

Export Prospects

Export growth in the last financial year was impressive at 16.81 per cent, up from 13.8 per cent in 1996-97. The credit for this export surge dating back to the time it took power obviously belongs to this government. Previous to that point in time we had two successive bad export years. Why? Because of unrelenting hartals, evidently. So, the moral here is, left to its own devices and motions an economy grows just as it has during the last two years in the export area, due to a relatively hartal-free atmosphere. Our belief is the export performance could have been even better if the Chittagong port had worked at an optimum level.

Partly because of the improved export outlook and partly in consideration of the programmatic nature of the five-year plan, the original export target for the current fiscal year has been revised upward at 5.8 billion US dollars. The differential is only 170 million US dollars in an overall pragmatic frame of mind that sets a modest, realisable export growth target of 12.4 per cent. The question that naturally crops up here is: if the actual rate of growth was 16.18 in the 1997-1998 fiscal what is it that has made us lower the aim at 12.4 per cent for 1998-1999? The commerce ministry perhaps owes us an explanation there.

In order to sustain the upturn in export we have to maintain price competitiveness in the international market. This has been rendered a bit difficult in view of the fact that the value of our currency has appreciated markedly vis-a-vis that of countries competing with us in the export markets. What good the devaluation of Taka could do to us has been perhaps a bit offset by the drop in the money value of our export rivals. On the lucky side though is the new prospect arising out of the limited economic sanctions having been imposed on India and Pakistan following their nuclear tests.

Our import of investment goods which fell rather sharply last year must be stepped up this year in order to give an extra-impetus to export.

The niche markets will have to be utilised more. No goodwill-sapping incident should be allowed to recur. We hear that the Export Promotion Bureau has served notices on 26 garment units who had allegedly committed quota frauds asking them to stop all export activities. We agree simple reprimands do not do. Strict vigil and stringent measures are required against all recalcitrant parties.

We strongly reaffirm our faith in export-diversification urging the government to accord maximum policy and material support to the export of processed fruits, frozen foods, vegetables cut-flowers and the like. Not a day should be lost in providing for the computer software export as well.

A Distasteful Affair

Only last week Bangladesh hockey ace Sadeque slapped the selectors by netting a hat-trick. And on Wednesday the Jatiya Sangsad Standing Committee on Finance slapped the Finance Ministry by rejecting and returning the ministry's report on the economic situation of the country. Sadeque's shaming the hockey selectors may have been a great personal satisfaction for our best hockey striker but it may not result in wiping off the mistake they did by not including Sadeque in the team named for overseas engagement. The Standing Committee's rejection of Finance Ministry's report underscores a shameful performance of the government amounting to a national scandal and is not such as the ministry can sit on uncaring for long.

Incredible but true, the report caused by the Standing Committee to be written was submitted without the Finance Minister or anybody in his place signing it. The indecorous slip in this state's most formal communication is an unforgivable sin. This could justifiably be taken as a misdemeanour — a most unfortunate and supremely avoidable thing to happen. And to compound the sin, the Finance Minister was not available for the meeting in spite of a three-week notice. Nothing presumably could be more important for his office than attending the JS Standing Committee's meeting. Hurting the norms this way will surely mean a loss in the Standing Committee's effectiveness as a watch-dog body. Which again would be a blow to democratic and efficient governance.

Reaching the report unsigned could be an unintended faux pas. But the Finance Ministry report's not reflecting properly what the parliamentary body had wanted to know from the ministry — as the newspapers reported it — was a dereliction of such order that AL joined BNP to reject the paper unanimously. How could the ministry be so callous?

One good and gratifying thing emerges from this thoroughly distasteful affair. The boon of a parliamentary committee functioning duly. And we also have here a wonderful bonus such as haven't come our way since the two major parties voting in tandem for a reversion to the parliamentary form of government — all the parties on the committee joining hands to throw out the ministry report.

Pre-Nightingale?

