

Society's victims

Children born in brothels must be helped to move out of it

CHILDREN born in brothels are not in the mainstream of our life, nor have they ever been treated as having the right to lead a normal life. Yet, what we cannot ignore is their presence in great numbers in the brothels across the country.

Those children are growing up, but most of them will be unable to come out of what is generally believed to be a wretched existence, with little promise. The girls are usually forced to accept the profession of their mothers, and the boys are left with the equally abominable option of becoming criminals. True, there are some NGOs which are working with the objective of liberating the brothel children. But it is also true that the progress that they have made so far is not very encouraging. Brothel children are still steeped in the same darkness that befell them when they were born to their socially ostracised mothers.

The task of creating the right kind of social conditions where these children will have the opportunity to grow up as worthy citizens is indeed a difficult one. The social stigma against prostitutes is so strong that it is not easy to say when our society will finally be able to come to terms with the universally accepted truth, that those women are no less sinned against than sinning. Many of them were victims of circumstances, but even their children are now caught in a situation which is tragic, to say the least. Nevertheless, the government, and all other agencies working for the collective good of the under-privileged people, should extend support to the NGOs working in this particular area.

To begin with, the little boys and girls must be sent to school, and arrangements should also be made to impart vocational training to them, so that they can find a way of leading a reasonably decent life in future. The decision-makers should never lose sight of our ultimate goal: total integration of the poor children into our national life. So the ideas that sound discriminatory like separate schools and other facilities should be discarded as far as possible. It is essentially a question of dealing with a humanitarian problem; so the principles of social justice and equality must be upheld.

Evicting Buriganga encroachers

Both political and financial influence peddlers must be kept at bay

WE congratulate the government for its commendable decision to evict all encroachers of the river Buriganga to ensure its natural flow and navigability and that's also 'within a very short period.' It was high time the government took firm action against those illegal occupiers on the riverside who took possession of those lands through corrupt means and was responsible for environmental damage.

We fully support the decision taken by the Task Force in its first ever meeting, but such a decision also needs to be implemented as quickly as possible. We know that restoring Buriganga riverside to its lost glory within a short time is not going to be an easy job, but at least there seems to be a beginning in that direction.

In the past we had seen some of the efforts turned out partly successful. For example during the last caretaker government's regime, the authority showed enough courage and determination in evicting many encroachers, even though some of them had political clout. But unfortunately there has been no follow up on that since an elected government assumed power last year. We would expect similar attitude would not be evident while evicting the rest.

It is only natural for the officials to feel under pressure while trying to evict the politically influential encroachers, but seeing the government's determination, we can only hope that the officials would be able to carry out their jobs without any hindrance.

The process of eviction was also hampered because of legal entanglements, therefore the concerned department should be able to play a more effective role in the future while dealing with such unwarranted legal matters. The Task Force has also identified and made a list of encroachers on the riverside lands - we would appeal to the authority to evict all of them without showing any mercy.

No matter how unfortunate it may sound, but the fact remains that there are some government bodies as well in that list of encroachers. They should give up their possession of those lands and lead the way for others to do the same. At the same time, the expertise of the Task Force should be utilised more in the efforts to regain the historical beauty of the riverside as well as restoring the environmental balance.

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

FORMER French President Giscard D'Estaing has dismissed Turkish aspiration for EU membership. The man shaping the constitution of the European Union told *Le Monde* early this month that Turkish inclusion in the EU would spell the end of Europe. He argued that Turkish capital was not in Europe; ninety five per cent of its people lived outside Europe; and Turkey was "not a European country". He labeled people backing Turkish membership of the EU as "adversaries of the European Union". A spokesman of the European Commission immediately rejected Giscard D'Estaing's remarks on Turkey and emphasized that Turkish membership would not mean the end of European Union. Recep Erdogan whose political party won two third seats (himself barred from participating in the elections) in the recently held polls played down Giscard D'Estaing's remarks and pointed out Turkey's membership of the Council of Europe, OECD and NATO. He is scheduled to visit Greece on 18th November where the two countries are expected to call on EU to set a date for the start of the accession talks at the Copenhagen Summit in mid-December.

