

Trivialising JS?

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has requested opposition BNP to join the JS proceedings. Politics Bangladesh style precludes the possibility of BNP responding favourably to the call. They will have to be given an apparent look of victory — to join the JS sessions. They wanted to pressure the government by a continuous boycott and convince people that it was government which was preventing them from participating in the JS proceedings. But their move was highly premature and has produced a negative reaction among the people. Why is BNP using extraparlimentary and flimsy excuses to stay out? How will this benefit them even party-wise — there being no question of its benefiting the nation?

The question is who can win if the nation loses. Who does the Jatiya Sangsad belong to? Not the Prime Minister, nor even the full house of all members. It is the nation seating itself there in a convenient size. Whoever trivialises the JS, down-sizes the nation in numerous and very important aspects. Perhaps quite unknowingly BNP has done exactly that, filing out of the JS without giving sufficient warning and chance, and presenting afterwards a 10-point condition for coming back and subsequently reducing it to three. To insist that this is not a boycott but mere absence does not lessen the wrong of treating JS as a plaything. Possibly it didn't occur to the opposition leader that absence *en masse* and *sine die* can be seen as serious misdemeanour which boycott, being in practice, cannot be construed to be. Here we would like to add that the treasury bench also did not give an ideal example of parliamentary practice. Ministers spoke out of turn to attack BNP which they needn't have, resulting in greater venom in each other's rhetoric.

There is every reason to hope that the next session will see the opposition take their JS seats. After all BNP wants to come back, for very good reasons, and AL will be only too happy to welcome them in.

The Prime Minister can be of help here and very effectively too. She can unilaterally decide to instruct BTV to cover it in full. This has been one important point with BNP and we think it is valid. This realised they can march to the Sangsad to the nation's relief.

Tribute to Prof Salam

In Nobel laureate Abdus Salam's death theoretical science has lost a father figure. Not only did he dedicate his rare genius to the altar of pure physics but also left, alongside the rich legacy of original thoughts, a maieutic institution in Trieste for the young aspiring practitioners of science from the Third World.

Although there is much to take pride in the global recognition of Prof Salam as a physicist of exceptional merit, a lot is left to be desired in the people's attitude of the region he hailed from.

Pursuance of the theoretical branch of science has apparently been on the wane in this part of the world. The fact of there being no universal recognition for anyone in the field of science from this belt after Mr Salam is a cogent argument for the observation of depressing state in the realm of science studies.

The psychological bent of a people of a particular place at a certain point of history cannot be solely blamed for this dangerous trend. Economic constraint and the sad absence of visionary elements in those who run the governments in this region have also contributed to the reality of flagging interest in science studies.

The enthusiasm and popular interest with which the applied aspect of scientific advancement has struck roots in this region is sadly missing in the study of theoretical part of science.

Myopic wisdom has its logic in marginalising theoretical study of science on the grounds of it being less rewarding but extending vision both into future and past one shouldn't find it difficult to realise that with proper and parallel feeding background of theoretical science, applied science will always be a source of delight and wonder for the achievement of original thinkers in the west.

A more meaningful and genuine mode of paying homage to the departed soul of Prof Salam would be to do something for the cause he lived for. Will the death of a savant contribute to a rekindling of interest in the purer and theoretical aspect of science, in the developing world, something his lifetime could not witness?

Barbaric

The frightening ebbing of human faculty in modern man had a case registered in its favour in the older part of Dhaka yesterday. Suman, a young man who reportedly had come to the court in connection with a case lodged against him, was taken away by two boys for a chat over a cup of tea. Suman did not or could not come back to the place of his purpose. He had to be rescued from an abandoned house at Sankharipatty with both his hands chopped off. The poor chap, having lost his hands to inerrable brutality of fellow human beings, is undergoing treatment.

Suman could be a criminal and those took out their barbaric wrath on him could have a case of suffering at the hands of the victim. But is there any crime which calls for such brutal act of vengeance making a mockery of man's unique capacity for reason and forgiveness? It shows how deep depravity has invaded into our moral imagination. We seem to be regressing to the days of Abel and Cain.

We want exemplary punishment of those who maimed Suman so that people think twice before desecrating man's status by committing such crimes.

