

Censorship in Rangpur

Something quite insidious has been unearthed in Rangpur recently. Through an office circular the Assistant Post Master General (APMG) of Rangpur Head Post Office ordered the letters and goods, both incoming and outgoing, of 11 political leaders belonging to AL, CPB, JP, Jamaat and Gonoantrik Party and 12 heads of organisation, to be diverted to the Superintendent of Police for censorship.

When a country is governed by newly elected government, they usually prefer to continue the existing plans and programmes. Then they gradually restructure the administrative setups, introduce new policies and plans in keeping with their manifesto.

PUBLIC SECTOR ENTERPRISES

Disinvestment can Offset Losses

by M. A. Baquie

resorted to the creation of permanent Corporations to go into business on ordinary market requirements. Some of those were, of necessity, brought into existence through nationalisation of industries and trading houses left behind by the Pakistanis in 1971.

It is clear that the government wanted to bring stability and discipline in the market and hence in addition to providing infrastructure, they also started to compete with the Private Sector to the extent that they used to retail even grocery items. And the end result was that while normally all those sectors used

bring benefits to its workers. We should have approached the subject of generating employment opportunities with care, logic and viability rather than mere continued operation of an enterprise; (e) They seldom appreciate that production alone is not sufficient; appropriate marketing and distribution are equally important and (f) The government employees have not been inculcated with the spirit of the survival of the fittest (for the sake of quality productivity). On the contrary, one thinks that once in service, is assured continuity without any weightage to his performance.

It is to be realised that while it may take three to five years for a new industrial unit to make any cognisable profit, for losing concern it does not take more than a few weeks to accrue that through its shutting down because the stoppage in recurrence of losses then becomes an economical profit.

to contribute substantially to the public exchequer in the form of duties and taxes etc. the government sector was running into heavy losses mainly through mismanagement, indisciplined and in addition to huge recurring losses these Corporations owe hundreds of crores of Taka to the financial institutions, commercial banks besides the government (Bangladesh) Bank, Adamjee Jute Mills Ltd, the largest of its kind in the world, which used to pay hundreds of crores of taka to the national exchequer, is these days always in the red by practically the similar amounts which means a double negative result.

Causes for poor performance

Why it is so? What are the causes for such devastatingly poor performances? Some of the reasons are: (a) Government is generally inflexible. They are only expected to enunciate policies in respect of industrial and commercial developments which are to be carried through by the private sector; (b) As autonomous bod-

ties the Corporations had never been given due authorities to discharge their assigned responsibilities. It may be noted that the delegation of power to the management to decide on all matters except on major policies was never there. (How could then they be expected to act efficiently and expeditiously to smoothly administer the enterprises?) Responsibility without authority is a mockery of decentralisation and delegation; (c) The government employees are not mentally prepared for that sort of duties; (d) They lack appropriate training and experience for a kind of job which calls for efficient management involving men, material, costs, loss and profit which are vitally important than mere continued operation of an enterprise;

We are well aware of the colossal losses being incurred practically in every public sector Corporation whereas each of those is supposed to earn for the government hundreds of crores of taka annually. Accumulated losses may have already gone much beyond hundreds of billions of taka, and we are still putting up with these huge losses to our national exchequer. But, at whose costs? The down-trodden and the badly suffering public? Yet there does not appear to be

any sign of re-thinking as to how to salvage these national losses. By simply avoiding these losses we could have been able to save annually large funds to offset, all by ourselves, even cataclysmic devastations. And possibly we did not have to stretch our begging bowls every time there was a natural calamity.

These establishments, no doubt, sustain a sizeable number of our work force. But that cannot be an argument not to arrest the rot that is eating up our meagre resources. It is only a healthy concern that can

emphasise that to save the national assets, offers of only those who have the expertise, experiences, resources and the management cadres to successfully contribute to the GDP may be considered. Head office staff of these Corporations should be treated to have been distributed to all the operating units on the basis of persons employed. While the unimportant, small and medium size enterprises be sold out and the less important ones denationalised/dismantled/dismantled, the important and complex ones be made into public limited companies or fully au-

tonomous bodies. It may be realised that while it may take three to five years for a new industrial unit to make any cognisable profit, for an irreversible losing concern it does not take more than a few weeks to accrue that through its shutting down because the stoppage in recurrence of losses then becomes an economical profit.

