

# Creating Entrepreneurship in the Country

by Md Asadullah Khan

## Ever So Usual Eclipse

By the time this issue of The Daily Star reaches the readers, they will have been occupied by a matter of celestial importance. An earthly thing like a newspaper can even so distract some into picking up one if only it contains enough gibberish about the sun, by then mangled well enough.

All things existing on earth physically react to this sudden global loss of daylight and all manifestations of sentient life moreover react to it emotionally. Specially to the sight of an eaten up sun. For, the latter somehow perceive that in sun is the source of all life. And with it thus mauled, by an eclipse, no living thing cannot be terrorised. Man's growing knowledge of the fabric of universe and its working has largely freed him from that animal terror. But the primeval fear persists as do those that have for ages pandered to it. Man should cultivate and know the science of the stellar bodies, in which eclipse is but a very normal and eminently predictable occurrence. And he is not to cling to the astrologers' irrational and unfounded fabrications mostly resulting from the familiar fallacy *post hoc ergo propter hoc*, or in familiar Bengali *Kaktali nyaya*, the crow cawed and the palmeto fruit fell etc etc.

There is nothing mysterious in the moon, revolving round the earth, coming between the planet and the sun and on the same plane. Part of the sun is blocked from the earthling's view as a result. And the moon, blocking the sun's rays, throws a shadow on earth bigger than itself. Those falling under the shadow see the sun eaten in part or whole. This is school geography. What is beyond the school text knowledge is the extra solar activity discerned at the time of an eclipse. How does this affect life, specially humanity, is yet to be understood.

A solar eclipse is a gold mine waiting to be quarried by experimental and astrophysicists. And what exactly it is not a prescient omen that Bangladesh's political situation will plummet further. It is a pity to see newspapers confuse between astronomers and astrologers where, in the subcontinent, the Nobel winning astrophysicists Chandrashekar Subramanyam and his uncle C V Raman and closer home in Bikrampur the formidable Meghnad Saha was born.

## Smuggling at the Sea

Sitting in Dhaka with one's eyes shut one could mentally visualise the smuggling scene at the outer anchorage of Chittagong port. For, the crystal-balls can be had in the marketplace — in the shape of contraband — through which anybody can gaze at the goings-on off our shores.

A Daily Star report on Sunday furnished an update on smuggling at sea. Thanks to the year-long discontinuation of a special drive earlier launched by the customs authorities, the coastal belt including Patenga, Muralighat, Chandgao, Malumghat, Anwara, Patiya and Cox's Bazar has turned out to be a smugglers' den. It seems the place-names have started magnetising the sea-faring contraband dealers by the courtesy of our own greedy set. This is where the real danger lies for us. The smuggling through land-routes, for very good reasons, has been bothering us a great deal but if one were to add the evil of marine trafficking of goods to it then surely we are in for a serious economic imbalance.

Just where, how and by whom the smuggling is staged is known to all and sundry. If the Customs and the police authorities coordinate there is no reason why it cannot be held in check. Contraband have often been seized and black-lists of collusive feeder ship operators have also been prepared. But when it comes to taking action against them there is obviously string-pulling from somewhere and the whole thing gets hushed up mysteriously.

Unless the behind-the-scene actors are tracked down and neutralised, smuggling cannot be contained effectively for sure. Then there is the lure factor among the customs and the police officials. This can be only curbed through repeated inspections by a supervisory authority. We are for a full-fledged marine police set-up to assist the sea customs authorities.

## Laudable Initiative

We feel deeply indebted to the Muktijuddho Smriti Trust for initiating on Sunday an organised collection of the freedom struggle memorabilia to be housed in a museum scheduled for opening on December 16. The first day's tally of possessions for the Muktijuddho Jadugar has itself triggered a touching remembrance of the origin, flowering and enactment of the saga of our Liberation War.

