

## Law of lawlessness

Rein in kith and kin of ministers

HEY say nobody is above the law. They also say whoever breaks the law, no matter how powerful he or she is, the person will be sternly dealt with. Unfortunately, these are all part of their pompous and essentially populist rhetoric. In reality, it is their sons and other family members who break the law with disdainful regularity. The Prime Minister knows it and has occasionally reprimanded the same in public but it goes on. One doesn't have to look back that far. In fact, on Monday alone, two such incidents took place -- one here in the capital and the other away in Rangpur. One, son of a state minister who has hogged headlines on several occasions for his predilection to flouting rules and regulations, pulled out a weapon and threatened to shoot a retired colonel for having the temerity to give him a sermon on discipline at the DOHS. The other, nephew of another state minister, landed a nose-cracking blow on an invigilator who dared question cheating at an HSC examination centre in Rangpur's Mithapukur area.

The acts of Dipu Chowdhury, son of the state minister for shipping, and Lemon, nephew of the state minister for environment and forest, reflect their deep-rooted conviction that the law of the land does not apply to them, no matter how grievous the crimes they commit are. They appear quite justified in their belief, because so far the law has only limped in its bid to catch up with them. Dipu, in particular, has simply trampled law and people's rights under his feet with impunity. From alleged land grabbing to toll collection, from intimidation to involvement in murder, the list of his misdeeds gets longer everyday. Why not? His father is after all a state minister and a ruling party stalwart. As Dipu goes on breaking one law after another, sons and relatives of other ministers and ruling party leaders grow in confidence. Lemon, a hitherto unheard name, is a case in point here.

Frighteningly, the bandwagon does not stop there. It only gains feverish momentum, with kith and kin of everybody who is anybody in the ruling circle joining in, until the law of lawlessness comes to prevail. Sadly, the administration looks the other way. They shouldn't though, if not for the anarchy such a trend can lead the country to, then for the sake of their own credibility.

## Economic diplomacy needs revamping

Performance far from satisfactory

THE pursuit of export expansion by your missions overseas has fallen by the wayside. Although the government has repeatedly propounded the aim of boosting our export earnings through 'economic' diplomacy, the venture is yet to take off. According to figures obtained from the central bank and quoted in the *Financial Express* daily of May 12<sup>th</sup>, exports have increased overall, but little thanks to the diplomatic missions with economic wings for that.

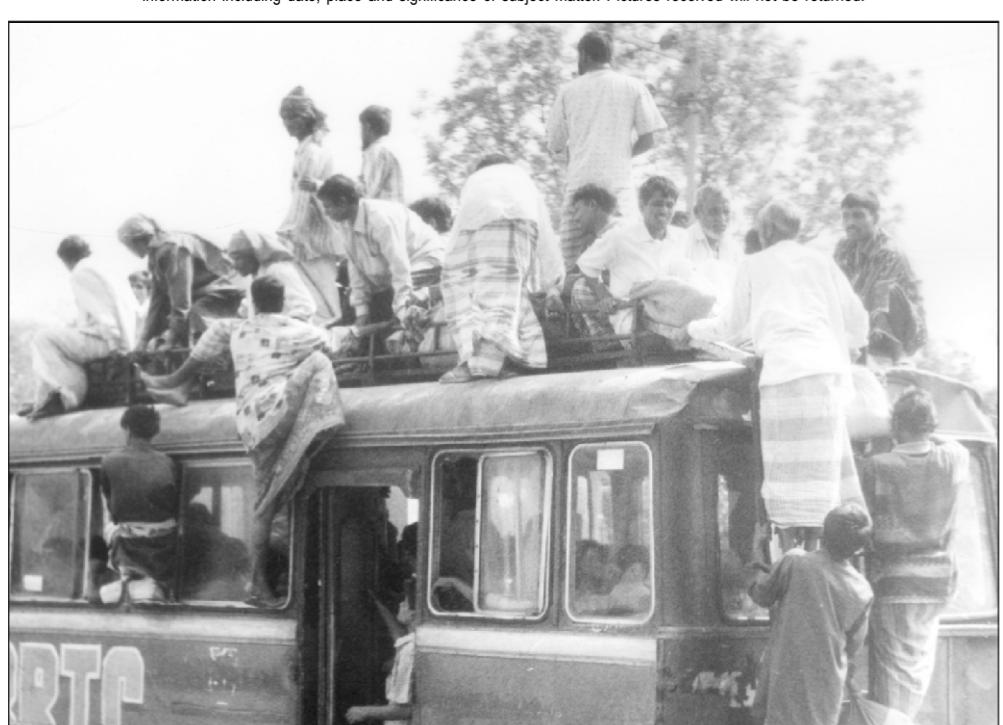
Exports have actually fallen to those countries where our foreign missions have been bolstered with commercial sections, mandated to improve our economic performance overseas. For example, in Russia, exports have declined by more than \$10 million, compared to ten years ago. In Sri Lanka exports have fallen from \$10.28 million in 1990-1991 to a feeble \$3.58 in 1999-2000. The emphasis on economic diplomacy notwithstanding, the declining trend could not be stemmed, so it appears.

