

Work in Harmony

President Abdur Rahman Biswas while addressing the half-empty inaugural sitting of the winter session of the Jatiya Sangsad on Monday made three points of topical significance.

The sitting of the parliament may have raised question-marks in the opposition circles owing to the unresolved status on their resignations as well as not serving a long enough notice for the winter session.

At any rate, the Speaker needs the right forum to give his ruling on the resignation en masse of the opposition members of Parliament.

The exigency of the present political situation demands that we make whatever use we can of the present parliament with only a year or so to go of its normal tenure.

The Speaker is likely to deliver his ruling on the opposition members' resignations during the current session of Parliament amidst a High Court restraint order on the subject for a stipulated period.

Just as the Jatiya Sangsad is supreme in the field of legislation, the judiciary is the final interpreter and arbiter in matters of the Constitution.

We are in Full Sympathy

We are in full sympathy with the Opposition-staged demonstrations demanding the autonomy of the electronic media. We feel certain as well that this will strike a responsive chord with the citizenry as a whole.

Many people regard the government's monopoly treatment of the state-owned radio and television as self-defeating because the government is losing on goodwill and credibility.

Instead of controlling the media so blatantly, it is wiser to open these up for diverse and differing views and opinions. When the TV failed to carry the news of the Opposition's mass resignation from the Jatiya Sangsad, its credibility with viewers hit a new low.

Orange Potential

According to a report carried in a Bangla daily, Moulvibazar boasts the ideal type of soil for the growth of oranges. This good piece of news is however marred by the other information: Lack of plan and proper management stands in the way of realising the full potential of the fruit.

This is however nothing new in our part of the world. We have already banished from our land quite a number of crops and fruits with tremendous values, both from economic and nutritional points of view.

It is not only that the orange orchards have vanished from a wide area of the greater Sylhet district, those that are there remain in a deplorable state. Shortage of soil nutrition and fertilizer has been responsible for poor quality of the produces.

The reality however is even worse. The production is much less. Ideally though an orange tree is capable of giving between 500 and 3,000 oranges.

The government's recent decision to give highest priority to trade promotion activities by our missions abroad is indeed an appropriate step, albeit a belated one.

One will notice that there exists today a fractious arrangement of several ministries and agencies concerned with industrial production and trade promotion activities.

The idea was perhaps borrowed by them from Japan whose Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) achieved phenomenal success in the post-war economic rehabilitation.

Apart from the need for re-organising government institutions as discussed above, the following specific issues also warrant our urgent consideration:

Diversification of exports: Today, Bangladesh exports about 100 goods, but 95 per cent of our export earnings are derived from 7 items while the rest 93 fetch the balance earning of five per cent.

Reflections on Export Promotion

by Nazem A Choudhury

These statistics it should be obvious that we have miserably failed at the supply side. This overwhelming dependence on an extremely limited number of goods, manufactures or agricultural products presents the greatest hurdle today for export expansion.

Possibilities for production of more finished leather and leather goods, handicrafts of all types, woollen carpets, silk and silk products, processed sea food etc. remain very strong.

True that some of the NGOs are quite active now in silk production. But no effort has yet been made for organised commercial production of cocoons or for drying and reeling processes in order to manufacture quality yarn and fabrics.

We have today a large area in the coastal belt dedicated for shrimp cultivation. Barring, however, a very few pioneers, these shrimp cultivators have generally failed in adopting appropriate technology — semi-intensive method in this case.

Asian countries from Turkey to China including Pakistan, India, Nepal and Bhutan in the sub-continent, foreign consumers, if necessary by adapting others' successful designs, in a manner not to invite application of harsh provisions of international trade related intellectual properties agreement.

There is also a good deal to be done in ensuring quality control in which the government as well as our chambers have to play more effective role for quite some time to come.

Emphasis on local value addition: While introduction of new goods will take some time, we have no reason not to enhance local value addition of goods we currently export.

Export credit guarantee scheme: The scheme launched a few years back with the World Bank and the USAID's support has failed to provide

raise local value addition of garments by 50 per cent. Local value addition of leather can also be raised significantly if we export finished leather only and not crust as is mostly done now.

The most critical element in export promotion is price competitiveness of goods. Under no circumstances, our exporters or government planners should overlook its importance.

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the fillip needed by our exporters to venture into unexplored markets. Being a sort of unattractive responsibility for the Shadaran Bima Corporation, its implementation has been far from satisfactory.

Lack of professional cadre: Barring a few professionals in EPB and TCB, we do not yet have a cadre of properly trained and oriented, personnel to undertake trade promotion activities.

Situation in Central and Eastern Europe: Markets in countries of Central and Eastern Europe as well as in Central Asia are passing through transition.

Since trade and investment promotion activities are intertwined, we should consider raising a cadre (a sub-cadre) or officers who should serve in a new amalgamated Ministry for Investment and International Trade and also in BOI, BEPZA and EPB to be attached to this Ministry in order to acquire a broad-range professionalism.

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Farmers Find it Tough Going

by Nilratan Halder

Ours is an overwhelmingly agrarian economy, with farm produces accounting for about 65-70 per cent of the total share. Surprisingly, however, agricultural policy is gradually getting inimical to the sector.

They even give the impression that the farmer's growth depends on the latter's restrictions! This is what makes no sense and is therefore untenable. Instead of viewing them as complimentary they are seen as a competitor to each other.

Even the virtues of the free market economy as propounded by the economists of the Western world have been grossly distorted here. There the stress is on creation of wealth through as much competitiveness as possible.

On top of this, when the resource continually moves bottom-up, and the process of diminishing benefit gets further revved up by endless demands by the huge administrative set-up and the emaciated factories and industries for their going-on, the majority at the bottom have to learn from a hermit's life.

The arguments therefore lead us to the lot of the overwhelming majority of the farm population. How are they faring with their agricultural activity? Few have cared to listen to their tale of woes and still fewer attempted to address their problems.

Both the industrial policy and the agricultural policy seem to have been tailor-made to serve certain purposes.

On the one side crores of Taka go down the drain in the name of industrial loans — bad loans to be precise — and on the other, the farmers are left out of such provisions and driven in desperation to take credit from butcher-like middle men and jotedars.

Crop production has systematically been rendered non-paying. The investment-cost-profit margin relations defy all economic theories. For the big farmers and the landless who cultivate, agriculture is still somehow paying — because of one's ability to control the implements and also to purchase inputs in time and the other's cheap labour.

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To the Editor...

Hartal Sir, The news item "Business Leaders Urge Parties to withdraw January 25 Hartal" in your esteemed daily on 20-01-95 attracted my attention.

I fully agree with the comments made by the various chambers of the business community. While foreign investors are preparing to invest millions of dollars in a neighbouring country our politicians are indirectly deterring a similar opportunity in our country.

Needless to say, only economic development and political stability can take this country forward. I deplore the attitude of the political parties who as a traditional means resort to hartals.

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