

Shore up Newspaper Industry

THE newspaper industry is reeling under the dual pressure of soaring international price of newsprint and the high duties imposed by the government on its import.

When the government had allowed import of newsprint some three to four years ago, impelled by a serious shortfall in local production, the move was generous on two counts: first there was no quota restrictions on the import; and secondly, no taxes were imposed on it.

Besides being a public service-oriented enterprise, the newspaper industry is an aid to the processes of democracy, transparency and accountability.

Hand in hand with this, the Khulna Newsprint Mill which has had BMRE must now be fully operational, some undertakings that are nearing completion need to be pushed to go on production, and some new entrepreneurship will have to be encouraged to raise the overall level of local productivity.

The government's advertisement policy comes in picture when the whole question of shoring up the newspaper industry is considered. Currently, the government ad rate is one-sixth of the private sector rate.

For Vigil in the Rivers

BLAME for Thursday's launch disaster in the River Buriganga is definitely on the two skippers who had engaged in a mindless race that ended with both the watercrafts crashing into a third one, the ill-fated MV Ashique.

After the third major launch debacle on the Meghna this year on June 16, we wrote, in an editorial while commenting on lack of monitoring and enforcement on riverine routes, that "when tragedy occurs BIWTA flaps its wings for a moment before relapsing into the old hands-off mould."

The facts and the figures amply prove that BIWTA has miserably failed to discharge its responsibilities. It cannot simply expect people to abide by rules and regulations on the riverine route unless these are stringently enforced.

We demand an immediate inquiry into Thursday's incident. Why was there no record or list of passengers on board the hapless launch with the BIWTA? Why couldn't they be specific about the number of passengers? Shouldn't they get their basics right?

Sunny's Great Act in Thames

MIZANUR-Rahman Sunny, a Bangladeshi youth living in England, who was expecting his O' Levels results, died for a great cause in a foreign land the other day. He jumped into the river Thames to save a drowning English youth, who had accidentally fallen from a riverside tree and was fighting for breath in the water.

We condole the loss of two young lives, and our heart goes out in sympathy for the members of their bereaved families. These certainly are irretrievable losses for their parents. Sunny's attempt to save a British boy is not merely an act of empathy but also a bridge-builder between communities.

THERE is a fallacy accepted as fact that disagreements over Jerusalem destroyed the Camp David peace talks. Not quite. It is Israel's unwillingness to let go of Arab East Jerusalem that derailed an accord.

Jerusalem, which the writer has visited, is a sprawling city. Muslim named for Jerusalem is Al Quds. Purely Jewish Western Jerusalem is a metropolis comparable to the best cities in the United States.

Israel discussed handing over about 95 per cent of the West Bank and the entire Gaza Strip to Palestinian sovereignty in exchange for annexing the other five per cent, including three major settlement blocs.

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adjacent to the city. Palestinians conceded Israeli sovereignty over West Jerusalem as well as the Jewish and the Armenian quarters and the Western Wall in the Old City, but continued to insist full sovereignty over the rest of East Jerusalem, including Haram Al-Sharif compound (which the Jews call Temple Mount) that houses Al Aqsa mosque and the Dome of the Rock.

Israel would annex part of the West Bank settlements where about 130,000 of the 170,000 Jewish settlers live. The remainder would be allowed to resettle in Israel or remain under Palestinian sovereignty, but with special security arrangements. All Jewish settlements would be removed from the Gaza Strip.

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LETTER FROM AMERICA

Camp David Talks Falter over the Sovereignty of Arab East Jerusalem, Not All of Jerusalem

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton

After travelling so far it is inconceivable that Barak, Arafat or Clinton will give up now. Peacemakers deserve support. Should they be able to pull off an agreement, Barak, Arafat and Clinton should be nominated for Nobel Peace Prize.

Barak knew that Arafat would dig his heels around the Old City; Barak would not or could not offer him a helping hand. Both Barak and Arafat found themselves in a hopeless situation. Even if Arafat was ready to concede the sovereignty of the Haram al Sharif compound to Israel, the world's Muslim nations would not have accepted it.

Five years ago, Yossi Beilin, now the Israeli justice minister, and Abu Mazen, a Palestinian leader compiled a draft agreement for a final status treaty between the Palestinians and Israel, custom-tailored to the measurements of the Palestinian and Israeli publics and their respective leaders.

Let us not be overly critical of Ehud Barak. He along with Arafat

and President Clinton took enormous risks for peace. With his coalition crumbling just before the Camp David talks, Ehud Barak's political survival is at stake. If Barak is forced to form a national unity government with Ariel Sharon's rightwing Likud Party, that will effectively end the peace process.

