

## New Lease of Life for Industries

The much heralded — and indeed expected — industrial take-off due to liberalisation of industrial policy has never come about. Nor is there any sign that it will do so in the near future. But the overriding government compulsion for bringing about an economic miracle is only much too understandable. So the emphasis on bringing the existing industrial establishments in order makes sense. However, the move to detect the industrial malaise had not been well directed in the past and naturally the necessary cure for it has also remained illusory.

This time, the government is seriously considering the establishment of an institution similar to the one India floated in 1985 under the name, Board of Industrial and Financial Reconstruction. The now-familiar epithet sick for industry has however not always been conceived with the clarity it should have been; sometimes it has been misplaced and other times deliberately used to create more confusion over the haze that has already been surrounding the whole economic spectre. It is therefore necessary to be clear about what makes an industry a truly sick one.

To our mind, sick industries are those that have simply failed to achieve their stated or conceived objectives. Now that industries in droves fail to kick sends a very disturbing signal through the length and breadth of a country. That precisely has happened in our case. It is not that one or two things going awry can frustrate the industrial aspiration of a country, several — indeed a whole lot of — vital aspects seem to have been made to work in the reverse. Genuine entrepreneurs have been pushed to the corner, on the one hand, and pursuance of wrong policies, on the other, have let down our industrial aims.

That industries becoming sick is mostly our own doing should be admitted in the first place to keep the record straight. Then the sincere investigation to look for the viable and non-viable industries can reveal the true picture of the industry sector. That industries in different sectors should have different problems is understandable but it is less so when one comes to recognise the industries en masse going bust — and so suddenly. But still this can happen, say, with the change in technology. But we are not unfortunately told so. What we however understand is that there are indeed some foul play and pressures and pulls from within and outside.

Those are the issues the proposed institution must take into serious consideration. The cases of mismanagement, embezzlement and other foul plays have to be dealt with the severity they deserve. Top-heavy management and over-staff have also stood in the way of making industries viable. The measure to cure the malaise, although somewhat painful, has nevertheless to be taken to save the industries concerned. Where all measures to salvage an industry appears to be doomed in failure, the question of any concession does not simply arise. Such industries must not exist. As for the industries that still stand a chance of revival should however be given the maximum benefits of the new initiative. But at the same time, it should be ensured that industries are not declared sick only with the aim of tax evasion and deriving some other benefits in the process. There are financial institutions who have failed to monitor and give early warning of the debacle in the industrial sector. The proposed institution, we sincerely hope, will efficiently do that job. The question of bailing out the industrialists should be strictly conditioned with the possibility of their coming round. In that task, we hope, the institution will leave its unstinted mark and the country's industrialisation will receive a new lease of life.

## Let There be Consensus

Every now and then, we are faced with a sight to behold, which is also a trifle hard to believe at times. Such a sight was enacted, with Hollywoodesque sound effects, on the Floor of the Jatiya Sangsad on Feb. 11 last. Members of Parliament on the Treasury Bench virtually laid siege to the frail frame of Golam Mirza Hafiz as the unfortunate minister tried to explain one or two things about the remuneration and privileges the honourable MPs could expect. The trouble was that the expectations of the government and members were separated by a gulf wider than even Manik Mia Avenue.

While we were enchanted by the sight of ruling party MPs giving the impression that they were not happy about something or other, the plot quickly thickened. Opposition members rose to their feet in an expression of cross-floor solidarity not seen since the House passed the 12th Amendment to the Constitution six months ago. The government probably had not expected such a rapid achievement of consensus among the members. It also went to show just how wonderfully united our parliamentarians could be once the issue at stake was considered important enough.

As representatives of the people, MPs deserved to be given privileges in accordance with the Order of Precedence, they felt. Quite naturally then, any downgrading of MPs status would be regarded as a matter of national concern, and as such, this impromptu alliance between the Treasury and Opposition benches came as a long-sought light at the end of an even longer tunnel.

With the honourable members having clearly made their willingness to cast aside their differences when confronted with such matters of national importance, we can now surely look forward to some serious bouts of consensus politics on the floor of the House. There are no shortage of issues facing the nation on which such displays of unity could be most useful. Can we now expect the MPs to unite on, say, the teachers strike? Or the still-prevailing atmosphere of terror and uncertainty on the university and college campuses? Or perhaps the Indemnity Ordinance (Repeal) Bill? How about the issue of industrial reforms, including the questions of privatisation and basic structural changes that may be required to put the economy back on the rails? Reorganisation of local government, maybe?

