The Baily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

Dhaka, Saturday, October 25, 1997

Ties Cemented Further

The three-day visit of Chinese Vice Premier Wu Bangguo heading a 14-member delegation to Bangladesh has been an unqualified success with very rich dividends paid to the existing bonds of friendship between Dhaka and Beijing. The whole gamut of bilateral relationship comprising trade, economic cooperation, investment and international understanding came in for not only review and renewal but also for resolute vitalisation, enrichment and expansion.

In concrete terms, two accords have been signed for an interest-subsidised preferential loan worth Tk 1.52 billion as commodity grant to assist economic and social development efforts in Bangladesh. The Chinese economic cooperation package, valued at Tk 17.59 billion to date, has been substantially utilised to raise such infrastructural milestones as the three friendship bridges - Buriganga, Shambhuganj and Mahananda. There were power stations in tow. The fourth friendship bridge is coming over the river Korotoa and the Baropukuria coal mine project is a prestigious undertaking with Chinese assistance.

The trade balance is heavily tilted towards China, Bangladesh's exports to that country being valued at a meagre 50 million US dollar as against her imports worth 600 million US dollar from China. It augurs well, therefore, that the Chinese side has responded favourably to our request for a greater access to our jute, jute products, leather and other commodities by way of reducing the trade gap. Most helpful would be, of course, a zero tariff entry of Bangladesh products.

The Chinese Vice Premier, evincing a keen interest in the telecommunications sector, has promised to install 1,40,000 digital telephones in Bangladesh. But, of all his assurances, the most forward-looking appears to be the one relating to re-location of some Chinese industries in our EPZs.

The level of international understanding between the two governments can be perceived from these facts: while China has assured support to Bangladesh's candidature for the non-permanent seat of the UN Security Council in 2001, Dhaka has reiterated its stance on One-China policy centring on Taiwan issue.

A Welcome with Open Arms

Dhaka is different as a megacity. Why? Dhaka doesn't have taxicabs. City dwellers in other countries simply cannot conceive of a city without cabs. We are very easily doing the inconceivable.

This is more remarkable for the fact that Dhaka doesn't have a good 'town service' of buses either. The contraptions that go by the name of city bus are moving boxes filled sardine-style with 'subhumans.' And Dhaka has been pulling on this way all through its recent history as capital city for exactly 50 years. When will Dhaka have ubiquitous cabs as its standard fixture? Could be after another 50 years. For the government or the many kind of bodies of practical minded men and women have not so far thought of going for it or ever complained of being inconvenienced by such an absence.

Now a private company is planning to introduce some 200 metred taxicabs in the city as a first phase of the programme. They may eventually go up to 500. Will that crowd the city roads? Not really. The World Bank is said to be believing that Dhaka city can absorb as many as 50,000 — let us spell it out, fifty thousand — cabs in the next five years. And whatever number of cabs we are going to get at our beck and call, will be pollution-free.

That's a good and comforting thought. This first-in-50-years initiative is no philanthropist's brainwave. For the first time substantial rebate has been allowed in the duties on cars imported for serving as cabs. The entrepreneurs say that has enabled them to go for the cab business.

They also say that they are looking forward to replacing the scooters and tempos which have been poisoning the city's atmosphere dangerously. How can they? At 28 taka for 3 kilometres or anything between Tk 150 and 200 for a trip from Sonargaon to Airport they cannot substitute the three-passenger scooter doing the stretch for Tk 50. The buswallahs would simply mop the scooter passengers up. They must down the metre at Tk 16 and do three kilometres for the same tariff. And for the extra kilometres let them charge Tk 5 each. That will be good business policy, we assure them.

Metred taxicab? A welcome with open arms.

Tragic End

Those were young rover scouts on a minibus ride from Meherpur to Lakkatura, Sylhet, to attend the 9th Asia-Pacific Rover Moot. Their long haul journey, barely past the small hours of night, at 5.10 am to be precise, met with a terrible accident as the vehicle skidded off to a ditch at Jaipur, Dhamrai when inclining on a side to let an approaching truck pass, both being in fairly high speed for the mutual passage.

