

BOI: A Victim of Neglect

THE Foreign Chamber of Commerce and Industry at their monthly luncheon meeting on Sunday delivered what we regard as the worst indictment to date on the Board of Investment, Far from being a 'facilitator' of foreign investment, the BOI has allegedly proved to be 'problematic' to it. None other than practitioners in the field are saying this now. What a fall from the sublime to the 'ridiculous'! Much of it because of the neglect shown to his body, what with the appointment of high-profile bureaucrats to the topmost slot of the BOI.

The fact of the matter is that BOI itself has not been served well by its chief executives so that one could not expect it to serve others or fulfil its mandate. Take the case of Faruk Sobhan. With his credentials he looked like the man for the job but could he find himself in full-time charge of the organisation? Far from it, he was to soon get enmeshed in campaigning for election to the post of Commonwealth secretary general he was nominated for the government for. He had to take time out for that purpose, with the lobbying at the government level proving patently inadequate. As a result, the BOI boat wobbled along rudderlessly for the most part.

Then comes Mokammel Hossain to the scene in shiny armour. However, no sooner had he dipped his toes on the job he faced an internal unrest which kept him unfocused for sometime. But this has been overtaken by a seemingly larger distraction. A rumour is currently making the rounds that he might stand for election at the Bhola constituency during the forthcoming national polls. That impression has grown stronger among the public following his frequent trips to Bhola and his speeches he has been delivering there with a political overtone.

The previous BOI chief could not work to his full potential as explained above and so is the present incumbent's attention apparently veering away from the job at hand. It is because of this lack of focus on the BOI that petty corruption and mismanagement have crept into the organisation over time making it a non-performing shallow entity now. The Japanese investors have lately made scathing criticism of our investment climate reflecting their growing disenchantment with what we are offering. Either we stop hearing our own voices for a change to lend our ears to others' voices or we perish in a competitive world.

Trade in Women and Children

THE 13 girls, aged between one and 18, who were repatriated from West Bengal on July 27, are fortunate, indeed. True, they had to languish in pathetic conditions at different jails in India, some of them for nearly six years but, at least, they have come back home. Many never do. They were headed, or a life of uncertainty, indignity and misery, a life, more painful than death. It is a new lease of life for them. The credit for freeing them from the clutches of the traffickers certainly goes to the Indian police, and for returning to their parents to the Bangladesh Women Lawyers' Association (BWLAWA) that tirelessly pursued the issue for over a year.

The number of recovered and repatriated souls is undeniably paltry compared to the magnitude of trafficking and sale to brothels in different parts of the region. According to a United Nations Development Fund for Women report, every year some two million women and children are abused and trafficked globally, with Southeast and South Asia topping the list. In recent years, the report also said, some 300,000 Bangladeshi children, most of them aged below 18 years, were sold to brothels in India.

Obviously, trafficking of boys and girls is more often than not facilitated by their own families. Take the case of Reshma, Ruma and Sumi, three of the 13 girls repatriated from Lilua Home in Calcutta. Their father, a poor carpenter, decided to take them to India where, he was made to believe by the 'well-wishers', they would get 'good' jobs and live 'happily' thereafter. On the way, he was rickety with and her daughters spirited away. Economic compulsions sometimes induce parents to send their little children with 'relatives' in quest of better fortune. Invariably they get sold to local brothels or to traffickers to be sold to brothels in some South Asian countries. Therefore, alongside enhanced vigil, especially on the border, we also need to raise community-level awareness about the traffickers and their mode of operations by way of tipping the problem in the bud.

An Opportunity to Serve

HERE are times in the life of a people when they close ranks and rise as one man to fight an evil or a misery. The opportunity has now come to us for a concerted move to rid ourselves of the menace of Dengue. Much is being spoken, written and disseminated through the national press on this dreaded disease to dispel panic and give guidelines to combat this killer virus. Men, women and children, students, teachers and professionals are all making special efforts to keep their surroundings clean in an attempt to destroy the breeding places of the aedes mosquitoes that carry the virus.

A Hoax of an Arrest: A Super-criminal Walks Free

Praful Bidwai writes from New Delhi

Mr Vajpayee has succeeded in surviving another crisis. He has greatly helped the Shiv Sena. But the citizen's faith in the Indian state has been severely shaken by its failure to bring a communal super-criminal to book.

