

Let There be No Misunderstanding

By the time this leader comes out, one hopes the cause that has gone into its genesis will have been taken care of with reason and sincerity getting the better of resentment and misunderstanding.

There is no denying much of the energy and attention for tightrope walking could have been saved if the BNP had lived up to the expectations of a responsible opposition in regard to the peace treaty.

Let the cobwebs of misunderstanding and misinterpretation be cleared quickly and conclusively. We want the opposition to indulge in a serious, factual and substantive debate on the treaty.

Why Not a Carmichael University

It is strange the way Carmichael College is being wasted. It has a fabulously big campus and it started giving graduation courses soon after it was founded in 1916.

The stunted college now has well over ten thousand pupils but only 25 class rooms for them, just about half what they need.

Two other factors contribute generously to the shut out of regular classes: Students' clash, mainly the doing of the fascist Shibir, leads to lengthy closures.

Why have successive governments not thought of developing Carmichael as a model institution? Developed into a university it could easily house first, a full-scale agricultural college and then, an institute of meteorology which, although the science is new and still a hand maiden to other sciences, is still vitally important for our country.

Towards a Thriving Friendship

Although no date has been set by the Myanmar side about the commencement of the stalled repatriation of Rohingya refugees, Foreign Minister U Ohn Gya detailed a process of how they proposed to tackle the end part of the problem before he left Dhaka on Saturday after a three-day crowded official visit.

No problem now remains for our throwing a bridge across the Naf to physically join our two countries. Myanmar is all for it. So is the case of transforming irregular border barbers, smuggling to be plain, into regular trade.

Myanmar is one of our closest neighbours. We substantially share history and culture. Various historico-political reasons have over the years made Myanmar shut its windows on the world.

Building Up a Myth

The subcontinent provides different experience altogether. In spite of its contiguous land mass, the interstate borders are impenetrable for the migrants. An odd cross-border movement of the people under still more odd circumstances cannot however be ruled out.

THE myth has been built up by India over a period of time — both by its government and a powerful media. The myth that millions of Bangladeshis have been illegally staying in India seems to be a ploy carefully contrived as early as in early '70s.

When Bangladesh government was rather exasperated in dealing with '74 famine, the polemic started over Bangladeshis exodus due mainly to the food shortage in the country as New Delhi lodged a protest with Bangladesh.

As a matter of fact, it was Bangladesh which worried more about such influx into its own territory as evident from a position paper prepared by Mujib Nagar Government as back as in June '71. The paper observed that "considering the economy of West Bengal and socio-political situation, people originally from Bangladesh who are not happy here or not settled may find it worth trying to go back to (independent) Bangladesh".

When viewed against this background, an Indian concern over Bangladeshi emigrants, at that juncture of time, appeared highly preposterous and a government of India statistics showing seven to 12 million Bangladeshi now in India is indeed incredible.

Indian authority was never tired of focusing on Bangladeshi emigrants even afterwards. It rather gathered momentum. The furor over "Bangladeshi emigrants" was most pronounced in a series of 'anti-foreigners' agitations that started in Assam in '78.

But when the tribunals were held for the deportation of illegal Bangladeshis they found a ridiculous figure of 124 persons who could as well be the cases of stray entries across the porous international border well before the creation of Bangladesh.

The fencing programme did not however materialise perhaps because India did not find it cost-effective. There was wide-scale reporting in Indian press during this early '80s as regards cases of immigration from Bangladesh. Nevertheless these wild reporting had never been substantiated and were mostly based on circumstantial assumptions.

For example, the 1981 census revealed that in the eight border districts of West Bengal the population had grown over 30 per cent between '71 and '81 whereas in the remaining districts the reported growth rates were below 20 per cent.

would have similar view is anything but expected. The non-BJP governments did not spare efforts in projecting the issue although with little success.

Initially the Bangladeshi migrants were reported to have been settled in bordering Assam, Meghalaya and West Bengal states. But later their presence were reported to have been felt as far away from the border as Delhi and Haryana. Now



PERSPECTIVES

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

there are reports that Bangladeshis are also in Bombay where they have become the primary object of Bal Thackeray's blast ever since the BJP supported by Siva Sena seized power in Maharashtra. The Siva Sena leader has vowed to first clear "Mumbai" of all "Bangladeshi Muslims" ignoring the problem of identifying them.

