

## Co-operation with Malaysia

In general terms, Bangladesh and Malaysia have always talked about prospects in their bilateral relations in an optimistic mood, but, more often than not, fell short of adopting concrete measures for fulfilling these prospects. True, Malaysia has provided jobs to Bangladeshis, semi-skilled workers as well as to well-qualified members of technical professions. In return, Malaysia has retained the balance of trade in its favour vis-a-vis Bangladesh, as part of its largely successful worldwide drive in economic expansion.

A close look at the scenario would convince experts that it has been the lack of a strong political will on the part of both Dhaka and Kuala Lumpur as well as the absence of an effective mechanism that slowed down the process of giving co-operation between the two countries the necessary thrust.

The just-concluded visit here by the Malaysian Foreign Minister, Datuk Abdullah bin Haji Ahmed Badawi has done much in giving the bilateral relations between Dhaka and Kuala Lumpur the right direction, with identification of areas for future co-operation. Here, of course, the most important outcome of Datuk Abdullah's visit has been the establishment of the Bangladesh-Malaysia Joint Commission (JC) which held its first meeting here last week, with the second meeting due next year in Kuala Lumpur. The JC has focused its attention on a whole range of areas which offer prospects for expansion. They cover joint industrial ventures and investment, co-operation in banking, shipping services, the establishment of palm tree plantation projects in Bangladesh, expansion of bilateral trade and the recruitment of manpower from here for Malaysia's agricultural and industrial fields. It is an impressive list mentioned in the agreed minutes of the high-level discussion between the two sides.

While we must put in our best efforts in the development of each of these areas, it is important to set our priorities right. There is no doubt that the establishment of joint ventures, with Malaysia providing the foreign exchange component of the capital, should get the immediate attention of JC. It is reported that the visiting Foreign Minister was impressed by what he saw at the Export Processing Zone (EPZ) in Chittagong as well as of its potential contribution to the economic growth of Bangladesh. It is now up to Abdullah to convince his government that their country should come into EPZ in a big way. Malaysia may also play a significant role in convincing other members of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) that prospects for foreign investment in Bangladesh are just as good as they are in other countries in Asia, which are also opening their doors to foreign entrepreneurs. In this context, Dhaka should aim at promoting a special relationship with Kuala Lumpur in political and economic fields. When it comes to politics, Malaysia's vocal support for our position on the Rohingya issue has given our bilateral relations a good boost. This is a good example to follow in other fields.

In spite of many disadvantages which Bangladesh, a Least Developed Country (LDC), suffers from — disadvantages which Malaysia would surely know — we should try hard to create the right conditions for expansion of Dhaka-KL cooperation. Here, the private sector in the two countries has a much bigger role to play than officials in the two governments. The delegation of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industries (FBCCI) which had a fruitful meeting with the distinguished visitor must now demonstrate its initiative in follow-up actions, instead of waiting for a signal from the government for its participation in the work of JC. In fact, the FBCCI should be aggressive enough to be the driving force behind the expansion of Dhaka-KL ties in the economic field. It should be the private sector which should formulate projects proposals for JC — not the other way round.

## We Salute that Indomitable Spirit

Kazi Nazrul Islam has no parallel in the history of world literature. The proposition may sound loudly presumptuous. There have been tens of thousands of very successful writers. Most of them have been unique people. Still Nazrul was perhaps uniquely unique. Can we compare him with Alauddin Khan who also rose to the pantheon of artistic gods right from a land-ploughing family? Perhaps not if any one pursuit is considered. But judged for his range of activities and its overall wholesome influence on society, Nazrul stands stupendously above many, and is easily in company with those that the avant-garde society of the Bengalee intellectuals and artists.

