

## Act Fast

Singled out and condemned strongly as the culpable 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 store house 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 be it asked in all fairness what their yesterday was occupied with? Public service? Seemingly not. Probably because Dhaka is quintessentially a metropolis begotten by unplanned 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 profession 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 a what has been claimed by 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 frequent. 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.*

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, satraps 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 late president Ziaur Rahman in Guinea for getting urgent release of S A M S 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 Mujibur 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. Chow 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 frequent. 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 Chandragupta Maurya established

slay. Motia Chowdhury must have taken advantage of the visiting 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 splendoured 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 half a dozen sessions took place between the Chinese ambassador and our PR to thrash out the resolution. Norwegian Ole Olgaard 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 Mujibur 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 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 role for pressuring China in its thinking. Recognition of Bangladesh through 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 closes 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 millennium 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.

## ENCHIRIDION

Waliur 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 in poverty alleviation must have figured prominently during the visit of the Prime Minister. Agriculture is still our main-

for 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 Pakistani military-bureaucratic combine made the bold 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

*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. 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*

RECENT trade liberalization policies in Bangladesh have made a variety of foreign-made products available to local consumers. As these products continue to make inroads and gain greater market share, their challenge to the local industries will also increase. Instead of withstanding these challenges by adopting a competitive orientation, there is a tendency among local industrialists to lean toward protectionism. While such a stance may benefit some industries in the short run, reverting to protectionist ideals can be self-defeating because the actual or perceived threat of competition can have beneficial effects. For example, consumers can benefit by paying less for better and more efficiently produced goods. Moreover, foreign competition can challenge local industries to define their niches and become more efficient in these niches. After all, Bangladesh cannot be competitive in every class of products.

To gain ground against the international players requires, as a starting point, abandoning company orientations that emphasize the stance "sell what you can make"; instead, local industries must adopt a more market-driven philosophy that stresses "make what you can sell." Adoption of the latter perspective, which emphasizes the essence of long-term success, is best begun by understanding and adapting to the needs and wants of the customer. To this end, it is important that local firms conduct or invest in market research to understand, first hand, where they are weak and what is the best recourse to regaining lost market shares. By taking a proactive stance and relying on market information that monitors every

wish and desire of the consumers, a winning strategy can be devised.

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 thrust 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 experiences. The quick dominance and market share gains 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 from a group of inquisitive and enthusiastic students from Independent University, Bangladesh, a private university in the country.

The findings indicate the following: In the toothpaste category, the Bangladeshi brand was rated the lowest on attributes such as attractiveness of the package, pleasing colour, and cup-juices — were examined. Data were collected from a group of inquisitive and enthusiastic students from Independent University, Bangladesh, a private university in the country.

In the fruit-juice category, the Bangladeshi brand rated lowest on attractiveness of the package and the colours used, ease of opening the information content on the package, hygiene factor, freshness and nutritional value. However, the local brand name was again rated as most pleasing. It was also deemed most economical and matched the foreign brands on social appeal. The local brand also matched both foreign brands on ade-

quacy of the quantity provided. In the detergent category, the Bangladeshi brand rated lowest on the attractiveness of the package, pleasing colours, ease of opening the package, social appeal, protective packaging (i.e., ability to protect and preserve the package contents), quality (having no adverse effects on the skin), information content on the package, foam producing capability, cleaning ability, fragrance, and freshness imparted to the clothing. However, it was again rated as most economical.

These ratings indicate where Bangladeshi products are deficient and lack their competitive edge. One clear message that local entrepreneurs must learn to compete on both price and non-price variables. Economical 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.

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 exhorts them 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, professional role with local entrepreneurs. This requires the adoption of several steps that include rooting out corruption (Bangladesh ranked No. 4 in corruption based on 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-

cerning 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 this regard it is important for the Government and industry to forge partnership relations and abandon 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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## 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 building 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 for 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 question i.e., whether the constructing person has conformed to the requirement as to the various spaces to be left vacant around the building site plan as per rules and as to the permissible height in the locality. As far as the structural design is concerned, it is outside the purview of the Authorised Officer or B.C. Committee. RAJUK — rather it is the responsibility of the owner of the building. In its lawful responsibility, B.C. Committee, RAJUK, after being satisfied on examining

the architectural design plan submitted by the constructing person, such plan is approved.

After approval, RAJUK's responsibility goes to the extent of periodical supervision as to whether such building is being constructed as per approved plan and in that RAJUK's officials concerned particularly examine whether required spaces are left around the structure being built up. If any deviation is found, officials concerned take proper steps. In the case of failure of RAJUK's supervisory staff in such responsibility, staffs are taken to task. When any member of the public brings any deviation or other of rules or of approved plan to the notice of the authority, it is always appreciated by RAJUK. Public co-operation and participation, therefore, is always essential for developing healthy and quality construction of buildings.

