

Is it nothing for BD from WTO?

Let us not take away any wrong lesson

THE sixth WTO ministerial meet in Hong Kong has come to a close with little real progress on the important issues that dominated the negotiations, and with nothing of significant advantage for Bangladesh.

The agreement reached with respect to farm subsidies was disappointing in its final form. Not only was the date of elimination for the subsidies pushed back from 2010 to 2013 to accommodate the wishes of the EU, but the details are still unclear. The agreement is not target-based and nothing has been quantified.

From Bangladesh's point of view, the center-piece was the agreement on granting duty and quota-free access to developed markets for goods from the group of 15 LDCs. The final deal permits duty and quota-free entry for 97 percent of products, but permits the developed countries to maintain restrictions on 3 percent of items, that will include ready-made garments from Bangladesh and Cambodia.

The reason given for this was that the RMG sectors in Bangladesh and Cambodia are considered competitive and have no need of such a helping hand.

It may not be lost on us that in a way the agreement is complimentary of Bangladesh and our garments sector. Perhaps the lesson to be learned here is that we should be moving beyond thinking of ourselves as a nation dependent on concessions and unable to compete without them.

The fact that the RMG sector is competitive at a global level should raise two questions for is. The first is why we are not competitive in other sectors, with a commitment to improving port facilities, infrastructure, banking services, etc to bring the business climate in the country up to a level where investment and trade prosper. The second is why we have not diversified our export base in such a way that we would be able to take advantage from the offer on the table.

Finally, there is nothing to stop bilateral agreements between Bangladesh and other countries with respect to greater market access, and this is a path we should be pursuing in recognition of the fact that the new tariff-line wouldn't be applicable before 2008.

Some questions have arisen revolving around our handling of negotiations at the Hong Kong round which was apparently blemished by lack of cooperation between our Geneva office and the visiting negotiating team from Bangladesh. The government needs to look into the issue to learn from the experienced so that we are better equipped next time around.

Bhutan's transition to democracy two years away

Felicitations to the monarch for his declaration

KING Jigme Singye Wangchuk of Bhutan has announced that his country will have its first-ever national election in 2008 to set up a democratic government. This will be a major shift from the monarchy that has been in place for nearly a century. Bhutan is looking forward to democratic governance which will give its people a voice in the running of the statecraft.

The King is apparently planning to have a constitutional monarchy with an elected parliament after his son takes over from him in 2008. He had devolved power to a council of ministers seven years ago as part of political reform, and has been proceeding step by step to steer his country along the path to democracy. Though there are still people in Bhutan who think that the country is not yet ready for transition to democracy, the King obviously believes otherwise; and as an enlightened person, he has unfolded his plans for democratisation in keeping with his liberalism and proper understanding of the dynamics in the present-day world.

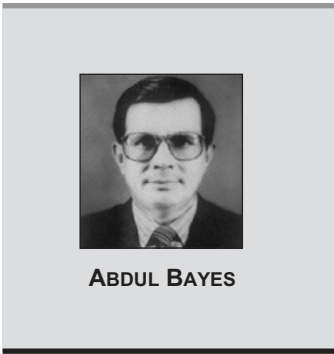
The news has great significance for the region as a whole. Bhutan's neighbours have every reason to feel happy with the prospect that one more country in South Asia will be a democracy.

At a time when many countries in the world are struggling to attain political stability, the Bhutanese are addressing the issue in their own peaceful way with the man at the top taking the initiative to carry forward the country's democratic agenda.

Bhutan has always had good relations with Bangladesh. And we hope these will grow from strength to strength with the passage of time as a full-fledged democracy and a country with liberalised polity work in tandem within the framework of Saarc.

God speed to the Bhutanese people.

Women to win over the woes



ABDUL BAYES

KAZI Nazrul Islam, the national poet of Bangladesh, once remarked that half of all that grew as great and glorifying in this world, was contributed by women and the other half by men. The role of women in the socio-economic uplift of nations has been well documented and researched all over the world. Still, the slip between the cup and the lip painfully lingers on and women tend to occupy the backseat, as far as the policies for their emancipation are concerned.

