

Predictions of fall in remittances

Govt must work to prevent it

REMITTANCES from Bangladeshis working overseas might fall over the next two years. And it could happen because of some recent actions taken by countries where we have traditionally exported our manpower. One does not need much wisdom to know how badly off we will be if such conditions come to pass. Of late our manpower industry has been hit badly by government actions in Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and other places. While we realise that the governments of those countries have the right to formulate their own policies regarding migrant workers from abroad, we also feel that the Bangladesh government should by now have adopted a strong and constructive position regarding our people working there. It is also important that the host countries go through rethinking vis-à-vis their own migrant worker-related policies. It is equally important that any misgivings here be removed at the earliest.

There are at present about 5,000,000 Bangladeshis employed in various global spots; and of these, a rather large contingent of 3,000,000 work in the Middle East. All these people together have not only been helping their families and the country's economy but have also been instrumental in the economic activities of the host countries. Therefore, to be warned now that these figures might fall in the coming days should be a wake-up call for us. We must heed the warning. It is surely encouraging for government functionaries to speak to us of new employment opportunities abroad. But much more can be, or could have been, achieved if our existing manpower markets were properly and judiciously tapped. That has not happened, which is a pity. Even so, we think there is yet time for the government, through the foreign and overseas employment ministries, to undertake policies directed at ensuring a healthy presence of our workers in the Middle East and other places. Why the issue has not been handled properly in Malaysia is anyone's guess. Similarly, the situations that have lately arisen in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain (where a Bangladeshi worker was executed after conviction for murder) should have been swiftly and deftly headed off. That they were not was dampening in itself and may serve as a bad precedent for the future.

The imperative at this point is for us to devise a new and more effective strategy towards ensuring our manpower employment abroad. Obviously, such a strategy must take into consideration the security aspects of employment. But such a step presupposes important steps like establishing a database of Bangladeshis already employed abroad as also those scheduled to fly out on fresh jobs. It is important that at the diplomatic level, particularly through our embassies and high commissions, projections and studies be made of job prospects abroad. At the same time, a new dimension can be given to the overseas employment policy by shaping plans for the development of demand-driven skilled manpower resources for utilisation in the Middle East and elsewhere. Again, new markets for employment will have to be tapped.

Regulating speed of vehicles

HC ruling must be implemented

AGAINST the backdrop of reckless driving and tragic deaths under the wheels of vehicles at regular intervals, the High Court (HC) had given a ruling on March 10, 2008 making installation of speed governor seals in all modes of motorised vehicles mandatory by March 10, 2009. The HC had also instructed the relevant authorities to publish notices in various newspapers to make the owners of vehicles aware of the ruling, particularly mentioning the provisions therein for punishment for noncompliance. It was expected that relevant authorities would take the HC ruling with due seriousness and start the implementation process without further ado. But, to our knowledge, motor vehicle owners have not yet been notified in any manner about the deadline and the details of the instruction.

The conspicuous absence of monitoring agencies and lack of strict vigilance to punish reckless drivers remain the most cogent reason for fatal accidents and loss of human lives on the roads and highways. It would be stating the obvious that an overwhelming percentage of vehicles, like minibuses and trucks, do not have the required fitness and the drivers carry on with fake driving licences. As a result, the sight of hundreds of run-down minibuses with faulty brakes, missing backlights, broken windowpanes and missing footrest maneuvering wildly through the traffic send chill down the spine of the onlookers. If such is the exterior of a vehicle how defective the interior is can be easily made out. These jalopies defy the speed limits on busy roads, and get away with impunity by bribing the members of the law enforcing agencies.

Nagging disorder and anarchy persist on the roads and various measures taken in the past could hardly improve the situation. But, this time around, we feel the HC instruction to install speed governor seals must be adhered to by the motor vehicle owners, both public and private, to bring order and safety back on the roads. As thousands of people have to take to the roads on a daily basis, the authorities will have to notify the motorists and bus-truck owners about the speed-monitoring device without further delay. At the same time we urge the relevant authorities to ensure strict monitoring of the speed limits and take immediate action against the violators of the instructions.

