# The Baily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

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## Chittagong's Future

Though late, we seem to be waking up to the idea that something urgently needs to be done about the development of our port city. For far too long Chittagong's development as a functional port city has been ignored. Our past political leaders put all their energy and concentration in developing Dhaka at the near total neglect of all other cities, including Chittagong. Japan International Cooperation Agency(JICA) has recently concluded a "Chittagong Industrial Development Plan (CIDP)". A joint meeting of Board of Investment(BOI), Chittagong Development Agency (CDA), and other relevant partners was held last Saturday which decided to form a task force to identify how the JICA plan could be implemented.

We commend JICA for taking the initiative to draw up CIDP, and thank the Japanese government for its support in this regard. However, we would like to point out that it is indicative of our present attitude towards major development projects that a foreign agency has to help us even to develop the plan. While we can understand our seeking help in implementing big projects, but do we have to seek help at the stage of plan preparation?

An important recommendation of Saturday's meeting was to create a broad-based socio-political consensus to implement the CIDP. We commend the participants for hitting on this central issue, the neglect of which often leads to serious difficulties in implementing development projects. But will we have such a consensus? Much depends on how the government and the ruling party behave. For too often in the past we have seen blatantly partisan decisions on issues like these, resulting in a serious mistrust by opposition parties, which leads to creating obstruction in implementing something which was meant to benefit all.

The group raised another critical issue namely 'political will', which is a prerequisite for the success of any major undertaking. We have pointed out in these columns, that many times in the past important, well-researched and relevant projects went down the drain because of lack of political will to implement them. Such neglect comes not necessarily from the fact that government decides to shift its focus from one project to another, but from a more dangerous tendency of sheer negligence and not knowing what we really want.

In case of CIDP we want all government agencies and all political forces to work inunison to make development of Chittagong truly our gateway for progress. But for that the tone will have to be set by the government.

## **Fertilizer Worry**

On its part, the government has taken quite a number of steps to avert a fertilizer crisis like that of last year. Of the measures, bufferstocks in as many as 15 strategic locations along with non-export of fertilizer should prove very effective. The government has also finalised the list of dealers well in time. Yet the prices of fertilizer are showing an upward trend.

Already there has been competition in apportioning blame on each other by the administration — district and thana administrations to be precise — and the association of fertilizer dealers. The administration's reasoning is straightforward and simple: since the government has taken all the good measures, prices of fertilizer should not go up. But the fertilizer dealers think otherwise. They admit that the administration has done a good job by plugging some holes in the system but allege that the government has done nothing about illegal 'toll' collection at the mill-gates by various groups and agencies. Disruption in ferry service and the consequent hike in transportation costs add up to the price of fertilizer no less.

There are other allegations. Now the fertilizer dealers want to talk to the Prime Minister on all such issues. This shows that they have some genuine problems nobody down the ladder cares to listen to and solve.

To get the desired benefits from the series of government measures, it is execution at the field level that must be fully ensured. Last year many genuine traders did not get dealership. We hope this time around economic rather than political considerations have formed the basis for dealership selection. The next step ought to be to force all uneconomic forces, such as the toll collectors, out of business.

## Saving the Past

At a seminar in the city, Mayor Mohammad Hanif has expressed the desire to create a special cell at the DCC for the preservation of architectural heritage.

In Britain Prince Charles came out of his customary role to make a scathing criticism of architectural incongruities and deformations in London. Mitterrand, who died recently, was an art connoisseur and will be remembered for his contribution to the Luvre.

Hanif, in his modest capacity, seems to have excellent ideas but in terms of delivering he cannot boast an equally high grading. This has happened from garbage-cleaning to solving the traffic-jam. Let us hope the mayor does not once again fail to live up to his promise. We want to see a cell in the DCC working with zeal and a real penchant for the

past of this dear old city. Our poverty should not be an excuse for the abject neglect of historical sites and architectural marvels.

