

Ports and Our Future

OUR two ports at Chittagong and Mongla are among the most valuable natural assets we have. Given our resource constraints and our immense need we should have been wise enough to make the most of these two important assets.

We have two examples — Hong Kong and Singapore — which have built their economies just on the strength of their ports. Singapore is one of the strongest economies in the world. It all started with the port and now it has become one of the most attractive centres of international trade, commerce and investment. Hong Kong's story is virtually the same.

We, on the contrary, through shortsightedness, mismanagement, politicisation, bad trade unionism and lack of vision have turned our assets into dens of corruption, inefficiency, nepotism and impediment to the growth of our economy. Instead of becoming one of our major engines of growth our ports are preventing us from reaching our potential. Chittagong Port is the second most expensive port in the world. It has one of the longest loading and unloading times. Through wildcat strikes and frequent work stoppages it has become one among the most unpredictable ports anywhere. There are about 22 unions that operate within it. Each with its own pushes and pulls and peculiar internal dynamics prevents modernisation efforts by the government or by any private company. Due to archaic procedures, backward technology and work habits of officials our ports have turned into glorified warehouses rather than a transit point for incoming and outgoing goods. We have done great harm to our economy and to our people by not taking the welfare of our ports seriously.

Successive governments paid lip service to their modernisation needs with the result that today our ports are out of tune with the times and the needs of our businessmen. Nothing short of revolutionary changes in them will help to meet our needs. With a view to identifying what we should do, this paper and the biggest user of our ports, the BGMEA, are holding a discussion today with all the stakeholders in our ports.

We would like to draw the attention of the government to this event and to emphasize that it should actively participate in it and take its deliberations most seriously. Our joint effort is meant to strengthen government's own efforts and to give directions as to what needs to be done most urgently. We cannot overstate the need to pay urgent attention at the highest level to modernise our ports and to make them more efficient.

Parking in Shopping Areas

IT is heartening to note that Prime Minister's Secretariat has issued directives to Rajuk, the Capital Development Authority, for ensuring parking facility around the busy shopping centres of the city. Much of the traffic congestion stems from lack of parking spaces for both the shoppers and the shopowners who are forced to park their vehicles occupying a considerable area on both sides of roads. The Rajuk chairman told The Daily Star that owners of many commercial structures who got their building plans approved with adequate parking provisions but did not comply with the requirement will have to build parking lots on their premises. Rajuk is now conducting a survey to assess the actual position and so far it has transpired that except for a negligible number, the shopping centres have not complied with the legal provisions. In addition, there are many buildings being used for commercial purposes which did not have parking provisions in their approved plans. For these a parking lot will have to be built. And those who have not complied with the provisions of law will be asked to convert their ground floors into parking lots. Hopefully, the scheme would be completed in the next three months. Like the capital city itself the shopping arcades of the city have grown haphazardly over the last two decades. The numbers of shoppers and vehicles have registered a phenomenal rise contributing to traffic jams in and around shopping malls.

We would urge the PMO to form a task force with Rajuk, Dhaka City Corporation and Works Ministry representatives to work out plans and formulate policies for building multi-storeyed parking lots in the busy commercial and shopping areas of the city. Lands can be obtained on long term lease from government organisations like the railways, the T&T and works ministry and parking lots built with bank financing and given on lease management to private parties on auction. It is time the authorities gave importance to the vexing problem of traffic jams which is acquiring a massive proportion and getting out of control. A citizens' committee some time ago had expressed alarm over parking problem and recommended immediate construction of a multi-storey parking lot at Motiheel C.A. but nothing has happened so far. We hardly realise that we are virtually sitting on a time bomb. If we don't solve the traffic problem we are doomed.

