

Attracting FDI

There is some sort of comfort for Bangladesh in an otherwise gloomy scenario. According to the 1998 World Investment Report published by the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), inflow of foreign direct investment (FDI) into Bangladesh reached 145 million dollars in 1997, up 10 times over 1996.

The report, released in Dhaka on Wednesday, shows Bangladesh has the potential to emerge as a serious player in the global energy market. However, the total volume of FDI inflow is still minuscule compared to the rest of Asia and totally inadequate compared to the need of the country.

There is no doubt that the government has attached top priority to attracting FDI into the economy, particularly critical infrastructure and labour-intensive industries. However, such policy priority is unlikely to translate into real inflow of FDI, unless inherent distortions in the economy are removed and transparency of the decision-making process ensured.

ME Peace in Peril

The recently-signed peace deal between Palestinian President Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had raised a great deal of hope, but it appears forces are still active in the region which would leave no stone unturned to derail the peace process.

On the face of it, the conditions do not appear too damaging by themselves. What the Israelis want to see is that the Palestinian side is also keeping to its commitment to ensure Israel's security.

Such turn of events has left the Palestinians questioning Israel's sincerity in wanting a peaceful settlement of the issue. Since the Palestinians have already given up the armed struggle, negotiations and diplomacy are the only means left with which to bring Israel back on course.

Save Chapai, Save Mango

Chapai Nawabganj is in the heat of one of the biggest campaigns of vandalism in all history. Seven hundred thousand mango trees, representing the wealth of the district and the delight of the nation are going to be felled in a massive action.

The only thing to do in the situation is to occupy all in the job of massive replantation. But that is not easy either. The saplings in the government and private nurseries — lakhs of them — are all dead too.

The message should be clear to all, specially the government: Chapai must be saved. To save it is to give it back its mango orchards. Can't it be done? Let us turn this catastrophe into a blessing.

For this to happen government must prove a mango faddist and not leave any stone unturned in the quest to green Chapai again and with better trees.

Mango is the ultimate in the subtropical gastronomy. It is not for nothing that a stoic of the order of Aurangzeb named two varieties sent by Mohammed, his son and governor of Deccan, as Rasanavilas and Sudharas.

AND at long last, the much awaited verdict in the long-drawn trial of the brutal killing of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and others has been announced. The wheels of history, as it is, set in the proper perspective: the verdict awards death penalty to the killers.

We welcome the judgement. At the same breath, we welcome the commitment made by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to put all killers and criminals under trial. In fact, this utterance should never be suppressed simply on the ground that it infringes the rights of others.

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Both Israel and the Palestinian Authority have now made a new commitment that they will implement the stalled parts of the accord: Israel will proceed with phased withdrawal from West Bank and

A Wasted Opportunity: Whose Fault Is It?

Sir, Ever since I enrolled into the CIS program of the Central Missouri State University, I've been hearing a lot about the Y2K Bug (for the Year 2000 problem).

Now Y2K Bug could be a nightmare to the Americans and Europeans (since they're highly computerized societies), but it wouldn't affect us, Bangladeshis, that much (well, needless to say, if the global economy suffers because of the Y2K Bug then we'd suffer too).

But alas, our previous and present governments were too busy with other "important" matters to avail of this great opportunity!! Well, some authority on Government policies might claim that Bangladesh didn't have the resources to train the young people in COBOL programming.

If one goes to the Silicon Valley (the heart of the computer industry of the United States), one would find Indians galore!! As a matter of fact, India DOES have a high potential of becoming a major power with the turn of the century!! Okay, I accept that Bangladesh has some limitations; even then, couldn't she have produced at least 1000 skilled COBOL programmers??

Justice Delayed but Not Denied

Let us deliver justice, not deny it. A delay could only linger the pains but justice cannot be postponed for ever... Only sensible politics and rule of law in the country can save us from the rots heaped on us by unscrupulous hands.

ance should have come much earlier from those who occupied the pinnacle of power before she died. Unfortunately, that was the most neglected element of all the commitments made by the previous rulers.

