

Post-MFA scenario

There is an opportunity in the challenge

THE need for keeping our garments sector buoyant in the post-MFA era cannot be overemphasised. There are basically two points of view insofar as the perceived fallout of the quota-free trade regime goes. There are the doomsday theorists who seem to see no light at the end of the tunnel, so to speak. And, there are those entrepreneurs and analysts who discern a clear opportunity in the challenge to prove the staying power of the garment industry in the new trading scenario.

The government must support the readymade garment manufacturers and exporters to survive in a highly competitive apparels market they have been catapulted into.

The sector itself though, has to take a robust initiative in standardising different components and areas of the production processes. The areas which are likely to come under increasing buyer focus include child labour, industrial environment, safety measures and terms and conditions of service of the factory employees. In other words, the fundamentals must be strengthened further in accordance with the international standards. Manufacturing efficiency and quality of products will certainly play an important role in sustaining our niche markets and gaining new grounds. The local entrepreneurs will have to prepare themselves for competing in a completely unsheltered situation where everything will be decided on the basis of performance alone.

The government, for its part, should adopt an enabling policy framework to see the sector through the critical phase of adjustment. The right kind of infrastructure has to be provided for the industry to perform to its full potential. The government must equip the entrepreneurs fully so that they can hold their own in the face of tough competition. Their capability to respond to the needs of the global market, now being flung open, has to be enhanced.

The government has already taken some steps to create a supportive environment for the garments sector. The steps are basically aimed at cutting costs of the RMG units. In the present context, the government must play the role of an effective facilitator and promoter of the RMG sector as the latter did its part to tide over the most testing phase of its survival.

Postponement of Saarc summit

A justified step but somewhat fuzzy handling

We were saddened to learn of the postponement of the 13th Saarc summit that was scheduled to be held in Dhaka later this month and for which preparations had been well under way. However, our saddening over the postponement is nothing compared to the sadness and distress we continue to feel for the events that have necessitated this postponement, and we agree that under the circumstances postponing the summit was the only responsible thing to do.

Our hearts continue to go out to the millions of people who have been affected by the tsunamis that have devastated the coast-lines of South and South-East Asia. The death toll has now crossed the 100,000 threshold and continues to rise on a daily basis. The fact that three of the countries most heavily hit -- Sri Lanka, India, and the Maldives -- are members of Saarc and are at present mobilising all of their resources and national energy on a relief and rehabilitation programme is by itself understandable ground for postponing the summit.

The summit is a crucial one, and we hope that the Saarc member-states will find it convenient to reconvene at an early date and that the regional cooperation issues which are on the table will be resolved sooner than later.

It is with regret that we must point out, however, that the situation with respect to the postponement has been handled rather unprofessionally at our end. As the death toll mounted, it became apparent to those of us monitoring the situation that postponement would be almost inevitable.

The foreign ministry, however, continued to deny this would be the case up until the day before the announcement of postponement. The vehement denial followed by the acceptance of the impelling reality comes across as rather amateurish diplomacy, and we would have hoped that the situation would have been addressed in a more mature manner.

Forum for the future

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

LAST June the G-8 Summit committed itself to promoting socio-economic and political developments in the Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA) through a Partnership for Progress and Common Future. The values of human dignity, democracy, rule of law, and social justice were to be integral part of the G-8 generational commitment, as was a just, comprehensive and lasting solution of the Palestinian crisis. The first meeting of BMENA and G-8 was held in December in Morocco entitled Forum for the Future. The Morocco meeting was not only the result of the G-8 declaration of last June, but also of Arab League and Arab Business Council declarations. The meeting reviewed the progress of collaborative efforts relating to democracy assistance dialogue, literacy, international finance, entrepreneurship, micro finance, and investment.

Though President Bush remains convinced that across the Middle East a consensus has emerged for political, economic, and social change, at the end of the December meeting, Moroccan Foreign Minister affirmed "the sovereign right for each country within its sovereign unity and territorial sovereignty to promote its democratic, political, social and cultural systems very freely, according to the UN Charter and the principles of non-intervention in internal affairs and peaceful settlement of conflicts and good neighbourhood." Colin Powell, representing the US, agreed with his Moroccan counterpart that could deflect and blunt the sharp edges of terror. Congruent

with this was the belief that democracies do not wage war against other democracies. The validity of this hypothesis lies in the fact that in a democracy one person or a small group cannot launch a war. The legal and constitutional procedure that democratic government has to abide by, and the popular support a democratic government has to carry for

liberalism was incompatible with libertarian values but comfortable with authoritarianism and religious orthodoxy. Princeton Professor Bernard Lewis' enquiry into the theological origin of political Islam and the rise of Islamic militancy partly contributed to western misconception about Islamic teachings. Lewis' great intellect found appropriate contestant in

safeguarding military installations had been voiced even before the first Bush administration. But the translation of this theory into reality was left to President Bush. In one of his speeches President Bush recognised Middle Eastern people's "need for freedom" as deep as our own. It is not realism to suppose that one fifth of humanity is unsuited to liberty, it

