

## Reforms in the Railways

ONCE again the issue of reforming our railways has surfaced. This time because the donors, mainly the Germans, have refused to agree to further loans unless the specified reforms are carried out. The reforms are: a) decision to corporatise BR; b) confirmation that government will invest where financing companies will not be forthcoming; c) clear understanding that inter-country link between Bangladesh and India is envisaged. Our first point on this issue is that why questions of reforms always come up when pushed for by the donors and why it is they who tell us which reforms to carry out and which ones not to.

Not only in the case of the railways, we have seen similar things with respect to reducing systems loss in electricity and water supply and other essentials. Why can't we have our own reform agenda and pursue it with sincerity and vigour? The sad truth is that we do not, and that is why the donors put conditions on us for their aid, grants and loans. The whole process is humiliating but is one that we bring upon ourselves and cannot blame the donors for. Why should it be the World Bank or the ADB or the EU or any other donor to tell us that we need to stop our waste, reduce systems loss or increase efficiency? We should be doing all this on our own, but instead are being dictated to in doing. On the specific question of reforms in BR we are surprised that a foreign country should make it a condition for its aid as to whether or not to have railway link with India. If we do it — and we think we should — then we will do it on the basis of our calculation as to how we can serve our national interest best. Why should a donor — in this case the Germans — make it a condition for their aid? We are convinced that BR needs drastic reforms. The once prosperous railways have been reduced to a pitiable state with losses in every direction. Deliberate promotion of road transport and continuous neglect of the BR has shifted most of the human and goods traffic away thus crippling BR completely.

We must do everything to restore BR simply because the railways provide the most efficient and cost effective transport all over the world. It is time that our government wakes up to the need to bring about fundamental reforms in BR and save this extremely important infrastructure from ruin.

## Punish Them

MUCH has been reported in the recent times about plunder of national wealth by a group of unscrupulous Civil Surgeons posted at Bogra, Rangpur, Satkhira, Tangail and Gopalganj between 1996 and 98. A number of officials of the health ministry were also alleged to have been involved in the misappropriation of medicines and medical equipment worth Tk. 140 crore during the period in question.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health Ministry has done an excellent job. Our congratulations are to the subcommittee in particular, headed by Tajul Islam Choudhury, an MP of Jatiya Party, which investigated the matter. The final report of the subcommittee was submitted to the Standing Committee which met on Wednesday and recommended legal action against the alleged offenders. Since the report clearly identified the officials alleged to have misappropriated public funds and also mentioned specific allegations against them, legal proceedings against them can be drawn without much difficulty. It will not be an exaggeration to say that corruption by public servants of the Republic is eating into the vitals of this impoverished nation. Many of the enquiry reports do not see the light of the day and that which do are hardly followed up with action. Some are virtually quashed through lobbying and political pressure. Departmental actions are also delayed due to procedural flaws and time consuming methods. But in this particular case the findings are very clear and conclusive and we expect quick corrective action on the part of the administration.

If the concerned agencies take to dilly-dallying tactics and the authorities succumb to their guiles, then we will be forced to believe that the government is not at all serious in bringing the culprits to book. It will also give an impression that one can get away with whatever crime one commits. This goes to question the credibility of the government insofar as eradication of corruption from public bodies is concerned.

## Menacing Magnitude of Drug Addiction

ADangerous issue at the educational institutions remains unnoticed by most. But, it is no less appalling and intolerable than the various kinds of "unrest" educational institutions go through. Silent self-destruction seems to be the order of the day as students at the university level in Dhaka city are increasingly becoming addicted to soporific and other drugs.

A recent survey has revealed that 42 per cent of the under-graduate and post-graduate students, residing in dormitories, are addicted to drug-related substances, which include cigarette, alcohol, sleeping pills, phensidyl, heroin, hashish etc. Of the students found using these substances, 55.2 per cent are male and 7.6 per cent are female. Falling prey to additives may not be a new phenomenon in the country's educational arena, but the extent to which students are getting involved in such activities provides reasons to be concerned.

Corrective measures need to be put in place immediately; the availability of such substances must come to a halt. The habit must be exorcised from amongst the student community. The adolescents are mostly enticed to drugs by fellow inmates, peer pressure and sheer curiosity. Teachers can play an important role in containing the menace. Students-counselling guidance services must be introduced and a way devised to encourage change in the students' behavioural patterns. Steps should be taken immediately to prevent the matter from getting out of hand. Unless the authorities act now, these drug addicts may turn into drug-dealers, drug-smugglers and the like.

