

Where are the Investment Opportunities?

DCC Employees Deserve Better Deal

The week-long strike by 120,000 or so employees of the country's four city corporations and 154 pourasavas (municipalities) has come to an end — albeit temporarily — to the satisfaction of the urban populace. But nobody knows for sure how this has been worked out, for the contradiction between the statement issued by the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) and the version of the Pura Karmachari Federation on the issue is too great to be reconciled. The fact that the DCC likes to believe that the strike has been withdrawn has implications not in any way to the liking of the employees. On the other hand, the Pura Karmachari Federation insists it has only put off their strike and may go for the same if their main demand — i.e., the enhancement of salaries, according to the new national pay scale, is not fulfilled.

This is a peculiar situation where one side claims the withdrawal is unconditional to the effect that it has won the round one of the battle and, at the same time, the other side is equally insistent that the other has given in to its pressure — one that draws its strength from a genuine cause. If clarity remains so shrouded, there is at least one point on which the two sides have agreed. The point is that the termination order served on 5,000 muster roll employees so far would be withdrawn. That looks like some sort of an understanding reached even though no side has changed its position.

In a situation such as this, the contentious point obviously remains unaddressed as ever. This points to the fact that the rumpus, although contained temporarily, still remains potentially explosive. Again, this means that the country's cities and towns will go down under tons of rubbish and garbage emitting obnoxious smell all around. To avoid such an odious prospect, therefore, there is a need for an acceptable solution for both the sides. The dialogue that has brought out controversial statements from the two sides shows the virtues rather than vices of such negotiations across the table. This time, the dialogue has not helped them arrive at an enduring and amicable solution but maybe next time they will be able to. Certainly, the striking employees have a point. It is they who really help run the wheel of the city by doing all the dirty jobs. And all for a mere pittance. If everyone else earns the right to enjoy an enhanced salary, these people deserved it even more.

And they have demanded nothing more or less. But the treatment meted out to them is simply barbaric and deserves outright condemnation. City fathers definitely have their own styles to deal with crises. But under no circumstances can this be anything remotely similar to the one — in which thugs and the law enforcing agencies together lent a hand to unleash a reign of terror — that took place on Wednesday at Sayedabad sweepers' colony and the following day in the street. The disdain shown to the striking employees is one aspect of the whole issue. These people have been treated just like pariahs. And by carrying out raids on their colonies, the men responsible have added an ominously dark chapter to people's democratic right to protest.

That issue has, it seems, come up for discussion only in passing. But it is a serious issue. In a democratic dispensation, such musclemanry — a favourite measure with the autocratic regimes — cannot be allowed to go unpunished. After all, this is a provocation for taking law in one's own hands and therefore does not help strengthen democratic institutions. Rhetorics have been aplenty for developing a culture of tolerance. Unfortunately, that tolerance is found in short supply from the administration side itself. This attitude must change, more so when dealing with such people who have suffered, generation after generation, social deprivation and class hatred, but all through served the rest of the society in quiet endurance. The authorities, we hope, will realise their plight and take a pragmatic approach, instead of one intimidatory, to solve their problem as early as possible.

Referendum in South Africa

On the face of it, it looks almost outrageous that the referendum taking place today in South Africa is designed to ascertain whether the country's five-million whites, but not the entire population of 37.5 million people of all races, support or reject the continuance of the reform process launched by President F W de Klerk in February 1990. The African National Congress (ANC) has severely criticised the move as one giving the white minority a veto over the whole process. No one would be surprised if the day is marked by demonstrations, protests, violence and a boycott of the referendum, at least in some places, thus adding further complications to the process.

Yet, an increasing number of analysts, inside South Africa and outside, have started looking at the referendum almost as a brilliant tactical move on the part of the President. For one thing, the poll may just produce an affirmative vote, perhaps only marginally, in favour of the continuance of the reform process. If this happens, Mr de Klerk will be in a pretty strong position to start substantive talks with the ANC on the framing of a new constitution for the country without worrying too much about the opposition from extremist whites. However, if he loses in the referendum, the President must hold a new general election, again for whites only, and face new uncertainties, indeed a very dark outlook. The defeat in the referendum, followed by a loss in the general election to the right-wing Conservative Party (CP) could well take the country back to the sixties, with the apartheid back in its place, Nelson Mandela back to prison and ANC back to its armed struggle. This is just too grim a scenario to speculate.

