

Not by Ad hoc Actions Alone

The proverbial fencing eats up the crops within its protective bounds routinely. The population is becoming less of a society with every passing day. A big landholder in a Domar village went to town. He set up shop as an NGO and gathered women around to train them in family planning techniques. Up to that is unremarkable. What followed was lurid and more. One day nine women trainees were detained for the night at the 'NGO office' at Lakkhipur, Debiganj and the boss called them for interview at one past midnight and one by one. One by one, six or seven of them were raped in a dark lightless room. The morning light intervened and two were saved from the ordeal. The women, including two children reading in Class V, went back to their villages and told their families about the experience.

The villagers went to police who refused to entertain any complaint. They rebuked them. The aggrieved ones went to TNO and gheraoed his office. Nothing happened. Meantime enter the Police Super of Panchagarh who purportedly warn all the raped women not to open their mouth.

The national newspapers break the news and the Home Minister asks DIG, Rajshahi Range to act. The OC and duty officer, Debiganj thana were suspended. These is no news of action against the Police Super. And the main protagonist, Ataur Rahman, has been arrested from his village home. Some of the raped women were beaten up following a *shalish* verdict.

Isn't something very gravely wrong with our society in the present time that such crimes as outrage our highest social values — the idea of the dignity of the human person, for example — are on the increase?

The police predilections to obstruct justice as express in the present case, for the umpteenth time, should not prove as inscrutable as the phenomenon of crime and ways to deter it. Theirs are failings against laid down rules and norms and are as such highly punishable offences. These are veritable acts of crime not different from the rapists' and murderers'.

The rapists should be punished, hanged if the judges so please, and the policeman covering up should go to jail or be thrown out of service. But can these actions do all that is needed to arrest the spread specially of sexual crimes, the vilest form of violating a human being's basic rights? These cannot be effectively engaged by ad hoc actions alone. The best minds must ponder on how to cure the society as a whole.

Omagh Blast

Forces of violence and trouble, it seems, are out with a vengeance. After the bombing incidents in the American consulates in Kenya and Tanzania, the world to its horror on Sunday last learnt the car bomb explosion in Omagh, Northern Ireland that left 28 killed and many injured. Referred to as the worst attack in three decades, the explosion was the culmination of a series of forays engineered by the IRA dissidents hell-bent to sabotage the April Peace Accord. Shocking as it may have been this however springs little surprise. Ireland has been in the grip of a bloody internecine feud for a long time. A sickening ordeal for people in general that it was for a small minority this perhaps meant a great existential tonic. These people try to cling to violent confrontation and unrest and panic whenever an atmosphere for peace is created.

The blast in Omagh reminds the reality back home in more than one ways. Here also the Chittagong Hill Tracts peace accord has been signed to put an end to a legacy of blood and feud between the hill people and the mainland Bangalees. But the path to that accord has hardly been a rosy one. There were numerous attempts to thwart it. Even though the accord has been signed and the process of rapprochement has begun the people who had earlier opposed it, still refuse to see the wisdom, beauty and utility of the peace settlement. And that makes it imperative for the authorities to be wide awake against any possible attempt by the dissidents to sabotage the healing process. We hope the Omagh explosion would serve as an eye opener for the authorities here.

The biggest defence against separatist attacks is to impress the necessity of peace upon people. Once they are convinced that peace is essential for progress stray acts of violence cannot make much of an impact. It was observed in this column before and perhaps it won't be irrelevant to mention here again that the ruling party did not quite exhaust itself of ways and imagination to make people understand the essentiality of the CHT peace accord in greater details. A vigorous attempt along that line will do the historic event a world of good securing permanence to the accord.

Railway's Looting Syndrome

This is diagnostic of BR's ailment. Our Rajshahi correspondent reports that 3000 coaches valued at Tk 300 crore, left uncared for at the yards of the Western Zone of Bangladesh Railway, have been rusting idly by as scavengers swoop on them to eat into their metals. Apparently these are casualties of defective manufacture or of a premature procurement without any forward planning for their use. Or that these have become unusable through lack of maintenance over time. A railway clarification is sought for.