SO Mr Bal Thackeray, the self-confessed instigator of one of our worst communal pogroms, has again gone scot-free thanks to a bad judicial order and the Maharashtra government's ineptitude, coupled with the Centre's dirty tricks. The worst scenario this column forecast has materialised. No one, barring the Supreme Court, has emerged unscathed from the sorrid drama.

The state government messed up the case. Instead of filing a fresh charge-sheet, it allowed the magistrate to invoke the 'time bar' based on a procedural technicality. The magistrate made a further mockery of the law by terminating the case altogether.

The most dishonourable role here is of course Mr Thackeray's. He subverted the law through blackmail. Only a little less brazen was the Sena MPs' arm-twisting. The pride of place here goes to Mr Ram Jethmalani who lost his job and is now maligning everyone. His conduct was downright loutish. At its core was a direct, open conflict of interest with his role as Mr Thackeray's legal adviser for 30 years. He had no business to comment on the merits of his prosecution.

Worse, Mr Jethmalani drew up a 'rescue plan' for Mr Thackeray involving unwarranted Central intervention in the case. This is before he was sacked.

Regrettably, he was not the sole Union minister to comment on the Thackeray case. Mr Arun Jaitley did the same, as did SS ministers Joshi, Prabhu and Vikhe Patil, inviting the Supreme Court's rebuke. This brought the ministers no glory. But Mr Jaitley has since been appointed law minister!

Mr Vajpayee is to blame for letting his ministers go berserk. By refusing Maharashtra's reasonable request for Central forces to meet the Sena's threat, and arm-twisting senior state ministers through Mr Pramod Mahajan, he showed partiality towards Mr Thackeray. Without his chosen emissaries, the July 25 false-arrest-and-release deal couldn't have been worked out.

Attorney General Soli Sorabjee too conducted himself less than impeccably. He got into friction with Mr Jethmalani. But that hardly justified his caustic remark that Mr Jethmalani with his 'inexhaustible store of pin-pricks' was himself to blame for his dismissal.

Testimony to tension between the two was the M.S. Shoes scandal, in which the AG opposed Mr

Jethmalani's decision to favour the company. This too speaks poorly of the former law minister. Mr Jethmalani carries a burdensome reputation after half a lifetime of defending notorious smugglers.

In 1996, he called for the hawala scam files during his 13-day tenure as law minister. He later recommended 'regularisation' of posh Anant Ram Diary properties for a sum only one-quarter of their market value (a loss of Rs. 86 crores to the exchequer).

As law minister, he also got into scrapes with the Supreme Court. Indeed, it is dismaying that Mr Vajpayee gave him that portfolio a second time.

However, Mr Sorabjee is no paragon of rectitude. He went along with the Vajpayee government's abjectly partisan decision to review the Constitution. He also breached a healthy convention by not resigning when the United Front, which appointed him AG, demitted office.

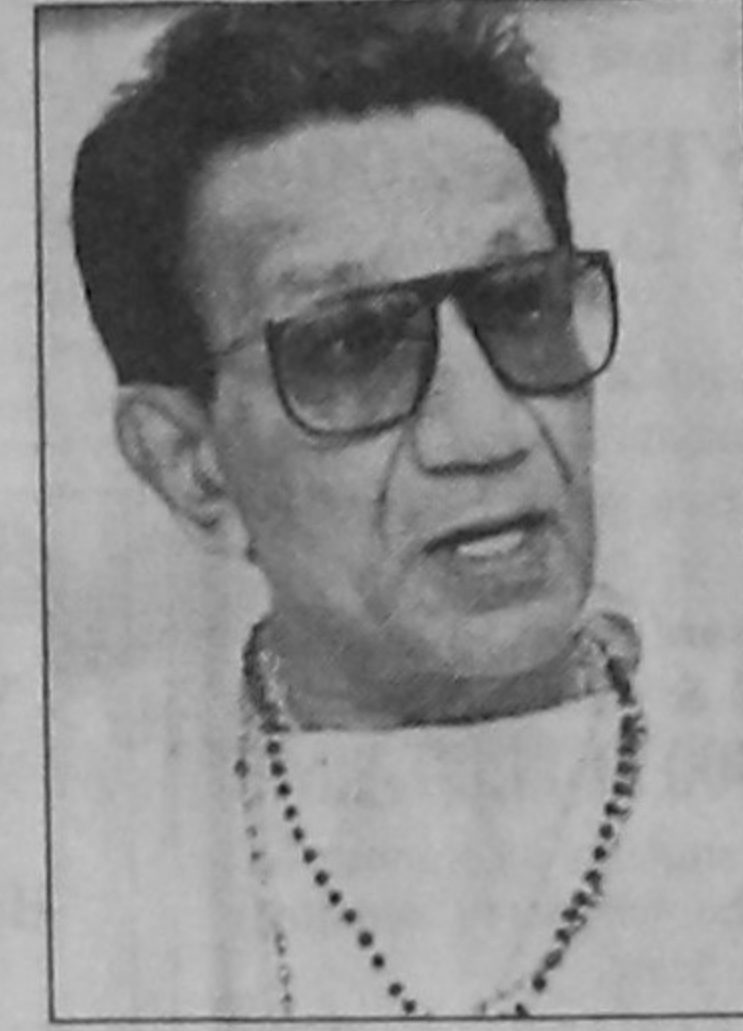
Mr AG's position is special in the parliamentary system. Mr Sorabjee does it no credit. His record on Constitutional matters is ambivalent. He defended the

