

Response Mechanism

LIFE in all the 16 districts of northern Bangladesh, out of 64 districts we have in the country, has been rendered miserable by a road transport strike. After a 48-hr standstill enforced by the transport workers and owners until yesterday morning, no sign of mitigation could be seen on the horizon, far less on the ground. Panic has spread all around that as per their previous announcement the strikers are set to continue with the standstill till such time as their 14-point demands are not met. This is one time too many that they have hit the warpath with, we don't know who, except to say that it is the whole lot of line ministries they seem to be unconsciously up against. No front ministry can be readily identified as a possible messiah. And look at the plight of non-combatants, the people at large, who are willy-nilly caught in the crossfire. The law and order situation has exacerbated as physical force is being applied by picketers to prevent other modes of transport from plying. Extortionism is on a wily kind of rise as *mastaans* ask their price for allowing folks to hazard a ride on auto-tempo while train tickets are being sold on the blackmarket making hay while the sun shines.

Now, let's go into the nature of the strikers' 14-point demand and the efforts made so far by the government to address them. On a closer scrutiny, the demands attract the responsibility of not merely the transport ministry as the front ministry but also operatively other ministries such as the home and finance to name the obvious two.

The way the authorities are trying to handle the crisis at the eleventh hour sounds ludicrous, to say the least. Rajshahi Divisional commissioner's office said on Friday that the transport workers and owners had not responded to their call for talks. Now the possibility is being explored to move the matter up to the higher level. We would not be surprised if it should land up at the PM's office simmering hot on the plate.

So, we reiterate our earlier suggestion for a task force always in readiness to apply a reality check, play a trouble-shooter's role, where necessary; and ensure fulfilment of promises made to the demanding parties. We have in mind a credible response mechanism working in tandem with line ministries, and perhaps as part of the PMO.

A Problem Named Telephone

A news agency has reported that some 13,000 telephones in the north-eastern part of the city, both digital and analogue, have been posing problems to their subscribers. Out of this number, around 500 to 600 are said to be constantly out of order, while the rest give routine irritations like cross-connections and "ghost sounds". This is not the first time that such a report has seen the light of the day. This paper had published similar reports a number of times in the past, and followed them up as well with editorial comments highlighting the plight and frustrations of the subscribers who regretted having bought this 'trouble' with their hard-earned money.

Over the years much has been heard about digital exchanges being installed in small municipal towns in the country as an example of improved telephone system. But large areas of the capital itself reel under the analogue exchange, a technology well on its way out. In many parts of the city cables were laid as far back as in 1993 for converting all analogue numbers into digital ones to step into the improved and efficient technology. Accordingly, the whole of Uttara Model Town and selected areas of the city came under digital technology free of additional charge from the subscribers. But there are thousands of subscribers in this very metropolis who have not been that lucky. Many of them paid around twenty thousand taka for conversion of their analogue numbers into digital ones. Even a portion of Dhanmandi Residential Area south of Road 5 has not come under automatic conversion. This is not fair at all. If some areas of the city could get digital, why other areas should not get the same facility? We strongly feel that all taxpayers should be treated equally when it comes to extending state-run facilities and services to people.

What a National Zoo!

AS if life in the cages is not cruel enough, the inmates of Mirpur Zoo are now subject to utmost maltreatment. Stale food and lack of attention seem to have become the order of the day. Sudarshan the African lion, one of the oldest 'mates at the zoological garden, breathed its last a few days back. In line, it appears, are a few more, especially the old ones. The Royal Bengal Tiger with an injured paw; the lonely ostrich, which lost its mate few years ago; or the deer carrying a nasty wound — all appear in the wait for the death knell, so reported a leading Bangla-language daily Saturday.

Scary sequence of deaths at the zoo raised widespread suspicion of foul-play. Intense media coverage, ascribing mysterious deaths of Sultana, the five-month-old baby elephant, four tigers, the giraffe, the orang-utan, the camel and the dolphin to negligence of the authorities, triggered off a rather knee-jerk reaction from the ministry of livestock and fisheries. The curator and three more officials were fired. Ministerial intervention seems to have ended with the disciplinary measures but conditions at the zoo remain largely unchanged.

Against this backdrop, plans for the zoo's silver jubilee celebrations sound no less than a cruel joke. Incredible it is though, the zoo people have not been able to bring out a brochure all these years. By the curator's own admission, although there are 200 employees on the pay-roll not everyone is found on duty. A drastic change in the administrative set-up and immediate improvement of conditions are needed badly. If the authorities cannot ensure these they better close the zoo, and let the animals go back where they belong and die in peace.

