

Dhaka, Sunday, May 24, 1992

Irrigate — the Local Way

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia recently inaugurated the North Bangladesh Irrigation Project (NBIP), designed to irrigate 44,000 hectares of land using 726 deep tubewells (DTWs). In a country where land is starved of water on either side of the monsoon season, and where landless or small-holding farmers struggle to survive on a single season's harvest of cereals, the implementation of the project should have come as a highly welcome news. However, the existing reality of rural Bangladesh, coupled with the availability of a credible alternative in the form of a manually-operated Trickle Pump (TP), makes the government's apparent acceptance of DTWs as the answer to the country's agricultural ills somewhat disturbing. Had there been no alternative to the imported, expensive technology, then there would have been no point to debate. Sadly, our policy-makers, possibly influenced by donors such as the World Bank, whose judgement may well have been coloured by imported perceptions, seem to be ignoring the local answer to this indigenous problem.

Agriculture in Bangladesh is unique and characterised by fragmented land, availability of abundant manpower, and the existence of a vast and regularly recharged aquifer. A comparative analysis of the benefits of the DTW and the TP in the context of the NBIP area would surely show which of the two options hold more in terms of appropriateness.

In terms of cost alone, the DTW should have been rejected. According to government figures, the 726 DTWs were installed at the cost of nearly US \$30 million, whereas the cost to install 176,000 TPs necessary to irrigate the same area would have come to some \$3.5 million. In addition, farmers in the NBIP area will have to pay Taka 1,200 per year to rent the DTW water for two cropping seasons; but in the case of the TPs, the farmers would have been the owners of the pumps giving them total control over their required water supplies throughout the year. That "control" is of vital importance, because with the DTW, the farmer remains dependent on the pump and its owner in a neo-feudalistic manner, and is never sure of supply when he needs it badly. The TP not only allows the farmer to irrigate his land with water when he needs it, but also by the exact amount necessary which is not always the case with DTWs. This control over water supply would also allow the farmer to diversify his crops thus vastly increasing his cash income and giving a major impetus to his efforts to break out of the poverty cycle. This is a major factor which is completely missing from the DTW scenario.

Bangladesh is also a country where real unemployment figures run into tens of millions, which should make any labour-intensive but productive technology like the TP instantly attractive. In the case of NBIP, the 726 DTWs are projected to generate 5,000 jobs, but manual irrigation would have required enough productive work to create 60,000 full-time jobs, giving vital roles to women and other rural family members, who would otherwise remain idle. The government should also consider the fact that while DTWs are heavily subsidised by external donors with large dollar components in the form of imported fuel and spareparts, the TPs carry no such burdens. Indeed, greater demand for TPs would have a rippling effect throughout the economy because it would create jobs and income in the manufacturing and installation sectors.

Given the vast socio-economic benefits apparent in the use of TPs and the obvious disadvantages associated with DTWs, it is surprising that the government has not made a thorough review of the country's irrigation policy. It is, however, never too late to effect a policy re-think. At present, the situation is characterised by a lack of clarity in government strategy, and that ought to change. The government should take a closer look at the alternatives available and arrive at a decision based on indigenous needs and resist external pressure or persuasion to do otherwise.

A Forbidding Full-day Journey

One thought that if Bangladesh, from the day of the British colonial exit, has added anything to itself in its history of dwindling riches, those were roads, buildings and population. The point of population explosion needs no elaboration. The changing skyline of Dhaka speaks eloquently of the building boom. In a land of unreal businesses and finances, real estate has, for better or worse, become real big business. And about roads, one can have an idea of the performance by even a casual visit to the three bus terminals of the city, namely, Gabtali, Mohakhali and Syedabad.

The third boom has taken place in such a breakneck fashion that many experts are inclined to see in the roads spawned by its devilish agents that are choking our waterways out of existence — a worthy accomplice of Farakka. In spite of such mixed blessings of the wild ramification of road links and dying water connections, there seems to be some cases in between the — two, some that combine the evils of both. One of such cases is exemplified by Dhaka's link with Shariatpur. The 40-mile distance takes a journey of 13 hours to complete — with everything — launches and trollers and buses and rickshaws and country boats and walking doing their bits just fine.

We have earlier in these columns drawn our readers' attention to the plight of Singair farmers serving their cattle sumptuous vegetable lunches and dinners faced with an inability to reach their coveted produce to the biggest market — Dhaka — only 26 miles away. There were reports of precious giant-sized shobri bananas — selling at Taka 1 for four. Every year crores of Taka worth pineapple and lemon just rot away in the Chittagong hills for want of transport to proper markets or lack of canning facilities. The Shariatpur or Singair or Rangamati case is a study in irrational and unplanned transport situation — as irrational or more than possibly the roads themselves — or the lack of them.