President Clinton has commenced possibly his last official visit to Europe which includes Russia and Ukraine. Although President Clinton will be a lame-duck president after November, the visit demonstrates that the leader of the free world is keen to establish an abiding relationship with the elected President of Russia Mr. Vladimir Putin.

The question that arises is: Why is President Clinton visiting Moscow almost at the end of his presidency? There could be several possible reasons behind the trip.

First, the US is keen to develop the Theatre Missile Defence (TMD) system to ward off any attacks on the US by "rogue states" and Russia is opposed to it partly because the manufacture of TMD goes against the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. Furthermore it is hugely expensive and may spark a new global arms race. There is a view that the main purpose of President Clinton's visit is to explain the compulsion of the US to go ahead with TMD and soften the Russian stance. He might advocate that TMD would be beneficial to international peace and security at the new century.

Second, Russia is not comfortable with NATO's expansion to include former communist states in Eastern Europe. Poland is already a member of NATO. The proposal of inclusion of Baltic States — Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia — in

NATO is perceived as a threat to Russia. It is important to remember that a small part of Russian territory is separated by Lithuania from its mainland Russia. The visit of President Clinton might neutralise the negative perception of Russia from NATO's membership to the Baltic States.

Third, in recent times there has been an emphasis of Russia's relations with China. There is a view that the US perceives the strengthening of Sino-Russian relations as a galling up against her. The strategic argument that the visit might put a brake on the state of increased bilateral relations to be directed against the strategic interests of the US in the Asia-Pacific region. President Clinton might canvass that the interests of Russia and the US converge on many common objectives in the unpredictable Pacific region.

Fourth, terrorism is a common concern for both the countries as today's terrorism appears to be far more a freelance operation than it was before. The US had experienced terrorism on its embassies in East Africa in 1998 and their

'number one terrorist' Osama Bin Laden continues to live in Afghanistan, ruled by ultra-orthodox Islamic Taliban. Russia has also been confronting it in Chechnya and it knows well that it is difficult to eliminate terrorism in that part of the world. Russia warned Afghanistan that there could be air strikes if it continued to support the Islamic militants.

Furthermore, the new facets of terrorism, including cyber-terrorism, and the possible attack by chemical (man-made poisons) and biological weapons are relatively easy. In germ warfare, tiny quantities could be enough to inflict tens of thousands of casualties. Nuclear-armed subversives are perhaps the worst nightmare of all. Both the powers have interests in combating terrorism beyond their borders. The visit appears to provide an opportunity to exchange views as to how to face the threat of new instruments of terrorism.

Fifth, it may be noted that although President Putin is seen by many in the West as an authoritarian, the Russian President's recent actions in

strategic matters please the leaderships of the West. Russia ratified the 1970 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the 1996 Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. Recently at the Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Russia along with other permanent members of the Security Council committed themselves to eliminate the nuclear arsenals from the earth (although no time frame was given). The purpose of the visit could be to say "thank you" personally to President Putin for his positive attitude towards global nuclear disarmament.

Sixth, after the collapse of the former Soviet Union, Russia seems to find itself marginalised in world affairs. NATO's war against Yugoslavia in 1999 against the wishes of Russia exposed its weakness in the political dynamics of Europe. There is a view that Russia felt humiliated and hurt. Russia wants respect from the West and to be treated as an equal partner. The visit will provide a clear signal that the leader of the free world treats Russia with respect and it is President Clinton who is meeting with

President Putin in Moscow and not the other way round. This will provide a boost to its image to the ordinary Russians.

Seventh, President Clinton is expected to raise with his counterpart the human rights record in Chechnya and freedom of media in Russia. In recent past the police raided the headquarters of the owners of an independent Russian TV channel (NTV). The government defended the action on the basis of allegations of tax evasions and it did not constitute an attack on media freedom. But this explanation did not satisfy many critics. Perception is often more important than facts.

Mr. Clinton may likely to underscore the fact that respect for human rights and freedom of press or media in Russia will be one of the important factors that will help strengthen the relations between the peoples of the two countries. The *quid pro quo* for Russia appears to be that Russia has a huge foreign debt problem and she needs co-operation from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the US can immensely help Russia in IMF's favourable decisions.

