

NOISE POLLUTION

How Long Should We Remain Indifferent to the Danger?

by Md Asadullah Khan

We must realise the fact that when we lose hearing we lose to some degree one of our most vital attributes, the ability to interact with our environment. Precisely speaking, people in the country should be making the most noise about noise itself!

Stress and stress is a leading cause of illness and even violence. Even in our country there is so much noise that we are exposed to on the roads, market places and in the workplaces that we seem to become complacent about it. Speaking on the state of things in the US about noise, as many as 10 million Americans are exposed daily to on-the-job noise that could gradually cause some degree of permanent hearing loss. In our country about 50 million people living in the city areas endure the cacophony of city traffic that is louder than the level health officials deem safe. People living close to airports are exposed to greater threats. It has been revealed that prolonged exposure to noise of 85 decibels produces gradual hearing loss. Above 100 decibels, even brief exposure can cause permanent damage. In our country, another deadly nuisance is slowly creeping in the society with menacing consequences. The uncontrolled cocktail and bomb explosion during festivities, along with shooting incidents, in different parts of the country are considered to be more hazardous. A single crack of gunfire can hit 130 decibels or more, easily exceeding the danger level of 85 decibels.

Children lead some of the most raucous lives of all. Noisy activities range from playing with cap guns to practicing with school bands to riding the roller coaster. Of greatest concern, however, is youngsters' devotion to amplified music. Rock concerts can surpass 110 decibels, though the noise is more of a threat to musicians than to audience members who endure the punishing pounding for only an hour or two. Correctly stated by William Clark, scientist at the Central Institute for the Deaf in

St. Louis, "we have laws to protect the hearing of workers in noisy work places but there are no laws covering recreational noises". In our country the situation relating to recreational noise is much more alarming.

The most endangered kids are those who wander with cassette players blaring music into their skulls for hours. These personal stereos (walkman) can funnel blasts of 110 decibels or more into the ear. They are damaging their ears", declares Dr. Jerome Goldstein of the American Academy of Otolaryngology. It is high time that our kids should be alerted over radio and TV and through newspapers about the dangers of their recreation.

Small wonder, the ear is an amazingly flexible organ but, it certainly was not designed to withstand the strain of so called 'modern' living. Hearing naturally deteriorates with aging, but not by much. A certain group of tribesmen in Sudan, it has been learnt, who have never been exposed to industrial sounds, maintain their hearing in old age. Sudden intense noise, like a gunshot or blaring of hydraulic horn or dynamite blast, can harm hearing instantly by damaging the tissue in the delicate inner ear.

Sustained noise from a jack hammer or disco music (110 decibels) is more insidious. The prolonged barrage flattens the tiny hair cells in the inner ear that transmit sound to the nerves. As the hairs wilt, people often feel a fullness or pressure in the ears or a buzzing or ringing known as tinnitus. Such symptoms soon subside and the hairs regain their upright posture if the ear gets some rest. But unrelenting noisy assaults can eventually cause the hair cells to lose resilience and die. They do not re-

generate and the result is a gradual loss of hearing. People in the country working in the factory premises blaring sound all the time and exposed to loud and prolonged noise should wear ear protectors which can muffle sound by about 35 decibels. Dr. Snow, Director of the National Institute on Deafness, contends that such protective gears should be as commonplace for children as helmets worn by riders on two wheelers. Efforts should be made to educate children about hazards to hearing. Encouragingly, musicians in the country, outside who have suffered hearing losses are mounting a campaign against noise and spreading the message about the price of high decibel rock.

In the country noise pollution generated from the city traffic blowing hydraulic horn, old rugged buses plying on the streets creating hellish sound and loud speakers of the carcases in normal tones, even as jets take off and land.

Many countries in the world, at least their city centres, are starting to enforce anti-noise ordinances more vigorously. They have mainly targeted the air conditioning equipment, discos, street construction machinery and horn blowing for launching their action programme. In many places in the US police have been empowered to confiscate big speakers installed in autos. Low in our country, noise is a low priority for the government. Hearing experts in the country call for installing noise emission information as well as new warning labels on audio equipment that can produce dangerously high decibel levels.

We must realise the fact that when we lose hearing we lose to some degree one of our most vital attributes, the ability to interact with our environment. Precisely speaking, people in the country should be making the most noise about noise itself!