## Francois Mitterrand: The Last Gascoigne of France

HE death of Francois Mitterrand on January 8 did not come as a surprise. He was suffering from terminal cancer. In his death the world has lost the last Imperial president of France whose early political beliefs did not quite foreshadow the future President's socialist proclivity. A staunch anti-fascist, he joined the resistance during the World War II — but for a while, he found it convenient to work as a petty official in the Vichy government of Marshal Pet ain: but he was wise enough not to have joined any highprofile job under the government of the Verdun hero. He was given medallion of honour in recognition of his contribution in the Resistance Movement against the Nazi occupation force later on.

His conservatism was strong enough to make him state on the Algerian War of Independence "the only negotiation of Algeria is War." By the time he became president in 1981 he was still incandescent with the philosophies of a bleeding heart liberal! When French Establishment refused to accommodate his brand of Socialism with a precipitous run on the French Bourse, Francois Mitterrand took a U-turn and by the time he completed his second term as President he was considered more conservative than even Guallist conservatism! To make things worse, towards the fag end of his presidency, the spectre of Rency Beusket re-appeared and Paris cafes and salons were abuzz with stories of his collaboration with

the Nazis. As if it was not enough, some scatological enthusiasts tried to bare his cupboard about his extramarital liaison. President Mitterrand took the unprecedented measure

OR over four years

Finance Minister

Mamohan Singh has been

repeatedly telling the country

how he and his government

have rescued the country

from the brink of utter

bankruptcy which the previ-

ous governments had left

behind for the country to

been the theme the Finance

Minister constantly harped in

the public. No doubt the for-

eign exchange reserve had

almost touched the rock

bottom in mid-1991, particu-

larly the NRI withdrawal

which had been going on at

the time almost brought the

country to the point of

bankruptcy. But Dr Manmo-

han Singh's stand at that

point of time had the touch

of duplicity. He had been the

Prime Minister's economic

adviser during the last non-

Congress government in

1990-91 before the Congress

returned to power under

Narasimha Rao. There is

nothing to show that Dr

Manmohan Singh had ever

supported any remedial mea-

sures at the time when the

country's finances had

reached that precarious state

Minister had never amplified

for the benefit of the public

how and why the country's

foreign exchange reserve had

fallen so low, although he had

known it perfectly well. That

was because he did not want

to tell the public that it was

the Congress government

under Rajiv Gandhi which

was really responsible for the

1991 foreign exchange crisis.

Secondly, the Finance

before the 1991 elections.

Till very recently this has

Indian

of admitting paternity of a 20-year-old daughter. Any revelation of this nature, or even of lesser magnitude of extra-marital relationships by an Anglo-Saxon leader would certainly have destroyed his political future. The flexibility of the older Latin culture made the French take a softer view of their President's personal life. Many would compare the French president to a Sphinx, - he maintained an enigmatic silence whenever necessary but took his decisions keeping in view what he thought was in the greater interest of La France.

essential by a pragmatist. Idealism for him was a tool

Waliur Rahman French GRANDEUR. To the detriment of normal economic sense he encouraged building of a glass pyramid near the Louvre and other big structures in Paris. Rising unemployment was not so much his concern as leaving his footprints on the sands of time, for history to judge him. That way he was perhaps the Francois Mitterrand was last Gascoigne of Europe. He was complex, varied, multi-

President Mitterrand's state visit to Dhaka in early 1990 would be remembered with great pride and satisfaction — being the first French President to have visited us. The UN special meeting in NY on Bangladesh floods and the

subsequent Flood Action Plan was largely

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which would only help him to reach towards realism. With Mikhael Gorbachev he tried in the beginning to block German unification. When he soon realised that the counterforce was too massive. overpowering, he invoked the Moynihan's Law - "if you can't lick your enemy, join them"! He turned away his eyes from certain amount of corruption in and around his government, which would be

parency and accountability. Rene de Chateauberiand. in the Memoires d'Dutre-Tombe said 'the French must be led by dreams' - the words also dear to Charles de Gaulle. Mitterrand had plenty of that. He had a vision of the

quite unacceptable in the

matrix of conventional demo-

cratic requirement of trans-

and baffling, difficult to imprison within neat definitions'. It was also Mitterrand who along with Francesco Cossiga of Italy cooperated with Americans in installing cruise missiles in France and Italy to balance the Soviet SSI and SSII.