Finally, the visit could have an impact on the domestic political scene in the US. The Democratic Party presidential contender Vice-President Al Gore appears to be trailing Republican candidate Governor George W. Bush in the polls for the November presidential election. President Clinton's engagement with Europe could be seen as a constructive foreign policy direction for the US. There is a view that the visit will help Al Gore who is expected to continue the main thrust of this policy. On the other hand, the Republican presidential hopeful Bush is being perceived as weak in foreign policy.

**Conclusion:** President Clinton's political antennae is commendable and wants a place in history. This is more so when he had faced a tumultuous phase during his second term of office. With the economy booming in the US, President Clinton wishes to make a mark in his foreign policy directions as well. He has accomplished in getting approval of the grant of permanent normal trade relations by the House of Representatives with China. He wishes to develop the Trans-Atlantic policy into a cohesive and comprehensive framework for peace and security both for Europe and the US. This visit appears to be a step towards achieving the goal.

The author, a barrister, is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

## What Prompts Clinton to Visit Moscow?

by Harun ur Rashid

*With the economy booming in the US, President Clinton wishes to make a mark in his foreign policy directions as well. He has accomplished in getting approval of the grant of permanent normal trade relations by the House of Representatives with China. He wishes to develop the Trans-Atlantic policy into a cohesive and comprehensive framework for peace and security both for Europe and the US.*

## The Educated of Sindh

Ardesir Cowasjee writes from Karachi

hangers-on if he knew how long he was to remain chairman as he needed to know whether to rent out his own house or not. Don't, he was told. Sure enough, he was soon moved out and sent to head PIDC, normally a three-year tenure.

Conrad Nawaz Sharif in 1990, and the all-powerful, vily, corrupt and now absconding, re-aucrat, Salman Faruqi, persuaded his equally corrupt master to get rid of the air marshal and appoint cousin Bilal Faruqi in his place. Daudpota found a job in the private sector, where he remained until uprooted to become governor of Sindh. Today, he is jobless, and not having been corrupt faces financial restraints. He now has all the time in the world to play bridge.

On the night of May 24 I drove over to the desolate governor's mansion to commiserate and ask if he needed any help in moving out. He told me that he would have already moved had there been any water in the tank at his Defence house and had his telephones been working. He intended to settle matters in the morning and move out.

The first time I had heard the not so common name Daudpota was when I was a student at the BVS. We were told that the new Director of Public Instruction (DPI) — the head of education, schools and scholastic institutions of the province) Dr Umar Daudpota, who had just succeeded that other fine

scholar, Nabi Bakhsh Kazi (A G N Kazi's father), was to inspect the school.

Umar Daudpota, a true son of Sindh, was born in 1896 in the village of Talti, where he also went to school. He later joined the Sindh Madrassah and then the D J Sindh College from which he graduated with a first class first BA and MA. A scholar, a linguist, fluent in Arabic, Persian and German, he then gained admittance to Emmanuel College, Cambridge to do his Ph.D. Returning to Karachi, he was appointed principal of the Sindh Madrasah. In 1930, he went to Bombay as professor of Arabic at Ismail College, and returned to Karachi in 1939 as DPI in which post he remained until 1948. Umar Daudpota was honoured by the British with the prestigious title of 'Shams-ul-Ulema'.

Nabi Bakhsh Kazi, a tall handsome man, was always immaculately dressed in a three-piece suit and a Fez. He spoke little and was held in great awe by the other scholars, the principal of our school, the BVS, Dr. Maneck Behnaji Pithawalla, a doctor of science, a geologist and a geographer.

The Kazi family has produced some notable men — all straightforward honest and talented individuals, amongst them Allama Kazi, Justice Mamoon Kazi, formerly of the Supreme Court (who managed not to sit on the Bench when I was hauled up last year for con-

tempt and the then Chief Justice of Pakistan Saiduzzaman Siddiqui convened a full-court bench), Akhtar Ali Kazi, another former judge who, incapable of rigging, has the honour of being the only sitting chief minister of Sindh to lose an election, the late Judge Imam Ali Kazi, and the extremely proper and well-mannered anaesthetist, Halem Kazi, who has the added distinction of being the husband of the very substantial Professor Doctor Hamida Khuro who sense of humour matches her bearing.

