

Dejected returnees

Enforce transparency in the business

BA NGLADESHI job-seekers abroad are finding themselves in increasingly difficult situations. With the return of 28 souls from Jordan, where they had to work in a garment factory without any payment for six months, it has become abundantly clear that our youngsters are often getting a raw deal in dubious circumstances overseas.

It seems the frequency of deportation and repatriation of Bangladeshi workers from different countries overseas has increased in recent times. In the extreme cases, not infrequently, job-seekers have even died or ended up in jail. Unscrupulous among the manpower recruiting and travel agents are primarily responsible for their predicament. Actually, the line between the recruitment agency and the travel agency is fast disappearing. What are the licensing criteria and the ground rules for them? Can their businesses legitimately merge with one another? Is there any organisation to oversee their activities?

Jobs abroad are being arranged through private channels more than ever before. The question is whether the job offers are coming from reliable enterprises. The high incidence of job-seekers being swindled has turned the business virtually into human trafficking. Fake hopes are held out and the gullibility of young men is ruthlessly exploited by greedy bunch of operators. Are all the recruiting agents keeping the manpower ministry posted about the deals they strike with external parties?

Remittances from Bangladeshis working abroad are a mainstay of our foreign currency earnings. Our workers also have earned the reputation of being sincere and efficient; so why give any negative signal to manpower importing countries by allowing rackets to live off fraudulent dispatch of human cargo? What is needed is to find out how and why the workers land in hostile situations and punish the people responsible for their sufferings. It is also essential for our missions abroad to keep in constant touch with governments and relevant authorities in the host countries to make sure that our workers are not discriminated against in any form or shape. Basically, if they come to our embassies with grievances they must be attended to.

The government has to act with a sense of urgency as too many reports on job-seekers' woes are pouring in from different directions.

A pressing public interest concern

Fares on an upward spiral

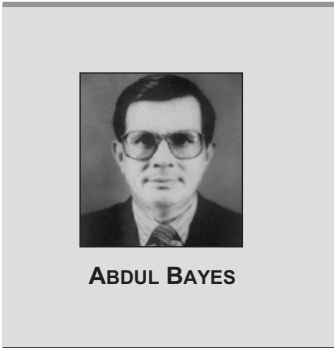
THE recent fuel price increase has led to arbitrary transport fare hikes across the board. The rates being charged now are far in excess of the fuel price increase. These have been raised between 10 and 25 percent on various routes. Passengers have no other option but to pay. All these have triggered tension on different city routes as well as on inter-district routes. Already some passenger-transport worker rows have raged and more lie in store, ominously in the shape of clashes.

What has happened is that bus and truck owners associations have drawn up new fare charts and put them up at various bus terminals without consulting the government agency concerned, namely, Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA). This is in absolute breach of law. The Motor Vehicles Act, 1983 clearly states that only the government has the authority to fix fares. It can, and we believe, should consult the owners, but that is that; owners cannot themselves raise the fares. But what we notice is the exact opposite, the owners are calling the shots. And, they are never punished for breaking the law which states that their registration and route permit can be cancelled if they have unilaterally raised fares.

As a result year after year, they have been arbitrarily increasing the fares and extracting these from the passengers with impunity. Government has rules to protect citizens' rights. However ridiculous it might sound, the last time fares were increased and put on the charts with governmental approval was in 1993. Needless to say, there have been many increases in bus fares since then without the stamp of government authorisation. In effect, they were illegal.

In such circumstances, the prime minister has formed a high-powered committee to streamline the chaotic transport sector. We want this committee to succeed. We can see that it will take a lot of political will to bring about a positive change in the situation since ruling party elements are influential in the owners' associations. We believe the government will prove equal to the task and resolve the question of excessive fare increases keeping public interest uppermost in its mind.

DU syndrome: Save their souls



ABDUL BAYES

IT all started with the sudden and sordid death of Shammi Akhter Happy. She came from Ponchagar to pursue higher studies at Dhaka University. Seemingly, Happy was happy with the happenings around her and she conveyed her well-being to her parents over mobile phone on the day of her death. But a few minutes later, a minibus took her life near Shahbag. Sometimes, to catch JU buses, I also have to stand at the point where Happy met her unfortunate death. Although the place remains crowded from dawn to dusk, buses plying through the intersection barely care for human lives. They tend to run fast to fetch fortunes. Any one of us could be the victim at that point at any time. The construction of an over or footbridge at such crowded points is a step long overdue.

In Bangladesh, road accidents rarely ride on reasoning -- neither in actions nor in reactions. Wherever such accidents tend to take place, people become riotous, burn vehicles, damage nearby establishments, and pelt the police. In fact

these are very much known post-accident happenings. They are driven more by emotions than rational choices.

