

BB Directive

It is a fairly wise move to start with. Making it dearer for importers of consumer goods from abroad. Country's central bank has sent a directive to all the commercial banks to mark up the margin for letters of credit so that importers are automatically discouraged in their bid to flood the market with foreign products.

There appears sense in Bangladesh Bank's decision to leave the discretion of spotting for higher LC margin with the commercial banks. For, making the decisive discretion its own prerogative would have engendered great many complications. Having empowered the commercial banks with the discretionary authority, the central bank will, however, from now on be saddled with the responsibility of monitoring smooth operation of the imposition. Otherwise, the purpose of the directive -- to boost our depleted foreign exchange reserve will be defeated.

In the hindsight the restrictive measure can be termed as a welcome one come little late. That our forex was low is not a nascent revelation. We have been hearing about its depletion for quite some time. Ideally, the government should have been strict and choosy about imports long ago. Because indiscreet and indiscriminate import of luxury items has not only been eating at our forex quite unnecessarily, but also given birth to a generation of consumers unduly enamoured of brand names more often than not; though basically it is a matter of attitudinal overhauling on the part of the consumers to help bolster local industrial productivity.

Not just by clamping disincentives on the import of luxury items from abroad can the government hope to retain a sizeable forex reserve. Actually the government has to be sincere and ruthless in terms of expenditure control to bring about any marked improvement in the situation. The present forex reserve of 1800 million US dollars which provides cover for the payment of import bills of three months has reasons to spawn worry. Because countries whose forex reserve is not sufficient to cover the imports for five months are viewed as suffering from balance of pay deficits by the IMF. Together with this the fact that we are poised for IMF loans, enhance the need for boosting our forex reserve because for us this is a return to a cycle from which we had come out and that too not long ago.

A Great Amendment

Nawaz Sharif, the Prime Minister, has called Tuesday's amendment to the Pakistani Constitution "a decisive and bright moment" in their history. The amendment, passed by both the chambers of the Pak legislature without a single dissent, clips the President's powers to dissolve both the parliament and the government, appoint the services chiefs and their chief and many other discretionary powers.

The presidential powers were making a mockery of parliamentary democracy which Pakistan was thought to be practising. These were invoked four times in nine years to dissolve four elected governments. With their annulment Pakistan takes a meaningful and big step towards democracy. In a land constantly plunged in conspiracies and armed coups ever since its creation, the people had so far had little taste of governing themselves. The society has remained tied to its medieval past in arrangements involving dispensation of state-power. This fact of rulers coming out of certain ruling families and the rest accepting their own role as the ruled -- the feudal socio-political equation -- has been contributing the most to Pakistan's erratic political performance of coups and conspiracies. The feudal landed families spreading themselves to take the role of bourgeois capitalist owners of labour and profit have been joined by the ambitious scions of traditional military families in building an insuperable block on the way to democracy.

Tuesday's big leap towards making the parliament sovereign is possibly the first serious success in efforts to break out of this circle. Nothing could be a happier augury for the region than a democratic Pakistan in it. We congratulate Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif for this great amendment. He says he has talked President Leghari into accepting it. Let's give one cheer to Leghari as well.

Tilottama Calcutta

The globally circulated American periodical Newsweek has recently written extensively on a re-awakened Calcutta. A filthy stinking garbage pit has been transformed into a fine clean city. This has happened only in three years. And at what cost? No billion-taka miracle was it. The only thing that the Marxist government did for the unbelievable transformation is imbining new ideas and throwing out many old ones and effecting a wholesale change in the approach to the city. A constant theme that the leaders were able to carve into the brain cells of the citizenry is Calcutta must be beautiful and acceptable to the foreigners. Why? In order that West Bengal may live, the foreigners must be enthused to invest. And unless the investor from abroad gets a good feel and a good smell, a good view and good goings about, the money will simply not be coming.

The Newsweek recommends the new Calcutta as a model to be emulated by not-so-well-performing Third World cities. Does Mayor Hanif feel that there's a message for him there? If Calcutta can do it in three years, why not he by the end his term? What holds him from doing that? But Hanif can argue convincingly that the transformation of Calcutta has been a handiwork of Chief Minister Jyoti Basu and his whole government rather than of the Mayor of Calcutta. A similar transformation in Dhaka would need the whole government to get down to the job. Prime Minister Hasina will have to seriously involve herself in the programme.