From the way the bogies are being nibbled at by hungry collusive thieves and all concerned are hell-bent upon scuttling any bid to sell these off for cost recoveries it seems everything is working to a design. Sheer scrapping away of what must have been procured through foreign loan or grant is appalling and outrageous. The scandal must be traced to its roots at the earliest. Let the rags be pulled under the feet of the ministry concerned, the railway headquarters in Dhaka and the western zone authorities in Rajshahi.

We urge the government to order an immediate probe into the matter so as to establish some accountability in the BR. In view of public impressions that railway assets, including landed property, have been routinely burgled into and illegally occupied this has become an urgent necessity.

Myanmar Opposition Leader's Stand-off

by Barrister Harun ur Rashid

Ms. Suu Kyi wants to assert her rights to freedom of speech and movement in the country. She wants to demonstrate to her party followers in rural areas that she has not forgotten them and she continues to fight for democracy in Myanmar. She wants to make it clear to the authority that she will not submit to any intimidatory actions.

MYANMAR'S Opposition Leader Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi embarked on yet another roadside test of wills with the military government. Ms. Suu Kyi set off from her Yangon residence on 12 August (Wednesday) in a van to undertake a journey to meet her followers outside Yangon (Rangoon). For the second time her van was stopped by security officials and she was asked to turn back. She stayed put on the road in a van since then. Ms. Suu Kyi wants to assert her rights to freedom of speech and movement in the country. She wants to demonstrate to her party followers in rural areas that she has not forgotten them and she continues to fight for democracy in Myanmar. She wants to make it clear to the authority that she will not submit to any intimidatory actions. The government, on the other hand, thinks that she is a 'big power' and seeks international attention through this publicity stunt.

Brief background

Ms. Suu Kyi (53) is the daughter of the hero of the freedom movement of Myanmar General Aung San who was assassinated in 1948 at the very beginning of Myanmar's independence. Her mother was subsequently appointed as Ambassador to India. Ms. Suu Kyi was educated abroad and married Mr. Michael Aris, an English academic in Oxford. She has two teenage sons living with their

father in England. Ms. Suu Kyi returned to Myanmar to see her ailing mother. During that time (1988) an anti-government demonstrations were staged for democracy and it is believed that several thousand people died as a result of a fierce backlash by the army. (Incidentally, Myanmar was ruled in one form or another by the military since 1962.) Ms. Suu Kyi was horrified to see such incidents and became active in politics to restore democracy in the country. Soon she became the leader of pro-democracy movement and formed a political party, National League For Democracy (NLD).

In the 1990 election, Ms. Suu Kyi's party National League won 352 seats (82 per cent) in the 484-seat Parliament. The military government was reported to be surprised with the election result and regarded the election as providing the basis not for a Parliament but a convention to formulate a new Constitution for the country. During the last eight years, many of NLD MPs have either died or left the country or politics.

Ms. Suu Kyi was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991.

Ms. Suu Kyi felt that she was

cheated by the military government and claims that more than 80 MPs are still in the country and are willing to sit in the Parliament if convened.

She said: 'we are always ready to work together with the authorities.'

The military government however thinks that by marrying a foreigner Ms. Suu Kyi has lost her 'right' to lead the Myanmar's people in the Parliament and further she is under control of foreign powers to stir political instability in the country to the detriment of the welfare of the people.

Present stand-off

Ms. Suu Kyi was initially detained in her house in Yangon for six years. She was released from the detention in 1995 which permitted her to meet with her party followers.

Within the premises of her house, she convenes public meetings intermittently attended by her party followers in large numbers on every occasion and reiterates her programme for restoration of democracy. This is not to the liking of the government, known now as State Peace and Development Council (SPDC).

Last month Ms. Suu Kyi made an attempt to meet her

party followers in the rural areas but was detained in her car at a road checkpoint about 50 kilometres west of Yangon for six days. The stand-off ended when the security personnel took control of her car and drove her back home in Yangon.