It was not unusually overloaded by our standards in that 37 scouts and four officials were onboard in a 36-seater bus. And, the vehicle, which must have been reserved for the purpose, could not have been filled on the roof either. By deduction, therefore, it was poor judgment on the part of the minibus driver, knowing full well how impatient a truck driver could be, not to have stood still for a while just to get the monster pass by. To be in nearwhizzing motion on a narrow strip as two vehicles approach each other is as dangerous as a mad race to overtake each other.

It was an early morning glow that in an ironical twist of fate flickered across the dead bodies of five rover scouts, aged between 16 and 20. As we express our heart-felt condolences over the premature deaths and sympathise with their bereaved families, we cannot help recall the pall of gloom cast over the 9th Asia-Pacific Rover Moot. Another reminder that we do something about the gory highway mishaps.

Perceiving Economy: Views Differ

Economists need to do a better job educating the public about economic matters and spend more time communicating the implication of their research to the public. In the meantime, economists will have to deal with the reality that public does not view the economy or its problems in the way the expert community does.

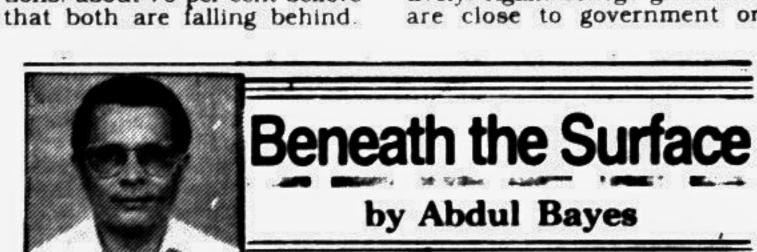
OBERT J Blendon et al writes on: "Bridging the ▲ Gap Between the Public's and Economists' views of the Economy" (Journal of Economic Perspectives, vol 11, No 3 1997, Page 105-118). It is interesting and very useful too, given the fact that, of late, public opinion has been exerting a major influence on many public policy decisions, including the domain of economic policy. Especially, elected officials tend to harbour such perceptions about economic conditions as a determinant of the outcome of elections. The authors argue that there is pervasive disagreement of views on economy held by the public and economists.

Contrasting views of the public and professional economists are presented along three dimensions : assessment of current and past economic performance, expectations for the economic future and perception of why the economy is not doing better. The observations in that article follow from surveys on (i) a total of 1.511 randomly selected adults (including 478 college graduates and 1,028 non-college graduates); (ii) a total of 250 self-described domestic economic experts all of whom are members of American Economic Association, have doctorate in economics and are employed as full-time economists; and (iii) supplementary questions were asked to a sample of 1,000 adults nationwide etc. All of the respondents were interviewed over telephone.

The growing gaps between

nomic data, compared to non-

college graduates. When asked first whether family incomes are falling behind the cost of living and then whether wages for average workers have been falling behind the cost of living, the general public does not differentiate much between the two questions: about 70 per cent believe from now, of changes like new technology, foreign competition and downsizing are positive, 54 per cent of the public sees these changes as bad for the economy. About 59 per cent of public consider downsizing of major corporations as bad for the economy, while a majority of economists view this positively. Again college graduates are close to government or



Economists not only disagree. but differentiate between these two questions. Only 22 per cent of economists agree that family incomes are falling behind the cost of living while 42 per cent of economists believe that wages for an average worker are lagging inflation." There is, however, one agreement: large majorities of both sides perceive that the gap between the rich and the poor increased

With respect to expectations for the economic future, while 93 per cent of economists view that long-term effect, 20 years economists' views, perhaps, in part because technology, downsizing etc have tended to be more disruptive for those with

lower levels of education.

Why the differences in perceptions?

 The experiences of individuals may not mirror official data. For example, in the event of the economy growing slowly. people may not perceive their financial gains because they are relatively small increments to family income. Second, during the last two decades, increased incomes to families sprang from spouses working more

hours in paid employment This meant lost work in the home and extra expenses on day care, transportation etc. Taking these into consideration, the per capita income rise might go unnoticed. Third, public always like cash incomes, not overall increases in wage compensation that include fringe benefits. Whereas, over the past 20 years, employers' contribution to employee benefits have grown faster than wage income but two-thirds of the public do not perceive that as part of

2. Public has many sources government has few: Public opinions are mostly influenced by what is happening to family members and to kith and kin. It any of the members of the sample respondent heard that his or her brother had been laid off, his response on the economy could turn out to be negative.

family income.

