

Unfortunate Children

Seventeen children and five women are in the shelter of Bangladesh Jatiya Mahila Ainjibi Samity (BJMAS). These women and children have recently been rescued in India while being smuggled to Dubai to be used as prostitutes and camel jockeys.

This paper including many others have repeatedly highlighted the trafficking in women and children that is going on in our region. And yet we have seen very little action by the government in this regard.

Why has there been so little action? In the last SAARC Summit a special resolution was adopted to bring about urgent cooperation between our countries to put a stop to this shameful reality.

The Yearly Ordeal

Eid is here. So is the rush to get back home. And as in the past, this year too the transport owners have anted up fare causing considerable distress to those for whom it is either a tradition or a necessity to travel out of the city to celebrate the occasion.

Same picture prevails at launch terminals and railway stations. Tickets are out of market there too, thanks to the blackmarketeers who in league with a section of corrupt employees have hoarded the tickets leaving ticket seekers at their mercy.

Eid is basically a city affair for the more financially privileged section of the society. It is the people of the fixed and smaller income group who form the bulk of the huge mass that leave the city twice a year for this purpose.

A Contribution to Culture

It is good, indeed great, to see a recording of 'N-abojiboner Gaan' being published from Dhaka. And we are lucky that we get it in Kalim Sharafi's golden voice and inimitable style.

These are songs of hope for humanity and especially for the victims of the Bengal Famine, 1943 that took away five million lives in one big fell sweep.

What about us? Can we not have simply 'Janata Bridge' or Jamuna Bridge?

Impasse in Middle East Peace Process

After hopeful developments of several years, a bleak situation has descended on the Middle East. It appears that we shall have to wait for the end of the Clinton presidency and disappearance of Netanyahu from the political scene to see the resumption of the peace process.

The latest round of US diplomacy involving the Palestinians and the Israelis has ended in abysmal failure. This was very much expected.

Dennis Ross, the envoy of President Clinton has been travelling in the Middle Eastern region almost on a semi-permanent basis and in his latest effort he has not even tried to put a brave face.

Since the Ramadan War of 1973, when for the first time Israel faced a debacle on the battlefield and had to run for her life from the Sinai desert of Egypt. It was the direct military intervention of the US that Israel was spared of a humiliating defeat.

Establishment of diplomatic relations between Egypt and Israel was an important breakthrough, the major breakthrough came early in the presidency of Bill Clinton when President Clinton appearing on the terrace of the White House with Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin, announced in front of the whole world the deal between Palestine and Israel.

The Oslo Accord, which laid the foundation for the Peace Accord between Palestine and Israel continued to progress reasonably well. The deal was as in the case of Egypt and Israel, land for peace.

Full diplomatic relations were established between Jordan and Israel. In North Africa, Morocco and Tunisia, established relations with Israel. Meanwhile Israel engaged in serious negotiations with the last important Arab state - Syria.



The Horizon This Week

Arshad-uz-Zaman

changed the picture totally. He started building settlements in West Jerusalem. The Oslo Accord, while drawing up a comprehensive plan for the settlement of the Middle East conflict, had very wisely left out Jerusalem for future negotiations.

tion organisation of Islamic Conference. For Israel, Jerusalem is the eternal capital, a fact recognised by few states. For Christianity it is intimately connected with the birth of Christ.

The US has been the driving force behind the peace process and if it has travelled this distance, it is thanks to the single handed effort of the US. It may be recalled that the Middle East question used to be a UN baby and the two super-powers of those years US and the Soviet Union used to co-chair the talks.

The Culture of Coalition Government and India

The BJP may face problems from within, because the hardliners will not be too willing to jettison its own programmes for the sake of coalition partners.... The moderates would certainly maintain that in such efforts the coalition may break up.... And a failure by the present government may render the coalition culture totally vulnerable in India.

With the installation of yet another coalition government in India, questions are naturally asked whether such a pattern of governance with different parties within it can effectively work as a sound administration which the people obviously want after a prolonged period of political instability that has seen four prime ministers in last less than three years' time.

It is possible that the lack of ability for a single party or group to take the electorate along with it for a decisive victory will continue to result in the emergence of "hung" parliament and in the process the governments have to be coalition in nature because support of more than half of the total members of parliament is a prerequisite for ruling the country.