Tannery Woes

AND now, the inevitable has happened. The Hazaribagh tannery workers in the city face grave health risks. A survey reveals that about three per cent of the workers are suffering from six diseases, like gastric ulcer, asthma, skin problem, rheumatic fever, kidney disorder, jaundice, tuberculosis, dysentery etc. The situation gives a signal of an impending mass sickness, and unless something is done on an urgent basis the situation will go out of hand. The technologies used in the tanneries are obsolete. And the workers are made to toil in a sickening environment. Solid and liquid waste generated in the factories are dumped untreated in violation of environmental laws. The worst affected are the workers who are directly and constantly exposed to the effluents. This pollution on the surface is also contaminating the waters of Buriganga river, let alone the ground water resource. In this context we reiterate our earlier demand for a scientific system of safe water management.

Now, we have a mammoth task ahead. First, the factory owners are advised to stop the process of morbidity of workers in Dhaka, with the government supervising their corrective work. Then the much-vaunted modernisation of these factories should take place after they are relocated properly. We just cannot overlook the need to save the lives that are significantly contributing to the country's economy.

Entry Level Profile of Indian Political Class

Anil Chawla writes from Bhopal

The idealist fools have really no place in the present political scenario. Yet, the fools choose to ignore such blatant realities and keep banging their head in the false hope of being able to make a contribution and bring about a change. It may not be just the idealists who are stupid enough to have hope. May be the whole of India is just that in having hopes from this or that political party!

shadows the leader from early morning to late night. This has two benefits: (a) the young man is no longer a burden on his poor family for food since this part is taken care of, and (b) the family does not pester him any more for the obvious reason that he comes home only to sleep and is otherwise never at home.

In due course, the young man learns to make some small amount of money. For example, he may collect say fifty rupees from a villager who wants to get a certificate signed from the leader. This petty amount gives him the out-of-pocket expenses that he needs. His next stage is when he learns to leverage his proximity to the leader to pressurise the local administration including the police. This is the point when he undergoes a metamorphosis and starts becoming a leader in his own right. His own family who had treated him so far as a disgraceful black sheep not worth mentioning starts treating him with some respect. There is someone or the other who is suffering at the hands of the government machinery and he acts as a great saviour for the sufferer by either using his proximity to the leader or by using some of the bullying techniques that he has acquired during his days with the leader. Some of these services are performed free to gain friends and others are at a price. The friends so gained help him climb up the political ladder, while the money helps him buy the starched kurtas that announce to the world that he is a leader.

As time progresses the mentor of the young man needs to move up and he needs to create a structure that will support him.

So the young man is appointed to some posts either in the party or in the government as a reward of loyalty to the great leader naturally with a commitment of future loyalty. This begins the journey of a politician. After a few years or may be decades, the young man becomes a leader who gets his own bunch of cronies and the process goes on.

More than eighty per cent of the new members of Indian political class belong to this category. Most of them are incapable of getting any job or gainful employment and have no understanding of anything even remotely intellectual. Democracy, ideals and ideology are hollow words in their mouths. They are incapable of understanding the meaning of such words but nevertheless recite them just like a parrot.

Born Rich and Important: This category is an important minority in Indian political class. They are born with a silver spoon in their mouth and do not need to do anything to earn their bread and butter. Education for them has no use since everyone in India is taught from an early age that education helps one get a job and these worthies do not need a job. Sure enough, they acquire some degrees for the name-sake but they look at all education with disdain. They have no skills or capabilities and are not inclined to compete and work the way normal mortals do. Their motivation for entering political parties is to get the respect that they think they truly deserve by birth. Members of this category rise very quickly. They do not need to hang around some leader from

morning to night like the poor young man. Acquiring a bunch of young men who hang around is very easy for them, since they can afford to spend on food etc. for a very large number of cronies. Applying the logic of Indian politics, one's status is judged by the number of cronies that one keeps. So, these rich men (and sometimes women) become senior leaders in no time. Often the process is aided by some relative who is already a political figure and who acts as a godfather (in many cases, it is the father himself).

Examples of this class include members of the erstwhile royal families and children of senior politicians. The class does not include children of rich businessmen because a businessman's child is generally trained to manage and run a business and is given a value system that encourages hard work.