The mementos already handed to poet Sufia Kamal by the relatives of the martyrs ranged from a speck of blood-stained earth and blood- and tear-soaked frock of a four-month old to other clothes, a pen, a briefcase, a helmet, books, letters and documents. We are grateful to the inheritors of the personal belongings of renowned freedom fighters who, despite their tremendous sentimental attachment to these, parted with them to enrich the contents of a museum dedicated to the memories of the Liberation War. Others in possession of such mementos are expected to come forward in the building of a repository swathed in a deep commitment towards upholding the immutable values of our freedom struggle.

One feels confident that the norms of objectivity and dispassion would be scrupulously followed in the choice and presentation of the exhibits. The museum should be a powerful guide to the understanding of the spirit of the Liberation War and a vehicle for the perpetuation of its memories.

MUCH of the country's fast growing youth force is without job or business. Creation of job opportunity for the unemployed young population either by the government agency or private sector appears to be a remote possibility. The country lags far behind other Asian countries when it comes to fostering entrepreneurship. Few in the country have much appetite for risk — and as a consequence they are much more likely to seek job of any nature than strike out on their own. But as competition is getting tough with each passing day, the government must push its citizens to get entrepreneurial. Our people are often likened to ostriches whereas dynamic people of Singapore and Hong Kong are working like high flying storks. They accept responsibility for their own lives and livelihoods. Let us look at Han, a Singaporean youth who quit a comfortable job in a multinational firm to take over a chicken-curry puff-pastry stall of one of his relations in the late 1993. Borrowing money from his relations, he poured almost \$40,000 into that business revamping it with modern production techniques, standardising quality and launching a marketing campaign in a bid to become owner of a world-class food chain business.

The strategy worked exceedingly well. His firm, now doing a brisk business in Singapore, has 14 outlets in the city and earned a million-dollar profit in a year. Han now proposes to expand this food chain business in Malaysia, Indonesia and China. Singapore government is offering incentive to this sort of business by allowing tax-rebate and other facilities for expansion and also offering counselling services to boost up further expansion. Unsurprisingly, Singapore (pop. 2.7 million) has a small domestic market and its exporters face tough

competition from up-coming countries like Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and its traditional rivals like Hong Kong and Taiwan. Nevertheless, people might be wondering if entrepreneurship can take hold in a society that is so highly regimented that even failure to flush a public toilet and throwing a cigarette but on the street is a civil offence. Happily, democratic practices and authoritarian rule have gone hand in hand in Singapore, propping up a spate of development in the country. If entrepreneurship that means allowing individuals wide latitude to make decisions for themselves can work so well in such a closed society like Singapore, it

boost personal initiative in people looking for confidence, co-operation and fund for marching ahead. People can be provided with entrepreneurial support in the business and industry such as repair technology and tools-making industry now booming up in the Dolaikhal area of Dhaka city. The government of Singapore made \$1.34 billion available to young entrepreneurs in 1991 in a bid to encourage them to go ahead with their ventures in the field of biotechnology, computer-related programmes, food technology and precision tools-making industry. People in the countryside are grumbling about administration's inattention to their needs and this un-

luxury cruise vessel in 1991 is shrouded in mystery, is an ample evidence. Maxwell came from a Czechoslovak Jewish family of poor labourers and as a child he often went hungry. He had only three years of formal education. To keep himself alive, he often resorted to selling trinkets. Young Maxwell fled to France and fought in the French resistance movement and was wounded by the Germans. He later escaped to England. He lost his parents, a brother, three sisters and his grand parents in the Holocaust. He joined British army and rose to the rank of captain in 1945. He was awarded the Military Cross for heroism in the plains of Normandy. After working for

cumulated in purchasing these two companies, he was forced to sell Pergamon in 1991.

Maxwell was a man who did everything himself. He acquired a string of high-profile business on both sides of the Atlantic, paying top price for everything. Not everything turned to gold. Maxwell's case is a reminder how a person with entrepreneurial skill, ambition and lofty desires can reach excellent heights all alone. "Working for the mercurial magnate," says Anthony Deleno, a former managing editor of London's *Daily Mirror*, "was both exhilarating and exhausting," he drove his workers as hard as himself.

counts customers in western Germany, Portugal, Italy and Netherlands.

