

Confronting Foreign Products at Home and Abroad

Rethinking Lock-in

According to SEC chairman, the regulatory body is considering withdrawing its recently imposed provision of one year lock-in for foreign investors in our stock market.

The important thing is, we have to understand what we are doing and what we want to do. Obviously we will love to have control over our stock market.

As Bangladesh has only begun to emerge as a possible destination of portfolio investment, our maximum concern should be to remain a very attractive investment location.

Folk Festival at Sonargaon

A month-long festival of folk art and craft began on Saturday at the campus of the Bangladesh Folk Art and Craft Foundation at Sonargaon, Narayanganj.

From the sketchy reports of the inaugural function published in the national press one is led to believe throughout the deliberation the name of Zainul Abedin was not mentioned by anyone even for once.

The Sonargaon set up runs a folk art museum — bravely. For who knows what is folk art in Bangladesh. The Bengal genius fashioned high-art statuary over centuries — sitting in village collapse.

And then here is the festival. Here is where the Foundation is in real action. This is its forte — this is the set up which should ideally hold the biggest rally of folk music and dance which is the be-all and end-all of the performing arts of Bangladesh.

A Home for Girl Children

An orphanage, exclusively for girl children, was opened at Uttara on Saturday by a counsellor of the Saudi Arabian Embassy.

While welcoming the good turn we, however, also feel sad to think that no one — not even our collective bodies or the government — was available to attain this 'first'. There is reason for this self-pitying dejection.

In my rambles on Eld shop ping in these columns last week, I made a mention of domestic products being palmed off as foreign manufactures.

Goods made by the local producers were generally price competitive. Nor did the buyers had much of a reason to gripe about quality, design and overall standard of the local stuff.

The findings of a survey of market shares for toiletries in Dhaka metropolitan area, released a few weeks ago, also indicate that local manufacturers were holding foreign-made competing products at bay.

The survey found that despite availability of imported varieties, local products held some 80 to 90 per cent of market shares of these products.

Import liberalisation is proceeding along two tracks basically. These are, tariff rationalization and removal of quantitative restrictions.

That way, it would then be less of an impediment to import of goods. Reform of the tariff structure thus entails lowering of customs duty rates. The exercise also branches out into related areas such as reducing the number of applicable duty rates, defining products subject to tariff more precisely.

Tariff reform by itself will not ensure free flow of imports unless foreign goods are also enabled to enter the domestic market.

ALONG MY WAY

S B Chaudhuri



Total prohibition or ban on import of specified items is the most commonly practiced form of quantitative restriction.

Mainstream modes of import liberalisation aside, exchange rate policies also impact inflow of goods from abroad. Depreciation of the exchange rate would increase the local currency cost of imports.

As between the two mainstream import liberalisation measures, tariff reforms appear to be on the faster track.

In contrast, the pace of reforms in the area of quantitative restrictions on imports appears to be decidedly sedate.

Reasons why import liberalisation by way of elimination of quantitative restrictions has not kept pace with tariff reforms are not far to seek.

and intermediate goods imported by them for use in, production process cost less. Given the import intensity of most of our manufactures, gains from tariff reductions accruing to domestic producers are considerable.

It is in this context that the indication of domestic goods competing freely with foreign products comes as a hopeful sign. Perhaps our industry is growing more efficient. And

efficiency is the key to the success of economic reforms. In the fiercely competitive global marketplace, our goods have to stand up to foreign products not only on the home turf but abroad too.

IMPORT liberalisation benefits the consumer. He gains access to a wider variety of goods at competitive prices. There is ample scope for him to be choosy while shopping.

Untying the Gordian Knot of Our Politics

A SERIES OF INTERVIEWS AND ARTICLES ON THE CURRENT POLITICAL CRISIS

'Solution Lies in Consensus for a Non-party Caretaker Government'

An Interview with Rashed Khan Menon, General Secretary, Workers Party of Bangladesh



The Daily Star (DS) : What, according to you, are reasons for the present political stalemate? What is the way out? Please, elaborate your personal views on what should be the next step?

Rashed Khan Menon (RKM) : The present political stalemate centres on the question of ensuring free and fair election. The experience of election held after the independence was not a happy one.