As his colleagues continue the formal ceremony, the "menacing" soldier - egged on by the cheering crowds lining both sides on the road and spilling over adjacent gardens - suddenly resumes his march to the border with a jerk, shouting commands, his eyes casting cold looks at the Pakistani rangers, his face convulsing in anger. He re-enacts his earlier routine.

The ceremony continues. One BSF soldier finally goes and holds the rope holding the Indian flag, ready to bring it down. Another officer gives the command. As the BSF and Pakistani flags blow the post, the flags slide down, slowly, to frenzied clapping. The flags are neatly folded and carried back to their offices by the border guards. The finale is a violent closing of the gates.

"It is fantastic, worth every moment spent here," said a young school teacher from New Delhi. Added Rajinder Singh, a Chandigarh-based trader, "It is so difficult to imagine that the soldiers do this day after day. Why, this is real drama!" As the borders were shut, large crowds from both sides rushed to the gates just to gaze at people on the other side - almost like children at a zoo. For many, it was photography time, for memorable snaps with the BSF and Pakistani Rangers standing close by. Some squatted near white coloured stone slabs which read: "Mera Bharat Mahan (My India is Great). Others competed to shake hands with overwhelmed BSF personnel.

"It is a pity there is so much hostility between the two countries," said Hardev Singh, a taxi driver who said the "retreat" had become a must for the growing number of tourists thronging Amritsar's Jallianwala Bagh ground and Golden Temple. "If the gate wasn't separated by no man's land, people from both sides would be shaking hands."

— India Abroad News Service

Private Container Terminal

Need of the Hour

by A S M Sohel Azad

Remarkable that we Bangladesh are much more emotive, idle, risk-averse, reluctant to do challenging and competitive jobs.

All the above are stated to support the private exertion to construct Container Terminal at Patenga, Chittagong. This is a joint-venture of Stevedoring Services of America (SSA) and Orient Maritime (BD) Ltd. The rivals put complaints against the private container terminal on the following points:

1. It will cause 50,000 workers unemployed.
2. Chittagong as a port will lose its significant importance.
3. 75 per cent trade will be shifted to Narayanganj.
4. Daily 3000 merchant labourers will lose their jobs.
5. Daily 25,000 trucks, trailers and cover-vans will be deprived from their due receipts.

On the contrary, "Chattogram Newmooring, Patenga Container Terminal, Bastobayan Parishad" is determined to erect the same on the arguments put below:

1. Tk 2500 crore foreign investment will come to Bangladesh which will be the second largest/highest private investment project next to KAFCO.
2. Present container handling capacity of CPA (Chittagong Port Authority) which is about 3.80 lac container per year will be doubled.
3. Private terminal will create jobs for 14000 people.
4. Increased freight and congestion surcharges could be removed.
5. Ninety-nine per cent of the officials of new terminal will be Bangladeshi who morally will oversee the benefits of the native country.
6. The new terminal will not handle the break bulk and bulk cargo (65 per cent of total cargo handled by CPA) so no question of reducing CPA's revenues arises.
7. Chittagong will be a "Transshipment Hub" like Singapore.
8. CPA and BIWTA will get Tk 21 crore as revenue for the first year which will subsequently be increased.

Clarification

The complaints put forward by the rivals are mainly based on the assumption that the new port will reduce the present container handling capacity of CPA and will snatch the scheduled and usual tasks of CPA resulting in a substantial cut on its total revenue receipts which is, in truth, quite impossible. There are so many

instances of private port or container terminal in the world. Japan has more than 2000 ports not all that are constructed and controlled by government. A number of ports have been privately set up besides the "Bay of Tokyo" each of which is bigger than Chittagong Port. These ports neither hamper their respective jobs nor let any labour remain unemployed rather smoothen the total activities. It is also indispensable for Bangladesh to erect more than 8/10 ports. The labours and general public should be convinced about the necessity of more container terminals and ports to meet the increasing demand. New port will never shrink the level of activities but ensure overall economic growth and prosperity.

