

Clever by Half

Has this abominable trend of hall-capturing come to stay? We had hoped not, but are being proved wrong. Thursday's capturing of a Dhaka University dorm, by the members of the Bangladesh Chhatra League, the pro-Awami League student front, tends to substantiate our worst fears.

Two conclusions can be drawn from the unabated recurrence of such incidents. Either the student front of the Awami League has become too much of a Frankenstein to listen even to its party chief or the element of sincerity that should have forced the BCL to pull its horns immediately was missing to start with.

The ruffians pampered and maintained by the parties for making political inroads into the residential territory of the universities are opportunists who know which side of the bread is buttered and never hesitate to cross floor as it suits their convenience.

BCL cadres marched into the hall in broad daylight. Instead of mopping them up wholesale some of the 'raiders' whom the police picked up from the spot were let off. We are convinced police can extirpate terrorism in no time if only it is allowed to play its role impartially and effectively.

There is no doubt the episode has considerably damaged the recent reconciliatory initiatives taken by VC Azad Chowdhury who seemed to be moving in the right direction in view of the upcoming DUCSU elections. Nevertheless, we hope and believe that a sincere exercise of political will by the ruling Awami League and the opposition BNP can give a new lease of life to the battered efforts for improving the campus atmosphere.

Fish Angle

Bangladesh is both a riverine and sea-bed country in a natural endowment mix that places her on the top-side of the world's fish resources map. But largely and very persistently has it been a story of unexploited largesse for her: mostly tragged about and that too in naively uninformed guesstimates.

From this precarious perch, the government seems now laudably up and about in determining the state of the country's fish resources extending over to the 363 km Exclusive Economic Zone. The survey will be undertaken in the current Annual Development Plan period. In addition to all sorts of nudges behind this maiden venture, the need is great for a motivational swing to make the survey in a comparative setting with some island countries, not quite as riverine as us, which nonetheless literally thrive on their fish resources.

We are for a three-legged strategy for pulling this sector out of half-way houses it is stuck with. Let there be more of self-employing pisciculture projects and fisheries cooperatives as group ventures to attract bank financing and other input supports. This may be part of the huge Fish Culture Entrepreneurship Project in the private sector envisaged under the Fifth 5-year Plan. It better be undertaken with effect from the next financial year.

The time for all this seems propitious when viewed in the context of water management planning being facilitated by accords with India. If salinity intrusion from the sea is checkmated by a swell in the rivers, fish will grow in superabundance. And as part of a scientific fish cultivation programme the stubbornly indiscriminate use of pesticides in farmlands should be over and out.

Continuing Hiccup

Not even a fortnight has gone since the fire tragedy in a garment factory in the city that another flare-up has been reported. Though no casualties were reported, Saturday's fire at the godown of Seraj Apparel could have very easily turned into a killer inferno as it had happened in the case of another factory in the same locality on July 16.

It would be some time before the causes of the fire are known or more likely, nobody would bother to dwell on it for 'its failure to be a news at the cost of human lives'. But the fact of the matter is that time is ripe for reviewing the safety measures in the garments factories.

Having commented unflinchingly in this column about the appalling structural flaws of these factories, the foundational edifices of our export industry, we take this opportunity to press home the urgency of bolstering the safety measures. Although it is yet to be known what caused Saturday's fire that despite its innocuous nature required an hour's work of the fire fighters to be put down, it is quite possible to imagine what went wrong. Probably short circuit, a common problem occurring due to patchily done work in networking power supply was behind the fire.

We believe if only the factory owners take the common hazards of a collective working place into active consideration and accordingly, observe the safety measures strictly, incidence of fire can be greatly scaled down. It is simply a matter of awareness put to use.

We wonder what the government, BGMEA and all concerned in this industry are doing in order to bury the fire fear once for all. Whatever is being mooted in this connection, needs to be implemented soon so that we do not have to be witness to more tragedies due to human callousness.

Rules of Business — Minister and Secretary

by Mohammad Siddique Rahman

Too much involvement in routine administration (like posting and transfer of field officers) may land a minister into the role of a bureaucrat in which case his political role of policy and programme formulation and keeping a watch on the performance of the ministry and safeguarding public interest is bound to suffer.

THE executive power of the Republic, according to the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, is exercised by or on the authority of the Prime Minister in accordance with the Constitution. The Prime Minister is the Head of the Cabinet of Ministers appointed by him/her who are collectively responsible to the parliament for executive functions of the Government. The Constitution also provides that the President will make Rules of Business for the allocation of business amongst the various ministries and divisions and for the transaction of business of the government.

