

Politics on the Slide Down

Politics in Bangladesh is going in all sorts of directions, and all of them are ominous. The will of the people is becoming increasingly defined as the will of the party or the group that shout the loudest.

Then take the demand made in the rally of Jamaat, and of the 13-party United Action Council of the religious parties and their allies. Their demand is to hang all writers and others who are against Islam, to enact a blasphemy law, ban newspapers and publications that speak against Islam, and to reform Bangladesh's Constitution to make it an Islamic one.

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A Costly Deception

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The legendary indecision and changes in decision on the part of successive governments are mainly responsible for this chaotic situation. It is a long story but to make it short let us refer to a report carried in a Bangla daily.

If this is how we continue to make fool of ourselves, nobody stands to lose except the entire nation. If the authorities concerned cannot foresee the outcome of such frequent decision changes and also of the imposition of orders without making supporting provisions, we simply end up rendering any system inoperative, or operative only in the most dubious way.

This indeed is a peril we are inviting for ourselves — little aware that the self deception can backfire any moment. In the case of the chowkidars and dafadars, they are hardly a party to this falsehood.

THE visit of a very high level Japanese Corporate delegation in the month of May raised much expectations and hope that Bangladesh has finally knocked the jackpot of FDI flows.

Investors' Characteristics The approach of Japanese investors to new foreign investment project or destination is such that they will wait

The Visit of Japanese Corporate Team and Investment Prospects

by Munim Kumar Barai

and watch the economic and political developments of the prospective country year after year. Undoubtedly, the practised rule of investment is followed. This rule of investment is that every investor wants his investment must remain safe and a desired level of return must accrue there from.

Present Eco-political Turmoil On both economic and po-

litical grounds, Japan seems to be in a turmoil. The Japanese economy which was racing ahead like the 'shinkansen' (the famed bullet train) has screeched almost to a halt.

The spectacular rate of growth in 60s and 70s seems a history of long past. Rather a quick deceleration in growth occurred in the later part of 80s and Japanese economy is passing through a rough testing period at present.

Again, compounded with the economic troubles, the political developments are mak-

ing the scenario worse. Ironically, political developments in Japan seem to prove that political instability is not a third world monopoly.

Moreover, the present LDP-Socialist coalition is also a shaky one. This prevailing sense of uncertainty is likely to have some impact on Japanese internal and external economic priorities.

Uncertainty Syndrome

The success of the Government of Bangladesh in stabilising the macro economic front seems to have so far drawn all but FDI to the vol-

ume. The rate of inflation is low, the deficit against GDP is upto a manageable limit, forex reserve is satisfactory and the country now has a more open and liberal environment for foreign investment than ever before.

Unfortunately, that did not happen. At this juncture, two high profiled visits to Japan by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and the Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina and the subsequent visit of the Japanese business delegates to Bangladesh generated an impression that the dearth phase of FDI inflows might have come to an end.

opments in Bangladesh and those in Algeria or Egypt. This very analogy may be detrimental to procreate a second thought among the foreigners about the investment prospects in Bangladesh.