Time to play the historic role

The caretaker government, pledge-bound to hold a free, fair, and credible election by the third week of December 2008, will keep its promise under any circumstances, and the political parties, taking into account their past omissions and commissions, will redeem their plans and strategies and lead the nation towards peace, progress, and prosperity -- that is what the people of this country want.

HUSAIN IMAM

THE Awami League after an extended meeting of the party on May 26 attended by more than 850 delegates representing almost every tier of their organisation from grass-roots level to the highest echelon, followed by a meeting the next day of the central working committee, the highest decision making body of the party, has decided not to join the ongoing dialogue with Sheikh Hasina. The decision was unanimous and true reflection of the wishes and sentiments of the party workers and activists. One must admit that the decision, right or wrong, has been taken by the party in a most democratic manner, a practice not so common in the body politic of this country.

One major accusation against our political parties is that they do not practice democracy within their parties. The parties are run in autocratic manner in the name of democracy. Interestingly, we now find it difficult, albeit out of our concern for election, to accept a decision of a party obtained democratically. We want Awami League to reverse the democratic decision of the party, ignoring the opinion of its workers and supporters out of fear that the decision may jeopardise the much needed election.

The Daily Star, like many of us a strong critic of the political parties for not having democratic practice within the party, has, through its editorial asked Awami League to review the decision of the extended as well as working committee meetings, taking into account the fact that Sheikh Hasina has in a message to her party voiced her support for the election. We understand and share as well the paper's concern.

No wonder, Winston Churchill had to say that "democracy is the worst form of government," but we may not forget, in the same breath he also said "but still better than all others that have been tried in the past."

The editor of another daily is accusing the party of taking undue advantage of the situation by resorting to democratic process. Is it a fair accusation? On one hand you will want the political parties to practice democracy within the party and on other hand you will not only dislike the outcome of the process, but also question it.

The reality is that Sheikh Hasina, despite all efforts from various quarters to disgrace her in the eyes of the public and debar her from politics, is still the most popular leader of the country, wielding overwhelming support from not only the grassroots level

leaders and workers of the party, but also from a vast section of general public.

There is no denying that, given what transpired in the political arena of the country in the last one and a half years, dialogue with the political parties is important for holding a meaningful election and peaceful transition to a democratic order by December this year. Although I do not consider it fair to put Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia in the same bracket, the reality is that the two ladies, as the top leaders of the two largest political parties representing nearly 80 percent voters of the country, still hold the key to a successful dialogue and a credible election.

The government will do well if they can realise the situation and do all that is necessary to bring them to the table for dialogue.

The government will also do well if they make it clear to the public the very purpose of the dialogue, spelling out a specific agenda. An open-ended dialogue always runs the risk of creating confusion and losing the actual target. What we have seen so far by the courtesy of television camera is that in the name of dialogue some small political parties have sat across the table with the nominated advisers of the caretaker

government (CA sitting aloof at the other end of the table) and placed a charter of demands, some of which were either irrelevant or beyond the capacity of the caretaker government.

Take for example, CPB in their turn has asked for revival of 1972 constitution. They want balance of power between the president and the prime minister. How can a caretaker government or the politicians do this now without a parliament? JSD and Gono Forum want a national government after the election. What has the caretaker government to do with it? What could be the basis of such demands?

Again, we cannot but get confused when we see the government inviting the business community and the so-called civil society to the dialogue. What for?

All these 16 months, with emergency on, the caretaker government of Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed had been talking and talking only with these people, keeping the politicians either inside the house or behind the bars or on the run. I wonder, what could still be left to talk with them?

