

Disturbing Trend

Talks about ministers pushing public institutions to do things which are in violation of the law of the land, or circumvents existing practices have been rife. We noticed with increasing alarm as various governmental and semi-governmental bodies have been forced to pass projects which are not in the best interest of the country. The most recent example is the one that deals with the purchase of 5000 auto-rickshaws. At the outset we would like to thank the Bangladesh Bank for stopping Sonali Bank, the biggest nationalised commercial bank, from funding this project. We have special reasons to feel vindicated because our report of Thursday pointed out how this project violated the banking act, the import policy and our environmental laws. The purpose of our comment today is neither to pat ourselves on the back, nor to pat the BB for its wise and bold action but to ask how could two ministers be a party to the violation of the laws of the land. We have reported that Sonali Bank's board was compelled to change its decision to show 'respect' to the wishes of a senior minister. We know why this particular minister put pressure on the bank's board because he wanted to please another powerful minister who was actually behind the pushing of this horrendous project all the way up to the very top.

The question that we would like to ask is that if senior ministers are in the game of pushing their favourite groups or lobbies then in no time all ministers, powerful MPs and party high ups will start pushing for their own favourites. How will the government run then? May be it has already started and what we have found out is only the tip of the iceberg.

We must express our utter astonishment at the level and the nature of pressure that senior ministers have been found to put in the case of auto-rickshaw import. We want to clearly state that the Prime Minister should get herself fully briefed about this particular case. This will reveal to her as to how some of her cabinet colleagues are running the business of government. This she needs to do to prevent it from happening again. We would like to request the PM to take a serious look at what her cabinet colleagues are doing. She needs to find out the truth before it is too late.

Forest Coverage

The government is said to be embarking on a grand plan of bringing 20 per cent of Bangladesh's landmass under a forest cover. It is as reassuring as it is ambitious — and far too difficult in the bargain. The government's reason for engaging in such a super-sized job is that this would effectively protect this land from cyclones and tidal bores and other natural disasters. We add to these another important result of the good work, if realised substantially, — a beginning of an effective check to aridisation in the northern regions and an increase in rainfall. Perhaps the grand plan is heavily weighted towards the southern regions and is not designed to counter aridisation. But why should this be? This is as important, and may be more, than the other factors being addressed.

Before the partition of the subcontinent, the area now constituting Bangladesh had about 25 per cent of its land area covered with forest. But then it started — the horrible dwindle. It was universally believed that we had hit a nadir of less than 8 per cent in 50 years. And the forest line keeps on receding — inexorably.

Forest minister Sajeda Choudhury gave a recent seminar some interesting figures, as reported in a national daily. She reportedly put the total afforested area at some 17.62 per cent of the nation's entire surface land. But only 10.37 per cent of the nation's land area was occupied by forests under control of government. Perhaps the difference can be taken as that exists between reserve forests areas and the area under trees in and out of these. Whatever this be, if the grand plan aims at extending a 17.62 to 20, this should be quite feasible with dedicated efficient work.

The grand plan is already on its way — by the name of Forestry Sector Project. What is charming about it is its positive approach towards coping with the problem of the receding forest line. Let 20 per cent of our entire land area be covered under forests proper. If not realisable in 17 years, let us have it in 30. But have it we must. Short of it we have no escape from chastisement, harsh and unrelenting.

Address the Real Problem

The government decision of allowing foreign doctors for private clinics has triggered contrary responses. As a report published in The Daily Star informed Thursday last, country's doctors opposed the decision, while the patients generally welcomed it.

What prompted the government to go for such a move? Is it purely based on the consideration to give country's hopeless health care a boost? If that is the case we don't think neither the government has taken a step in the right direction nor its critics are properly focused.

The real problem with our health care is poor maintenance of the medical facilities. While some ramshackle corruption ridden constructions are standing there as a screaming but thoroughly poignant farce about government's commitment to health care, the few initiatives that have come by the hands of private sector entrepreneurs are doing more service to business than the notion of service itself. We would like to remind both the government and the opposing doctors that a lot is left to be desired as far as the individual responsibility of the two parties are concerned.

The government should invest in promoting professionalism in the health care sector. Mere transfer of technology will not solve the problems of our ailing hospitals. It is wonderfully sensitive and ethical of doctors to point out the loopholes in the government decision but what have they done to improve the image of the community? It is not only for professional expertise or technological edge that local patients go abroad to seek treatment. The care, cordiality with which foreign doctors treat is something to reckon with also. After all doctor-patient relationship is a very important factor in the whole process of treatment. And a very common complaint against local doctors is that they are not caring and sensitive. Only after doctors and the government woke up to their responsibilities that health care can get a face lift in this country.

