

Wheels of Justice

IN a country where the ratio between crime and punishment or prosecution and conviction has been far from favourable to the ends of justice and rule of law, any news of prompt delivery of justice revives a wee bit of our lost hope in the system.

We believe that the District and Sessions Judge of Narayanganj has delivered a landmark judgement in the Mummy murder case by handing death penalty to the husband, mother-in-law and sister-in-law of the victim Mahmuda Sultana Mummy.

All in all, the verdict represents what we would like to regard as a trend-setting application of the Prevention of Women and Children Repression Act, 1995.

Now we turn to other cases of repression and murder of women and children where justice walls in waiting like those of Sazneen, Yasmeen, Seema, etc. etc. Let us see it delivered conclusively there, too - sooner than any later.

Message of Ramadan

THE month of self-abnegation and prayer begins today. Abstinence from food and drink during daytime will make us feel the pinch of what hunger means to millions of starving or under-fed people in the country.

Since fasting is the antonym of gluttony, over-eating has to be shunned even at iftar and sehri times. We need to be self-disciplined, austere and frugal imbibing the spirit of Ramadan.

This is the time when bureaucrats, doctors, engineers, teachers, policemen, industrialists and businessmen should bring to bear a greater social commitment on the discharge of their professional responsibilities. Work ethics should be followed unwaveringly.

To the Editor ...

The politicisation of BCS posts

Sir, As a citizen, it is very disturbing to read the DS front-page report 'FSC influenced by ruling party?' about alleged unauthorised infiltration of freedom fighters and political party candidates with dubious certificates hastily obtained at the last moment or arranged previously.

It means that the standard of politics and political culture are deteriorating in the country day by day, and we are reminded of similar unethical practices in vogue during the early years since independence.

Many leaders and vested groups of the society are taking advantage of the weak infrastructure of protests, condemnation and peaceful demonstrations, in

a situation where the rich are richer, and the poor are poorer, and bank-loan default culture is thriving. The forthcoming elections have no meaning, as the right type of potential leadership would not be available to the masses.

The three pillars of the society are at loggerhead, namely the Executive, the Judiciary and the political system. The image of the politicians is at the lowest ebb, and firepower, might, muscle and black money dictate the proceedings of the day. The governance is passing through a crisis.

The nation has to wake up and start a cleansing movement. Appeals to good sense have no meaning. Who will save us from this frustrating state?

AZ Dhaka

The patterns of inefficiency

Sir, Our airports and seaports have a similar pattern of inefficiency; which is now being spotlighted in the print media through investigative journalism. At the

ASIA is at the threshold of a renaissance fuelled by its maximisation of benefits and opportunities of the rapidly changing global economic scenario. Asia, where more than half of world's population live and whose landmass makes up a third of the planet, now produces more than 25 per cent of the global exports, consumes about twenty-three per cent of the world's imports, and commands 33 per cent of the international services.

This is how the continent was viewed by the Commission for New Asia back in 1994 (the data quoted here needs to be updated as six years have passed by in the meantime). The Commission in its report made the futuristic view that in the wake of East Asian miracle which would in a gradual process trickle down to the rest of the region, Asia would emerge as the single largest market and growth centre not only economically, but also culturally, strategically and politically.

This is how the idea of possible economic integration of Asia was contemplated and germinated. Then came the sudden and unforeseen crash in the economies of the East Asian countries in 1997. This vulnerability demonstrated the need for Asian countries to step up dialogue, co-ordination, cooperation and increasing interaction in maintaining regional economic security as well as for sustaining healthy and stable economic development in the region.

Remaking Asia

What started at Boao is no doubt a landmark achievement, a milestone and breakthrough for Asia and in less than another sixty years it will hopefully blossom into fuller integration of Asia. If it takes about half a century for Europe to integrate, it will definitely take much lesser time for the Asian countries to come closer together for their mutual benefit and for the collective benefit of their people.

group of nations. Countries around the world started to redefine their relationships towards positive and mutually productive and beneficial collaboration in the form of regional, inter- and intra-regional and trans-regional structured economic cooperative bodies like the integration of EU (European Union), 22-nation APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation), NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement), ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) etc as better bargaining chip and clout.

Although Asian nations participated in transregional body like APEC, Asia as a whole lacked a viable exclusive economic forum led by Asians and guided from Asian perspectives of Asian interests and views providing the opportunity of discussing the Asian issues as well as issues relating to enhancement of exchanges, interaction and cooperation among Asian countries, and between Asian countries and other parts of the globe.

Elaborate preparations are afoot to hold the first convention of the proposed Forum in the year 2002.