Turkish efforts to gain the membership of the EU have been an uphill task from the very beginning. Though at a point of time in history Turkey was known as the "sick man of Europe" and at other stages of history (particularly during the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent) the Ottoman Empire extended into the heartland of Europe and prevailed

over the Europeans for centuries, yet Turkey's total acceptance as European was at best a proposition accepted hesitatingly and at worst totally nullified. Eternal conflict between the two great religions Islam and Christianity played significant role in creating this chasm in geographical Europe. This conflictual trend is still evident today in the split personality of Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Kosovo. Even if one were to accept the European Union Guidelines for Recognition of December 1991 regarding East European countries

blood in its population. Only Teutons can sit on the throne of Europe". Chamberlain was preceded by French diplomat and social philosopher Comte de Gobineau (1816-1882) whose *Essay on Inequality of Human Races* stated that Aryan or White race was superior to all other races a philosophical justification of Nazi racism. Indeed the allied victory in the Second World War put in the final seal of repugnance and rejection of the racial superiority theory, a rejection further emphasized by the multi-culturalism embraced by modern day Europe.

mutated capital. Therefore if EU is not to be regarded as a Christian club and Turkey's cultural and geographical asymmetry is not incompatible with European values then Giscard D'Estaing's remarks need full scrutiny and justifiable rejection.

Luxembourg European Council of December 1997 decided on EU enlargement for "finally putting an end to the division of the past" and as "pledge of future stability and prosperity" of the whole European continent. The Luxembourg Council confirmed "Turkey's eligibility for

Turkey's progress in the pre-accession strategy with particular attention to legislative changes and to Turkey's administrative capacity to bring itself in line with other European countries. The European Commission noted Turkey's abolition of death penalty and broader rights given to the minority communities. The reforms were considered "promising for the future" and demonstrative of the will of the Turkish political system to make progress in areas hitherto considered as "highly sensitive". Resolution of the Cyprus issue remains a stumbling block in

values and standard of the European Union in all fields.

In the face of EU's continued public utterances reiterating its intent to accept Turkey within its fold, the dissonant note struck by Giscard D'Estaing is not easily understood. Could it be reflective of the Western world's suspicion of every thing Islamic in view of September eleven and Bali massacre; of EU's latent fear that Turkey with its huge Muslim population would have a destabilizing effect on mainly Christian European culture; inevitable Turkish migration into EU15 with attendant socio-cultural anomalies (e.g. religious conservatism displayed by Turkish girls/women in Germany to the utter consternation of the German society); or is it European revenge of its centuries long subjugation by the Ottoman Empire? Are Christian and Muslim worlds so different that one has to give meaning to words like "conspiracy" beyond what is credible in the Princes Diana-Dodi al Fayed episode and Helmut Kohl's son's marriage to a Turkish lady after Kohl's defeat in the polls? In today's world of libertarian values and spatial shrinkage due to the inexorable pressure of globalization it is almost heretic to give credence to scandal sheet journalism and to a belief that inter-religious conflicts cannot be resolved through responsible dialogue. One would, therefore, like to believe that Giscard D'Estaing's remarks on Turkey was a faux pas; a cry in wilderness without any resonance in any part of Europe.

The writer is a retired Secretary to the Bangladesh government and former ambassador.

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particularly in view of Yugoslav intractability relating to Kosovo which can never again be a part of Yugoslavia given its history of genocidal terror at the hands of the Serbs; one is intrigued at the self-exclusion of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Albania (both peopled predominantly by Muslims) from the Organization of Islamic Conference.

One is left wondering as in Christian Europe Turkey is an incongruity lending credence to Anglo-German writer Houston Stewart Chamberlain's theory of superiority of Teutonic or Aryan stock advanced in his book *Foundation of the Nineteenth Century*. He wrote in 1899 "the importance of each nation as a living power today is dependent upon the proportion of Teutonic

