

# Violence and Lawlessness Stalk the Country People Cry for Peace and Progress

by Md Asadullah Khan

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**D**URING the past years, the country's problems, as vast and varied as its population of 120 million have proliferated, raising questions about Bangladesh's future course. One of the most pressing issues, in fact, is population growth. By the year 2000, demographers estimate, Bangladesh will have boomed to 150 million inhabitants. Just a year before the country experienced a devastating drought, followed by heavy flood, worst in the past 50 years in our living memory and a condition that is giving a more desperate edge to political passions.

The charisma and stubbornness that the administration had shown in the early stages of their takeover have almost faded out. People were vastly impressed and animated when they heard the eminent lawyer and former law minister Mirza Golam Hafiz speak that even a minister or the most important functionary's car will not whisk away after seeing red light in the traffic signal and if people want a minister driving in a motorcade to stop and listen to them on the road, the minister will oblige them ungrudgingly. With the passage of time, people, now are wondering if all these euphoric talks really came to pass. As it appears, the administrative measures and actions in the later days appear to be a bit indecisive, inconsistent and permissive toward corruption in high places.

The most serious of all the problems that has spread like an infectious wound is the political impasse that does not seem to be resolved soon and rather shows definite signs of growing worse. For the past one year regional problems like Yasmin murder case in Dinajpur, Bogra, Rangpur and Barisal's demand for universities in their areas, Syihet's demand for an

international airport and Chittagong Mayor's 28-point charter of demands for the upliftment of the port city have been kept at a steady boil impelling the administration to get mired in crisis after crisis, and sometimes adding to positive concern about the ability of the administration to govern wisely.

Surveying the country's fractious political landscape, one can take comfort from the fact that the country has been held together under trying circumstances. Yet there is a growing sense that the idea of Bangladeshi nationalism evinced by the patriotic feeling, sagacity, commitment and sacrifice by the teeming millions is under unremitting pressure from many quarters. Extremist forces of all nature and other evil forces are making all kinds of demands in a way so as to destabilise existing pattern and fabric of the society. But what alternative can we see in this conjuncture? Unsurprisingly, the country's problems are varied and mounting up day by day.

Although the country seems outwardly calm but a travel from one part of the country to the other end would reveal a mood of despair, anger and mute defiance that could explode at any moment. Actions taken here and there fall far short of what the people are beginning to demand. Business community and disenchanted peace-loving citizens have demonstrated their anger by forming human chain on the road in an effort to ventilate

their mood in silent protest. But this silence, one shudders to think, could quickly kindle into bloody clashes with one another, simply for the reason that people are being pushed to the edge. The economic situation in the countryside is far from satisfactory. Towns people have, possibly, enough to eat, but in the rural areas we meet people who have never tasted meat or eggs.

Even "Dal-Bhat", these days, seems to be a luxury for them. Children's bellies are swollen from malnutrition. With birthrate still much higher than the developed countries and the lowest per capita income, the greatest challenge facing the government is to "feed the people". Experiences of the past year are very grim. Crops withered because of drought, shortage of fertiliser and inadequate irrigation. Unemployment is surging up. Even in smaller towns, vacant places in front of roadside shops, street corners and parks are crowded with idle men, mostly educated, at all hours of the day. What should they be doing? There is nothing for them to do other than gossiping and indulging in anti-social activities. Some of them, out of dire necessity to eke out a living, work as hired mastans and musclemen for the unscrupulous politicians and gang leaders, roaming the big cities and even smaller towns.

Newspaper reports carry news of bloody clashes in all parts of the country between rival groups resulting from the control of the area and

share of booty. Unsurprisingly, this worsening situation has produced a frightening new generation who now carry pistols, bombs, daggers and listen to rock-'n-roll music at full volume in their operational headquarters and terrorise even the hungry and frail. What the administration does not possibly know is that guns bristle the countryside like swamp mosquitoes, almost as a deadly plague. The country's agony now seems limitless. Death toll soars with each passing day. The code of right and wrong has disintegrated. People still believe that this country's dreadful torment could possibly be alleviated by creating job opportunities for this disgruntled young population. Happily, there are many in the country who are quite willing to make sacrifices to save the country discarding a few who seem to respect 'money above all else' — not a very unfamiliar virtue in a country where politics is greased by money.