It is, therefore, not surprising that fellow students of DU would take to the streets in protest against the killing of their friend. Quite expectedly, they burnt vehicles and bedeviled normal activities. Might be that they also pelted the police standing nearby. Unfortunately, our law enforcing agencies fail to realize

classrooms, dormitories, or faculty building. I presume that police forces have done it on their own. If my supposition is correct, then the VC should have resigned immediately in protest against the heinous hoodlums heralded against his community by the police. Given the experience of the outcome of police actions inside Shamsunnahar Hall just a few years back, I am shocked to learn that the authority could allow things like that to happen.

cadres to rescue him.

As we could see from the pictures shown in TV networks and newspapers, the rescue operation was prompt but painful. Cadres used lethal weapons and beat up male and female students to the satisfaction of their political masters. I am told that such kind of atrocious behaviour on the part of cadres is used as testimonial or certificate in their search for higher position in the party. You want to be president

BENEATH THE SURFACE

The government should see that its student organization is run by students only. The university authorities should not be used as pawns of power politics. History shows that such a tactic is a negative sum game where a particular party gains in the short-run but the nation as a whole loses in the long run. The sooner we realize this, the better it is for the nation.

the emotions from which such occurrences originate. Instead of going for tolerance, they tried to contain emotions by barbaric encounters. Therefore, to chase the agitating students, police reportedly stormed into the Institute of Fine Arts and beat up female and male students. Thus, fuel was added to the already existing flame.

And that sparked off further violence. After all, police forces can never enter into the campus premises without due permission from the authority concerned. Even if they are permitted to stay in the campus to enable a peaceful environment, as we often experience it, they should never be allowed to beat up the students entering the

But the seeds of discontent lie elsewhere also. Quite obviously, students and teachers of the university have the right to know as to who permitted such atrocities to take place. The students gheraoed (besieged) the VC in protest against police atrocities inside the campus. VCs are always subject to gheraoes in situation like this. Mr. Sattayendra Nath Sen, a former VC of Kolkata University had to face such a fate at least 30 times during his 8-year tenure. He was wittily called "besieged VC." In our country also, many VCs had to be in such a situation for days and nights. But for "fortunate" Mr. Faiz, it was less than two hours till he phoned Jatiyotabadi Chatro Dal (JCD)

or secretary of the front organization? Well, submit photos or newspaper reports with guns in your hand. A middle-ranking leader? Well, show us pictures with hockey sticks. If nothing else, at least a picture that shows that you are dragging a female student with your hands on her hair. The ultimate positions in the party determine their economic positions in the future. Not surprisingly, therefore, the president or secretary of the ruling party becomes the owner of a NAM flat or a plot in precious areas overnight. I am not even talking about the millions of cash taka at their disposal. It is thus not ethics but economics that drive the leaders and their cadres to such atrocities. If

that call comes from the top, the rampage reaches a peak.

Mr. Faiz was rescued but his institution is reeling under riots. A reign of terrorism rules the campus. For three consecutive days, JCD men created a reign of havoc driving out general students. The opposition backed students had to leave the campus. Even today (June 3), pictures show how JCD cadres are sitting with check posts to guard against the entry of students from another organization.

As usual, the university authority set up an enquiry committee. But the enquiry committee formed to investigate the matters soon fell flat with the resignation of three members. The earlier enquiry committee reports never saw the light of day. Had actions been taken as per the reports, I am hopeful, things would not have been so sordid. I fail to understand why VCs do not apply their special powers to expel criminals instantly in such a case. After all, pictures in newspapers help identify the criminals at the very outset. Suspicion can only loom large if they are outsiders in which case problems of identification

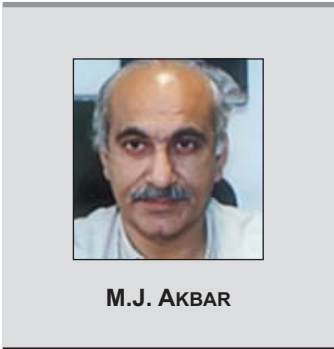
might creep in.

And that is what it should be. A VC may have political links, and obviously with the party in power, but it is also true that he is a teacher with some ethics and morality. As a teacher worth his salt, he cannot entertain criminal activities to draw a certificate of faithfulness from the party he supports. If VCs tend to remain as a "pure" government or party servant to patronize the goons and the guns on campus, I am afraid, public universities might have to face fatal consequences. They are already in the grip of grievous politics on campus and showing signs of sickness in academic pursuits. The soul of the nation comes mostly from places like universities. These institutions need to be more open, accountable, and transparent.

In a country where major positions of student fronts are captured by money-men and muscle-men, the campus can hardly claim a wind of calmness. The government should see that its student organization is run by students only. It should help the university authorities to save their souls from the atrocities of their party cadres. It means, inter alia, the university authorities should not be used as pawns of power politics. History shows that such a tactic is a negative sum game where a particular party gains in the short-run but the nation as a whole loses in the long run. The sooner we realize this, the better it is for the nation.