In the ultimate analysis, however, if global convulsions are to be minimised and threats from non-state actors are to be eliminated, then the root causes fuelling the convulsions have to be addressed. These root causes are well known. What is lacking is the political will of the Prometheus to display his sincerity to many skeptics that he is willing to solve the problems. It is crystal clear that the prosperity of the First World is inextricably linked with the socio-economic and political developments of the Third and the Fourth Worlds.

were international condemnation of Anglo-American invasion of Iraq and global unease over Bush's policy of pre-emption to prevent probable threats of aggression. Despite Colin Powell's call for international partnership and his reiteration of the importance of the UN's role in global affairs, President Bush's conviction that "Middle Eastern exceptionalism" should not be tolerated any longer remains deeply anchored in the US foreign and defence policies. Given Condoleezza Rice's record as National Security Advisor, a change of guard at the State Department should not hold out any promise of mellowed policy in the second Bush administration.

On the heels of the brutal onslaught of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the Bush administration's policy makers decided upon democratisation as the key factor that could deflect and blunt the sharp edges of terror. Congruent

waging and continuing a war, makes the job of undertaking a war an extremely difficult proposition. The international community may scrutinise war by a dictator or an oligarchy but war by a democratic government is also scrutinised by the people of the country. Hence President Bush's aversion to "Middle East exceptionalism" and his fundamental rupture with decades of failed US policy in the Middle East due to US willingness, in his words, "to make bargain, to tolerate oppression for the sake of stability" which in the long run proved elusive because peace and stability cannot be purchased at the expense of liberty.

One must admit that for decades western scholars firmly believed that the Islamic world in general and the Middle Eastern countries in particular were impervious to democratic values, because in their eyes Quaranic

Columbia University Professor Edward Said who accused Lewis of furthering his political agenda under the cloak of scholarship. In the course of Said's relentless defence of the oppressed Palestinians his thinking led him to conclude years before President Bush's two nation solution of the Palestinian imbroglio that a just solution of the problem lies in global recognition (in opposition to then PLO official policy) of two states existing side by side in Israel and the occupied lands. Though realism dictated that some such solution be adopted to break out of the "iron circle of inhumanity" Edward Said's espousal of the two states solution testifies to his intellectual courage and political acumen.

Articulation of the concept to deny "democratic exception" given to autocrats dictated by raison d'état during the cold war and for easy acquisition of oil and

is pessimism and condescension and we should have none of it." Western realisation of the need for democracy to fight the war on terror was embedded in many western scholars' belief that the absence of Christian doctrine of rendering unto Caesar's and unto God which are Caesar's and unto God which are God's in Islam made the Muslims at once a political and religious community and therefore at variance with the essence of liberal thought. Bernard Lewis pointed this out in his book Crisis of Islam. Lewis underlined the dichotomy of regnum and sacerdotium (temporal and sacramental) so crucial in Christianity has no equivalence in Islam. If the separation of religion and the state is not needed and sovereignty lies not in the people but in divinity, it has been argued, then the resultant form of government becomes theocracy or some other form of authoritarianism but certainly not partici-

patory democracy.

If the non-western world is divided into fundamentalist, traditionalist, modernist, and secularist camps, then the western efforts should be directed towards assisting the modernists and secularists who support inclusion into global modernity and relegation of religion to private sphere. Such efforts are not only Herculean but time-consuming as well. It is therefore easily understood why both the June G-8 Summit and the Morocco Forum for the Future have pledged generational commitment to democratic and economic upliftment of the Broader Middle East and North African region.

Given widespread belief in the western world that Islam's current crisis is due to its failure to thrive and connect to the global mainstream due to the Muslim world's long period of backwardness and comparative powerlessness, the Bush administration's Greater Middle East Initiative and G-8's commitment to BMENA are noteworthy. In the ultimate analysis, however, if global convulsions are to be minimised and threats from non-state actors are to be eliminated, then the root causes fuelling the convulsions have to be addressed. These root causes are well known. What is lacking is the political will of the Prometheus to display his sincerity to many skeptics that he is willing to solve the problems. It is crystal clear that the prosperity of the First World is inextricably linked with the socio-economic and political developments of the Third and the Fourth Worlds.

