

Minting money at transport terminals The roots being cut off now

THE government has decided to cancel the leases of the bus and truck terminals in the city in its bid to contain the extortionist culture, which has assumed an all-pervasive character. The move follows the law enforcers' abortive attempt to clear the terminals of the extortionists and illegal toll collectors responsible for the chaotic situation prevailing in the transport sector.

The government has acted firmly on an issue which has a direct bearing on law and order. The extortionists have virtually taken control of all the important points of the communications network and it is no longer a secret that they derive their strength from the godfathers having political clout. And traditionally the ruling party has been the source of such clout.

The government, therefore, had to make a determined effort to dislodge the well-entrenched hooligans making a living out of an illegal business. Cancellation of lease of the terminals was an extreme measure the government had to go for in the knowledge that the musclemen are often deployed by the lessees themselves! The nuisance reached a level that raised some worrying questions about the future of the transportation business.

The government has also decided to try toll collectors operating in the name of any *samity* or route committee through speedy trial tribunals.

The nation could not live with a malaise as malignant as extortionism. Illegal toll collection at the terminals has become a routine affair and many people might have begun to believe that it is an integral part of their life. That happened because the law enforcers failed to curb the illegal activities and people were placed entirely at the mercy of the anti-social elements. Their presence in and unlawful domination of this crucial area has had a highly negative impact on trade and commerce.

However, the political will at the top must be reflected through the implementation process which should be fool-proof. The decision to ban toll collection in any form or shape is a step in the right direction. But it will be as good as its implementation.

Joynal Hazari convicted

Much more needed to be done

THE sentencing of Joynal Hazari to life imprisonment, even in abstentia, bears a good deal of significance. This is for the first time that a verdict has been delivered on him even though 40 criminal cases have been pending against the infamous 'godfather'. He has been convicted in an arms case by Feni Special Tribunal-1. What is to be noted is that the case for which he has been punished was lodged during the tenure of the last caretaker government. The elected AL government did not bring him to trial even though there were instances galore to book him under law.

One prime example of impunity he enjoyed was reflected by the attack on local journalist Tipu Sultan by his 'henchmen'. It was reported that Hazari's political influence, muscle power and above all the phobia surrounding him were of such magnitude that the local police station refused to take the case in the first place. It wasn't just Tipu's family, no one in Feni had the courage to lodge a complaint against him or his cronies. And it wasn't just the fear psychosis he created around him which was responsible for this; his being a Member of Parliament of the then ruling party conferred a special kind of immunity on him. The terror created by Hazari and his musclemen in which the people of Feni lived was something that can't be forgotten so easily.

Hazari struck such fear in people's mind that 24 of the 40 cases had to be discharged due to lack of evidence. It would have been more satisfactory had he been punished during the Awami League rule. This is where lies our political culture syndrome. If and when other godfathers are prosecuted and punished, irrespective of their political colour, that we would have our faith in the rule of law fully restored. Leaders of both BNP and Awami League had affirmed their commitment to rid their respective parties of godfathers at a public debate earlier on. We expect the commitment to be implemented sooner than later.

Free-trade with India: How beneficial is it for Bangladesh?



M. M. REZAUL KARIM

result, Indian traders promptly took due advantage so much so that Indian exports to Bangladesh soared within four years to \$1082 million in 1995-96 and continued to stay more or less at that level till at present.

Bangladesh did not get any reciprocal benefit from India, since the act of liberalisation was done by Bangladesh unilaterally, mostly at the behest of the World Bank, and without specific reciprocal expectation from any other country, including India. However, much later, during the Awami League regime,

experience and various marketing advantages of Indian traders. Consequently, Bangladeshi industries, especially medium and small scale as well as agro-based industries, will be doomed to failure in competition. The enormous adverse balance of trade of Bangladesh will increase further. Industry and commerce of Bangladesh will then be sacrificed at the altar of India's economic interests. Such an apprehension, at the very outset, is surely natural. However, one should also at the same time recall that if other countries, both in and outside

Bangladesh, would like to take the free trade system as a form of challenge to face squarely and boldly. What is of special significance on this issue is that, apart from abolition of tariff, non-tariff and para-tariff barriers, the concerned people connected with trade, customs and service sectors should have a changed outlook and a new mind-set signifying mutual help, benefit and accommodation.