According to the Rules of Business, the Prime Minister may constitute a ministry consisting of one or more divisions, whenever necessary. The Prime Minister may assign a division or a ministry or more than one division or one ministry to the Prime Minister, a Minister or a Minister of State. The business of the government is distributed among the ministries/divisions in the manner as laid down in the allocation of business in Schedule-I of the Rules of Business.

All business of the ministry/division allocated to it may be disposed of by or under the general or special directions of the Minister-in-Charge subject to the provisions of the Rules of Business.

The minister is also responsible for conducting the business of his ministry/division in the parliament unless otherwise directed by the Prime Minister. No important policy decision can be taken except with the approval of the Cabinet. No ministry/division can take decision on any of the matters enumerated in the rules without previous consultation with the Cabinet Division, the

Ministry of Establishment, the Finance Division, the Ministry of Justice and Parliament Affairs, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as the case may be. The Minister has to submit all cases to the Prime Minister/President as enumerated in the schedules (Schedules III, IV, V) of the Rules of Business. When any matter concerns more than one ministry/division, the ministry/division concerned has to be consulted and their views obtained and properly recorded before taking any decision or before submitting the case to the Prime Minister or the Cabinet. Besides important policy matters, the Rules of Business also enumerates a number of cases which are required to be submitted to the Cabinet by the ministry/division concerned.

The Cabinet/Prime Minister may constitute standing committee of the Cabinet and also ad-hoc committees and assign functions to them. Cabinet Committee decisions if approved by the Prime Minister have the force of a Cabinet decision unless required to be ratified by the Cabinet.

The Prime Minister may also constitute committees composed of Secretaries to the Government and such other officers as may be necessary to provide secretariat and administrative support to the Cabinet committees and also coordinate activities between ministries and divisions at official levels.

Each division has a Secretary, Additional Secretary, Joint Secretary, Deputy Secre-

tary, Asst. Secretary and other officers to carry out the responsibilities allocated to the division/ministry. The Secretary is the administrative head of the ministry/division and is responsible for its administration and discipline and for proper conduct of business assigned to it. He is also responsible for careful observance of these rules in his ministry/division, attached departments and subordinate offices. The Secretary has to keep the Minister-in-Charge informed of the working of the ministry/division. The Secretary is to organize the division/ministry into various sections or other working units and distribute the work of the various units and officers among the various units and officers. A ministry/division has attached departments and subordinate offices which are executive agencies, responsible for the execution of the policies of the government and for the administration of laws, regulations and extension services.

The Secretary is the principal accounting officer of the ministry/division, its attached departments and subordinate offices and is to ensure that the funds allocated to the ministry/division, attached departments and subordinate offices are spent in accordance with the rules/laws for the time being in force. The business of the Ministry/Division and attached departments and subordinate offices will be conducted according to the Secretariat instructions and other instruc-

tions issued by the Establishment Ministry. According to the Secretariat instructions, an Additional Secretary/Joint Secretary unless he is in charge of a ministry/division is to be entrusted with a well defined sphere of duty in which he is to take full responsibility.

A Deputy Secretary is to dispose of all cases in which no major question of policy is involved or which under the rules or standing orders, he is competent to dispose of.

The Role of the ministry/division is limited to (a) Policy formulation, (b) Planning, (c) Evaluation of execution of plans, (d) Legislative measures, (e) Assisting the minister in the discharge of his responsibilities to the parliament at the top-level viz. (i) officers not below the rank of member/director in the case of public statutory corporations and (ii) officers not below the level of NPs-V in the cases of attached departments and subordinate offices, (g) Such other matter as may be determined by the Prime Minister and (h) matters required to be submitted to Cabinet or Cabinet Committees or the Prime Minister.

The Secretariat instructions require that there should be carefully designed delegation of authority within the ministry/division (intra-organisa-

tion delegation) and from the ministry/division to the attached departments, subordinate offices, and other agencies (inter organization delegation). Within the Secretariat intra-organisation delegation should take place from Minister to Secretary, from Secretary to Additional Secretary/Joint Secretary, Deputy Secretary and to Assistant Secretary. Each category of officers should have full authority and power to deal with the cases at their respective levels. They should be at the same time be accountable to their higher level of officers and ultimately to the minister. The same pattern of delegation of power should be applicable in the attached departments.