The emergency department of the Dhaka Medical College Hospital is run according to a 15-year old duty roster — two doctors and six nurses for a shift. In the same span of time patient arrival has perhaps tripled to quadrupled. When for a decade and more the two shift doctors have been finding it impossible to attend to all patients in their charge, they have learnt to take the emergencies easy. Or they would all have gone insane. The result: a male nurse, stitching a three-inch gush, laboriously and vainly, sending a screaming boy into stupor, as reported in The Daily Star on Thursday.

Why has it to be so? The hospital Director knows the rule that all patients in the emergency must be treated by a doctor but says this is not possible. Is there any plan to make it possible by increasing the number of the attending doctors, say four per shift? None for the present moment, is the answer.

And why? It should be the Director's business to press the right number of doctors into service so that not one of his patients goes without competent professional treatment. Budgets are his headache. If he feels there should be six doctors manning an emergency shift, he should go and get them. If he feels helpless let him say so and seek support. Is it the health ministry's wrath that reduces him to inaction while his patients suffer? Perhaps it is all a standard bureaucratic lethargy machine at work. This won't do in areas where government comes in direct physical contact with public. We charge both the Director and his ministry to do everything needed to fashion and run the DMCH emergency as it ideally should be run.

The Moral Dimension of Nuclear Proliferation

THE Indian nuclear tests of May last have irreversibly changed South Asia. They have catalysed retaliatory tests in Pakistan and negated the prospects for a roll back as were done by several other countries even after reaching the nuclear threshold. South Asia has now in its possession devices capable — with the touch of a finger — of annihilating a civilisation which could have taken millennia in its making. The region would unavoidably bristle with new series of tensions usually generated by horror weapons in possession.

And this has been done by a country of the tradition of 'ahimsa' and 'satyagraha' with which India waded its unique struggle for independence. A nuclear-weapon-free-world has been India's principal plank of nuclear policy even after its launching of nuclear programme in 1948 which its leaders claimed was for peaceful purpose. India took the lead in calling for an end to all nuclear testings during the '50s when the mushroom cloud of above-ground tests became the visible symbol of nuclear age. Nehru's India guided by an abhorrence of nuclear weapon called for negotiations on prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapon and its testings.

In 1965, alongwith a small group of non-aligned countries, it was India who had put forward the idea of international non-proliferation agreement

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under which the nuclear weapon states (NWS) would agree to give up their arsenal provided other countries refrained from developing or acquiring such weapons. But when the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT) finally emerged in 1968 India — obsessed with China's nuclear explosion in 1964 — refrained from signing it while remaining committed to nuclear disarmament. Thus began a period of dichotomy in India's nuclear policy.

Apparently it dislodged her from the moral high ground she so painstakingly built earlier for herself. A plethora of 'security concerns' clouded her perceptions. To make things worse she, to the anguish and surprise of international community, exploded her first nuclear device in 1974. It was a clear departure from her earlier arguments that the nuclear weapons were certainly not the weapon of war and hence no safeguard for security. Also otherwise India's security in 1974 was perhaps at its best after having defeated her arch rival, Pakistan in the war of 1971 from which India emerged preeminent power in the subcontinent by tilting its power balance in her favour. China was going

through its internal transitions during the period and posed no serious threat to India, already equipped with friendship treaty with former Soviet Union.

After staging Pokhran-I India already lost her moral standing in either pursuing the NWS for disarmament or dissuading others from taking a nuclear plunge. In the mean-

time the NWS also were guilty of not carrying forward their disarmament as envisaged in the NPT which was unscrupulously extended unconditionally in 1995. This however afforded India a fresh ground for opposing CTBT in 1996. But now with Pokhran II India's hypocrisy is also unmasked before the world.



PERSPECTIVES

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

time the NWS also were guilty of not carrying forward their disarmament as envisaged in the NPT which was unscrupulously extended unconditionally in 1995. This however afforded India a fresh ground for opposing CTBT in 1996. But now with Pokhran II India's hypocrisy is also unmasked before the world.

