

Act Fast

Singled out and condemned strongly as the culable party in last Thursday's tale of civic sufferings, the Water Supply and Sewage Authority (WASA) of Dhaka has stirred forth. Its officials reportedly consulted legal experts to seek an end to a court order prohibiting the government agency to pursue its developmental plans. City dwellers would like to believe that the removal of this legal bar would pave the way for Dhaka WASA to retrieve from memory's storehouse a city unfamiliar with the phenomenon of water-logging. Even after thanking WASA generously for planting in us seeds of such banal optimism couple of questions continue to disturb the peace of our commonsense.

Did not WASA, foresee the problems while chalking up the plan to improve Dhaka's drainage system with things like box culverts and storm sewage? Or, if they saw it coming why did they get on with it in the first place knowing fully well the monstrous multiplication of miseries unfinished projects might cause? A little less indifference, a little more caring of the conscience would have spared the urbanites the trouble they had to put up with on that and many more unjudged days.

If today they attribute their helplessness in alleviating the sufferings of the city people to legal problems can it be asked in all fairness what their yesterday was occupied with? Public service? Seemingly not. Probably because Dhaka is quintessentially a metropolis begotten by unplannedness that people who live on tax-paying citizens' money as the guardians of public service, can get away with such mayhem of commonsense.

WASA must fight out of the mess it is in, fast. We believe given an integrated approach and coordination among the concerned quarters, it should not take long to see the deadlock off because the matter is of public interest. Looking beyond the legal wrangle, the formation of a task force looks like what the doctor ordered. Let a high powered committee deal with the snags and bottlenecks hindering WASA's performance.

What To Do with Returnees

The evacuation of the Bangladesh working force from UAE, coming as unfriendly and as suddenly as a bolt from the blue, has three main aspects the government will find it hard to grapple satisfactorily. First, how to get all of them out before the cut-off date, September 30, secondly, what will happen to those who cannot make it by the deadline and what can the government do to minimise their ordeal; three, what will the government do about the returnees.

The first two tasks are gigantic. But the government is completely seized of the facts and needs of the case and we believe it will do all in its power to get the best results out of an impossible situation. But aspect number three is more important in many ways. One thing must be ruled out at the outset. The returnees must not be put on a dole-list. The government has much more to do for them if it can appreciate what expatriates had been doing for our nation over the years. Almost all of the 100,000-plus Bangladeshi expatriates in UAE have been regularly remitting money back home, whatever the seem. Expatriate money is surely one great mainstay of our national economy.

How can we repay that at their time of the greatest need? The foreign nations do not pay the expatriates for nothing. Each of them have to be good value for the money they get. Not all of them are unskilled labour hands. Most have by now picked up some trades and professions and certain skills. We propose to the government that a separate fund be founded to set up the repatriates according to their capacity — in business and in jobs. The last thing that should happen to them is for them to become liabilities for the society.

The UAE action should have come with some notice. We can hardly complain about it because it has also hurt our neighbours India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and the Philippines. But how can we forget how Bangladesh received Al-Nahyan when the head of the Emirates came here on a state visit. It was far more than a state visit he got — not in terms of glitter, but in warmth and in whatever he was pleased. One thought these matters of friendship bursting out of bounds of forms, also counted in interstate relationship. There is no denying we have been disappointed. Some among us placing much value on the so-called *ummah* must have been rudely shocked. Not by the decision to push out foreign workers but by the way this is being done.

Explosive Situation at CU

Yesterday was the fourth day of a BCL-imposed siege of the Chittagong University. This news by itself would show the student party in a wrong light. For this is but in reply to what has been claimed as complete takeover of the university by the Shibir — the student front of the Jamaat-e-Islami. Perhaps BCL has done an unwise thing. For, the news is that taking full advantage of the absence of general students and many teachers and officers — the Shibir has turned the whole campus into a highly fortified citadel, teeming with arms and calling in armed cadres from Jamaat strongholds such as Rajshahi. The idea is to physically render the university inaccessible to all those who do not owe their allegiance to Shibir and subscribe to their view of things. A bloody encounter is shaping up there at Fatehabad.

This comes at a moment things at Dhaka University were being ironed out with a great and sustained efforts — thanks to the stand-in VC's ungrudging pains. Although the latest news — that of JCD threatening to revert to their old programme to wreck the university's normal working — is not encouraging in any way.

The universities must again be universities and continue to be so. On Saturday a murdered student's body was found at BAU. There has been trouble at all our universities these past months. Khulna and Kushtia has joined the traditionally sick ones of Rajshahi, Chittagong and Dhaka. BUET, the model university bent on nothing but learning and performance — has also joined the wayward ones.