Even more striking from the point of view of potential investors, Steiner is pushing Rolitron for quick expansion into new foreign markets, both East and the West. He now plans to sell a 50 per cent share in his company to a western firm. In return, he hopes to gain not only a needed infusion of new capital but also fresh technology, marketing and management expertise and access to big new foreign markets. What Steiner has to offer matches what investors throughout the West are looking for: an already-established East European enterprise with a capacity to expand quickly and profitably.

The history of Rolitron illustrates the problems that private enterprise in all countries starting from Hungary to Bangladesh have been facing. Entrepreneurs have to navigate through the country's still-abundant thicket of red tape, grueling experiences of inattention, neglect and racing from one place to another. People have to wrestle with endless annoyance that simply make up life here horrible.

But these budding talents rich in innovative ideas, technical expertise and bubbling with the spirit of doing something that helps them and the country have hardly got the recognition at the proper moment. These people, it must be admitted, have a major challenge to meet to build the economic bridges to the West and other developing Asian countries that will guarantee the hard-won political freedom. People in all sectors of the society and belonging to all shades of opinion see joint ventures with western and fast-developing Asian firms as a panacea for revitalising the stagnating economies in the country. That calls for ensuring a climate for investment in the country.

**What the government and other potentially affluent people have to do now is to boost personal initiative in people looking for confidence, co-operation and fund for marching ahead. People can be provided with entrepreneurial support in the business and industry such as repair technology and tools-making industry now booming up in the Dolaikhal area of Dhaka city**

seems puzzling why it should not take roots in our country?

What is now needed in our country is to cast aside the wheeler-dealer practice in business and to throw away the net of corruption arresting flow of business. Entrepreneurship means taking risks and people don't take risks unless times are bad. In the Bangladesh scenario, times are not only bad; may be, people are passing through the worst of times measured on any scale.

Allowing government fund to small entrepreneurs trying to get off the ground should start without further debate. Agencies working under the government must target the export-driven sectors that are coming up lately i.e. handicrafts, leather goods, food technology, jute goods such as carpet, bag, mat etc. What the government and other potentially affluent people have to do now is to

doubtedly has muddled up relations between the two groups. If people are trying to find answer to this escalating menace of rampant killing of all varieties, abduction of wealthy businessmen and affluent people in the rural areas, the root cause can be attributed to inequitable distribution of wealth and impoverishment of the general masses that are often throwing them to commit crimes. People are screaming with frustration over the neglect, unsympathetic attitude of the administration and apathy of the potentially rich people to the suffering class, neighbours and relations close to their hand.

In all countries and in all ages, supporting the ventures of new entrepreneurs has helped foster business, industry and wealth. The case of billionaire and media mogul Robert Maxwell, whose death in the Canary island in the Atlantic in a

British intelligence in Berlin, Maxwell returned to England in 1947. During this time he borrowed money from his in-laws to buy a stake in what became the Pergamon Press, a science publisher. The business made him a millionaire and in 1964 he won a seat in the House of Commons as a Labour Party candidate. In 1984, Maxwell purchased the Mirror Group Newspapers, a chain that includes *Daily Mirror*, the left-leaning tabloid, in a war with other London tabs, including Rupert Murdoch's *Sun*. Maxwell increased the *Mirror's* circulation to 3.6 million from 200,000. Maxwell continued his entrepreneurial skill and journey undaunted. He sought to establish his presence in the US. After purchasing the official Airlines Guides for \$750 million he took over the Macmillan book publishing firm at a cost of \$2.6 billion. Because of the debt he ac-

Struggling through years of privation and stagnation during the socialist regime and now with democratic norms taking roots in the country, Hungary is restructuring its financial health with priority for market economy.

