

Garment Industry's Crunch

The ethno-centric political brawl in Sri Lanka, once a roaring success in the garments field, caused her to lose market to Bangladesh. But now with political uncertainties snow-balling here over the long haul we are about to yield our marketing advantages to India, and perhaps to Pakistan as well.

In a marked departure, the foreign buyers have given our garments exporters bookings up to February in place of April or May as had been the case around this time every year. Under the circumstances, the sector seems somewhat off-the-track in fetching the standard US 2 billion dollar in export earnings this year.

The cumulative effects of our political impasse have already made the buyers abroad switch their choices in one vital area. If the trend continues, it is bound to affect adversely not only the garments business but also our other economic interests. The political tangle must be resolved the soonest.

Having said that to ourselves, let's draw the foreign buying houses' attention to the need for avoiding any fixed opinion on Bangladesh's political situation or clinging to any impulsive alteration of choices. As soon as the politics get normalised, Bangladeshi garments should be well-received as before, because the MFA withdrawal schedules do not apply to the categories of products that she turns out until the very end of the 10-year phase-out programme ending 2004 AD. Till then she should, in all fairness, be enjoying her position in the international market in terms of the quota system. The other exporting countries' advantages over Bangladesh as far as their higher productivity and the indigenous availability of fabrics and other inputs go should not make any difference there.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh ought to be able to create backward linkages for a self-reliant manufacture of garments by 2005 AD and reap dividends from a neat and compact package of value added business.

Murder on Campus

Three students were killed in clashes on Sunday at the Bangladesh Agricultural University. Campus violence is nothing new even in the beautiful and soulful ambience of the BAU. It can be said that, in fact, we are in the thick of it. Even so, we cannot but be shocked by the BAU deaths. We grieve the loss of these lives of students slain by students. But those responsible for sending them to death do they grieve? They are as responsible for their killing as the killers themselves. Instead of building a way out of politics of murder they seem to wallow in blood and with evermore relish. These deaths rather than setting them to do rethinking, spur them on the bloody way, committing evermore young lives to death and murder. This is ancient tribal blood feud in all its hellish cruelty and moronic silliness being enacted at the campuses sending young people to death with the elders safely away from the scene.

Campus violence is one of the most tragic developments of the past decade. Clashes between different student groups have been with us for as long as we can remember. But it assumed its current violent form only in the recent past. Gunbattles between student groups, and the consequent loss of lives have become the most tragic feature of present day student politics. We have, on several occasions, appealed to the government to make a serious and sincere effort to rid the campus of violence, by arresting the few known terrorists. Our appeals have obviously fallen on deaf ears. If the government took even a minimum effort to eliminate campus violence, then the latest deaths could have been prevented.

Ours is a country of platitudes and conversely of indecent fulminations against those that do not accept those platitudes. You always hear of the great advances made in the educational arena. One is never told how things have wholly been messed up by woolly ideas of examination at the SSC level and by the coaching centres and the system of universal private tuition. But murder on the campuses, of the students and by the students, the leaders do not talk of. And this, more than anything else, will brutalise our entire society by the first quarter of the new millennium. Unless, of course, the nation in the meantime moves successfully to clean all campuses of violence and intolerance.

What a Death!

It was a most premature death and a loss to the nation. But what a death it was! Such is not granted to many. Feroz Shain will long be remembered for his art and no less for his glorious death.

He was participating in a Victory Day function on Saturday at the Shilpakala Academy. His turn came and providence dictated him to choose a particular number — *Ek seconder nai bhorasha, phuraibo shob rong-tamasha*. Hardly had he finished, with the song, he collapsed. Never again to recover.

This is possibly a very very rare and the fittest way for a singer to end his earthly journey. But there have been great ones dying in the same manner. Khan Saheb Abdul Karim Khan knew his call had come and started singing. As the song ended so did his life. Dwijendra Lal Roy once got agitated when singing his own and immortal song *Bango Amar, Janoni Amar*. He stood up and with flailing arms kept repeating it until he collapsed. He recovered but only to die in a matter of days. Feroz is in august and enviable company.

