for the first time that traders have desperately sought administrative action against a much maligned practice that has definitely proved to be a disincentive to trade and other economic enterprises in the country. Only days before the Eid-ul-Fitr, businessmen of Banani Bazaar kept their shops closed for half an hour to protest extortion and terrorism.

Nothing new in the manner of registering the protest. In the Nayarhat case the businessmen took their protest to the street knowing full well how it would affect the road journey between Dhaka and north and south of the country. What they are planning to do is definitely an infringement on the right of the road users who may not even have the remotest connection with the wrong done to the businessmen of Nayarhat. However legally incorrect their action may be, the businessmen have only been forced to go for this. They just want a redress to a problem caused by legal impotency on the part of the relevant authority. They could not be more desperate. This is how disorder or failure in one area of society adversely affects other areas as well.

In the Banani Bazaar case however, there was a bit of reassuring news which eventually proved even more frustrating. That the police were extending their help to the traders there could be a very good sign but for their failure to curb terrorism and extortion. The message is clear and loud: the police cannot arrest the slide in the situation even if they want to. Terrorism and extortion—two faces of the same coin—are so entrenched that the police also appear to be helpless before it. We however are not yet ready to believe that the administration and the police have run out of steam. Have they given their hundred per cent? One or two thanas' experience cannot be taken as a national standard. The fact is that a concerted, serious and undeterred drive against terrorism throughout the country and extortion is the need of the hour.

Make the Claims Credible

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan has been demanding that the government implement the 4-point accord it reached with the Opposition and also release his party leaders and workers from jail. Earlier, the BNP had claimed that the government resorted to repressing the opposition political activists and added that an end to the 'repression' was one of the conditions for the party to join the Jatiya Sangsad. At that time the government challenged the BNP to submit a list of those activists who were allegedly subjected to repression and harassment. The BNP did not take up the challenge.

There has always been a practice with governments here to resort to repressive measures against opposition political activists. We have therefore had a natural sympathy for the political parties in opposition. Now, as the largest opposition in our political history whatever claims or complaints the BNP makes should count for a lot and therefore be taken seriously. Unfortunately, some of the criminal incidents that take place involving the cadres of the party or its student wing certainly call for clarification by them. How does the BNP explain the abduction case in Narayanganj in which as many as 11 Jatiya Chhatra Dal members were said to have been arrested?

Shouldn't the BNP be ready to condemn and disown the mastans and criminal elements within its fold? No party can deny that it has arms-wielding gangs who commit crimes of various types. A Jubo League leader also from Narayanganj was arrested in connection with looting a track-load of garments. The home minister himself took an initiative in the matter. The criminal goons need political umbrella and no party can and should defend such elements. Now the question is, how far will a party risk its image extending that umbrella? The opposition too is required to limit its partisan politics at a point and must come blasting against its own bad blood. Only then will its criticism about the government's unfair treatment with the opposition cadres be credible. A wholesale accusation against the government might well help the cause of criminals to fish in troubled waters. Let the parties come clean on this much maligned issue.

Positive turn for Pakistan

Pakistan's politics often known for personal rivalry dominated by animosity, hatred and revenge has for once shown a sign—just a sign as yet—of refreshing change. This concerns down and out former premier Benazir Bhutto's latest statement about the election outcome vis-a-vis her party's role when Nawaz Sharif takes office. Her's is the most sensible utterance for an overwhelmingly defeated leader just out of office. She has not only expressed her happiness over the sweeping victory of her bitter rival Nawaz Sharif but also sees a positive turn for the country if he fulfils the commitments he has made.

This is indeed sound and healthy politics. Abandoning the tune she played immediately after the poll results, she now shows the maturity befitting a politician of high calibre. The acceptance of the Pakistani electorate's verdict and the new-found generosity coupled with a vision for that country's future well-being have suddenly made her sober tone remarkably strong and credible. Through this display of political sagacity Benazir proves she may be down but not yet out of the Pakistani political theatre.

Indeed this is a nice way to recover the lost ground. The former prime minister has decided against agitation. Quite a promising political overture. Sharif will hopefully read the message correctly and reciprocate it with political moves that can pull the country from the mire it has dipped into. Not negative but constructive politics and mutual co-operation can only help consolidate the cause of democracy in countries like Pakistan. Let Benazir's change of political way initiate the process there.

