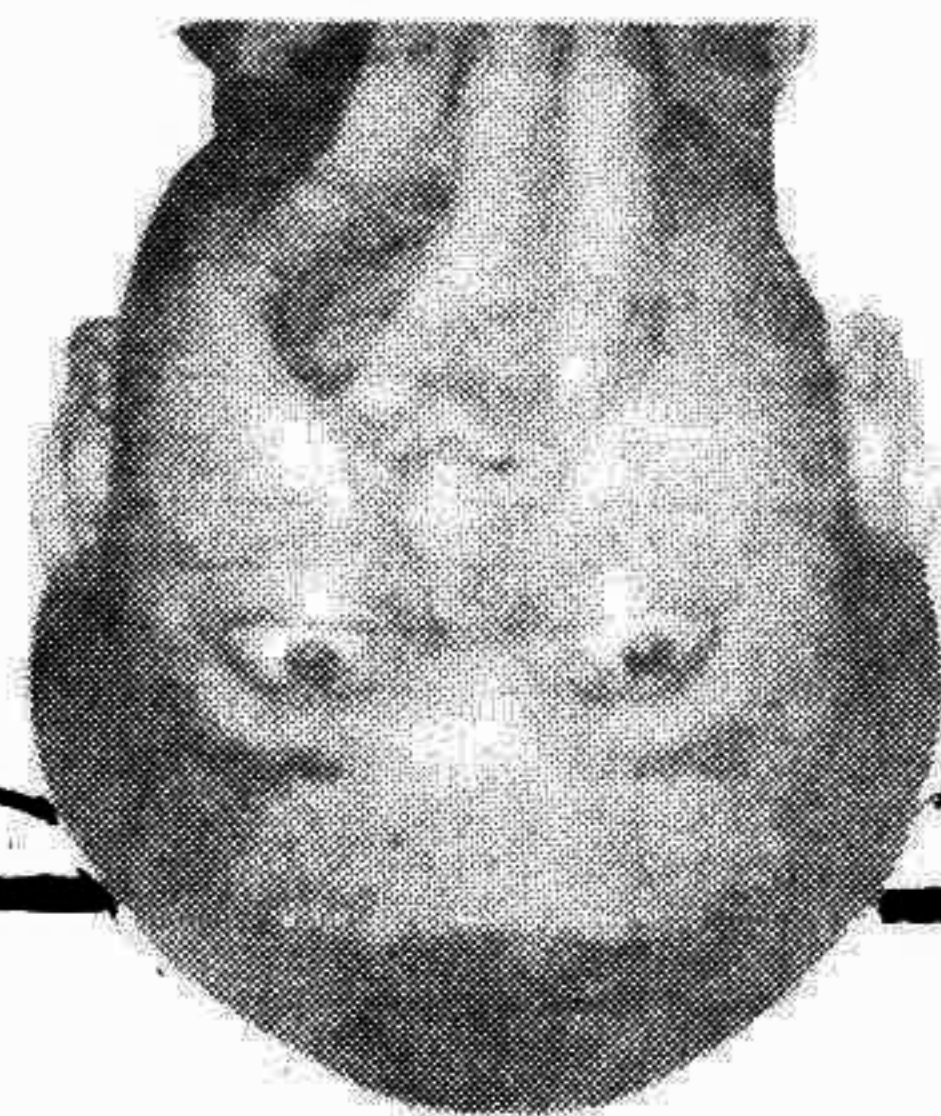


YEP TALK



February Fiasco An Entrepreneurial Nightmare

Osama Taseer

As the prospect of politically charged February looms ahead — it is surely an entrepreneurial nightmare. Once again partisan politics of Bangladesh has taken the route of hatred and insensitivity. Bankruptcy of our political ideology is truly exposed by the confrontational politics of all the major players — party in power and parties in opposition.

Living and striving in a poor country, the odds are already stacked against us. We really don't need the political leaders to add to our miseries. Do we deserve this or do we get what we deserve?

Otherwise how can you explain when nobody in their right senses sees any benefit from these 'Imposed' hartals of past & present — and still we have to endure it! How else can you hold an entire city or nation hostage to the political whims of a few politicians and their supporters (beneficiaries)?

