

Save the Garments Sector

The owners of readymade garments industry are frightfully apprehensive of an abysmal failure to meet the December 31 export quota deadline. The loss to the sector and to the country would be incalculable if that debacle happens. Already, the industry is tottering through the effects of previous dislocations; and the seven-day hartal, being nightmarishly imminent as a precursor furthermore of a point of no return, the garments manufacturers have decided to hit the streets to call a halt to all these.

They, along with the owners of industries ancillary to the garments manufacture like the packaging, carton and accessories ones, have planned a grand rally in the city today, the day before the opposition's countrywide siege programme. This will be to protest against playing ping-pong with the fate of the garments sector as a whole. We would not be surprised if many of the workers of the sector in a rare show of solidarity with their employers come out to the streets on that day.

For, they have a right to do so. They would be the worst sufferers were the garments sector to close down under the escalatory impact of continuing political impasse and the chain of opposition strikes. The sector has not only been the biggest employer of women in the country raising their societal status, it has also given us self-confidence on the international marketplace as a competitor in a high-profile global business.

The magnitude of the ruin facing the garments industry is to be assessed not just from the stand point of losses to be sustained in foreign currency earnings but in terms of the import payments for the inputs going down the drain as well. Furthermore, goodwill will be corroded at a time when we can hardly afford it in view of the phasing out of the MFA by 2005.

So, if the appeal to Begum Zia and Sheikh Hasina fail to bring about a speedy end to the political crisis then the garments sector eminently deserves to be kept out of the purview of strikes. This should apply to the manufacture, internal transportation and onward transshipment of the garments. All the ports of the country — land, sea and air — must work on a contingency basis for the sector to meet the year-end export deadline. The fragile but a rising sector needs to be saved.

Is it that Bad?

There is no sign yet that the government knows anything about the unusual, if not downright scandalous, statement the Pakistan Foreign Minister had made in their Parliament on Wednesday. Our Foreign Ministry has not said as much as they have noted it and are studying it — far from reacting to it and indicating that government would act on it.

The statement, *inter alia*, had two points that particularly hurt the Bangladesh perception of the relations between our two nations. These were things fit to come only from an inimical position, missives meant to make serious dent on the long sensitive areas of the two nations' ties.

When the minister said Pakistan would deport two million illegal immigrants including — he specified it — one million Bengalees, he echoed the notorious Balthackery of Bombay Shiv Sena. This is standard mastan-talk by governments failing to handle certain situations — in this case Karachi.

Two, he said Pakistan would not take anymore of the Pakistanis stranded in Bangladesh. As a sovereign nation Pakistan can take any decision affecting its people and its territory. But outstanding bilateral issues do not lend to unilateral action so easily. The Foreign Minister has violated a norm of international practice. Such violations do occur but only when a nation decides to be deliberately nasty to another and does not mind the damage. One never knew things were that bad between us.

Tigers on the Defensive

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) are facing the most crucial test in their long history of separatist movement. Riviresa (sunshine) the codename of the Sri Lankan army's latest offensive is poised to take over the LTTE's stronghold, Jaffna. The Tamil Tigers have indeed too much of a stake in defending the strongholds. So far they have successfully done the job. Now the Sri Lankan army seems to be determined to take the fight to the Tigers.

The fall of Jaffna will weaken the Tigers almost to the point of surrendering their demand for an independent homeland. Even if it does not come to that point, it will certainly take the teeth out of the LTTE's bargaining power. That exactly suits the purpose of President Chandrika Kumaratunga's government. The President had one objective on the election agenda clearly stated. It is to make peace with the Tigers. She proposed to give a large-scale autonomy to the Tamils in the country's troubled north.

Kumaratunga's offer, however, did not satisfy the militants, although many among the Tamils found it quite acceptable. So the latest military push has everything to do with the rejection of Kumaratunga's autonomy offer by the Tamils. The Sri Lankan President will be better placed, once her army captures Jaffna, to push ahead with her peace programmes. Apart from the Tamil rebels, civilians on both sides are weary of the war. They want to see an end to the fighting that has proved highly costly for the beautiful island country. Enjoying no more support from across the border the Tamil Tigers now stand little chance of reversing the course of fighting. Let us hope the military offensive against the Tamils stops short of bringing the Tamils to total capitulation. For that may eventually backfire. Since the objective is to establish peace in the country, no side must be unduly humiliated. That is the best guarantee for a durable peace.

