

Now for the Follow-up

The much talked about investors conference ended here last Friday with some serious messages for us to think about. It was clear from the speeches of foreign company representatives that most of them thought ours was a good country to invest in.

So what is holding us back? Three things. Politics, corruption and bureaucratic maze. In an unprecedented and highly questionable move the donors went public castigating both the government and the opposition for a politics of "violence, intimidation and confrontation."

The message was clear, and so should be our follow up agenda. Bangladesh could receive FDI if we cleared our act in the three areas mentioned above.

A Truly Good Turn

A dependable headway has been made in solving the problem of arsenic contamination of ground water affecting almost a large part of our population. The World Bank will co-ordinate a two-year study to identify the causes of the contamination.

This is not to say that the great work put in by the Dhaka Community Hospital in identifying the affected patients in the districts and offering them mitigation of pain and suffering is in any way less important. The World Bank study would take two years and action based on that may take another two.

The answer that comes pat to mind is government. We have no doubt government. Particularly the Public Health Engineering Department is taken up with the job and some field work done by them has been useful.

Why is this so? If it is a big threat born of natural processes, why should government want it to look small? The World Bank took the all important step to investigate the causes and the money for that comes from Britain.

Avoid This Ploy

We are mortified to see that despite repeated exhortations to shun all counter productive and disruptive methods to register protest, country's jute, cotton and textile mill workers have gone ahead with their 48-hour strike and 20-hour rail road blockade programme from today.

Let alone the same minds within the country that see hartal or similar programmes as pitfalls our emaciated economy can well steer clear, even foreign donors much to the chagrin of people with self-esteem have goaded against this economic hara-kiri.

While it is true that an agreement with the government is immune to the vicissitudes of a party's fortune, as a party in power for only 17 months, the AL too needs time to honour an old agreement.

Nonetheless the government cannot drag over the matter for donkey's years bleating that being a complicated and chronic one the problem would take time. If sincerity is the theme then we do not see how the negotiating sessions can end leaving so many loose ends and unsolved questions.

Government must will strongly enough to put this vexatious issue behind it as soon as possible. Labour leaders meanwhile should not let negotiations dissipate into more crippling strike or blockade calls.

An Emerging Order in the Middle East

Egypt's foreign policy elite seems to have reached a consensus that the current peace process will further reduce their country's power vis-a-vis other regional power particularly Israel. They already sense this subtle shift of fortune in the rush by the gulf countries and Maghreb Arabs to do business with Israel without any coordination with Egypt.

AFTER a protracted foreign domination when the countries in the Middle East — traditionally and predominantly the land of the Arabs — threw off the shackles of Ottoman rule and post-war mandatory arrangements of the European power it was for them a new dawn of self-assertion inflamed by an unprecedented nationalist passion.

West through its strategic Suez Canal gave her an international clout, its enormous political and intellectual resources made Egypt an obvious choice to be at the helm of Arab affairs. Seldom was her leadership contested except during the post-Camp David interregnum when Egypt turned into a pariah almost overnight for her volteface over an Arab consensus with regards to Israel.

aimed at strengthening her national security rather than abandoning her regional influence. But in the maze of American shuttle diplomacy during the late seventies Sadaat, it can be seen in hindsight, lost his way and committed his faux pas. The shifting sand of Middle East politics blurred his vision and he could see beyond the immediate gains of Camp David. The ominous conse-



PERSPECTIVES

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

quences of the inroads allowed to Israel into Arab politics both through Camp David and Oslo process have now started to manifest with their disastrous effects. In signing Camp David treaty and backing up Oslo process Egypt obviously hoped to be used as an unavoidable conduit between her Arab neighbours and US-Israeli axis but there are evidences now that she was outwitted by the latter's superior diplomacy.

the Catalyst for any event of significance in the region is genuinely worried over the development. But can Egypt undo Israeli design?

There are few signs that Egypt can do it. Since the signing of their peace accord with PLO in 1993 Israel has pursued active economic diplomacy to lift the Arab economic boycott against Israel and establish direct links with several Arab states. Israel's campaign has led to important breakthroughs with Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia and some Gulf countries.

