

## Walk on Two Feet

More than the jingle of money it is the need-orientation or substance of a project that appeals to us most. Accordingly, we regard it as an auspicious development — worth welcoming from the very word go — that five foreign companies are to form a consortium under the leadership of Trade and Investment Department (TID) of the UK for the purpose of setting up a container terminal in Chittagong.

In other words, a brand new port is visualised in the private sector, and at the mouth of the river Karnaphuli where on a different location we have the ailing Chittagong seaport in the public sector.

Everything seems to be in a state of splendid readiness for getting on with the project. Tim Steel, Chairman of the spearheading factor — the TCM group — is 'aggressively ready to launch it' in consideration of the 'high viability' of the project, fund is ready to be put upfront, land acquisition is under process and the government's final approval is seemingly round the corner.

The justifiability of a modern container port at Patenga cannot be assailed from the points of view of the limited, often erratic, handling of cargoes by the existing Chittagong port which has by its own poor performance, albeit courted a degree of competition from a port in the private sector. In the overall also, the pressures of inward and outward consignments have been on far too rapid a rise for the existing inadequate facilities to cope with.

It sounds so very nice and forward-looking that we are up and doing about new things, but in operating the existing facilities we have a dismal record to countenance in the first place as this might cast a shadow on the prospective ones. Trade unionism or collective bargaining agency, as it has functioned, for all one knows, has resisted modernist alterations and adjustments, like in the case of installation of lift-crane at the Ctg port. They felt threatened in terms of job-loss. It seems maintaining the status quo itself is becoming difficult by the day. Furthermore, little distance away, one has not heard of any determined plan yet to realise the full potential of the Mongla port. Containerisation outfits in some form or the other string out here and there; how well are these working, is worth noting.

So, our impassioned call is, have by all means a new facility but do resurrect the Chittagong port with a powerful thrust in the first place.

## Police Must Explain

The tragic death of a physician of the IPGMR at the hands of musclemen resorting to extortion once again drives the message home how insecure life in this city has become. That the mastans are still holding the city hostage is quite clear — and this is despite the home minister's genuine effort and commitment to wage war against crime. The physician who paid the price with his life when the mastans raided his residence with an intent to loot might be blamed for his audacity to catch hold of one of the gangsters.

The issue is, however, not of a civilian's courage but of desperate response in the face of continuous threats and harassment by local ruffians. In this case, 12 mastans have already been arrested by the police within a couple of days of the murder. The police have been quite prompt in their combing operation. While this deserves appreciation, there is another side to this event. The police are categoric that all the arrested men had several charges against them with the thana. Now the question is, why these elements were not apprehended earlier. That the police can, if they want, catch hold of them has been proved by the swiftness of their action. Should we then assume that they move only after someone has been killed by the gangs and turn a blind eye to the freely roaming social parasites at other times? Cannot they make preemptive strikes?

The home ministry and the police hierarchy must ask themselves this question and ask the thanas what prevents them from hauling up the mastans beforehand, particularly when there were specific cases against the goons.

Of all the charges the opposition brings against this government, here is definitely one that is convincing and draws public sympathy. But at the same time it forgets that when in power it did little to improve the situation. Now we consider this an injudicious position against a most maligned social problem. Irrespective of party politics, there is a need for all to take a common tough stand to root out muscleman and crime from society. Without effectively dealing with this social curbuncle, the rule of law can never be established.

## Train Accident

A train accident near Khanial in Pakistan's Punjab province has put out scores of lives. We condole the tragic death of so many people and express our sympathy for the bereaved families. We too are not unfamiliar with similar tragedies on our railway tracks.

Pakistan's antiquated railway system, it is said, has been responsible for frequent train accidents. So is ours. This parallel has a significance both for the government of Islamabad and of Dhaka. The significance is that both peoples have almost accepted such tragedies as their fate.

There should be a genuine effort to transform the aged railway systems into modern and efficient ones in both countries. Unfortunately, this area has not received the attention it should have and therefore we always run the risk of such fatal tragedies. Both Pakistan and Bangladesh should immediately think of improving the system. India is somewhat on a better keel but needs keeping an eye on it.