It is against this background that the ANC had been asking western powers, sometimes in vain, to maintain the sanctions which serve as the only pressure on right wing white factions to support the reform process. Let us hope that the worst fears expressed by sceptical observers will not come true. Instead, today's referendum will mark a milestone in the process of reform in South Africa.

HERE are more than 700,000 vehicles operated on natural gas in 38 countries at present but none of them in Bangladesh. Our present import cost of crude petroleum and refined petroleum products, kerosene in particular consume more than one-fourth of our export earnings. By conversion of diesel engines into gas operated ones for buses, trucks, water-craft and locomotives, we can substantially reduce consumption of imported fuels. Also, compressed natural gas or CNG in cylinders can obviate the need for pipe-based supplies. A whole new industry for compression and distribution of natural gas can be developed. CNG can be made available throughout the length and breadth of the country as a fuel for cooking and very many other purposes without the spread of extensive network of pipeline which at present involve large-scale public investment.

Why this is not being done in spite of the existence of a fairly large ready-made market is due to lack of government policies, the required incentives and regulations. The actual investment will be forthcoming from the private sector if government is sincere and vigorously pursues the promotion of CNG.

Shortage of cooking fuel is a living reality. It now constitutes a significant item in the actual cost of living index of the poor, particularly those living in the urban and peri-urban areas. Fuel wood is so expensive that it calls for no further elaboration. Development of peat coal mining in Gopalganj and Madaripur districts would make peat briquettes available all over the country as the fuel wood substitute as well as coal itself in the brickfields. Above all, peat mining would require several thousand workers.

Gold from the Bay

Around 30 to 40 percent of the total fish caught in the Bay of Bengal is thrown away, back

into the sea because there is no market demand for the so-called trash fish in the country. Anywhere else in the world, such trash fish would be processed into fishmeal which then would become valuable high protein ingredient for manufacture of poultry feed. Even export of fishmeal — for example, in Peru — is a big business. Why we must not start doing the same?

Fishmeal and imported corn or maize are the basis for large scale manufacturing of poultry feed. Gradually, domestic maize cultivation should be encouraged to replace imports. Availability of feed on a large scale might then be utilized to promote modern poultry farming aiming at 100,000 such farms selling 100 birds each week and another 100,000 farms geared to the production of eggs. There is a tremendous amount of unsatisfied demand for chicken and eggs within the country and together with feed manufacturing, at least half a million new jobs could be created within the next few years. The question is why this is not being done?

Export of marine foods in Bangladesh is confined to frozen fish only, while from Thailand and other leading exporting countries of south-east and east Asia, export of canned tuna, sardine and mackerel is equally important. Interestingly enough, not all such canned fish are caught by their own fishing boats. Frozen tuna is imported by Thailand for canning and export. Since labour is cheap, it is profitable to can imported frozen fish for export. Why can't we do the same in the coastal districts of the country? At least a quarter million new jobs could be created to work in the on-shore canning plants as well as the fishmeal production facilities.

Our own fishing fleet should also expand rapidly. Bay of Bengal is very much our own area for fishing where at present fishermen from other

countries come and take away a considerable share of the annual catch. Special incentives, technical support facilities as well as subsidies are urgently required so that our own fishing fleet in the private sector can rapidly expand. The target should be the international market for frozen and canned fish and also fishmeal. With extremely limited land area we must venture out to the sea in order to seek new employment, income and business opportunities. The Bay of Bengal can not only ravage the land, it can produce gold as well.

Textile for Major Manufacturing Growth

So much on fishing for growth; there are several other investment opportunities as well. Export of readymade garments now amount to one thousand crore taka every year. Its rate of growth have been 30 to 40 per cent per annum.

From LDC to NIC by Shahed Latif

Given the continuation of favourable conditions, strong government support within the country as well as abroad for aggressive market penetration, the value of exports should be near around one billion dollar by the year 2000. It should however be remembered that around 70 per cent of the export earnings from readymade garments are returned abroad for the import of the fabrics used.

Textile industry could expand manifold in Bangladesh. It should be capable of supplying at least half a billion dollar worth of textiles to the domestic garment industry before the end of the century. In fact textile manufacturing should be the key factor in the attainment of sustainable double digit rates of growth of the industrial sector as a whole.