If Economic activity is the lifeline of a nation, then how can you put a brake to it once so often. Everytime you will require it to be given a jumpstart after a prolonged & imposed 'immobility'.

Efficiency, Accountability & Performance are not the buzz words of our sacred political 'Leaders'. So many articles, reports, interviews & write-ups have appeared in the printed media (we don't have any electronic news media worth mentioning), still we are moving in circles. Come what may, whoever is in the opposition, has to resort to 'Hartal' at the drop of the hat — so to speak. We can only thank the Almighty that we don't have the tradition of Hartals being called by the party in power! That way we would surely require a full 'Hartal Calendar' every year!

Coming back to the Economic activities of the country, it is common knowledge that every industry has to struggle to keep up with rising costs and achieve the projected growth and/or profit. Few sectors are still maintaining the projected growthrate against stiff competition and new challenges. The ready-made garment sector of the country is still earning the bulk of the foreign currency. Although new avenues are opening up in the Information Technology sector, still the garment sector is the most important industrial sector keeping in view the employment generation among women and productivity. Value addition has not achieved a desired level in this sector although it is maintaining a steady growth.

This sector is competing in International Market with handicaps which are at times self imposed. Even after close to two decades of existence we don't have a sound system in place in our seaports. Here also strikes & hartals & work stoppages are the rule of the game. When all the genuine garment exporters are trying hard to cut down the leadtime on our orders to keep ourselves competitive with other countries, we still can not plan properly (not to speak of precision) how long will it take for our raw materials to reach our Warehouse through our port. The total logistics of the export cycle is dependent on so many variables e.g. congestion at Chittagong port, hartals or work stoppages at the Chittagong port, whims of every agency involved at the port, no planning to upgrade and increase efficiency of the system of clearing & loading, the political situation of the country, hartals & strikes at any level at any time, the list can go on. This sector requires massive investment in backward linkage specially Textile — but this is time & again hampered due to uncertain political atmosphere. Mere rhetorics will not woo investments and joint ventures — it requires long term planning to achieve an efficient industry based on accountability and performance. Specialized sector like Textile requires technical & entrepreneurial skills based on knowledge — it can not be maintained if you are busy half the time trouble shooting or rearranging your logistics. This is only part of the negative politics — living aside corruption, favouritism, nepotism and so on. The steady growth and side by side value addition can be achieved through constant upgradation, skill attainment, proper training, precision work and increasing local component of the whole export package. These all requires a high level of efficiency, accountability & performance. But, it is almost unattainable if the precarious situation exists in the country where political boiling point can be attained at any time.

We need tolerance at every level. The whole country can not be at ransom. We need to infuse & enlighten our leaders with patriotism & self discipline based on efficiency, accountability & performance. They can not take everybody for a ride on their bandwagon. As the opposition is expected to behave and maintain sanity of the nation while exercising all democratic rights, the people in power is also expected to deliver the goods — not threats & rhetorics. We feel both of them have failed miserably even by very optimistic standards. In this historic month of our Bengali culture and nationalism, we urge upon all the right thinking Bangladeshis to rise and put a stop to this rot. This is our country and we will build it — we expect our political leaders to give direction and vision — we want an end to this nightmare. Let us all behave in a way that makes us 'Proud to be a Bangladeshis'.

Osama Taseer is an entrepreneur and coordinator of the YEFP.



Hartal is a mindless game that politicians play ...

Save the lifeline of Chittagong: The Kulgaon Wetland

KHONDKER NEAZ RAHMAN

Chittagong the main port City of Bangladesh is situated in a unique geographic location. The city and its surroundings have a wide variety of wetlands.

The city being a major industrial hub of the country is experiencing a tremendous growth on its export industry sector. As a result the economic stagnation of last two decades have nearly come to an end. If not properly managed the city in near future may expand over its wetlands, and some precious natural resources might get lost forever.

The fresh water marsh of Kulgaon is one of the most extended wetland in Chittagong; it is linked with other wetlands by the river Halda and is crisscrossed by many canals. Once very rich for its fisheries, birds and fresh water this wetland is now exposed to the possibility of degradation and pollution.

Destruction of this wetland will open the Halda River to urban pollution and salinity from the Bay of Bengal. Other alternative sources of water for Chittagong City are Karnaphuli River, Bay of Bengal and underground water from the south bank of Karnaphuli. All of these sources will require very expensive water treatment measures before consumption.