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ported simply on the ground that it infringes the rights of others. Even then, as some would argue, hartals emerged as one of the important weapons of protest by politicians. It is considered by certain quarters as a constitutional right.



Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes

to be justifiable even on that line of argument. First, as far as the trial of killers was concerned, they appear to brush it aside with the naive notion that "we want trial of all killings".

bounds. The killings of Col Taher and President General Ziaur Rahman are still shrouded in mystery but none came out to unfold the true story. Therefore, the mere demand for the trial of all killers as made by BNP do not hold much water in the absence of a happy marriage between what they preach and what they practice.

Second, the prolonged hartal is said to have been forced upon to protest against the alleged attack on BNP followers who wanted to make their ways into Paltan Maidan meeting.

the ruins in the aftermath? There were many such occasions when Sheikh Hasina was seen in Chittagong met with chase by armed hoodlums. Jatiya Party could not hold any meeting any where and opposition parties had to abandon their meetings in the face of attacks from the then party in power — BNP.

We find no justification in burning the mosquito curtain to punish the mosquito as has been done by BNP and its allies recently. There were, we firmly believe, more cost-effective ways of giving a good lesson to the party in power had BNP and its allies followed a cool-headed and calculative path.

Third, the hartal call came at a time when the nation likes to see the post-flood rehabilitation work at its full swing. To the utter dismay of the critics who foresaw a famine and vultures flying overhead, the management on the score seems to be sound.

ME Peace Accord Proceeds on a Stormy Course

by A S M Nurunnabi

Observers feel it is a long stride towards crowning of a patient process of mutual accommodation, confidence-building and peace-making, which may help in realistic realisation of long-term interests and requirements of co-existence on both sides and in correcting a historical wrong of pathetic humanitarian consequences under the post-World War II prescriptions.

Palestinians have given a fairly water-tight assurance that they would prevent terrorist activities of extreme elements. Their fulfilment of these commitments will be a crucial prerequisite for their hope for a full-fledged state to be realised.

A discordant note was struck in respect of the achieved peace accord when Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, founder of the militant Palestinian group Hamas, called the agreement a sale-out and declared the CIA involvement in looking after Israeli security within the Palestinian territory cannot erase Hamas.

The impact of the Wye River summit on Israel's domestic politics might seem interesting. It appears that Netanyahu is now moving towards a middle of the road position from the conservative stance of his early days as Prime Minister.

It was also quite significant politically that in signing the deal at Wye River, Netanyahu had in his team a prominent

hardliner like Ariel Sharon, the Foreign Minister who said that a Palestinian state is inevitable.

Soon after the signing of the Wye peace accord, a bus-load of 40 children of Jewish settlers in the Gaza Strip narrowly escaped attack from Palestinian extremists through the timely intervention of an Israeli army jeep.

On the face of it, Netanyahu made little headway last week. He opted to postpone a vote both in his cabinet and his party, the Likud, to formally endorse the agreement.

He responded to the bombing attack in Gaza with an unprecedented crackdown on Hamas, the militant Islamic movement. More than 100 Hamas figures were rounded up.

isly hardline Israelis. Netanyahu attributed the postponement of the cabinet vote on the Wye peace accord to the "Palestinians' supposed failure" to produce a plan for combating terrorism.

The peace process suffered yet another setback when the Israelis decided after a second bomb attack at a market in East Jerusalem late last week not to ratify the new interim peace deal until the Palestinian Authority took steps to clamp down on anti-Israeli militants.

May, 1999. Given that the peace process has got stuck in stalemate for a long time, that target date may not appear feasible now.

The greatest hurdle in the peace process now appears to be the Israelis uncompromising insistence on the security issue, in spite of the Palestinian guarantee as far as possible with the resources of their security apparatus. But it appears the whole security issue is very complicated and ticklish one.

US officials said that despite some Israeli delay in ratifying the Wye accord, the timetable would not be disrupted. Under the plan, Israel is to withdraw from 13 per cent of the West Bank over 12 weeks, with each phase accompanied by Palesti-

fodder, diesel and fertiliser need speedy movement — came the hartal call to set a stumbling block in the mobility of output and in factors of production throughout hoods and corners of the country. What we expected from BNP is that it would take the floor in the parliament and unleash an attack on the party in power in regard to the mismanagement, if there is any.