The Simpson Trial: One Land, Two Nations

American reaction to the acquittal was divided along the racial lines... While the black community was jubilant, the whites were unhappy. The blacks saw this case as yet another example of white attempt to suppress the blacks by branding them as criminals.

THE American Declaration of Independence fascinates people everywhere. Not only did it launch a great democratic experiment but the concepts enshrined in that historic document have been a source of inspiration for other nations struggling for freedom and independence. Its celebrated preamble declared that all men are created equal and have inalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Two hundred years have elapsed since the ringing declaration was made but the struggle for equality still goes on and no one can claim that its end is in sight. The Simpson trial seemed to highlight the unfinished struggle for equality and brought to the surface a cleavage in American society which has not yet been erased or even bridged.

While other countries were busy with their own national or regional affairs or with international events such as the genocide in Bosnia, the American people were mesmerized by the tragedy that occurred on 12 June, 1994 and the trial that followed. To them, nothing else seemed to be as important as the "trial of the century". Millions of Americans were glued to the television screen to follow even the minutest details of the slow-motion drama that was unfolding. In fact, to the rest of the world it looked like a media addiction, an obsession which defied all rational explanations. How come a murder case should dominate news coverage for almost a whole year? The verdict on the case on 3 October, 1995 seemed to have let the nation off the hook. Unfortunately, the verdict has not ended the conflicting emotions which have been simmering underneath; it has merely let it out into the open. The title, "One land, two nations" was the headline of an interna-

tional Herald Tribune story on the subject. It brings out, rather sadly, the dilemma that the American people have faced since the earliest days of the republic. In fact, a civil war was fought to establish the fundamental principle proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence that all men are created equal. Yet even today the question of equality and discrimination still continues to haunt the nation.

Mr O J Simpson, a former football super star, had made a second career as an actor and television spokesman and had attained a kind of celebrity status. His former wife Mrs Nicole Brown Simpson and her friend Ronald L Goldman were murdered on June 12, 1994. The killer or killers were never caught but Mr O J Simpson was arrested on June 17, 1994 on the basis of circumstantial evidence. Since that time a nationally televised drama was being enacted in the court of Judge Lance A. Ito. The lawyers and witnesses got national exposure as a result of the year-long trial but even the Japanese-American judge became a celebrity. The jury selection was not an easy process but finally 12 persons were selected, 9 blacks, two whites and one Hispanic. Prosecution case was that Mr Simpson slashed his former wife in a violent spasm of rage. His 17-year relationship with Nicole was alleged to be characterized by passion and abuse. Prosecutors contended that "Mr Simpson's genial and affable public persona masked a dark, possessive, obsessive side that had propelled him to beat his wife during their marriage, stalk her after they separated and kill her in a final effort to control her after she left him

for good." Goldman, a waiter who was a friend of Mrs Simpson, died because "he was at the wrong place at the wrong time."

The basic weakness of the prosecution was that there was neither any eye witness to the murder nor was there any murder weapon. The prosecution spent months to build up a case on circumstantial evidence to prove that the super star had the opportunity and motive to commit the murders and had left blood, hair, fibres, a hat and gloves that pointed to him as the killer.

Mr Simpson pleaded not

guilty and hired a multi-million dollar team of more than a dozen expert trial attorneys, including some of the biggest names in the profession. They argued from the beginning that he was wrongly accused. In fact, they charged that racist police officers had conspired to plant evidence to frame the black celebrity. In their eagerness to convict Mr Simpson, they overlooked the plot by the racist police officers. No one may ever know if there was a plot to frame Mr Simpson but detective officer Mark Fuhrman virtually destroyed the prosecution's case by giving credence to that suspicion. This officer had a known record of strong prejudice against ethnic minorities. According to his own taped admission, he had ear-

lier framed suspects. His taped statement, played to the jury as well as the whole nation, confirmed his strong racial bias. Yet this was the officer who arrived first at the murder scene. The glove, an important item in the prosecution's case, was found by him. He entered the Simpson house without any warrant. Naturally the jury suspected Mr Fuhrman's testimony. The disclosure that Detective Fuhrman was a virulent racist who frequently bragged over the years about planting evidence and assaulting suspects, especially blacks, was a key element in

