

Killer food poisoning is a tragedy for all

Unregulated food selling could hurt just about anyone

A horrific food poisoning incident at the police barracks in Paglpara at Kaptai has left at least 11 dead and 16 others fighting for life. We express our deepest condolences to the family and friends of the deceased. Death is not only a deeply tragic event in itself but its agony continues in many ways for the family for long. It brings in its wake much vulnerability and families affected by death will have a long and painful route to traverse in future. We hope they will somehow find the strength to sustain and survive. We wish them courage and good luck.

The source of the poisoning appears to be stuffs bought from the market to prepare Iftar snacks. Doctors are even mentioning a particular toxin which grows in overly stale food ingredients being routinely sold in the market. In the month of Ramadan, the sheer scale of food items bought in the open-air exposes more people to health hazards than would be the case normally. All this is because we have no quality control mechanism regarding food sale. Honestly speaking nobody really cares about what is sold, what is eaten and how it affects the consumer. One is probably lucky that the number of deadly infections are so few given the amount consumed.

The large number of make-shift Iftar shops that spring up at every street corner could be a fine example of Ramadan-time entrepreneurship but there is no way of ensuring what they sell is safe. Not only what they market is unsafe but the vending stands near the roads are collection points for mud, flies and grime as well. As a result, the food has a deadly coating that will certainly make many sick. The combination of unsafe food that begins with preparation and ends with serving is not just a seasonal hazard but a major public health problem.

Over a period we the public have managed to ignore all the dangers and the authorities have absolved themselves of all responsibilities. But we can't afford to wait for more tragedies to strike, every time we are goaded into action. The issue is that of ensuring safety of food items whether sold for preparation or in a consumable form. Not just what is sold but how and where as well.

This problem is staring at us and needs to be addressed. It needs to be addressed quickly before more people die.

Test of attitude

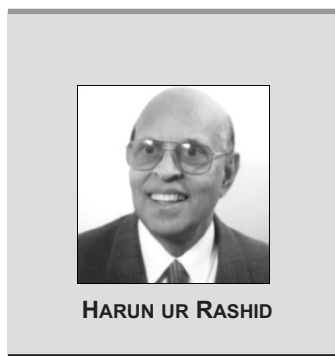
Our cricket gets another lesson

AVERTING innings defeat is Bangladesh's solace stated the headline of the front-page report of a leading Bengali newspaper yesterday on the second and final cricket Test against the visiting Zimbabweans. Well put, one must say, despite the cynical undertone. The hosts were the heavy underdogs throughout the two-match series. Saving sterling display of gritty batsmanship by Javed Omar and Habibul Bashar on the third day of the second Test in Chittagong, strength of the visitors was not tested, not even for once. In Dhaka, it could have been extreme humiliation for the hosts, had not the rain gods been so generous.

Still, there have been flashes of brilliance, albeit rare, that have positive readings for the future. Some of our batsmen — especially Omar and Bashar — and bowlers — Mashrafe bin Mortuza in particular — deserve special mention as having the ability to consistently perform at the highest competitive level of the game and even win matches for Bangladesh. What our current national team obviously lacks is the urge to win and the prime reason is that they don't believe they can even put up a good fight, let alone win. In his post-match reaction, Bangladesh skipper Naimur Rahman, who has been left out of the national team for the one-day series, actually said that averting innings defeat was "our achievement". What could be more poignant a submission than that.

The greatest lesson this series has had for our cricket is that we need to change our attitude. The pithy 'win or lose, participation is important' has lost its currency and there is no place for such mild and meek mindset in modern-day sport. The cricketers must start playing to win, not just for the sake of participation. True, they have inadequacies in all departments of the game and need to improve dramatically to stand a chance in the international arena but so long as they are not driven by the urge to win, mere technique and application would bear no result in the end.

China's admission into WTO: Apparent Implications



HARUN UR RASHID

ON 10th November China finally made its entry into the 142-member nations Geneva-based World Trade Organisation (WTO) at a five-day WTO meeting of trade ministers in Qatar. It took almost 16 years for China to enter into the global trade club.