For months, the peace-loving citizens in the metropolis and other cities like Chittagong, Rajshahi and Khulna and even rural places have watched a wave of terrorism, looting and extortion spree by some frenzied youths. The fall of autocratic rule and the restoration of democracy were supposed to herald an era of harmony and prosperity. But it has not quite turned out that way. Everyday brings fresh violence and atrocities as if a long simmer-

ing vengeance and animosity bottled up under high pressure has suddenly been unscrewed. Things have come to such a pass that citizens have now to be fully armed, to pitch in to protect themselves by staging 24-hour vigil around their homes and marketplaces. The vast majority of people in the cities and countryside who did never anticipate such slide is appalled by this surge of violence, terrorism and mayhem in the Dhaka city alone. Now this appalling situation has galvanised people and the "silent majority" is awakening. The news item recently carried by national dailies about the murder of a college student in the Sukrabad bus stand area in a gun fight, unearthing of an illegal arms-making den at Lalbagh, arrest of one suspect in the Lalbagh seven-murder case, and last of all, recovery of 1 kg of Heroin from a hotel in the Fakirapool area in single day are all quite horrifying.

Newspapers have been doing an excellent job in projecting the crime-situation of the country. But the state-run electronic media is unmistakably failing. It should have launched public awareness drives and debates about the cases and consequences of such worsening trend. They should extend the programme by broadcasting a flurry of government-sponsored pleas against violence. At the same time, administration has to take heed of the enormity of the problem that is eating into the vitals of the nation.

The festering malaise has not taken root in the society all on a sudden and without any rhyme or reason. The simmering despair and frustration in the younger generation, long years of stay in the university due to session-jams, lack of employment opportunities even after snatching a university degree have exacerbated the problem. Other problems that have added dimension to this rot is the falling income, unfair distribution of wealth in the society, fast-dropping export earning and exploding desires for luxury and also an eroding work-ethic prevalent in every corner of the society that have thrown people to face the reality of impoverishment with each passing day. People these days are so blinded by a wave of materialism that they are not able to see what they have. There is too much focusing on what they need.

Despite all these escalating menace, there is a glimmer of hope. The people who fought so valiantly in the Liberation War and have successfully coped with all kinds of adversities in the country's long history will certainly be able to put things back in order soon. The mood of the country which was once so buoyant, full of self-confidence and self-assertiveness must not give in to despair and defiance. Happily, there does exist a very active group, may be a small minority, who are opposed to such violence and mayhem against a silent majority. However, the voice of this group is by far much too small to be effective and it is not listened to by the government officials. Some unscrupulous politicians of the country are the persons who fan the flames of violence and acrimony, instead of defending human values and preserving unity of the society.

