

Traffic Brass-tacks

ARMY and BDR Jawans have again been pressed into service for traffic management in the metropolis. We have been given to understand that this aims to beef up DMP (Traffic) in its efforts to streamline the traffic anarchy.

We welcome the sense of discipline, efficiency and skill which the army have brought to bear on traffic management whenever they were called out to help.

We do appreciate the government's realisation, belated though, of the need to give the citizens a reprieve from the stranglehold of the daily traffic.

The way we look at it, the traffic management issues will have to be addressed on a three-some footing: short-term, medium-term and long-term, but not too longish to be sure.

In the medium term, raise the strength of traffic police, train and equip them properly, visibly enhance their status, and so on.

It is in the long run — but only in a time-bound sense — that we must try to remove the deep-seated structural deficiencies like the extremely limited road space relative to the number of vehicles and traffic turn-about ratio which has a bearing on overall traffic, both inward and outward.

Successive governments must bear the responsibility for having allowed the traffic mess to grow to this magnitude. This ought to be now a top priority concern with the incumbent government.

East Timorese Nightmare

IMPOSITION of martial law and shoot-on-sight curfew on East Timor following escalation of pro-Jakarta militia-generated violence appears no less than a government machination to deny the people of the former Portuguese colony independence they have overwhelmingly voted for in the UN-brokered referendum.

Unfortunately, the state apparatus has so far played the onlooker by and large, thereby indirectly encouraging the hoodlums instead of protecting the lives and properties of the East Timorese. Even worse, introduction of martial law appears to have worked, according to reports, as a blanket for the perpetrators.

The bright patch in an otherwise dark episode is perhaps the release of East Timorese resistance leader Xanana Gusmao after six years in prison. Hopefully, it would entail more measures reflecting a government commitment to make good on the promise of independence to East Timor.

For obvious reasons, international community has expressed grave concern at the ominous development there. The UN secretary-general has already served a 48-hour ultimatum on the Indonesian government "to bring violence in East Timor under control" or put up with international intervention.

The State of Football

FOOTBALL was once the most popular game in this part of the world. Hopefully it still is. But of late doubts have been cast on the future of this favourite pastime of millions because things are not moving in the right direction so far as local soccer management goes.

Only we do not have any plans for our football. The performance of the home side, which was almost a national team, left much to be desired and a final without local representation was a frustrating experience for the crowd.

New Hopes for Peace in the Middle East

Whatever may be its shortcomings, the latest agreement is good news not only because it moves Palestinians and Israelis closer to peace; it will also make it possible for negotiators in Israel and Syria to resume the peace talks Israel broke off in 1996.

THANKS to good-faith negotiations by Palestinians and Israeli officials and a nudge from Secretary of State Albright of the United States, the long-delayed momentum for peace in the Middle East has at last been resumed.

Palestinians and Israeli officials have just signed an agreement providing for another pullback of Israeli forces from Arab territory. This agreement would give the Palestinians more qualitative land, as opposed to barren areas that were given on previous occasions.

Under the agreement, Israel will begin to relinquish in three stages another 11 percent of land it holds in the West Bank, completing the withdrawal by next January.

It is very doubtful that they would have made this important concession if Netanyahu had still been in office. The Palestinians never trusted Netanyahu. He made deals with

the Palestinians only when he was forced to, signing the Wye River accord last fall mainly because of Clinton and late King Hussain's relentless pressure.

Israel's new leader, Ehud Barak, is a very different sort of prime minister: a former general who is committed to the principle of exchanging occupied land for peace.

It is probably not a coincidence that the new agreement was reached after U.S. Secretary of State Albright arrived on the scene to push the two sides closer together.

The new agreement has left the least tractable issues, such as borders, Jewish settlers in the West Bank, Palestinian refugees, and the future of occupied Arab East Jerusalem, until last. A final peace agreement would be reached by next September, settling the most

difficult questions of control of Jerusalem and possible Palestinian statehood.

Latest reports coming out from Israel indicate that Ehud Barak may be ready to recognise a Palestinian state but with conditions attached that Yasser Arafat would find both tempting and painful to accept.

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The possibility of such a deal is much brighter now than it was a week ago, thanks to the latest achievement by the Palestinians and Israelis.



Connecting the Dots. Dr. A. R. Choudhury

Will the Asian Recovery Last?

by Dr Munim Kumar Barai

For the moment it seems that a repeat of the 1997-98 type crisis is most unlikely. The most dangerous elements for the generation of the crisis have been identified more than one way. So the policy planners or the party in power cannot make the same mistake to face the fury of another attack, at least for the time being.

country in 1997, people were seen on the street to pray and collect funds to help the government to tackle the financial emergency. Factories were closed down, unemployment soared, and the most dynamic Korean 'chaebols' lost much of their glamour.

For Thailand, the crisis-led recession hit the economy very badly. But now the economy might be on the mend. It was the devaluation of the Thai baht that ignited the financial flu that engulfed the entire region hitting most of the economies.

Malaysia is turning around quickly. Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad was straight fust in refusing the IMF's fund and prescription package after the debacle. He even "horribly repeatable opinion by imposing capital controls," as described by Paul Krugman, the famed M.I.T. professor. In

the process of controlling the foreign capital, one-year locking system was imposed, fixed pegging of ringgit against the dollar remained in place and exchange market was kept under close watch.