Moreover, all local shipping agents, stevedores, C&F Agents, public and private staff, officers, truck and equipment owners will be benefited. CPA's productivity which has declined to 25 per cent in due to sluggish policy of the CPA's labours can be improved. Again, steady services of CPA due to illegal, influential groups' interventions in CPA's activities have induced the foreign shipping lines threaten Chittagong Port to declare an exclusion zone. So, the new terminal ensures to plummet the coterie benefit of such enemies of the country's economy. Nevertheless we dare to dream to compete with Rotterdam or Bangkok but we can unambiguously say that the new terminal would at least smoothen, strengthen, improve the functioning of total operation of the port system in Bangladesh and in coming across the developed nations. Quizzical it may sound but welcoming 'market economy' and hesitating to adopt its concept fully is alike the dancer eschewing to unveil herself.

Conclusion

Very recently I had the chance to get close with some high officials of CPA. On condition of anonymity they have expressed their happy belief as they would get rid of the incorrigible scourges, agony, undue influence and coercion of the pressure groups who cause the wastages and deprivation of CPA's high revenues. These groups are moaning and groaning for their potential loss of illegal gains. The officials also recommended that the private exertion should juxtapose, pull together with public or autonomous bodies. They concluded that the "Newmooring" will either open a new avenue for port development or will at least be a bar for the international smugglers.

Many American housewives these days never stay in the kitchen when the dishwasher is running. Diane Russ, an American housewife, would never think of using power tools without wearing earplugs. And on weekends she keeps her windows closed. "Some mornings you can't walk outside because so many people are using their power mowers", she laments.

In fact, even in our country, starting from the roar of airplanes to the wail of sirens, the blast of loudspeakers and the blare of movie sound tracks, ear-shattering whines of buses, auto-rickshaws and tempos, noise is a constant part of our life. According to the US Environmental Protection Agency, this noise terrorism is loud enough to cause hearing loss, high blood pressure and numerous other afflictions in those repeatedly exposed to its savage voice.

To be sure, noise pollution is not easily defined. Part of the difficulty lies in the fact that in some ways it is different from other forms of pollution:

Noise is transient, once the pollution stops, the environment is free of it. This is not the case with chemicals, sewage and other pollutants introduced in the air, soil or water.

Noise is measured, and scientists can estimate how much material can be introduced into the environment before harm is done. Though we can measure individual sounds that may actually damage human hearing, it is difficult to monitor cumulative exposure to noise or just to determine how much is too much.

The definition of noise is subjective. To some people the roar of an engine is satisfying or thrilling, to others it is an annoyance. Loud music may be enjoyable or a torment depending on the listener and the circumstance.

But broadly speaking any form of unwelcome sound is noise pollution, whether it is the roar of a jet plane-overhead or the sound of a barking dog a block away.

As already stated, noise pollution is the danger it poses to health. Noise causes

The Daily Drama at the Indo-Pak Border

A sunset everyday, Indian and Pakistani border guards enact a blend of drama and military tradition before large crowds of inquisitive civilians that recreates the unending love-hate relationship between the two South Asian neighbours. For almost 20 minutes the otherwise desolate border post, the only active road-cum-rail link linking Pakistan and India, comes alive with a military ceremony during which the Border Security Force (BSF) of India and Pakistan Rangers bring down their national flags.

The "retreat" has of late become a major tourist attraction, wooing hundreds - at times thousands - of people from both sides to watch the grand spectacle at the border gates located just 30 kilometres each from the cities of Amritsar in India and Lahore in Pakistan. On October 2, a whopping 3,000 men, women and children clogged the Indian side of the border (which cuts the Grand Trunk Road linking Peshawar in Pakistan and Howrah in eastern India), forcing BSF officials to throw up their hands in joyous despair. On the Pakistan side, there was

a mostly male audience of some 500. "We are amazed how popular this has become," said Gurdeep Singh Dhillon, who heads the small BSF unit at the border. A freelance photographer who has made it a profitable business to click visitors in the background of the border gates added: "Hundreds come here every evening. On holidays, the crowds are becoming unmanageable."

The border consists of two pairs of steel gates painted in the national colours of India and Pakistan and embossed with their state emblems and separated by four feet of no-man's land. On either side of the gates, a long and apparently endless barbed fence put up by India separates the Punjab provinces on both sides. The fenced area gets flood-lit after sunset.