But his achievements are not quite why we remember him on the occasion of his anniversaries. This is perhaps another way of saying that there are other greater and nobler aspects to his strivings and his being at whole than passes for his achievements. Let us recall only three more prominent of those. His was the perfect or ideal synthesis of the three great strands of culture and civilisation that contributed to the making of the ethno-cultural historical Bengalee. When Bangladesh was born on the plank of Bengalee nationalism, there was much need for a figure on which to model Bengaleeness. None other, not Tagore himself, qualified better for the role than Nazrul. And this would continue to be true far into the future. If Bangladesh thrives as a state, Nazrul's relevance as representing ideally all that goes into the making of a cultured Bengalee will keep on growing.

Nazrul was the very first man who, being a writer and composer from the beginning to the last, nevertheless had an all-in commitment to discharge his responsibilities to society straight through politics.

Nazrul was not just a rebel. He was a revolutionary. And like all revolutionary he was a visionary dreamer. And such dreamers cannot but be incorrigible romantics. Nazrul's romanticism, albeit a little too bent on the medieval nostalgia, found its best expression in his music. The creator of hundreds of immortal songs, Nazrul however will perhaps be more remembered as a fashioner of songs that preserved the Calcutta of Wajed Ali Shah — the Calcutta which in the early part of the century housed all that was best in a thousand years in the whole of the north of the subcontinent.

While saluting him on his 16th death anniversary we salute the indomitable spirit that made him as also the ideal Bengalee that he was.

INDIAS much vaunted Free press is under siege

One of the freest press in the world's biggest democracy. It is caught in the crossfire between government and rebel forces in one part of the country and being threatened by political extremists in another.

In both instances, Indian journalists are under constant pressure to either sell out or risk life and limb to maintain their independence.

The situation seems ironic at a time when the boundaries of press freedom are being pushed to the limit. This is borne out by the situation in two Indian states. In Kashmir, media people are under attack from both government and militant organisations fighting for independence as they go about trying to report on the crisis which has gripped the region for some time now.

Anti-government forces usually seek them out to tell their own versions of what is going on in the troubled region. Media people are invited to a clandestine rendezvous attended by so much secrecy and intrigue to evade detection by government troops.

With reporters' phone often tapped and government forces keeping a sharp eye on people who come in contact with them, journalists are walking a tightrope everytime they try to arrange or are invited to a meeting with anti-government forces. Foreign journalists seem to have better access to the militants.

Indian reporters who get and survive such risky inter-

# Indian Press under Siege

Prakash Chandra writes from New Delhi

Many journalists, whether they are evading bullets or deflecting attacks from a powerful political party, persevere in the exercise of press freedom.

views with the militants are naturally sworn to keep the rendezvous site secret. But they also have to face very unhappy authorities who are bent on getting them to reveal the hide-outs of the militants.

Several newspapers in the region have already been shut down, their presses raided and some members of the staff arrested. Others are censored heavily. Some journalists occupying government-owned flats were also evicted, apparently in an effort to force them out of Srinagar, capital of Jammu and Kashmir state.

A senior foreign correspondent said, "When you fly to Kashmir where the extremists are kept at bay only by the Army, you are almost risking your life. Hotels are almost empty, the once fashionable bazars open only for brief hours when the curfew is not on. Streets are deserted and, most of all, reporters are not welcome."

Another correspondent who has managed to remain in Srinagar said, "We are writing at the point of the gun. The extremists want us to give in detail all about government atrocities against the Kashmiri people — how their houses are searched, their women interrogated and their young people shot. It is an agonising experience."

Living under the gun is not the only major problem. Journalists also have to sharpen

their skills in sifting fact from fiction. They have to make sure they are not buying fairy tales from either side which are both eager to score every little moral or psychological victory from the conflict. One side, for example, would exaggerate the losses to life and property while the other would reduce them to negligible proportions.

While Kashmir-based journalists are dodging bullets, their colleagues in the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu face a different challenge altogether. The leader of the near-fanatical party, Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (ADMK), appears not to be enamoured with the media. Jayalitha, the Brahmin Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu who has been variously described as a goddess of fear, a woman Hitler and the Honourable Revolutionary Leader (by her followers), is believed to be behind recent attacks on newspapers and magazines which have been critical of her.