We mourn his death and send our condolences to his bereaved family.

Economics of Mastani: A Light-hearted Analysis

by R H Khandker

Of course, the similarity between begging and mastani crumbles if their effects on production is considered. The former is neutral but the latter is certainly negative. A widespread mastani will have a depressing effect on production and the GDP

THE Bangladesh Economic Association, of which I am a life member, recently held a one-day seminar on current Macro-economic and Sectoral Trends in Bangladesh. For some reasons, I could not reach the seminar before its concluding stage. When I reached there, Dr Anisur Rahman was speaking. Once I managed to tune my ears to his speech, I heard him dealing with Mastani as a service industry and since this service is growing fast it was helping the growth of the GDP as customarily estimated. But he felt that, and I agreed, considering the mastani service as a positive contribution to the GDP was unacceptable; in fact, it should be considered negative and a disservice. He then suggested that his disservice should be deducted from the GDP, since the standard national accounts system treats all services as positive, he proposed a reform of this system, a la Simon Kuznets, as he himself claimed humorously. I instantly felt good, because I was agreeing with someone whom I held in some regards, particularly we both having once served on a National Commission on Pakistan's national income accounting. This besides the obvious agreement on mastani as a disservice.

Mr Golam Kirbia, a former Finance Secretary, was the next speaker. He maintained that the high rate of mastani was a function of a high rate of youth unemployment, and made a plea for an analysis of both the phenomena. I hope I am stating him correctly. I may as well be wrong, since

his speech was hardly audible to my aging ear. Again I felt instantly good, agreeing with the remarks of a respected friend. After the conclusion of the seminar, I left for home in a high spirit.

On my way home, I started feeling uncomfortable. I first thought that it might be due to the car being small and the windows shut to avoid pollution. But opening the windows produced little relief. As I proceeded forward, my mind raced backward to a time when I had crossed 25 and the current century its mid-point. I felt better, because at that time, I used to consider myself as an expert on national accounting, having completed a Ph D thesis on this subject at the London School of Economics. His better feeling, however, did not last more than a few minutes. Questions were rising in my mind on what I had heard in the seminar. I again started feeling depressed. This time for beginning to have doubts on my friends' discourses.

Before I proceed further, I must categorically state under oath that I am not a Mastani. I do not run any mastani business, nor have I any connection with any such business. In fact, I do not think I have ever seen a Mastani; if I had, I have not recognized

him/her. Despite this absolute assertion, a reader may still maintain some doubts on completion of his reading this piece.

Now, let me try to unforget my distant and perhaps outdated knowledge of national accounting. The basic unit of the national accounting system is a transaction. The national accounts portray the economy in some aggregates and sub-aggregates of transactions to reflect their functional inter-relationships. The first question that comes to my mind is where in this system should I put a mastani transaction and how should I treat this service (disservice) functionally? It seems that it belongs to both the Enterprise Account and the Household Account. In the former, it is a provider of a service (disservice), and in the latter, it is a consumer.

This much is clear. However, whether it should be added or deducted or kept outside the national accounts should depend on its functional character. If it is treated as an income accruing to Household and an expenditure for Enterprise, it should be entered as such to the respective Accounts. But in the Enterprise Account should it be treated as a factor or a non-factor input? It seems neither. Therefore, a mastani transaction should be treated

as a transfer and should have no effect on the GDP. It is like a payment to a beggar. Both a beggar and a Mastani ask for payment without providing any productive goods or service. However, any payment to the former is optional, while such a payment to the latter is just the opposite. In one case the payer feels a spiritual uplift and in the other case a distress. Since the national accounting system is unconcerned with the spiritual domain, to it begging and mastani transactions are similar.