Quirk phenomenon of Jorge Haider and Jean Marie le Penn are aberrations or unthought out knee jerk responses by a part of the people to stake their aboriginal claim on the benefits of modern technological developments regardless of their eligibility for such claims. After all a Europe largely run on the basis of meritocracy where the colour of skin or ethnicity is not always a disadvantage given the fact that all societies are run by people and not by saints. It is all the more true in today's world of accretive and accumulative capitalism (even President Jiang Zemin called upon the Chinese to open the door to the capitalists) that those who contribute to the accretion process is prized more than those who subtract from the accu-

accession to the European Union. Turkey will be judged on the basis of same criteria as the other applicants while the political and economic conditions allowing accession negotiations to be envisaged are not satisfied, the European Council consider that it is nevertheless important for a strategy to be drawn up to prepare Turkey for accession by bringing it closer to the European Union in every field". The Saville European Council of June this year concluded that "new decisions could be taken in Copenhagen (European Council meeting in December) on the next stage of Turkey's candidature". Early last month the European Commission in its 2002 Regular Report made a detailed analysis of

the EU-Turkey negotiations. The European Commission particularly urged Turkey to "lend full support to the efforts of the United Nations to achieve a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem this year". EU also remains to be convinced of the civilian control of Turkish army and remains concerned over the major role played by the army in political life through the National Security Council; persistent human rights violations; Turkish commitment to peaceful solution of disputes according to international law; disbarment of the leader of the political party which just won two thirds majority in Parliament from participating in the polls etc. In short EU would like to see further Turkish alignment with the

The fog of democracy



IKRAM SEHGAL writes from Karachi

much-maligned 1973 Constitution of Pakistan, duly abridged, will stand restored.

Since none of the political parties got a clear mandate, the GNA was always slotted to be part of viz (1) a national consensus government of all the major political parties, (2) a coalition government either with PPP-P or the MMA, or most unlikely (3) sit in strong opposition to a PPP-P-MMA coalition. GNA could also easily form a government even if 10-15 members of PPP-P and/or PML

cess got politically out-manipulated! With players of her calibre in the democratic market and with the stakes so high, the dialogue to come to a solution was wrongly diagnosed as a political deadlock of Gordian-knot proportions. That concerted discussions took place in earnest before the enactment of the NA Session prevented democracy from being stillborn at re-birth; that would have been a disaster. In many democracies of the world, coalition governments consisting of many

Benzir's government, and then after the repeal by the subsequent PM Mian Nawaz Sharif when Leghari was forced by circumstances to resign as President). The President needs to have adequate powers so that he is not a Tarar-like rubber stamp and the so-called democratic mandate is not transferred into an elected dictatorship. By the mode and conduct of his governance over the past three years, Pervez Musharraf has shown that he is adequately qualified to be an effec-

compared to one in Russian routine. The NSC is somewhat of a shock absorber. One can change the composition of the NSC so that it is more "civilianized" by maybe deleting two of the Service Chiefs, the Chief of Air Staff and the Chief of Naval Staff. As for Article 52(2b), it should never have been revoked, simply re-worded pragmatically. Instead of the draconian extreme of dissolving the Assemblies by punishing the PM and his Cabinet for whatever indiscretions, only the PM

become infructuous. Why do we need constitutional monarchs? The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) should also directly report to the President, accountability has been one of the major success stories of the Musharraf regime. The acid test of the new democratic regime will be in its attitude towards NAB, whether it enhances its powers and reach (eg to include the superior judiciary and the Armed Forces) or whether it curbs its effectiveness and thus consigns NAB's successes to the dustbin of history. If such a thing should happen without the cover of NSC and Article 52 (2b), politicians may well live to regret the omission.

PML (Q) will lead the GNA into a coalition government with or without the MMA. The MMA stance on the LFO issues are too demanding for the supporters of the Musharraf regime to accept as it would virtually Tarar-ize Gen Musharraf, and that is one thing he will certainly not let happen. With the help of "rebel" votes from the PPP-P and PML (N), the GNA cannot only easily form the Government, they will have a useful enough majority in the Centre. The MMA have gambled by demanding too much and if they strike out, they will have lost out big. Not only will they lose the NA Speaker's slot, they will be confined only to government formation in NWFP, certainly not in Balochistan. Unfortunately because they tried to be more clever than others, the PPP-P is the biggest loser of Elections 2002. They stand to lose out in Sindh where they should make a government, having the largest number of seats, but most probably will not. As opposed to the "fog of war", who says that we will not have surprises emerging from the dissipating "fog of democracy"?

Ikram Sehgal, a former Major of Pakistan Army, is a political analyst and columnist.

