

Commuting is Dreadful

TRAFFIC problem in the city has frightfully aggravated in recent times. Simultaneous jams at different points of the metropolis have been a constant source of exasperation for quite a few million commuters as well as thousands of vehicle drivers. The situation has been compounded by the pathetic condition of city roads rendered unusable by rains and the overzealous utility services organisations' 'seasonal insanity'. During last winter at some points of the city Army and BDR personnel were deployed to streamline traffic to a tolerable extent. Most of the drivers were awed by the presence of liveried men to fall in line rather than developing any instant respect for law. The honeymoon did not last long and as many of the rickshaws went off the roads during and after the Eid holidays, these special arrangements were also withdrawn.

Once again the whole city has been clogged with overflowing traffic. But no worthwhile arrangement to regulate traffic is in sight. This results in enormous drain on human resources in the shape of total manhours lost. Most workers caught in the jam inhaling heavy doses of lead in the air can hardly stay healthy, concentrate on their jobs and deliver the best. This does not speak well of a nation trying to improve its standard of living and determined to keep its head high in the comity of nations. We have in the past expressed our opinions so many times on this particular subject but nothing worthwhile has been done by the authorities to break the log-jam by disciplining traffic.

We strongly suggest that regular checks be carried out by the traffic constables to weed out unlicensed rickshaws and other transports, impound smoke emitting motorised vehicles, check road-worthiness of cars, buses, trucks and autorickshaws and apply traffic rules in their letter and spirit. These measures, if taken without fear or favour, will definitely reduce traffic congestion to a great extent. We urge the authorities to take serious note of the vexing problem immediately and go about the business in earnest in the interest of nation's health and economy.

Too Hasty for Comfort

THE blitz seizure of the movable property of three DCC commissioners for their alleged involvement in police constable Farhad's murder may lend itself to some public misgiving. Even if ward commissioners Messrs Chowdhury Alam, Kazi Abul Bashar and Ariful Islam did not carry opposition BNP's affiliations with their names the hurried property impounding operations of the police would still have raised some eye-brows. The fact that they indeed wear the BNP badge only makes the blitzkrieg look vindictive in public perception.

Yes, the police acted on the CMM's court order served after they failed to arrest the three commissioners which, technically speaking, gave the police the authority to impound their movable property. We also realise that the matter is as serious as the dastardly killing of a policeman on duty and without any provocation whatsoever. But this did not preclude a thorough consideration of the law on confiscation of property of an accused avoiding arrest or surrender before the court of law. As a matter of fact, due process of law demands that we follow it from A to Z. What is relevant here is the laid down procedure for impounding property. First, the police need to put in maximum effort to arrest the accused. Secondly, after the latter has escaped arrest for a reasonable period of time he has to be declared a fugitive from law. Thirdly, his being an absconder has to be circulated through newspapers and the official gazette. He could seek a bail by surrendering before the court. But in case of the three DCC commissioners, within a week of an FIR having been lodged against them, all their movable property has been seized by the police.

There are plenty of cases characterised by strong public grievance or interest where such a drastic action, though justifiable, is yet to be taken. Besides, it makes us sit up and take note of the fact that here the affected individuals are people's representatives. Surely a provenly guilty person deserves no leniency because all are equal in the eye of law but at the allegation stages the treatment cannot be ruthless especially when names of elected public representatives belonging to an opposition political party are involved. What has happened can hardly serve the ends of justice.

Save Hilsa

SHARP fall in the availability of hilsa, primarily caused by the mindless fishing of jatka (fry), is certainly a worrying bit of news; for, it directly affects the lives of thousands of fishermen and traders in the country. On the other hand, the very fact that the species itself is endangered by the mindless act bodes ill for the ecological balance. That it is more than just a matter of culinary significance seems to have somehow evaded our consciousness. Therefore, while catching of jatka has increased manifold over the years—more than 60,000 jatka are caught every year from different rivers, according to a recent Fisheries Research Institute (FRI) estimate—effort to enforce the law against it appears to have become an academic exercise.

The FRI survey unveils a rather disconcerting scenario, highlighting the economic inertia induced by the drastic decline in catches of full-grown hilsa. Most of the 5,000 trawlers and boats that engage in fishing during this time of the year are sitting idle, casting a cloud of uncertainty over an otherwise rich source of protein for domestic consumption. The way things are, there will also be an export shortfall this year.

The institute has ascribed environmental changes like siltation and current and course of rivers as another major reason for the sharp decline of hilsa population. But that being something beyond our control, we should zero in on enforcing the laws that forbid catching the fishing. The people concerned should show a lot more activism in this regard.