The great potential of the textile industry in Bangladesh is not unknown to the possible

domestic investors. Yet they are shy because the investment costs in terms of land and buildings are too high, long-term investment loans are lacking and above all, there is a strong reluctance to deal with large number of workers. By making available ready made factory buildings with all the utility services like electricity, water, gas, telephone etc on hire-purchase or long-term rental basis, not only the long construction period would be avoided but a large component of the investment costs would no longer be necessary. Similarly, weaving looms and other machineries may also be made available on the hire-purchase basis. Most important is to encourage small family type of weaving mills employing 20 to 30 or at best 40 workers, who are mostly drawn from within the family of the investors, supported by common facilities for printing and finishing of textiles which

also need not be large units in terms of labour employed in each enterprise. Thus at least a million new factory jobs can be created within the next 10 years in the textile industry alone but the structure would be in harmony with the prevailing norms and conditions in the country.

So much for the textile industry and there is nothing new in the proposal. What is lacking is a specific textile industry development plan which should be formulated within the next few months. We must get out of the inertia; rid ourselves of the morbidity and do what we must, now — right at this very moment.

Modern Rice Processing

Another very big opportunity for investment exists in the rice processing industry. Our paddy production now amounts to 24 million tons.

Through modern processing instead of *dhenki* or the crude husking mills, this volume of paddy should yield 4 per cent more rice, about 300,000 tons of edible bran oil and around 1.4 million tons of deoiled bran cake, the latter an important ingredient for the manufacture of poultry feed. At present we cannot recover the bran oil through existing processing technologies — the traditional *dhenki* or husking mills. The bran presently obtained are fed to the chicken but it is also substantially wasted.

Instead, modern rice processing plants each with capacity to process 50 to 100 tons of paddy per day, about 400 such mills linked to 40 solvent extraction and feed manufacturing plants can take care of 25 per cent of the existing output of 24 million tons of paddy yielding 4.2 million tons of rice, 75,000 tons of edible oil and 340,000 tons of bran-oil cake which further mixed with maize and fishmeal could produce one million tons of excellent poultry feed. Thus a whole new agro-industry will come into being in support of which several foundries and workshops can also flourish.

Compensated by poultry

The loss of employment due to the demise of traditional rice processing would be more than compensated by the poultry industry that will — inevitably follow the modernisation of rice processing. Further, in order to pack the rice and the feed, 52,000 tons of jute bags would be required which is 10 per cent of the existing output of the jute mills of Bangladesh. The leftover paddy husk mixed with paddy straw can be converted into fuel sticks with excellent burning qualities. These residues are being used as fuel no doubt but the fuel sticks would ensure much more efficient use of rural energy resources. Modern paddy processing

complex together with manufacture of edible oil, poultry feed and fuel should be linked to intensive paddy production. Two million acres of irrigated transplanted *aus/aman* land should be identified and one processing complex set up for 5000 acres each and ten such processing units linked to one oil and feed manufacturing plant. Therefore, 400 such processing units will be required for 2 million acres under intensive paddy cultivation. The complex should be responsible for supervised paddy cultivation within their procurement areas including input supplies, guaranteed prices and extension know-how.

It may be noted that only 10 per cent of the net cropped area will then account for 25 per cent of the present day level of paddy production. At a later stage, a third maize crop may also be introduced and an output of 3 million tons should be feasible so that the entire raw material needs of the feed plants could be locally met. But not only that, from maize or corn, edible oil, sugar syrup and varieties of other corn based products can also be manufactured.

Plan of Action

In a variety of areas, quite different from each other, a set of investment opportunities have been identified above. Each one of them calls for detailed planning and elaborate actions which could propel the private sector to action. The suggestions are not exhaustive at all. Very many other opportunities have been left out. But the set of investment decisions would result in the spread of industrialisation all over the country — boost export, reduce imports, create employment and income on a rapid scale. Most important, the set of investment opportunities have the potential to maximize the growth rate of the economy within the very near future.

Indians Fight Recolonisation

by A Correspondent

1992 began as a year of protests against the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in India. On New Year's eve, social movements demonstrated against the changes being forced on Indian people under pressure of the unholy trinity of the Bretton Woods institutions — the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and GATT. The protest was initiated by the *Bandhua Mukti Morcha*, an organisation to liberate bonded labour, and was aimed at building public awareness of the new bondage into which the entire country was being forced.