On more than one occasion, it was mentioned in this column that people's perceptions about politicians and politics have been undergoing tremendous changes over the years. Politicians need to take into due cognizance such changes and to that effect, revise their strategies.

Let us deliver justice, not deny it. A delay could only linger the pains but justice cannot be postponed for ever. Let us sow the seeds of justice for the bereaved families and brave farmers. Only sensible politics and rule of law in the country can save us from the rots heaped on us by unscrupulous hands.

tinian security measures. In the first week, no major Israeli steps are required. The Palestinians are to outline their plan for fighting Islamic militants to the United States, and several Israeli-Palestinian committees are to begin meeting.

According to Oslo agreement, May 4, 1999 should represent the deadline for resolving all major issues including Palestinian statehood so that Arafat would not have to resort to unilateral declaration of Palestinian state. The Palestinian Authority has committed itself to stamp out anti-Israeli terrorism in its area. Israel is also pledge-bound to accelerate the process of land transfer to Palestinians.

In the latest development, the Israeli government ratified the Wye River Peace Accord with the Palestinians, after attaching several riders. The Israeli cabinet also approved maps of the West Bank zones to be turned over to Palestinian control under the accord.

have to come up with some olanning guidelines. But we have been waiting for a quarter of a century for the administrative messiah to make its appearance!

This is not a new situation, the Israeli government has many times in the past — how to run Dhaka city smoothly, if the soldiers can control the city traffic, then what to do with the Police Traffic Department?

Why professions have to be interchanged? This is a ridiculous situation. A medical doctor cannot run an electric power station, and an engineer cannot examine a patient and prescribe medicines.

The government should be aware that eroding any established and accepted public institution is a serious public offence. It is the first and basic part of governance to improve the institutions. All our regimes in this country get poor marks in this field.

A Zabr Dhaka

Whither devaluation?

Sir, Are not we striking our own legs with axe and doing harm to ourselves by devaluing our currency — taka — again and again? After independence, we have devalued our taka innumerable times. But have we ever been able to improve our economy, increase our exports and mitigate the sufferings of our people? Only a handful of people in our country have always benefited by our non-stop devaluation.

Would we never be able to get rid of the cancer of our devaluation and save ourselves from the ever increasing colossal amount of foreign loans? How and when we would be able to recover from the disease of our devaluation, regain our economic health and pay all the outstanding foreign loans?

O. H. Kabir Wari, Dhaka-1203

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.

A Wasted Opportunity: Whose Fault Is It?

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subject of other people's consciences? This is the truth. This remark is applicable in every matter.

Let us take an example from a report appearing in DS under the caption "DCC bumps up fifth week's dues before Wye". It is stated here that the DCC's chief conservancy officer blamed "lack of awareness among the city dwellers for the garbage disposal problem". Isn't this another farce and passing the buck on to others? Let the DCC do its job efficiently and see what happens.

Here is another farce: government has suddenly imposed surcharges on telephone bills in an effort to raise a part of the 300 crore, which is causing hardship to the telephone users while reportedly Taka 600 crores are outstanding from the VIPs (MPs) and the government departments. While the MPs and the Government departments do not pay their telephone bills — the buck is passed on to those who pay. How easy it is!

There appears to be utter lack of transparency in the telephone department. Will some one tell whether the calls made from digital phones are metered and charged on time basis? I have a suspicion that these calls are metered and billed on basis. No printed tariff of charges are available. Will some one in the T & T give a categorical answer? Verbal enquiries could not elicit any clear information. Isn't this a farce?

The People's Republic of Bangladesh (PRB) has a Constitution, in the Parliament, consisting of 330 MPs every year with lot of fanfare a budget is voted, authorising the government to raise taxes from the people but no sooner the budget is passed the Finance Minister or the Board of Revenue, on one pretext or other starts raising taxes and duties. Isn't this another farce!

A Citizen

"NCBs" loan ..."