Alongside we have the curses of being compelled to do 40 miles in 13 hours — slower than one's walking rate. The Himalayan toy train used to take seven hours to negotiate the 52 miles between Shiliguri and Darjeeling. We once thought that was a world record. The Takerhat-Gopalganj bus beat that hollow for most of the history this brick-soled stretch. And now the Dhaka-Shariatpur journey beats them all. The horror of it comes out in a Daily Star report made on Thursday.

THE PRIME TIME ABERRATION

Process of Sustainable Development yet to be Launched

THE glories of liberation on 16 December 1971 was the prime time of our nationhood. Through blood and tears, in spite of the ruins and destructions, the birth of independent Bangladesh rejuvenated the united homogeneous peoples of Bangladesh in ways which would perhaps never occur again in our history. It was the end of all conflicts, all divisions were obliterated and every citizen prepared for hard work and sacrifice. Everybody thought that there could be nothing but unending peace and therefore it was the best of times to launch a massive endeavour and develop the nation as fast as possible. For the first time in history, the people enjoyed the unique opportunity to decide their fate, realise their dreams and fulfil their aspirations.

The supreme leader after his return from captivity, announced in his first address to the Nation: "We will make Bangladesh the Switzerland of the east." Why was it Switzerland? Because it is the only country in Europe which never suffered from a war. It is the country of permanent peace and neutrality as well as the most prosperous in spite of lack of natural resources like us; small in size although hemmed in by giant neighbours like Germany and France which is again very close to our conditions. In fact if one compares the two countries, we

had a distinct advantage: Switzerland is divided in terms of race, language, culture and the Church; while Bangladesh is truly homogeneous in every sense like the Japanese and this is often cited as a significant factor behind emergence of Japan as a leading world economic power.

But Switzerland or Japan — they are only distant mirage; receding further with each passing day. We failed over the last two decades and during the reign of three successive Governments to launch the vital process of sustainable development that could carry the nation along the path of economic and social progress. The critical stimulus to sustainable growth remained conspicuous by its absence. In fact this has been the case all over South Asia. There were sporadic growth, may be for two/three years with good weather and bumper harvests but the long-term trend of a high growth economy which could have come from the correct stimuli were vitally missing.

Miracle of ASEAN Economies

This has been quite unlike what happened in other parts of the Asian continent where the newly industrialising economies emerged or the growth miracle of some of the ASEAN economies took place during the last few years so much so that when in 1992, the whole

world is suffering from recession, the economies of east and south-east Asia are still booming with relentless expansion of the manufacturing sectors, in particular.

Today it is generally recognised that the vital difference have been the prescription for growth. South Asia generally followed the public-sector oriented policies, more akin to the socialist planning model of development and looked inward to sustain market expansion necessary for economic growth. To the east of the subcontinent, the policies favoured outward strategies relying on the market forces and the private sector. We adopted

of growth and development in spite of its uphill nature.

But what were these aberrations? First after 1947, the arms race between India and Pakistan drained away resources for development on a massive scale. Second we in south Asia became more concerned with the distribution of the benefits from growth rather than growing first. One of the planning ministers of an ASEAN country put it very succinctly when he said: "We were more concerned with increasing the size of the economic cake; while they (meaning us in south Asia) were busy cutting up the small economic pie into bits and pieces."

WINDOW ON ASIA

Shahed Latif

Import substitution while to the east, vigorous export promotion became the order of the day.

Thus at the prime time, that is during the initiation of the growth process, there were aberrations of what should have been the detailed policy framework and programme development in South Asia while to the east of the subcontinent, the most appropriate stimulants were identified so that the aberrations were avoided and they had a straight run through the path

Enlightened Pragmatism

To add more, as much and as fast as possible to the gross domestic product on a sustainable basis should be major goal at the prime time of development. Unfortunately the south Asian leaders were lured into policies that maximised the share of politically more relevant interest groups. In order to increase national wealth, south-east Asia stretched the welcome hand to foreign capital even as early as 1960. As a result, Japanese entrepreneurs

moved in with their technologies although hardly 15 years before, the Japanese had come to south-east Asia with tanks and bombs and the memories were still quite fresh. The enlightened pragmatism manifested in these developments were truly amazing. At the same time (during early 1960s), I remember an influential Indian economist telling me that colonialism came to the subcontinent through a trading firm, the East India Company. That was foreign investment in those days. We must therefore resist by all means a repetition of history. In Pakistan, the refugee capital from India could have initiated the high growth economic process. To this day, the refugees from India have not been integrated with the locals in Pakistan since they had to organise their own political party. Moreover in the early 1970s, there were with hunting of the wealthy capitalist families. As a result, they moved away to safe havens elsewhere in the world. The history of Bangladesh is all too vivid in our memory: the large-scale nationalisation of 1972 was a full-blown national disaster.

