Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

Dhaka, Monday, November 24, 1997

## **Better Pay Your Taxes**

The cash-strapped government faces a challenge in making up for the revenue collection shortfall it recorded during June to September of the current fiscal year. The deficit was as high as Tk 318.59 crore and could increase down the year. Reduced import duty accrual from car dealers owing to court cases filed by them very largely contributed to a sharp fall in the overall receipts. This might not prove to be a one-timer surprise; for in money matters, the taste of litigational option could linger. Besides, one cannot be too sure about tax administration magically turning around in other areas of collection. Dividends of evasion are alluring both for the evader and his consultant. So why bother? That could very well be their outlook unless they are shaken to sense by tax intelligence work, not of the snoopy kind, but of the persuasive professional type.

The process of reform must begin with the NBR itself and then encapsulate the present and potential tax paying people in the country. As against less than a million tax-payers on the book there are potentially more than a crore to be hauled into the direct tax net. A matter-of-fact educational campaign needs to be launched and carried out all the year round to instill in the solvent people's mind a patriotic as well as a self-serving obligation to file their tax returns. How is the readiness to pay going to be in pragmatic self-interest when the tax evaders and their promoters revel in equating cheating the government or society with a 'saving' made or an increase effected in their personal incomes? We just have the latest piece of evidence to show how: the government, pushed to desperation by a sharp fall in revenue collection substantially raised the prices of urea, petrol, octane, diesel and kerosene between June and August. This followed the steep 15 per cent increase in the power tariff announced in October and December of last year. This is how a government has to rob Peter to pay Paul when shortfall occurs in expected receipts to the national exchequer.

Macro-economic balance is upset by deficit financing. Bank borrowing by the government has a way of denying the private sector of credit to operate their industries and business. While the World Bank says we must limit financing of fiscal deficit to 1.5 per cent of the GDP, we have hovered with two per cent during the last two years. We better pay the taxes.

## Garments Stampede

Garment factories, it looks like, have entered an endless cycle of death caused by fire-related accidents. But real fire has rarely been the killer. It is the scare of fire that has been causing irreparable losses of life with maddening consistency. The death of two female garment workers in the city on Friday brought this fact to the surface once again. Thanks to one unthinking undiscerning good Samaritan's voice, the word fire spread resulting in too many people seeking passage through a small outlet at a time.

We have time and again commented in this column that these are not accidental deaths. These are murders owing to human callousness and irresponsibility. What else can one point the finger at Friday's fatal stampede than lack of proper floor management? Ordinarily, garment factory floors are pretty well managed. There is leadership and organisation to make sure that the workers give their full when it comes to production. The question is how come they are so careless about rudimentary safety considerations on the floor whenever the chips are down? It is unlikely that there would have been any death at all if there were people to counsel the workers how to behave in a crisis and what to do instead of running helter skelter out of panic. The truth is deep in the psyche of the owners lies the motive of ruthless profiteering and the irresistible temptation to exploit man's helplessness out of his want.

We have urged the government repeatedly to make sure that the garment factory owners adopt the little safety measures like broadening and increasing the number of exits including the staircases, arrange fire drills regularly. But then these are the initiatives the owners should have adopted on their own by now to soothe their conscience which they seemingly have in such short supply. The unabated death news say there has not been any change in their attitude.

## Unstable Vegetable Prices

When the first winter vegetables make their appearance in the kutcha market stalls of the city, it's some arrival! Green beans at 160 to 200 a kg. It should better have been called Dillika Laddu. If you are floored by the vendor's quotation for gold and hustle away, you pine for the taste that you know nothing beside these can give. If you slay yourself and collect some 200 grams, you will suffer because it wouldn't taste right. It is only when the bean price comes down to earth from its heavenly perch and sells for around Taka 30, the right tasting variety will be there for the asking. And when it will plummet to Tk 5 of even below, the same will cease being bit for human consumption. From Tk 200 to Tk 5 for the same quantity of the same victuals in the span of some four months must be some kind of a record.

