

Search for New Markets

A drop in the country's export earning in the first five months of the current fiscal year, from July to November 1991, serves as a signal which should be taken seriously. According to a recent study by the Metropolitan Commerce and Industry (MCCI), the drop is estimated at approximately 17 per cent — substantial but not massive — but there is a danger that the situation may deteriorate further in coming months due to the recession in the United States and European countries. If the MCCI's prediction comes true, the country is indeed in for serious trouble.

The position of Bangladesh in the two-way import-export trade with the outside world is a negative one, as with so many other developing countries. We export commodities worth of \$1.7 billion as against imports amounting to \$3.7 billion in value. With the garment industry and some non-traditional goods making a headway, we have made some progress towards diversification in our export trade. But other countries, including some of our neighbours, have entered the same field. We remain vulnerable in a fast changing world.

If we are to improve on our export performance, we have to take advantage of some — indeed, several — aspects of the fast changing world. For one thing, we have to establish contacts with East European countries which, now committed to market economy, may well go for imports of consumer goods from developing countries, provided their prices are considerably lower than those offered by industrialised nations. The same goes for the newly-emerging republics of the former Soviet Union, the members of the Commonwealth of Independent States, especially the Muslim ones with which Pakistan has already set up strong links, from air communication to establishment of diplomatic and trade offices. Then, there are the former Indo-China states, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, which are in desperate need of reasonably-priced daily necessities, from garments and medicines to newsprint and tea. Traders from such neighbouring countries as Singapore and Thailand have entered this wide open field, leaving little room for others. So, we are late, but, hopefully, not too late.

The Export Promotion Bureau has a role to play in exploring these new markets. But it is the private sector in Bangladesh, especially our chambers of trade and industries, which must take up this challenge with all seriousness. True, there will be obstacles, like the system of payment. Being short of hard currency, our potential partners would expect credit. But this would be a matter for negotiation. Institutions like the World Bank, the IMF and proposed bank for Eastern Europe should help in devising an approach that provides necessary financial assistance in support of the new trade links. Meanwhile, our exploratory missions, both governmental and private ones — should visit these areas and establish necessary contacts.

What we also need most urgently is consultation between the representatives of the private sector and the relevant ministries of the government. A workshop should help, but it is more important to set up a small think tank which should be provided with first-hand accounts of problems and prospects in the areas just mentioned. It will be a long haul. However, the sooner a start is made the better.

The Doctor's Dilemma

Africa is losing its young doctors because they are frustrated by lack of facilities and drugs — as well as poor quality drugs they have to use because their countries are forced to buy cheap. So writes Charles Rukuni in the Daily Star of Tuesday. It reads so much like someone from Bangladesh writing about Bangladeshi doctors. There is much more in Rukuni's piece that fits so well on the Bangladeshi doctor's precarious situation. About a budding junior doctor in Africa he says: Everytime you meet him he complains about the frustration in the profession. He cannot wait to finish his housemanship and emigrate. That description is nothing if not a graphic representation of the Bangladeshi young doctor's impatience with his situation.

The most unfortunate part of our dubious distinction which adds mightily to the doctor's interminably simmering frustration is our society's totally wrong and unsympathetic idea of the doctor's personal and professional situation. The society takes them all as a bunch of unabashed fleecers. The doctors are no more held in awe and reverence and gratitude — their respect as a regiment of good samaritans out to stake everything including life for the alleviation of the afflicted people's suffering has by now been reduced to a fable come from hoary past.

Thinking of the whole community of doctors as heartless, the society at large has become quite heartless in its approach to the actual situation of the doctors. So much so that very few know about the dire straits all the doctors excepting for some tens of 'successful' specialists are in — financially, professionally and even emotionally, soon after they enter into the professional life. No family grooms its children into super-performing scholars sailing into medical colleges and then, for at least five years, eating up hefty slices off the family budget — all for getting in return a country doctor. The rush for a seat in the medical college has behind it the warped idea that those passing out of it will have both a job and a lot of practical wanting ready for the young hopeful — a position both in the profession and in society, and, of course, in the capital city.

Very few of us know that for the most of the lot that pass out every year reality comes as a rude shock that sends them reeling for years and years. A hope of marrying into money and setting up a medical 'byabsha' or of going abroad to collect rewarding degrees and diplomas help many a one survive past the traumatic years following internship. But these flickering hopes are only another face of frustration.