Buttress the Butter or Garner the Guns?

The cost of nuclear weapons is manifold and so is the loss in social development... let us buttress the butter rather than garner the guns. It is only through socio-economic development that both human and state security could be ensured. The bell is chiming for a new realisation.

AND at long last — very recently — India successfully undertook underground nuclear tests. While this largest state of South Asia continues to celebrate the carnival with carols, economic sanctions seem to loom large following worldwide indignation to the defiant threat to global security. Already UN Security Council aired its discomfort and is reported to have deplored India's actions that took off despite overwhelming international concerns and protests.

A section of Indian political leaders (including its PM) and the people unvelled their heights of pleasure and pride having been able to build a nuclear defence. The Indian PM is reported to have warned that 'India would not hesitate to unleash nuclear weapons if it was attacked... India is now a nuclear weapons state. We have a big bomb now for which necessary command and control system is also in place' (The Daily Star May 16, 1998). Close at heel, the Pakistan Cabinet has approved the holding of nuclear tests. The explosion only awaits a date. Of course, world powers asked Pakistan not to follow the devastating suit.

With nuclear tests already completed in India and Pakistan poised for the same, the slimmer hope of a comeback of peace in this region seems to have been stripped off. Mounting tensions have always been brewing among these two arch-rivals — India and Pakistan —

even on smaller pretexts. But recent utterances from both sides of the fence produced some rays of hopes hovering around demilitarisation, increased trade flows and socio-economic and political stability in the region. The very recent threats and counter threats could, we apprehend, raise the prospect of attaining peace for ensuring development. We are concerned with the ravages of such tests and are indignant of the ravages nuclear appetite.

Our attempts in this column have always been to argue for human security and deemphasize state security. Given severe scarcity of resources, both may turn out to be mutually exclusive events to compete for scarce resource allocation. South Asian leaders, especially of India and Pakistan, should realise that the region they lead is the most deprived one in the world. It contains one-fifth of world population with the lowest GNP per capita. Again, it is the habitat of forty per cent of the world's poor. The adult literacy rate is the lowest at 48 per cent and the number of children without access to schools is the largest. South Asia lags behind other regions in whatever social or economic indicators one might choose to compare with.

In this ocean of pervasive poverty, illiteracy and malnutrition, increased defence ex-

penditures are being made to further rock the boat of economic development. It is the only region in the world where defence expenditure shot up despite the dissipation of cold war. A World Bank report says that between 1988-1992, India ranked 142nd in terms of per capita income (PPP dollar) but topped the list of arms importers. Pakistan's position

Pakistan is reported to be one-fourth more than that on education and health. For India, the share is two-thirds more. What is more perplexing is the fact that the trend continues unabated and is not in consort with the trends elsewhere in the world.

India and Pakistan together account for 93 per cent of the total military spendings in this

cohesion enshrined in SAARC charter. Further, the spill-over effects of diplomatic tensions could jeopardise development in these countries also.

Indian leaders are riding on the wrong horse. Their of from insecurity is, probably, right but the route they chose to pacify the fears is definitely wrong. The widely acclaimed view is that a state can hardly be made secure — through the accumulation of arms and nuclear weapons — when millions starve and when human and social development are bypassed. Security nowadays implies human security and not only state security, personal security not only national security. It is the security enshrined through development but not security developed through arms race.

The costs of state security impinged through possession of nuclear weapons are mostly borne by the citizens of that country alone. And if the neighbouring country, such as Pakistan, also embarks upon retaliatory attainment of nuclear weapons, the outcome could be a zero-sum game. The benefits are intangible — a feeling that the state is made secure. Growing poverty, malnutrition, unemployment among vast segment of the people could make a state insecure from in-

side although it might remain secured from outside aggression. It is simply a semblance of security. Let's call it insecure security.

Information on expenses for nuclear weapons are usually kept secret. The availability of such information could help us working out the opportunity costs of such expenses. Even then, let us consider a hypothetical case where India intends to spend 4.5 billion dollars in buying a modern package of jet fighter, submarine, aircraft carrier etc. What is the opportunity cost of the resources spent on such 'unproductive' venture? The money so spent could provide (i) primary education for one year to 45 million children already out of school; (ii) ensure safe drinking water for 226 million people who are deprived of safe water; (iii) provide essential medicines for 135 million people, already deprived of health services, for one year and (iv) ensure family planning services for additional 22 million couples for one year.