We would like to know why these and some other commercial wings have failed to achieve their objectives? Were they given any targets to achieve or did they set themselves any target? To our understanding, plans to adequately equip our commercial sections with computer-based links with key ports of information appear to have been nothing but empty promises. At the same time, initiatives to streamline operational arrangements between the Foreign Office and various concerned ministries and departments whose officers form the commercial wings, have been sketchy.

It is time the government backed up its rhetoric with action. It must provide adequate infra-structural support, and establish clearly defined channels of operation and responsibility for the commercial wings. Our total export earning figure now stands at \$5952 million, up from \$1717 ten years ago. We would like to caution the government against becoming complacent because credit for this achievement largely goes to the private sector. Our overall volume of earnings would have been even more substantial if the diplomatic missions had put their shoulders to the wheel under appropriate guidance from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

## 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.



STAR PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

### Risky business

Breaking rules and regulations has become a national habit. This bus is overcrowded inside, but that is not the only reason passengers clamber to the rooftop. They like riding in the open, even if it is risky. Accidents can and have happened. Commuters have been flung and injured or killed. Let us stop these dangerous practices. Why is the public transport system still so glaringly inadequate?

## Indo-Bangladesh relations at crossroads



DILARA CHOUDHURY

Inception of the country "India Factor" lied heavily on the foreign policy makers of Bangladesh, which has been evidenced by its constant endeavours to improve relations with New Delhi. But India's gestures were neither conciliatory nor reciprocal. Its policies basically have been either to punish or reward Dhaka according to its perceived attitudes of the Bangladesh government towards its big neighbour. Change of government in 1975 made New Delhi keep a stiff posture

between the governments of India and Bangladesh even though most bilateral irritants like border problems, demarcation of maritime boundary, huge trade imbalance etc. continued to bedevil the relations. What was discerned is that even during Awami League rule New Delhi was not prepared to the walk an extra mile in order to alleviate Bangladesh's concerns. This was glaringly demonstrated when, during the secretary-level talks on trade held in Dhaka, New Delhi

secret deal between the governments of India and Bangladesh in order to influence the outcome of their respective elections. However, one is not really sure about why the border clashes of such magnitude took place. But it is admitted that the recent border clashes are unique in the sense that it may be an enmeshing of military factor with that of the political one. Indeed it is very disturbing if the events were allegedly influenced by the domestic factors. However, the domestic factor alleg-

ed should not expect equality with its smaller neighbors. It should be more benign, more considerate, and more willing to make room to accommodate a neighbour's legitimate hopes and aspirations. The process can begin by taking quick steps in resolving the border issues by implementing Mujib-Indira border treaty of 1974 and removing other outstanding irritants.

