

A freedom fighter, Francis de Goya: Shared character of Bangladesh and Spain

LUIS TEJADA

DURING this month of October, the Bengal Art Gallery will display the prints of the very renowned Spanish painter Francisco de Goya (1746-1828). The exhibition has been organised by the Embassy of Spain with the co-financing of the Inditex Chair of Spanish, an undertaking established in Dhaka University by our very well known textile multinational, owner of Zara shops. The prints belong to the Spanish National Museum of Engravings.

There are three Spanish painters that are above all our masters: Velazquez, Goya and Picasso. The Bengal Gallery in Dhamondi will exhibit 84 engravings of Goya of the various series of his work: critic of social customs (Caprichos); the disasters of war; the art of bullfighting. These selected works show well the originality and uniqueness of the talent of the artist. Goya excelled in several aspects of painting, as was the case in his portraits of some of the most relevant European politicians and military men of the time, like the royal Bourbon family or General Wellington. Or in the outstanding and exquisite Rococo cartoons for Royal Tapestry, where he represented pleasurable and vivid descriptions of day to day life of popular types and scenes his time: children, bull fighting, peasantry parties, popular beauties. Very few painters have achieved the lightness of colour, freshness, spontaneity and dynamism of Goya in those delicate tapestries.

But in it is his prints where his most profound and uncompromised talent lies. In the "Disasters of war," his innovative design is used to protest against atrocities, starvation and degradation of human beings. In the "Caprichos," as a follower of the Enlightenment and the nascent Liberalism, he denounced all sort of follies in the

traditional popular customs, the common prejudices, the brutality of ignorance and self-interest. Being a true reformer, he never had a complacent view to the vices of society and persistently attacked them, none of the social classes being spared.

A recognised and talented painter, admired and loved by the royalty and the aristocracy of his time, he did not grant himself an easy life, as he was an independent personality who could not renounce his liberal beliefs or accept easily any form of authoritarian rule. This is why he neither sided with the French invaders in the Independence War of Spain against Napoleonic troops, in spite of his ideological proximity with them, nor could later accept the return of absolutism, choosing to spend his last years in exile in Bordeaux.

All these aspects of his personality are strikingly present in the engravings to be displayed in Dhaka. The Bangladeshi public will find many familiar motifs in Goya, as he was a freedom fighter as well. The desire for social reformation, the rejection of atrocities of war, the spirit of liberty, are all well present in Bangladesh, as they have been for centuries in the Spanish people, and they appear so creatively defended and represented by Goya.

This exhibition of Goya's works has been presented in some of the most important cities of the world, and only very recently in Beijing. By financing this exhibition, even in times of economic tightness in our country, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Spain demonstrates its strong interest in the warm and rising relations between our two countries. Spain admires the economic progress, democratic system and growing political stability of Bangladesh. Because of this development, Spain is now one of the main European destinations of garments from Bangladesh. At the same time, our companies are

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increasingly considering Bangladesh as an emerging economy, full of opportunities. Only in the last 12 months, Spanish firms have obtained contracts to construct power plants for around 1,000 MW. In the textile sector, Inditex is one of the main Spanish multinationals in this country. They sell items of almost 150 Bangladeshi factories and contribute decisively to the employment of around 200,000 workers. The Muslim culture is another strong linkage between our two countries, as Spain remained a Muslim country for more than eight centuries of its history.

This exhibition is doubtless one further step forward in our relations. It will be framed within a "Spanish Week," as October 12 is our National Day, and the Westin Hotel has been so kind as to organise a Spanish gastronomic week from the 13th on. In this last case, a firm with close links with Spain, but Bangladeshi, Indesore, has organised, together with Westin, the visit to Bangladesh of two eminent cooks and a group of Flamenco musicians and dancers.

The writer is the Ambassador of Spain to Bangladesh.

LEST WE FORGET

Reminiscence

SHAMSUL HAQUE

I had worked with Ambassador Ataur Rahman Khan Kaiser as his deputy in Bangladesh Embassy in Seoul during the late '90s. As a bureaucrat, a diplomat and his deputy, I looked upon Ambassador Kaiser as an icon of leadership and dynamism, intellect and wisdom, flair and flamboyance, charisma and grandeur, empathy and kindness, honesty and integrity, finesse and niceties, professionalism and patriotism and above all a guardian and a good soul, a father figure and an angelic entity in human form. May Allah keep this great soul in peace.