In hindsight it appears now that India never had a principle with regard to her nuclear policy which has proved to be highly opportunistic. It is evident from the extent of contra-

dictions with which her nuclear programme is replete and the wild shifts in official pronouncements after the tests were carried out. Prime Minister Vajpayee said that India's nuclear weapons were for 'defensive purpose' which could rationalise even preemptive first use. Then he offered 'no first use' but quickly hedged it in with other conditions. The nuclearisation only shows a lack of consensus at the policy making level and BJP's obsession with the bombs. It may be recalled that the Sangh Parivar demanded bombs as an article of faith since 1951 — regardless of external threat. Even now few are convinced of the kind of threat to India that can drive her to go nuclear. As a matter of fact, a new Shakti of nuclear annihilation has now been added to India's pantheon which turns radioactive sands of Pokhran into an object of

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improved version, the hydrogen bomb. She almost sparked off nuclear holocaust in 1962 by transporting her nuclear-tipped missile to Cuba for use against the US then the British, French and Chinese not only made the bombs but piled them up in their respective arsenals. The stock pile of P-5 are enough for destroying the planet fifty times over and again. Thus they hold the mankind hostage to their dictates. In 25 years for which NPT was signed they did not bother to abide by its provisions regarding disarmament. The manner in which it was extended and the scrappings of the conditions contained in its earlier version simply point to their unwillingness for disarmament. Isn't it the height of immorality?

How can the five nuclear powers prevent nuclear arms development by other countries which are clinging to their own nuclear arsenal? The NPT came into force in 1970 as a temporary measure to recognise the nuclear capabilities of the five countries who conducted nuclear tests by 1967. But the treaty did not recognise this special status on a permanent basis. Preaching non-proliferation by the five nations without acknowledging their own failure at disarmament will not work. It will not be surprising if in course of time more countries — Iran, Israel, North Korea and so on — line up to gate-crash the citadel of nuclear powers.

LETTER FROM AMERICA

Oh My President, Why Have You Sunk So Low!

Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton

The American public have been quite unmoved by the momentous events of August 17. They had already given their verdict: yes, Clinton had sex with Lewinsky and lied about it, but he is doing a great job as President and should continue to do so, and should not be impeached or forced to resign.

PRESIDENT Bill Clinton's narcissism eventually caught up with him. Always operating on the dark fringes of morality, for once he had no escape route. Either he had to humiliate himself publicly and admit infidelity, or he had to go over the precipice. Ever the survivor, Clinton chose to eat crow. On Monday, August 17, at 10 P.M. eastern standard time, the President addressed the nation on television for four and a half minutes. He admitted to having "an inappropriate relationship" (read "sexual") with the former White House intern, Monica Lewinsky, called it wrong and took full responsibility.

He regretted misleading the nation and apologized to his wife and daughter. Earlier in the day, for four and a half hours, he had answered questions (via television) in front of a grand jury investigating possible crimes committed by him. On January 26, 1998, President Clinton had made a contradictory statement: "I did not have any sexual relations with that woman, Miss Lewinsky."

For those who like to equate President Clinton's indiscretions with the late President Richard Nixon's Watergate crimes, here is a comparison. The possible charges against Clinton are perjury about his private sex life, subornation of perjury about his private sex life and obstruction of justice trying to protect his private sex life. President Nixon covered

up wiretapping, illegal breaking in and entering the Democratic party headquarters at Watergate, and an attempt to subvert the electoral process and obstruct justice.

Human beings are imperfect. Former President Jimmy Carter was soundly ridiculed in 1976 for admitting that he had "lusted in his heart." Carter spoke the truth. Men (I guess, women too) entertain shameful thoughts in their mind. However, lack of opportunities, fear of societal and religious consequences put brakes on the desire to act out such fantasies. In a society such as America, where opportunities are plentiful, society is permissive and the secular values dominate the religious, such transgressions are common. The opportunities are the greatest. If one is the handsome, young President of the most powerful nation on earth, more than anything else, women are attracted to power.