Coalition governments not necessarily have to be unstable but the record in India would show that no such government could complete its full term and that necessitated midterm polls. However, some multi-party government despite its short tenure functioned unexpectedly well and people felt it would have been really good if that government could continue but failed mainly because of rivalries among the different component parties in the government and for some other reason - not for inefficiency or inexperience.

One can argue that Morarji Desai government which was in effect the first coalition government in the sense that the ruling Janata Party itself was a combine of several parties to fight the elections, did fairly well but had to bow down because the leaders could not maintain their unity that was demonstrated during the pre-poll alignment. Today's prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee was the external affairs minister in that government while present home minister Lal Krishna Advani the information minister. A senior minister of the government - health minister Raj Narain - who shot into prominence as "giant-killer" by defeating Indira Gandhi in the elections - had caused much of the discomfort for the ruling circles. Since several parties including Mr Desai's Congress (O) that was made up by the senior leaders of once united Congress and known as "old-guards" and Mr Vajpayee and Mr Advani's "Jansangh" came together, the rivalries

over the authority came to the fore even though the performance of the government as such was not disappointing. At one stage, among other divisive matters, the controversy of "dual membership" in the Janata Party - whether someone would be allowed to retain the membership of erstwhile organisation despite their being integrated in one apparently monolithic organisation - came to the fore in such a manner that the contradictions blew up out of proportions.



This was what led to the emergence of today's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) by breaking away from the Janata Party as their leaders favoured dual membership which Mr Desai and others objected to. The BJP began with a mere two seats in the house and its strength following the recent elections has risen to amazingly 179 in the 573-member lower house of the parliament (Lok Sabha). For last two consecutive elections, the BJP stood out as the single largest party in parliament - albeit it failed to secure the strength to rule by itself.

The disillusionment about the coalition government of Mr Desai was such that people gave a decisive verdict in the 1979-80 elections to Mrs Gandhi to an extent that she herself could not

believe. The majority of the Congress in the house then was more than two thirds and this came mainly from the realisation that the experiment of such a government was not a happy one. Mrs Gandhi was a vitriolic critic of the coalition government which she called "khichdi" administration. But her son Rajiv Gandhi could not hold on to that majority despite his charisma and dynamism and the National Front government that came late headed by Mr Vishwanath Pratap

Singh also left a far image as far as the performance of the administration was concerned. Mr Singh himself proved an honest and respected prime minister but his was a coalition government that did not last too long.

Then, there was the United Front (UF) government in recent days when there was not too much problems for the coalition as such but it collapsed twice because it had to rely on a critical support from the Congress from outside. The Congress was certainly expected to pull the rug from under the feet of the UF government and it did when the Congress thought it was appropriate. Here again, on the first occasion that led to the resignation of the H D Deve Gowda government, it was more

to pull out of that area in exchange for full security. That it is no more than a hoax is evident from the fact that Lebanon is strongly tied with Syria and in order to break the logjam, serious negotiations with Syria, have to be undertaken first. From time to time, Netanyahu puts out a feeler towards Syria and the result is 'Immobility'. And of course the war of words continue between the Palestinians and the Israelis. From all this it is evident that Netanyahu is satisfied to sit tight and has no interest in engaging in serious negotiations.

The US has been the driving force behind the peace process and if it has travelled this distance, it is thanks to the single handed effort of the US. It may be recalled that the Middle East question used to be a UN baby and the two super-powers of those years US and the Soviet Union used to co-chair the talks. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, US has been the sole super-power to take the peace process forward. The European Union (EU) has made some brave, but fruitless, attempts to supplement the US effort but to no avail.

If the peace process appears to have reached a dead end, the

answer must be sought in the activities of the super-power US who alone has brought it to near success. The US has often literally dragged a recalcitrant Israel to the negotiating table and disgorge some of its ill-gotten gains at the expense of the Arabs. To put a total brake on the peace process Netanyahu banks heavily and rightly so, on the US Congress, where he has very sympathetic ears and lot of funds. Israel has yielded, faced with heavy pressure from the White House.

When President Clinton was reelected convincingly for a second term, it was speculated that unburdened by the question of reelection, he would have a free hand to deal forcefully with many issues and in the foreign affairs field with the Palestinian-Israeli question.

Yet it appears that President Clinton is bogged down with petty personal matters and gives the impression of unable to take any initiative in this matter. There used to be a lobby in Israel in favour of a settlement with the Arabs. That lobby has remained strangely dormant during Netanyahu's premiership.

