

Tragic end to a promising life

Act now to prevent such tragedies

DEATH of a young person is always shocking. It is even more so when the circumstances are as tragic and dreadful as the ones under which a promising young girl, Shammee Akhter Happy of Dhaka University lost her life, crushed under the wheels of a bus driven by a reckless driver. Regrettably, some inept handling by the police compounded the whole situation in the aftermath of the accident.

We notice with great deal of dismay and consternation the ever-increasing frequency of such mishaps that could have been avoided with a bit more sensibility.

Such mishaps raise some serious questions about road rights and traffic management that all concerned, particularly the keepers of public safety, must address.

The issue of reckless driving tops the list of causes of such vehicular accidents. It does not need an expert to suggest that a reckless driver, who seemed to be in a hurry to meet deadline, killed Happy. The place of occurrence is a complicated traffic intersection, which is configured in such a way that does not lend itself to speedy driving; because of the layout of the roads the traffic is automatically slow. Only a mad and heedless person can cause an accident like this. To add to this is the fact that most of the drivers are untrained who procure their driving licence through dubious means. It is also a fact that an overwhelming number of vehicles that ply the roads of Dhaka would hardly pass a genuine fitness test. And, whereas, in any other country pedestrians have always priority and right of way, not so in Bangladesh, where crossing roads involves great personal risk

The inflexible deadline fixed by the bus operators, meeting which becomes more compelling for the driver than concern for the safety of other vehicles or the pedestrians or his passengers, is a causative factor. He has to meet the deadline or risk being penalised.

Enough is enough. The authorities must act promptly to prevent recurrence of such accidents. Drivers must be tested properly before given licence, and vehicles must undergo rigorous inspection before they are issued with road permits.

We also strongly suggest that the authorities put the stretch of road between Nilkhet and TSC and between Doel crossing and Shahbag off limits to heavy vehicles at all times. Road dividers and speed breakers must also be put up on roads that are frequented by students and other pedestrians.

What a thrust area!

Back-up for IT outsourcing missing

THE ranking of Bangladesh among the top 20 IT outsourcing destinations by the EU, a great development partner of Bangladesh, is indeed a cheery piece of news. The country has a huge potential in making waves in the international IT market. Only if government had given the sector the backing it required from the beginning, it would have forged ahead by now to get a good slice of the IT bonanza. A survey conducted in the sector found that lack of skilled human resource, inadequate internet connectivity, other infrastructural shortcomings, and above all, gaps in governmental pledges and their implementation are the major factors hindering the growth of IT in the country.

Governments, both BNP and Awami League, termed Information Technology as a thrust sector on their assumption of office, but to this day the proclamation of priority remains a declaration of intent at best and a hollow promise at worst. They cried hoarse over the high degree of importance deserved by this sector, but results speak otherwise. We wonder, what happens to sectors not anointed by the prefix 'thrust!' The failure to live up to our IT potential is more a governmental debacle than a private sector one. And, what could have been a more convincing testimony to this than our delay in having the submarine cable connectivity. Look at the IT revolution in neighbouring India, albeit with the government's assistance bolstering private initiative!

We seem to confuse announcement with implementation. We are adept in issuing policy statements with the notion that all that was needed was to make proclamations to move things ahead; never mind the lack of follow-up! The next best thing to announcement is reiteration. It is like continually feeding on verbal diet, while results remain elusive. Let's hope, the EU's assessment of our outsourcing potential will be an eye-opener, as though we didn't ourselves realise we have a great promise in that high-profile domain.

ALI IDRIS

EITHER because of the ensuing general election or in order to materialise the PRSP it is anticipated that the national budget of 2005-2006 would be compiled as a pro-people budget which is so vital for a country like Bangladesh where 80 per cent people are poor peasants. With a view to compiling a pro-people budget the following steps are essentially warranted.

Prices of daily essentials to be kept stable: About 80 per cent of the people who are peasants living in rural areas have no means other than their agricultural products that comprise their per capita income. Floods, draughts, loan burdens, hike in transportation costs etc. often obstruct and frustrate their efforts to get the value of their products that results in decline of their per capita income. Maintaining the prices of daily essentials viz. food

grains, edible oil, sugar, salt, clothes, medicine etc. at par helps them to a great extent to stabilise their income. Any hike in duty, tax or VAT at wholesale or retail level in the national budget will have a repercussion on the prices of those commodities at consumers' end. Similarly the prices of the implements used in agriculture like seeds, fertilizer, cost of irrigation (price of diesel) pesticides etc. need to be kept stable, or else subsidy has to be given. But due to corruption and weak administrative channels the subsidy would not reach the peasants intact. Hence it would be advisable and desirable not to give effect to price hike. Rather the root cause of price hike of agricultural implements, i.e. smuggling, should be controlled by vigilant army patrolling.