views, unfortunately, were not shared by his compatriots. While the black community was jubilant, the whites were unhappy. The blacks saw this case as yet another example of white attempt to suppress the blacks by branding them as criminals. Their concern is not baseless. In fact, the statistics is mind-boggling. According to a study published by the New York Times, one in every three black men in their twenties are under the supervision of the criminal justice system! Small wonder that the black community takes such a dim view of the American police and the criminal justice systems. But the white establishment is clearly disturbed. Even a liberal newspaper such as the New York Times wrote an editorial entitled "Justice Stained". It faulted the jury for taking too quick a decision and said, "the jury, after being locked up for nine months, took less than four hours to reach its verdict. That was clearly too little time for a methodical sifting of the evidence and the conflicting claims of the closing arguments." The editorial blamed the Los Angeles Police Department for putting "Mark Fuhrman, a racist detective, at the centre of its case. During the Simpson trial he lied about his own racist speech, and tapes emerged betraying his willingness to tamper with evidence. Since Mr Fuhrman was alone when he found one of the most incriminating pieces of evidence, a bloody glove, and since he may have been in a position to tamper with other evidence, his exposure as a racist threw doubt on much of the prosecution's case and allowed the

defense to play the race card."

Even the New York Times thought that it was the "race card" which swayed the black members of the jury. George F Will, a noted Washington Post columnist, went so far as to claim that it was the jury which was convicted in this trial. Angry at the verdict, he blamed the Simpson's black lawyer Johnnie Cochran for inciting the them to "turn the trial into a political caucus." According to him the "jurors abused their position in order to send a message about racism, police corruption or whatever." Mr Will was giving vent to the anger that the white community felt at the acquittal of a man they thought was guilty. The conflicting reaction of the blacks and the whites is a disturbing evidence of the gulf that divides them and of the continuing tension that afflicts the American society. A noted New York black journalist said, "There was something historic about this. It displays an already open wound that America refuses to deal with — and that is racism."

In South Africa apartheid has been defeated. A bold new experiment to build a truly multi-racial society has begun. After passing through a euphoric phase it has entered a most difficult stage in which the old wounds are hurting. The chequered American experience should tell them that they must be prepared for a long struggle. The Simpson trial has sent a signal to all those who may feel too optimistic about the prospects of racial harmony and equality. Mankind will have to work hard and long and very patiently to achieve what the American founding fathers had declared with such profound conviction. Today, all men are equal but regrettably some men, mostly white, are more equal than the others.

ON THE RECORD

by Shah A M S Kibria



undermining police credibility. In fact, the Fuhrman debacle turned the trial into "Mark Fuhrman versus the image of O J Simpson," thrusting the race issue to the forefront of the case. The suspicion that the glove, which was too tight for Mr Simpson, was planted by Fuhrman, may have tilted the balance against the prosecution case.

American reaction to the acquittal was divided along the racial lines. President Clinton issued a statement which said, "The jury heard the evidence and rendered its verdict. Our system of justice requires respect for their decision. At this moment our thoughts and prayers should be with the families of the victims of this terrible crime." These sober

Invisible Membrane between Fantasy and Reality

I think one of the essential qualities of being an idiot is the ability to dream even when the world around him is crumbling to bits, going to pot. I am proud to say that I have that gift. The other day I had a dream. This may sound suspiciously like a Martin Luther King-sian political speech, now the conventional language of the professional dream seller, the politician's spiel: "I have a dream" or "new dreams for old"... No, mine was the kind of dream only a 24 karat, prize idiot like me could have when there is no place to escape to from the political realities of his world.

Well, I dream that the world had suddenly transformed. Not by magic but by some speeded up process of political evolution, perhaps. I dream that the educated, genteel middle-class in Bangladesh had suddenly learnt the language of political dissent. They had mastered the art of political maneuvering, grasped the basics of street-smart politics and political self-defence, a sort of civic Shotokan or Karate. Every intelligent man or woman was now a fortress, a force to be reckoned with. The political opposition, the ruling juntas, political aspirants, all took this class into consideration and wooed its opinion and support. In short, the middle-class had become politically empowered and was a most feared, and thereby, respected tier of society. (Wow, I have goose bumps just writing about this).

I saw that the middle-

class had declared its independence and had created for itself an island of sanity in the churning sea of political chaos. They first announced that instead of allowing any political party (ruling or otherwise) to decide how the people were going to vote i.e. under a caretaker government or some other political animal or condition, the rational majority threatened to boycott elections altogether. They decided that if election meant choosing between the devil and the deep blue sea — two deaf and blind ladies — the intelligent voter would rather go without, thank you very much. They propagated and infected other classes till most people announced that they would stay away from election, since that had become the bone of contention.