This time it is reported that she had enough food to last for a week or so and seven senior NLD officials accompanied her. As of writing this piece she was staying put at the checkpoint on the road. The official version is that the area where Ms. Suu Kyi wants to go is not secure and the security personnel does not want to take any chances in permitting her to visit the area, lest it should endanger her life.

Meanwhile 18 human rights activists from ASEAN countries, the US and Australia were arrested as they were found distributing 'anti-government' leaflets on the streets of Yangon. The government put them to trial on 14 August and the judge Khang Gyi sentenced each of them to 5 years hard labour for violating seditious laws. However, diplomatic negotiations led the government to deport all the 18 persons from Myanmar. The harsh sentence appears to be a message to any foreign pro-democracy activist who enters Myanmar in future.

Both sides appear to have irreconcilable differences. Ms. Suu Kyi wants to assert her rights to meet her followers. On the other hand she is seen by the government, a 'trouble-maker'. A commentary on 13 August in the government daily newspaper, *The New Light of Myanmar* said that Ms. Suu Kyi had become arrogant because she was accorded so much international recognition, including being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. The paper further continued that she was willing to ignore the suffering of her own people and followed the directions of unspecified big powers.

The official response at the present roadblock incident was that Ms. Suu Kyi and her companions remained free to return to their homes or to continue staying by the roadside as long as the conditions remained safe. (Ms. Suu Kyi, as of writing, passed four days in the van.) It is believed that the UN Secretary General's efforts to mediate discussions between the government and Ms. Suu Kyi was rejected by the government. The regime also appears to have

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turned down a joint request from the US, Australia and Japan to start a political dialogue with Ms. Suu Kyi.

Conclusion

Unity is a condition of economic progress and development. Myanmar is rich in natural resources and could be an economic 'tiger' if the political impasse is resolved. The natural resources of the country could be fully exploited through direct foreign investment which will accelerate economic development in the country for the benefit of the people.

Furthermore the relations with its ASEAN members, in particular with Thailand and the Philippines, which appear to be uneasy because of the political stalemate and 'poor' human rights record, will be restored on friendly terms.

Myanmar leadership, in my view, has to come to an agreement through a political dialogue with Ms. Suu Kyi. Myanmar is predominantly a Buddhist country and in my view Buddhism is about softer virtues: consensus, consultation, peace and harmony.

I would argue that it is hard to see how the government can ignore the Buddhist principles in not arriving at a political settlement amicably and peacefully. Let me conclude by quoting St. Francis of Assisi: 'where there is discord, may we bring harmony, where there is despair, may we bring hope.'

The writer is Former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN in Geneva.

A Breathing Space

Politics is the art of compromise, as Mian Nawaz Sharif is now showing, he is gradually coming to terms with this art. If he succeeds, Pakistan will have the breathing space we so desperately need.

AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

has been, totally out of sync with the reality of the times as well as the ability to match the glib tongue of Jaswant Singh. To compound our problems, as Ambassador in the US at this crucial juncture, Riaz Khokhar is a living disaster for Pakistan. His priorities are more attuned to the limousine that can be purchased for his use.

It is better to send such people to places where they can do little harm. Our Afghan policy seems to be finally paying off with the Taliban more or less in control of most of the country. No doubt someone mature and competent in ISI is handling Afghanistan, the inter-action in the field is almost over and it is time to inter-act positively at the diplomatic level. The Taliban victory is proving very costly to Pakistan in terms of our deep friendship with Iran.

On Tuesday last there was a demonstration (the only one in living memory) outside the Pakistan Embassy in Teheran. We must help resolve this problem of the missing Iranian diplomats because putting it very bluntly we cannot afford a hostile Iran. In fact, given our geo-political situation we can ill afford a less than totally supportive Iran. About Kashmir, we need to narrow the difference of perceptions with India by practising realpolitik. A fresh and indirect approach could be to seek the active sup-

combined two roles, that of external relations and finance. With a positive command of facts and statistics as well as being well respected in international financial circles, the good Senator will be an asset to Pakistan as in any other role for this country. What we need is a belt-tightening policy that can absorb the long-term effects of sanctions if they last. In a sense the same economic team is in full charge of constructive engagement in an increasingly economic world.