THE profession of weavers of facts into fiction, and fiction into facts, gained prominence in this country in the good old days of Ayub Khan, back in the 60s.

To emphasize their superlative to their masters they adopted stereotype measures such as the nationalisation of newspapers, promulgation of oppressive ordinances, imposition of black laws, planting of informers in press offices, retaining columnists and letters-to-the-editor-writers (the count today is 80), purchasing journalists (commonly known as 'lifafas'), purchasing editors and thus control of a publication. The unpurchasable are harassed and persecuted in various ways, one favourite being the filing of false cases against them. In the Punjab the current saying is 'Kharido nahi to kaso' (If you cannot buy, beat). Recommended reading for those interested is Zahir Raza's trilogy: 'The Press in Chains', 'The Press Under Siege', 'The Web of Censorship'. What he has recorded has never been contradicted. The maximum harm done by our weavers of lies is the bolstering of our leaders' euphoria by convincing them that they are the be-all and end-all, the State embodied. They encourage these megalomaniacs to destroy, to rob, even to murder.

Our roll of honour of notable weavers includes, but is not limited to, Altaf Gauhar (Ayub), Maulana Kausar Niazi and Nasim Ahmed (Bhutto) Lieutenant General Mujibur Rahman (Zia) Husain Haqqani (Nawaz I and Benazir II), and now Mushahid Hussain.

Altaf, a civil servant, in the service of Ayub Khan, dealt with his master's challenger, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, so nastily,

that one of the first thing that Bhutto did when he managed to grab power was to arrest Altaf on the charge of possessing an old copy of 'Playboy', a forged passport, and half a bottle of whisky. He was unduly harassed for months on end.

The Maulana was used by Bhutto to appease and pacify his brethren, the maulanas and maulvis. He bought and sold. He was most useful when the Arab Sheikh visited. He made their stays comfortable, provided them with the recreation they sought, and conversed with them in their own language. Maulana Sahib was a relatively poor man when he joined Zulfikar, but when he left office he had managed to amass a small fortune.

Nasim Ahmed was a proficient flatterer, good at buttering-up those that needed verbal buttering. He also constantly sought approbation. On one of my Islamabad visits, he invited me to a party he hosted in honour of local, foreign, and visiting journalists. Taking me aside, he asked how I thought he was doing, how I rated his performance. Keeping a straight face, I told him he was doing brilliantly. Happy to hear it, he beckoned some of those around us to join us. Come and listen to this, he told them. This man is no flatterer, hear what he has to say about me. And he handed the floor to me.

Brilliant, yes, I said to Nasim. You have welded the na-

Weavers of Lies

Ardeshir Cowasjee writes from Karachi

Mushahid further disgraced our judiciary with the lies he told about the storming of the Supreme Court. He told the world that the Chief Justice of Pakistan, Sajjad Ali Shah, was not sacked by his government but by his fellow judges. He omitted to say that it was the government which had instigated the judges to rebel.

tion into one. No one, just no one, believes one word uttered on PTV or on Radio Pakistan, or printed in one of the government newspapers, or uttered in public by Bhutto. Infuriated, he addressed me in Urdu. I had no business to say what I had said in the presence of foreign journalists. It was traitorous. I had ridiculed the State. Soon after this incident I was arrested without any charge, sent to jail for 72 days, and released still not knowing why I had been arrested. There was some speculation by men who had been at Nasim's party that I had to be taught a lesson for my 'traitorous' utterances.

Mujibur Rahman was a good harasser of publications that displeased his master Zia. 'Mussarat', the PPP mouthpiece was his particular target. He had 140 newspaper men arrested and jailed, including Nisar Osmani and Mazhar Ali. He also encouraged Zia to change the penal code, making the writing of truth an offence.

After Zia's heavenly flight, democracy was reborn in Pakistan and we had Tweedledum and Tweedledee, Benazir and Nawaz Sharif alternating at the top, both adding to our woes. During Nawaz I and Benazir II the most prominent weaver and damage-doer was Husain Haqqani. From 1988 to 1990, Husain was Punjab Chief Minister Nawaz Sharif's Special Assistant, becoming his Press Assistant when Nawaz became

Prime Minister in 1990, until in 1992 he was sent off to Sri Lanka as High Commissioner. As soon as Nawaz was forced to step down, Husain joined Benazir's camp and from 1993 to 1994 was Secretary to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, until Benazir also shunted him out to head the House Building Finance Corporation.