Consumption and Investment Pattern in Rural Bangladesh

The rate of investment at about 13-14 per cent in rural areas seem reasonable given the fact that the whole of it is private investment. In Bangladesh, the share of private investment to GDP is said to lie in the range of 7-8 per cent... Social investment nowadays tends to claim a better slice out of total investment package.

UNDENIABLY, agriculture continues to hold the key to the process of our economic growth and development. Agricultural sector contributes 35 per cent of our GDP and involves over half of our active population. Thanks to the advent of irrigation-led modern technology that facilitated the growth of foodgrain production at a much faster pace. However, given that the largest agricultural sector is rural based where four-fifths of the population live, the pattern of consumption and investment taking place therein have a lot to say about the dynamics in place in rural areas and its linkages with urban based industries. To this effect, the statistics that would be used in the following paragraphs were drawn heavily from a recently concluded survey of rural households conducted by the Centre for Human Resources Development (HRD), Jahangirnagar University in 1995. The survey covered 22 villages and 425 households. However, presented below are preliminary findings and one needs to be cautious to arrive at a on-to final conclusion.

Consumption Expenditure

Economic theory tells us that with a rise in income, people tend to switch over to more income-elastic goods. This means that food items are less preferred to non-food ones at

the higher levels of income. For example, the income elasticity of demand for rice was estimated, by Dr. Mahabub Hossain, at 0.18 implying that a 10 per cent rise in income would lead to 1.8 per cent rise in demand for rice in Bangladesh. However, rural households made, on average, 56 per cent of their yearly expenditure on cereals items in 1995. This can be compared with about 52 per cent as found by the Household Expenditure Survey (HES) 1991/92. However, households in high irrigated villages (HIVs) where per capita income was estimated to be higher (\$296), the share of cereals stood at about 57 per cent compared to 61 per cent in low irrigated villages (LIVs) with a per capita income of \$226. Survey results further showed that the sample households tended to make three per cent of yearly expenditure each on treatment and education. Almost the same share of expenses were claimed by the household consumption of fish, meat, consumption of fruits and vegetables accounted for seven per cent of the yearly expenditure in HIVs and 4 per cent in LIVs.

For the sake of better understanding of the consumption-induced linkage effects in rural

areas, consumable items were grouped as crops, forestry, fisheries, livestock, rural and urban processing, and service items. Households with relatively low per capita income tend to spend relatively more on crop items (55 per cent) compared to higher income households (about 45 per cent). This is not surprising given the eco-

nomic theory that as income goes up, demand for income elastic good also goes up. High income households spent about nine per cent of their yearly expense on forestry products compared to five per cent in low income households. Rural processing items (gur, bidi, tobacco, sweets, mustard oil, handloom clothes etc) accounted for about five per cent in both HIVs and LIVs. However, commodities that are processed in urban areas (e.g. sugar, tea, cigarettes, soyabean oil, toiletries, im-

ported clothes, readymade garments etc) claimed about 14 per cent of the budget in HIVs and nine per cent in the LIVs. Again service items also had a large proportion in HIVs. *Empassant*, one needs to bear in mind that it is the marginal budget share, rather than the average budget share that has been talked about so far, which is more im-

portant and relevant for policy purposes. We hope to brief the reader about the marginal budget share in future.



Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes

Reinvestment of Surplus

Investment is defined as the addition to the value of fixed assets and working capital. Such investment can be categorised into two types: (a) directly productive and (b) indirectly productive. It is generally known as social investment — an investment expenditure which is likely to upgrade hu-

man capital and thus uplift productivity of the labour force in the long-run. Such social investment items include spending on housing and cattle sheds, tubewells, latrines, education etc. It may be mentioned here that households are observed to be engaged in a number of transactions such as purchase and sale of land, receipt and repayment of loans and interest, expenses on account of litigation etc. These are called transfer items and when added to the total investment gives us investible surplus.

sanitation, education and housing? Probably yes because at lower level of income, subsistence pressure pulls the fund towards meeting both ends.

