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## Handloom industry

At long last the government has taken notice of the traditional handloom industry (still in the informal sector) by announcing a Tk 50 crore loan scheme. For institutionalised assistance programmes, administrative steps may be necessary in the formal thrust sector.

The free market in 2005 will put pressure on the RMG industry (competition), hence it is time to diversify and popularise handloom (including khadi) garments locally through fashion shows, to encourage the young generation, who are still obsessed with foreign labels. It will generate the feel for exporting such goods.

One point to notice for the exporters is that handmade garments and textile fetch very high prices in the developed countries (long man-hours in contrast to high speed production of fabrics on automated machines). Our R&D on cotton production has to be modernised, with better varieties in the market.

We have a big market for lungie and

ghamcha (towel).

Similarly, the silk industry has to face keen competition from other Asian countries. Mix tradition and modern trends. How to encourage the private sector on entrepreneurship in the handloom industry?

The NGOs are contributing positively towards the handmade production of clothes and materials (Aarong computerised department store in an example), hence there should be close collaboration between the official policies and field assistance.

One area is neglected: handloom clothes for office goers (formal wear), in contrast to a large variety of leisure time garments available in the market. The absence of safari suits and Hawaiian shirts is keenly felt in this hot and humid climate.

The politicians in power can play a pivotal role in setting trends by analysing the working of the bureaucracy in more details.

AHusnain, Dhaka

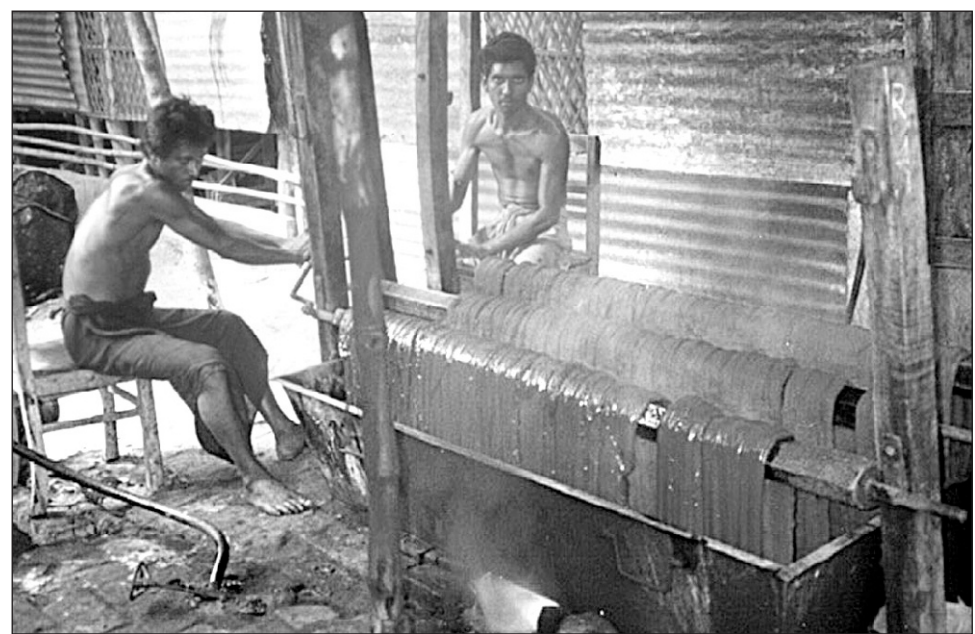


PHOTO: INTERNET

with wisdom, not devoid of humanity and compassion. It is a mystery why the leaders of the US are so insensitive to the cause of the Palestinians. Doesn't John Kerry know the history of Palestine, the injustice done to them? The Palestinians have been suffering for so many years. We are hearing about a roadmap but know that it will never be materialised.

Palestinians are no match for the Israeli army, its military forces are equipped with most sophisticated weapons of every sort and have the support of the US.

I do not know why Ariel Sharon reminds me of the vultures always on the lookout for some prey.

Nurjahan, Ctg

## RSF report

According to the latest finding of Reporters Sans Frontiers, Bangladesh is a dangerous place for journalists. This is greatly credible because our politicians, political activists, bureaucrats, businessmen etc. and almost all of us are not tolerant to criticism. Please note that I have not mentioned the terrorists and criminals. They are identical in all countries. People in power take legal recourse to teach the journalists 'a lesson'. Those who have no such opportunity depend on muscle power.

Please allow me to say also that journalists are partially responsible for this situation. Why are there two BFUJs? Why some journalists have to be partisan in their reports and writings and editorial duties?

MAH, On e-mail

## April 30 deadline

The AL is the oldest of the political parties of Bangladesh. It has seen a great leader like Sheikh Mujib, who played a vital role in our movement for independence. Even the staunchest BNP supporter will agree that the AL has an extensive network of grassroots activities. But unfortunately this party has been dominated by the kind of people who seem to have no control over their tongue. The present leader Sheikh Hasina has already made her mark for the wrong reason. Now her deputy has decided to take charge. The April 30 deadline is just another example of poor political acumen on the part of our 'tested' politicians.

