

Response to EU Ban

The European Union has decided to impose a ban on frozen foods from Bangladesh. Consignments of such foods reaching member-countries by August 15 next will however be accepted after necessary bacteriological tests.

The areas comprising north eastern states of India came under British rule/influence at different periods of time over the last two centuries.

The first tea (of a variety indigenous to Assam) garden was established in 1835, and in 1838, the first consignment of tea was exported to London where it was received with acclamation.

The Assam-Bengal railway was built along the south bank from Guwahati to Tinsukia with a spur thrusting through the Mikir Hills via Halflong to Silchar whence it linked up with a line from Chittagong.

Enough is Enough

Once again an accord — this time an eight-point one between the leaders of different student organisations and the Dhaka University authorities — has been signed to make things hum on the campus.

But the question is how durable is it going to be? Experience tells us that life of this kind of an accord is as short as that of the daffodils.

While congratulating the student leaders for responding to the authorities' efforts at restoring normalcy sooner than later, we cannot help asking them to reflect over the farcical proportions student politics has been lowered to.

It seems to be an unending procession of farcical acts and utterances. Proper perspective seemed to be no body's business. If BCL committed a crime in capturing Surja Sen Hall, the rival and dispossessed JCD did no better in demanding a status quo.

Political leaders who for years have been cashing in on the impressionableness of young hearts and the economic weakness of the students should realise what a pass they have brought the university to by the sheer pursuit of their petty inclinations.

They must understand that their puerilness has reduced the venerable office of the Vice Chancellor into that of a referee in a rustic, unprincipled and wasteful game. How would he, as the administrative head, think of ways to meet the demands of fast changing times if every now and then he has to remain busy in sharing sweets and cups of tea to broker peace among feuding groups?

Let this peace accord be the last of its kind. Let there be political will for a consensus to delink student fronts from the national political parties.

Hartal Compensation

When pragmatism takes hold of a society, traditions, even the most deep-rooted ones, no longer remain unchallenged. In a remarkable move Ernakulam Chamber of Commerce, a business body of the south Indian state of Kerala better known for its high literacy rate and fish haul, recently filed a petition with a court seeking its verdict on wild-cat strikes, a disruptive syndrome the state had come to be plagued with for quite some time.

Significantly, the Court has given a legal seal on the petition in the affirmative spelling out what we all utter without seeming to realise "... no political party or organisation can claim that it is entitled to paralyse industry and commerce and prevent citizens from exercising their fundamental rights".

The verdict is not an absolute one as it can be challenged at a higher court. But the fact of the matter is strike or hartal once known as such a potent force to press home demands in these part of the world since the Gandhian days has finally come under critical light in the land of its genesis.

Kerala is not very far from Bangladesh from any conceivable context. But how come are we so far behind at the conceptual level? When will the political leaders of this country wed their patriotism to a benevolent pragmatism to bury hartal as a colonial spectre once for all?

Economic Dimensions of SAGQ: Views from Bangladesher Perspective

by Dr M Masum

If the sub-region is developed as a single economic zone, aiming at, in the long run, formation of some entity similar to the European Community within which all goods and services produced in the sub-region, and all factors of production including labour will freely flow, all the people of this region enjoying equal rights to all its resources which are developed and utilized in a planned way so as to bestow maximum benefits to the maximum number of people within this sub-region, potential gains from such a venture are enormous indeed.

and vast quantity of virgin land suddenly found themselves in an inhospitable atmosphere as 'sons of the soil' found the cake shrinking in size and more people to share with particularity in the wake of large scale immigration from (East) Pakistan due to communal disturbances following partition.

Transforming a traditional subsistence economy into a modern one is the major challenge faced by the economy of Bhutan.

Essentially, to put this sub-region on a 'fast track' of development sub-regional cooperation within the framework of a South Asian Growth Quadrangle has been proposed.

Given the current composition of Bangladesh exports, SAARC countries, despite preferential trade arrangements within SAARC, accounted for only 3.28% of total exports from Bangladesh in 1995/96.

India in recent years however has emerged as the most important source of imports into Bangladesh, raising its share from 8% in 1990/91 to 12.2% in 99% (CPD, 1997).

If Bangladesh decides, as a goodwill gesture, to allow the Northeast access to Chittagong port by the shortest possible route, that may be generally acceptable. But any other decision, particularly those relating to transit from India to India through Bangladesh should be taken with national consensus.

tion, from the metropolitan centre, Calcutta, whose industries used to utilize bulk of her products, particularly jute, from Calcutta port, through which her major exports gained access to the international market; from all sources of manufactured goods she needed which were located mainly in India.

Partition of British India into independent states of Pakistan and India brought havoc to the economy of the Northeast which at that time was administratively organized as the province of Assam (including certain areas administered differently), and the princely states of Manipur and Hill Tippera.