By Kazi Anwarul Masud is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

The plight of non-government teachers

MASUM BILLAH

NON-government teachers constitute ninety eight percent of the total teaching staff of the country at the secondary and higher secondary level. Though the number and amount show a gigantic figure, they represent a very negligible influence at the national level of education planning and other decision making activities. Of course this is not fully unexpected from a society where the national budget depends on foreign aid. Even then a little better deal can be expected from the society, had it been given a little better care.

The present way of running the non-government schools and colleges is based on private and government partnership which experiences fragile administrative structure and poor performance. Frankly speaking, this system of running the institutions has proven almost dysfunctional. There does not lie any reason or rationality in respect of student teacher ratio, the method of teaching, and the assessment and recruitment system of teachers and other staff.

These institutions are virtually run by managing committees which are hardly answerable to anyone. No transparent accountability has so far been established though it has been in vogue for years. The main function of the committee is to employ teachers. Recruitment of teachers sees non-transparency because of the direct and indirect pressure of the members of the managing committee. To speak the truth, no standard system of recruiting teachers has yet been established. Political pressure and colour also get involved in the recruitment process, hindering the smooth running of the institutions.

Most of the evils in the educational institutions happen mostly because of financial crisis. It is a big shortcoming on the part of non-government schools and colleges. It is also the democratic right of the citizens of the country to have educational facilities from the government. It is again true that the government of any poor

system based on a standard test, academic performance of the candidates, attachment to teaching, honesty, teaching experience, etc. may be the criteria for recruiting teachers. Everything should be impersonal so that no member of the committee can exercise any influence to recruit less qualified candidates, which is a common practice now plaguing the educa-

country cannot afford to do it despite it being a well known fact. Government money is being misused in various ways which government cannot afford to stop due to heterogeneous causes. In the midst of these causes, education in the country will continue. Teachers will teach. Children must receive education from the society. Educated people must

cannot concentrate their attention on studies on an empty stomach, and this common practice has been going on for ages.

iii. Every school or college can raise a poultry farm starting from small scale. Raising poultry farm will not only increase the institutional income but also it will be a source of protein to the surrounding areas of the institution includ-

I must cite the example of Mukul Niketan high school of Mymensingh town. The headmaster of this school possesses tremendous energy to dedicate all of his time for the betterment of the school. He has created a unique example by visiting the houses of his students at night accompanied by his teachers who help the students in their houses. It has become a routine affair of the headmaster which has made his institution renowned not only at Mymensingh but also all over the country.

tion system. The Ministry of Education must take this initiative which will not claim much extra money from the government funds, but will improve the transparency of the system.

Again, with some possible exceptions, it happens in most of the cases that the members of the committee are not educated, or not real social workers, or do not take interest in education. Even some of them are local touts. The teachers, headmasters, and principals don't have any say or power to undo this. So, in the greater interest of the nation education ministry must make a law so that nobody without having good qualifications or social acceptability can be selected as the member of the committee.

Most of the evils in the educational institutions happen mostly because of financial crisis. It is a big shortcoming on the part of non-government schools and colleges. It is also the democratic right of the citizens of the country to have educational facilities from the government. It is again true that the government of any poor

provide these needs of the society. To meet the financial needs of non-governmental educational institutions the administration and the government can take the following steps:

i. Every school and every college must have a cooperative society where every teacher will contribute from the first month he or she gets his or her salary. This money could be used in various income generating activities. The fund can be raised further taking a negligible amount of money from the students, local people, and available government sources.

ii. In most of the non-governmental educational institutions, there is no arrangement for tiffin for the students. But students take tiffin during their leisure period in unhygienic shops. Every school and college can arrange tiffin for the students and teachers through the cooperative society. The institution will be financially benefited and students will be able to give their concentration to their studies after the leisure period. They

ing the institutional staff.

iv. It is a common scene that almost every school or college possesses a pond. This pond can be used for fish cultivation in the most modern way.

v. In possible cases every school and college can set up a shop to sell books, pencils, scripts, and others teaching aids which is absolutely necessary for the students and they must buy these items from nearby shops. Schools and colleges can set up other kind of shops to earn some extra money for the improvement of the institution.

vi. In case of availability of space, institutions can cultivate vegetables and fruits. Tree plantation can also be done in a planned way. Still there are schools and colleges where there is space, but it is not used for any productive purposes.

Poor students can be engaged in these income generating activities which will help to ensure the continuation of their education. It will also give poor students opportunity to learn practical life

people and social workers will learn to mobilise local and possibly hidden resource, it will definitely exert a sound effect on our national economy. It is a kind of effort to help the government.