The CHRD conducted survey also showed that landless households of HIVs left aside five per cent of total expenditure for investment purposes. This can be compared with two per cent in LIVs. Half of the total investment by the landless households in HIVs was made for social development. Small farm households in HIVs earmarked about one-fourth of the total expenditure for investment purposes compared to only 12 per cent in LIVs.

The discussions on investment pattern of the sample households seem to lead to the following conclusions: first, the rate of investment at about 13-14 per cent in rural areas seem reasonable given the fact that the whole of it is private investment. In Bangladesh, the share of private investment to GDP is said to lie in the range of 7-8 per cent. We feel that the private investment figures (and hence savings figures) are grossly underestimated in Bangladesh. Second, social investment nowadays tends to claim a better slice out of total investment package. The information so generated tends to forstall the premise that technological progress is the easy answer to the uneasy questions about social investment.

Andre Malraux in Bangladesh

Today (23rd November) the last mortal remains of Andre Malraux will be transferred to Pantheon, in Paris. Pantheon is the monument which houses the remains of great Frenchmen who have contributed in different fields, Andre Malraux will be placed in Pantheon with great pomp and ceremony in presence of President Chirac.

1970 when in November a devastating cyclone hit the Bay of Bengal and left half a million dead. East Pakistan deprived of everything, did not even have a helicopter to overfly the region, received help from the world over as the government in Islamabad remained a spectator.

A month after this natural calamity general elections were held, organised by the head of government General Yahya Khan, who had declared martial law. The elections brought about results that the Pakistani military or bureaucrats could not have imagined, the Pakistani voters in a certain fashion voted for the partition of Pakistan. In West Pakistan, Pakistan People's Party obtained a good score whereas in East Pakistan, Awami League of the charismatic leader Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who had campaigned for autonomy, won 167 seats out of 300 seats in the Pakistani parliament, that is an absolute majority. In fact Sheikh Mujibur Rahman should have become the Prime Minister of Pakistan — an unacceptable situation for the Pakistani authorities.

President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who had powerful allies among the military and high civil officials, was the first to oppose. In order to gain time, General Yahya Khan pretended to negotiate with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, but in reality prepared the military strike against the civilian population of East Pakistan. Without notice he cancelled the first session of the National Assembly due on first March 1971. This was the spark which ignited the powder, when Dhaka lived the heady days of a revolution, following the election victory. The people, who demonstrated in the streets and shouted slogans



The Horizon This Week

Arshad-uz Zaman

against exploitation by West Pakistan, rose in revolt. Pakistani flag and national anthem were replaced by Bangladesh flag and national anthem composed by Tagore, which the people always sang. On 7 March 1971 Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman delivered a speech before a crowd of one million. This was a historic speech for the Bangalee nation and the most important of his political career. In a solemn voice he declared: The struggle this time is the struggle for emancipation, the struggle this time is the struggle for Independence. And he called upon the Bangalees to resist the enemy by everything at his disposal. On 25 March 1971, a little before midnight Pakistani army arrested him and let loose massacre against the civilian Bangalee people. The Bangalees started then their glorious War of Liberation. Never had they been so united for such a noble cause — freeing the motherland.

At the outset the Bangalees were defenseless, silenced by the Pakistan army equipped with tanks, rockets and most modern weapons. But the resistance did not take long to organise itself, first among the military and the police followed by the Bangalee youth, who rushed to the Indian border, where training camps were quickly established. Once the guerrilla was organised, more audacious attacks were launched, which demoralized

the Pakistan army far from her base and frightened by the spectacle of monsoon. Although the Liberation War lasted nine months only, the number of dead and destruction have been colossal. Three million died, two hundred thousand women were raped by the Pakistan army, ten million sought refuge in neighbouring India, thousands of houses were destroyed and entire villages burnt down. After nine months of war Bangladesh lay in ruins.

These events have strongly mobilized international public opinion which has unani-mously condemned Pakistani atrocities. World opinion was deeply shocked by the tragedy of the Bangalees, whose electoral victory was cruelly snatched by Pakistani military, and who were fleeing by the million faced with Pakistani soldiers bent upon exterminating them.

