

Manpower export to Malaysia

Streamline it soon

THE Kuala Lumpur daily, The Star, has reported that a 'ban' has been imposed on the recruitment of Bangladeshi workers in Malaysia. The report has taken officials on both sides by surprise. The Ministry of Labour and our High Commission in Kuala Lumpur, as well as the Malaysian High Commission in Dhaka, had not received official notification of this 'ban'. While urging officials to quickly dispel the confusion, we would like to say that in any case, the issue merits urgent attention.

Malaysian officials have reportedly justified the 'ban' because of the consistent influx of illegal Bangladeshi workers, and the 'social impact' of their marriages to local women. We believe that the percentage of Bangladeshis married to Malaysians is negligible and we would hope that this would not be ground for such a strong stand. But we do see the point about illegal workers and urge the Ministries of Labour and Foreign Affairs to take this matter very seriously.

Illegality in the status of Bangladeshi workers in Malaysia are not new. Two years ago, Bangladeshis without work permits had been discovered undergoing forced labour in camps owned by private merchants who were exploiting the workers' fear of being caught and deported. A high level Bangladeshi delegation sent to Malaysia at that time managed to resolve the situation giving assurances that at the Bangladesh end steps would be taken to curb illegal recruitment. But in 1999, and again in 2000, at least 60,000 and 90,000 illegal Bangladeshis, respectively, were deported from Malaysia.

We would like to ask why the government has allowed illegalities to be committed by irresponsible quarters who preyed on the gullibility of workers? The importance of overseas remittances, as well as our ties with Malaysia, can hardly be exaggerated. The government must send a high-level mission to investigate this matter. It must clean up the manpower and labour sector, particularly the nexus of corruption that exists between private agencies and officials. We should make overseas recruitment a governmental responsibility, especially in vulnerable areas, limiting the role of private agencies to a few tested companies. The government should initiate dialogue with Malaysia along these lines. We would urge the Malaysian authorities to extend their cooperation as well. Both countries should aim for an agreement that would enable Bangladeshi workers to make the most of overseas employment opportunities, without jeopardising their personal security or their country's image with the host country.

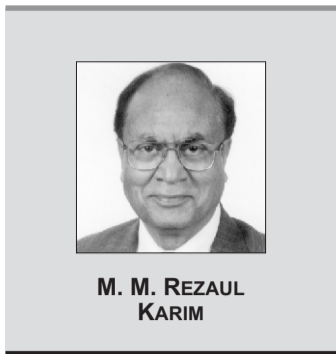
Chicken pox alert

Preventive measures needed

A significant health risk for people who live in a crowded and congested city is exposure to an infectious disease. It is in this context that we find the report of an outbreak of chicken pox to be grounds for concern. As this newspaper has disclosed, hospitals have reported that the disease has been spreading fast, since the first cases were recorded early this month. The Infectious Diseases Hospital (IDH) at Mahakhali has treated hundreds in its emergency department, and other hospitals and private clinics have reported cases as well.

We would urge the Ministry of Health to take note of the rate at which these cases of chicken pox have been occurring and take appropriate steps to prevent the incidence from becoming more serious. Immunisation drives should be stepped up, particularly in educational establishments, hostels, and other places where people live in close proximity with each other. Since the disease spreads through physical contact with the infected person, those infected should be kept in quarantine. In a crowded city where so many live in slums, and communal sharing of water and utensils is common, this may not be easily achieved. Health officials must, therefore, focus on those locations in the city which are likely to be more vulnerable to its spread.

The Ministry of Health must respond with alacrity and in strength. The problems faced by people in Dhaka are already cumbersome. To add an outbreak of this disease would be most unfortunate, particularly because the authorities have the resources and the time to prevent this from happening.



M. M. REZAUL KARIM

FEBRUARY 13, 2001. It was a very sad day, a significant day and a revealing day for the people of Bangladesh. On this day, three demonstrators lost their lives and a number of people injured in the streets of Dhaka through indiscriminate but deliberate shooting by a group of people led by an eminent law-giver, an honourable Member of Parliament of Bangladesh. An innocent off-duty policeman was also shot dead by an unidentified assailant.

Killings of innocent human beings are always a sad affair. Political killings add a new and wider dimension to it. The motivation, the act and its consequence speak volumes worthy of pondering by those interested in the analysis of the prevailing political situation in the country.