CHT Problem: Lessons from History

by AKN Ahmed

NEGOTIATIONS between government party political leaders and the CHT delegation led by Mr Shantu Lama and others of Shanti Bahini are going on now. This is the second meeting between the parties after the present government has come to power and 21st since the government side opened negotiations with Jana Sanghati Samity (JSS) the political wing of Shanti Bahini. Government side seems to have agreed that a Regional Council with wide autonomous powers is going to be set up, land acquired by the plains people would be handed over to CHT people, further settlement of people from the plains in CHT area will be stopped and the assurance to allow the original inhabitants to live and cultivate their land understood and institutionalised by amending our constitution to that effect when 2/3rd majority in the Parliament can be garnered and in the meantime all army camps in the area would be disbanded and armed forces withdrawn. CHT leaders in turn agreed that thus armed insurgents would lay down their arms and people taking refuge in the adjoining areas of India would return and pick up their old thread of life. The two sides will meet again on 12th March, 1997 when an agreement to this effect is expected to be signed formally. All these are welcome news and the present government deserves congratulations for making such a daring move so soon after coming to power.

CHT problem has been in existence as a festering wound since long. The CHT is home to 13 mountainous tribes consisting of about 600,000 people of which Chakmas with 350,000 to 400,000 people are the largest group. The uplands that are Chittagong Hill Tracts constitute only about 10 per cent of the total area of Bangladesh but economically it is a treasure trove of natural resources. It contains 60 per cent of reserve forests, and geological surveys uncovered large reserves of hydrocarbons, and some coal and copper. Some experts also think that uranium may also be available in this area. The tribes are believed to have entered CHT in three waves. First came the Tibeto-Burmans of Kuki group. The second carried the Mura and Murang group while the last wave brought in the Arakanese group—the Marma and Ryang. The dominant Chakmas came from Burma or Myanmar. The whole tract was largely unknown until 15th century and contact between the bustling plains and the uncharted, malarial and sparsely populated hills was limited. But this otherwise egalitarian and democratic tribal society was subjected to centralised control as distant powers extended their writ into Chittagong hills forcing the Chakma society to change. Delhi's satraps in Bengal annexed Chittagong in the mid-17th century. The Mughals however did not demand complete subjugation as they had on the plains: the tribal people also found regular payment of tax levied on trade between Chittagong hills and Chittagong plains suited them better than perpetual warfare.

It is only in the recent years that the government at Dhaka has come to realise and admit that CHT has been neglected in the past and that the problem is essentially political and its solution should be sought by identifying its causes.

The advent of British East India Company further concentrated power. Three years after the Plassey War in 1757, the company persuaded Nawab Mir Kasim Khan to cede Chittagong hills to its control. In 1789, the British replaced the cotton tribute with cash introducing monetisation into the substance and barter economy of the hills. This in turn brought usurious money lending practices developed by Bengalis from the plains. In 1860, a century after CHT has been ceded to East India Company, the area finally became an integral part

of the British Empire in India. With British occupation of CHT came military measures, suspension of traditional 'Jhum' cultivation, tracking over choiced lands by the government, encouragement of 'settled' cultivation by people from the plains. But these measures met with the resistance of the tribal chiefs and the government was constrained to enact in 1881 the regulations that formalised and offered to underwrite the chiefs support wet-rice cultivation. In pursuit of more effective control, the authorities also moved the headquarters from Chittagong to Rangamati in 1898 and built roads, schools and hospitals near the seats of three chiefs who were given enlarged powers to extract revenues from the people for the government. In 1900, the government passed Chittagong Hill Tracts Act to separate CHT from the rest of the province of Bengal and Assam empowering the British administrator to run the district as he thought fit. The Act laid the legal and judicial basis for administration of CHT to be given parity with the system of 'civilised law' in force on the plains. The Act did not specifically bar Bengali immigration to land right but gave the British the authority to impose restrictions when it considered fit. In 1921, Delhi declared CHT a

backward tract and an excluded area. Subsequently under Government of India Act 1935, CHT was declared 'totally excluded area' to be administered by governor general of India directly. This enforced separation of CHT from the rest of the country did not endear the tribal people to the mainstream politicians in India. This merely reflected congruence of political ties between CHT people, their three chiefs and the British rulers and had the effect of creating a mental barrier of misunderstanding between tribal people and the people of the plains in the neighbouring provinces. The then British government took these measures not to protect the tribal people and culture and save their lands from encroachment of the people from the plains, but to guard the frontiers of their empire from all evil external influences of ideas and people inimical to their imperial interest.