ABOUT KULGAON: The wetland of Kulgaon is on the northern fringe of Chittagong City. It is about 6km long in north south and 2.5 km long along the east-west direction.

This wetland remains under water throughout the year, except the dry months of January-April. During this period large area remains boggy or depression with little water. The water in this wetland is absolutely free from salinity. The settlement pattern is very scattered. During monsoon the depth of water varies from half to two meter. The settlement on the southwest part of the wetland is dominated by polluting chemical industries.

VALUING THE WETLAND OF KULGAON:

Before going into technical discourse let me focus our attention towards the names of the village and canals. One prominent village is called 'Shikarpur'. In Bengali the term 'Shikar' means hunting; this gives an indication that in the past this area was a home of good variety of birds, animals and fishes for hunting and fishing. Even today the inventory of birds and reptiles are able to create enough interest for tourism and research. One important canal is 'Khandak' the Khali. The term 'Khandak' means ditches. Therefore it can be assumed that for a long time, back into history this area was well known for its wetland characteristics. The people of the area are mainly farmers and fishermen.

In the following sections the value of the wetland have been illustrated in six headings.

Flood control and prevention of salinity:

The rainwater which runs from the hills on the north and north-west of the city needs a huge retention area before they reach the sea through river Halda and then Karnaphuli. Karnaphuli is susceptible to tide of the Bay of Bengal and regular water discharge from Kaptai Lake, which prevents faster discharge of water to the sea. Therefore the wetland of Kulgaon plays a very effective role in reducing flood effect over Chittagong City through retaining rainwater.

Due to the presence of continuous water in this vast wetland the adjoining area of river Halda stays free from salinity.

Water Supply:

Water supply requirement of the Chittagong City is met 55% from the river Halda. The present demand for the 1.6 million population of the city is 36 million gallon per day (mgd). Out of which 20 mgd is supplied from the river Halda.

Future water supply for the city will be more dependent on this river, because the possibility of deep tube well extraction had already reached its limit of 15 mgd. By the year 2005 the projected demand of water supply will be 60 mgd. Implementation of new facilities for supplying another 20 mgd of water from the river Halda is going on. Keeping Halda's water free from salinity and chemical pollution, is a major role this wetland is playing.

Toxicant retention:

The wetland of Kulgaon plays a role of natural barrier between the river Halda and industries along the Hathajari road. The pollutants discharged from these industries especially from the tanneries are retained in the wetlands. The wetland works like a sink. It also kept urban development away from the river Halda and helped to preserve a major source of water to meet the future need of the city.

Flora and Fauna:

The productivity of a wetland is enormous. The soil nutrient trapped by the plankton gets cycled through aquatic animals, birds and ultimately by man and the whole chain together forms a stable ecosystem. Wetlands are now considered to have a phenomenal contribution in the environment. They harbor specific species of plant and animals, which may not survive elsewhere.

The fresh fishes such as, Koi (Anabas testudineus), Magur (Clarias batrachus) etc. are abundant and they provide perennial source of food to the local people. The common toad frogs, monitor lizard, fresh water turtle etc. form a typical herpetological fauna of this wetland. The spectacular avifauna comprises of Little gray heron (Ardeola striata), Large egret (Ardeola alba), Greater Adjutant (Leptoptilos dubius) Goose (Anser anser) etc. The common reptiles are, Monitor lizard (Varanus bengalensis),

Aquatic turtles (Kachugachuga, Batagur buska).

Beside these birds and reptiles there are lots of mongooses (Herpestes edwardsii), rabbit (Lepus species) in the area.

As most of the area are brought under cultivation of rice natural vegetation are not present in sample area, but a few aquatic species appears during the monsoon, of these, Kachuri pana (Floating Eichornia), some Algal species are common. Along the road and canal there are Hugal (Barringtonia acutangula), Keya (Pandanus) etc. and a large number of grasses and sedges. A sweet water ecosystem with both flora and fauna has developed in the area.

MAJOR ISSUES:

The wetland of Kulgaon needs to be maintained for the benefit of the local population and also for the city. The wetland is threatened by different factors.

