

Beefed Up Border Patrol

THAT plan for progressive enhancement of the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) is underway certainly comes as a cheery bit of news. However, such a plan should definitely have come a long time back. By the BDR director general's own admission, our border is "extremely porous". In fact, a stretch of nearly 500 kilometres of the country's border, in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) and the Sunderbans, lies unprotected since independence. With thick forest making the area inaccessible, even to the BDR, who knows, insurgents or drug racketeers or weapon traffickers may have used the area for hideouts or depots all these years. With only 37,000 men in its ranks and equally inadequate logistic support, the BDR has beyond doubt been hard-pressed to keep the criminal elements at bay. Increasing influx of contraband items, illegal weapons, narcotics, etc bears testimony to the poignant truth. Belated though, the decision to nearly double the personnel strength of the BDR and introduce a helicopter fleet to facilitate border patrol, and raise a Riverine Rifles Battalion to guard the Sunderbans region is definitely a very good start.

There have been quite a few incidents in recent times suggesting international drug and weapon cartel may have been using the country as a conduit. Last year, the Department of Narcotics Control with the help of customs officials and police made a major drugs haul. Two foreigners were arrested in this regard. Also, there have been reports in the media on unchecked influx of illegal weapons. Besides, trafficking of women and children has gone on unabated. Put together, all these point to a disconcerting reality: people in the wrong end of law have grown in strength. While there have been enough evidence to suggest existence of an international network behind the sinister acts, the law enforcement agencies in the region have not quite been able to get together to launch a concerted anti-crime combat.

Smuggling and drug and weapon trafficking no longer remain a national concern. In fact, regional and international co-operations have become crucial to fight these ills. While enhancing its force, the BDR should, therefore, initiate a process to involve the intelligence agencies and other enforcement machinery in the fight against the criminals and work with their counterparts in the region towards a surveillance network. We must realise that to have the holes in our own borders plugged, we need to help others do theirs.

VIP Terrorists!

THE four BCL activists who were caught with arms and beaten up by the employees of Shikhhkha Bhaban on 26 June last have been receiving 'VIP treatment' at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH), according to a pictorial and graphic report in the Bangla daily *Prothom Alo* on Wednesday. The four namely, DU BCL Mohsin Hall president Shafiqul Islam Shafiq and his associates Shimul, Mizan and Ashraf stormed the Shikhhkha Bhaban with arms, fired indiscriminately injuring five on the spot, but were caught and chastised by the employees and then handed over to the police, who in turn took them to the DMCH for treatment. Instead of being the inmates of the emergency ward (which is ward No. 32) the terrorists are now occupying cabin No. 32 at the DMCH by courtesy of the hospital administration. It has also been alleged in the report that this cabin is now being used as a subail 'unofficially' even though the gang of four has fully recovered to leave the hospital and make their journey to the Nazimuddin Road Central Jail. But for reasons best known to the hospital authorities they have not yet been released and, instead, are being given VIP treatment.

The most intriguing part of the story is that none in the hospital admitted to the presence of the goons in the cabin and for unknown reasons everyone tried to suppress the fact including the Director of DMCH who answered vaguely to the queries of the paper. Police have also acted strangely on the day of occurrence when a couple of firearms recovered from Shafiq were recorded as 'abandoned'. Even the OC of Ramna thana denied that any accused were staying in cabin and said that all were under treatment at ward No. 32 under police protection though the photograph on the front page of *Prothom Alo* completely negates his claim.

In the past a lot of allegations were made against the government of soft pedalling vis-a-vis criminals and terrorists belonging to the ruling party and its front organisations in spite of regular claims by the administration of dispensing evenhanded justice to all irrespective of their political affiliation. Now the report in the *Prothom Alo* has once again unmasked the duplicity of the government. Do we have to understand that government does not mean what it preaches or it is not at all serious about taking actions, as per law of the land, against the terrorists belonging to its front organisations?

