

**Tokyo-Dhaka Cooperation**

While there exists a broad agreement between Dhaka and Tokyo that there should be increased Japanese investment in Bangladesh, this understanding is marred by pronounced differences from both sides. Many of these divergences, politely but firmly expressed, surfaced at the inaugural session of the Sixth Meeting of Bangladesh-Japan Joint Committee for Commercial and Economic Co-operation yesterday, right at the presence of Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia and a distinguished gathering of high-level experts from the private sector from the two countries. We are pleased that Japan-Bangladesh relationship has now reached enough maturity to take a few hard knocks from either side and then take a forward-looking approach in the best interest of the two partners in economic co-operation.

The main difference between the two sides lies in their respective perceptions of what constitutes or does not constitute an acceptable, if not an ideal, climate for Japanese investment in Bangladesh. The last meeting of the Joint Committee was held more than two years ago. During this period, there have been exchange of visits among entrepreneurs of the two countries. However, as the speeches of Japanese participants, especially of Ambassador Toshio Saiki, at the opening session revealed, there has been no more than a marginal progress in the size of the Japanese participation in our economy. Tokyo's investment in our industry remains only a fraction of one per cent of the total Japanese involvement in the global industrial scene. Whether the current meeting which will provide for a visit to the Chittagong Export Processing Zone (CEPZ) by the Japanese team, will be able to set targets and, generally speaking, take an optimistic view of the overall situation remains to be seen.

The view from Bangladesh, as presented by ministers of finance, commerce and industry, is almost a rosy one. There is little doubt that during the past two years of our democratic rule, we have made progress in macro-economic field, but it is a progress which is yet to manifest itself in the management of our banking institutions, in the removal of bottlenecks in our administration and in raising the level of uninterrupted productivity of our labour. Having dealt with these issues in his characteristic forthright manner in the two speeches in past two days, the assertion of Finance Minister Saifur Rahman made yesterday that the investment climate in Bangladesh today is as good as that in Thailand and Indonesia certainly lacked conviction or logic, if not both.

However, we must move forward. In this respect, we should listen to the private sector in both Bangladesh and Japan, which, in the evolving market-oriented economy in this country, has the decisive voice in opening a new chapter in our economic cooperation. Here, we commend a realistic position taken by Mahbubur Rahman, President of the FBCCI and Leader of the Bangladesh Delegation for what we see as a forward-looking approach to the country's investment scenario. We cannot play down our deficiencies, but it will be unfair for our friends in Japan to ignore that the economy is capable of turning the corner and reach the take-off point. There may be a risk in making substantial Japanese investment in Bangladesh. But is the risk greater than letting the democratically elected government fail in its economic agenda? Or, to put it bluntly, is the risk any less challenging than pouring in massive funds in Vietnam which is yet to evolve a durable democratic political system? Finally, what about the move by the United States to commit almost two billion US dollars to Russia when Moscow is yet to put the process of reform in motion? We cannot grudge where major industrial nations, including Japan, put their investments. However, it is important, almost essential, for them to play a positive role in the process of building a new Bangladesh. This is what the current meeting of Japan-Bangladesh cooperation should be all about.

**Love at 115**

It is never too late to fall in love. Pablo Casals, the greatest cellist of all times, set a record to illustrate that. He was past 85 when he fell in love and married one of his brighter students. Both for the first time. And she was 21. The marriage endured till Casals died some fifteen years later. Charles Chaplin had, however, married thrice before he was 50. One guesses he had had at least as many affairs in his life upto that time for we cannot conceive the lugubrious eternal tramp to enter into conjugal complications without having inspired by a generous partaking of that strange potion — love. Then at 56 he found love again — truest of them all for he died decades later in the embrace of that last love. The girl that walked into his heart so surely was playwright Eugene O'Neill's youngest daughter, Oona. And she was nineteen then.

Those were two of the myriad celebrated cases of love coming late — to celebrated men. Something is shaping in Thailand that would set an all-time record for geriatric passion. Very far from the glare of any earlier media projection, a man and a woman — whose combined age now reportedly is 221 — have become overnight celebrities for having decided to marry each other.