Jubilee Celebrations of Independence: Viewed in Retrospect

Heroes appeared and will appear in history again. Any omission or diminution of their rightful status will tantamount to a distortion of history. This must be avoided. Otherwise, history will take its due course again and we, as a nation, will be subject to ridicule by others.

THE silver jubilee celebrations of the anniversary of the independence of Bangladesh on the 26th March passed off well and in a grand and befitting manner. As it should have been. People celebrated the joyous occasion, despite the pains, sorrow and indignity suffered by them on that day 26 years ago. This year being the special year, the celebrations were attended by Heads of three friendly countries. President Yasser Arafat, President Nelson Mandela and President Suleyman Demirel.

Why did we celebrate? Indeed for a great cause. To recall the glory of our liberation war that commenced on that day and to pay homage to the martyrs and victors of the great event. Also, the present generation, which was yet to be born then or was too young to comprehend real significance of the day, needed to be kept abreast of the history. They must feel proud of the deeds of their forefathers.

The day was marked naturally by special events two of which are extraordinary. These are the visits of the special dignitaries and implanting the torch of eternal flame at the Suhrawardy Uddyan after it has been brought round the length and breadth of the country. The purpose was noble and clear. The torch made the people aware of the spirit and deeds of the liberation war and kindles their hope for a better future based on the inspiration of the glorious past. The venue was chosen to be the Suhrawardy Uddyan to commemorate the historic speech of Bangabandhu on the 7th March at the same place, which also witnessed the surrender of the Pakistani troops resulting in the birth of a new nation after nine months of arduous conception.

The significance of the historic speech of the 7th March was enormous. In this speech Bangabandhu made a clarion call to the people of the country

to prepare for waging a war of liberation. It was a call for preparation for action and not for action itself. This contention can be substantiated by the fact that after the call on the 7th March 1971 till the late 25th March Bangabandhu held talks with the Pakistani President and other leaders for a negotiated settlement within the loose but overall framework of one Pakistan. The call of the 7th March, therefore, manifests the farsightedness of a leader for a possible future action. In the event of a failure of talks, and was reportedly heavily influenced by the insistence of the militant group of students. People, specially the optimists, were still expecting Bangabandhu to be able to take over as the elected and lawful Prime Minister of Pakistan before he could realise the mandated demand. In the 1970 election, for the autonomy of East Pakistan.

Many speeches were delivered at the Suhrawardy Uddyan and later, most of which were fiery, emotional and inspiring. These included the speeches of the visiting dignitaries, besides those of our Hon'ble President, Prime Minister and many others. Except for the President, who did it admirably well, hardly anyone else apparently paid befitting homage to other national leaders. Besides of course to Bangabandhu, who had made the most outstanding contributions to shaping the events that led to the victory of our war of independence. The visiting leaders, for obvious reasons, had little knowledge of our history. But the invaluable contributions made by our immortal leaders, such as, A K Fazlul Haq, Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani and Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy

ought to have been recognised and appropriately mentioned with due reverence on this occasion.

Again, names of the members of the Bangladesh government-in-exile who were responsible for giving the overall direction to the war of liberation were hardly mentioned here. It is unfair, incomplete and inconceivable to accolade leaders of the liberation war without its principal actors of the time, namely Tajuddin Ahmad, Syed Nazrul Islam, Qamruzzaman, Khondakar Mostaque, Captain Mansur Ali and others. How could we forget to mention General Osmany. Com-

mander-in-Chief of the Mukti Bahini, Shaheed Ziaur Rahman and the other sector commanders who had fought valiantly, braving all odds against a formidable foe and without resources, training, equipment and weapons worth its name? Should not have the name of Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury, Special Overseas Representative of Bangladesh, who amassed our diplomats abroad into a cogent force and helped to build up a strong world opinion for Bangladesh deserved a reference? These shortcomings of our celebrations were too glaring to escape notice of knowledgeable observers. These heroes appeared and will appear in history again. Any omission or diminution of their rightful

status will tantamount to a distortion of history. This must be avoided. Otherwise, history will take its due course again and we, as a nation, will be subject to ridicule by others. All noted with great appreciation the addresses of the three world statesmen of long standing who did our people great honour by gracing the occasion with their presence. Each of them gave us a message in clear and unequivocal terms. President Demirel, a highly revered and successful politician of his country, was pragmatic in his approach. He identified, and did rightly so, that the essential requirements of the people of

total, unqualified and continuing support for the cause of Palestine. President Zia was a motive force behind the Al-Quds Committee, which was entrusted by the Islamic Ummah to work for the liberation of Jerusalem, the first Kibla of Islam.