I was one of the very few lucky ones in Foreign Office to have had worked with him as his deputy. My wife Meeta, our daughter Noor and son Shaan and I fondly and gratefully re-collect those wonderful and unforgettable days in Seoul, considered to be one of the most challenging and toughest diplomatic posts. We had enjoyed working and staying together in South Korea under the kind guidance of Ambassador Kaiser and in homely relations and caring company of Mrs. Nilufer Khan and their two wonderful daughters Muneer and Huma. Though we never had the opportunity of meeting their first daughter, who was married at that time and living with her husband in Chittagong, we always felt her presence through the conversations of the ambassador and Mrs. Khan.

Ambassador and Madam Kaiser loved to invite people around them to private dinners, lunches or tea very frequently, apart from the many professional diplomatic parties they hosted. I remember the many evenings Meeta and I visited Bangladesh House, the official Embassy Residence, and had the privilege of dining with them.

As a professional bureaucrat and his deputy, I could never feel for a moment that I was really working under an ambassador, and always felt that I was working under a big bunyan tree or an umbrella who would take care of everything. At heart, he was like a baby. I remember, once in November 1998, when Mrs. Khan was in Bangladesh. At around 11 o'clock at night, I received a call from the ambassador telling me that Mrs. Khan had suffered a stroke and had gone into a coma. My wife and I rushed to the Residence, we saw him weeping just a like baby, uttering "Nilu, Nilu."

He loved Mrs. Khan and his three daughters very much and felt very proud of them, which was always evident in his conversations and even in his countenance. His daughters were his own world. Our son Shaan was only 5 years old when we attended Eid Open House at the Embassy Residence on Eid Day in 1998. The ambassador was perhaps talking to his eldest daughter who was in Bangladesh. From the conversation, my son could deduce that, and he whispered to me: "Ambassador Uncle is talking to his 'Amma.'"

On the professional level, we had an excellent working relation. We understood each other's wave length and chemistry. Despite being a very senior political leader from the ruling party, a freedom fighter and a close associate of the Father of the Nation and his daughter, he never displayed those connections in any way. He made me feel elevated to work with him as his deputy and second-in-command in a foreign mission (despite the fact that many of my senior colleagues or batch mates in administrative service had been just working as private Secretaries or staff officers with different cabinet members at that time).

As a political personality and a leader, he never asked for nor tested my political views, explicitly and implicitly, to see whether I had any, nor ever tried to get my politically induced opinion on any matter. As my boss, he always encouraged, appreciated and highly valued analytical, honest, fact based and purely professional opinions on all issues from me as a bureaucrat and his deputy totally on the basis of merit of the matters. He either endorsed my proposal if he liked it or added his own views or reviewed my proposal on the basis of merit of the matter or his own perception or understanding or political consideration. He never expressed his prejudice for any difference of opinion, which we sometimes had occasionally. Such true sense of professionalism and approach was really a great source of encouragement and inspiration for me as a young career diplomat.

As a human being, he was a gem of a person and a perfect gentleman. Meeting him had been a matter of pleasure and honour and talking to him had always been a matter of inspiration. He was endowed with a blend of opposite qualities like simplicity on one hand, grandeur on the other. I was very much amazed and inspired and also learnt a lot from his versatile disposition. He could meet ordinary Bangladeshi people from all walks of life and grasp their day to day problems and give solutions. He could speak eloquently with the Korean intelligentsia and the Korean leadership, both in political and corporate arenas, media and the civil society as and when the situation demanded. He loved music and loved to discuss various contemporary issues. He always thought about how best to replicate the Korean model of development for the benefit of Bangladesh and asked me to work accordingly.

With his sad demise, the country had lost a great son of the soil and I pray for the eternal peace of this great soul.

The writer is Director General, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Addressing community clinics

MD. RUHULLAH SIDDIQY

HEALTH service delivery is an intimidating challenge for Bangladesh's health service systems. Many rural people face hazardous health conditions because of poverty and backwardness.

Yet Bangladesh has made great progress over the past four decades in breaking the cycle of poverty and poor health through its set of connections of affordable rural health-care. Over the last decades key health indicators such as life expectancy and coverage of immunisation have improved notably, whilst infant mortality, maternal mortality and fertility rates have dropped significantly, which can be an example for other developing countries to follow.

People's involvement is central to all aspects of human development where health issue is vitally interlinked. In the Alma-Ata conference in 1978, community participation was described as an essential component of primary health care. In our country, Community Clinic (CC) approach of the present government is one of the most important components of public health programme that ensures the active involvement of community people, from delivering the

Dis:Panchagarh) and Manick Pir community clinic (Union: Bangahari, Upazila: Boda, Dis:Panchagarh) took initiatives to level the ground around the community clinic and make a new road across the community clinic by themselves.