Peacemakers deserve support. Should they be able to pull off an agreement, Barak, Arafat and Clinton should be nominated for Nobel Peace Prize.

peruse the following editorial: "It's difficult to predict what will result from the failure of the Camp David summit. Hopefully, dark predictions of a firestorm in the territories won't come true and it would be sensible to take measures already in case frustration gives birth to violence.

"With the veil lifted on the details of the summit, Israelis and Palestinians will find out the reasons their leaders were unable to reach an agreement. On both sides, people will make their own decisions whether the circumstances justified the failure.

"While the summit reached its climax in a nearly desperate effort

to get down to earth, away from the rhetorical and divisive sloganeering of the last 100 years, the Israeli opposition, led by the Likud, took the easy way out: The leadership competed with bombastic statements in a clear attempt to torpedo every effort to find a compromise.

"Particularly hollow were the clichés mouthed by Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert, who is supposed to prove his concern for the city with concrete action, and not with slogans that are nothing more than code words for elbowing his way to the top of his party.

"If there was any accomplishment at the failed Camp David summit, it was the way the most profound issues were made concrete. Even if officially the suggestions and ideas that came up at Camp David are invalid, and the sides can repudiate them when talks resume in whatever format, the mere fact that the core issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict were discussed is a turning point from which there is no return.

Was the above editorial written by a Palestinian or Arab newspaper? No. This editorial was published, on July 26, in Haaretz, Israel's leading liberal newspaper. After travelling so far it is inconceivable that Barak, Arafat or Clinton will give up now.

Thackeray Episode and Its Ramifications

Extremism in any country should not be encouraged because religion is a personal affair in a secular society. There may be an impact of the majority religious group but the minorities must not feel insecure.

THE Shiv Sena and its supreme Bal Thackeray are no strangers in Indian politics. Although confined mainly in the western Maharashtra state and in some other pockets in India, the Shiv Sena as a political party evokes both admiration and fear among people. The reason is simple. Its jingoistic policy of Hindu nationalism is admired by the hardliners, while the minorities and other sections of Hindus abhor this extremism.

It was during the Shiv Sena-BJP government in Maharashtra not too long ago that thousands of Bangladeshi Muslims were detected in Mumbai. The authorities attempted to round up many so-called Bangladeshis and push them back into Bangladesh.

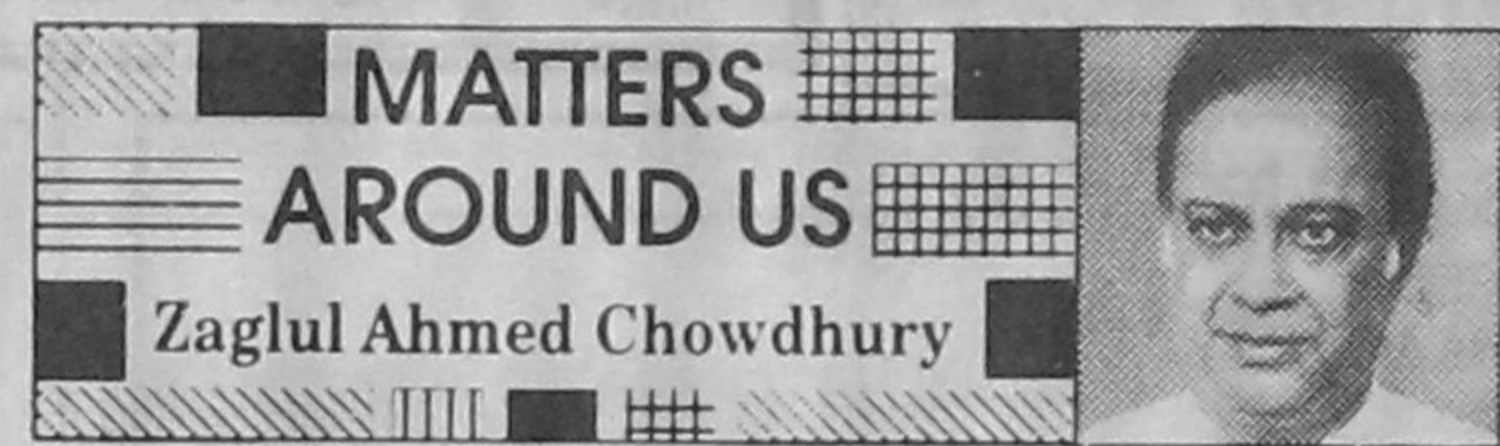
When the Pakistani cricket team visited India more than a year ago after a fairly long gap, Indians were eagerly looking forward to the tour, leaving aside the rivalry between these two cricket-crazy nations. But it was the Shiv Sena that had threatened to disrupt the entire itinerary. The reason that was cited for its opposition to the tour was Pakistan's involvement in Kashmir.