Hon'ble President's message was most pertinent in the present situation of the country. He enquired about the extent of achievements our independence was to achieve -- democracy and development. Have we attained the desired goals of our economic pursuits? He underlined the need and urgency for sincere cooperation between the government and the opposition in order to foster democracy. His was the only speech which paid due and befitting homage to all our national leaders.

Hon'ble Prime Minister's speech, as expected, was designed to extol the virtues of Bangabandhu as father of the nation. The nation must immortalise him for his unparalleled contribution towards the birth of the nation. This emphasis is understandable in the light of the notable shift in the priority of policy and action of the ruling party before and after the election. On some issues, like repeal of the Special Powers Act, the shift was pronounced. On some others, it was not made public.

It was Nelson Mandela's speech, specially the one at the banquet, that stole the show. He was the man of the century, the hero of the oppressed and the discriminated, the hitherto unknown pundit of a political philosophy of tolerance, understanding and compassion, who had languished in jail most of his life. His countrymen were tortured, killed and suffered by

the architects of the most heinous form of discrimination, the apartheid.

Mandela's message to the people of Bangladesh was delivered softly, heard loudly and acclaimed widely. It was about the imperative need of a government to work sincerely and effectively with its opposition. This can only be accomplished by way of subordinating party interests to the interests of the people. Mandela literally and meticulously practised what he had preached. He set the shining example of effecting a perfect synthesis of precept and practice by way of forming a true government of national unity. He won over the second and the third largest parties in the parliament, the white dominated former ruling National Party and the Inkatha, to join his government. The first one was the one which subjected his people to armed repression and the second one fought him with vengeance on account of tribal and regional rivalry. All the very formation of government in 1994.

To make the former President De Klerk, whose party had let loose a reign of terror by imposing the hated policy of apartheid since early this century, as his own Vice President is a magnanimous gesture of immeasurable magnitude. Again, to offer the sensitive portfolio of the Ministry of Home Affairs to his black arch-rival Buthelezi of Inkatha is also an act of that stunned the world. These super-statesman-like acts represented sincere gestures to win confidence of the dead-end of political forces. Could any one believe that Buthelezi, his erstwhile blood-enemy for decades, was made Acting President of the Republic by Mandela during his tour of Bangladesh and in the absence of De Klerk? It is true. Does not this put us to shame as a nation for our own deeds? One needs to pause and ponder.



Currents and Crosscurrents

by M M Rezaul Karim

Bangladesh at present are to meet their basic needs in order to improve the quality of their life. So, people valued highly when he pledged enhanced operation of Turkey in the domains of trade, investment, and culture with Bangladesh.

The great revolutionary leader Yasser Arafat, who all his life waged a bitter and bloody but successful struggle to regain his homeland, came to Bangladesh to express solidarity with and salute the people, who had gone through the same pangs of suffering and sacrifice as his own for independence. He stressed the identity of interests and shared joys and sorrows of the two peoples and also availed the opportunity of thanking the people of Bangladesh for their

'Hub of Terror' Fears Being Caught in the Crossfire

NEPALI intelligence officers have recently called for the establishment of a special anti-terrorist unit following reports branding Kathmandu a centre of Asian terrorism.

The call came a couple of months back, in late January, at a seminar organised by the Royal Nepal Army, attended by security officials. Stories in the Indian press have claimed that agents from Pakistan's powerful Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) are active in Kathmandu -- with India their target.

Reports say anti-Indian agents operating from Nepal were arrested in New Delhi on the eve of India's Republic Day celebrations on 26 January and that 4.8 kilograms of explosives were seized.

