

Investing in women

Neither MDG goals nor PRSP agenda nor the empowerment of women will be achieved through only awareness activities. Investing in women in concrete terms, as well as transferring asset or income, requires high priority. For example, government's 100 days employment generation program should devise mechanism to ensure employment of women living in poverty.

SHAMIMA PERVIN

WOMEN own less than 4% of the total cultivable land in Bangladesh. Due to patriarchal set up, as anywhere else around the world, they are largely excluded from capital accumulation process. They are neither considered bread-winners nor future successors of the family, which provide ample logic to support the systemic discrimination against women.

The irony is that women head at least 25% families of all landless households and they represent the poorest category in absence of livelihood opportunity. The incidence of ultra-poor (intake of 1600 kcal) and extreme poor (intake of 1805 kcal) is higher for female-headed households than male-headed households. The Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2005 reveals

that about 29.6% of divorced/widowed women are in poverty, against the national average of 25.1% in poverty. In absence of asset-based entitlement, poor men have freedom to exchange their labour power in the market and obtain remuneration. These men can also seek dowry as primary accumulation of capital. On the other hand, poor women do not have freedom to exchange their labour power, as they need their family's approval, and there is also restricted employment opportunity, due to gender division of labour.

Even with labour market access, they face wage discrimination and harassment. Time poverty, due to women's roles in caring for their family and cultural restrictions on their freedom of mobility, worsens their poverty situation. In the munga situation, the female-headed households have virtually no options other than being destitute, as they have nothing to sell

and very limited options to exchange their labour power.

The society permits a destitute woman to be a sex worker but not a rickshaw puller. A young girl cannot work in a local tea stall. On the other hand, the poor male-headed households can sell their minimum physical asset or the homestead, achieved through patriarchal inheritance, or can migrate for wage work.

It is impossible to change patriarchal notion of ownership over means of production, as well as production relations overnight. However, recognising the gender dimensions of poverty, and achieving MDG goal on poverty, and hunger, the state and private sector must act to transfer asset and income to women, particularly to female-headed households, to those who are widows, divorced or separated. The income base for women would support them and their families to increase their level of consumption, income, asset,

health and education, work opportunity, social status and so on.

Greater resource control by women changes expenditure patterns of the household, and outcomes that strengthen women's as well as their family's well-being. These women are more likely to spend on family and on children than men. Also, women's empowerment, in claiming rights, is critical in order to obtain fair share in household resources, food, and access to education and health.

The asset and income base would help women and the country not only to overcome poverty, but also to curtail brutality of dowry and domestic violence. Awareness raising activities have definitely contributed to breaking the silence against the centuries-old tradition to perpetuate discrimination and violent culture against women. However, without addressing the asset and income base of women, it is not possible to change women's status within the family or society.

In any given context, those who possess means of production or control over production, they ultimately devise rules, laws, norms, and values in favour of themselves. This rule of the game has created both the concept of class and gender. This crude reality

could not change the dowry or domestic violence situation despite extensive awareness raising activities, adoption of policy and laws against dowry or violence against women.

The government, NGOs and donors, spent a significant amount of fund in VAW and anti-dowry programs without any specific change in this respect. Now, dowry has become a non-negotiable issue of interest, as it has created livelihood option for men.

To some extent, working in garment industries has given some bargaining capacity to curtail dowry price. As a whole, Bangladeshi society has observed that education, engagement with income generation, and garments work has brought substantial changes in women's lives as well as in the society, as these have to some extent the touched root causes of women's subordination.

Bangladesh's substantial success in education helped in dropping fertility despite the low age at marriage. These achievements might have been expanded with women's increased labour force participation or involvement with entrepreneurial activities.

For instance, garments work helped women in marrying later. Working women plan families for



We should share more than just our children.

their own interest, for which external motivation is not required. Women's asset base supports them in undertaking reproductive decisions or influence husband to be partner in using contraceptives.

Fertility is high among the poor, as male children are their key earners. If mothers are self-reliant, they will envision their children's future in a different way. So, existing concern about population threat could be minimised with women's asset and income base.

in order to save more food for the boy since he was the only earner for the family. The family might think about the daughter equally if she had any work opportunity.