Second, there have been a lot of

ill feelings and misgivings among the peoples of both countries.

alleged meddling into the internal political situation of Bangladesh. Its relations with Bangladesh should not depend on change of regime. India's attempt in going 'soft' on Sheikh Hasina by isolating the "rogues" that included not only the Director General of BDR but five other Major Generals of regular armed forces allegedly influenced by the Opposition BNP for engineering Padua incident is an indication of New Delhi's preference for Sheikh Hasina's government. The point here is why should an external power have preferential treatment for any particular political party? It should not have any problems to deal with whoever comes to power through a free and fair election.

Fifth, India must accept that Bangladesh is sovereign country. It may have a different worldview but that does not necessarily mean that it is acting against India. And India must appreciate that upholding our national interest does not necessarily mean being anti-Indian.

Lastly, Indo-Bangladesh relations, at present, are at a critical crossroads. Due to the border problems both sides reacted, India sharply and negatively, while Bangladesh mostly showing its determination in upholding its national sovereignty but at the same time pointing out to India of its disliking of New Delhi's use of the outstanding disputes as political levers on Bangladesh. Subsequently, New Delhi calmed down and began looking into the incidents from a different perspective. Bangladesh, in the past, on numerous occasions demonstrated its willingness to cooperate with India. It is now India's turn to show its desire to do the same and realize that cooperation between them is an imperative for the peace and stability of the region. India-Bangladesh relations have never before stood on such momentous crossroads.

## PANORAMA

Bangladesh, in the past, on numerous occasions demonstrated its willingness to cooperate with India. It is now India's turn to show its desire to do the same and realize that cooperation between them is an imperative for the peace and stability of the region. India-Bangladesh relations have never before stood on such momentous crossroads.

towards Bangladesh (till the present government came to power in 1996) in the form of unilateral withdrawal of water from the Ganges and its indulgence to the *pahari* insurgency in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). It is sad and tragic that Bangladesh's consistent attempts, since its inception, to maintain good relations were not, with a brief respite during Janata interlude (1977-80), reciprocated by India. Gestures of goodwill like agreeing to let Farakka be operational without a permanent water sharing agreement and return of South Beruberi (an Indian enclave located in Bangladesh territory) within three months of the signing of Mujib-Indira Border Treaty, were perhaps considered by India as weakness on Bangladesh's part, and even during euphoric Indo-Bangladesh relations during Mujib era New Delhi's attitude was that of indifference to Dhaka's needs. However, with the return of Awami League to power in 1996, it 'softened' its attitude as evidenced by a 30-year water sharing treaty and distancing itself from CHT insurgents that culminated into CHT peace treaty of 1997. There were, as such, visible signs of warmth

asked it to 'sell transit and port facilities' in order to correct the trade imbalance while not giving any assurances for the measures which were really going to promote economic co-operation and reduce the trade imbalance like 'zero-tariff', removal of existing non-tariff barrier or setting up of joint venture industries on buy-back basis. This tendency of *quid pro quo* by Indian policy-makers in an overtly asymmetrical unequal situation is at the root of India's fragility in relations with its neighbours.

But despite such irritants no one expected such violent Indo-Bangladesh border skirmishes during April 16-18, in which as many as sixteen members of Indian Border Security Force (BSF) lay dead in Bangladesh territory of Rourmari in Kurigram district. There were casualties on Bangladesh side as well. Three Bangladesh Rifles personnel got killed in this tragic happening. The incident generated a sense of disbelief and bewilderment. How could this happen between two friendly countries?

As usual the air is rife with numerous conspiracy theories. They range from local adventurism to a

edly came to play, because of the ground realities that remained a nagging irritation mostly for the Bangladesh side. The constant intrusions by BSF into Bangladesh territory, firing across the border, abduction of civilians of the border areas are somewhat a regular phenomenon. The straw that broke the camel's back was a provoking act of the BSF who were, defying the international law, constructing a road with 30 yards of no-man's land in Padua, a Bangladeshi enclave which has been in India's adverse possession for thirty years.

There is no doubt that the border incidents have done incalculable harm to existing Indo-Bangladesh relations. It has been fractured badly but hopefully not beyond repair. Let us examine the impacts of the recent developments on Indo-Bangladesh relations and the measures needed in order to have an effective damage control.