Newspapers quoted Indian Home Ministry sources as saying that the captured men were Pakistan-backed militants fighting for secession for the disputed Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, and that secessionists in Punjab and Nagaland have also been using the porous Nepal border.

Nepal's tabloid newspapers have joined in the chorus of claims, reporting a spurt in the activities not only of the ISI but of India's intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW). The papers question how

Nepal is under pressure to tighten its security amid reports that it is becoming increasingly a base for terrorist activity elsewhere. One of the fears in the Himalayan kingdom is that explosives and weapons might be diverted to home-grown insurgents, Jan Sharma writes from Kathmandu.

Nepal's poorly-equipped and underfunded National Investigation Department is coping with such a situation. Kathmandu has a sizable Kashmiri Muslim population, and officials say they will now have to monitor the flow of Kashmiris into the city.

The police have recently begun operating a monitoring cell that exchanges information on terrorism with Interpol and other countries' security departments. The cell was set up after the September visit to Kathmandu by RAW chief Rajan Roy, in the wake of the arrest and deportation of what was described as a "large number" of Sikh terrorists that month.

In December, Nepal Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, who heads a three-party coalition government, told journalists that the activities of ISI agents seemed to be confined to the Indian newspapers. Within hours, however, police in Kathmandu detained a suspected member of the Jammu and Kashmir Islamic Front on charges of possessing 20 kilograms of explosives.

It was the second seizure of explosives in Kathmandu in less than a year, and was followed by a third one in January.

A fax message found in the room of the accused man contained a detailed plan for detonating the explosive, which was given the code name *atla* (flour) as it looked like wheat flour. The message was handwritten in Urdu, Pakistan's national language.

"There is no evidence to suggest that the explosives were aimed at Nepali targets," said Dhruva Bahadur Pradhan, Assistant Inspector-General of Police. "It could have been aimed at Indian targets."

The man is being tried under the Arms and Ammunition Act as Nepal has no modern anti-terrorist legislation. Police sources said an ISI agent was also being sought in the investigation, but the Pakistan Embassy in Kathmandu denied that any Pakistani nationals were involved.

"We are looking for two other terrorists," said Pradhan.

Despite the critical press reports, India praised the "prompt and effective action" by the Nepali authorities in "unearthing a sinister conspiracy" by terrorists. Delhi officials said the action reinforced "the solemn assurances given by successive governments of Nepal that they will not allow any activities prejudicial to the sovereignty and integrity of India from Nepal soil."

But the fears and allegations are not all one-sided. In the past, India has been accused of ignoring the presence of anti-royalist guerrilla training camps along its border with the Himalayan kingdom.

In addition, many Nepalis find it surprising that India has refused to discuss Kathmandu's suggestions for regulating their 1,750-kilometre frontier to control not only terrorism but also cross-border crime and smuggling.

The main Nepali worry at present is that explosives and other lethal materials used by terrorists in the region could be passed on to groups such as the Maoist guerrilla bands who

have launched a "People's War" in remote western and central areas. The official death toll so far is 55 terrorists and 24 policemen.

It has been alleged that Nepali Maoists have links with India-based Maoists and left-wing groups.

However, police admit they

have not been able to establish a link between explosives found in Kathmandu and the insurgents. "Maoists are using only low-quality explosives," says Assistant Inspector-General Pradhan.

The Maoists enjoy some support in areas where development has been lagging, particularly among high-school students and teachers.

— GEMINI NEWS
JAN SHARMA is a freelance journalist reporting for the 'Asian Wall Street Journal' and the Gulf-based 'Khaleej Times'.

OPINION

One Product, One Ad?

Nadim Jahangir

Standardised advertising or using the same advertisement everywhere in the world is a controversial issue. Standardised ad is based on an assumption of consumer homogeneity. Most countries impose regulations on advertising. The reasons behind are: 1) to protect consumers against misguidance, 2) to protect local business from multinational enterprise (MNE) and 3) to increase revenue through high taxes on imported ad materials. To overcome these barriers MNEs are trying to market their products on a global basis. In other words, "one product, one ad for the whole world." For decades, marketing people are arguing that once the world becomes a global village, it would be possible to use standardise ads everywhere. But the question remains: is it really possible to have one ad, one world philosophy?

