

The Port Must Work

Nothing seems to nudge the Chittagong Port to improve its performance. It remained stone-deaf to a boycott threat from foreign shippers and the disappointments periodically voiced by visiting business delegations, donor community representatives and our own chamber leaders.

Even the highly ingenious idea of punishing prospects awaiting the Chittagong Port authorities and the several conflicting labour unions there fell flat on them. We warned them of a possible takeover by the private sector if they did not improve and called for a greater compensatory attention to Mongla Port. The local politicians, trade union leaders and port authorities have become too thick-skinned to allow their sensibilities to be hurt. The labour is in perpetual conflict with barge and container operators, stevedores and importers while the customs clearance has been problematic all the while. At times it is the introduction of mechanisation that has been resisted tooth and nail. At other times petty squabbles between temporary and regular workers continued for days on end.

The commonsensical methods to quicken the loading and unloading operations by means of hired equipment or additional labour were hardly given a chance by the labour unions. Neither would they deliver goods nor allow any contingency measures to be taken to ease congestion. What a terrible barricade mentality!

The chronic under-performance of Chittagong Port, our infrastructural Achilles' heels and a physical block to our integration with the global market, has lately hit another low. It is the food-grain ships that keep waiting at the jetties and outer anchorage. The exporters have to pay heavy demurrage as we keep worrying over the food price. There is quite an intriguing conspiracy of circumstances — inadequate berthing facilities, shortage of container spaces at the port sheds, a labour go-slow and the importers' delay in taking delivery of goods.

The efforts made so far to set things right at Chittagong Port have been perfunctory to say the least. Some serious action is warranted now. The Ports and Shipping Minister need to concentrate on the problems of Chittagong Port more than the prospects of Mongla Port at the moment. The government should perhaps form a special task force to put our premier entrepot on an even keel.

Rapists at Court's Door

Twice in three months! The figure may not appear striking in a country where molestation seems to have broken out as an epidemic but come to think of it they took place at court premises and people who are likely to provide protection were involved in it. The picture albeit ceases to look like a mere tell-tale sign of the general deterioration of law and order in the country or just another illustration of the criminal overdrive of the libido that seems to have been let loose by country's men on their female counterparts.

On March 10 a six-year old minor was violated there. And yesterday the morning press published photographs of two men arrested on charge of attempting to rape a teenage girl at the same place. What makes the second infinitely more sinister in character is the professional identity of the diabolical duo involved in this abortive. One was the bodyguard of none other than the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate and the other was one of the night guards of the precinct.

We are aghast and would like to share a question or two with the authorities. How come such beastly individuals who have no control over their behaviour or their occupational obligation land in such jobs? Does not this stigmatise the legal system and institutions? Authorities must keep it in mind that a society can put up with the irrationality of a few individuals but when institutions get a bad name it should be interpreted as the ringing of death tolls for the society.

We can't help feeling incidents like these take place far more frequently than they are actually reported. It is a small minority of cases that we get to know. Most of them are swept under the carpet. This is a most ominous sign for the society.

We want some effective activism to clear the stigma of human rights violation within the premises of public institutions. We simply do not want to hear of molestation at the court premises or in the safe custody of none other than the men entrusted with the sacred job of ensuring safety.

A Good Augury

We are delighted at the inauguration of Rangamati Betar, the eighth full-fledged radio station of the country. The 10KW station which will cover an audience in an area of 7000 sqkm has been launched exclusively for expansion and preservation of tribal culture. Following hot under the heels of the CHT Peace Accord this comes to underline government's intention of giving peace a permanence in the troubled region and integrating its people with the mainstream population.

We believe this practical step towards cementing rapprochement on paper is of seminal importance. One reason the CHT, despite its immense potential, has remained a backwater of sorts was its bloody legacy. But another very valid if not very touted reason was the failure of the governments of the day to take any step that could have matched their protestations of linking the region with the mainstream. We have to make sure the tribal people are not at pains to retain their ethnic individuality. At the same time we have to create the atmospherics for their integration with the national developmental activities. And for this radio can play a significant role. Even in this age of electronic innovation, radio remains a powerful mass medium for networking people.

We hope while promoting the cultural and developmental causes of the region Rangamati Betar will play a pioneering role in sensitising the tribal people about their duties and obligations as citizens of Bangladesh. Besides, this gives the ethnic groups of the southeastern part of the country an opportunity to make their presence felt internationally. Because, as the PM pointed out in her inaugural address, the programmes on ethnic population will find place in the SAVE or SAARC Audio Visual Exchange. One hopes the authorities do their part in ensuring professional excellence of these programmes. With radio station on and TV relay station on its way there is no reason why the CHT people won't be connected with the mainstream sooner than later.

