

The Man from Hope

There is a danger in the way in which Bill Clinton has come to assume the office of the President of the United States. He has raised far too much expectation in us all — both Americans, and those of us from the developing world. It will call for the sharpest of skills, the most creative of plans, boundless resourcefulness and an indefatigable drive to live up to them.

The inaugural speech, which we in Bangladesh were able to see live for the first time — courtesy BT and CNN — did not match the elegance of Kennedy or the eloquence of a Lincoln. But it surpassed all with the zest of youth, the courage of a dreamer and the sincerity of a man committed to change.

As was expected, the inaugural speech was mostly addressed to the American people with occasional, and over-generalised references to the world outside. However we would expect one item to receive a higher priority in the Clinton agenda, than it did in Mr. Bush's.

If the words that "there is no clear division today between what is foreign and what is domestic — world economy, the world environment, the AIDS, the world arms race affect us all", came from President Clinton's heart—and we believe that it did—then he will of course realise that economic development of a country like ours depends on the treatment meted out to us by the stronger economies.

America's leadership in the world, which President Clinton correctly claims the US did so much make, will be truly meaningful if the new President takes a fresh look into the whole question of US relations with the developing world.

Saving the Rural Riches

All of Bangladesh's cultural riches, including literature and music, born in the cities, are of rural origin. Most of them are directly so. And a few of the rest are once or at the most thrice removed from that. Zainul, our great painting mentor, came from the village and in his lifelong stay in cities, indeed lived in the selfsame villages — in his mind, in his outlook. And he dreamed of artists of the nation — all kinds of artists — to live in the villages and in close community.

Slips—lesser only when compared to the above but otherwise gross—were certain to follow. When was Sonargaon the capital of Bengal? It was a capital of surrounding countryside never amounting to the whole of what we call Bengal over different patches of times and the monuments that are now being preserved there are not of the Isa Khan regime or subsequent Mughal suzerainty.

A definition of culture given at the inauguration of the festival that "culture means to live a better life." is a very inept adage that can at best be confusing. Who doesn't know that those that are living 'better' lives in Bangladesh — in the eyes of all classes of people — are people mostly bereft of culture and those refinements that are born of belonging to culture — a culture any culture.

To the folk museum at Sonargaon and the various government agencies having to do with village crafts — as also the art connoisseurs and businessmen dealing in artistic wealth of the villages our fervent appeal would be to please save those from the consumeristic onslaught of the day that compels art to be watered down to vulgar mass scale caricatures — whether these relate to visual or plastic or performing arts.

A GATT-ed World Food Market

The heart of the issue as formulated by the US and the EC is the reduction of oilseed production in Europe: sowing would be limited to 5,128 million hectares, and production reduced from 11.5 to 10 or 11 million tonnes.

But the subsidies are not the real problem as they are the reflection of a far more serious situation. Agricultural technology has significantly increased productivity, whether in the development of blight and weather resistant hybrids or the use of chemical fertilizers.

This is far from the truth. These subsidies profoundly affect the countries of the South whose products are competitive with those of the EC, as well as the tropical and subtropical countries which produce oilseed that is competitive in the international markets with European oilseed.

A GATT-ed World Food Market

With the exception of a few isolated cases, the greatest economic problem of the food producing nations is how to place surplus products without bringing down international market prices. Humanitarian problems count for little or nothing.

But unlike those of the past, these miracles are not based on agricultural production. Neither Japan nor Germany nor the countries of South-east Asia are food exporters that have to subsidize their own agriculture to survive. They guarantee food security with unyielding protectionism and price support to annul the comparative advantage of countries that do not subsidize agriculture.

Former Colombian president Alfonso Lopez Michelsen writes that the focus on the US-EC deadlock at the Uruguay round of economic talks is misleading and obscures the more serious problem: the economic distortion called agricultural surplus. IPS reports from Bogota.

A recent example in Latin America of the cost of subsidizing agricultural exports is the case of coffee. For years, there was a quota arrangement between coffee producers and consumers, which kept the price of coffee at a profitable level in world markets. At the same time, much of the coffee surplus was traded with socialist countries for certain industrial materials.

national coffee fund, built up over many years, were exhausted. The result was a fiscal outlay of US\$500 million. While no one would allow such an expenditure for armaments in a single year, it seemed logical and necessary to the Colombian government to spend that much to protect the livelihood of 350,000 coffee-growing peasant families.