All India Drug Action Network and Medico Friend Circle — groups working on health issues) pointed out the future implications of the attack launched on India by these vested forces. If India surrenders her economic sovereignty, it can lead to total disaster as far as the health of the people is concerned. The questions related with availability and pricing of essential drugs and the liberalisation of drug production leading to a steep increase in prices of even life-saving drugs, spell disaster. It is unfortunate to note the way in which the government is opening all doors to multinationals.

A poster exhibition was also organised along with the demonstration. The gathering burnt an effigy of US President George Bush as a token of protest against the US government.

The demonstration was organised by *Bandhua Mukti Morcha*, *Nirman Mazdoor Panchayat*, *National Front of Trade Unions*, *Delhi Forum*, *Ankur*, *Active India*, *Lokayan*, *National Working Group on Patent Laws*, *All India Drug Action Network*, *Medico Friend Circle*, *Delhi Science Forum*, *Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad*, *National Campaign Committee on Housing Rights* and others.

On 7 and 8 January,

Gandhian activists, ecologists, consumer groups, trade union leaders, farmers' organisations and members of parliament gathered at Swargam in Wardha to fight against the new slavery. The *Azadi Bachao Andolan* was launched, to resist the establishment of a new rule by transnational corporations (TNCs) which would have consequences far worse than those suffered under the rule of one corporation, the East India Company.

On 12 January, the eve of the submission of responses to the Dunkel Draft on GATT agreements, a wide spectrum of representatives of citizens' groups gathered at the Constitution Club to discuss the draft. Throughout the meeting, hosted by the National Working Group on Patents, the draft was referred to as DDT (Dunkel Draft Text), its appropriate acronym given by Surendra Patel, who played a leading role in UNCTAD to protect the Third World interest. Parallels were drawn between the text and the chemical which is hazardous, which builds resistance in pests and therefore aggravates problems it tries to solve, and which kills non-target beneficial species.

The Uruguay Round of GATT as embodied in the Dunkel draft is similarly a threat to the Third World, it

will create 'resistance' to public accountability for TNCs, which are the most serious impediments to free and fair trade, and it will cripple and annihilate the poor and vulnerable of the Third World for whom it will be impossible to meet survival needs on a global market place. The enforcement of freedom of transnational to invest and trade without hindrance in a country like India already beset by a high incidence of poverty and unemployment will further aggravate these problems.

At the meeting Balraj Mehta made it evident that both investments and markets were aimed at 20% of the Indian population, who aspired for global integration by the exclusion and dispossession of 80% of India. Resistance to GATT needed to build a sense of oneness in Indian society. He called on the need to overcome the sense of helplessness and fatalism involved in handing over all decision making to international bureaucracies in Washington and Geneva which grow bigger and more powerful even as they force a dismantling of national bureaucracies through structural adjustment programmes.

Dinesh Aorol pointed out that all the demands and inputs of the Third World that had been included in the draft at Brussels in 1990 have been

dropped in the Dunkel Draft which is now blatantly an agreement being forced on the Third World by the G-7 industrialised countries in the interests of these TNCs.

Dr Vandana Shiva, Usha Menon and farmers' representatives noted that in the field of agriculture, the domination by TNCs, which is what GATT strives to achieve, will destroy the Indian farmer, India's soils and our rich biodiversity. 'Free trade' as construed in GATT is freedom for TNCs to exploit and pollute our resources and displace millions of our farmers from agricultural livelihoods, with no place to go but the slums in our exploding cities. The GATT text threatens to take away all protection for Indian farmers in the form of either policy support or markets for their produce. The appropriation of seeds and genetic resources through patents and intellectual property rights will convert what is a freely available and freely shared resource into a high priced input supplied by seed multinationals like *Cargill*, *Monsanto*, *Ciba Geigy*, *Sandoz*, *Hoechst*, etc.

Not only will people be denied food as a fundamental right in the new GATT order, but malnourished people living in polluted and deteriorating environments will further fall prey to disease epidemics and

ill health. Most diseases in India are communicable (vector borne or water borne like cholera, malaria, kala zar) or arising from unmet nutritional needs.

These diseases cannot be dealt with only with a public health approach. However, Dr Mira Shiva noted that the cuts in public expenditure forced by structural adjustment and privatisation of health care inherent to liberalisation of services under GATT will slash down and close public health options and will make public health care a luxury commodity for the privileged few.

