

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and as many of the rickshaws went off the roads during and after the Eid holidays, these special arrangements were also withdrawn.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 uncensored 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 a 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 proven 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

S HARP 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 fishling. 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.

THERE is no reason to crow about the statement by the Group of Eight nations. They have, no doubt, said that any military action seeking to modify the *status quo* on the Line of Control (LoC) was 'irresponsible'. But that was a general statement, which Islamabad claims, is applicable to both sides. The fact that the statement does not name Pakistan does indicate that the group has supported India alone. Indeed, the statement had appealed to both the parties to work for an immediate cessation of the fighting, full respect in the future for the LoC and the full resumption of the dialogue between India and Pakistan in the spirit of the Lahore Declaration. In fact, the exhortation on cessation of the fighting went in Pakistan's favour. How could we do so without the aggression was vacated? To say that it is our diplomatic victory is to totally swallow the Indian Foreign Office line, which the press has done willingly.

President Clinton's stand was more categorical. He not only asked Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to withdraw his troops and restore the *status quo ante*, but told Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee that he had asked Sharif 'to take immediate steps to defuse the crisis and respect the Line of Control.' There was no ambiguity about the stand.

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

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.

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.

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