This powerful AND intelligent class (well, this IS a dream) now dictated, okay demanded, that unless both parties shaped up, neither would be allowed to play. I mean participate in the election. Further more, whichever party came to power would be required to pay reparations to the nation for all the economic damage done to it in all the wranglings and delays of decisions during the year of impasses and hartals, since both were equally responsible.

All conscientious newspapers stood solidly behind the people. In protest of both the opposition and the ruling parties, they started to publish a blank front page, with editorials and statements to the effect that unless the most dire issue of the day

was addressed and resolved, the newspapers would consider nothing important enough to print. This was the beginning of a media hartal of sort where news coverage concerning anything to do with either the opposition or the government was stopped. The only news that was printed were events, actions, views and opinions of the real people, not the politically manipulated masses, but the affected citizens of the country. The media was now focused on the plight of the country itself and not the few who were tearing it up.

Groups formed of politically-conscious individuals multiplied and united under

— the Messiah. This was nothing but a creation of the people, a wishfulfilling symbol, a mascot. This was a life-like robot in the shape of that mythical beast — the political leader. But in contrast to the real flesh and blood leaders past and present; this was a far superior product. It was packaged with all the qualities of a successful political star, with none of the flaws. To start with, to differentiate it from other leaders who have no other qualification for a political career except a relative who was also in politics, this figure was declared an orphan. And whereas our leaders never have any real political wisdom, instincts,

turban whatever pleased the crowds; made all the appropriate statements and non-statements; sent red roses to its opponent one day or attended the wedding reception of an enemy, but unlike other political figures, only in the national interest not as a politically irrelevant, personal event; it actually shook hands with other leaders; and of course, it campaigned. But above everything, it did what the others did not do: it reflected the intelligence and political conscience and aspirations of its creators; it was a true representative of the people, unlike the real-life power snatchers who masquerade as leaders. This was the hero everyone had waited for, the Saviour that having failed to arrive, had had to be INVENTED. But it was a success. It started to get supporters, followers, even devotees. More importantly it got promises of votes in the elections. Thus, the middle-class had finally, with its brains, check-mated the powers that be and also the powers that would destroy a nation, just to be.

Then I saw in this delicious dream... wait a minute: what is this? What I saw should have been that in the face of election threats and stiff competition from a robot, two sari-shrouded figures sheepishly arriving at the negotiating table, signing a mutual accord to break the impasse, resolving issues, shaking hands and allowing the country to live happily ever after. Instead, what I saw were endless political processions, long marches,

demonstrations and public protest by citizens against both parties. I saw human chains, newspaper articles, discussions, people ranting and raging and yet the impasse continued, as well as the hartals which grew longer and longer till the country finally disintegrated totally and died of boredom and economic dissolution.

Oh dear! where do our dreams take the wrong turn and change into nightmares? What is that invisible membrane between fantasy and reality and how does it disrupt, leaving people not even the luxury of dreaming, of escaping? Why are we forever stranded on the twilight zone between national hopes and political disasters, dreams of a better world and the reality of hartals and impasses? And yet, the idiot must continue in his idiocies, the dreamer must dream. Shall we too, at least invent some dreams, create some new leaders? Shall we paint new doors on the blank walls of our reality, then by the sheer force of wishful thinking, by the super-human power of a people united in a cause, bring this imaginary door to life so we can make a mass exodus out of this black and white documentary of political foolishness and mismanagement, into the technicolour, virtual reality magic of other options? Shall we enter the world of our dreams? Then follow the idiot and defy the present order. Let us dream together and invent the other Bangladesh. And so... new dreams for old... I have a dream... Dream on idiot.

POSTSCRIPT

by Neeman A Sobhan

a single banner. The message was clear and direct: immediate solution or the people would boycott both the contending parties and any election in which they took part. In my fevered state I saw processions everywhere, all over the country, even outside Bangladesh, and in front of the UN building too. I saw black shrouded, silent but ominous masses in droves, filling up the streets like Hitchcock's *Birds*, carrying placards saying "We do not want election, we want Peace," "Resolve or dissolve," "Down with the Govt and down with the Opposition."

