

We Say No to Armymen on Bank Boards

CAT is out of the bag. The finance ministry, or for that matter, the government stands accused of a matter they perhaps had expected would run its course without any incident, but evidently it hasn't. The finance ministry's proposal for induction of five Brigadiers as directors in bank boards with the seal of approval from the Prime Minister's Office on it has been boomeranged. At the receiving end, Bangladesh Bank, whose 'concurrence' in it was sought - with an unmissable emphasis on compliance - has sent back the proposal to the ministry of finance maintaining that the defence personnel do not qualify for the posts. Bangladesh Bank deserves credit for its uprightness on the question.

The BB's 'no' stands on very solid grounds in that the use of levered men's services as bank directors did not work out satisfactorily in the past nor is there any reason to believe that it would in the future. The primary reason for this lies in the fact that such a co-option was based on a notion of privilege rather than in recognition of their training, expertise and vision in the field of banking, attributes they could otherwise legitimately claim as far as the defence sector went.

Given our long history of bank-related bunglings - thanks to the political appointees on the boards - it was but natural only that the preamble to the Bank Reform Committee (BRC)'s report suggested that 'persons whose social recognition and capability are beyond question' should man the bank boards. What is the difference between a military appointee to a board and a political appointee to it if the common denominator is lack of professional knowledge or standing in banking? To be frank, inclusion of army personnel in the boards smacks of political appointment rather than economic appointment.

The finance ministry's commitment to bank reform and its professed puritanism about recompensation of the boards with banking professionals sounds hollow after all this.

The saddest part is that the principle of transparency in appointing directors and forming a national banking advisory council for such appointments is neither in place nor is being followed.

One notes with concern that a practice which fell in disuse during the first two years of AL rule has been revived by it and that seven defence personnel are already on boards of directors in as many banks and financial institutions. The proposed addition of five more to the boards could give a signal that the government might be up to pampering army before the elections. Our's is an emphatic No to this misconceived and harmful move.

All Those Ministers' Sons

COMES yet another report of forcible occupation of property by a cabinet member's son to make us wonder whether the kith and kin of the ruling party politicos are actually above the law. The alleged confiscation bid by Abdul Latif Tipu, son of the labour and manpower minister, appears premised on two suppositions. First, the local administration would think twice before initiating any move against a minister's son; and second, if there be any law suit, painfully slow legal proceedings in the civil court would buy him more than enough time to realise his acquisitive designs. Even the Prime Minister didn't intervene in the matter despite being informed of it by the original owners through a faxed message and an open letter in a daily newspaper.

The whole episode must be quite embarrassing for Mr. Abdul Mannan, who is known to have been a man of modest means with a reputation for honesty. But apparently his parental authority has not been decisive there. But, should the ruling party not be ashamed, too, for its failure to devise means to rein in the reckless sons of its senior leaders? Not long ago, Rajuk thwarted a bid by another minister's son to illegally construct a shopping mall in Uttara. Before that, one of Chief Whip Abul Hasnat's sons hogged headlines by forcibly occupying a residential apartment in the city's Kalabagan area. Even worse, sons of a ruling party legislator and an AL ward commissioner have also been implicated in two gruesome murder cases. In each case, subsidence of initial media and popular up roar has also pulled the curtain down on administrative and legal activism. Has any of them been punished yet? The answer is a big no.

It doesn't seem that the ruling party is aware of the serious damage such instances of misgovernance have wrought on its image. We once again urge the prime minister's intervention. Ministers' sons or not, all culprits should be tried according to the dictates of law. Speaking of law, civil courts take ages to settle disputes over land possession. Such instances of land appropriation only highlight the need for a quick redressal system. We hope the government of the day would initiate a process in that direction.

EU on CHT Accord

EUROPEAN Union (EU) Parliament delegation members on a fact-finding mission here shared their impressions about the implementation of the CHT accord in a dialogue with the BIIS on Monday. They thought the accord has been implemented on a very limited scale. The accord is into its third year, and while the operationalisation has been slow there is no reason to be cynical about its intrinsic merit. Basically it has ended the bloody insurgency of the past era. That is where its strength lies.

The observations of the delegation are not lost on us but what we would like to emphasise is the need for recognising the ground realities. There may be some points in the accord which have not yet been implemented but these require time to be implemented in a manner which will be acceptable to all concerned parties and also top priority has to be given to continuation of the present generally peaceful atmosphere in the area. We gather the powerful delegation members Bob Van den Bos and Chairman and member of the European Parliament Antonio Miranda de Silva will go back and report on the conditions here. We request them not to be overly dismayed by what they have seen and urge the EU to release funds for development of this beautiful but poor area for which they have been showing tremendous interest. That, in fact, could be a stimulus to the process of implementation of the accord.