DU Library Automated

THE Dhaka University Library Automation Project (DULAP) was finally inaugurated on Monday. The 87-crore-taka project aims at instituting a completely digitised catalogue for some half a million books housed in the library, besides installing Internet browsing facilities for students, teachers, researchers and faculty members of the university. When implemented in its entirety - only 45,000 books have so far been catalogued - the automation initiative would turn the decades-old library into a 'user-friendly' facility in the modern sense of the term.

The DULAP, we hope, is part of an overall development plan for the university towards restoring its prestige. Over the years, blatant politicisation and subsequent criminalisation of the university have had a disastrous effect on the standard of education there. Vitiated atmosphere has induced an academic nosedive. Achievements of teachers and students no longer hog the headlines, political skirmishes on the campus do. Indeed, it is time for revival. We would like to believe that the process has begun.

In an era of greater inter-connectivity, information technology holds the key to sustainable development. The DULAP should not be the end. Rather, it should be the beginning of the process. The objective should be to prepare the students for the world of IT, which means to ensure access to Internet for each and every student. While we hail the inauguration of the DULAP, we hope similar automation projects would be undertaken for other public universities and institutions as well.

How to Face Western Politico-economic Challenges

OIC Conference

by A M M Shahabuddin

OIC will have to shake off its old tradition of being bogged down in political quagmire and get ready to boldly face the political and the economic questions in the new millennium. Better be envied than pitied so goes the wise man's advice. Let OIC prove that they are not just 'empty sacks' and they can 'stand upright'.

ous as to carry the Iraq-Kuwait resolutions on its agenda for the last more than a decade, then it should have the guts to turn its attention to what is now happening there under the initiative of America and United Nations. Instead of hiding its face or sitting on the fence, OIC should have come out with strong resolutions condemning the 'unholy' alliance between USA and UN, to continue the most atrocious decade-long economic sanctions against Iraq leading to the premature deaths of thousands of ailing children for want of essential medicines and deaths of thousands of men, women and children of virtual starving. That they have failed to do for reasons best known to the organisation. At least, they should have condemned the merciless bombings by the Anglo-American forces, killing innocent people, in the name of protecting the 'sanctity' of the so-called 'no-fly zones' created by America (not by UN resolution) in the northern and southern Iraq. When this pernicious 'nightmare' of the Iraqis will be over? OIC owes an explanation, of course.

At the KL Conference, Iraq was reported to have tried to push its fellow member states to support its call for lifting the so-called 'UN sanctions', but perhaps got little backing. Iraq has claimed over and again that it had complied 'fully' with all UN resolutions and had 'destroyed' its weapons. But the weapon inspectors, sent by UN, (who are alleged by Iraq to be mostly there for spying) are still searching for the proverbial black cat in darkness. But then the 'search' by the weapon inspectors will go on ad infinitum. It is indeed a pity, if while for adopting even a 'watered down' or 'toothless' resolution, the organisation is to wait for the distant 'red' or 'green' signal.

Islamic Common Market

However, the statement made by the present OIC Secretary-General Azeddine Laraki, in a press interview in the sidelines of the conference, is worth mentioning. Mr Laraki had advised the Muslim states to give up their 30-year old habit of beating about the bush and make all-out efforts to establish closer trade relations among the OIC member states, by establishing an Islamic Common Market (ICM). Earlier, Laraki had urged the delegates at the inaugural session of the conference, in his 'Political Report', that global trade liberalisation "constitutes an environment which is fraught with dangers," adding, that OIC "is regrettably on the weak side". And to face it, Laraki said, the Islamic states will have "to cooperate and show solidarity" among themselves, by creating the ICM. It is indeed a good sign that the OIC has adopted a resolution stressing the "urgent need" for steps

towards "economic integration" of the 56 member states.