Here is a genuine test for the present government. Those not wanting it to succeed to bring normality and right academic atmosphere in the universities, may not quite be helpful to the government's efforts that is one part of the problem. But the worse part is when student bodies wanting the government to succeed in all respect put up impossible and mostly absurd impediments to it. Can the government do anything worthwhile without setting things right at Dhaka, or say Shah Jalal — which was the most improbable case of student fracas among all?

PRC: Prime Minister's First Official Itinerary

Interactions between Bengal and China have not been too infrequent. On a purely philosophical plane, our contacts with China can bring a lot of good to us. Whereas the Chinese were instinctively worldly-wise and pragmatic, our philosophy grew with a leaven of ascetic other-worldliness with a mix of emotionalism.

EDGAR Snow, perhaps the first historian on China could not find anything better than Alexis de Tocqueville to conceive of his inner views on China: "Men will not receive the truth from their enemies and it is very seldom offered to them by their friends." It is a truth in microcosm vis-a-vis Bangladesh.

We live in a very small world. For Bangladesh, it is even smaller. And it is fast shrinking to a point when we cannot countenance anything that may bring some good to this country. In 21 years of our existence following the August 15, 1975 tragedy, we have been telling our people that tremendous development work has been done. In the past five years in particular, a cacophony of official pronouncements has been derived into the ears to make us believe that milk and honey were round the corner. Just a little time.

The long awaited rain came to Bangladesh on 17 and is September to a thirsty parched earth of the metropolis; we thanked God and rain-god in particular, for listening to our prayers. Dhaka had experienced after all one of its most dry monsoons. But lo and behold! When the rain came it left a situation of an abstract art or a cataclysmic configuration. The *Wall Street* of Dhaka was water-logged! Knee deep water with boats plying around, the FBCCI reception for the Prime Minister had to be delayed by more than five hours! If this is the outcome of the buzz and hum of development experienced by us over the past five years then only God can save us. What happened to the FAP projects to save Dhaka? So much money was brought after the 1988 floods! UN special session was held. Jacque Attali came with President Mitterrand. But some powerful ministers of Bengal Zia even suggested — there was no flooding in 1988! But what happened to the money?

Two weeklies and one daily have not found comfort in the visit of the Prime Minister to

China. All kinds of reasonings, mostly imaginary, some wishful, are thrown around to confuse the people. Inter-state visits and *tete-a-tete* at summit level are the norms in modern day diplomacy. It has happened in the past when ambassadors and envoys took the brunt in conducting relations between the kings and emperors, satrapas and potentates. Today, communications have changed all that.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's official visit to China has to be seen in this light. I remember a day in 1980 or 1981 in New York when I bumped into an album of photographs at the residence of Ambassador KM Kaiser. We were trying to speak to Prof Shamsul Huq and later president Ziaur Rahman in Guinea for getting up-to-date release of SAMS Kibria, as Kurt Waldheim wanted, for appointing him as ESCAP's Executive Secretary. The album to me was an experience never to be forgotten: Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Rahman's visits to China in 1954 and 1957. The photographs showed how warmly received was the young Bengali leader by both Mao Tse Tung and Chou En Lai. Numerous other photos showed the Bengali leader with other Chinese leaders, including the People's Liberation Army. Chou En Lai's visit to Dhaka in 1956 again gave the two leaders an opportunity to meet.

China is a continent by itself. So is India. Interactions between Bengal and China have not been too infrequent. On a purely philosophical plane, our contacts with China can bring a lot of good to us. Whereas the Chinese were instinctively worldly-wise and pragmatic, our philosophy grew with a leaven of ascetic other-worldliness with a mix of emotionalism. Confucius could appear only in China whereas Buddha could only come in India. The

Venetian globe-trotter Marco Polo visited the court of Kubla Khan in 1271 and witnessed the great splendours in China. commerce and culture flourishing, Kubla Khan's kingdom bequeathed to us one of the greatest works of art, the unfinished poem, *Xanadu*. The pleasure garden of Kubla Khan is both a precursor of symbolism and surrealism. Pax Britannica of the 19th century gave way to the Pax Americana of the present. We should be ready, therefore, to see the next millennium with China and India as dominant actors in the region. The Greek historian Megasthenes was in Pataliputra where Chan-drangupta Maurya established

stay. Motia Chowdhury must have taken advantage of the visit in learning better tools in using back home. With Hong Kong becoming a part of China in 1997, the Prime Minister has shown great vision and statesmanship in spending the last leg of her tour in the British colony. We have to bring investment at a speed which will beat other negative factors impeding speedy economic growth. With over a billion dollar commitment in the private sector and more offers coming, it is not at all an impossible task to attain 7 per cent GDP growth and raising the investment growth rate to 25 per cent. in the security sec-

non-intervention," he said. "China advised for a political settlement. China is ready to give aid for rehabilitation of East Pakistan economy. The Chinese press did not publicise the Indo-Soviet treaty. China intends to strengthen relations with Afghanistan, Ceylon, Nepal and Bosnia. China would like to see Pakistan active in the politics of Indo-China."