Stabilisation of transportation cost: Commuting and transportation cost is as important as food grains and essentials price in urban



M ABDUL HAFIZ

BEHIND the facade of a new strategy for "long term US engagements with the South Asian region" her unusual urgency in building up a "strategic relation with India" has surprised few. There had already been an intriguing nexus between BJP-ruled India and Bush administration forming a Delhi-Washington-Tel Aviv axis. The nexus gained a fresh momentum with the neo-cons' growing desire to bring India within the fold of their oft-expressed policy of containing China. It is no secret that the neo-con cold warriors see China as the only strategic rival of the US and want to draw India into a military alliance against it. No wonder when asked whether the US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice meant what she had stated in Delhi that "the US policy was to help India become a major world power in the 21st century" the State Department emphasised that "Washington understands fully the implication of that statement". Clearly it is this American policy of encircling China, the United States needs India to complete the circle while some of the US' staunchest allies like South Korea, Japan and Australia already obstruct any of China's outward thrust in Asia-

Pacific.

Alarmed by the US designs and recent developments in the neighbourhood China has been earnestly mending fences with the immediate neighbours. As a part of it the Chinese Prime Minister recently undertook a high profile visit to Delhi to totally erase the bitterness that was created in the wake of 1962 Sino-Indian border war. The growing rapprochement between the Asian giants is already some years old but has gathered momentum in recent

border. The joint statement after the visit indicated a 'breakthrough' at long last in Sino-Indian relations when it spoke of two sides being convinced that an early settlement of border question would advance the basic interests of the two sides and should therefore be pursued as a strategy objective.

The tone and tenor of Delhi talk in which China was more enthusiastic partner suggest that China would eventually acknowledge Indian sovereignty over the Kingdom of

targeting her for containment -- all combined to convince China that her salvation lay in her being able to dissuade India to participate in US' containment policy. But before that India must be won over and convinced of the danger of such policy -- apparently a cold war legacy.

Both the US and China are vying with each other to get India on their side to fulfil their purpose. Both are promoting peace and detente in South Asia but from different perspectives.

power is wooing her and also the country's once estranged neighbour is extending the hand of friendship and cooperation? The Indians have reasons to be elated at the development but they are matured enough to choose and pick the options presented before them. The American offer to India comes with a flattering postscript while Washington's largesse to Pakistan is aimed at shoring up Islamabad's resolve to fight foreign terrorists and domestic extremists. Even as New Delhi

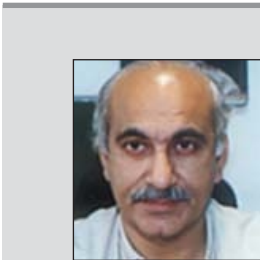
dependency on the US and it would, by the same token negate the country's pattern of primary reliance on Russian equipment leavened with military supplies from France and other European countries. In other words, in a deal with US India would say goodbye to its multi-polar view of the world. Not surprisingly the Indian cabinet has already approved the purchase of second hand Mirage 2000 from Qatar in place of US-offered fighter aircraft along with licence to manufacture them in India.

India is after all too big and too proud to be someone's catspaw. India, since independence, had world view of its own and capability to chart its own course. The similar goodies offered once before by John Foster Dulles to enlist Nehru in the rank of cold-warrior and crusader against communism were spurned by India despite cost. True to that tradition, India imbued with Bandung spirit of the fifties and the principle of Panchsheel can hardly move against a great neighbour. Neither can she be lured by a vague aura of greatness in 21st century with American benediction. Nor will she trim her policy to suit the American dream of running a second Roman empire.

No country can indeed be great on the strength of others' benediction. Nor can any bargain be worthwhile if it desecrates a nation's soul. India will attain greatness perhaps only by its own toil and resolve. And there are decades to go before India can surmount its people's poverty and deprivation and become a more equitable society before engaging the world in leadership stakes. The Indian leadership is well aware that there is no shortcuts or crutches for greatness.

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Saturday morning fever



M.J. AKBAR

distraught Corby. Australian media did note earlier that Corby had a history of drug abuse, but that has been quietly eliminated from most of Australian media (but not all; serious newspapers have taken admirably objective editorial positions). However, the feeding frenzy is at its greediest. There is little time for questions. Why ask who left the bag open, or whether open bags are normal behaviour for Australians heading for a holiday in Bali. Since the bag was caught at customs, it must have been taken there by Corby; didn't she notice a difference of four kilograms in weight?