Regrouping the units for disposal

To start with, the government may regroup all the public sector Corporations and their operational units into the following categories: (a) For immediate disposal. (b) For conversion to public limited companies. Preference may be given to the employees association/society, provided they have the means, like any other bidders, to pay off the required amounts. The government may retain equity participation. The private or public limited companies taking over any of these concerns must be given the unfettered legal rights, powers and due authority to reorganize in any manner they would like

in the interest of the enterprise. Such conditions are considered pre-requisite and essential in the best interest of the country. However, here a word of caution may be added that even if the government owned majority shares, unless its agencies are willing to stop interferences in matter of policies, plans, employment and pricing etc these newly-formed companies are also likely to meet premature deaths as losing concerns. The appropriate ministry/department/directorate should be geared up to properly monitor the performances of these public limited companies where they have equity participation. (c) To be kept under close observation and scrutiny regarding their operational performances for the next three years. The ultimate objective should be also to turn these into private sector ones in due course of time. All the remaining industrial, commercial and service organisations in the public sector excluding Biman, Railway, Radio, TV, Electricity, Water and Shipping should be placed under this category. If any of these are found not showing any positive and decisive signs of improvements, that should also be quickly disposed of as under (a) or (b) above.

Crusading "Crackpot" Puts Himself up for FAO Top Job

Dennis Craig writes from Rome

A man who was a senior FAO official for many years has set himself up as the conscience of the UN organisation. He says it has lost credibility and that he is a candidate for the job of secretary-general when it comes up in 1993. He believes many others could do the job better, but that his candidature will force international debate on the FAO's future. Otherwise, some states, such as the dissatisfied US, may pull out.



RAYMOND LLOYD "Opening up a can of worms"

A growing number of states across the economic spectrum want to prevent Saouma being re-elected. They believe that if he is, a number of major donors, including the US, would leave the FAO.

Lloyd is in no doubt that he can get a member state to nominate him, although he will

not try to get Britain's nomination because he has lived more than half his life in other countries.

He says: "Over the years I have made important friends in a number of countries at every level, from heads of state to influential civil servants.

"Nomination don't have to be in until March 1993, so I have two years to present my proposals. It will be the first time in nearly 50 years of United Nations history that someone campaigns publicly on a platform of issues, initially as an individual and not as a government nominee"

Lloyd was an FAO official until 11 years ago. He quit voluntarily because, as he put it in his letter, "I believe that for the foreseeable future I can make a greater contribution to human progress from outside the UN system than inside it..."

"I feel I can enhance the work of colleagues remaining

inside by opposing rather than by going along with certain current decadent trends."

While he worked for the FAO he was looked on as something of an oddity by most colleagues. He stood aside from their claims for higher salaries, pension rights, duty-free and other privileges.

Instead - and on this there is accord, even among his greatest detractors - he dedicated all his energies to combating the war on want and hunger. He instructed the FAO payroll section to send most of his salary to selected development projects.

Among many schemes he initiated which are now annual international events, such as donating a day's wages or the price of a meal to the world's hungry, was the only one launched in FAO's 45-year history to generate its own funds.

This involved the sale of coins and medals bearing the

FAO logo and message. Lloyd administered it for 14 years, making FAO nearly \$3 million profit for investment in small-scale development projects.

Despite his candidature, Lloyd does not see himself as the future director-general. In his first campaign letter, issued from the London flat where he has run self-financed campaigns for more women at senior levels in the UN system and for the reform of FAO, he says:

"I can think of many persons more able, more experienced, or more good for governments to nominate.... I hope my campaign will challenge governments to nominate such persons, or such persons to seek nomination. In any case, my campaign should oblige other candidates to take, or refuse to take, a public stand on the issues."

Among these issues are restraints on abuse of power by future directors-general (including standing for public

office while an FAO staff member); purging the FAO staff of members who have been senior members of a government which has murdered or tortured its civilian opponents; higher standards of professional competence; and financial accountability.

As the self-appointed conscience of FAO, Lloyd says he will not hesitate to use his ammunition he possesses to restore its credibility and integrity. Lloyd compares the way Saouma has "sold FAO out" to repressive regimes with the way the 1939 Secretary-General of the League of Nations, Joseph Avenal de France, tried to sell the League to the Fascist powers.

Lloyd says: "That he did not do so was due mainly to the integrity of another League official, Sean Lester of Ireland. A similar person is now needed in FAO."

Possibly none or no more than one or two FAO member states will believe Lloyds is that person. The rest may be forced to concede reluctant respect for a man who has chosen to hoe a lonely furrow. GEMINI NEWS

DENNIS CRAIG has worked for three UN agencies over 22 years and is a specialist writer on international organisations.