Kaiser was not sure about the nature of Chinese help in case of a war between India and Pakistan. He added: "Private sources indicated that arms shipment to Pakistan since March 25, 1971 was almost nil." The strategic thinking of China was that the National Liberation War in Bengal would go in favour of the people of Bangladesh. Kaiser opted for Bangladesh much later. Because of China connection, he was sent to Burma by Bangabandhu as our ambassador.

China is a many splendidly reality. While they slowed down their military shipment to Pakistan during our War of Liberation, China vetoed our entry to the UN till September 17, 1974. Since then relationship has grown at a steady pace. It is interesting to note that a diplomat from Bangladesh played the role of a catalyst in arranging Kissinger's secret visit to China, which was followed by the historic Sino-American summit. Soon after we started working together, Bangladesh, as a member of the Security Council, came to the assistance of China in the adoption of the cease-fire resolution on China-Vietnam conflict in 1980. I clearly remember the snowy day in which over a dozen sessions took place between the Chinese ambassador and our PR to thrash out the resolution. Norwegian Ole Olgard and Swedish PR Thunberg together helped us craft this resolution bringing to an end the conflict

that was an embarrassment for the Chinese.

A resurgent China with 13 per cent GDP growth was the natural first stop of the Prime Minister. Besides investment and trade, China is a good example of history being put in perspective. China is one country where any effort to distort history is universally derided. The brutality of the colonial Europe figures as prominently in Chinese history as the shameful opium wars imposed on China. Japanese occupation of Manchuria or the prevention of China from occupying its rightful place in the United Nations till 26th session of the UNGA in 1971 are textbook primers in China. Don't we have a lot to learn from them in this regard as well?

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib would muse about China: I heard him speaking about China several times while in Geneva in 1972. In 1973 also, while on a short stay in Geneva on our way back from Ottawa Commonwealth summit, he mentioned about his visits to China in the early 50s and need for appropriate relationship with this big Asian neighbour. He was unhappy about Pakistan's role for pressurising China in withholding recognition of Bangladesh, though he was supremely confident that the day was not far off when the recognition would come.

Sheikh Hasina's China visit in 1993 as opposition leader and the present official visit as the Chief Executive of the country closer one chapter — an important chapter in the two countries' relationship. The window of opportunity that opens up with the latest visit also brings Bangladesh closer to the millennial change taking place in the Pacific Rim. With Myanmar becoming an ASEAN member, Bangladesh will then be connected overland with the Association of South East Asia. We can act as the SAARC bridge to take advantage of the momentous developments of the Asia Pacific century to the benefit of not only Bangladesh but the whole South Asian region.

Consumers will demand greater quality, value, service and satisfaction.

The no-confidence vote that consumers have cast regarding local products not only reflects on the local enterprises and their capabilities; it is also a clear denunciation of the policies of past Governments and their administrators and agents who have failed to create an environment in which local products can succeed and thrive when exposed to competition. This setback is perhaps reversible if it exhorts the key players to act decisively on the consumer's vote. In the adversarial ones that have often prevailed. Through this new relationship they must create a vision of the future that both parties are committed to. In this vision, the idea of serving the consumer is paramount. It is high time that the rules of the game are redefined by the new Government along with industry owners and managers so that a winning strategy can evolve. It can be done when the players muster their genuine willingness to respond to the challenges.

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ENCHIRIDION

Walid Rahman



his Pax Indiana, while about the same time, the greatest Hun ruler Wu-Ji brought the great Chinese peace in central and eastern Asia.

The visit of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to China achieved all that was set out in the agenda. The four agreements including a 30-million-yuan grant and a 100-million-yuan soft loan were signed during the visit. Besides one agreement on the avoidance of double taxation was also signed paving the way for qualitative improvement in future Chinese investment in Bangladesh. China has already taken a big part in the improvement of infrastructure in the country. Their phenomenal success in literacy, in crime prevention, in population control and poverty alleviation must have figured prominently during the visit of the Prime Minister. Agriculture is still our main-

tor also there is considerable cooperation between the two countries and there is no reason why the two countries cannot work together to sustain this cooperation. Certain needed emphasis on the further development of bilateral defence cooperation will be an important factor to negate any fear, real or perceived, of the so-called axis known to have played a role in the tension-ridden events of 18-20 May, 1996.

