

Get the Ports Ready

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has ordered speedy unloading of foodgrains at the seaports. This news should be read with another piece of information front-paged in The Daily Star on Thursday last: The government has requested donors to expedite shipment of foodgrains. Obviously, it would mean a loss of face for the country if after urging the donors to send their food consignments quickly we ourselves are caught sucking our finger in any resigned helplessness to a go-slow, at the Chittagong port when they arrived. More than the slur, it is the suffering of the flood-ravaged people that would mount in that event, which, we think, we should use all our powers to forestall.

All that we need to do is to strike the urgency iron when it is the hottest now and, be uncompromisingly tough and exclusive in our action against any form of work abstention by port workers. In fact, we are for an immediate declaration of moratorium on wild-cats or go-slows at low two seaports — Chittagong and Mongla. Of course, as is their wont, the trade union leaders might not like a golden opportunity of extracting an undue advantage to pass barrenly away — their own version of hitting the iron when it is hot. Still the odds now are overwhelmingly against them. This is the time to call the bluff and act in defence of national interest, and act tough at this testing time to reach food, medicines, vaccines water-purifying tablets, and other relief materials in the multiplying end

when massive food and other life-saving consignments are on their way to Chittagong port from the US, UK, Germany, European Union, Japan, Sweden, Australia, to name some of the major sources promptly responding to our call for assistance? Last week-end saw tension building over Deputy Shipping Minister Saber Chowdhury's visit to Chittagong in the company of an ADB delegation which sought to review the progress made in setting up a private container terminal at Patenga. With 22 workers' organisations having decided to show black flag to the minister in protest against the government plan to have the private container terminal, extra police force had to be deployed in the port area to maintain law and order. Previously the trade unions had announced a go-slow programme with no qualms at all for the plight of the flood-victims all over the country.

And strangely a local political voice has been lent to deflect the private terminal agenda by hammering at the deep sea port issue which need not be mutually exclusive matters at all.

We urge a combined meeting of all concerned — the trade unions, port users' associations, port authorities, shipping ministry officials — to adopt a single-line resolution like this: there will be not a single impediment to off-trading relief goods.

The Retention of Literacy

The claim was evidently very tall — 'Entire population of the district (Magura) are now free from the curse of illiteracy after completion of a six-month long literacy drive.' The news report published by The Daily Star said a total of 200,100 people were given preliminary knowledge of reading and writing through 6,670 mass education centres in four thanas.

Giving the happy tidings DC Nuruzzaman Khan told a news agency Prime Minister Hasina would herself make a 'formal announcement' of the achievement in a public meeting on September 16. This last piece of information seals the chance of any lack of authenticity of the report. And we can safely rejoice over the achievement of Magura.

Ridding some area of illiteracy somehow rings a bell in the mind. In fact, many bells. It started possibly at Mithapukur, Rangpur in Pakistan times and how we all celebrated it! No one possibly lied over Mithapukur's achievement. But then in the following years the area was found to be as bristling with illiterates as anywhere else in Bangladesh.

Then there is the suspicious-sounding wordings — given preliminary knowledge of reading and writing. How much time do the primary schools need to 'literate' a child of five? Mind that the child is then at its highest receptive brain power. How much time will it take to effectively enable an adult to read and write? Six months of intensive instruction perhaps can do it if it is imparted without gaps. But six months of continuous intensive training for two lakh adults is an impossible proposition for everywhere except Magura.

The alphabet is such a wonderful invention of man that one needn't learn all the ways this can be manipulated. One can self-teach much of these after one has been led into its rudiments. This facility is balanced, unfortunately, by the fact that new literacy rusts fast if not exercised by poring over ever new reading material. While congratulating the Magura people on their achievement, we want to underline that second aspect of literacy.

