

Eventful Non-event

The official announcement declaring the Taka convertible on current account, has passed off without causing any stir on the economic scene, almost like a non-event.

The official announcement is rather terse, leaving many a question unanswered. Although marking a departure from the usual sense convertibility is understood, continuation of restrictions on outward remittances for living expenses of family members staying abroad or for school level education, can be rationalised to some extent.

The official announcement on current account convertibility is silent about certain other restrictions on free access to foreign exchange such as travel quota and limitations on medical expenses abroad.

In point of fact, the extent to which the new convertibility has freed foreign currency transactions even in trade account, remains ambiguous. Subject to the limitations imposed by the import policy, for all practical purposes, the Taka had been convertible for outward remittance on goods account anyway.

The requirement of obtaining prior permission of the central bank for remittance of profits of foreign banks, insurance companies and other financial institutions has been waived. This is a new measure of exchange control relaxation that convertibility on current account brought in.

Whatever strictly legalistic interpretations might suggest, it is impractical to detach the issue of conversion rate from currency convertibility. A currency is not really convertible unless the exchange rate is determined by the market freely.

All in all, the newly introduced foreign exchange regime does not seem to meet the tests of currency convertibility on current account. It did not even bring significant new measures of exchange control relaxation.

What's Wrong with Molasses?

Can you do this in a 'market' economy? Can you dictate the farmer what to cultivate and where to sell the produce? Doesn't such conduct remind one of the infamous 'neelkar' sahibs so detested by the farmers?

A report from Natore published by The Daily Star on Tuesday and headlined 'Production of molasses hamper sugar output' says that government has banned production of molasses in mill areas but a section of people are producing it despite repeated warning by the concerned authorities.

It is understandable that a sugar mill — to be viable — must get its supply of canes from the fields adjacent to it. This necessitates ensuring that the farmers working the fields around the mill keep to cane farming and offer their produce to the mill.

There can be nothing limiting his choice on this account. If there is a question of the millwallahs helping the cane farmers with advances against the crop or other farming inputs as inducement for being helpful in return, that cannot be used as an instrument of exploiting the tillers by offering prices lower than available from elsewhere.

Molasses is no contraband commodity. Rather refined sugar is close to being one. Only a handful of years back ours was a sugar exporting country. Often we produced it in surplus quantities and offered it abroad at internationally competitive prices.

Bangladesh Agriculture: Crisis in Development

In the year 1990, the total agricultural population of 79 million in Bangladesh were primarily dependent on the fixed supply of nine million hectares of cultivated land; less than a bigha of land on a per capita basis.

Also, it is not only growth in manufacturing and urban job creation which caused the decline in population dependent on agriculture. During the same period, our total population increased by as much as 31 per cent against only 15 per cent in China.

According to the Human Development Report, 1993, the estimated population of Bangladesh in the year 2000 will be 144.3 million, implying a 25 per cent increase from 1990.

against 30 per cent increase during the previous ten year period (1980-90). There is a decline no doubt, but too little to bring about any substantial demographic transition like in China.

In the meantime, our population programme has been rated as a success because the decline has already set in. If, for example, if the year 2000 population could be drawn down to 140 million, then the total percentage growth will be reduced to 22 per cent against the estimated one quarter increase.

Industrialisation and urban growth are very much inter-related. Population growth can be curbed if industrialisation is rapid and successful. In demographic terms, increase in agricultural population was 20 per cent during 1980-90 period, when total population increased by as much as 30 per cent.

What are the implications of this projection? First and foremost, total population in the year 2000 will be 144.3 million, out of which 83 million will be agricultural population. The total population dependent on the industry and the service sector must increase from 36.4 million in 1990 to 61.3 in the year 2000.

Textiles The ambitious scheme to manufacture and export textiles including garments worth Taka 30,000 crores by the turn of the century is the type of endeavour geared to the generation of the extremely large scale employment required for the purpose.

Further deepening of poverty and landlessness would imply that the wage rates, both rural and urban, should remain at the deplorably low subsistence levels.

Clear Conclusion Given the above expectations, conclusions are loud and clear: In spite of all the garment exports, which indeed is likely to be enormous in size by the year 2000, and I have no quarrel with it, the nation would still remain poor as well as least developed.

around us. By agriculture, we only mean growth in paddy output. As a result, production of all other crops sit either on the decline or growing at a marginal rate of less than one per cent per annum.

The inevitable consequence is smuggling of eggs and fish — even rawshogolas at the corner stores. Bangladesh is a land of rivers — it is a delta made out of water; yet fish is smuggled from the drylands of West Bengal.

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Like missing the forest because of the trees, we are failing to appreciate agriculture inspite of its overwhelming presence all

industry across the border. Clearly, agriculture is in crisis. Paddy alone, can never deliver agricultural development.

On the other hand, the focus on labour intensive manufacturing growth for export is a development in the right direction but alone it can never alleviate poverty.

IN MEMORIAM 'Khasru Mama' — Syed Manzoorul Islam



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So why didn't I write for him, except for an occasional piece? For an answer, let me go back a little in the past and begin from the beginning.