It may be recalled that China withdrew from the WTO's predecessor GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) in 1950. After the Chinese supreme leader Deng Xiaoping adopted the country's "open door" economic policy, China decided to join the WTO in mid 1980s. In 1995 it was refused permission to rejoin the WTO as a founding member. A key impediment was the efforts of the US to link membership to China's human rights record.

The basic principle of the WTO is that no discrimination is allowed for a member-country in the conduct of trade among member-countries. It stands for liberalisation of trade and low tariffs and is a global forum to regulate tariffs on international trade through multilateral agreements. Critics to the WTO believe, how-

ever, that the policies of the world trade body are being dictated by the rich nations, resulting in more inequality among nations. They argue that rich countries advocate free trade for every body but when it comes to their domestic markets, a whole new series of arguments appear for why they should not be open.

The last round of multilateral

mean that it will be bound by the rules of the WTO in international trade. The protection barriers for foreign products will gradually crumble. In practical terms China will open its market, reduce tariffs on agricultural products, allow foreign investment in the sensitive insurance, telecommunications, banking and securities sectors and free up access to other services. Already

covering the inspection and regulation of manufactured items in the country of origin. They fear that more non-tariff measures may be brought in by the Chinese authorities to protect its industries.

In return, China will also be able to gain market access for its products with other WTO trading partners. After 20 years of reform, Chinese manufacturing products

indicate that as many as 10 million workers employed in China's antiquated State-owned enterprises are now losing their jobs each year.

The entry into the WTO implies liberalisation of the Chinese economy that in turn will face significant restructuring. Trade experts maintain that in general private enterprises and labour-intensive industries are likely to gain while State-owned enterprises and capital-

developing countries. It is a wake up call to other Asian nations. They will not be able to remain complacent and have to get their act together and introduce domestic reforms because the competition is at their front door from China. Many exporting developing countries (such as India, Pakistan and Bangladesh) will now have to face competition from Chinese goods in the Western market, in particular textile and garment products.

Conclusion

China is already a significant trading and manufacturing power. In 1997 China's foreign trade volume was US\$563.4 billion, up from US\$35.7 billion in 1978. The foreign direct investment to China has grown considerably. Last year it is reported that foreign investors spent on factories and joint ventures a record of US\$45 billion dollars (equal to Bangladesh's Gross Domestic Product as of financial year 1999-2000). China's economy is going forward even at this time of global economic slow-down.

By being a member of the WTO, China will transform from a socialist command economy to a free-market one in line with those that have become China's key trading partners. Another bonus is that China's admission has led an easy admission for Taiwan on 11 November to join the WTO but because of China's opposition it has to be satisfied with the name of "Chinese Taipei" in the WTO.

Barrister Harun ur Rashid is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

BOTTOM LINE

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trade negotiations was completed in 1994 and is known as "Uruguay Round". A new round of trade negotiations is being pressed by the Western countries while the developing countries have not yet made up their mind because of the effects of the Uruguay Round on the developing countries have not properly been assessed.

Implications

The implications for China's admission to the WTO are enormous. China's Minister of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation Shi Guangsheng said in Doha that the admission would "invariably exert widespread and far-reaching impact on China's economy and on the world economy in the new century".

China's entry into the WTO will

China has allowed foreign broadcasts in entertainment area in southern zone. Restructuring will touch nearly every sector of its economy.

