

BGMEA Allegations

Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) chief Golam Quddus last Wednesday put on the firing line just about every organisation his association members come in contact with while carrying out their export business obligations. He reeled off pent-up grievances about coercive palm-greasing against NCBs, police, customs, port personnel and T&T in a meeting with the Board of Investment (BOI) Executive Chairman Farooq Sobhan against a highly charged backdrop of urgency being attached to garment export in the disruptive sequel to the floods. Furthermore, a meeting between the BGMEA and the foreign entrepreneurs already involved in the garments sector is due to take place shortly so that there was a precious bit more to the stocktaking exercise.

Such an expansive critical mood Quddus allowed himself to be in that he even took a dig at the foreign investors who, according to him, "had come to produce high-fashioned garments but are now turning out low-cost wears which any local factory can do." This smacks of an unhealthy conflictory situation but surely we must look into their charter and verify the allegations.

This in no way should detract from the main burden of the complaints being aired against a whole range of public sector functionaries falling head over heels for a finger on the pie. Officials of Sonali, Janata and Agrani Banks dealing with LCs are reportedly even bending laws at the jingle of coins; but generally they could be making anything between Tk 50,000 and Tk 100000 per day! By comparison, private banks have been disposing of LC cases on the spot, even on the computer without any gratification sought whatsoever. It falls on Bangladesh Bank now to make the NCBs meet the standards set by the private banks. By the BGMEA chief's own admission, since the deployment of Army at the ports the loading and unloading operations have been free of corruption. As for the 'sackful' of money being spirited away by the customs officials at the airport and the policemen's pickings on the roads, corruption would need to be de-institutionalised by a consensual political intervention and the refusal to give bribes duly backed up by vigilante squads positioned at the right places.

We are afraid, the BGMEA chief's allegations are much too generalised for any punitive action. In order that he and others in a similar position can bring up specific details, we suggest that the government open a special cell to heed the complaints and take action wherever necessary along the conduit.

Oh No, Not from Malaysia!

We are flabbergasted at the way ousted deputy premier Anwar Ibrahim has been treated in captivity. Slapped, bruised and bloodied through the nose on the night of arrest! Even if it were less of a torture inflicted on him, how and why could even that happen? Even a most discredited autocrat felled by a popular uprising, to say nothing of someone who had voiced a dissent with reasonable public support for it against any political supremo was hardly ever known to have been 'slapped' by minions. It is such an incredible shock our sensibilities — a deep hurt that will take time to heal. Come as it does from Malaysia — a middle-income forward-looking country with a rich cultural lore including political traditions, religious ethos and a normative smack of British legal system, this is unbelievable, all said and done.

Moreover, is it a kind of treatment one even in the most bizarre frame of mind expected would be meted out to a man Mahathir had once held so close to his heart grooming him up through many high calling of the state almost making him look like his heir apparent? Well, differences of opinion between Anwar and Mahathir developed subsequently and they fell out of each other. So what? Mahathir was within his constitutional rights to sack him. And, then the wheels moved quite awkwardly for all to see. Anwar was arrested on unbelievable charges; and now he is beaten contrary to all norms of civility, decency and legal propriety. By this single act of indiscretion the standards of a legal government have been lowered before the eyes of the world.

What is more, a highly dishonourable precedent has been set. We urge prime minister Mahathir Mohamad to desist from the self-demeaning path. And, we implore him to give Anwar the benefit of a fair trial.

Mid-East Peace

Even though fiery exchanges from Hebron threatens to dilute optimism, the world has enough reason to look wistfully to the US brokered Middle East peace talks between the Palestinians and the Israelis. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu recently confirmed that Israel would withdraw from the West Bank provided the land is not used to launch attacks on Israel. For a mind as closed and bigoted as that of Netanyahu who once in his ambassadorial days reportedly refused to share the same table with famous Palestinian scholar Edward Said without even knowing that Said was not a Muslim he thought him to be, that is quite a progress.