It is some time that Prom Kaewngarm, age 115, entered a health contest for the elderly in northern Thailand — and won it. A woman, 106-year old Bai Ounok came a close second. It seems to have been a case of love at first sight. They decided to marry. We can take Prom at his words. He had married twice earlier — at 20 and 40. After outliving his second spouse he did not go for another wife and lived for decades on end as a very 'lonely' man. All for his efforts not to hurt his grown up sons and daughters.

But on meeting Bai Ounok, he couldn't hold himself anymore. We shall never know what he saw in the 106-year woman for to do that we shall need to have Prom's eyes — or, perhaps, his years too.

A traditional wishing in the subcontinent was to pray someone to be 'Shatayu' — a centurian. Both of them are past that. Our hearts go out wishing them a conjugal life of decades and thus, by the way, establish new longevity records. This wouldn't be an unrealistic exercise for Prom is reported to have confessed to having in the meantime developed both mental and physical relationship with his bride-to-be.

All the long living men and women, accosted so far by the media, have had to give their own formula for a 100-plus life. Prom is indeed special when he volunteers the prescription of frequent exercise, cooked food, fruits and vegetables for not only longevity but also for sexual potency.

**H**uman beings with a certain bent of mind have seen patterns in the rise and fall of nations, of civilizations. Spengler and Toynbee easily come to mind. I am told that centuries earlier, Ibn-i-Khaldun, in his *Muqaddimah*, had anticipated them. I am not aware what kind of pattern he had discerned in what most people will see nothing but a blind movement of events and accidents. At best, a certain continuity can be perceived in some cases. I can see this in British history. But in the case of Indian history, this sense of continuity is missing. Nirad Chaudhury will violently disagree. He will make out a case for a pattern, which he did a long time ago, in his *Autobiography of an unknown Indian*. No title of a book could be more misleading, a thin veil to conceal a dogmatic personality. I was left unconvinced by Chaudhury's thesis, though that is not to say that I was not impressed by the profuse evidence of a fine mind, of scholarship, and above all by the beauty of narrative. The style appeared to me slightly, only slightly, laboured, an impression which was removed by his second and third books.

Those who see a pattern in history clearly take a distant view of a nation's or a civilization's life spread over centuries. I am not going to quarrel with them now. Most of us are content to look at things over a narrower span of time. Our eyes are fixed not on a vast landscape, but on a limited space. We are concerned with our immediate scene, with current affairs. These limits have their advantages. If some sort of a pattern emerges, we can claim that we are not indulging in high flights of fancy. The decline and fall of the

**Decay in Political Parties**

**A rising political party speaks the language of the day, and never the language of the past; its message has an immediate appeal to the nation, and particularly to the rising generation; it is receptive and accommodating; it gladly accepts dissent and is not afraid of factions, and this it does because of its vitality and self assurance.**

Bengal Renaissance may be a fiction, at least in the manner presented by the redoubtable Nirad Chaudhury but the decline and fall of the Indian National Congress or of the Muslim League of Pakistan is a fact. We all of us are eyewitnesses of the process.

Now let us think about it. Congress has lived for over a century, and is not quite dead yet. It is still the ruling party in India though its role has been drastically reduced. The Muslim League, though traditionally established in 1906, actually did not attain any status till thirty years later. It is dead in Bangladesh and in Pakistan, is a much weaker organisation now than what it was in 1970. It has, like the Congress, seen its best days, and it would be a miracle if either of the once formidable parties regain something of their past influence.

When we juxtapose the career of our political parties with that of the major parties of the UK and the USA, we are driven to the conclusion that the life-span is shorter here, and the mortality rate is much higher. Maybe this can be explained in terms of the political stability a people has attained. The decline of a party may well be accompanied by the rise of another party, as witness BJP's spectacular rise which seems to have gone hand in hand with Congress's decline. Many of us are baffled, not so much by Congress's decline as by the rise of a party like BJP with its avowed com-

munalism, its patently retrogressive plan of action, its close alliance with RSS and Vishva Hindu Parishad whose philosophy is no different from Hitler's Nazism. And yet a politically mature India has given enough support to forces which, if their march is not halted soon enough, can spell political disaster to the world's largest democracy.