The media, artists and intellectuals have played a pioneering role. In 1971 I was director of Public Relations of the East Pakistan government. After 25 March I remained in my post but without any work, because a bureaucrat arrived from West Pakistan and did everything with the help of the military. Although they tried twice to transfer me abroad, I managed to stay in Dhaka. And this was the most passionate moment of my life, because I too, I was contributing to our War of Liberation. In the beginning I arranged for the safety of my five hundred employees spread

throughout the country. Later I met clandestinely foreign journalists, who had been expelled from East Pakistan, who were returning through circuitous routes within two months. Most of them were my friends whom I had known in Europe and the USA. I supplied them with information regarding the War, information collected by my young colleagues specially from border regions where the guerrilla was very active.

The name Andre Malraux remains engraved in the memory of the Bangalees. Malraux not only condemned the barbarism of the Pakistan army, he offered himself as a volunteer to fight beside the 'Mukti Bahini'.

His call I recall to this day. This gentleman aged 72, known throughout the world, ready to fight by our side, has deeply touched the Bangalee. Malraux had a multidimensional personality: writer with a very personal style, explorer and specialist in archeology, which led him to Asia, where he was very young, Malraux was an intellectual but a man of action par excellence. As a young man he did not hesitate to join the War in Spain and later during the Second World War, responded to the call of General De Gaulle to free France from German occupation. This created very solid bonds among the two men, which would last the lifetime. It is thus Malraux, who became the first Cultural Minister of the French Republic.

After the independence of Bangladesh the government did not forget to invite Andre Malraux. As Chief of Protocol of the Foreign Ministry I was the first to welcome him when he arrived at the Dhaka airport in March 1973. I accompanied him throughout his tour of four days in Bangladesh. On alighting from the plane he was covered with bouquets of flowers and the first words uttered by him were a homage to the martyrs of the Liberation War. He received all honours that a newly independent country was capable of offering him and was lodged as an exceptional gesture in the presidential Palace — Bangabhaban.

The programme of Malraux began with a visit to the National Monument of Savar which is about forty kilometres from Dhaka. The foundation stone was laid by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman shortly before. Sun was setting as Malraux arrived. The soldiers stood to attention. The national flag fluttered in the air. I shall never forget his gestures before the camera of the French Television, which had accompanied him and which filmed all his activities. I discovered in him a man of the stature of General De Gaulle. In fact Malraux behaved in public like an actor perpetually on stage. On the occasion of

an official lunch at the presidential palace, where I was the interpreter, Malraux met president of the Republic Abu Sayeed Chowdhury, who played a big role in the War of Liberation. He was a personality of impeccable honesty, who mobilised world public opinion for our War. Chowdhury spoke about his experiences in different world capitals and particularly Paris. Then he touched upon discreetly a subject which agitated the minds of the Bangladeshi authorities: to become member of the UN. China opposed the move because she supported her friend — Pakistan, who had helped her to open the dialogue in 1971 with the Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. We had heard that Malraux had the ears of Chinese leaders but he replied to Chowdhury that he did not have contact with them since many years.

President Chowdhury accompanied Malraux to the University of Rajshahi, in the north of Bangladesh, where he received a Doctorate Honoris Causa. I accompanied him to the small museum of Rajshahi which he found pretty rich in archeological objects. Malraux showed his emotion when he was received in the Presidential Palace by the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who had organised a large lunch in his honour. He listened with rapt attention the history of the struggle of the Bangalee people and also met many eminent personalities during the lunch. Malraux's stay included a visit to the Shaheed Minar and a meeting with the students of the Dhaka University. Malraux was very much at ease with the youth and he showed a great respect for these students, who had played such a big part in liberating their country. I received Malraux as President of the Alliance Francaise. When he came to deliver a speech, I accompanied him to Chittagong, this picturesque city with little hillocks, a pretty river and the sea not far away.

It is also the largest port of the country, which played a significant role during the War of Liberation. At that time it was totally blocked by sunken ships and a big effort was undertaken to clear the port in order to receive international aid. On his return to Dhaka Malraux addressed a press conference, and addressed directly through TV and gave his first impressions. He spoke of the youth, who had deeply touched him, expressed his total confidence in the future of the country, although she was healing, painfully the wounds of the war and expressed his genuine admiration for the attachment of the Bangalees to cultural life as he had witnessed them in various cultural functions.