Thinking of France within a secure border, Mitterrand didn't hesitate for a moment in putting his weight behind Helmut Khol of Germany for a united Europe - which he wanted to achieve through his motto La France Unie. (United France). Jacques Attali, special advisor to Mitterrand for about a decade, evaluated him, and not without good reason, as the masterbuilder and architect of the Maastricht Treaty. He wanted to rope in Germany to avoid

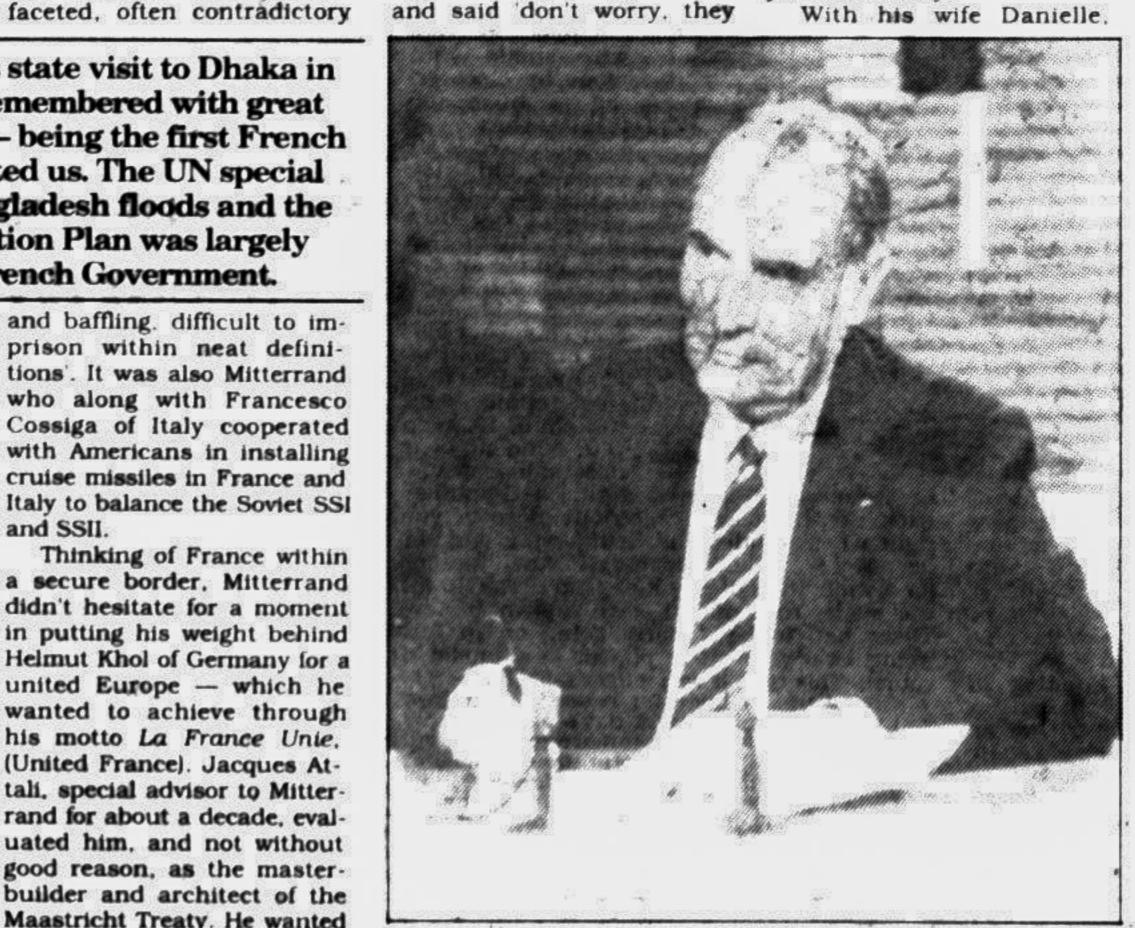
ENCHIRIDION

another Verdun, another Monte Casino. Helmut Khol extended his hand. He was quite puzzled with his inability to bring in Margaret Thatcher on board, lock stock and barrel. But he had a certain amount of admiration for her. In one of the summits prior to Maastricht when Margaret Thatcher was hand-bagging her then Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd and said 'don't worry, they

are used 'to me'. Mitterrand was non-plussed with her loud stage-whisper and is reported to have said, "She has the voice of Marylin Monroe and the eyes of Stalin!"