It may be mentioned here, that according to one estimate, trade among 56 member countries of OIC currently accounted for less than 10 per cent of the total world trade, although they constitute little over 25 per cent of the total UN membership. Hence, there is an urgent need to bring about some basic 'reforms' in the organisation to put it on strong feet economically as well as politically. "Whether we like it or not, we will have to be committed to the idea of Muslim bloc," Laraki said.

Malaysia's Example : Road to Success

Meanwhile, Malaysia, whose Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad is considered as the most outspoken personality in South East Asia, has given a new lesson not only for the region but also for the Muslim world to follow if they want to save themselves from the 'onslaught' of western financial machinations. Malaysian delegate at the conference had accused currency speculators (as did Mahathir much earlier from different Asian economic platforms) of 'triggering the Asian financial crisis' and reiterated that Malaysia will not abandon its 'selective' capital controls until there are international regulations to rein them in. Thus Malaysia could successfully save itself from the last Asian financial crisis 'triggered' by financial speculators, like

George Ross of America who siphoned off millions of dollars out of the troubled Asian financial waters, because Malaysia stuck to its gun and totally ignored IMF's 'prescriptions' which were swallowed by many Asian 'victims' only to become more depressed. Therefore, Malaysia's recommendation, later taken by the conference as a resolution, for adoption of a 'multilateral trading system' may go a long way to boost expansion of Muslim world economy. Another Malaysian proposal, adopted as a conference resolution, aims at bringing about 'reforms' to the international financial infrastructure. Bahrain's proposal to enforce economic ties among the OIC members, adopted as its resolution, will help give the ultimate shape to the creation of the Islamic Common Market.

Laraki's successor, Abdelouh Belkiz, a fellow Moroccan, elected unanimously by the conference, who assumes his assignment on January 1 next year, will have a tough job to carry the proposed new reforms to put the OIC on a new pedestal to face the new economic trends, including globalisation of trade. Whatever might be the earlier controversy about the selection of the new Secretary-General, that he has been selected unanimously puts the record straight. It is true that this time it was Asia's turn but as there are precedents of a second-term it has now gone to Morocco to run the second term (2001-2004). And

the conference has decided that the next term (2004-2008) would be for Asia. So there should be a 'full stop' to all bickerings alleging that Arab world and Africa were "clearly trying to elbow them (Asia) out". Let the new Secretary-General carry his mission to success in taking the 31-year old organisation to its new glory, with full support of the member countries.

Time has come for the OIC member states to take a bold step to expand its horizon of outlook to bring it at par with other international organisations. A united solid platform of 56 Muslim states undoubtedly can serve as a tremendous force both in political and economic fields, making its strong presence felt both within and without the United Nations. It can serve as a powerful bloc in other bigger international organisations, like the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the 'Group of 75', which has now more than one hundred members, to take a united stand against any unfavourable stance by powerful developed western countries. For this OIC will have to shake off its old tradition of being bogged down in political quagmire and get ready to boldly face the political and the economic questions in the new millennium. Better be envied than pitied so goes the wise man's advice. Let OIC prove that they are not just 'empty sacks' and they can 'stand upright'. Let the OIC Summit be held in Qatar in November next show the day.

The writer is a retired UN official.

A Cadre-based Party and Ivory Towers

Anil Chawla writes from Bhopal, India

THE office building of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Madhya Pradesh is truly magnificent. No political party in India and may be in the whole developing world has an office building that can compare with this well-designed and well-built complex. Yet, at present the mood inside the building is of despondency. Public utterances aside, in private conversations, the stalwarts of the party express their anguish and despair. A sense of alienation with the way BJP is conducting the Government at Delhi can be felt among the cadres as well as among a large number of senior functionaries of the party. Instead of a sense of ownership about the Central Government, one sees an apologetic attitude which is, of course, duly covered up by lofty statements at official press conferences.