We now know they are well capable of rising above petty differences. We are, therefore, convinced they would not fail us, and would unite on all issues of national importance just as they did over their own remuneration and privileges.

# Dawn of Democracy in the Sands of Arabia

John Beasant writes from Sana'a

At first sight the scene is not that remarkable. The city boulevards are furnished with pavement cafes. The warm climate encourages people to engage in lively discussion over a tide of tea laced with mint and black coffee, introduced into the country by the Ottoman Turks during their colonial rule.

This is the ancient city of Sana'a, founded by Shem, son of Noah, and capital of Yemen, which makes the volume of uninhibited and animated political debate very remarkable indeed.

For even the staunchest admirers of the peoples of the Arabian Peninsula would falter in claiming that the region is known for lively political discussion where Government is more often than not a family affair.

Yet, here in Yemen, national experiment in parliamentary democracy, endorsed by press laws which rank as the most liberal in existence, is in full, unfettered progress.

It is a development giving rise to mounting concern among Yemen's traditional, conservative neighbours, notably Saudi Arabia. Indeed, so enraged was the Saudi King, Fahd, at Yemen's reluctance to endorse the US-led military offensive to expel Iraq from Kuwait that he sent home virtually all Yemenis working in his Kingdom, said to number about one million, many of whom had been in Saudi Arabia for a generation and more.

But Yemen is what it has, most assuredly, always been, a highly individual place and on the fateful occasion of Iraq's occupation of Kuwait took its own, independent line, calling for an Arab-based solution to the crisis. It was a decision for which Yemen was made to pay dear, the return of its nationals from Saudi Arabia placing a heavy burden on slender state resources.

However, as President Ali Abdullah Saleh, a former Lieutenant-General and architect of his country's social and political reforms, told me: "We acted in what we believed to be the best, long-term interests of the Arab, Islamic world."

The re-unification of North and South Yemen achieved in May 1990 was a major event in the Arabian Peninsula. Now under President Ali Saleh, Yemen is embarking on a national experiment in parliamentary democracy and multi-party elections are scheduled later this year. As Gemini News Service reports the experiment in democracy — unprecedented in the region — is giving rise to mounting concern among Yemen's conservative neighbours, notably Saudi Arabia.

That was the basis of our policy. We have no regrets."

And it was Saleh, too, who pioneered the political moves which in May of 1990 led to the re-unification of the two Yemenis following centuries of artificial, colonial division caused by the Ottomans in the North and the British in the South, the Yemen Arab Republic based in Sana'a, and Aden-based Peoples Republic of Yemen merged to become the Republic of Yemen.

The social impact of re-unification, long a dream of many in both the north and the south, features prominently in conversation among Yemenis of all shades of opinion.

Abdul Malik Alisindi of the Ministry of Information said: "It held the same significance for the Arab peoples as German re-unification held for the

nations of Europe."

He said: "Re-unification, while being important in political and economic terms, was of even greater significance in that it has led to unity based on shared ideals and common goals among all Yemenis. These we will pursue through peaceful, democratic dialogue. Re-unification was, in essence, a humanitarian accomplishment. It is proving to be a unique and successful experiment."

And, so far so good, indeed it is, even if the experiment is giving sleepless nights to many in other parts of the Peninsula. For Arabia has never before seen anything quite like it, the aim of current reforms being the transformation of the Yemen Republic into a fully democratic state, governed by an elected Parliament, on the

basis of universal adult suffrage.

The steps to a multi-party system were initially taken following the success of re-unification negotiations, which produced agreement under which Ali Abdullah Saleh became President of the new Republic and Ali Salim Al Bad, former Secretary-General of South Yemen's Socialist Party, was appointed Vice-President.

Given that the former southern socialist state has just one fifth of a total population of 11 million, and that Sana'a is universally acknowledged as the ancient capital of all the Yemenis, it is an arrangement enjoying comprehensive approval.

Following re-unification a new constitution was written and endorsed by a national referendum, which brought together the northern Consul-

tative Council and the southern Supreme People's Council into a single Parliament. Some 31 new members including 10 women — representing hitherto banned political organisations — were nominated to Parliament.

The new Parliament was given a 30 month tenure, with its main function being to influence and monitor the practicalities of re-unification and to prepare the country for the General Election, scheduled for later this year.

Currently some 41 parties have registered to contest the elections, representing all shades of political opinion from socialist groups to conservative tribal rulers.

Observers say, however, that only a few parties have any real chance of success at the polls. These include the General Peoples Congress — the party of President Saleh — the Socialist Party, and the Party of Reform — Islah, which advocates a Islamic government.