So, following the contribution of the ready-made garment industry, education program and micro-credit or income generation, the government, private sector including NGOs, civil society and definitely families should invest more in women and transfer something concrete to them.

Neither MDG goals nor PRSP agenda nor the empowerment of women will be achieved through only awareness activities. Investing in women in concrete terms, as well as transferring asset or income, requires high priority. For example, government's 100 days employment generation program should devise mechanism to ensure employment of women living in poverty.

At the same time government intervention for women's development cannot be gender sensitive only with safety net programs for women. Women do not want to be treated as dependents but want to be included in the mainstream development process.

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Scaling new heights

The 101-story, 492-metre-high Shanghai World Financial Center finally opened its doors last week, becoming the world's second tallest building after Taipei 101. Designed by New York architects Kohn Pedersen Fox. The project is the brainchild of leading Japanese property developer Minoru Mori, president and CEO of Mori Building Co., Ltd., and the man behind Tokyo's celebrated Roppongi Hills development. He spoke to Newsweek's Duncan Hewitt in Shanghai.

Hewitt: What gave you the idea for this project back in the early '90s, when Shanghai's modern development had barely begun?

Mori: When I came here in 1993 Shanghai really felt like postwar Japan: everyone was dressed in drab clothes; there were a lot of bicycles. But I felt this was the place to invest. I visited many different cities -- including Moscow, Jakarta, Ho Chi Minh, also Shenzhen in southern China -- but we settled on Shanghai. I knew that Shanghai was the centre of Asia before World War II, for finance but especially for trade. It was a larger centre than Tokyo ... and so I felt that once the system turned from communism to capitalism, Shanghai would certainly come back onto the world scene.

What did people say when you went back to Tokyo and told them you were going to build in Shanghai?

Generally, the Japanese were very sensitive to the risk represented by China, including the political risk I knew that reactions would be

