

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-cranes 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 categorical 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 musclemoney and crime from society. Without effectively dealing with this social curuncle, the rule of law can never be established.

Train Accident

A train accident near Khaniwal 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 faithful staying away in droves and ensuring her drubbing at the electoral polls, Benazir has not paid heed to "lessons learnt".

DEFEAT 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 Ghaniwa 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-rule" 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 Ghaniwa 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 PML candidate rather than Ms Musarrat Shaheen.

In 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 1993. 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 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.

One must analyse the reasons for PML (N)'s seemingly easy victory by an overwhelming majority. While the PPP's track record in governance was

terrible and it was expected that their voter count would drop dramatically, the fact remains that the people of Pakistan did vote for PML (N) rather than for the obvious star quality appeal of Imran Khan's PTI and Ghaniwa Bhutto's PPP (SB) as possible alternates. As such it is logical to assume that the masses saw much more positive qualities in the PML (N) platform than that of the others. Unfortunately this theory falls flat when one realises that not even one per cent of these going out to vote for their favourite parties had bothered to read or understand their respective manifestos. Most people go on personality and perception, by that token Imran Khan should have been over the top before anyone else.

However, since this did not happen by far, the safe conclusion is that people had more confidence in PML (N) and Mian

Nawaz Sharif. Since PML (N) is like all the other parties of Pakistan, dependant on each constituency on the individual strength of the party candidate, the resounding victory PML (N) got on Feb 3 was almost entirely due to the mass public belief in Mian Nawaz Sharif personally.

While a number of factors, including a rather pleasing, humble personality, conceded to coalesce the public support, the outstanding factor is the mass belief that he alone has the answers to the economic problems bedeviling this country. Mian Nawaz Sharif comes across as a sincere man with plenty of credibility, this makes a severe contrast with Benazir who does not on either count. Within the uniformed class, serving and retired, Benazir universally comes across as a "security threat", in a Muslim country immersed in traditional military influence this can be very damning indeed.

No doubt, the Supreme Court verdict a week before the elections was a severe setback to her supporters but Benazir's abusive TV appearance in "Election Hour" utterly demoralised her cohorts, her defensive posture indicated that she had not only thrown in the towel but the kitchen sink as well. By Election Day, it was clear that the comfortable majority forecast by most opinion polls for PML (N) was going to become a landslide.

Mian Nawaz Sharif has to build on a number of lessons from his history, the scale of which increased because a sub-

stantial number stayed at home rather than vote for PPP. Public mood is very fickle indeed as President Leghari discovered two weeks after he had dismissed the PPP regime, the slow process of accountability almost backfired on him. If the election campaign had not taken the heat off him and the elections not been held on schedule, the President would have found himself in real trouble.

Similarly the PM does not have all the time in the world at his disposal, he has to be a man in a hurry, economic amelioration and accountability must go hand in hand. His choice for the economic management team was excellent, both Sartaj Aziz and Ishaq Dar inspire confidence. The PM has put a good cabinet in place, only the odd person can be said to be controversial to some degree, the likely others he has kept out, at least till now. In the selection of his team he has been deliberate, he has to continue to being so. His innovative scheme for debt retirement and interest payments has evoked a strong and positive response from the masses but such short-time innovations will never be enough.

To reform the economic system he has instituted Eleven Committees, all headed and staffed (mostly) by the private sector. The results are due to come within a week or so. The major breakthrough has been in restoring public confidence in the future of the economy, that money is flowing back in evident from the Pak Rupee becoming stronger against the US dollar and remaining so for some time. Every national Chief Executive has usually a "kitchen cabinet", an "inner cabinet" and the formal full fledged cabinet. The "kitchen cabinet" is usually composed of intimate friends

(and relatives) who give advice informally about various issues. The "inner cabinet" consists of a few selected political colleagues who form the core of the decision-making process before it is presented to the cabinet for approval or otherwise.

The correct way should be for options to be made available to the PM, who in his discretion can consult his "kitchen cabinet", who should be able to speak without fear or favour so that his own individual mind is clear before he discusses various options with his "inner cabinet" colleagues. Under no circumstances should decision-making seem to emanate from the "kitchen cabinet", riding roughshod over the PM's political colleagues should be avoided. Unfortunately in Pakistan as all over the world, the "kitchen cabinet" makes most of the decisions which are rubber-stamped by the "inner cabinet" before being presented to the full cabinet.