The GPC's policies represent a blend of the traditional and the contemporary, including an advocacy of market economics, while the SP calls for 'the rule of law, equality, democracy and freedom.'

The GPC is basing its electoral confidence on being led by Saleh, widely regarded, and respected, as the man who made Yemeni unity a reality. The SP will have to attract support among the northern, and more conservative, electorate.

It will, of course, draw its main support from the south where the liberal social reforms it presided over remain hugely popular. Women

go unveiled, for example, and Aden has the sole brewery on the Arabian Peninsula. Islah will be advocating moderate Islam.

The 'Party Conference' session is expected to get under way in April when all the parties will proclaim their respective policies.

The electoral process will undoubtedly be aided and in some instances abetted by the 100 daily newspapers currently on sale.

The lively press was made possible by the Press and Publication Law, signed by Saleh in December 1990, which guarantees, in the words of Article 6 of the Law, 'the protection of journalists and authors, provides legal guarantees necessary for them to practise their profession and to enjoy freedom of expression and immunity from interference.'

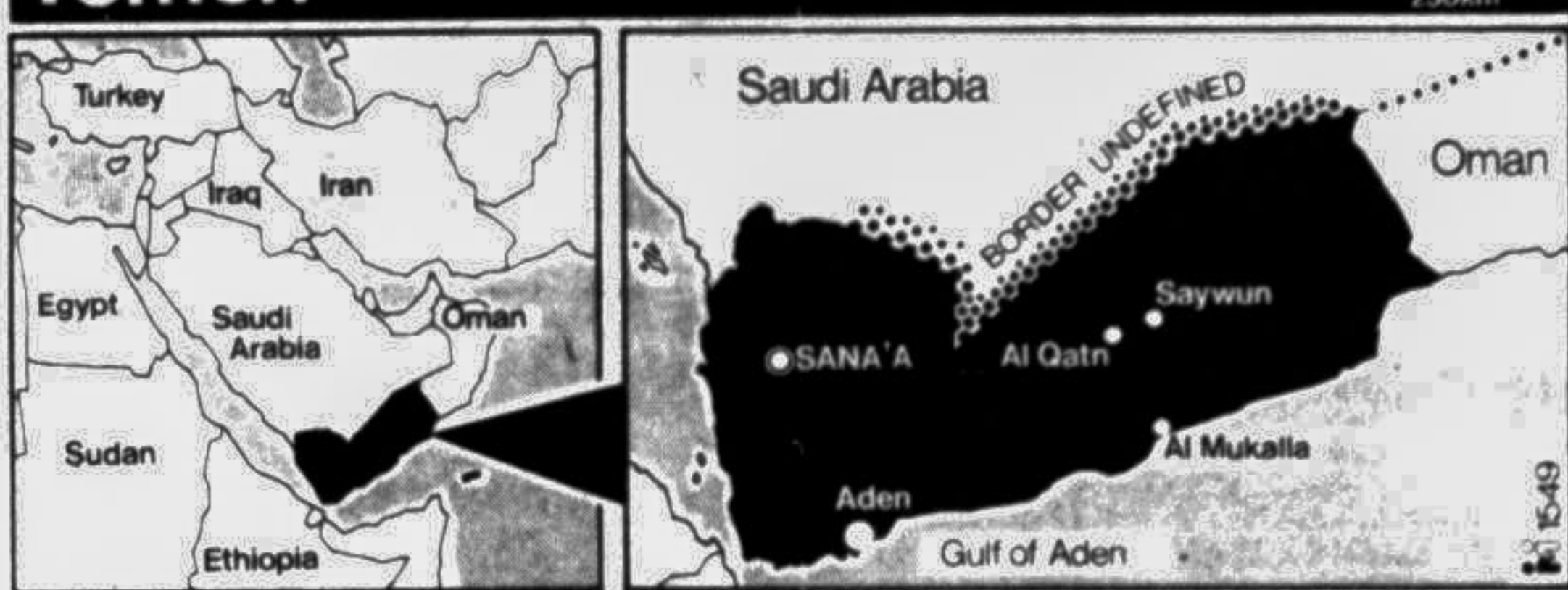
The outcome of the elections, still at least seven months away, is difficult to predict. But if such a remarkable development, without precedent on the Arabian Peninsula can be divined, a narrow win for the GPC would seem most likely, which would both require and enable it to form, as at present, a coalition with the SP even if, as could well happen, Islah came second in the vote.

What is certain to predict is that it will be an experiment in democracy that would be watched with keen interest around the world, but nowhere more closely than by Yemen's neighbours where a successful ripple could well cast a regional, ripple that could in time turn into an unstoppable whirlpool.