To recount facts briefly, a demonstration staged by the Bangladesh

Nationalist Party was proceeding peacefully in Malibagh area of the city in support of hartal. A counter-demonstration led by Dr. HBM Iqbal, an Awami League Member of the Parliament, came forward from the opposite direction. According to some reports, the police officer in-charge of the Thana concerned twice requested and implored the MP not to proceed farther towards where the BNP procession had been stationed, but to no avail. The

bear pictorial evidence which were duly published in newspapers the following day.

The next day, the MP issued a press statement alleging that the BNP demonstrators fired at his procession and killed three of his men. The Home Minister also made a similar statement to the effect that it was the BNP who did all the killings and inflicted injuries, without realizing that pictures published in newspapers belied their remarks

restraint and did not allow their supporters to stage any counter demonstration in the streets on hartal days for the obvious purpose of avoiding confrontation, conflict, violence, bloodshed and killing. Unfortunately, this policy was reversed by the Awami League when they assumed power. Instead, they staged counter demonstrations to manifest their muscle power, provoked conflicts and, under police protection, unleashed a reign

he had to pay dearly by being closed (non-operational) in another place because his actions evidently did not please the leaders of the ruling party. On the other hand, one feels aghast at the sight of non-chalant policemen giving protection to sharpshooters instead of preventing from committing the most heinous crime and arresting them on the spot. The published photographs of this incident only corroborates the serious apprehension

Parliamentarian, Haji Maqbool, received widespread publicity following killing of a BNP student picketing peacefully by shooting from the motorcade led by the same law-maker. Instead of apprehending the real culprits, the police took the incredulous step of instituting false cases against the victim and his family, who have since been under constant pressure and intimidation. Renowned godfathers and leaders of the political criminal world, like Jinal Hajari, Abu Taher, Osman, Mofazzal Hossain Maya and his son and many others have not been touched by the police and are roaming around the streets boldly and freely. The demand of the BNP high command to arrest Dr. Iqbal without delay merely reflects general sentiments of all those who sincerely want the rule of law to prevail in the country. Rejection of this demand by the government is sure to provoke greater discontent and further unrest in the country.

The Malibagh incident witnessed the same pattern of action by the Awami government. Instead of proceeding with a criminal case against Dr. Iqbal, the MP, and his cronies and detaining them, the police entertained cases against the victims, opposition BNP leader Mirza Abbas and his men in the procession.

The author, a former Ambassador, is a Member of BNP's Advisory Council.

CURRENTS AND CROSSCURRENTS

The role of the police during these incidents evokes a mixed reaction. While the officer-in-charge of Ramna Thana undertook commendable acts in carrying out his due and legitimate responsibility by way of respectfully attempting to prevent the MP from advancing toward confrontation and violence, he had to pay dearly by being closed (non-operational) in another place because his actions evidently did not please the leaders of the ruling party.

MP, surrounded by distinctly marked and notorious criminals already wanted by the police, ignored police entreaties and went forward. As soon as they came within the range of the target, the terrorists flanking on the right and left of the MP started shooting towards the BNP procession and killed three persons. The policemen on duty, instead of preventing crime and arresting the criminals, appeared to have been guarding the MP and his associates. All these

totally and destroyed their credibility altogether. This corroborated BNP's assertion that the Awami League professes something and practices something else. Such behaviour pattern of the Awami League leaders, BNP contends, is not confined only to narrating facts but also to propounding ideals and objectives of the Awami League.

One may recall that during the 173 days of hartal called by the Awami League when they were in the opposition, the BNP exercised

of terror on peaceful demonstrations of the opposition political parties. The Malibagh incident typifies Awami League's anti-democratic misdeeds.

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voiced by the opposition to the effect that the ruling party has been using law enforcing agents to break laws and to help them commit crimes.

The Prime Minister, as usual, made a public statement instructing the police to take action against those who broke laws and committed criminal acts. Ignoring her public warning, on the very following day on the 15th, a peaceful opposition demonstrator was killed by someone from an anti-hartal procession. About two years ago, another

Indo-Pak relations: No more the game of ambivalence

AMM SHAHABUDDIN

THE unexpected always happens, so goes the saying.

And it also happened in the case of two arch rivals India and Pakistan. But the tragedy is that it needed a devastating earth-quake, measuring 6.9 on Richter scale, killing about one lakh people (official estimate 30,000), rendering many more homeless, destroying properties worth billions of rupees, to force Vajpayee and Gen Musharraf to come nearer to talk on telephone. Perhaps one expressed sympathies for the huge loss of lives and properties and the other thanked him for sending relief materials for the victims. As if, angry nature physically dragged the two 'recalcitrant' fellows to check and reduce the ever-widening vacuum between them, perhaps to demonstrate that 'nature abhors vacuum'.