The Conflict of Values: The West versus Islam

Doctrinally, the distance between Islamic and Western values are little indeed. However, the distortion of values in the West as well as depravity of its people and relative departure of the Muslims from the Islam's core values keep increasing this distance. Yet, while Islam has not risen to the dazzling heights of its accomplishments, its precipitation is also not as abysmal as those of western culture.

Chinese power pose potential threat to the West? Why wasn't the possibility of an intra-civilizational conflict in the western world itself considered as a possible source of insecurity as it was the case for centuries in the past?

Instead, the whole thrust of western society thought is directed towards a bogeyman called 'Islamic world' with its billion plus impoverished people spread over 55 countries clearly lacking a collective clout. Isn't it an overblown posterior perception of threat? This is, however, not entirely without reason.

The westerners, in general, tend to view Islamic societies as backward-looking, oppressed by religion and inhumanely governed compared to their secular liberal democratic egalitarianism. The western media never tires of depicting Islam as foreign, mysterious and something to fear. Even in this information Age Islam is perceived in the West as inherently extremist and monolithic.

In the West, curiously, Islam still represents uncouth barbarism, medieval theocracy or a kind of distasteful exoticism. The West's role in and attitude towards Algeria, for example, is a clear signal of its prejudice and antagonism against Islam even when Islamic Salvation Front of that country was voted to power through a democratic process.

Worse still, the substantial number of Muslims the world over remain enamoured with the mores and values of the western world. In more than one way they continue to support the demonisation of Islam without the realisation that through such demonisation and the spread of its own value system the West wants to sustain its centuries-old sway over the global community. Whereas Islam by itself is a civilisation and a way of life animated by a common spirit far more humane than most westerners realise.

Neither we nor the Westerners recognise how the Western

societies themselves have failed to live up to their liberal mythology and how much the latter's own value system has atrophied. On the contrary Islam is still a living force with its pristine value system notwithstanding the creed's ostensible decline as a result of greed, violence, lust for power and an avarice for wealth which once also polluted the Church.

The Westerners consider many problems of the Muslim world the product of religion and pride on the purported secularism of their societies and governments. But in spite of a secular pretension the Church and State had seldom been to

ways had a special status in Muslim society as people of the Book and others were protected as 'dhimmis'. Ottoman emperor Suleiman I had Christian ministers as back as in 14th century. The Moghul empire integrated Hindus and Muslims into a consolidated Indian state. Boutros-Ghali an Egyptian Coptic Christian could become UN Secretary-General only because he was brought up as long time foreign minister of an otherwise Muslim government. Even today a Chaldean Christian is Iraq's deputy prime minister. In Senegal, an overwhelmingly Muslim country, there could be a Roman Catholic President for long two

chised women in 1920s. France in 1944 and Switzerland as recently as in 197. Decades before the Swiss women enjoyed the voting right the Muslim women in Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq and Pakistan had been casting ballots. In two hundred years the US did not have a female president whereas several Muslim countries are already ruled by women. The Muslim countries are ahead in female empowerment, if not in female liberation.

The Muslims have often been branded as fundamentalists by the West while many people in Muslim countries also join the chorus. It must however be understood that Islam is not just a religion and certainly not just a fundamentalist political movement. The truth is that neither the word fundamentalism nor its concept exists in Islam. Actually it is a Christian code word to explain born-again Protestant who insists on the literal truth of the Bible. Furthermore, the fundamentalism generally urges passive adherence and does not advocate the change of the social order which is not the agenda of contemporary Islamic movements.

The West often censures the human right violation in Muslim society. But there is a genuine difficulty about understanding the kind of human right and its extent which the West would like us to protect. Is its parameter set by so-called western liberalism or the moral standard of Islam itself? Pre-marital sex, for example, was strongly disapproved of in the West until after World War II. Today sex before marriage with parental consent is common. There are laws against sex outside marriage, if rarely enforced. Now if there will be steps to apply them stringently, by western standard, it can be regarded as a violation of human right. Can Islam conform to such madness without throwing away its basic values?

Is Islam oppressive as it has charged by the West? There is no precise answer and it re-

quires elaboration. But it can be safely claimed that there are no Muslim equivalents of Nazi extermination camps, the genocide on the scale perpetrated by Europeans in Americas and Australia during their settlement in those lands, apartheid approved by the South African Dutch Reformed Church and the racist culture of old South in the US with its lynchings and brutalisation of the Blacks. And the examples cited are all the Christian legacy.