The main reason for abnormal prices in the vegetable market is transportation-related. At the end of the season or when there is a glut, transport cost goes past the grower's price. And the grower, unable to pay for transport, starts feeding his cattle on radishes and cauliflowers and sweet gourds. If only some agency cared after the harvest and transport and price situations, the city dweller could get enough vegetable at a reasonable price round the year and there wouldn't be any wastage either.

There is then the evil of market manipulation. Only a week ago all things vegetable were selling at 10 to 20 per cent less than the current week's price. Why this unforeseen spurt? Wholesalers blamed transport for the umpteenth time. But in point of fact there was no transport breakdown in the relevant time.

There must be some kind of rationalisation in the vegetable market.

# Russia in Search of a Strategic Partnership

Russia pretends to turn to the East but in reality its genuine orientation is towards the West and America, where her slavophile culture has some chance of blending and the Russians are more at home in their socio-cultural exchanges with the West.

disappearance of the great strategic friction. the West's relationship with new Russia is reminiscent of cold war legacy with the Transatlantic community still remaining undecided as to what the former superpower is now to them — an ally, or a client or a mere defeated adversary? So far the West has failed to put her in one single category. Likewise, this ambivalence is no less acute for Russia which is unable to integrate itself with the West although she chooses to be its friends. She is too big, to proud and too nationalist to be reduced to vassalism. Even if the cold war has been won by the West Russians are not prepared to accept the defeat and continues to claim the traditional greatness of their country. Sharing with the US the special global responsibility the postcold war Russia very much wanted to evolve a strategic partnership with the West but thus far she has been meted either with veiled contempt or

subtle discrimination from the

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Moreover, much to the disappointment of the Russians the flow of the western financial assistance as a dividend for dumping their socialist ideology came at the most in trickles. The West only dangled their carrots which often turned into sticks. In the meantime, much vaunted reforms initiated in the wake of Soviet disintegration is practically dead. The organised crimes and social chaos symbolised by a mafia capitalism are what emerged as the most explosive force from the wreckage of Soviet communism. The so-called mafia has not only stalled economic reforms, it also constituted serious threat to post-Soviet democracy. There is a growing skepticism among the Russians about a democratic transition and productive partnership with the West which is busy drawing a new security line in Europe by expanding NATO further to the East with the exclusion of Russia. More Russians

TIRAD C. Chaudhuri is a

anniversary of his birth. Much

of Niradeana is controversial,

mostly because be willed it to be

so. There will now be no debate.

however, about his being the

longest living among writers of

world stature in all history.

Chaudhuri was conscious of

hitting the longevity jackpot.

He was lately crediting himself

with writing a volume, so far

his latest, "Three Horsemen of

the New Apocalypse". at 99; well

past any writer in history,

Sophocles being a distant

second turning in the last tome

in his eighties. Perhaps no one

anywhere, even in his Bengal

now torn into two and where he

is the best unloved man and

writer, would grudge him this

latest plume to his exhibitionist

streak of egotism. We con-

gratulate you, Nirad Babu, on

not just reaching the three-digit

age but indeed for doing it in

unique fashion, with both in-

tellect and variety undimin-

ished with a zest for life and

work knowing no respite, and

keeping your gauntlet ready to

throw at the slightest sugges-

Chaudhuri has his own theory

of what made him preserve

himself and so well up to to-

day's hundred. He says it's all

due to his spare and diminutive

structure that demanded so lit-

tle of the material world and

was so spared the overwork to

assimilate the same. Unlike his

Durvasa or Chanakya type, he

hardly ever kept good health.