The cost of nuclear weapons is manifold and so is the loss in social development. To repeat, let us buttress the butter rather than garner the guns. It is only through socio-economic development that both human and state security could be ensured. The bell is chiming for a new realisation.

(The figures used are from 'Human Development in South Asia 1997' by Dr Mahabubul Huq.)

Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes

was 119th and 10th respectively. While in both the countries, majority of the people starve of minimum basic needs for livelihood, while adequate resources are not available for productive investments, the growing militarisation undeniably imposes immense costs in terms of unproductive uses of resources. In the trade-off between the gun and the butter, the leaders in both the countries seem to decline to buttress the butter, rather like to garner the guns. This is a very risky choice — the most insecure way of ensuring security. For example, the defence spendings in

region. The per capita military spending in India is, as reported by Dr Mahabubul Huq, \$10 compared to \$26 in Pakistan. For each 10,000 citizens, India maintains 19 soldiers while the figure is 49 for Pakistan.

In this backdrop, the nuclear tests conducted by India could blow up the power balance in the region and invite retaliation. Pakistan's determination to do the same can hardly be denounced given that India showed the ways. As far as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and other countries are concerned, the growing heat generated by such tests could upset

Writing on the Wall

I know of computer experts who steal every bit of software they sell. I know of bankers who default on every bit of capital they borrow. I know of mechanics who fake original parts; cooks who use adulterated ingredients; managers who embezzle; executives who cheat; rickshaw owners who fake licences; men and women who believe they are all doing the right thing — even if it stinks.

Your sweaty hands have handled my wonderful, private, personal, delightful party photos.

"It's not okay to shriek in Bangladesh. People think you're a mad woman," my friend says later, when I tell her how I react.

At the time, I think I am having chest pains and therefore cannot breathe. Seriously, I do not realise how quickly and irrevocably I have raised my voice. And although my shrieking may have been related in some way to the intense heat of the day which has made all of Bangladesh irritable and explosive, I am convinced it has a great deal to do with a violent dislike I have taken to Flickering Eyes.

He jumps back and, for the first time, since we have been engaged in a conversation, he opens his mouth. For approximately thirty seconds I see surprise register in his eyes. Then, it is gone. Flickering Eyes swiftly shifts his glance away again.

"Maybe he is shy. Maybe he isn't used to women talking directly to him," my friend suggests.

Please, don't tell me he's an innocent. He has done things to my photographs. He has taken his time over this, believe me he has. My photos have been arranged — out of sequence, no

Coming Home...

Almas Zakiuddin

doubt, but definitely arranged — inside a couple of tacky, polyester-covered albums from Taiwan, no doubt made in Jinjira or wherever and all the rage in the trendy circles of Dhaka.

How dare someone, a stranger, look through my private photographs?

"If he arranged them out of sequence, he couldn't have looked through them," my friend persists.

I glare at Flickering Eyes. Don't you know that this is not acceptable? I mean, you

have no business to go through my photographs and arrange them in albums! These are my photographs! Do you understand what I'm saying?

"We do this for everyone," Flickering Eyes declares, churlishly.

And do you know what makes the bile rise and fog right over the contact lens inside my eyes so that not only do I think I am having chest pains, but I also believe I have lost my sight. It is the churlishness of the wretch.

Flickering Eyes is typical of a breed that dominates. He is bored with life, rude and unkind. He slouches behind his service counter and when he is not being insolent, he leers. I see him leer at me. My skin crawls at the thought that he and for all one knows a brigade of inquisitive and oily wretches like him have probably handled and eyed photographs that capture my personal moments with my friends.

But what makes me truly angry is the realisation that Flickering Eyes does not give a damn.

"Don't make too much of it!" a male friend admonishes.

But I do. I believe that Flickering Eyes is part of a way of life. It is a way of life dominated by people who have no ethical standards, who believe they are right and everyone else is wrong.

I know of computer experts who steal every bit of software they sell, and tell you how much of a favour they are doing by selling it to you. I know of bankers who default on every bit of capital they borrow and remind you how useful they are to you. I know of mechanics

who fake original parts; cooks who use adulterated ingredients; managers who embezzle; executives who cheat; rickshaw owners who fake licences; men and women who believe they are all doing the right thing — even if it stinks.

I believe it is all happening because deceit, like water, rises to its own level. When there is so much deceit all round, it covers everything in sight.

When people lose sight of small truths, they lose sight of their future.

We don't have a future, until we realise that it is not okay to pry through someone's photos when they are not looking. Especially when they are not looking.