AS I SEE IT

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(N) deserted their party whip to vote their "conscience". Late night on Thursday Nov 14, the cracks in PPP-P appeared publicly. The sticking point for all the major political parties is the Legal Framework Order (LFO) giving cover to the 29 constitutional amendments (on 21 of which the political parties are reconciled) made by the President on the recommendations of the National Reconstruction Bureau (NRB). To ensure literally a witch's brew of confusion, master-politician Ms Benazir Bhutto threw the PM-ambitions of JUI (F) leader Maulana Fazlur Rahman as a spanner into the political works. In direct support, she also resuscitated (literally) from the dead, wizened old perennial leader of the opposition (for opposition's sake) ARD chief Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan. But others can play the same political game and the lady outsmarted herself and in the pro-

parties big and small are the fashion rather than a rarity, the latest ones being in France and Germany, major stakeholders of the European Union (EU).

Before coming to agreement on the formation of any government, the GNA and MMA tried to thrash out the issues in the LFO that separate them, namely (1) the National Security Council and/or its composition, (2) the retaining of Article 52(2) (b) or rewording of it thereof, (3) the retaining of the COAS post by the President and (4) the continuance of the President or the ratification of his office by majority vote of Parliament. The grey area really is of the President's continuation in office and delineation of his powers thereof. Given the history of weak Presidents having no powers (remember Farooq Leghari before the repealing of Article 52(2) (b) when he dissolved the NA and sacked Ms

Head of State provided he has the requisite powers, he is simply not cut out to be a figurehead.

Third World countries with low literacy and high democratic aspirations like Pakistan need a National Security Council (NSC) that can debate crisis of various mode and proportion at a responsible forum before the crisis crosses the democratic "fail-safe line" into military autocracy. It would be disaster not to have the NSC safety-valve, the next martial law may not be as benevolent to politicians as Pervez Musharraf has been. And believe me, those who think bloody martial laws are not possible in Pakistan better rid themselves of this gross misconception, even if the next martial law is not bloody it will hardly be as benign as the present rule. Removing the checks and balances will be like playing Pakistani roulette, five rounds in the chamber

and his Cabinet should be dismissed and the matter referred automatically to the SC for adjudication within a specific time period. The punishment should fit the crime, collective punishment for all is no solution. After all why should the opposition suffer for the government's excesses?

The President would certainly not retain the post of COAS in normal circumstances but he will be forced to resort to this anomaly in the absence of the NSC and a suitably worded Article 52 (2b). Our esteemed last Supreme Commander Rafiq Ahmed Tarar was really a toothless President as he himself has been publicly stating overtime, having lately recovered the voice he lost over 18 months or so ago. The COAS post is really a bargaining chip and as soon as the issues of NSC and Article 52 (2b) are settled, this matter should

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE



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Why deposit arms?
If guns cause crime, then matches cause arson.
Pir Saheb NY, USA

because by allying ourselves with a community such as the type of school we attend, I believe we tend to lose focus of the bigger picture. Eventually, if we are to do anything to take this nation forward and progress as individuals ourselves, we shall have to work together with people from all kinds of educational backgrounds. Anyway, the HSC and SSC super-achievers also have their own private awards function I believe, organised by a popular Bengali daily! Perhaps what we do miss is a national organisation, which recognises meritorious students from all types of schools, and awards these students, according to a scale which could be developed to compare H.S.C./S.S.C results with A Level/O Level results.

regrettable. But most Bangla Medium students who go abroad also do not return, I assure you, and those who do not go abroad, for the majority of them, the reason for staying back is not a dream of building up the nation. There are many other reasons apart from financial constraint-of-course, but a dream of developing Bangladesh is quite low down the list, believe you me. The same goes for most of the English Medium students who stay back as well.
Shayan Khan Gulshan, Dhaka

This letter is to all who criticised those students who recently received their accolades for their achievements. I would like to know your honest opinion -- "If you had the opportunity to leave Bangladesh and get a job or have a life in the US, would you not?" I'm sure you would. It seems that we have embraced finger pointing as the primary means of settling an issue in our culture. Whether it is blaming the English medium kids or anything else for that matter.