Mamata may Still Miss the Bus

It looks as if the purpose of Centre's exercise is to keep the pot boiling in the state and allow Mamata to create an atmosphere of uncertainty where she is recognised as a 'saviour'. It suits both Mamata and the NDA government because the state goes to the polls in April next.

MADE it a point to be in Calcutta on September 7. This was the day on which the Centre was supposed to take action against the Communist-led West Bengal government for investigating terrorism in the state. Trinamool Congress leader Mamata Banerjee had thrown down the gauntlet. No, I am the last person to pick it up. But I must say I did not find any sign of ferment or fear in the city during my five-day stay. True, Calcutta is not West Bengal. But if the state's five districts Midnapore, Bankura, Birbhum, Hooghly and Bardhaman had been in the grip of terrorism, as the Trinamool Congress had claimed, some terrified people would have migrated to the city. Accounts of extensive violence would have appeared in the local press, which is known for its detailed coverage of happenings in the districts. For him to compare the state with Bihar was merely politics. He was on a serious mission. But he spoke like a person who read out from the text which he had prepared beforehand. That Fernandes served the purpose of Mamata Banerjee is clear and understandably she is 'pleased with him.' It is another matter that his credibility on political matters has gone down still further. But how does his 'assessment' help the Centre? It has only increased her pressure on New Delhi to take action against the state government a point which Mamata has been plugging for many months. The Centre will be damned both ways if it acts or doesn't.

Still the fact remains that New Delhi has gone about in a way which not only challenges the

state's authority but also betrays some political game. First, the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) sends a team, which says that the five districts be declared as disturbed areas. (The Centre may have the constitutional power but can it do so? And which machinery does it have to enforce its flat in the state?) Then,

Chief Minister Jyoti Basu in the morning and Deputy Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya in the evening. By then Fernandes had not arrived in Calcutta. Basu's comment was that it was a free country and Fernandes could go anywhere. The chief minister vehemently denied the allegations that Mamata had made.

Chief Minister Jyoti Basu in the morning and Deputy Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya in the evening. By then Fernandes had not arrived in Calcutta. Basu's comment was that it was a free country and Fernandes could go anywhere. The chief minister vehemently denied the allegations that Mamata had made.

Perhaps CPI(M) Secretary General Harkishan Singh Surjeet, who rushed to Calcutta on September 8 following Basu's SOS to fix the date for his exit, persuaded him to stay on until the Centre decided on the report by Fernandes. The 'appraisal report' that the West Bengal government has sent to the Home Ministry to inform it about the 'conditions' prevailing in the state is contrary to the thinking of the Vajpayee government. It is understandable because Mamata is a senior minister in the cabinet and her clout is immense.

My assessment is that the Centre will not dare impose President's rule in the state, although it can get any type of report from State Governor Viren J. Shah. He is a BJP prodigy and a close friend of Fernandes from the days of the Baroda dynamite case.

It looks as if the purpose of Central ministers, dictated by political considerations, are in the interest of take-over of the state under Article 356 of the Constitution (the imposition of President's rule). But they do not seem to appreciate the repercussions. They may placate Mamata but any action against the Basu government will alienate the CPI(M) under Basu would return to power, although not with an absolute majority. Mamata would still miss the bus.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

New Delhi asks, of all persons, Fernandes to give a report. His bias against the communists, who consider him a renegade, is too well known. And he does not hide it. He indicts the West Bengal government even before entering the state. Fernandes said in a two-volume account that the CPI (M) has killed several people and that women are being raped and children tortured by its workers. Who will authenticate what comes from Fernandes? His is a one-sided verdict. This is evident from the absence of any criticism of Trinamool Congress in his report.

On September 7 itself, I met

She wants to dislodge the government and her supporters are indulging in every type of violence to destabilise the state," Basu said. He, in fact, felt hurt over what was happening in the country. Talking in a philosophical mood, he wondered to which direction the country was heading. He had little hope of "a change in the government at Delhi" and was unhappy that no alternative was emerging. He saw no challenge to the Vajpayee-led government. Basu has not forgotten how New Delhi would have had a communist-led government in 1996 when he was offered the leadership of a coalition.

"Let them dare," was the

Vajpayee's Visit to US

by Harun ur Rashid

India's ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) remains uncertain and is a setback to the global nuclear non-proliferation regime. Furthermore Kashmir situation could further worsen until a political solution is found between India and Pakistan. Given the political stalemate, it does not bring comfort to the US.