Our society's idea of its doctors are formed largely by true fleecers. It is a sad fact that it is unprofessionalism — by a handful of people — that thoroughly vitiates our medical situation from inside. And this is one major factor that prevents the society from giving the junior doctors the right kind of support they need. We do not think the budding African doctor faces this kind of lack of sympathy from its constituency.

MOHAMMED Nawaz Sharif, the Pakistan Prime Minister, admits that the progress in resolving the dispute between Islamabad and New Delhi is "slow." He does not pin much hope on the efforts made at the official level. "Why don't you make some formulations which could suggest a way out?" he asked us, a group of senior Indian and Pakistani journalists and academics, who met him in Lahore the other day.

That a hot line has been installed between him and Prime Minister Narasimha Rao satisfies Nawaz Sharif only up to a point. He is frank enough to say that no worthwhile understanding between them is "possible" without a settlement on Kashmir. "Mutual trade, economic cooperation or mere cultural exchanges cannot last beyond a few weeks if Kashmir remains as it is," he says.

Nawaz Sharif is not alone in holding such views. This is the dominant mood in Pakistan. You may start discussion on any subject. It ends on Kashmir. Even innocuous matters like the availability of books and newspapers of one country in the other have been bogged down by technicalities. The attitude is: either a settlement on Kashmir or nothing. Asked why Pakistan does not import foodgrains from India which is cheaper and available next door, Nawaz Sharif said: "Were we to do so, I would incur the wrath of my people since Kashmir is uppermost in their minds."

Obsession

Five years ago, when I was in Pakistan last, Kashmir was mentioned in passing; now it is almost an 'obsession'. Two developments are responsible

Kashmir: Symptom or Disease

for it. One, the persistent militancy in the Valley has both surprised and impressed Pakistan, which recalls how its infiltration in 1965 was foiled by the Kashmiris themselves. Two, the renewed world interest has made Islamabad believe that the question can be reopened.

It is conceded that if there had been no upsurge in the Valley, Pakistan would not have been able to interfere. "You are a cause, we are a consequence, just as we were a cause in East Pakistan and you were the consequence," many have no hesitation in saying. The cause, surprisingly, is what the intellectuals and journalists in India have pointed out: on the one hand, Farooq Abdullah's alliance with the ruling Congress (I) demolished even the fiction of Kashmir's autonomy and, on the other, the large-scale rigging in the 1987 poll convinced the Kashmiris that bullet, not the ballot box, would get them their self-rule. A booklet, which the protagonists of independent Kashmir have brought out, makes the same point: "The majority of the youth who have swelled the ranks of militant groups had finally run out of patience with the policy of working with the system in the wake of fraudulent polls in 1987."

The general impression in Lahore, Islamabad and even Peshawar, the three cities I visited, is that it is only a matter of time when New Delhi will be humiliated at the hands of militants. The Pakistan government denies giving them any assistance, other than political and moral.

But the public resents even diplomatic denials because it favours an all-out support to the Kashmiris who, it believes, are fighting not only for the right of self-determination but also for their Islamic identity.

Unverified Stories

The militants are hailed as freedom fighters and Indian security forces condemned as gun crazy. Practically every Pakistani has got conditioned to believing that most heinous atrocities are taking place in Kashmir. Unverified stories are being told and retold. It would be far better for New

Delhi, keeping Jammu, Ladakh and Gilgit separate.

Even Amanullah Khan has dropped the letter 'J', connoting Jammu, from the JKLF (Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front), the outfit he heads. When I pointed out this to him at Islamabad, he did not join issue with me. He was confident that India would one day quit Kashmir as the US did from Vietnam. He admitted that the militancy in the Valley was not at its peak and explained it as a temporary phase in any uprising. But he drew hope from the support he had received in the West.



Delhi to allow the Pakistani journalists in Kashmir than let the exaggerated or even concocted accounts to circulate.

When it comes to concrete proposals, an independent status for the Valley does not raise many eyebrows. Former bureaucrats, academics and journalists in Pakistan argue that if the Kashmiris want to stay independent, their wishes should be respected. The earlier stance that the Kashmiris should either join India or Pakistan and have no third choice has got somewhat diluted. Benazir Bhutto, former Pakistan Prime Minister, concedes: "I think the option is either to opt for India or Pakistan but the Kashmiris must decide what is best for them." And it is taken for granted that whatever the set-

particularly the US and Great Britain. He made no secret of the pressure, Islamabad was exerting on him to give up the demand for independence and opt for Pakistan. "But we will have our own independent state," he said.