There must be some natural law in operation behind the change of climate in politics.

**PASSING CLOUDS**  
Zillur Rahman Siddiqui

In countries enjoying a reasonable level of political life — Shaikhdoms and absolute monarchies are easily ruled out — these changes are marked by the decline of older parties and the rise of newer ones. The most dramatic instance near at hand was the sudden eclipse of the Muslim League.

It was not immediately followed by the emergence of the Awami League. The right moment and the right leadership came towards the closing years of the sixties. The nation's youth has played a decisive role in each climatic change. I am not sure if the changes, or the successive waves we have witnessed during the last seventy years in the Indian sub-continent, will reveal any pattern of cycles. If Toynbee can speak of cycles enveloping civilizations and centuries, a concept which is mind-boggling, can we not at least

make an effort to find something similar on a smaller stage within a shorter period of history?

I spoke of the last seventy years. That takes us back to the days when Mahatma Gandhi electrified Indian politics, and youth in thousands left colleges, rejecting a slave's education, and became political activists. The subcontinent can be said to have enjoyed an uninterrupted political life during the following seventy

years.

During these seventy years, political life of our people has evolved around political parties, and parties, in their turn have often been led and directed by leaders, and as often misled and misdirected by leaders that happened to be.

Can it be said that only when ideology and leadership have met and coalesced — under a Gandhi, a Jinnah, a Shaikh Mujib — has politics been the agent of radical changes, of so many leaps forward?

Or is it that subterranean social forces — that nameless and faceless thing — have produced parties and leaders, who have but played a role set for them, and their's was but an hour upon the stage?

That would sound something like a historical determinism, and who knows what I am suggesting comes close to

what Marx and Engels formulated long ago, with much more assurance and knowledge? Not being a political scientist, I can only make my surmises, and leave it at that.

It looks as if genuine political parties share the same fate as any other living organism, subject to the law of growth, decay and death. I am making a distinction here between parties that are genuine, and parties of artificial breed. The latter type can occupy the stage for a while, sometimes for a long while, as in Burma, but because of their dependence on uncertain and dubious factors, both their appearance and exit tend to be sudden.

The signs of decay in India's Congress and Bangladesh's Awami League may well support the theory of parties as political organisms.

At this point of the argument, I expect an interruption, a question, namely, how does one diagnose a decay, pointing to an ultimate death? I think, relevant as the question is, that certain symptoms can be identified as portending a disease which may prove incurable. A rising political party speaks the language of the day, and never the language of the past; its message has an immediate appeal to the nation, and particularly to the rising generation; it is receptive and accommodating; it gladly accepts dissent and is not afraid of factions, and this it does because of its vitality and self as-

sureance. Its total outlook is positive, and it believes in drawing people to its fold rather than driving people out, or keeping its doors closed both to ideas and to individuals. It has a continuous thought process because it has a highly developed brain and it is its brain that keeps its other organs active.

These characteristics — not inclusive description though — will indicate what are the symptoms of a decaying party: the absence of all or most of these characteristics, plus a few other signs: the non-functioning of the party machinery, the atrophy of the brain, the harping on the past, the tendency of myth-making (a weakness sometimes shared by a rising party too), and a superhuman and a supernatural role assigned to a leader.

If there is any thing resembling or suggesting the existence of micro-cycles in the political life of a people, may be within the larger cycle of historians like Toynbee, these cycles will perhaps be seen as corresponding to the succession of political waves. And perhaps the waves will be seen as producing and/or being produced by a rising political party. There is no doubt that the past seventy years have seen a number of political waves, and in this part of the subcontinent, one in every generation, with a gap of twenty to twenty-five years. The latest was in the late eighties. If things go by the rule, the next wave is not due yet. I believe in the theory of fatigue or exhaustion following a period of intense activity. I think we are passing through one such period. I should only add that fatigue does not mean that the pulse beat has stopped.