Of course, the similarity between begging and mastani crumbles if their effects on production is considered. The former is neutral but the latter is certainly negative. A widespread mastani will have a depressing effect on production and the GDP. So will be a widespread crime of any kind — theft, burglary or mugging. Essentially mastani is a crime and should be treated accordingly. Since the other crimes remained unmentioned in the seminar, I need not go into a discussion on them.

Before leaving this section, I feel compelled to discuss whether mastani is service or a disservice. For that I have to define service and disservice. I shall define them this way: If the presence of the phenomenal helps increase the total output, it is a service, but if its

presence helps decrease total output, it is a disservice. But what about its absence? We may expand the above definition to say that, if the removal or a reduction of the phenomenon helps increase total output it be could also be treated as a disservice. This definition clearly makes mastani a disservice.

So, far so good. Now, are there other services included in the national accounts which could be dispensed with or reduced to have a positive effect on the total output? What about the government itself? Can we not believe that downsizing a ministry or a department of the government will lead to an increase in the total output releasing resources for redeployment, to more productive areas? Let us take the Planning Commission. Are we absolutely certain that its downsizing, or even outright abolition, may not affect the total output of the economy positively, if the Government's policy regime is appropriate? Having left this institution 20 years ago and no prospects for reemployment, I dare raise this question now. However, this light-hearted question could be taken with some seriousness. I am certain in my own mind that cutting back government services by a quarter will, through a series of adjustments, lead to a higher growth of the GDP. Could we

then treat at least a part of the government as a disservice, as is mastani?

In this section, I wish to deal with Mr Kirbia's point. He is absolutely correct that the high rate of mastani is a reflection of a high of youth unemployment. But what is its policy implication? If a kind-hearted policy decision is made to employ youths in various state institutions to relieve youth unemployment without considering relevant micro-economic conditions, the net effect on the total output may be negative, following my analysis in the last section. There will be a change from a criminal mastani to a respectable mastani, because in both cases the effect on the GDP is negative. The correct policy should be to augment the demand for productive employment and provide incentives to the sectors or industries having demand for young labour. Given the size and proportion for total unemployment in Bangladesh, the prospects for success in this respect is however thin. But we must avoid the temptation to change the character of Mastans without reducing the real effect of mastani.

Finally, I wish to conclude this discussion saying that mastani is a criminal phenomenon and a serious one. Let it remain in the domain of crimes and not brought in to confuse economics.

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Situation in Senabhaban—III

When the country was eagerly waiting for the two leaders addresses, speculations on who would replace President Ershad was growing fast. On the other hand, leaders of the Combined Opposition Alliances were facing difficulties to select a person for appointment as acting President

I woke up after about two hours of sleep and received a message from the Chief of Army Staff. He called a conference at his office and wanted that I should attend. After a hasty breakfast, I went to AHQ and met Chief of Army Staff in his room. Naval Chief Rear Admiral Mustafa, Acting Air Chief Air Commodore Arefin and all generals of AHQ were present in the conference. Chief of Army Staff gave a briefing on the whole situation and occasionally asked me to explain certain specific issues. By and large reaction of the officers were favourable. Many expressed that the decision of resignation was correct but late. In the middle of the conference I got a message from the ADC that President was going to the office i.e. to the President's Office near the Old Airport and wanted to talk to me. I range the ADC from the adjacent room. ADC Maj Rajib told that the President was adamant to go to the office though they discouraged him. Even PSF officers including Mrs Ershad advised him not to visit the office at that time. It was not at all safe but he insisted. They wanted I should join him immediately.

I could take in the reasons of President Ershad's visit to his ostentatious office which was so dear and precious to him so long. This would be his last visit. Many valuable and sensitive papers, documents and materials were there. He had to bring back those before someone occupied the chair. When Chief of Army Staff learnt about it, he also suggested me to request President not to go out of the cantonment. I rushed but when reached near Senabhaban I saw the tail end of the Presidential cavalcade going towards the President's office.