Pressure is Different from Punishment

At a time when President Clinton is fighting against China's challenge, he will not do anything to send Pakistan running to Beijing's lap. His policy is to bring Islamabad and New Delhi closer. He is seriously concerned over nuclear war between the two. He may admonish Pakistan as he has done. But he will not be a party to any action which is punitive against one country and a clear tilt towards the other.

Disclosing the behind-the-scenes talks of US officials, the *Christian Science Monitor*, an influential paper in America, said in a dispatch that they accused the Pakistanis of supporting infiltrators "in order to bring international sympathy for their claims on Kashmir and force action by the UN Security Council." US Ambassador to India Richard Celeste also emphasised in New Delhi that the *status quo ante* must be restored. Thus the US position was unambiguous and it squarely laid the blame on Pakistan.

Why the G-8 has not gone that far is point for the Indian Foreign Office to consider. It is apparent that Japan, which is not convinced about New Delhi's case, has influenced the final outcome. Prime Minister's Secretary Brijesh Mishra should have gone to Tokyo, not to Geneva. He went to Geneva only to deliver a letter for the US President before the G-8 meeting.

The letter itself was a wrong diplomatic move. New Delhi reportedly asked Washington to put sanctions on Islamabad be-

cause of its reluctance not to withdraw troops from Kargil. Neither our Foreign Office nor the PMO seems to understand diplomatic intricacies. This move can be used to expand Kargil into Kashmir. We are unnecessarily giving an opening to a third party. Requesting Clinton to stop monetary assistance to Pakistan is skating on

thin ice. All these years we have adopted a policy which does not recognise America or the G-8 in our problems with Pakistan, whether they relate to Kashmir or any other subject. For the first time, we have accepted the position that America is the party we should approach. And then we go on to believe that we have the right to suggest that it put teeth to its proposal to Pakistan on the restoration of the *status quo ante* in Kargil.

If this does not amount to third party intervention then what is it? America has already become a court of appeal. Tomorrow we have no ground to argue against Washington's inclusion to expand the area of its advice. We cannot say that its intervention on the infiltrators is acceptable but not on the overall problem of Kashmir.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

CPI (M) politburo member Prakash Karat has a point when he says that the Vajpayee government should desist from going overboard in projecting America's support since the superpower's is a "finely calibrated position."

Our experience should have told us that Washington does not want to alienate Islamabad. Even after it conducted nuclear tests despite Clinton's repeated requests, America made one-

LETTER FROM AMERICA

Cleaning Up After Kenneth Starr

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton

In the first part of this century, there was no term-limits for the United States Presidents. After Democrat Franklin Roosevelt was elected President four times (1932, 1936, 1940 and 1944), the Republican Congress enacted the two-term limit. They regretted their decision during Reagan Presidency, and are now relieved during Clinton's tenure, because Clinton could have been reelected to a third term.

showed up in the Lewinsky investigation. Starr's deputies broke Federal rules to keep Ms. Lewinsky from her lawyer. They leaked lurid sexual tales to the press. Mr. Starr used the feeble excuse of a grand jury's absence to videotape the President's testimony so it could be played to the country. Over his deputies' objections, he insisted on beginning his impeachment referral to Congress with an extended pornographic narrative.

Anthony Lewis continues: "The aim of such abusive tactics was to shame the President and arouse public opinion against him in the hope of driving him from office. Fortunately for the future of our political structure, the tactics failed. The American public was more outraged by Kenneth Starr's abuses than by the Lewinsky scandal. The public was more outraged by the Lewinsky scandal than by the Starr investigation."

Starr went to court and established precedents that give the President less privacy than any of us would expect. He can no longer, even talk in confidence to a White House lawyer without fear that an antagonistic prosecutor may some day make that lawyer testify about it.

Lewis concludes: "More broadly, our republican system of political accountability was distorted out of recognition. Instead of making a President pay for misdeeds politically—

in Congress or at the polls—we subjected him to potentially mortal attack by an unelected and unelectable prosecutor. The impeachment process itself was dangerously distorted. The constitution confides it to Congress."

"But here an unaccountable prosecutor with unlimited resources (\$40 million spent so far) used his great power to help one party in Congress to bring down the President of the other party. Mr. Starr produced the witnesses, drafted the charges and urged them on Congress."

