

Smoking Vehicles

On June 6 this year Environment Minister Sajeda Choudhury launched a programme of checking and penalising vehicles emitting black smoke.

The June 6 show was, as it now appears, a woolly affair. The October 6 outcome of a Department of Environment meeting with representatives from other ministries as well as a number of NGOs promises to be somewhat less goofy.

Encouraged by the meeting's repeated objections to the import of two-stroke engines we want to put in a few suggestions although they are as old as when Dhaka's azure sky first turned black through machine-made smoke.

1. Why isn't government stopping import of leaded petroleum? Government being the monopoly importer, it can do so by itself provided it indeed cares for people's health and environment.

2. What about our old suggestion that government take a decision, at the PM's level, that none of the government vehicles should smoke beyond a pragmatically set date. This is the best test of the government's sincerity about clearing the Dhaka sky.

3. Any motorised commercial vehicle — two-stroke or not — should be put off the road for good if 20 years old.

4. The CNG way-out should be embraced by Mrs Choudhury's ministry and the DoE as their very own cause and the two should make it a regular campaign to convert all vehicles to CNG.

Fine or whatever punitive measure against black-smoke culprits must be such as to be an effective deterrent.

Democracy in Pakistan

This has a ring so typical of power struggle in Pakistan even after elections have mandated someone or some party to rule for a term. Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has received a suggestion from Army Chief Gen. Jehangir Keramat who has until next January to retire that a National Security Council be established to involve the army directly in the country's highest policy-making process.

Nawaz Sharif's government has been embattled since early in the day despite high hopes that his comfortable majority in the National Assembly would easily see him through. He had a row with a Chief Justice over judicial appointments that created a constitutional deadlock affecting governance for a couple of weeks or so.

In Pakistan where the military have ruled for half the 51-year time-length of her existence as an independent country any politically assertive remarks, far less a specific proposal for induction into an extra role, from the traditionally powerful army chief makes one sit up with trepidations about the fate of democracy in that country.

Nawaz Sharif has been juggling with too many fire-balls in his hands — an economy bedeviled by sanctions, religious fanaticism, corruption charges against Benazir Bhutto vis-a-vis allegations of corruption against his own self and simmering discontentment in the smaller provinces, especially Sind.

How much we wish democracy in Pakistan to take roots, deeply and firmly for the sake of the people of that country as well as for the betterment of South Asia as a whole.

Najma, A Reminder

We have long left behind the tradition of poor students claiming top position in public exams through sheer merit. This is the age for the average with the means. At a time when the representatives of the more privileged section of the society are gradually making it a right of sorts to top the merit list, Najma has arrived as a revelation.

A good education system is that which makes sure that only the truly meritorious and deserving students irrespective of their social or economic status would do well in the examinations. Here the students don't have to be really good to top the merit list. Private tutors or the coaching centres do that for the result-seeking students and their parents.

Whither Global Disarmament Agenda?

As a matter of fact the arms race would continue because even after signing of the Treaty and pressure from Washington both India and Pakistan would have ample room for weaponization and deployment of various sorts.

EVERYBODY knows about the actual utility of nuclear weapons. Pundits and experts while analyzing the cost/benefit of these weapons of mass destruction (WMD) have, on numerous occasions, pointed out that there is no strategic rationale for having nuclear weapons.

Russia to conclude START-III to further cut their arsenals. He also deployed India and Pakistan carrying out their respective nuclear tests in defiance of world opinion. He has also suggested for the 'non-use of nuclear weapons as one step on the road to these weapons' total abolition.

1, however, humbly feel that the endeavours by the international community towards the realization of global disarmament, despite its discriminatory instrumentality and mechanism, have not been one of complete failure. Since the end of cold war world's two most formidable nuclear powers, the United States of America and the erstwhile Soviet Union have concluded bilateral treaties to cut their existing nuclear arsenals.

The critiques of such an approach, however, abound. India being the foremost. A holistic approach with a certain 'halo' would have been undeniably more effective but this incremental approach, at least, was keeping the world in the right direction. Now, however, the entire gambit and dimension of global disarmament agenda are under shadow with India and Pakistan going nuclear.

The nuclear explosions by India in May 1998 and a subsequent tit-for-tat test by Islamabad not only shook South Asia but the world as well. The reactions of the international community were quite predictable, both countries were slapped with economic sanctions. As a result, Pakistan was affected more adversely. Not that India was facing the music.

