

Stop Stampede Tragedy

No one learns. No one wants to learn. But is there a choice not to learn particularly in matters involving definite risks to life of big groups?

Stampede deaths at garments units is not an unfamiliar tragedy. Has the experience resulted in any improvement in the arrangements and lay-outs of workers inside the locked up factories?

How can the owners forget about Mr Nasiruddin's fiery death — a hero's death. He was the owner and he could have escaped first from the fire that broke out in his big establishment.

The Traffic Mess

Lately a lot has been written about the city's traffic problems. In fact a lot more should be written as our life is about to come to a stand still because of it.

We also suggested the use of Rover and Boy Scouts, UOTC, National Cadet Corps and Girl Guides as forces to help out our police.

The point to be noted here is that the traffic problem of the present season has an impact on the economy itself, and hence it should be addressed with much more urgency and seriousness than we have seen so far.

An Artiste of Many Parts

Not all excellent singers are 'golden voiced'. And the epithet isn't a hollow overstatement. If we had heard Juthika Roy in person, one would surely have known what it meant.

With her death on Friday is gone a very colourful and indeed halcyon piece of Dhaka — old Dhaka. It was her father Syed Mohammad Taifoor who first spelt this city's name that way — in his important work Glimpses of Old Dhaka.

FINANCIAL analysts came up with quite a few catchy expressions to describe the economic crisis that took hold of Mexico from December 20 last year.

The euphemisms are quite apt. Tequila is a district in Mexico. Tequila is also the name given to the strong liquor distilled from fermented juice of plants of the genus Agave.

Any way, this particular tequila hangover spread far and wide beyond Mexico's borders. The quassia engulfed bourses in the Americas, Europe, and of more immediate relevance to us, the emerging markets in Asia as well.

On the surface, things have been running quite smoothly for Mexico. It had teamed up with its powerful northern neighbours, the United States and Canada, in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994.

The same year, Mexico also became a member of the 24-nation Paris-based Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) which has been known for long as the Capitalism's club.

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term private foreign investment that had gone into financing its current account deficit. The foreign investment was in the stock market mainly in short, the inflow of foreign funds took the shape of portfolio investment in bonds and equities.

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Till very recently, we also had been running a current account deficit. We tried to bridge the gap between our current earnings and spending in foreign currency, through the infusion of long-term official development assistance funds.

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China, Hong Kong, India, Philippines, Pakistan, the Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand — all lost 10 to 15 per cent in January alone. While the Mexican crisis provided the proximate ground for the sell-off, there were other underlying reasons too, particularly the changing scenario of investment returns in the United States. In 1992, the real short-term US interest rates — that is nominal rates adjusted for inflation — had come down to 0.4 per cent and by 1993 had dropped to zero.

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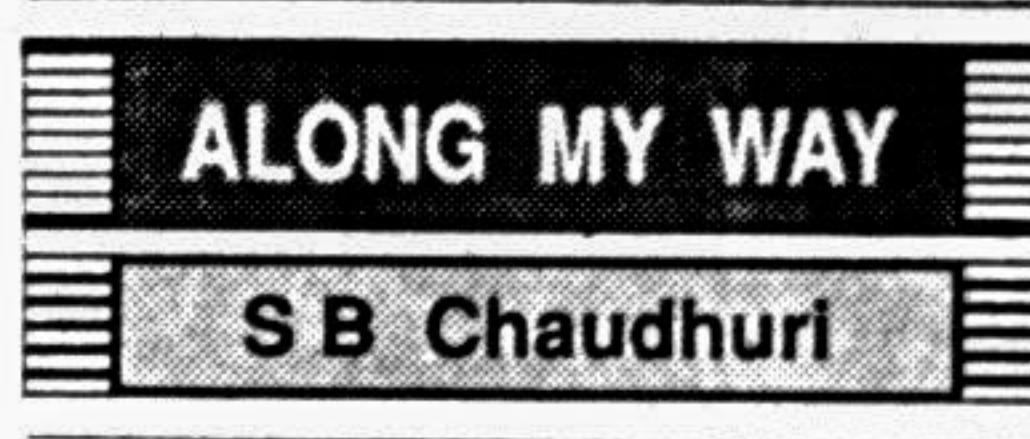
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portant is the texture of the current account deficit. When capital inflows in the form of import of investment goods, such as machinery, swell imports, contributing to current account deficit, then that could be reckoned as a healthy sign — portending a growing economy.