At the end the American people saved the day. Right away they saw through Starr's satanic game plan. Through all the prosecutorial larceny, the public remained steadfast in their belief that the Republicans and their stooge Starr were unfairly attempting to overturn the people's verdict in electing Clinton in 1992, and again in 1996. Throughout the impeachment proceedings, Clinton's approval rating remained sky high, and Starr remained the most hated person in America, with the Republicans far behind.

Purporting to be a family man with unscrupulous morality, Starr nevertheless, gladly unleashed pornographic expressions on mainstream America. Parents, many of whom did not themselves know what the expression actually meant, nevertheless had to

struggle to explain "oral sex" to their children. Some one came up with the best answer: "as opposed to the written variety!"

The evil of the demonically possessed prosecutor negatively impacted the nation in several other areas. Sensing Clinton's preoccupation with impeachment, Slobodan Milosevic set in motion the destruction of Kosovo. Shamelessly, the Republicans attempted to portray Clinton's staring down Saddam Hussein as a diversionary tactic. With the nation virtually at war in Yugoslavia, the Republican Congress refused to back "Clinton's war." Now that the war in Kosovo has been won, the Republican response is, "Big deal Clinton lucked out! (Doesn't he always!)"

As time magazine essayist Michael Kinsley pointed out, the Republicans are loathe to admit that the country, too, "lucked out!"

Ken Starr did manage to drive a wedge between President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore. As a Clinton loyalist, the day President Clinton was impeached, Vice President Al Gore called him one of the greatest Presidents of the century. Now that Al Gore is a Presidential candidate, and he knows that the possible Republican nominee, Governor George Bush of Texas is going to replay that tape in his commercials, Gore is hedging. In a

time exception to give it arms. Again, the US came to its rescue and saved it from going bankrupt when it asked both the World Bank and the IMF to bail out Pakistan. There must have been some weighty considerations which made America change its strong stand despite Pakistan's defiance.

At a time when President Clinton is fighting against China's challenge, he will not do anything to send Pakistan running to Beijing's lap. His policy is to bring Islamabad and New Delhi closer. He is seriously concerned over nuclear war between the two. He may admonish Pakistan as he has done. But he will not be a party to any action which is punitive against one country and a clear tilt towards the other. There is also the reality of close relations between the Pentagon and the Pakistan, armed forces which India must face. Pressure is different from punishment. America may exert the first but not go to the extent of exercising the second. However unhappy the US administration may be with Pakistan, it cannot afford to write off "a tried friend" as

US official circles have described Pakistan again and again.

There is also a strong perception in Washington that Islamabad's role is important to fight Islamic fundamentalism in the world. It does not want Pakistan to go to the Taliban way, a path which is not ruled out even by the Pakistanis themselves. So far, with all the noise about the Shariat, Pakistan is not a fundamentalist state. Pakistani liberals are under pressure. They are also afraid to speak out against the mullah. But elections have shown that fundamentalists have never won any seat in the National Assembly. Their votes have never gone beyond two per cent.

My impression is that once our Foreign Office, with all the story in an American daily, USA Today, that "Washington has drawn up a list of punitive measures if Pakistan does not withdraw," it thought that the ground was favourable to ask America to re-impose a ban on aid from international monetary organisations. Surely, we should have known by this time that America has its own long-term policy. It may say that Pakistan must withdraw the infiltrators. But it will not add bite to it. The G-8's wishy-washy statement should have made New Delhi wiser. But it goes on deluding the nation that it is a diplomatic victory for the BJP-led coalition.

Clinton upstages any policy statement of Gore's with one of his own. Gore supporters are not even sure whether Clinton will endorse Gore over the other Democrat seeking Presidential nomination, former New Jersey Senator, basketball superstar, Olympic gold medalist and Rhodes Scholar Bill Bradley. They need not worry. Once he has made his point, Clinton, the master compromiser, will rally around Gore. After all, Clinton's legacy depends on Gore getting elected.

In the first part of this century, there was no term-limits for the United States Presidents. After Democrat Franklin Roosevelt was elected President four times (1932, 1936, 1940 and 1944), the Republican Congress enacted the two-term limit. They regretted their decision during Reagan Presidency, and are now relieved during Clinton's tenure, because Clinton could have been reelected to a third term. Poor Clinton! His better half, Hillary, is surely running for Senate from New York. His hand-picked Vice President Al Gore is running hard to succeed him. A very young fifty-two and unable to run, Clinton is staring squarely at premature retirement! Cut him some slack!