The worst impact of GATT is on our democratic fabric. Even the negotiations so far have been reviewed from the public's eye and the parliament. In fact the reason that issues like intellectual property rights have been shifted from the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) to GATT is to allow for increased manipulation by countries like the US, which are trying to replace democracy in our country by 'green room' decision making behind closed doors in Geneva.

The shift of fundamental decisions that touch our lives in every way as farmers, producers, consumers and workers to remote centres of power controlled by the GATT Secretariat is totally 'anti-democratic' and 'authoritarian'. It is encouraging extra territorial control on our people, resources and decision making.

Democracy demands that key discussions about GATT be demystified and made more transparent and accountable to citizens of the country. As a leader of the farmers' movement, Professor Manjit Singh said, 'It is the nation that should decide whether we want GATT or not. If the government wants to make a decision on GATT, it has to go to the people.'

— Third World Network Features.

To the Editor...

Black money, white money

Sir, According to a news item published recently in various newspapers, the Industries Minister has reportedly said that in order to encourage industrialisation, the government is considering to allow to make black money white on payment of only a nominal rate of interest and no question will be asked as long as the declared black money is invested in new industries. On reading this news item an honest business friend of mine ruefully said that the government's intention, if implemented, will make the black-marketeers richer and richer and the honest tax-payers poorer and poorer, resulting in the accumulation of more and more black money with impunity for enjoying similar illegal benefits in the future. Such a policy can only be

termed as being tantamount to penalising the honest and rewarding the dishonest.

A Qayyum Gulshan, Dhaka

Telephone bills

Sir, Of the various problems faced by the telephone subscribers, excess bill is the major one. We hope that under the democratic government rule, the curse of ghost billing will be removed from the telephone service.

The T & T Board, almost every month, issues a press-note urging the subscribers to pay their telephone bill by the 7th of the month. But, had the Board ever felt it necessary to check if the bills reached the subscribers before the due date? Not only I, but many of my friends and colleagues are

not getting their telephone bills regularly. Would the T & T Board please take necessary steps to ensure timely delivery of telephone bills?

M. Zahidul Haque, Assistant Professor, Bangladesh Agricultural Institute, Dhaka

"An Irish Tragedy"

Sir, Your editorial (Feb 26) on the abortion/human rights debate using words like 'hypocrisy', 'religious bigotry', 'victimization by the law', 'medieval concepts of morality' etc, falls short of the understanding and intelligence one has come to expect of your paper. I write in the hope that your columns are still open enough to share the views of those who think very differently from you.

In your discussion of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, you vigorously defend the right to travel, but overlook one of the basic rights — the right to life itself. When various rights conflict most people will accept limitation on their rights in order to give another the chance to live, just as you would stop your car to let an ambulance through. The Declaration is better implemented by people honouring the rights of others than by claiming rights for themselves. The weakest deserve our concern, whether they are 14 years born or 14 weeks unborn.

The Declaration does not give individuals the right to abortion on demand. Whether you agree or not, many non-Irish, non-Roman Catholic countries including Bangladesh, regard abortion as a crime. Illogically, you chide the Irish Government for not

stopping one crime (rape), but you are offended when it does prevent another (abortion).

An essential element in any working democracy is respect for the law until it is changed by democratic means. The press can play an important role in airing issues, but abuses its freedom when it supports one view so beligerently that it becomes as bigoted as those it accuses. Religion is not above criticism, but an open mind will not belittle morality simply because it is based on religion. There is a solid body of evidence suggesting that morality cannot be sustained without religion.

You unfairly try to use native sympathy for a rape victim to promote the abortionist cause, when that case is not representative of central issues in the abortion debate. Most aborted pregnancies are not the result of criminal behaviour.

You claim that "it is ironic that a country which has produced human rights crusaders like Sean McBride" could refuse to allow a rape victim to travel to have an abortion. It is not ironic. It is logical. Abhorrence of abortion and promotion of human rights spring from the same respect for the quality of all human life.

Abortion is a poor response to rape. Our Creator and our humanity require that we desist from the knee-jerk reaction of trying to solve one act of violence with another. In the Western societies you so heartily criticized, there are many organisations like *Mother Teresa's* which honour rape victims, both mother and child. Also in the West there is a growing number of married couples anxious to adopt a child nature has denied them.

A 'Bidesh'