At the same time a new figure emerged, a new leader

convictions or personal initiatives, this artificial creature being finely pre-programmed, was head and shoulders above the other false prophets of our system. This man-made Messiah of the masses was destined to be a great success for it did everything that leaders do before, during and after elections. It functioned as a speech-making machine, those fist-raising, thundering speeches; it was programmed with all the essentials required to represent a nation whether as an opposition leader or as a head of state; it wore the right clothes, covered or uncovered its head with sari, cap,

To the Editor...

Mother-in-law, the most misunderstood person

Sir, The letter published in the October 30, 1995 issue of your esteemed newspaper, under the heading "Living with In-laws" has drawn my attention. The letter-writer mentioned about an article published in the recent past written by Aasha Mehreen Amin and commented that the writer of the article has nicely depicted the whole picture of living with the in-laws. It is indeed a great problem with many housewives. But they cannot express their problems freely. So they silently tolerate everything for the sake of their children or their own personal interests. I would not read the article, and as Mrs Suraiya Habib did not mention the date on which it was published, I could not procure it as well. Anyway, I have a few words in this connection. I think, the mother-in-laws are the most misunderstood per-

sons in the whole world. I don't know why it is so, but it is the fact. From early life girls picture mother-in-laws as formidable characters, who always finds faults, act cruelly and all that. So they come to their in-laws' houses with a defiant attitude, which results in misinterpreting whatever the mother-in-law says or does, and there lies the crux of the matter. It is a very grievous situation.

Can there be any doubt about a mother's love for her son and her wish to see him happy? Only a mother can bring in her domain, another woman, arms outstretched with love, trying to treat her as a daughter but it is a futile attempt. Daughter-in-laws misunderstand and take offence in words which the daughter would not even dream to do. So, how can there be an easy relationship?

"Your son is your son, till he gets a wife."

"Your daughter is your daughter, all through your life."

these lines, but it is the sad truth. Overnight the son changes and becomes a stranger, your home becomes an alien place, where you have to tread very carefully so that nobody can find fault with you, watch your every word and feel with a sinking heart an unseen wall forming between you and your love ones.

Nur Jahan
East Nasirabad, Chittagong

Perspective Plan 1995-2010

Sir, The government is going to launch a perspective plan commencing from this year to 2010. The perspective planning is long-term planning. The long-term planning is always good if its performances are evaluated properly on regular basis. It is reported that perspective plan has been prepared on regional and national basis. The regional development programme will be chalked out locally and financed lo-

cally too. Here in Bangladesh all the areas are not equally resourceful. Say the source of fund in Chittagong cannot be compared with that of Rangpur, Gaibandha and Kurigram. Whereas these areas are very much less developed. In that case the participatory perspective plan will face fund constraints. The services of qualified manpower will be required to implement the development schemes as outlined in the perspective plan.

There are some subjects which are to be handled on national basis. For example the removal of illiteracy and poverty, and providing of housing for all those programmes should not be tagged with the local participatory programme. There are some NGOs that are looking in to this problem locally too. We are not aware whether the activities of the NGOs have been kept out of the perspective plan or not? The NGOs are also a participatory group in the field in the present concept of perspective plan. The plan is now in Bangladesh. I know there was

a twenty-year perspective plan sometime in the '60s in the then Pakistan. We have already spent 25 years as an independent country.

Twenty-five years is not a short period for a nation. But no substantial development excepting some road and bridges took place during these years. We had Five-Year planning during this period too. I would request the concerned authority to have free discussion on the perspective planning so that our exercise for coming 15 years give a fruitful result.

Agriculture is our mainstay of the economy. Agriculture should get all priorities on our each and every planning. The export earning from manufactured goods is a temporary event. The income from export may decline at any time. So we should keep all the emphasis on our traditional base.

Mahbubul Haque Chowdhury
Sonali Bank
Dhaka

Bengali dubbing of English movies

Sir, Since the Bangladesh Television (BTV) has started screening two popular English series with Bangla dialogues, some viewers have registered their opinion against it. They have, of course, some valid reason. But in my opinion, the BTV has done a good job by dubbing the English dialogues into Bangla in only two popular English serials which are regularly watched by all sections of people. In this regard, I asked a number of common viewers for their opinion and they opined that they now understand the exact story of the movies.

Meanwhile, for the viewers who love to watch English movies with original dialogues, the BTV is regularly screening a number of English social movies plus documentaries.

M Zahidul Haque
Asstt Prof
BAI, Dhaka