As a first step towards the formal floating of the Forum experts, academics, scholars, former diplomats, journalists and representatives of former Asian government leaders from as many as twentyfour different Asian countries gathered at Boao for two days on November 18 and 19 last. (The absence of representation from the oil-rich Arab world and from the Pacific rim countries was strongly felt and it was suggested that in future these countries should have proper representation so as to give the Forum a compact Asian look.)



HEART OF THE MATTER Mansoor Mamoon

government Asian leaders in the fourth week of February 2001 to be known as the Preparatory Committee Meeting for the convening of the full dress meeting of the Boao Asia Forum (BAF). From Bangladesh former state minister and ruling party MP Syed Abul Hossain, who is also a leading businessman, has been included in the preparatory committee.

It also elected a pro tem Secretary General of the Forum and the obvious choice was Ajit Singh, the first Secretary General of the ASEAN, a career diplomat from Malaysia.

The main theme of the Forum was directed towards ways and means of reaping the maximum benefit for the Asian countries and to avoid their marginalisation out of the process of globalisation. The expert group meeting, chaired by Mr Chen Cl, Director General of Hainan Provincial Foreign Affairs Office, laboured to chart a road map or vision for what has been described as striving to become the 'premier forum' with strong Asian perspectives and promoting the business and economic integration of the Asian countries in a rapidly globalising world. The

missions of the forum comprised: (1) generating, through high level interaction between government and business leaders, strategic initiatives for augmentation of trade, investment and technology partnership in Asia; (2) developing an enabling environment through creating Asian business synergies for comprehensive and sustainable economic progress; (3) promoting region-wide strategic alliance to seize trade, industry and investment opportunities emerging from a globalising world; (4) nurturing the concept of intra-regional institutional networking and identifying the global trade and investment opportunities in the context of global digital revolution; (5) providing intellectual leadership for developing capital and conducting research on areas of special importance to the region and its international partnership and, last but not the least, (6) enhancing inter-cultural understanding and fostering a deep sense of social responsibility among busi-

ness communities in Asia.

Its strategies included convening conferences and workshops on a regular basis to discuss important issues relating to Asian development, trade and investment in the context of globalisation as well as to develop and promote closer inter-relationship between the Forum business communities and the governments. Identification of and dissemination of information on emerging business and investment opportunities, serving as a clearing house for promoting joint ventures among business communities operating in Asia, undertaking feasibility studies and providing consultancy services to business communities, serving as an early warning system for the business communities on the impact of global trade and investment liberalisation measures, turning the Forum into a global centre to undertake research and impart training to equip business communities with better management and technological capabilities and complementing the regional initiative underway to intensifying collaboration between the governments and the business communities on trade and investment issues are the other notable strategies identified by the experts.

What is so very notable is that representatives from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka, who belonged to SAARC, now in limbo due to unending bitter rivalries between the two giant South Asian neighbours India and Pakistan spoke in one voice at the forum expert group meeting. This demonstrated that at the rulers' level (in South Asia) there might be differences, but at the civil society level there is a common aspiration for economic liberation of the teeming millions in Asia through joint effort and increasing interaction. Noted analyst Bhabani Sen Gupta has rightly said that for India to become a viable regional power, as it is long striving for, it must first come to terms with both China and Pakistan. Boao Forum for Asia provides such an opportunity for the trio China, India and Pakistan to cooperate.

History recorded that before the advent of colonialism there had been business interactions and interchanges among Asian countries and Asia as a whole reached the zenith of progress and prosperity. Asia had been the home of great civilisations like that of Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian and Islamic. Asia was the melting pot of diverse cultures. There was free mobility and borders had been no barriers anywhere in Asia. But long subjugation under the yoke of colonialism had created the current great divides and suspicions among the Asian countries. The time has now come for them to integrate and make the Asia-Pacific century a reality. Asian voices should be clearly and collectively aired in the international fora. The Boao Asian Forum is definitely a good beginning in this regard and will act as a catalytic agent in bringing the countries of Asia together on one single platform. It will be the precursor and manifestation of the Asian Renaissance about which Asian think tank was speaking for a long time. The Boao Asian Forum aptly reminds what Noble Laureate the great poet Rabindranath Tagore had prophesied in his last public address in April, 1941 'The new dawn will come from this horizon, from the East where the Sun rises, and unvanquished man will trace his path of conquest to win back his lost heritage'. This lost heritage that Tagore so eloquently spoke of is a completely secular Asia where all irrespective of language, race, religion, sex, creed, caste, colour and nationality will happily converge as they used to do in the pre-colonial days. At long last the first rays of that new dawn and vision of a happy and prosperous new Asia has started to glister in the horizon from the east, from Boao in China, as Tagore had dreamt of sixty years ago. What started at Boao is no doubt a landmark achievement, a milestone and breakthrough for Asia and in less than another sixty years it will hopefully blossom into fuller integration of Asia. If it takes about half a century for Europe to integrate, it will definitely take much lesser time for the Asian countries to come closer together for their mutual benefit and for the collective benefit of their people. Peace will then reign in the continent and the present trouble-spots will disappear.