How many able Bangla Medium students do you think stay back? The first opportunity they get, they leave. Educational background is irrelevant for our brain drain. During my last visit, I spoke to a few CEOs

of Bangladeshi Software Companies. Almost all of them told me that as soon as their employees learnt to speak better English, they applied for jobs abroad. Now is that a bad thing? I'd say no -- but obviously it is for the CEO.

We should stop pointing our fingers to each other and work together to solve our problems. There are many established professionals living abroad who want to make a difference. As a matter of fact, many have gone back and started their own companies. Sure, the numbers may be low but that doesn't mean it's not happening. It's really disheartening to read a fellow Bangladeshi tearing down another.
T.A Boston, MA, USA

Once again the English vs. Bangla medium schools debate rages on! This time the generalisation is that students from English medium schools tend to go abroad for higher education and eventually settle in America where they contribute to building America (food for thought).

I know of many Bangladeshis who have come from "Bangla medium" backgrounds and have settled in England and America with cushy jobs or they make every effort to acquire nationality within the immigration laws of that country.

However, I also know many Bangladeshis who have returned after receiving their education abroad from reputable institutions (e.g. Oxford, UPenn) and are currently pursuing very successful careers at home. It's unfair to blame the "brain drain" which began many decades ago, on students from English medium schools alone.

I find it equally objectionable that Mr Hannan should singly blame "passion and nurture" of parents for sending their children to English medium schools. Every parent wants the best options to be available to their children, there is nothing wrong with having aspirations and parents should not be made to feel guilty for the choice they make (Mr. Abeer Chowdhury's letter, 14/11/02). Without wishing to enter the lion's den, what guarantee can our government give to our children for a bright and secure future? Most parents, regardless of the school they choose, wish to safeguard their children's future. Some parents may believe that by choosing an English medium school, they are buying an extra option for their offspring.

I also strongly feel that the love/hate relationship expatriates may have, should not be blamed on English medium school culture either. This possibly has a deeper socio-economic root of our identity

in the world, which of course is topic for another debate.
Nahid Rahman Oxford, UK

Ramadan rule

I would like to know if it actually is illegal to have restaurants open for lunch during Ramadan. If it is illegal then it is a violation of civil rights.

A couple of days ago some army men visited a Tophkana Road restaurant during the lunch hour and shut it down. They threw out the patrons, berated the owners and gave the food away.

A lot of people would approve of this. But it seems to me that the Holy month of Ramadan only brings out the most chauvinistic in us. Until Ershad's regime, this wasn't the case. Back then you could openly smoke or drink tea in the road without people saying anything. Religion back then was a private matter and not something you wear on your sleeve.

Now it seems that the norm is encouraging people to fast and making life difficult for those who choose not to. Fasting like any other aspect of religion is an individual choice. It should not be dictated by the state.

Kim Dhaka

Switching jobs

Banking service being of personal, sensitive and confidential nature, I really think we ought to address the issue of the mid-level and senior executives "jumping" between banks every now and then! The central bank should put some sort of a "moratorium", for say four or five years, on higher level bankers that they cannot switch jobs at their sweet will. When they move from bank to bank so often what happens to the customers' needs and plans? The customers should come first.

If the purpose of setting up so many banks in this country was to serve the people then what happens to the "banking relationship" concept if the person at the other end goes "missing" so frequently? Somebody does not change his/her doctor or lawyer everyday-so, how to do that in case of the banker?

A Distressed Observer Chittagong

Reason for regime change

This is in response to Mr. Mahmood Elahi's letter (November 11).

When you say that the most important argument "regime

change" in Iraq, you should remember that's the US's agenda not the whole world's. This argument is not discussed, as no resolution would have passed in the UN Security Council if the US continued the slogan of regime change in Iraq. Even the US cabinet is not united in this issue as the French Ambassador to the UN described, "The US cabinet is divided in the issue. Our stand only strengthen Mr. Powell's position." after the resolution was passed.

Let me tell you very frankly, you or Mr. Bush or I do not decide who should be in the government in any sovereign country. Only that country's people have the power to decide that. This is the simple basic law upon which the present world order stands. Bush's national security strategy changes the US attitude towards the world. The US does not want to contain its enemies any more but wants to strike at them. Pre-emption is the name of the new game, which will alter the world order, as we know it. If this continues the US will make the 21st century a step backwards for the cause of peace in the world.

M. Mashui Huq Qatar