Indonesia, the worst hit in the turmoil, is also expounding confidence in the recovery. The confidence is based on the facts that the rupiah stabilized between 6300 and 6700 per dollar; inflation is also down and interest rates have also declined sharply.

Singapore, the Philippines, Hong Kong and of course Japan are showing signs of recovery. The stock market indexes indicate that bourses at all-important centers of Asia are doing better business in recent days.

For the whole of 1999, projections are for one per cent or slightly better economic growth. Again the Thai recovery is led by the growth in the manufacturing sector. Good signals are emanating from the export sector as well.

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gapore are now above where they were in mid-1997 when the collapse began. Foreign investors are coming back, though not in flocks, to the markets they were so bullish about not so long ago.

But will the recovery last? This is probably a billion-dollar question right now. Though the policy planners and others who know about economics are optimistic about the continuation of the process, skeptics are also there.

For when you come down to it," wrote Paul Krugman in a recent article in the Time, "Asia has not emerged from the crisis with any clear idea about to avoid the next one. None of the vulnerabilities that made the great Asian crisis in 1997-98 possible has disappeared, and there is every reason to believe that Asia has emerged from the crisis with its long term prospects far less promising than had seemed only two years ago."

Actually many more 'chaebols' in South Korea need to be shaking up. They have huge debt burden; the weight of debt can push them to collapse creating another crisis for the country. Daewoo, the second largest conglomerate in South Korea, shake-up might be an indicator in the direction.

To the Editor...

Why registration

Sir, During an exchange of views with the editors of national dailies and news agencies, PM Sheikh Hasina suggested that along with the sex-workers the name of their customers should also be registered. Then again she said, "We have constitutional obligation to discourage this profession and bring the brothel inmates to a decent and normal life from this cursed life."

Though I appreciate the above observation of our PM, my question is, when the government has already taken up the hard task of banishing this immoral profession from our soil through rehabilitation of sex-workers then why again the provision for registration of the sex-workers and their customers?

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

Really interesting

Sir, A recent seminar on corruption, organised received much media attention. I think a re-iteration of a few of the verbal offerings won't be superfluous here. Former Finance Minister Saifur Rahman pointed out that corruption in bureaucracy is at least similarly widespread as in politics and as harmful to the nation.

The implied meaning of the word "relatively" caused a small verbal storm. Chief Justice Mostafa Kamal recommended an education system with a strong religious and moral bias to instill ethical values.

I think the most acute and genuine observation that made this exchange of sublime airs a most interesting event, was presented by Mr Salahuddin Ahmed of BRAC. He said that this seminar was his 20-50 year participation in seminars of similar agenda and he still finds a net result of zero from all these auspicious gatherings.

Interesting indeed. Shaifur Rahman, Lalmaita, Dhaka

Dangerous electric wires

Sir, A high power line of 11,000 voltages supplying electricity from Chuaha sub-station to a textile mill and other units crosses over many residences of West Brahmondi, the most thriving residential quarter of Narsingdi municipal area.

contact with the live wires. In the subsequent years several labours were injured in the same way when they were working. Children are always at the risk of their life when they play on the roof.

It is therefore requested that the government and the authorities concerned take immediate action to remove this dangerous wires.

Md Sharif Sarker on behalf of the residents of West Brahmondi Narsingdi

Twelve new universities

Sir, The Government has planned to establish 12 new universities in the country's 12 greater (old) districts where there is no such institute. This is no doubt, a welcome project, but all the 12 universities will be on Science and Technology" is not a good news at all.

Universities should be 'universal' in containing capacity and to be a full university, an educational institution of the highest rank should contain the faculties like 1) Arts, 2) Social Science, 3) Commerce, 4) Natural Sciences, 5) Biological Sciences, 6) Medical Sciences, 7) Agriculture, 8) Law etc. But a Science and Technology University may at best contain 4-7 faculties i.e. it is subject to be a partial university.

Private universities do not have enough seats for the undergraduates. Therefore a number of government and private colleges have opened Honours and Masters courses. But the standard of education in these institutions is far below than the

Where is the good news?

Sir, The banking sector, already reeling under the loan defaulters' elusive submerging techniques, has now attracted gun-toting mastaans at directors' meeting. Earlier, for several years, the nascent stock exchange institution (we cannot handle money) had been brought to it knees (due to know forces); it is still unable to stand upright, or even walk, with or without invalid-aid. We are the proud carriers of the sick and the ailing sectors (including the Bangladesh Biman). The CBAs have become corny bullish associations, tickling others the wrong way.

general universities. Therefore to remove this bias towards science education and for even distribution of general universities, the government is fervently requested to transform at least half of the proposed 12 new universities in general ones.

MAS Mollah, Member BAAS, Dhaka.

New political tactics

Sir, It appears that in our country, politics does not interest many now-a-days, let alone their sacred right to vote. When activities like hartals, gheraos, demonstration, slogans and high-pitched speeches run high for national cause, even the unlettered people are found laughing at these displayed confidently in the name of politics.

The 21st century is approaching. The craft of the political parties are using in our country to capture the press and the people seem to have been almost outdated. Could they not come up with new techniques for the new century like face-to-face dialogue or discussions explaining more and more important issues such as transit, trade, sovereignty of the state or the Constitution which the common people do not understand clearly?

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