Asian policy which was dominated by nonproliferation tropy. Along with it NPT also became redundant. The United States was hoping that its global disarmament agenda would get another boost if nuclear proliferation is contained in South Asia.

The P-5 states which could bring qualitative improvement in developing nuclear weaponry while states like India with nuclear ambiguity would be forbidden to do so was not accepted. Besides, New Delhi also insisted in 1996 that it could not sign it unconditionally due to the absence of a time-bound framework for the P-5 to destroy their existing arsenal.

New Delhi never accepted, even after China's first nuclear explosion in 1964, its own so-called peaceful nuclear explosion (PNE) in 1974. Islamabad's admission of its nuclear capability in 1990 and CTBT debate in 1995-96 and World Court judgement that nuclear weapons are necessary evils and needed for national security or having them has any strategic rationale. Even the

least prepared, a completely new ball game is taking place between Washington and India/Pakistan. The core issue is the insistence of Washington on signing of CTBT, whose fundamental aim is to "constrain the development and qualitative improvement of nuclear weapons, contribute to the prevention of nuclear weapons and the process of disarmament," by India and Pakistan unconditionally. India objected to the signing of CTBT in 1996 precisely because of its fundamental aim of restraining effects on the nonnuclear states or ambiguous/opulent nuclear states endeavours in developing and improving nuclear weapons.



Dilara Choudhury

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threat of use of nuclear weapons was considered to be 'repugnant' by New Delhi. But now there is discernible change in New Delhi's nuclear doctrine. A clear picture of India's turn about on CTBT and on global disarmament is emanating from the confidential negotiations between Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbot and Indian Prime Minister's special envoy Jaswant Singh held in Washington. The last round of talks was held in August, which was followed by India's declared nuclear policy by Prime Minister Vajpayee in his address to U.N. General Assembly session of September 1998. Prime Minister Vajpayee categorically mentioned New Delhi's continuing desire to cooperate with international community on a number of nuclear issues including signing of CTBT in effect dropped all 'concerns' lists which were previously linked with the signing. It would probably agree to drop its traditional opposition to initiating negotiations on FCMT at the UN Conference of Disarmament and begin negotiating the terms to sign CTBT.

The global disarmament agenda would certainly get a setback as soon as both India and Pakistan would sign CTBT and drop opposition to the negotiations to FMCT. Both would become part of the so-called discriminatory disarmament order, especially India would lose its moral rights to speak for it any longer. At the regional level i.e. in South Asia no progress is apprehended towards any incremental nonproliferation. As a matter of fact the arms race would continue because even after signing of the Treaty and pressure from Washington both India and Pakistan would sign CTBT and drop opposition to the negotiations to FMCT. Both would become part of the so-called discriminatory disarmament order, especially India would lose its moral rights to speak for it any longer.

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Hostage of Cloudy Thinking

by Kazi Alauddin Ahmed

If for any earthly reason the traffic police is not capable of bringing about the desired discipline in the street, would Begum Zia opt for continued indiscipline instead? And what is the harm if our armed services men — the most disciplined community in our society — let their users of our streets, roads and highways have the benefits of their discipline, regimentation and expertise even for a brief period? Would she ask for barring our soldiers from performing their part of the social service?

BNP MPs were provided with Tk 25 lakh each to disburse among the affected when the MPs from the opposition bench were rudely excepted. There were blatant incidences of discrimination in distribution of relief materials and financial assistance in their constituencies. Sporadic criticism too didn't so far evoke any reaction from Begum Zia and her party leaders.

Mishandling of or corruption with relief materials have been a perpetual stigma in the mind-set of those who are habitual offenders trading with human miseries. They do not fall in any category of human being. These criminals have no respect for decent and honest living. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has already and quite legitimately given a stern warning to such perpetrators in unequivocal terms. She even went to the extent of asking people to haul them up assuring that she would put the culprits on the TV screen for national condemnation. Till now, it appears that PM's message has reached the devils' ears. So far 2/3 cases of default have come in the news concurrently with the immediate punitive measures taken. Though these are small and may be, insignificant reflections on the assumed transparency of the Government, it is capable of creating an effective deterrent to the brazen-faced rascals still prying around for their opportunities.