Prestige via Oxbridge? Kissa Kursi Ka!

Praful Bidwai writes from New Delhi

Governments should not make bequests to foreign universities to promote area studies, languages or culture. If these are worthy of serious attention, the universities concerned should promote them. Many indeed do. Endowments are best left to the expatriate community. An Oxbridge professorship is no longer what it used to be in prestige or providing leadership.

THE Vajpayee government has mocked India's academic community by endowing Rs. 12 crores to Oxford University for a chair in Indian history and culture. For foreign minister Jaswant Singh, this was an 'exciting' fulfillment of a long-held 'dream'.

For India's finest research institutions, this may be a nightmare. This contemptible search for false prestige distorts our education priorities. It does not show the 'new' confidence of a 'resurgent India', but just the opposite.

All the government has done is buy up a chair. This won't be the first India-related chair at Oxford. There already exist five positions. Some have been occupied by distinguished scholars, including Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan.

So Mr Jaswant Singh's claim to have created the first India chair reflects his own ignorance, natural for someone who joined politics after an undistinguished army career. So he is using public money to pursue a private fantasy. This is reprehensible.

His 'dream' is worse. A major nation with a thriving scholarly community shouldn't have to buy chairs abroad. Here, New Delhi is following its own bete noir Pakistan, Bhutto and Zia-ul-Haq also made endowments to Oxford and Cambridge. But Bhutto was an Oxford alumnus, whereas the Singhs and Vajpayees had humbler education, which they are

compensating with vaulting ambition.

Governments should not make bequests to foreign universities to promote area studies, languages or culture. If these are worthy of serious attention, the universities concerned should promote them. Many indeed do. Endowments are best left to the expatriate community.

An Oxbridge professorship is no longer what it used to be in prestige or providing leadership. Today, any Oxford teacher can get a 'titular' professorship for the asking.

However, the present case is particularly deplorable for the disproportion between the government's generosity to Oxford and the way it treats Indian universities. Today, the average budget of each Indian university, with hundreds of teachers, is less than Rs. seven crores.

The Oxford endowment is three times the budget of the Indian Council of Historical Research and more than one-half the budget of the Indian Council of Social Science Research, to which 27 institutes are affiliated. Grotesquely, most of the 27

institutes have no assured funds to pay even salaries. Many live from hand to mouth. Most can't even pay University Grants Commission-scale salaries. For instance, ICSSR senior researchers, with a doctorate, earn Rs. 1,250 per month three times less than a chaprasi, well below the minimum wage.

Most ICSSR-affiliated institutes have been plunged into bankruptcy under the new chairman's 'austerity' measures. Acclaimed scholar Partha Chatterjee, director of Calcutta's Centre for the Study of Social Sciences, has threatened to resign unless the grants are restored.

The ICSSR headquarters is horribly depressing. As a former Governing Council member, I still cannot forget my disgust with its functioning. For years, it operated from a sadiistically maintained building without usable toilets.

At the Council's meetings, attended by India's topmost social scientists, we were never once served a hot meal comparable to what students eat. Worse, we were routinely insulted by

petty bureaucrats, who relished telling us we would get no money from the sole funding source: the education ministry. And the ICSSR is an 'autonomous' institution!

The justification for keeping ICSSR institute directors on tenterhooks is unvarying: there's no money. Strangely, however, under chairman M.L. Sondhi, it is setting up new institutes. The latest are 'Shyam Prasad Mookerjee Gateway of Social Sciences', 'Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Centre for Social Welfare' (whose sole major activity was to organise BJP president Laxman's talk) and 'Centre for the Study of National Security' created in collaboration with JNU, without consulting its academics.

The new Centre will collaborate with numerous institutes arbitrarily chosen by Mr Sondhi. The ICSSR is also funding a gigantic 'SP Mookerjee International Conference' on 'the national and global agenda,' no less.

This is part of Hindutva's foray into higher education, reflected in its takeover of the University

Grants Commission, National Museum, Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, National Council of Educational Research and Training, and Indian Council of Philosophical Research.

The sangh parivar's foray abroad is a pitiable attempt to gain a figleaf of intellectual respectability something it has always craved but never achieved.

In the 75 years of the RSS's existence, its ideologues have failed to produce any scholarly work. Their highwater-mark is a few tawdry pamphlets full of venom against secularism, social reform and the minorities. By contrast, India's Left-liberal scholars have produced world-class work in history, economics, sociology and political science.