Before the quick-firing generals take aim at their good people within their range, let us remind them that they chose well when they inducted into the Sindh cabinet the talented educationist, Professor Anita Gulam Ali. She well knows the value of education and is of the firm conviction that education and education alone can thwart and repulse the present invasive, insidious, and rife bigotry with which this country is stricken. She is the daughter of that enlightened and charming couple, now sadly both departed from this world, Feroze Gulamally and Shireen Nana. Feroze was a distinguished judge of the Sindh High Court, Anita is the granddaughter of another educationist, Nuruddin Ahmad Gulamally, a fine moustachioed figure of a man, also a former DPI of Sindh; and she is the great-granddaughter of another Shams-ul-Ulema, Mirza Qaleech Beg, author of

392 books. More needs to be written about the Nanas.

General Pervez Musharraf is a forward-thinking man of liberal thought. If well advised, he has the capacity to lead us out of the mess we are in. He was taught, as was Azim Daudpota, at one of Karachi's finest schools, St Patrick's High School, where boys in those days learnt all about gentlemanly behaviour, manners, and what is and what is not done.

Musharraf was actually in Karachi the day his chief of staff called Daudpota to give him his marching orders and had been with Daudpota a few hours earlier, when no mention of any change was mooted. The right and proper thing would have been for Musharraf to drive to the Governor's House, meet the air marshal, who is ten years his senior, and say to him, "Air Marshal, Sir, we wish to make a change, and appoint a less bothersome junior man to sit in the governor's chair. May I have the privilege of dining you out and driving you home?" He chose the craven, rather than the correct, way of riding himself and his corps commanders of a man who was capable of saying what he felt had to be said.

The general can still make amends. He can dine out the Air Marshal and ensure that he receives the perks and privileges to which a former governor is entitled.

## Freedom of Choice

by Barun S. Mitra

*Socialism failed because it is impossible to efficiently allocate resources by publicly controlling private property. A much more efficient way is to bring much of what is thought to be in the public domain under private control — privatize public goods.*

plosion in international smuggling, creating channels through which now RDX explosives are slipped into the country.

The US's "war on drugs" has been costly: billions of dollars have been spent and the prison system is overflowing with offenders. The promised victory is nowhere in sight. Some Latin American governments are being increasingly marginalized, caught between the drug mafias and the US government.

Good intentions are never a sufficient condition for bringing about social change. The do-gooders claim to make life safe and free of risk. Only a life in a cage provides such safety. Life is about taking risks. And benefiting yourself and your fellow risk takers, if you are successful. And accepting the consequence if it is not. A useful example of such risk taking is private entrepreneurship. Enterprise in others is an anathema to all control freaks, many

of whom appear to be entrepreneurial only when it comes to controlling the lives of others.

Drugs and alcohol have been a part of Indian culture from time immemorial. There is no evidence this led to any collective decay or degeneration. Today India is a democracy. The underlying principle being that every voter, irrespective of background, has the wisdom to meaningfully participate in the decision-making process. Do-gooders think these same people are too incompetent to decide on issues that directly affect their lives — drugs, alcohol, tobacco, or even lottery tickets.

There will always be some people who will make a choice harmful to themselves. But so society as a whole comes to stronger for the lessons they learn. That is why control was not necessary in past.

International bodies like World Health Organisation have been trying to rally sup-

port for a crusade against tobacco. WHO's prime focus should be curing malaria and other avoidable diseases. But focusing on real diseases would mean targeting governments. WHO is made up of such governments. How much more convenient to attack the sale of certain products or hold the common man responsible for his alleged follies.

WHO and the like are motivated by the costs to the state health service. But the inefficiencies of the health service should be dealt with by denationalization, private participation and introducing competition.

WHO and the like carry anti-choice candle. WHO's attempt to control health care, and restrain individual freedom, legitimizes their own agenda of controlling a whole range of economic and political issues. This desire for control poses the greatest threat to individual freedom, dignity and choice in

the new century. Grassroots voices against this insidious subversion are growing. The Nobel economist, Milton Friedman has called for an end to the US's war on drugs.

These people carry the cross of failed government economic policies, unresponsive and inefficient administrations. No Indian political leader will tell these people that if elected he will send police to sniff out tobacco in their homes. Agencies like WHO provide a cover to push for types of control that will otherwise never receive popular mandate.

No one denies tobacco carries a degree of risk. Life is full of risks and uncertainties. Indeed, it is the attempt to lower risks and overcome uncertainties that contribute to improving the quality of life.

The question is who should bear the cost of taking the risk? For example, should smokers force others to share their risk through passive smoking? It is assumed those external to the trade in tobacco — passive smokers — must be protected by the government. It is often forgotten people have been devising strategies to deal with such situations for a long time. Even without going into the science of whether or not passive smoking is harmful, there are many instances of people devising voluntary responses to similar situations.