Mitterrand was quick to recognise the ODER-NIESSE line and vanquish Germany not with arms but through diplomacy. The European Union will be his biggest legacy and Maastricht, the historic signpost. Mitterrand knew the resonance of the city built by the Romans over 2000 years ago over the passage Masae Trajectum, passage across the Mosae river. the fortress town of the Yore traversing two-thousandyear-old history.

With his wife Danielle.



Francois Mitterrand : Bleeding heart liberal

ing world. An uncompromising supporter of the cause of the Palestinians, Mitterrand always led the European Union in endorsing the PLO cause at the UN — sometimes much to the annoyance of the United States. Today the experts at the Foggy Bottom would have words of praise for the farsightedness of the French leader in seeing the dream of a Palestinian homeland in the Biblical land of Judea and Sumeria coming to reality. It is not an accident that the first LDC International Conference took place in Paris. Danielle Mitterrand's visit to Bangladesh following the devastating floods in 1988 in still a living memory. President Mitterrand's state visit to Dhaka soon after in early 1990 would be remembered with great pride and satisfaction being the first French President to have visited us. The UN special meeting in NY on Bangladesh floods and the subsequent Flood Action Plan was largely advanced by the French Government. With Mitterrand's blessings trouble-shooter Bernard Kouchner along with Guilio Andreotti of Italy was credited with substantial Nordic, French and Italian pledge of support to Bangladesh to help her tide over the devastation caused by the worst floods in living memory. Francois Mitterrand seemed to have fully agreed

Mitterrand devoted consid-

erable time to understand

the problems of the develop-

with Gustave Flaubert that the French are "Le premier peuple de l'univers' (the first people in the univers) and left the world remembering Victor Hugo, "France France, sans tois le monde serait seul." (the world would be alone without you). It will indeed be difficult to fill in the void left by him.

# Bluffs by Manmohan Singh

Nikhil Chakravartty writes from New Delhi

The Prime Minister can hardly afford to place a messed-up picture of the economy before the public when the general election is round the corner. Hence, the spate of special yojanas for various deprived sections of the people like women, old age pensioners and others.

Towards the later half of his tenure as prime minister, particularly since 1986, the Rajiv government had incurred a whole lot of shortterm loans — mostly against the blue chips public-sector undertakings such as the SAIL, BEHL, the Railways and ONGC — and squandered the amount so collected on government account, that is without anything hardly been given for development purposes. These short-term loans had to be repaid and thereby a crisis of foreign exchange shortage was reached. Add to this, the immediate withdrawal of a large number NRI deposits which touched off the 1991 financial crisis. Dr Manmohan Singh did not think it necessary to enlighten his countrymen on this point. Which says volumes for this integrity.

After preparing the ground by painting the harrowing prospect of bankruptcy, our Finance Minister swiftly introduced the entire World Bank prescription of Structural Adjustment of the economy. He and his team conducted a meticulously worked out reforms programme on behalf of the World Bank and launched a subtle propaganda against the economic model of the mixed economy that had been in vogue since the fifties. This was particularly noticeable in the case of the public sector which the World Bank programme wanted to be dismantled. A tirade was launched against the very concept of public sector, never telling the public that all proposals for its revamping had been neglected by both the Indira and the Rajiv governments.