On 14th August 1971, Pakistan came into existence and CHT was included as part of Pakistan. In the initial years, CHT retained its special administration. But official restrictions notwithstanding tribal people found themselves unable to compete with Bengalis who established a monopoly in the wholesale and retail trade and in unofficial money-lending operations and transport. With Ayub Khan capturing power towards the end of 1958, the remaining vestiges of its separation were taken away and the happy people fell prey to martial law's ruthless drive to build up a strong, centralised and unitary state at the expense of the nation. Subsequently, the 1959 Basic Democracies Order replaced tribal institutions with new patron-client networks and then with the constitution of Pakistan 1962 a systematic but clandestine colonisation of the hills by the Bengalis began. During this period, Kaptai Dam at Chittagong creating 500-square mile reservoir was constructed to generate hy-

dro-electricity without considerations of tribal sensitivities. As a result, 40 per cent CHT land was lost 96,000 people were displaced and rendered homeless and the meagre amount of compensation payable were not paid to the displaced persons for a long time by the government. Side by side CHT acquired a strategic significance in the late 1950s by becoming a centre of the CIA's secret struggle against communism. From here, the US controlled its covert operations against Chinese authority in Tibet until the CIA's command post for the operations was moved to Delhi after the 1962 border war. CIA operations ran along with U-2 flights over USSR from a post near Peshawar. Involvement in cold war operations led US-trained intelligence operative to feel that they could engage in covert operations of their own against India, the principal source of Pakistan's insecurity. During the anti-Ayub agitation in 1968-69 and during liberation struggle of Bangladesh in 1971, many tribal students radicalised with their Bengali counterparts and came to believe in the legitimacy of Bengali demands. They went to India to join the freedom fighters being organised by Indian intelligence. They were however not trusted by Bengali fighters or their Indian mentors and many

were even maltreated — they returned home disillusioned, concerned over their collective fate in the future Republic of Bangladesh. When Bangladesh emerged on 16th December 1971, the situation did not change for better. There are reports that in 1972 units of Bangladesh Army followed Indian Battalions to occupy areas formerly used as Naga and Mizo base camps and to neutralise Chakma renegades who were suspected to have collaborated with Pakistan Army and in the process burnt and looted the houses of ordinary people. This opened a new chapter in the tense relationship between CHT people, and the new government opening up the old wound. Manabendra Lama, a tribal leader, a member of parliament, was summarily dismissed by the new Bangladesh government when he demanded certain amount of autonomy for this people to be inserted into the new constitution then being written in order to enable CHT people to protect their culture and way of life in their territories. Once again CHT people braced themselves politically for another round of struggle against the new state and Bangladesh responded almost in the same manner other previous regimes did to their demands for self-determination: repression.

The carrot and stick policy with more of stick and less of carrot followed by Bangladesh government since then had the effect of alienating a large section of tribal people who started feeling that it was not possible to get a fair deal from the government. Military operations continued in the name of flushing out the radicals and the concessions offered in bits in the form of assurances not to transplant more people from the plains in CHT area to grant limited self-government and more money for development neither helped full pacification of the area nor alienating the radical groups from the moderate ones. In fact, during

this period a large segment of tribal people organised themselves under the armed group called Shanti Bahini who now are regularly making raids on army, police and Bengali settlers in CHT to create terror and disrupt lives of people in general. It is only in the recent years that the government at Dhaka has come to realise and admit that CHT has been neglected in the past and that the problem is essentially political and its solution should be sought by identifying its causes.

With the collapse of communism, dismemberment of USSR, the cold war has ended and USA has emerged as the only super-power in the world. With these developments, metropolitan countries do not have much incentives to use the problems like the one in CHT to embarrass or harass their rivals or to use small client states to carry on proxy wars on their behalf. At regional level the two big countries — China and India — are again trying to mend their fences and Bangladesh under the new government is trying to break the logjam in its relation with India and to that extent the latter will have less inclination to use CHT problem as a lever to put pressure on Bangladesh provided we no longer entangle ourselves directly or indirectly with Mizo, Naga and Tripura rebels. This new situation makes it possible to solve CHT problem at national level with regional cooperation provided the government is ready to do this by overcoming the resistance of those who over the years have developed vested interest in this problem.