In Egyptian perception, Israel as indicated by her moves aims to dominate the region at the expense of Egypt's traditional regional role. Israel also wants to turn the historical Arab heartland into mere geopolitical entity called Middle East. The Egyptian ruling elite resents Israel's decisions to by-pass Egypt and establish direct ties with other Arab states but can do little to thwart it.

Given their political and military weights and geostrategic positions as well as competing interests it was inevitable that Egypt and Israel would one day clash in the new Middle East order. Both Camp David and Oslo process hastened that inevitability.

Renewed Trend towards Secularism in Turkey

by ASM Nurunnabi

The top military commanders had expressed in clear terms that they were committed to democratic and progressive principles, and warned that any fundamentalism and fanaticism from the administration challenging the principle of 'secularism' would not be tolerated.

A notable political change has taken place in Turkey. Its secularists have found a new champion in conservative prime minister Mesud Yilmaz. President Suleyman Demirel used his constitutional powers to hand the mandate to the pro-western Yilmaz who had pledged to force an "Islamic revival" coalition from among the country's fractious political parties.

Turkey's new prime minister Mesud Yilmaz, who took office on June 30, 1997 and later faced a vote of confidence in the Parliament and won, has promised to be a champion of "civilian, democratic and freedom-loving values." The fall of Neemmettin Erbakan, the country's first prime minister from the Islamic Welfare Party was inevitable due to constant pressure from the western powers, dished out through Turkey's powerful generals.

On assuming power, Turkey's new government under Yilmaz launched an aggressive campaign to roll back the influence of the Islamic-led coalition headed by Erbakan. Since Erbakan held an anti-western stance, it created a scare among the western powers who didn't like Erbakan's revolutionary ideas of a global Muslim order — an Islamic Common Market, an Islamic UN and a world Islamic Union. Equally disquieting was his economic blueprint that he intended to re-negotiate with the International Monetary Fund.

This scared a section of the Turkish people, particularly the military all the more because Erbakan attempted to undo Article 24 of the Turkish Constitution which enshrines the principle of secularism in modern Turkey. This was a revolutionary step which the majority of Turkish population, especially the armed forces were vehemently against and would never allow it to be adopted.

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

ZIA Sir, I had the opportunity to be at the ZIA on 29th October, 1997 around midnight to attend an incoming Malaysian Airline flight. Although I checked the ETA over phone before going to the airport, at the airport there was no way to check if the flight was on time or further delayed or landed. A close circuit TV screen which used to show the above information outside the building previously had been removed for reasons best known to the authority. As a result, one has to wait indefinitely in rain and shine outside the newly-erected fence, if one has that much of time, for the passenger to show up.

After one-and-a-half hours of wait, I was told by a gentleman that only way to know about the flight was to buy a 20 taka ticket and go inside the concourse hall where a board proudly displays the flight information. I was waiting for. I wonder if any airport operating international flights is so ill-equipped and apathetic to the public interest. Or shall I assume that the CAA are doing this willfully to help boost the sale of entry tickets into the concourse hall whose interior arrangement is like a cage and offers no other facility except viewing of the flight information display board as a cost.

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Laser Pointers Sir, This is regarding a letter printed on the 2nd Nov in your daily by Saju. The theme of the letter was Laser Pointers. Though this is not such a recognised tool in our country but it is catching on fast. Especially with the younger generation, as it was correctly pointed out by Saju. This "toy-like item" apparently is causing a nuisance in the society. And the "wicked boys" are using them to harass

girls, the writer continues. The part which completely threw me off guard was the mentioning of youths turning out to be armed cadres if these wicked boys continue using these "arms toys".

I recall when I was a child my favourite toy was this plastic army set equipped with tanks, jets, trucks and soldiers. My friend and I used to command our own bases, blow up the enemy base as well as to protect our own. And those soldiers who gave their lives would get a military burial. We actually buried them too! My friend has grown up to be a doctor and I am pursuing computers. I can hardly describe us as being armed cadres.

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Saju, you mentioned that the youths ought to use "educational toys" instead. What is an educational toy? I have seen those geeky-looking kids with pimples and thousand powered glasses spending all their waking moments in front of computers. Now, is that your idea of a proper unarmed youth with an educational toy?