A few weeks back a very small news appeared in some Hindi newspapers. Some organisation representing vegetarians had written a letter of protest against the Central Government's so-called decision to allow beef extract up to 2 per cent to be mixed with tea leaves to enhance flavour. This was the starting point of a rumour that kept growing with time. Various organisations joined in the protest. Jain community was extremely disturbed. Jain temples put up posters and displays of newspaper cuttings. The rumour has grown to such an extent that the tea trade is affected. Sale of all types and brands of tea has gone down. The whisper campaign has affected the rural areas and small towns more than the large towns but the effect is widespread. At the time of writing the article a few days back, many local language newspapers have carried long stories and local TV channels have reported the matter in great detail.

BJP has always been known as a Hindu party and its vote bank has traditionally included

conservative religious elements of Indian society. It is unimaginable and beyond all reason that BJP government could take such a decision which hurts the religious sentiments of Hindus (including Jains and Buddhists). Most of the senior members of BJP have participated in the movement to ban cow slaughter. It shocked BJP members and sympathisers that a party that has been all along at the forefront of such a movement could permit the use of cow blood for a product like tea which is used very widely by all communities in India.

It was just natural that as soon as the controversy surfaced, various sections of people approached BJP leadership at the local level to clarify matters. Local BJP leaders, in turn, approached the state office and Members of Parliament. Frantic faxes were sent by the state office as well as by various Members of Parliament to BJP's Central office in Delhi. Weeks passed after that, yet the powers at Delhi did not even think it a matter worthy of their consideration. A few enthusiasts who rang up and tried to personally talk to some of the Central leaders were snubbed and told to mind their own business. Till the time of writing this article, there has been no clarification in the matter by any Central leader of BJP or by Government of India. Tea Board has issued a clarification, but that is not convincing anyone because Tea Board has no statutory powers and is not a part of Government of India. The Central leadership of BJP would wake up and issue clarifications. But the damage has already been done and it will soon be too late to even start a damage control exercise.

The damage to the tea trade is insignificant and tea sales will bounce back soon after the baseless rumour is exposed. But, the damage to BJP is not likely to be so short-lived. It will be worthwhile to remember that

the revolution (British prefer to call it mutiny) of 1857 was triggered by a rumor that bullets which soldiers had to bite contained beef and pork. For centuries, beef has been a highly emotive issue for a large number of Indians. Failure of BJP leadership to understand such basic realities about Indian psyche raises fundamental questions about the leadership of BJP and about the communication channels within the party. Someone, who was in jail during emergency, and is, an active member of Sangh Parivar (RSS clan), said that the effect of beef-extract-in-tea controversy is likely to be as devastating as the forced family planning measures proved for Indira Gandhi during 1977 general elections. This person was on way to RSS headquarters at Nagpur to attend a function of an organization of RSS clan (of which BJP is a part). Yet, he saw no possibility of his being able to communicate his views to the powerful elders of his own clan.

A clerk in the state office of BJP, Madhya Pradesh had an even more poignant comment. He said that people are not fools; people can see that the government in Delhi reduces the prices of computers while increasing the price of everything else. This humble clerk has worked for more than two decades at the party office for a pittance. He has seen the present top leaders of BJP at a time when they were just struggling for survival. Naturally, he is bitter. He feels that he has wasted his life for a party that has now been hijacked by self-centered egotists, who do not care for issues that concern common men like him.

BJP has always taken pride in itself as a cadre-based party with a difference. RSS clan is known for its emphasis on discipline. Historically, RSS clan and BJP have been run on the lines of a benevolent dictatorship that strives for consen-

sus. The lines of communication within the Sangh parivar have always been two-way from top to bottom as well as from bottom to top. Yet, in recent years, BJP leadership seems to have lost its touch with the bottom rung of its own party. The lines of communication within BJP now seem to run only one way from top to bottom.

