

## Pushing Jute Forward

A week ago we published a special supplement entitled "The Future of Jute: Problems and Prospects", based on the transcript of a Roundtable we had held, with the major players in jute sector taking part in it. Two things have happened since then. Firstly, we have got an initial feedback taking note of the new effort launched to breathe life into the tottering jute sector, something we like to believe would gather a greater momentum in the fullness of a public debate in the near future. Secondly, true to his commitment at The Daily Star Roundtable discussion, Jute Minister Brig. (Retd) Hannan Shah is hosting a national dialogue on the subject in a couple of days' time.

We can allow ourselves the nostalgia of bemoaning the old glories of jute only in passing but not the luxury of being frozen in that frame of mind. The basic thing to realise is that hard-headed decisions are needed within a national policy framework to integrate our jute sector with the world market in a context so vastly different from the Korean war-time boom enjoyed by the golden fibre.

There has been a decline in the production and quality of raw jute as well as of jute goods. Our costs of production have made the merchandise, both in its raw and finished forms, uncompetitive on the international market. Add to this our interest rates that keep above the worldwide rates of between 3 and 4 per cent on an average. Our export prices are overvalued in relation to those of India which is our major competitor in the field.

It is not only at the level of raw jute production but also at the manufacturing level that we have had to subsidise the sector that is so full of potential to be highly profitable in its own right. While the costs of production reduce the competitiveness of our prices abroad, and our foreign exchange earnings drop, the other folly of keeping the industries alive by huge subsidisation goes on impoverishing the tax-payers. So, it has been loss all the way.

Now therefore, a cost-cutting management of the industries and diversified use of jute can increase our sales and profits so much so that these can have a lift-pump effect on the cultivation of jute at the primary level. But yes, marketing will be another component, which may stand in need of a supplier's credit in due course. Yet, for all practical purposes, we have to firm up the agricultural and industrial production lines in the first place. Our goodwill has eroded away a good deal also because of shipping defaults of an unworkable kind.

The jute sector reform programme, as prescribed by the donors, has had to major elements such as privatisation of the loss-making public sector units and restructuring of their past debts. Privatisation is conceived not merely as mode of transfer of ownership but as a harbinger of improvements in the productivity and management of the industries. There has to be an interim financial arrangement catering to a training programme for upgrading the skill of workers retained in the industries. And the declared surplus of labour has to be retrained for absorption elsewhere. The third component of jute sector reform has to be basically our own baby — namely, promotion of jute in paper, textiles, furniture and soft luggage industries.

We have done some spade-work in all these areas, and have some grasp of the pattern of emphasis to follow. What is needed now is a priority-based national commitment within a clearly stated policy framework to push jute ahead.

## A Helpful Academy

The Shilpakala Academy has eased the procedure for selection of works of art for the 11th National Fine Arts Exhibition. Now an artist — painter or sculptor or any worker in the visual media — will not be required to carry his pieces to the Academy for selection. Slides and colour photographs will take the place of the original works for selection purpose. This will be very helpful to painters and specially to sculptors. And artist from outside Dhaka will be much benefited by the new arrangement.

One may debate that a photograph, either in the slide or print form, cannot wholly be a substitute for the real thing; but the many good points of the new mode should outweigh the reservations that may be aired by some. The more cogent point is whether there are adequate facilities for making good colour slides or prints of paintings and sculptures outside Dhaka City. If a badly done photograph fails an artist — and not his lack of quality — it would be a most unfortunate thing. But this hardly can be avoided.

One had the impression that these selections had always been vitiated by lobbying and other kinds of influence peddling — whether or not such malpractices proved paying. If the outstation entrants must send their slides and prints through mail or courier, can't it be made binding on all to do the same? Could the names of the artists be kept away from the knowledge of the selectors? This would sound a little less outlandish if you kept ten or twenty artists outside of this 'selection' competition for inviting those venerable masters to please participate in the show.

Is a 'fair' selection of works of arts possible? It is possible that a jury would not be influenced in their judgement by considerations other than strictly aesthetic. That can be a 'fair' selection but not necessarily a competent or good one. The selectors must of necessity be picked from painters of reputation, experience and power and probity and art connoisseurs and critics of unimpeachable records as to their knowledge of and feeling for art and also their integrity of opinion. There should be a homogeneity of approach among the selectors which may not always be the ideal gauge to measure quality of art in a world now dominated by plurality of tastes and standards.