Nouveau Riche: This category of people come to politics in middle age. They have made a huge amount of money and are distressed by the fact that money does not get them the respect that they deserve. Politicians love this category and exploit them to the fullest. This category of persons not only provide the money and the cars needed by the politicians but are ready to even act as drivers to be close to the top leaders. They come to politics with petty motives which are easily satisfied. Politicians are glad to throw a few crumbs at them to get all the goodies, while keeping them out of the mainstream and out of all key decision making processes.

Nose-in-the-Air Oldies: They have lived there to the fullest as

pillars of the establishment, in glorified positions. Faced with an eventless retirement, they go back to the leaders whom they had obliged during their career and seek to initially become advisors and subsequently move on to positions of power to satisfy their insatiable urge for power. Their strength lies in their knowledge of the bureaucratic machinery as well as their old boys network. Deep in their heart, they look down upon all politicians as well as at politics. For them politics is an essential evil to maintain the trappings of power that they have been used to. Political parties try to get some of these arrogant oldies to try to convey the impression that they have some 'intellectuals' among their ranks and to show that they are capable of running a government. Some of these 'intellectuals' are assigned the job of preparing policy documents and manifestos of various political parties. No wonder, the policy documents and manifestos of all parties in India read like government handouts — drab and unreadable.

Stars: They (including film stars and sports personalities) are just like the nose-in-the-air oldies except that they do not have any illusions about their capabilities of being able to run a government or about being an intellectual. Stars and political leaders share a symbiotic relationship. Stars, who are fading away from the glamour world, like the importance that they get at political rallies. On the other hand, political parties like the crowds that stars attract. Stars are very convenient to political parties since they rarely get involved in the inter-

nal squabbles and are not as demanding as the nose-in-the-air oldies. (Exception — Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh)

The Idealist Fool: This is an endangered species that is on the way of extinction in the Indian political jungle. Some of these specimens can be found in all political party where they are either neglected or hunted out or assigned to the most menial jobs possible or exploited by some political animal as a good backroom assistant. A case comes to mind of a bright young engineer from IIT who was assigned by BJP bosses to serve tea. The fool did it with such a finesse that he was noticed and appreciated. This raised an alarm and he was moved out of even that and was duly hunted out.

Pre-independence Congress had a large number of idealist fools. After independence the fools have gone to various parties from time to time. Communists, Socialists, RSS and BJP attracted such fools for a fairly long time. However, the times have changed now. Socialists have disintegrated. Communists have become political dinosaurs. BJP is trying to become a mainstream political party and is trying to attract as many as possible of the five categories — unemployed youth, born rich and important, nouveau riche, nose-in-the-air oldies and stars. The idealist fools have really no place in the present political scenario. Yet, the fools choose to ignore such blatant realities and keep banging their head in the false hope of being able to make a contribution and bring about a change.

It may not be just the idealists who are stupid enough to have hope. May be the whole of India is just that in having hopes from this or that political party!

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Another Woman Leader Emerging in the Sub-continent?

by A M M Shahabuddin

Although Kulsoom Sharif is the latest in the series of 'woman leadership' in Pakistan, the scenario perhaps began with Miss Fatima Jinnah, sister of the Founder of Pakistan, Mr. M A Jinnah. She stood up to challenge the most powerful and army backed leadership of Ayub Khan when she contested as a candidate of the Muslim League in the presidential election.

THERE has just emerged another woman leader, being perhaps the latest in the series in the sub-continent. Perhaps the sudden rise of Mrs. Kulsoom Sharif, wife of Pakistan's ousted Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, will serve as a sort of a signal to the Army ruler Gen. Musharraf. It has also shown that there is no dearth of 'Woman' power in Pakistan to fill in the 'power vacuum' created by the removal of Nawaz Sharif, thus turning a former housewife into a political challenger. She is now in the forefront of Sharif's political party — Pakistan Muslim League (PML), to lead the people to what she claims, democracy and get Sharif released from the prison.