Moreover, there is a schism that seems to have emerged within the party. On the one hand, is the top leadership and their cronies who live in metros, move in fancy cars and experience a five-star existence. On the other hand is the large mass of junior and middle-level party workers who are struggling to keep the body and soul together. It is ironic that the former set never tires of delivering long sermons to the latter but has no time to listen to the grassroots realities that are a part of their everyday existence.

It is interesting to study the interaction that takes place when the two classes meet. The interaction can be broadly defined as two P's: Preaching and Pleading. The higher creatures preach and the lower ones plead for favours, which are rarely granted except to the chosen few. This is necessary to maintain the exclusivity of the select club.

It is no wonder that whenever BJP comes to power in any state or centre, it finds it extremely difficult to make any political appointments. In 1990, BJP came to power in Madhya Pradesh. BJP Government in MP took more than two years to make essential political appointments. A few months later the Government was dismissed. The same scenario is being re-enacted in Delhi. This adds to the feeling of alienation of the party workers.

The growing disenchantment of the party workers and middle level functionaries of BJP with the party combined with the

communication gap that has developed between the haves and have-nots within the party is too serious a matter to be ignored. Senior BJP leaders seem to be listening more to the voices from Mumbai Stock Exchange than from their own cadres and from the people of the country. It is high time that the King moved out of his bunch of courtiers and met the kid who can tell him that he is naked.

Beef-extract-in-tea controversy may be based on some facts or may be baseless. Yet, it has exposed the weakness of the leadership of BJP in responding to unexpected developments. It is high time to preach the Bible to the Pope. RSS founders like Guru Golwalkar and Hedgewar never wanted any organisation of the RSS clan to construct buildings and property. Yet, BJP and many other organizations of Sangh Parivar have constructed magnificent buildings. May be

all that the BJP needs to do is to follow its own ideals and move out of magnificent buildings and fancy air-conditioned cars to the humble houses of its own cadres. BJP leaders must move out of the ivory towers and put their ears close to the ground. If they can do so, the mood of despondency that grips the hierarchy will soon turn to optimism.

Let us hope that BJP leaders will learn because it is not only BJP that is at stake. India's democracy needs political parties to be in good health. The falling health of Congress on one hand and despair in the BJP on the other should ring alarm bells in the minds and of all those who care for India & democracy. Let us pray for the good health of these two national parties and for some good sense for their respected leaders.

The writer is Managing Director of Hindustan Studies and Services Ltd, Bhopal.

Art Buchwald's COLUMN



Help! A Homecoming

"HELLO, is this the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta?"
"Yes, it is."
"I am calling because my son has just graduated from college and he's coming home."
"What has that got to do with us?"
"Well, he hasn't cleaned his room for four years, and his mother and I were wondering what shots we need."
"I see. Can you describe the room to us?"
"It's medium size. The bed is against the wall. He hasn't made it since we came up for Parents Day during his freshman year. There's a pile of dirty clothing by his bed."
"Could you tell me its height?"
"I'd say it's about four feet high. I can't be sure because once I asked him if there was anyone sleeping underneath the clothes and he said, 'I honestly don't know.'"
"I think you and your wife ought to have cholera shots for starters."

"Thank you. Off in one corner is what he called his study area. The last time we saw it, it was filled with old books, music CDs, yellowing term papers, beer cans and a banner that read, 'We'll Beat Columbia If It Kills Us.'"

"Was there a wastepaper basket in the corner?"
"Yes, it was overturned, and you could see Chinese food cartons, a torn Frisbee and a can of spoiled dog food."

"Might I suggest that you both get a typhus shot?"
"That's what I told my wife you would say."

"What was hanging in the closet?" the CDC man asked.
"Nothing was hanging in the closet, everything was on the floor, except his skis. They were hanging in the closet."

"In that case, I would recommend a heavy dose of typhoid serum for both of you. We're not saying that you could get typhoid just because all the clothes in your son's closet were on the floor. At the same time, when college kids come home, you never know which one is the carrier. Is there anything else you can tell me about the room that would give me clues as to what other inoculations you need?"