The Shilpakala Academy must be complimented for their generous promotion of the visual and plastic arts. One only wishes that they did the same to the other forms of art specially music and the theatre. The Academy once played a significant role in promoting the folk theatre 'Jatra'. The Jatra was then suddenly consigned to a state of limbo by people on higher perches. Has the Academy been steadfastly upholding the cause of that form and exerting to salvage it in the way it should have? An answer in the negative would only justify our earlier call — the Shilpakala Academy must be a wholly autonomous trust set-up. We repeat our call.

# Military Rule in Haiti, Nigeria and Myanmar: Response of the International Community

## ON THE RECORD

by Shah AMS Kibria

share a small island in the Caribbean Sea, not far from Cuba, their bigger neighbour to the north west. In the shadow of a superpower, the Caribbean states had little choice but to accept the Monroe doctrine under which the United States exercised a sort of benevolent guardianship over these states. Cuba is the only country which, for political and ideological reasons, fell out of line. The resultant tension between Cuba

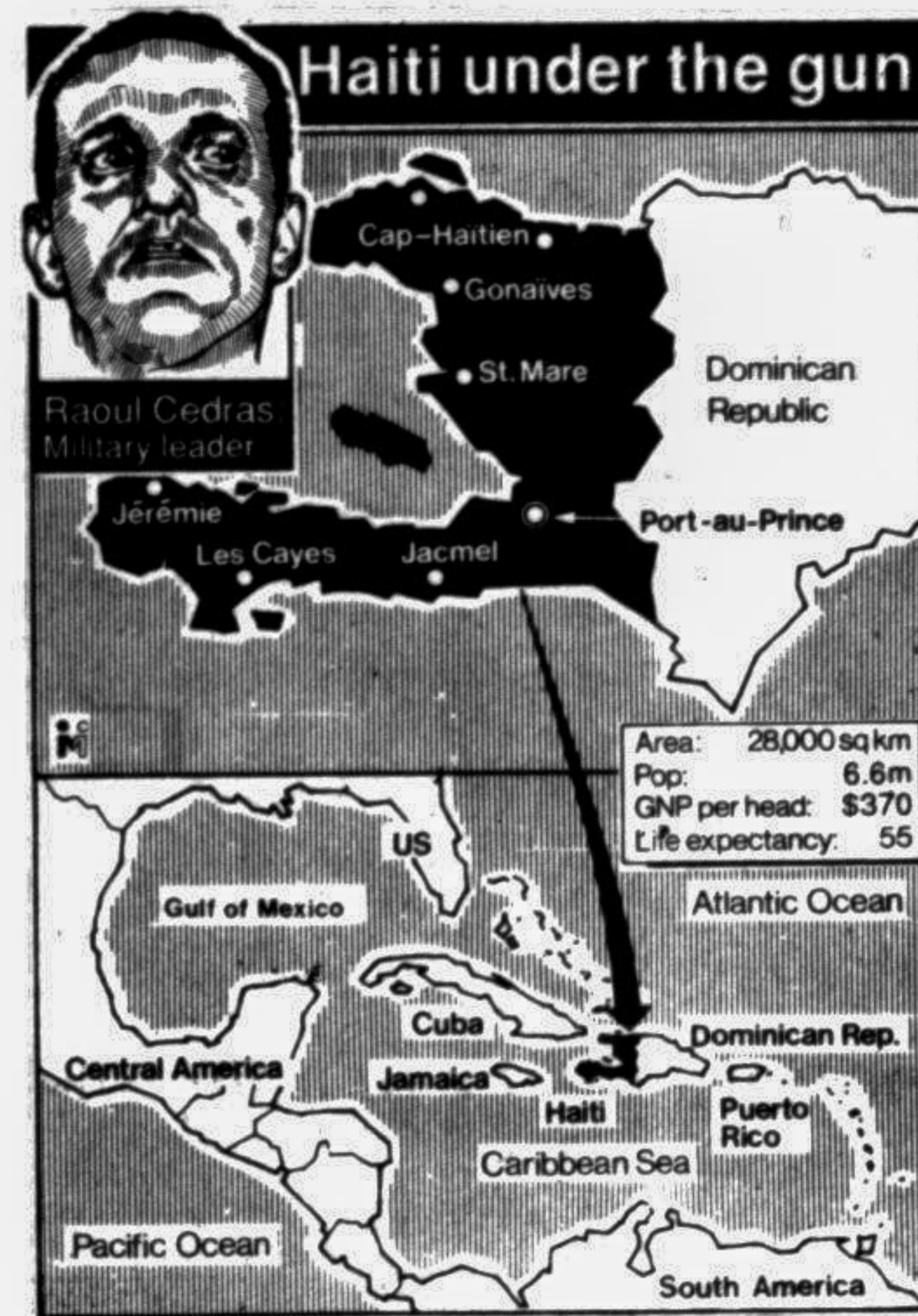
and the US is well known. No one believed that the military rulers of Haiti, led by Gen. Cedras, would succeed in defying for long the wishes of the United States. They ousted Mr Aristides and hoped that if they could hold out long enough the United States might accept their regime as a fait accompli. If Reagan was in the White House perhaps their plan might have succeeded. But a democratic White House