The "starstruck groupie", Monica Lewinsky's sole mission as a White House intern was to bed the President of the US and to brag about it to her friends. It is the bragging of the wretched creature called Linda Tripp, a Clinton-hater, that made the relationship public. Pretending to be her "friend", Tripp encouraged Lewinsky to

reveal the intimate details of the relationship, and without Lewinsky's knowledge illegally taped their conversation for twenty hours ("Friends do not tape friends") and handed over the tapes to the "Independent" Prosecutor in quest of a crime. Kenneth Starr, Republican "Judge" (aren't judges supposed to be impartial?) Starr, a pathological hater of Clinton, who has been unsuccessfully looking to indict Clinton for something, anything, for the last four years, pounced on the gift, and is now trying to convict the President for having consensual sex!

In January, Lewinsky had stated under oath that she did not have sex with the President. Starr gave Lewinsky complete immunity from perjury if only she would contradict herself and the President. She did. Therefore, the President too had to own up. Starr essentially told Lewinsky: "If you cooperate with me, I shall exonerate you; it is Clinton I am after!" In the American jurisprudence, a prosecutor can grant someone immunity from prosecution in exchange of his/her testimony to convict someone else.

Clinton got the short end of the stick. The target of an investigation never testifies in



front of the grand jury, because the evidence can be used against him/her. Clinton had to, for political reasons. The Democrats wanted him to come clean, lest their chances in the upcoming November elections

are harmed by his silence. Bill Clinton's philandering was well-known. The American people elected him to the presidency twice, fully aware of his weaknesses. The President is elected to the political leadership of the nation, not the moral leadership. It is best for the nation if the same person embodies both. Judges and lawyers may disagree on interpretations, but the laws are written in black and white. Morality, on the other hand, is personal and in the realm of the spiritual. A person should not be elected to political office, and then be accused of coming up short on morality.

The American public have been quite unmoved by the momentous events of August 17. They had already given their verdict: yes, Clinton had sex with Lewinsky and lied about it, but he is doing a great job as President and should continue to do so, and should not be impeached or forced to resign. They feel that the matter should be dropped because Clinton's private life is his family's business, and that he should be free to attend to the affairs of the nation.

The writer's colleagues reflected the opinion of the nation. Most females regretted Clinton's infidelity but believed that the matter was private. "Many men are like that. If Hillary can forgive Clinton, who am I not to?" A male colleague lamented the decline of morality: "It is a sad commentary on the nation's morals when we forgive a person his sins only because the economy is good and we have more money." Personally, the writer

was saddened by the fact that a fellow Rhodes Scholar had sunk so low. I was disappointed that he did not try harder to control himself. I would have preferred to have seen him tell the truth at the first opportunity, not the last. But he is the President, who deserves our respect and he has apologized. Everyone makes mistakes, even Presidents. Apology accepted.

The only remaining suspense is whether in his expected report to the Congress for the possible impeachment of the President, prosecutor Starr will have anything to show for the non-erotic part of his investigation, on which he spent 40 million dollars of the tax payers' money for the last four years. Starr, who failed to extend Clinton the courtesy due to a President during the grand jury testimony, making the President furious, is trying to emulate the Chicago gangster Al Capone's conviction. The prosecutor in that case, unable to prove Capone's deadly crimes, had him convicted on tax evasion instead!

President Clinton has hurt a lot of his loyal supporters, now who feel betrayed. No one feels more betrayed than Hillary Clinton, who last January had staunchly stood by her husband. She was deeply hurt when the President told her the real truth only last weekend. No woman likes a philandering husband, who has to confess his infidelity to the whole nation. Nevertheless, the First Lady, a super brainy lawyer, not only stood by her husband this time, she even wrote a part of his television speech. But, Hillary, too, is human. As the First Family left for vacation in Martha's Vineyard the following day, the First Strains were obvious; as they walked towards Air Force One, Hillary was seen holding Chelsea's hand, not Bill's!