Even though women remain at the bottom of society, research findings of the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) identify women as key to food and nutritional security. Unfortunately, in this part of the world, millions of women are left behind, maternal malnutrition remain high, and the children that they produce tend to emerge as a liability rather than an asset.

This is not an unforeseen outcome where half of the population is yet to be drawn into the mainstream of development. But given proper policy environment and positive attitudes, women could win over the woes that they are faced with. To

this effect, allow me to draw upon some of the seminal observations from one such research report produced by IFPRI.

Technology and women

First, targeting women in agricultural technology dissemination can have greater impact on poverty than targeting men. IFPRI assessment of the impact of vegetables and fishpond technology on poverty in Bangladesh observed that untargeted technology dissemina-

tion" by many, delivery of services at doorsteps would be more empowering.

Equalizing access

Equalizing agricultural inputs between men and women results in significant gains in agricultural productivity. The general perception is that women are less efficient farmers than men. IFPRI attributes this difference to inequalities in agricultural inputs between men and women farmers. Take the case

Kenya, the yield could rise by 25 per cent.

Gender disparities in property rights threaten natural resource management. Rights to property increase women's status and bargaining power within household and community and provide them with greater incentives to adopt sustainable farming practices and invest in natural resource management. Perhaps it needs no mention that insecurity of tenure tends to discour-

malnourishment in this age group alone. The same in Sub-Saharan Africa would reduce child malnutrition by 3 percentage points.

Deterring disease

The social and economic status of women is one of the most important factors affecting the spread of HIV and the ability of households and communities to withstand its impact. HIV/AIDS severely threatens agricultural production and food security as it adversely affects major

Raising a woman's status dramatically improves health, longevity, and productivity of her children. In South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, increases in women's status has been proven to have a strong influence on the nutritional status of their children. According to IFPRI research, equalizing gender status in South Asia would reduce the rate of underweight children under age three by approximately 12 percentage points, meaning that 13.4 million fewer children would face malnourishment in this age group alone.

tion was more likely to benefit men and wealthier households. But when women are targeted as recipient of training and credit -- as done by the NGOs and say for vegetables improvement -- the impact on poverty assumes a new height.

Economics of earnings aside, such access tends to enhance women's mobility, control over resources, and more importantly, political awareness is raised and domestic violence is reduced. Vegetable farming is a good example as it needs not much of land and can be grown at homesteads by the very poor households. In a country like Bangladesh where status issues make it difficult for women to access government extension and where job hunting outside the home by women is considered a "social

of Sub-Saharan Africa. Although women play a pivotal role in food production and yet their access to education, labour, and fertilizer is more limited than for men. Therefore, unequal access to assets could impinge a greater impact on food and nutrition security in this region than in others.

Burkina Faso is a country where men have greater access to fertilizer and to both household and non-household labour for their farm plots. It is being argued that reallocating these resources to women could increase household agricultural output by 10 to 20 per cent. In Kenya, if women were given the same level of education, training, and farm inputs, their outputs would rise by 22 per cent. If all women could attend primary school in

age women from investing time and resources in sustainable farm practices. This is specially true of agro-forestry resources where there is a lag between investment and return.

Mother and child

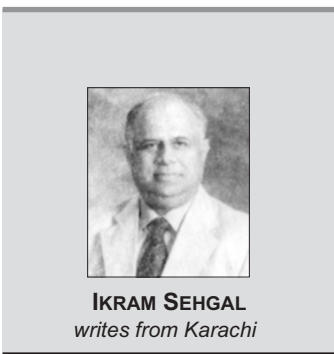
Raising a woman's status dramatically improves health, longevity, and productivity of her children. In South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, increases in women's status has been proven to have a strong influence on the nutritional status of their children. According to IFPRI research, equalizing gender status in South Asia would reduce the rate of underweight children under age three by approximately 12 percentage points, meaning that 13.4 million fewer children would face

classes of assets. The disease is also undermining natural capital, particularly in the case of women who may be forced to leave their husband's village upon his death and who often do not have control over land and other assets used jointly.