The "open door" policy with low tariff will present a wide range of opportunities to the exporters of the Western industrialised countries including in industrial equipment, infrastructure, telecommunication equipment and food processing. Wheat and wool exporting countries have warmly welcomed China's entry into the WTO because they see a prospect of billions of dollars of export trade in agricultural products in China. However pragmatists feel that non-tariff measures are not likely to disappear overnight. China has already stringent regulations affecting imports of some goods,

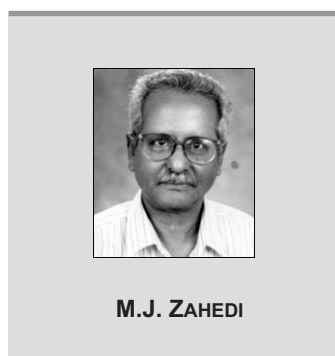
are conspicuously visible in markets of all countries with reasonable price tags. Many say that in these days it is hard not to buy a product that is not made in China—from safety pin to weapons.

Whether China likes it or not, it will eventually have to play by the rules of the WTO to survive in a globalised system. It faces the daunting task of reforming its laws and regulations and encouraging bureaucrats to conform to WTO rules. Its domestic economy will face competition from foreign services and products. This may cause job losses among domestic workers in China (some estimate 40 million people out of work) as some of the industries may not be able to sustain in the face of stiff competition from foreign products. Media reports

intensive industries are likely to suffer. Despite its tremendous economic growth, financial experts believe that the admission to the WTO will put pressure on China's four state-controlled commercial banks and financial experts say that at least 50 billion yuan (US\$1.00=around Chinese yuan 8.30) of capital each year will be required so as to survive in international competition. They believe that reform of financial institutions in rural areas is needed and co-ordinated development of the money and capital markets is required. Market-oriented reform of interest rates will be imperative, first in foreign currencies and then in home currency.

The effects of China's admission will also be reverberated in all

Stealing cars has become an 'industry'!



M.J. ZAHEDI

CAR theft indeed has become a big industry in Karachi. The newspapers of the country daily publish reports of the day's thefts or forcible snatchings of vehicles or motorcycles in broad daylight and at busy street corners; on November 18 (Sunday) newspapers reported nine cases happening on Saturday. The newspapers have written innumerable editorials on the subject. But nothing has been of avail; the crime, instead of stopping or showing at least a downward trend, has increased.

'The Nation' ran a story last week which said that in the first ten months of the current calendar year the number of cars stolen or snatched at gun point was 3,734.

The month wise record, according to figures given by the paper was: January 440, February 450, March 392, April 446, May 476, June 492, July 454, August 491, September 433, and October 532.

The cars stolen or snatched away are not disposed of in Karachi, not even in nearby cities or towns. They are sped away to the farthest corner of the country. Indeed as far away as the Pakistan-Afghanistan

thing conceivably related to the public and the police of this premier city of Pakistan. Then, there is a very special facility. But it is costly and many car owners may not have installed it in their cars. This device will locate the vehicle at any time of day and night. This device is considered an insurance against car theft. This is over and above a special cell in the Karachi police establishment. It is designated as anti-car theft cell.

per cent than last year as against 15.6 logged by the car thieves).

Let us have a look at the financial aspect of the entire matter. Car prices are very high in Pakistan, add to it the gradually falling value of the Pakistan rupee against the US dollar. So let us assume that the average price of a motorcar stolen or snatched is around Rs 5,00,000. So in October alone the car thieves stole or snatched Rs 80,000,000

awesome figure only a fraction shy of two thousand million rupees. This is the taking of not a whole year but only ten months. Perhaps no other undertaking or enterprise is likely ever to yield such profit by the month. No investment, no taxes either. Besides, the 'industry' has very few hazards. There may be a recession for other industries. Not for this one.

It is absolutely fascinating to see

really talented they steal and, when necessary, snatch vehicles at gun point on busy thoroughfares in broad daylight. The police say that car thieves do not operate alone. Some say that the thieves are really the wage earners. They work for others who are high and mighty. On an average it is around Rs 25 to 30 thousand per vehicle for the man who does the stealing-snatching job. He is presumably assured protection and this much of cash is guaranteed.

The question remains: where the stolen or snatched vehicles ultimately go. An average citizen of Karachi knows all there is to know about this industry. Here we have a grand coalition. It simply has to be grand if it is an enterprise worth what we have just seen. To say that there must be some very powerful figures in this great game is to say the obvious. After all the gentlemen making Rs 2,115,150,000,000 cannot be greenhorns playing marbles. They know their way about and also how to stay about in this game without a fear in the world.