**China Cracks Down on Pingyuan Mafia**

Dong Shumin and Chen Ya write from Pingyuan, China

**T**HIS town in southwest China was synonymous with vice for several years.

About 300 km southeast of Yunnan province's capital of Kunming and 150 km north of the Vietnamese border, Pingyan is strategically placed as China's largest bazaar in the illegal firearms trade, as a major clearing house for drugs and a bolt-hole for some of the country's worst thugs.

According to a well-informed source, police have traced to Pingyuan some drugs, firearms and ammunition used in criminal cases in 25 provinces and autonomous regions throughout China.

The town was also an asylum for wanted criminals from other provinces. As the saying went, 'A criminal is safe once he gets to Pingyuan.'

Buying guns and ammunition was easy. 'Walking along the street,' recalls Yin Hong, a reporter with *China Youth News*, 'I was stopped three times by three women asking me to buy their weapons.'

The price of a pistol was

2,000 yuan (US\$ 350), a sub-machine gun 5,000 yuan (US\$877) and even stun guns were on sale for 600 yuan (US\$105) each.

The town is near the site of intense fighting during the Sino-Vietnamese border war in the 1980s. But while some weapons come from old battlefields, many are smuggled from Vietnam or made locally in illicit gun shops.

The weapons — and drugs — trade produced quite a few millionaires in town. Luxurious buildings belonging to guns and drug traffickers are scattered in this tree-lined sub-tropical town.

The beginning of the end came last August 31. About 3,000 police and public security men moved into the town to begin an 82-day battle which ended with the defeat of the Pingyuan 'mafia.'

Nearly 900 criminals were captured or gave themselves up. The booty included 896 kg of drugs and 964 guns.

About 60,000 people live in

the seven villages of Pingyuan town which is under the jurisdiction of Wenshan Zhuang and Miao Autonomous Prefecture. The population is composed of Han, Zhuang, Miao and mostly the Hui cultural communities.

Until August 1992, part of the town's political and religious power was in the hands of gang leaders. Criminality was all in a day's work.

The town was a stronghold for foreign drug traffickers. In three major villages, 16 drug trafficking groups were at the centre of a supply and marketing network with connections to Myanmar, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

For sometime, the Yunnan provincial government had been strengthening its public security forces in Pingyuan. It was the only town in China where a country-level branch

of the public security bureau was set up and bolstered by a working force of many provincial officials.

But the government took a comparatively tolerant attitude towards Pingyuan because of its large Hui community and the large number of people involved in criminal cases. Also, many of the people, including some criminals, were themselves victims of vicious thugs.

But a line was drawn when the gangs started beating up public security men, and laying siege and setting fire to government offices and the public security bureau. Gang-related violence rose from 42 incidents in 1988 to 130 in 1991. The provincial government decided it was time to make a move when another two country officials were killed when searching for a wanted criminal in the town.

In the early morning of August 31, Pingyuan town was surrounded by 3,000 armed police and public security men. Twenty detachments, each composed of 20 hand-picked soldiers, were formed to track

down the 20 most vicious criminals. The soldiers arrested one criminal after another, until they met their first armed resistance, from Ma Ming.

Protected by his solid house and a large armoury of sub-machine guns, grenades and pistols, Ma Ming shot it out, wounding two armed policemen. His father tried to convince Ma Ming to give himself up, but Ma Ming then strafed the car his father was in.

Finally, after a 100 minute firefight, Ma Ming was shot dead. On his body was a pistol, a submachine gun and 362 bullets.

The fight against Ma Cilin was even more fierce. Mr Ma had been sentenced to death two years before, but managed to break out of prison before execution. He was finally shot dead, but the fight claimed three soldiers.

The deaths of Ma Ming and Ma Cilin turned the tables on other criminals. Some gave themselves up, and others escaped to nearby forests. But none dared to fight the soldiers.