All government allocations for the public sector undertakings were stopped, while a declared policy of disinvestment was initiated. What was intriguing in the Finance Minister's scheme of things is that even the shares of profit earning public sector undertakings like the BHEL and the SAIL were also put up for disinvestment. This has shown up that the Finance Minister and his team are out to dismantle the public sector per se without bothering if they were lossmaking or profit-earning. Not that one need to have done this for securing a mega size Fund-Bank loan. Indira Gandhi's government in the eighties secured the IMF loan without the conditionality of having to dismantle the public sector. As part of the same campaign, one found the ministries running down our own public sector undertakings. The Railway Minister

speed Swiss engines turning down the much better offer of the BHEL, which had the support of the experts' committee.

For three years, it was a continuous sledge-hammer operation by the Finance Minister carrying out the dictates of the World Bank. When the controls and permit system was abolished, the government earned kudos from the public, particularly from the corporate sector. But the problem came when multinationals particularly the US giants were coaxed with all sorts of concessions to invest in India. At the beginning Dr Manmohan Singh sought to explain that unrestricted foreign investment would lead to transfer of technology which our country badly needed. But then the concessions were made to foreign investors try-

ing to capture Indian consumer goods market. And even in the infrastructure sector, there has been hardly any transfer of technology. For instance, the Enron project for the power station at Dabhol in Maharashtra involved no transfer of technology, but yet the government offered guaranteed return of 16 per cent - an unprecedented concession which no India company has ever received - though Indian corporate giants like the Tatas could easily have invested in the power sector if the government had offered them even lower guaranteed returns. The Enron deal was really scandalous. The present Maharashtra government's decision to re-negotiate it has shown up the prospect of reducing its cost by a heavy margin, which the previous Congress government never cared to bargain

For the last six months, things have not been looking up for Dr Manmohan Singh and his team. The first signs of dissonance within the government appeared when the Planning Commission drafted its midterm appraisal of the Eighth Plan. The period cover fitted in with the first three years of the economic reforms. It showed that most of the expectations held up by the economic reforms have been belied. Particularly serious has been the decline in the percentage of employment, fall in the living standards in real terms, the exports far below expectations while the debt-service charges have been going up. The price control mechanism has obviously not been working as the prices of all essential items for food consumption have gone up steeply. The picture was so disappointing that the gov-

ernment has thought it prudent not to publicise the mid-term Plan appraisal so far, and consequently the meeting of the National Development Council has been deferred indefinitely,

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister can hardly afford to place a messed-up picture of the economy before the public when the general election is round the corner. Hence, the spate of special yojanas for various deprived sections of the people like women. old age pensioners and others. These are like the socalled loan malas of the past, somehow to attract the public — the manifestation of the so-called anti-poverty programme which if fully implemented would cut into the depleted resources for development. While if these socalled yojanas are not implemented after being announced, it would damage the government's credit irreparably. Incidentally the resort would be sought

through deficit financing. The foreign exchange reserve has been seriously depleted through four years of virtual tax holiday and reckless imports. The foreign exchange reserve of the country stands somewhere near four billion dollars, while the current account deficit, is as much as five billion dollars. So, once again our government will have to go with a begging bowl to the IMF. Are

that is Dr Manmohan Singh. - Mandira The writer is an Editor of

So much for the gentus

we heading for Mexico?

Mainstream'.

## On "Take Care"

Sir, I was very delighted to read the letter "Take Care" in the 5th January issue, not because I was informed about sexual harassment of a sort going on in educational institutions in my country, but to see that somebody finally had voiced a complaint in national level about it.

In personal circles, I have heard about incidents of this kind from my friends who are/were students at institutions (both public and private) in Bangladesh. I have been a student in the US for a while, and from my experience there, I know that sexual harassment of various types are accepted as a reality in educational institutions around the world. They have rules and procedures to deal

Being a teaching assistant in a university, I was instructed to be careful about such matters — in not committing one, and not giving a student the chance to make a false allegation of this sort. Also, it is a strictly observed practice in the US institutions never to be romantically involved with a student while teaching a class he/she is in. If an allegation is proved to be true, an instructor may be

subjected to various punitive

actions ranging from mild admonition to losing a job. In more serious cases, he/she would be tried in court of

The educational institutions of Bangladesh, not being outside human domain, cannot deny the occurrence of sexual harassment in them. There is no shame in recognising it when we are only human. However, it will be a great shame if we ignore this problem and let it expand. It is high time the institutions at least constructed an institutional procedure to deal with and record the occurrence of such incidents.