For his astute handling of the first phase of the Cabinet reshuffle, give a plus point to Mian Nawaz Sharif. He needs to make more omelettes without breaking eggs. The major issue confronting the nation internally is the unity factor which has been split wide open by the Kalabagh Dam, a vital project of dire necessity for the country, but one which without consensus is a non-starter. One good thing is that separatists have come out of the closet with Wali Khan showing his true colours at Attock Bridge on August 10, with volleys of AK-

47 fire aimed at Punjab. However this gathering was nothing much to worry about, it was a futile show of force. As is usual for Ms Benazir, when she is in deep trouble she falls back on her ploy of last resort, the 'Sindh Card'. By blockading Punjab at Ubaro she displayed her contempt towards her once mighty Punjab bastion. Increasingly she realises that her only defence to corruption is being a regional leader. To the credit of both MQM and the rest of the PAI parties, they did not take part in this outrage. To foment separatism when the country is facing financial disaster is nothing short of a crime. The PM made a mistake by announcing the construction of the Kalabagh Dam, then he made amends by calling for a consensus. At least give him a plus for quick retraction.

When all the experts are united that this Dam is necessary, the only option available to the PM is to make Wali Khan Chairman of the Commission to examine the Kalabagh Dam issue and come to some conclusion whether he or the technical experts are right or wrong. If Wali Khan is as honest as he professes to be, then we will get the correct logical answers to our questions. If indeed he plays politics at the cost of honesty then he stand exposed as not only being a hypocrite but having no love for this country. In any case what we need desperately is breathing space.

The city of Karachi needs a respite badly from the cycle of violence that it cannot seem to

shake off. A dramatic initiative is required to get back the Mohajir Community into the national mainstream. While Local Bodies Election and their function up to the District level in Karachi and Hyderabad is essential, something has to be done about the 'Quota System', now constitutionally amended to last for a decade plus. This drowns the Mohajir youth their rightful place under the Pakistani sun, in fact drives them up the wall.

The MQM has shown good faith by not joining the Sindh extremist Ms Benazir Bhutto at Ubaro, the government should reciprocate by suspending Karachi and Hyderabad only the 'Quota System' for a period of five years. The reciprocal condition must be maintenance of peace and harmony in these cities at all costs. Let the District level Local Bodies be made responsible for such. This will get Pakistan some more breathing space. Mian Nawaz Sharif desperately needs to gain time for the nation and his government. He needs to take radical initiatives of some consequence. After all he has been constitutionally elected in free and fair elections. His mandate is strong enough to suggest that he cannot be brought down by anything less than extra-constitutional measures.

However, the emergence of virtually unelectable parties like the Millat Party suggest that he has to compromise with those that are electable for the sake of national unity and integrity. Politics is the art of compromise, as Mian Nawaz Sharif is now showing, he is gradually coming to terms with this art. If he succeeds, Pakistan will have the breathing space we so desperately need.

To the Editor...

Good governance

Sir, There is a popular saying that, 'during British time there was administration (shashon), during Pakistani time there was exploitation (shoshon) and during Bangladesh time there are speeches (bhashon)'. This appears to be true. In Bangladesh we basically see seminars, workshops with wise, spirited speeches, but no action. In public meetings in presence of thousands of people political leaders deliver sweet speeches, tell sweet lies, describe the failure of past governments and promise many good things and bright future for the nation.

For good governance we would like to suggest as follows: 1) Incompetent and unscrupulous politicians should be retrained from doing politics. 2) Civil servants and police should be released or re-deployed elsewhere. Honest, sincere and pious persons should be engaged/retained. 3) Some tested system of administration/management of some advanced countries should be adopted. If Islamic system cannot be adopted now. 4) Political leaders must pass certain education/training course which will include even religious lessons. They must be pious.