Sir, I was quite surprised to read in your esteemed newspaper an item published on the 12th November, 1998 under the heading "NCBs" loan to Shinepuruk raises questions". This loan has perhaps been given, as far as I understand, under the direction of the highest quarter of the country, and this is the current rumour. So no question can be raised. You might have noticed in different newspapers that Beximco is mentioning all the time in their bulletins and advertisements

that they are the biggest employer of the country — say, about 15,000 people are working in their different projects.

After all they are doing a benevolent job — a job which was supposed to be done by the government but being done by them; as such, I feel the government should excuse the big defaulters in IFIC Bank Limited and Arab-Bangladesh Bank Limited.

We understand that recently in a plaint before the Fifth Sub-Judge, Dhaka Judge's Court, they have mentioned that the huge money has not been taken by them, but it was devolved on them as they wanted to give financial help to more than 243 small entrepreneurs in IFIC Bank Limited and the IFIC Bank Ltd gave them loan on their verbal assurance of repayments, if they become defaulters. After all, such group of industries' assurance is much more important than collateral, whereas Islam Brothers — the other defaulter — has rather seemed unsmart to repay their monthly instalments regularly.

They (IBEXIMCO) have tried to create jobs by giving money to these small parties. Seeing the fits of things, the government of course EXCUSE their default in paying IFIC Bank and Arab Bangladesh Bank loans, as a gesture of appreciation to their highly commendable philanthropic action. No action should be taken against them and the present Governor of Bangladesh Bank who is very strict in enforcing rules and regulations on them, is, after all in the chair up to 20th of this month.

I was surprised to read in Thursday's (12-11-98) newspapers (namely The Daily Star and Bhoher Kagaj) that Tk 70.00 crore has been sanctioned again by Sonali Bank — out of which Sonali Bank would pay Tk 45.00 crore, Janata Bank Tk 15.00 crore and Rupali Bank Tk 10.00 crore. I have never seen that commercial banks could advance loan for purchase of land and that too without any collateral security, but only a piece of guarantee paper from the promoters. Secondly, as per Bangladesh Bank's Regulations, in case of loan for land and building purposes 50 per cent of the value could be advanced to the party. How can an experienced Chairman of the Bank who has now become Bangladesh Bank Governor passed this loan and how the present Managing Director of Sonali Bank who was the Deputy Governor of Bangladesh Bank could bring this proposal to the Board for approval?

Our government is a benign one and it seems the relation-

ship with the incumbents is good. In such circumstances I would suggest that these loans may even be allowed as 'grants' as reciprocity to giving employment to people which is primarily the task of the government in setting up industries (no matter how overvalued). I hope through your esteemed paper my voice would reach the highest quarter and they would do some more benefit to the incumbents, for, after all, what does a loan of Tk 1000 crore or Tk 1500 crore matter, which would be borne by taxpayers jovially!

Anis Ahmed Khan 105, Peelkhan, Azimpur, Dhaka

Complaint against the Dhaka GPO

Sir, I sent some articles to your esteemed Daily for publication through registered Post dt. 8.10.98 from the Jessore HPO the matter was very urgent. But the registered letter was given returned to one on 20.10.98. On the plea that the address of the payee was incomplete, I am very much astonished to observe such act of the Dhaka GPO as lots of letters were posted earlier to the similar address and those were duly delivered. Due to non-deliver of the letter concerned I have been sustained an irreparable loss.

Md Abdul Latif Khan Jessore.

Terms of reference: Separate Rajuk & DCC

Sir, Reading the DS (Oct 29) write-up on Rajuk and DCC on the mushrooming of the kitchen markets and unauthorised constructions of all sorts going on in Dhaka city today, it is high time for the Government to review the situation and take some policy decisions so that both these nefarious agencies cannot pass on the buck to the other as far as duties, responsibilities, implementation and prosecution are concerned. There cannot be two masters of one mistress-Dhaka!

The rules and regs must be clear who are responsible for any particular job and who should be held responsible. There cannot be two heads for one does not work. In many areas of public administrations there is dual authority and sharing of assignments, causing confusion and delays; ultimately the public suffer. In the longer perspective, the Admin Reforms body