Enam Ahmed Chowdhury Dhaka-1205

## The name United **Nations**

Sir, Recently we have observed the 50th birth anniversary of the United Nations Organisation. As far as my knowledge goes, this name "United Nations" was proposed by Sir Winston Churchill who doesn't require any introduction. He had picked up this name from the last verse of an English poem. I have exerted much pressure on my memory to remember the name of the poet and the poem, but miserably failed.

for instance ordered high-

I shall feel most obliged if any of the esteemed readers may please let me know through these columns the name of the poet and the last verse or the whole poem from which Sir Churchill had picked up the name. Was it Milton or any other poet?'

Unfortunately even the Dictionary of Politics, 1967 edition which I possess, does not contain this fact.

K R Zakhmi Khulna

## Fly-overs needed

Sir, This is to draw you kind attention to the ever increasing traffic jam problem in Dhaka about which a lot has been said, although very little is done. It is now wellknown that people from far off places reach Dhaka in 3-4 hours but can not move 3-4 miles within the city wasting hours in jams almost everywhere.

To solve this problem steps like traffic discipline and police vigilance have been increased but there is hardly any tangible improvement. The over-bridges being built here and there will no doubt reduce the risk of accident somewhat and en-

able people to get across roads but this will be far from any help in doing away with

What is most urgently needed is the construction of fly-overs at least at ten important intersections like Gulistan, Jatrabari, Mohakhali, Maghbazar and Farmgate. Unless this is done there will be no real change in the awful situation. Construction of fly-overs will let traffic flow smoothly without causing unnecessary jams and all the accompanying problems. I hope, whatever the cost, this unavoidable step will be initiated without any

Faruguddin Ahmed Minto Road, Dhaka

further loss of time.

Imran's hospital Sir, It is highly regrettable to learn that a democratically elected government itself is obstructing the very democratic practices it was supposed to allow, just for the sake of safeguarding its own political interest. This is in reference to the Pakistani government's attempts to block fund-raising for the now celebrated Shawkat Khanum Cancer Hospital founded in Lahore by its most legendary cricketer, Imran

Khan. Just under what ground is he being prevented from fund-raising in government schools and colleges when he had done so in the past? Even his hospital advertisements have been banned from the state-run PTV! Television is for the people, but unfortunately. governments in the subcontinent are still monopolising

The Pakistan premier's

sports advisor, Sarfraz Nawaz released an unexplicable statement that no advertisements with "political intention" can be entertained on TV. I have watched all of Imran's advertisements and fail to find anything political in asking plainly for donation to the hospital's Zakat fund, etc. but in any case, it is his right to advertise, his right to raise fund and definitely his right to criticize politicians. This is a part of democracy. But why resort to what amounts to spreading lies (again, from Mr Sarfraz) that poor people are turned away and only the rich and affluent are given treatment, when reportedly 21,043 patients have been treated absolutely free-of-cost leven without the Rs. 50 registration forms)? At least, we did not expect Ms. Benazir's government to stoop to such practices only to discredit a 'potential' politician. In real-

ity, such policies are only robbing these poor people who cannot afford such expensive cancer treatment from their only chance of

We pray and hope, Imran and the hospital emerge a winner in their fight against cancer ... and petty politics!

Ayesha Farzana

hope and survival.

### Dhanmondi, Dhaka-1209 EC and FEMA

Sir. We are shocked and disappointed to know that the Election Commission (EC) will not allow independent, non-partisan observers like FEMA, to observe the elections as was allowed in 1991 by the interim government of Justice Shahabuddin

This obviously suggests that the EC and the BNP government want to hide the balloting and counting process from the people

We think the EC should request FEMA to monitor all aspects of the election process including being present when the counting would be done. This would convince the voters that the whole electoral process is being administered and conducted impartially, leading them to believe the outcome of results.

M A Rahim 67, Manda, Dhaka