

OC's 'Sensitivity' Plea

THE officer-in-charge of Dhanmondi Police Station has admitted to handling a hot potato which he desperately wants palmed off now to other agencies for a reprieve. OC Mohammad Hanif who has been looking into the complaint filed on April 25 regarding forcible occupation of flats in a Lake Circus building by Sadiq Abdullah, son of chief whip Abul Hasnat Abdullah wishes to call it quits. In his assessment the matter has become 'very sensitive' for him to deal with anymore, so that he would much rather see it transferred to other agencies, such as the DB, CID and the like.

What is there to be 'sensitive' about? It is a criminal case, pure and simple; all that he is required to do is to investigate the complaints and forward the case to the court with an arraignment of the accused. It sounds like a clear case of a whole series of criminal offences seemingly rendered more culpable by the allegation of highhandedness on the part of a son of a ruling party high and mighty. If accusations of illegal entry, forcible eviction of a genuine tenant, unlawful occupation, intimidation, threats and violence do not constitute a criminal case worthy of investigation, what else would! The fact that the sibling of a ruling party high-up figures as the accused made it into another test-case for proving the government's bonafides about and commitment to equality before law and the whole question of rule of law as such.

The Dhanmondi thana OC's 'sensitivity' plea to escape the responsibility of investigating the case may be more than just a simple statement of fact. Anyone plumbing deep into his reaction is likely to come up with an opinion that he has had to yield under a political pressure to act in a particular way or not to act at all. Another inference could be that he is unwittingly being a party to a delaying tactic foisted on him by vested quarters.

We have observed a certain police diffidence in entertaining the case despite the fact that it has been at the centre of media and public attention for quite a while now. In the first place, the police did not accept the complaint as an FIR but made a general diary entry of it. They arrested three 'mastans' but the principal accused remains at large. He is issuing statements as his mother puts out threats to the police and expresses no confidence in them. A whole lot of case versions, six in number, have been dished at the thana from April 26 to May 1, all of these tending to create an impression that law is being basically prevented from taking its due course through a thicket of confusion, as it were. The process is sought to be delayed and eventually thrown off course by guiles, if necessary, like in the cases of somewhat similar nature in the past. The fact of the matter in this case, however, is that it represents by far the most glaring instance of alleged high handedness by a kin of ruling party toprass to-date. The public are watching which way it goes. One would, therefore, like to see the OC given full support to handle the case rather than being stonewalled in the discharge of his normal duties.

Friday Mailbox

Is this transparency?

Sir, Bangladesh Biman published an advertisement for procurement of one DC 10-30 and one A310-300 aircraft on dry lease which appeared in your daily on 26 April. In the said advertisement it was mentioned that the year of manufacture must not be earlier than 1980. But your utter surprise correction has been published in your issue of 28 April stating that "Year of manufacture must not be earlier than Bangladesh Financial year 1979-1980". The aviation industry practiced throughout the world consider the calendar year as year of manufacture and not the financial year. This unusual correction of the year of manufacture bears the testimony beyond iota of doubt that Bangladesh Biman has already finalised the lease of aircraft of 1979 aviation and this particular advertisement is just to regularise the lease of aircraft already finalised by the highest authority of Biman.

The government speaks of transparency in all the procurement deals. Is this transparency? Will the authority concerned undertake an investigation and let people know the reason of such an unusual step taken by Biman in changing the age old industry practice of considering calendar year as year of manufacture and introducing a new nomenclature of "Financial year as year of manufacture".

Ashfaq Ahmed, Baridhara Dhaka

Reliable BTV news!

Sir, I had an opportunity to watch the news on the Ekushey Television (ETV) broadcast at 7:50 PM on May 2, 2000. The news ended at 8:00 PM and the BTV news started immediately. The headline of both ETV and BTV was about the launch wreckage in the river Meghna near Nabinagar, Brahmanbaria. The ETV news reported the death of about 28 people and 100 people being missing and recovery of 5 dead bodies. The ETV correspondent sent this message live through television conversation with the newscaster. While the BTV news, though started approximately two minutes later, reported that no dead body was found till then!

