

Shrimp and the Plan

The damage inflicted on economic installations by the cyclone and tidal wave of April 29-30 has been enormous, with no industry suffering a more crippling blow than the frozen food sector. Of the US \$112 million earned by exports of frozen food in the first three quarters of fiscal year 1990-91, shrimp exports alone accounted for US \$101 million. The value of shrimp in the national economy can therefore be hardly overestimated.

Over Tk. 4 billion worth of shrimps were lost in the storm, and nearly 70 per cent of the industry's raw materials destroyed. Deep sea trawlers suffered heavily as well, with six out of 46 sea-going trawlers sunk, 26 grounded and 14 damaged pretty badly. It may take months before deep sea fishing gets back to its pre-cyclone level, seriously affecting export earnings.

But the bigger prize, shrimp, is in bigger trouble. Thousands of workers face unemployment for an indefinite period, as the industry struggles to find its feet, further hampered by a Tk. 1.7 billion bank debt around its neck.

Given the hard currency earning capacity of frozen food, and particularly of shrimp, it is imperative that the industry receive priority in any plan for rehabilitation of the coastal economy. We must keep in mind that existing world market for frozen food is not going to wait for Bangladesh to get back on stream. Whatever portion of the market we had before the cyclone, will simply look elsewhere for supply. South-east Asian countries such as Thailand and the Philippines are far more efficient than Bangladesh in terms of production as well as marketing. They have already eaten into Bangladesh's market in the Far East and the United States; too much delay in resuming production and exports could see our existing Middle Eastern market overrun by our South-east Asian competitors as well. We can be sure that current outpouring of world sympathy for Bangladesh, genuine though it is, is most unlikely to stretch as far as the cut-throat arena of world trade. The onus is on us, and the stress must be laid on speed.

This would naturally involve financial support in the form of extra loans on special and considerate terms; the government will do well to consider waiving interest accrued against existing loans (this will not represent an extraordinary move since farmers have already had interest waived on part of their loans).

As well as inject fresh capital into the industry, the government should take this opportunity to reorganise this vital sector of the economy along more professional lines. Regulations have to be made in order to discourage cowboy investors seeking a quick buck at the expense of local farmers. But more important, the government's plan must include the questions of efficiency and protection of the environment. At present, our shrimp farmers are nearly 900 per cent less efficient than the average Thai producer. Expert advice and technical assistance must be made available to our shrimp farmers to attain a similar level of efficiency, without which our products will become unmarketable. Particular attention has also to be given to protect the soil from over-salination. Specifically, a shrimp must make sure saline water does not seep into land around his farm. We do not wish to see the coast deserted as has been the case with North Bengal due to wanton de-forestation.

The Quayle Watching

President George Bush may well feel absolutely fit, not only to complete his term energetically but also to get ready for the 1992 campaign for the second term in the White House. But all this cannot prevent Americans — and indeed people outside the United States — from indulging in the favourite game of the season, the Quayle Watching.

It all started with the recent hospitalisation of Mr Bush, when suddenly many asked nervously if Dan Quayle was just not a heartbeat away from the Oval Office. Now that Mr Bush appears to be in reasonable health, for a man of his age, the Vice President no longer seems all that close to the White House. But this has not ended the Quayle watching. It has only changed the perspective. Now, the focus is on the second term for Mr Bush, and the question asked is, whether Mr Quayle should be his running mate and thus have the odd chance of taking over from Mr Bush before the latter is able to complete his second term in office.

This is hardly an academic question. After all, in the recent history of the United States, two most successful men in the White House — Harry Truman and Lyndon Johnson — took over from their respective predecessors when one died in office and the other was assassinated. All this makes any speculation about the future of Mr Quayle quite relevant and, as many Americans would say, one of concern.

As opinion polls suggest, at this moment, only a small minority of Americans — only 19 per cent, according to a CNN survey — would vote for Mr Quayle for president. Many would say, it is more a question of image than of the untested ability of the Vice President. But all said and done, Dan Quayle remains an unknown quantity. Maybe during this year and next, Americans and their friends abroad will get to know a bit more about the Vice President and that when the time comes for Mr Bush to name his running mate for the second term, he will make the right choice, whatever it may be. Until then, one can only wish good health to Mr Bush.