Even before she became Chief Minister, supporters of her party attacked the newspaper *Murasoli* soon after the assassination of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in May 1991. The offices of the family

weekly *Kumudam* were raided and another paper, *Rajarishi*, was forced to close down. The staff of *Nakkeran* was hounded.

Most recently, a warrant of arrest against KP Sunil, a former correspondent of the *Illustrated Weekly of India*, was issued for a breach of privilege case involving an article he wrote claiming the State Assembly had degenerated from an intellectual forum into a combat arena.

The case had earlier been dropped after the Privileges Committee of the Assembly accepted Mr Sunil's explanation of the incident so the revival of the charges had been a surprise.

Observers find a systematic attempt to intimidate the press, attack the media as an institution and silence opposition papers. They also note the creation of a climate of fear by goons believed to be working for the ruling ADMK party.

These various incidents have been taken as very clear signs that the press in Tamil Nadu is hardly tolerated by the present regime.

In spite of these, there has been very little open denunciation of what is going on. Northerners think this is partly because of the generally

timid attitude of the Tamil Nadu people themselves. Even respectable newspapers in the state behave in a very docile manner.

As one analyst noted, "No newspaper in the North could have tolerated such an intolerant behaviour. It is a strange attitude of the Tamil people which encourages politicians to adopt a dictatorial attitude."

With the Jayalitha-Congress alliance holding a clear majority in the State Assembly — 224 out of 232 members — very little help can be expected from that sector which seems to be very much in awe, if not in fear, of the Chief Minister. One newspaper said, "She keeps them in a perpetual state of submission deriving from fear and uncertainty. She is basically inaccessible to them and to the media which she treats with disdain and contempt that set her apart from all other political leaders in the country."

The local press' own history is also a setback. Politics in Tamil Nadu has been characterised by confrontation not only among political groups but also among their respective publications. Newspapers had been set up and used as vehicles by political parties to attack their rivals.

But despite the odds they have to work against, many journalists in both Kashmir and Tamil Nadu, whether they are evading bullets or deflecting attacks from a powerful

political party, persevere in the exercise of press freedom. In Kashmir, many journalists have transferred their base to Jammu, the region's winter capital, where only occasional bomb explosions interrupt their work. A few newspapers, mostly in the Urdu language and one in English, make a brave effort to come out regularly.

The journalists' trade union — the Jammu and Kashmir Union of Working Journalists — has protested the government's attitude. The union has asked the state government to refer to the Press Commission of India any media account it considers offensive instead of resorting to high-handed measures.

It also suggested the setting up of a press advisory committee which will arbitrate conflicts between media and government. At the same time, the union asked journalists throughout the country to raise their voices against the dictatorial behaviour of government.

In Tamil Nadu, various opposition parties have started to condemn the excesses of the Jayalitha group. The Supreme Court is also about to consider some of the incidents which have arisen so far.

The press itself is speaking up. The respectable Madras newspaper, *The Hindu*, has advised Ms Jayalitha to drop the proceedings against Mr Sunil.

But other media institutions will have to join the struggle to preserve India's tradition of press freedom.

— *Depthnews Asia*

# Why We Can't Win a Position in World Economy

by Sajidur Rahman

WHY some nations make it up to the peak and some can never even start the climb has been a subject of great debate for many decades. A number of reasons have been put forward by scholars. Some attributed the growth of a nation's economy to macro-economic policies, others to abundance of natural resources and yet others to management policies and practices like labour-management relationships.

Harvard Business School Professor Michael E Porter in an article "Why Nations Win" in *World Executive's Digest*, however, propounded that reason behind a nation's competitive advantage is not something to be found in a nation's macro issues. Contrarily, the competitiveness can be explained by analysing the productivity of a nation's "particular industry or industry segments." The question to be asked is "Why the value of output of a particular unit of labour or capital differ among industries within a nation?"