Bottled Water Worry

The static flood situation has drastically aggravated a chronic problem: paucity of pure potable water. There is water everywhere but very little of the type that poses no threat to health. In most places these days the tap water is filthy, stinky and dangerous. Any hope of resorting to the bottled mineral water on the shelves of shops as an alternative is equally fraught with danger. The other day, Sajeda Chowdhury, Minister for Forest and Environment, found some alien substance in a sealed bottle of a fairly well known company. She is not the first person to have the creeps at the unexpected discovery of 'things' in a bottle of so-called bishuaddha paani. There were quite a few reports of such confidence-shattering 'discoveries' before. The latest proves things have not changed. In fact, it goes to show how much more exposed public health today is to the threat of spurious content in bottled water.

Obviously this calls for immediate intervention by the authorities. Apart from telling the companies to take steps that will make things difficult for spurious bottlers, the government should improve its own market intelligence system. We suggest the relevant government agency hold a dialogue with the retailers to find a way to tackle with the problem of adulteration. They are the people to be the first and most effective agents of vigilance against adulteration. Bottled water was a novelty when it entered people's consciousness some years back. Now with the increasing paucity of drinking water from the traditional sources, it has turned into a necessity. The government has to do something immediately to resist the unscrupulous people from making this changed reality a source of health hazard.

Chime of Time: Let's Face the Challenge

Is it possible on the part of the government alone to meet such a big challenge? Those who are at the pinnacle of power should play their due role. But then the nation as a whole should be on its feet to take up the challenge.

early but is late in leaving. As a result, two important rice crops — Aus and Amon — are badly damaged. The Amon production — that constitutes 46 per cent of total foodgrains and 54 per cent of total rice — was to the tune of 88.56 lakh M T in 1997-98 which was lower by 7 lakh MT from the previous year's output. To little water caused the deficit. This year, the problem is too much water that submerged 60 per cent of Amon crops and thus signals a big deficit in the offing. However, the major Amon growing areas like Dinajpur, Bogra, Rangpur remained unaffected by flood to provide us with certain rays of hopes in the ocean of despair.

Available estimates show that the food deficit may run as high as 30 lakh MT during the current fiscal year. Managing such huge deficit thus should constitute a perennial concern for policy makers. We have, reportedly, 7 lakh MT of foodgrains in government godowns and the government is reported to have already asked for about 14 lakh MT from donors. Besides, private sector imports and stocks should add more grains to the bucket. However, coping with the ensuing food

crisis would hinge much on post-flood rehabilitation programmes and their implementation. The task is massive no doubt but, nevertheless, quite achievable. Let us float few suggestions for consideration.

The overall food situation should be tackled on two fronts by, first, making food available to the market (augmenting supply) by harnessing various channels of food supply and

so distributed among those who really need them is urgently needed so that human 'vultures' do not grab them to throtle the true spirit. Past experiences on distribution of agricultural loans during crisis do not bear a good testimony. Second, if the water recedes by Sept 10, there would remain scope to grow local transplanted Amon. All facilities should be made available to farmers. Third, to

low priority ADP projects should be fulfilled. We are glad to note that Planning Ministry has already embarked upon such an exercise. Second, the revenue expenditures of public sector enterprises/institutions including that of defence, should be heavily axed. Mind it that a war time like situation should hang around all of our minds that warrants rational expenditure to save financial resources. And, finally, foreign aid and grants should be sought and the reported positive response from the donors would go a long way in healing the wounds.

Let me go back to the statement I made at the beginning of this note: the PM and her government are faced with the biggest challenge. In reality, it is possible on the part of the government alone to meet such a big challenge? Those who are at the pinnacle of power should play their due role. But then the nation as a whole should be on its feet to take up the challenge. Civil society, political parties, various other organizations should marshal their respective efforts, and mop up relief goods and come forward to serve their fellow countrymen in the crisis not seen in such magnitude before. After all, politics is to ameliorate the sufferings of the people, not to take human sufferings as weapon of politicking.



Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes

second by, enhancing of food entitlements to the poor secured by transferring income to them.