Structure of the Nepalese economy with agriculture overwhelmingly dominating both in terms of contribution to GDP (44% in 1994) and share in the employed labour force (94% in 1990) and its rather poor performance (average annual growth rate over 1990-94 being 1.3% only), and high rate of population growth (average annual growth rate over 1990-94 being 2.5%) seem to be the major constraints to growth in Nepal.

The above potentials are not currently being exploited for lack of demand locally, and around and also for lack of infrastructure, which are not forthcoming, again for lack of demand.

of their locational advantage may also benefit from the same through setting up of joint ventures. Besides, Bangladesh will be able to earn substantial amount of revenue from users of its ports and other infrastructural facilities.

When major hydro-electricity projects will get commissioned, Bangladesh will have access to cheap electricity, and with development of water resources in the sub-region, Bangladesh's irrigated acreage will surely increase giving a boost to her agricultural production, particularly cereals. It may be mentioned here that the Northeast currently suffers from an overall food deficit. So, Bangladesh's surplus grain will find a ready market there.

The above relaxation in demand constraint will not only boost production in most northeastern states, but also, by generating employment in

the process, will absorb the unemployed and thereby destroy the breeding ground of insurgency and create an enabling environment for investment, local as well as foreign. Increased economic activities will create demand for power leading to its generation.

The Northeast is particularly rich in mineral resources much of which remained unexploited so long. Improvement in Indo-Bangladesh relationship in the wake of changes in government in both the countries has already led to launching of several joint venture projects to be implemented in Meghalaya and Bangladesh in the area of cement production.

The sub-region shares a number of rivers. Treating these rivers as common resources, through careful planning, such water resources may be developed and utilized for generation of power, irrigating the fields, besides mitigating flood hazards.

Nepal and Bhutan, both landlocked countries can benefit from the above sub-regional cooperation not only for free access for their goods to this market, but also for gaining access to Chittagong and Mongla ports in addition to Calcutta for pursuing their export/import activities.

From free trade particularly with the north eastern states of India, Bangladesh can immensely benefit. Most of the products which have to be produced from mainland India. Competing Bangladeshi products, therefore, can possibly make easy inroads into the Northeast market.

Location of seaports and a major international airport in Bangladesh will surely contribute to transforming Dhaka as the financial, and Chittagong as the commercial capital of the entire sub-region. The Northeast being extremely resource rich, as it opens up, is expected to attract considerable foreign investment. As they will be routed through Bangladesh, Dhaka and Chittagong, because

growth, the Northeast badly needs access to Chittagong port, but Bangladesh does not need any such facility from India. Pursuing a more or less open economy policy, Bangladesh is currently in the process of gradual integration with the global economy. Possibly that serves her interest best. Bangladesh may benefit from regional water resource (including hydro-electricity) projects but implementation of such projects take long gestation period and huge investment, not easy to mobilize. Moreover, they have considerable environmental and socio-political impacts. When subsequent developments are considered, one may wonder whether implementation of Kaptai hydro-electricity project was justified at all. If Bangladesh decides, as a goodwill gesture, to allow the Northeast access to Chittagong port by the shortest possible route, that may be generally acceptable.

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Art Buchwald's COLUMN

The Venetian Lagoon

YOU can't go home again — you can't even go to Venice, a city of fond memories for me. I come here almost every year to swim in its sparkling waters and snorkel in the souvenir shops.

I met Katharine Hepburn in Venice when she was making the film 'Summertime'. She was preparing for a scene on the canal, and I was smoking a cigar and I chatted with her. She said, 'That is the filthiest cigar I have ever smoked. How dare you smoke while talking to me.'

I immediately extinguished it as she continued to upbraid me for my behaviour. The assistant director came up to her and said, 'Miss Hepburn we're ready to shoot.'

The set was hushed, and the we heard: 'Roll 'em.' Suddenly Hepburn dove into the water which was filled with every imaginable flossam. When she climbed out someone threw a towel around her. I said, 'How come you get so upset with me for smoking a cigar when you just dove into heat smummy water?'

She replied in that wonderful Hepburn voice, 'Oh, shut up!' One of my fondest memories of Venice concerns that Bestegui Gala, the costume ball of the century. I went as Louis XIV in a costume I had rented in Paris; it has a few tears and included a somewhat frazzled powdered wig. I wasn't invited to the party, so I crashed it.

I arrived three hours early carrying a basket of flowers, and nobody stopped me at the door to the palace, although I did hear the security men whispering about checking my credentials. I bolted upstairs to the second floor where there appeared to be hundreds of bedroom doors. I opened one and slid under the bed. To my surprise I found two photographers already there. They told me to beat it, but I refused to go.

I turned out that the room was occupied by a beautiful guest of Bestegui. She was preparing for the ball, and since she had the loveliest ankles (which was all we could see), we decided to stay put.

Finally, after the guest left the room we crawled out from under the bed and went to join the ball. Even if you can't go home again, the nostalgia lingers. Bestegui, who treated all his guests like royalty, is now in heaven, his palace closed and empty. Katharine Hepburn is not here this year for her dip.