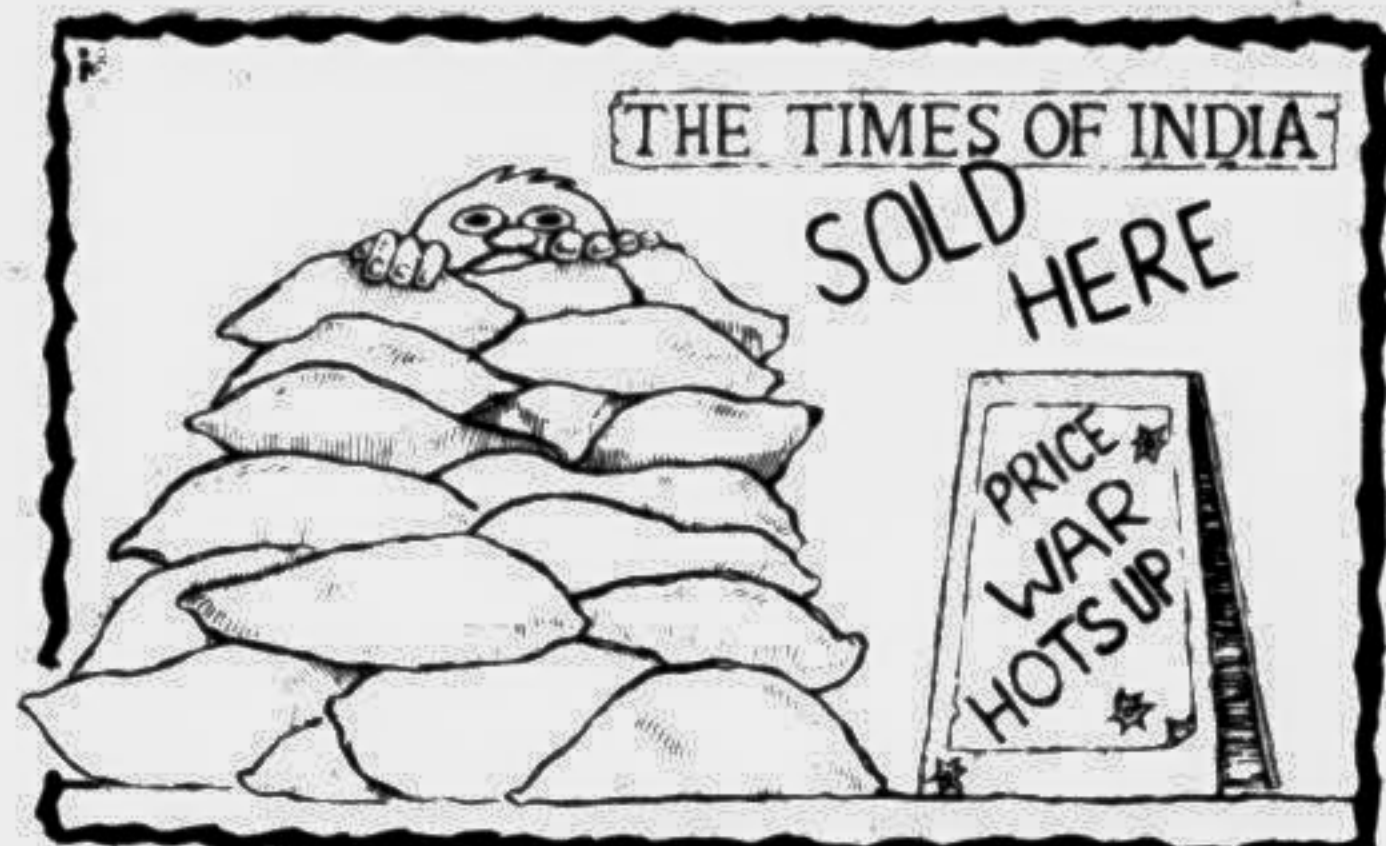
Conclusion

The people of Bangladesh need economic progress more than any thing else. The internal resources of Bangladesh are too meagre to meet the uphill task of industrialisation by her own.

Tensions and Circulations Rise in Newspaper War

Rahul Bedi writes from New Delhi

Months of tension have spilled onto the streets of Delhi as a newspaper price-cutting campaign has turned ugly. Vendors have been injured, journalists have resigned and the reading public may ultimately pay a heavy price.



sales and the Association, representing around 6,000 vendors in Delhi, said a price war would greatly reduce the earnings of its members.

have substantially driven up circulation in the last few months.

Over a three-month period The Times of India claims to have increased circulation by 20,000 copies to more than 210,000.

Another high-quality newspaper from the Times Group, The Economic Times now priced at two rupees, or 60 per cent cheaper (except on Sundays, when it is 10 rupees), has almost doubled its circulation.

The Bennett Coleman Group plans to offset losses by increasing advertising rates based on higher circulation. It also conceived a strategy of giving management the deciding role in editorial matters.

According to Samir Jain, managing director and part-owner of the Times Group, managers in editorial positions can guarantee increased sales irrespective of editorial content. Jain says marketing newspapers is little different from selling consumer goods.

His implementation of this policy, however, by which a former cigarette company marketing executive was recently made editorial manager of The Times, led to protest resignations by the paper's editor and more than 30 journalists.

Meanwhile, beleaguered Bennett Coleman officials accused other Delhi newspapers of inciting the vendors. The Times Group carried daily reports that their rivals were present during the roughing up of vendors attempting to stock Times Group publications.

And as the price war raged, leaving a trail of battered vendors in its wake, members of The Times of India employees union moved around Delhi in groups delivering their paper. The also sold the paper in two of south Delhi's worst 'war zones', reportedly 'controlled' by a rival newspaper through vendors.

The first response to The Times' price war came from

The Hindustan Times, Delhi's most widely read English-language newspaper with a circulation of over 343,000.

After initially refusing to cut prices, on the plea that prices did not determine readers' choice, The Hindustan Times succumbed. In mid-July, it sliced its weekday price to 1.50 rupees, down from 2.40 rupees.

Senior editors at the paper said the decision was taken after The Times of India price reduction began to slowly 'bleed' their circulation.

Managements of other English-language newspapers, following similar reasoning, are expected to cut costs in order to survive in a price-driven market.

Media analysts say the price war is bound to hit Hindi newspapers too. And though this will generally benefit readers in the short run, the analysts say the public is still at the mercy of newspaper management who may arbitrarily raise prices after riding out the current crisis.

RAHUL BEDI is a freelance Indian journalist.

AT the age of 37, Najma has nine children from seven marriages. Today, she is at a family planning clinic on an island near the Maldivian capital to get some advice on nutrition for her children, to vaccinate her youngest son and obtain some contraceptives for herself.

Her counselors at the family planning clinic say Najma is fairly representative of mothers who come for help in a country with the highest population growth rate in Asia.

The Maldivian archipelago consists of about 2,000 islands strung out like beads in the Indian Ocean south-west of Sri Lanka. There are 227,000 people living in the two hundred inhabited islands, making a living off fishing and tourism.

Its population may be negligible in comparison to the South Asian mainland's 1.3 billion people, but the Maldives' land area and resources are so limited that demographers are concerned over how the country can cope with a population growth rate of 3.4 percent a year.