"Come on now. You are getting carried away," my male friend protests.

Maybe I am. But what if I am not. What if I am reading something on the wall.

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.

No to N-weapons

Sir, Nuclear weapons do not enhance security. On the contrary they diminish it. This lesson was expensively learned during the Cold War by strategists of the two warring camps, the US and the USSR. This paradoxical result derives from the peculiar frightfulness of the nuclear arsenal. As long as only one side has the Bomb it cannot translate this into any meaningful political advantage because the threat to inflict nuclear holocaust is not credible. And then when, as is almost inevitable, both sides acquire them, the deterrent effect leaves both sides back at square one.

The only thing that has changed for the worse is that a climate of horrid nervous tension grips both the antagonist countries because of the fear that one side or other will launch of first-strike, either by calculation or error. This dynamic in turn generates the concept of a pre-emptive first-strike and so itself tends to bring about the very result which was to have been avoided.

At least during the Cold War a continent separated the US and the USSR and so there was a reaction time of half an hour which could have been used to avoid catastrophic error. In the case of India and Pakistan the reaction time will be at most a few minutes which will further destabilise the first-strike or not-to-strike (?) strategy game described above. Furthermore because of the geographical proximity of the two countries radioactive fallout will spread across borders and inflict horrendous casualties on both sides. A nuclear Bomb on Lahore can hardly spare large parts of Indian Punjab!

Some quarters in India have hailed the nuclear explosions as a great scientific achievement. For a nation which can hardly feed itself to reproduce a 40-year old technology is hardly cause for pride if they

had any real talent for original research Indian scientists would have done better to develop technology to help alleviate the misery of their countrymen, and others all over the world. In this sense, Bangladesh, which has thrown up great sons such as Professor Yunus and F H Abed, who have made innovative contributions to positive human growth, has much greater reason to be proud.

In short the Indian leadership's decision to take their country down the nuclear garden path is thoroughly irresponsible and bordering on the lunatic. It is a matter of outrage that Bangladesh, being one of the countries placed most at risk by this development, has not joined the worldwide condemnation of the Indian move, which as has been briefly shown above, will prove not only counterproductive but also downright dangerous to all the inhabitants of the subcontinent.

It also marks a decisive turning away by India of the SAARC spirit, which has been such a centerpiece of Bangladesh's foreign policy ever since Sheikh Mujib. In effect the Indian mandarins have delivered Bangladesh a sharp slap in the face and such is our subservience that we are not permitted even a peep. The Awami League government should be put on notice that it has taken an oath to protect the interests of Bangladesh and not to serve as apologists for the worst follies of a foreign power.

A Concerned South Asian

Cricket mania

Sir, What is a sport for? Money, business or recreation? Sports channels broadcast the cricket matches for money, many companies sponsor them for their business purpose and we, the spectators, watch it for recreation. But all groups associated with it are intent on the accomplishing their objects ex-

cept the maniacs. We watch the matches all day long. As cricket is played almost all through the year, we waste our valuable time watching them. Students, especially teenagers are the main victims of it.

Nowadays, it is as harmful as 'charal' because it inactivates us for 7/8 hours. Another irritating matter is the excessive discussion about it. What a peculiar entertainment!

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Encroachment on lakes

Sir, It is good news that investigations are being made to determine such encroachments, by asking Rajuk to do this job is rather surprising in view of the reported involvement of some Rajuk officials in these acts of illegal filling.

In all fairness, if the government is serious about the matter, the investigations should be carried out under judicial officers heading the committees and the committees should include some prominent residents of the lake areas and environmental organisations which have pointed out suspected encroachments.

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Winning is not everything...

Sir, I went through the letter published on the 19th May captioned 'A reaction of the students' by Aneek Rashed. I fully agree with him about the issue he has pointed out. Many of the journalists of our country are far away from the true spirit of journalism. For this they have criticised the accent the students spoke in the press conference held for Shazneen.

I myself am from a Bengali medium background and I know very well that some students from English medium schools do speak in a rather modified Bengali, but this wasn't the point to ponder at, especially in such a press conference that was supposed to uphold a different aspect. The journalists have asked ques-

tions like 'why they didn't raise their voice when Tania was violated. In reply, as a common young citizen of this country? I would simply comment that the leaders, the elders and of course the journalists have not yet established any ethic for us to follow as a nation.

These journalists should feel ashamed to ask their youngsters such silly questions whereas they haven't fulfilled their duties yet. They are just going ahead in printing the horrible pictures of the brutal killing of the young girl for business purpose!