Acting in Opposite Direction

These were the prime time aberrations from which we are badly suffering today. While Indian real estate developers flourish in Thailand, Pakistani

capitalists locate their factories in North America and Bangladeshi restaurant owners make money in England, the locals of south-east Asia act exactly in the opposite direction: they invest in their own countries and also invite foreign capital to do the same.

What we essentially lack is pragmatism. We in south Asia tend to be more emotional. When subcontinental politics was (and still is) dominated by the Kashmir issue with one realising at what cost, Malaysia decided to annul the union with Singapore and create a separate city state. ASEAN politics is dominated by economics. We in the subcontinent revert back to our sordid history bloodied by communal tensions. The depth of enlightened pragmatism is perhaps best demonstrated by China when Hongkong has been tolerated to grow and prosper or trade with Taiwan allowed to expand very rapidly. Politics and militarism seemed to be the primary source of aberration in south Asia. China avoided the pitfalls by considering economic compulsions — first and foremost.

But it is better late than never. The politics of the subcontinent is at last veering to the stark realities of life today. Let us no longer be the deviants of the continent and return to the mainstream of growth and development.

Wanted : New Words for a New World

NEW YORK — To understand the dramatic political changes taking place in many parts of the world where institutions and internal relationships seemed till recently to be set in concrete, it is necessary to begin by remaking the glossary which has shaped political discourse for many decades.

Here are some reflections: Third World. Its use began in the late 1960s when Alfred Sauvy, the French demographer, wrote an article in *Le Monde* in which he referred to three worlds: two industrialised, one capitalist, one communist — i.e. the Soviet Union — and an unindustrialised *Tiers Monde*, a third world.

People everywhere took on the phrase and gave it connotations which Sauvy had not intended. Third World was soon universally taken to mean that huge mass out there, far away from the rich.

Third World became that materially poor world characterised by gross poverty, grubby cities where beggars in their thousands pestered visitors with their hideous whining for *baksheesh* rapid population growth rates and a multitude of other horrors unfamiliar in this day and age to the First World.

The First World was of course, the rich capitalist world. Very few knew what the Second World was, but it was a useful distance-making phrase which interposed a buffer between the First World and the Third which hardly anyone, except poor people, wanted to think about.

Old words and concepts like Third World, Non-alignment and New International Economic Order no longer define world relations. Sri Lankan journalist and author Varindra Tarzie Vittachi says the world needs to discuss ideas and moral relationships instead of wasting time on words that have lost their meaning.

But now that the Second World has largely disappeared as a global force and has been revealed as a rickety superstructure held together for 70 years by ideological pins and sealing wax, the phrase Third World too has lost its meaning.

Another such outmoded epithet is Non-alignment. It began in the early 50s with Jawaharlal Nehru's phrase "third force" which he applied to those countries that were emerging from colonialism, which needed time and space to take their place under the sun without being dragged into the Cold War.

Since there was not much "force" behind them, the preferred word for a short time was "neutrality". But there was a flaw in it: it suggested not only ideological neutrality but also moral neutrality, as though the adherents of the concept believed that "politics could be value-free".

Then came the Bandung Conference where the titans of the ex-colonial world — Nehru, Tito, Nasser, Sukarno — and rather awkwardly, Chou En Lai, whose country had not yet broken with the Soviet Union, met to frame the prin-

ciples of "peaceful co-existence" with the two superpowers.

Soon after, the word non-alignment became the generally accepted brand name for countries which did not want to be pushed around by the United States or the USSR.

And then a non-aligned bloc of 77 countries emerged from a seminar-conference held in the mid-sixties in Santiago, Chile. Pressure from this bloc brought about the United Nations Conference of Trade and Development (UNCTAD), which was to serve as an intergovernmental instrument to press for change in the international trading system.

The 77 grew in number to more than 120. But is still called the 77 and will continue to be called the 77 because the concept of non-alignment was deprived of its *raison d'être* with the sudden collapse of one of the superpowers.

The new configuration of power now demands a reassessment of the relationships of the developing world and the industrialised world. Many questions are in the air.

In the face of the protectionist zeal growing in the United States and the rapid building of

the commercial fortress of Europe, what will Japan do? What can the developing world do, jointly or separately, to deal with this clear trend?

More moulting of the slogans of the 70s — a New International Economic Order for example — will not do. The industrialised world is not discussing ideas and moral relationships. They are playing hardball for high stakes.

Even the cherished concept of the South as a common effort to deal with the North has to change for two reasons. The North is no longer what it was in the 1970s when the South became a mental construct in the developing world. And the southern hemisphere is not a coherent force.

