

## GROUND REALITIES

## Prospect of jute goods high in EU

*Grab the opportunity*

As stress on artificial fibres as a packaging material in preference to natural ones is growing, the prospects for jute, popularly known as the Golden Fibre, are opening up further. The International Jute Study Group (IJSJ) based in Dhaka recently also echoed this view.

Bangladesh so far has hardly been able to make the most of this possibility, thanks to half-hearted approach of the government to provide enough incentive to the growers of this cash crop. Every year jute growers get frustrated with their products as they do not get fair price in the market. As a result, farmers are losing their interest in growing jute.

According to IJSJ, the demand for jute products, especially jute bags, will rise to as high as 32 million bags annually compared to its present demand at 12 million bags. The European Union (EU) is also learnt to be considering imposing a ban on the use of polythene bags. So, time is propitious for Bangladesh to cash in on this opportunity as EU is our biggest market overseas.

It is worthwhile to note that, despite our strength in producing the best quality raw jute, Bangladesh is still not the leader of this commodity in the world. To overcome this shortcoming, we need to focus on making various jute-based products like shopping and food grade bags, geo-textiles, pulp and paper and so on as users are getting more biased towards green products.

To this end, it will be necessary to reinvigorate the sector with generous budgetary allocations. At the same time, the ailing state-owned jute mills have to be reinvigorated and new jute mills set up and where feasible replace the old production technologies with new ones.

It is reassuring to note that the private sector is prepared to play a very proactive role in the jute sector. Now the government needs to facilitate them with necessary policy support.

Overall, the government must consider jute as a thrust sector and go all-out to turn it into the next hard-cash earning sector after the readymade garments.

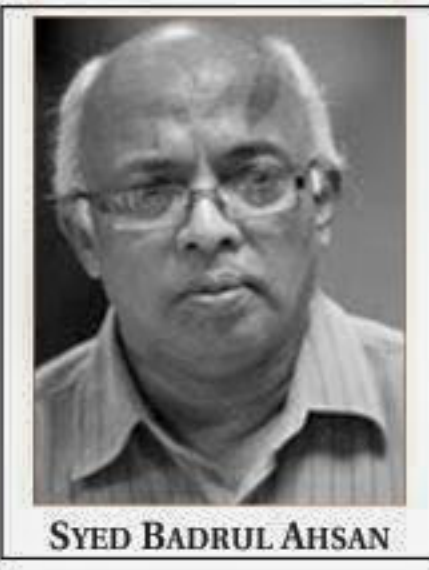
## Misuse of water resources

*Getting tough with action on the ground*

THERE is little doubt in the public mind of the need to do something on the constant attack by unscrupulous business interests on constricting, redirecting and filling up of public water bodies, rivers and canals for profit. In an effort to halt such malpractices, the cabinet has approved a draft Bangladesh Water Act, 2012 that promises to put in place a series of checks and balances aimed at halting misuse of said resources. While it is commendable to see that the government has finally taken heed of outcry by affected communities, environmentalists and water experts, it will be interesting to see whether the stringent provisions proposed in the Act, such as, five years' imprisonment or a fine of Tk. 5 million will actually be enforced with due diligence in reality. Reasons for disruption of natural flow of water and pollution are well known, but we often overlook the disastrous effects such wilful trespassing have on the natural state of affairs. Whether it is pollution or obstruction of natural flow of water, there is no denying that manmade interventions have helped bring about ecological disaster to entire communities of people who depend on these water resources for their livelihoods.

The proposed piece of legislation however is not above criticism. There exist concerns whether the draft fully addresses prioritisation of consumer needs over that of commercial and industrial needs or whether there is enough clarity on the issue of licensing water distribution and so on. This paper has always operated on a zero tolerance policy when it comes to protection of the environment and water has always been and will always mean difference between life and death to people of the delta plains that constitute Bangladesh. We welcome the latest government initiative to enact into law which if implemented, according to the letter of the proposed law, will go a long way to limit what projects public and private bodies can undertake that may undermine biodiversity, fish sanctuary, natural drainage systems and

# Clinton's *adda* ... the questions not asked



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

I have in recent times watched Hillary Clinton respond to young people's questions on Barkha Dutt's programme in Kolkata. I was

impressed with the quality of the questions that were placed before the US secretary of state, for they were tough and relevant and were a demonstration of the level of knowledge India's young have about America and its policies in the geo-political context. It took Clinton quite some time and quite some thinking before she could respond to those questions. On a question related to American pressure on Iran regarding Tehran's alleged nuclear programme, a young woman asked the secretary why Washington was not applying similar pressure on Israel. Clinton fumbled, before going on and on about why Iran needed to be given the harsh treatment. She remained evasive about Israel.