Is Islam medieval in its outlook? But then medieval attribute of barbarism in the form of genocide, racism and violence within the society is very much persisting in the West. Unlike Christian churches the mosque has never been segregated by race. The beloved companion of the Prophet of Islam (pbuh) was an Ethiopian, Bilal Rabah, a freed slave who rose to great prominence in Islam. Since the conversion of Constantine I in 313 AD, Christianity has been led, if not dominated, only by Europeans. But the leadership of Muslim world changed hand several times: from mainly Arab Umayyad dynasty to the Abbasid dynasty to the Ottoman empire, dominated by the Turks. The diversification of Muslim leadership — in contrast to the Europeanisation of Christian leadership — helped the cause of relative racial equality in Islamic culture.

Doctrinally, the distance between Islamic and western values are little indeed. However, the distortion of values in the West as well as depravity of its people and relative departure of the Muslims from the Islam's core values keep increasing this distance. Yet, while Islam has not risen to the dazzling heights of its accomplishments, its precipitation is also not as abysmal as those of western culture. It was in the Christian world that a dangerous death was reached by its people by breeding creeds like Fascism or Nazism.

There has never been Muslim equivalents of such madness. In contrast Islam, by divine teaching, harbours no enmity against another religion, race or a segment of humankind. The only purpose the Muslims are ordained to fulfil is the well-being of humanity.



PERSPECTIVES

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

tally separated in the West. As a matter of fact, the theocracy is very much alive in Britain since Henry VIII established the Church of England in 1531. The major democratic changes had to wait until 19th and 20th century only when the franchise was extended to new social classes.

The US has had separation of Church and State under the constitution but American politics had hardly displayed a secular tradition. John Kennedy had been the only non-Protestant US president — that too by a narrow margin. There are six million Muslims in the US none of whom qualifies even for a cabinet post. In western Europe there are millions of Muslims but history is still awaiting the appointment of the first to a cabinet position in Britain, France or Germany.

On the other hand, look at the magnanimity of Islam which tried to protect the minority religion and promote their interests, throughout the history through ecumenicalism. Jews and Christians al-

decades and even today the country's First Lady is a Christian.

The Westerners regard Muslim societies as oppressive and consider their own societies highly liberal. One of the yardsticks by which they tend to measure the extent of the liberalism is the status of woman. True, the Islamic rules on sexual modesty have often resulted in excessive segregation of the sexes in public places sometimes bringing about women's marginalisation in public affair but otherwise they are given highest dignity in Muslim societies. For example, while British women were granted property rights only in 1870 the Muslim women always have had that right. In many western culture daughters could not inherit anything if there were sons in the family but Islamic law has always allocated shares from every inheritance to daughters and sons.

In the western countries women did not gain the voting right until the 20th century. The US and Britain enfran-

Keeping One's Cool

An economically and militarily strong Pakistan, capable of defending itself in a conventional war and with the option of going nuclear quickly in quid pro quo is the only deterrent India will respect.

a numerical superiority ratio of 4:1 (and even 5:1 in some areas) with respect to conventional forces (given that a favourable military attack ratio is 3:1). The BJP manifesto spoke about the nuclear arming of India. They are well on their way, the manifesto is also clear on seizing from Pakistan the partition of Kashmir not occupied by them already. Now with the nuclear sword in hand, they can very well atomic-bomb Pakistan if we risk all-out war over Kashmir.

More than the logical reasons is the psychological one. Pakistani mass opinion demands equal manhood with India and that is, if they can explode a bomb, why can't we? There is also the question of "mutually assured deterrence" (MAD). There is always the possibility that if we do not explode the bomb the Indians will assume we are bluffing and therefore gamble with trying to accomplish the other cornerstone of their manifesto, knowing that they may come off better in a conventional war given the acute military disparities. The Indians will certainly suffer enormous losses without much gain on the ground, are they prepared for that amount of collateral damage in men and material? The fact that the BJP leaders took on the world in the nuclear blasts — and their newly elected leader Thakre is vocal about Kashmir — should make us apprehensive about their intentions.