Indian and Pakistani flags fly on top of two posts of the same height on either side of the gates. The gates are open only during the "retreat" and for motor traffic. Travellers from India, after clearing customs and immigration, take a short tiled path running parallel to

the border fence which joins a similar tiled path coming from Pakistan, on the no-man's land.

Every evening, at sunset, half-a-dozen uniformed and armed men of the BSF and Pakistani Rangers, each about six feet tall, enact the "retreat" with military precision, their starched uniforms - khaki for Indians and black for Pakistanis - providing the stark contrast which often divides the two countries.

Each drill is conducted simultaneously on both sides - a ritual continuing since partition in 1947. A BSF soldier first briskly marches from his camp office to the gates, stomping his boots and raising his feet to an incredible shoulder level. He opens the gates slowly one after the other, almost unseeing them and shake hands with his Pakistani colleague who has reached the spot by synchronising the scene on the other side.

The clapping of hands by the border guards sends the crowds cheering and clapping. And then another BSF soldier takes over, as if to underline that all is not cosy between India and Pakistan. And this bit is almost melodramatic, resembling a well-rehearsed Bollywood dance number.

The soldier comes stomping too, but with menacing looks, almost cursing under his breath. He walks briskly to the border, shouting commands at no one, as if he was about to attack his Pakistani counterpart. The scene is enacted on the other side too. The two "enemies", however do not touch each other at the border. They take abrupt U-turns and quickly retreat into their territory. But the BSF soldier - like his Pakistani counterpart - doesn't fade away. He stands erect huffing and puffing, as if just out of a battlefield, occasionally expanding his chest like a warrior about to make the final kill. The crowds are delirious.

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— India Abroad News Service

Lessons from Salman's Satanic Story

After nearly a decade of living in fear of his life, author Salman Rushdie is now free from the threat of state-sponsored terror. But the irrevocable fatwa remains, and, as Gemini News Service reports, so does the damage it created to understanding between the Islamic and Western way of life. Daya Kishan Thussu writes from London.

As Salman Rushdie adjusts to his new life of freedom from state-sponsored death threats, it is perhaps time to reflect on the lessons of this sorry saga.

While the Iranian government's decision to disassociate itself from the death threats to the beleaguered author is hailed as a victory for freedom of expression, the way in which Rushdie reacted to the news has left many unhappy.

The bearded novelist, not known for his modesty, has no regrets about publishing *The Satanic Verses* or any intention of apologising for the pain it has caused to the Muslims worldwide. Instead, he told a crowded press conference in London: "I could ask for apologies - I have had 10 years of my life deformed by this."

For the 51-year-old author born in the year of India's independence, this lost decade has meant living in secrecy in different locations in Britain under round-the-clock vigilance of the special security forces, which cost the British tax payers millions of pounds. This isolation has led to a divorce, three books, a marriage and a son.

In Britain, the most important fact of the Rushdie affair socially has been the race relations. Internationally, the affair has negatively influenced the West's relations with the Islamic world. This decade has also seen the transformation of Islam into the West's main adversary, with the demise of communism.

For Muslims across cultures, languages and regions, *The Satanic Verses* was and remains an offensive book. Many of them, however, may not approve of the fatwa (the Islamic death sentence) which the Ayatollah Khomeini, the supreme leader of Iran, issued against Rushdie, ironically on St. Valentine's Day in 1989.

Even before it was published in September 1988, the book had generated more than its quota of controversies. Most of this took place not in Britain - where both the author and the publishers (Penguin) were based - or in the Islamic world, but in secular and largely Hindu India, Rushdie's birthplace.

Weeks before its publication, a well-known Indian author and journalist, Khushwant Singh, warned about the potential for trouble that Rushdie's book was capable of creating.

Singh, a non-Muslim but well-versed in Islamic culture, who also acted as editorial adviser to Penguin Books India, told an Indian magazine then: "There are several derogatory references to the Prophet and the Quran. Mohammad is made out to be a small-time impostor."

Though the publishers appeared to be satisfied with the content of the novel, the government of India, then led by Rajiv Gandhi, a secular-minded politician, heeded Singh's warnings.

India became the first country to ban the novel, just weeks after it was released in London, fearing that it could inflame an already delicate communal situation in India. Yet, feelings were running so high that anti-Rushdie demonstrations in parts of India and Pakistan claimed several lives.