What made him make the

mark? Does it boil down to

mind making it over matter? It

contrary extraordinnaire, from

the very start in Kishoregani.

and specially in his grooming

years in Calentta, seemed to

specialise in creating problems

for himself, all because of an

unbending mindset shaping up

from intellectual moral pro-

bity. This all again can be

sourced to a tremendous sense

of self-respect. And boundless

confidence in himself. How did

he overcome his mundane chal-

lenges and the intellectual

crises, the former often almost

putting an end to his expedi-

tions of the mind? For over-

This go-it-alone man, a man

must be very nearly it.

Like all centenarians.

tion of challenge.

hundred now; yesterday

the 100th

are convinced today that the western countries plan to undermine Russia's status further and turn it only into a source of raw materials for the developed

Caught between her lofty ambitions and reduced capabilities Russia now desperately struggles to extricate from its present predicaments. Repeatedly rebuffed by the West on the question of NATO expansion and strategic partnership, as the fallen giant looks for an alternative to buttress its remaining strength a rising China emerges as a choice on the agenda of the many in the Russian foreign policy community. Although senior Russian diplomats claimed that the interests of Russia and China coincided in almost every area. President Yeltsin, however, remained lukewarm for long apparently not to annoy the West which in a significant way sustained him in power. But now even Yeltsin is explicit in his tirade against 'some' who are pulling the world towards a unipolar order. On the occasion of Chinese President Jiang Zemin's visit to Russia early this year, Yeltsin declared that their two countries had established a strategic partnership. one that would shape twentyfirst century world in a 'multipolar' mould. The Chinese President did not, however, want to call the newly-emerging bilateral relations between the two countries anything more than a 'relation of friendship and co-

operation'. Nevertheless in the past few years, shared perceptions have brought the two countries closer to each other and with reasons. The West's attempt for the Eastward expansion of NATO has been a source of concern for the both in varying degrees. The growing conflict of Russian interests with American interference in her 'near abroad' partic-

ularly in central Asian region constitutes another serious irritant, both Russia and China have a shared interest in the stability of this volatile region. Both countries have close links with Iran of which the West is circumspect and even suspicious. They have common distrust of Islamic fundamentalism of 'Taliban' variety which has already caused problems in Tajikistan, a close ally of Russia and along the border that shares with China Afghanistan.

As NATO's forward line moves closer towards Russia. the US has also thrown a secu-

Historically China and Russia coexisted uneasily, and at times in violent conflict. Although geography compelled them to live as neighbours the relations have seldom been harmonious because of profound differences between them in their character and outlook. Even when they both were within the framework of international communism there were upswings and downswings in their relationship. Now with a pronounced ideological distance, can they reach the sort of understanding implicit in a strategic partnership when their 'unbreakable friendship'



rity ring around China by concluding a security pact with Australia and Indonesia and roping in Japan for a similar arrangement. Both China and Russia watch these developments with increasing anxiety Both have also been discriminately kept out of World Trade Organisation and are occasionally chided for their human rights performance. Given this backdrop, the emergence of a strategic partnership between China and Russia is, of course, one of the possibilities but as of now both particularly China would like to go slow in spite of President Yeltsin's hyperbole Moscow during Jiang Zemin's visit. But most observers of Sino-Russian scene are sceptic about more fundamental question whether such partnership is at all a possibility now or later. If the past is any indication, the prospects are few inof early could not last even beyond mid-50s? Only Chengis Khan could, for sometimes,

bring them together under his sway during the medieval age. However, the current phase of Sino-Russian friendship initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev's visit to Beijing in 1989 was propelled by pressing compulsions on both sides. For decades the Sino-Soviet relations had been difficult and tense and a great drag in every conceivable way on both countries. Neither China, even less so Soviet Union already on the brink of a economic collapse could any longer afford the drain caused by the maintenance of 7.500 km undemarcated and thus militarised Sino-Soviet border. Since the Beijing summit of 1989 not only the border tensions were removed and the quantum of troops to be deployed reduced the overall relations are in upswing. Two-way

trade rose by 25 per cent last year reaching \$7bn as China went on a weapon-buying spree with massive transfer of defence technology from Russia to China. The mood would continue to be buoyant on either side so long the relations are mutually beneficial.