A nuclear blast by us will not be a display of show of force but perversely will be a logical outcome of caution on our part. That may be the only way to warn India against the consequence of adventurism. The

world presently wants us to roll over and play dead, to accept India's hegemony in the region, to behave like the other SAARC countries and stay in line with Indian tutelage. For that they may be proposing to give us some guarantees and some economic/military sops. In the 1980s we lost a golden opportunity to economically/militarily reach emancipation. As the front line State for the West in their proxy war in Afghanistan, Pakistan did not get any of the recurring and residual economic and military benefits that countries like Thailand,

live as virtual slaves or the west can take concrete steps to not only assuage our fears but to give us the capability to defend ourselves. The initial steps have already been taken by some of the western countries, imposing economic sanctions, the main prop of which is suspending aid and grants particularly US/Japan support for loans by international lending institutions. Already the EU led by UK, has shown it is not even prepared to go that far. However, if US and Japan would impose trade sanctions on India this would make a considerable difference because

dead. We may be a smaller country and India may have more bombs, the devastation will be mutually horrifying. That more than any other reason may deter BJP from adventurism. However, if we do explode the bomb, it will take the Indians off the hook.

The Indians will never be blamed for passing on nuclear secrets but we shall be accused for giving away this knowledge to Iran, Libya, Iraq, Sudan, etc — anyone that the west labels as "terrorist friendly" states. The world's anger will well up against us and we will be vilified from pillar to post. The EU nations, which are treating us with kid gloves because it is a vast industrial and consumer market, will turn on us like a pack of wolves. The economic sanctions that the world imposes on us will be more akin to the economic quarantine of Iraq presently — since we do not have the benefit of oil it will hit us far more badly. We will eventually become economically so weak we will not be able to maintain even a weak deterrent force — India thus could walk over us at will! For a few days of chest-beating and a rather stretched logic as regards deterrence, are we prepared to eat grass — and eventually humble pie?

The government must be commended on its rather sophisticated and patient handling of the situation up till now. The west is alternately showing us carrot and stick, let's test this potency by clearly spelling out that there is a cost price to restraint and it must include a comprehensive package, foremost by giving us the means to conventionally defend ourselves against India.

That while we will not go ahead and explode the bomb, the guarantee of a nuclear umbrella by the west can only be counter-guaranteed by our own ability to have and to use nuclear weapons if the west deserts us in one-hour of need. Not only sanctions against India must be made more effective but we should be shored up economically and militarily. Like Egypt and Turkey and other countries, our debt must be written off and we should beef up our conventional forces, particularly airpower.

We must have focused western investment in infra-structure such as roads, railways, telecommunications and ports, similarly like Egypt and Turkey we must get indigenous armament manufacturing capacity as required by us. Above all, the world must put pressure on India to solve the Kashmir problem. If the economic sanctions are effective, the brunt of the misery that ensues will be borne by the masses. The language of the streets is the only language the BJP leaders will understand — that may make them more amenable to reason over Kashmir. An economically and militarily strong Pakistan, capable of defending itself in a conventional war and with the option of going nuclear quickly in quid pro quo is the only deterrent India will respect. Before we follow the track of the hawks, we have to evaluate whether the compensation package includes tangible security and economic guarantees and whether an ill-conceived move in exploding the bomb without calculating the risks may not result in our eventual economic extinction. Someone has to negotiate hard to exploit the God-given opportunity. The Indian leadership has provided us by their sheer obduracy.

AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

Philippines, Singapore, Indonesia, etc got from the US during the height of the Viet Nam War. Prepared to go any lengths in the proxy war, the US quickly discovered that our leaders had a low personal price, their penchant was for filling their own pockets or receiving favours, than for negotiating a better deal for Pakistan. Some of the riches on display by retired general's sons but were funds meant for Pakistan and the Afghan war being pilfered/diverted into private coffers.

For a few pennies, our leaders sold our short-term and long-term interests down the river. The choices before us, before we explode the bomb, are very clear, either we accept to

they are India's largest trading partners. Firstly it would hurt India more economically and, secondly, we could derive some benefit from trade (and investment) diversions.

However, even though an official US spokesman has gone so far as to condemn Indian leaders for their duplicity (a fact we have been repeating ad nauseam over the years), in the long run these sanctions will most probably be shrugged off by India. What happens if we explode the bomb? Other than a few days of euphoria, it does send a message to the Indians, that our potential is not bluff and that they should be prepared for the consequences in collateral damage. Whether one bullet kills you or a dozen, once you are dead you tend to remain

To the Editor...

Extravaganza — At whose peril?

Sir, I am getting sceptical and becoming worried as the time for the opening of Jamuna (Bangabandhu) Bridge draws nearer. I presume, keeping with the tradition of this country, it will be a grand opening ceremony and the pomp and grandeur would equal the new landmark of the country.

The usual ribbon cutting, release of many gas-filled balloons and the scree of nips and guests who would attend from all over the country will not give the correct expenditure involved.