The first and foremost important factor is urban encroachment. Sprawling of the city into the wetland can destroy this rich natural resource. A proper local area plan, integrated with the Structure Plan of the city is to be done.

The second factor is uncontrolled development of polluting industries on the west and southern fringe of the wetland. Immediate step is required to stop their growth and encourage developments, which can be considered as "Good Neighbor" to the wetland. New gas drilling site has been set on the north bank of river Halda. If appropriate measures are not taken it might become a source of water contamination in and around Halda River.

The most dangerous and phenomenal destruction can be done to this wetland by under taking development project based on wrong perception of welfare and development.

Use of pesticide and chemical fertilizer had created an unwanted socio-physical environment in rural life of Bangladesh. A survey conducted by a NGO, UBING, shows the following results of using pesticide and chemical fertilizer:

i. The fertility of soil has declined alarmingly, decreasing yield from the land under "modern" method of agriculture.

ii. The health situation is becoming terrible. Particularly women and children are victims of the use of pesticide and chemical.

iii. The total income of the family has declined, both in economic value and the return from agriculture activities... "High Yielding" varieties does not necessarily mean a "Higher" production or increased income for the farming house hold as a whole.

iv. The fish population is declining in the water bodies and ponds in quantity as well as in diversity.

v. General degradation in nutrition level. Therefore it is essential to arrange substitute of chemical pesticide and fertilizer to protect this unique biotype developed over a long span of time.

We Must Unite To Stop Hartal

Raquib Md. Fakhru

I don't want to go to work during my holiday. I have other commitments too. Previous mishaps seem to have no positive effect on us. The last time we had on going, endless hartals, we the nation as a whole were the victim. Who are calling all these hartals? Who are the victims of such hartals? And is hartal the solution to every problem? Was the consent of the common man taken?

Hartal is not the right approach for having your demands accepted. All hartal does is, put the economy under a stagnant position. It disrupts normal life. We are falling behind in terms of development, compared to our neighboring countries. Whereas we have enormous mineral resource to gain comparative advantages over our neighbors and move towards sustainable economic emancipation. Moreover, we have earned the title, "The world's most happiest Nation" Nothing to be proud of. Then again, does everyone know why we have been given this title.

The apex body delegates are making sincere appeal to the policy makers for serious consideration for such hartals. What are they doing there? Nothing seems to go the way they want. What should they do to have their demands accepted? Close down all their industries and contribute further to the unemployment problem that we already have.

We should not be at the streets carrying out processions. The leader should have far better things to do than be on the streets. Family gathering and unification is a major set back in our influential society. Again, we should be pre-occupied with books, enhancing knowledge. Most of the developed countries visualize that way. Every individual can be a contributor to the development of the nation, directly or indirectly. Every small thing together becomes a big thing.

Calling hartal can never be possible if one day every individual says to himself, "Nothing can stop me today from doing my daily routine work" The fact that we, the mass have no unity, the policymakers are taking full advantage of it. "Who can stop us from doing the right things in life. Only if we back each other" It's only a matter of time and realization that one day the people of this country will not let this happen anymore, possibly, with a positive drive.

The Writer is a young entrepreneur

Hartal : The Game of Doing As They Please

Ruhsan Rahman

'Hartal' is a very common phenomena in our lives today. We, the general people of this 'third world' country are unable to realize what the 'so called' politicians of ours are putting us through. Bangladesh is one of the most least developed countries of the world but our politicians seem to be completely oblivious of this fact. Our economy is in the doldrums and the people are the 'puppets' of the leaders. Our 'Wise' leaders can call 'hartal' whenever they please and the people are totally in the palm of their mercy. In the last few days there has been numerous articles concerning this social menace, but the question remains, do our politicians really care?

The meaning of 'Hartal' is strike. The practice of such strikes are suppose to be exercised when people's civic rights come in question. But cynically as it may sound, our 'beloved' politicians are using this 'hartal' to cripple our country in every way they can. It is high time that leaders in question realize that they should resolve their problems and differences in the 'sanghsad' or assembly and not by negative politics is much less in ratio to the cons.

The Write is a Stock and Excess Director.