Indo-Pak dispute over Kashmir dates back to 1948 and its not a new aspect in bilateral ties of India and Pakistan. But Bal

Thackeray wanted to spoil the visit of the Pakistan team on this pretext. The BJP, though an ally of the Shiv Sena, did not fall in line and its government in India led by Atal Bihari Vajpayee did not bow down and boldly faced the problem. The Sena activists damaged the pitch in the Feroz Shah Kotla ground in New Delhi but this had only hardened the attitude of the government which did not want to mix sports with politics and ensured that the tour went off peacefully. Thackeray had to eat his own words. Thackeray's men were disappointed but the designs of the handful were routed by the spirit of the overwhelming majority of the Indians who are not keen to rely on the communal tensions of the subcontinent on different issues and in most occasions come down heavily on the religious fundamentalists which is the case in other South Asian countries.

The Shiv Sena was subject of debate in the context of communal riots in Maharashtra seven years ago - particularly in Mumbai - where more than 2,000 people, mostly the minorities, were killed in the aftermath of the demolition of the 16th century mosque in Ayodhya. Another few lakhs Muslims had to leave the city because of fear unleashed by Hindu zealots.

Bal Thackeray was briefly arrested the other day for inciting riots in Mumbai through inflammatory writings in the party mouthpiece *Samna*. The present government in Maharashtra is the alliance of the Congress of Sonia Gandhi and Nationalist Congress led by Shrawad Pawar. Both are secular parties. The government decided to take on Bal Thackeray



Zagnul Ahmed Chowdhury

and arrested him amidst simmering tensions and fears of mayhem in the state whose government brought in extra security from outside to contain threats of the Sena who said Mumbai would be in flames if their leader was taken to custody. The central government of Vajpayee was obviously in a difficult situation. It apparently was not happy over the actions being taken against the leader of its ally, but at the same time, was careful that it did not intervene the decision of the state government.

The metropolitan court released Thackeray immediately as the judge found the charges "time-barred" and closed the case. It appeared a victory for the Sena people who distributed sweets in Mumbai, but the state government said it was moving to higher courts since the issue was serious and the accused cannot go scot-free. Whatever be the future developments, the matter has raised several questions. Indian government, despite being an ally of the Shiv Sena, did not want to interfere in the process of law in Maharashtra.

Ram Jethmalani, the law minister, made certain observations taking a pro-Thackeray stance which the prime minister did not relish and the minister was asked to resign and Jethmalani complied. Here gov-

ernment of Vajpayee appeared matured in dealing with the issue although new law minister Arun Jaitley said central government hopes that things are not politically motivated against the Sena leader. This has earned good image for the government while the determination of the state government to proceed with actions against those whom it considered as responsible for provoking trouble during the communal riots in 1993 deserves commendation because this will discourage the communal forces.

However, there is an impression that the state deputy chief minister and home minister Chaghan Bhujbal is seeking to take on the Sena leader to retail-

ate an old relationship. Bhujbal was once a follower of Thackeray but he quit the party calling it communal. Whatever the case, communal forces will be discouraged by the state government even though the release of Thackeray is seen as a first round victory for him. I have had the occasion to watch the film *Bombay* made in the backdrop of communal carnage in the city soon after its release in New Delhi. The film is largely neutral on the Hindu and Muslim involvement in the riots and I could feel, while watching the film, that it was sympathetic towards minorities. It portrayed that minorities are vulnerable and it is the task of the majority to protect them. The message is universal. In this respect, I remember a sweet shop near the Purana Paltan area in Dhaka belonging to a minority member was attacked in the aftermath of the Babri Mosque demolition and many of us rushed to protect the shop. Some over-enthusiastic persons engineered the trouble. The city of Mumbai is known

as a bastion of the Shiv Sena. But many there are non-communal. A few years ago, I accompanied a group of senior journalists on a visit to Mumbai. A small but otherwise meaningful matter drew our attention in the hotel we were staying. In the evening we were at a marriage ceremony of a Muslim girl and a Hindu boy in the Taj. We were little curious as inter-religion marriage was something unusual in a city like Mumbai. But a staff of the hotel told us that most people are not much bothered about personal matters in context of religions although certain quarters try to spoil the peaceful co-existence. But Mumbai must have felt the undercurrent of communal ascendancy when the Shiv Sena was in power and Thackeray was in charge of the government though he held no official position. The result was it lost power in last year's elections.