Husain was born and schooled in Karachi, went to Karachi University where he was a Jamaat student leader. He then became a professional journalist and for some years was with the 'Far Eastern Economic Review', both in Hong Kong and here in Pakistan, until he was picked up by Nawaz. After his experiences with both 'leaders' he claims he is a chastised man, who has learnt a lot and who now recognises both as being marginally as bad as each other. He writes columns for various newspapers, both in English and in Urdu and all largely critical of this government. He has formed his own political party, the United Democratic Front. He considers himself capable, with the necessary help, of climbing up the greasy pole and leading the 140 millions to glory.

Brittle and paranoid as it is, this government for some mad reason considers him to be a threat, possibly because it thinks he has armed himself with copies of compromising documents picked up during his

days of officialdom. He is now tied to the rack. The government has not denied that its dirty-tricks brigade kidnapped him in the middle of the night, had him beaten up, kept in solitary confinement, initially incommunicado, but now under judicial custody in a safe house near the Rawal Lake. His cuts and bruises have been brought on record, his bail applications have been rejected. Ostensibly he has been charged with corruption, embezzlement, and the squandering of government wealth. Could he even remotely have squandered one-hundredth of what has been squandered by Benazir or Nawaz?

Governments in our country are known to be vicious and Husain can expect little help from our 'independent judiciary', many members of which are totally ignorant of the value and importance of liberty, of the fact that a writ of *habeas corpus* cannot be rejected, and that every man is due his rights. If there is an understanding judge around, who has *suo moto* powers he should help, give him bail and get him out. Mushahid Hussain claims to be a profoundly educated man, but his association with Nawaz Sharif seems to have washed away all his qualifications. He is responsible for Haqqani's predicament and for all the troubles faced by Najam Sethi. The government has also not denied that Sethi was abducted in the middle of the night by its

dirty-tricks men, beaten up and kept in solitary confinement. At least has been released, without any charges having been made against him as none could be proved. Now free, he has been banned from leaving the country and is facing 28 income tax cases. The systematic income-tax-cases harassment is a hangover from the Bhutto days. Sethi would do well to refer to the White Papers compiled by Burney, 'Misuse of the Instruments of State Power' and 'Misuse of the Media'. With this vicious government, Najam may suffer. All we can do to stand by him and help as much as we can. One of the worst mistakes cocky Mushahid has made is to have sought to stand trial in the BBC televised court of 'Hard Talk'. He cut a sorry figure in front of his griller, Tim Sebastian, and managed to successfully disgrace our nation. We have him on tape, and this is one tape he will never be able to claim is doctored.

In the service of his master, he makes a pretence of believing what the world does not believe about the present Kashmir fiasco. His performance may have made us lose whatever residual sympathy we had from a few quarters in the world.

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Having done such a tremendous job on 'Hard Talk', we can only hope and expect that in appreciation of his service to the nation his tool, the valiant PTV, will show to the people how well its wielder performed.

LETTER FROM AMERICA

Steve Jobs, Bill Gates and the Internet Revolution

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton

Internet is the supreme manifestation of the information superhighway. It is the future. Unless we embrace it wholeheartedly, get on the superhighway and start moving with it, Bangladesh will only fall further behind.

first crack at his inventions. With trepidation, Wozniak went to DEC and gave a demo of his 'personal computer', and asked if they were interested. Barely able to suppress their contempt, the DEC chiefs ridiculed him: 'Tell me, Mr Wozniak, what is a person to do with your personal computer?'

Freed from the contractual obligations to DEC, Jobs and Wozniak were nevertheless, extremely suspicious when a venture capitalist wanted to invest a quarter million dollars in their garage operation. 'What's the catch?' they asked. Of course there was none. Even Jobs and Wozniak were not fully aware of the revolution they were about to unleash on the world!

Apple was lucky. They did not invent the mouse or the concept of windows. They bought it for next to nothing from Xerox. Xerox was not a computer company, and over the objection of scientists who developed it, gave their technology away to Apple. Instead of typing several lines of command, as IBM machines required, the mouse allowed the users to simply point at a bar and click. The concept of simply clicking at a bar and the opening of a window of application was revolutionary in computing. Xerox management could not suppress their laughter as they gave the house away: 'You need our mouse to run your computer?'