THE five-day (13-17 September) visit of the Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee to the US is significant in many ways. Its impact on Asia could be far-reaching. The very fact that President Bill Clinton hosted a banquet for the Indian Prime Minister at the White House at the end of the visit demonstrates that India and the US have been able to establish a new relationship after years of mutual suspicion when New Delhi supported the Soviet Union during the cold war period.

The basis of the new relationship was heralded when President Clinton visited India in March this year and alleged that Pakistan government was in some way involved in encouraging the Muslim militants to cross over the Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir. Furthermore, President Clinton dismissed US mediating role in Kashmir dispute. Indian leaders were delighted about the way President Clinton made his views known to Pakistani military leaders.

The visit of Vajpayee is in response to the one made by President Clinton in March and it has been described as a great success in forging a new vista of relationship between the superpower and the largest democracy in the world. A plethora of scientific and economic agreements were concluded during the visit. India's immigration quota to the US would be increased. President Clinton is reported to have said in the banquet: "We have together

built the strongest and most mature partnership India and America have ever known".

The question arises: what are the implications of the visit?

First, it could be said that the US has recognised the dominance of India in South Asia and it is galling to Pakistan. Pakistan never accepted India's dominance in the region and believes in parity with India. The need for restraint by the US for India's dominance in the region seems to have disappeared as Pakistan is a "fish" out of water in the democratic tradition of the Indian subcontinent as the military overthrew a constitutional government in Pakistan in last October. The US can hardly support the military government in Pakistan after the end of the cold war. In fact, it does not need to in the context of contemporary global strategy.

Second, although relations between China and India has been lately improving, Indian perceptions of a Chinese encirclement of India and of Chinese assistance with Pakistan's nuclear, missile and conventional weapons programme are worrying concerns for India. There is a view that the visit could send a message to China that its primacy in Asia including the Indian Ocean region would not go uncontested by India, supported by the US. Thus a new dynamics of strategic relation is emerging between India and the US to ensure that China may not be able to secure dominance in Asia.

Third, the reiteration of unwillingness by the US to mediate in Kashmir dispute during the visit seems that the Kashmir problem would be in a limbo and it suits India perfectly. It must be disappointed to Pakistan.

Finally, India's self-image and its national pride have been recognised by the US not only as a self-reliant and sovereign nation but as a major international force with authority and power. Although the visit has been hailed to change the Indo-US bilateral relationship qualitatively, the major concerns of the US in the subcontinent remain. President Clinton is worried about the arms race in the Indian subcontinent after the nuclear tests in May in 1998. India's ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) remains uncertain and is a setback to the global nuclear non-proliferation regime. Furthermore Kashmir situation could further worsen until a political solution is found between India and Pakistan. Given the political stalemate, it does not bring comfort to the US.

The US faces a critical challenge to bring stability, predictability and peace in the volatile politics of the subcontinent. Let us hope that the success of the new relationship would be judged on the ability of India to look upon one another in the subcontinent as friends and not as enemies.

The author, a Barrister, is former Bangladeshi Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

To the Editor ...

When will Sylhet Vet College reopen?

Sir, Sylhet Government Veterinary College was closed sine die on 7 June owing to some flimsy ground. It has been learnt that a television set was stolen from one of the residential halls for which the college authority closed the college and forced the students to vacate the halls within twelve hours.

This institute is a development project of Livestock Department under the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock, and is under the Faculty of School of Life Science of Shah Jalal University. Although, the institute started functioning five years back but till date it is plagued with numerous problems. There is acute shortage of skilled teachers. The library is not rich in technical books and journals. The laboratory is not well-equipped for which practical classes are not held as required. Moreover, the political atmosphere is always so taut that it gives rise to tension among the students.

The college is situated on the outskirts of the town and lacks modern amenities. There is not a single canteen for the two hundred and fifty students. There is no telephone booth either in the campus and due to lack of this facility the students need to rush to the town to make emergency calls.

Thanks to session jam, the first batch which ought to be in 5th year are now only in 3rd year 2nd semester. How long will it take to

obtain the degree only almighty Allah knows! If an educational institution functions like this then the authenticity of the whole educational system becomes doubtful. Under the circumstances, I would like to draw the attention of the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock to look into the matter at an early date and save the students from utter despair and frustration.

A Wretched Father
(Shameem Haider)
142, Shahjahan Road
Mohammedpur, Dhaka

Liquid wastes

Sir, The dwellers of Fakirpore and Arambag area have been suffering immensely due to overflowing of liquid wastes from manholes.

According to concerned authorities, high-rise buildings, including commercial complexes and apartments are the main cause of overflowing of liquid wastes from underground sewerage line and disruption of pure water supply. Due to this, a significant number of residential units in this area are not getting sufficient water supply.