The election of 1991 held under the interim government of Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed fulfilled people's long-felt desire to cast their ballots by themselves.

I proposed that the 12th amendment to the Constitution incorporate the provision of holding three more consecutive elections under a caretaker government with a view to helping the Election Commission become independent and the election process take root.

Therefore, what had to happen, had happened. The party in power started following the path of its predecessors

by Nazmul Ashraf

Manipulating the elections by abusing the administrative machinery and using muscle power just to make sure that its candidates win the polls.

The way out of this impasse lies in a consensus by all political parties to amend the constitution providing for a non-party caretaker government to conduct the future general elections.

Everybody is talking about election, but when should it be held, within the next few months, or later in the year, or at its scheduled time, early next year? Suggest measures to be taken for timing of your choice.

The election should have been held on expiry of the present government's term. But as the present parliament has become ineffective due to prolonged boycott followed by the en masse resignation of the Opposition MPs, it should be dissolved immediately to pave the way for next general elections.

How to ensure an independent Election Commission? What are the pros and cons of the EC Bill passed?

In the 25-point demand by the Left Democratic Front (LDF), of which the Workers' Party is a component, we have proposed restructuring of the Election Commission to free it from the administrative control of the government, allow to act unstrained, provide adequate financial and other resources so that it can have its own office everywhere with separate telecommunication network, computerised voters' list, identity cards for the voters, and have security forces to check unfairness in the elec-

Looking Back at March towards Independence

March 13, 1971

The meeting decided that a delegation should call on President Yahya to discuss the mechanics of transfer of power, and also meet with Sheikh Mujib in this connection.

The meeting felt that two of Sheikh Mujib's demands, withdrawal of military and a judicial enquiry into the firings in East Pakistan, should be addressed immediately.

Mufti Mahmud further gave a written statement which said, 'There can be no Pakistan, nor can the concept of Pakistan have an ideological validity or practical credibility, without the unity of the people of East and West Pakistan.'

Mian Mumtaz Muhammad Khan Daultana, Chief of the Council Muslim League, spoke in support of the resolution adopted by the minority parties in the NA, calling Sheikh Mujibur's demands reasonable and necessary in order to end the political crisis in Pakistan.

Syed Siddiqul Hasan Gilani, Chief of Parliamentary Affairs for Jamaat-i-Islami, claimed that the responsibility for the present crisis lay with PPP chief ZA Bhutto who had aggravated the situation by threatening to boycott the National Assembly session on March 3.

(Compiled by Rashida Ahmad)

To the Editor...

Focus on history

Sir, I was so delighted to read a very sensible article in your esteemed daily dated the 28th February and the 1st March that I could hardly wait to congratulate the writer Mr Oli Ahad and you for writing and publishing a very transparent article on our history of the last 47 years and the effect of machinations and cliques by various interest groups over the years.

Trampled to death!

Sir, One woman and several children were trampled to death by wild elephants in the jungle but by fellow human beings in the metropolitan city of Dhaka while attempting to collect zakat cloth on the occasion of holy Eid-ul-Fitr.

Appointment of ombudsman

Sir, The Constitution of People's Republic of Bangladesh (PRB) rightly provides for a position of ombudsman. But the post has not yet been filled up. The reasons are not known. It is high time the present democratic government showing interest in

Barings Bank scandal

Sir, The collapse of Barings Bank has generated enough news item as we could see in our media comprising television and newspapers. Similar enthusiasm was observed dur-

Establishing rule of law, and transparent and accountable administration made use of the institution of ombudsman.

We further urge upon government to kindly consider appointing former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and interim President of PRB, Justice Shahabuddin Ahmad, as the first ombudsman. In our view, Justice Ahmad eminently qualifies for the position. If he agrees to accept the responsibility, we hope, he can demonstrate how an ideal ombudsman should function in a democratic system.

Understanding is still possible if the parties concerned keep people's interests above all else and wish democracy to work.

Under the above backdrop the authority must look into the affair before it is late resulting in any collapse of the capital market. Sadiq Alee Maghbar, Dhaka