

The Northern Limbo

Feuds in the road transportation sector of 16 districts in northern Bangladesh have cut a swathe of immobility across the economic hinterland of the country. Movement of people and goods has come to a standstill within that large tract of a region. Moreover, supplies of merchandise to other areas and to the ports have been ruptured at a slow-time for farm products. Read with the on-and-off slow-downs at Chittagong and Mongla ports and the growing season for political hartals, the road transport limbo in a northern Bangladesh comes as a reinforced paralytic stroke on the national economy.

The pattern casts an ominous shadow on the economy. This has to be defused and rolled back into normalcy and vibrancy by stepping back from largely localised fomentation, irresponsibility and unprofessionalism in the sensitive infrastructural sectors. For its part, the government would have to rethink policies that have been hands-on yet slanted or reactive to developments unfriendly to it.

It has been a long, endless story of feuding labour unionism in the transport sector trading on the miseries of people who cannot do without mobility. No less contributive to the irresolution of problems has been the phlegmatic indifference of the local authorities to the initial rumbles of troubles. Their attitude seems to be that it has to make news with casualties to top it off, nudge the authorities in Dhaka and ruffle them into making phone calls issuing directives to the district authorities. While the issue is elevated thus in pedigree the ground situation has become infinitely more complicated.

In the present case, the northern region committee of the Road Transport Workers' Federation has called for an indefinite strike in protest against a newly-formed breakaway committee of the truck workers' federation. From Monday no buses, coaches and trucks have plied. When some BRTC buses ventured out the motor workers' fell on them in an ugly demonstration of wrath. The services were stopped. Besides, in Rajshahi, sneaky minibus and autorickshaw operators have been charging three times the normal fare from commuters.

The ministries of communication and home should intervene in the matter before it deteriorates into a full-scale law and order problem.

Save Ideal School

It is really unfortunate that a reputed educational institution like Motijheel Ideal School and College has been in a state of administrative stupor for so long. We share the anxiety of the guardians of its six thousand students whose annual examinations fell through after having got off smoothly due to the recalcitrance of its dismissed principal who, with a notice, precluded all exams until 'harassment' were stopped against him. By doing that Mr Rahman, who has been accused of misappropriation of the school's donation fund by an enquiry committee of the education ministry, is holding a major educational institution hostage to his whims. This is not only unethical but illegal also. He should understand that it does no good to justice nor to the public image of the institution to have pictures of its newly-designated principal being refused entry into the office published across the pages of newspapers. He simply cannot link his own sense of injustice with the future of so many students. Let Mr. Rahman be advised for the good of all that he should stop exercising his obstructive influence against resumption of the normal activities of the institution immediately and let the new principal take over without any further delay. Alongside, we suggest that an independent enquiry committee be formed to probe the matter and by its neutral pursuance either establish or dismiss the charges against Mr. Rahman. It is this instead of an ego ride he has taken the whole school on that Mr. Rahman should have gone for if he is so confident about his dissociation from alleged corruption.

We feel there are lessons to be learnt in the Ideal school imbroglio around Mr. Rahman. Most of the educational institutions of the country if delved deep into the interior of their financial management would reveal quite a few skeletons in their cupboards. In order to establish transparency and accountability in the educational institutions the education ministry should lay down specific stipulations about yearly auditing and follow them up with monitoring.

Death of a Virtuoso

Few have the versatility, the wanderlust with which Khan Ata roamed around the world of our arts with elan and aplomb for fifty years. He was such an amazing all in one: film maker, actor, music director, playwright, lyricist, newscaster, poet. He was a delightful departure from the rather mawkish concept of hero in this part of the world. The unmistakable ruggedness of his features, the moist warmth and slightly nasal yet immensely rich voice of his all combined into such an exceptional presence on the celluloid. The great sense of loyalty, patriotism and sacrifice that Khan Ata made so inescapably vivid in *Nawab Sirajuddoula*, is that visual experience forgettable? For that matter who can forget his portrayal of a rebel husband in *Jibon Thekey Neya*?