Please bear in mind the unseen activities much before and after the ceremony, not counting the effort and energy diverted otherwise.

It is true — this expenditure involved may not be sufficient to build another such bridge but may be sufficient to construct one more culvert somewhere in our country.

My urgent request to our leaders — please give this occasion a new approach and history will surely remember you with different perspective.

Tasmita Ameen
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

"BBC on BTV"

Sir, Pursuant to the letter of Mr Alan Macdonald, Regional Director for South Asia and the Middle East of the BBC World television, published in the DS of 16 May, I regret to notice that the rebroadcast of the BBC World session between 2pm and 3pm on BTV has also discontinued for the last one week or so.

Therefore, at present there is no BBC programme being rebroadcast on BTV.

M. A. Obaydullah
Park Plaza Apartment
31 Banant, Dhaka-1213

Mohammadpur Town Hall Market

Sir, What's happening at and around the Mohammadpur Town Hall Market? Too much development activity, and too fast, judging from the critical press reports.

Big, open, stair cases were constructed for the first floor above the market. But these are hardly being used, as the traffic density has not increased. Why the public should use the stairs? Supplemental question: the iron security gates on the

roads in Mohammadpur and Lalmaia are neither used nor dismantled. Who can afford this loss? Where is the accountability?

Part of two open areas in this congested locality are being closed up for new 'shops'. Why such animosity against the 'lungs' of the city? (Rajuk has the same lusty attitude towards lakes within the Dhaka Metropolitan area!)

DCC find unnecessary to issue any press clarification. Familiarity breeds contempt.

A Zabr
Dhaka-1207

Quizes and paradoxes

Sir, If Dhaka city (8 million) cannot be governed systematically, how the country, a greater problem of 120m people, can be governed in a reasonable and acceptable manner? Suggest a "short-cut" formula.

Can political programmes succeed in "public interest" if politics is considered as a 'business' (profit-making, indirectly)? Then the outpost of politics becomes 'nobody's business'.

In politics, how nepotism its related to misuse of power? Draw curve exponential.

Gun or degree? Choose one (can't choose both).

For how many years this 'gun power' will last; at the two sites: i) on the campuses; ii) in the person's lifetime?

If short-cuts can bring success, what will happen to standards in each and every profession? Where and when this 'short-cut philosophy' should stop? What is the role of the rulers?

The AL-BNP confrontation is leading the country — where?

A Citizen
Dhaka.

Prof Yunus and Economics

Sir, I would like to express my disappointment at the response of economists to a recent speech made by Professor Mohammed Yunus. As we recall, Professor Yunus criticised economists for their complicity in propagating many of the inequalities we see around us. A number of eminent professional economists replied, some in this paper. Typically, their worthy remarks were bogged down in pedantic details, missing the spirit of Professor Yunus' remarks altogether.

I would like to extend my support to Professor Yunus and share his reservation that "the dismal science" has brought mixed blessings to us all. Or as Victor Gacia work about another great let-down, Columbus was the first economist. He didn't know where he was going. He deceived his men. And he travelled on government money.

A Hannan
Dhanmondi, Dhaka-1205

Was it fair?

Sir, The unilateral and sudden decision of the DSE to delist ACI shares from trading on its floor since last January has resulted in thousands of investors being stranded with the company's shares which they are unable to trade. In addition, their funds are now blocked in those shares.

Delisting of shares of a company by a bouse implies that the shares are no longer permitted to trade on its floor, consequently it is on longer quoted by the Exchange.

A company may also apply to the Exchange to delist its shares. As was in the case in India — Reliance Industries Ltd. versus the Bombay Stock Ex-

change. Reliance Industries applied to the BSE to delist its shares. In response, the BSE temporarily suspending the company's shares on account of a complicated share transfer issue. However BSE refused to delist the share, considering it too important in terms of its market capitalisation and active trading. The matter was later mutually settled between the two.

In ACI case the hurried decision of the DSE has only caused financial loss to the investors who are holding the shares.

Delisting was imposed when the public offering of its rights offer was withdrawn when the main underwriter could not fulfill its obligation, as it went into liquidation.

If the DSE authorities wanted to penalise the company it could have imposed a fine instead of opting for delisting of its shares.

Although four months have elapsed, it is regrettable that neither the ACI nor the DSE has taken any serious steps to resolve the matter and resume its share trading on the floor.

Khurruim Malik
923/A 5k, Mujib Road,
Kashfia Plaza (2nd Floor),
Agrabad, Chittagong.