During the last nine months since Pakistan army took over power on 12 October last ousting Prime Minister Sharif of some specific criminal charges, Army Chief Gen. Musharraf, who is now Chief Executive of Pakistan, had more or less a smooth sailing with the people in general, without any violent street demonstration against the army rule. Rather army was welcomed as 'saviour' of the nation, particularly, after the controversial 'Kargil' tragedy which the Pakistanis consider as a great shame and humiliation brought about by Nawaz Sharif at the behest of Washington. Pakistan army, thus, enjoyed the benefit of the 'psyche' of the people.

Plus Points' for Army Ruler

The renowned Indian columnist Kuldip Nayar has recently given some 'plus points' to Gen. Musharraf in his column in (DS 12 July). First, according to him the General 'has not muzzled the press', adding that 'even a short visit to that country shows that newspapers and journals are savage in their criticism of the regime'. Secondly, Musharraf regime does not face any challenge, either from within the army or from politicians. Thirdly, 'the country doesn't look like caving in', as apprehended by some businessmen

and industrialists, adds the columnist.

So when Gen. Musharraf and his colleagues were running the country without any physical opposition or obstacle from anywhere (except perhaps suspension from the Commonwealth Club and questionable postponement of SAARC summit, as desired, by India), Kulsoom appeared as a 'shooting star' creating a big alarm, when she planned to lead a protest march, organised under her instruction, by the so far 'dormant' and 'immobile' PML leaders and activists. And the army for the first time during last nine months had to launch a major crack-down to foil Kulsoom's planned 'long march', when she was put under house arrest and many of the PML leaders and workers were arrested. But many considered that the army move against the emerging woman had 'backfired' and thus 'propelled' Kulsoom into the forefront of Pakistan politics. It is an irony of fate that the woman who once had said that 'my job is in the kitchen', has now become the only vocal opposition leader who wants to stand face to face with the army ruler. She had the guts to say that Gen. Musharraf should be 'tried for treason', and not her husband.

But putting her under house arrest, and the calm all around instead of agitation, go to show that all is well for the army ruler at least for some time to come. Maybe, the scheduled general elections will be held within the stipulated period. Hence the bottom-line is that a former housewife has been 'thrown up' by the force of circumstances from her kitchens to the political arena. Only time will show how far she will be able to carry the people with her in her new adventure.

Women Politicians of the Subcontinent

It will not be out of place here if we take a wider view across the horizon of our sub-continent to make a brief analysis to see how many of our sub-continent women have emerged to assume accidental leadership' or 'thrust upon leadership' when they were left behind by their near and dear ones who had earlier made name and fame by dint of this 'male chauvinism' in the political field.

INDIA: The largest country in the sub-continent with a population now about one billion, has witnessed ups and downs of many illustrious women in political and socio-economic fields. But as we are concerned with political leaders only, and that also on national level, the first and foremost name that comes up is Mrs. Indira Gandhi, daughter of that most illustrious father Pandit Nehru. She became a national leader almost overnight following the death of her father. She inherited the mantle of her father to lead the country through rain and sunshine, thus keeping the rule of the 'Nehru dynasty' on right track.

But, unfortunately, due to her some glaring political follies, perhaps committed because of her over-confidence about herself, she had to suffer a tragic end in the hands of her Sikh body-guard, following her 'successful' military operation against 'terrorists' at the Sikh Golden Temple at Amritsar. Her assassination was followed by one of India's worst carnages where some twenty thousand Sikhs were killed allegedly by Congress activists. After her tragic death, the 'mantle' was put on by her son Rajiv Gandhi, to keep the 'Nehru dynasty' cord

straight on the line. But, unfortunately again, he met his tragic death by a 'human bomber', said to be a woman volunteer of the LTTE, which is fighting for secession from Sri Lanka, during an election campaign in Southern India. The sudden death of Rajiv pushed his wife Sonia Gandhi up the 'dynastical ladder' to ultimately take up the mantle to lead the Congress. Although 'Nehru dynasty' has been by-passed by other parties, led by BJP, to take control of Delhi, but who knows that Sonia Gandhi, the present President of Indian Congress (I) might one day 'bounce back' to power to put the 'de-railed' dynasty back on track again.