It may have been the most significant Cabinet reshuffle in Canadian history. In mid-April the prime minister, Brian Mulroney, made two dozen changes among his 39 Conservative ministers without dropping anyone. Believing his party is headed for disastrous defeat in the next election, critics were quick to say he was "rearranging the deckchairs on the Titanic."

But two shifts must be remarkable. Joe Clark, the External Affairs Minister for more than six years, was given the title of Minister of Constitutional Affairs—and the daunting task of saving Canada from break-up.

And his place on the world stage was taken by Barbara McDougall who, assuming she does as well in External Affairs as in her previous posts, is perfectly positioned to become the next Tory leader—and, some day, Canada's first woman prime minister.

Joe Clark, not yet 52, and with his record as failed Prime Minister (half a year in 1979) now buried and forgotten, has turned into the government's indispensable man.

This has happened because Mulroney, who displaced him as party leader in 1983, has become so unpopular with voters that the Conservatives are at the bottom of opinion polls with 14 per cent, far behind the Liberals and New Democrats. Even the Reform Party, a newish rightwing party with its base in Alberta, has surged past the Tories in the latest Gallup poll.

This springtime Mulroney knew he had to act on the issue of Canadian unity and Quebec separatism. A top-notch commission on the fu-

The Shuffle to Save Canada

Clyde Sanger writes from Ottawa

Canada's embattled Prime Minister, Brian Mulroney, is faced with presiding over the disintegration of Canada. To head off Quebec sovereignty in 1992 he has swallowed his political pride and appointed his old foe, Foreign Minister Joe Clark, to sort out the mess. In turn Barbara McDougall is the new foreign minister—and she may become Canada's first woman prime minister.

ture of Quebec voted in March to commit the province to a referendum on political sovereignty in 1992 unless Canada offered Quebec major changes—and greatly increased powers—in the meantime. The sovereignty stance in the culmination of 30 years in Quebec's evolution from a predominantly rural, priest-dominated province to a modern society of self-confident businessmen and professionals. But



JOE CLARK: His job? To keep Canada in one piece

it nurses one great fear: that its language and culture will be swamped in a Canada where only six million out of 25 million have French as their mother tongue.

In 1960 the transformation was being called Quebec's "quiet revolution." It has, in fact, been raucous and quarrelsome. Last summer Mulroney thought he had put the quarrels finally to rest with the Meech Lake Accord.

But two provincial legislatures failed to ratify the accord within the time-limit. Their reasons were complex, but most Quebec politicians simply concluded other Canadians had rejected the whole idea, central to Meech Lake, that their province was a "distinct society."

Mulroney seemed paralysed for months with this failure. By background a Quebec-born lawyer with a skill at cutting deals, he is distrusted outside his home province. His Meech Lake negotiator, Senator Lowell Murray, was scorned as second-rate.

So in April, as the separatists (or separatists) seemed to be sweeping all Quebec into their camp, Mulroney swallowed his pride

and appealed to Clark to become the new negotiator, and to head a Cabinet committee on national unity.

It was a smart move. Clark is admired everywhere for his guts and stamina in making a political come-back. Once thought politically clumsy, he has been nimble in tricky diplomatic issues like South Africa and the Middle East. He is liked in Quebec, having made vigorous efforts to master French.

Best of all (in Mulroney's eyes), Clark comes from Alberta and can counterattack the Reform Party on home ground.

The federal government's strategy seems to be to sell a deal to Western Canadians, offering to hand over various powers, and then get agreement from Quebec. (It tried roughly the opposite at Meech Lake.)

Clark, who a dozen years ago used to envisage Canada as "a community of communities," apparently has the green light from Mulroney to try this route of a much decentralised country.

He has about a year to reconcile two factions: those in Quebec and Western Canada

who want Ottawa stripped down to only a few powers (like the Swiss government), and those mostly in the poorer Atlantic provinces and industrial Ontario who believe a central government has to be strong enough to control economic policy and to solve new problems, like dangers to the environment.

It is a high-risk job, and at first Clark said he wanted to stay with his friends in the club of foreign ministers. So Mulroney appealed to his sense of loyalty.