First, India being the pivotal country should evaluate its long-term policies towards its smaller neighbours. It may seriously consider the application of Gujral Doctrine, which propagated that India by dint of its bigness in every respect

Though the Indian press eventually calmed down but its initial rhetoric about Bangladeshis being ungrateful for not remembering its help during the liberation war of 1971 would continue to haunt the people of Bangladesh for quite some time. It should be noted by New Delhi that the people of Bangladesh do remember India's help, but that does not mean they are prepared to make compromise on the questions of political independence and sovereignty. In the same vein, New Delhi's expectation of Bangladesh taking actions to 'punish the people responsible for the incidents in Rourmari' defies all logic. Defending national territory is an act of patriotism. It has nothing to do with gratefulness. New Delhi would have done exactly the same if BDR personnel intruded into Indian territory. Moreover, isn't it an internal matter for Bangladesh, for arguments sake, even if there was a breakdown of chain of command with BDR? Such mentality on New Delhi's part would only breed more mistrust and suspicion rather than promoting good feelings.

Third, New Delhi should stop its

## Powell-Sattar meet: Not much to be gained by Pakistan



M.J. ZAHEDI

ALTHOUGH no date has yet been announced for Pakistan Foreign Minister Mr Abdus Sattar's visit to Washington, the local Press has been speculating on the purpose of it. For this visit will not be the usual one that a Pakistani foreign minister makes to the US capital which is usually at the initiative of the Pakistani side. This visit will be different because it will be made at the invitation of the hosts' side.

The two sides have several problem areas in their long relations, which on the whole have always been cordial and generally problem-free. To try to sort these out through bilateral talks surely is commendable and may act as a welcome example to others.

The problem-areas in Pakistan-US mutual relations are (looked at from Islamabad's point of view): Washington's illogical attitude, rather postures, vis-a-vis Afghanistan, Osama bin Laden, international terrorism, and the

emerging India-US strategic partnership.

Washington, however, should appreciate the change of attitudes in Pakistan that have taken place over the years. Of course, it must be admitted that Washington is now more 'educated' on these issues. Pakistan needs to be business-like in its attitude towards many issues, especially relating to USA because the country is reliant on international finances.

Moreover Pakistan must prepare for the talks against the backdrop of

Korea, from Bosnia Herzegovina to Serbia and Kosovo, from Saudi Arabia to Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and Turkey, from Diego Garcia to Spain, Portugal and Greece. Then there are smaller US troop commitments in Kenya, Ethiopia, Yemen, Uganda, Russia and other countries that once comprised the Soviet Union.

To aid it in its policeman's role, Washington has two key pillars, viz. Israel, of course an old ally, and India, the latest one. Mr Powell

described this latest ally as a coun-

peril.

Perhaps that is why Washington has not uttered a single word of criticism or protest on the massive weapons spree the Indians are on, from Israel and Russia. On its part, India has been in a haste to support the US ballistic missile and defence programmes.

All in all, the US is on its way into forging a close strategic relationship with India. India naturally is seeking to ensure that the regional milieu is settled within parameters accept-

able to it. This means a resolution of the Kashmir issue outside the principle of self-determination. It also means, according to the head of the Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad, pressure on Pakistan to accept Indian conditionality for regional cooperation. In addition, the US now seems to be presenting states with 'either or' choices. Its perceived notion of isolation is allowing its allies to use force where it suits US interests, like in Palestine where Israelis are massacring Palestinians. It is nothing but a ploy

quote Pakistan's strategic experts again, "today it is US resolutions on Kashmir, tomorrow it will be US resolutions on Palestine that may be regarded as redundant".

Definitely, the approach is aggressive and the US is not going to show much concern for international public opinion that does not conform to its own objectives and perceptions. At the same time, the world is gradually becoming resentful of the US attitude towards issues confronting the world at large. Pakistan, too, experts here feel,

needs to reflect soberly on the Powell invitation. For, there is little doubt that the reason for it is to put forward US expectations and demands. In other words, experts here feel, there will not be much to be gained by Pakistan from this meeting. The US is more concerned about a hasty resolution of the Kashmir conflict so as to relieve India of this regional burden.