Key to the reconciliatory deal is Israel's willingness to withdraw from 13 per cent of the West Bank territory. This will be on top of 27 per cent already vacated to the Palestinian Authority along with two-thirds of the Gaza Strip. Under the new withdrawal package Israel would hand over 10 per cent of the West Bank to Palestinian control with an additional three per cent designated as nature preserve in which Israel would retain security control for the time being.

President Clinton has invited both Netanyahu and Arafat for further talks. All eyes are focused on the October 15 talks of the trio. Unless the Israeli leader reverts to any of his old tricks the Palestinian crisis is destined for some sort of a denouement. Both parties should exercise extreme caution to make sure that provocations are avoided on both sides. The region has long been on fire. It is more than time olive branch spread there over endless acrimony.

A Tree Grows Within My Head

It was only last Thursday. An evening of trance, as it were like music asleep in the shell of memory. For one long moment time dissolved and in the waves of its breathing between the myth and the real, the ancient Mandai (Sai) forest came alive only to be devastated along with its children. Trees murmured, the wild boar and the little rabbits came out of their hiding places, doves cooed and the birds hummed, a woman and a man's love wavered between desire and faith. Then in one fell swoop, the avice of the powerful intruders burnt down the living alphabets that send out roots, shoot-up, bud, fly off scatter and fall. As in the mythical past, an ancient community is ravaged again by the marauding hordes of Parshuram of recent times in Madhur Gar. And the ghostly dust rises from the ashes in brown and reddish spirals.

I am talking about an epic poem, an inscription on a fallen stone, a drawing in the chest of green that scatters birds in the garden of wind, rattles the dice-cup of the moon and the stars and creates a woman by mixing night and music and sacred wine for Lord Shiva. It is prosody of the heart that makes long syllables short and the short long. It is Selim Al-Dins legend of 'Bana Pangsul', the children of forest. Enacted by Nasiruddin Yusuf and his compatriots of Dhaka Theater. I saw the men and women of an ancient warrior community, the Koch or the Mandai, reliving their far-away past and the very recent one that we can still touch if we care to do so. They were driven out of their ancient domain by mythical Parshuram and entered into their new habitat of dense 'Sal' forest in our very own Madhurpur. And like the fallen leaves and trunks of dark tall and handsome trees, they were brutally evicted and killed, their women, ravished, their habitat devastated.

Guntin, thousand years old in his faith in Lord Shiva, a mixed deity of the rituals and the fold tradition, is also utterly innocent like a young tree. He is afraid of the dark lake of death, but finds an eternal home in the trunk and branches and leaves of an ancient tree. Shuki, the infant widow given away to Shiva as a mistress wants to

Why am I writing all this? Because the other day my eyes dampened with dew-drops of joy when I saw in the leader of our people, a messenger of peace, embracing the men and women of the hills and dales of the Hill Tracts in Chittagong. They had been exiles from their ancestral habitat for more than two decades.

break out of the strait-jacket of ritual faith and embrace young Anil who comers and sings. But Anil wavers even when the humming birds hum. He is afraid of the wrath of Shiva. And then destruction strikes with barbarians of the plains looting, burning, maiming and killing like Parshuram of the myth. But rising from the ashes of ghostly dust, Shuki and Anil rebuild their home in a corner of the devastated forest. In ravished Suki's womb, the beautiful dark eyes and heart of a child of the forest flutter. S/he will come back again. I recalled the words of two saintly persons of the subcontinent. The first, known as Nanda Rishi, his name at birth being Nuruddin Wali, lived in the late fifteenth century in the snowy Himalayas. He said, "There will enough food as long as there are forest". Because forest is the mother of soil and water. The second, Zambhoji, lived in the deserts of Rajasthan in the early sixteenth century. He believed that the arid land was the result of human kind's degeneration. Ascending from the depth of perversion to nature and culture would require reverence for all that is created in the plant and the animal world. He enumerated 29 codes of conducts for his followers, the 'Vishnois' two of which are i) not to cut down a green tree and ii) not to kill an animal.