PAKISTAN: Although Kulsoom Sharif is the latest in the series of 'woman leadership' in Pakistan, the scenario perhaps began with Miss Fatima Jinnah, sister of the Founder of Pakistan, Mr. M A Jinnah. She stood up to challenge the most powerful and army backed leadership of Ayub Khan when she contested as a candidate of the Muslim League in the presidential election. Although she had never been in active politics, the opposition banked on her popularity as sister of Quaid-e-Azam Jinnah. But destined to be defeated in the 'unequal match', Fatima Jinnah made her exit from national politics as quickly as she had entered the field.

Earlier another woman, Rana Liaquat Ali, wife of then Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan, who was shot dead while addressing a public meeting at Rawalpindi, tried to create some 'waves' in the political waters of Pakistan. But she went silent after accepting an ambassadorial assignment.

Then came the popular-most young lady, Benazir Bhutto, daughter of that populist leader

and prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who was accused and imprisoned and later hanged by a Pakistani court, with great relief to the much-worried President Gen. Zia-ul-Haq. But after trying to rule the country for two terms as Prime Minister, she was defeated in election by her rival Nawaz Sharif and had to leave the country to live in 'self-exile' while corruption charges were hanging against her. Ironically, Nawaz Sharif is now behind the bars with so many criminal and civil charges including corruption brought against him by the Army ruler Gen. Musharraf. And thus opens a new chapter on Pakistan's 'woman power' with the rise of Kulsoom Sharif as a 'centre-piece' in Pakistan politics. Whether she will succeed, or wither away, only time will show.

BANGLADESH: 'Woman leadership' in Bangladesh has taken roots lately and has been growing fast during the last two decades or so. Women leadership in our country has a unique feature of its own. Undoubtedly, as in other cases, circumstances have put forth

two women leaders — following the assassination by some army officers of her father, the father of the nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and the other entered the following the assassination by another group of army officers of her husband, President Ziaur Rahman. They occupy the 'musical chair' of Bangladesh politics by turn, when one is in 'position', the other shines in 'opposition'.

Common Culture?

Now, the purpose of the above brief analysis — which reflects mostly the 'writer's opinion' — of the women leaders in the three countries of the sub-continent, namely India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, is to identify the 'common culture' prevailing in the three countries, of course, with a difference of degree only but in kind, it is the same 'elimination' of male leaders by 'opponents' but their ultimate 'replacement' by their daughters/wives. It is a strange phenomenon, no doubt. May be just a 'co-incidence', but a hard reality. It depicts an wonderful 'characteristics' of the three nations. With all our political and socio-economic differences on one issue or the other, there is at least one 'common culture', as seen above, that should bring the three countries closer!

The writer is a retired UN official.

Art Buchwald's COLUMN



Littler Big Man

YOU can argue that the breaking up of Microsoft is a good thing or bad a bad thing. Microsoft defenders say the company is being mistreated. Others say that bringing down Microsoft is no more unfair than what the government did to AT&T years ago. At the time the judge said, 'This bell wont ring. We want at a lot of little bells to answer your calls instead of one big bell.'

The judge did not know that eventually the little bells would give birth to big bells, and so on, ad infinitum, until instead of one monopoly you had five or six.

With all their money, the little Bells started buying everything is sight, including cable channels, fiberglass and other telephone companies. Ma Bell did well too, going into other businesses that were as lucrative as the one she was kicked out of. The antitrust lawyers in the government said, 'We've done Ma Bell. We have to get on to something more comfortable.'

What the public discovered after the phone breakup was that it didn't get any better service from the little Bells than it had from Ma Bell. The difference was that when Ma Bell was the sole provider you only got one bill instead of five. Also, Ma Bell bent over backward to give good service so no would call her a monopoly.