Another important point must be given consideration. Better and attractive performance of the school and college will invite attention of the guardians as well as the people of the society. In order to better perform there is no alternative to the sincerity of the teachers and institutional management. The better performing institutions will invite more students to come there which is another means to boost the financial condition of the institution.

All kinds of guardians will appreciate to send their wards to those institutions and don't hesitate to spend more money for their wards. In non-reputed schools and colleges guardians don't get any interest or impetus to spend money for their wards.

As a part of my professional duties I get to meet with various sorts of teachers both at urban and

rural, famous and unknown institutions, government and non-government level, and everywhere teachers show a deep frustration that in the practical field of the world, this kind of learning will definitely help them.

Only dependence on government money to meet all kinds of expenditure of the institution does not bring positive results. Government is to run and manage a lot of state affairs with its very limited resources. When educated

I must cite the example of Mukul Niketan high school of Mymensingh town. The headmaster of this school possesses tremendous energy to dedicate all of his time for the betterment of the school. He has created a unique example by visiting the houses of his students at night accompanied by his teachers who help the students in their houses. It has become a routine affair of the headmaster which has made his institution renowned not only at Mymensingh but also all over the country.

Undoubtedly it is a rare example at present in our country. This school possesses a huge amount of wealth. Financial problems do not stand in the way of the progress of the school. Many students and guardians crowd here to get admission. Many students sit for the SSC examination from these schools without paying any fee. The school meets the expenditure of those poor boys and girls. Doesn't it prove a rare example in our educational arena?

Every school can be a real learning centre and resource centre. Every school can be run like a university. Every school can be a real house to solve the personal, national, and international problems.

Md. Masum Billah is a Material Development Specialist, Post Primary Basic and Continuing Education (PACE) Programme, Brac.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Long awaited win

First I would like to congratulate the Tigers for the emphatic win over India. Yes, I am the one who wrote several times against their poor performance. I am the same person who shouted and danced like a mad man in the TV room. We want our team to perform steadily and play a positive game as they did in the last two games. Political interference and nepotism in the selection process has to be avoided.

I have a disturbing experience about a game between Bangladesh and Pakistan. One guy in the TV room was disheartened that Saeed Anwar got out in the nineties and missed his century. This time I overheard some people (who seemed to belong to a minority group, no offence intended to anyone/ group). I have friends belonging to that group who are sensible and more patriotic than I) laughing and saying that India did

not care much in that match and now they were going to make a flurry of world records against Bangladesh in the last match. When OUR team is playing, can't we give full support to them? Is this too much to ask for from a Bangladeshi?

Saf

Dhaka

A requiem

The macabre homicide of Professor Muhammad Yunus, a teacher of Rajshahi University, appalled us. The terrorists liquidated a progressive man. Mr. Yunus was a veteran teacher of RU for many years. He was a very much liberal minded academic. He was very strong in his pro-liberation notion.

He was a senior vice president of Bangladesh Economic Association and president of Rajshahi University Bangabandhu Parishad. He was very amiable and student-friendly. So his gruesome demise

stories. The first one is about a time when there was no Rab and the second one describes an incident taking place after Rab was born.

In a crowded shopping plaza Mr. B (not the real name) and his family members were shopping peacefully. All of a sudden, there were some gunshots and some hue and cry. Everybody was running here and there but Mr. B didn't run for his life, he went forward and tried to find out what had happened. He came to know that a shopkeeper was shot dead for not giving *chaandaa* or the *chanchas* of a muscleman, and to his utter dismay Mr. B found out that the shopkeeper was none other than his son's father-in-law. After that nobody came forward to help them in any way and our great police arrived after two hours. Mr. B was again surprised to see that instead of going after the culprits (who were very much recognised by police) the police asked for money

from Mr. B for lodging a murder case... Years went by but nothing happened to the culprits, but Mr. B and his family members were still threatened to withdraw the case, or they would suffer the same fate.

After Rab was born Mr. B went to them and narrated the whole incident. Rab started searching for the main culprit who was a listed criminal wanted in a dozen murder cases. At last Rab found him. They arrested him and the next day he was shot dead in crossfire.

Mr Kaushik, please note that you want the system in the first story. But the people of this country prefer the system in the second. That is why Rab is liked by most of the people in this country. It is a democratic country and there is law. But until and unless corruption and crime are uprooted there won't be any proper application of this law.

Tawfiq Zunayeed
Gulshan, Dhaka

Turkey and EU

It is very good to hear that after forty years of waiting, European leaders finally allowed Turkey to start membership talks to join the Union. I cannot understand why Europe has kept Turkey waiting for such a long time. Turkey is an integral part