

Edible Oil

According to reports published yesterday, we import Tk 150 crore worth of edible oil every year. This is to supplement 200,000 tons that we produce domestically, which is only 25 per cent of the demand. Taken together — import and domestic production — the present supply makes for only 4 per cent of our per capita calorie intake. To put it simply, there is a huge potential for the expansion of domestic production of edible oil. Oilseeds like mustard, groundnut, sesame, sunflower, soyabean, etc are grown in Bangladesh. But in spite of the far greater demand, domestic production has stagnated over the last two decades, which has raised import bill for edible oil from Tk 15 crore in the 80s to the present Tk 150 crore. This is another example of neglect and lack of policy on the part of the government.

The same report cites the example of India, where a breakthrough in edible production has occurred precisely during the period that we stagnated. Why?

There are many reasons for our failure, the principal one being the lack of government policy. For one thing, we need to go for a stronger research thrust to discover a variety of high yielding seeds that we can grow. The HYV that our research bodies — Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI) and Bangladesh Institute of Nuclear Agriculture (BINA) — have so far discovered, have some limitations. For example, the HYV mustered seeds have seasonal limitations, but can double output if we could use these. Similar is the case with sunflower.

In all these instances, we are near scientific breakthroughs, but just falling short of the final variety. All we need is some more research. A member-director of Bangladesh Agricultural Research Centre (BARC) rightly pointed-out that we need to also have wider technological options for our edible oil sector. The idea of large-scale contract growers programmes should also be seriously looked into.

All the above measures can be taken, if we have good leadership. We have to identify our potential growth areas and push forward in them. Given the fact that we have such a prospect for growth in edible oil cultivation, why should not we give it a major push. We draw the attention of all concerned to do whatever is necessary to break out of the current stagnant situation in edible oil production.

Alter the Response

It is difficult to visualise what indeed happened — or is still happening in, or rather to the northern districts. For both its scale and its kind are quite unfamiliar to us. It is therefore, advisable to try to get some knowledge of the disaster through small-scale samplings. The Daily Star has done a good job of this on Sunday by focusing on Natore.

The Natore centenarian Abdul Jabbar has said that in his memory spanning nine decades the current floods have been the most devastating. More than 90 per cent of the district was under water and some two lakh were marooned till the beginning of the week. The damage? To take only one aspect, some two lakh houses have been washed away.

It is at the point of the recession of the waters that the problems begin. Where will the people return to? The houses are gone. And gone with them are food stocks and poultry and much of a family's life's savings.

They need either full-scale rehabilitation or nothing. Yet, the government is still thinking in terms of relief. A saree or a lungi, some rice or wheat could not square up with the exigency.

The devastated people need shelter and job and food and treatment. In Natore as elsewhere in the affected districts. Can the government rise to the occasion? They can try. For that they must eschew this practice of throwing food and clothing items to the distressed. A flood of this scale warrants a response on a radically changed scale.

Recalling a Selfless Leader

Today is the eighth anniversary of comrade Mohammad Farhad's death. As long as he was there, the communists were a force, very much positive in both the East Pakistan and Bangladesh contexts, and that owed much to Mohammad Farhad's incomparable organising skill and dedicated labour. But even he could not possibly have done anything to save his party from breaking into smithereens from within itself. Unbeknown to him, his own handiwork has been eaten up by germs of individualistic ambitions of the coarsest kind, not unlike the germs that ate up the Soviet party.

Still we very much want to remember him. In him we want to refurbish our admiration of and abidance by that breed of leaders fast receding into extinction, the ones that put the interest of the masses ahead of everything else and found fulfilment in sacrificing to that cause their entire selves.

His was an indomitable spirit that, from underground, forged a wonderful student resistance to the Ayubi dictatorship manifesting itself in the 1962 movement, the first fissure in the Pakistani military bulwark. We remember him as the good influence he was in the emerging unity of pro-Bangladesh forces during the sixties as also in the trying seventies and eighties.

Our deep respects to Comrade Farhad's memory.

THE wise judge Daniel in the apocryphal book of Susannah is reported to have conferred the above attributes to the people of Medes and Persia. The people of Medes gave their Aryan language, alphabet of 36 characters, their moral code of conscientiousness, and last but not the least, their Zoroastrian religion of Ahura Mazda and Ahriman.