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Bangabandhu Jamuna Bridge and flood control

Sir, Some Awami League leaders claim that it was the dream of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to construct a bridge over the Jamuna river which the Awami League government has turned into reality after coming to power long after 21 years.

One wonders whether it was also not the dream of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to save millions of people of Bangladesh from the catastrophe of flood? If so why the Awami League government has not taken any pragmatic step as yet for flood control?

What a hopeless and disastrous state of affair it is that almost every year during the months of June-July-August millions of people of our country are marooned by flood, we make huge hue and cry, come out with different plans and schemes, strongly demand for flood control measures and relief materials for the flood affected people but as soon as the flood water recedes we forget everything. This tragic and deplorable situation is continuing endlessly for decades together. The bitter truth is that whether we have a JP, BNP or Awami League government no one cares.

The SAARC forum has also failed to take any concrete step to check the havoc of flood in the region due to peculiar, indifferent attitude and hegemony of, say, India. Our sufferings, miseries and hardships know no bounds. In addition to human losses we are incurring financial losses every year of crore of taka more than five to six times the cost of Bangabandhu Bridge. Can't we take any measure to drain out all rain/flood water coming from upper riparian to Bay of Bengal? Can't we undertake dredging work of our rivers, plant trees on their banks and

construct embankments? Let us not politicise all our issues and misfortunes. Let us move forward with constructive works and plans and save our people from abject poverty, hunger and disease.

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BCS preliminary examination

Sir, 20th BCS preliminary examination is going to be held within a few months. The allocated time for that examination is 80 minutes only. The candidates are supposed to answer 100 multiple questions within this short period. Moreover the marking system is very strict, the pencil's stain is not allowed to be exceeded/crossed out of the respective circle. To a large extent the authority concerned waste few minutes at the beginning of the examination and some times few questions/consume two or three minutes to figure out owing to printing mistakes.

Therefore I request the authority concerned to increase/extend the allocated time.

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Buildings of Dhaka

Sir, A very poetic and descriptive article on the contemporary buildings of Dhaka authored by Arch. Khadid Ashraf was published in your esteemed daily on Friday, 14th August, 1998. Arch. Ashraf has given a very lucid but critical picture of the environment and structures of the city and has tried to draw attention to their mediocre standard. He has brilliantly coined two terms 'polluting' and 'scheming'. These terms vividly express the activities of the developers who are coming up with catchy commercially suc-

cessful buildings at a fast rate making rather sorry impact on the visual scene.

What I don't like about the article is that in the process of describing public spaces Arch. Ashraf has pin pointed only two building complexes the 'Osmani Memorial Hall' and 'Bally Road' residential complex. These by any critical standard are not examples of bad architecture of Dhaka. As a matter of fact these were designed by one very senior, sincere and successful architect of Dhaka, who for the information of readers, has a different peer-group identification than the author. The designer of the above mentioned buildings are proud of his creation and rightly so.

Mies Vander Rohe and Frank Lloyd Wright two very famous architects of same period had very contrasting ideologies. Both are recognised to have produced great buildings. A critic may not agree or even like the design of an accomplished architect but to cite the work of only one as example of bad architecture is definitely mean and malicious.

The author has also very appropriately used the term 'decent architecture'. For the architects of Dhaka this will be a very useful term to use. My advice to the author is that in an effort to try to create decent architecture for Dhaka let us also try to be decent persons.

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President Clinton

Sir, President Clinton is a man. If Monica Lewinsky would not have allured him to an extramarital affair, it would never have happened. In America sex is believably free for any individual. But after all, he is a President.