Despite this, it's still good to come back. The lire is now 165,000 to the dollar, and who can figure out what you can get for that in Italy these days? The highlight of my visit was the moment I was presented with a Lifetime Achievement Award from American Express when my card rang up for dinner at the Cipriani Hotel.

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OPINION

Why in Ramna?

Renwan H Khan

People's sufferings in the city are being compounded everyday owing to negligence and shortsightedness of RAJUK, City Corporation and the government. Day by day, open space in the city is getting reduced, ditches and canals filled up by the unending greed of property developers.

We have already seen how the most parks and foot paths are permanently occupied by the vendors and slum dwellers with law enforcing agencies seemed uninterested to remove them. Even two big parks of the city — Ramna and Suhrawardy — do not have adequate legal protection for their existence.

Governments in the past allotted some portion of these parks to Tennis Club, Tablig Jamaat and Children's Park. Now the present government's decision to allot further area for Tablig Jamaat and to raise cultural complex in these two parks will further reduce the open space.

It is so necessary to build such complex spending a fabulous sum of Tk 130 crore when other pressing needs of the city remain unattended? Where are those environment-conscious NGOs educated from the Earth Summit and the elite of the city? Where are those people who induced the PM the other day to throw seeds on the barren hills of Chittagong from a helicopter? Nobody came to protest this highly contradictory decision of the PM to ruin the greenery and open space of Ramna and Suhrawardy Uddyan.

To the Editor

"Repression on Women"

Sir, This refers to above-mentioned subject published in the DS on July 16, 1997. MAS seems to be very much kind to feminist groups/activists and has extended his/her helping hands to them to get rid of society from repression on womenfolk.

MAS's advice is: shut down all doors and windows otherwise entry of evil culture can dilute our original culture (indeed, our culture is deep-rooted!)

We are very much accustomed to religious teachings from our childhood. Can it prevent us from staling state coffers? Best example is the present state of PAC.

Overhauling of society is imperative and democracy can give us freedom from all kind of repressions. So-called ethics/purity can no longer help us in preventing rape, arson, violence, acid-throwing and wife-bashing. Their is no meaning to cry lest we can lose ethical values without sensing our own blindness.

Sanity of womenfolk in our society is considered above their lives. In our society, double standard with respect to womenfolk has been in existence before freeing Bollywood/Hollywood and cable TV. Free flow of information cannot be wise to be mixed with show of pornography. Advancement of society, if you re-

Power factors

Sir, Electrical power will now be shared by two new private (?) companies, PGCB for transmission, and DESCO for meter reading and customer services. The experienced senior executives will be local (not foreign) and come from the parent agencies PDB/DESA, the latter notorious for systems loss (more human than technical). So the old hands will run the new shows, as per precedent in the birth of DESA. Experience counts, qualitatively.

Perhaps change of heart is not necessary. The problems are monitoring, regulation, and control to maintain technical, financial, and service transparency. The DS staff report (July 11) carried a strange sentence which reads 'One of the main OBJECTIONS of forming the company is to cut down the systems loss from the power distribution.' Pray, who are objecting? Perhaps it is the printer's devil playing naughty with the correct word 'objectives'.

To contain the evil side of local culture which contributes to systems loss, both human and technical, it may be necessary to attach foreign consultants to the companies, under the supervision of ADB and other donor agencies, to act as watchdogs, in public interest (not mentioned in the news report).

We get contaminated water. Are we also getting adulterated electricity (certainly electricity cannot be inflated)? Sub-standard power is possible, if the 'power factor' is abnormal. Anyway, it is a welcome sign that the power and telecom sectors are slowly and reluctantly privatizing (power is dear and near to the soul). The people's representatives may put more pressure on the inflated, democratic concepts aired so frequently by the netas.

Abul M Ahmad Dhaka

Mob justice or injustice?

Sir, We are agast with horror and deeply hurt with misgivings at what had happened in the last few months. Quite a number of persons lost their lives in the hands of unruly mobs. At Demra seven persons were killed assuming they were cow-lifters, then at Badda a few more lost their lives in the suspicion of being child-lifters, again in Narayanganj five persons were murdered by furious people.

My question is: in this respect, who are more guilty — those suspected criminals or who murdered them?

Nur Jahan East Nasirabad, Chittagong

Gano Adalat

Sir, We do not hear any more about the judgement of Gano Adalat and much publicised roars of our intellectuals to bring to trial of Ghulam Azam and other Razakars for many crimes. At that time, Awami League supported Gano Adalat, but after coming to power they are silent about it. I suppose AL government is too embarrassed to move against their former partner, Jamaat, in movement to unseat the BNP government. That is understandable. Naturally, the question crosses in our minds whether the Gano Adalat Nirml Committee was engaged in street agitation and resorted to hartal only for the benefit of Awami League.

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