5) At all levels like union parishad, upazila/thana, district, division, ministry etc., public representation should be ensured in a democratic manner.

A F M Moeenul Islam
Chandgaon R/A, Chittagong

Why?

Sir, The IGP himself while meeting the Prime Minister on 9 August 1998 (DS August 10, 1998) observed that a conspiracy was being hatched since the present government came into power to create a gap between the police and the members of the public.

On listening such a remark the PM must have asked the police representatives what action the DB took to nab the criminals. She also must have asked if the those DB personnel were given special treatment as was received by Rubel. Since the PM believes in transparency, we

expect and earnestly plead to reveal answers she got to these two questions for the benefit of the nation.

We noted that the home minister and the secretary of the home ministry were absent from this very important meeting. Why?

Syed Wailullah
Dhaka

SSC Results

Sir, I fully endorse the views and opinion by Mr Ahmed Hossain of Malibagh in his letter dated Aug 13, 1998 regarding recent SSC results of old syllabus (1997). We shudder to think of the terrible fate the failures have been pushed into. They must be given another chance as:

1. They have no scope to appear at SSC as private candidate (the Board has stopped it).
2. Even BOU registration has been closed up to the year 2000 before their result came in.
3. Regular registration from Dhaka Board has also been closed up to the year 2000.
4. The only way open to them is to register for the year 2001 which is 3 years from now.

The Education Ministry and the Board can easily save some of these wretched students from ruin by allowing them a chance by accepting any of the following:

1. To grant a general grace mark of 10 for covering shortfall in falling subject.
2. To give a chance for compartmental examination the subject failed.
3. Or give them special registration to appear in 1999 SSC exam as their registration expired in 1998.

Unfriendly Airport

Sir, Recently I have had the misfortune of traveling through Dubai Airport a number of times. It is a big and busy station handling flights of around 60 airlines of the world. The outside temperature mostly remains near the 40 Celsius mark which makes life uncomfortable once you are out of the aircraft of the terminal building. The situation turns very un-

pleasant in the absence of airbridges. All passengers changing here are subjected to carrying their hand bags up and down the stairways of the aircraft and these days the planes (most of them) are very big and high. So one can very well feel the predicament of the passengers, especially elderly people and mothers with babies at arms and baggages in hands. Why can't Dubai, one of the richest airports, have airbridges for millions of passengers? Massive work on the expansion of the airport facilities is going on but I have not seen any signs of airbridge being built during the last four years.

Another point: The officials as well as the ordinary uniformed guards/seeps are most ill behaved. On a number of occasions I have seen them ill-treating shabbily dressed or uneducated passengers, mostly from my country, who pay a lot of money as taxes to the UAE government and also spend money on shopping.

I strongly feel that our foreign office should take up the matter of ill-treatment of our citizens with the UAE authority.

Ahmed Ali Khan
Elephant Road, Dhaka

Remembering Sir

Sir, A colossus has fallen, and the guiding hand is no more there. On the 6th of August '98 our 'Sir' Prof Syed Ali Ashraf passed away in his Cambridge (UK) home peacefully in his sleep. Prof Z R Siddiqui, myself and many others were privileged to be his very first students. Sir was in his mid-twenties, when we were in our late teens. An age gap of no more than six years. An internationally-known and respected scholar, he was man of great wisdom and courage. He came to serve his beloved Bangladesh in the last years of his life. It reminds me of my friend S M Ali, who also came to serve Bangladesh in the last years of his life.

I was a financial adviser of the Darul Ihsan University, and I know how difficult it is to obtain funds to meet the establishment charges and development charges of a private university. We often forget that educa-

tion is a very expensive thing. We often criticise the huge fees realised by the private universities. Unfortunately we do not have generous donors as are seen in the US, UK or even India.