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balance of unanimity is a must for being at the helm, will certainly make every effort to check any divisive tendencies despite conflicting ideas on many matters. It is for this reason the BJP has abandoned its party manifesto while running the government and has gone for the national agenda to accommodate the views of some other partners who are avowedly secular on certain sensitive matters relating to communalism.

Nevertheless, the differences do come to the fore. The trouble may come more from the party which supports the government from outside without taking part in it like the Trinamul Congress of Ms Mamata Banerjee of West Bengal or Telegu Desam of Mr Chandrababu Naidu from Andhra Pradesh. Clearly, they have supported the government despite controversy that surrounds their own parties on the issue of supporting the government and as such they want to maintain a distance from the seat of rule while extending the support. It is possible that they would join the government but they are now very careful on the matter whether to join the government directly.

The BJP - the dominant force in the coalition - may face problems from within, because the hardliners will not be too willing to jettison its own programmes totally for the sake of coalition partners as they feel their party has won so many seats for being on its own ideological lines. The moderates would certainly maintain that in such efforts, the coalition may break up and the chance to rule will diminish. And a failure by the present government may render the coalition culture totally vulnerable in India.

Leaders Have a Lot on their Minds

One lot lit candles in the dark, another lot accused the lot that lit the candles of knowing the lights were going to go out, otherwise how come they had candles handy, and the lot that lit the candles said they found the candles in the store or something and the other lot said this wasn't possible.

The problem is, everyone blames our leaders. And our leaders, well, what can I say. They have a lot on their minds. Like where to find candles for the House.

Don't get me wrong. I am not saying that our leaders have nothing to do with it. I accept that they are the people who are officially responsible for providing electricity to this country.

Indeed, they are the people who will be able to explain to us, eventually, once they have found out what exactly went wrong, in the fullness of time, in the very near future) exactly what caused the breakdown of our national power grid and the loss of power to the entire country for about 30 minutes, and most of the capital, Dhaka, for ten to 12 hours, on Thursday.

You see, you admit that it is their fault. It is their job. That's why we blame them! exclaims a friend of mine, a highly excitable kind of person. I might add, with a tendency to jump to conclusions.

I have to correct her. I never said that it's their fault. I tell

her firmly. Yes, the authorities are responsible, technically. But there are a number of factors, a complex set of issues that play a part in determining developments.

"Determining developments? Cheez. You sound pathetic," she says, rolling her eyes at me. "Okay, name one determining development. Come on, tell me," she demands.

I will. The authorities have to cope with a number of complex challenges. They have to work with scarce resources and limited skills. They are human, too. They have problems too.

"Oh yeah. So what. So what if they have to face challenges. They don't have to face the kind of challenges we do. We're ordinary people. We have to survive."

Exactly. That's my point, why can't ordinary people do something?

"Oh yeah. What can we do. Give me an example," my friend



retorts, loudly.

I don't say anything. (You know something, now that I think about it, I am at a loss. I know we can do something, it is just that I am not sure what it is that we can do.)

"Ha. You don't have a clue! You know why? Because we can't do anything - we aren't supposed to," my friend declares, throwing her hands all over the place. It's their responsibility, and their responsibility alone, to make sure these things don't happen."

Pass the buck. I snap at her, angrily. All you ever do is pass

the buck. Why do people in Bangladesh always pass the buck. Here we are, a nation of over a hundred and twenty million people and all we can say is that a handful of people ought to take the responsibility for providing the basics to us.

"They're supposed to look after us! That's why they are there, that's why we elected them!" she cries out.

Oh don't be so naive. I tell her with a shrug. You ought to know better. If you think that people come to power, take high office, sit in parliament, become ministers, chase after

floor, wherein settlement has to be made the same day with information to the exchange authorities.

A problem arises when odd lots are traded in a bulk at a price which is unusually below or above the ruling market price. Because the price of the odd lot is averaged with the prices of the other market lots, the resulting quoted price is unexpectedly lower or higher than what it should be. This creates a high degree of volatility in the market.

To overcome this problem, the exchange authorities may show the daily quoted price of market lot and an odd lot separately, instead of averaging both together.

Khurram Malik, First Capital Securities Ltd., Chittagong.

To the Editor...