Turning back to Begum Zia's objection to using the Army in road traffic Management and control one might ask what is so bad about it? If we consider the city streets a perpetual social problem besides being a colossal infringement upon the smooth pursuing of our economic activities, why shouldn't

every sensible citizen contribute towards mitigation of the problem? If for any earthly reason the traffic police is not capable of bringing about the desired discipline in the street, would Begum Zia opt for continued indiscipline instead? And what is the harm if our armed services men — the most disciplined community in our society — let their users of our streets, roads and highways have the benefits of their discipline, regimentation and expertise even for a brief period? Would she ask for barring our soldiers from performing their part of the social service? How would she define the great services these brave men are called upon to render to mend roads and highways against erosion of river banks, to re-build sheds and homes of the poor, to provide medical care to the diseased, malnourished children, men and women?

She must be knowing fully well that the civil administration has several independent and inter-dependent departments to do all these odd jobs. Why then the Army is deployed? The answer obviously is that it is an emergent situation that demands such action. The awe-inspiring traffic jam, so baffling to the civil administration having risen to an unmanageable proportion that would call for suitable, alternative intervention. And only our armed services personnel (having admittedly a sort of psychological advantage on the civilian population) can provide such a desirable alternative to attain positive results. Here is the logic, the stark reality, the untaunted truth.

However, when she talks about deploying the Army only for relief distribution her inner message has been the Awami League are not to be trusted. In her words, they have had a 'bad' history. And when she says so

she doesn't give an account — transparent or hazy — of the huge amount of money each of her party MPs was given in 1991.

Actually, the question is not that. Nor it is difficult to find an answer to the unmentioned question. It appears that she had already and unofficially launched her campaign for the next general election. It could be even a mid-term exercise because, according to her, 'the present government has miserably failed to address the problems facing the nation'. In the same breath she warns 'if the government fails to provide or rather, to take adequate post-flood measure to ameliorate people's sufferings she would wage 'andolan' (movement) 'with the people' to topple the government. In fact her relief activities have been more repetitive with her usual political offensive than with actual relief she distributed.

Her threatened 'action' coming or not, one doesn't have any illusion that Sheikh Hasina cannot live for a single day if she cannot ensure a meaningful realization or materialization of her words into action. So far, despite weaknesses here and there, she appears to be on track. It is hoped that her wisdom doesn't betray her, nor she becomes complacent in any manner.

OPINION

Does Women's Dress Really Cause Violent Sexual Responses from Men?

Tanzina Choudhuri Priyaanka

In a recent letter September 18, 1998) Dr. S. Nasrullah claimed that men are by nature, aggressive and less inquiring because of the hormone named testosterone. This opinion of Dr. S. Nasrullah reflects the ideologies of a certain school of thought which is known as "biological determinism".

This school of thought maintained that human behavioral patterns are regulated by biological factors; in other words, human behavioral patterns are pre-defined and fixed from birth. This notion of a 'fixed' from birth seems apparently true since it resembles the religious concept of 'fate' and 'destiny'. But in the light of modern knowledge, the "biological determinism" theory has been rejected by the scholars.

The "biological determinism" theory, which was immensely popular in Nazi Germany, was often used to justify the oppression of one group of human beings by another. Nazis used this theory to denounce the people of semitic origin as "impure" and therefore worthy of being "purged". And now, the same theory is being used in the subcontinental and other developing countries to justify the enslavement of the females.

Dr. S. Nasrullah also claimed that the excessive sexual tendencies displayed by some of the males of our country are instinctive. "Instinct" was a term coined by Sigmund Freud to describe some basic and fixed behavioral patterns in animals and human beings. Ethology rejected the notion of Instinct. Human beings are not guided by instincts. Each and every behavior that a particular human being displays is

learned during the process of enculturation i.e. when the culture or of the society he or she belongs to is being passed to him or her from the previous generation.

An individual's morality (i.e. sense of right and wrong), values and perception of reality is shaped by culture. And if the culture to which the individual belongs has a distinct definition of gender roles, that individual would grow up with THAT conception of gender role. In our subcontinental culture, men are supposed to be aggressive and so they ARE aggressive. Hormone has very little control over an individual's level of aggression. I'm not saying that hormone has no role to play.)