In his place as External Affairs Minister comes a tough-minded, confident woman, Barbara McDougall made her way up in the male world of business journalists, financial analysts and stockbrokers for almost 20 years. When she defeated a top Liberal for a central Toronto seat in the 1984 general election, she went straight into Mulroney's first Cabinet as a junior finance minister.

She shocked traditional Tories with her hennaed hair and her cigars. But they admired the calm, drawing voice she used in Parliament to deflect criticism of the government's expensive bail-out ac-

tion which still failed to stop the collapse of two banks. They liked the brisk manner in which she privatised an aircraft company and international telephone traffic.

In her recent portfolio of Employment and Immigration, she found her way through minefields. When a group of Turkish immigrants threatened with deportation for illegal entry were marching from Montreal to Ottawa, she drove out to meet them—and so avoided an awkward scene in front of Parliament. She flew to Hong Kong, to learn about the refugee problems at first hand.

Is she too businesslike for the subtleties of the diplomatic world? When she was in charge of the Status of Women department, she disappointed some feminists with her severely practical approach ("Women aren't just half the population, they're half the talent. As a nation, we can't afford to lose it.")

But her family life has taught her compassion; her father, a teacher, died of polio when she was 11-years-old and she helped her mother bring up two younger sisters, one of whom died of cancer recently.

What is clear is that she won't just be Mulroney's messenger, and that she will stick to her activist slogan of showing the qualities of "credibility, initiative and courage." Barbara McDougall is definitely worth watching. — GEMINI NEWS

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Environment Groups Hit Contract Reforestation

Michael A. Bengwayan writes from La Trinidad, Benguet, Philippines

LEADING world environmental organisations like the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) are up in arms against the Tropical Forest Action Plan (TFAP).

They blame it as having failed to stop destruction of tropical forests world-wide since 1980.

The TFAP, which has mobilised more funds and people than any other environment plan, is being carried out by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). The strategy was developed by the World Bank, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the World Resources Institute.

Already, twenty of the biggest environmental groups have changed FAO with insincerity and mismanagement of the TFAP program. The

Malaysia-based World Rainforest Movement (WRM) has charged that "the plan has been elaborated with almost no consultation with non-governmental or community-based organisations, paid little attention to the needs and rights of forest dwellers and seemed unduly focused on funding commercial forestry and wood-based industries, while failing to identify the real causes of deforestation."

Another international group, the Friends of the Earth (FOE) pointed out that the TFAP was forced on many Third World governments without their involvement in planning.

Chitp Fay, FOE's Projects director of Asia, told Depthnews that Third world countries

have been practically disregarded in the conceptualisation of the TFAP plans. These plans, which formed the framework of national forestry plans — particularly in Asia, South America and Africa — were incorporated in national

Contract reforestation favours commercial logging rather than sustainable forestry

development plans of many countries upon the recommendation of the World Bank, one of TFAP's sponsors and financiers, Mr. Fay said.

Mr. Fay added that the recent US\$125 million loan of the Philippines for contract reforestation is under the TFAP. The contract

reforestation, he said, favoured commercial logging rather than the establishment of sustainable forests for the next generation.

The WRM and FOE charges have been confirmed by no less than two of TFAP's sponsors,

the World Resources Institute (WRI) and an independent Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) assessment body. The WRI says that TFAP as currently implemented is not achieving many of the plan's original objectives.

"Institution controlling the TFAP, like FAO, donors, World Bank and national govern-

ments, particularly in the Third World, have allowed their investments in the forestry sector to lead in increased deforestation, and as a result, have foregone opportunities in sustainable development."

The independent FAO assessment body headed by former Prime Minister Ola Ullsten of Sweden, charges that the FAO has "failed to develop realistic ways and means for implementing the plan's goals. It has failed to promote sustainable management of forests resulting in increased timber exploitation."

The WRI and Ullsten report (which assessed five years of the TFAP) has resulted in drastic recommendations which have recently altered almost all of TFAP's programmes. The protests have called for a moratorium on international funding of TFAP, restructuring of its programs, promotion of multi-disciplinary planning, freedom of information in the evolution of national forestry action plans and changes in TFAP leadership.