A number of NGOs are extending their support in various components to successfully carry out the project. They are all working for the betterment of the health status of the community people. They also assist the government in empowering the community people for the better management of CCs through formation of Community Management Groups (CMG) and Community Support Groups (CSG). These community groups ensure maintenance, security and cleanliness of the community clinics. They also accumulate resources, raise and utilise funds for properly mobilising health care initiatives at the community level.

The process of installing solar panels in the community clinics, where there is no electric supply from the national grid, has already started. In the near future, community clinics are expected to be the nucleus of integrated health information system and a unified service centre. The

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first level one-stop service for Primary Health Care (PHC) to the doorsteps of the rural population to clinic management. This involvement is expected to contribute towards strengthening the accountability of service delivery, both in the short and the long terms.

The CCs are meant to provide primary health care service packages ranging from maternal and neonatal health, nutrition and family planning to treatment of minor ailments, first aid and health education. It is also intended for identifying emergency and complicated cases and referring them to higher facilities for better health management. The whole gamut of activities is being implemented by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare under a five-year (July 2009 to June 2014) project titled Revitalisation of Community Health Care Initiatives in Bangladesh (RCHCIB).

Community participation in service delivery is essential to establish sustainable health care, and the people very conscious about their participation. For example, Community Groups (CG) of Arazi Gaigata community clinic, Moydandighy community clinic (Union: Moydan dighi, Upazila: Boda,

government has planned to establish e-health service in all community clinics by providing CHCPs with laptops. Reporting and communications will be done through internet. Mobile phone health service has been started recently. In the coming year the monitoring system will be completely MIS-based, which will help the government greatly in promoting e-health facilities as part of the strategy to establish a Digital Bangladesh by 2021.

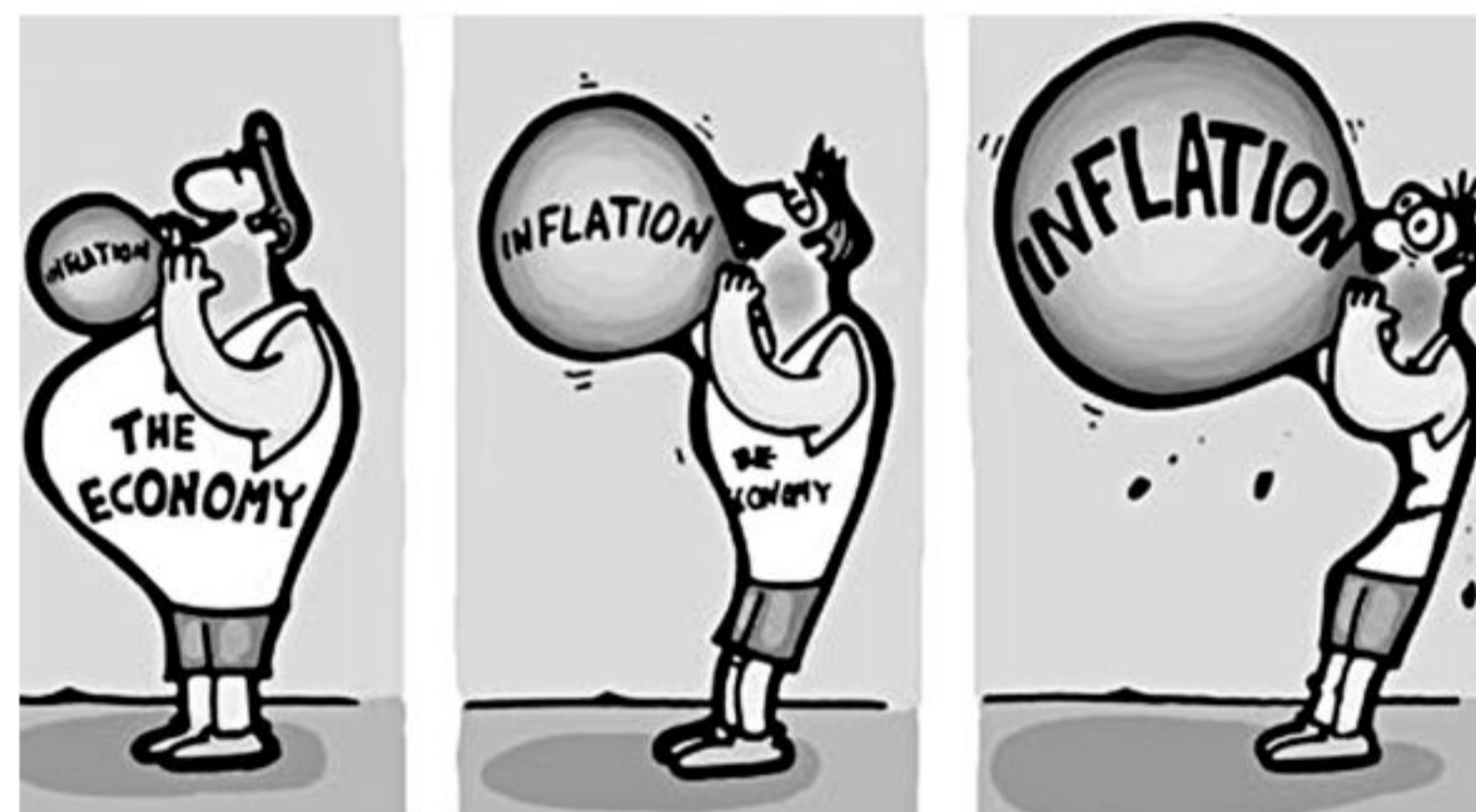
Every nation passes through various challenges. Identification of challenges always opens the avenue for innovations, which ultimately leads to sustainability towards continuous development. Harmonising the activities of CHCP, HA & FWA; building appropriate reporting system; timely supply and proper storing and distribution of medicines; and overall activity monitoring by the higher officials need to be further improved. If the government overcomes these issues then the CC approach will meaningfully address the much demanded health care need of the rural communities where two-third of the total population lives.