Entrepreneurship has taken roots in Hungary after the cold war. Steiner, a 43-year-old engineer is a rare-sighted person whose works can inspire our people looking for opportunity, dynamism and market. Starting in 1981 with just one partner, Steiner built a back-yard refrigerator repair-shop into an aggressive, sophisticated firm that is poised for new growth. His Rolitron Co, which has now 220 employees has diversified its production units into water purifiers and "user-friendly" homo-dialysis machines. The company is now targeting a sale figure of \$13 million a year. The company now

## The UN and Bangladesh

# Gaining Ground at the World Body

by Muhammad Quamrul Islam

S M Hall auditorium of Dhaka University in the late '50s on the efficacy of UN and there was apprehension that UN may meet the same fate like that of its predecessor. On the other side, strong points were raised; if UN fails, what were the alternatives. For global peace, an amalgamation of nations in a platform is needed. Ultimately, UN survived the test of dreadful time, when the world was divided into two camps — socialist bloc and capitalist bloc. Of course, the uneasy cease fire, dividing the Korean Peninsula, and issue of reunification of North and South Korea is still flaming. It is calculated that during the last 50 years, after the Second World War, about 100 wars were fought, in which about 20 million people were killed. No doubt, UN has averted the possibility of Third World War, but could not stop those 100 local or regional wars. Let us wait and see how the 50th session of UN General Assembly considers the past and the present wars to ensure peace in future. It appears that American initiative was more effective, than UN SG's efforts, to bring in peace in war-torn Bosnia Herzegovina, over the last 40 months.

Let us take a look of our own position, as Bangalees, in relation to United Nations. When the United Nations was established, India was under British rule and so we, in Bengal, were part of British India. India was partitioned in August 1947, thereby giving birth of two independent states i.e. Pakistan and India. These two are member-states of United Nations, with the partition of Bengal, East Ben-

gal, renamed as East Pakistan, became part of independent and sovereign Pakistan, as a province unit. The federal capital was in West Pakistan, which was 1400 miles away from East Pakistan. During the Pakistan period, till 26th March 1971, the Bangalees of East Pakistan got few chances to serve in Pakistan Foreign Service and thereby received postings in Pakistan missions abroad and at United Nations, including its agencies. When the Pakistan Army refused to hand over power to the elected majority-leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and attacked the unarmed Bangalees at Dhaka on 25th March, '71 the independence of Bangladesh was declared.

Through a 9-month-long blood struggle, Bangladesh emerged as a sovereign and independent state. The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, which was passed by the Constituent Assembly of Bangladesh on the 4th November, 1972, states: "The territory of the Republic shall comprise — (a) the territories which immediately before the proclamation of independence on the 26th day of March 1971 constituted East Pakistan; and (b) such other territories as may become included in Bangladesh." Bangladesh had to wait a long time to become member of the United Nations. On 17th September, 1974, Bangladesh got the membership of UN and thereby new vista of opportunities opened up in the field of international relations. The serial number of the membership of Bangladesh is 136. It also means 49 states joined UN, after Bangladesh, during the last 21 years. Meanwhile, Bangladesh participation in different UN bodies has been ensured.

There is no denying the fact that Bangladesh derived immense benefits from the UN System, since its membership in 1974. But how can one forget that Bangalees got international recognition of its national entity, at the sacrifice of 3 million people, embracing martyrdom and untold suffering of women? But, it is apparent that most of the ministers and bureaucrats, whether active or retired, in the foreign line have had little concern for martyrs sufferers and fellow countrymen, living below the poverty line. Various reports have appeared in the press which proved, beyond doubt, that privileged few were always out to grab foreign tours and postings, and the ruling

regime seized this scope to distribute favours to their henchmen and relations too. Their performances abroad, in the eyes of the people, are anything but satisfactory and humane. They are for themselves, and so their responsibility for Bangladesh 'image crisis' abroad can not be minimised. Even, the composition of the Bangladesh delegation to the current session of UN General Assembly has come under fire, as being partisan and not befitting the occasion. Not this time only, in the past also similar criticisms were raised against the entourage of the President and the Prime Minister. The democratic set-up of the Government, since '91, does not strongly pay any heed to the public reactions!