On the other hand, most of the manhole covers have been stolen and many of them are yet to be replaced.

We, therefore urge the concerned authorities to take necessary steps to solve these problems.

Monir Uddin Mondol
Fakirpore, Dhaka

32-series telephone
Sir, Many a letters have been published in this column regarding the manifold problems of 32-series telephone and urging the T&T authority to convert this analogue series into digital. Now it is a matter of great relief that recently most of the 32 numbers have been converted into digital ones. However, some of the numbers are yet to be converted.

While extending sincere thanks to the T&T board we would request them to expedite the conversion process of the entire 32-series.

We sincerely hope that the telecommunication system as well as the IT network in Bangladesh will witness further changes and development in the near future.

Mahbubul Alam
Purana Paltan, Dhaka

Bottled mineral water

Sir, A number of reports have been published in different dailies regarding the purity of bottled mineral water marketed throughout country. Allegations have been made from many quarters that the different brands of bottled mineral water are not at all hygienic and pure. But people are drinking these considering that they are safe and sterile.

Under the circumstances, it has become imperative for the authorities concerned to investigate the matter through spot verification and lab tests.

A Concerned Citizen
Dhaka

Murder rape, kidnapping, extortion and all other crimes conceivable have become a daily feature of items in the newspapers instilling a sense of great fear and insecurity among the citizens, particularly in Dhaka. As a consequence of what has been happening, life is becoming cheaper in the virtual absence of law and order in the country.

This inhibition of insecurity leads one to come to a conclusion that breakdown of law and order has reached its nadir, while the self-deluding administration seems to treat this burning issue as all in a day's work.

Politicians or political parties in civilized parts of the world get the better of their opponents excelling in political wisdom by professing what one would do for the welfare of the people and the nation if voted to power. But the political culture in Bangladesh is totally different: Politics here has come to a pass where it has boiled down to vendetta, which in turn has given rise to gun culture engulfing the society in almost a mayhem. The administration has lost sight of preserving law and order which is sine qua non for the welfare of the state and the people. It has possibly forgotten that whatever we may talk of reform, consolidation of democracy and political stability, it can never be achieved as long as unrest in society and turbulence in the political arena continues to prevail upon good order.

As a conscientious objector, for me being devoid of political bias, it is my perception that what has been happening around us is a result of political contest which has rather become political rivalry giving rise to violence by the unscrupulous elements in the party who are only for themselves; they are neither for the party nor for their leaders nor for the nation

because it would take them no time to turn their coats.

It may therefore be sincerely and honestly suggested that it is high time for our Prime Minister, since she is in office, to put her foot down and take decision on crucial national issues by independent judgement. She is fully aware of the Commonweal on the issue of military rule in Pakistan? Let us be prepared to face the truth: our national interest can hardly be served through politeness towards those who seize state power by illegitimate means. Besides, there remains the matter of General Pervez Musharraf's attitude to Bangladesh. He thinks that mistakes were committed by both Bengalis and Pakistanis in 1971. He also thinks that we in Bangladesh should forget the past and move on. Do we have to make him happy? Let us have no question about one thing: relations between Pakistan and Bangladesh

As it is the bounden duty and sacred responsibility of the political leaders and of the political parties to preserve our social fabric, I would indulge in making an analysis of the activity of our political parties and the contribution they can make to build the nation by sinking all differences when it comes to the question of welfare of the people and the nation.

As a matter of fact there are two major political parties Awami League and BNP to be reckoned with. By the same token there are two leaders to conjure with. The two major contending political parties are vying for the next national election to be held in 2001 and both the parties as well as their two respective leaders are trying all they have in their bag of tricks so as to win the next election and this is quite in the fitness of things as it is anywhere in the world. But then where it makes the difference? The difference is that here in Bangladesh political contest is reduced to personal level so much so that the leaders do not refrain from indulging in character assassination of each other which is certainly not expected of them. Consequently, this personal dislikes for each other are exploited by unscrupulous elements in the party who are only for themselves; they are neither for the party nor for their leaders nor for the nation

The writer is an advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh.

OPINION

Prime Minister at UN

Syed Badrul Ahsan

I have just had the pleasure of going through M.M. Rezaul Karim's Currents and Crosscurrents in the issue of the Daily Star of 16 September 2000. I have noted especially the last paragraph in Mr. Karim's write-up, where he appears to think that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's emphasis on the need for the United Nations and the world community not to recognise any regime taking over a state by force of arms was not a practical move and indeed does not further Bangladesh's national interests. The point in politics at this stage and it does not matter at all whether that point is made by powerful or weak states is that governance must be redirected to principles of morality. Since the end of the Cold War, it has