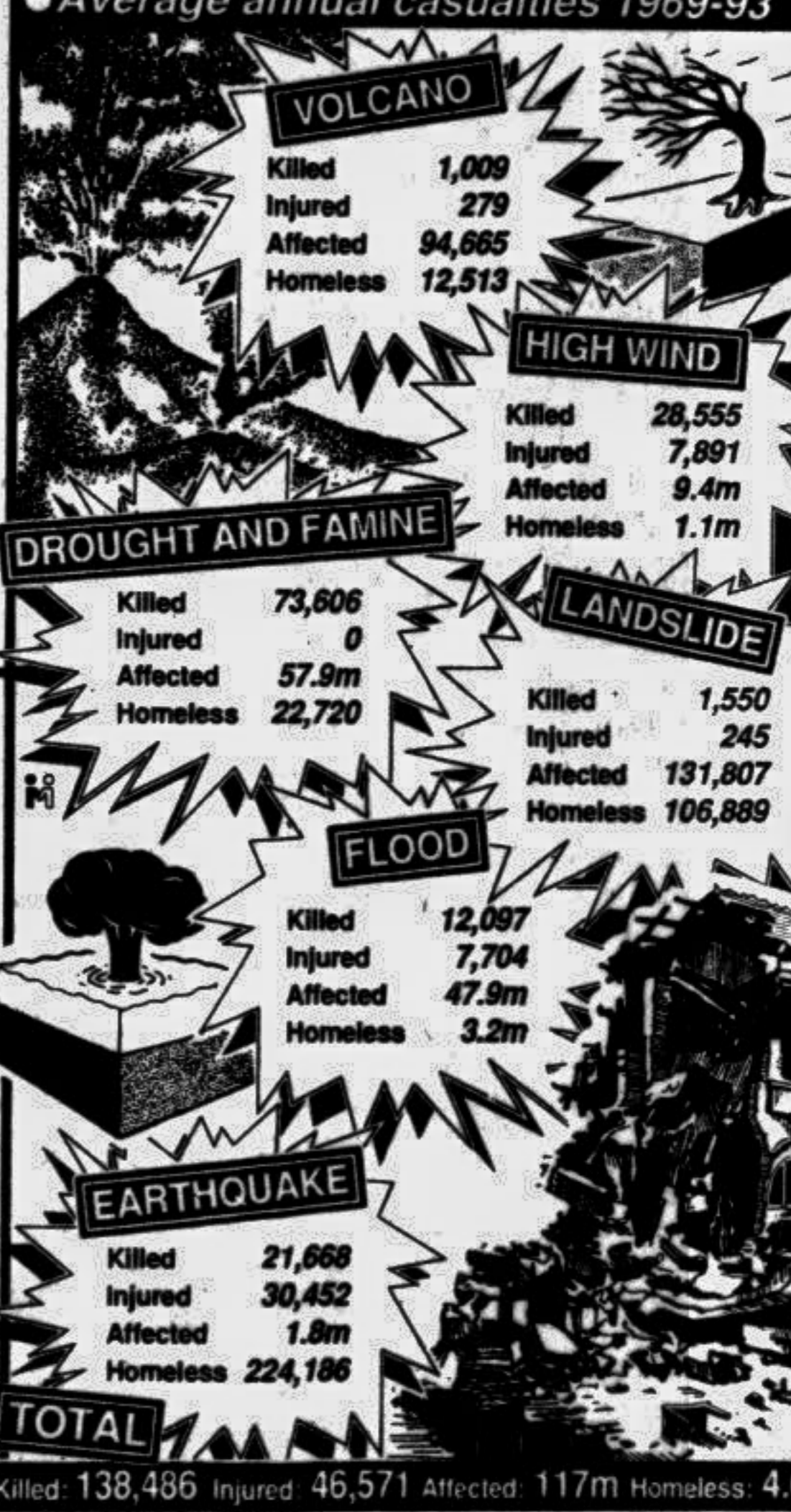
# Floods Wash the Smile off the Tiger's Face

Teena Gill writes from Bangkok

Angry Thais accuse their authorities of being unprepared for the worst floods in half a century. But in the country's dash for growth the contingency planning and infrastructure required to cope in such a crisis has been largely neglected.

## When Nature strikes

Average annual casualties 1969-93



# Unfavourable Trade Balance with India: Narrowing the Gap

by Mohammad Mujibur Rahman

**S**INCE the independence, Bangladesh has had an increasingly unfavourable balance of trade with India. Instead of being narrowed down, the trade gap has been persistently widening at a very alarming rate in recent years.

Export to India sharply declined from 40 million US dollars in 1984-85 to a paltry amount of 8 million US dollars in 1991-92 and also in 1992-93, and then increased to 21 million in 1993-94 and 28.6 million dollars in 1994-95, which is still lower than that of 1984-85. Export during the period declined by 28.5 per cent. On the other hand, imports from India registered a sharp and constant increase from 67 million in 1984-85 to 414 million dollars in 1993-94, and to 676 million dollars in 1994-95. Import during the period increased by 966.27 per cent. Consequently the trade gap widened from 27 million dollars in 1984-85 to 393 million in 1993-94 and to 647.4 million in 1994-95.

