

## What a Sense of Environment!

The ammonia gas contamination from the dumping ground of a pond on the premises of Ghorashal Fertiliser Factory has had a severe effect on the health of the local people. Five hundred have already fallen sick with respiratory problems. The hazard is spreading.

This dangerous toxin-filled inhalation is attributed to the summer heat having reduced the water level of the pond used by the fertiliser factory to discharge its effluents to, thereby exposing the surrounding areas to belching ammonia. But the disaster is hardly a bolt from the blue; because since as early as in March, the alarm clock has been ticking: the gas leak from the fertiliser factory at that point in time had taken a toll of 150 fowls, 25 cattlehead and a large variety of fish. Crops were also damaged. Evidently, the management of the Ghorashal Fertiliser Complex and, more importantly, its Mecca, the Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC), cannot escape the responsibility for having turned a blind eye to an impending disaster.

The crux of the matter is that this has not been an accident. Rather it is the outcome of a procedure cool-headedly and deliberately followed to funnel the toxic waste of the factory into a so-called retention pond in anticipation of the rains coming to wash these out into the Sitalakhya river. In other words, a massive gurgling flow of untreated toxic waste was let loose making a complete nonsense of science and the standard practices of effluent management.

With noxious gases emitting all around us, public awareness of environmental hazards may have somewhat grown, as is evidenced by their wearing all sorts of non-regulation masks in a state of desperation. But the government's consciousness of environmental pollution seems to have dulled with each passing day; otherwise how is one to explain the fact that Environment Minister Sajeda Chowdhury's initial activism and resolute roar has frizzled into a whimper. From the river Buriganga to the Ghorashal pond toxic waste has travelled a long, long way posing a veritable threat to public health in wider areas of the country.

It is only when our environmental degradation breaks into a scandal of neglect that our consciousness of it surges but only to taper off with the dusts setting down. We hope this one more wake up call will not go unheeded like the previous ones and that management of industrial wastes will be prioritised and addressed head-on, not in words but through deeds. A reasonable sound toxic waste treatment-cum-disposal system is well within our reach, regardless of our economic standing. We cannot take refuge in a poverty hymn here. What seems in short supply is lack of will compounded by a chronic dearth of answerability to the public. Let's not play football with the environment. It will be suicidal.

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# Chinese PM's Visit to the Right Place at the Wrong Time

by Barrister Harun ur Rashid

*The US-led NATO air strikes against Yugoslavia has been condemned by China as it was not approved by the Security Council of the UN. (China is a permanent member of the Council with its veto power). Kosovo is considered as an internal matter of Yugoslavia and NATO's attack is perceived to be a violation of the sovereignty of Yugoslavia. If such attacks are permitted, no country would be safe from a stronger military power. Overlaid on this sort of sentiment is the suspicion that if NATO's military action against Yugoslavia, is allowed it may be applied one day when China decides to integrate Taiwan by force.*

CHINA'S Prime Minister Zhu Rongji's nine-day visit to the US beginning from April 6 was perceived to be at a wrong time in their bilateral relations which appear to be at their lowest point. When President Clinton visited China last year, the relations were at a high water mark and the policy of engagement with China pursued by Clinton administration, despite the opposition of the Congress, seemed to have originated from a belief that "shouting match" diplomacy with China would not be able to achieve the objectives of the US in North Asia.

### Why did the relations now sink so low between China and US?

Simply put, the US Administration was criticised by the Congress for doing nothing with the human rights violations in China. China's treatment of its dissidents tantamounts to gross violation of human rights. China's policy towards the Dalai Lama did not improve as expected. Beijing was perceived to have a belligerent attitude towards its "rebel province" — Taiwan. Besides these there had been an allegation of espionage of nuclear secrets by China.

The Chinese Wen Ho Lee, working as computer scientist in Los Alamos National Laboratory, the US's largest nuclear weapons facility, has been sacked on March 8 from Los Alamos after he had admitted to the FBI (Federal Investigation Bureau of the US) that he was approached covertly by Chinese officials at a Conference in Beijing in June 1998 when he delivered a lecture on his speciality: "Material Void Opening Computation". The Taiwan-born Mr. Lee had failed to report the illicit contact 11 years ago. That, plus failing a polygraph test, raised the

question whether he was acting as a spy for China. Mr. Lee worked in the top secret "X Division", the chief nuclear weapons design group at Los Alamos. Among Lee's duties was the task of developing computer codes for W-88 trigger mechanism. A few knowledgeable experts believe that if Mr. Lee had passed on the secrets, China had saved at least 15 years of hard research on the nuclear weapons technology. Since China has been accused of stealing nuclear weapons secrets, anti-Chinese feeling in the US appears to be on the rise. Although spying is not a new phenomenon at Los Alamos, the allegations against Beijing have seriously damaged its bilateral relations. An US investigation on this matter is on foot.