Did the tequila hangover afflict our market as well? There is no clear evidence either way in so far as the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) is concerned. DSE share price index did shed about 5 per cent since December.



ALONG MY WAY S B Chaudhuri

A glimpse at Child Labour in Bangladesh: Social Security Needed

by Ambreen Choudhury

CHRONIC poverty is a burden which is most severe on children. It is the main cause of child labour in Bangladesh and it will continue in some form in future for obvious socio-economic reasons.

Research indicates that developing countries with high rates of population growth have higher incidence of child work. While various socio-economic factors favour high fertility, parents in traditional economies reduce the cost on children by engaging them in work.

Given the interactive relationship between poverty, child work, school enrollment, economic development and population growth, it is common that several developing countries find themselves in a vicious circle. Bangladesh is an example of this phenomenon with its abysmal poverty, high incidence of child labour and low school enrollment.

Some children have to work when they are ill in order to keep their jobs in force. Some children have to work more than 8 hours (8-14 Hours). No leaves are allowed. No letter of employment is given. Therefore, the working children have no bargaining power. It is the responsibility of the government, politicians, NGOs and international agencies to work hand in hand in order to combat this problem.

prerequisite for human capital formation. This has, however, proved to be a difficult task.

Children opt to work, aim to survive, improve their own life and that of their families. All that young children so engaged may not be necessarily destructive in case of human capital formation. Some forms of employment may be positive experiences for them and the nation.

Child labour appears to be indispensable in a number of small cottage industries. In rural areas children are engaged in income generating activities not only within the households but also outside as agriculture labour on the farms.

in affluent rural households in very adverse working conditions.

Child labour is subjected to exploitation by adults in a variety of ways in both formal and informal sectors of the economy. The actual jobs in which children are engaged, the danger they face and the desirable opportunities of which they are deprived bear testimony to the extent of such exploitation.

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social sector such as health, education and population control are designed to serve the majority of the population who are poor. The Government approved the legislation to make Universal Primary Education (UPE) compulsory and it is also encouraging international organizations and NGOs to combat the problem.

Children opt to work, to survive, improve their own life and that of their families. Some even work in order to have enough income to go to school. Some of them work to support their siblings' education. But their immediate aim

is not easily achieved, due to the fact that they do not get proper wages. In fact it is not even enough to guarantee their basic needs. They are deprived of other basic rights such as recess time and health care facilities. Some children have to work when they are ill in order to keep their jobs in force.

The writer is a Bangladeshi student studying Journalism in Australia.

Defence Pact Ushers in New Era in Indo-US Ties

Prakash Chandra writes from New Delhi

A new defence agreement between the United States and India may be valuable as a tool to prevent a war between the South Asian country and its neighbour Pakistan.

The signing of a new defence agreement between the US and India appears to be opening a new chapter in the history of this sensitive area. Some observers suggest that New Delhi may be turning its back on the Nehruvian era (named after the late Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru) of leaning on Soviet shoulders and distrusting Washington.

Even the doctrine of non-alignment is now being questioned. Many analysts believe it is a negative approach to international politics and has not achieved much in recent years. It has not prevented mutual bickerings among the so-called members of the non-aligned bloc nor has it been useful in bringing together countries like Iraq and the US.

On the other hand, the demise of the Soviet Union has altered the world situation dramatically. The Russians have joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and are also now part of the European Union. They become heavily dependent on the West's economic cooperation and for the restoration of national stability.

However, the new defence pact will not mean any dramatic transfer of technology or resources to New Delhi from Washington. It involves coop-

eration between the two countries' defence establishments, expanding the scope and content of cooperative research and production activities.

US Defence Secretary William J. Perry, who visited India recently, said: "It (defence pact) is a major step to step up security links between the two countries."

An immediate result of the agreement is the formation of a joint technical group composed of senior professionals in defence research and production to ensure consistency in cooperation in these two fields.

Also, the two countries will upgrade the Inter-services Joint Exercises and Joint Technical Training Programmes. Washington has already been cooperating with New Delhi in a light-combat aircraft project, costing so far 10,000 million (US\$319 million). Analysts say it will take some 10 years, if not more, before such aircraft can be used by the Indian Air Force.

The message of the US defence secretary's visit and the subsequent agreement is some kind of balancing of relations between India and Pakistan with the US as a partner.