In Britain - home to more than one million Muslims, a majority of whom come from the Indian sub-continent - the resentment was strong. And as the copies of the novel were ceremoniously burnt in Bradford, along with chants of "Death to Rushdie", race relations nosedived.

Such actions invited detestable remarks from the media, with some commentators drawing parallels with an earlier era of book-burning during the Nazi regime. The liberal press - run by journalists who profess little or no "faith" - seemed to find it difficult to understand how a mere book could offend people so deeply.

The media's tendency to tar every Muslim with the same brush fed on resentment whose roots lay in continuing racism. Many self-styled community leaders did their bit to fan the flames, calling Rushdie by turns, a man of loose morals, an Indian agent, even a Zionist.

The irony was supreme: a man, who was seen to "speak" for the British immigrants, reviled by his own people. However, it is debatable what he had in common with them, given his background. Rushdie comes from a wealthy and Westernised business family and was educated at English public schools and at Cambridge University.

What made the Muslims in Britain particularly angry was the fact that there was no legal recourse. British blasphemy laws do not cover Islam. The episode and its coverage in the media created a renewal of

Ten years of the Fatwa



Sept. 1988	The Satanic Verses published by Penguin	July 1991	Japanese translator of book Hito Igarashi killed
Oct. 1988	India, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Somalia, Sudan, Malaysia, Qatar, Indonesia and South Africa ban book.	Dec. 1991	Rushdie visits US
Feb. 1989	Ayatollah Khomeini passes fatwa sentencing Rushdie to death. Militants put \$2 million bounty on Rushdie's head. He goes into hiding	March 1992	Paperback published by international consortium
Dec. 1990	Rushdie announces his conversion to Islam	Feb. 1993	Iran renews fatwa
		Feb. 1998	Britain renews pressure on Iran. Rushdie sees Blair
		Sept. 1998	Iran withdraws support for fatwa

racist abuse against the British Muslims, contributing to the creation of several fundamentalist Islamic groups.

Did Rushdie, born into a Kashmiri Muslim family, not have a sufficient understanding of Islam? Did the publishers and all their expert readers and legal advisers fail to see beyond the "magical realism" of Rushdie's engaging prose? Or does the episode show how little the West knows and, even worse, cares for the sentiments of the non-Western world?

Now that the British and Iranian governments have reached a diplomatic breakthrough, this story can perhaps come to a happy ending. Iran's relatively liberal President Mohammed Khatami told journalists in New York that as far as his country is concerned the Rushdie affair was "completely finished."

Khatami, a moderate cleric who was elected last year, heads a government desperate to open up Iran to the West. To end its isolation, in force since the Islamic revolution of 1979, the eight-year war with Iraq and the continuing sanctions from the United States, which still considers Iran as a state that sponsors terrorism, have

stunted the growth of an oil-rich country.

The Rushdie affair was one of the less stumbling blocks in normalising relations between Britain and Iran. In addition, Britain's close ties with the US, until recently the "great Satan" for the Tehran regime, has not helped.

The resolution of the Rushdie problem should make it easier for British firms to exploit commercial possibilities in Iran. Already, German and French companies are queuing to win lucrative contracts in the oil and gas industries.

For Western energy corporations, Iran has assumed special importance in recent years, given its growing influence among the oil-rich republics of central Asia with which it shares religion and culture.

Producing True Grit Drugs

THE Bangalore based biotechnology company, Biocon India Ltd plans to diversify into bulk activities in pharmaceuticals. For this the company will form a subsidiary company, Helix Biotech Private Ltd with a total investment of Rs 40 crore (approximately US \$1.5 million). Biocon has recently expanded its fermentation facility. This expanded facility will be merged with Helix Biotech. According to Kiran Majumdar, chairperson of Biocon India, the company plans to set up a chemical conversion unit

A programme at Sandia National Laboratories in California has recently patented a machine that can mend holes in the road automatically. About the size of a single-decker bus, the Rapid Road Repair Vehicle, as it is called, scans the road using an array of sensors on its bumpers. When it detects a pothole or crack, it first cleans up the area with a high-pressure air house, then proceeds to vacuum up any debris. A filling material such as aggregate, is then tamped into place with a fast sealant and dusted with grit to provide grip.

CSE/Down To Earth Features

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