The April 30 deadline was like the 'panacea obtained from dream'. Mr. Jaill kicked off the countdown; he did not give any clear idea what had led him to believe so. Interestingly, other senior members and the chairperson of AL also endorsed it. The government added colour to this circus. It mobilised all its security and intelligence organs to fill the already overcrowded jail. At last, the Supreme Court had to intervene.

If you ask a group of dumb people to select their leaders, they will select the dumbest. It cannot be truer in our case.

Saif, Dhaka

## Our lawmakers

We were dismayed to learn about the passage of bills in the Jatiya Sangsad enhancing MPs' perks by 100 to 600 per cent. The decision to raise the amount, however, was quite timely to give them relief from the price hike. They were also allowed to gain tax-free cars at the

expense of the public exchequer. Now the lawmakers are demanding free telephone.

Apparently, these claims may appear to be illogical but are truly democratic! The present day democracy is representative in character. The poor condition of the national exchequer makes it difficult to fulfil the needs of the general people. As such, the benefit is extended to those who are representing the people. They are elected by the people and represent them. So it is obligatory for them to see that their requirements are fulfilled. We are very happy indeed to see that they are representing us by receiving enhanced salary and allowances, using tax-free luxury cars to be highly mobile to make liaison with those who elected them. They are making the best use of tele-communication involving crores of taka to quickly communicate with thousands of people at home and abroad.

Long live representative democracy!  
Anupam Barua  
Atish Dipankar Road, Dhaka

## Upgrade the OC

The officer in charge (OC) in any police station (Thana) is a vital post for law and order implementation. In the upazila (former thana) level, there are many first class officers - upazila nirbahi officer (UNO, ex-TNO), upazila health officer, upazila fisheries officer, upazila education officer etc. But the OC is an inspector, a class two position.

Thirty-three years have passed since our independence, but the post has not been upgraded. It should be upgraded to ASP immediately, considering the important role that an OC has to play in enforcement of the law.

Md. Zillur Rahman  
Gandaria, Dhaka

## Attitude towards private universities

A few years back, there were only a few public universities in Bangladesh. Now there are lots of private universities all over the country. And the prosperity of some private universities is quite noticeable.

Still some people have a negative attitude towards private universities. Because they think that the education that is provided to students in private universities is totally borrowed knowledge, as some teachers from public universities teach in private universities. Sometimes professors from those universities attend private universities as visiting professors. And this is a very common practice all over the world.

Besides, in private universities in our country there are many new teachers who have completed higher education with good results from different universities. So the time has come to change our attitude towards private universities.

Sometimes people think that the financial cost is too high in private universities. But we have to think that private universities are providing all types of facilities to students--such as well-equipped classrooms, lab and computer facilities, free internet service, financial aids and many things else. So, we can hope that students passing from private universities will be able to utilise their knowledge and ability properly



PHOTO: AFP

## Perversion

The level of perversion, demonstrated by the British and US soldiers upon the prisoners of Iraq, has astounded the millions of conscientious people across the world. The photographs, printed in your daily (in its issue of May 2, 2004), have revealed the fact that they are completely devoid of any ethical sense. We strongly protest such sordid acts.

This is surely an extreme violation of human rights. The criminals in this case

deserve stringent punishment. We think the civilised West (!) would rather refrain from trading in democracy and human rights and cultivate ethical sense among its military personnel and the civilians as well.

Ehsan  
Noyatola, Dhaka

## Sadistic!

People all over the world lost their language of protest when they came to learn

about the barbaric treatment meted out to the hapless Iraqis by their self-proclaimed liberators(!). This is the worst of all crimes mankind has ever come to know because it was inflicted on the victims by one of the greatest exponents of the loftiest civilisation. The US and its allies should liberate their own minds and souls from all kinds of condemnable thoughts, before they go for liberating any other country.

Arif Abdullah  
Gulshan, Dhaka

## EU expansion

From May 01, EU has become a 25-member family. Ten new countries have joined the bloc with high ambition. The new members have joined it to energise their economies.

Most of the countries are from the former Soviet block. Their economies are not stable yet. The EU expansion may alter the global order a little bit. It may America to downsize its political and economic hegemony. On the other hand, the Russian oligarchy may be marginalised. But, pragmatically, the LDCs must lose something from EU. They will lose trade incentives like MFA. EU will have to prioritise the Baltic and Balkan states. So, Asian and African countries will be deprived of economic facilities. But in future, the vast EU should become a large market for the LDCs.