Corby's mother, Rosleigh Rose, and her sister, Mercedes, were in court when Judge Linton Sivait

not know that World War II is over. It was thought that the last such Japanese veteran, Lt. Hiroo Onoda, emerged out of the caves in 1974. However, Yamakawa and Nakauchi might have simply integrated into the local community and even been of service to them. How?

They are living with the Muslim rebels of Philippines who are engaged in an armed struggle against the state, and could always do with help in military training.

NO one really believes in opinion polls anymore, but no one has the courage to discount them either. Twenty-four hours before the voters

taking their jobs, are dreading the possibility that Brussels might allow the 70 million Muslims of Turkey into the European Union.

Turks are "Your people".

A blackout in Moscow left life in tatters for a day. Saturday's bulletin reported that the Muslim Chechens demanding independence from Russia had claimed responsibility for the blast that blew up the power station and created havoc in the capital. I read a piece in the *International Herald Tribune* by Mark Medish, senior director in the US National Security Council for Russian, Ukrainian and Eurasian Affairs in 2000-1. He was walking with his

his chest and flew through the air after the blast. 19 people died and over 65 were wounded. A grim President Pervez Musharraf called the suicide bomber a "religious terrorist".

In Pakistan, your people and my people even among one people.

KASHMIR shut down on Friday to protest the desecration of the Holy Quran at the American prison camp in Guantanamo Bay. Stories about such desecration by Americans have been appearing for a while now. In March 2000 prisoners went on hunger strike in protest. Former prisoners like Aayat Vahitov and Abdallah

Saturday's pre-dawn bulletin. No one counts Iraqi casualties. Iraqis don't count.

LEBANON. It is an orderly political meeting. Rows of dignitaries are seated on chairs lined in neat rows. It is all utterly respectable. At the microphone appears Sheikh Hasan Nasrallah, leader of the Hezbollah. This meeting is being held to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, often described as the only Israeli defeat since the loss of Sinai to Egypt in the 1973 war. In Lebanon, victory was claimed by Hezbollah. Sheikh Nasrallah says that he has 12,000 rockets under his command, all trained at Israel and warned that the war was not over. CNN then showed a video, shot by five cameras, on how to make a devastating bomb from chemicals you can pick up from your nearest chemist, put it into a simple pouch, strap it to your body, and -- bang!

Awar of the people.

THE last major story mixed pleasure with business. The share price of the major pharmaceutical multinational Pfizer went down after a certain Dr Howard Powerantz reported with what I thought was a gleam in his eye (but I could be prejudiced) that he had found 40 cases of loss of direct or peripheral vision among over-50s after they had taken Viagra. Pfizer countered, as might be expected, vigorously. Some 23 million users had benefited from Viagra in the last seven years, the company said. In 2004 alone Viagra had earned Pfizer \$1.7 billion in sales. The 40 alleged cases therefore were a minuscule sample. My own view is that the men were simply affected by shock of out-of-practice ecstasy. This is what the blinding flash of lightning is probably all about.

This was the only story of the early morning on Saturday in which Muslims were not being hated, or killed, or killing each other, or preparing to die. And even this story was depressing.

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BYLINE

From Japan came a story out of Reader's Digest. Two veterans of the Panthers Division, Yoshio Yamakawa, 87, and Tsuzuki Nakauchi, 83, have been found in the mountains of Mindanao in south Philippines, where they may or may not know that World War II is over. It was thought that the last such Japanese veteran, Lt. Hiroo Onoda, emerged out of the caves in 1974. However, Yamakawa and Nakauchi might have simply integrated into the local community and even been of service to them. How? They are living with the Muslim rebels of Philippines who are engaged in an armed struggle against the state, and could always do with help in military training.

sentenced Corby to 20 years in prison. Their faces were contorted with virulent rage. Liar, shouted Rose at the judge. In any American or Indian court she would have joined her daughter in prison, for contempt of court. Here she was permitted to take her venom to the world via media. One phrase of hers stuck in the mind above the din. She looked at the judge and shouted that "Your people" are the ones who are really guilty.

Your people. People who are brown and Asian and Muslim.

FROM Japan came a story out of *Reader's Digest*. Two veterans of the Panthers Division, Yoshio Yamakawa, 87, and Tsuzuki Nakauchi, 83, have been found in the mountains of Mindanao in south Philippines, where they may or may

of France decide to accept or reject the new Constitution of the European Union, conceived by France and Germany and now expanded to 25 nations, the polls suggest that "no" might win. This will be considered a catastrophe for the world's bravest idea of the last century. As one commentator put it, a few thousand swing votes could decide the fate of 450 million people. All is not lost. As one Frenchman put it so charmingly, "My head is not made yet. I think I decide on Sunday."