Guaranteeing women's property and inheritance rights has a two-pronged effect on HIV/AIDS: (a) it can help prevent the spread of the disease by promoting women's economic security and empowerment and thereby reducing their vulnerability, and (b) by enabling them to be a better care-taker of the victims.

The key recommendations that arise from the IFPRI research perennially point at women's empowerment. That would obvi-

Eliminating perjury



IKRAM SEHGAL
writes from Karachi

JUSTICE is dependant upon the evidence brought before those dispensing justice. If the evidence is manipulated in any manner, the verdict given will be flawed. It stands to reason that for justice to be done, it is imperative to ensure the credibility of evidence. A witness deliberately making material false or misleading statement while under oath commits the offence of perjury. Not only in Pakistan, or in South Asia, but throughout the world, less so in the first world than in the third, perjury is regularly committed by those giving statements under oath. In the first world, serious notice is taken of perjury, and many are convicted and punished for it. One really wonders as to the record of such convictions in third world countries -- presumably the number would be abysmally low.

In the foregoing perspective, the situation is indeed deplorable in countries in South Asia. It is common knowledge that outside many subordinate courts professional toads can be found, ready to render "evidence" for a price. In many criminal cases, those investigating cases are subject to the disbursements by the highest bidder. It may not happen all the time, perjury is

taking place in enough of the cases for the situation to be considered catastrophic for the rule of the law. To put it bluntly, justice can be manipulated to suit those who have a reason to manipulate it, and have the means to do so. This subversion of the law has become endemic in many countries in varying degrees. Clearly, drastic corrective action is a crying need of time before justice becomes a prey to such a detestable practice.

Deliberate falsification of evi-

dial action by the judiciary, and from a level not less than the superior judiciary. Recently, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Pakistan Mr. Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, has set about enforcing a code of conduct among the superior judiciary. Why not also go after those who have brought false evidence under oath to the High Courts and the Supreme Court itself?

Those committing perjury must be punished by giving them stiff

tors and abettors.

Whenever a case is brought before any judicial forum, whether it is a subordinate court or a High Court or the Supreme Court, there are two sides to it. The lawyers are officers of the court and they are, under law and professional ethics, not supposed to be party to fabrication of, and tampering with, the evidence. If there is malfeasance of any kind, they are supposed to bring it to the attention of the law. How many of our lawyers, or for that

loser's evidence is credible, bringing into doubt the credibility of the material evidence on which the decision of a court is based?

No doubt the Superior Judiciary cannot be expected to become an interested party, but, for the sake of justice, why do they not form a committee that will choose at random some cases where they have some doubt about the evidence and ask outside agencies to give their expert opinion about the evidence presented under oath? If affidavits

AS I SEE IT

Devising ways of ensuring that perjury, ostensibly for rewards, is punished at the grassroots level, is to crack down on the subordinate courts and make examples out of some of them. While this would be a part of a greater superior judiciary scheme to ensure that justice is fair, the punishment of those who allow perjury would have a very salutary effect down the line. Judiciary has a moral responsibility to ensure that the citizens of the country have a fair opportunity when they turn to the law for justice.

dence, mainly through fabricated documents and perjury, is no doubt punishable with imprisonment ranging from two to ten years and fine under stipulated provisions of Pakistan Penal Code, but, realistically, one may ask, do we have smoothly functioning infrastructure of law enforcement agencies and law courts to cope with this scourge?