OPINION

While Hartal Snatches Lives, Its Callers Celebrate Victory

Dr A H Jaffar Ullah

This is a post mortem of a very 'successful' hartal that was staged on July 8 by most opposition political parties. The violence that accompanies these hartals in modern-day Bangladesh is claiming lives. But do the politicians care? Seemingly, the hartal-loving politicians of Bangladesh are always on the lookout for silly reasons to unleash violence with one aim. That is to destabilize the society. While some loss of lives is expected every time a 'successful' hartal is staged, it is surprising that none of the leaders is quite ready to sacrifice their lives for the cause, no matter how inane it is.

From the perspective of a rational mind, Bangladesh has all but gone to pots. The opposition political parties finding no new games in town had decided to call yet another mindless hartal on July 8. Why did they call the hartal? They gave a combined verdict that the proposed budget for the fiscal year 1999-2000 was an 'anti-people' budget. A rational approach to this could have been to engage in a healthy debate in public forums. But the opposition political parties know only one place to go to protest the policy of the administration—streets; and violence appears to be the only weapon they possess.

The all too familiar violence has netted two precious lives: one, a cop's on the eve of hartal day, another, an imam on the day of hartal, July 8. How gruesome! Another victim of violence was a poor rickshaw puller. The pickets broke and burnt his rickshaw, the means of earning his daily bread. I would like to hear from the opposition chairperson whether she shed few of her precious teardrops for the victims. But why should she?

And then do you think any of the politicians who called this hartal would care to pay a visit to the homes of the victims and say some kind words to the grieving families? No! These leaders probably had better things to do than joining the distraught families.

Isn't that true that those two people involuntarily gave their lives to hartal spawned violence? And the rickshaw puller was innocently killed? He was allowed to ply his trade as a minded people ought to help the families of the victims to go to court and seek redress from all the leaders who gave the clarion call to this particular hartal. Trust me if this would have happened to any civilized countries in the West, you are virtually assured that the

instigators would be facing a civil litigation. May be this what is needed in Bangladesh.

The Bangladeshi expatriates are watching the whole development of hartal culture with disdain and it is only a matter of time that some groups of civic-minded people may foot the bill to take leaders of the opposition to court. This thought has not crossed the mind of some people; must I say?

I am positive after the "successful" completion of yet another nationwide hartal the leaders of the respective opposition parties have gone back to their party headquarters in a gleeful mood to celebrate the "victory" without even thinking that two lives were lost and property damaged on the occasion. Do you think they care?

I wonder if the civic-minded people of Dhaka who showed tenacity and astuteness to save those invaluable Seshum trees in Osmani Park would come forward now and protest against the loss of lives and property. How wondrous it would be if only the same caring folks would form a committee to save lives from violence-ridden hartal. Until and unless the intelligentsia would come forward to vigorously protest against the enactment of hartal, I see no end to the misery caused by this anti-people's activity. If they don't speak collectively against the hartal, who would then demonize this uncivil behavior of a few politicians?

To publicize the ills of hartal what is really needed in the capital city is the erection of a humongous signboard in which to tally a host of statistics including loss of life, loss of work hours, loss of GDP, school days, etc. to be exact. Only through education, could we create a public pressure that would kill the urge to call the menacing hartal.

So, let us demonize hartal and the politicians who call them. A massive anti-vote getting campaign could be lodged by the civic-minded people to make sure that the politicians who favour violence would not be elected to the parliament in the next election. If the suffering people could only unite, then all those politicians favouring hartal could learn a lesson of their lifetime. What is then preventing us the civic-minded people?

The writer is a research scientist working in protein biochemistry and molecular genetics. He writes from New Orleans, USA.

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

MIG 29 and Bangladesh

Sir, Bangladesh government is buying some MIG 29 fighter planes for security purpose. Bangladesh is an underdeveloped country with a large population where the fundamental demands are not even fulfilled. In spite of that, this year the government has declared in the budget, the second highest allocation for defence sector.

The MIG 29s are expensive fighter planes, and a poor country like Bangladesh can never accumulate such a large amount of money. Moreover, a few MIG 29 is not sufficient for the over all security of a country.

It is true that the government has to think about the sovereignty of the country, simultaneously it has to think about the economic conditions as well.

Humayun Kabir Rumel
Shibatala, Rajshahi

The city of mosquitoes

Sir, Nowadays, Dhaka is regarded not only as the city of mosquitoes but also of mosquitoes. The population of Dhaka has increased and along with it has increased the infestation of mosquitoes. The situation has become so alarming that even during day-time, people can't remain free from the attack of these tiny but harmful insects.