Extremism in any country cannot be encouraged because religion is a personal affair in a secular society. There may be an impact of the majority religious group in a country but the minorities must not feel insecure. The fulfilment of Shiv Sena or such groups in India should not be allowed to go too far and their wings need to be clipped as much as it is required in other countries.

VOTER FEEDBACK

Going for a Political Career?

by Alif Zabr

WHEN elections are round the corner, dirty political campaigns start, vitiating the climate, and overloading the dustbins of the voters. The latter are taken for granted, and bombarded (there is no other term) to toe the line, or... Fishy fishermen bait for fresh fish, in an atmosphere of rotten fish.

How long the voters are going to swallow this arrogant attitude of the political candidates, who aspire (not perspire) to become the august representatives of the people? They come with hidden agendas, and seek transparency through the wily tongue. Elegant manifestos are for filing, not for record. Surely the PA (public-address) system is not the goal of life?

The problem is that the neopoliticians (or the fossilized class) wish to develop faster than the society. This lagging effect produces all sorts of distortions and instability. The political leaders assert that the leaders must lead the lagging society (Mahatma Gandhi is different 'There go my people, I must follow'); but the traffic signals and directions change during the political pilgrimages (a pilgrimage is supposed to be a pious and sacred journey of the egoless soul), and the country finds itself at dead ends, time and again. This pattern is not changing, while leaders come and go, in solemn processions; while some disappear. What is disconcerting is that there is no sign of new leadership. What is the fertilizer to grow more potential leaders?

Future leadership is under lateral assault, from society's

Hyde, who offer public service at reasonable commission (reasonable is not defined, and discussion on commission is taboo).

To the voters, politics looks nasty enough, but what is the lure for the sharp brains to join the popular political parties? Perhaps the dividends from the investment. There is one advantage money laundering service.

The servers of the society love their *matribhumi* notice the land-grabbing exhibitionism. There ego is at the foundation level of the high-rise buildings. The vegetable vendor at my local wetmarket blocks the road junction with his baskets of goods, blocking traffic, told me he paid twenty Taka daily for the prime spot (a police constable was on duty a few yards away. To my mild protest, he felt that it was not his duty alone). Where is the local municipal commissioner? Perhaps there is a spelling mistake in the word 'commissioner' should it be 'commission-wala'?

About 100 newly built shop-lots are still vacant after a year; and the police raid the overcrowded parking lots regularly. Routines become habits.

The beauty of a local political career is that perhaps it is above the law, under cover of patronisation, and the middle (wast) is ample in girth. Some colleagues confessed in the drawing room that they choose the right profession, but the wrong career. What is the difference between profession and career? That is the \$64-million question in Bangladesh today!

To the Editor ...

Revenge

Sir, The Chittagong residents must be deeply worried on possible future violent retaliation on the attackers of the group which carried out the brushfire on the microbus killing a number of AL activists.

Although the police is alert, the social problem created is deep and traumatic. One can only hope this will not result in a chain reaction, spreading into other cities. Actions based on revenge listen to no logic.

Also, there would be some witch-hunting, at least initially. The sense of public security has been shattered. The situation elsewhere in the country is not that calm. The Administration has to display the highest level of control of the situation, and more so, as the electioneering campaign has already started, wild political accusation will fly around, worsening general confidence.

Concerned Citizen Dhaka

New delta project Sir, The local experts may like to pauser-study the New Delta

project in Egypt (DS supplement, July 23), and find out if some concepts of the project could be applied in delta Bangladesh.

AMA Dhaka

What's in a name?

Sir, It was an eyesore for me whenever I used to come across naming/spelling of 'Karwan Bazar' as Kawran Bazar. Similarly many other names in the country are not properly spelled or written, which needs appropriate attention and correction.

Of course there is importance and meaning in naming a person, a building, an area, a road or a lane but if it is not followed properly and popularly it is bound to be bygone in the oblivion.

A rickshaw-puller could never take me to PG Hospital when I ask for Bangabandhu University Hospital.

Our authorities concerned must be aware of history and facts and guide the citizenry rationally.

There is something in a name in fact.

A.F. Rahman Dhaka

Bi-polarisation

Sir, The Putin-Zemin accord marks the end of US polarization of global power and emergence of bi-polarization terminating US hegemony on world politics.

The re-assertion of Russian super power status augers well for the European as well as Afro-Asian states to assert state sovereignty and re-structuring of global politics.

It is time that Russian sort out their internal and domestic conflict to pave the way for greater role in the arena of international power politics and at the same time save the UNO from state of limbo and becoming instrument of American global polarization policy. The eventual culmination of US hegemonistic role and ushering in bi-polarization in effect augers well as it sound the death knell of single super power monopoly.

Al-Haj S. M. Khalid Chowdhury Dhaka