If the idea for a dialogue is to create a congenial atmosphere for holding a free, fair, and credible national election and smooth transfer of power to a truly elected representative government, it is probably high time for the caretaker government to give full attention in constructive engagement with the political parties, withdrawing all sorts of restrictions on peaceful political activities. Time has also come for Sheikh Hasina and Begum Khaleda Zia to play the historic

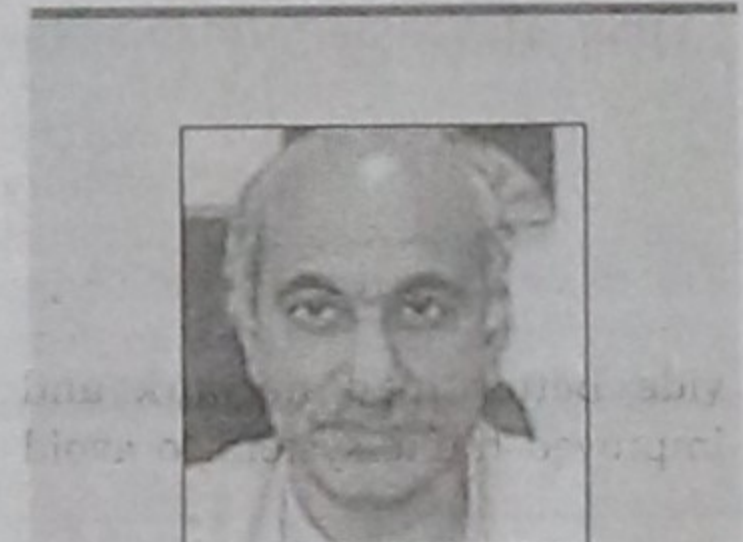
role in shepherding the dialogue, in turn the politics of the country through a very difficult period.

Certainly, much of the future of democracy depends on how carefully, patiently, and skillfully the caretaker government and the political parties handle the situation. The caretaker government, pledge-bound to hold a free, fair, and credible election by the third week of December 2008, will keep its promise under any circumstances, and the political parties, taking into account their past omissions and commissions, will redeem their plans and strategies and lead the nation towards peace, progress, and prosperity -- that is what the people of this country want.

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The secret diaries of Manmohan, Advani



M.J. AKBAR

HOW could my fellow-traveller Buddhadeb Bhattacharya call me the worst prime minister India has had? That stung. I rather like Buddha. I know his type sheep dressed in wolf's clothing. I've done my bit of lip-service to socialism. What option did one have if you wanted some trajectory up the old Congress bureaucracy greasy pole? Indra Gandhi would spread nonalignment at breakfast and turn pink with the salad over lunch: poor dear, no one told her that nationalisation and nationalism are not quite the same thing.

Rajiv was different. His instinct told him that this socialist claptrap might be good for the ballot box but would not do for the economy, dear boy. But Bofors blew him away before he could merge his brains to his instinct.

However, all this jargon did help when Chandra Shekhar I wish he had stopped wiping tears out of the eyes of the poor in every

That's it. There lies the problem. The branding is wrong. Congress is now off-message. Bangalore doesn't want a Congress that veers between Centre and Left. It wants one that veers between Centre and Right. We should rebrand the Congress as Right-Centre, because we are both Right and Centre. Must discuss it with the media boys in the office tomorrow, if I can find one who isn't looking for another job.

speech became prime minister. He kept me in play with, probably, the last decision of his brief and unlamented term, when he put me at the head of University Grants Commission.

That may not sound like a big deal when you are prime minister, but it is one huge blessing when you are a retired babu in Delhi.

Like a good bureaucrat, I have always believed in what the boss believes in. What a miracle, then, was 1991, the Year of the Great Counter Reformation! I finally got a boss who was persuaded to believe in what I believe in. Narasimha Rao had an intellect but no beliefs. That was helpful. When the call came, he somersaulted right into the economic reform box.

I thought Buddha was one of us: spouting socialism as long as the supply came from there, and switching instantly to my old bank's free-market-leave-the-poor-with-a-trickle thesis the moment we were sworn in. Ah, the pleasures of that great ebb and flow of intellectual dialogue in the

World Bank canteen! I didn't expect Buddha to have as much faith in America as I did, but then he wasn't lucky enough to land a job at the World Bank. Studied Bengali at Presidency College, I gather. Pity he couldn't get into Economics. We would have pulled him up to Delhi School of Economics, saved him from the Commies and made him leader of the Congress in Bengal by now.