Visit Bangladesh

Sir, "Tourism Month '95" began on December 5. But there is more to sustained tourism than a month-long promotional programme. Visitors are concerned not only with what is on offer but the service received. A few examples: the level of understanding English language, especially at reception points, needs particular attention; the Agrabad Hotel in Chittagong and the Government-run hotel in Cox's Bazar are cases in point.

Cox's Bazar is allegedly the best tourist spot in the country yet the main hotel — Parjatan's Hotel Shaibal — does not have a back-up generator for the frequent power cuts. Despite its length the menu is limited. Foreigners ironically call it the "No Have" restaurant.

Biman, the national flag carrier, needs more than just a smile. When I boarded on a Biman flight in Delhi in a wheelchair on 4 December, I was given no assistance. The corpulent air hostess refused (unlike any other airline I

followed and straight entered into his office. He was busy collecting various personal stuffs; the ADC and an orderly were assisting him. Seeing me he told, "I had come to collect my personal stuffs, you know I had been in this office for so many years and many things are mixed up with official ones and thought to come myself." I requested him to leave the office as early as possible since we were concerned for his security. Also suggested that ADC would be left behind to collect his stuffs and I would ensure his personal belongings reached him. He agreed but took over 30 minutes. He had some other important reasons besides collecting personal papers and documents to visit his office at that time.

When the President left for Senabhaban I returned to AHQ where conference was still continuing. There was hardly any fruitful issues to discuss except gossips and repeating various incidents and tall-talks. It continued till mid-day, I wanted to leave earlier but the Chief of Army Staff insisted me to remain present. Meanwhile, I gave attention to tie up Radio and TV broadcast arrangements. By 8:30 in the morning I got President's TV and Radio crew in AHQ for recording of live broadcast of the two leaders statements. Both the media were instructed to start broadcasting right from the morning. The aim was to keep maximum people confined to their houses instead of streets. It worked very well; though actual broadcast of two leaders' messages got



FALL OF GENERAL ERSHAD

by Maj Gen Manzur Rashid Khan (Retd)

delayed but repeated announcements took crowds of Dhaka off the streets. BTV's old popular programmes and movies attracted people to remain near their sets. This greatly helped in normalizing law and order situation of the capital.

When the country was eagerly waiting for the two leaders addresses, speculations on who would replace President Ershad was growing fast. On the other hand, leaders of the Combined Opposition Alliances were facing difficulties to select a person for appointment as acting President. Sitting in AHQ we were also eagerly waiting to know the name. It was undoubtedly a difficult task for the political parties who had nothing common except the issue of oust-Ershad. I returned to Senabhaban at around 2:30. President was in his office room. ADC informed me that he was looking for me and should see him immediately. As I entered, he told me that swearing-in of the Acting President would take place next day i.e. on 6 Dec 90 at 4 pm in the President's Office. Till then I did not know who would be the Acting President, so I had to ask him. He told that opposition parties, at long last, had agreed to see Chief Justice of Bangladesh as interim President. Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed was the Chief Justice who was sworn

few months back after Justice Badrul Haider retired. I remembered the occasion of his swearing-in and his rare visits afterwards. When President told me that the time of swearing-in would be at 4 pm it struck

my mind as why so late and why not on that very day or night or at best next day morning. I told him that since he had decided to leave the office it should be delayed and better be on that very evening. He seemed offended and annoyed. I had to tell him that delay might create a problem and he should understand the tense political situation prevailing at that time. He was quite adamant to stick to next day's schedule but agreed to advance

OPINION

Political Violence

Dr KM Maqsoodur Rahman

I congratulate The Daily Star for the most timely and appropriate editorials 'Serious infractions', 'Dangerous Indiscipline' and 'Burning of EC Office' on 9, 10 and 11 December, respectively, on the current political situation.