This is indeed a glaring example of the authenticity of BTV news!

S. M. Enayetur Raheem, Mirpur, Dhaka

"Queen's Day"

Sir, On 30 April 2000, DS issued a Special Supplement on the occasion of National Day of the Netherlands, namely "Queen's Day". The cover page contains two messages. Both these messages presumably contain a special message each for Bangladesh.

The first one is written by His Excellency Ambassador Dick C.B den Haas. The principal and only theme that does not escape the reader is that the respected Ambassador draws our attention to two issues including transshipments and port facilities extended by the Dutch government to "its considerably larger neighbour Germany...a giant eastern neighbour" despite the loss of hundreds of thousands of its civilians killed by Germany during the Second World War rather than guided by sentiments. The decision was based on the "consideration that rehabilitation of the Dutch economy depended to a large extent on the reconstruction of Germany as an industrial nation." Without telling us directly what is good for us in terms of opening up our transshipments and port facilities to our neighbouring countries, the Ambassador has subtly drew the analogy for

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WHEN *Le Figaro*, a leading French paper, frontpages the story on President K.R. Narayanan's visit to Paris with the headline, "An untouchable at the Elysee Palace," it is pertinent to ask what is the matter with France? Is it oblivious of the derogatory meaning the word 'untouchable' carries or is it meant to be a condescending remark to suggest that a hick has come to occupy the highest position in India? Both observations are hurtful. The first one reflects a thoughtless act, the second a patronising attitude. The apology by *Le Figaro* Chief Editor makes amends for the offensive headline. Yet, it does not correct the impression of a sense of superiority emanating from a society which gave the world the slogan of liberty, equality and fraternity.

But why blame France? India is the real guilty party. The manner in which the elite or the upper castes parade the small progress the untouchables, the dalits, have made betrays a haughty attitude. The President underlined it when he gave vent to his feelings before the journalists returning with him from France.

"I have lived with this kind of behaviour from the Indian press for the last three years," he said. There was pain in his voice and he was visibly moved when he uttered the words. He was replying to a question by a journalist, who wanted to know when the controversy over the headline in *Le Figaro* would end. "It all depends on the Indian media," the President said. "How long would you want to

non-exploitative order. Terrorism was the one topic which Narayanan took up with the President and the Prime Minister of France separately. Neither was as forthcoming as expected, although Paris has proposed a Convention on the Suppression of Financing Terrorism. When Narayanan mentioned the cross-border terrorism to the French President, he passed on the query to his foreign minister. He, on his part, spoke about the meeting with the Pakistani military ruler Pervez Musharraf in Paris.

Although France downgraded Musharraf's visit by not letting him meet either the President or the Prime Minister

From France, with Love

Problems in the West are different from ours. Their attitudes are also different. In fact, they are a different people. The rule of law is ingrained in them and civic sense is their second nature. . . People are safe in the remotest area. . . There are no private *senas*, no review of the constitution, no sectarian appeals.

Was that the end of the firming-up of the traditional capitalist system or did it seek to transform India into a socialist state? found the answer when Narayanan jolted the French Prime Minister by quoting Karl Marx who, according to him, said the bourgeoisie would spread all over the globe and make a mess of it. They were talking about globalisation. Both ultimately settled on a

ter, he seems to have left a pleasant impression on the rulers. They consider him moderate and modern and feel that he is capable of fighting against the fundamentalists in Pakistan. Narayanan's specific proposal to set up a joint working group on terrorism, as India has constituted with the US, was noted by the French Prime Minister. He did not make any commitment but promised to

France does not seem to be so much focussed on restoration of democracy in Pakistan. There was a reference during the discussions but it was far less categorical or persistent than that of President Clinton. France is a pragmatic country. This was reflected even in its reaction to India's explosion of the bomb. Paris was against any sanctions and did not impose any. It wants India to sign the CTBT. But it respects New Delhi's argument on building a consensus

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

talk to his President. Obviously, France is still to make up its mind because the statement it issued on the visit of Narayanan contained no reference to terrorism.