Abdul Bayes is a Professor of Economics at Jahangirnagar University.

Surprise, surprise



M.J. AKBAR

NEVER underestimate the magnetic power of a sideshow. While the crosscurrents of history sweep through the larger stage, and Hurriyat does what was unthinkable day before yesterday and unacceptable yesterday; while Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and President Pervez Musharraf lift the spirit of their language far above the stodgy bureaucratic wrangling that must inevitably inform discussions on detail; while the leader of the Indian opposition and an architect of the Ram Mandir movement, Lal Krishna Advani, apologises for the destruction of the Babri mosque during a visit to Pakistan; Gohar Ayub Khan, son of Field Marshal Ayub Khan, pinches some of the headlines with the titillating claim that an Indian brigadier sold India's 1965 war plans.

Who is this top spy? Mr Khan refuses to reveal the identity but strews the path with teasing hints. The spy is still alive. His wife needed the money for a hobby, canning fruits. The payment was made in London, through the Pak military attache there, Brigadier Said Ghaus. The plan was so comprehensive that for a while Ayub Khan even suspected it to be a plant and had it double-checked by other intelligence assets in Delhi. The plan envisaged the Indian army falling back behind the Beas in case of reverses. In later interviews Gohar Khan, never without a Frontier twinkle in his eye, said that the brigadier was director of military operations between 1951 and 1958. I saw one Indian televi-

sion news interview in which Mr Khan blithely claimed that everything relevant on the table of the Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru eventually reached his father, Ayub Khan.

As an Indian I was terribly reassured by this last statement, since Nehru was not Prime Minister of India during the 1965 war: Lal Bahadur Shastri had been Prime Minister for some sixteen months when Ayub Khan launched Operation Gibraltar in

one as yet has called him a fool. While every army has standard operational plans against any neighbour deemed to be hostile, or even deemed to be friendly, to call something written in the fifties the war plan for 1965, is about as absurd as it gets. It is even more stupid to believe that there can be anything like a comprehensive plan, for the simple reason that no one knows where the enemy will concentrate its strike, unless of course some Gus has told you.

Ayub Khan was not such a dud as to base operational plans for 1965 on intelligence purchased in the fifties, if indeed there was any such Brigadier who sold any such plan. For starters, the Indian army of 1965 was a very different force from the army of the fifties and indeed of 1962.

Here is a key question for Gohar Khan. If the Brigadier had given Ayub Khan the full Indian plan for the 1965 war, how come Pakistan was surprised by the

Nehru that Sheikh Abdullah's long imprisonment was a costly mistake. The Sheikh was released in April, and in May -- after consultations with Acharya Vinoba Bhave, Jaya Prakash Narayan, and C. Rajagopalachari -- was introduced the novel idea of a confederation of India, Pakistan, and Kashmir. On May 23, 1964 the Sheikh went to Pakistan to sell his three-nation theory, but Ayub Khan was in no mood to purchase uncertain goods. On May 26,

in front of 7 Division and Jammu was at its mercy, with the possibility that the Indian army in the valley would be surrounded and cut off. At this point something totally inexplicable happened. Malik, the hero of the hour, was shifted to Kargil and Major-General Yahya Khan was told to take command in mid-battle. While Pakistan soldiers were waiting for the code word to move forward, headquarters was playing favourites. (The memoirs of General Mohammad Musa are illuminating.) The stalled Pak offensive reached Jaurian only on September 5, and despite orders to take Akhnur as quickly as possible, Yahya Khan dallied. He gave India the only thing she needed, time.

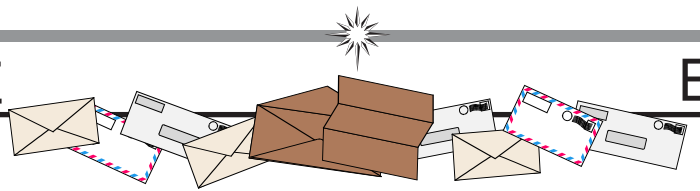
On September 6, India opened a front from Sialkot to Kasur, and it became a different story. This was the second surprise. It was Pakistan's turn to be outflanked. It is true that India's army chief General Chaudhry had contemplated, during those days in which the situation seemed hopeless, that India consolidate behind the Beas, but his colleagues would not consider what would have been an abject surrender of Punjab. Punjab meant something to Sikhs like General Harbaksh Singh. Rather than retreating from Amritsar, they took the war into Lahore.

Gohar Khan exaggerates the role of one driver and his accident, which he says, prevented Pak armour from breaking through on the Punjab front. More sensible accounts talk of the lugubrious nature of tank movement. Suffice to say that Indian generals found a brilliant tactic: they stalled the heavy Patton tanks (heroes of the second world war) by flooding the monsoon-moist fields of Punjab, and then poured withering fire on the trapped elephants in a decisive battle known in India as 'Asal Uttar' (the Real Answer). This was the third surprise.