Then it was time for departure. What I retain as the most precious souvenir, it is the book, *Antimemoirs*, published shortly before, which Malraux dedicated to me and this long friendly handshake before his departure. I shall never forget him.



Andre Malraux with Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman during the former's visit to Bangladesh.

To the Editor...

Bangalees again?

Sir, I would like to draw the readers' attention to a news item published in *The Daily Star* on 10th Nov 4, 1996, at the last part of which a statement attributed to Mr Zillur Rahman Siddiqui was given. I quote it verbatim: "75 million people of the country were all Bangalees during the Liberation War, but we observed in the 12 June elections that half of the population has now turned Bangladeshi. The nation has to be united again, all should be Bangalees again."

It is not clear as to why Mr Siddiqui seems to have realised 'now' that there are people in this country who are Bangladeshi. This very question of Bangalees and Bangladeshis was raised by Mr Suranjit Sengupta in the first parliament in the seventies. Besides, the 1991 election was won by BNP and governed they country for five years; if there were no

Bangladeshi in this country then it would not have been possible.

More importantly, "..... all should be Bangalees again", what does he mean by it?

Does he question the lack of patriotism of those who voted for BNP? Or, is he asking the government to use the state-owned media for Goebbalian propaganda to indoctrinate the people who voted for BNP?

Whatever he has meant by this statement — these are dangerous precepts to follow for a country whose democracy and democratic institutions are just emerging from the embryonic state.

One more thing, the general election results are decided by the floating voters i.e. by the voters who are not members of any political party. In 1991 election all those who voted for BNP were not Bangladeshi and it would be a great mistake to think that all those who voted for AL in 12 June 1996 election

are firm believers of Mr Siddiqui's Bangalee philosophy.

The tragedy of our nation seems to be that our intellectual scene is still dominated by the people of bygone generation who have failed to give any new idea(s) either to the nation or to the party they subscribe to during the last 25 years or so.

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November 7 politics

Sir, Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury, the acting chairman of Jatiya Party, while talking to *The Daily Star* on 5.11.96 told that his party would not observe the November 7 this year as it did not do the same in last year.

One thing he did not disclose whether they observed the day before last year.

He also did not give any hint if their party would observe the day in the future. Maybe that he

wants to keep it hidden in the miracle box.

Interesting aspect is that the AL government itself has observed it by not cancelling the government holiday on November 7.

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Food for millions

Sir, In 68 A.D. when Rome was burning, Nero Claudius Caesar was playing with his flute. In 1996 A.D. when 800 million people around the world are united the United Nations Food Organisation is singing in Rome at World Food Summit that the number of unfed people would be reduced to 400 million by the year 2015.

In 1974 World Food Conference vowed to wipe out hunger in ten years. Since then 22 years have went by but nothing so far has been achieved and

FAO has utterly failed to perform its duties and responsibilities. How long millions of people of world would continue to suffer from hunger and malnutrition?

Why so much pomp and show in Rome in the name of World Food Summit — for whose service, for whose benefit?

What about hungry millions of Afghanistan, Rwanda, Burundi, Zaire and Somalia? How the countries like Bangladesh, China and India beset with colossal population and abject penury are going to solve their food problem?

The price of food is beyond the purchasing capacity of teeming millions who are going to do away with the financial and economic hardships of the people?

Not only FAO officials, 100 world leaders and a few hundred members of their delegations need food but also 800 million hungry people require food to

eat.

The world food super-powers and G-7 countries should give up their ostentatious and lucrative foreign aid show business, write off loans for the poor nations of Asia, Africa and Latin America, build up food stock in different food deficit countries, stop the price-hike of food and contain the ever growing alarming situation.

As a token of love and empathy for the hungry millions we would request World Food Summit leaders to donate an amount equivalent to expenditures incurred by each country's delegation on TA/DA, air ticket, food and lodging for attending World Food Summit in Rome, rush food to starving Afghans, Hutus, Tutsis, Somalis, do away with the financial and economic hardships of the people? Promises for the teeming hungry men, women and children in words and deed.

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