The US is actively working against China at the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva and it is reported to have sponsored a resolution at the session of the Commission deploring the human rights violations in China. (The US did not introduce such resolution last year.) China is angry at the US leading the campaign for the adoption of a critical resolution at the Commission. The subject of human rights is a very sensitive one for China and it considers the US move mistaken and self-serving.

China has not been comfortable with the US as it is reported to be developing anti-missile defence system in cooperation with Japan to ensure its security commitments in North Asia. China is concerned that the US may include Taiwan in a proposed Star Wars-style missile defence shield and this would seriously impinge the possible use and effectiveness of China's M-9 and M-11 missiles attack on Taiwan. The US is bound by a treaty with Taiwan and it cannot

compromise with Taiwan's security, although the US does not support Taiwan's independence and maintains one China policy.

The US-led NATO air strikes against Yugoslavia has been condemned by China as it was not approved by the Security Council of the UN. (China is a permanent member of the Council with its veto power). Kosovo is considered as an internal matter of Yugoslavia and NATO's attack is perceived to be a violation of the sovereignty of Yugoslavia. If such attacks are permitted, no country would be safe from a stronger military power. Overlaid on this sort of sentiment is the suspicion that if NATO's military action against Yugoslavia, is allowed it may be applied one day when China decides to integrate Taiwan by force. It is reported that Chinese reaction to the bombing raids on Yugoslavia has been unusual in its virulence. The Chinese papers are routinely comparing the air assaults with Germany's attacks on Yugoslavia during the World War II. The political analysts believe that the intensity of the reaction could be due to the factions of the Communist Party that oppose Mr. Zhu.

One of the primary purposes of the visit is to unlock the issues impeding the entry of China in the Geneva-based 133-member World Trade Organisation (WTO) including Bangladesh. Although the US supports China's admission to the WTO in principle, it considers China has to meet its obligations of WTO rules by opening its markets to the competition of the foreign companies and investors. There is a view that unless China complies with the rules of trade in accordance with WTO, its admission will be delayed. The entry into WTO by

China has been pending for 13 years and the US appears to be in no hurry to agree China within the fold of WTO during the visit.

If the timing is so wrong for his visit, the question that arises is: why did Mr. Zhu undertake the visit?

Prime Minister Zhu is first and foremost a reformist and he wants to put his imprint in restructuring the Chinese economy in a robust way and his past role as the Mayor of Shanghai confirms this fact. He perceives himself to be a different breed of a leader who is deeply committed to market-economy for economic growth and development of his country. During his visit to Europe last year, he said many things which the European leaders and businessmen wanted to hear from him in opening up the economy in the country. Under his regime the state-sponsored sick industries are being wound up and private sector has been given its legitimacy as an important part of the socialist economy under its recently amended Constitution. This will provide credit facilities to the cash-strapped private sectors. He is known to be inclined to open the financial sectors in China to the foreign investors.

There is a view that Mr. Zhu wanted to keep his commitment to make the trip despite an apparent "Cold War" mentality in Washington. It appears that he perceived that if the visit was postponed the bilateral relations might further worsen. His visit appears to be the confirmation of the "engagement policy" pursued by both countries. The Prime Minister appeared to believe that his direct contact with Congressional leaders might lead to the softening of their attitude to China. Furthermore, he wanted to demonstrate to the opposing

factions in his Communist Party that he had a different agenda from the one advocated by them.

Prime Minister Zhu seemed to be aware that no concrete results might be produced out of his visit. However, he thought that his visit would allow the domestic and international constituencies to be fed with images and sound bites and this appeared to be a sound strategy.

Furthermore, he would be able to see in his own eyes the merits and demerits of the deregulated economy and market in the US and this experience would be immensely useful for him to undertake the economic reforms in his country.