Emergency as 'lawful'.

This sordid episode shows up the growing rot in our system and critical failures of the Indian state. Surely, it speaks poorly of our legal system that it took seven years, three governments, and a suspended-now-revived-later judicial inquiry, for a case against Mr Thackeray to be lodged only to be dismissed. The Supreme Court rebuked the Maharashtra government: 'You appoint a high court judge to head a commission. Is this the way you treat his report?'

It is no less unfortunate that the Supreme Court itself rejected a petition in 1994 for Mr Thackeray's prosecution on identical grounds. It must redeem its integrity now by ordering his prosecution.

Recent actions speak equally poorly of the Indian state's integrity. It 'regularised' patently illegal encroachments by the super-rich on government land in 1,071 colonies in Delhi. This amounts to trading in sovereign rights. The message it sends out is that the affluent, including ministers Mr P.R. Kumararamangalam stands named can get away with gross illegality



Bal Thackeray

and enormous greed just by paying money.

The Sainik Farms issue is different from, say, regularising unauthorised slums. The poor squat on land because they cannot afford to buy property. Cities need their services. Squatting by the poor is survival-related. Sainik Farms are greed-driven.

Equally deplorable is the government's decision to free the five

Russians in the Purulla arms-drop case. They were fairly tried and found guilty. Their sudden release was not a 'humane gesture', as claimed, but an act of cowardice on the part of a government which sacrificed its own law to cut huge arms deals with Russia.

That's not the mark of a self-respecting government which takes sovereignty seriously.

India's state is turning increasingly parasitical. It has less and less to offer its people in services necessary for survival. It is withdrawing even from areas like power and telecom. Its sources of authority are now found largely in its armed apparatus. They are bereft of legitimacy.

This spells a unique danger. In the Age of Democracy, states get their legitimacy not from above, but from the people, in whom real sovereignty rests. They must fulfil the citizen's needs. If they fail, their legitimacy comes under a cloud.

That's precisely what is happening in India. Mr Vajpayee has succeeded in surviving another crisis. He has greatly helped the Shiv Sena. But the citizen's faith in the Indian state has been severely shaken by its failure to bring a communal super-criminal to book.

That faith won't be restored unless the Supreme Court itself quickly orders Mr Thackeray's long overdue trial.

G8 Promises: Platitudes for the Poor

by Mansoor Mamoon

Peace and prosperity on a global plank as desired by the G8 leaders will continue to largely remain elusive so long poverty stalks the earth and stares billions of its people in the face. ... So long there remains the great divide between the developed and the developing countries in respect of resources and riches there cannot be any real peace.

AT its face value the raft of promises contained in the joint communiqué issued at the end of three-day annual summit of the G8 countries comprising USA, UK, France, Japan, Germany, Italy, Canada and Russia (Russia, however, is yet to formally become a full member, its status is that of a dialogue partner) in Okinawa in Japan on July 23 would appear lofty and worthy. It contains the pledges to help reduce poverty in the developing countries, cut their debts, fight infectious diseases, provide schooling for the poor children, harness the power of new technologies and ensure that all countries could equally reap the fruits of globalisation.

President Bill Clinton, for whom it was the last such summit as he will be relinquishing his office in January next, appeared extra-jubilant on its outcome. 'This is first time, at least in my experience, and this is my last G8 conference, that there has been such a systematic focus on the developing world on the problems of disease and the digital divide and education,' said he as he announced \$300 million in aid to provide free school lunches in developing countries.