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on the subject. It may be willing to instal nuclear plants to generate power.

France may have been conscious that Narayanan's visit was crucial. But it used the opportunity to convey that it sought close friendship with India. The French President said openly that France loves India. So did his government's statement. It was repeatedly said that France wanted India to be a member of the Security Council. Paris appreciates the importance of India in the effort to make the world multipolar, instead of its being unipolar with America calling the tune.

France is still focussed on China but the spell is breaking. If not the corporate sector, at least writers, philosophers and artists are being stirred by India. A strong, democratic India is seen as a bulwark against China's communism and West Asia's fundamentalism. New Delhi's technological and industrial potential is beginning to attract attention. "I place you above China because you have a far more sophisticated manpower than it has," said a leading intellectual, who studies both India and China closely. Paris is naturally keen to sell its Airbus to the Indian Airlines and Air India. The plane, as such, has been cleared by our experts and the government's okay is being awaited. Both the

President and the Prime Minister of France requested Narayanan to exert pressure on his government to purchase the Airbus. His reply was that it all depended on the price. It was obvious that France was willing to negotiate the price and even offer a loan.

What France buys from India may help clinch the deal. In two months' time, Paris will head the European Union (EU). How much access New Delhi has to it will determine the depth of relationship. EU shares 29 per cent of world's economy as compared to 25 per cent by America. No doubt, the economic relationship will bring India nearer to France or, for that matter, the West. But every visit — this time as a member of the delegation accompanying the President — convinces me that the problems in the West are different from ours. Their attitudes are also different. In fact, they are a different people. The rule of law is ingrained in them and civic sense is their second nature. Their schools in villages have teachers and even far-flung hospitals doctors. People are safe in the remotest area.

Unlike us, they have solved their basic problems — of national unity, integration, destitution and population. There are no private *senas*, no review of the constitution, no sectarian appeals. Narayanan had to concede at a meeting that religious overtones are beginning to appear in Indian politics. And a population of 350 million below the poverty line even after 52 years of independence shows that the country has a long way to go.

The Winner Takes It All, Even History?

by Mohammad Badrul Ahsan

Forgetting is a biological necessity for nations like sleeping is for men. We may care to look at the warring factions in Lebanon, Cambodia and the African countries, where absence of a clear winner and inability to forget have perpetuated unending horror.

DAVID Irving is a revisionist historian who has recently lost a court case in London. What was the crux of his case? He had sued Penguin Books and US academic Deborah Lipstadt over a book in which he was described as a Holocaust denier. Going farther back in time, what earned him that epithet of derision is his doubt that the systematic murder of Jews in Nazi concentration camps had never happened. In its verdict, London's High Court declared that the comment made by Deborah Lipstadt in her book was justified and ordered David to pay \$3 million in defense costs.

David's mistakes are obvious. He not only failed to look at history from the winner's side, but also embroiled himself in a litigation to refute the ascription he had rightfully earned. Then again, he is not the only denier of historical facts in recent times. Shintaro Ishihara, the writer-politician

and Governor of Tokyo, provoked controversy in 1990, when he categorically said that the massacre perpetrated in Nanjing by the Japanese troops was a fabrication of the Chinese historians.

History, like most things, is a matter of perspective and creates its own paradox when seen from different angles. Needless to say, the optimum angle of history is neutral, although, more often than not, it is tainted by the passions of the winning side. A Spanish priest named Bartolomeo de las Casas, who was engaged in the transcription of Christopher Columbus' journal, wrote that the Genoese navigator had invoked God in the name of slavery. "Let us in the name of Holy Trinity go on sending all the slaves that can be sold." Thus a notorious slave trader, who so ruthlessly exploited the Arawak Indians that they no longer exist, is remembered in history as the man who discovered the New World. If any of the Arawak Indians had survived the massacre, what would have been his assessment of Columbus?