To ease the supply problem, government should provide credit to farmers. Reportedly, the government had already taken up the task of providing Tk 300 crore as interest-free, long-term loans to farmers. It is a timely positive step. But a proper monitoring of the loans

target a bumper boro crop, necessary arrangements should start so that farmers do not face input supply constraints. To augment the supply of seeds for boro season, farmers in flood free zones can be encouraged to produce seeds for the affected region. That would help create a market for seeds. And, finally, farmers should be encouraged to go for maximum utilization of their agricultural lands dur-

Does US Policy towards Iraq Take a U-turn?

by Barrister Harun ur Rashid

At a time when Islamic orthodox revivalism is emerging in many countries, the US should not fuel its spread in the moderate Islamic countries by its harsh actions. Consensus and reconciliation should not be substituted by discord and force.

THE US administration appears to have shifted its tactical policy towards Iraq. Reports suggest that it does not wish to pursue its hard line approach towards Baghdad in respect of the inspection of the weapons of mass destruction. The Washington Post reported that the Clinton administration had tried to persuade the Chief Inspector Richard Butler of UNSCOM (UN Special Commission) not to undertake "intrusive" weapons inspections in Iraq.

Mr. Butler admitted that the US made its views known to him but denied that Washington tried to pressure him over the inspections. (It is with US's strong support that Mr. Butler became the chief in UNSCOM). Meanwhile, the situation worsened when one of the UN inspectors Mr. Scott Ritter (from the US) resigned last week accusing the UN Security Council and the Secretary General of the UN of surrendering to Iraq on the issue of weapons inspections.

Six months ago, President Clinton ordered an armada of US warships to the Persian Gulf to confront Iraq. The UN Secretary General brokered a deal with Iraqi leadership that "a gun-gang" approach should not be conducted by the UN inspection team and that the sanction would be lifted in the near future when UNSCOM completed its task of inspections of the

weapons of mass destruction (biological and chemical weapons). Iraq reasonably expected that the sanctions would be lifted by October next.

Six months later Iraq has ceased co-operation with the UN inspection team as it believes that the UNSCOM is pursuing a US agenda in that the inspections have no timeframe to complete. There is a growing perception that sanctions will continue against Iraq irrespective of the fact whether Iraq satisfies the UN inspection team as to the destruction of the chemical and gas weapons. Iraq maintains that during the last seven years the UN team should have carried out the inspection and completed its task. To Iraq, the inspections have become the name of the game of the UNSCOM and they are being pursued as a political vendetta.

This time when Iraq is reported to have ceased co-operation with the UN inspection team, the US did not respond as it did in last February. Axxious question is now being asked: why did the US change its approach towards Baghdad?

There appears to be a number of reasons for this change.

First, the international community including some of the permanent Security Council members (Russia, France and China) has become fatigued with the Iraq problem. It seems to be odd that the UNSCOM could not complete its inspection for the last seven years. There is a view that Iraqi people had gone through immense sufferings under sanctions and there should an end to this.

Second, there appears to be a manifestation of double standards policy of the US towards Iraq. The US administration remains a silent spectator to the events in West Bank while Israel continues to flout the UN Security Council resolutions as opposed to US's general approach to Islamic countries.

Third, the recent military strikes to the "terrorist targets" in Afghanistan and Sudan did not go well for the US in Islamic countries. Almost all the Islamic countries deplored the attack as it violated the territorial integrity of the country in question. A view prevails that

the US should not deal with international terrorism by unilateral attacks. To be effective, international terrorism is to be countered through international action.

Fourth, there is no guarantee that a US military strike would force Iraq to cooperate with UN inspectors. Iraq knows that the international community does not endorse the attitude of the US to them. Tenacity of the US administration can be a virtue in international politics but there comes a point where tenacity becomes unreasonable, even arrogance. US's approach to Iraq may be cited as an instance in point.