There are a number of regional organisations outside our region where free trade, in some form or

concept, trade of all the partners will grow. But the special objective is that exports from the weaker partner will grow more than proportionately. Under this system, and, for that matter, under any other such system, our trade imbalance will not completely be wiped away. For example, a 10 per cent rise in India's, say, \$1 billion exports to Bangladesh will raise its value to \$1.1 billion. At the same time, if we are able to raise our, say, \$100 million exports to India, by even 100 per cent or double, our total exports will rise to only \$200 million. In the new situation the

regional groups like BIMSTEC. Exclusive trade with eastern India and consideration of providing transport and road facilities to Chittagong and its improved port facilities will certainly prove to be of mutual advantage. After all, a welcome beginning has recently been made by introducing passenger bus service between Dhaka and Agartala.

It goes without saying that both India and Bangladesh are hypersensitive in their relations with each other. So, both sides have to proceed with due caution. It is natural that they will try to uphold their respective national interests at best as they can, but this should not be done at the cost of the other's legitimate interest. Solutions must be fair, equitable and acceptable. In order to register due progress, the minor and less controversial subjects must be dealt with first. This would create a congenial atmosphere and encourage further progress.

CURRENTS AND CROSSCURRENTS

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the visiting Indian Commerce and later even the Prime Minister himself pledged duty-free concession on 25 categories of Bangladeshi exportable items to India. This pledge is yet to be redeemed fully.

The Indian side sought to link this concession to transhipment or transit of Indian goods over Bangladeshi territory to eastern India, but Bangladesh refused.

India has already introduced free trade with her neighbours in South Asia, except with Bangladesh and Pakistan. Those neighbours appear to have found, in varying degrees, the newly adopted free trade policy beneficial. At least, not much of discontent has been aired by any of these countries. In that case, why should not Bangladesh and India earn some benefit by introducing the same system? One wonders.

Though all such cases are not identical in terms of traded goods and their volume, let us first take up the case of Bangladesh.

There is a general apprehension and veritable fear that under a Free Trade arrangement cheaper Indian goods will inundate Bangladesh because of India's economy of scale in production as well as consumer skill, elaborate network, vast

our region, have benefited by using this system, why should not we? In that case, we have to examine first the nature and extent of benefits accrued by others as well as the reasons thereof?

Two principal safeguards are ensured for the weaker economy in such agreements. One is induction of the clause of a "negative list" on which the principle of free trade will not apply, fully or partially. The other is a provision relating to the "length of period" of restriction imposed on such goods.

In other words, whereas all goods and, hopefully, services will have free access across the political boundaries of the sovereign states, the two sides may mutually draw up a list of commodities on which some restrictions and barriers will remain for a specified period of time for entry into the weaker economy. If Bangladesh is able to draw up successfully a suitable long list of exportable commodities for a sufficiently long period of time, we will be able to derive substantial benefit by imparting equitable benefit to all members. A common fund was first created through subscription of rich members, like Germany, France, Luxembourg and others. These funds were later allocated more to poorer countries, such as Greece and Portugal, so that the economic and industrial level of all member states came close to one another in order to allow a fair and just competition. In our region, the only country, which can, to some extent, contribute to a common fund, is India. But India is reluctant to grant such material benefits to her relatively poor neighbours in order to elevate their economy and industry to allow a fair competition.