The beauty of every filmic venture Khan Ata associated himself with was that it was never bereft of message that was uniquely relevant to his time and society. His role as a loving teacher trying and succeeding in reforming a band of his derailed students in the topsy-turvy reality of country that had just won freedom in *Abaor Tora Manush Haw* still awaits replication on the silver screen.

He was a truly cultured man, a man relentlessly driven by his own aesthetic imagination. If death has taken away this one of the few sources of originality in our filmdom our music world has been equally poorer. His was a great mind and ears for the classical stream of music. His was such a magnificent stay against the cacophony of confusion that we have around in the name of music.

In his death we have lost a mohican in whom tradition and modernity lived in such enviable harmony.

US-Iraq Stand-off : Who Won?

Arms supply is a trade that has been thriving and would continue to thrive. Many UN members are themselves producers of weapons of mass destruction and therefore morally do not have the right to stop others doing so.

SADDAM Hussein took a calculated risk in asking American inspectors of United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) to leave Iraq. He has no alternative but to create a situation that would attract world attention to the plight the Iraqis have been going through since 1990. Saddam and his army face no problem — entire burden of long economic sanction ever imposed on a nation was on Iraqi people. The crippling sanction caused considerable damage to Iraq's young generation in terms of their health — something the world body may have to face someday.

The argument Iraq put forward to drive out the American inspectors was that they were spying on Iraq. Of course, any sovereign country has the right to expel foreigners who are suspected of spying but in this case the argument seems meaningless as US does not have to depend only on a couple of inspectors for spying — it has all other mechanism including U2 available to it.

Some, however, say that United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) inspectors were about to lay their hands on huge potentials of chemical and biological weapons which were concealed by Iraq so far. One has to wait to see what quantities of these weapons are ultimately detected by UNSCOM. However, if that was the situation then UNSCOM made a blunder by withdrawing all weapons inspectors from Iraq. Obviously this gave Saddam the opportunity to relocate those allegedly suspected materials and equipment. It was, in any case, a bad decision by UNSCOM Chief if he had done this under his own authority. He should have simply reported the expulsion matters to the Secretary General of UN for his action. He also should have asked for additional inspectors

of any nationality till expulsion matter was solved politically, and redoubled his effort by redeploying the available inspectors to the suspected areas. Instead UNSCOM Chief got involved politically on the question of nationalities and thus compromised his neutral position. Indeed, he had very little to do with political matters except keeping the Secretary General informed.

In any case, the expulsion of American inspectors of UNSCOM by Iraq created serious tension in the Gulf. The US went for full military build up in the Gulf by sending aircraft carriers with fighters like F-15, F-16, B-1 bombers, stealth fighters, etc. The US position was that 'We are pursuing the diplomatic route to resolve the issue, but we are doing it from the position of strength'. Therefore, the military build up went unabated.

Mrs Albright also said, 'As President Clinton has said, Iraq must not be allowed to threaten the world through development of nuclear, biological or chemical weapons...'. Though too much military power blurs a nation's diplomatic vision, work was, however, continuing on both sides to ease the stand-off between US and Iraq. Mrs Albright being a sophisticated lady and having considerable knowledge of the inner reactions of the Arabs on possible US military strike against Iraq, played somewhat sobering role though she went ahead with strong rhetorics against Saddam. She, however, got the full picture of the Arab position in Doha conference. Even Kuwait opposed military action against Iraqi people. Practically all Arab countries advised against another strike

against Iraq.