In 1730, the same Vishnoi community, children, women and men of Kheidalji village near Jodhpur embraced each tree, when the King's men struck. Three hundred and sixty-three men and women led by Amrita Devi resisted and laid down their lives. That blood has no witness in the histories of arrogant men and women of the so-called civilized world, as there is hardly any scribe to portray the epic struggle—destruction-resurrection of the children of forgotten forest of ours — the Koch and the Rajbangshis. Yes, in our times, Ghanasyam, the folk poet of Chipko movement in Garhwal regions sang:

Embrace the trees your life;

Embrace the water your life. It is a struggle between life and death.

Why am I writing all this? Because the other day my eyes dampened with dew-drops of joy when I saw in the leader of our people, a messenger of peace, embracing the men and women of the hills and dales of the Hill Tracts in Chittagong. They had been exiles from their ancestral habitat for more than two decades. And I wrote, love is like a bunch of white roses and the mountain-top is pure again:

সময় ফুরাবে বনের গোলানগের বন্ধ
পাহাড়ের চূড়ান্তের কল্পন মৃত।

But then, some inherited problems, still lingering, disturb me. If our leader does not intervene the forest may be degraded again, the birds may fly away from their nests and the long-jumped young ones may disappear.

The problem is a series of gazette notifications dated 25.06.1990, 04.01.1992, 08.01.1994, 12.05.1998 and 31.05.1998 declaring a total area of 217,790.30 acres as Reserve Forest in accordance with section 4 of the Forest Act of 1927. Some areas have already been converted accordingly. Conservation of forest, particularly in critical water-sheds is no doubt essential and a responsibility that the government must carry out. But is conservation possible by evicting the children of the forest from their own habitat or by ignoring their generational wisdom regarding the resources that ensure their livelihood?

And that, when our leader has pronounced in no uncertain terms about the principals of participatory conservation and afforestation. Today because of

her the trees murmur again and the young girls dance like the rippling waves of Karnaphuli. It is, therefore, that the children of forest make their appeal to their most reliable benefactor and respected soul-mate. Not only they, the trees also are in terror and the birds and the beasts. Will the green bondage between human kind and the foliage be severed again?

Let me briefly delineate the four types of land about which notifications have been issued. First, private homesteads of hill people under Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation of 1900. According to rule 50 (1), hill people may occupy upto 0.30 acres of non-urban land with prior consent of the mouza headman without applying for formal settlement or registra-

tion to the Deputy Commissioner. Such land may be acquired by the Government on payment of compensation for structures and trees but not for the value of the land itself as per procedures laid down in rule 50 and the CHT Land Acquisition Regulation of 1990.

Second, registered homesteads and agricultural/horticultural lands. In such cases total compensation is to be paid as per CHT Regulation. The affected people are both from the hills and the plains such as in 95 Kaskhali and 95A Betbunia mouzas within Rangamati district. Many of them were displaced by the Kaptai dam and rehabilitated in these lands.

Third, Jum, agricultural/horticultural lands under long occupation. These lands, not registered, have been under long occupation and use by hill-people including many displaced by the dam in Kaskhali, Belaichari and Langadu thanas of Rangamati.

Fourth, plantation lands under

Government Rehabilitation Schemes like those of the Bangladesh Forest Department of the '60s and '70s; of the Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation in 1967-73; and of the CHT Development Board in the '70s and the '80s.

As for the fourth category let me give some examples. Landless Jumas were rehabilitated under the Jum Control Division of the Forest department. These lands, later, became Protected Forest Land. There were express commitments, however, that these lands would be settled in the names of the planters. After the orchard programme failed in the 1970s some of these lands were converted into both hard and soft wood plantation employing the same Jumia farmers under Tungya method. Many of them continue to face persecution under Forest Act.