Perjury must be punished, and salutary examples made. This is easier said than done. Where can a start be made, and by whom? To expect the government executive to do this would be asking for an impossibility. Some individuals may be honourable exceptions, but can they buck the system? The reprehensible malady of perjury can only be brought under control by reme-

imprisonments and heavy fines, according to the nature of the offence in a case. In criminal trials, the punishment could be exactly what the accused would have been given if the evidence had been held to be correct. If based on the statements of the witnesses committing perjury, the accused would go to the gallows, shouldn't those giving false evidence should face drastic punishment themselves? The punishment can only be marginally less for giving false alibis to those guilty, in court cases. The persons must be given punishment commensurate to those bearing false witness. No given formula can be used. The judge (or judges) must decide each case of perjury on merit and come down with a heavy hand against perjurers as well as their manipula-

matter across the entire world, really report wrongdoing that comes to their knowledge? It is true that many lawyers will not take the case if they find evidence of malfeasance. Many others will fall back on the sacred nature of the lawyer-client relationship which holds that all facts disclosed are privileged communication that cannot be disclosed to a third party (or parties) if detrimental to the interests of the client. When a court decides in favour of one side, unless it is for technical reasons, it has effectively confirmed that the other side's case did not have credible evidence. What remedy is there with a superior court of law to order an enquiry so as to focus on the evidence brought by the losers? And what happens if an outside investigation agency finds that the

have been given these can be verified as to their accuracy or otherwise, with the full weight of the superior judiciary being brought to punish false statements made under oath. Once this Review Committee has worked for some time, the Honourable Chief Justice can see for himself whether there is need for a permanent Review Committee or indeed for a procedure to turn to impartial outside investigation agencies whenever perjury is suspected. There could be at that time a comprehensive assessment of whether a permanent "Internal Affairs" set-up can be put into place.

While the statements that political leaders make are not made under oath, the fact remains that the masses expect their leaders to tell

ously need changes in policies that eradicate gender disparities, proactively promote catch-up for women, and engage women directly in their implementation.

The first and foremost candidate for a close look is the legal and institutional barriers that tend to distort a level playing field. Change is needed in property rights laws to allow women to hold individual or joint title on land. Second, increasing the access of women to resources would make a powerful contribution to food and nutritional security of households, especially of the vulnerable members like children. Third, women should be allowed to actively engage themselves in the development process, project design, and implementation.

One effective way of securing women's participation is through networks and group-based programs. These groups might enable them to harness the potentials of a relatively non-homogeneous female population with due disaggregation. And finally, turning words into actions. While political commitments for the emancipation of women are in abundance, the actions of translating words into deeds tend to remain short of expectations. To win over their woes, women must play a positive role in national development and necessary arrangements should be made to facilitate the process.

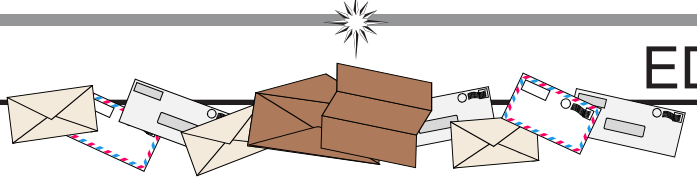
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the truth. There is a fine line between making promises and of stating facts that may not be entirely true but an outright lie. While the public does hold accountability of sorts by voting these making false statements and/or promises out of power, the judiciary must take suo-moto action against these leaders who make it their business to try and come to power by misrepresenting the truth.

The Superior Judiciary can ask for statistics about case from the lower courts, setting up an "analysis wing" under its jurisdiction to see the trend of the decisions of the subordinate lower courts, as to who gave the verdict, as to who were affected, as to how many verdicts were overturned in appeal, as to how many in the lower courts who turn a blind eye to this have been punished for perjury, etc., etc? Devising ways of ensuring that perjury, ostensibly for rewards, is punished at the grassroots level, is to crack down on the subordinate courts and make examples out of some of them. While this would be a part of a greater superior judiciary scheme to ensure that justice is fair, the punishment of those who allow perjury would have a very salutary effect down the line. Judiciary has a moral responsibility to ensure that the citizens of the country have a fair opportunity when they turn to the law for justice. When applied, justice must be fair and equivocal. This can only be done once rampant perjury is eliminated, and, if not eliminated altogether, at least contained.

Ikram Sehgal, a former Major of Pakistan Army, is a political analyst and columnist.

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.

Find a way out

We are not well, are we? In addition to the economic and social problems, another problem has been added to our life and that's "extremism". What have we achieved independence for? To live in the fear of bombing? Some newspapers and a few politicians blamed the militants, but the government always said that it was nothing but propaganda. So they did not pay heed to it. On 17 August, a series of bombs were blasted around the country and the worst fear has come true.