The trade and commerce are monopolised by the Indian community in most of the Gulf countries. Even in the eastern province of Saudi Arabia there are large number of Indians. At some points of history they migrated due to some compulsions and none disputes their bona fide in the countries of their migration. The same applies to

the nationals of all other countries. This is how has there been demographic disposition in the past. The migration is a highly individual choice. In many cases, there have been no choice at all. The people have been simply transported and dumped in a new land like the African blacks in America and Indian labourers in the Fiji.

At least one rationale is provided by a noted demographer of India when he comments: "Human beings like water move downwards from higher level of misery. That is migration."

True, economically India is somewhat better off than Bangladesh which is, in no serious way, worse off than India either. How would the resource of India, even if it is there in opulence, matter to a

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"Bangladeshi emigrant" in a caste-ridden country where the bulk of the population live in stark poverty. The conditions of the low caste Indians in certain areas are worse than the poorest of the Bangladeshis. Can an outsider expect a better fate than them? India is one of the largest reservoirs of the technically qualified skilled manpower in the world.

Moreover, if he is a skilled labourer he has enough prospect in Bangladesh itself which is critically short of such labour for its burgeoning export-oriented light industries. Can an outsider assimilate so easily to live and earn his livelihood in a society religiously or ethnically hostile to his own ethno-religious identity?

The first wave of settlers came to America in 1607 and after that it continued in trickles. The mass migration to America took place between 1830 and 1930. But much before that the debate started about protecting the interests of old settlers and the Congress passed the Alien Act restricting immigration as early as in 1797.

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Glimmer or Mirage

The mass disappointment comes from the rising prices of electricity and gas, the lack of water and the perception of failure of services in general, particularly law and order.

WHILE the pall of dark economic gloom continues to hang over us, some short-term indicators have started to twinkle. We continue to face a horrendous economic situation, deepened by a chronic shortfall in revenues. The magic revised figure of Rs 305 billion is still almost Rs 100 billion away in the last quarter, there is the glimmer of hope that the worst may have bottomed out and we may finally be on the road to the elusive economic recovery.

For the commonman there is no issue more sensitive than food, followed by water and electricity. Last year, due to failed projections, the last election regime defaulted on adequate imports of wheat stocks on time, with the caretaker regime maintaining the status quo of inertia, there were "atta" riots as wheat stocks plummeted. Some PML stalwarts in Sindh took advantage of the situation to turn "atta" into gold.

sulted in 12-13 per cent increased production with 4 per cent increased average, a two million ton increase.

To this, the success of the canola crop in reducing our edible oil imports by an additional US\$ 300 million last year and almost US\$ 150 million this year.

With a world-wide slump in textiles, our domestic cotton off-take has been reduced and we have an importable surplus, enough at least to keep feeding our traditional markets. Even though our textile made-ups have gone down considerably, it has been somewhat made up by a sizable spurt in the manufacturing sector, up by almost 16 per cent, almost 60 per cent of it policy-related. The most significant manna has come from heaven as oil prices have crashed the world over, saving the foreign exchange earmarked for this purpose. If "el Nino" holds back in Sindh where the wheat harvest has already started and any rains would play havoc, things may well look up considerably.

The banks re-structuring has gone well, though each one of the Nationalized Commercial Banks (NCBs) has followed a different route and while there is bound to be heart burning and hiccups in downsizing, the exercise has had marked success. The DFIs have started to show profits, a far cry from their dumps in 1996. Even though the debt portfolio has gone up overall, these are in way to curb this without stinting economic growth. While

there is lip-service about a definite move to go after bank defaulters, the State Bank of Pakistan has played an encouraging role in stiffening the spine of the political government, the laws to this effect are still not completely in place. If we can successfully separate the collection of utility bills from the purview of the banks and force-multiply the cash-flows of the utility companies as well as increase their revenues near to what should be their actual projections, we may be home free. In any case, despite signifi-

per cent in order to keep some cushion as a "reserve for unforeseen".

The PM has finally shown resolve to make the Independent Power Project (IPP) reduce their charges to WAPDA. The IPPs have been campaigning that this pressure would hurt investment in Pakistan, this is nonsense! What did the revising of charges in the ENRON Project do to India? Did investment suffer? Pakistan has to pay through its nose for the exorbitant charges. What is it doing to the economy? Obvi-

While the political divorce with ANP in NWFP has gone well the psychological separation from the MQM has not resulted in complete disassociation as it should in the circumstances. For an ally, the MQM has been behaving worse than all the other political opponents put together. Having destroyed the credibility of the PML as its C M Sindh, Liaquat Jatoi is now lobbying to become the Governor in case there is Governor's rule, a distinct possibility of which exists. Liaquat Jatoi is missing the point of the whole exercise, it is because of his misrule (or lack of rule) the Governor's rule has become necessary, if he had functioned as CM as supposed to do we would have reason for such recourse. A further elongation of the period will only add to the misery of the populace of Sindh in general and Karachi in particular. While certainly action will beget reaction in Karachi, the economic capital of the country and the conduit for 95 per cent of its imports/exports, we have to take the bit between our teeth and revamp the whole rotten structure in Sindh or we will have to pay a fairly heavier price down the road.