The efforts so far taken by the authorities to wipe out the pest were only half-hearted and went in vain. The real remedy lies in regular and timely clean up of drains and other dirty places. But the authorities concerned take a little care to clean up the drains properly. As a result, heaps of rubbish have accumulated and the drains are remained full of dirty as well as filthy water in different parts of

the city. Moreover, they don't care to spray insecticides properly and punctually.

As a result, the mosquitoes have multiplied making the life of the city people unbearable.

Mr. Motiur Rahman
4, Sobhanabad, Mirpur Road
Dhaka-1207

The city of hawkers

Sir, The Mogul capital of Bengal, the city of mosques, now the metropolitan city and capital of Bangladesh has been turned into a city of hawkers and vendors, thousands of trucks, buses and rickshaws, open air workshops and garages, tons of garbage piled on public thoroughfares, dirty lanes and stinking drains, hundreds of slums, drug traffickers, smugglers, toll collectors, terrorists, anti-social elements and traffic jam.

A journey to the center of Dhaka, an area of about three square miles covering Nawabpur Road, English Road, Fulbaria, Telegraph Office, DCC Building, Osmani Uddayan, Abdul Ghani Road, Bangladesh Secretariat Buildings, Topkhana Road, GPO, Motijheel Commercial Area, RK Mission Road, Hatkhola, Folder Street, Wari, Jai Kali Mandir Road, Bangabhaban, Stadium and Bangabandhu Avenue is tedious, horrible and time consuming. An entry into and exit from this crowded indiscipline, traffic jammed and anarchic area is not an easy task.

It is a common phenomenon that whenever there is a rally, public meeting, procession, hartal, sport or game, religious, cultural or state function the center of Dhaka metropolitan city looks like a person infected with small pox.

In such an awkward and awful situation our government has now decided to construct a

mammoth international conference center in the infernal and accursed locality for holding the NAM summit in the year 2001.

Is not the proposed construction of Bangabandhu International Conference Centre at Uddayan Uddayan, felling 11,000 trees a bolt from the blue for millions of people of Dhaka? Would the construction help alleviate the problems and difficulties of the people or would further aggravate their pains and sufferings?

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

Budget 1999

Sir, The Finance Minister has made a provision in the 1999 Budget for deduction of tax at source from bonus share. The nature of bonus share is a capital receipt and not revenue in nature. Therefore, it should not attract any tax at the first instance. Moreover, this is a highly impractical proposition to deduct tax at source from bonus share.

Issue of bonus share does not entail any monetary disbursement. The share holders do not maintain any fund with the issuing company from which also such tax could be deducted. This is a script only and therefore, how the tax could be deducted at source from the share holders by the issuing companies, perhaps, the authorities alone can better explain.

Moreover, imposition of any such additional tax will discourage investment in capital market instead of revamping it. Payment of L/C commission also has been brought under the purview of deduction of tax at source. Such commission is usually realized by the banks by debiting importers' account maintained with them.

Therefore, there is no scope at all on the part of the importer to deduct tax at source from such commission. Perhaps the government could levy tax on those two items in some other forms but not by deduction at source which is impractical.

Mr. Ataul Haque
Dhaka

Analogue into digital

Sir, The Telecom Minister deserves appreciation for taking personal initiative towards improving telecommunications service in Bangladesh. Meanwhile, the minister, on a number of occasions, has announced that all the analogue telephones in Dhaka city will be brought under the modern digital system.

Now would the minister please see the BTB's progress of conversion of 32 analogue series telephones to digital and do the needful to expedite the process?

M. Zahidul Haque
BAI, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar
Dhaka-1207

Acid Survivors' Foundation

Sir, It is a very timely initiative to set up 'Acid survivors' foundation' against acid violence in our country. This brutal violence has turned out to be a common offense against women all over the country. An unofficial report says that till today, as many as 200 cases have been filed where the victims can do nothing but suffer for the rest of their lives. However, a ray of hope for the acid victims sums to have seen on 12 May '99, with the inauguration of the Acid Survivor's Foundation. Here, I would like to thank Dr. John Morrison, a great hearted man who has been working tirelessly with the acid victims of Bangladesh for last six months. And also to Dr S. L. Sen, consultant plastic surgeon DMCH for his humanitarian service to the victims.

It is a matter of great hope and aspiration that some of the voluntary organisations have also come ahead with helping hands to those unfortunate victims. UNICEF and CIDA funded project, 'Help acid survivors', was the first such project to help acid victims in our country. Yet, this is not enough to serve them as there is also the need to arrange rehabilitation programme for the recovered victims.

Arun Kumar Biswas
Dhaka