This latest tragedy in Pakistan has come on the heels of another catastrophe of earthquake in Beluchistan. Let the nation in mourning feel that it is not alone; rather all the SAARC members might be found standing by its side.

# Absorbing Defeat, Analysing Victory

*The harsh reality is that the masses have taken up Mian Sahib on his promises, he has now to deliver. On the other hand, despite a fair number of factors leading to the PPP's faithful staying away in droves and ensuring her drubbing at the electoral polls, Benazir has not paid heed to "lessons learnt".*

**D**EFEAT is always a bitter pill to swallow whatever the nature of the competition. As much as a child may weep in anguish and frustration at losing at sports, a politician may find tears very near the surface when beaten at the polls. Those who have character can shrug off defeat with a wry smile, the famous quote "it hurts too much to laugh and I am too old to cry" being apt. Those with character and resilience immediately take to heart the lessons learnt and get back on the trail for next time around, whenever it may be. Raised by media hype and star quality to great expectations in public perception, both Imran Khan and Ghinwa Bhutto took a severe psychological mauling at the hands of voters but took their loss with much more grace than the big loser of the day "born-to-the" Ms Bhutto, who took off on histrionics bordering on the ridiculous.

The latest object of 'hate' being President Farooq Ahmad Khan Leghari, Benazir seems oblivious of the fact that every time she opens her mouth to make an outrageous accusation, her credibility takes a further tumble into the depths. As for calling the President, Farooq 'ul Haq', has she bothered to take a closer look to see whom her husband has taken to resembling lately? Imran and Ghinwa went back to some selected constituencies respectively and thanked them for their consideration, if not their vote. Veteran politicians like Mostafa Khar, Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan, etc kept their cool mostly. Maulana Fazlur Rahman must have thanked his stars that he was beaten by the PM candidate rather than Ms Musarrat Shaheen.

It is literally going back on the campaign trail with dignity, the younger politicians followed the footsteps of Mian Nawaz Sharif since 1993. Despite knowing that his defeat was conjured up by motivated duly 'programmed' computers in

1993 when PML (N) got more votes than PPP but still lost at least 15 hairline urban-rural swing seats past midnight. Mian Nawaz Sharif graciously absorbed defeat when he congratulated Benazir without any rancour in the National Assembly on being elected as PM. Mian Nawaz Sharif then went straight back onto the campaign trail, he became such a peripatetic traveller that only Mushahid Hussain among his colleagues was able to keep up this "not-so-accidental tourist" while he roamed around the countryside in many out-of-the-way places rousing his constituents out of the depression that hit them post-elections. Secretary General PML Mr Sartaj Aziz in the meantime kept a lonely vigil in the PML Secretariat in Islamabad, holding the political infrastructure from collapsing. While Pakistan followed a disastrous course economically in the years 1993-1997 because of the rather deliberate derailing of the economic locomotive, what emerged from this national and personal adversity was a leader mature in years, brimming with self-confidence and the knowledge that the absolute force of public opinion was willing to follow him anywhere in his quest for economic emancipation.

Mian Nawaz Sharif absorbed defeat, contrived though it was, extremely well and thus profited by it personally, so has the nation in its search for a leader to match its destiny. The harsh reality is that the masses have taken up Mian Sahib on his promises, he has now to deliver. On the other hand, despite a fair number of factors leading to the PPP's faithful staying away in droves and ensuring her drubbing at the electoral polls, Benazir has not paid heed to "lessons learnt". She has put up the *raison d'être* for her

downfall, her husband Asif Zardari, for a Senate seat. Is this limitless self-flagellation part of a permanent psyche or is this by deliberate design? Who knows what goes on in the "born-to-rule" Bhutto mind? For the time being Pakistanis seem to have given up trying. The sheer contrast between the Sharif and Bhutto stances respectively is amazing, the other politicians have been intelligent enough to take the right course.

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