The tortuous experience of CHT through various regimes — Mughal, British, Pakistan and Bangladesh — and over so many centuries suggest two lessons. They are: one, within each state the people who rule need to accept the strength that can come direct from diversity. This will be evident when nations of mere majority rule and unitary state are seen as concepts whose usefulness have passed. States need to develop a loose, more confederal character which holds its components together because its components desire a voluntary union and not because dominant groups believe it is in their interest to do so. Two, what the rulers need to do at the state level must be replicated at the regional level. A loose confederal structure can work but only if the system develops a similar feature at regional level in which cooperative linkages replace the ones of conflict. Thus diversity and devolution of power should be the principal components of nation-building exercise as also building up regional cooperation on durable basis.

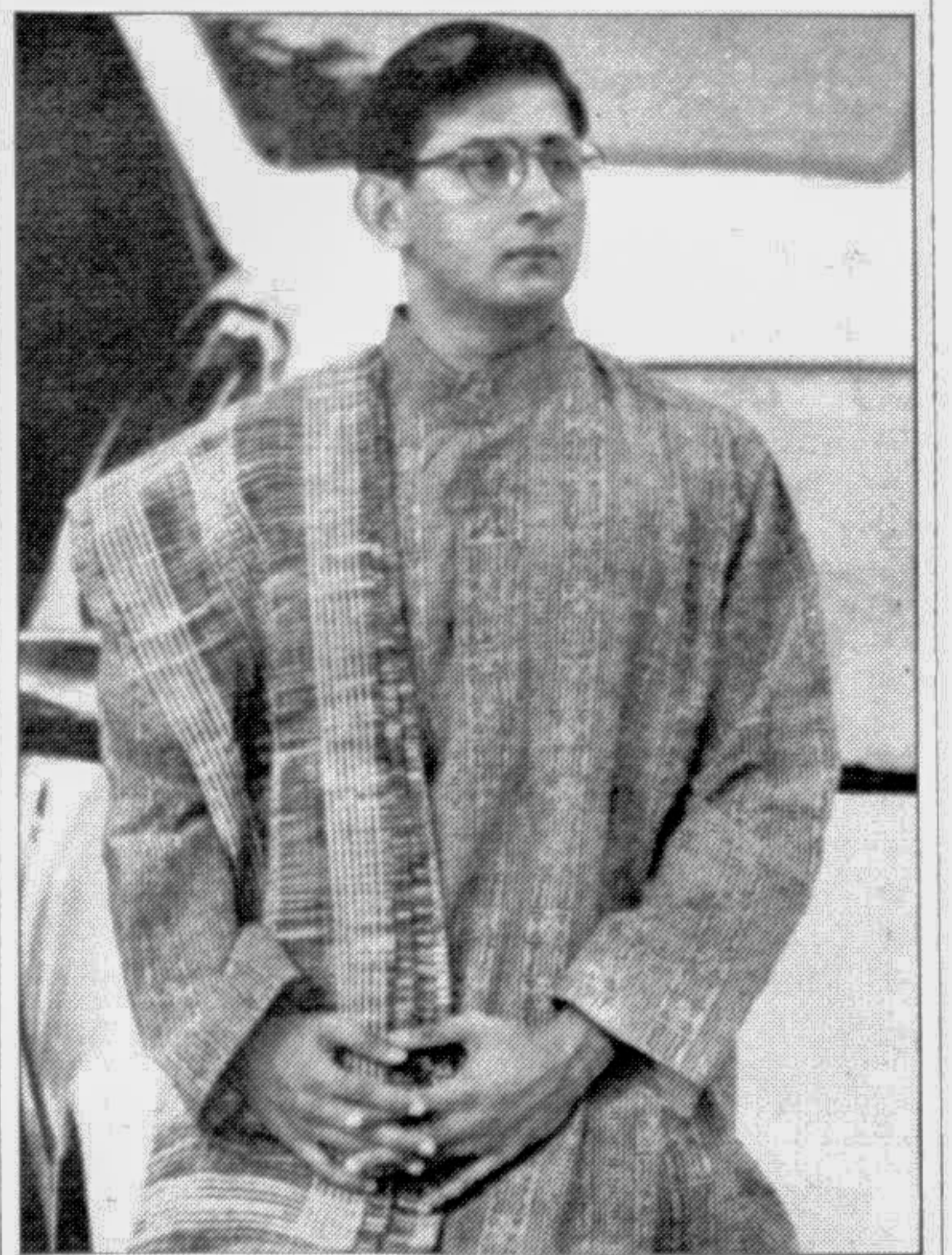
It seems the present government in its current negotiation with tribal leaders is keeping these lessons in view in its quest for finding a durable solution of CHT problem. If it is doing this, it is likely to succeed. And if it does, it will be the role model for other governments in this region who are afflicted with similar problems — some more serious than ours. Those who are now engaged in negotiations on solving CHT problem without being aware of it. Whether 120 million people can live in peace and harmony with mere 600 thousand brothers and sisters living on hills will be the litmus test of the strength, resilience and durability of the nationalism that nurtures our country now. Let us recall the principle with which we fought our Liberation War, and get moving in the right direction. The challenge is great, so is the opportunity.