Fifthly, the recent thaw in relations between Iran and Iraq in near will have an impact on the security profile in near future in the Gulf area. It appears that both countries want the US out of the area so that no external influences can prevail. The US is bound to acknowledge this reality. US's olive branch to Iran in recent weeks demonstrates its reconciliatory efforts with Iran.

Finally, the biological and

chemical weapons can be produced at any time by any country even after the UN inspectors certify that the weapons of mass destruction do not exist. These weapons are relatively easy to produce and considered as poor country's answer to nuclear weapons.

Given these above factors, the US appears to have decided that military force is not a practical option whenever Iraq does not extend cooperation with UNSCOM. Although US Secretary of State denies that there has been any shift in policy on Iraq, failing to respond by the US in identical fashion to the same type of incident cannot help but send a message of its change of approach to Iraq.

Furthermore, it is reported that the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan had expressed concerns about Mr. Butler and made it clear that he would not give to see Butler go.

Conclusion

The poor standing of the US throughout the Middle East leaves it incapable of influencing events which will have a

crucial bearing on Baghdad. It appears that Clinton administration has realised that it would be a mistake to rush its military forces into the Persian Gulf every time Iraq does not cooperate with the UN inspectors. Iraq has its own reasons not to extend its cooperation with UNSCOM. The issue needs to be subjected to a much more critical analysis than has been common hitherto.

Islamic role of the US in the Middle East has gone through a radical metamorphosis since the 1990 Gulf War. The US is perceived as an "unfair bully" to the Islamic countries. It will not be incorrect to say that Iraq hardly now poses a threat to its neighbours, to regional security and to US's vital interests. At a time when Islamic orthodox revivalism is emerging in many countries, the US should not fuel its spread in the moderate Islamic countries by its harsh actions. Consensus and reconciliation should not be substituted by discord and force.

The best and most honourable thing the UN can do would be to open diplomatic negotiation with Iraq. It may find that it has to give surprisingly little in order to get an agreement with Iraq on the issue of weapons of mass destruction.

The author is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN in Geneva.

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.

Double standard US politics

Sir, How weird the US policies are! Firstly they manipulate the UN to their own advantage by implementing more and more sanctions on Iraq as well as increasing British and American personnel in the weapons inspection team. They pretend to be the high and mighty guardians of the world who do not tolerate any form of injustice. And then they suddenly decide to attack Sudan and Afghanistan, without bothering to negotiate with the rest of the world, based on invisible evidence claiming to attack terrorists.

What a double standard they follow! If the Americans feel that they can carry out whatever task they dream of, whenever they feel like it, then they are extremely wrong. Punishing terrorists is legal and just. But do not let us have the International Courts as well as the United Nations to do the same job.

Taking law in one's own hands is barbaric which is against the legal system. What the US has proved is that anyone can decide to attack if they feel that they are threatened.

May be the cold war era is gone, the USSR is split up. But there may be colder war in the future if majority of the Muslim countries decide to unite against a common enemy. Or is lying to the nation as well as the DNA sample too much for Mr. Clinton to bear which was the reason why this sudden attack was mandatory for a deviation from his ugly personal scandals?

Shagor Dhaka

Discrimination

Sir There is little difference of educational qualifications between secondary school teachers and college teachers.

At present, most of the school teachers are master degree holders. But the difference of load of classwork of these two stages of teachers is immense. School teachers have to do more classwork in comparison with the college teachers. Generally school teachers have to take six or

seven classes a day whereas most of the college teachers take five or six classes a week. That is, college teachers visit college twice or thrice a week.

On the other hand, school teachers have to go to school daily except on weekly holidays and remain there minimum for five hours at a stretch. But college teachers go to college on some fixed days and times. They need not put signature to prove their presence.

So it is observed that one month's classwork of the college teachers is not equal to one week's class work of the school teachers. Even a school teacher having 26 years experience has to take five or six classes daily.

For these reasons, a secondary school teacher leaves a sigh of relief if he/she is fortunately able to take the college by passing the BCS examination. School teachers have to follow the stop-gap routine which is not in vogue in the college. So college teachers get a lot of time to study and research. If more teachers are appointed to lessen the burden of the school teachers, they will be able to devote themselves to the classwork as well as the experimental work.