But beneath the surface, justifiable and serious misgivings about this sudden turn towards China do exist in Moscow. There are sufficient historical and psychological reasons for this. Behind the hoop-la about new ties with China a deep suspicion and feer of her lurks among the Russians including the country's defence minister Igor Rudinov who still considers Beijing to be potential enemy than a friend. Most observers tend to see Russia's growing leaning towards China more as her response to NATO expansion which she has apparently failed to stop. Russia, now the 'sick man' of the world politics wants to show its estranged western friends that it still has alternatives to fall back. China - even with her memory of bitter rift between Mao and Khruschev, the deep ideological divide and violent armed clashes over Ussuri river region in not too distant past is obliged to play up as the recipient of Russia's military hardware and technology. Russia's warming up with China is also considered by the latter a timely 'Russian card' to be used in her dealing with Washington. Apart from these minor give and take there is hardly any substance in the much bel-

lyhooed partnership. Also in her desire to prove that she has a Asian dimension to her foreign policy, Russia pretends to turn to the East but in reality its genuine orientation is towards the West and America, where her slavophile culture has some chance of blending and the Russians are

more at home in their sociocultural exchanges with the West. At the moment because of a pique with Washington, Moscow is seemingly turning toward Asia. But there is no guarantee that after a short time when the West offers new inducement to China — and it will - then Asia, China and socalled strategic partnership will not again be forgotten.

It is still more intriguing that Moscow does not advance any definition or elaboration either of 'strategic' or 'partnership' - the buzzword of newlycultivated Sino-Russian fraternity. In the new cycle of Sino-Russian normalisation, the relationship rests mainly on trade which of course has steadily grown since 1989 Beijing summit — with Russia providing industrial goods, machinery and arms while China supplying consumers goods to each other. The trade does not require any political alliance or strategic partnership. China's trade with not-so-friendly Washington also was up to the tune of \$63bn last year. Such a volume of Sino-US trade did not call for an alliance or partnership. Then for Russia, strategy against whom? Partnership to what purpose? Boris Yeltsin is known both for his notorious unpredictability and expediency in domestic politics. But he cannot perhaps achieve any of his goals with his departure from the fundamentals of international politics.

The problem with Russia in her search for a strategic partnership is the country's amateurish attempt to play geopolitics on the scale of the Soviet Union which is no more there. The problem also lies with her blind ego of being a superpower in yesteryears, while today her clout has diminished immea surably. Unless she lowers her sight from being expansively global as in the old time to being more modest geographically as well as politically in keeping with her present predicaments she is to face more rebuffs and from all quarters.

## An Unbeaten Century

by Waheedul Haque

This Victorian votary of British imperialistic hauteur has done a wonderful good turn to the Bengali mind. Bengal is central to his writings. And who knows more than him about the best standards of creative performance of the nations of the world?

come he did everyone of the myriad blocks standing in his way. And perhaps this perpetual struggle to beat all that looked to be eating himself up has kept him so well and for so long. We may both be shocked or agitated by many of his brash comments and observations from an incorribly proimperialist position and a lifestyle more English than an Englishman's. But he has been a boon to us all, specially to us Bengalees, and all of this gift he has fashioned himself intellectually and more through a unique persona. His is a life of unsurpassed

scholarship. A recognized authority on Greek and Latin classics as also on medieval and modern continental literature in French, German, Spanish and of course English, he is also an expert in such widely dissimilar subjects as military science and viniculture. He has been too a respected connoisseur of paintings and western classical music. One can suspect that he has Toynbyesque group on world history and also a profounder than Durantish approach to philosophers and their philosophies. But what did this anglophile nonpareil do with his vast knowledge and his incomparable power of intellectual labour? He wrote only of India. - India as lived and remembered by him. His excursions into biography writing also had very much to do with India. "Scholar Extraextraordinary" was the life of Max Mueller, who to the Indian mind was the greatest writer on Indian scriptures and philosophy and civilisation. And then the other piece was "Master of Bengal", life of Robert Clive, the Welshman founder of the British empire in India. All the rest of his writings were autobiographical in nature save one critical and pithy volume on Hinduism. And that is India all