Security Council was seriously divided on the issue of another war in the Gulf though Britain as usual supported Russia, France and China gave clear signal to the US that they did not have stomach for another Gulf war. Though each country has its own political and commercial agenda in the Middle East, overall negative reaction of the Arabs on this issue worked fairly well. Mrs Albright's round-the-clock diplomacy and her late night meeting in Geneva with the representatives of the permanent members of the Security

and humanitarian approach. The attitude that sanction should continue as long as Saddam is there is wrong. This attitude will ultimately destroy a nation. If US and its allies are based upon seeing change in the top most political leadership of Iraq, sanction is doing exactly the opposite. It is antagonizing the Iraqi people and sanction is indeed turning the Iraqi population against the West and particularly the US. Though it can be said safely that a vast majority of Iraqi people want an immediate change in their leadership, they have no means to do it. Sanction and bombing



spotlight on Middle East

Muslehuddin Ahmad

Council by cutting short her visit to India and Pakistan and altogether shelving Bangladesh visit brought a temporary end to the dangerous stand-off between the US and Iraq. Of course, Russia played the critical role as Primakov worked on Saddam with some assurances to ease Saddam's climb down on the issue. The US said 'there is no deal, there is no concession'. Yes, no deal, no concession; but apparently there was some kind of assurances from Russia and some other members on the question of sanctions — at least to reconsider this under certain conditions.

Indeed, it is high time for the UNSC to look into the question of sanction with objectivity

would not advance the process either; indeed they would retard it. Serious rethinking in the matter by the world body is called for.

UNSC should realize that Iraq could be temporarily freed or near-freed on such weapons but there are many countries including some of the UN members which would be prepared to supply to Iraq everything for building up such weapons of mass destruction. Arms supply is a trade that has been thriving and would continue to thrive. Many UN members are themselves producers of weapons of mass destruction and therefore morally do not have the right to stop others doing so. However, as the question of falling these weapons in the 'wrong hand' as

chance to walk into Iraq. After all Israel has nuclear and possibly other weapons of mass destruction about which UN Security Council never enquired and according to the West, Iran is not far from having them. If some countries are allowed to have them for defence and on the plea of 'deterrence', Iraq as a sovereign country also has the right to have them. However, for the purpose of removing the 'wrong hand' different and pragmatic approach is necessary. Instead of punishing the Iraqi people who have already been suffering under Saddam, they should have been taken into confidence. There is still time and hence review of the present policy is called for.

While UNSCOM continues its work with the help of a bigger inspection team with greater efficiency, a time frame should, however, be set for completion of the work. Inspection and sanctions cannot continue for an indefinite period. This will certainly lead to the death of a nation.

With the collapse of Soviet Union the world became unipolar. It seems that the strength of the US as superpower was not properly and strategically utilized; indeed US vision of the world politics got blurred in several areas. This became acute in the ME because of its undue bias in favour of Israel. This gave the opportunity to Russia to return in its original Soviet style to the ME. As it seems, the world is gradually returning to bipolar political game. As Russia has come as a saviour of one of the Arab countries, the US is clearly seen as the protector of Israel. The picture that the US sees and the stories it hears in some of the palaces are certainly different from those in the streets of Arab world and hence the present turn around. The US must cultivate enough flexibilities before it loses its entire control.

Of Lesser Gods: We and Our Street Children

Those of us who really do not want to walk past our vagabond child population, should organise our own groups and make this issue central to our lives. Otherwise we cannot buy our Roshomalai and eat it too, without guilt that is!

STEP children is how they could be viewed, and 'Tokal' is the fond appellation given to these children, bred on the streets of a society whose attitude towards them is one of studied indifference. In her article 'Children Of A Lesser God' Almas Zakiuddin has, with humour, left us with an important question: Is indifference, though reprehensible, a more acceptable social attitude than the half-baked concern and merely 'intellectual' curiosity of those of us who regard this social issue more to jump start our social conscience and write a 'tongue-in-cheek' article or two for newspapers, than with any intention or desire to explore and solve this burgeoning problem?