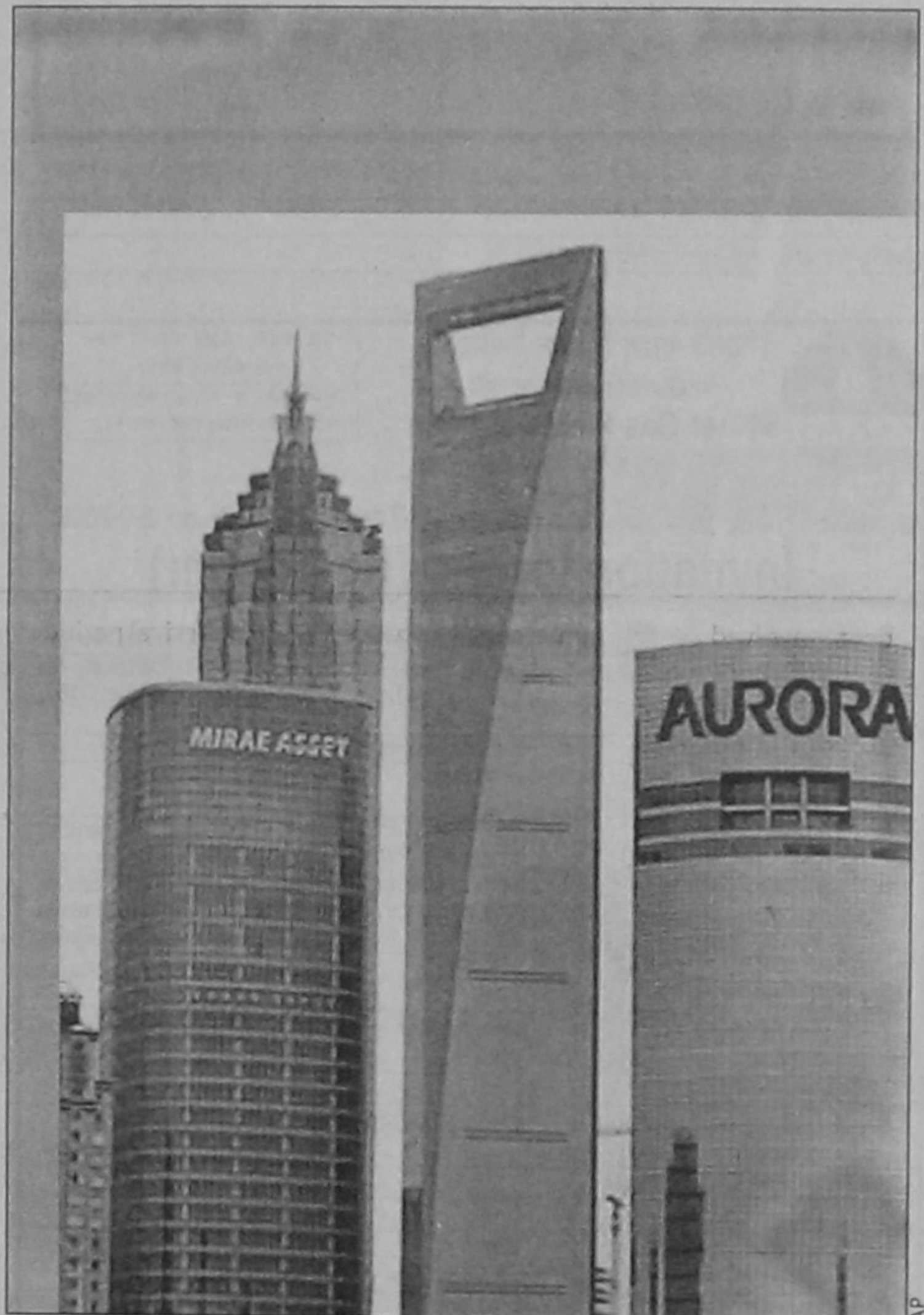
rather difficult and negative back home. So, I had the idea of making this project part of the official development assistance from Japan to China. I approached the president of the Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund, and they agreed to gather about 70 percent of the equity portion, and Mori Building was to take up 30 percent. So the funding was partly public -- and I think that's how China authorised this.

Is it meaningful in terms of Sino-Japanese relations? Absolutely. When we started [in 1993], we didn't expect a roller-coaster path for Sino-Japanese relations: we expected they would naturally become deeper and stronger, so we didn't really think about the building as a symbol of Sino-Japanese relations. But of course Sino-Japanese relations deteriorated; people even threw rocks at the Japanese Consulate in Shanghai [in 2005], and some violence occurred when the Japanese soccer team beat China. After so many incidents between

the two countries, I feel the presence of this building is very symbolic. In fact this year is the 30th anniversary of the Sino-Japan Peace and Friendship Treaty, so the fact that it's completed at this moment is also symbolic.

But you had to change the design because many Chinese thought the rising sun's shining through the original round hole on top of the building resembled Japan's wartime rising-sun flag, a despised symbol in China. Doesn't that show there are still problems? The design change was not based on a political consideration but rather a social consideration -- in many countries there can sometimes be an overflow of patriotism -- so you have to be sensitive toward this. But this actually resulted in a happy outcome: it gave us this extraordinary observation deck [on the 100th floor]. And I have a fundamental optimism about relations between China and Japan, that these will become better and better.

But the Chinese real-estate



Mori conceived of the Shanghai World Financial Center 15 years ago.

industry, along with the rest of the economy, is showing signs of

slowing down. Are you worried that there's a risk in opening a

property like this?

As far as Shanghai is concerned, I think this is a short-term correction. The city has already started its preparations for hosting the 2010 World Expo; this will trigger new inbound investment into Shanghai, and will also stimulate Shanghai's economy to move more into the post-industrial sector. So I think and hope that Shanghai's growth rate will not slow down so much.

There is a discussion among some Chinese architects and intellectuals about whether the country is too obsessed with tall buildings. Are you concerned that a high-profile building like this will just inspire taller and taller buildings?