But this formidable and ponderous Indiana is India as seen by an angry Bengali babu,



Nirad C. Chaudhury: The Last Englishman — Courtesy: Time

and often times Bengal, very unabashedly. Bengal - its literature and culture and social becoming. Bengal has produced many world figures from S. N. Bose to Amartya Sen in the present century alone. No one of these has introduced Bengal to the world abroad more than Nirad C. Chaudhuri or better than him except of course Satyajit Roy, whose Bengal was, however, an untitled paean to poverty and humanity. When Tagore spoke to the world, he spoke of the world and not of Bengal although he was full of Bengal and in truth very little

Chaudhuri has waxed eloquent of not looking back, ever. From Kishoreganj he went to Calcutta, never for once to return to the East Bengal — or as he always prided to call himself, a Bangal-home. From Calcutta to Delhi and then to the intellectual El Dorado of Oxford, England. Never wanting to come back to the habitat abandoned. And has anyone noticed, says Nirad Chandra with a hardly suppressed glee, that it has always been Westward Ho! But no, he has indeed not travelled for from his Kishoreganj and his Calcutta. His Oxford retreat of decades is but a cozy Calcutta flat mines the uncongenial milieu of the great Bengali city. He did not move much - from an angry literary worker to a bitter literary giant is but little distance.

This Victorian Votary of British imperialistic hauteur has done a wonderful good turn to the Bengali mind. Bengal is central to his writings. And who knows more than him about the best standards of creative performance of the nations of the world? He has set his Bankim and his Rabindranath beside the highest and mightiest of the world. Medieval Bengal was provincial. Bengal — Bangladesh and West Bengal — is worse off now at the threshold of the Third Millennium. Nirad C. Chaudhuri derides Bengal for its provincial

rusticity but, all the same, took it into the world abroad with head held high. One thing he never suffered from is a sense of inferiority which begets selfdoubt. He bordered on the megalomaniac but was saved by an unsparing pursuit of knowledge and the delight he took from this. And an unsuspected unremitting patriotism which, we would insist had at its centre not so much India as it was Bengal And how was he vindicated

in his confidence as a writer

and scholar! He was the one who could, very rightfully, talk through his hat. For he was the only one who could more than get away with that. Regally. His magnum opus 'Thy Hand, Great Anark! was also his bulkiest all 979 pages of it. And this comes from a nonagenarian's pen! Look at the man's conceit he posted the manuscript to a publisher never introduced to him. So that no one could say anything but sheer merit made the mss accepted. The publisher accepted it, all the same, but reverently suggested that Chaudhuri reduce the size substantially, first by ditching the profuse quotations from non-English classics occurring everywhere in the text without any translation. Nothing doing, said Chaudhuri, not a comma would go out. They should better return the mss. That was the man. But why am I writing in the past tense. Let me say this is the man as he was for eight decades and more. And we pray he pass as thus. A great Bengali a great man. Like a very good distance runner he opened up at lap 54 with his charmer of a debut, "Autobiography of an Unknown Indian". He has not yet completed fifty years of publishing. Pray he does it. We wish all Bengal, all of the Subcontinent, to celebrate this small big man. And how we expect to get more volumes from him. He can do it. For, he still can quote at random very long passages from the vast treasury of Rabindranath's poetry. Perfect with page and edition number.

Another thing is sustaining him in his unique aging. Rabindrasangeet. He must be knowing all of the 2200 Tagore numbers, text and tune. There is no one like him. And no one will be.