In the PPP's regime, the "kitchen cabinet" reigned supreme, giving out direct orders, the cabinet was rarely consulted. The PM has to be careful that he must carry his close cabinet colleagues as being part of the decision-making process right from the beginning. As the ultimate authority, the PM into whose hands the decision does not find palatable but he must take the time to explain why to his colleagues.

The PM has the people's mandate without question but he must not seem to flout it. Victory brings euphoria, in the present environment it has brought a tremendous responsibility onto the shoulders of the PM. In analysing his victory, the PM will find that he cannot keep on basking in the glow, he has to get on with it or else there are many always waiting in the wings to stoke the public frustration into anger in the streets. Mian Nawaz Sharif has to convert his victory into deeds which will bring direct benefit to the masses, and soon!

ASI SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

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Politics of Apology—Ershad Style

by Dr A K Monaw-war Uddin Ahmad

After all, Ershad was in power for nine years. After that it was rather terrible for him to be out of power and then in the jail for six years. But, then developing a new 'apology culture' apparently to capture state power would not serve any national interest.

IT is interesting to note that the former CMLA General Ershad on 2 February 1997 has apologised to Noor Hossain's father. We were amused to see the report published in The Daily Star on 4 February: "Former president and Jatiya party Chairman H M Ershad on Sunday gave Taka 25,000 to the father of Shaheed Noor Hossain to enable him to celebrate Eid and also expressed his willingness to give him Taka 5,000 every month. Ershad met Noor Hossain's father Mojibur Rahman at his house in the city Sunday night and begged his apology for the untimely death of his son, says a party press release."

Noor Hossain, a young man in his 20s, was killed during the anti-autocracy movement in the city on November 10, 1987. Expressing his sympathy to the members of Hossain's family, Ershad said "though he was not directly responsible for the death of Noor Hossain, yet he could not avoid the responsibility as he was then the head of the government."

While it is appreciated that Ershad could realise his mistakes, it should be added that it is too late by ten years. One is rather curious about this tendering of apology. It must be said that General Ershad is believed to be a very clever man who really understands the simple mindedness of the people of Bangladesh. Probably he is going to add a new dimension in the political culture of

Bangladesh. Since all the criminal cases against the former military president are lying before the courts including some before superior courts, it would be legally wrong to comment on them. It is only for the learned judges to decide on these matters. The honourable courts will decide whether Ershad has done any wrong or not. But our comment is about Ershad's own party press release. It appears that he takes an indirect responsibility of Noor Hossain's killing. But killing is a crime. If he does not want to avoid the responsibility, what does he want? Is tendering an apology a compensation or a self-imposed punishment? No, perhaps it is not such a simple thing. One who knows this poet-cum-politician's track records would tend to believe that this is another political stance from the player. There are, of course, other political actors in this country, but very few are believed to be as efficient and smooth as he is.

A number of important issues may come up for discussion in this regard. It can be mentioned here that a 'political apology culture' may soon develop in this country like, say, the 'lifer party culture'. In many cases many non-fasting people

attend the 'lifer party' more vigorously than the fasting ones. In the same vein people tendering apology may not really mean anything so deep and, who knows, H M Ershad is not leading the path! Lifer parties are organised at the cost of state exchequer both by the Government and the Opposition leaders. Such parties are also thrown by the political parties at the cost of party fund(?). Ershad has given Noor Hossain's father a compensation of Taka 25,000 for Eid celebration and also promised to give Taka 5000/- per month. This shows that he is quite rich. After all he is a former president and currently an honourable member of the Parliament. However, one may raise a number of questions in this respect. Is he giving the money from his own purse? Why is he giving money only to Noor Hossain's father? Why not to other victims during his nine-year tenure as President of the country?

One tends to believe that Ershad is desperate to emerge as a popular leader and he is possibly moving slowly or, who knows, probably very fast — towards the edifice of power!

The departure of Ershad from political power in 1990 can be contrasted with that of

Sir Edward Heath, former British prime minister in the seventies. When Mr Heath lost prime ministership, he had to borrow money from a good friend of his to shift some of his personal belongings from No 10, Downing Street. Incidentally, he borrowed this money not from any colleague of his own Conservative Party. He took this money from Mr Anthony Crossland of Labour Party. He later on became British Foreign Secretary. It was no wonder that Mr Heath was weeping like a child at the funeral ceremony of Mr Anthony Crossland. The former British prime minister Mr Edward Heath left his office with a remarkable standard of honesty and integrity.