Everything Bangabandhu

Sir, Living thousands of miles from the country I feel quite distressed that the Prime Minister is naming everything in her daddy's (Bangabandhu) name. While Sheikh Mujibur Rahman has his place in our history, it is highly inappropriate for her daughter to be naming things in his name. We need to have a bipartisan proposal that bans the ruling party from naming structures as they please. Just like Sheikh Hasina should not be allowed to name IPGMR into Daddy University, Khaleda Zia must not name anything 'My-Hubby-Airport' or 'Ershad, My Mistress Stadium.

Named after a river that is synonymous with our existence? Please do not let history repeat itself. Be a hero, Madam Prime Minister, introduce the bill yourself. This is how you establish yourself in history. There is no other way, like it or not.

Dr PB Roy, Austin, Texas, USA

"Oh, so rude!"

Sir, I went through the letter (dated 1/4/98) under the above caption written by Shahab Uddin Mahtab. In the last paragraph of his letter he stated that, "we are one of the rudest and unhelpful nation in the world and these start off as soon as we land at Zia International Airport."

In my opinion these start off

as soon as we board a Bangladesh Biman aircraft at an international airport. The stone-faced air hostesses and stewards, and their indifferent behaviour towards the passengers give one the infallible feeling of the rudeness of Bengali character.

Faruque Hasan, 4, Sobhanbag, Dhaka-1207

Pricing of odd lots

Sir, Odd lot shares are defined as those other than market lots. These may be in big lots mainly of foreign or institutional holdings i.e. 500, 1000 scrips or fractional numbers arising out of the rights/bonus issues, or allotments made in IPO other than the market lots. Trading in odd lots is allowed under spot transaction in the

government jobs just because they want to serve the people, you're out of your mind.

"The whole country went on the blink, right? Someone says it was sabotage. Someone says machines break down because we just don't maintain them. But why don't we? Is that why the national grid had a nervous breakdown? Who is to blame?"

"Listen, you're far too demanding. If you want to live peacefully in Bangladesh, don't be so aggressive. These things happen. We are a developing country. We are doing our best. They solved the problem didn't they - and they are working on making everything much better."

"Yeah. For instance. What are they doing," my friend asks, belligerently. "Give me an example."

And so I read out the entire list to her.

First and foremost, the matter is being handled at the highest possible level. Everyone has been told to get a move on.

The army is lending a hand. The whole issue is being given top priority. People are scampering all over the place, making field trips, holding emergency meetings, sending out directives, sacking and appointing experts, making sure that everyone knows that no matter what may have happened in the past, this time the authorities mean business.

"Why?"

"What do you mean, why. Why do they have to call in the army? Like we're at war or something?"

Oh, don't be melodramatic. It's not like that.

"What is it like. What is the problem. Can someone explain to me exactly what is the problem?"

I don't know, I'm not a mechanic or an engineer. There must be a reason - indeed, there must be loads of reasons. I mean, this is a country-wide grid we are talking about. This is a network that supplies an

entire nation of people, from one end to another. It is complicated, complex, fraught with potentially difficult situations.

Once in a while, something happens and everyone thinks it's the end of the world.

"Not the candle brigade. Ha! They don't think it's the end of the world. Far from it, they think it's a birthday party or something," my friend says loudly, surprising me somewhat.

"I have a lot of respect for our leaders, really I do. That is why I don't like her tone of voice. In case you are not aware of this, she is talking about what happened when the power failed inside the Jatiya Sangsad on Thursday and soon afterwards, apparently, the generator also failed. Our National Parliament had no power. Our MPs could be heard, but apparently, not clearly seen."

You shouldn't talk in that disrespectful way about them. I admonish her.

"Why not, they deserve it. I mean do you know what happened...?" she guffaws.

"One lot lit candles in the dark, another lot accused the lot that lit the candles of knowing the lights were going to go out, otherwise how come they had candles handy, and the lot that lit the candles said they found the candles in the store or something and the other lot said this wasn't possible and anyway no one had ever brought fire into the House before and this was quite unacceptable but then so is a national grid failure which blacks out the nation's Parliament, isn't it, so who are they to talk, right?"

"These are the representatives of the people, the members of the highest democratic forum in the land, the final and ultimate repository of the people's will, the august house from whence great legal precedents are made. Don't talk like this about them. Please."

"Yeah. Yeah."

That's the problem, you see. Everyone blames our leaders. And our leaders have a lot on their mind. Like who gets to light the next round of candles in the House. Amen.