Before I give my opinion on this issue, I like to take the argument further starting with globalisation. The notion of globalisation is to create internationalisation. The term internationalisation refers to the extension of ownership by a firm to cover new markets, new source of materials, and new stages of production processes. Basic focus is to reduce costs through standardisation, and also to reduce dependency on other firms. Through globalisation, MNEs are trying to practice the strategy of internationalisation. The internationalisation strategy provides MNEs with mass production, mass distribution, as a result MNEs are becoming entrepreneur giants. These enterprises are moving to the Third World to produce and to sell their products. All these enterprises in general are from the West; they were never national enterprises before. Now they have crossed their boundaries and transformed to international enterprises. Moreover, these enterprises are now not only trying to create global markets and products strategy, but also global ad strategy. It means, for people regardless of race or ethnic background, having the same needs and wants are also motivated in the same way. Therefore, one advertisement for all should do.

But I cannot agree with this argument. A US-made ad could work for Europe, but might not work for South Asia. Not only Euro-Americans and South Asian countries income levels are different but also is their culture. In our part, we perceive things differently from the West. Adoption of standardise ad strategy has number of constraints. First, government and trade policies are not the same all over the world. Product, price, promotional regulations would hamper a free standardise ad policy. Second, the

nature of the market is not the same all over the world. Therefore, making the same ad would not allow the company to reach all the countries. Third, in the US TV, advertising is a powerful media to reach the target customers, but it is not equally applicable to reach customers in the other parts of the world. The slow development in the satellite television.

In the standardise-advertisement strategy the underlying assumption is customer needs and interests are becoming increasingly homogenous world-wide. But I differ on this point; the only thing that is same is the universal preference for low price at an acceptable quality. Some of the American MNEs are using visual imagery to prepare a global advertisement. Their argument is: through visual imagery, it is possible to overcome cultural barriers. The visual image portrays the message and it would be applicable on a consistent basis globally. It would be more precise and powerful to carry the theme. Since it is a visual imagery, all the people would get the same message. In my opinion, for certain product visual imagery technique might work, such as Coke or Pepsi. But definitely it would not work for all products. The concept of a single product may be same all over the country but as the product crosses the boundary, the concept changes. And at the same time, mode of communication also changes. Attitudes, feeling and behaviour across boundaries affect the mode of communication. As the mode of communication changes, it does affect the concept of the product.

Human emotion is not the same all over the world. We as human beings are unique in different ways. That is what makes the world such an interesting place to live in. And this is the challenge for the marketing people to understand this different cluster of people in pursuit to become efficient marketers.

Standardised advertisement would not work for all goods and services because the concept of products are different from country to country, culture to culture and in general, people are sensitive to their own culture. So making ads in one country, and naming it as global ad may not be accepted in other countries. Marketers may go about how people think, and give emphasis on that, but it is still not enough to create standardised advertisement for a product for the whole world.

The writer is a lecture at the Independent University, Bangladesh.

To the Editor...

Loadshedding

Sir, Not only the town-dwellers and industries but also the peasants of the villages in the northern part of the country are being subjected to lots of sufferings and loss as a result of the frequent loadshedding in power supply. Irrigation work of the season is seriously being hampered for want of water as hours of loadshedding has made most of the power-driven irrigation machines inoperative and made the cultivable land split.

It is learnt that clashes among the peasants are regularly taking place over the issue of who would get water first when power comes only for few minutes.

If this problem cannot be solved very soon, the government may bear the responsibility.

Kamrul Islam
BA College Road, Sirajganj

Say "Cheese"

Sir, Our Peoples-oriented regime perhaps do not care for the expression "Say, Cheese" (why they govern so seriously, without displaying any sense of humour even when berating the opposition?). Perhaps eating cheese now and then is not considered to be a small pleasure for our middle-class. Both the famous "Dhaka" cheese and the new local "Comilla" cheese are outside the purchasing power of the middle-class due to abnormally high retail price.

The "Comilla" cheese is marketed in big heavy-weight round balls, the minimum retail price starting around Taka 200 per piece, which only the car-wallas can afford to pay. The price of Dhaka cheese has also no relation with the retail price of milk. During my school days, I used to buy a round at Rupee one and four annas (when milk was eight seers to the rupee). A third brand of modern processed cheese is also being marketed at a higher price than that during the period of the previous regime.