3. Government's statistics is big lie: Overall trust in the federal government is near a 23year low which seems to be affecting trust in government statistics as well.

4. The media portrayal: The media tend to portray the condition of the economy as being worse than it actually is leaving the public overly pessimistic about nation's economic future. Recent research suggests that the media tend to emphasize the aspects of the economy that are

COLUMNI

banning of them.

Buchwald's

gion and the press, among other freedoms.

ment that guarantees him the right to do it.

Not so, says the National Rifle Association.

the hip before he gave us the Ten Commandments."

other reason than to attract attention.

ing their right to assemble in the desert.

The Ben Hur Pitch

Y friend Moses (a.k.a Charlton Heston) came to Washington to make his usual pitch for gun ownership

LV Land his usual attacks on those who would demand the

Ben Hur) said the Constitution's Second Amendment — the

right of the people to keep and bear arms - is more essential

than the First Amendment, which guarantees freedom of reli-

is America's first freedom — the one that protects all the oth-

pacity to live without fear. "I want to save the Second Amend-

ment from those nitpicking little wars-of-attrition fights over al-

leged Saturday Night Specials, plastic guns, cop-killer bullets

and other for prime-time nonissues invented by some press

fend with my deadly automatic rifle his right to say it, men of

goodwill can argue whether it is the gun in Heston's closet that

makes it possible for him to give a speech, or the First Amend-

essary in a modern society live in fear that if everyone has a gun

they might start using them before making a speech, if for no

armed, reporters would think twice about what they write in the

right to bear arms is more important than the guarantee of

freedom of religion. This upset people who believe it was Charl-

ton Heston who brought his people out of Egypt by guarantee-

argument, he said, "Thank God he didn't start shooting from

The people who don't believe the Second Amendment is nec-

Everyone knows the media are corrupt, and if all of us were

Where Heston got into deep trouble was when he said the

When I asked a clergyman what he thought of the Heston

By arrangement with Los Angeles Times Syndicate and UNB

I may not agree with what Heston has to say, but I will de-

In his presentation at the National Press Club. Heston (a.k.a.

He said, as he parted the Red Sea. "The Second Amendment

Heston also said guns along are what offer the absolute ca-

getting worse and to pay less attention to the improved situa-

5. Americans' lack of foundation of knowledge about how the economy operates: Surveys demonstrate a rather low level of public knowledge of the economic system. For example, only one-tenth of American adults know that the Consumer Price Index is the most widely used measure of inflation. More than two-thirds (69 per cent) of the public believe that when prices go up, it is due mainly to companies manipulating prices to increase profits. Only 28 per cent think price increases are mainly due to the laws of supply and demand. Another example: Nearly three-fourths of the public believed that increase in gasoline price had nothing to do with supply and demand but with companies' profits. More than four-fifths of economists believed that it was due to supply and demand phenomenon.

"However, the results of this study make it clear that economists need to do a better job educating the public about economic matters and spend more time communicating the implication of their research to the public. In the meantime, economists will have to deal with the reality that public does not view the economy or its problems in the way the expert community does and are likely to continue to communicate these divergent views to elected decision makers"

Epilogue: Having read the last para. I tend to conclude that my writings in this column are perhaps not all that in vain.

BAGABANDHU MURDER CASE

Verbatim Text of Cross Examination of 27th, 28th and 29th Prosecution Witnesses

Continued from yesterday Cross-examination of PW 27. Havildar (retd) Harunur

Rashid, in Bangabandhu murder case began when the court resumed Thursday morning. Following are the excerpts from his examination by advo-

cate T M Akbar, defence counsel for accused Lt Col (LPR) Muhi-Q: Artillery night training

takes place with cannons. Isn't A: It depends on the decision of the regiment commanding officer. Night training may take place with cannons or without

cannons. However, classes are held in the training. Q: Did all of you go to the airport altogether?

A: The gunners went by vehicles while rest of us in march. Q: Who started first? A: The gunners.

Q: Did any training take place there? A: I don't know about the gunners. We took rest there. Q: Did you take rest together

at the same place? Q: Besides the army personnel who were in your vehicle and where did others go?