At present, Washington has closer ties with Islamabad. But this has not prevented the Americans from denying military supplies to Pakistan for reportedly going ahead with a nuclear development plan, despite American protests.

Experience tends to suggest that Washington's relations with Pakistan, however close, have not stopped the south Asian country from getting involved in an arms race on the subcontinent. Pakistan has reportedly acquired a substantial number of missiles from China and currently engaged in the development of nuclear weapons.

Nuclear weaponry appears to be part of Pakistan's internal

policies. The Air Force is demanding it and the Pakistani politicians strongly believe that it will be a bargaining chip against India.

Missile production remains a controversial issue in India. While everybody is inclined to admire the perfection of missiles made by Indian defence research scientists, some complain about the wastage of resources.

India, some analysts say, should devote its resources to social development as no amount of economic liberalization will provide bread to the poor and give medical help to the needy.

Washington has asked the feuding south Asian nations to stop the proliferation of missile technology.

Those familiar with the old Indo-Russian security and friendship agreement note a sharp contrast between that and the defence agreement with the US. For instance, under Clause 9 of the old pact, India could consult the Russians if it perceived a threat from any country to its borders and seek Soviet help to remove the threat.

While it is not certain whether the agreement really averted armed hostilities between Pakistan and India, New Delhi at least did not feel unprotected or weak when its neighbour was being armed by the Americans who, during the Cold War, needed Islamabad's cooperation in containing the Russian threat or the threat of communism in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

All this has changed now and it appears to be in the interest of both India and Pakistan to have equal relationship with Washington.

American analysts believe that the new agreement with India might liberalize Washington's foreign and defence policies.

To the Editor...

The destiny of Rohingyas

Sir, The latest trump card of the SLORC was the peace negotiations with ethnic groups, under its own terms, leaving out the students and Rohingyas. A total of 12 rebel groups had signed peace agreements with the SLORC.

As for Rohingyas, they are left alone. There are no negotiations or peace-brokers between them and the SLORC. The SLORC regards them as alien and declared that they would only talk with the rebel groups of 135 indigenous races in which Rohingyas are not included, though Rohingyas were declared as an indigenous ethnic race of Burma and their language was aired from Burma Broadcasting Service (BBS) by the previous elected democratic government with Rohingyas members in parliament and cabinet.

The SLORC categorically made it known to the UN special rapporteur, Yojo Yokota,

that Muslims of Arakan are from Bengali stock and are not in 135 indigenous races, flagrantly obliterating the past record of Arakan's history. Thus, no amount of changes in Burma for transforming it into a democratic state with the consent of the SLORC could bring peace and honourable living for Rohingyas unless specific step is taken for them by someone whom the SLORC could not ignore, in accordance with the adage, "a stitch in time saves nine."

May we, therefore, take the opportunity to entreat earnestly the Hon'ble Prime Minister and the Hon'ble Foreign Minister of Bangladesh to give a sympathetic consideration to our chronic issue and help us in a way so, as to persuade or pressurise the SLORC regime, directly or indirectly, to restore the indigenous status of the ethnic Rohingyas of Arakan and to invite them to peace talk to resolve all their problems and to allow them to attend the national convention drafting a new constitution and to give them a constitutional safeguard.

Jlalat Maungdaw, Burma

Liabilities of foreign loans

Sir, With the fall of value of our taka currency the liabilities

of our all foreign loans, principal amount and interest thereof, for repayment are believed to be increasing day by day at an alarming rate.

Let us take for example, we took a loan of US dollar 100,000 @ Taka 8.00 per dollar in 1972, the loan stands at Taka 40,00,000/- @ Taka 40.00 per dollar in 1995.

Similarly the amount of interest of US dollar 100,000 @ Taka 800,000/- in 1972 and Taka 40,00,000/- in 1995 has increased manifold now.

Some of our experts claim that foreign loan is a blessing for us for carrying out our various development works. Some of our critics opine that foreign loan is a curse when the question of repayment comes.

We strongly feel that we always must be cautious about taking foreign loan and think thrice about our own resources and limitations. Accepting colossal amount of foreign loan year after year to feed our annual budget is neither a credit nor wise. We must cut our coat according to our cloth and stop uneconomic and wanton expenditure from our public exchequer.

O H Kabir Dhaka-1203