The writer is a former Governor of Bangladesh Bank. He also served as Bangladesh ambassador to Japan and South Korea.

Dhaka Day by Day

A New Trend in Male Attire

by A S M Nurunnabi



Lately a new trend in male attire seems to be in evidence. Normally, in our country, there are no distinctive features in dress, formal or informal, for our males. In a country where the climate is hot and humid for most of the year, the general preference is for a dress that is light and loose, allowing ventilation of air in the body. This requirement is fully met in the present trend of male attire. The notable thing is that this trend is getting highly popular in the field of casual wear. This refers to male's steady preference for *punjabi (kurta)* and *pajama* in summer.

mindar *punjabi*. In this connection, an embarrassing situation which I faced in the past in an Urdu-speaking country may be mentioned. When I asked for a *punjabi* as we call it here, at a shopping centre in that country, the shopkeeper looked blank. Luckily for me, a specimen of that thing was displayed in the show-case on the shop front. When I pointed it out to the shopkeeper, his perplexed look vanished and he produced the thing for me. Obviously, he was baffled by my request, which probably meant something like an inhabitant of Punjab to him.

Gone are the days when men used to wear *sherwani* and *chost pajama* for formal occasions with, of course, some exceptions. Now their place appears to have been taken by the knee-length *kurta* during religious festivals particularly. This new trend is noticeable almost everywhere.

Indication of the present popularity of *kurta* is available in almost all city shops dealing in ready-made garments for males. When a big religious festival arrives, the buying spree for this item of dress is set in motion. Currently there is such a big variety of designs on the shoulder and front portion of the dress that making a selection for purchase is not an easy thing. Lately a number of fashion houses have come up displaying attractive varieties of this wear. They are made from various kinds of dress materials: cotton, silk, green check with embroidery work of eye-catching designs. They carry price tags ranging from a hundred taka to several thousand taka. *Punjabis* with special designs were lately seen in the market. Such newly designed *punjabis* are known as *Pathan punjabi*, *Nauabi punjabi*, *za*

There is a variant of this dress known as *Peshwari* or *Kabuli* suit with loose flowing skirt reaching down below the knee and loose *shatwar*. Although this dress is sometimes worn for formal occasions, it doesn't enjoy much popularity because of our hot climate and also because it is more expensive than an embroidered *kurta*.

The overall impact of this dress with elaborate embroidery work is that it is now elevated almost to the status of a formal dress. We find evidence of this in gatherings where Western dress is taboo.

For some religious functions particularly, this dress enjoys predominant preference. The *kurta* for the males, however, stands behind in comparison with the so-called three-piece for the females, which is more variegated and gorgeous in colour and design, and also more expensive.

It is a pleasant development that this new trend in casual wear offers a scope for colourful designs and styles, free from the straight jacket of convention within affordable financial limits for most of the male consumers.

The External State of the Federation

PAKISTAN stands at a particular crossroads of both history and geography. Primarily, it belongs to the South Asia, being geographically within the boundaries of the Hindu Kush and the Himalayan mountain ranges in the west north-west of the sub-continent. History's transient political status has also made us part of both Near-Asia and the Middle East, with the fall of the Soviet Empire we went back to our historical connections with Central Asia. We are at the very nexus of four important regions in Asia and as such economically and geo-politically we should occupy a far greater niche on the world stage than is accorded to us. Part of the reason is that we have failed to build up our strengths, on the contrary the greed, incompetence and ambition of our leaders has made us the slave of our weaknesses.