I have not had occasion to watch the *adda* Hillary Clinton had here in Bangladesh at a programme hosted by Munni Saha and Ejaz Ahmed. But I do have now a text transcript of the secretary of state's interaction with Bangladesh's young earlier this month in Dhaka. I am not terribly impressed, for two basic reasons. The first is that I find the questions rather ingratiating, indeed fawning, in nature. When the moderator allows herself, at the beginning of the programme, to be charmed by her guest (Saha cheerfully lapses into "Wow. Wow" in response to an early statement by Clinton), there is hardly any point in watching the rest of the programme. The second is her bringing up the matter of Clinton's meeting with Muhammad Yunus and Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, prompting the secretary to go full throttle into what you could call a discussion of Bangladesh's internal affairs. The problem here is compounded by the apologetic manner in which Saha draws her conclusion to Clinton's Yunus related remarks (Madam Secretary, we know what happened with Dr. Yunus. All of us, we know, and we feel very sorry for that...). Why should Saha feel sorry? Her job was to ask the questions and get out the answers. No more, no less.

The *adda* was a clear waste of an opportunity for our young to place trenchant, educated questions before the visiting American secretary of state. That was not done and what we had in its place was a session where nearly everyone seemed to be star-struck in the presence of certainly one of the most powerful political figures on earth. And when you are star-struck, your intellect gets into a jam somewhere. What would you make of this statement, again from the moderator: "Madam Secretary, you are an inspiration and leader to us, and you are a loving mother, and you are a

one of the disconnect between Barack Obama's coming by the Nobel Peace Prize and then having nothing to show that he deserved it.

Those young people in the audience had a very real chance of demonstrating before the visiting American secretary the grasp they have over issues of a global nature. In the event, they missed the boat. The young crowd in Kolkata made it a point, as Local Government Minister Syed Ashrafur Islam correctly pointed out, not to ask Clinton anything about internal Indian politics. Here, the young did not seem inclined at all to move out of

and Serbia can be indicted for war crimes, what reason could there be for George W. Bush and Tony Blair not to be identified as war criminals over their illegal invasion of Iraq? It would be interesting to have had the secretary of state's response to that question, along with another on Washington's unwillingness to have anything to do with the International Criminal Court. America welcomes people from across the world, but how is that in light of September 2011 Muslims still face huge difficulties as well as humiliation at American airports? No one raised that question.

Someone should have asked Clinton why US sanctions against Cuba have gone on when the Cold War has long been gone. Someone else should have stepped forward with a question of when, if ever, Washington will nudge Saudi Arabia towards democracy, seeing that it has for years tried promoting pluralism, however misplaced, in Afghanistan and Iraq. There should have been a good question on the frequency with which American drone attacks in Pakistan are made and whether they do not undermine Islamabad's sovereignty. Just as those young people in Kolkata did, our children ought to have raised the matter of Iran and the bellicosity with which Israel has been going around harassing the Palestinians. A pertinent question could have related to the present state of the American economy and whether it could lead to Obama's defeat at the presidential election later this year.

Finally, couldn't someone have asked the secretary of state why she and her entourage took all those long minutes to step out of their aircraft when they knew Bangladesh's foreign minister was waiting to welcome them here? You don't keep your hosts waiting while you huddle with your own diplomats on board an aircraft and take your own time to emerge from it.

It was most instructive having the very cerebral Hillary Clinton travel to Bangladesh. It was not edifying, though, to listen to the insipid conversation our young had with her, at that *adda*. Did the Bangladesh government know that the *adda* was on the cards?

The writer is Executive Editor, *The Daily Star*. E-mail: bahsantarea@yahoo.co.uk



STAR ARCHIVE

*It was most instructive having the very cerebral Hillary Clinton travel to Bangladesh. It was not edifying, though, to listen to the insipid conversation our young had with her, at that adda. Did the Bangladesh government know that the adda was on the cards?*

great soul, I must say. And my question is .... what is the magic?"

But let that be. And let us now toy with thoughts of the kind of questions, real questions, Hillary Clinton ought to have been asked at the *adda*. Someone should have come up with questions on American policy in Iraq, seeing that the country has been in a mess since the ouster of Saddam Hussein in April 2003. There ought to have been a query on the imbroglio in Afghanistan, where rumours abound of Washington trying to strike a deal with the Taliban in light of the refusal of the latter to fade away. A pertinent question could have been

Bangladesh and into wider territory. That was a pity. A very good question could have related to the matter of yet another American taking over the presidency of the World Bank when a groundswell of support had been building up for Nigeria's finance minister Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala to be the first non-American to head the institution.