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LETTER FROM KARACHI

The question remains: where the stolen or snatched vehicles ultimately go. An average citizen of Karachi knows all there is to know about this industry... To say that there must be some very powerful figures in this great game is to say the obvious. After all the gentlemen making Rs 2,115,150,000,000 cannot be greenhorns playing marbles.

border, running from Balochistan to the northern most tip of the country that falls in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP).

Not that the police in Karachi is not alive to the increasing number of car thefts in the city. The police are alert and they know or are told about these thefts. There is a Citizen-Police Liaison Committee (CPLC), something other cities should envy. This is a very high profile body. Its functions extend to almost every-

All this should add up to a grand design to prevent car thefts. Yet thefts take place daily, at the average rate of at least 15 to 16 cars a day.

Bandits helped themselves to nearly 3,500 motor vehicles in ten months of the current calendar year. The automobile 'theft industry' indeed is doing better than the previous year, at least the last year. Of course, the motorcycle thieves are doing better (they logged 18.8

worth of vehicles from the people of Karachi.

Another thing to be kept in mind: Car thieves in Karachi are gentlemen of taste and discernment. They do not fancy old or over-used units, for the simple reason that the return on these is not attractive. Only the best available is good enough for them.

Working out the value of 3496 units @ Rs 550,000 we get the really

the total yield the vehicle theft industry of Karachi of more than 13 million people. Motorcar theft yields a net round figure of Rs 2,000,000,000. Add to this figure the profit of Rs 15,150,000,000 from motorcycle branch of the enterprise and you have a dazzling performance worth Rs 2,115 million. What industry in Pakistan earns anything like this!

It must be acknowledged that the people who commit these thefts are

OPINION

Why gas export is not a viable option

BADRUL IMAM

IN an apparent U turn on the question of gas export, the BNP hierarchy is now trying to make its way clear for the pipeline supply of natural gas to India. Yet it was not so long ago that Khaleda Zia was speaking in the same tone as the then prime minister Sheikh Hasina on gas export. "We cannot become beggars by exporting our gas" she said.

Since her above rhetoric, neither the gas reserve of the country increased, nor the projected future domestic gas demand decreased. So why does she change her mind? Was it a political showpiece or was it a genuine gesture that somehow turned sour? Whatever it is, it looks like finance minister Mr. Saifur Rahman will have tough time in selling the idea of pipeline gas export to the people because a large mass of politician, academician, professional and national experts strongly believe that exporting gas at the present stage will go against the national interest.

How dependent Bangladesh is on natural gas? The dependence is overwhelming and obvious as one can see that about 90 per cent of the electricity generated in the country comes from gas fired power plant. A comparative study shows (oil and gas journal, 16 July, 2001) that the share of natural gas among total commercial energy consumed annually in the following Asia Pacific countries is as follows: India 8 per cent, South Korea 9 per cent, Japan 13 per cent, Thailand 24 per

cent, Indonesia 31 per cent, New Zealand 32 per cent, Pakistan 42 per cent, Malaysia 50 per cent and Bangladesh 70 per cent. Obviously Bangladesh is placed in an unique position, being the most dependent on gas.

Why consider 40 or 50 years gas demand? At present Bangladesh produces about 1000 million cubic feet of gas per day and about 332 billion cubic feet of gas per year. This is what the country needs and uses mainly for generating electricity, producing fertilizer, feeding industrial, commercial and domestic sectors. In that sense there is no additional demand of gas at present. This is a point emphatically preached by the foreign oil companies working here, as they advocate the case of gas export. The foreign companies try to down play the fact that Bangladesh have to depend on its gas for a long time in future and there is at present not enough gas to sustain such dependence. Not surprisingly, the foreign companies are here to do business and to make profit and therefore would not bother to consider the future energy scenario of the country. But for Bangladesh, ensuring future supply of gas is of paramount importance. There are basically two reasons for this:

1) Except for natural gas, there is no other significant indigenous commercial energy source in the country. Oil prospect of the country is not bright and geological evidences suggested the generation of gas in the subsurface Bangladesh did not accompany generation of significant oil. This is because most petroleum sources are gas prone

here. This was also pointed out in the recently submitted USGA-Petrobrangla joint gas assessment report.