Recent surveys showed that only nine women in the capital of Male, which has a population of 60,000, used intra-uterine devices. Only 590 used condoms and the national contraceptive use rate is eight percent — compared to 62 percent in Sri Lanka.

Experts say although easier availability of contraceptives would help, social and cultural factors affecting high fertility

Maldives: Bursting at the Seams

Tiny Maldives tries to tackle the problem of having Asia's highest population growth rate. Kunda Dixit of Inter Press Service reports from Manila.

These factors seem to negate parameters like the Maldives' low child mortality level (56 for every thousand live births) and high literacy rate (90 percent) which in the rest of South Asia are seen as necessary precursors to low birth rates.

The Maldivian Department of Public Health says it wants to raise the contraceptive prevalence rate to 30 percent in the next two years, but some experts say the target may be too ambitious.

Social workers say mothers like Najma are not the exception. The country's high birth rate seems to be directly related to the exodus of young males from outlying islands to find work in tourist resorts or in Male. Religious factors in this Muslim nation also play a part.

Helping the government with family planning are voluntary groups like Society for Health Education (SHE) which runs a free family planning and health counselling centre in Male.

With help from the United Nations Population Fund

(UNFPA) and the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), SHE has become the only non-governmental distributor of contraceptives.

"We know the problem and we are trying to ensure that every child born to Maldivian parents is a wanted child," says Ahiend Shakeeb, SHE's chairperson. The group also regularly takes multi-purpose health clinics and floating family planning centres to outlying islands.

SHE is also working on the Maldives' number one health problem: thalassaemia, which is a congenital blood disorder that can be fatal.

Up to 18 percent of the people of the Maldives are thalassaemia carriers, and public health experts say the high incidence is partly due to the propagation of the recessive genes through inbreeding.

Thalassaemia carriers do not exhibit symptoms, but the full blown disease usually kills a victim by the age of 16 unless treated with expensive drugs and a transfusion every month.

SHE operates a blood lab and together with the govern-



ment is working on a national thalassaemia screening campaign together with an effort to make prospective marriage partners aware of the dangers

and persuade them not to have children.

SHE's other effort is AIDS prevention through education. The Maldives is a tourist

To the Editor...

Whither 'black-gold' or Cox's Bazar?

Sir, May I invite your kind attention to a news report entitled 'Foreign firm keen to extract beach sand minerals' published on the first page of The Daily Star on July 19, 1994.

The report says that an Australian company, Minerals Pvt Ltd, Queensland, is interested in the extraction of heavy minerals from the beach sand in Bangladesh and has applied to Bangladesh Government for an appropriate exploration and mining permit for Moleshkhali island and Cox's Bazar areas.

The report further says that the beach sand in Cox's Bazar coast and off-shore island of

Moleshkhali contains appreciable quantity of heavy minerals such as zircon, rutile, ilmenite magnetite, kyanite and thorium etc which are in high demand for industrial use both in and outside the country.

I express my grave concern over the news and strongly oppose involvement of any foreign country in the extraction of valuable minerals from the beach sand in Bangladesh. This would deprive us of billions of dollars of our national wealth 'black-gold' available in huge quantity in some coastal areas from Cox's Bazar to Kuakata. If we do so we would be committing the biggest blunder of our life.

In fact we are capable of extracting the valuable minerals from the beach sand

through our own indigenous technology and method and our limited resources either in the public or private sector. And by making a humble beginning we may establish a giant industry of our own within a few years' time.

I wonder if we can produce salt, make shrimp cultivation in the coastal areas and earn crores of Taka why can't we utilise our more valuable natural wealth 'black-gold'?

Unfortunately most of our public leaders and bureaucrats are perhaps in the dark about this 'black-gold'. They are completely ignorant about this valuable minerals

Would the print media depute reporters/photographers to see for themselves the

'black-gold' of Cox's Bazar, issue special supplements on it and help create a general awareness and interest among our people on 'black-gold' of Cox's Bazar in the greater interest of the country?

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Alladi-pana

Sir, How long this alladi-pana will continue in local politics? Some political parties ask for the moon like spoiled brats. What gives them the right to hold the electorate as hostages to fulfil their wishful dreams of phantasies?

In economics, now we have the free market. In politics do

we see free market interplay? The voters should introduce 'yellow' and 'red' cards for political fouls and misbehaviour.

The citizens have given the spoiled politicians a long leash for too long a time. It is time to introduce movement against undesirable political activities.

The politicians should not force the people to go in for a third force to rule the country. It has happened in this and other countries.

One cannot have the cake and eat it too. The power and the decision-making belong to the people, and not to the managers.

A Zabr Dhaka

An appreciation

Sir, I very much appreciate and enjoy the relevant and sound medical advice that Ms Farhana Ahmad is providing us through her articles, published on your 'Living' page.

Her writing has an original style, and she has an excellent command over the English language. She provides technical information in a lucid manner which can be easily understood by the layman.

Keep up the good work Farhana!

M A Zafar Shah Asstt Prof, Deptt of PR DU, Dhaka