For instance, Indian restaurants routinely publicize their "pure vegetarian" or "non-vegetarian" status, depending on the clientele they seek. Many ban alcohol or cigarettes. Privately operated chartered bus services in Delhi charge extra for smoke free rides or smoking privileges. Demand has induced some airlines to offer special smokers only flights. The power of private negotiation best comes through reported instances where passengers sitting at the border zone of smoking and non-smoking seats in airlines have made deals to induce a neighbouring smoker not to light up during the flight.

These illustrations of anti-

cable private settlements over so-called public domain contrasts sharply with the performance of public regulations. For instance, in Delhi a law was passed giving powers to government officials to arrest smokers in an attempt to restrict smoking in many designated public and private places. Two years since its passage, no one has ever been prosecuted. The law has not achieved its objective. It is just being grossly violated, to the point it is impossible for the authorities to seriously try to prosecute.

Tobacco regulations attempt to drag to the public domain what is essentially a private issue. Socialism failed because it is impossible to efficiently allocate resources by publicly controlling private property. A much more efficient way is to bring much of what is thought to be in the public domain under private control — privatize public goods.

An advantage of this approach is that one can bypass the evaluation of scientific evidence for and against tobacco. Science doesn't get politicized under the pressures of public policymaking. Public policy doesn't get embroiled in scientific debates. Instead it focuses on ensuring maximum space to the public so that everyone negotiates their respective preferences. That is what an open market provides. The competitive environment of an open market induces suppliers to make available scientific information to consumers about product safety. There is no doubt consumers should be aware that certain practices or preferences might be harmful.

The refusal of public agencies and activists to explore nonregulatory approaches to the tobacco debate exposes the real agenda. They create an environment of crisis in order to justify regulatory controls. Public health is a facade to camouflage restrictions on freedom of choice.

In a competitive economy, companies and even industries come and go. There is no reason to shed a tear for the tobacco industry if it fails because of changing consumer preference. But on the other hand, the various groups are not just an attack on an industry. It is an attack on individual freedom and liberty as well.

The author is founder member, Liberty Institute, New Delhi

## To the Editor ...

## Old topic, new idea

Sir, During my visit to a neighbouring country in the recent past, I found that their offices open at 10:00 AM and run till 5:00 PM. I realised that this was excellent timing with great advantages: employees got sufficient time to drop their children to school, go to bazaar and attend to other household chores before coming to office without anxiety. This is especially helpful to bankers and other commercial people who keep long hours at office.

I was wondering if this practice can be adopted here as well, in the interest of service holders. However, if adopted it must be seen that punctuality is maintained and the practice of early leaving is stopped.

Mushfique Ahmed  
142/1 New Bally Road  
Dhaka

## Experience from a foreign land

Sir, A few years ago, my wife and I went on a trip to Singapore and Malaysia. After a few days in Singapore we set off for Malacca City in Malaysia by coach. As we crossed the border over the causeway, we had to get off from the coach and walk from one border check-post to the other. As we came to the Malaysian side of the border and offered our necessary documents to the Customs people we found that our coach had already left without realising that two passengers — my wife and I, were left behind. As our traveller's cheques and other important documents were in a briefcase, went away with the coach we were naturally very concerned and told the Customs officials about our problem. To our surprise the Customs officials started laughing and said, "Don't worry, none of your be-

longings will be lost, you will get everything back. Please get another bus and follow your earlier coach to the next service station where they must be waiting for you."

We took a transport as advised and true to their prediction we found that our coach was waiting in the service station and the conductor was phoning the border outpost enquiring about the lost two passengers. His face lit up when he saw the two of us.

Though we were annoyed at being left at the border outpost like that but at the end of it all I kept on wondering at the way the Customs officials were telling us confidently that none of our belongings would be lost. Would we have gotten back our things if we were in Bangladesh?

A M Mahmood  
Dhaka

## Thanks, NU

Sir, We would like to thank the National University authority and welcome their strict decision of holding the exams (especially Honours Part-3) on the scheduled date. We have at last started to believe that NU authority is really trying to be regular and is endeavouring in turning NU into a session jam free establishment. However, publishing results on time is also an imperative matter for an well-organised institution. We therefore hope that, NU will be punctual enough to publish the results of the 98-Batch at least one month before the exam of 99-Batch so that there remain sufficient time for the unsuccessful students for making a second attempt.

Mainuddin Mainul  
98-Batch  
Jagannath College, Dhaka