Surely, Bangladesh does not lag behind in contesting for positions at the United Nations. In 1986 the then Foreign Minister of Bangladesh was elected president for the 41st regular session of UN General Assembly. There was no other candidate from Asia. In 1981 Bangladesh contested, but did not succeed. Secondly, Bangladesh is quite active as coordinator of a group of 48 Least Developed Countries (LDCs), which held its last session in New York from 26th September to 6th October '95. To recall, UN Conference adopted a Programme of Action for LDCs in 1980; which was followed by another programme in 1990. But, what is surprising is that Bangladesh remains at the bottom-end of the world economy, with per capita income of \$235 in 1995. What is the value of such involvement to the people? Almost nothing to the people, but something to the bureaucrats.

It is widely known that leaders of those countries, who fail to solve their domestic problems, are more or less keen to show their success at the world stage. According to opinion of diplomats, Bangladesh leaders are moving along this line, what happened during Zia-Ershad regime, did not stop with the installation of the elected government of Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia. They remain very busy to meet, a little while, with the president of USA, shake hand to show that to fellow countrymen over television and circulate through other mass media. Gen Ershad did so. Allegations are there that the present government still maintains lobbyists abroad at the cost of public exchequer. Before the Prime Minister left

for New York, 96-hour hartal was observed by the opposition political parties. Will Bangladesh leaders forsake bad practice to mislead their own people, and develop Bangladesh image abroad, in its true perspective, as a traditional country, dedicated to peace and development? Instead of developing the own country, in lure with near-by South-East Asian countries, there is no use in seeking positions only in the UN system. We have already faced an ignominious defeat when our candidate for the post of Director General, FAO, got only 2 votes out of 168 votes, during the regime of Begum Khaleda Zia. There is no agenda item on Farakka for consideration of 50th session

of UN General Assembly for which BNP is so vociferous at home and abroad. On the other hand, there are shining examples, which are often over-looked. It is reported that Bangladesh Army has earned appreciation of world community for their work in UN peacekeeping operations in different countries during the last three years. They have also remitted \$80 million in foreign exchange. The Bangladesh police have also done a good job in UN missions (UN-CIVPOL). Once a senior police officer raised a question that when Bangladesh police can win laurels outside the country, why can not they do good work in their own country? The answer lies with the politicians and top bureaucrats. Will they ponder over the matter?

The writer is an economist and Advocate, Bangladesh Supreme Court.

## To the Editor...

### Digital connection

Sir, With a view to providing better services to the subscribers and to bring over improvements to the telephone sector, the Bangladesh Telegraph & Telephone Board has undertaken a huge project to install new digital telephone connections for which the Board definitely deserves appreciation.