There could have been a whole range of other questions which might have tested Clinton's mettle as a diplomat and our young people's understanding of contemporary global issues. If the fallen leaders of Liberia

# Nato's eastward expansion

LI HONG

T HE biggest-ever Nato summit opened in Chicago on Sunday and brought representatives of around 60 countries and international organisations together to discuss Afghanistan, future capabilities and strengthening of its cooperation with non-members.

"This will be a summit of commitment. Commitment to complete transition in Afghanistan and to support Afghans achieve a stable future. Commitment to keep Nato capable to deal with the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Commitment to strengthen even further the connections with our partners across the globe," Nato Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said at a news conference in Brussels on May 11.

Afghanistan has been an important experiment for Nato's military intervention into a non-European region, but it remains a troublesome issue, given that participating countries have been longing to pull out of the Afghanistan quagmire as early as possible.

Since the Republic of Korea withdrew its military personnel, who were offering logistical support to US troops in 2007, following the abduction of some of its nationals, Nato members increasingly asked for their troops to be withdrawn.

In August 2010, the Netherlands withdrew troops from Afghanistan, making it the first Nato member to do

so. Under increased pressure, at its summit in Lisbon in November that year, Nato agreed to withdraw the majority of combat forces by the end of 2014 and transfer security responsibilities to Afghan security forces.

However, how to promote a steady security transition and consolidate its military achievements in the ravaged nation still remains a problem for Nato. How to ensure an orderly troop withdrawal without causing turbulence and how to help Afghan security forces improve their capabilities, tasks that need large inputs of funds and personnel, pose a huge challenge to Nato.

At the Chicago summit, Nato members are expected to make arrangements for the final stages of the transition and their future missions in Afghanistan. They are also expected to debate on how much member countries will contribute to the \$4 billion needed to aid Afghan security forces and police.

Nato's future military capabilities are also expected to be on the agenda. It is the belief of France, Germany and other European nations that Europe now faces no pressing security threats and thus they hold a passive attitude toward the alliance's expansion and build-up of military capabilities. Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium have even called for a review of the role of nuclear weapons in Europe's security and demanded the US remove its nuclear arsenals from the continent. As far as the missile

system is concerned, some European allies also advocate dialogue with Russia to avoid confrontation with Moscow.

Meanwhile, China's rapid development, Russia's ties with the West under Vladimir Putin's new presidency, the alleged nuclear build-up by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea as well as uncertainties in the Middle East, including Iran's nuclear programme, are seen as constituting an increased security challenge to the US and Nato.

To tackle such challenges, the US, financially exhausted after its decade-long war on terror, has increased the pressure on its European allies to increase military inputs and share more responsibilities. A decade-long anti-terror war has seriously exhausted the US. However, in the context of the deteriorating debt crisis in Europe, European leaders are unlikely to make some of the commitments that are necessary to build-up Nato's military capabilities for the future.

Despite its original concept of focusing on European and Atlantic affairs, Nato has unveiled its plans to develop itself into a political and military alliance engaging in global affairs. It is expected Nato leaders will sum up their lessons in the Afghanistan war and military interventions in Libya to make better preparations for Nato involvement into non-European affairs.

Nato succeeded in including some

East European countries into its scope of influence through the "Partnership for Peace." And in Afghanistan, it realised cooperation with the ROK, Japan, Australia, New Zealand and other quasi-allies. New headway has also been made in its cooperation with Russia, Pakistan and some Central Asian countries. That some Asian countries were invited to the Chicago summit reflects Nato's plan to set up some strategic strongholds in the Asia-Pacific region.

Nato's ongoing transformation has also offered the possibility for cooperation with China, which has expressed its willingness to have some cooperation with Nato on the basis of "mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and coordination."

In fact, both sides have conducted dialogue and contacts in political and diplomatic fields, as indicated by bilateral anti-piracy cooperation in the Gulf of Aden. There is also room for non-proliferation and anti-terrorism cooperation.

However, the huge differences between China and Nato in ideology and values, as well as China's non-alignment policy mean no essential progress will be achieved in bilateral cooperation. China needs to remain highly vigilant of Nato's development of an anti-missile defence system in Asia and its militarisation of space.

The writer is Secretary-General of the China Arms Control and Disarmament Association.

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## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

May 23

1945

World War II: Heinrich Himmler, the head of the SS, commits suicide while in Allied custody.

1949

The Federal Republic of Germany is established and the Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany is proclaimed.

1951

Tibetans sign the Seventeen Point Agreement for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet with the People's Republic of China.

1967

Egypt closes the Straits of Tiran and blockades the port of Eilat at the northern end of the Gulf of Aqaba to Israeli shipping.

1998

The Good Friday Agreement is accepted in a referendum in Northern Ireland with 75% voting yes.