Mira Nair's award winning 1988 film 'Saalaam Bombay' has I think, unintentionally, done a great disservice to society. By creating a false charm and glamour around this social problem, it has generated a fashionable interest about a layer of society, who need much more than our momentary and self-conscious compassion.

The citizens of Dhaka don't just need to be shown the incredible social problems they live with; they need to be shown

how to solve them. I think any discourse, however amusingly presented, that merely describes the existence of a problem, be it the question of street children or the ubiquitous but invisible one of corruption, would be merely overstating the obvious. Because the visible part of the particular problem of 'street workers' and vagabonds — having to do with children — has an inherent piquancy and charm, this is the most approachable and human

cal pressure on the government, on society and on ourselves to solve this problem.

Rita Panicker, director of Butterflies, a New Delhi-based private organisation that champions the cause of street children and child workers in her country, says that what we need is 'concern that goes beyond sympathy, to the point of feeling anger and shame, and therefore wanting to do something... If not there is no point talking about it.' I mention her

POSTSCRIPT

Neeman A Sobhan

of all the myriad social ills, that the lay social worker or observer is tempted to pick up as an easy way to assuage his moral need to show that he cares.

But the road to caring is paved with more than good intentions. We need commitment and organisation to attack it. We need to be fully aware of the roots of the problem and take into account the broader issues of poverty underlying this social phenomenon. And then we have to apply social and politi-

cal pressure on the government, on society and on ourselves to solve this problem.

The newspaper is a forum whose pages should be utilised to generate social and political awareness of issues, with the aim to push the class that reads about them — we, the comfort-

able and complacent middle class — to want to be part of the solution to the problems. It is not enough to be entertained, or informed, we need to be jolted out of our complacency. Ms. Zakiuddin has with her wit and pithy style, re-focused our attention on the invisible children of the streets. We hope we will hear more from her and other writers, about how we the privileged members of civil society can train ourselves to care enough to do something about them so that we are no longer in complicity with the gods who spawned these children.

We need to know about, and to promote and actively support, organisations, both governmental and non-governmental, that work with issues of street children. Those of us who really do not want to walk past our vagabond child population, should organise our own groups and make this issue central to our lives. Otherwise we cannot buy our Roshomalai and eat it too, without guilt that is!

The newspaper is a forum whose pages should be utilised to generate social and political awareness of issues, with the aim to push the class that reads about them — we, the comfort-

able and complacent middle class — to want to be part of the solution to the problems. It is not enough to be entertained, or informed, we need to be jolted out of our complacency. Ms. Zakiuddin has with her wit and pithy style, re-focused our attention on the invisible children of the streets. We hope we will hear more from her and other writers, about how we the privileged members of civil society can train ourselves to care enough to do something about them so that we are no longer in complicity with the gods who spawned these children.

We need to know about, and to promote and actively support, organisations, both governmental and non-governmental, that work with issues of street children. Those of us who really do not want to walk past our vagabond child population, should organise our own groups and make this issue central to our lives. Otherwise we cannot buy our Roshomalai and eat it too, without guilt that is!

The newspaper is a forum whose pages should be utilised to generate social and political awareness of issues, with the aim to push the class that reads about them — we, the comfort-

able and complacent middle class — to want to be part of the solution to the problems. It is not enough to be entertained, or informed, we need to be jolted out of our complacency. Ms. Zakiuddin has with her wit and pithy style, re-focused our attention on the invisible children of the streets. We hope we will hear more from her and other writers, about how we the privileged members of civil society can train ourselves to care enough to do something about them so that we are no longer in complicity with the gods who spawned these children.

We need to know about, and to promote and actively support, organisations, both governmental and non-governmental, that work with issues of street children. Those of us who really do not want to walk past our vagabond child population, should organise our own groups and make this issue central to our lives. Otherwise we cannot buy our Roshomalai and eat it too, without guilt that is!