It is clear from the Rules of Business that the decision making power of the ministry is vested in the Minister who can himself dispose of a case or give general or special directions for dealing with the case subject to the rules and instructions of the government. He should deal with matters of policy, planning, evaluation of execution of plans and legislative and parliamentary business and above all safeguard public interest and satisfy their needs. As part of his constitutional obligation and his oath of office he has to discharge the duties of his office according to law and to do right to all people without fear or favour, affection or ill-will.

As administrative head of the ministry, the Secretary is responsible for the activities of carrying out and implementing the policies and programmes

decided by the Minister, Prime Minister or the Cabinet and for ensuring proper administration of laws, regulations, rules and instructions efficiently and timely. It is his duty to ensure that the rules and instructions of the government including financial rules are properly observed. He should also advise the Minister on the appropriate rules and instructions concerning a case and point out any deviation from the laws and rules.

The ministry (Minister or Secretary) should not interfere with the administration and personnel matters falling within the domain of the attached departments and subordinate offices. The ministry should keep a watch on their activities and call them to account for inefficiency or unsatisfactory performance.

If the Minister wishes to deal with any administrative matter, that falls within the sphere of activities of the ministry, he has the authority to do so within the bounds of the Rules of Business and instructions. But to such involvement in routine administration (like posting and transfer of field officers) may land him into the role of a bureaucrat in which case his political role of policy and programme formulation and keeping a watch on the performance of the ministry and safeguarding public interest is bound to suffer. It must be remembered that assuming all powers at the top by transgressing delegation of authority and decentralization of functions is as bad as unnecessarily pushing cases upward for decision making. Decentralization of administration and delegation of power at the optimum level is the clue to good governance.

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Indo-Pak Amity: Still an Elusive Goal

Notwithstanding reconciliatory pronouncements during the election campaign, Nawaz Sharif has gone back to Pakistan's old stance of treating Kashmir as the core issue for any discussion with India and insisting on holding plebiscite in Kashmir under UN supervision.

IGNOMINY. Now after half a century at the close of the millennium, the new generations of both India and Pakistan look askance at the wisdom of this continued hostility. They are not convinced of a legacy of the conflict inherited from their forefathers. They are more impressed by the miracle of economy and growing quality of life which they witness around them. The subcontinental landmass with its uninterrupted stretch and tremendous commonality provides an ideal turf for the interplay of the economic forces to each other's gain. Yet only 1.26 per cent of Pakistan's export finds its way to India while India accounts for paltry 0.68 per cent of its import from Pakistan notwithstanding the countries' contiguity and other built-in advantages. It is not thus surprising that their people are among the poorest of the world.

At least 60 per cent of the electorate in both the countries were born after '47 and as such do not carry the baggage of the past. Obviously, they murmur against the bondage, prejudices and restrictions that exist in the relationship between their countries and would like to be freed from the free trade, relaxed travel and more interaction leading to some prosperity in their impoverished countries. On cultural plain, the urge is more irresistible. While Madhuri Dixit is a craze for the younger generation of Pakistanis, many Indians including Prime Minister IK Gujral who was born in Jhelum and educated in Lahore have insuperable nostalgia for Pakistan which once added colour and diversity to pre-partition India.

There are more compulsions for both India and Pakistan to move closer to each other. Fifty years of adversarial relations have left both of them in economic shambles with an unabated drainage of their scarce resources for a chimerical security. The situation is precarious in Pakistan where 26 per cent of its annual budget goes on defence expenditure and another 35 per cent on debt servicing. To revive the wobbly economy, among other things, it needs to drastically curb its defence spending. Can Pakistan do it without reducing tension with India? Indian economy is somewhat better with her consistent policy of self-reliance and well developed infrastructure but she has also an enormous burden to provide better quality of life to about 360m Indians living below the

poverty line. With such predicaments both the countries maintain large armed forces as well as elaborate nuclear and missile programme with tremendous strain on their economy. Both have their 'troubled areas' to be controlled only through their military. The problem is more acute in India where her turbulent north-east and Kashmir continue to cause huge drainage of its exchequer. Only an interstate amity can relieve them of these unbearable financial burden.

So, the stage was, in a way, set at least to bring under review the whole gamut of Indo-Pak relations. Not only an appropriate hour was struck for it, the initiative, if any, was also attuned to the public mood. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif made enough overtures about improving relations with India during his election campaign. He won a landslide victory without any India bashing which had earlier been the election winning factor in Pakistan. On India's part ever since

of dispute between the two countries? Strangely, there are few. There is really no tangible issue like India has with all other countries of the region. The issues stemming from the partition like canal water disputes, evacuee's property, etc., were promptly taken care of. What remained unresolved was, however, an ever-widening perceptual gap between the two nations breeding all the tensions of half a century. It was only the perception of each other as sworn enemy. At the core of that perception are antithetic ideology, rival philosophy, and a divergent attitude and way of life sustained by one single issue of Kashmir. For Pakistan, Indo-Pak amity means the settlement of the issue of Kashmir. According to India, Kashmir, 'an integral part' of India, cannot be subject for any negotiation for peace. So, there is a fundamental difference in the very approach to any peace talk.