Solving Population Problem: How Training can Help

POPULATION is an asset to Japan whereas it is a liability to Bangladesh; it is a liability to Bangladesh because it is still posing as one of the main hindrances to socio-economic development of the nation.

by Syed Naquib Muslim

For the last few decades, continuous attempts have been made by the successive governments to arrest the galloping growth of population and to convert the vast untapped manpower into a productive force.

Population is one of the chief barriers to socio-economic development of Bangladesh. China which is considered to be one of the conservative countries in the world (for its practising a closed system), has also opted for "one-family one child" programme as is practised by the Western countries.

Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre (BPATC) is alive to the increasing gravity of the population problem and to the urgency of devising effective mechanisms to solve the problem.

A population policy was for the first time formulated in 1976. It envisaged an integrated health programme. Of late, population issues are being looked at from a broad perspective and are being integrated with other socio-economic policies and programmes like extended role of women in development.

It is traditionally conceived that population of Bangladesh is too big for a country having small geographical area and limited resources. It is also a proven fact that population has links with development and environment.

It is contended by the experts that trained field workers cannot reach the clientele properly or as desired. Therefore, both population trainers and their clientele should be involved in the design stage of a training programme.

Many people hold the view that training in our country does not give any pay-off because the follow-up process has not been institutionalised. In this context, modern techniques like PERT can be employed to assess training impact on the beneficiaries.

Training function on population cannot be tackled single-

handedly by one agency, however specialised it may be. NIPORT alone cannot tackle the heavy responsibility to bring the rising population under control; other training institutes should also come forward to joining hands with it in terms of design and delivery of training courses.

One of the most common complaints against the public sector training is that training administered to the clientele often gets encapsulated and there is little applicability of training to real job situations.

Institutes to Join Hands Training function on population cannot be tackled single-

The items of the possible population training agenda are: 1) Politics of Population Policy Making; 2) Sustainability of Population-related Institutions; 3) Skills for Demographic Research/Analysis; 4) Intra/inter-agency Coordination for Population Programme Efficacy; 5) Female Employment Generation; 6) Improvement of National Nutritional Status; 7) Strategies for the Reduction of Child Mortality Rate.

It is not until he finally settled down in Dhaka, from 1989 to be precise, that I came in close contact with him. By then I had got rid of my schoolboyish awe of him, which was quickly replaced by a genuine respect — for I discovered a kind and affectionate person in him, one who cared deeply about others and took interest in little details one would not think much of sharing with elders.

Persons, living at home and abroad, belonging to any of the source materials mentioned above and aware of any other relevant information, not stated here, are requested kindly to inform the researcher. The researcher with his own initiative would collect the information from them and the names of the contributors of any source material would be acknowledged in the thesis paper.

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S M Ali Road Sir, It may be appropriate to rename 'Topkhana Road' as 'S M Ali Road', as the National Press Club is located on this road. A 'Star' reader. Dhaka

To the Editor...

Traffic mismanagement.

Sir, Mr A S M Nurunnabi in his feature 'Down to Earth' covers the subjects quite comprehensively and if the relevant authorities take any note their own workload would be eased.

However, one is tempted to point out an overriding factor which Mr Nurunnabi might have kept out deliberately. It is the performance of the traffic constables. To an onlooker it appears that the poor creatures are neither trained for the job they are supposed to do nor are they given the requisite authority.

no such power. A long time ago someone suggested to replace the traffic police by the scare-crows to save tax-payers' money!

Information about Syed Nawab Ali Chowdhury

Sir, Under the supervision of Dr K M Mohsin, Professor of History, University of Dhaka, a research work has been undertaken by me on the role of Nawab Bahadur Syed Nawab Ali Chowdhury (1863-1929), the Zamindar of village Dhanbari under Madhupur police station of Tangail district.

ward Muslim community of Bengal under the British rule, during the later 19th and early 20th centuries.

The Nawab's personal and family-held papers — academic certificates, diaries, Kursinama, Kabinnama, genealogy of the relatives, history of Dhanbari Estate, Sanad of zamindari, deeds of property, documents of will, gift and wakf-nama of property, papers of his appointment to government and non-government posts, papers concerning government titles conferred upon him, letters of appreciation, address of welcome and farewell given to him, political and private letters to and from the leaders and the British administrators, election manifestos, portraits and paintings, photographs, manuscripts, speeches and statements, auto-biography, reminiscences,

giving light on his career, history and gazette of the greater Mymensingh district under British period, an English booklet written by him entitled 'Views on the present Political Situation in India', a Bengali book written by poet Shaikh Fazlul Karim (1882-1936) entitled 'Syed Nawab Ali Chowdhury', review papers on the books written about him and any other relevant documentary evidences, if available, will be used as source materials in the research work.

Besides these, an attempt will be made, as far as possible, in taking interviews of those teachers, researchers, Ulema, poets, litterateurs, artists, journalists, physicians, politicians, lawyers, intellectuals, school and college-mates, colleagues, friends, assistants, kith and kins and descendants who came in close contact with the Nawab.