The newspaper is a forum whose pages should be utilised to generate social and political awareness of issues, with the aim to push the class that reads about them — we, the comfort-

able and complacent middle class — to want to be part of the solution to the problems. It is not enough to be entertained, or informed, we need to be jolted out of our complacency. Ms. Zakiuddin has with her wit and pithy style, re-focused our attention on the invisible children of the streets. We hope we will hear more from her and other writers, about how we the privileged members of civil society can train ourselves to care enough to do something about them so that we are no longer in complicity with the gods who spawned these children.

We need to know about, and to promote and actively support, organisations, both governmental and non-governmental, that work with issues of street children. Those of us who really do not want to walk past our vagabond child population, should organise our own groups and make this issue central to our lives. Otherwise we cannot buy our Roshomalai and eat it too, without guilt that is!

The newspaper is a forum whose pages should be utilised to generate social and political awareness of issues, with the aim to push the class that reads about them — we, the comfort-

able and complacent middle class — to want to be part of the solution to the problems. It is not enough to be entertained, or informed, we need to be jolted out of our complacency. Ms. Zakiuddin has with her wit and pithy style, re-focused our attention on the invisible children of the streets. We hope we will hear more from her and other writers, about how we the privileged members of civil society can train ourselves to care enough to do something about them so that we are no longer in complicity with the gods who spawned these children.

We need to know about, and to promote and actively support, organisations, both governmental and non-governmental, that work with issues of street children. Those of us who really do not want to walk past our vagabond child population, should organise our own groups and make this issue central to our lives. Otherwise we cannot buy our Roshomalai and eat it too, without guilt that is!

The newspaper is a forum whose pages should be utilised to generate social and political awareness of issues, with the aim to push the class that reads about them — we, the comfort-

able and complacent middle class — to want to be part of the solution to the problems. It is not enough to be entertained, or informed, we need to be jolted out of our complacency. Ms. Zakiuddin has with her wit and pithy style, re-focused our attention on the invisible children of the streets. We hope we will hear more from her and other writers, about how we the privileged members of civil society can train ourselves to care enough to do something about them so that we are no longer in complicity with the gods who spawned these children.

We need to know about, and to promote and actively support, organisations, both governmental and non-governmental, that work with issues of street children. Those of us who really do not want to walk past our vagabond child population, should organise our own groups and make this issue central to our lives. Otherwise we cannot buy our Roshomalai and eat it too, without guilt that is!

The newspaper is a forum whose pages should be utilised to generate social and political awareness of issues, with the aim to push the class that reads about them — we, the comfort-

able and complacent middle class — to want to be part of the solution to the problems. It is not enough to be entertained, or informed, we need to be jolted out of our complacency. Ms. Zakiuddin has with her wit and pithy style, re-focused our attention on the invisible children of the streets. We hope we will hear more from her and other writers, about how we the privileged members of civil society can train ourselves to care enough to do something about them so that we are no longer in complicity with the gods who spawned these children.

We need to know about, and to promote and actively support, organisations, both governmental and non-governmental, that work with issues of street children. Those of us who really do not want to walk past our vagabond child population, should organise our own groups and make this issue central to our lives. Otherwise we cannot buy our Roshomalai and eat it too, without guilt that is!

The newspaper is a forum whose pages should be utilised to generate social and political awareness of issues, with the aim to push the class that reads about them — we, the comfort-

able and complacent middle class — to want to be part of the solution to the problems. It is not enough to be entertained, or informed, we need to be jolted out of our complacency. Ms. Zakiuddin has with her wit and pithy style, re-focused our attention on the invisible children of the streets. We hope we will hear more from her and other writers, about how we the privileged members of civil society can train ourselves to care enough to do something about them so that we are no longer in complicity with the gods who spawned these children.

We need to know about, and to promote and actively support, organisations, both governmental and non-governmental, that work with issues of street children. Those of us who really do not want to walk past our vagabond child population, should organise our own groups and make this issue central to our lives. Otherwise we cannot buy our Roshomalai and eat it too,