How is enculturation responsible for male aggression? In a traditional subcontinental household, male offspring are exposed to a greater degree of violence whilst the female offspring are exposed to non-violent environment. Let me give you a few examples: a male child is given toy pistols, the dad plays "roughly" with his boy etc. (see how the boy is exposed to aggression from his childhood?) On the contrary, a girl-child is given Barbie dolls, the dad talks sweetly with her, the mom encourages her to play "raanna-baati" (cooking) etc.

Now suppose if the opposite thing happens, that is if little boys are placed in a non-violent environment and little girls are exposed to a greater degree of violence, what do you think would be the result? Girls would tend to display a greater amount of aggression! (Believe me, psychologist have experimented with this notion.)

Another thing that Dr. S. Nasrullah has implied in his

letter is that "exposure" of female body parts would cause arousal in a male observer. This theory of his is not correct. The visual stimuli do not cause "arousal" but perception do the trick! Our perception of reality is never objective. Perception depends on the mental structure of an individual and therefore subjective.

Let me give an intriguing evidence to demonstrate the above mentioned fact: When a physician touches a patient's genitals during examination and when a lover touches an individual's genitals during love-making, the physical stimuli provided by the touches are of the same intensity but what causes the arousal by the lover's touch is perception (in other words the individual's interpretation of the touch).

Now, what women's wear would cause arousal in which individual, depends entirely upon the observer who'd be perceiving (i.e. interpreting). He also mentioned prevalence of rape syndrome in certain individuals. Well, if a guy is really suffering from that disorder, no dress (not even the highly venerated burkha) is capable of protecting the female from the lust of that guy. In such a case, the arts of self-defense would stand the victim in good stead. I suggest that instead of putting an embargo on women's wear (thereby interfering with their independence), the society should divert its attention towards making the women more conscious of their possible danger from "sick" males and, if need be, teach them the arts of self-defense.

The writer is majoring in Anthropology at Iowa State University, U.S.A.

To the Editor

Democratic and secular Bajpayee

Sir, Kuldip Nayyar a journalist of repute sent a revealing article 'Tele-e-Chat with Bajpayee' (DS'20-9-98). Revealing in the sense that during a casual conversation between the two (Bajpayee and Nayyar) we got an inkling of Bajpayee as an outspoken man and his fragile position in a 14-party coalition government.

When Nayyar told Bajpayee that during his visit to Kohima he found that extortionists were living in ministers' houses, Bajpayee nodded in agreement. It reminded me of Indu who took shelter in the house of the then state minister, K. Kasim. Fortunately police nabbed Indu even from his safe sanctuary.

When Kuldip drew Bajpayee's attention to UP Chief Minister Kalyan Singh's son's making money in the name of his father in Aligarh, Bajpayee replied "We should accept it as the fact of life. None can do anything about it". It means that he (Bajpayee) confirmed the corruption but expressed his helplessness though he stands

shoulders above his colleagues. For the first time it was confirmed by a prime minister of any country of the world that his police force played a partisan role when Bajpayee revealed that "the Kar Sewaks did not demolish the Babri Masjid it was the police" — the police had begun to take sides. In the same context he lamented the role of police in Mumbai riot too. The police all over the world is paid from the national exchequer which is filled by the tax payers (including Muslims in India). If they (police) played such a nefarious role as in Mumbai and Ayodhya then where the minority Muslims stand?

Syed Fida Hussain is a renowned painter of India whose solo exhibitions were held in many western countries. But what an irony of fate that only because he is a Muslim he is now hounded by RSS, an armed wing like Siv Sena of Bishwa Hindu Parishad, Kuldip did not broach the subject with Bajpayee seeing Hussain's painting of his (Bajpayee's) room, but even if he should have raised the subject he might

have got the same advice to accept it also as a fact of life and the adviser was none else than Atal Behari Bajpayee, the Prime Minister of India.

Syed Abu Saleh 170, Malibagh, Dhaka-1217.

Reduce electricity rates

Sir, Due to erratic power supply the electric bulb and tube get frequently fused. TV, refrigerator, air-conditioner, water pump machine and lift become inoperative and defective and one has to spend a lot of money for repair and maintenance of these.

We would request the PDB to realise and consider the above facts and financial difficulties of the members of the public and to cut and reduce the current electricity rates by fifty per cent pending improvement of power supply in the country.

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