I don't think the height is a problem; actually the higher the better -- as long as you keep the ratio of greenery large and the footprint of each building minimal. This is my concept of the Vertical Garden City. City development is not contradictory to nature: you build high up in the sky and use the rest of the land at ground level for greenery and water -- and also use underground space efficiently for functions that don't need sunlight to make a city which is well lit by natural sunlight. The more compact the better for the global environment.

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BANGLADESH IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The promise of aquaculture

This piece is from the series of summaries of papers presented at the "Bangladesh in the 21st Century" conference held at Harvard University (June 13-14). The views expressed in the articles are expressly those of the authors.

NAZIA HABIB AND MD. SAIDUL ISLAM

CULTURED shrimp is promoted as an alternative to the exhaustion of global fisheries. The coastal zones of some tropical countries, including Bangladesh, are dominating the production of commercial shrimp, and export to the US, Europe, Canada, Japan and other wealthy countries.

For many developing countries, including Bangladesh, shrimp has become a major source of foreign exchange and has integrated often previously marginal coastal communities into high value commodity networks. However, the producing countries are facing increasing challenges with international trade, particularly concerning "quality."

Among the recent transformations of the global agro-food system, quality rather than price or quantity has become the basis around which production, commodities, and markets are increasingly organised.

Under increasing pressure from various actors such as environmental and labour activists, multi-lateral organisations, and

regulatory agencies in their home countries, multi-national firms are implementing "certification" arrangements that include codes of conduct, production guidelines, and monitoring standards that govern and attest to not only the corporations' behaviour but also to that of their producers and suppliers around the world.

While previous "quality" assurance was confined to only Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) manual, recent movements have extended quality assurance to traceability, environmental sustainability, labour rights, and community-based resource management in production sites.

As major buyers such as Wal-Mart, Darden and Lyons recently committed to buy only the "certified" seafood, including farmed shrimp, it is anticipated that other buyers will also follow the same path and a major portion of shrimp production will soon come under certification umbrella. This conspicuous trend poses both opportunities and challenges.

While it offers an opportunity to move towards a sustainable aquaculture, the producers who

fail to meet the shifting private regulations will eventually lose out in the market. It is observed that Bangladesh can easily earn about \$2 billion from shrimp industry. While many neighbouring countries such as China, Thailand and India are genuinely working with pragmatic plans and policies to capture the lucrative shrimp markets, Bangladesh -- despite having enormous prospects -- is now grappling to survive with numerous problems and malpractices.

Part of the problem is that about 80% of the economic actors are living in poverty. Poverty is not simply low income or economic inequality, but rather a serious deprivation of certain basic capabilities and rights to improve. For these people, when improvement means food, health, shelter and education for children, making waterproof floors in the depot, having running water on the entrance, as per international regulations, are last of the priorities. As a result, 70% of Bangladesh shrimp industry operates within informal economies.

Furthermore, Bangladesh fishery exporter association

(BFFEA), who are the major lobbying group for this industry, fails to recognise that the major weakness of this industry lies in the feed, chemicals and fry used as inputs. These inputs are mainly imported from China. The use of low quality and often contaminated inputs resulting in low quality shrimps. This low quality shrimp gets low market price, which trickles down to the bottom of the supply chain. The industry needs comprehensive industry-wide strategies which will help to improve the conditions of economic agents at all level socially, economically and politically.

The following proposals are a starting point to incorporate local socio-political considerations into industrial policy. To do so, the Bangladeshi government and researchers should undertake a household-level economic shock and vulnerability study to build a framework for national policy responses.

First, policies should regulate, reward, and penalise private entities but should not try to compensate for economic shocks. If an unforeseeable crisis creates an economic shock requiring compensation, policy should not discriminate against affected actors in the industry. For example, the entire industry suffered from the 1997 ban, but incentives were given to factory owners/exporters and not other actors. Recipients of government incentives should

undergo third party audits verifying fulfillment of social and economic objectives, such as job creation, export growth, or technology improvements.

Second, Bangladesh needs to improve import policies to ensure quality and appropriateness. Policy can support farmers by regulating imports for basic acceptability, such as shrimp fry and feed contamination screening. Instead of government laboratories as the only check point, consumers of these imports should receive training, technology, and basic tools to test on their own.