The US, on the other hand, saw the visit as continuing its normal diplomatic relation with China despite its air strikes on Yugoslavia. The visit might give signal to Russia and Yugoslavia that China after all was keen to maintain its relations with the US.

Furthermore the visit marked a sharp contrast to the decision of Russian Prime Minister Primakov not to continue his scheduled trip when his plane was heading for the US after he learnt that NATO had decided to launch air strikes on Yugoslavia.

I would argue that diplomacy is the art of possible and isolationism is not an option in the context of globalisation of markets and capital. As a directional underpinning to foreign and security policy in the modern world, mutual understanding of each other guarantees the stability of a country. Prime Minister Zhu Rongji's visit to the US may have proved the doctrine in international relations.

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# Significant Events

*If the PM Mian Nawaz Sharif thinks that he has railroaded Ms Benazir Bhutto and the PPP into oblivion, he should think again. He may have given them a new lease of life, rejuvenating PPP after its disastrous 1997 electoral showing. As the strike called by PPP has shown, on the national scene the response was spotty but the interior of Sindh is still very much PPP country. That is not good news for Pakistan. PPP has always been a national party and we need them either in government or in the opposition, not as a regional entity.*

AS much as one admired Ms Benazir Bhutto for many leadership qualities that escape lesser beings, in the matter of corruption she has been a major disappointment. As much as one thought that the BJP ultra-nationalism militated against Pakistan, one had to concede that they at least had coalesced a political mandate to effect meaningful changes in India's policies. For the moment both are derailed, albeit probably temporarily, but the manner of their leaving may leave behind festering wounds that may never heal.

Ms Benazir Bhutto has led the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) for over 20 years. She has effectively carried the baggage of the legacy of her father, late Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who had his own extreme moments, contributing significantly to the break-up of Pakistan in 1971 but then almost single-handedly consolidating the then western wing as an independent entity. Giving the country a workable constitution in 1973, he emasculated it simultaneously by a number of amendments. His tinkering with the growth-oriented economy by nationalising everything in sight put us back two or three decades at a crucial time with respect to our place in the world economy. In short, he beggared us, put us in a hole that every successive government since then has put us deeper into. Maybe because of her youth, maybe because of her courage, certainly because she was educated and articulate and certainly because she had charisma, a number of us forgave her the sins of her father and looked at her as a national leader having international standing and instant name recognition.

The crowning moment of her glory came when she came to Lahore in 1986. The accolades of the mass population were well deserved. Even when she went and married Asif Zardari, one gave her the benefit of the doubt. To almost anyone but Karachites who knew him far better, Asif Zardari was a good match. The fact of the matter was that his family was in hock to the banks. A scion from a

landed family fallen on hard times, one could forgive AZ his ham-handed attempts to play the rich dilettante, a playboy. Playboys have money, by the time he met up with Benazir, AZ (and his father) needed a golden goose badly to stay financially afloat. AZ wanted money alright, and tons of it, but to Benazir's (and PPP's) detriment he hankered after power more.

After a few ham-handed attempts at petty extortion during Benazir's first term, AZ came into his own post-1993 i.e. during her second term. As much as people say that he ran a government within a government, he actually ran the government and everyone and sundry paid homage and obeisance to him. These included politicians, industrialists, businessmen, bankers, generals and senior bureaucrats, etc, some of whom became "special advisors" in guiding him in milking the Pakistani cow. This was not an open secret, it was good public knowledge and anybody who denies this is a liar. Throughout this period, we gave Benazir the benefit of doubt. We were ready to believe anything but the obvious, we wanted to believe that she knew nothing of what was going on and even if she knew, she was not a willing party but was being emotionally blackmailed by her husband.

The SGS-Cotecna case has removed that doubt. However the trial may have been conducted, whatever the antecedents of the judges and their credibility thereof, the evidence on record is damning. The fact remains Boomer Finance, an off-shore company, was owned directly/indirectly by AZ and Benazir was a recipient of funds from SGS through this conduit. No doubt she says the truth when she says the government of the day is victimizing her to remove her from politics. What is also true is that while she may fight on technical

grounds, she is as guilty as her husband is, whether in all his "enterprises" one does not know but certainly SGS is a "smoking gun" she cannot escape. As PM Ms Benazir advises all those targeted by her regime to seek justice from a court of law, surely she will appeal but if the verdict goes against her in the Supreme Court (SC), will she abide by it?