## Private airline

Sir, I feel very happy to find that another private airline will soon be operating flights early next year from Dhaka to important places like Chittagong, Sylhet and Jessore. This is indeed good news for people living in these places, as currently there are limited number of flights to these places. Aero Bengal airlines did give us some hope when flights were introduced between Dhaka-Barisal, Dhaka-Sylhet and Dhaka-Chittagong, but very soon these flights were suspended. I feel with limited flights by Biman currently available to passengers, GMG airlines is not only likely to derive maximum benefit out of these flights but also will be providing useful services to people living outside Dhaka. I am sure there will be many passengers like me availing GMG flights. Chittagong-Sylhet-Chittagong should prove popular to people like me who are connected with tea and need to fly quite frequently to Sylhet. Perhaps GMG airlines could

consider a stopover at Shumsh-

planters. I full agree with Mr Abdus Sattar, Chairman of GMG airlines that there is adequate room for a premium air service which will cater not only to business travellers but also to overseas travellers with greater flight frequencies than are generally available in the country now. The limited number of Biman flights between Chittagong and Dhaka now are becoming very unreliable; timings are also not quite convenient and very often, passengers are delayed or flights are cancelled at the eleventh hour causing great inconvenience to passengers.

Rasul Nizam 31, Agrabad Commercial Area PO Box 71, Chittagong.

### "Names for Identity" Sir, I would like to extend

my sincere hanks to Mr M H Khan for his kind apology. He proved himself to be a true gentleman, who indeed are rare

ernugger for the benefit of tea . these days! Unlike some his name before). See what it means letter was not at all rude but just had a question which he was curious about.

> Opinions vary from person to person. No two persons will have exactly the same. But you don't have to be rude or harsh to the other person for that matter, especially a lady! You can just express your disagreement. which is always welcome in a debate. To some, culture is more important while to others religion is.

Another thing about our nomenclature is, girls and even boys are not given their father's name as surname. In western countries and even in Arab countries, they are. Otherwise how would one know who the father is? Sometimes each son of one father has a different surname! That they are brothers is also obscure that way. Then after marriage, women are supposed to take their husband's name, but that too they don't. They, for example, write Mrs Farida Begum, which means she is Mrs of Mr Begum! Or Mrs Ali (if Ali is her father's name and was her maiden

Why are women of our country hesitant to take their husband's name? It makes identification so much easier, because family is a unit in the society. She is now living with her husband and they together with their children make a family unit. If they have one surname, it makes things much easier. rather than carrying her father's name and each child having a different surname. It becomes difficult to connect them,

unless told. Are we following the western rule or eastern or an Islamic one? We don't know.

Dr Sabrina Rashid Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka

## **EPZ** at Feni

Sir, Two export processing zones set up by the government in Dhaka and Chittagong have proved to be a grand success. Encouraged by this, the govmore EPZs in the country

ernment is setting up some It is felt that Feni is an ideal

place for this purpose, because there is enough governmentowned land at Feni Airfield which was acquired perhaps during the second world war. Quantum of land may be around 1000 acres. So the government won't have to acquire any land which involved a lot of money, time and human suffering in this land-hungry country. Feni is well communicated with Dhaka and Chittagong both by rail and road.

So the government should seize this opportunity and should immediately go for an EPZ at Feni

Zamir Ali Feni

## English from Class I

Sir. The present government after its assumption of power formed a national education commission for developing a dynamic education policy on the basis of Dr K Khuda Education Commission report. The members of this commission are renowned and respectable

persons in their respective fields The recommendations have come up to the ministry

and some of the dailies pub-

lished the same in brief.

The Commission recommended that English (language) will be introduced from Class Three in all government primary schools. I appeal to the Commission and to

the government to reconsider the decision before implementing it, because it will create inequality among the students of government and non-government (KG, English medium etc.) schools. Certainly those who are introduced to English language from Class One will be more skilled in the subject. And they will get preference in their further education and in their

introduced from Class One in both government and non-government schools.

So I think English should be

M Nazrul Islam GSS, Mohammadpur Dhaka-1207

service life.