They have batted, and

gained approval, for involvement of non-governmental organisations and native peoples in planning, focusing of governments in formulation of policies discouraging deforestation and the building of an international convention on global deforestation issues.

The independent FAO assessment body strongly urged for the removal of the FAO Forest Action Committee which was largely responsible for TFAP implementation, calling it as "incapable of carrying out TFAP's objectives."

These actions and recommendations by NGOs and the Ullsten Report were accepted and approved last February by FAO Director General Edouard Saouma. However, the FAO refused to remove FAO's Forest Action Committee from TRAP, triggering protest from the NGOs.

WWF Director of Tropical Forestry Robert Buschbacher has, with 20 other international environment NGOs, asked World Bank President Barber Conable to "reform the TFAP." And the US Congress has voted to "deny US funding to TFAP unless it is reorganised." — Depthnews Asia

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Altaf Hossain as seen by Ian Stephens

Sir, Hat's off to S. M. Ali for his very illuminating and 'touching' tributes to the sub-continent's immortal editor Altaf Hossain. (My World 3.5.91). Only for a short while I met this great journalist, alas now dead! Long ago, while covering, on behalf of the PID, his official visit as a central minister (perhaps in 1967) to the erstwhile East Pakistan, I met him for 'news' but I was surprised to see that he had already typed out a press release. He gave it to me, jokingly remarking, "You may just add, says Altaf". On another occasion, I telephoned him to know if he had anything for the press. He replied: "You need not come. I have already given it to Mahubul (Mahubul Alam, the then Dawn Correspondent). That's all. But the personality and dynamism of this great editor charmed me so much that I still remember those rare, invaluable moments of my life with Altaf Hossain, whom S. M. Ali has rightly described as "an outstanding editor" and "eminent personality", who enormously enhanced the prestige of the editorial institution. The forerunner in this field was certainly Ian Stephens (1903-1984), editor of "The Statesman", who is known to be the "trendsetter" of bold journalism in the sub-continent.

I may be permitted to dig out some interesting episodes of the life of Altaf Hossain, who regularly contributed to "The Statesman" of Calcutta during the pre-partitioned days, particularly when Ian Stephens was its editor. In

the words of Ian Stephens: "One of the creators of Pakistan was certainly 'Shahed', for several years a mysterious regular contributor of articles to The Statesman..... We published them on our editorial page — where a Hindu contributor's articles also regularly appeared. The extremity of baffled indignation which "Shahed's" effusions aroused among the more chauvinist of the paper's Hindu readers, and the enthusiasm among Muslim ones, will be almost unintelligible now."

In reply to a letter written by Prof. Nicholas Mansergh, Master of St. John's College, Cambridge, who was also editor-in-chief of the British Government documents under the title "The Transfer of Power in India, 1942-47". Ian Stephens wrote: "Yes indeed, 'Shahed' was indeed Altaf Hossain. For good reasons, personal to Altaf, the fact was for many years a well-kept secret,..... I can't specify the year (between 1937-1942) I became aware of important new contributions to our editorial page — fortnightly, I think, by an able, obviously well-informed, and representative polemical Muslim writer signing himself 'Shahed'. They reflected the view-point of the Muslim League; and, as the League, though much under-represented in the Indian Press, then had substantial popular backing and seemed to be a rising force, I thought them well worth our publishing. And, I was amused by periodical evidently sharp annoyance expressed by the Congress party enthusiasts at their appearance....."

Ian Stephens further re-

called: "During the strenuous summer of 1941 Arthur Moore took 'long leave' for travels abroad and Wordsworth, as acting editor, soon stopped taking 'Shahed's' articles, replacing them by contributions from Humayun Kabir, a talented young man but known to be pro-Congress, subsequently a Minister in Nehru's central government. Rather shocked, I deduced that Wordsworth had somehow been 'got at'. Exasperating to many Congressites though 'Shahed's' contributions must certainly have been, they did represent the views then held by many or perhaps most Muslims, whereas Humayun Kabir's did not. And Moore, evidently shared my views because, shortly after his return, in or about October '41, 'Shahed' was revived, and Kabir dispensed with."

Abdul Kader Purana Pallan, Dhaka.