Why the surge towards "no"? The reasons are many, from 10% unemployment to the proposed extension of the 35-hour-week to dislike of Chirac. But the key to the anger is the creation of a supranational state in which foreign policy will be controlled by Brussels. The French, already furious that the Poles are

father, a world war veteran, in the Russian city of Krasnodar when he was picked up by the Federal Security Service, successor to the KGB and interrogated for three hours for taking pictures of the local police building. After threats, questions and videotape they were released and told, "You should know about the extraordinary security situation in the Northern Caucasus."

Translation: Haven't you heard about the Muslim rebellion of Chechnya?

IMAGES follow of breast beating and mourning in Pakistan. A suicide bomber has attacked Shias gathered at the Bari Imam shrine of Shah Abdul Latif Kazmi, patron saint of Islamabad. The bomber had two kilograms of explosive strapped to

Tabarak have narrated behaviour that will only inflame passions if described. The Red Cross has confirmed other incidents. Why did a small item in Newsweek, semi-denied by its editors, catch fire across the world? Why does no Muslim believe the denial or accept George Bush's word that no disrespect was ever meant? Not because Imran Khan held a press conference in Pakistan to encourage anger, but because Washington no longer has any credibility among Muslims. No one believes that America is in Iraq to save democracy; particularly not the Iraqis. The insurgency was supposed to have been crushed by now; the number of daily attacks is somewhere over 70. America's death toll continues to mount, even on

OPINION

For compiling a pro-people budget

budget, rather increase should be given effect in luxuries like big cars, deep fridges, large screen TVs etc. This measure will equalise and rationalise per capita income and wealth and reduce accumulation of black money.

Taxable income limit: In order to support the policy of "More income, more tax, less income, less tax" the taxable income limit should be raised and the tax slabs should be rationalised. This will render parity in distribution of wealth between the rich and the poor.

Austerity in public expenditure: Expenditure in running the state administration is a major head that comprises salaries and allowances, pension and gratuities, transport and traveling, printing and stationery, telecommunication, utilities, foreign tours, entertainment etc. False attendance in pay rolls, inflated bills of office expenses, traveling, tours and transport, entertainment must be controlled.

Conversion of all vehicles into CNG will save 70 per cent of the transport cost. This will also reduce false and inflated claims in running of vehicles. Purchasing luxury cars, jeeps for the ministers, secretaries, projects etc. and running and maintenance of the same drain a lot of public money which is not befitting a poor country. In the long run sufficient car loans with soft terms may be allowed to the employees so that they may buy their own vehicles. This will save a lot of expenses. In the same way luxury in foreign tours should be avoided. The budget should reflect measures for all of the above.

Whitening and eliminating black money: According to economists an estimated amount of Taka 50,000 crore of black money is generated every year in the country. This figure is almost equivalent to yearly forecasted revenue of the budget. Evasion of duty, tax, VAT, resorting to bribe, theft, corruption,

terrorism, secret transaction etc. are the sources of this black money accumulation. The administrative machinery could not control the generation of black money. Had it succeeded in control or eradication of black money, the revenue income of the country would have doubled. In order to force out this black money from the hiding dens, it is necessary that some opportunity/incentive should still be kept open for investing it in industries, factories, share market etc. so that it does not fly overseas. At the same time, measures should be adopted to seal the loopholes of generation of black money. Persons found to possess more wealth than their legal income should be brought to book and justice. The budget should consider all these matters.

Defaulted loans/tax: An estimated amount of Taka 20,000 crore is lying as defaulted/bad (classified) loans from the banking system of the country. This bad loans are

playing an adverse role in the economy in so far as the government loses tax, VAT, excise duty etc. on this amount once it is classified or written off; it affects the liquidity and profitability of the banks substantially. A staggering sum was written off during the year 2004. One can guess the devastating effect of this writing off in the economy. By writing off the bad debts the banks are favouring a few of their customers while the general public is being deprived of the benefit from the revenue which could have been derived from these loans. The GDP as well as the development activities are hampered due to this.

The budget should provide for all measures to be taken by the banks for recovery of these loans. The courts may be given more powers to enforce attachment of property of defaulters for recovery.

ADP budget: Allocation of big sums in the ADP plan is not a bold step towards development. Projects

which are of paramount importance to the general public, rural people, peasants and business men, unemployed youths etc. and those which will generate some temporary and permanent employment in the rural areas should be selected. Political consideration should not be the basis of selection of projects.

Control of crimes and enforcement of rule of law: All sincere efforts will be fruitless if terrorism, graft, forced donations, muggers are not stopped and rule of law is not established. The budget should propose appropriate measures and allocate funds for ensuring eradication of crimes and establishment of rule of law.

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