Indeed, as the date of the General Election draws near there are some fears in the Yemeni capital of the possibility of external, covert interference aimed at disrupting the process.

JOHN BEASANT has been Press and Private Secretary to three leaders of Commonwealth small island states. He recently visited Sana'a.

## Yemen



Until late 19th Century Yemen was part of Ottoman Empire.	1967: Civil war ends with republican victory. People's Republic of South Yemen founded.
South Yemen was a British protectorate until 1967.	1971-72: War between North and South Yemen.
	1978: Ali Abdullah Saleh comes to power in North.
1962: North Yemen declared Arab Republic of Yemen.	1983: Joint Yemen Council established.
	1990: North and South Yemen unite.
	Civil war between royalists and republicans.

# Women Diplomats Make Inroads in Male 'Territory'

Priya Darshini writes from New Delhi

WOMEN appear to be now fully ensconced in that once all-male bastion of diplomatic service if the composition of India's foreign diplomatic corps is anything to go by.

This country seems to have drawn the most number of women holding the rank of ambassador — seven out of 125 diplomatic missions. Among those with women ambassadors in India are Finland, Ireland, New Zealand, Cuba, Belgium and the European Economic Community (EEC).

Sending the women to India seems highly appropriate as the country has boasted of women diplomats long before it became fashionable. The country's diplomatic service itself attests to the significant strides women have made in this heretofore male preserve.

While in many countries women in the diplomatic service started making an impact only in the late Sixties and early Seventies, India has had its first woman diplomat since its independence in the Fifties.

Vijayalakshmi Pandit, sister of India's first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru, was probably the country's first woman diplomat. She was sent to Washington, DC as India's ambassador to the United States then headed her country's High Commission in London. Ms Pandit, who also headed India's embassy in the former Soviet Union, became the first woman president of the United Nations General Assembly.

Since then, the number of women in India's diplomatic corps steadily rose.

India now has three women heading overseas missions. Each year, women comprise 40 per cent of selected candidates for diplomatic posts. They make up 10 per cent of the total diplomatic service workforce of about 500.

The women ambassadors who are now serving in India also come from countries where women are making enormous progress in the field of diplomacy.

Finland's diplomatic corps is almost equally divided between men and women. The

country has four women ambassadors currently on overseas assignments. Its representative in India, Marjatta Rasi, who arrived in Delhi only last September, has served in London, Paris and New York.

Ms Rasi explains that a job or a career is normal for Finnish women. There are no housewives in Finland. The tradition of working women is so well established in may country that women face no discrimination as far as professional lives are concerned, she says.

Some 25 per cent of the personnel of the Irish foreign service are women, several of them holding high positions, in spite of the fact that until 1975 women had to resign when they got married.

New Zealand, which actively recruited women for the foreign service only in the Seventies when it was faced with a severe shortage of qualified graduates, now has many women in senior positions. It will also soon have the distinction of having an all-woman diplomatic mission in Delhi.

In Cuba, women now account for 48 per cent of the foreign service personnel, a slight decline from the earlier 51 per cent share. Women are proportionately represented at the ambassadorial level.

Belgium now has two women ambassadors and women account for 33 per cent of the foreign service's workforce.

The women ambassadors admit that a career in diplomacy was not a cakewalk for them and other women.

Cristina Funes-Noppen, the Belgian ambassador, describes her early days in the foreign service: "At first, people are very patronising. They treat you as a sweet little thing until you prove your competence. Male diplomats, of course, do not have to go through the same trial of fire."

Ms Funes-Noppen adds: "In other professions involving long hours, there is at least the stability of living in one place. If a woman decides to be a diplomat, it is difficult to have a family life. You can't do both."

She also admits that some

India seems to have drawn the most number of women ambassadors. And New Zealand will soon have the distinction of having an all-woman diplomatic mission in Delhi

assignments might not be open to women. "Obviously, I would never be posted to Saudi Arabia, for instance, but at one point, our foreign office did plan to send me to Tehran (Iran)."

Margaret Hennessy, the Irish ambassador, may be a little luckier as her family was able to join her in Delhi, but she still finds things a little hard: "Even then there are only 24 hours in a day. You have to sacrifice something — social life, reading, etc."

New Zealand's Priscilla Williams agrees. "You carry a double load. As a woman diplomat you have to run the office, the home and also entertain. Single men do it, too. But the reaction is: 'See how well he manages without a wife?' For women the expectations are that much higher," she says.