Winning is not everything, its the only thing.
Shehzad Bin Shams
Dhaka

Forming an anti-nuclear group

Sir, At a time when the whole world is condemning India for carrying out nuclear tests, and Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and BJP leaders are rejoicing their dreadful achievement, why is our government keeping mum? Can't we as a sovereign and independent country differentiate between right and wrong?

An ominous threat of nuclear holocaust is hovering like a dark cloud over the millions of people of SAARC countries. If India-Nepal-Bhutan-Bangladesh can form a sub-regional group within SAARC for economic development, why can't Nepal-Bangladesh-Bhutan-Sri Lanka have another sub-regional group for anti-nuclear arms race in SAARC?

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Condolence for Mushfiq

Sir, It is very sad to learn that an unknown gunman shot the medical student — Mushfiqur Salehin of Chittagong Medical College (The Daily Star 19th May 1998). We would like to provide condolence and sympathy to the parents of Mushfiqur Salehin in this difficult time. We very much hope that the responsible person will be found and brought forward to the justice.

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OPINION

TREATIES WITH FOREIGN COUNTRIES

Constitutional Process Not Complied Since 1978

ABM Shamsud Doulah

Since 1971 the People's Republic of Bangladesh is a sovereign State and has become signatory to many international treaties. But until 1978 the Constitution of the country did not have any provision on "Treaties". In 1978 Article 145 A was inserted by the Second Proclamation Order No IV, which reads "145A. All treaties with foreign countries shall be submitted to the President, who shall cause them to be laid before Parliament. [Provided that any such treaty connected with national security shall be laid in a secret session of Parliament.]"

A "Treaty" is an agreement between subjects of international law, primarily between States, regarding the establishment, change or termination of their mutual right and obligations in any sphere economic, political, scientific, technical, cultural and other cooperation. Treaty is a basic source of international law. In fact, the word "Treaty" is used as a generic term to cover agreements, pacts, covenants, charters, conventions and declarations etc. Irrespective of the name all treaties have identical legal force. Treaties lay a very important role in strengthening international order and are essential instruments of international peace and cooperation between states.

Approval of a treaty is one of the stages in the process of concluding a treaty, which includes the considerations of an agreement to the treaty by a competent state authority on whose behalf it had been signed, for the purpose of making it valid. Broadly it is the process of ratification.

The Article 145A of the constitution of Bangladesh is clear about it. It clearly says that "All treaties with foreign countries shall be submitted to the (Hon'ble) President" and such process is the obligatory responsibility of the administration [vide Article 6, 7, 16 (XII), and schedule-III of The Rules of Business of the Government of People's Republic of Bangladesh]. Moreover, according to The Rules of Business, "Liaison with international organisations and matters relating to treaties and agreements with other countries and world bodies relating to subjects (are) assigned to the respective Ministries. As such, "all treaties with foreign countries", as referred to the constitution becomes the basic responsibility of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Hon'ble President's steps in respect of such treaties to "cause them to be laid before the Parliament" is the responsibility of the Ministry

of Law. But it is unfortunate to note that even after the insertion of the Article 145A in 1978 in the Constitution, still our public officials have not submitted scores of treaties which foreign countries and international organisations to the Hon'ble President of the country and, as such, he never has had been reported to have laid those treaties before the National Parliament for due process of ratification. The members of our National Parliament have been, as such, kept in dark about all the treaties between foreign countries/international organisations and Bangladesh.

For example, the Geneva Convention on Diplomatic and Consular Relations; New York Convention on Arbitration; Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property; Universal Copyright Convention; and General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade etc none has been reported to have been ratified by the Parliament.

It is important that the Administration and the Government of Bangladesh should soonest undertake the due process of law for the required ratification of all treaties with the foreign countries as well as the International Organisations and the UN Bodies.

We draw the urgent attention of the Hon'ble President Mr Shahabuddin Ahmed who himself was a Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh; the Hon'ble Prime Minister; the Hon'ble Speaker Mr Humayun Rashid Chowdhury who himself was a very high executive in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for a very immediate package remedy helping the people of Bangladesh and further strengthening our international relations.

Moreover, in the greater interest of the people all the treaties which Bangladesh has signed with foreign countries and international organisations should be collectively published with the listing of the countries with whom we have legal reciprocity. This will help all courts, chambers of commerce and industry and the entire nation. Such publications are made in many countries, including our neighboring countries. If the copies of the concluded treaties are provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the commercial publishers can print and publish it in one month or so with excellent presentation of the earnestness and democratic image of Bangladesh.

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