URBAN PLANNING ACTS AND STRATEGY:

The wetland of Kulgaon is within the jurisdiction of Chittagong Development Authority, vested with power and responsibility to develop, improve and expand the town of Chittagong and certain areas in its vicinity. According to section 25 of CDA ordinance, the Authorization committee of CDA control all development work within the Master Plan area by exercising Building construction Act 1956, (Amended 1996).

Section 26 of CDA ordinance gives CDA the power to declare any area in the Master Plan as a controlled area and issue such direction as it consider fit and appropriate for prevention and correction of growth of building and operation in such area.

Section 3(h) of CDA ordinance gives the Authority the responsibility for formation, retention or enlargement of open spaces.

The above power and responsibility makes the Authority able to take care of its natural resources like hills, wetlands etc.

The new Metropolitan Master Plan prepared in 1995 extends the Authorities role towards restoration of environment.

Conventional planning and development initiative involving natural resources like forests and wetlands, which establishes complex ecosystem over a long period of time had shown disastrous results.

In and around Dhaka City there were a number of marshes, like Motijheel, Shamoli, Badda etc. Indiscriminate filling of these wetlands had resulted in phenomenal disaster in drainage system of the city.

INSIGHT:

To restore and create wetlands are difficult to achieve, because,

- Wetlands are extremely complex ecosystem, which involve hundreds of microbes, plants, invertebrates, reptiles, bird and mammals. They have developed as a part of larger landscape that took hundreds of years to develop and attain a natural balance...

(Wetland conservation IUCN, 1990).

If it is asked, how much technical ability mankind has achieved to deal with wetlands? Probably not enough. The more crucial question is, whether analysis of wetland is a technical problem or cultural issue of a complex system of interdependency of man and nature? The question can be put in another way, does the ecosystem of a wetland comprises of natural factors only or it is an interdependent system of man and nature?

It is more logical to say that wetlands are an interdependent system of man and nature. Lot of details which can't be revealed in a study carried out over a time of couple of years, can be only known by the part-

ners of wetland who have survived with the other components of the wetland over a span of hundred of year. Here comes the importance of "Wisdom" of the inhabitants of the wetland, which is the most important aspect for planning and development of any wetland.

Positive intervention in a wetland can probably be done through proper synchronization of technical "Knowledge" with the "Wisdom" of the local inhabitants.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

This paper will not give a set of recommendation in the sense of giving advice about what to do. Rather it views a path to preserve and explore the relationship of a community, the

essence of human being, with the nature; to put each man in a place where his/her dignity is preserved and the power to control his or her own destiny and its environment are assured.

To guide the intervention in the wetland the paper suggest a Participatory Planning process to address issues identified and

will be identified in future through the planning process.

The issues identified so far need to be taken care of are:

i. Alteration of urban encroachment pattern to suit the ecosystem of the wetland.

ii. Controls use of pesticide and chemical fertilizer and promote integrated pest control measure and compost.

iii. Control and restrict polluting industries to be located on the fringe of wetland and on the upstream of the river Halda and other canals.

iv. Take proper measures to control pollution that might be generated from gas well drilling site.

v. Promotion of the wetland as a tourism and research center.

For the implementation of participatory planning a planning team have to be formed with representatives from technical and administrative organizations and from the members of the community to ensure,

i. Community's idea (input)
ii. Technical input
iii. Political good will.