Masroor Ahmed Deepak By e-mail Dhaka

A case for the bats Sir, We have a general dislike for, nay discomfort, in presence of a bat. We suffer from the myth that bats are dirty and would stick to your hair or cloth if not careful. So a bat is unwelcome and invariably we would like someone to kill the little creature. But as the experts say, humans would need military night-vision scopes to see as well in the dark as some bats do. Most bats also "see" not just with their eyes, but with echolocation. Emitting high frequency sounds that bounce off potential prey and return as echoes, bats can detect objects only two millimetres long and as fine as human hair. Conservationists like Merlin Tattle say "bats, whose nearly 1000 species make up a quarter of the earth's mammals, are not creepy, worthless creatures; they are among the gentlest and

most benign of animals". New research shows they are better friends of the human beings than we realise. In a season only 150 big brown bats can consume 600,000 cucumber beetles. About 300 plants worldwide need bats for propagation. To quote some of their activities: bats, pipistrelle can eat about 3000 mosquitos-size insects in a night; fruit bats spread seeds over thousands of square miles in one night; cave nectar bats assist pollination by feeding on mangroves, durian, jackfruit, mango and banana trees.

Everyone knows that the chain is there to be pulled in emergency, otherwise it is a punishable offence.

When the Loco-Master and the attendant came to enquire, the members of the Airforce became violent and started beating the railway employees. We are stunned; behaviour of this sort from a highly esteemed quarter is really unacceptable. Our police force has greatly disappointed us, now the Airforce, what next?

Nur Jahan East Nasirabad, Chittagong

Security check-post Sir, A security check post was built by the Uttara Association of Sector 7 near the mosque in view of the rapid rise of mugging by motorbike riders in broad daylight. This was conveyed to the residents of the locality during the Friday prayer some time back. Other measures were also taken by the Association to check mugging. It was indeed a tragic blow to the residents to find their security check post demolished by the City Corporation without any notice. This structure was an isolated one not interfering with any facilities of the area and was built to help the residents.

Why should City Corporation target a structure which was helping the residents and turn a blind eye to all the illegal structures flooding from Azampur and stretching right up to Tongi Bridge? The City Corporation has failed to provide or maintain any basic facilities to the residents of Uttara such as bad roads, clogged drains, no garbage cleaning, no maintenance of culverts etc. The Association has itself taken up projects like security, garbage collection from the houses, planting trees etc. Other projects are also under consideration. Instead of joining hands with the Association for the betterment of the society, the City Corporation has decided to bulldoze all the good things from the society. There are a number of MPs, high government officials and reputed businessmen residing in Uttara Sector 7. Will these honourable gentlemen please protest this act and take up this issue with the Mayor of the City Corporation?

LA Ahmed Sector 7, Uttara, Dhaka

What next Sir, People have become weary and restless, with foreboding by the current situation of our country. Law and order, discipline, morality are going down the drain. People never felt so insecure and perplexed before — chaos is prevailing everywhere, even the quarters, to which people look upon with reverence acting most disappointingly.

According to a report published on 29th October, 1997, in The Daily Star, an Awami League MP and his five companions arrived at the Zia International Airport five minutes before take-off time and demanded that they be taken on the flight but their demand was turned down since as per rule, one must board the plane at least 20 minutes before take-off. This enraged the supporters of the MP and they threatened the traffic controllers. The scene created panic among the people who were present at that time. This sort of events are un-called for and are bad examples.

Another distasteful incident materialised by the action of our Airforce personnel, which we learned from a local Bangla newspaper. On 31st October, 1997, forty-two members of Bangladesh Airforce were coming to Chittagong by the intercity train Mahanagar Prabhathi. At 1 pm when the train reached Mastan Nagar, two members of the Airforce pulled the chain to get down from it.

OPINION Joke on Second Marriage

Farida Akhter

During the five-day visit in Bangladesh, the World Bank President, Mr James Wolfensohn made a comment about second marriage and dowry which is totally unacceptable to us even as a JOKE! The Bhorer Kagoj and the Daily Ittefaq (17 October, 1997) reported that Wolfensohn was quite happy and enjoyed the visit to Bakpur village in the Banaripara thana of Barisal district. There he met some Grameen Bank women.