Mr Vajpayee's Govt fell by one vote but there is no satisfaction in Pakistan for BJP's

**AS I SEE IT**  
Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

meeting its come-uppance. There is greater maturity in recognising that Pakistan has a better chance in dealing with foes with known views and a stable government, rather than coping with an unstable coalition ruling our massive neighbour. The upsurge of regional parties in India is good news for Pakistan, only a workable coalition government having constituent partnerships throughout India that look more towards domestic needs can take tough decisions can lead to a solution of the Kashmir problem. People seem conveniently not to remember that there are more Muslims in India than in Pakistan. Despite many travails and provocations, the Quaid consistently sought peace with India; one major reason was the mass Muslim populace remaining in India. Today more than ever we cannot turn our backs on them. The logic itself is mind-boggling, for several million souls in Kashmir why should we consign the 150m plus Muslims to the dustbin of history?

Vajpayee's BJP has more hatred for Muslims than all the other political parties combined, as such to conveniently forget the animosity of top BJP leaders Thakre and Advani as well as others and comrade Shiv Sena's Bal Thackeray would amount to

criminal negligence at the state level. India has been swept by the winds of Hindutva, Hindu nationalism fanned to their electoral advantage by BJP, their symbol of infamy being the Babri Masjid. While our basic formulation of policy is to deal with whoever is in power, to expect that the BJP will ever give way on Kashmir is a pipedream.

The rule of regional parties and their support of a minority government led by Congress is our best bet. However one cannot thank BJP enough for having served Pakistan's cause well. Before the May 28 blast we were sin-

gularly vilified as a possible "nuclear outlaw" by one and all, thanks to BJP we have come out of the nuclear closet and into grudging respectability in the world comity. Similarly in the case of missiles, BJP, in trying to shore up their own political fortunes, has afforded Pakistan a golden opportunity to test both our liquid fuel and solid fuel rockets, the missiles having range enough to reach almost all of India. Most important, the world now recognises us at par with India since it takes India to be the instigator of both nuclear and missile escalation in the region.

If the PM Mian Nawaz Sharif thinks that he has railroaded Ms Benazir Bhutto and the PPP into oblivion, he should think again. He may have given them a new lease of life, rejuvenating PPP after its disastrous 1997 electoral showing. As the strike called by PPP has shown, on the national scene the response was spotty but the interior of Sindh is still very much PPP country. That is not good news for Pakistan. PPP has always been a national party and we need them either in government or in the opposition, not as a regional entity.

Moreover Benazir is at her best when the chips are down, as much as the corruption muck will not come off easily,

the fighter that she is she could easily convert the sympathy support into an electoral force. What is bad news for the Sharifs is that by convicting Benazir they may have inadvertently opened a Pandora's Box for themselves. As much as Achilles' mother entreated with him not to kill Hector since his demise would not be far behind, having supposedly "slain" the Bhutto potency, Mian Nawaz Sharif and family are now going to be the focus of a whole lot of unwelcome attention, orchestrated by the Establishment that has no love lost for either.

Quote "Let him cast the first stone, he who has not sinned", unquote. We are in for interesting times. Benazir may be as guilty as her husband, the greater national interest as well as self interest in political survival demanded she should have been handled with greater sophistication.

One can be assured BJP will use Pakistan as a whipping horse if election looms near, any new government will shy away from being too cosy with Pakistan. In short we have left the Kashmiris fighting in the state without any lifeline for the future, that comes out of short-term attention not only to policies but also to detail. Today Nawaz Sharif is surrounded by a cabal of bureaucrats. Sometimes the democrat in the PM asserts itself but he is basically a "last man, last ear man".

Despite his very capable younger brother, Mian Shahbaz Sharif, but the present stranglehold of bureaucracy is awesome. Pakistan has seen many of these men for all seasons over the five decades of independence; they are all strikingly similar in intent and lack of vision. To counter the significant events that are affecting Pakistan; they have no game-plan except the mundane, the routine and the glaringly obvious. Unless the PM breaks out of the bureaucratic stranglehold he has got himself into, we shall go further down the river of no return.

## Friday Mailbox

### Why are we being punished?

Sir, Why the ordinary citizens of this country are being punished like this? Why should we be deprived of electricity hour after hour, every day, in this excruciating heat? Why should we be left without water — the very essence of life?