Cyrus was overambitious like Napoleon; like Alexander, he created an Empire but did not survive to see the fruits of his conquest.

Darius I described himself in Nakshi — Rustam as a Persian, the son of a Persian, an Aryan of Aryan descent. In his time the language of the court and the nobility was old Persian. This Persian was very closely related to Sanskrit thus evidently implying that both were dialects of an older tongue. Old Persian developed into Zend, the language of Zend-Avesta. Reportedly, this language on the other hand, transformed into Pahlavi, a Hindu tongue from which comes the modern Persian language. Interestingly enough the similarity of the old Persian was so close to Sanskrit, Latin and English that a brief reference would be useful:

Table with 5 columns: Old Persian, Sanskrit, Latin, English, Bengali. Rows include Pitar (Pater), Nama (Nomen), Matar (Mater), Bratar (Frater).

Darius I, like latter-day Romans, distinguished himself by building great roads and highways. Herodotus says: 'There are royal stations and excellent inns and the whole road is through an inhabited and safe country. A well-organised bureaucracy was serving various satraps during the reign of Darius I.' Today's much-maligned bureaucracy was given lot of respect at that time! It is said — 'the king dies, but the bureaucracy is immortal!'

As Persian legends have it, many years before the birth of Christ, a prophet appeared in AIRYANA VAEJO, the home of the Aryans. He was called Zarathustra, — and the Greeks called him Zoroaster. It is said that when he appeared he found his people worshipping animals, the earth and the sun, and many deities in common with the Hindus of the Vedic Age. The chief divinities of this pre-Zoroastrian faith were Mithra, the god of the sun, and Anaita, the goddess of fertility and the earth. The veneration of Al-Mithra caught the fancy of the then civilised world, beyond the borders of Old Persia, and temples dedicated to Al-

The Law of the Medes and the Persians which Altereth Not

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Mithra, originally the sun-god, are to be found in many parts of the Mediterranean. In Rome, in the little Church located in the Via Quattro Santi Coronati, not far from the Colosseum, excavators have unearthed a temple dedicated to Al-Mithra, who was worshipped by the wise and wealthy of ancient Rome, not many years before Christ.

Like the Old Testament, Zend-Avesta is highly eclectic, in the composition. One finds the God's ideas and phrases of the Rig-Veda, to such an extent that many Indian scholars and philosophers consider the Avesta to have been inspired by the Vedas. The word Veda is probably derived from the Aryan root Vid — to know (Vidya). According to Avesta man's duty is three-fold: (1) to make him, who is an enemy, a friend; (2) to make him, who is wicked, righteous; and (3) to make him,

trouised the language, and the heritage that the language represented. The great Aryan synthesis that took place in India where Hindus and Muslims co-habited and worked together to create a homogeneous society, found expression in some of the finest architectural monuments: the fusion can be witnessed in the Taj Mahal and Fatehpur Sikri.

Bengal was also no exception from the influence of Persian. Up to 1837, no noble family in Bengal, like the rest of India, could be considered cultured without the knowledge of Persian. When English replaced Persian around the year 1837, the

medium through which the 'law and scriptures' of Islam reached them. What Gibbon said in his Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, 1786, applies at this moment of history in Bengal, with more than its original force to the Hindus: 'Instead of an indivisible and regular system which occupies the whole extent of the believing mind, the mythology of the Greeks was composed of a thousand loose and flexible parts, and the servant of the gods was at liberty to define the degree and measure of his religious faith.' Thus the Public Instructions system introduced by the British totally failed to satisfy the needs and aspira-

Earlier on, Louis XVI of France and Czar Nicholas II of Russia almost unwittingly advanced the cause of revolutions in their countries by introducing reforms — but they came too late as also in the case of Iran!

Bangladesh was a member of the Security Council, when the American Embassy in Tehran was stormed and occupied by the revolutionaries; American diplomats were taken hostage. The then Prime Minister of Iran Mohammad Ali Rajaei created a dramatic sensation at the Security Council by demonstrating visible marks of torture on his body by the security forces of the Shah. Ambassador Bedjaoui of Algeria (later Judge in the International Court of Justice at the Hague) Oumarou (later Secretary-General of OAU) and Ambassador Kaiser visited the permanent mission of Iran in New York to negotiate a resolution on the release of the American hostages in Tehran. I accompanied them to take notes. The release did not take place immediately but the plane flying the American diplomats to freedom, landing at the Algiers airport cannot be seen in isolation from the confabulations that took place at the meeting of the 5th Avenue Mission!