The coal resource exploitation in the country has a gloomy scenario. Most of the coal deposits in are not shallow enough to go for easy extraction. The Barapukuria underground coal mining project began in 1994 and was supposed to be completed in 2000. But with only half of the work done so far, it struggles to make a face saving completion which is unlikely to be economically profitable, but likely to run on government subsidy. Riddled with underground accident and other difficulties, merit of underground coal mining in this country is in serious doubt. The scope of hydro electric power in the country is very limited and the prospect of nuclear power is almost nil.

2) The possibility of early availability of alternative energy like solar or wind energy is now down played by its innovators. Scientist previously forecast that solar energy would be widely available in the world in next 20 years from now. But they are now saying that the take off point for the solar energy or other renewable (as a means of large scale) energy source will not happen before 2060. Also the role of nuclear energy will continue to decrease worldwide because of its environmental negative side. In fact oil and gas together will remain the prime energy source throughout the world until 2040 after which fuel will be the single most important fuel. Use of natural gas will peak in 2050 and after that time battle between

gas and solar energy will begin for dominance. It is only after 2060 that the battle will swing in favour of solar energy.

Form the above it is logical for a country which has gas as the only significant resource, to make a conservative approach in its gas use and to look forward for sustaining the gas reserve for next 50 years. This may not be a perfect policy for oil rich Malaysia, Indonesia or coal rich India, but for Bangladesh it is certainly so. Energy experts opine that Bangladesh must ensure reserve to meet minimum of 40 years gas demand, if not 50, before contemplating to export its natural gas.

Gas demand past, present and future: Use of natural gas started in Bangladesh in 1960 with the commissioning of Chattak gas field. Since then use of natural gas steadily grew to the present level when 47 per cent of the produced gas is used for power plants, 35 per cent for fertilizer production and 18 per cent for industrial, commercial and domestic sector. The daily average production of gas increased from about 3 million cubic feet per day (mmcf) in 1961, to 40 mmcf in 1970, 125 mmcf in 1980, 450 mmcf in 1990 and 907 mmcf in 2000. At present Bangladesh produces about 1000 mmcf of 13 gas fields.

Until the end 2000, a cumulative of 3.9 TCF gas has been used. If we look into the decade wise share of above gas use, it appears that gas is used during 1960-1970 was 0.067 trillion cubic feet (TCF), during 1971-1980 it was 0.279 TCF (more

than four times the previous decade), during 1981-1990 it was 1.067 TCF (3.8 times the previous decade) and during 1991-2000 it was 2.49 TCF (2.3 times the previous decade). The present growth rate of use of natural gas is 7 per cent per annum.

A study of the future demand of natural gas in the next 50 years has been carried out by the government. The demand forecast is done on yearly basis from 2001 to 2050 taking care of individual sectors like power, fertilizer, commercial, industrial and domestic. A decade wise future gas demand is shown as follows: 4.4 TCF during 2001-2010, 8.8 TCF during 2011-2020 (twice the previous decade), 13.0 TCF during 2021-2030 (1.6 times the previous decade), 16.9 TCF during 2031-2040 (1.3 times the previous decade) and 19.3 TCF during 1941-1950 (1.2 times the previous decade). From above it is seen the 40 years gas demand of the country is 43.1 TCF and 50 years gas demand is 62.4 TCF.