The summit did not make any shattering decisions. The international scenario is relatively calm. There are no new and pressing problems. The leaders of the affluent countries in the exclusive club of G8 had thus time to focus on long-term issues which they considered as crucial to global peace and prosperity.

About debt relief the G8 summit made the vow for trying hard to ensure held to 20 out of 41 very poor countries to come out of the burden of foreign loan under which they are presently groaning. Apart from this, it also pledged to meet a wide range of UN development goals, including numerical targets to reduce AIDS (by one-fourth) and other infectious diseases like TB and malaria, halving absolute poverty by the year 2015 and a place in school for every child on earth. They also stressed the need for integrating all the countries with the process of globalisation so that its benefits equally reach to all corners of the globe. The G8 leaders decided to set up a task force to be called 'Digital Opportunity Task Force (DOT) to reduce the existing wide disparity in the use of information technology between the rich and the poorer countries. Dispersal of the latest development in bio-technology was also in the agenda.

At the end of the year, there will be an assessment meeting for reviewing how far the pledges made by leaders of the affluent trading countries have been materialised. A project named as 'creating Digital Dividends' being organised by World Resources Institute has been planned for

October this year at Seattle. The next G8 summit has been convened at Genoa in Italy and till then it could not be determined how serious and sincere the G8 leaders really had been.

So far so good. But at its core the raft of pledges made by the G8 leaders could not bring flickers of hope to the poorer countries. The promise for debt relief, the wording of 'try hard' is indeed vague. At their last year's summit in the German city of Cologne they had pledged a debt relief of \$100 billion. But very little was done in this respect. The expectation of the developing countries with heavy burdens of debt was never met. At their conference this year they refrained from specifying any figure but said the countries, which would be on the right track of reforms and restructuring would get the benefits of debt relief and their number would be up by nine from 11 to 20. This is a conditionality that is not going to help the poorer countries from getting the benefit of debt cancellation for long. Hence the global poverty situation is not going to improve albeit the lofty words spelt out by the summit leaders. (Among the G8 countries, only Italy intends to cancel debt worth \$6 billion under which 62 coun-

tries will get benefit and some among them will also receive new aid packages.)

Globalisation, the inflow and outflow of goods and commodities, to and from developing countries from and to the developed ones, are still very incongruous and inconsistent with what the G8 leaders are vouchsafing. The reality is extremely different and highly unfavourable for the developing countries. Market economy or the so-called liberalisation is turning out to be, by and large, a new monstrous type of economic colonialism for the poorer countries, whose economic viability is virtually at peril because of the unfair nature of competition between the countries in the North and the South. Even Russia in G8 is yet to effectively integrate itself with the process of globalisation. Rather a huge number of Russians are turning out to be victims of pauperisation. The latest buzzword on the international circuit the digital divide demonstrates how far the disparity in the distribution of information technology has reached. Almost 60 per cent of the on line users are North Americans while the rest 40 per cent belong to other countries. The share of the poorer countries is minimal. Closing the great

Digital Divide will, therefore, take decades if not centuries. When the mercurial Laloo Prasad Yadav in the Indian state of Bihar opposes IT he has a cogent point. He said, 'What does IT mean for India? India is not USA? What shall we do with IT when millions of Indian people are shelterless, when Medicare for the poor and rural electrification are still a luxury?' This is not only true about India (in IT, India has made notable progress) but also for a large number of poorer countries.

Japan has already committed \$15 billion in aid stretching over a period of five years to the developing countries to close the ever-widening digital divide. The amount is to be spent for training IT planners and engineers. The amount is just a drop in the ocean viewed against the backdrop of huge requirement in this regard.

The G8 leaders were optimistic that the world economy would register strong growth this year, but there is no sense of direction as to how its benefit will reach to all countries equally, particularly to the poorer ones and to the poorer segments of the community in the affluent countries.

Despite the long-drawn economic slump, Japan spent a lavish amount of over \$750 million towards the hosting of the

summit plus two ministerial meetings. There were stiff criticisms both at home and abroad against what has been termed as this huge unproductive expenditure. According to the critics this amount is much more than the total foreign loan of Gambia and Equatorial Guyana combined. With this amount the educational expenses of 12.5 million children could have been easily met. Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori had however his own logic. He said, 'I did my best to put together the views of particular leaders and did my utmost to open up the path to the world and Japan into the 21st century.'

The majority of the world population is not going to agree with the logic of Mori. There had been protests at the WTO conference in Seattle and World Bank-IMF meetings in Washington. Protesters also gathered at the summit venue in Okinawa against the monopolisation of world's resources by a handful of countries leaving the vast majority of the countries and billions of their peoples deprived and exploited.