Pathakoli Trust

Sir, The present government has retained certain projects such as 'Guchcha Gram' of the past autocratic regime which it considered can ensure welfare of the poor people. These projects couldn't yield a satisfactory result during the period of the previous govt. due to large-scale corruption within the projects.

What about the 'Pathakoli' schools which were established for the education of the working children and street urchins? It is known to all that a huge amount of donations was collected by the deposed President, his wife and others to run these schools. But a large portion of the collected money is reported to have been misappropriated. Now the 'Pathakoli' school buildings are lying vacant without any student or teacher.

May I request the new democratic government to

arrange to re-start the 'Pathakoli' schools by establishing a new trust under a different name, if not Pathakoli Trust, in the greater interest of the poor and working children. The Trust may simply be named as 'The working children welfare trust'.

M. Zahidul Haque Assistant Professor, Bangladesh Agricultural College, Dhaka 1207.

Partex

Sir, Partex is now-a-days being used more and more as a substitute for wood.

This is another good side of industrial progress. Though still used in a limited way, it is no doubt a beginning. We all are aware of the fact how expensive wood has become, because of the shortage in its supply.

Partex, thus is being used for making doors, as well as furnitures, even though it has not reached one perfection, in the sense of hard texture and durability—meaning that a lot can be done in this field still.

In cases it looks better than wood. After a piece of furniture is made of veneered Partex, it is often hard to distinguish between it and that made of wood.

So in these days of crises and in a bid to save wood from being extinguished we would request those involved in this trade that they should promote this item in more and more novel ways.

Actually Partex is nothing but a product made out of jute sticks, and farmers grow jute regularly. So there will be, hopefully, little or no dearth of it any time. If it is rightly used, it can be very helpful in solving a number of our problems to a large extent.

Raqib Mojumdar Nakhla, Dhaka.

OPINION

Executive : Clarity

In all communications both the writer and the receiver should be in the same wave length otherwise no communication takes place. The communicator must try to understand the educational level, background, experience, etc. of the communicatee, and then explain things to him in a detailed and elaborate way. This elaboration should be as much as is needed. The explaining may be a little more, rather than a little less. For effective communication the speaker should also be a good listener, and understand the difficulty and knowledge gaps of the communicatee. The failure to communicate with each other is a major of misunderstanding in many cases.

Promptitude

Why do our files/cases get delayed for days, months and years? One research finding indicated that cases/issues of national importance take as long as three to four years to get a solution, whereas personal cases such as seminar attendance and foreign scholarships move faster than the Japanese bullet trains. So also when my nephews and nieces go to the U.S.A./U.K. to work, they are punctual, dutiful and earn the reputation of good workers. But when we work here, everything is thrown to the winds. An honest person has to cover the endless miles before he can reach his target. Each one of us is passing a bad coin, and in the end all of us are losers, because in this game no one can be better off except the shiny briefcase 'wallahs'. Where are we going after all?

Rule Books, Manuals

The soldier needs his arms, the cultivator his plough and the oxes, the tailor his sewing machine, and the executive's tools are his manuals, the rule books, the guard files, etc. The two years of training that an

officer undergoes while he is on probation gives him a good foundation, but the structure has to be built by him over the whole period of his service career. At the very beginning of his career, the executive must procure all the departmental manuals, law books, guard files containing general instructions, some basic reference books, etc. All these manuals, etc. may be kept by him on the right hand side of the table, where it will be easily accessible to him/her. Further references, etc. may be kept in the room in the steel file cabinet/racks, etc. Without a complete and exhaustive references, etc. the executive cannot succeed in his work.

In the present day Bangladesh, very few people are conversant with rules and regulations, and important matters and cases get delayed, and the victim has to suffer for the lack of knowledge of the officers. For the last two decades the officer class seem to read less and less. Such factors result in the suffering of the people, and a decline in the efficiency of the Government, which is now there for all to see. The confidence of an officer will come, if he is thoroughly conversant with the rules instructions etc. An able officer will run his office, instead of being run by his office.

Clear, detailed and creative instructions must often come from the top, and this can be the beginning pages of the file. The ideas and the directions of the top man can percolate through the different layers of the administration, and the final outcome and the result can be a superior one. The whole idea of the Secretariat system is that knowledge and wisdom will be added at each stage when and where necessary.

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