Similarly under the BADC scheme many Jumas were given three to five acre hill-side plots for growing pineapples and fruit-orchards. Some of these were recorded, many were not. Again Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board rehabilitated landless hill farmers and some plains people for plantation of fruit-trees and trees farms. In most cases, the land was never recorded in the names of the rehabilitated. This was in the '70s and the '80s.

All the notifications follow the words of the law but perhaps not the spirit. For example, after the notification, a Forest Settlement Officer is to be appointed to register any claimant or claim of the Jumas. After that, with the acceptance or rejection of claims, full compensation is to be paid. Only then the Deputy Commissioner concerned will hand over the land to the Forest department. The legal formalities apart, there are some hard realities. Before the historic Peace Agreement, many of the hill-people were in hiding or in exile, because of the conflict. How could they appeal to any Forest Settlement Officer, thus appointed?

India has done in his second stint as captain.

The report 'SIRAJ — The Jack of All Trades' is shocking. It demeans the chairman BCB selection committee, is the DS in on a witch hunt?

Fahim Khan
Purana Pallan
Dhaka.

Polybag Menace
Sir, Polybags indeed are a menace to the environment, to our soil and to our drainage system. But they have become so indispensable that knowing all its drawbacks full well, we still continue to use it, including very learned people too, as is obvious from relief distribution pictures! The distributing philanthropists are seen handing over these little menaces to each of the flood victim by their own hands! Knowing all too well their disastrous effects. What a pity.

So the only way is to close down its production, as it does more harm than good but strangely enough none of us can help but use it! It is time we try to manufacture jute bags of all size and shapes, good looking and light to carry. It must be cheap as our country is the biggest jute producer in the world. It is very environmentally friendly too, it will rot only to enrich the soil and not pollute it as the undegradable polybags do.

Everybody must carry his or her own bag or the shopkeepers can hand over the things bought in jute bags, just as they do in polybags now. Even in a developed country like Japan they felt the need to do away with synthetic bags. So their slogan now is 'My own bag'. Which means, minimum synthetic bags are given by the shopkeepers as everybody carries his or her own bag for shopping. We should follow suit to help boost our dying jute sector if we can create a big market for it at home, rather than seeking buyers abroad with not much success. Who knows others might follow our example, as more and more people are getting aware of the harmful effects of synthetic bags, and ask for our jute bags, making it a golden fiber again as in the good old days when it earned the maximum foreign exchange.

Dr. Sabrina Q. Rashid
Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka

Clinton's conduct
Sir, the Americans seem to think that Clinton's affair with Monica Lewinsky is his private matter and should not become a factor for his impeachment or resignation from office. But the office of the President is the centre of all activities of the American administration and what happens in the executive premises of the White House cannot possibly remain outside domain of the public. Had Clinton's sexual activities taken place in his bedroom in the residential portion of the White House, perhaps, one could argue that the public had no business to pry into his private life! But the affair took place in the office complex in the knowledge of his staff and secret service men.

In Mr Clinton's case, it is difficult to defend his conduct when it is seen that he appears to be happily married to Hillary Clinton with a grown-up daughter living in the White

To the Editor...

An ode to Lara

I met you but twice
And knew you from eternity
You wanted to fly
Ride through the clouds
Soar up to higher
and higher altitudes
I admired you
You were reaching for the sky
A Bengali woman
named after a Russian
heroine
You knew no boundaries
I had said to you
It is a woman's world
The sky is the limit —
Never ever
did I think
the sky would
come down
and limit you
to the ground
Lara
Rise up again
You will not be grounded
Your spirit is free
Do your magic
Flash us that magnificent
smile
So that we too can learn to
fly
and reach out for the sky
Nasreen Huq
Dhaka