The world's first truly 'personal' computer, Apple, took off like gangbusters. First came Apple II, then Lisa, named for Jobs' flower child. For a long time Jobs denied paternity. However, as the head of a major US corporation, he insisted that his illegitimate daughter not be named 'Arusha' or 'Ravi Shanker'. 'Lisa' was his choice for his daughter's name and Apple's next computer. Happily, daughter Lisa is now a member of Jobs family.) With the introduction of the Macintosh in 1984, Apple computer became synonymous with personal computing, capturing 30 per cent of the market.

As Apple became more powerful, Steve Jobs lost sight of a basic business tenet. Specifically, he forgot about Sony's experience with Betamax. Originally, in the late 1970s there was only one system for the VCR - Sony's Betamax. With very clear pictures, Betamax was far superior to anything in the market (even today Hollywood films are shot on Betamax). However, determined to dominate the market, Sony refused to licence the technology to others. Frustrated, a few other companies got together and launched an inferior product - VHS - and flooded the market. Today, Betamax is dead, and VCRs run only on VHS.

For someone like the writer, who grew up using IBM work stations, the simplicity of Apple was astonishing! Their operating system was an order of magnitude better than IBM's. All Steve Jobs and Apple had to do was to licence the technology to others and there would be only one operating system in the world today - Apple's. But he did not.

This provided an opportunity for a Harvard dropout named Bill Gates, born the same year as Jobs, 1955. Whereas Jobs concentrated on building computers - hardware - Gates interest was in writing the instructions that ran the computers - software. Bill Gates had other interests too, that did not quite impact his working life - Playboy magazine and Go Go dancers.

Setting up shop for his company, Microsoft, in Albuquerque, New Mexico, Gates went to IBM and told them he had a system for running their

computers - Disk Operating System (DOS). Gates lied, he did not have DOS. Nevertheless, upon receiving IBM's contract, he relocated to his hometown, Seattle, Washington, and frantically looked for an operating system. He lucked out, and bought a system from a tiny Seattle computer company for fifty thousand dollars. That remains Gates' trademark; to grow through acquisition, not invention.

Gates kept on pestering Steve Jobs for some work for Microsoft. Jobs ignored him. Until one day Gates revealed that he was working for IBM. Naturally, that drew Jobs' attention. 'But I would rather work for you,' Gates said rather mischievously. Jobs gave Gates Apple's system to work on. A year later, Jobs summoned Gates. 'People tell me you are copying our system for something called Windows?' Ever the shrewd pacifier, Gates explained in great detail that what he was doing had nothing to do with Apple's operating system. Once again, he was lying.

When Microsoft's Windows came out and flooded the market, and it was clear to everyone that it was a poor imitation of Apple's system, Jobs is supposed to have told Gates, 'Our system is better.' Gates is supposed to have replied: 'It does not matter!' alluding to Sony's Betamax fiasco. Apple Computers sued Microsoft for patent infringement and lost. It is too much to expect the jury of ordinary people to understand the intricacies of computer operating systems, and to convict the American icon, Gates.

Steve Jobs autocratic ways were too much for the company he co-founded with Steve Wozniak. In 1985, he was fired. But Apple went nowhere. Its market share dwindled down to 3 per cent, as Bill Gates and his Windows took over the world. In 1997, Jobs was back at the helm of Apple. This time, conceding that the battle with Microsoft was lost, he made peace with Gates. Extracting a promise not to renew Apple's failed suit against Microsoft, Bill Gates agreed to invest 150 million dollars in nonvoting Apple shares. The tragedy is that Apple's 1985 operating system is still better than Microsoft's Windows 97!

Personal computers at every home made the Internet revolution possible. With Bill Gates' IBM clones looking more and more like Steve Jobs' Apple, the processing speed, memory and communication capabilities of personal computers increase continually. Current personal computers have the capabilities of supercomputers of a decade ago. And the capabilities of personal computer software increase each year.

The Internet grew out of data sharing by students and Professors in the US Universities through modem, via the main frame. Soon hospitals and US government agencies adopted the good idea for their use. In no time, it became a world wide web (WWW) phenomenon.

Technically, the Internet is a networked collection of more than a million computers. Internet connects hundreds of different types of computers and computer programmes from thousands of sources. Key to the success of the Internet is a set of standards that define the

interconnection of computers and networks and permit applications such as electronic mail (e-mail) and electronic publishing. The Internet spans multiple vendors, national boundaries and regulatory regimes, making the exchange and sharing of information throughout the world as easy as a piece of cake.