Third, counter-cyclical policies are needed to protect jobs and incomes and provide adequate social security in times of economic shocks and natural disaster. The finance ministry, industrial ministry, or land reform ministry should be tasked to include a complete cost-benefit analysis of the distributive effects of proposed budgetary, tax, or land reform initiatives that considers every group of the industry.

Fourth, collectiveness should be promoted in the bottom half of the supply chain. This largely informal segment should have greater incentives to collectively contest and resist exploitation and discriminating policies, but the informality of their business, continuous insecurity, and submission to local political power hampers their collective force.

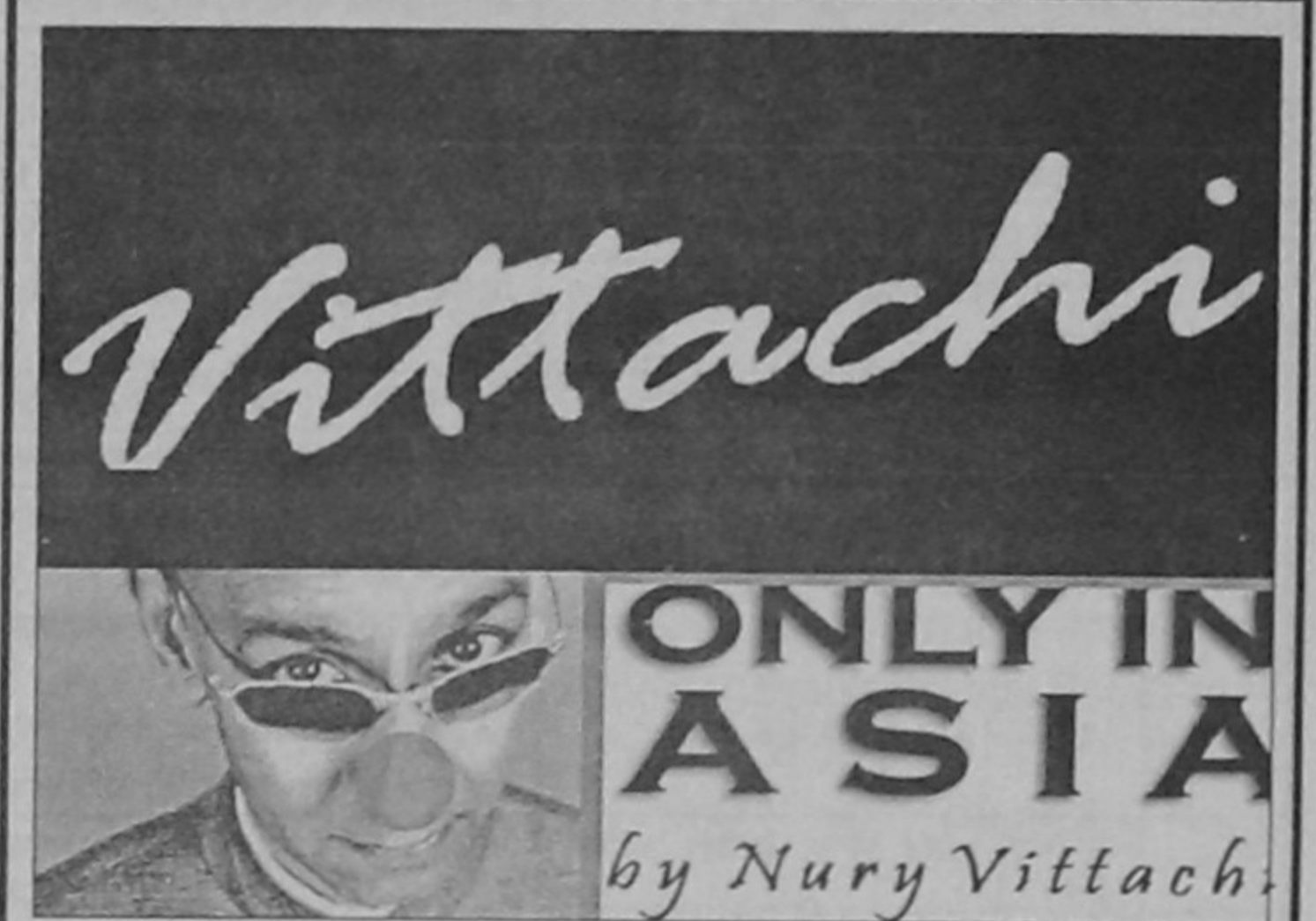
Lack of collective force translates to lack of political voice to represent their needs to the government and exporters.