Buddha telephoned to apologise of course, but the explanation was thin: election rhetoric. Bah! I am an honest man. Everyone knows that. How can I help it if everyone in my Cabinet makes money? Why should I be called the worst prime minister?

I gave my country the Indo-US nuclear deal virtually single-handedly; even George was saying so. Well, not single-handedly, that is immodest. There were a few others, I must admit it. But who can deny that I brought my nation to the brink of an understanding with the United States that could make India America's most

important ally in Afro-Asia after Israel!

We made history, and history will remember its maker! Those who oppose the deal are relics of a dead past! The Soviet Union is long dead, Comrades! I never criticised Buddha for being wrong on the nuclear deal; I could appreciate that he had to toe the party line. Why did he get personal with me just because the Congress lost every election under my watch?

What I can't understand is why the geeks of Bangalore never voted for the Congress after all I did for them. I don't get it. The Indo-US deal is for their India! I've sacrificed my future for their future! And yet they've shifted to the awful BJP, which didn't have the decency to support a deal that they would have happily done themselves. I only sold the right to test which fool wants another bomb, in any case, the BJP would have sold the whole store! Politics is so unfair...

Young Prithviraj Chauhan was wrong when he said we lost Karnataka, because Deve Gowda

split the secular vote. Judging by the speed with which Gowda's secular vote rushed towards the BJP rather than towards us, we are lucky Gowda held on to 16%. If he had sunk further, the margin between the BJP and us would have been greater.

I can't understand why chaps keep talking of inflation as the reason for the Congress slump. My economic policies are beyond reproach. What have prices got to do with defeat? Millions of honest Kannadigas voted for Congress. Don't you think their wives go to the market? If prices did not affect them, why should they affect anyone else? I can't stop the price of oil from rising, can I? And when I offer peaceful nuclear energy in 2020, no one wants it! I could have been a Gulliver during these four years but little men from Lilliput have tied me up, made me immobile.

Let us face it, Dear Diary: this is a moment of introspection. I must be honest in my analysis, for I am an honest person. I was reading a Reuters report on the election results; it is a Western news agency, so it was unbiased. Reuters described the results as "another blow for the Centre-Left Congress party."

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veers between Centre and Right. We should rebrand the Congress as Right-Centre, because we are both Right and Centre. Must discuss it with the media boys in the office tomorrow, if I can find one who isn't looking for another job.

Goodnight, Diary. Extract from the Secret Diary of Lal Krishna Advani: It's nightmare time again. I won't be able to sleep. This is precisely what happened four years ago. We swept the Assembly polls, stepped out with confident stride, brought the general elections forward and fell into a big hole from which we still cannot quite get out.

If I had to offer one explanation for that catastrophe, it was the smug look on the faces of all our chaps on television. That cost us the general election. I can see that same glimmer back on some BJP faces on television. My sweat is cold already: remember all those who predicted that the BJP would get 300 seats...

It doesn't bother me a jot when television channels are critical of the BJP. That is probably advantageous. Who cares if their opinion polls give Congress twice the seats it eventually gets. It makes no difference to the voter. The BJP cannot be defeated by its foes. But God save the BJP from its friends!

Is there no one who will ban television news channels till the next general elections are over?

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Pride and prejudice destroyed Hillary Clinton

LETTER FROM AMERICA

Hillary claimed that both she and Senator McCain "will bring a life time of experience to the presidency; Senator Obama will bring a speech he gave;" and "Senator McCain and I have passed the commander-in-chief test; as for Senator Obama, you have to ask him." McCain campaign is already airing ads with clips showing Hillary uttering the above statements. In trying to damage Obama, Hillary may have mortally wounded the Democratic Party's chances of winning the presidency in November.

FAKHRUDDIN AHMED

CANDIDATES are often guilty of acting the part the press assigns them. This time last year, the press anointed Democrat Hillary Clinton and Republican Rudy Giuliani as the two "inevitable nominees." Even after Giuliani flamed out fairly quickly, Hillary continued to wear the label as a badge of honour. Of course, the press did not consult the voters.