This is but one of the many flip-flops in history when winner's merriment overshadowed loser's misfortune. David Irving may have been a denier of the Jewish Holocaust, but history has been a denier of its many misdeeds. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German Protestant theologian executed by the Nazis, coined this phrase "history written from below" in 1942. In prison he wrote, "to see the great events of world history from below, from the perspective of those who are excluded, under suspicion, ill-treated, powerless, oppressed, and scorned, in short those who suffer."

According to Richard Cohen, a columnist of *The Washington Post*, the American historians fell all over themselves in the late 80s as if to write history from below and they tried to "rediscover the greatness of Harry Truman". Truman had many positive attributes like "a snappy candor and willingness to take tough decisions", but he also showed a terrible capacity "to ignore victims". The historians took a renewed look at how this lionized US President had ruined the careers and lives of many loyal Americans by the Loyalty Review Board instituted by him. He was also the Presi-

dent who had inaugurated the McCarthy period, which had unleashed an unprecedented era of paranoid politics in the history of his country.

Second time around, Truman was insensitive to victims when he ordered the use of two atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki killing hundreds of thousands. He once said that he never lost a night's sleep over his decision to drop the bombs on these two Japanese cities. How would the residents of Hiroshima and Nagasaki measure the greatness of a statesman who wrecked their lives to implement his one tough decision? For that matter, how would

blacks consider the greatness of Dwight D Eisenhower, yet another larger-than-life US President, who took his time to implement the Supreme Court's school desegregation decision, while many black kids missed their chances to attend an integrated school? Or, how would the greatness of Winston Churchill be ascertained by the residents of Dresden, the German city, which was fire-bombed into ash at his insistence? Nearly 35,000 people got killed by this bombing at a time when the war was almost over.

and Germany was already beaten. Historians have often asked whether bombing of Dresden was at all necessary.

On the long stretch of moral shoreline, history appears to be a Darwinian vindication where the winners tell their stories and the losers are forever silenced. Is there anything right or wrong about it? What makes the Jewish Holocaust any less justified than the annihilation of the Arawak Indians? How is Christopher Columbus any more adorable than Adolf Hitler? Or for that matter, how does one draw parallels between two of history's foremost heroes: Christopher Columbus and Winston Churchill, one who is credited with discovery of the New World and another who is credited with the deliverance of the Civilized World?

Hitting home, these questions address the jumbled state of our own history, which is marked by a Holocaust in which three million lives had perished in nine months. Last week, a meeting of Golam Azam had to be foiled in Narsingdi by the government-supported pro-liberation forces. Why must we encounter the killers of 1971 turf by turf, meeting by meeting,

and statement by statement all these years after independence? Are we trying to tell our history from below, showing understanding and patience for the losers?

That is not, however, unheard-of. Abraham Lincoln intervened on behalf of the state and pocket-vetoed the Wade Davis bill, when, at the end of the American Civil War, the "Radical Republicans" proposed to restrict all of those who had fought for the Confederacy from voting and holding office. In Uruguay, the people voted in a referendum to let the brutalities of military rule be bygone. The Argentines, however, prosecuted their military leaders who had given orders for torture and execution, and then erased that chapter from their minds.

May be it is important to be decisive in history to put its controversies to rest. The most popular way of doing that has been to let the winner tell their story and force the losers to their silence. A more agreeable way may be if the winners can forget part of their story and forgive the losers. Forgetting is a biological necessity for nations like sleeping is for men. We may care to look at the warring factions in Lebanon, Cambodia and the African countries, where absence of a clear winner and inability to forget have perpetuated unending horror.