Fifth, Bangladesh should diversify trading partners to find policy maneuvering space. Instead of depending on the US and EU, Bangladesh should focus more on under-exploited markets such as the Middle East and emerging markets in China and African nations. This will provide shrimp producers more space to improve their activities while seeking to venture into new markets.

Sixth, countries like Bangladesh, with weak institutional support, need to thoroughly and carefully consider international insurance proposed for countries facing shocks from price swings and non-tariff barriers to trade. Such insurance is designed to offset monetary shocks, but is not attuned to socio-political crisis that the poor encounter on a daily basis.

Last but not the least, the Bangladesh shrimp sector needs immediate policies and programs in the following areas: Establishing research institutes to increase productivity and to invent cures for viruses, adherence to quality standards as required by the buyers, and negotiation and consultation with NGOs opposing shrimp culture.

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Public speaking and other extreme sports

READERS may recall that I wrote a column recently which made certain wild allegations about introducers. People were only given the title "Moderator" or "Master of Ceremonies" if they agreed to have their brains surgically reduced to the size of a sesame seed, I said. Their single remaining brain-cell contained only one thought: "Make speaker look like jerk."

Well, I gave a talk the other day at a destination many thousands of kilometers away from this newspaper. I was led onto a stage by an introducer with whom I had worked before.

He announced that instead of sharing the speaker's CV with the audience, he was going to give them a flavour of who I was by reading something. He then produced from his pocket a copy of my long and bitter denunciation of moderators and read it out loud from beginning to end.

"So this is what he thinks of me," he told the audience. I was wandering whether his introduction would climax with me being arrested live on stage for libel. That would have been a first.

At least it was more exciting than an event I was at last week where the moderator read the speaker's entire CV out loud. It seemed to contain everything from his mother's maiden name to a recitation of his entire decoded DNA genome.

Too much information. Unless of course, someone in the audience was planning to clone the speaker and send pirate copies on speaking tours (probably just the sort of thing, which happens in Asia).

But no. If you have to introduce someone, take inspiration from newspaperman William Randolph Hearst, who sent a telegram to a reporter saying: "Send juicy details,

never mind the facts."

Mind you, tread carefully. I turned up at an event with a rather serious statement prepared for the person introducing him. The introducer scanned the written piece, decided it was too dull to read, and instead told the audience that they were going to wet themselves laughing at a speech from an amazingly funny guy.

Unfortunately the speaker had come to deliver a grim speech about a dead child.

As soon as he started to deliver his talk, the atmosphere in the room turned to ice. Audience, speaker and introducer all felt like jumping off high buildings, and may, indeed have done so.

The day before writing this column, I gave a speech at a conference in Singapore. The introducer caught me a few minutes before I was due to get up on stage. She said, "Would you like to read my introduction about you to make sure it is accurate?"

I scanned the piece and realized that it was several years old.

My ego, which is unfortunately so large that I have to enter rooms sideways in a half-stooped position, snapped into action. I said: "Your introduction says 'He has sold more than 90,000 books.' That's years out of date. It would be more accurate to say several hundred thousand books."

She duly scribbled the change onto the little card she was using.

Sixty seconds later, she was up on her feet in front of the crowd. "I am delighted to introduce our speaker to you," she said. "This man has sold several hundred books."

Serves me right.

Shrink our columnist's huge ego by refusing to visit his website at www.vittachi.com.



"Wow, excellent turnout."