No wonder Hindutva proponents use extra-intellectual methods to combat their opponents: raucously disrupting debates, physically attacking conferences. ICHR's chairman B.R. Grover recently disrupted a seminar in Montreal, closing exhibitions in Delhi's National

Gallery of Modern Art, and banning books and films.

The only time I was heckled and prevented from speaking against nuclear weapons was on May 16, 1998. The heckler was Mr Sondhi.

However, it is extremely doubtful if reputable Western institutions, which respect academic freedom, will bestow legitimacy upon sanghi academics. A case is the Hinduja's early 1990s effort to establish a chair in Vedic studies at Columbia University. The faculty refused to entertain this even with a changed title ('Indic studies').

So overbearing was the Hinduja's interference in syllabus and personnel selection that the project collapsed.

The Hindutva agenda means subverting rational norms of academic functioning, including balance and democratic decency values alien to the parivar. But because many Western universities are turning mercenary, there is a danger that their resistance to Hindutva's depredations will weaken. This must not be allowed to happen.

One final point: The Hinduja has been charge-sheeted in the Bofors scandal by the Central Bureau of Investigation on new evidence in Swiss courts. The government must have no track with them. And all academic institutions must sever their links.

Looking at Greatness

by Anon

JYOTI Basu (87) retired as Chief Minister of West Bengal after more than two decades of superb, dedicated active public service; visible only a couple of times in a century (greatness is that rare). A fitting tribute was paid by New Delhi columnist Prof. Bidwai (The Daily Star of November 6). Jyoti Basu wished to retire earlier, but his workers and admirers would not let him go (that nagging feeling of uncertainty in the minds of the faithful followers at the loss of leadership). Now he will continue to guide from the back room, freed from executive responsibilities.

To be able to influence (public or private opinion), it is not essential to hold position of power. Today's materialistic world is power-hungry. Paradoxically, when power is sought, it is not available. To hold it, is elusive. Modern political leaders today believe more in power than in service; more in mundane ideologies than in moral principles. What is timeless, survives.

To rule a society (with voluntary support and backing of 50 to 80 millions for two decades is a rare example of the subjugation of the ego and ignoring the sycophancy attached with power and influence. It means that greatness does not depend on external support but is self-sustaining from within.

This internal containment is missing from today's global leadership. There are rings and layers of surrounding defensive fortifications, based on human and materialistic resources, which cannot stand the test of time, and ultimately crumble with the gravity of time and circumstances. The other negative factor is the doggedness to cling to power, even when the tide is turning, and the writing is on the wall. Let go when the time arrives. All have to face the cycles of autumns and winters. In undeveloped and uncultivated minds, the winters of discontent reign supreme.

Leaders must respond to the signs of change and be in tune with the philosophy of change. What are left behind are not physical monuments and signboards, but the acceptance of sound principles deep in the hearts of more than one generation. Advertising cannot increase greatness, or the lack of it diminish its value and place. Emphasis in Nature is at the routine level.

Greatness in leadership is more than mere belief in fondisms and ideologies, and rigorous implementation of the same for a period of time. That explains why many of the global political leaders who reigned for two decades or more in different nations had to wearily fade out, as victims of

time and change. There is no greatness without empathy. It is different from sympathy and support. Great leaders create eras, not waves. Thereafter comes stagnation, because the right gardeners are missing; as the messages stop, due to communication gap.

Genuine leadership needs inner and outer space, for proper elbow room and mobility. Without accommodation there cannot be dynamism. The synergy has to come from within, rather than extracted and collected from an exploited society. First the basic issue concerning approach to greatness has to be faced: who supports whom? Greatness withers with external aid.

The Bengalees are capable of producing some great leaders at odd intervals. For the Bangladeshis, the time is ripe for another to emerge. This sprouting and identity will follow its own course, and it cannot be imposed by human groups in a planned manner.

When the time comes, the master appears', is told and retold in more than one book of wisdom. For qualification, there are automatic self-tests for the society to fathom out. Till then, chaos will take its time to settle down to a conclusive focus.

as helpless as it was before, or even worse.

AbulMahmad Dhaka

Approach road to Rayer Bazar Monument

Sir, We thank the government for building the long cherished monument at Rayer Bazar, Dhaka in memory of the martyr intellectuals of 1971. The monument, by now, is a part of our national heritage. It is, hence, of immense importance to bring the monument to limelight, which can be done by linking the site with the city road system.

We, therefore, propose for construction of a paved road from Satmasjid Road Physical Training College point to the Monument site. This can be done acquiring a small stretch of land from Physical Training College and Commercial College without using much of private land. We, therefore, urge the authorities concerned to take necessary steps in this regard.

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