Porter identified four factors responsible for this difference in performance. He termed the factors together as

"Diamond" because "nations are most likely to succeed in industries where the diamond — a dynamic system made up of the four interacting determinants — is the most favourable." These determinants are:

1. Factor conditions: It refers to "the inputs necessary to compete in a given industry." Lack of these factors does not necessarily hinder growth. It may spur innovations, thus putting the nation in a position of competitive advantage.

2. Demand conditions: Not outside demand but demand within a country is what counts. The demand structure must set quality over quantity.

3. Related and supporting industries: An industry needs other related industries' support for its growth.

4. Firm strategy, structure and rivalry: What is the background of the personnel who determine the strategy of the firms in an industry? Is the economy free enough to encourage competition between firms? These need be worked out.

According to Porter, the role of government is "influencing the four determinants." If

uncontrollable events like wars do not hamper a nation's political and economic life then these are the factors which determine a nation's destiny.

Now let us analyse the situation in Bangladesh.

Factor conditions: Bangladesh faces severe constraints in inputs like land and capital. This was also true for newly industrialised nations. Those nations were able to overcome this weakness through high savings rate and continuous innovations. But Bangladesh could not. It happens to be our national characteristic that we were never much cautious in spending. Our Mughal rulers did it and, of late, our government has done it. On the other hand, the people really have little desire and opportunity to understand whereabouts of the economy. In developed economy, the information flow is so intense that you always have to be aware of the economic condition, whether you like it or not. But surprisingly in the national media of our country we rarely find any credible information, frank discussion on

this issue. This flow of information is very important because it is what makes the world go, or at least creates competition and keeps the firms running.

Demand condition: We, the consumers of Bangladesh, usually care little about the quality of the product we are buying. When the consumers expect high quality products and reject products because of a little defect, then, naturally, the manufacturers are encouraged for quality production. A group of producers continuously competing against each other for quality production is more apt to satisfy domestic as well as international customers.

Related and supporting industries: Industries are inter-

woven with each other and diversification of present industries can breed more competitively advanced industries. In Bangladesh diversification is not a very common phenomenon. Lack of entrepreneurship and venture capital impede growth and diversification of firms.

Firm strategy, structure and rivalry: Technocrats, not bureaucrats, are the ones who are leading the major companies of the world. So decisions are concentrated on technological breakthroughs. The firms in our country are usually headed by people who possess little technological knowledge and have little interest in making the production process more competitive.

The driving force behind developed economies is rivalry. Firms are competing against

each other; they are constantly comparing themselves. This results in creation of, say, just-in-time production, strategic management etc. The organizational structure is becoming as flat as possible. But our country, still does not enjoy the free economy. The economy is burdened with losing public concerns. It is usually said that three layers of supervision create pure insulation. What we have in our 'corporations' is nothing but bureaucracy.

Germany and Japan were defeated powers in World War II. But the adversities they faced were associated with great innovations and industrial progress. Bangladesh won the freedom in 1971, when we will win the desired position in world economy remains a question.

## To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

### Donation for mosque

Sir, Baitur Rahmat Mosque in Mirpur is more an imaginative but is taking a materialistic shape. Construction of its ground floor has been completed in November 1991 with the help and co-operation of local devotees and other philanthropist. It is beyond the capacity of the mosque committee to complete the essential finishing works for want of fund. As a result devotees are facing much inconvenience in performing their prayers. On the other hand, roof and walls are being damaged for want of adequate plaster.

Therefore, to prepare and affix windows and doors, to complete the plaster works, to build verandha and boundary walls and to install electricity and concealed wiring we like, to appeal to all spiritual minded Muslims, as well as religious organisations, local or foreign, to extend possible help to wards this House of Allah.