A: I don't know about others and where they went. Q: How many vehicles were with you when you went to the

A: Six vehicles. Q: Where did the vehicles go? A: Two, including that of

ours, went to Kalabagan. I don't know about the rest four. Q: Do you know about the use of a cannon?

A: No. Q: Did you know where the possession of Rakkhi Bahini were? A: I didn't know.

Q: Did you tell the IO that Muhiuddin told you that Rakkhi Bahini would attack the army?

A: I can't recall. Q: How many army personnel were with you when you went to Kalabagan from Balurghat?

the public and economists on

perceptions about economy are

as follows: Unemployment, ac-

cording to government statis-

tics, was hovering near a seven-

year low in 1996. Yet, only a lit-

tle over one-third of the public

believed that unemployment

rate was lower than it was five

years ago. Nearly one-third

even believed that unemploy-

ment rate was higher. Infla-

tion? Economists thought, over

the five years from 1992-1996,

it was 3 per cent — a record not

matched since the early 1960s.

Yet, only one in six Americans

said that it was lower than it

was five years ago. Nearly half

said, it had increased. Again,

while government figures show

the number of full-time job in

the US increasing, nearly half

of the public believes that the

number has decreased over the

past five years. Sixty per cent of

Americans are not convinced

by the statistics that there has

been a substantial reduction in

the number of elderly living in

poverty. Rather, they perceived

cans do not think that the

economy is growing although

government statistics depict a

growth rate of real GDP by 4.1

per cent in 1994 and 2.9 per cent

in 1995. However, Americans

with college degrees seem to

have stood close, with their per-

ception, to government eco-

Nearly 40 per cent of Ameri-

a rise in poverty.

A: 10 to 12. Q: What would be the approximate number of the army personnel who were taking rest at the new airport?

A: I can't recall Q: Did any other vehicle move, except the cars that you diverted at Kalabagan? A: Some army vehicles were

moving there. Q: Did you tell the 10 that then we realised that officer sahebs bluffed us?

A: I can't recall. Q: Everything of your statement is false.

A: This is not true. A junior on behalf of advocate Sharfuddin Mukul, defence lawyer for accused former state minister Taheruddin Thakur, declined to cross-examine him.

Twenty-eighth

Prosecution Witness Following are the excerpts from cross-examination of PW 28 Abdul Hye by advocate Khan Saifur Rahman, defence counsel for accused Lt Col (dismissed) Syed Farooqur Rahman:

Q: Was there 21 gun salute when the body of Bangabandhu was lying to rest?

Q: Was any moulvi available to maintain shariah for the body of Bangabandhu?

A: Yes, there were maulanas. Q: Were all the works done in front of police?

Q: Did you keep the clothes that Bangabandhu was wearing or deposited to police? A: We kept those to Abdul

Mannan Sheikh. Q: Was the spectacle and the pipe with the body? A: Those were inside the cof-

Q: Army didn't bar people to. come and attend the janaza.

A: There were thousands of people outside the compound of Bangabandhu's home. But they were not allowed by the army personnel to attend the janaza. A few people, who were in the compound of the house, had been able to attend it.

Q: The compound of Bangabandhu's home was too small to accommodate people in his janaza.

A: No, it was not so small. Perhaps, all the people, who had rushed there, could not be accommodated in the janaza. But 2,000 to 2,500 people could have taken part, had they been allowed. We a few people could attend the janaza.

Defence lawyers advocate Abdur Razzaq Khan for Col (retd) Sultan Shahriyar Rashid Khan and Hon Capt (retd) Abdur Wahab Joardar, advocate T M Akbar for Lt Col (LPR) Muhiuddin and advocate Sharfuddin Mukul for former minister Taheruddin Thakur declined to cross-examine him.

Twenty-ninth Prosecution Witness

Following are the excerpts from cross-examination of PW 29 Naik (retd) Shehabuddin by advocate Fariduddin Ahmed state defence counsel for absconding accused Major (retd) Rashed Chowdhury:

Q: What was your trade?

A: OCU. Q: Did you know all who marched?

A: It was not possible. Q: How many people boarded the truck along with you?

A: 25 to 30 people. Q: Did you receive the bullets with issuance? A: No bullet was distributed

with issuance. Q: You entered Serniabat's house with double-up. Who

broke the gate? A: I can't say. However, no resistance came from there. The officers entered first and they

Q: You didn't see what happened inside Serniabat's build-

were followed by us.