So, for the sake of his family and avoiding further personal humiliation President Clinton should resign to set an example for the Americans to tell the truth in real life. It can make a new history for the US President and the rest of the world as lying is a crime in the civilised societies.

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OPINION

A Death that Questions the Validity of Our Values

Q M Karamat Ali

IN a country plagued by poverty, malnutrition and diseases, ravaged by natural calamities, terribly tormented by social unrest and fratricidal political feuds dog us daily like hungry wolves in uninhabited jungles. Frequency of its occurrence seems to have blunted our finer sensibilities. We don't seem to react to these irreparable losses.

Yet some deaths shock us to the core — deaths that do not extinguish a single life, bereave and aggrieve a single family but signal a danger that threatens to strangle the conscience of a society and questions the validity of the values we hold dear to our hearts and would always like to jealously guard. Such a shocking death occurred in the fateful evening of July 23, '98, when Shamim Reza Rubel, a young University student was picked up by DB men for interrogation on allegations or charges still mysteriously undisclosed.

The whole nation is shaken out of a slumber. Social and political organisations, men, women, guardians, students and all others have expressed their shock, anger and indignation at this cadaverous crime. Voices keep mourning for a determined demand for justice to the bereaved family and exemplary punishment to the perpetrators of this atrocity crime.

Rubel's alleged death in the hands of men meant to arrest crime threaten to belittle the great cause that fired the nation to light a war for wiping out the vestiges of all injustices and challenges the government that is pledge-bound to uphold the Constitution, which guarantees the fundamental rights of the people including the right to life. How could some personell maintained by the public exchequer — dare or afford to for-

get their limits. The top police official, a very sensible and conscious person of the Department in a recent press conference reportedly tried to emphasize on departmental immunity of uniformed men diluting the paramount importance of public safety and security. If torture under custody is a punishable offence, then death due to torture under custody is the gravest of offences — the most flagrant violation of the most fundamental of human rights — the right to life. How could the whims of a callous few be allowed to tarnish the image of a force who made glorious contributions to the war of liberation?

One of the few hands that reportedly dealt the death blows to Rubel was seen raised publicly displaying a handcuff challenging the photo-journalists to click as many snaps as they like, demonstrating a defiance of public feelings and ignoble ignorance of their obligations to people.

Where are the lapses and loopholes? Did not the officials specially the commissioned ones receive and continue to receive proper orientation for playing a fitting role in an independent country with a democratic dispensation? Or does the legacy of the colonial past, Pakistan-era or the post-liberation misrule defy all people changes in the Department?

The world is now a global village and our people are much more exposed to the outside world than before with higher expectations — which the top brasses of the Department must take notice of. A sizeable number of letters that keep pouring in the letter columns of the dailies expressing shock and

anguish, anger and protest over the death of Rubel originate from expatriate Bangladeshis having the opportunity of comparing the role of the police of the country with those of their hosts. The Prime Minister's and Home Minister's prompt response and initiatives to institute judicial probe and proposal to constitute Special Tribunal to dispense justice without delay are welcome steps to be constantly propped by their unceasing attention till it is finally dispensed.

It needs to be mentioned that the repeated exhortations of the leaders of the party in power that the legacy of injustice and irregularities of the past still persist and cannot be repaired overnight and even graver crimes were committed in the past seem to jar on the auricular nerves of the people. The overwhelming majority are unlettered and poor but they are not poor judges. They understood and understand things. In the last election, they did give their verdict for a definitive and positive change for the better. They will demand of the party in power to deliver the goods. A political party winning mandate of the people on the prized programmes of restoring law and order, installing a rule of law and justice and institutionalising democracy neither can, nor should, try to satisfy everyone or every group while never losing sight of the surging public opinion.

Hectic and disjointed attempts by some quarters to reap political harvests from the outside world have also betrayed humane sensibilities, not talk of the damage done to a struggling economy.

The writer is Editor of The Business Review