

Betting on Bengal Tiger

Eventually, being 'poor' won't be as much a matter of living in a poor country as it will be a matter of having poor skills.

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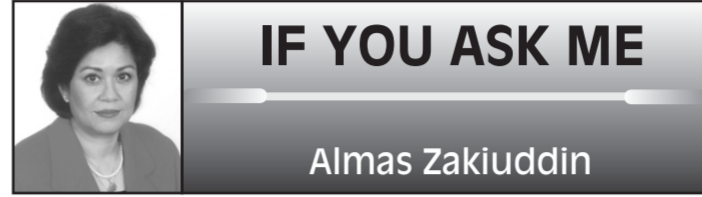
World Bank in Dhaka said this week that the next tiger could be the Bengal tiger (and one assumes he wasn't planning a boat trip to the Sundarbans) my heart leaped in joy.

Does anyone believe that might happen one day? Could the Bengal tiger really earn the title and prowling the land with a modicum of authentic pride one day? Or is everyone convinced our world is going to remain as it is now, with the icons of capitalism telling one lot exactly how to eat up their greens and wash behind their ears.

The truth is, no one is really quiet or compliant. Yes, in any other part of the world, abject poverty such as exists here would be cause for a revolution as indeed, it has been on numerous occasions.

Now, as Mr Temple of the World Bank informed everyone this week, the problem of disparity not only continues, but also appears to

getting richer, but the poor are still getting poorer. As always, the World Bank was trying to get a message through, namely, that unless the government brought about radical changes in institutional governance, the World Bank would not



IF YOU ASK ME

Almas Zakiuddin

sectors have done well and there is a great deal to be thankful for, one cannot and must not deny this.

But the bad news, said Temple, was in the general area of making a dent on poverty. It is clear that Bangladesh has not made a 'significant' dent on poverty.

ough up any more funds. A messy political situation, high levels of corruption, low standards of performance by the civil service, weakened investor confidence, were some of the issues raised, not for the first time of course.

One is all for cleaning house, now and whenever required. But it might also be a good idea to consider the issue of priorities. Indeed, as much as one may frown upon the pronouncements of outsiders, et al, the question of priorities is moot. I came across an interesting commentary, a kind of synoptic

LETTER FROM EUROPE

Will there be a United States of Europe in the Near Future?

Chaklader Mahboob-ul Alam writes from Madrid

The last summit of the leaders of the European Union's fifteen member-countries was held in December 2000 at the Mediterranean French port of Nice.

In June 1955, further impetus was given to the idea of greater economic integration. Intense negotiations among the member-countries of the ECSC resulted in the Treaty of Rome of 1957, which created the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM).

although Britain, Sweden and Denmark decided to remain out of it, at least for the time being.

At present there are thirteen European countries, who are seeking the EU membership. While Turkey applied in 1987, Cyprus and Malta did so in 1990, Switzerland in 1992.

The Single European Act of 1987 modified the voting system for the first time after the Treaty of Rome (1957), by introducing the Weighted majority system on certain subjects.

The European Commission, as mentioned before is the highest executive organ of the EU government. At present it is composed of 20 members.

Then, of course, there are the European Parliament (a consultative body), the Court of Justice, the Economic and Social Committee etc.

Now we are in a position to

Germany. Now Germany should carry much greater weight because of its huge population (82million), which is 23 million more than that of France (59million). After much haggling and bickering, although ostensibly the parity between France and Germany was maintained, in reality Germany came out as the winner because it will have more members in the European Parliament than any other country.

The size, composition and powers of the Commission, the Parlia-

round since the Second World War that what we have today is at least partly the result of that cosy little chat which took place in Bretton Woods several decades ago, after which the World Bank and its siblings were born.

In the light of these two perceptions, the one that provides a pen portrait of the world, and the other about our separate worlds made famous by Truman, one wonders if the World Bank's threat to pull the plug might be such a bad thing, after all.