Qayyum Khan

Elderly Abdul Qayyum Khan, the Azad Kashmir prime minister, sounded more realistic. He refused to spell out the solution he had in mind, although he reminded us of the repeated promises Jawaharlal Nehru made to hold a plebiscite to decide the future of Kashmir. He proposed a meeting of the elders to find a way out and included among them Abdul Ghani Lone, Karan Singh, and Muslim League chief Gillani, not

Farooq Abdullah. When asked why he wanted to exclude the militants from the meeting, he said he would associate them "after we have arrived at some understanding." Their participation from the beginning, he said, "may create confusion." Qayyum was warm and effusive and presented each one of us an Onyx flower vase, after hosting a dinner in our honour.

Gaibuddin Hikmatyar, the Afghan leader of Hizbe-Islami, whom we met in Peshawar, repudiated the reports that they were training or arming the Kashmiri youth. He ruled out the possibility of the Afghan mujahideens joining the Kashmiri militants or crossing into the Valley to fight. Nonetheless, he supported the Kashmiris' right of self-determination.

I was surprised to find substantial support for my Trieste-like solution of Kashmir, which envisages converting the present line of control into international border, while keeping the border in the Valley soft so as to facilitate free travel between the two parts. Similarly they will be able to trade with foreign countries and set up joint ventures in industry and tourism. However, the Indians wanting to travel to the Pakistani side of Kashmir will seek a visa from Islamabad just as the Pakistanis wanting to travel to the Indian side of Kashmir from New Delhi.

Ethos

Nehru once said that Kashmir was a symptom, not a disease, and even if it were presented to Pakistan on a platter it could think of some

other issues to keep its hatred alive, for only in that had it found its ethos. The restoration of democracy has given Pakistan its ethos. And over the years the symptom itself has become the disease. Its treatment may not cure all the ills between India and Pakistan, but it will take the sting out, making it possible for the two countries to become friendly neighbours in due course.

The Pakistanis increasingly realise the futility of confrontation; they also realise how the various countries have come closer for economic benefits. New Delhi can take advantage of this realisation and initiate some concrete measures to foster goodwill. To begin with, it should ratify the agreement on the Stachin glacier it once reached. Islamabad created confusion by using the word "withdrawal" instead of "redeployment" which was agreed upon by the foreign secretaries of the two countries. What it envisaged was that the armies of both India and Pakistan would vacate the area, leaving it a no-man's land, as it was before the two sides took unilateral steps to register their presence.

New Delhi should also honour its commitment to lease to Islamabad the house where Mohammed Ali Jinnah, founder of Pakistan, lived in Bombay. Narasimha Rao, when foreign minister, gave the undertaking in the Lok Sabha on September 3, 1981, that on the vacation of the building by the British High Commission, "It is proposed to lease out the property to the Pakistan Embassy for use by their Consulate." Ten years ago the Jinnah House fell vacant but the solemn commitment made by India to Pakistan still remains unhonoured.

An Early Poll Could Catch Moi Opposition Napping

by Mark Ochieng

After 28 years of one-party rule international pressure has forced President Moi to move Kenya back to multi-partyism. Opposition parties are forming and several ministers have resigned, complaining of economic mismanagement and alleged cover-up of the murder of foreign minister Robert Ouko. Former vice-president Mwai Kibaki has formed the Democratic Party. Proliferation and division of opposition parties could play into Moi's hands.

The Kikuyu-Luo marriage compelled the smaller tribes — the Luhya, the Kalenjin, Maasai and Costal tribes — to form KANU in a bid to prevent the domination of the big two.

Moi, a Kalenjin, and Shikuku, a Luhya, were both prominent leaders of the Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU).

In 1966 Odinga fell out with Kenyatta and formed the opposition Kenya People's Union (KPU). Ideological reasons were given for the split, but tribal considerations clearly played a role, particularly because Odinga's exit from the government was accompanied by a mass walkout by his fellow Luo MPs. Many felt Luo had deserved a bigger representation in the government.