Alfonso Lopez Michelsen is presently the leader of Colombia's Liberal Party. Fourth: Japan is the world's largest money lender to US. Its cross-country investment includes direct investment of more than \$50 billion and portfolio investment of \$175 billion that supports over 500,000 US jobs.

The Japan that Can Say No to US

Tokyo's decision-making is largely a function of what Japan needs, not what US wants. Japan is now less willing to follow US lead and no longer convinced that its economic well-being and territorial security depends entirely on Washington.

US weaknesses have handicapped US ability to conduct its domestic and foreign policies quite independently. Previously autonomous decisions are increasingly becoming hostage to international developments.

Today's assertive Japan is saying no to US which holds a limited leverage to dictate to Japan. There are four key reasons why Japan depends less on US today. First: Japan's share of trade with US, for instance, accounted for 35 per cent of Japan's global trade in 1986.

The Japan that Can Say No to US

by Abu K Selimuddin

has grown over the years. The Pentagon, for instance, depends on Japan for semiconductors and high tech equipment for smart weapons which helped US tremendously to win a quick victory in the Gulf war.

Second: In the 1980's, almost \$600 billion Japanese money was invested abroad, especially in United States. Today, Japanese investors are turning inward because US market is no longer attractive to invest. Last year, Japanese investors took more money out of US than they put into US; they withdrew almost \$20 billion from US, plus the Japanese investors are now net sellers of US securities and bonds.

Ample Harvest Fails to Feed Hungry Planet

Depthnews reports from Rome

Poverty, not lack of food, is the root cause of hunger and malnutrition

The world has more than enough food to feed itself. Yet millions are dying of starvation and hundreds of millions face malnutrition. By 1900-1990, there was enough food in the world — if distributed according to individual requirements — to provide well over that would be needed to meet energy needs.

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The report was issued for the nutrition conference, the most important gathering of its kind for 50 years. The conference approved a World Declaration and a Plan of Action aimed at improving nutrition and eradicating hunger and malnutrition.

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.

No more such atrocity

Sir, As a result of the grim incident in Chittagong four naval officers and 15 sea-men have been dismissed. Thirteen more navy personnel are undergoing a Court Martial for their involvement in the arson and looting at Bandertilla and Hallshahar.

The timely steps taken by the Bangladesh Navy are certainly appreciable in this regard. It is expected that the armed forces will always be with us in the time of crisis, as they did before, and help uphold the values of democracy in the process.

Pull towards barbarism

Sir, Thank you for your editorial comment on the barbaric stoning of a woman in Maulvibazar. The Imam's 'fatwa' is another example of inhuman exploitation of religion.

We hope that this sort of shameful acts that impair the image of our armed forces will never take place on our soil.

The Declaration of Independence

Sir, Fine, we believe that the late President Ziaur Rahman had said: 'Aami Major Zia bolchhi.....' over the microphone of a radio station installed at Chittagong in the year 1971. We believe he also made this declaration of the liberation war on behalf of the leader late Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

When Zia ended his declaration he did say 'Bangladesh Zindabad' or 'Joy Bangla' must be clarified by them who make a strong show of the War of Liberation fought at the cost of millions of people of this country.

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What exactly is happening in this country? Is the stoning of Nurjahan a wild isolated incident? Or are we letting the dark forces in our society pull us all into barbarism?

OPINION

"A dangerous fascination..."

Mahfuz Anam has done a wonderful job. His timely commentary "A dangerous fascination for controversies" on January 12, 1993 has, in fact, echoed the feelings of the whole nation, nay, the people of the country, who can ill afford to see the history of the War of Liberation so blatantly twisted by so-called politicians and their side-kicks.

It is indeed a pity that Barrister Huda, by being over smart, is not only ridiculing himself but also unknowingly splashing black hues on his leader. Inevitably the later has had to face embarrassing situation within the Cabinet or in public meetings.

God bless Barrister Huda. And to you Executive Editor Mahfuz Anam our heartfelt congratulations for such an excellent exposure. Thanks to The Daily Star.

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