Sure, there are lots of people to blame in Bangladesh. There's the government, always a useful place to start when trying to apportion responsibility for the state of the nation.

even went so far as to talk of a 'federation of nation states' in certain areas like taxation and social security.

Although, in principle, the idea of extending membership to the east and central European countries was welcomed, on practical terms, very little progress was made in this respect.

Again, even though the French talked about some sort of a 'Euro-army' due to intense British and American pressure, it was finally accepted that NATO will remain as the bedrock of European Defence.

So, what is the outlook for the future? Ever since the idea of economic co-operation was launched by the French in 1950, economic integration has slowly but steadily progressed.

Both the new and old members will benefit from a gradual enlargement of the EU. Because of the acceptance of the idea of a two-tier membership system, a few members will most probably have a more integrated supra-national inner club within the EU, which will remain open to other members as and when they satisfy the admission requirements.

As far as political integration is concerned, under the present circumstances, it is highly unlikely that in the foreseeable future the member nations of the EU will surrender their sovereignty and form a politically integrated United States of Europe.

For the first time, the idea of having a two-tier membership system was accepted. A group of eight or more countries, could, if they wanted to proceed with enhanced co-operation (some

driving it for some distance, they are reluctant to put on the brakes. They often go the wrong way, and maneuver recklessly at intersections. They are excused on the plea that they have to pull the rickshaws manually.

We must decide whether we will allow this inhuman means of transport from the Dark Ages, putting people, especially women and children at risk. Many countries around us like India, Sri Lanka and Myanmar have abolished rickshaws and we can do so too.

Anisur Rahman Dhaka.

Clinton's Eight Years

by Harun ur Rashid

President Clinton relinquished his office as the President of the US on January 20 after eight years. He was elected in 1992 defeating the incumbent President George Bush Sr and got re-elected in 1996 after defeating Republican veteran Senator Bob Dole.

How do you measure his eight years of presidency? One of the primary tests appears to be: Are Americans better off today than they were in 1992? The answer appears to be in the affirmative. Even his critics cannot deny this.

His presidency saw continuous strong economic growth, coupled with low unemployment rate. His foreign policy successes include ousting of Serbs from Kosovo, constructive engagement with China, restoration of diplomatic relations with Vietnam, encouragement of 'sunshine' policy of South Korea towards North Korea and strengthening of relations with South Asian countries by visiting India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

President Clinton's presidency may be divided into two periods. First there was a two-year period of 1992-94 in which he did not perform well. His attempt to reform healthcare failed when the Republicans took control of the Congress.

Furthermore as a Democrat he realised that big-spending government was not the right recipe for the US people. He veered the policies to middle ground the 'third way' that is neither conservatism nor liberalism.

The Republican Congress under Mr. Newt Gingrich misread the mood of the people and made several political mistakes and President Clinton was able, like President Reagan, to bypass the Congress and approach the people directly for approval of his policies.

He was successful in doing so because of the misplaced strategy pursued by the Speaker Gingrich. Ultimately Gingrich had to depart from the political scene.

President Clinton was a great communicator. He could explain most complicated facts to the people in simple words. He had uncanny ability to empathise with every section of people blacks, his panics and whites. He maintained very good working relations with minority leaders, including American Muslims.

His disappointments appear to be his failure to strike a deal between Israel and the Palestinians and the shaky peace deal between the Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland, despite investment of his energy, political skill and time.

His indiscretions with the White House intern Monica Lewinsky marred the reputation of his presidency, although he attempted to suppress the facts with his clever use of words before the public. He was a master craft of words. (For example, he smoked but never inhaled it).

What a great tribute to the departing President Clinton!

The author, a Barrister, is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

The search for an integrated European Union owes its origin to the age-long intense rivalry between Germany and France, which caused two World Wars in the 20th century with devastating consequences.

In 1951, a French civil servant called Jean Monnet and the then French foreign minister, Robert Schuman put forward the idea of setting up a new economic framework for western Europe. An independent supranational authority to administer a common market for coal and steel was set up in 1951 by France, West Germany, Italy and three Benelux countries.