YEPE CHRONICLE

Lecture on EMU & Implications for Bangladesh

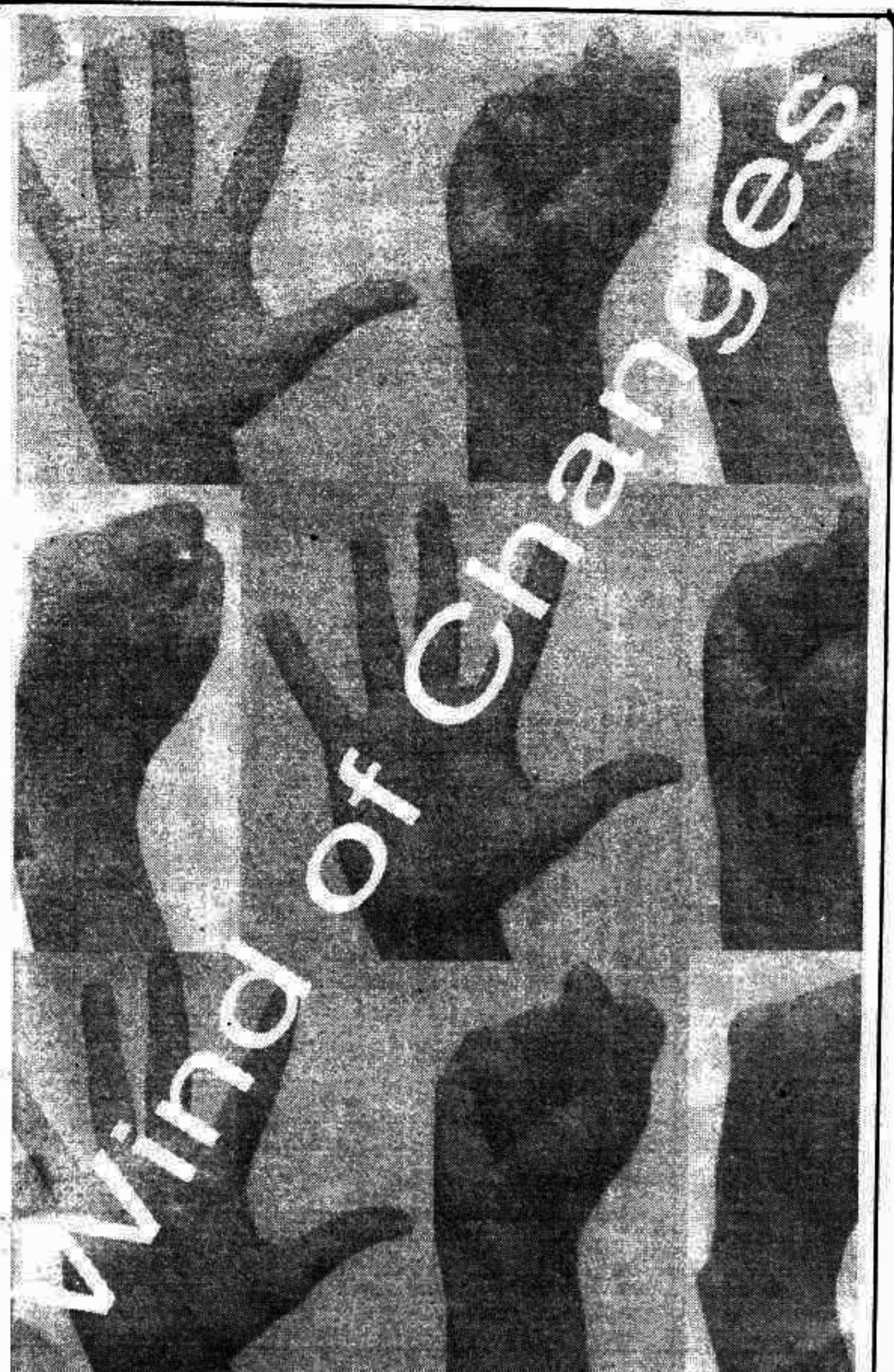


The Young Entrepreneurs & Professionals Forum (YEP Forum) organised a lecture on the 'European Monetary Union (EMU) of the European Union and Implications for Bangladesh'. The programme was jointly organised by the YEP Forum in association with the British Council, Dhaka & The Daily Star on 27th January 1999.

Dr. Pikay Richardson of the prestigious Manchester Business School was the speaker. The program was attended by Mr. M.H. Rahman, President of the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce & Industry (DCCI), as the Chief Guest. In his speech he stressed the need for proper evaluation of the EMU and its implications for Bangladesh. The program was organised at the DCCI auditorium.

Dr. Richardson gave an in depth presentation on the EMU's economic & political aspects. Although the program was attended by invited guests from different backgrounds, the presentation was skillfully worded so as to be comprehensible by the diverse audience. The well balanced lecture touched on every aspects of one of the greatest events of the century including the great uncertainty & irreversibility of the whole process.

The oratory skills of Dr. Richardson was highly appreciated. The lecture was followed by a stimulating session of questions and answers. The two hour long program was rounded off with a 'Wrap-up' and vote of thanks.



YEP FORUM encourages each professionals to participate in its various activities. The lawyers and the Doctors chapter are particularly invited to contribute to YEP TALK.