The present government has a great plan to overhaul the education system of the country. So I earnestly request the authority concerned to take necessary step in order to lessen the discrimination between college teachers and school teachers.

Md Abdur Rahim Assistant Teacher Comilla Zilla School Comilla

Is Bangladesh a police state?

Sir, In order to assess by the respected readers whether Bangladesh is a police state or not I quote the relevant portion from the Police Regulation Book (PRB) of 1927 and 1973 about the relationship of the SP and the DM. The reader will find easily how much deviation has been made in order to make Bangladesh a police state.

PRB-1927 27(e) Should any difference of opinion on any question relating to the police administration arise between the Superintendent

of Police and the District Magistrate. It is the duty of the Superintendent of Police to carry out the Magistrate's instructions and to request the Magistrate to refer the point under dispute for the orders of the Commissioner, who will decide all such references in consultation with the Deputy Inspector-General. Any officer of the Police who is dissatisfied with the decision of the Commissioner, may submit his case to the Inspector-General.

PRB 1973 15(e) Should any difference of opinion on any question relating to the police administration arise between the Superintendent and the District Magistrate, it is the duty of the Superintendent to carry out the Magistrate's instructions. The Magistrate shall in such cases forthwith refer the matter to the Commissioner and the Superintendent shall similarly make a reference to his Deputy Inspector-General. The Commissioner and the Deputy Inspector-General shall consult together and, if possible, arrive at an agreed decision. If they are unable to agree, the matter shall be referred to the provincial Government through the Inspector-General.

M.B. Karim (Advocate) 13/1 Jurain, Dhaka

To the PM

Sir, we are heartened to know through press reports that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has been kind enough to hand over saving certificate for one lakh taka to Sabina Huq (Shilpi) the widow of Nuruzzaman Sharif, a former employee of Bangladesh Biman. The widow has also been provided with a suitable job in Bangladesh Biman.

We would be grateful if the Prime Minister kindly let the anxious and worried public know the precise and truthful cause of the mysterious death investigation report and the judgement of the murder case of Nuruzzaman for the sake of accountability and transparency.

O.H. Kabir 6, Hare Street, Wari, Dhaka-1203

The third-time loser

Sir, I am writing for the third time to draw the attention of the higher authority to the deplorable condition of the link-road between College gate on Mirpur road and Bangladesh Agricultural Institute (Krishi College).

In these rainy days users of the road mainly teachers, stu-

dents and staff of BAI, all plus doctors, nurses and patients of Shaheed Suhrawardy Hospital complex are facing serious difficulties in using the cracked road full of mud and water.

Would the authority please decide the ownership of the link-road and repair it immediately for mitigating the public sufferings.

M. Zahidul Haque Bangladesh Agricultural Institute Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207

Illegal immigrants!

Sir, The government in India, has been actively contemplating to forcibly push in lakhs of Bengali-speaking Indians to Bangladesh by alleging that they are "illegal immigrants". In fact they are Bangla speaking Muslims of India. It is a fact that ever since the partition of the Indian Subcontinent, there has been large-scale migration from and to all sides of the borders. Recently there have been reports of illegal immigration from India into Chittagong Hill Tracts. The government of India had, in the past, alleged that a number of Hindus had gone over to India. Now the people whom the government is trying to evict by brutal force are all Muslims. This is a blatant contradiction of the government's own position.

The government and the people of Bangladesh must resist such nefarious activities which are clearly motivated by base communal ideas and orientation. In fact, the civilised world should raise its voice against such Nazi-like unacceptable government conduct. However, there may be arrangements for the extradition and exchange of criminals and fugitives. For example, as reported in the press a Magistrate in Bangladesh, Devashish Roy posted in Joypurhat raped a young woman named Shah-nawaz (Daily Star, page 3, August 19). The criminal was prosecuted, but he absconded. Reportedly he fled to India. He was tried and sentenced by court absentia to ten year's imprisonment. The victim, Shah-nawaz, on August 17 went to meet the establishment secretary seeking redress, but fainted in agony and mental distress in the Secretary's office. We would welcome repatriation of such criminals. Similarly we would be happy to return such absconders to India, if there is any.