found it too distasteful to live with a uniformed mini-dictator next door to the United States. However, much to the embarrassment of the liberals in the United States, Clinton vacillated. He was loath to commit US troops for ousting the generals. The decisive factor, it seems, was the large flow of refugees arriving at the shores of the United States as destitute. Americans are already concerned about the flow of illegal immigrants from Mexico and the asylum-seekers from Cuba; they did not relish the prospect of another massive wave of immigrants from Haiti. The tide could not be halted, it was concluded, unless the corrupt, inefficient and oppressive military junta was removed from power. Hence the final decision to act.

It should be noted that Haiti's population is largely black. Many of them are descended from freed American slaves who were settled in Haiti. Due to the years of exploitation by unscrupulous rulers as well as the mismanagement of the economy, the people of Haiti are very poor. A witch doctor known as Papa Doc ruled over the state and exploited the people for many years. He used Voodoo magic to cast a spell on the people and secure his regime. After his death his son Baby Doc succeeded him but could not hang on to power. I believe he has taken shelter in Europe with his looted treasure. The present military rulers have also tried to make use of Voodoo magic to tighten their grip on power. The case of Haiti clearly shows how deeply a nation pays for lack of education and general backwardness.

The time has come for the Third World countries to consider how the UN can be made an effective instrument on the side of the people everywhere. After all, the Charter was proclaimed not in the name of the member states but in the name of the "peoples" of the United

Nations. If fundamental human rights as well as the democratic rights are denied by a brutal regime to its own people, can the UN play a role on the side of the people? It is a basic question though admittedly a tricky one. Section 7 of Article 2 of the Charter which bars the UN from intervening in matters which are "essentially within the domestic jurisdiction" of members states, has been used by dictators to prevent the UN from looking at their misdeeds. But chapter VII of the Charter gives the UN enough scope to overcome these legal barriers if the Security Council decides that the situation contains the seeds of conflict which could spread beyond the borders of the state concerned. In Haiti, Nigeria and Myanmar the military rulers gave clear proof of their bad faith and evil nature by cancelling elections results. There are clear signs that the internal conflicts will not remain confined to the geographical borders of these countries. The position may not be so clear in other situations. In Zaire, another African nation, the military dictator Mobutu has reportedly stolen billions of dollars from the people of that unlucky nation but no one seems to be able to do anything about it. However, where there is a clear case such as in Nigeria or Myanmar, the UN and the international community has a responsibility. The great powers cannot apply the standards on a selective basis. Respect for the UN and international law and morality will be seriously eroded if it is seen that it is the great powers who are deviating from the ideals which they preach. While one must commend the United Nations for taking positive steps to save the people of Haiti from the oppression and brutality of a corrupt and cruel regime, its silence or failure to act in similar situations will undermine its moral authority. Instead of being used as an instrument of the great powers, the UN must live up to the high ideals enshrined in the Charter.



force to restore the elected president of the country. There cannot be two opinions that it was the right decision. The response of Bangladesh to the request for troops was also the correct one. In fact, as far as I am aware, no mainstream political party in the country has expressed any reservation on the point. But the question that haunts us all, particularly in the Third World, is: why is the UN not applying an uniform standard in dealing with identical problems?

I realise that the answer to the question is not a simple one. While the people in the vast majority of the UN member states would like to see an end to the oppressive and illegal military regimes in different parts of the world, the UN seems to act, as did in Haiti, only when it serves the interests of a great power. That is the international reality today. The situation in Nigeria, for instance, is similar to Haiti. The former military ruler, Gen. Ibrahim Babangida, voided the results of an election in order to deny the office of president to Mr Noshod Abiola, the person elected by the people to that post. His successor, the new head of the military junta, Gen. Sani Abacha, is doing exactly what his predecessor did: he is brutally suppressing the popular movement in favour of Mr Abiola. In Myanmar too a military junta nullified the results of a general election by putting the elected MPs and their leader Aung San Suu Kyi behind the prison bars! Defiantly, the regime nullified the people's verdict and ignored international criticism. Yet neither the UN nor the champions of democracy in Europe and America thought in terms of UN intervention on the side of the people of those countries. Is it because these are resource-rich countries and the western businessmen would not like to rock the boat that offers prospects of such profit?