There is a vast difference between Nawaz Sharif's pre-election and post-swear-in pos-

ition. Notwithstanding reconciliatory pronouncements during the election campaign, Sharif has gone back to Pakistan's old stance of treating Kashmir as the core issue for any discussion with India and insisting on holding plebiscite in Kashmir under UN supervision. Whether this is based on Sharif's own conviction or not his hands are tied by the army chief and President Leghari who have greater say, within the framework of NDSC (National Defence and Security Council), in Pakistan's policy vis-a-vis Kashmir. IK Gujral has talked aplenty from peace and amity to trade, travel and normalisation but touched only upon the periphery of the core problem of Kashmir. And even in doing so, he did not miss the point of making it absolutely clear that India's sovereignty was not negotiable under any circumstances. In his own personal view any concession in the 'settled' issue of Kashmir would be tantamount to compromise on the question of sovereignty.

However, the most critical point for Gujral is that his political base is weak. Neither the coalition partners of his United Front nor a hostile opposition would let him make even a 'minor adjustment' in Indian position based on a national consensus. So where do they go from here? If Kashmir is the crux of the whole debate surrounding the ensuing Indo-Pak peace endeavour, the situation in Kashmir itself would dictate the course of the peace talk and determine its fate.

The Kashmir dispute originating from the state's controversial accession to India simmers for half a century and over the period the crisis has been rather entrenched with the state remaining physically divided after the military clash of 1947-48 followed by a UN-imposed ceasefire. India with many advantages weighing in her favour took calculated steps both internationally and domestically to consolidate her position in Kashmir. India with a skilful combination of cunning, superior diplomacy, propaganda blitz and even high-handedness as well as some appropriate measures followed in relation to the state like granting of special status, etc., was able to make its inclusion to Indian Union a fait accompli. However, right from the beginning Pakistan disputed this accession on moral ground and a long-drawn diplomatic battle ensued in the UN between the countries with Pakistan demanding a UN supervised plebiscite in Kashmir and India parrying it on one pretence or other.

With the signing of Simla Agreement in 1973 Kashmir issue virtually died down. Pakistan, for a while, reeled back to recover from the losses sustained in 1971. Her priority was then to reorganise herself. Both the regional power balance in South Asia and the changed global situation did not favour Pakistan to renew her fight on Kashmir issue. Moreover by signing the Simla Agreement, Pakistan appeared to have accepted Indian position of allowing the ceasefire line to become the line of control. India has ever since been toying with the idea of eventually turning this line of control into international border as 'concession' or 'minor adjustment' in existing arrangement for any future settlement with Pakistan. Both the countries took important steps to incorporate under their jurisdiction Kashmiri territory held by them. But despite all these steps, the larger issue of the dispute was only shelved and the basic hostility remained. In the meantime, due mainly to the complacency of India whose regional supremacy was guaranteed by

then, took affairs in Kashmir for granted. Thus many privileges so long granted to the Kashmiris were done away with. And within a decade the state of Kashmir was stripped of its special status and brought in line with other Indian states.

Perhaps as a backlash to this breach of trust the current uprising in Kashmir broke out in late '89. This time clearly with a secessionist hue. Kashmiris now decidedly turned their back to Delhi. Although India alleged of Pakistani hand in the uprising, according to neutral observers the dynamics of the trouble this time were generated locally within the boundary of the state itself. India, shocked by the extent of support for the pro-independence elements in the valley moved in troops. At the peak of the crisis in Kashmir, the state was garrisoned by as much as half a million troops. The rapidly-worsening situation in Kashmir's free zone gave Pakistan the issue opportunity to revive the fresh and renew its plebiscite demand in Kashmir. In fact, the dead issue of Kashmir was brought back to life. Now when Pakistan wants to talk Kashmir with India, the main roadblock on the way to its success is Pakistan's renewed demand for the self-determination of the Kashmiris through a UN supervised plebiscite. The talk has to bog down when India would invariably refuse to comply.