From gas fields to gas reserves: Central to the subject of gas export is the question, do we have enough gas for export? Do we have or will we have 62 TCF gas available to meet 50 years demand or 43 TCF gas for 40 years for that matter? The 'floating on gas' theory which used to sneak through the media from time to time, has lately been silenced, thanks to the USGS-Petrobrangla joint gas assessment report. Before coming back to this gas assessment report, let us point our attention to some of the gas fields in Bangladesh.

Bakhrabad gas field, discovered in 1969, was initially considered one of the largest in the country with a reserve of 2.78 TCF. In 1990 Canadian consultant IKM in a revised study concluded that the reserve of the field is 0.867 TCF, substantially lower than the previous estimate. Bakhrabad was put under production in 1984 but since 1995 the pressure drop in the field caused continuous decrease in production rate and production decreased to 105 mmcf in 1997 and 45 mmcf in 1999. At present it is producing only 35 mmcf. Bakhrabad gas field will be exhausted in a few years from now.

Titas gas field, one of the largest in size and the biggest producer in the country, had initial reserve of 2.1 TCF, but more than 1.8 TCF or about 85 per cent of the reserve has already been produced from the field. How long the remaining 15 per cent gas will run is anybody's guess. Chattak gas field has 1.14 TCF gas according to the previous estimate, but recently a revised reserve estimate showed it to be 0.27 TCF. Chattak was put under production in 1960, but production decline led to its suspension in 1987. A reappraisal of the field has been suggested. Kamta and Feni gas fields, put under production in 1984 and 1992 respectively, were suspended from production in 1992 and 1998 due to water production instead of gas.

Out of 22 discovered gas fields, only a handful are large in size (reserve in excess of 1 TCF). There are 14 fields with individual reserve less than 0.5 TCF. These include

Begumganj (0.01 TCF), Meghna (0.08 TCF), Semutang (0.098 TCF), Sylhet (0.10 TCF), Narsingdi (0.10 TCF), Saldanadi (0.12 TCF), Beanibazar (0.16 TCF), Kamta (0.17 TCF), Fenchuganj (0.21 TCF), Chattak (0.24 TCF), Shahbazpur (0.33 TCF), Moulvibazar (0.40 TCF), Feni (0.44 TCF), Kutubdia (0.46 TCF). These gas fields will be short lived. The country has a present-gas reserve of about 11 TCF.

It is not that large field will no more be discovered in Bangladesh, but the distribution of field size will certainly follow the already proven trends of the present fields. That means there will be more small discoveries than large discoveries. We need to remember that we are looking for 40 or 60 TCF of gas for our future need while most of the gas fields are less than 0.5 TCF each in size.

Coming back to USGS-Petrobrangla joint gas assessment, what their report concluded really needs serious consideration. As the report said, there is 95 per cent possibility of finding about 8 TCF of gas in future including offshore. That is not too much of gas and certainly will not to support our domestic need for any considerable time in the future. A more optimistic 32 TCF reserve discovery has only 50 per cent chance, according to the above report. But one cannot really contemplate formulating a gas export policy on the basis of 50 per cent chance of finding 32 TCF gas reserve. So these should place the government in the backstage so far gas export is concerned.

Put it in other words, there is no point in contemplating gas export while you 1) presently have 11 TCF of gas in hand, 2) hope to find another 8 TCF with 95 per cent confidence, 3) know that Bangladesh has no other significant energy source, 4) estimate that country needs 43 TCF of gas in the next 40 years or 62 TCF in the next 50 years and 5) know that the world is not going to bring out an alternative (solar or other) energy source to replace gas in the next 60 years.

It therefore brings up several questions. Why can't the government realize that it will make the nation vulnerable to a disastrous future energy crisis if it starts gas export with this modest reserve in hand? Should the government want to judge the viability of an export option, why can't it wait more for the reserve scenario to change substantially, if it does, in favour of Bangladesh? Why can't the government tell the foreign companies that the interest of the nation is more than the interest of the companies? Why can't the government ask the foreign companies to go and find more reserve before they propose an export option? And finally, why is the government in such a hurry to make a point on gas export? Or has it already made the point?

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