Caliph Omar (RU) was well known as a very kind hearted man among the people of Arabia. During a famine in that country the Caliph used to move around in disguise at night along with a companion to see for himself the conditions of his people. Thus one night he found an elderly lady boiling stones in water and consoling her children by saying that food was soon going to be served. Caliph Omar rushed to his official food store and himself carried the bag of grains to the elderly lady, sat with her and cooked food for her children. They were fed and the mother out of gratitude said to the Caliph, "Oh! my son, you are nobler than Omar."

These are the stories of genuine kindness of noble leaders over the ages.

Since Caliph Omar, time and perspective have undergone vast changes. But, then Edward Heath is a recent example. It is highly desirable that politicians give up political acting.

OPINION

Why Should the Students Listen?: The Other View

Imdadul Haque

I have gone through Prof AK Monaw-war Uddin Ahmed's well-thought out and carefully written article (DS, January 21, 1997).

Those who have the privilege to know Prof Ahmed personally (I happen to be one of them) will never question his good intention and honest judgement. I appreciate his exasperation regarding the vitiated atmosphere on the campuses (DU in particular) and share his concern for the bleak future. Inspite at that, I find the main thrust of his arguments unacceptable. For, to me, it seemed too close to the Bengali adage: "To cut the head to get rid of the headache." This short piece is a modest attempt to highlight the points which run counter to those of Prof Ahmed's.

Let me begin from the beginning. Why did the Order of 1973 come into being in the first place? This order which allows elections for the different bodies of the universities and these elections, according to Prof Ahmed, are the main culprits for creating the pathetic situation now prevailing on the campuses. The 1973 Order is, like our independence, the embodiment of the aspirations of the teachers and the students of the universities and the product of the protected struggle against a ruthless dictatorial regime. Because the 1973 Order was supposed to be the Chairman of the latter department happened to be an outspoken critic of the regime. The 1973 Order has, at least, put an end to such ridiculous, albeit, grossly unfair incidents. There had been instances where teachers' annual increments (let alone appointment in the higher posts) were withheld, as those particular teachers were not in the good book of the sitting Chairmen of the department.

A sitting Chairman of a department was, simultaneously, appointed the Chairman of another department. Because the person who was supposed to be the Chairman of the latter department happened to be an outspoken critic of the regime. The 1973 Order has, at least, put an end to such ridiculous, albeit, grossly unfair incidents. There had been instances where teachers' annual increments (let alone appointment in the higher posts) were withheld, as those particular teachers were not in the good book of the sitting Chairmen of the department.

ments concerned (since the chairmen were permanent incumbents, and C&D Committees were not working or composed as provided in the 1973 Order). The regime even discontinued the practice of electing deans, as provided for in the Act of 1921 on the basis of the infamous Hamudur Rahman commission Report and had been appointing deans whoever the regime liked. The 1973 Order has righted this wrong.

The point I am trying to emphasise is that there must be other ways (than cutting the head off) to achieve a breakthrough. Democracy means the exercise of free choice in dealing with the matters political in nature. One of the major means of exercising that free choice is election. So, if we demand/desire democracy to govern all spheres of our social life, how does Prof Ahmed propose to dispense with elections?

Prof Ahmed has rightly pointed out that simple enactment of laws is either unnecessary or inadequate to accomplish any better results. Similarly, simple declaration of delinquency of the student fronts from the national political parties (as suggested by the President) will hardly usher in any change in the situation. Because links will always be there. Did not the student fronts in Pakistan days have a very close links with the political parties in the then EP? Besides, student politics are allowed in almost all the campuses in the world (including Oxford and Cambridge). Even the campuses in our neighbouring India have a very active student politics. But why the situation there is not as vitiated as in Bangladesh? The responsibility, in my view, rests squarely on the shoulders of the practitioners of the craft — not the craft itself.

In fine, let me frankly admit that I do not have any ready answer to the existing malaise whose complexity and multifacetedness have been clearly and ably identified by Prof Ahmed. But neither do I think that banning elections/politics is the answer.

The writer is Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Dhaka.

To the Editor...

Weekly holiday

Sir, The decision by the new Prime Minister of Pakistan Nawaz Sharif to revert back to Sunday as the weekend holiday is indeed commendable. Coming from business background himself, the Pakistan's Prime Minister aptly realises the fact that an emerging economy cannot afford the luxury of keeping its business closed while the rest of the developed world is trading.