Which regulatory agency is

monitoring the food/consumer goods to try to bring down the prices to consumer-friendly level, having some relations to the purchasing power of the middle-class? Free market does not mean fleecing the public (compare prices of meat and large and live fish). There is huge disparity in purchasing power at the two ends of the buyers' spectrum. The market has to be regulated, if not controlled.

It is easy for a seller to target the high income bracket to siphon the extra funds which can be spared for luxury shopping. The official facilitator's role is not transparent. Of course, the existing mechanism is outdated, based on bureaucratic indifference.

I would love to see a 'cheese procession' initiated by the CAB, Consumers' Forum or whatever the body is named.

Cheerlessly Cheeseless
Dhaka

Electricity and the airport

Sir, Recently, in major daily newspapers it was advertised that we are facing loadshedding because nothing was done to enhance gas and electricity supply within the last few years. Obviously other than the last energy minister, the top officials including the PDB's and DESA's had been groomed, paid and pampered over many years to foresee, plan and execute much before such a crisis arises. This, they failed miserably. If these officials could not convince the then minister instead of resigning they are involved in advertising their failure through newspapers (wasting more public money). SOLUTION? Replace such officials with ones who are sincere to serve public interests instead of safe guarding their jobs.

Presently, the new government is again lead to believe that it is people's fault that Zia International Airport is badly managed. The in-charge of the airport, in a military-like operation, sweeps away the Bengalee sentiments to see off their

friends and relatives by issuing large advertisements, banning the visits at the departure driveway. Again insensitive and incompetent officials are managing the way our country lives. It's time to CHANGE them.

Mohammad Iqbal
Dhammond, Dhaka

'Broadcasting Commission': E&OE

Sir, A seemingly 'preview' in the Star report (March 25) on the line of thinking of the so-called Broadcasting Commission makes uneasy reading for any citizen who believes in the unfettered freedom of the broadcast media in an under-developed country, run with under-developed political acumen with a 16-year gap in the cultivation of true and lasting political culture.

Firstly, the very composition of the this Commission is open to question, as the list of members reveals that several areas of expertise have apparently not been covered. The absence of a technocrat is glaring in this age of information technology.

Secondly, the composition is establishment dominated -- a wider net should have been cast, with a judicious blend of public opinion and professional input from four areas: administration, operation, performers and the audience.

The unexpected pointer in the report is that the control of broadcasting might be vested in a parliamentary body (proposed recommendation). Why make things complicated? If it is the intention to have three MPs advising the permanent independent broadcast controlling body (whatever be its name), then this can be arranged without dragging in the JS.

The Star report is silent on the technical and engineering aspects of the proposed changes, remembering that state policy changes with fast changing electronic technology. The point to note is that the listeners and viewers cannot be controlled with state policy stands.

Another point: where is the entry mechanism for the private sector to participate in the near future, as soon as the dust has settled down? The weather forecast must be transparent (politically).

There are other factors on which comment is not possible unless the summary of the report is released after due submission. The least the government can do is to have the report debated in the JS and encourage public discussion on the recommendations before making up its mind. This is not a topic to be rushed through like the flowing Ganga water, or a Farakka gate, to be blocked at the will of the masters!

The broth has to be right before it is served on the dining table. The kitchen and the pantry work have to be right. Formerly too many chefs spoiled the broth. As a not obedient listener or viewer, I am getting some fishy smell after going through the report.

AMF Quadir
Lalmatia-B, Dhaka-1207

Cynic's delight

Sir, I read that the DSE index has reached the "Farakka" level, having gone down below 1500 from 3600.

Any agency to sign a 31-year agreement to vitalise the situation? Politics is also changing -- a major change has occurred after 21 years.

Big changes have big oscillations. The swing of the free pendulum will not come to the golden mean without a period of damped oscillations, as all students of science know.

The politicians are taking is on a ride in good faith but our poor performance. The next couple of years are critical for Bangladesh. The current operational will do, or we (our combined leadership) have to change orbit? We have to get out of the vicious cycle.

The problem is, we cannot agree on the definition of this vicious circle.

A Zabr
Dhaka