Desperate remedy!

"Desperate diseases always need desperate remedies," they say. And India and Pakistan are suffering from a 'desperate' political disease, which is eating into the hearts of the two nations in the form of Kashmir issue, that prevented two leaders from talking to each other for more than a year since Gen Musharraf came to power in Pakistan in October 1999. Perhaps it was a 'desperate' remedy for the benefit of the two nations, provided they learn the hard lesson and make a fresh start. The well-wishers not only of India and Pakistan, but of the entire South Asian region would earnestly hope that the 'buck' should not end with more telephone-talks between them but should be followed up with tangible results, taking, in right earnest, positive steps.

What was unthinkable had happened as two planes of Pakistan Airforce loaded with relief goods crossed into Indian air space and

flew over Indian territory to land at Ahmedabad airport without being challenged! Neither Pakistan could dream that its Air Force planes would fly over Indian territory so freely.

Sometimes facts are stranger than fictions. Just as Vajpayee had told the journalists in New Delhi, before he talked to Gen Musharraf, that "it is at times of distress that people come together and share grief." Let this coming together and sharing of grief be remembered as a great lesson for the peoples of the two countries.

gasping for breath since the sudden postponement of its annual summit scheduled to be held at Kathmandu in November 1999, simply because Vajpayee refused to sit at the summit with Gen. Musharraf. Since then much water has flown down the Ganges and the Indus and the sub-continent had faced many ups and downs. It would, therefore, be an act of great statesmanship, if Vajpayee goes one step ahead, following his much-publicised telephonic talks with Pakistan's Army ruler to make a fresh start, agreeing to attend the postponed SAARC Summit in

series on humanitarian grounds.

Some obstructionist forces seem to be at work down the line to sabotage the move for reviving Indo-Pak dialogue on a happier note. In this context, it is worth-mentioning that India's Sports Minister Uma Bharti's roaring statement came literally as a bomb-shell. Perhaps being pressed by some strong anti-Pakistan lobby, Uma Bharti made a highly inflammable statement, which ran on a different wave-length from Vajpayee's soft posture towards Musharraf, rejecting outright India's participation, saying that she stood by "Indian

exhibited many times in the past. And that is why Pakistan's former captain Wasim Akram, in a recent statement regretting India's refusal to play with Pakistan, said: "I know the fans love India-Pakistan ties ... but they are starved due to politics which should not be mingled with the game." It is the high expectation of all Indo-Pak cricket lovers that 'politics' and 'cricket' should be allowed to make their 'runs', not on a single collision course, but on parallel lines. In the long run, they may become complimentary to each other.

run into the third month. Pakistan in response had withdrawn part of its soldiers deployed along the LOC (Line of Control). Now India demands stoppage of cross-border terrorism while Pakistan demands immediate stoppage of 'atrocities' by Indian forces on the innocent Kashmiris. There will be no end to such 'war of words' unless they sit and talk to find ways and means to defuse the increasing tension in the region. It is a hard fact that Kashmir as the bone of contention had been pricking in the throats of both India and Pakistan and causing a continuing pain in their necks.

Vajpayee, therefore, should not stop where he had opened the door with telephonic talks with his 'adversary' Gen Musharraf, nor should he allow any 'evil force' to come in his way to foil his mission for peace and stability in the South Asian region. Voicing her concern that the danger of a nuclear conflict between India and Pakistan poses a threat to the security and stability of South Asia, PM Sheikh Hasina urged world leaders to help reduce the tensions gripping the Sub-continent. So there is good will all around to inspire the two hesitant nations.

I would like to conclude here quoting from a statement made recently by a noted Pakistani human rights activist Asma Jahangir at a function in Dhaka: "It is time to fight not against each other (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh), but together as South Asian. ... If India and Pakistan fight each other, we will present two faces. We need to present a common face to the world." Will that 'one face' ever emerge out of the debris of devastating earthquake? Let not our proverbial 'bread' fall again on the 'battered side'.

AMM Shahabuddin is a retired UN official.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Ruling party misdeeds

It's ridiculous! The Prime Minister has been defending one of her party members in Feni who is widely accused of terrorism, another of her colleagues in parliament has let loose his armed goons on the street of Dhaka to attack an opposition procession. But despite all these, the Prime Minister and the government are not embarrassed!