The history of Persian and Persian civilisation has attracted many including the great French philosopher Montesquieu. His Persian letters, foreshadows a great deal his thoughts which we see later on in his Magna Opus, The Spirit of Laws (1748). In letter number 96 one of the eunuchs implies that rule by force alone, or despotism, will fail. Montesquieu's most important theory on the separation of powers is clearly discerned in the Persian letters. When Usbek arrives in France, he reports that Louis XIV was also despot. He possesses, in a very high degree, the talent of making himself obeyed' — letter No. 37. God, in the Persian letters, is a God of justice and to be religious is to obey His precepts. Changeableness is frequently derived in love, religion and finance.

It is no wonder, therefore, that the Persian Letters was first anonymously published in Holland, a standard practice when there was a risk of official disapproval. Even to-

day, the Netherlands maintains that tradition. As the Spirit of Laws, the Persian Letters was also put on the Vatican's Index of Prohibited Books; they were both attacked by one Abbe Gaultiers. Creative thinking has not mostly been appreciated by Establishment. Earlier on, in 1644, Milton's Aeropagittica came in conflict with the Orthodox Puritan authority, particularly, Archbishop LAUD, for his strong defence of the freedom of the printers and writers.

Milton was greatly influenced by Isocrates of Athens. Athens, faced with the power of Philip of Macedonia, was in a decadent phase. Isocrates strongly believed that Athens could be saved only if the lost power and authority of the Athenian Court was restored. He wanted the return of benevolent administration based on justice and discipline and Milton wanted freedom of the Printers. Isocrates addressed the Athenian Parliament whereas Milton wrote to the members of the House of Commons. Archbishop Whitgift succeeded nonetheless in imposing state authority on printers all over the country excepting Oxford and Cambridge in 1586. It was only in 1694 that the British Parliament finally withdrew all restrictions from the printers and stationers. Even today, at the threshold of the next millennium, we are not yet free from the prejudices and lurking fears of the unknown or truth starting at our face.

President Rafsanjani's visit to Bangladesh is important. When a nation of 120 million people is striving to break out of the vicious circle of poverty, dependency and illiteracy, Bangladesh needs every possible support from friendly countries. Investment and economic development go side by side. If we can renew the strand of relationship on a more permanent footing to the mutual benefit of 185 million people of the two countries, it will go a long way in advancing the cause of peace and stability in this part of the world. We could do better to always remember that moderation and 'golden mean' has helped peoples and countries in history. Don't we remember that the Ottomans practically ruled the civilised world for over six hundred years, with the help of minority Janissaries and the Great Moghul Akbar ruled India successfully by eschewing extremes of any sort?

President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati, who will be visiting Dhaka from October 10, are destined to hold the law that Daniel's wisdom bequeathed them.

ENCHIRIDION

Waliur Rahman



Muslim aristocracy felt terribly discriminated against. They were unhappy and almost withdrew into an artificial sequestration in the same way as the Hindu aristocracy had been sequestered in an earlier era. It is relevant to mention here that Sultan Ghiyasuddin of Bengal had invited poet Hafiz to visit this country; the poet, we understand, obliged by composing a poem on Bengal! Sheikh Saadi and Omar Khayyam are also well-known to us for their important creative work.

But there was difference in approach by the Hindus and the Muslims, affecting the Muslims of Bengal more injuriously than the Hindus. As W.W. Hunter said: 'Under Akbar, the Hindus met the enlightened monarch halfway..... At the end of the sixteenth century the chancellor of the Empire, himself a Hindu, commanded that the public accounts, should henceforward be written in Persian..... Under the British, with the introduction of English as the court language, the ancient conquering race could not easily divest itself of the traditions of its nobler days. The Bengal Muslims refused a system which did not grant them, prima facie, any advantages over the people whom they had so long ruled..... Persian had become a quasi-sacred language with the Bengali Muslims, since it was the

tions of the Muslims. Again to quote Hunter: 'A hundred and seventy years ago, it was almost impossible for a well-born Muslim in Bengal to become poor; at present it is almost impossible for him to become rich!'