Lara's death and some questions

Sir, Lara was a friend. No need for me to describe how I felt hearing the news of her death. It still visualize her around me talking and it is unbelievable, that such beauty is lost not only in death but also under fire! Along with my family, her grief-stricken family, friends I have some questions.
How is Bangladesh still using Cessna, an aircraft used in World War II? Did the company have licence to buy these aircrafts? Did they have proper authorization from the government? I hear that these aircrafts have cost Bangladesh only USD8000. Is it true? Why were these old aircrafts bought knowing that these were full of technical problems?
Moushumi Nasser
Dhaka

The same old sabotage

Sir, A very shameful incident happened at Chittagong Stadium on 14th September during a football match in which five journalists and at least 100 persons were injured by police atrocities.

It is reported that the supporters of the two teams became a bit unruly over a controversial goal but after some time the situation became normal. Policemen were silent during the upheaval but suddenly they leapt up and started throwing stones, when some press photographers were taking snapshots, policemen attacked them shouting abusive words. They angrily said, "You have made enough trouble for us concerning Rubel's death. You have got only pen and cameras in your hands, we have got licensed weapons, now have the feel of the fun." Then the policemen started beating the press photographers mercilessly in front of thousands spectators, and many tear gas shells were also used at that time.

We are stunned! It seems that policemen are becoming more arrogant day by day in spite of the current dissatisfaction of the public by the misconduct of some members of the police department.

During a meeting with the journalists at Chittagong Circuit House on 20th September, Home Minister Rafiqul Islam said that he will inform the Prime Minister about the incident and will take steps to punish the guilty policemen but he also added that it will be investigated behind the incident.

Oh no! We have become tired hearing of sabotages and conspiracies.
Nur Jahan
East Nastrabad, Chittagong

"Tale of a President"

Sir, the letter by Ms. Nur Jahan, "TALE OF A PRESIDENT" in the DS dated 23rd September,

Use of laser beam

Sir, After reading A Husnain's column (DS dated 11/9) I looked into the McGraw Hill Electronics Handbook, 1982 Edition, and found that a high power laser beam of one cm can deliver an energy as high as 500MW (megawatts). If that was the technology 16 years ago, the super power star wars are beyond imagination!
Another point struck me which is: what happened to the huge volumes of steam generated by the vapourisation of ice? More rains?
An Enrum Student
Dhaka

"Turning crisis into opportunity"

Sir, Letters by Mr Md Kamran Reza Chowdhury, Mr Aminur Rahman and Mr Kafi published on 18.9.98 reflected the common views of the conscientious citizens of this country. We also express our indignation in the same vein.

The journey of Hasina-Khaleda from the kitchen to crown should ultimately not be a disaster for the nation. They must read the writing on the wall and shun politics of rage and pain. Great leaders' sacrifices are proportionate to their stature.
Forgive and forget would be the best policy.
Md Shah Jahan
Dhaka

Flood and the HC

Sir, When the whole world is aware and extending help to cope with the unprecedented flood damage in Bangladesh, our High Commissioner in the UK reportedly (DS Sept. 17, 98) over-enthusiastically stated in a BBC interview that "there is nothing to worry about and everything is under control".

What a travesty of facts! There cannot be more upsetting statement than this. While the natural calamity that befallen very badly on this poor nation, it is being fought and faced unaided by all at home and from abroad, this type of statement is discouraged.

The most important duty of the responsible concerns is now to assess responsibly and correctly the extent of damage and post-flood requirements of cash and kind. And care and proper handling of the health and sanitation should also top the list — which otherwise may become another irreparable catastrophe for the nation.

The government had already done a great damage initially by declaring that 'they would not need outside help to combat this natural disaster'. And now they will be doing a great service to the nation if they formulate very constructive and effective policy and execute them honestly and responsibly.
A F Rahman
Dhaka

Half cricket!