The Internet has transformed American work place over the last five years. Employees send memos to each other electronically. Although this may give the impression of a paperless society, it is not quite so. People keep hard copies of memos, and since a click of a mouse can print hundreds of pages of documents, the use of paper has actually gone up. For faster connection to the Internet, most people like to use their computer at work.

The fear of corporate America, as it flooded offices with personal computers over the last ten years, was that employees would waste time downloading pornography and other smut as they surfed the Net. That was true for a while. Now employees spend most of their Net time buying and selling stocks and other merchandise over the Net, and becoming quick millionaires. Internet commerce has exploded. Companies like the Internet search engine Yahoo.com, book seller Amazon.com and auctioneer e-Bay are worth more than companies like Xerox. In fact, the joke in the business circle is that any company with a name that ends in dot com (.com) is a winner! Market forecasters say that Internet companies are now where Microsoft used to be ten years ago.

Internet is the supreme manifestation of the information superhighway. It is the future. Unless we embrace it wholeheartedly, get on the superhighway and start moving with it, Bangladesh will only fall further behind.

OPINION

Fifty Years Old, or Older?

Alif Zabr

As a citizen who had watched (as an adult) the birth of Awami League, I have been going through some of the contributions in the press on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of this historic political party. Now it is the ruling regime for the last three years for the second time since independence. How does it rate?

Its return to power had many ups and downs, sapping energy in the background of frustration and suffering. It was not easy, and that too after a long interval (the lead is marginal compared with the next competing party). My first impressions are not very optimistic.

The rustiness and the flustered passion showed as One has to get out the city's traffic jam to be on the highway, to get the bearing of one's journey. The party has chosen to live in the past, and focus on this theme to the current generation/s who are now adults. Political zeal and passion have to be curbed as selling points, when competing with patriotism, which is apolitical. The rate of adaptability to any campaign has to be carefully gauged as the times are sensitive, and the general political awareness and sensitivity are high.

Three years of pending publicity is enough (in the first phase); as any overdose tends to be repulsive and irritating. Why do we have too much politics? (the AL is not the only culprit). Life is more than politics, and the latter is technical, as also be carefully gauged as the times are sensitive, and the general political awareness and sensitivity are high.

It is like the air we breathe. How many bother about the complex technicalities involved? Politics should work from and in the background, and not dragged to the forefront and the centre stage, once the dust has settled down. Space must be for other activities. The people must be given the choice to choose options. The attraction of democracy is the availability of options. But even today the political dust has not yet settled, hence the political parties have to beat the drums, generating a lot of noise.

For how long? This is an internal question for the political parties and the politicians to respond to, for offer the nation the benefits of good politics. We have to look at the political roots, and the flowering of the tree, before counting the flowers or fruits. Both the politicians and the citizens have a common question: what is the return on the investment? The economy of life works at all levels, with or without the benefit of awareness.

The best option for a citizen is the development of an environment to be able to enjoy neutrality (a product of freedom). He need not carry any flag. But the style these days is the covert attempt to hand over a flag to every citizen. Why the whole population has to take an active part in politics? Sometimes the identity has to be diffused - it exists; that is enough. There should be no pressure (power lies in not using it).

The main accent should on the present realities, and future development of the country.

and not on the party (lower priority). This stage is an elusive one in the emerging nations, because there are many changes at the foundation phase of the growth of a nation. The structure cannot come until the foundations are shifting. The curing time has to be allowed for. Any leadership must recognise the limitations of the current circumstances, before issues, political or otherwise, are placed or forced on the public agendas.

The LDCs do not have enlightened electorates. The latter suffer from several weaknesses: over-population, illiteracy, and marginal living around the poverty line (impoverishment). They are not interested in political monitoring, assessment, evaluation; and setting up judgement values, as the struggle for existence becomes the prime motivation. The environment for better politics is therefore missing, to the chagrin of the political workers. All of us are working in cramped environment. Muscular cramp is a medical sickness; it does not mean that political cramp does not exist.

Political impatience might be damaging to the nation. It might result in the misuse or over-use of power. Sometimes too much is expected from the electorate, causing misfires. Idealism and vision have to be finely tuned for survival in today's fast changing world. Stagnation or mobility? Rigidity or dynamism?

One last observation: let us have it in smaller doses; because first we have to build up the capacity; first for the known, then for the unknown equations.