Of the Caesarean Section

Some notions have a way of attracting adherents. Without there being any dependable survey on the matter, anyone would tend to suggest that youngsters of today are taller than their counterparts of yesteryears - their parents to begin with. And you will find hordes to agree and suggest furthermore that today's boys and girls are a lot smarter too - at least in appearance and bearing. Such beliefs are so widely subscribed to that it is quite futile to point out that there has been no foundation to these by way of objective scientific observation. A study in the matter would be meaningful only if it can prove that the facts are otherwise.

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.

VIP taxpayers, roads

Sir, I endorse the view expressed by Mr M Zahidul Haque in his letter published under the caption "VIP tax payers" on June 21 in your paper. Though our per capita income and GDP are the lowest in the world, some of our fortunate (or corrupt) officials and businessmen have made a place in the list of the rich people. We have already VIP residential areas - in Dhanmondi, Gulshan, Banani and Uttara. Now if the same class is separated in the list of tax payers by introducing VIP tax payers list, I am afraid, God forbid, if there be any revolution on class basis they will be vulnerable to that, not to speak of how much it adds to superiority-inferiority complexes!

has infringed the right of rickshaw-pullers and their passengers as well. It has hit Article 27 (Equality before law), Article 28 (Discrimination on grounds of religion etc), Article 36 (Freedom of movement) and Article 40 (Freedom of profession or occupation) of the Constitution and as such the action is illegal. The present government must rescind the order, if any, which declared the VIP roads.

We must remember when the British Queen can use public thoroughfares and is subject to traffic law, no one in this part of the world is a monarch and needs a VIP road.

M Saleem Ullah Advocate Motheel C/A, Dhaka.

IT Return: A request to NBR

Sir, The common individual tax-payers are often confused as to the Income-Year or Assessment Year from which changes in Income-Tax mea-

sures, announced through the National Budget, are applicable. Besides, changes in the slab/rates of Income-Tax, are not included in the budget-speech.

The Finance Minister, in his budget-speech of 12 June '91, introduced several changes in the existing Income-Tax provisions. The Income-Tax payers of individual category will have to submit their Income-Tax Returns for the Income-Year 1990-91 (Assessment Year 1991-92), to the tax authorities from 01 July to 15 September 1991. To enable them to prepare their returns correctly, the National Board of Revenue (NBR), would do well to issue clear guidance, through press release and press notifications immediately on the following basic points and ensure that, these are published in all major English and vernacular dailies:

- (1) Whether withdrawal of 15% Surcharge on Income Tax will be effective for Income-Year 1990-91 i.e. Assessment Year 1991-92; (2) Whether lowering of investment allowance from Taka two lakh to Taka 1 lakh, will be applicable to Income-Year 1990-91 (Assessment Year '91-92) or to Income Year 1991-92 (Assessment Year '92-93); (3) What are the new slabs/rates of Income Tax, made by way of rationalisation,

as announced by the Finance Minister? Whether the new slabs/rates of Income-Tax are payable for Income Year 1990-91 (Assessment Year '91-92)?

Status of Banani

Sir, The government is determined to develop Banani as a model residential area. But it is regrettable that its residential status is being grossly violated by the practice of housing travel agency and manpower export offices in a number of strictly residential buildings. For instance, now some 15/20 houses on Road Nos. 6, 8, 11 and 17 of C and D blocks are vibrant with such businesses attracting thousands of people everyday. Imagine of the tranquility and privacy preferred for a residential area in the crowd, continuing from morning till late in the evening!

formed by such traders, when they raise any protest.

According to base deed allowing ownership to a plot in Banani, RAJUK can take action against anyone setting up a commercial office in the residential area and evict such offices from residential buildings. However, in the past, RAJUK could not do its duty despite serving notices, perhaps due to its "inability" under the then autocratic regime. But now? The present democratic and benevolent government must do something to save the residential status of Banani and to the relief of its genuine residents.

Municipal tax

Sir, The Dhaka City Corporation tax commonly known as municipal tax, varies widely even on houses that are identical in all respects and are on same or similar locations or, surprisingly, in the same compound! Even a two-storied building owner has to pay more what is levied on a three or four storied house in the same locality. Moderate finishings and floor spaces are compared to luxury fittings and more floor space occasionally, and the owner has to pay more. Under the above backdrop it would be just and appropriate to engage several civil engineering consultants to fix the municipal tax based on lotage, floor area, finishing content, rent probability etc. and relieve the tax payers of illogical burden. Sadik Alee Maghaziar, Dhaka.