Within South Asia, our historical links with our giant neighbour India has been vitiated by India's military occupation of Kashmir, negating the concept of Hindu majority and Muslim majority areas which was the touchstone of Partition of the Sub-continent in 1947. The brute force India has used to keep Kashmir under subjugation has added to the tension. To be fair, Kashmir also evokes emotional reaction in India but the religious affinity of the vast majority with Pakistan keeps the independence struggle alive even after half a century. Within the framework of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), it was to be expected that India would offer meaningful concessions on Kashmir that would allow natural commerce between the two countries to flourish, but that has not happened. The Kashmir question remains a live flash-point, sooner or later economic

ground realities will influence India to change its policy. With Bangladesh, Pakistan has historical and economic links of long standing is now complete. We are very much an important part of a grouping that is developing fast into a region of great opportunity. Pakistan has the best access to the Indian Ocean and from Central Asia, with peace now returning to Afghanistan, this is something that needs to be economically exploited. We have to recognize the Taliban-formed government in Kabul is too much an existing reality to ignore. At the

same time, the world must recognize that we are a greatly moderating influence on both Kabul and Teheran, that Pakistan is the stabilizing force for the region, particularly in the south, as much as Turkey has a similar role to play in the Turkic-speaking CARs. The buzzword for Pakistan is an economic association where informal trade is already a reality, what we have to do is to formalize this and force-multiply the benefits. With the Middle East, particular with Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, Qatar and Kuwait, Pakistan has a relationship of long-standing based on religious affinity and providing of a large numbers of skilled and unskilled workers. The expatriate remittances to Pakistan averaging \$ 2 billion plus yearly is an important contribution to the economy both visibly and invisibly. Pakistan's workers in these countries in return give political stability to the countries which

are vulnerable to various pressures both internal and external. Saudi Arabia and UAE have always been of economic assistance to us in our hour of need, a pragmatic and frank presentation of our economic aspirations should get us a greater advantage. With the advent of the European Union, our historical association with UK has diminished. Europe has always been commercial minded and as such have established stronger links with fast developing East Asia than with South Asia, as such they have

AS I SEE IT
Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

set different human rights standards for them and for us, it is to be expected that their two-track policy will continue. The EU countries are also worried about trade to the CARs flowing through to the Indian Ocean rather than through Europe. As it is Europe has a long standing animosity with Islam and equates countries like Pakistan to Iran and Afghanistan. With Islamists leading a coalition government in Turkey, Europe is again sensitive to the issue. While we have to have constructive engagement with them, we have to recognize that unless we strike oil in a big way, EU countries will not suit us the way they treat Saudi Arabia, UAE, Malaysia, Indonesia, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, etc. France's relationship with us is confined to economic ones, mainly selling arms to us, while with UK our bi-lateral relationship remains only because of the large number of Pakistanis in UK

and the heavy British investment in Pakistan. It is indeed a sad commentary on our successive governments that we have failed to maintain a good balance with the two main countries in our life as a nation, China and the US. We served as the bridge that broke the ice between the US and China, late Chou en Lai even admonished US National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger during his July 1991 visit with words to the effect that "Pakistan has been the bridge you have used to come to us. Do not forget this bridge for you may have to use it again". We let our country be used as a frontline State to counter Soviet aggression in Afghanistan but the economic and political returns have been dismal. For a few F-16s we sold away our soul as regards our national interest and policies thereof.

Subsequently the worst thing that Benazir did was to downgrade our relationship with China from the level it should be, the result is that sensitive China has adopted a more pragmatic real-politik stance vis-a-vis India and the US does not consider us the vital bridge in the region (cornerstone of US policy) that we once were. No wonder China greeted Mian Nawaz Sharif's sweeping victory with unusual warmth, a clear indicator of their prefer-

ence of leaders in Pakistan. With China getting the most important role on the Pakistani pedestal and its known history of principled support for friends, the relationship with the US has to be based on mutual recognition of realities. Pakistan's stabilizing influence in the region is of vital interest to the US and it is in their interest to maintain our military parity with India to deter Indian adventurism.

Mian Nawaz Sharif has to put together an effective foreign policy team, remembering that in this technological age we may be left far behind if we cannot put our foreign trade in order. "Has been" people without vision should be replaced by dynamic futuristic thinking persons. Emphasis should be placed on pragmatic foreign trade initiatives, to search for non-traditional markets in Central Asia, Africa, South America and Latin America. With an entrepreneurial background, the future PM has the necessary potential to break the present economic logjam and force-multiply our initiatives into material benefit. PPP's foreign policy was confined to interest in Asif Zardari's personal acquisitions and with Benazir, the sum total was minus of zero. That is now in the past and we cannot do much about it except trying to get our money back. For the future, we have hope, that hope can be translated into reality by a group of sincere dedicated workers dedicated to the common cause of prosperity for Pakistan.

The column 'Between the Lines' by Kuldip Nayyar will appear tomorrow.