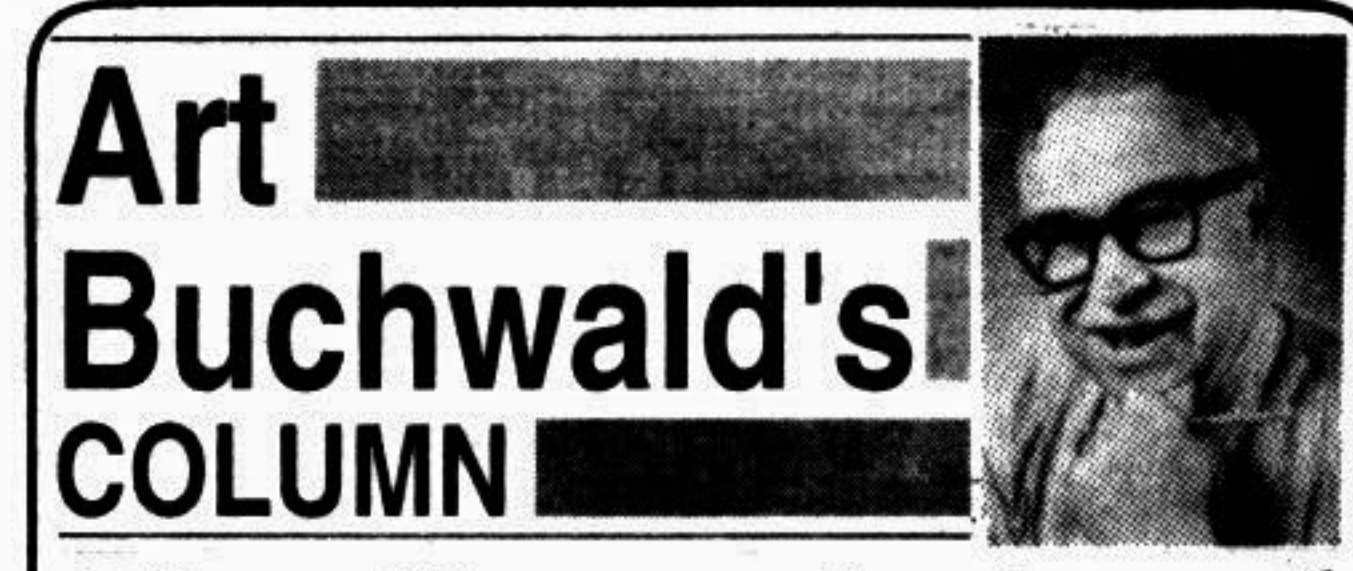
Meanwhile my attention has been drawn to an 'Urgent Notice' recently published by the T&T Board in different newspapers requesting the applicants who had earlier filed applications for analogue telephone to register their willingness (if they will) for digital telephone instead of their previous analogue reg-

### istration.

Well, some days back we read in the newspapers that all the analogue telephone numbers starting with '31' will be officially converted to digital connections by June, 1996. Now, what about the '32' series?

I think the T&T Board should also invite applications from the subscribers holding '32' numbers who are willing to convert their analogue connection to digital system. And the present analogue subscribers should be given priority.

I sincerely hope that the T&T authority will take necessary action in this regard. M Zahidul Haque Assistant Professor BAI, Dhaka



## Art Buchwald's COLUMN

### The Chutzpah Award

IT'S time for the 1995 Chutzpah Awards. Chutzpah is the Chinese word for "nerve." But it also means audacity — as in the famous case of O J Sing Tow, who killed his parents and then asked the court for mercy because he was an orphan.

My candidate for this year's award is not fictional but a real human being. He is a billionaire who gave up his American citizenship to avoid paying American taxes. His name is Kenneth B Dart, who moved from Sarasota, Fla., to Belize in Central America. He did this to take advantage of a loophole in the law that states that if you are no longer an American and did not spend more than 120 days a year in the United States, you could tell the IRS to stuff it.

Now there is nothing wrong with a billionaire giving up his citizenship, and Dart would not even be a candidate for the Chutzpah Award except that he persuaded the Belize government into opening a consulate in Sarasota to service the millions of Belize citizens who live in the city. His big selling point to Belize officials was that he already had a residence in Florida so it wouldn't cost the tiny country any money.

The cynics who have been following the move believe that Dart has just found a new way to live at home without giving a nickel of tribute to the United States. But Dart's lawyers say nothing could be further from the truth. All who know the wealthy man say that he loves Belize and would give his life for it.

Apparently Dart believes very few people in the United States understand how important this strategically located country is to America's security. If Belize has a consulate in Sarasota, economists from all over the world can travel there to study the effects of Belize ground nuts on the Japanese yen. The consulate could be declared a tax-free zone where curious billionaires could learn the latest loopholes for those who have it and want to keep even more of it. So, I nominate Ken Dart for the Chutzpah Award which, unfortunately, does not carry a monetary prize. It does, however, entitle the winner to wear a bronze Belize flag medallion around his neck when "Stars and Stripes Forever" is played.

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