A: No. I didn't see what happened inside. But, I heard the sounds of brush fire from there. Q: You didn't know anything about the incidents took place

at Bangabandhu's house. A: I came to know that Bangabandhu and his family members had been killed.

Q: But you didn't see. A: I didn't see, but came to know.

Examination by advocate Mahbubur Rahman, state defence counsel for absconding accused Major (retd) Bazlul Huda:

Q: Was the night parade prescheduled?

A: No. Q: You were supposed to write on the register while receiving ammunition.

A: Yes. Q: Police guard the ministers' residence.

A: This is not known to me. Q: Did you see police at Ser-

Q: You came to give witness about what you saw at Sernia-

bat's house. A: I came to give witness about what I saw there and to know about Bangabandhu's house.

Examination by advocate Mahbubur Rahman, state defence counsel for absconding accused Major (retd) Noor:

Q: How many times you made statement about the incidents that you told us today? A: Once and that is to the IO.

Q: Were you compelled to carry out orders of superior officers?

A: Yes, we were bound.

— UNB

Further texts of cross examination will be published as and when received.

ence in this case as they do not

take any necessary measures to

repair those buses. In last two

years, the university did not

buy any new bus. But univer-

sity at present needs at least

five new buses for the con-

nivance of large number of non-

versity like others I want that

As a student of Dhaka Uni-

residential students.

OPINION

Regional Polarisation Brewing

The sharp political polarisation in Bangladesh has become a source of concern to all peaceloving citizens, including the two main groups responsible for it, namely the BNP and the Awami League. This will certainly affect the regional polarisation in the zone. Let us have a look at the scenario (this is one of several interpretations).

India and Pakistan are very much interested in Bangladesh, for obvious reasons. Pakistan would prefer a strong and independent Bangladesh, standing on her own feet, able to fence for herself from undue outside pressures. Pakistan would also expect to take advantage of the common denominator, the Islam factor, as both the countries are Muslim-majority

Also, Bangladesh is placed strategically as a link between the Middle East and the Muslim countries of Southeast Asia or ASEAN. It is a vital bridge for positive activities of the world's the Christians.

It is a small world in this shrunken globe dominated by the information age. The new style of politics, would - and should - be different, whether it is evolution or revolution. How Dhaka is preparing to run and develop the country and handle the regional situation?

It is difficult for India not to behave like a big brother, whatever the implications, positive or negative. A neutral stance lish game of chance. But one would be a challenge to the diplomatic finesse of both the neighbouring countries. Therefore, India and Pakistan may not be backing the same major the unfolding politics of Asia. political party. That means each will lend support to any one party, different from the other.

The polarisation will increase. That is not the end of the game. Now enters the super-

power with its own global strategy. The US policy on South and Southeast Asia is more or less clear for basic analysis. Burma (Myanmar) has to be 'neutralised' (rich in untapped resources and oil), and ASEAN weakened for a foothold - now slightly easier with the recent upheaval in the money market.

The United States is likely to make Bangladesh its base in Asia, as there appears to be no other better alternative site (South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand burnt out, no foothold yet in ASEAN, and Singapore is too microscopic and too rich) Therefore the US would resist the wooing of Bangladesh by India, and strengthen Pakistan and Bangladesh against big India, as also, for stability, against political signals numbers one to three (speaking in the jargon of the weather reports). The US may also play with China and India to maintain a balance — the two big future powers in Asia in the 21st second largest community, after century, controlling two billion people (what a market!).

> So at present the Awami League would be facing cajoling from India on the one hand. and the combined pressure from Pakistan. US and the Muslim world on the other. Therefore, on paper, BNP happens to have the edge on the chess board, looking at the renonal weather.

Political forecasting is a tickaspect is clear: Bangladesh is in the very thick, of the regional game in South Asia; and would be made to play a pivotal role in the continent with the highest rate of development in the next century (the vultures are scanning). The stakes are high, regardless of Bangladesh's state of the nation.

Palestine and Israel

Sir, The Saudi King Fahd has rightly called on Arab countries to adopt a unified stand against Israel to force the Jewish state to honour its peace process. He had also reiterated that Arab countries will never accept anything other than the implementation of international resolutions demanding a total withdrawal from occupied land.