In the case referred to in the write-up RAJUK has already taken action against its supervising staff for failing to take proper supervision and also on the owner of the building concerned for violation of the approved building plan, and that building plan has already been canceled. For future caution, RAJUK has already constituted a Task Force to examine and find out constructions in violation of approved plan and also to locate the endangered buildings and to take appropriate legal action.

In order to avoid repetition of such dangerous building-collapse, faulty constructions violations of approved plan and unauthorised constructions, RAJUK makes a fervent appeal to the people to construct their buildings according to the plan approved by RAJUK, using good and reliable building materials.

Secretary, RAJUK

We very much appreciate RAJUK's stance of responding to our editorial — Editor

## To the Editor...

### Advertisement and media ethics

Sir, The BTV and other media have been showing various advertisements, and in the recent times, there has been an increasing trend of advertisements highlighting cosmetics which "make the skin white from dark." And the most objectionable portion of these advertisements has been the showing that if some females are possessing dark skin, they are not going to be loved or get married.

I personally feel that this is objectionable on three grounds: a) this is a clear expression of racism as it openly advertises that dark skin is not appreciable, b) the other aspect is gender inequality — all the related advertisements show that only the dark females need to transform their skin in order to be "acceptable"; and c) the effectiveness of these so-called skin transforming cosmetics are also not unquestionable.

The other advertisement which hurts the moral of the society is that of the so-called "note-books" which are published by the various publishers. These advertisements clearly show that note-books are essential for good results. But, this is also unethical as: a) note-books cannot ensure good results rather they prevent the thoughts and imagination of the learners from having a free thought and virtually destroy the desire to learn and create and b) the quality of these 'note-books' is also debatable.

So, I believe the media should re-examine these two kinds of advertisements. Media as a vehicle of the standard of the society must uphold the ethical standards also and must have the dignity to express the just. It has definitely nothing to lose in any terms if these types of ridiculous and unethical advertisements are stopped immediately.

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### Preventive cure

Sir, Recently, we have been coming across news about police-muggers clashes. It is no doubt a good news to know that our police have come forward to take drastic measures like shooting out criminals while disarming their duty. At the same time, it is also very painful to know that many pedestrian and other innocents got killed in such encounters. The situation is indeed very crucial. Our police have got to play their part to remain brutal against criminals but at the same time, must also do something to protect or safeguard the innocent people.

I suggest that police should introduce a loud peached siren on such situation and in graves condition — like in crowded public movement — they should use tranquilliser bullets at muggers, robbers etc. Later, put them to imprisonment. I strongly believe in the proverb "Prevention is better than cure." So, why must we wait for things to happen. To prevent crime,

criminals have got to be properly manoeuvred for instance, constant raids on every suspicious dents. Stop every suspects for vigorous body check. The law enforcing agency should remain severe against any nepotism or in any regards no political or outside influence.

K Viqar Mohiuddin  
Dhaka

### "Paralysed Generation"

Sir, At first I would like to thank you for your liberal attitude to express different opinions of different persons in your newspaper.

On September 10, 1996 a write-up by Dilara Begum, was published in *The Daily Star* under the heading "Paralysed Generation". And September 16, 1996 a letter was published in this paper and that was also under the same heading. In the second one, Shaikhur Sohel questioned that how did the family of Ziaur Rahman, made several crores within a few years for that question. But what I would like to say that Dilara Begum opines her beliefs and she said nothing in favour of Zia's family members. She emphasised on some values of honesty patriotism etc. May be Zia's family members are corrupted. But it is a very simple logic that an honest person is not responsible for his relatives' dishonesty after his death. The fact is that Ziaur Rahman did not favour his relatives when he was in power.

Mr Shaikhurukh 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 the Ziaur Rahman was not really a patriot, then what about Sheikh Mujib? How the so-called "paralysed generations" thinks that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was a man of real patriotic zeal? I only want to mention the Farakka issue. The new generation thought that Sheikh Mujib was responsible for the sufferings 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 national interest of Bangladesh is gained in return of this? How could a great patriot like Sheikh Mujib ignore the sufferings of his own people?

Mr Shaikhurukh also questioned about the awareness of real history. I thank him. History says that the rise of the Bangladesh nation older than the rise of Sheikh Mujib. Haji Ilias is the founder of Bangladesh nation. Because he for the first time united the whole Bengal zone and from then Bengalee nationalism arose.

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