Iran recognised Bangladesh on February 22, 1974, the same day as Pakistan and Turkey extended recognition. The bilateral relationship, since then, has been developing apace. The historic meeting between Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Shah of Iran on the foreground of the present Bangabavhan, is a date to remember. It was in pre-Bangladesh days, but the warmth shown, by the Shah to the nationalist leader of that time was not lost on the cognoscenti. Later on, Lieutenant Ziaur Rahman visited Tehran in March, 1977, at the invitation of Amir Abbas Hoveida and the Shah of Iran. As a member of the entourage, I had witnessed unmistakable signs of restiveness and uneasiness among the common people in the bazars of Tehran. Although the cordiality extended to the visiting Bangladesh leader was warm and sincere, the revolution that took place in Iran about a year later, did not come to me as a surprise. Certain reform measures that the Shah was just trying to introduce was perhaps the triggering factor in ensuring the success of the revolution.

The Party is Not the Nation

Ashok Mitra writes from New Delhi

THE country's leading political party, which is also the party ruling at the Centre, is in some mess. The tandoor murder has brought into public glare what was already generally known: the large-scale infiltration of criminal elements in the party's ranks. That is however only one facet of the problems afflicting it. With no ideology worth the name to drive it forward, the Congress is now essentially a party of spoils. If it has to survive, it must therefore somehow stay in power, for if the power is gone, the spoils too are gone; that would be the end of the party.

This largely explains the commotion around Sonia Gandhi's barely-ten-minutes-long speech at Amethi. The Nehru-Gandhis have been turned into an ikon. A mythical vote-gathering power is being attributed to the family. Therefore the strenuous efforts on the part of various factions to rope in on their side Sonia Gandhi and her yet-quiet-to-attain-majority children in the on-going inter-cousin squabbles. And the calculations proceed further beyond. It is an eerie spectacle: seasoned politicians, who have spent long years in administration and in the conduct of the party's affairs, are demoralised beyond measure. Notwithstanding the supposed success of the economic reforms, the mood across the country is one of deep discontent, and there is widespread speculation about the party faring extremely poorly in the impending Lok Sabha elections. To avert that outcome, party leaders are desperately looking around for a miracle. Several of them are assuming that Sonia Gandhi and her offspring are capable of supplying that miracle.

The lady in question, her Amethi performance makes

it obvious, is ready to make use of the situation for her own purposes. She conceivably nurtures major political ambitions either for herself or for her children. Or it could be that she has a more short-term objective in mind.

Whatever facts have been revealed about the Bofors case leave little doubt on one point: Ottavio Quattracchi, an Italian citizen known to be close to the Nehru-Gandhis, was one of the principal beneficiaries of the pay-offs. Indian newspapers, presumably out of deference to the family, have carefully stayed away from publicising this important aspect of the Bofors story. Enough hints have however been dropped, most recently by the Union Home Minister that the government, if it so chooses, can embarrass the family by laying bare to the public certain uncomfortable facts, Sonia Gandhi and her acolytes may want to foreclose that possibility by going on the offensive on a front where they feel more confident. An allegation that the administration has not been doing enough to punish Rajiv Gandhi's assassins, it is being assumed, counter-move to rename would put the government squarely on the defensive. The Amethi performance in that sense has been like a gambit in a game of chess, just like the government's almost simultaneous counter-move to rename Connaught Place as Rajiv Chowk.

The underlying basic postulates still are: (a) India is, really and truly, a jagra of the Nehru-Gandhis, and (b) none can ignore the charisma or the vote-catching prowess of the dynasty. The first hypothesis is distasteful and will be rejected out of hand by each and all except a handful of sycophants. The

second assumption is equally questionable. Indra Gandhi had barely squeaked through the general elections in 1967; 1971 was a somewhat different proposition, but she went down again to a crushing defeat in 1977 in the wake of the lifting of the Emergency. Rajiv Gandhi's electoral triumph in 1984 was on account of the sympathy factor following his mother's assassination. He however lost in 1989. And the Congress, while doing better than other parties in the 1991 elections was still unable to obtain a clear majority; had Rajiv Gandhi himself not got assassinated in the midst of the poll, the party, according to all accounts, would have done considerably worse.