Observers here think that at the Powell-Sattar meeting the former may ask Pakistan to help ensure a cessation of Mujahideen activities in Kashmir, to renounce its position of being an integral party to the issue, to let India negotiate alone with the Kashmiris, to accept India's selective acceptance of the APHC and to observe sanctity of the LOC, rather a post-Sachin violated LOC. On Afghanistan and related matters, the US will expect Pakistan to toe a line that will help US interest only, ignoring Afghans' interests.

All in all, the line at the projected Powell-Sattar meeting will be unilateral. Perhaps that is why foreign policy experts in Pakistan suggest that Pakistan should adopt a realistic attitude and not get carried away at being invited by Mr Powell for a meeting. They are of the view that there is no reason to rush to Washington the moment a US official beckons...Timings and reactions play an important role in

International relations.

significant developments in the regional and global context. One, US militarisation policy. It is at its peak at the moment. During the Clinton administration America deployed more US forces to more foreign countries than before. There are now said to be more than 200,000 American service personnel stationed in 139 countries around the world. And another 26,000 serving on naval vessels in foreign waters. The range of countries is wide: from Germany to Italy, Netherlands, Belgium, Iceland and the UK, from Japan to South

real problems like education, employment etc. As for the Indian government, it should address the concerns of Bangladesh and both the countries should stick to the Indira-Mujib accord to solve the border crisis. Bangladesh should check the illegal infiltration or at least allow India to erect an electric fence along Indo-Bangladesh border to check illegal immigrants. No matter how much the Bangladeshis deny the illegal infiltration issue, it is true and real. It has been reported that there are at least 12 million illegal Bangladeshis in India. Bangladesh should understand that this is a serious issue threatening to change the demography of India especially of the border areas in Assam and West Bengal.

The root cause for all the misconceptions about India is that the foreign policies of all the SAARC countries including Bangladesh are India-centric. And there are some political outfit in Pakistan, Bangladesh and even in Nepal which want to gain mileage by generating strong anti-India feelings in their citizens. Those who are influenced by such leaders should realise that India is in no way responsible for their ills and should understand the designs of those political leaders who try to divert their attention from

Rama Murty  
India, on e-mail

We often read that millions of

## EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



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#### Democracy in Bangladesh

Readers would find consolation and confirmation in the able analysis by M Abdul Hafiz (April 16) on the precarious political situation created in Bangladesh by the political leadership as a whole. How can politics work without the opposition? It is a safety valve and a monitoring and correcting mechanism for the good of the people, if properly run.

It is amazing to hear ministers, especially the prime minister and the home minister, offering instant hypotheses about the group identification of the criminals of the public bombing, without waiting for the official probe reports. So far, the government has utterly failed to solve any of these bombings. People have the right to rest and recreation, with or without the presence of the politicians. The latter's image is doomed, and people are waiting for an alternative solution, at least for the next few years.

A Hopeless Citizen  
Dhaka

Wrong perspective

I have read many letters from Bangladeshis criticising India and the Indians for the so-called 'big brother attitude', 'Indian arrogance' etc. I would like to state that this is rather an ill-conceived perception on the part of the Bangladeshis.

The Indians don't have any kind of hatred against Bangladeshis or any intention to grab their territory. If they had such intention then why did they help Bangladesh in 1971? The Indian army could have easily retained some parts of Bangladesh occupied from the Pakistani forces in 1971. Instead, the Indian forces withdrew respectfully even after losing thousands of their men.

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You sacrifice a considerable portion to publish share market reporting, but not any analytical report showing performances of Public Limited Companies (PLC).

We often read that millions of

taka has been earned during the present government by all the banks. But City Bank, United Commercial Bank, Pubali Bank, Rupali Bank and even National Bank continue to fail to give dividends for years and still you never report this part of the story.

One has to pay interest in case of bank loan and banks also pay interest on deposits, but the shareholders do not get any dividend for years.

While the prime minister and the finance minister often praise the performance of the financial sector, such a poor show is really frustrating!