Sub (Rtd), Al-Haj Minnat Alt President and Sheikh Abul Hossain Secretary, Baitur Rahmat Masjid Committee Sec 11/C, Ave 5/19-20, Mirpur, Dhaka

### Agriculture Group Students

Sir, It is a matter of great regret that students passing SSC and HSC in the Agricultural Science Group are not getting even a chance to apply for admission to BSc Ag (Hons) course under Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU), because most of them do not study Physics as one of the elective subjects in their HSC course. From the current session, the BAU has withdrawn Maths and Zoology subjects from the BSc Ag

(Hons) curricula. As a result, now only those students who had studied Physics, Chemistry, Biology (comp or opt), Mathematics (comp or opt) in the HSC course are eligible to apply for admission to the 4-year BSc Ag (Hons) course.

Today when we are thinking to introduce complete agricultural courses in secondary and higher secondary level for the expansion of true agricultural education as per the need of the agro-based Bangladesh, depriving the Agriculture Group HSC passed students from applying for admission to BSc Ag (Hons) course is really shocking and a matter of injustice.

May we draw the attention of the relevant authorities to the issue?

M Zahidul Haque Assistant Professor Bangladesh Agricultural Institute Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka

### Terrorism in DU

Sir, Terrorism in DU has been a myriad of vices slurring this highest seat of learning in Bangladesh. Although it is rooted in the broad social fabric, yet it has some unique features on DU campus.

Outside DU campus, as alleged terrorism has not always been politically patronized, administratively condoned or publicly admired. DU has been a sacred precinct shivered by the anti-terrorism slogan-chanting demonstrators and again rocked by heavy gunshots.

Political patronization as a contributing factor to the cancerous growth of this debilitating vice has long ceased to remain a secret. Since the DU students have proved to be the

vanguard of all national movements, the political parties assiduously make efforts to stretch their wings over DU. Dreadful are the aspects of the use of fire-arms to achieve the goal muddling the DU atmosphere.

Police action on the DU campus remains to be more than a mystery. Faring of the gun-trotting youngmen just several meters away from the police is also an open secret.

Concrete measures are called for to strike at the very roots of these vices, brushing aside high-sounding rhetorics and all-pervading hypocrisy.

Md Abdur Rouf Sergeant Zahurul Haque Hall, DU

### Audit objections

Sir, We commend the recommendation made by Mr LK Siddique MP for replying/settlement of audit objections within three months. This would go a long way in inducting financial discipline.

In this connection we would like to draw Government's attention to the fact that over lakh of pensioners are not getting their pension due to audit objections. Audit objections are outstanding for 10-12 years. Most of the audit objections are on flimsy and untenable grounds. Even appropriate replies are not given any attention. Audit authorities are adamant in upholding their view points even when are wrong.

In order to obviate the difficulties and reducing the suffering of pensioners, an appellate tribunal should be constituted in each ministry with an additional secretary, as chairman, and a representative of audit department. The tribunal should review the cases and its decision would be final and binding on both the parties — audit authority and the individual.

A time frame for resolving audit objection and settlement of pension cases may be set out.

Golam, Shamol, Dhaka

# Governments Let Torturers, State Assassins Get Away with Abuses

Amnesty International's Annual Report Details Violations in 142 Countries

G OVERNMENTS around the world are breeding contempt for human rights by letting their forces get away with abduction, torture and murder. Amnesty International said as it released its 1992 annual report last month.

"As long as the torturers, the state assassins and those who give the orders act with a free hand and without fear of punishment, the cycle of violations will never be broken," the human rights organization said.

A growing number of governments have said they will stand up for human rights, but all too often they ignore past violations, set up tribunals or investigations simply as whitewash, and pass amnesty laws in the name of political expediency, Amnesty International said.

The organization's global survey covering 142 countries shows the result of letting human rights violations go unpunished. In 1991 alone, people were jailed as prisoners of conscience in about half the countries in the world, and more than 100 governments continued to torture or ill-treat prisoners.