After confiscating the houses and money of some crime lords, the army decided on a psychological ploy. In September, a meeting for the

lenient treatment of confessors was held in Pingyuan. Three villains got off with light punishment because they not only confessed their crimes, but also surrendered large amounts of drugs and firearms.

At the same time, police and public security men tried every means to win the confidence of the local people, especially the relatives of criminals.

Knowing that Pingyuan town is heavily populated with Hui people who are Muslims, the police were particularly careful to respect local Islamic customs. For example, they buried the packings of their pork provisions far from the town.

Their efforts paid off. The local people began to help the police search for fugitives by providing clues. As a result, 660 outlaws surrendered.

Nowadays, Pingyuan is no longer a drug and firearms smuggling centre. Ten drug smugglers were executed, while a few hundred were jailed.

The locals have learned a tough lesson. Even Wang Fenyang, one of those executed, cautioned in her last words to her children: 'No matter what you do in the future, never do what I have done.'

—Depthneus Asia

**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.

**Public toilets**

Sir, Dhaka is the capital of our dear beautiful Bangladesh. But it's not very pleasant to have to say in this not-very-beautiful and rather dirty metropolis of ours. Surely, none ever hopes to see heaps of stinky garbage in the streets. Neither do we like to see people using the roadside drains as public toilet! But if one asks who is to blame, I as well as many others would promptly say, it's not the citizens' fault. There are dustbins and public toilets in the city, but one has to admit they're not sufficient. This is why, people take recourse to such embarrassing things as public nuisance.

As a citizen, I must place before the RAJUK or DMC a request to set-up more public toilets and dustbins in the city. If they say, 'we're poor and can't afford such development, then, I'll just say, where do we get the money from to spend right and left for many a good-for-nothing 'beautification' stance.

Sarifida Kalabagan Lakekreis Dhaka

**Biman flies to New York**

Sir, It was heartening to read in your column that Biman will be flying to New York from May 14. I must commend the Biman authorities for taking such a bold decision.

I do not know how the people at the helm of affairs in Biman view the competition over the trans-Atlantic route. From my limited experience as a trans-Atlantic passenger, I feel Biman has to improve and match its ground and in-flight

service to that offered by other carriers on this route to attract passengers to fly Biman to New York.

Biman's reservation and ground service is appallingly poor and one could write a treatise on it. In so far as in-flight service is concerned, it is no match to service offered by other carriers. For instance, Biman does not accept any currency other than US \$ or Sterling for duty free sales on board. Whereas other carriers accept multiple currencies as a matter of service offered to its passengers.

The sight of a cockroach inside Biman aircraft is nothing new. But the question I ask of Biman is whether they have tried a thing called 'fumigation'?

Question of upgrading passengers in Biman flights is done on the basis of personal acquaintance and relationships and not as a matter of business.

Passengers visiting Calcutta have to spend a good part of their stay in that city to get re-confirmation of their return flight. The usual reason for such tedious waits is that the 'computers are down'. Why can't they re-confirm return reservations, over the telephone which is the norm with most airlines.

One could keep on writing about Biman's inadequacies in almost all sectors except flight operation. Therefore, the decision to fly to New York brings to my mind an old adage about angels fearing to tread....

M Abdullahi 5 Mohakhali C. A., Dhaka 1212

**GEF**

Sir, Critical decisions are coming up in the months ahead on the future of the Global Environment Facility

(GEF). Though the GEF is hardly a household name, what it does matters to all of us. It currently has a budget of \$400 million. The GEF is responsible for helping to cover the costs for the Third World of preventing global climate change, saving the ozone layer, reducing pollution of rivers and oceans and halting the massive extinction of species.

There is widespread concern among environment and development groups that the GEF, which is closely linked to the World Bank, has many bad habits including secretive control of information and inadequate consultation with the people in local communities that are affected by its projects.

The government of Bangladesh should use all its influence to help make sure that:

1. There's full consultation with citizen groups and local communities in all stages of GEF project identification, design and implementation; and

2. There's full public access to information about projects, including information about World Bank loans that GEF projects are attached to. Among other steps, citizen groups should have observer status in the GEF Participants Assembly which currently meets behind closed doors.