About Jinal Hazari, the Prime Minister repeatedly said "clapping is impossible with one hand." Well, by her own words she has pointed that there must be two hands. One of these belongs to a ruling party MP. The Prime Minister has admitted the involvement of her party colleague in terrorism at Feni, but she is totally reluctant to take action against him and his terrorist group. Four innocent people were killed in Tuesday's hartal in Dhaka and people once again found an MP of the ruling party, Dr HBM Iqbal, involved in the incident. Photographs published in newspapers including The Daily Star clearly showed this. But despite this crystal clear evidence, the government or the ruling party did not think it wise to take action against that MP and the men.

The government is supposed to protect the people. Instead, the government itself emerged as killer! A government, which was elected through people's vote, has not only failed to protect citizens but also lost minimum sense of responsibility. It's really painful for the citizens who voted Awami League to power after long 21 years.

Ziaul Haq
Dhanmondi Road No-3, Dhaka

State protection to MP

The definition of fascism is that of system in which the forces of the State are put at the disposition of a particular political party instead of serving the people as a whole. In this light the incident which took place on February 13th seems to indicate that Bangladesh today is fully in the grip of a fascist outlook. All the elements are present. The political party in this case was the Awami League, represented by its MP HM Iqbal under whose command, well-known thugs of the city shot and killed four people. All this took place while blue-uniformed policemen provided armed cover to the perpetrators.

The organs of the State, instead of carrying out their institutional duties, which would have meant arresting the criminals at sight, obligingly served the narrow partisan interests of the ruling party. This represents dereliction of duty on the part of the police officials present and their superiors. The Prime Minister is supposed to uphold the interests of the nations as a whole, prime among which is the preservation of law and order. If she does not immediately take action to discipline the police she will herself be guilty of violating the oath of office she took when she was appointed Prime Minister of Bangladesh.

Dissatisfied Citizen
Dhaka

PHOTORIAL

Readers are invited to send in exclusive pictures, colour or black and white, of editorial value, with all relevant information including date, place and significance of subject matter. Pictures received will not be returned.

No consideration!



STAR PHOTO: A K M MOHSIN

Civic courtesy is missing, and so is the DCC. No one cares about garbage dumped on the road. It will probably lie there indefinitely, sending out a stench and polluting the air. This aberration was found in the Teigaona area, but hundreds of similar dumps are found littered around Dhaka. What will it take for the Dhaka City Corporation to respond to the city's needs?

Stop illegal buildings

As residents of Dhanmondi Road No13 and 14, we were very pleased to see your report (January, 20) on illegal construction in this area. Those responsible in Rajuk and in the developers firms should be severely punished. To safeguard local residents from a hazardous environment, immediate action should be taken to stop illegal construction and demolish all illegal buildings. You reported that "Rajuk's authorised officer S M Asaduzzaman and other officials expressed concern over creation of a high-rise 'enclave' in Dhanmondi. They said they have stopped approving any building plan above six story."

The fact is that at this very moment a construction firm is building more high-rises in this area and has already started earth and foundation work. We request you to continue to pursue this issue. Residents of Rds 13 and 14 Dhanmondi, Dhaka.

Is this democracy?

Homicide reports have become common. Human security is threatened so deeply that even political congregations are not safe. There is no record of bomb attacks on political meetings in the past, but it has become almost normal now. It speaks of the great failure of the government. We read about the leaders and their proud sons being involved in all kinds of criminal activities, but justice is not done.

The Public Security Act is only applied against opponents of the government. Hartals called by opposition are made more ferocious by anti-hartal movements. Except some who are stone-blind, everybody knows the facts but all cannot express themselves. City life has become so dangerous that we are afraid of going outside. We want a fair and square government.

Saifullah
BUET, Dhaka

Botch up of city traffic

I thank the author of 'Much ado about nothing' on the back page (January 29). Instead of widening and modernising the roads the authorities are narrowing them with unnecessary barriers. The side lane is now being used as a parking lot for rickshaws, vans and cars and in some places for piling construction materials and garbage.

At traffic lights the roads must be straight or follow a gentle curve. But intersections have become dangerous because the island is jutting out in front of vehicles. Vehicles in the right lane are forced to stand still right in middle of the intersection, creating impossible traffic jams!

As the owner and driver of a car may I appeal to the authorities concerned to rectify the road junctions at Mirpur Road and to make proper use of the separate rickshaw lanes in Satmasjid and other roads.

Prof Abdulla A Haroon
Mohammadpur, Dhaka.