They asked him, whether Elaine Ruth was his only wife and whether he has taken dowry at the time of marriage. Mr Wolfensohn replied (laughing and jokingly) that he was thinking of a second marriage and since he did not get any dowry at the time of his marriage with Elaine, he was inspired for a second marriage to get dowry.

Usually the village women ask very clever questions to the foreign visitors. The Grameen Bank women in other areas have asked very personal but witty questions to Hillary Clinton the of USA and Queen Sophia of Spain. They wanted to know the situation of women and the man-woman relationship in other countries.

It may be a matter of simple joke among a group of village women and the World Bank President, but it is not acceptable to us as the activists in the women's movement. For us, the issues which have any connection with the violence against women cannot be a matter of joke in anyway. Polygamy and dowry are serious problems and we are fighting against it at all fronts.

It is an insult to women in this country that Mr Wolfensohn, the President of the World Bank, can be insensitive to such issues. World Bank is now talking about women's empowerment. Mr Wolfensohn informed the village women that WB is helping 180 poor countries of the world. But if this is what he thinks, then I have doubts whether they really understand what the women's issues really are. I hope, Mr Wolfensohn will reflect on this matter.

Hills and Hillocks M Taheruddin

Every time I visit Chittagong, I come back with a saddened heart. To me like many others the attractions for the city queen of Chittagong are the open sea that washes the southern terminal of the city and the range of lovely green hills that start from Dhum near Feni and reach up to the centre of the port city. From my personal experience during my long stay in Pakistan unlike the hills and mountains of Pakistan which are mostly barren and sun-burnt with gaping stones all over, our hills are blissfully different. The lush green hills soothe the eye, relieve the heart and broaden the vision of any mortal. Every time I gaze at the beautiful sight, I feel how beautiful and magnificent life can be on this planet.

But alas! My imagination is bombed when I find what our fellow human beings are causing on this beautiful gift of God. Like many others again, to my utter sorrow and bewilderment I find that people are cutting the hills for making brickfields, poultry farms and what not. In a similar sojourn to Sylhet, to my utter consternation, I found that the green hillocks of Sylhet are also being dismembered and disfigured for small earthly gains. In the context of the mostly flat land mass of Bangladesh, the hills of Chittagong and Chittagong Hill Tracts and tillas in Sylhet present a pleasant departure. When we visit Chittagong or Sylhet, the sight of such beautiful green hills and tillas brings a refreshing breeze of life. Topographically, the break from the monotony of flat land that mostly comprise our country is provided by the hills of Chittagong and Sylhet. But human cruelty and avariciousness have befallen on these beautiful landscapes and treasures of the

country. Can we not do something to stop this destruction of these heavenly gifts? Like many others, I am only trying to express my feelings and I expect others to join me to resist this defilement of the Nature's beauty spots. Is it too much to expect from the city fathers of Chittagong City Corporation and Sylhet Municipality to take effective steps to stop this indiscriminate destruction of hills? While one travels to Chittagong by train, the range of hills from Dhum to Chittagong presents a unique scenic beauty. We should do our best to preserve the Nature's gift. At the same time, we may plan to turn nearby hillside areas as tourist spots with minimum alteration and interference. The Sanitarium complex at Kumira is almost not being used for many years from now. The complex may be remodelled into a tourist complex by adding a few modern amenities like a few huts for tourists, rope-way, a few springs, children's play-ground, park etc. This will attract a large number of tourists and if our Parjatan Corporation can evolve a package programme with their Indian counterpart, this may prove to be a boon for foreign exchange earnings. Besides, foreigners who visit Bangladesh but cannot afford time for Cox's Bazar or Captain-Rangamati, may find this very useful. Likewise similar plan may be evolved for our tillas at Sylhet. For attracting tourists, some facilities may be built up on the tillas with minimum topographical alteration. It is not merely the natural beauty that is at stake. It is now felt by environmentalists and geologists that destruction of the hills is eroding the natural shields against cyclone, tidal bores and other natural calamities.