It will not be out of place to examine here the Indian import policy. India has always been following a strict protectionist import policy. According to the Indian import policy, "All consumer goods however described, of industrial, agricultural, mineral or animal origin, whether in SKD/CKD condition or ready to assemble sets or in finished form" are "not permitted to be imported except against a licence or in accordance with a public notice issued in this behalf."

Besides, the following

goods are also included in the list of consumer goods: consumer electric goods, equipment and systems; consumer telecommunications equipment; watch, in SKD/CKD assembled condition; watch cases; watch dials; cotton, woolen silk and blended fabrics; rice including cotton (very towel fabrics; concentrates of alcoholic beverages; wine, saffron, cloves, cinnamon and cassia.

High tariff on Indian imports and high tariff value fixed on Indian imports, which in many cases are actually higher than CIF cost also have seriously limited our exports to India. As a result, Bangladesh's exports to India seriously declined from 40 million dollars in 1984-85 to 8 million dollars in 1991-92 and also in 1992-93.

On the other hand, we have been following a liberal import policy, which in fact started in 1985-86 when, for the first time, goods outside the control list of the Import Policy were made freely importable. Consequently, imports from India increased from 67 million dollars in 1984-85 to 181 million in 1990-91. To worsen the situation, a vigorous attempt was made to further liberalise our imports by drastically reducing the number of items on the control list from 329 HS code headings in our Import Policy of 1989-91 to 203 in the Import Policy of 1991-93 and further to 114 in the Import Policy of 1993-95. As a result, the Indian imports sky-rocketed both absolutely and relatively, widening further the trade gap between India and

Bangladesh to 647.4 million dollars in 1994-95.

Due to drastic liberalisation of trade, since 1991-92, the additional increase in imports from India was 49.71 million dollars in 1991-92, 140.78 million in 1992-93, 192.85 million in 1993-94 and 434.92 million dollars in 1994-95. The additional increases in the coming years are likely to be much more if the unbridled trade liberalisation continues in the future.

The massive Indian imports have not only widened our trade gap with India, it has been one of the main causes which have seriously affected our indigenous industries, a number of which have already been closed down, causing a significant reduction in the number of jobs.

Consequently, production in a number of indigenous industries has alarmingly fallen.

Recently 73 consumer goods have been placed on the free list under the Indian import policy, the effect on our exports is yet to be seen. However, it may be noted that even among 73 items placed on the free list, some are commercially insignificant.

Even the present import policy of India will not be able to boost Bangladesh's exports to India to a remarkable extent.

## US-Japan trade war

In this context, it will be interesting to discuss the recent trade war between US

and Japan. Currently, the US has a 60 billion dollar trade deficit with Japan. In order to narrow the trade gap, the US wanted Japan to open its market to US made car and auto parts, a sector that accounts for nearly two-thirds of the US deficit with Japan. A series of trade talks were held between the two countries in which the US pressed for accords that included ways of measuring progress in opening Japan's markets. But the Japanese insisted that they would never agree to numerical targets as it tantamounts to managed trade. Being frustrated after prolonged talks which failed to yield a deal, the US threatened to impose sanctions which included 100 per cent import tariffs on 13 luxury Japanese car models if no accord was reached by June 28, 1995.

However, on June 18, 1995 a car trade deal was concluded. Though the deal set no specific numerical targets, it acceded to US demands for better access to Japan's market for cars and car parts. Under the deal, Japanese regulations that kept many US-built replacement auto-parts out of its market are to be reformed. Japan will loosen the rules governing repair work that is now largely in a network of garages tied to the Japanese car makers. US auto companies will gain greater access to auto dealership in Japan. American negotiators predict US auto companies could open 200 new outlets in Japan by 1996 and the num-

ber will rise to 1000 new outlets by 2000.