One must not also be oblivious of the fact that under the Free Trade

over-all trade imbalance will still remain at \$900 million. One may naturally ask, if the trade imbalance cannot be substantially reduced under the free trade system, then why is so much hullabaloo? The reply is that otherwise the trade gap will widen further, to the detriment of Bangladesh's interests. However, though Bangladesh has limited number and volume of exportable items to India, the prospect of enhancing our exports to a higher level still exists. It depends upon the skill and determination of our entrepreneurs as well as facilities granted by both governments.

There is another way of mitigating the trade imbalance which may be toying in the minds of many. In their opinion, Bangladesh and the seven sisters of Eastern India should have an exclusive Free Trade agreement. The result will go in favour of Bangladesh. But its volume and value will be relatively low. Yet, it has a better prospect in future, particularly if Indian goods cannot substantially and competitively find market across Bangladesh in eastern India. One must also note that Bangladesh and India are participants in dialogues to forge co-operation by forming sub-

M.M.Rezaul Karim, a former Ambassador, is a member of BNP's Advisory Council.

Colin Powell -- a 'dove' in hawk's clothing?

RON CHEPESIUK

In the current controversy over the half truths and outright lies that have gushed out of the Bush administration about the intelligence concerning Saddam and weapons of mass destruction, one top US official -- US Secretary of State Colin Powell, the darling of the US media, has remained above the fray. Yet, it was Powell who made the key February 5 presentation to the United Nations that laid out the US's case for going to war with Iraq.

And now it has been revealed that the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR), the US State Department's Intelligence Analysis Unit, along with experts from the Department of Energy, had advised Powell that the evidence he was going to use to prove Saddam was re-starting a nuclear weapons programme was "questionable".

Powell, the ever dutiful servant of power, went ahead away and made the dubious case for war with Iraq.

Once again, much of the US media were willing to give Powell the benefit of the doubt. After all, he is a dove, isn't he, who must work and survive among the hawks in the Bush administration? A USA Today newspaper headline published the day after Powell's UN speech graphically illustrated the media's crush on Powell. "Case is stronger when biggest dove makes it." So now in light of this revelation, can we expect the American media to take the gloves off and do some hard investigative reporting on the Colin Powell-intelligence connection? Don't hold your breath, even though it's a big story.

If Powell had gone to the UN and used his authority and stature to treat the "intelligence" information in the manner he reportedly describe it in private -- as the excrement of a bull -- then Uncle Sam's relentless push to war might have sputtered or at least been slowed down long enough for rationality to return to the making of US foreign policy. Imagine what would have happened if the Secretary of State, the official with more credibility than any other Bush official, had said: "I can't present this

garbage to the world. Take it out or I will resign?" But Powell didn't. Instead, the statesmen who oversees the US Embassy and its American Centre in Bangladesh, stood up before the world and pointed to blurry photographs to make the Bush administration's case. "Trust me when I say Saddam is trying to re-start his nuclear weapons programme", was Powell's message to a skeptical world audience. The US went to war, thousands died and are still dying and the future of destabilised Iraq remains uncertain. Not since Ronald Reagan more than 15 years ago has there been a US statesman like Colin Powell who has been able to wear the mantle of the "Teflon Man" so comfortably.

The day after Powell's speech, journalist Norman Solomon wrote on the website of Fairness and

from a burning helicopter. But the image of the reluctant warrior who believes in using force only as a last option is shattered by Powell's own words. In his autobiography, "My American Journey," Powell reveals that he saw nothing wrong with the common practice during the Vietnam War of firing a bust of machine gun fire from helicopter in front of any Vietnamese peasant who looked "really suspicious". In defending his view, Powell wrote, "If he moved, his movement was judged evidence of hostile intent, and the next burst was not in front of him. Brutal? May be so. The killed-or-be-killed nature of combat tends to dull fine perceptions of right and wrong."

In writing about his first tour of duty in Vietnam, Powell also defended the American military

from the abuses that led to the killing of hundreds of unarmed Vietnamese civilians. In researching their book, "Four Hours in My Lai," British journalists Michel Bolton and Kevin Sim discovered a letter in the National Archives in Washington DC from a young American soldier named Tom Glen who has served in the Vietnam War. Written in November 1968, the letter is addressed to General Creighton Abrams and described how some American soldiers were abusing Vietnamese civilians and captured Viet Cong suspects.