Haiti and Dominican Republic — two small states

## Sale of NZ Farmland to Asians Raises Concern

Ian McCrone writes from Queenstown

NEASINESS about the amount of land which Asian interests are acquiring has surfaced in the booming New Zealand resort of Queenstown, which is thriving on outside investment.

A district councillor has called on the local government to curb the sale to foreigners of "critical pieces of rural land" near the southern tourist town of lakes and mountains.

He told a council meeting in July that virtually all New Zealand beauty spots were now on the international market. The councillor, Barry Lawrence, said recent sales of farmland near the resort, a 45-minute flight from the international airport at Christchurch, had forced up prices far beyond the productive value of the properties.

Mr Lawrence, who is regarded as a voice of the environmental and conservation lobbies, said his major concern was the number of leased upland grazing runs in the region which were going for up to 10 times their farming worth.

He produced figures which showed that the country's Overseas Investment Commission, a regulatory arm of the central government, had approved 114 foreign applications last year for about 49,000 hectares of land worth in total NZ \$138 million (nearly US \$83 million).

Mr Lawrence added: "I can see very little advantage in putting New Zealand on the market for the very rich..."

The district council agreed to pass on his concerns to the central government in Wellington, where they will be received but most likely pi-

geon-holed.

It is nearly 10 years since a Labour (socialist) government set out on a private enterprise course to bring New Zealand into the real world, and relaxed strict controls on foreign investment.

The present National (conservative) government of Prime Minister Jim Bolger, a North Island farmer before he entered politics, is committed to getting all the Asian investment it can.

Changes to the overseas investment regulations in 1985 have seen millions of dollars, notably from Indonesia, Singapore, Taiwan, Japan and Hong Kong, sent in to buy property in key urban and tourist locations.

Purchases ranged from the warm sea beaches of the North Island to high-country sheep runs and scenic lake, river and mountain resorts like Queenstown, in the South Island.

Although its resident population of 15,000 does not qualify it for city status, Queenstown is one of the best-known places in New Zealand to foreigners, along with Auckland and Rotorua, the centre of volcanic hot springs and Maori culture.

Pushed by an active tourism lobby, Queenstown has welcomed visitors to a wide range of outdoor adventure activities like skiing, trout-fishing, white-water rafting and high-speed jetboating in clean, green scenic surroundings.

Both central and local governments have smiled at overseas investors bought up farms to build a luxury golf and country living complex 20 kilometres from Queenstown

and Lake Wakatipu, on which the town stands.

New Zealanders have always been afraid of being "bought out" by wealthy foreigners, who can find the cash for investment "bargains" the locals cannot afford — or do not wish to risk.

As recently as April this year, a Ministry of Foreign Affairs survey found that four out of five New Zealanders considered Asian tourists were a benefit to their country.

But only a quarter thought Asian investment was a good thing. Most had mixed feelings, and 18 per cent opposed it outright.

The Overseas Investment Commission, which implements government policy under powers delegated from the Minister of Finance, says New Zealand welcomes and encourages foreign investment, without discrimination.

An overseas "person" is defined as a non-resident company or a New Zealand grouping in which 25 per cent of the voting power or more is held by foreigners.

The commission's consent must be obtained for any project exceeding NZ \$10 million (US\$6 million). Special conditions apply to fishing ventures and land deals.

Foreign purchase of farmland over five hectares, or one hectare of any island, foreshore or lakefront has to show benefits in the form of job opportunities, more processing of primary products, market development and introduction of technology or business skills.

Most of the deals are done

without fanfare. Only occasionally is the extent of the buy-up made apparent to the ordinary New Zealander — when something goes sour.

Two years ago, the sale of an island resort near Auckland to a German national collapsed because of the outcry which followed the disclosure that he was wanted for a number of alleged offences in his home

country.

Critics of the government's free market philosophy argue against the one-sided nature of the land sales policy.

They point out that New Zealanders do not have reciprocal property-buying rights in countries like Japan, or even the Cook Islands in the Pacific Ocean, which were financed for decades by New Zealand aid dollars.

They also worry that

wealthy developers may be able to persuade local councils to bend their planning ordinances and allow land uses which would normally be refused.

There is no sign at present that the Bolger government has any interest in tightening the criteria against foreign investment. The outlets for Asian money in the property market are likely to remain as they are.

— Depthnews Asia

## OPINION

### Of Pledges and Parliament, Democracy and Dictum

Shahabuddin Mahtab

ON the evening of September 19, the Prime Minister spoke to the nation. Any sincere person, whatever party he or she may belong to has to admit that her speech was profound and sincere. There was not the least insincerity in whatever she spoke. There may be difference of opinions and views on what she presented before the nation. It is one of perception, and one's attitude to the events that influence us.