OPINION

Agonies of Bangladeshi Hajjees: Some Suggestions

Md Anwarul Afzal

Functions of Bangladeshi Hajj Mission in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia needs to be carefully examined without any bias. My experience during the Hajj in March this year has left me convinced in this regard. To help improve the services of the Mission, I narrate below my experiences and also offer some suggestions.

Majority of the houses rented for Hajjees are not at all up to the mark compared to their rents. Rents are paid in advance by Hajjees three to four months before their arrival in Makkah. Yet the Mission fails to select good houses situated near the Masjidul Haram i.e. the Ka'ba Sharif Mosque. Toilets are small and not in hygienic condition. Missions of other countries select better houses for their citizens at the same cost as ours near Masjidul Haram. There is acute scarcity of drinking water as well as water for taking a shower. We, the residents of House No. 55, Muallim 14, Da Khela Road, Makkah were about to miss our bath prior to entering into Eham for Hajj. We somehow managed to take bath at other houses nearby and had to use toilets situated outside Masjidul Haram far from our house as there was no water from noon on the seventh day till the early morning of the eighth day of the month of "Zul Hajja". In the evening and in the night, I personally lodged complaints about water at the Hajj Mission 4/5 times. This was indeed a bad experience.

The house we lived in had no kitchen, no gas, no gas burner, no utensils for preparing hot water or cooking. Hajjees become sick off and on. They need hot water for gurgling, bathing and preparing special diets. When Hajj missions of other countries successfully provide all these facilities, why do we fail? Massive corruption, lack of knowledge, poor administration, inefficient management are the reasons why. Muallims' volunteers don't visit the house as it is not their duty. The mission also fails to give proper information and guidance in

time. In Madinah it was severe cold at night. Most of the Hajjees from Bangladesh visiting Madinah were without any warm clothes because the Mission failed to inform them of the climate properly either in Dhaka or in Makkah. More comfortable buses for Makkah-Madinah and vice versa with air conditioner and built-in toilet could have been arranged at the same cost. Sufferings knew no bounds.

Pilgrims should be informed about their total number in a bus so that they can do a head count to see if any body is missing. They should also be encouraged to stay in touch with each other when in Madinah. Otherwise it is very difficult to

arrange the return bus to Makkah as bus needs to be filled to capacity. Such information is never given. In the absence of such information, many pilgrims are usually stranded in the Madinah Bus Terminal for a few days because they had left their rented house in time with the idea that buses are easily available. Passports are kept with Muallim's personnel in the Bus. Without checking passport, no bus ticket is issued. If seats in the bus is allocated according to the serial number of passports, it will reduce the rush at the time of boarding the bus. Hajjees need to be instructed to always remain with the group. To facilitate forming the group, a portable sign board bearing the name Bangladesh in Arabic and Bengali should be provided free of cost.

The Mission should rent one or two houses in Madinah to keep the luggage of the Hajjees temporarily and also to provide a temporary resting-place for them. Buses should go there straight to pick up passengers. This should give ample time and opportunity to Hajjees to look for and finally select a suitable house without having to rely on the middleman. After selection of the house, the bus could carry all of them to the rented house. In Makkah, the

Mission can also hire one or two such houses for non-Bal-lotte pilgrims so that leaving their luggage there temporarily, they can get ample time to look for a suitable house without any intervention from the middleman.

Bangladesh Biman or the chartered Southern China Airlines had scarcity of water. No announcement was made about the important cities that we crossed during the flight. En route to Jeddah, the Eham point was "Eialmalam Mountain" and no announcement was made about it, as we went past the mountain.

Umbrellas presented to pilgrims by Biman were so useless that they broke after a few days' use. Foldable umbrellas with strong, smooth stand, screw, hook etc. is useful and easy to carry around specially during the performance of circumambulation which consists of seven rounds around the holy 'Kabah' in Makkah and would be very useful also at Arafat, Mina. Its cover should be made of durable cloth. The outer surface should be white and the inner surface, green. It can then serve to cut the severe heat of the sun to avoid sun stroke. The name Bangladesh in Arabic and English should be inscribed on it.