Three years later Kenyatta banned all opposition parties. Mboya, then Economics Minister was assassinated. KPU disappeared and Odinga and Luolund were relegated to the periphery of national political, economic and social life.

Luo hatred of the KANU government eased in 1978 when Kenyatta died and Moi took power. The warmer relationship was short-lived. In August 1982 two Luo soldiers

Kenya

- 1960 Declared British protectorate
- 1962 Mau Mau emergency; Kenyatta ban
- 1966 KANU and KADU formed
- 1969 KANU wins poll, refuses to form government till Kenyatta freed, KADU forms government, Kenyatta freed, Coalition formed.
- 1983 Dec 12 Kenya independent
- 1984 KADU dissolves itself, KANU now sole party
- 1991 Multi-partyism back

in the Kenyan air force led an abortive coup against Moi. Odinga was accused of masterminding it and put under house arrest. His son Raila was detained.

Ever since then the Luo have been frustrated at their inability to assume effective control of the country's political power. With Odinga now

leader of FORD, they see a chance at last of achieving their goal. The Kikuyu, who make up 30 per cent of the population, and the third largest ethnic group, the Luhya, entertain similar ambitions.

Odinga and Muite, coming from the great tribal divide, may have realised that the only

way Moi can be beaten in a straight election is for the two biggest tribes to close ranks and make a combined assault. The question is: if Moi is beaten in an election who should become president? A replay of the old Kenyatta-Odinga rivalry is possible.

The opposition must also find a formula to win over the lesser tribes, without which victory would not be altogether complete. The Luhya and Kamba (the fourth largest) are of special importance.

If Odinga can enlist two leading Luhya lights, Shikuku and Masinde Muliro, and bring into FORD an important Kamba figure, Paul Ngei, his victory will almost be assured.

It will not be easy. Shikuku is said to be strongly opposed to assigning to Muite any responsible role in a post-Moi government because it is feared Muite will hand Kenya over to the conservative Kikuyu elite class of Kenyatta's Kiambu district.

Western governments are closely following development. Canada's secret preference for Shikuku is thought to have contributed to his early decision to go it alone to the exclu-

sion of the FORD mainstream. The United States, France and Germany appear to have settled for anyone from the Odinga-Muite camp, especially as the 80-year-old Odinga seems to have shed completely his earlier Marxist outlook.

At a recent corporate function Odinga praised Kenya's capitalist system that has allowed him to run east Africa's largest gas cylinder making company.

Britain, the former colonial power, which has been upstaged by other western governments in the campaign to get Moi's monolithic regime out of the way, is yet to show its hand. It is expected to go along with anyone who can safeguard British interests in the country. Currently they are valued at \$2 billion.

For the opposition to win the coming multiparty elections the factions will have to make an effective common assault. Moi still enjoys not inconsiderable support from the minority tribes. By comparison with many other African leaders, he has done much for the ordinary citizen — such as abolishing primary school fees and providing free milk to pupils.

A fractious opposition will find it hard to unseat the man. Timing of the election is important. If Moi calls it early in the year the opposition will not have enough time to canvass for votes.

— GEMINI NEWS

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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.

Tension at border

Sir, The article "It's Time to Support Battle for Democracy in Myanmar" by Mr Kaiser Rasheed in The Daily Star of 8 January 1992 is thought-provoking. When a neighbour's house is on fire, one cannot sit quiet and complacent, especially if burning cinders are all the time falling on one's own house. In Arakan, there is a mixture of many races — the Bangalees, Arab, Portuguese, Andamanese and others. Unlike the bulk of the population in Myanmar who are racially Tibeto-Burmans, the Arakanese are ethnically a different mix. What the Myanmar army is doing in Arakan is not only a persecution of the people of one religion by those of another; it is in fact a genocide.

Experience shows, as Mr Rasheed has said, that a little show of force or a strong posture from this side may defuse the tension for a while; but it is not a permanent solution. Particularly with an autocratic regime like that in Myanmar, it is useless to seek any rational understanding or permanent solution to the problem. It is time to look for alternative solutions. Let Myanmar

go where it may, but we cannot be indifferent to what might happen to Arakan on a long term basis.