It is true that China initially acted against our Liberation struggle. But China also did not come to the assistance of Pakistan, as the Pakistan military-bureaucratic combine made the world believe, when the crunch came. Ambassador KM Kaiser not particularly sympathetic to our cause at that time, in his remarks at the Pakistan Envoy's Conference in Geneva, on August 24, and 25, 1971, stated the obvious: "China wanted

Meeting the Threat of International Competition

by Dr Syed Saad Andaleeb

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Unfortunately, a cursory survey of a variety of local firms indicates that, even when faced with serious competition, they do not invest in market research that can provide crucial information. To thwart competitors, they must learn to track consumer needs over time because the ultimate route to success in the marketplace is via winning the hearts and minds of the consumer.

For far too long, the protected industries have continued to thrash shoddy, cheap unsafe, and unhygienic products on the hapless consumer. Many of these products would not see the light of day in the international market. And the consumer has suffered many a tribulation from these generally undesirable products. As they suffered, apparently, they did not forget their bad experience. The quick dominance of foreign products bear testimony to this contention.

It is important first to see where the local products have failed the better-deserving consumers of Bangladesh. To do so, selected Bangladeshi products were rated relative to foreign products. Feedback was obtained directly from the consumers through a survey. Because of resource con-

straints, a small but adequate sample was conveniently selected. Three product categories — toothpaste, detergents, and fruit-juices — were examined. Data were collected by a small group of inquisitive and enthusiastic students from Independent University, Bangladesh, a private university in the country.

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Another message to the local industrial enterprises is that while conditions of a seller's market may have lulled them into complacency, open market conditions will no longer allow that state to continue. Given the resurgence that Asian entrepreneurs (from Malaysia, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Singapore, and others in the region) are demonstrating, the wake-up

call that Bangladeshi consumers have placed to local entrepreneurs to shape up or take a back seat to more enterprising products that cater better to consumer needs in Bangladesh.

It is also crucial for the Government to play a more supporting and professional role with local entrepreneurs. This requires the adoption of several steps that include rooting out corruption (Bangladesh ranked No. 4 in corruption behind Nigeria, Pakistan and Kenya in a recent Time Magazine report), easing the many restrictions and barriers that the Government continues to impose on its business community, providing access to information on market conditions, and staying out of the daily affairs of the entrepreneurs. By doing so, it can help local entrepreneurs become more vibrant and self-reliant. Eventually, local industries could become a competitive force, first at home and then in the more daunting export markets where more dis-

trictive rules are imposed. This setback is perhaps reversible if it exhorts the key players to act decisively on the consumer's vote. In this regard it is important for the Government and industry to forge partnership relations and abandon the adversarial ones that have often prevailed.

These ratings indicate where Bangladeshi products are deficient and lack their competitive edge. One clear message is that local entrepreneurs must learn to compete on both price and non-price variables. Economic products are not necessarily what all consumers want as reflected by market segments who want other benefits (e.g., social esteem and status). Marketers must strive to provide these benefits.

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Mr Shahrukh also questioned about Zia's patriotism and at the same time he blamed the writer not to mention the name of the founding father of the nation. He wanted to say that Ziaur Rahman was not really a patriot. Suppose that Ziaur Rahman was not really a patriot, then what about Sheikh Mujib? How the so-called "paralysed generations" thinks that Sheikh Mujib Rahman was a man of real patriotic zeal? I only want to mention the Parakka issue. The new generation thought that Sheikh Mujib was responsible for the suffering caused by Farakka. Because, when India finished the construction of the Farakka Barrage, it signed a treaty with Bangladesh by which it got the permission to test experiment the effectiveness of the newly built barrage. The question is: why Bangladesh permitted to do so? What was our necessity? What was our national interest of Bangladesh? How could a great patriot like Sheikh Mujib ignore the sufferings of his own people?

Mr Shahrukh also questioned about the awareness of real history, I think him. History says that the rise of the Bangladeshi nation older than the rise of Sheikh Mujib. Haji Ilia is the founder of Bangladeshi nation. Because he for the first time united the whole Bengal zone and from then Bangladeshi nationalism arose.

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RAJUK's Explanation

In the issue of September 18, 1996 of "The Daily Star" there was an editorial under the caption "RAJUK Must Explain". Attention of the RAJUK has particularly been drawn to the subject of collapsing of buildings either during construction or after construction in the Dhaka city areas which falls within RAJUK's jurisdiction.

With regard to the construction of buildings of whatever nature, height, dimension or design, the law that governs such construction is "The Building Construction Act, 1952". Under the existing rules and laws, any person willing to construct any building as residential, commercial etc., a building plan consisting of architectural design in its different phases, prepared by architects, is submitted to the Building Construction Committee (B.C. Committee). RAJUK has its examination and approval.

This particular plan is commonly known as the architectural design plan of the building proposed to be constructed on a particular site. Corresponding to such architectural design plan, structural design has to be prepared by an engineer or under the supervision of an engineer. All these design plans are prepared at the responsibility of the persons wishing to construct the building. The B.C. Committee, RAJUK examines only the architectural design plan vis-a-vis the site in