One cannot deny that there is an element of disaffection in the populace that is manifest in the fact that even the much-touted Ms Benazir is able to draw crowds, even though a fair portion of it is presently paid for and imported from outside the venue of the "show of strength". The mass disappointment comes from the ris-

ing prices of electricity and gas, the lack of water and the perception of failure of services in general, particularly law and order. Here the government is to blame because it is the Federal Ministers who should have shouldered up the utilities by ensuring that professionals with a motivation and capability for positive change should have been inducted, to start with packing their Board of Directors with hands-on professionals instead of bringing in assorted individuals to reward them for loyalty or in some cases, their only qualification their being cronies of individual ministers having no relevance to professionalism.

Instead of increasing the prices of utilities we could have gone in for plugging leakage of revenues and an aggressive early collection of bills. To ensure quality, monitoring can be instituted by employing private sector who are geared to such an exercise. However all this is better said than done, the PML would do well to conduct an in-house inquiry as to the machinations of its own stalwarts. What Asif Zardari used to do on a centralized basis is now being done by nouveau regional leaders having no real constituency of any kind except a commitment to their own pockets.

What crisis will happen between now and the budget is known only to divine Providence. However if things go on as they are now we may yet see the glimmer of hope become brighter. On the other hand, there are enough intangibles in the air that it could well be that distant glimmer of hope is a mirage, only a fake reflection in the desert of our dreams.

AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

cant bureaucratic foot-dragging the Central Board of Revenue (CBR) is looking at pragmatic ways of plugging leaks in revenues, particularly in customs duties and excise; even looking at deterrence by electronic surveillance means to make the cost of violations higher. The Chairman CBR is fairly confident that the CBR will reach the projected Rs 305 billion target; given the new-found dynamism through the length of the service one dare says the target is achievable. In any case, the government has asked every Ministry to again take a hard look at its current budget and try to cut down as much as 25

ously their IPPs paid money under the table, why not first make them certify that no such "goodwill" or "commission" was paid and then investigate their accounts. Except for two or three projects, each one of them indulged in activity running afoul of the US Foreign Corrupt Practices Act. Only two IPPs have signed certificates that they had not given bribes. The reduction of electricity charges to WAPDA will have a commensurate effect down the line for the citizens at large and the economy in general. The decision to go after the IPPs is a correct one in the national interest.

To the Editor...

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.

Local medical research facilities

Sir, While the strengthening of the medical wing of the armed forces with a new medical college is a welcome news, the press material published so far did not give any clear indication of the economic and logistic feasibility of the project in an underdeveloped country; and that too in a specialised sector.

What we possibly need more is scope and orientation for more local research in tropical and indigenous medicines, including the popularisation of kavrifal, hakimi, and homeopathic practices. The society leaders have been talking about it, but the translation into reality is lagging behind; perhaps due to administrative indifference.

There is scope for research (R&D) on local diseases, including malnutrition and its long-term effects, on which literature in the developed countries may be scanty. The new scourge is arsenic poisoning through drinking water — and the world appears to have been caught unawares.

With a vast population of 120 million, and the half living below the poverty level, the effect on the future generations is a useful field of study. Medical research is high-level, high-tech profession, and needs adequate structural support, and

access to funds.

Our potential philanthropists have not been adequately tapped into. Third World research fields. The lead has to come from the society for establishing the needed foundations for such activities; now that the private sector is being encouraged to invest in an environment of global trade.

Research does not aim for immediate cash profit or topical value. The political initiative is lagging. We need many orientations in many directions; once we settle down to a systematic way of governing.

A Zabr Dhaka

All is not well

Sir, A news item which appeared in The DS on March 31 has drawn my attention and concern. Though the news was not highlighted, I consider it to be alarming.