The Mission's service in Mina, Arafat and Muzdalefa need to be intensified and improved. Insufficient number of volunteers with poor knowledge and training will not serve the purpose. For identification of tents of pilgrims staying in Mina, a site map showing its location, nearby bus stands, vantage-points in Arabic and Bengali will undoubtedly help a great deal. Each pilgrim should possess a photocopy of the site map. Pilgrims usually waste considerable time and energy looking for their tents specially when they return from Arafat, Muzdalefa and from Makkah after performing the obligatory circumambulation and also after throwing pebbles at the three Jamrats in Mina.

Even Saudi volunteers don't know its location. Such site maps in Arabic and Bengali will help all to locate their tents. The rush becomes severe on the twelfth day of the month particularly in and around the area where the three Jamrats are located. The Mission should have a temporary camp there. On this day, the pilgrims usually become extremely tired, sometimes even fainting from extreme exhaustion. I found a unique and affordable ambulance service there owned by the Turkish Mission — a spacious long tempo-like vehicle with cover for protection from the sun, seating arrangements for about the four persons and enough room for a sick pilgrim to lie down.

Bus services on the Makkah-Mina route on the 8th day and vice-versa on the 9th and the 10th day of "Zul-Hajja" are very inadequate. Muallims fail to provide sufficient number of buses. To avoid the heavy rush and to take Hajjees to Arafat before Zohar prayers, more buses in cooperation with the Mission should be arranged by the Muallim. Hajjees pay for transportation costs three to four months earlier. Many Missions of other countries arrange such bus services for their citizens to avoid the heavy rush.

The Mission's temporary office at Musafir Khana in Mina needs to be opened more than two lakh pilgrims from different countries stay here under sheds. Bangladesh Hajjees mainly non-ballottes stay there. Medical facilities at Mina need to be enhanced. The Mission volunteer wears a banner in green with the Bangladesh map on the back but without the name Bangladesh. The name of Bangladesh in Arabic and, if possible, in English need to be mentioned on the banner. It will help Hajjees of other countries to provide information to the volunteer on any missing Bangladesh Hajjee. Medical facilities with sufficient and proper medicines

including essential ones, hot water bags, lotions for tonsils and other throat problems, and other high fever, sun stroke, joint pain etc. should be brought from Bangladesh in plenty. Medicine in Saudi Arabia is very costly. The services need to be improved both in quality and quantity.

Hajjees from India, Pakistan get more than two thousand Rials for food, stay in Madinah, miscellaneous expenses, whereas a Bangladeshi gets 1380 Rials. The total money deposited by an Indian or a Pakistani Hajjee is reported to be less than that of ours, and yet they get their money's worth more than we do.

At Jeddah Airport, return flights are usually delayed. Indian and Pakistani airlines issue free lunch/dinner tickets to their passengers when their flights are delayed. Bangladesh Biman should also issue such tickets for lunch/dinner in case of such delays since towards the end of the pilgrimage, Hajjees usually have very little money left. Due to heavy rush there is acute shortage of trolleys at the airport to carry luggage to customs' room at the time of departure. The Mission could have its own trolleys.

The government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia deserves to be congratulated for providing all possible facilities, amenities for Hajjees. Managing millions of Hajjees, and coordinating a wide range of services for them, providing for their safety and their smooth passage to specific places in all the holy sites within the short time-span is not all easy. So the Missions of many countries play a crucial role. To improve our services for both ballottes and non-ballottes, Bangladesh Mission needs to be scrutinized and accordingly improved and changes need to be made with priority. If necessary, the services of our Defence Force personnel may be used along with that of the Civil Administration.

AZ Dhaka