As authors Robert Perry and Norman Solomon described the letter in FAIR's publication *EXTRA* (January-February, 1996), "Glen's overall complaints encompassed some of the atrocities later dubbed "The My Lai Massacre" (which had

Richard Armitage, whom Powell referred to in his autobiography as "my brother and my bodyguard", was accused of moving heroin from the Golden Triangle to the Golden Crescent so it could be used against Russian troops in Afghanistan. In his book "Called to Serve", Colonel James "Bo" Gritz, a former Green Beret officer, alleged that Armitage was a close confidant of Khu Sa, the legendary heroin trafficker of the Golden Triangle. Today, Armitage is Powell's top aide at the State Department.

And we all know about some Dick's Cheney's cozy connection to Big Business. A Federal Court is now considering a lawsuit that charges Cheney, while an executive at Haliburton, a multi-billion dollar oil-service company, misled investors. Haliburton, of course, is now getting fat off of Iraq's post-war reconstruction.

Powell's detractors say he has gotten an easy ride throughout his career because of his skin color. In the increasingly politically correct America, one can't be too critical of the media darling who happens to be black unless you want to be accused of racism. But some black leaders have not impressed with the person whom many say is the perfect role model for young African Americans. In a radio interview in San Diego in November 2002, famed singer Harry Belafonte slammed Powell as being a sell out to the black race. Belafonte compared Powell to a plantation slave and added that "when Colin Powell dares to suggest other than what the master wants to hear, he will be turned back to pasture."

But don't bet on that happening, judging by the career of the careful and ambitious man who has been compared in stature to the popular General and U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower. If some day the Bush administration decides it needs to cover its behind on the Iraq War fiasco, it will once again call on the perfect servant to make its case and spin the media.

Ron Chepeliuk is a Fulbright scholar and Visiting Professor of Journalism at Chittagong University

accuracy in Media (FAIR), a US-based media watch dog group, that "there is no doubt" about it. Colin Powell is a great performer, as he showed yet again at the UN Security Council. On television, he exudes confidence and authoritative judgment. But Powell owes much of his touted credibility to the fact that he is functioning inside a media bubble that protects him from direct challenge."

For Solomon and the few other US journalists who have shielded themselves from the strong glare of the Powell charisma, the Secretary of State's performance at the UN was *deja vu*. A look at Powell's career reveals that, while he may look like a dove, talk like dove and walk like a dove, he is, in fact, as hawkish as Rummy, Wolfowitz or any other leading statesmen in the Bush administration. Let's look at his war record. He is no doubt a war hero. In the Vietnam War, he received two Purple Hearts, including one for saving fellow soldiers

occurred on March 16, 1968. Though Glen made no specific reference to My Lai, he expressed deep concern about American troops who "without provocation or justification shoot at the people themselves." When the letter landed on Powell's desk, he did a quick investigation, which didn't include interviewing Glen, and dismissed Glen's charge as unfounded. In a memo dated December 13, 1968, Powell wrote: "In the direct refutation of the portrayal is the fact that relations between American soldiers and the Vietnamese people are excellent." Case closed. The Vietnam War would not be the last time that the media-created image could have been challenged by the mainstream US media, if only it was willing to do so. In 1995, for instance, when Powell was still being touted as the next US President, embarrassing allegations leaked about Powell's role in the Iran-Contra affair and how Oliver North had kept Powell fully informed

Casper Weinberger and Frank C. Carlucci have helped Powell move up the career ladder. In recognition of being a life long protege of Bush Sr., Powell's detractors have called him another "SOB" (Son of a Bush). Can we judge a man by the mentors he has had? Let's look at some of the movers and shakers who have taught Powell the political ropes. Casper Weinberger, under whom Powell served in the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), was pardoned by Bush Sr. for his role in the illegal Iran-Contra affair.