Following failed mission of US envoy Denis Ross and US Secretary of State Madeline Albright's visit to Middle East which ended in a flasco due to belligency and bellicosity of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, there are reports that the Palestinians and Israelis would resume their stalled 18-month peace talks recently. We are doubtful if the proposed talks would yield any fruitful result.

Ever since Benjamin Netanyahu came to power in May. 1996 he has been playing with fire. The civilised and democratic world is surprised and shocked at the politics of double standard and that the Israeli Prime Minister has been following the story of the wolf and the lamb. On the one hand, he has been grabing more and more Arab land, making Jewish settlements there, and on the other, he has been accusing the Palestinians of committing crime and terrorism. We strongly feel that Netanyahu is guilty of violating international agreements, human rights, democracy and free market economy. We also hold the strong opinion that Netanyahu should be treated as a war

criminal like Bosnian Serb

leader Radovan Karadzic and

military commander Rato Mi-

We wonder why the USA, EU. UN and NATO are following a policy of 'to be or not to be' with regard to historic 'Land for Peace' accord signed in Washington DC in September 1993 when they are all strictly trying to implement the Dayton agreement signed in Ohio, USA in 1995 on Bosnia.

We strongly feel that without further delay, without further waste of time, energy and public money, the best way to establish comprehensive peace in the Middle East is to impose an UN economic sanction on Israel like one imposed on Iraq. The UN economic sanction would continue till Israel implements the UN resolutions and the historic 'Land for Peace' accord of 1993 in letter and spirit.

O H Kabir 6, Hare Street, Wari, Dhaka-1203

Bus service of **Dhaka University**

Sir. More than 10,000 students of Dhaka University are non-residential. To give these students transport facilities, there are 16 buses on 11 routes under Dhaka University Transport Department. But these buses are not enough for more than 10,000 students. This transport network is also pervaded outside of Dhaka. Some routes, lacking sufficient buses, need immediate solution.

Under this circumstance, the students suffer a lot. Often they take the risk of life oscillating the road of the door of the bus. Some students have termed it as the 'fashion' of university students.

If we visit the university garrage, we find many buses lying carelessly, unused. Authority concerned seems to be an audi-

which they have shown in the

Deep appreciation for every letter on Diana and tremendous generosity

Sir, As you might imagine, many hundreds of thousands of people around the world have. since the tragic death of Diana. Princess of Wales, sent letters of condolence and presents to The Prince of Wales, Prince William and Prince Harry at St James' Palace in London. The volume of correspondence has been quite overwhelming and, whilst The Prince of Wales has ensured that as many as possible of the more than 300,000 letters have been answered, this will not be possible in every case.

It is with this in mind that

The Prince of Wales and the

young Princes have asked me to

make known to the people of

Bangladesh their deep apprecia-

tion of the very kind thoughts

many letters they have written and the gifts they have sent. The Prince of Wales and his sons have been enormously touched by the public support shown to them all around the world, and have taken great strength from The Prince of Wales and his

sons would like, through me. to say thank you, and to pass on to everybody who wrote to them their heartfelt best wishes, and to assure them that every letter has been read and each one gratefully received.

David walker CMG, CVO British High Commissioner to Bangladesh

the authority concerned will take necessary steps to solve this transport problem of the students. Masudul Karim Biswas Dept. of Mass Communication

and Journalism, Dhaka Uni

Why the silence? Sir, Why the silence over ex-

Prime Minister and Opposition Leader Begum Khaleda Zia's trips? First, we hear of the US itinerary. Then comes an invitation from the Pakistani PM for Khaleda to journey there either on the first leg of her trip to the States or on her return. Good. But why didn't the Pak PM invite our current PM as

All right, so Khaleda goes to Islamabad en route to US Some retired BNP diplomats and a few of her yes-men leaders organised the meeting. Nizhat Sumon

13/6. Kakrail, Dhaka

Bold stand Sir. Shabash on taking such

a bold stand against BEXIMCO... Reading it on the net made me feel very nice that The Daily Star is a paper I feel I'm still associated with.

Asrarul Islam Chowdhury Wolfson Court, Clarkson Road Cambridge CB3 OEH, UK