In view of the recently concluded auto-trade pact between the US and Japan, the following suggestions can be

hands to collect sales information.

d) Barter trade between India and Bangladesh should be encouraged. Barter and counter-trade appear to be on

## Export from Bangladesh, Import into Bangladesh and Balance (Value in million US Dollars)

Year	Export from Bangladesh	Import into Bangladesh	Balance
1984-85	40	67	-27
1985-86	9	60	-51
1986-87	12	64	-52
1987-88	9	87	-78
1988-89	9	104	-95
1989-90	20	148	-128
1990-91	24	181	-157
1991-92	8	231	-223
1992-93	8	342	-334
1993-94	21	414	-393
1994-95	28.6	676	-647.4

Source: Statistics Department, Bangladesh Bank.

## Employment Indices of Industrial Workers in Selected Industries (Base 1985-86=100)

Year	Cotton	Cement	Steel	Paints and Varnish
1989-90	105	100	101	95
1990-91	106	97	100	96
1991-92	106	96	99	83
1992-93	107	97	96	88
1993-94	90	98	88	91

Source: Statistical Year Book of Bangladesh 1994

## Quantum Index of Industrial Production by Industrial Groups (Base: 1981-82=100)

Industry	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92	1992-93	1993-94
Textile	95	84	84	86.5	81.5
Rubber products	130	104	77	85	88.9
Aluminium	107	93	98	60.5	39.5
Enamel Ware	147	94	65	29.8	37.6
Motor Vehicle	69	53	34	6.5	5.6

Source: Statistical Year Book of Bangladesh 1994

made to narrow the trade gap between Bangladesh and India:

a) India must open its market for Bangladeshi exportable goods. For this, all our exportable goods should be placed on the free-list of the Indian import policy. Besides, Indian tariff on our exportable goods should be reduced to zero and 5 per cent. Again, Indian tariff value fixed on its imports should in no case exceed the respective CIF value.

b) In order to reduce the huge trade gap, India should increase purchase of our exportable goods through the State Trading Corporation of India. Ministry of Commerce and Export Promotion Bureau should chalk out a list of our exportable goods for the purpose. Besides, big Indian companies should be encouraged to purchase goods from Bangladesh.

c) Bangladesh Government should carefully monitor the implementation of the above measures. A detailed package should provide a variety of ways to measure success in increasing exports to India. The Ministry of Commerce Export Promotion Bureau and Bangladesh Bank should join

the increase in the world economy, a consequence of increased trade between the former Eastern bloc countries and developed nations, according to the US-based International Trade Commission.

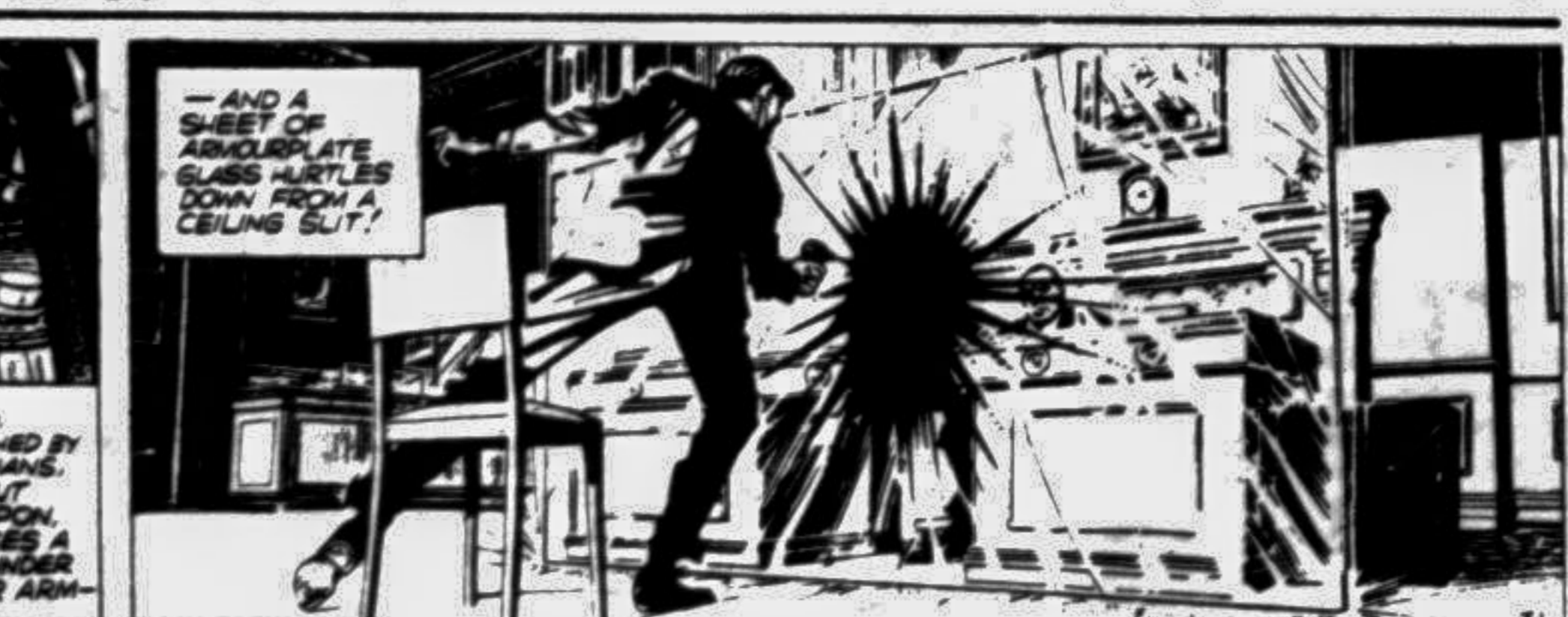
If the above measures are not acceptable to India or measures acceptable are not enough to narrow the trade gap sufficiently then the following additional measures should be taken:

Imports from India, of all consumer goods, raw materials and capital goods which Bangladesh is producing or is capable of producing and all luxury and non-essential goods should be strictly restricted. 100 per cent punitive tariff should be imposed on all Indian imports of essential consumer goods not produced in our country; imports from India, of raw material and capital goods not produced in Bangladesh should be made under barter and counter trade system; and instead of depending heavily on India for its goods, a vigorous attempt should be made to diversify Bangladesh's import trade.

The writer is former Collector of Customs.



James Bond BY IAN FLEMING DRAWING BY MORAN



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metropolis which has developed without any apparent long-term vision. Buildings have sprung up over swamp lands which traditionally soaked up excess water.

Some of the old waterways and canals in what has been called both the "Venice of the East" and the "City of Angels" have been filled and tarred over for use by vehicles. As a result, flood waters have restricted means of escaping into the sea.

The problem is exacerbated by seasonal high tides in October and November, which push upstream. In addition, water stored behind dams in the north reaches a peak at the time of the monsoon, and when released, adds to the floods washing over fields and villages and draining down to Bangkok.

Meanwhile, the uncontrolled sinking of wells has caused the water table to drop — posing a subsidence threat in the city.

Before this year's floods came drought. Last year was one of Thailand's worst dry seasons, when many traditional water sources dried up. Environmentalists said the problem had been considerably worsened by increasing deforestation, the conversion of woodland to commercial agriculture and tourist resorts, and damage to water tables.

Increased pumping of water from the Chao Phraya caused salt water to flow upstream from the Gulf of Thailand — further reducing supplies. As a result, water was rationed across much of Bangkok, while farmers inland were discouraged from planning a second rice crop to save water.

At the same time, the growing number of golf courses found sufficient supplies to keep their courses green throughout the year — creating tension between farmers and leisure-industry developers.

"As has been the case with floods this year, rural areas outside Bangkok are always asked to sacrifice their crops and fields for the sake of the city, while the city has taken few measures to change its haphazard and dangerous course of development," said a Bangkok political science student.

One of the main reasons for the country's lack of long-term planning lies in its changeable political climate, according to Wittayakorn Chai-angkoon, a writer on social issues. A lack of continuity in government since the 1970s has left many infrastructure plans unfulfilled.

Shaky coalition governments have failed to share "a commitment to a particular agenda, policy or ideology", he adds. As a result, even proper drainage, sewerage and water-treatment systems have not been implemented. Growing corruption among bureaucrats and I has only worsened the problem.

The capital is typical of a GEMINI NEWS