For nearly two years our politicians have been making the politics murky. It is due to almost continuous agitation, frequent strikes, street fighting, indiscriminate cocktails and other missiles throwing, etc. The people have now become tired of them. In the newspapers, the contents of politicians' frequent statements that we read remain the same as before. However, during the last two months the effects of the political agitation have become extraordinarily violent. The violence is reaching to an epidemic proportion. It has now reached a point of anarchy. The political leaders calling frequent strikes do realise what the violence is telling on the common people. On the day of strike the people are so fearful of the pickets that they are compelled to stay at home as if they are chained. One can judge the popularity of strikes if its callers offer the option to the people of not joining the strike. The callers should not forget the proverb 'you can drag the horse to a pond but you cannot force him to drink.' However, the violent culture what we see today never existed before in our society. Moral values of our society have been deteriorating over the decades. The selfishness, hatred, intolerance and violence have become the norms of the day especially among the youths. The reasons are many and these are known to almost all of us. Social decadence reached a level that is beyond imagination.

In recent years, a few cunning and clever people belonging to the inner coterie of the political parties have made the political cobwebs very fast. Another group, the most dangerous of all, is the presence of some hornets in the political parties. The combined effect of these groups along with their

armed cadres is frightening. They have maimed and killed the innocents. They become hyperactive at the time of strikes and add fuel to the fire. As a result the daily wage earners suffer most. The whole nation feels the pinch in one way or the other. The untold sufferings of the people cannot be measured in terms of daily loss of Taka or dollars. One does not need to read the newspaper to see the damaging effects of the strikes. Just seeing the photographs of manhandling, dragging, beating, burning etc. in the newspapers are enough to tell him the sad part of the story. One need not tell that the violence brought tears to thousands of near and dear ones.

A few questions arise as to why the incessant and increasing political violence occurs, and who are responsible for such occurrence? Answer lies in the free availability of arms and explosives (imported and locally manufactured) at the hands of delinquent youths and impotency of our law enforcing agencies. The youths are instigated with the offering of handsome money. Besides, the political environment that exists for some time is very much conducive to practice violence. It is the unethical politics. Who are instigating those delinquents? They are the hornets that I mentioned earlier. Of course, the hornets get, if not instructions, at least the approval of their leaders. May be, instructions too. The target, timing, venue and modus operandi, etc. are set by them or their sub-cadres. To solve the political impasse, many attempts have been by several groups of people and these are well known. As the election is approaching the dangerous and destructive actions of delinquents of all the parties have become more violent.

To solve the crises, need of the hour is earnest attempts by the top leaders of both the government and the opposition. However, a ray of hope appears to have been arising at the end of the dark tunnel. One such is the latest and last attempt of the Com-

monwealth-Secretary General that may lead to a fruitful negotiation. Another is the recent visible aspect of objective presentation of the TV and Radio news. It was never so before the announcement of the election schedule. It seems that the Election Commission's efforts are likely to succeed.

The time now is very short and the process of holding the elections is very long. Therefore, the government leaders, instead of wait and see attitude, should move with a supersonic speed to bring the opposition parties to the negotiating table. BNP should be magnanimous to accommodate the public demand so that they can cast their votes freely and fairly. Meanwhile the opposition political parties should call off the movement of save the country from the savagery that has fallen due to the 'act of God'. Here it would be appropriate to quote from the famous book Freedom at Midnight, 'Thousands of Indians followed his call and thousands more went off to jail. The beleaguered governor of Bombay called the most colossal experiment in world history and one which came within an inch of succeeding. It failed because of an outbreak of bloody violence in a little village of United Province. Against the wishes of almost his entire Congress hierarchy Gandhi called off the movement because he felt his followers did not yet fully understand non-violence.' Leaders of the opposition should create the history by following the example of Mahatma Gandhi that he had set in the twenties. It will then gradually eliminate the violent culture of our politics.

Before I conclude I quote a sentence of the great prime minister of the century Late Sir Winston S Churchill: The people die once but the politicians can die many times. He and Late Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi were the examples. We may see the same in our country, if not in this century, almost certainly in the early next one.

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