It was reported that most of the Bengali officials working in Kagrachhari have been asked to vacate their quarters by April 10. The order was reluctantly issued by the Executive Engineer of the Parbatya Chattagram Development Board, Mohammad Shahjahan at the behest of Kalpa Ranjan Chakma, the minister without portfolio.

of conformity? — Why Bengalis alone have been sorted out to vacate quarters?

— Why at such a short notice? It is not clear what Kalpa Ranjan Chakma's real intentions are and the government must look into the matter immediately before it is too late.

I am a little sceptical about the CHT Peace Treaty issue, and I sincerely believe that my doubts are proven wrong. But I cannot ignore the fear that what appears to be a small move today by Kalpa Ranjan Chakma by evacuating Bengali government officials from Kagrachhari can take the form of massive autonomy movement by the tribals, in say another 10 years.

I do not subscribe to the AL government's view that all is well at the CHT frontier.

It is high time that the government in consultation with the opposition must sit together and analyse the pros and cons of the CHT Peace Treaty, for the sake of maintaining unity of the country, before it gets too late.

Shaukat Islam Dhaka

Reporting rape incidents

Sir, On the 11th March, '98 Ms Zakiuddin wrote an article in The Daily Star regarding the rape of a minor girl and other related matters.

She has rightly pointed out that in our country the media simply pounce on such stories and write in details about the incident without caring about the emotional trauma that the

victim and her parents go through. They do not bother to protect the names of the victims and their parents. For them, it is of no concern.

Perhaps, there is no crime as degrading and traumatising for a girl/woman as rape. It is impossible for a man to feel how devastating it is for a woman. It is bound to affect her whole life. No amount of punishment or compensation can atone for the crime.

Thanks to Ms Zakiuddin for writing a perceptive article on a very sensitive issue.

M A Mohsin 40, Siddeswari Circular Rd. Dhaka

Who is the real culprit

Sir, A lot of things have been written about Maria's fate. All of us were outraged by the act of so-called accused, but nobody is thinking why this kind of perversion is eating the society so fast. We can punish one or two Tom, Dick or Harry but will this stop this kind of offence! No — and no — we cannot stop this (Even capital punishment couldn't stop this kind of nuisance in Saudi Arabia).

Who is actually responsible for Maria? I would hold responsible the people who evict the brothers, and cannot think or see the long-term effect of the eviction. Therefore what was supposed to happen has happened. I therefore suggest that a redlight areas should be activated again. I do not want to offend anybody, all I want is to offer my suggestion to minimise this affair as far as the society is concerned. I do not say that

the culprits should go unpunished. Law should be amended in such a way as these kind of pervers be separated from the society in some island like Kalapani or in solitary confinement where all sexual activity is stopped for him.

A Disgusted Citizen Shantinagar, Dhaka.

Illegal intrusion of foreigners

Sir, It is disquieting to learn that more than 10,000 Indian nationals intruded into Bangladesh from Mizoram during the last two months. The intruders are claiming that they are Bangladeshi nationals fled to the Indian state of Mizoram at the time of 1971 War of independence. It is also reported that about 70 Burmese have crossed into Bangladesh. The repatriation of all Rohingyas has not yet been completed.

Bangladesh is a small country and cannot bear the burden of any further refugees. If we fail to drive out these illegal people to their native land, more people will try to cross the border. We have come to know that some of the local tribes are encouraging the tribal people to come to settle in the hilly regions. The claim of Bangladeshi citizenship should not be accepted. Many people who were living here long before independence have already left this country permanently and staying in India. There was a large number of exodus after 1947. These people are no more nationals of this country.

When people of other districts of Bangladesh cannot settle in the hilly regions, why

then the tribal people of other countries should be allowed to settle in our country? We should not accept them as refugees even. We are already overburdened with our own population.

Mahbubul Haque Chowdhury Laxmipur, Rajshahi

Of scary prospect

Sir, This is at the backdrop of your timely editorial "Scary Prospect" (DS, April 7, '98) that we, a whole family, establish our firm stance against, and express our utmost dismay at, the likely enlargement of Sweden Aslam et al on bail.

There's no denying the fact that mechanical application of law can at times fail, they will so to speak, keep doing the job they are supposed to be doing with a renewed strength, and sheer injustice will unambiguously triumph over society.

Besides, we feel outraged at the total failure of the government to nab any of the godfathers — supposed to have been named by this imprisoned circle — who work behind the scene. It, we think, behooves the government to nab and try them publicly.

Nishat, Emdad, Jumna, Janna, Enayet and Jamil Sylhet