

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.

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 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.

The Chinese Vice Premier, evincing a keen interest in the telecommunications sector, has promised to install 1,40,000 digital telephones in Bangladesh.

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.

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'.

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.

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.

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.

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 on-board 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.

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.

ROBERT J Blendon et al writes on: "Bridging the Gap Between the Public 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.

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 growing gaps between the public and economists' perceptions about economy are as follows: Unemployment, according to government statistics, was hovering near a seven-year low in 1996. Yet, only a little over one-third of the public believed that unemployment rate was lower than it was five years ago.

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 that both are falling behind.

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

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

Public has many sources, public opinions are mostly influenced by what is happening to family members and to kith and kin. If 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.

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

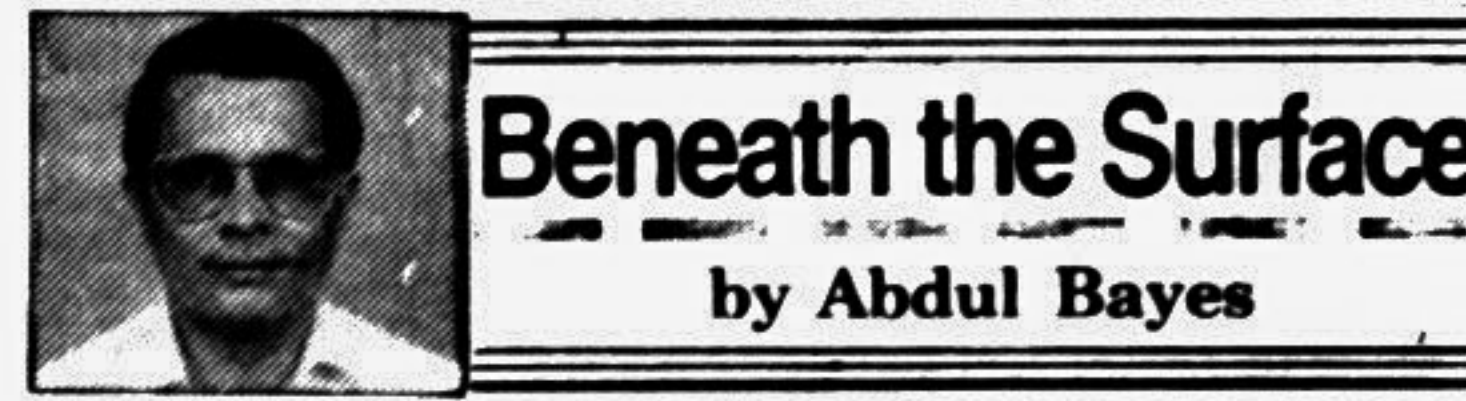
The media tend to portray the condition of the economy as being worse than it actually is leaving the public overly pessimistic about nation's economic future. Recent research suggests that the media tend to emphasize the aspects of the economy that are

getting worse and to pay less attention to the improved situation.

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.

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.



Beneath the Surface by Abdul Bayes

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 over time.

With respect to expectations for the economic future, while 93 per cent of economists view that long-term effect, 20 years

Examination by advocate Mahbubur Rahman, state defence counsel for absconding accused Major (ret'd) Bazil Huda:

Q: Was the night parade pre-scheduled? 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 Serniabat's house? A: No.

Q: You came to give witness about what you saw at Serniabat'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 (ret'd) 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.

BAGABANDHU MURDER CASE

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

Continued from yesterday

Cross-examination of PW 27, Havildar (ret'd) Harunur Rashid, in Bangabandhu murder case began when the court resumed Thursday morning.

Following are the excerpts from his examination by advocate T M Akbar, defence counsel for accused Lt Col (LPR) Muhiuddin:

Q: Artillery night training takes place with cannons. Isn't it? 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? A: Yes.

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 town? 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 Bahur? 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 IO 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.

Q: Was there 21 gun salute when the body of Bangabandhu was lying to rest? A: No.

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? A: Yes.

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 coffin.

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 Raazag Khan for Col (ret'd) Sultan Shahryar Rashid Khan and Hon Capt (ret'd) 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 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? A: No.

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? A: Yes.

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 coffin.

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 Raazag Khan for Col (ret'd) Sultan Shahryar Rashid Khan and Hon Capt (ret'd) 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 (ret'd) Shehabuddin by advocate Fariduddin Ahmed, state defence counsel for absconding accused Major (ret'd) 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

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 university at present needs at least five new buses for the convenience of large number of non-residential students.

As a student of Dhaka University like others I want that 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 University

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 yet?

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 Samon 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 Wofson Court, Clarkson Road Cambridge CB3 0EH, UK

Q: How many vehicles were with you when you went to the town? 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 Bahur? 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 IO 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-ninth 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? A: No.

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? A: Yes.

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 coffin.

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 Raazag Khan for Col (ret'd) Sultan Shahryar Rashid Khan and Hon Capt (ret'd) 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 (ret'd) Shehabuddin by advocate Fariduddin Ahmed, state defence counsel for absconding accused Major (ret'd) 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

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 university at present needs at least five new buses for the convenience of large number of non-residential students.

As a student of Dhaka University like others I want that 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 University

Art Buchwald's COLUMN

The Ben Hur Pitch

MY friend Moses (a.k.a Charlton Heston) came to Washington to make his usual pitch for gun ownership and his usual attacks on those who would demand the banning of them.

In his presentation at the National Press Club, Heston (a.k.a. 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 religion and the press, among other freedoms.

He said, as he parted the Red Sea. "The Second Amendment is America's first freedom — the one that protects all the others."

Heston also said guns along are what offer the absolute capacity to live without fear. "I want to save the Second Amendment from those nipping little wars-of-attrition fights over alleged Saturday Night Specials, plastic guns, cop-killer bullets and other for-prime-time-newsman-invented-by-some-press-agent-over-at-gun-control-headquarters."

I may not agree with what Heston has to say, but I will defend 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 Amendment that guarantees him the right to do it.

The people who don't believe the Second Amendment is necessary 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 other reason than to attract attention.

Not so, says the National Rifle Association. Everyone knows the media are corrupt, and if all of us were armed, reporters would think twice about what they write in the papers.

Where Heston got into deep trouble was when he said the right to bear arms is more important than the guarantee of freedom of religion. This upset people who believe it was Charlton Heston who brought his people out of Egypt by guaranteeing their right to assemble in the desert.

When I asked a clergyman what he thought of the Heston argument, he said, "Thank God he didn't start shooting from the hip before he gave us the Ten Commandments."

By arrangement with Los Angeles Times Syndicate and UNB

OPINION

Regional Polarisation Brewing

A Husnain

The sharp political polarisation in Bangladesh has become a source of concern to all peace-loving 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 states.

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 second largest community, after 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 would be a challenge to the diplomatic finesse of both the neighbouring countries. Therefore, India and Pakistan may not be backing the same major 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 century, controlling two billion people (what a market!).

So at present the Awami League would be facing a juggling 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 regional weather.

Political forecasting is a ticklish game of chance. But one aspect 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 unfolding politics of Asia, the continent with the highest rate of development in the next century (the vultures are scanning). The stakes are high, and the game of Bangladesh's state of the nation.