People also "disappeared" in some 26 countries and remained missing in many more, extrajudicial executions were carried out in 45 countries, and death sentences were handed down in more than 50 countries and carried out in 33 countries.

"Paying lip service to human rights in new laws and international declarations achieves nothing if in the end governments don't act on violations," Amnesty International said.

In Africa, where governments have been slow to tackle past human rights violations, the political killings continued, with extrajudicial executions reported in Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Rwanda. In Burundi, 1,000 or more extrajudicial executions were committed against a backdrop of ethnic tensions; in South Africa, hundreds of government opponents were extrajudicially executed with the acquiescence or direct involvement of the government's security forces. Elsewhere in the region, torture was taking place in Sudan on a daily basis in detention centres known as "ghost houses", while in Uganda hundreds of suspected

opponents of the government were detained during counter-insurgency operations.

"Governments in Africa and throughout the world often use the violence of opposition groups as an excuse for letting their security forces get away with human rights violations," Amnesty International said. "While we condemn torture, hostage-taking and deliberate and arbitrary killings by such groups, those abuses can never justify government counter-terror."

Extrajudicial killings and "disappearances" continued in the Americas as well, where sweeping amnesty laws in a number of countries have let the state killers go free. In 1991, hundreds of street chil-

dren died at the hands of death squads in Brazil, hundreds more were killed by the army or paramilitaries in Colombia and more than 300 people "disappeared" and at least 60 were extrajudicially executed in Peru. Hundreds of extrajudicial executions took place following the overthrow of President Aristide's government in Haiti, where there were also widespread reports of torture and arbitrary detention. Up to three hundred possible prisoners of conscience remained in prison in Cuba. In the USA there were more than 2,500 people on death row and 14 executions throughout the year — a figure that was already surpassed in the first six months of 1992.

In Asia, too, governments frequently shut the door on the gross violations of the past only to see them continue in the present. The mass extrajudicial executions and "disappearances" in Sri Lanka in previous years have gone unpunished; in 1991 more political killings and "disappearances" were reported there while hundreds of other people were extrajudicially executed in Indonesia, including in East Timor. Elsewhere, political opponents continued to be imprisoned in their thousands, with more than 1,500 political prisoners — many of them prisoners of conscience — held in Myanmar

(Burma). Hundreds of thousands of people were held without charge under administrative detention in China, where hundreds of prisoners of conscience were also still behind the bars. The rise in the use of the death penalty also continued in China with more than 1,000 known executions. In India political detainees and criminal suspects were routinely tortured, sometimes to death.

In Europe, the fighting in Yugoslavia led to large scale human rights violations including torture and massacres of civilians by all sides in the conflict, while political killings also took place in Turkey, mainly among the Kurdish populations in the southeast. In the former USSR, statistics were released for the first time revealing that in past years hundreds of people had been sentenced to death and executed. In France, Greece and Switzerland, hundreds of prisoners of conscience were held all of them conscientious objectors to military service. Torture of political opponents continued to be widespread in Turkey; in the United Kingdom, reports of ill-treatment continued, amidst concern about interrogation and detention procedures used in Northern Ireland. In many countries, governments often didn't investigate allegations of ill-treatment by police or prison guards or when they did the investigations were inconclusive.

In the Middle East, Iraq and Kuwait were the scene of massive human rights violations, with arbitrary arrest, torture, "disappearances" and killings following the withdrawal of Iraqi troops from Kuwait and similar atrocities committed by Iraqi soldiers in the wake of uprisings in March and April. There, as in other parts of the region, years of impunity have fuelled the violations. In the Israeli-occupied territories, thousands of Palestinians were tortured or ill-treated during interrogation. Hundreds of "disappeared" people were still unaccounted for in Morocco, despite the release of hundreds of others during the year; and torture continued to escalate in Tunisia as the government cracked down on Islamic opponents. In Iran hundreds of people remained in prison after unfair trials held in previous years.