"Well, he had a hot plate next to the sink in his bathroom, and he hasn't washed the dishes for four years. It appears he kept buying new ones as the old ones got dirty. So all the dishes remained in the sink next to the burned pots and frying pans."

"I know this may be a silly precaution, but I feel that you should both have yellow fever shots as well. Our CDC detective has found a lot of yellow fever spread by unwashed pots and pans, particularly when they are used more than twice."

"I can't believe we sent a boy away from home four years ago and all we get out of it are shots in our arms."

"I know it doesn't seem right, but you people raised him to keep his room that way, and you have no one to blame but yourselves. After graduation, what does your son plan to do?"
"He wants to work at something that will improve the environment."

By arrangement with Los Angeles Times Syndicate and UNB.

To the Editor ...

Solid waste-- a threat to the city dwellers

Sir, The solid waste management scenario of Dhaka City frustrates and disappoints us. Though Dhaka is considered as a megacity, its development infrastructure especially in respect of solid waste management is very poor. The population of the city at present is more than 10 million and they contribute more than 4,500 tons of solid waste per day. Undoubtedly the quantity is huge. Due to the socio-economic state of the country it is indeed a bit quizzical to handle the situation properly. To our dismay even the concerned agency and authority is reluctant and negligent to confront the situation.

Intrusion of solids like polythene bags, extracts of fruits and vegetables, bones of fishes and meat and other different types of solid matters block the water and drainage system of the city causing sewerage overflow. Such overflow in roads and streets cause immense sufferings to the city dwellers by damaging roads, creating traffic jam, annoying the pedestrians,

polluting air etc which may also cause different viral diseases and contaminate surface water.

It has been reported in a study (Improved Sanitation Study) done by the consultant of Dhaka WASA that a sample of water taken from a deep tube well at Jatrabari has shown BOD 10mg/liter. The study reveals that it had been resulted from dumping of solid waste near that particular tube well and which is threatening for the ground water.

Due to maladministration, the task of collecting wastes from each house as well as from the particular dustbins are not done properly or adequately. Usually solid waste here in Dhaka is dumped in an open yard by the side of roads which causes pollution and nuisance for the inhabitants of the nearby locality.

Solid waste disposal, therefore, needs to be addressed efficiently. Solid wastes can also be utilised to produce bio gas. Such effort will surely improve acute energy shortage problem of the city to a certain extent.

One should dispose solid waste in due manner instead of throwing them here and there. Mass awareness is a very important factor to bring the

issue under control. And the media should play an active role in raising awareness in terms of understanding and addressing the importance of the issue. In short, mass awareness can play a vital role in managing solid waste efficiently. In order to create awareness among people at all level, the concern agency/authority should prepare, execute and evaluate mass-awareness-program in collaboration with the representatives of the city dwellers.

Abdul Muqueet
Ex-Chief Engineer,
Dhaka WASA

"Education for All"

Sir, In the DS (June 30) 3-page supplement on 'Education for All', the experts at the Roundtable provided a lot of background information to the readers on the state of school education in Bangladesh.

It appears that most of the negative and positive factors had been well analysed during the years, and are available to the government for the formulation of the proper national education policy. But things are

just not ticking from the implementation point of view. The adopted policies look well on paper, but the bug is top-down management of the education sector. The political will is much talked about, but the hollowness inside is apparent, even to the experts in the sector.

Education is not a politically sensitive issue, but all regimes had been grappling with it; although Bangladesh has made some outstanding progress in setting up a network which is not available in many LDCs. But the concentration and priority are suffering and the final push for integrated take-off is not there.

To generate the latter motivation, the government policy drafts must be debated publicly. In JS and outside/for generating further feedback, and add one vital ingredient--the sense of participation at all levels of education, by the operators and the users. Perhaps further national deliberations would be taken up by the next regime, as the general election is round the corner.

A Guardian
Dhaka