Molla Mohammad Shaheen  
Dept of English, DU

## Awami League's move

So much for Jali's "deadline" and Tofail Ahmed's "mass uprising"

against the government. It is too bad that the hired mob could not coalesce to form a "mancha" due to heavy hands of the law enforcing agencies. The "trump card" remained in the stack to be played later. We have learned some new terms in politics.

In its desperation for power, the Awami League made this dangerous move to pull down the elected government by creating anarchy and it failed miserably. Their timing was all wrong. It is only two and half years since their election debacle and the memory of their misrule, economic mismanagement and MiG and Frigate purchases are still fresh.

The AL still has a chance in the next election if it follows constructive politics.

Iskander Meah  
Dhanmandi RA, Dhaka

## Chittagong a city of terror?

Chittagong is the biggest city after Dhaka. It is famous for port, sea-beach, trade and for natural scenes.

The mayor of Chittagong has already introduced Chittagong as a healthy city. In spite of all these, the people of Chittagong are faced with many problems. Terrorism is the main problem in Chittagong. People of Chittagong do not pass a day without some major crimes being committed there. Robbery and hijacking are routine matters in Chittagong. People have lost their mental peace.

Would the law enforcers do something to save the people of Chittagong?

Partha Majumder, Sylhet

## US support for Sharon

I'm so disappointed and feeling betrayed after hearing US presidential candidate John Kerry's statement supporting the Israeli prime minister's ordering the killing of Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and then Abdel Aziz Rantissi, who was killed less than a month after the assassination of Hamas's spiritual leader.

We thought John Kerry would be different from Bush, and considered him to be a person endowed



PHOTO: INTERNET

## Those marines

The US marines are generally less privileged than the army. They are trained to do the dirty work. Their motto is "Search and Kill". The words "Blind Killer" are painted arrogantly on their tanks. They abusively make use of disproportionate firepower and are conditioned to reach target at any cost. One American psychiatrist recently commented that it appears that men are taught to be killers more than disciplined soldiers.

The brutality is now infamous in Iraq. Iraqis are made to run naked, the beating of civilians (documented by independent media) and now joined by their British allies has dispelled myths about "heroic" fights.

The insanity that has touched Iraqi lives has a domino effect too. You hear about US marines committing suicides. The killer instinct is difficult to turn off once they begin killing in combat. That insanity caused the Gulf War hero, Timothy McVeigh, to blow up a day care centre along with a Federal building!

Is America training a new breed of killers and afraid to bring them back home? Maybe, there is a fear of the repeat of Fort Bragg scenario. American families should start doing some real soul searching. Do they want their children to become killers? Is their life worth sacrificing for fighting a proxy war for Israel or for the politicians who have never been to war themselves? Are gas and oil worth the amount of hatred that is being sown?

Syed Akhtar (RN), Gulshan, Dhaka

## Primary education -- performance standard



PHOTO: INTERNET



Mr. Akter Faruk in his report "A gloomy picture of primary education" published in your daily on Thursday, April 22, 2004 mentioned that in the newly introduced evaluation test for class six in Barisal district, a total of 28,089 students were tested and about 50 per cent student, who crossed primary schools and madrassahs, failed in the test. Only five per cent got 60 per cent and above marks. He also raised a question, "How a student gets zero after spending five years in school?"

I feel tempted to write something on this issue. It may be mentioned that "Education Watch", 2002 and EMIS report of the ESTEEM project, 2003 also present a similar picture of an important facet of primary education in the country. These reports were based on collection and analysis of data in a professional manner.

The above findings on performance of primary education do indicate a major national failure. It is not intended to apportion blame to anybody for deficiencies and failures- but the questions are: Have we ever enquired about good achievement data for monitoring performance at schools? Have we ever considered the large number of vacant posts of teachers along with other posts in primary education? Have we ever considered the faulty recruitment of teachers? Have we ever looked at the effectiveness and qualification of teachers, academic supervision and quality and quantity of teaching materials? Our failure is the failure in seriousness of efforts-

particularly in applying professionalism to management and decision making in primary education.

A major reason behind poor achievement is the lack of accountability and lack of good achievement data for monitoring performance at school, upazila and central level, so as to guide school improvement activities. Linked to the shortage of good achievement data is the absence of awareness among teachers and guardians of the importance of students' achievements. Given a large number of vacant posts, how can we expect good performance of students?

About 10% of teaching posts (39,000) are lying vacant. Moreover, their uneven deployment also creates problem. Teachers' recruitment is generally based on academic requirements- not on teaching experience. As a result, teachers are appointed without strong evidence that they can teach well. In the recruitment criteria, thirty (30) marks are kept for viva-voce examination, encouraging corruption and discouraging the appointment of deserving and qualified teachers. If well qualified and competent teachers are not appointed, how can we expect good performance from students?

If we are serious about improving the performance of students at primary level, we must fill all the vacant posts of teachers forthwith including other posts, and free the recruitment of teachers from political influence.

Dr. FK Chowdhury