I am sure I voice the mind of the nation when I ask the government of India to desist from such activities which will adversely affect inter-state relationship and vitiate communal harmony. We hope bulk of the population of India also will resist such ill-motivated moves. Let us try to build up a secular democratic order in the sub-continent. We have a legacy of a rich and ancient civilisation. There is no reason why some misguided leaders of government should succeed in making situation turn barbaric.

Enam A Chaudhury Dhaka

SAARC with the big two

Sir, Since the SAARC is not functioning even normally, as it should, and not progressing or developing at all, due to continued unfriendly and hostile relationship between India and Pakistan for half a century, the rest of the members may try to run it without the two big non-brothers. No harm in trying — something is better than nothing, without provoking the two big members.

Why the smaller members should not derive the benefits of the region if two members are snarling at each other all the time, and more so, now that they possess nuclear capabilities? Leave them alone in their "lovers' quarrel over Kashmir and micro-atom bombs.

The kafela (caravan) must move on.

Alif Zabr Dhaka

Wrong hallmarks

Sir, I refer to DS, editorial (27-8-98). It sounds as if, criminal acts of BCL-AL are isolated events. Chittagong-specific only. What about the naked obfuscation of justice by calling strike a 'JUP'? The evil motive is to extend respite to the rapist criminals, so as to create panic in JU. This unholy respite also, in JU the BCL managed with smashing success as reported to the press by one of the assistant professors who was cowardly manhandled by the BCL goons and also, with the blessing of one of the proctors.

There is a common saying: "history repeats". I remember one of the famous lines of the late and lamented Banghabandhu in a rally wherein he blurted out: "I demand sonar manush — can you give me? Because, whomever I trust, turns to thievery. What am I supposed to do?"

It was said therein that, there is a marginal improvement in the law and order in Chittagong. On 26/8/98 the

Chittagong port was crippled due to strike and the city mayor addressing a workers rally in the Chittagong port as the chief guest declared that, he will sacrifice his mayorship to "smash" the government-proposed private container terminal. This private container terminal involving FDI worth US\$500 million, for which any country worth its salt will crawl on all fours to beg and grab such bonanza.

On the same day the minister of port and shipping declared that, no obstacle whatsoever can ever stop the private container terminal from establishment in the Chittagong port.

So, as a Chittagonian I have already witnessed the holocaust let loose when the same mayor was once arrested, quite recently, scars of which are still visible all over the port city as a grim reminder to the scourge. Hence, we can safely assume that, the shipping minister belonging to the birds of the same feather — i.e. they are not only comrades in arms but even of the same family clan — can outperform the holocaust of the present mayor which will resemble a birthday party.

A veritable calm before the great "danger cyclone". One can safely add to your editorial conclusion that, slamming the door on FDI in such rude, crude and obscene manner tantamounts to collective national hara kiri. Or is it the hallmarks(s) of BAKSAL?

Salaudin Jamal Firozshah Colony Chittagong-4207.

Timely reminder

Sir, This refers to your editorial on the 6th August.

Here I like to refer to an article written by M. Anisuzzaman on the 5th August titled "Public Administration Reforms Commission, People as Protagonist". The writer has pointed out that "it was possible even decades ago to receive state services without bribery or influence. But why is it not possible now? For whose protection is there legal and judicial system, administrative system and to punish whom? For whose interest is being run at the cost of public exchequer. Why people are afraid to visit any government office? We have to free the nation of these vices and wrongdoings..."

Therefore, according to your editorial, there is no doubt time is ripe for massive reforms in all sectors.

M Ali Dhaka