The situation has turned critical and nobody knows how the militant threat will be neutralised by the government. Political confrontation has aggravated the situation. The two major parties should sit together and try to find a way out of this terrible crisis.

Kayumul Hossain Rana
Intl. Islamic University Chittagong

Female education

A few days ago I went to Hathazari. The place is developing in many ways. But it's lagging behind in education. There is only one high school for girls, and there are five teachers for over 400 students! As a result, female education in the area is in bad shape.

The authorities concerned should look into the matter.

Astudent
Chittagong

Acid violence in Bangladesh

Our life is beset with many problems. And acid throwing is one of the worst problems, which is committed to take revenge. In Bangladesh acid

throwing has increased at an alarming rate. Some barbaric people use acid to wreak their wrath on perceived enemies. Mostly women are the victims of acid throwing. They want to destroy a woman's future by throwing acid on her. Generally, a woman becomes a victim when she rejects a man. She may also fall victim when her family is unable to meet her husband's demand for dowry.

Besides, there are also several socio-economic reasons behind it. The impact of acid throwing is horrible. It causes irreparable damage to the victims. The victims have to undergo intolerable physical and mental agony. The law enforcers must play the vital role in stopping acid violence.

Acid throwers must not be allowed to escape without being punished.

Samina Nawshin
Chittagong University

Plot allotment

In order to solve the residential problem of Chittagong city, the Chittagong Development Authority invited applications in 2001 for allotment of plots in the southern part of Chittagong. They named the project as "Kalpalok". For this purpose they received many applications and crores of taka through pay order from the applicants. About four years have already gone by, but the plots have not yet been handed over to the eligible applicants. We have come to know from a reliable source that a list of the eligible applicants was sent to the ministry concerned for approval by the allotment committee about two months back. But the ministry postponed the allotment for unknown reasons. Now the applicants are passing their days in anxiety.

In the circumstances, I would request the ministry concerned to settle the matter without further delay.

Sumaia Sharmin
Chittagong University

Power shortage

To be a modern country what we need most is electricity. Electricity is needed for rapid progress of the country. But the situation is far from ideal in our case.

The development planners should pay due attention to generation and distribution of electricity. Only that can keep the wheels of economic progress moving.

Md. Jahed Ullah Jaman
Chittagong

Traffic jam in Ctg.

Traffic jam is a common sight in the big cities and towns. The problem is the result of rapid growth of

population and the increasing number of vehicles. The causes of traffic jam are many. In proportion to our population, the number of roads has not increased. The roads remain more or less unchanged. There are many unlicensed vehicles which should not be allowed to ply. In the Chawkbazar area of Chittagong city traffic jam is a regular phenomenon. Matters worsen when students are going to school, college and university. They cannot reach their destinations on time. So they have to start much earlier than usual from their homes.

Traffic jam is slowing the pace of our life.

Areader
Chittagong

A gift, but..

Nowadays, Internet is regular

companion of its users. The Internet is a great gift of modern science. We get a lot of entertaining elements in it. But it also has a negative impact on our young generation. The culture of western countries is different from ours. The students and youths are getting access through the Internet to things that are alien to our culture. These often violate our social and cultural norms.

So we should not get carried away by what we are getting from the Internet.

Md. Aftub Uddin
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Police and flowers!

I am rather shocked to go through a news report under the caption - "Bad days for flower traders at Shabagh" that appeared in the city page of the DS on Nov. 30,

2005. Flower is a beauty from heaven and flowers are an important part of human culture. But unfortunately, as mentioned in the report, flower traders are facing bad days in running their business because of rising prices and changes in the attitudes of people. The most painful side of the flower trade as mentioned or alleged by the flower traders is that, they have to pay tolls to the police for using the footpaths!

Can't we arrange some space for the floating flower traders at Shabbagh and other points of the city?

Can't our dear cops start loving flowers by helping the poor flower traders run their business smoothly?

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