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FOOD PRICE SPIKES

What can governments do?

Importing-country policies can lessen the short-term impacts on the most vulnerable, as well as boost farm productivity in the longer term. Beyond lowering import tariffs, governments can use "safety nets" to assist with cash transfers those in need.



ALBERTO VALDÉS and WILLIAM FOSTER

WITH recent UN figures showing food prices still near historic highs, how can governments help ensure that poor people have enough to eat? In a new paper for the International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development, we reviewed the type of policies and mechanisms that poor, net-food-importing countries might use to overcome food security challenges during such price hikes. We argued that governments should heed the lessons of the 2007-08 price spikes, if -- as predicted -- prices remain high and volatile in the years ahead.

Consumers in net-food-importing countries, such as in Bangladesh or sub-Saharan Africa, have a lot at stake. Farmers in the big exporters, such as Argentina and Brazil, have most to gain.

Our research showed that 89 out of 136 countries examined are net importers of both food and non-food agricultural products. In addition, there are 22 countries that, while being net exporters of agricultural goods, are nevertheless net importers of food.

And since a decade ago, 20 countries have switched from net exporters to net importers of agricultural goods. Nations affected by civil war or political unrest feature heavily on this list of countries that have moved away from exporting farm commodities -- with Somalia, Sudan and Zimbabwe being among them. Other countries are now net importers of agricultural goods simply due to changes in their competitiveness in other activities relative to food.

On the positive side, with higher incomes people have diversified their diets, cushioning the international price shocks that affect basic commodities. More worrisome is the case of poorer, "captive" consumers of basic grains. Even in middle-income countries the food component of cost-of-living indices has risen faster than other prices, with a consequent rise in poverty levels.

Of course, even within food-importing countries, farmers could gain with access to rising world prices. Government policies and poorly-integrated markets might mean, however, that world prices are not passed on to poor producers -- especially those in remote areas. Moreover, the poorest in rural areas are often those who spend more on buying food than they make in selling it, and price hikes harm more than they help.

What can governments do? In the case of exporting countries, what we do know is that there are negative externalities of export restrictions, which have exacerbated global prices spikes, and undermined the reliability and credibility of world food markets. There is a vicious circle: Unreliable markets propel countries to shift toward self-sufficiency, incurring high social costs -- domestically and internationally. The resulting enhanced world price volatility reinforces the domestic political incentives to insulate national markets.

Although there are studies of the policy responses to the recent price spikes, the household welfare effects are not well understood. But importing-country policies can lessen the short-term impacts on the most vulnerable, as well as boost farm productivity in the longer term. Beyond lowering import tariffs, governments can use "safety nets" to assist with cash transfers those in need.

These importing countries should find that increased spending on farm advisory services or improved access to seeds and fertilisers is money well spent in the longer term: by boosting yields, farm incomes rise, allowing poor farmers to respond effectively to growing demand. The extra investment could make the difference in the future between what could be merely a food price rise and what could be another food price spike crisis.

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