Hillary's pride did not let her take the challenge of the scrawny

freshman African-American Senator from Illinois seriously; the one with the funny name and two big ears. As Barack Obama defined himself as a "change" candidate, Hillary's pollsters advised her to define herself as the candidate of "experience."

Experience would trump change every time, they reasoned. With Hillary sporting a 25% lead over Obama in polls as late as early January, their strategy seemed to be working.

Hillary's brain trust was full of "experienced" people who had

run Bill Clinton's successful campaign in 1992. They were the new kids on the block in 1992, who ran circles around the aging President George Herbert Walker Bush.

Sixteen years later, Hillary's campaign was a replica of Bill Clinton's 1992 campaign. But this is 2008. This is the era of the Internet and the social networks like "My Space" and "Facebook," the domain of Barack Obama and his millions of young supporters. Obama's message of "change," spread through the internet,

suddenly caught fire in mid-January.

No presidential candidate can win an election in the US without raising millions of dollars and spending those on television advertising. Hillary raised funds the old-fashioned way; through celebrity-studded dinners and contributions from a few wealthy donors. Obama raised three times as much through small donations from over a million donors on the Internet.

Hillary ran the best possible twentieth century-style campaign. Barack Obama introduced to the world the methods on how elections are going to be run and won in the twenty-first century.

Iowa caucus, which kicks off the nation's presidential nomination process, has been the graveyard of many a front-runner. The lily-white state does not like favourites; it favours the underdogs. Some Hillary strategists had argued unsuccessfully

about skipping Iowa caucus on January 3. With Obama winning the Iowa caucus and Hillary finishing third, her aura of inevitability and invincibility were gone. A narrow victory in New Hampshire saved Hillary's candidacy from a premature demise.

With defeat staring her in the face in South Carolina, Hillary injected some prejudice into the race. Hillary attempted to diminish Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s achievements before the holiday named after him.

King needed President Johnson to enact the Civil Rights Bill, she reminded the blacks. Bill Clinton lumped Obama's victory in South Carolina with those of Jesse Jackson's in the same state in 1984 and 1988, with the clear intent of painting Obama as just another black candidate who thrives on black votes.

With the strategy of wrapping up the nomination on Super Tuesday (February 5), Hillary

spent all her money before the 22-state contest. When it turned out to be a wash, a bankrupt Hillary had no plans for the future; she had no foot soldiers in the caucus states.

Obama's campaign was predicated on the long haul. His young caucus and primary workers were everywhere ushering in the "change." In the remainder of February, Obama won eleven contests in a row, essentially ending the contest.

Had the tapes of a ranting and raving Rev. Jeremiah Wright, Obama's former pastor, not surfaced in March, the game would have been over sooner. It was then that Hillary threw caution to the wind and aimed lethal fire at Obama.

Hillary claimed that both she and Senator McCain "will bring a life time of experience to the presidency; Senator Obama will bring a speech he gave;" and, "Senator McCain and I have

passed the commander-in-chief test; as for Senator Obama, you have to ask him."

McCain campaign is already airing ads with clips showing Hillary uttering the above statements. In trying to damage Obama, Hillary may have mortally wounded the Democratic Party's chances of winning the presidency in November. In May, Hillary injected a dose of racism into the contest by telling the nation that "hardworking, working class whites" will not vote for the black Obama.

Bill Clinton, too, dished out more of his prejudice. "It would be a great thing if we had an election year where you had two people who loved this country and were devoted to the interest of this country," the former president said referring to Hillary and McCain.

Bill Clinton was legitimising and reinforcing the attempts by

the Republicans to portray Obama as someone less than fully American, with an unknown past, who is not patriotic enough and therefore, cannot be entrusted with the reigns of the US government.

Given such acrimonies history, it will be foolhardy for Barack Obama to offer Hillary Clinton the Vice Presidency.

Blinded by pride and prejudice, Hillary overestimated her power. Her latest spiel was directed at convincing the superdelegates that she is the better candidate. They were not convinced.

On the contrary, it was the threat of 31 of her own superdelegates, 8 senators and 23 congressmen, to endorse Obama without her releasing them, that convinced Hillary Clinton to finally concede and endorse Barack Obama on June 7.

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