More than 70% of humanity and two thirds of the world's species live in the developing nations of the South, few of which have money to spend on protecting the planet. An effective world-wide response to our planetary environmental problems depends on steadily increasing funding for the Global Environment Facility. To make that possible, there needs to be increasing public support for its work. And that depends on making the GEF as open, participatory and accountable as possible.

Lyndene Krause Mohamadpur, Dhaka

**OPINION**

**Media Round Table Discourse**

Hats off to The Daily Star for its thought provoking Second Anniversary Supplement based on a Media Round Table discourse. As far as I recall this is the first kind of thing ever presented by any newspaper in the country as an anniversary supplement. The transcript has also been written in a very plastic style, with a lot left in between lines to be guessed, read and absorbed by the readers themselves, for which the team members deserve special tributes.

Mr S. M. Ali is an intimate friend of the developing world especially comprising ASEAN and SAARC countries. He has penetrated deep into the political, social and cultural spheres of these countries. He is a man of experiences and as it was expected from The Daily Star, some new trends in the set pattern of local journalism have surfaced to the much delight of the readers.

As regards the observations made by the participants on many aspects, I do not feel any necessity to express my own view on each and every point. However I cannot help expressing my dis gusts in certain matters. Mr Ataus Samad's comment that long spells of martial laws have weakened journalism is not wholly correct. The period of Martial Laws in the last twenty-two years was quite negligible. In all sincerity the harms done to the media or democratic values and, its essence were far less in comparison to the normal days of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Gen Ziaur Rahman and Hussein Muhammad Ershad. Sk Mujibur Rahman introduced one party government reducing the once vibrant press into an extension

of a government department, Soon after liberation a single editorial of the Bangladesh Observer made him so furious that late Abdus Salam, its editor, was removed from service.

The media has been found always cooperating with all the three rulers: Mujib, Zia and Ershad. Take the period of H M Ershad, none of the papers ever exposed his real face and after his downfall they all left no stone unturned to point him as the worst ruler ever born in the world and totally neglected his good works. Much of whatever progress is seen today in the rural Bangladesh goes to the credit of H M Ershad although like two former presidents, Sk Mujibur Rahman and Ziaur Rahman, he was also surrounded by the selfish supporters and sycophants. They all ruled the country with some *bahini* in one way or other. But the media overlooked all these dicey soap operas.

It is said that Emergency imposed by Mrs Indra Gandhi in 1975 was the watershed in Indian journalism. The press rediscovered its role. Many editors and columnists suffered jail to defend themselves. No doubt, some applauded Mrs Gandhi and her henchmen who had laid siege to the press; some started yellow journalism, but the majority of the journalists and columnists vehemently defied Mrs Gandhi's emergency and curb on press. The emergency in India distinguished the cowards and the lackeys from the courageous and the defiant editors and journalists.

We readers have not lost faith in journalists of our country, but of late we suspect

that many of the national papers born within last three or four years are serving the interests of 'others' more diligently than that of our own country. A new trend is also visible. Many of the papers, especially English language ones, have invented 'journalism of balancing'. We readers often find equal size photos of the two most powerful ladies in the newspapers. Even space for news concerning them or their parties are being found equal in words and space. This speaks a lot how media is fearful of them. No doubt, despite assurance of freedom of the press, journalists are beaten like criminals by the police and newspaper office are attacked and burnt down, reportedly by hired hooligans of political parties. No political party or individual politician from government or opposition side apparently has the courage to face the reality.

They perhaps consider it their birthright to condemn and dictate others including medi-amens and care nothing about advices from their critics and well-wishers.

However, we readers have still faith in media. I only regret that while newspapers and magazines are mushrooming everyday, good journalism is still a far cry in our country.

I would request The Daily Star to pluck courage and try to correct at least some of the recent historic errors. Further, if the media has the mandate to cast its eye of opprobrium on others, then it must peep into its own conscience too.

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