Peace and prosperity on a global plank as desired by the G8 leaders will continue to largely remain elusive so long poverty stalks the earth and stares billions of its people in the face. A globalised world cannot afford to neglect the plight of the poorer countries. So long there remains the great divide between the developed and the developing countries in respect of resources there cannot be any real peace. For peace is indivisible.

Are We Heading for a Catastrophe?

by Kazi Alauddin Ahmed

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THE ghastly murders on July 12, 2000 in Chittagong beggar all descriptions. It was around 11 in the morning that this gruesome and senseless killing in broad daylight in the busy Bahadurhat street was perpetrated by a group of blood-thirsty criminals. Their targets, reportedly, were the front-ranking Student League leaders travelling in a microbus to attend a meeting of the party. They were incidentally saved by a divine act of providence even though the bandits tried to intercept the microbus by placing a hired bus on the road. The planned interception didn't work due to delay by a few seconds in placing the bus when the target microbus was already away from the site. But the hapless second microbus carrying another group of Student Leaguers fell instant prey to the assassins' bullets which pierced through the windshields killing all inside. Besides, a baby taxi driver passing by was also hit by bullet fatally. The total toll was eight.

The brutal murder was instantly condemned by almost all political leaders irrespective of their party affiliation. Invariably, the party in power has been the most vocal. Home Minister Mohammad Nasim blasted the killers and their patrons behind the scenes. As usual the minister promised the aggrieved families to haul up the criminals by any means. Student community all over the country, particularly the Student Leaguers have vowed to retaliate if the police failed to bring the culprits to book. The armed cadres of the Islamic Chhatra Shibir have been accused of such diabolical murders.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina expressed her displeasure with the pitiable failure of Chittagong police to arrest the hoodlums. She was so overtaken with grief and anger that she would not accept a 'no' for an answer. She disclosed that she had enough reasons to believe that had the police jumped into action immediately the assassins couldn't flee the place of occurrence so easily. To her utter dismay she said that evidently there were some unscrupulous elements within the police force who, for some material gains, pass on advance information to the bandits facilitating their safe passage to unknown hide-outs. She cautioned the police to do their duty selflessly or else they would face dire consequences.

It was contended by the government party leaders that a few new members of BNP, hitherto belonging to the defunct NDF led by SAKA Chowdhury were behind the murders of six Student League leaders, the driver of the microbus they were riding and a totally unconcerned baby taxi driver. Besides, a number of innocent passers-by were severely wounded in the incident.

The accusation against Islamic Chhatra Shibir was denied by its parent body. Jamaat-e-Islami chief Golam Azam shifted the responsibility of the barbaric killing on the feuding factions of the Students League. He also demanded a judicial investigation into it. BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia came by the heels of her alliance colleague making a lengthy statement to condemn such a massacre. However, in the same breath she accused the party in power of 'patronising terrorism' which, she opined, was proved in the incident. In other words, she sang in tune with Golam Azam asking for a judicial enquiry.

There has been a chain reaction at times violent all over the country and almost at every

place. Jamaat-e-Islami and its student front have been the target of the wrath of the Student Leaguers and the Awami League itself. Tense situation prevails amidst threats from them that in the event of police's failure to arrest the killers within a stipulated period they would resort to fierce retaliation. Even some newspapers have reported similar outrageous remarks attributed to Sheikh Hasina herself when she was in Chittagong. However, stories are coming out in the newspapers that the Chittagong police, in their desperate bid to haul up the culprits and also to save their faces, have taken into custody many people with allegiance to Jamaat, for interrogation. Some described such an onslaught as a reign of terror. Government must at once ask the police not to overdo or to whip in the void. The Prime Minister will, hopefully, realise that such alleged excesses on the part of the police might discredit her and her party. She must command patience and fortitude to withstand the calamitous situation.

The Chittagong murders were followed by the tragic murder of Janakantha special representative in Jessore, noted journalist Shamsur Rahman. It came off at such a time when the Jessore Sessions Court was poised to frame charges against the killers of Kazi Aref Ahmed and others in a meeting of Udichi in Jessore. The tragedy assumed a newer dimension when it was alleged by some quarters that Shamsur Rahman's assassins could include 2/3 fellow local journalists. One of them has already been interrogated by Jessore police and two others are under close CID surveillance.