About four years back, on November 19, 1990, Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia and Awami League Chief Sheikh Hasina Wazed had agreed on a Parliamentary form of Government in the country. The leaders also agreed, that the electronic media should be autonomous, and completely free from government control. But that is yet to occur.

The Prime Minister in her speech said, that in September, 1991 the 12th amendment to the constitution was adopted in the Jatiya Sangsad through a national consensus leading to the restoration of parliamentary democracy. However, in fairness to truth, we have to admit that this transition to the Parliamentary form of government did not come easily. The BNP dragged their fit for quite sometime, before the amendment took place.

At his stage we would not like to define or to give the details of a Parliamentary form of Government. It would suffice to say that the Parliament is the supreme and the absolute authority to express the wishes of a sovereign people. Here we must recall what happened during the last three years of the parliamentary democracy.

The most important duty of the Leader of the House and the Leader of the Opposition is to sit regularly in the parliament when it is in session. The Deputy Leaders or the Ministers certainly participate in the deliberations that affect the future and welfare of the nation. It was the very negation of the parliamentary form of government, when the leaders were not there, and a large

majority of the MPs who are to serve the public were also not there.

The leaders may not be present in the House due to urgent reasons beyond their control. But such occasions must be minimal, if we are to show our honest and due regard to the supreme parliament. It is only through discussions, and the wisdom of the parliamentarians that the innumerable problems of this country can be tackled. All reasonable suggestions, and opinions of the opposition were needed to be respected. In this matter the ruling party had a great deal of responsibility.

During the last three years, the professional bodies, the trade unions, the students and every segment of the society in their courses of actions, apparently tried to defy an elected parliamentary government. And more than three years have already passed, and the next election is not far off. But the signals seem to be gloomy for both the ruling and opposition parties as well as the electorate in general. It has been a matter of great sadness, that when the whole people suffered from one 'hartal' to another, was not some amount of patriotism necessary on the part of the comparatively conscious section of the society, not to see the economy only shudder and dip.

At a time when the nation expected foreign direct investment (FDI) from Japan and many other countries, we created an image which simply frightened the intending investors. When Vietnam is being flooded with FDI, we are even unable to have a trickle down amount.

The Prime Minister, in her speech spoke of doubling the size of the Annual Development Programme (ADP) within a period of three years; she also said, that we have been able to finance 36% of ADP from our domestic resources in the fiscal year 1993-94. Madam Prime Minister also added that our export earnings have increased by about Taka 300 crore.

The people of Bangladesh are simply wonderful, who have time and again braved the floods and cyclones, fought the great war of liberation, when the cream of our youth made the supreme sacrifice, so that we may live with dignity. Let not the blood of our martyrs go in vain or disrespected anyway.

## 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.

### Living with Rickshaws

Sir, Rickshaws are now an essential part of our way of life. Besides the socio-economic reasons, this is also a political factor. No party, in power or out, would displease the large group of owners and pullers. We are to live with this traffic phenomenon and make whatever improvements that are possible.

I suggest some measures for consideration here. One, let some roads be exclusive for rickshaws for certain hours in a day (when alternate roads will be rickshaw free). Competent traffic consultants can determine this. Two, localise the movement ward wise. Lastly, design of permitted rickshaws may be modified for amicable co-existence with others. Rickshaws (and autos

& tempos) being wedge shaped tend to insert the front wheel into even an inch of gap at the peril of the pullers and passengers and ignoring the well-being of surrounding vehicles. The new design may incorporate a flat bar or fender in the front to make the width uniform along the length. In other words the vehicle only enters into any space where the whole body can pass.

M A Haq  
Green Road,  
Dhaka-1205

### Charismatic personality

Sir, Commonwealth Secretary General Chief Emeka Anyaoku made a courtesy call on Leader of the Opposition

Sheikh Hasina at her Minto Road residence on September 18, 1994. They sat together and exchanged views on various issues. The Commonwealth Secretary recalled his meeting with Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in Ottawa, Canada in September 1973 during the Commonwealth summit. He mentioned how he was overwhelmed by the charismatic personality and generosity of the late leader.

The background photograph of Bangabandhu placed in between Sheikh Hasina and Emeka Anyaoku on the occasion which was published in The Daily Star, Dhaka on 19-9-1994 looked live as if Sheikh Mujibur Rahman himself was physically present there and listening to their talks.

Is it not a reflection, of the charismatic personality of Bangabandhu? We hope Commonwealth Secretary General may preserve this photograph also, like he has not forgotten his meeting with Bangabandhu in Ottawa in 1973.

O H Kabir  
Dhaka-1203