Women diplomats either have to organise their family life so well or choose not to have a family at all. Sonia Diaz of Cuba remained in her country while her children were small. Today, they are all working. Still, she finds diplomatic work very exhausting and demanding. "There is so much to read — telexes, reports, and your (Indian) press — it's very rich. I sometimes read till after midnight," she said.

In a number of instances, the diplomats' families opt to remain in their own countries leading to what Ms Rasi describes as "remote marriages."

If having a family poses difficulties, being single has its own problems. Ms Williams says, "There is more interest in the life of a single woman diplomat than in a single man's. Especially in a small community, you have to take care to protect yourself from comment." Ms Williams, who succeeded the immensely popular Sir Edmund Hillary of

the Mt Everest fame, says that "a woman ambassador has a certain curiosity value."

The women ambassadors share an enthusiasm and keen interest in their host country. EEC's Ambassador Trancine Henrich says "being posted in India is a reward and a challenge."

Thanks for your editorial under the caption "And now the solution (Dec 29). I want to add a few lines in support."

Much have been said and written about road accidents but very little or nothing has been said or written to provide relief to the accident victims or their dependants. I want to write something about the new concept of 'structured damages' now followed in England.

'Structured damages' to the victims of road accidents would mitigate not only sufferings of the surviving victims but also be a deterrent to the owners of the vehicles who are vicariously liable for their drivers' negligence and careless driving.

Dr. Akhila Aricha accident on April 22 last year took a toll of 59 lives and maimed 100 others and Dharmaroad accident on December 31, took more than 10 lives and injured 20 others. Subsequent accidents took more lives. These victims or their heirs will get nothing in compensation unless they bring protracted law suits on payment of huge court fees to the government.

The insurance companies escape the liability beyond Tk. 20,000/- under the Third Party Risk. They ensure the owner of the vehicle to indemnify them to the extent of Tk. 20,000/- under the insurance. The insurance law fixed this sum in 1940.

A survey in Dhaka District Court gives a dismal picture. One Malik Bepari's son was killed at Mohammadpur in 1977 by a BRTC bus. He brought a law suit for Tk. 50,000/- in 1978. His suit was decreed on contest and on appeal the amount was reduced to Tk. 20,000/- with cost. He filed Money Execution Case in 1986 in the 2nd Court of Subordinate Judge, Dhaka.

The lawyers hold the view that Government should waive the court-fees for accident cases, and for 'structured damages' the Fatal Accident Act, 1855 should be suitably amended, providing for interim damages in terms of money. This will give short

term relief to the sufferings of the claimants. In England the High Court in Sheffield has recently awarded \$2.1 million damages to a boy who became severely handicapped as a result of a car crash. The settlement was awarded on January 29, 1991 by Mr Justice McCullough. The award was \$500,000 higher than the previous largest award for a road accident victim in England. The boy, Graylee Grimsley, aged 15, had sued his father, who was driving the car. The insurance company would ultimately pay the assessed damages.

The action was brought by Garylee's mother, and supported by his father. It also included a claim against the driver of the car which was involved in the head-on collision in 1985.

The accident left the boy with severe head injuries. He has been confined to a wheelchair and has severely restricted body movement. He has great difficulty in speaking, but is mentally aware. The judgement brought to an end a six-year legal campaign by the family. The award was in the form of 'structured damages', a new mechanism for awarding compensation to injured plaintiff. It will provide guaranteed payment, in addition to a lump sum, for the rest of his life or a guaranteed minimum period of 30 years.

The law in Bangladesh requires drastic changes to make the insurance company liable for the damages that may be awarded by the court in a suit under Fatal Accidents Act, 1855 with a provision of interim damages. This may give some relief to the accident victims or to the heirs of the victims.

N Saleem Ullah  
Motijheel C/A, Dhaka.

## OPINION

## 'Structured Damages' to Road Accident Victims

## To the Editor...

### It is the right time

Sir, Teachers are on strike to support their demand for salary increase. Government is refusing to accept the demand on the plea that the present economic condition of the country is unable to shoulder the burden. At the same time the parliament is passing series of bills to enhance the emoluments of posts where the salary and benefits are already much above the national average.

being elective, the occupants are voluntarily offering their services in patriotic spirit. Additionally it is reported that the much-criticized duty free import of motor vehicles for the Members of Parliament would be allowed again. This alone would involve an expenditure of about Tk 20 crore.

Isn't the timing for all these in bad taste?

M A Haq  
West Rajshazar, Dhaka.

Civic amenities  
Sir, As an inhabitant of

Moreover, the positions