For much of its history, Arakan was an independent state with friendly relationship with the people of Bangladesh. It was the British who presented Arakan to Burma (Myanmar) as a gift when that country was separated from British India. Arakan fulfils all the criteria needed for an independent state, with a favourable geography and a distinctive history and culture of its own. In the long history of this region before the British came here, there never had been any tension between the Bangalees and the Arakanese people. In an independent and democratic Arakan, Bangladesh would have found a most friendly neighbouring country and tension on that border would permanently disappear. Let us look at the problem not from a religious point of view, but from a geo-political and historical perspective. What the Arakanese need most at this moment is a democratic voice of their own.

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Aviation

Sir, Talking about political will of the present government, there is a strong possibility that, unlike the Ershad regime, there will be accountability with regard to every major project, if not all of them, be it an Airport Development Project at Chittagong or procurement of new aircraft for Biman.

If at less cost, more benefit is to be derived by the state, the national airlines and the travellers, about a dozen questions may be asked by the general public as well as their representatives, the MPs. Why do we have to wait till 1997 to link Chittagong with the international destinations, instead of making it operational with Mid-Haul aircraft immediately? Why do we need wide-body aircraft to operate from Chittagong? Is it to open another avenue to add to Biman's loss, because others will operate their wide-bodies through Chittagong at the cost of Biman? Is it to force DC-10s of Biman to make domestic flights on Dhaka-Chittagong route for onward flights to international destinations? If the only way to make Chittagong airport an international airport is by making it capable of operating wide-body aircraft then it will mean that Sylhet will never have an international airport, is it true? Is it to enable the GSAs of other airlines to earn more commissions when wide-body aircraft of other airlines will operate from Chittagong? Is it a

manipulation to eliminate all possibilities of making Sylhet International Airport? How much cargo Biman's DC-10s are lifting now?

A recent news report in "Economic Times" where the Aviation Minister reportedly said "Biman planned to connect more cities in Europe and Asia in its international network in addition to 26 international destinations" is a positive sign and correct thinking. The nation stands to gain much from such thoughts provided that these are meant to be implemented in the near future. Indeed, it is about time that Tehran, Istanbul, Manila and Ho Chi Minh city are connected by Biman. He has also indicated that "one or two Mid-Haul and Short-Haul aircraft will be required by one or one and half year period for necessary expansion".

Some people say that a strong ground is being prepared to re-negotiate with British Aerospace to procure the third ATP with the excuse that once the 2 F-28s are sold out (which I agree that these should be sold out) only two ATPs will not be able to cope with domestic market. To counter such arguments one can say that Biman can very easily operate appropriate Mid-Haul aircraft during the days of peak-demand, which can be planned and published in the flight schedule.

Whatever it may be, it is about time that the Ministry of Finance and the Prime Minister herself might like to probe into Biman and save the

nation from repeated disasters in Civil Aviation sector. The Civil Aviation Authority cannot maintain the airports from its own income and Biman cannot even plan at its own level as to what aircraft should be procured, on which routes to operate and such other questions. Under such circumstances how can the Chairman alone plan as well as execute things?

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Containing crime

Sir, We congratulate the police on their success in re-arresting Makim Gazi and his accomplices. Some days back, I had an informal talk with some police officials who told that when they first arrested Makim, a notorious criminal, they kept him locked under extra-security measures. They locked him in the cell with handcuffs. But later on, due to some negligence of the officials Makim and three other co-accused managed to escape from the court lock-up.

Meanwhile, it proves that our police department has the capability to contest with the criminals to combat crimes. It is known to everyone that Bangladesh Police lacks modern facilities and equipments. Training facilities for the police personnel are also insufficient.

We would urge the govt. to take proper measures to modernize our police department and to solve various profes-

sional problems of the police personnel.

At the same time we expect that the police personnel would become real friends of the law-abiding common citizens through offering honest and dedicated services.

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Retirement age

Sir, I was disappointed by the report "22 Secretaries retire next year" in your January 7 issue. The reporter compares our situation with those of ASEAN countries, Sri Lanka and so on, although they are not comparable at all. None of them has the kind of severe unemployment problem, rock bottom per capita income and low life expectancy that we have. Besides, the report does a disservice to the abilities of those highly seasoned officers who will take over when those 22 Secretaries will retire. We are to remember that even the developed countries with unemployment rate only as high as 10% are seriously considering the introduction of such concept as "job sharing" because there is a "planetary distance" between those who have jobs and those who have not.

Hence there is absolutely no justification whatsoever in raising the retirement age beyond 57 years, as the report suggests.

One who cares