Education and medicine must not be the fields of profiteering. These are the highest areas of public service and an opportunity to serve humanity in the purest form. All the universities, private or public, are property of the nation and are fully accountable to the government.

We are sure there are many generous donors in our society, who will donate generously, once they are sure their hard-earned money is well spent. We will never be remembered for what we have earned, but only for what we gave or did for others.

On 10th of August Professor Syed Ali Ashraf was laid to eternal rest in the Darul Ihsan campus at Balbhadra (near Savar) — his beloved campus, to which he gave whatever he earned in his life. The surrounding of his grave is so green and serene. May his soul rest in peace.

Shahabuddin Mahtab
Institute of Business Studies
Darul Ihsan University
House # 9/B, Road # 2, DRA,
Dhaka-1205

US foreign policy

Sir, Some foreign think-tanks believe that there are ample evidence to point out that the United States foreign policy is more based on self-interest than in sincerely responding to the alleviation of poverty in the Third World.

It appears that aid receiving poor government are ignoring this side of the equation and gleefully accept anything offered without eyeball to eyeball cross-examination and amendments in the proffered drafts discussed before signing the documents.

The relevant experts can point out glaring examples. I do not know if SOFA is one of these. The cartels in the oil gas and power sectors is another pointer. What the experts have to say on this topic relative to Bangladesh?

AZ
Dhaka

OPINION

Our Expo Blitz

AZabr

Our export experts talk a lot about exports. But the exposure is not enough, as there are many areas which have communication and other gaps, which need not be elaborated here, as those who deal with the issues at high level are familiar with the approaches and the snags.

These talking marathons are not followed by flooding (a familiar and apt expression well understood in this delta region) the printed media with details of fact and data, charts and graphs (easy with the computer) for popular reading and awareness campaign of the dismal state of our export endeavor, specially with the neighbor.

The EPB, the apex bodies and the various Chambers headed by the FBCCI are not doing their written homework for public consumption. What the latter do from time to time are to spotlight their own problems; which is different from general analysis of the market and the current policies of Bangladesh and the other relevant countries. This is different from academic harangues.

Our export (and trade) performance with the adjacent neighbours is dismal. Nepal is a land-locked country, and separated from Bangladesh by a narrow strip of Indian territory; and the bottleneck appears to be concentrated there (not technical, but policy).

With the largest neighbour, the trade gap is huge to the disadvantage of Bangladesh, and both are members of SAARC, SARTA, SAPTA, triangles, quadrangles and what not (beautiful catalogues, not productive in output; the deliveries are not guaranteed).

What's wrong between Bangladesh and Myanmar as far as trade is concerned? Nothing much apparent to the eye except a small glitch known as the Rohingya refugee problem, which is a separate issue. What was the volume of

trade during the last quarter of a century; or during the 1990s? Only last month there were welcome official bilateral talks. There is no reason why business in this sector should not click. Too busy with CHT is not a valid excuse.

With India, the situation is not simple and straight forward due to geographical location and political pressure for transit facilities. It is a mystery why Bangladesh exports to India is so dimly low; realising that we can sell a lot of consumer and other products to isolated NE India, to compensate the relatively huge imports from the rest of India. We are having rounds and rounds of cordial meetings which cannot be quantified in millions of tons of goods or billions of Rupees or Taka of actual two-way transactions.

The huge disparity is not enhancing the images of both the governments in the eyes of the laymen in the streets (kerb reactions). Foreign trade need not be linked with patriotism except when there is noticeable disparity in the trade balance.

It is still time to improve the flow both ways with the neighbours. One is ashamed to leak out to foreigners outside the region that the volume of trade amongst the SAARC members within the region is only three per cent of the total volume of global trade by the same members. If SAARC does not work, let us have some reorganised set-up which is workable. Just for two members, why the rest of the members should suffer? It is a very pertinent question.

I am not an expert to spell out the detailed implications, but this opinion is just a means of drawing attention to the regional leaders to do something which the masses in the member countries will understand and appreciate. That is the basic objective of any diplomacy, if I understand the term correctly.