Microsoft lawyers are arguing that if the government breaks up the company, one big Microsoft will be replaced by dozens of baby ones just like they did to AT&T. The lawyers, 'How many Bill Gates can this country stand?'

Bill Gates argues that if they force him to break up his company the baby Microsofts will cause too much competition for his software.

The government says that's just what it had in mind. The big question is if they break up Microsoft how much will Gates lose? At the present we're talking about something in the ballpark of \$76 billion. Even if it was reduced to \$70 billion, economists say he would have no problem buying much for his garden.

The reason I bring all this up is that I just read in the newspaper that AT&T plans to acquire the MediaOne Group, which controls one third of all the cable and internet access in the country.

So the only question that comes up concerning companies' gobbling up other companies is asking the Justice Department, 'Where are you when we need you?'

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To the Editor ...

Ring road around the border

Sir, Thanks to the BDR chief for his timely suggestion to build ring roads along the border and to make the BDR more effective through some changes in it (DS, 16 July). The suggestion to build ring roads around the Bangladesh border seems to be quite timely. The recent attacks and hoodlunism by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) is indeed a threat to the security of Bangladesh as an independent country. So the suggestion of the BDR chief should be considered seriously. BDR with its insufficient forces, are combating an unequal battle to curb intruders and smugglers through the border. They have long been a force with not much power. Due to lack of BDR's logistics and power, the smugglers carry out their business almost uninterrupted. In the recent time, the intrusion by the BSF men makes the border issue all the more vulnerable. We hope, the authority concerned will take this matter seriously and act accordingly.

ER
Dhaka

Scourge of AIDS

Sir, HIV/AIDS is an issue that cannot be further ignored. While the Durban AIDS Conference is sending a grim reminder of the devastating global impact of the disease (both socially and economically), hope in form of a potential vaccine exists, aided by the efforts of organisations like the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative (IAVI).

World-wide HIV/AIDS is slowing the growth of national economies by reducing the size and productivity of the labour force, diverting savings to medical and funeral expenses and decreasing public spending on health and welfare services for those affected by the epidemic. The effects of infection are already having an impact on national production and income in some countries in terms of absenteeism, decline in skilled workforce, and higher payments for sickness and death benefits. For example, it is estimated that by 2005 Kenya's gross domestic product (GDP) will be 14 per cent smaller than it would have been without AIDS.

Hardest hit by HIV/AIDS are the countries of southern Africa, which harbour 24.5 million of the 34.3 million persons

affected by the disease globally. Of the 14 million people worldwide who have 'died of AIDS', more than 11 million have been Africans. The African epidemic has spiralled out of control over the past two decades, exacerbated by persisting colonial traditions perpetuating grinding poverty, changing notions of family versus individual responsibility, lack of access to proper education and health services, and overwhelming public denial of the disease. According to a report filed this week by a leading South African newspaper, the human carnage is such that the blacks in South Africa may one day be in the minority.

Bangladesh is fortunate in that the affects of the epidemic have not been widely felt, indeed in terms percentage of population infected and total number of persons infected in Bangladesh remains on the low end world-wide. However, the neighbouring country India, now has the second highest number of HIV infected people in the world behind South Africa — an estimated 3.7 million according to a June 2000 report by the Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). If left unchecked by extensive preventive efforts, the

Indian epidemic could in a few years parallel that of South Africa.

While traditional prevention measures can play a role in slowing the epidemic to a certain extent, it is clear that the best hope for ending the epidemic and the global development catastrophe it is spawning is a universally accessible preventive vaccine.

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The drama unfolds

Sir, Nature (the law of compensation) has now started taking its rightful toll—the terrorists are now killing the opposing terrorists. This horizontal vengeance will change direction and creep upwards and aim at the evil godfathers, dredging away the pollution in the society. Then will come the time for the abettors at the apex to pay the heavy price for the misdeeds.

The time is coming soon for the signs to appear.

Let the drama unfold.

AZ
Dhaka