It is not any specific halo attaching the Nehru-Gandhis, but the two assassinations which, it can be suggested, brought the Congress party its more significant electoral success in the recent period. Certainly the party has reasons to feel grateful to the family; without the assassinations, it would perhaps have been by now in total wilderness. To acknowledge this is no endorsement, though, of Sonia Gandhi's claim that her mother-in-law and her husband sacrificed their lives for the sake of the country. Indra Gandhi was killed by Sikh militants who could not forgive her for Operation Blue Star. But was she not herself responsible, in the first place, for the emergence of Bhindranwale and his rabble? Her personal obsession to get even with the Akali Dal led her to some wild experiments in Punjab. In the process, she committed severe blunders. She paid with her life for these mistakes. Her brutal killing was a reprehensible act. Still, what she started in Punjab did not further the nation's interests;

the turmoil she set in motion was in the nature of a personal vendetta, and its consequences have done more harm to the country than good.

Similar has to be the judgment apropos of the circumstances of Rajiv Gandhi's murder. If, as is the general assumption based on the identity of the accused put on trial in Madras, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam were responsible for the grisly assassination, it does not still follow that Rajiv Gandhi laid down his life for the sake of the country.

There was no need for him to meddle in the affairs of Sri Lanka and browbeat the Tamil insurgents into agreeing to an accord he had privately negotiated with the Sri Lanka establishment. His egregious intervention in Sri Lanka did not advance India's cause. On the contrary, it gave us a bad name; the Big Brother trying to emerge as South Asia's super boss.

The season of politeness ought to be over, and it should indeed be the time for some blunt speaking. The assassinations of Indra Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi were horrendous, contemptible crimes. Even so, they did not lay down their lives in the nation's cause. The causes they were pressing forward, and which led to their murders, had very little to do with the nation's interests. True, both assassinations advanced the Congress party's interests, but the party is not the nation. Sycophants will perhaps not be cramped in their style by this assertion of what the reality is; the record nonetheless deserves to be kept straight. — Mandira

The author is a former Finance Minister of West Bengal and now a Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha.

OPINION

Values and Society

Dr S Rahman

'Moral Values', 'Minimum Decency', 'Principle', 'Honesty' — do they really exist in our society any more??

Looking around us I often wonder, do the basic values like respect for others' view, discipline, morality, decency, honesty and longer exist in our society? Or these words can only be found in the dictionary? One does not need to look that far — just let's look at the few recent incidents: i) the unprecedented act committed by police in Dinajpur and subsequently shedding of crocodile tears by the political parties over the incident, ii) the most unbelievable act committed by the consultants at the Islamia Eye Hospital, iii) the mean and disgraceful act of forcibly stripping a citizen of his clothes in the name of 'hartal'.

I can carry on describing more incidents like giving wrong medicines by leading doctors from BIRDEM and from National Cardiovascular Institute, removing tonsil without any anaesthesia at a well-known local clinic in Dhanmondi Residential Area, carrying out kidney transplant at another well-known renal clinic. The outcome of the above incidents: the patient almost died because of the wrong medicine, the patient screamed hell of his life when the tonsil was removed and only God knows what actually happened as a result of the kidney transplant.

So what is our future prospect? Well, only our wise political leaders and the influential business people can give us the answer! We the ordinary people can always try to participate in the programmes like 'Save Dhaka, Clean Dhaka' and other social events. The 'Save Dhaka'

campaign initiative taken by The Daily Star was indeed a brave and unique one. I did participate in both the programmes. We did formulate quite a few recommendations. But then what? What actually happened? Where is the feedback? Who should give us the feedback — The Daily Star, the participants/public, or the concerned authorities for whom the recommendations were formulated?

Let's be hopeful and let's ask these questions to our political leaders, doctors and to ourselves:

a) Can the political leaders tolerate each other and act constructively for the country, irrespective of whatever political affiliation one may have? Didn't we do that during the liberation war in 1971? Should our aim be just to overthrow the government (whoever it may be) or should it be for the peace and prosperity of the country?

b) Can we expect a sincere service from the medical profession? (Just a note here: Dr Devi Shetty is one of the busiest heart surgeons at Birla Heart Research Centre. He works almost round the clock yet he has a smile on his face.)

c) Can we expect a hassle free service for every aspect of our life, be it from the government sector or the public sector?

d) Can we have our faith on the law and order enforcement agency?

e) Can the 'Save Dhaka' campaign be not limited only to a small section of the intellectual class? Can The Daily Star take yet another brave and novel initiative to broaden the agenda within the framework of 'Save Dhaka' campaign?