Carlucci, Weinberger's assistant in the OMB, was accused of supervising the CIA plot that led to the assassination of the Congolese president Patrice Lumumba. Five months after Lumumba's assassination, Armitage was expelled from the Congo. Four years later, Carlucci was expelled again, this time from his CIA position in Tanzania after being accused of trying to assassinate the Burundi Prime Minister Rene Ngendandumwe.

one must point out constitutional provision (2) of the article 135 in part IX of the constitution, which, inter alia, says that "no such person shall be dismissed or removed or reduced in rank until he has been given a reasonable opportunity of showing cause why that action should not be taken."

While serving in the Republic he/she should have allegiance to the country and honour the work assigned by the government within the existing laws of the country. It is regrettable to note that many of our officers show exuberance of alliance publicly with the ruling party during their tenure in service. They should not forget that their services are meant for the country and people. During the last part of BNP rule in 1996 some officers openly demonstrated their anti-government stance by addressing public meeting from open dias in the Press Club. This was gross violation of discipline of the administration. This caused widespread discontent and division in the administration. This should not have happened.

It is high time discipline is brought and maintained in the administration and it is allowed to work without fear or favour in the interest of good governance. Witch hunting campaign by the immediate past government as well as the present government has only caused damage to basic concept of neutral administration. As a result, there has been slow progress and in some cases no progress at all in the implementation of the projects.

However, at least in one area there has been marked progress in activity -- road repair! With the assumption of power by the new government digging of roads have featured prominently along with breaking and making of dividers. Indiscriminate digging of roads by

How is the state of affairs in the state?

MOHAMMAD AMJAD HOSSAIN

THE state of affairs in all sectors of the country has come to such a pass that it is anything but anarchic. It is simply hard to accept what some members of the Jatiya Sangsad would have one to believe. They are apparently least bothered when their attention is drawn to pitiable road conditions, deterioration of law and order and sky high prices of essential commodities, for instance. They have no respite, however, in raising their allowances, availing of a posh area house and tax-free luxury car. Members of the cabinet with a few exception have seemingly used the administration for achieving their ends. The members of all political parties have adopted this policy when voted to power. With their blessings party activists and executives of CBA in different Corporations and Departments are also

achieving their ends without caring for employees as well as organisation. It is really disturbing to note that no mechanism has been in existence or operation which should arrest such unhealthy trend. A lineman in T and T Department or a metre reader in DESA or Titas Gas is earning much more than an honest schoolteacher. However, some school/college/university teachers are also not lagging behind. They have adopted innovative method of earning more, however at the cost of actual. Coaching centers have sprung up registering a mushroom growth. A teacher is spending more hours at coaching centre and less than required at school/college/ university. But a student from middle class family could hardly afford the exorbitant fees of coaching centre after somehow managing the Awami League government in 1973. Having served the country

for twenty-nine years and worked under two BNP regimes in the past these officers have now been declared redundant. Immediately after the liberation of the country Awami League won the elections in 1973 and formed the government. Hence, it was logical for the government in power to recruit people to run the administration. One does not find any reason of dispute about the recruitment even if these officers used to hold any pro-Awami League stance. Every individual has the right to hold exposed some of

different utility service providers is already a common feature in the city causing obstacles in vehicular and also pedestrian movement. There is no common agenda nor any coordination among the organisations like WASA, T&T and DESA. The breaking and making of dividers have only added to the public inconvenience. During the last more than one-and-a-half-year rule of the ruling alliance we have not yet come across any project worth of creating job opportunity for the increasing number of the unemployed. Law and order has gone beyond comprehension as daytime dacoity in the capital and killing of police personnel are causing too much of an alarming situation.

Are we paying for democracy, or is it democracy paying off?

Mohammad Amjad Hossain is a former diplomat.</p