Is it because we have multiplied too much beyond our limited supply in the last couple of years, or have we industrialised too much all of a sudden in the recent past (Calcutta is more densely populated and much more industrialised, but there is no dearth of electricity or water, even for 15 minutes)?

Or have we been wasting our meagre income in luxurious projects rather than building and repairing our power stations? Do we actually need these luxurious projects in our poor, improvised country where the basic needs of the people are not even met? Whose purpose these luxuries will serve? Not of the teeming millions for sure, who just want regular supply of electricity and water — nothing more, so that they can etch a decent and honest living for themselves and survive in peace. But even that they are denied.

What is the difference, then, between an elected government and otherwise? If none of the two can take care of the bare necessities of life of the people who voted them to power, but do as they wish then what is the use of taking trouble to vote when no one cares one bit for them?

Dr Q  
Dhaka

### Power failure

Sir, The country is facing a serious problem in terms of power failure. Load-sheddings occur at least 4 or 5 hours each day. For domestic purpose people somehow can manage to deal with it, but in the factories and offices it's absolutely intolerable. Due to power failure, most of the factories cannot complete their production on time. This is one of the main reasons why our country is not economically developing.

To solve this problem government should take strict measures to restrict the use of electricity in shops and markets after 6:00 pm and they should also take immediate action to supply more power to avoid loadshedding.

Lutfunnessa Jubilee  
Dhanmondi Tutorial, Dhaka

### Promotion barrier

Sir, There is an unexpected promotion barrier for the non-government college teachers. Usually a college teacher should get 'assistant professorship' after eight years. But there is an illegal and inhuman barrier against such promotion. The barrier is called ratio-policy of the Education Ministry.

According to this policy, only one lecturer receives assistant professor's rank out of three. This means if any college has 36 lecturers, in that case only twelve lecturers will get assistant professor's rank. Rest of the teachers will remain only lecturer throughout their career. A large number of lecturers have become victims of such barriers.

We fervently appeal to the authorities concerned and the PM to remove this inhuman barrier and give the dignity of labour so that those who have spent eight years as lecturer

can get the promotion as assistant professor and nobody is victimised in future.

Md Nurul Islam  
Kaliakoir Degree College  
Kaliakoir, Gazipur

### "Traffic Congestion: Day in Day out with a Demon"

Sir, I refer to the above-captioned article and I would like to correct Sumaiya's and Bashar's wrong understanding regarding some issues that they talked about in the sections namely 'Urbanization and Traffic Congestion' and 'The Road to the Future'. If you look at countries like USA, UK, Germany, France, Canada, the Netherlands, and even India you will find that all these countries have their capital located at a corner. However, most of these cities have significantly more population than any other cities of that particular country. On the other hand, there are cities located at a corner of the country but have higher population because these cities are business centres or it may be due to some other specific reasons. Now, how do you explain this? People generally perceive capital city as the heart of the country and tend to come to the capital to settle down. Location has got very little to do with the labour mobilisation and migration.

Moreover, historically and strategically speaking, Dhaka, the then Jahangir Nagar, was selected as the capital long before, mostly because of its location, keeping in mind the defence of the city, as well as the country. Location of Dhaka at any corner, close to any border area of the country would have made the city vulnerable to outside attackers.

In the article the writers have talked about the formulation of some new policies like pricing of roads, tolls, use of technology like electronic tagging systems, etc. Considering the context of our country, before talking about all these ultra-modern concepts, which are borrowed from developed nations we should first remember that we already have enough problems to deal with and these problems require immediate consideration. We cannot jump at anything that is not viable for our country particularly at this stage. We know well the adverse effects of the air pollution problem, but has any one of us ever turned off the car-engine while in a traffic jam? Have we stopped importing two-stroke engine vehicles? Has the government, till date, stopped importing leaded gasoline knowing very well the long-term effect of burning this fuel on people, especially on children? The one answer to all these questions is 'no'.

Therefore, the first thing we need at this very moment is strong enforcement of law regarding pollution. The only way to shape our behaviour positively for the sake of the future generation is through strong enforcement of law and order. Singapore is the prime example, where people are well aware of the severe penalties of any wrongdoing regarding public issues. Without strict enforcement, formulation of new policies will just add to the list of law breaking.

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