When the whole nation was yet to recover from the terrible shock it had sustained in the Chittagong and the Jessore incidents the news of planting of a very powerful bomb at Kotlarpura, Faridpur rocked the

country with a vicious jerk. This time the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was the target. In fact she has been on the hit list for quite some time. It was indeed a very commendable job that her security personnel had performed in unearthing and diffusing the planted explosive before Sheikh Hasina reached her public meeting venue at Kotlarpura on July 20, 2000.

Undaunted, Sheikh Hasina kept her schedule, addressed the largest ever gathering at Kotlarpura expressing her total surrender unto the merciful Allah. 'Death will come when it will' and she found no reason to fall back in her current pursuit towards economic and social emancipation of the people. She is determined to forge ahead in spite of the malevolent threats to her life.

Meanwhile, other such devices, planted not very far away from the venue, have also been commendably unearthed and diffused. But who knows, how many would be in the offing and could be similarly diffused before being detonated. People are simply awe-stricken. They are faced with the mind-boggling question: Are we heading for a catastrophe?

The law and order situation, despite the government's oft-pronounced 'hard endeavour' continues to deteriorate. Some vested interests appear to have organised themselves to create social and political unrest throughout the country by any means. One of their main goals, as it seems, is to foil the current proceedings of Bangabandhu murder case in the High Court to save the necks of those sentenced to death by the lower court. So, maintenance of law and order has assumed topmost priority at the highest level of administration. Any faulty action on the part of the government is bound to be disastrous. Therefore, a cool, cautious and, of course, calculated path has to be followed.

To the Editor ...

Chocolate bombs and after effects

Sir, Bangladesh is getting attention (internally and externally). More than 36,000 chocolate bombs have been seized by the police in the south western region of the country within a week, suspected to have originated from across the border. Brought in for use by whom against whom? The response has to come from the government, to protect the citizens from terrorism.

Thinking of terrorist styles of operation (all terrorist activities by different groups are inter-related, in the larger sense), it sounds rather implausible that the opposition groups would dare to mount a daring commando raid on a microbus (in Chittagong city) in broad daylight in a crowded street, against the party in power, block the road, and escape; and so far none of the direct culprits could be arrested.

The risk involved is too great compared to the small individual hit and run attacks. Anyway the proof is being awaited.

If this is a planned operation, it is ominous, considering the shape of things to come. On the other hand, the ruling regime had also been adopting a hard confrontational style, for reasons which are hard to fathom, considering the fact that the whole administrative machinery of the government is at their beck and call. The third point of doubt is the expected efficiency of the police, as the PM herself pointed out during her visit to the port city. Has politicisation become so powerful that the division within, a service is now hard-lined (the janatar mancha after-effect)?

The final year prior to the general elections has become thorny. The regime is being cornered with more and more tough problems. It is not so easy to rule over the Bengalees, as history has shown, but there is one weakness in the national character: frequently Bengalees go against Bengalees, even at the national level, perhaps due to overdose of patriotism! Before the mass level is corrected and oriented, the leaders themselves have to do some

soul searching as to where they are leading the nation to. A Citizen Dhaka

The 'protection' syndrome

Sir, The newspapers are full of protection pleas from groups, big and small, in almost every sector of the society. It is turning into a negative business, to stall government policies and resist topical change. If we do not agree in principle to change, how do we progress?

The CBAs have become mini planning commissions telling the government its policies are wrong! How to run the government, when the government is not allowed to take decisions, and later, those decisions are flouted? This administrative anarchy has to be resisted. There is a saying that three Bengalees cannot run a company. Then how 300 parliamentarians can run the country?

The Bangladesh Biman change in structure is being protested by the employees. The foreign container terminal near Chittagong port is being resisted by the Mayor, who is from the ruling party. The BGMEA has a long list for protection. The employees of the sick SOEs are scared and resist privatisation moves. The garment factories are reluctant to vacate the residential areas of the cities and move on to the Garment villages. The Opposition refuses to go to the JS.

If the status quo is maintained everywhere, the country will stand where it was decades ago. The regimes have a huge PR job in hand, to mentally prepare the people for changes. Conservative and traditional societies do not like change. Three major reasons are over-population; poor economic holding power (poverty); and poor literacy. The fourth reason is hidden corruption.

The politicians have to seriously address these psychological factors, when they are out making noises in public. There is discontent even inside the political parties, with factions inside who resist the introduction of new-look in the party image.

Today's formula for success is simple: change, or be left behind. Abul M Ahmad Dhaka