Sir, Cricket cannot be played in Kuala Lumpur with half a team and without coach Greenidge. It was good experience for the Bangladesh team sharing the common wealth.
Something is wrong with the health. They escaped the floods, but fell sick. Play half day Test matches! Where to bury the 'ashes'?
Alif Zabr
Dhaka

Tax-free donation

Sir, Innumerable industrial, trading, commercial, non-profit making organisations, etc., are continuously coming forward to donate to the government's flood relief fund. These donations, as always seen in the past, are fully tax-deductible expenses for the donors' corporate income tax assessment purposes.



Do I Dare!

Do I Dare!

A Z M Obaidullah Khan

Besides, on a representation by the Chakma Raja in 1992, the Government had created a committee headed by a Joint-Secretary of the Forest Division/Ministry to reexamine the problems on humanitarian grounds. Also, some affected people in Rajshahi thana in Rajshahi district have recently filed a writ petition to the High Court. The Honorable High Court issued rule nisi on the concerned authorities and stayed the implementation of the impugned notification/order. But I do not want to harp upon legalities. I want to emphasise the ethics of forest conservation, the fraternity of the forest and the plains, the coming together once again of the people and the children of the forest, to echo what I wrote three decades back when I was young and callow:

*I faltered walking by the
tree trunks
because they are sentenced to
death.*

*Now I stay within the door and
windows of my room
shuttered and closed.
Otherwise, even the roses
will die.*

The Koch and the Rajbangshis today are almost extinct like Gunin-Shuki-Nripen and Rajendra of the epic of Banarajshul. But they will come back like the child growing in Shuki's womb. The foliage will come back, the trees and grass, the hawk and the thrush, the mist of the doves and the little birds like dew-drops on blades of grass or the just opened eyes of a sparking fish-child.

Then 'Sraban' will peep at the bird-nest, come down the roots of 'Hijal' tree and knock at the doors of a river. And mother earth will be covered again with a mist of love that sends out roots, shoots up and blossoms. The words tumble down my blood as I say it:

*A tree grew inside my head
A tree grew in
its roots are veins,
its branches nerves,
thoughts its tangled foliage.....
There, within, inside my head
the tree speaks.
Come closer can you hear?
(Octavio Paz)*

(Acknowledgement: I am indebted to my two young friends, Raja Devashish Roy and Selim Al-Din)

Questions about FBCCI candidates

Sir, In view of the impending election of the presidency of the apex body of Bangladesh business chambers, one must appreciate your interviews on both of the candidates, Mr Abdul Rof Chowdhury and Mr Abdul Awaf Mintoo, running for president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI). One would be more appreciative of The Daily Star if you were to probe a little further rather than take their word for it.

One candidate seems to revel in his claims of academic superiority and business success two decades ago, whilst the other appears to be smug in reminding us of his high political connections and of his high-salaried job in America in 1980-81. One expects The Daily Star to dig beneath the surface of such claims and bring into picture the really substantive issues. In order to do so, one needs to know the CURRENT business activities of the candidates. Is Mr Chowdhury running his vegetable oil refinery well? How is Mr Mintoo's shipping company performing? Do their companies enjoy leading positions in their concerned industry? If a candidate is not successful in running his business, such may also be interesting to know their level of commitment to business ethic. For example, have they defaulted on their loans? Do they pay their taxes? Do the contributions of the candidates to the Inland Revenue reflect their wealth? What are their plans to make the FBCCI more effective in serving the business community if elected its president?

The fact that these issues do not play a dominant role in the election campaign allows the election of the president of the FBCCI to be in the hands of the political parties. The merits and the demerits of the candidates become secondary to who is the Awami League candidate and who is being backed by the BNP. Instead of knowing about the candidates' business and his plans for the FBCCI if elected its president, the voters are subjected to mud slinging and the candidates' claims to fame for issues which are either irrelevant or outdated. One hopes The Daily Star will do its level best to ensure that the right climate prevails for the election campaign for the president of the FBCCI by bringing to the attention of the voters the relevant and the substantive issues.

A Concerned Voter
Dhaka