In Bangladesh, currently the weekly holidays — Thursday half-day and Friday as full-day — result in keeping the country closed for four days with America and Europe because of time difference.

Foreigners, making business trips and trade inquiries, would prefer official timing which would match their own time schedule.

Our government may consider reverting to Sunday as weekly holiday instead of Friday, more out of a commercial necessity rather than religious connotation. Friday can be declared closed from 12.00 noon to 2.30 pm to say Duma prayers.

Khurruhm Malik
20 M M Ali Road
Mehdiabagh, Chittagong

Gulshan Post Office

Sir, It is high time the higher authorities looked into the affairs of this Post Office, particularly in regard to its delivery system of incoming mails. For the last several months, letters are delivered long time after they are due. Most of the time, a letter is dropped with the addressee 4/5 weeks after its posting from abroad, particularly from Europe/USA, whereas, previously it would take about 8/10 days.

Moreover, many a time the

letters go missing. Most surprising is that — letters, when delivered, do not bear any POST MARK of Gulshan Post Office as a sign of their date of receipt or delivery.

Urgent attention of the authorities concerned is solicited in this matter.

A Sufferer
Dhaka

Easter Sunday

Sir, Easter Sunday is the most important religious event for all the Christians in the world. The theme of the EASTER SUNDAY is that Christ was born. Christ had died, Christ had risen from the death and Christ will come again. Although Sunday is an international weekly holiday, some countries do not observe it. But in order to observe the Easter Sunday, we (the Christians) need public holiday on 30th March 1997 to observe Easter Sunday with due religious fervour.

May I request our government to declare Easter Sunday a public holiday each year.

Benjamin Gomes
12, New Circuit House Road
Kakrail, Dhaka.

Bengali culture and history

Sir, The interviews of the Bangladeshi intellectuals on Bengali culture and history were interesting, but there were streams of diversity and stress on the themes. No three Bengalees think alike, as the proverb goes!

This calls for a DS Roundtable, starting with a rectangular table!

One issue which escaped notice is the effect of two centuries of the Hindu minority domination in Bengal during the

British rule (Similarly, the partition of 11 per cent Muslims in UP, India to control the Hindu majority). The history of Bengal may be updated from the Bangladesh angle for our future generations. All we find as 'news' is the dominance of political leaders in setting the direction of history. The true recorders may come forward and make their neutral contribution.

Our society is in a sad state today, where professionals have to take a back seat even in non-political fields. The flux of changing politics have to be confined within legitimate boundaries. I speak as an ordinary citizen.

A Husnain
Dhaka.

"Akbar The Great" on BTB

Sir, Beyond doubt, the television "Akbar, The Great" was a marvellous serial on the BTB. Millions of people irrespective of age and sex were enjoying the film which depicted the activities, administrative reforms, judicial sharpness of the glorious reign of the great Mughal emperor, Akbar. Secularistic attitude to maintain peace and harmony in the society was a noble example found in the history of mankind. We saw how he was establishing social structure among different religious believers, brought reform in the administration and ensured justice in the all walks of life. We really admire the role of the emperor who knew everything of his empire. This was a noble act of patriotism practised by him and he got real ethics and inspiration in reforming the social structure. We at the present time only practice the leap-service by making big promises and fooling the people by power hungry politics. We were learning a lot from this

telefilm.

But we are surprised and disappointed on the announcement that the serial will no more be telecast due to reason of its set damaged by the recent cyclone over Joypur. The film has just reached its climax when we could see more and more about the life and reign of the great emperor Akbar. It is not clear to us whether the original Hindi version has also damaged. It is my personal belief that this film was screening on DD-1 channel for last 2/3 years. I believe the original version remains in Hindi. We request BTB to arrange show the remaining episodes, if not in Bengali, in Hindi at least. This is the demand of the millions of viewers and hope that the authority will give a second thought on this matter.

A Citizen
Chandagnon R/A, Chittagong

Government donation for Eid

Sir, For the first time in our country's history on the occasion of holy Eid-ul-Fitr our government has decided to donate a sum of Taka 2.07 crore to the distressed of our country. Twenty people in distress of each union will get the money to celebrate the Eid.

We congratulate our Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on this historic, righteous and kind decision which we consider equivalent to government's payment of fitra or zakat to the poor.

We would request the Ministry of Religious Affairs to distribute Taka 2 crore and 7 lakhs among the needy and distressed people honestly and smoothly without any irregularity.

OH Kabir
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