Although the immediate objectives continued to be economic, (the creation of a single European market and a single European currency), some French and German politicians kept nourishing the idea of a closer political integration as well.

It will take time for new garment factory zones to be created at specially chosen sites, or garment villages. But in the meantime these factories could prove to be a good offshoot industry for local investors.

Proper factories, with flat roofs should be recommended for the RMG sector. Building factories could prove to be a good offshoot industry for local investors. Whatever happens, people's safety should not be compromised.

Fire in Garment Factory

AMA Dhaka.

community, decided to set up a mechanism for co-operation on foreign policy matters. At the same meeting the UK, Ireland, Denmark and Norway were invited to start negotiations with a view to joining the community.

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of course, to secure military protection against an eventual Russian resurgence as a colonial power. As far as a closer political integration with the EU countries is concerned, most of these ex-Soviet bloc countries have hardly any intention of giving up their recently conquered sovereignty.

It would be difficult to make a fair assessment of what has been achieved in Nice and what has not without some background knowledge about the structure of the EU government.

Then comes the Council of Ministers (the main law-making body of the EU), which is composed of a representative minister from each member nation. Its terms of reference do not permit it to take on the function of drafting legislation itself. However, it can accept, reject or even request proposals from the Commission, which is the Union's highest executive and administrative organ.

Bar too often India flexes her muscles instead of adopting a policy of understanding toward weaker neighbours, as her attitude towards Sikkim and Sri Lanka and the

understand and evaluate the principal objectives of the Nice summit. There were three main objectives: to redefine the balance of power between the big and small countries by reallocating the voting weight of member countries in the Council of Ministers, the Commission and the European Parliament; to streamline the voting system with a view to accelerating the integration process.

The summit started off with a row between France and Germany. The French argued that the whole idea of European integration was first put forward by two Frenchmen in 1950 to eliminate the age-old rivalry between France and Germany by integrating them in a community and in that integration process they were to have equal status.

Maldives, trade embargoes imposed on Nepal from time to time, and threats and bluster against Pakistan, have made India look like the bully on the block. There is no denying the fact that most of the small countries in South Asia have to exist uneasily with India.

Dr Subramanian Swamy, a scholar and ex-minister recently stated that whereas 'China has borders with 14 nations and, except for India, it has resolved its disputes with all, including Russia (and whereas) India has borders with six countries and excluding Bhutan, it has disputes with all five.'

Robert Kader Chittagong.

Cause for shame

Shamim Anshary Sumon Savar, Dhaka

ment and other organs of government were discussed and finally agreed upon, although not quite satisfactorily. This is my impression that the powers of the Commission were reduced and the Council of Europe (in the form of Inter-governmental Meetings) came to be accepted as the EU's most effective and powerful organ.

In many respects, the summit can be considered as a success because the EU was able to put its own house in order before letting new members in. The summit however, failed to extend the qualified majority voting (a very difficult system to understand by ordinary people) to all the areas it wanted. Only 29 new areas came under the new system leaving at least twenty others (probably the most important ones like tax and social security) outside this system.

For the first time, the idea of having a two-tier membership system was accepted. A group of eight or more countries, could, if they wanted to proceed with enhanced co-operation (some

face of a girl by throwing acid on her because she has refused to marry him. As a man, I feel a great sense of shame, when another man commits misdeeds like these because as a man, I am no different, physically, from an ordinary man.

Shamim Anshary Sumon Savar, Dhaka

Rickshaws Rule the Roads

Sir, A young mother and a young rickshaw-puller were killed in a road accident recently. I had the misfortune to witness a similar tragedy in which a teenage boy was killed when his rickshaw was hit from behind by a bus, about a month ago. We are always quick to blame a motorized vehicle and sympathize with the victim. We demand driving permits from drivers of cars and buses, but we allow persons with no road sense to pull rickshaws through busy roads.