No plan can ever contemplate such realities.

MJ Akbar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE



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Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Violation of women's rights

The main working force of RMG sectors, which are playing pivotal in earning foreign currency and sustaining our flourishing economy, is woman. But I feel very dismayed when I observe their wretched condition. I pay visit to my cousin's in Dhamrai, and I see women garment workers falling victim to hassles while getting on public buses. They feel very humiliated as the helpers and bus conductors often take the opportunity to touch them unnecessarily. But finding no alternative, they keep silent. Besides, they are not allowed to get down at their desired places.

In this age of empowerment of women, they are subjected to such kind of harassment. How long will this continue?

Abdul Karim
Jahangirnagar University

Law taking an

unusual course!

The other day I was sitting in a tea stall at Alamdanga, I was observing what the police were doing. They were looking into the necessary documents of motorcyclists. Those who had documents got permission to go. Without documents there was no permission to move. I observed the police did not stop a certain motorcyclist. That motorcyclist went away without any restriction. It was a very regrettable matter. Is it law and administration? Why did not the police stop that motorcyclist? Do you know who that motorcyclist was? Brother of an influential politician!

Anoaruzzaman
Chudanga

Learning English

English is now the most important language in the world. All types of educational materials are

expressed in detail in English. So to gather knowledge in medical science, engineering, textiles, geography and scientific inventions, it is necessary to learn English. Again 80 per cent of the world computers are programmed in English. It is true that though it is essential to have proficiency in English, the average standard of it in our country is not satisfactory at all. Some students do well in all subjects except English.

So, a large number of students fail in the examination every year. In seeking jobs, good command over English is needed. If a student possesses this, it is so positive for him to build up his career.

It is true that the process of learning English varies from man to man. For this reason, the technique of teaching English is so important.

There are standard methods of learning the language which we

should follow without being scared of the alien words and terms.

Jesmin Akhter
Joypurhat

Keeping-up-with social changes

The collapse of the 9-storey garment factory near Dhaka has triggered a post-mortem in the society amongst the professional circles. The government has been caught napping, as usual, because the ABCs of good governance are not being followed by the politicians in power.

The weaknesses of Rajuk and DCC have been revealed time and again; but huge time and energy are being conferred on political elections (viz., for the Ctg mayor). Our politics is still immature, seeking extra publicity all the time and paying attention only to big projects

(or kick-backs).

None is interested in quiet, background activities. Black money has fast circulation, working in grey areas in the background, but the damages are headlined from time to time. It encourages corrupt practices, which the government cannot control through routine actions, because big, influential, high-ups are involved. This closed cycle has to be broken up, but it is not that easy without visible official commitment.

The fast rate at which the construction of high rise buildings has been allowed is neither scientific nor justified. Political nepotism is vicious, and resists eradication, as the policy makers are involved in the process and proceedings. "Political will" is weak in Dhaka, the parliament is limping, and the role of the opposition is ineffective.

Now correction has been left to

Nature, and it is going to take its toll in the coming years, adding to the two categories of miseries: man-made, and natural. Tsunamis, earthquakes, and floods and not whims of Nature. There are two sides to it: one scientific, and the other mystical (the supreme Creator rules!).

Coming back to lack of parking space, the developers could not keep pace with the fast-changing mores and modes of the society. The other temptation is the high cost of the land in big cities. The solution is decentralisation and checks on urban migration. The politicians (and the bureaucrats) just cannot face the issues, for obvious reasons. What happened to political will? Answer: politics is now big business, and public interest is low down in the list (in other countries also).

The regime has switched on a

pre-election campaign, based on pre-conceived notions. The mass awareness has risen each decade, but political policies based on annihilating the opponent areas of the society (the mores) are uncontrolled (no time to pay attention to the basics, to build up the right foundations, before pointing to the super-structures).

Urban development policies are breaking under social pressures; and the latter are changing fast. Reactive governance cannot solve problems. Foresight, judgement, and continuity have no entry points in the planning networks. We see the after-effects, and wail and holler!

It is too late for the regime to drive in corrections, as the general elections are just around the corner, and the situation tends to encourage self-survival activities. How to reduce the 34-year gaps through truant

politics? Our politics is virtually high-rise without the right foundations! Catch whom? Your guess is as good as mine!

A Abad
Dhaka

AL leadership

During the AL's five-year rule (1996-2001) many bizarre things happened. Prominent among them was the rise of godfathers like Joynal Hazari, Shamim Osman and so on.

The AL leadership did nothing to rein them in. They should have been tough on them. They have realised, rather late, that a man like Hazari is a burden to any party.

Md. Aminul Islam
DU