Kashmir crisis has perforce to continue also because both India and Pakistan have developed, over long five decades, much more serious stake in the state almost surreptitiously. It constitutes the raison d'être for India's existence, to maintain its secular democratic character and to preserve its territorial integrity. Any loss of territory either in Kashmir or elsewhere would put in motion a domino effect threatening the unity of a large, unwieldy and heterogeneous India. India is alive to the reality and would in all probability fight a last-ditch battle to retain Kashmir whatever may be the cost involved. Pakistan's stake is equally high in Kashmir. Pakistan has undergone interesting metamorphosis in its experience as a nation state. Even if the state has survived in Pakistan the nation is clearly under threat. With ever-growing communal, ethnic and sectarian rifts Pakistan is in dire need of an unifying symbol. Kashmir constitutes, like the country's cricket and an atomic bomb, the essential symbol it is in search of. And so long Pakistan has a case in Kashmir, why not making best out of it? Given these stakes on both the sides, a rapprochement between the two arch rivals of the subcontinent appears as elusive as ever.

PERSPECTIVES

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

IK Gujral entered the south-block for the second time he put on priority list the improvement of relationship with the neighbours including, of course, Pakistan. He realised that to play a larger international role, to push export and to concentrate on rapid economic growth settling disputes with the neighbours is an inescapable prerequisite.

After having achieved some success with regard to India's reaching settlements on several pending issues i.e. Ganges water treaty with Bangladesh, Mohakali treaty with Nepal and confidence building visits to Sri Lanka, the Prime Minister Gujral was now poised for taking a calculated step towards Pakistan. Male meeting of IK Gujral and Nawaz Sharif only gave some shape to these developments under way. If anything, the meeting generated a good deal of optimism and a speculative gale as to an Indo-Pak amity at long last. Both the prime ministers vowed to start on a clean slate, put the official round of talks snapped in 1994 in motion and installed a hotline between them.

But what are the issues in question? What are the points

nobody has come to help the so-called customers or taxpayers with whose money the government officials get their pay checks.

Who is responsible for this area, to whom people can go for getting their grievances addressed? The government officials and employees are agitating for more pay, to do what? Keep screwing the taxpayers? I am disgusted. Will the good general incharge of the energy ministry answer? After all, he begged for our votes not very far in the past?

Himu Ibrahim Mirpur 11, Dhaka 1221

India and Pakistan have been two arch-enemies ever since their independence half a century ago and, during this period, they fought three bloody wars. And yet, according to a news item as published in 8 July issue of the DS, a high-powered Indian delegation will shortly visit Pakistan to explore the possibilities of importing electricity for the country's northern region.

If India finally decides to buy power from Pakistan and needless to say, Pakistan too decides to sell its surplus power, undoubtedly, for their common benefit, could this step be termed as a 'sell-out' of India to Pakistan?

A Qayyum 69 Gulshan Avenue Dhaka-1212

Explosion

Sir, After months of investigations into the TWA jet 008 disaster over the North Atlantic, very close to the Long Island coast, the investigators are of the view that an explosion occurred because of an empty fuel tank full of Jet fuel vapour, and faulty wiring.

If this is correct, then I should be having such an explosion in the fuel tank of my 1973 Toyota KE200 right in the middle of crowded city streets almost everyday. I agree with B-747 engineers who are not convinced. Perhaps it is a cover-up for miscalculations made elsewhere, admission of which may be embarrassing.

Faraq Aziz Khan Boro Magbazar, Dhaka

To the Editor

Will DESA/PDB pay any attention?

Sir, Recently, due to a crisis at the National Grid, the electricity to our locality in Mirpur 11, Dhaka, was restored nearly at mid-night. This grid failure was perhaps the 2nd or 3rd incident in a years time. I am sure our engineers are doing their best to keep the grids humming and have taken necessary precautionary measures to make sure that this type of national disasters do not occur in future. Remember, the Japanese won't invest unless they are assured of a 24 hours steady power supply.

formers at Mirpur 11 or in the city. Every time there is a major power failure, which is random in Mirpur 11, Block A, a particular transformer located behind the Mirpur Bangla School in Avenue 1 goes berserk and power is disrupted. Repeated calls to the Power Office in Mirpur 11 near Nupur Cinema and the control room at section 13 falls on deaf ears and the people at the area suffers.

In most cases, a particular grid or line of the said transformer goes off effecting some of the houses in Avenue 1. When this happens, it is almost impossible to get the maintenance crew to have the fault removed in a reasonable span of time. The said transformer is partially off the 8 in the morning and at the time of writing this complaint (2:15 pm)

Is power import a sell-out?

Sir, If my memory is not failing me, I must have read on