The West is well aware of this absence of coherence and has become a past master of the art of playing one southern country against the other. It is time for another Bandung where the developing world could come to some firm agreements about how not to be further marginalised by global events.

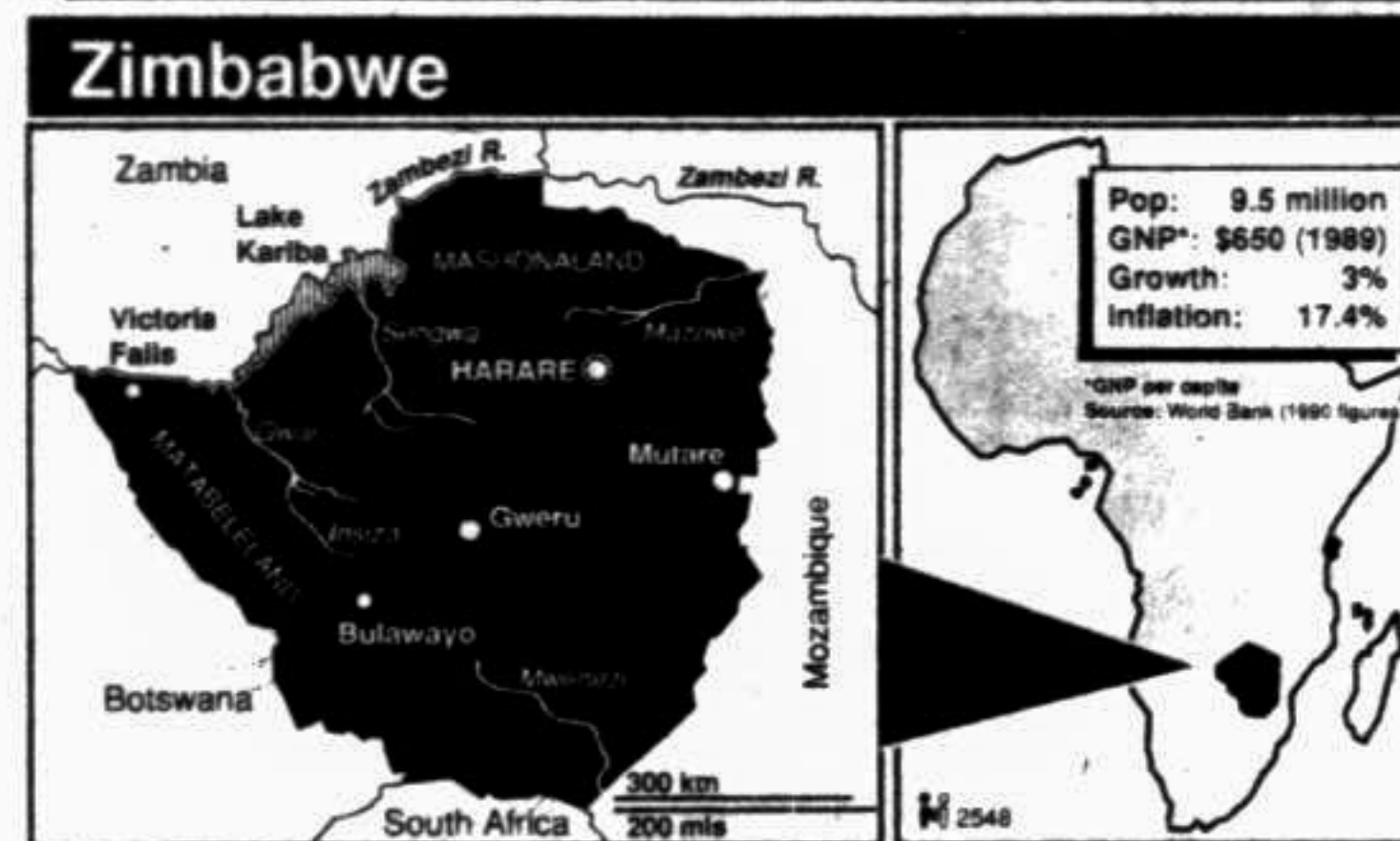
Ex-Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere's South Commission Report could well be the basic working paper. The study has been done. What needs doing is making agreements and getting down to work. There is no time to waste on words we can do without.

— IPS
Varindra Tarzie Vittachi is a former newspaper editor and former deputy executive director of the UN Children's Fund, UNICEF.

Drought Starts More Panning for Gold

Charles Rukuni writes from Bulawayo

Devaluation of the currency last year and the deepening drought are encouraging more people to pan for gold. Most do it illegally. Some are using mercury for gold dust testing, which is polluting the rivers. Panning is also leading to increasing crime. New regulations have been introduced but they are not being strictly enforced.



rivers — Runde, Insiza, Muzungwane and Mtshebezi in Matabeleland, and Mazowe in

Some panners are now reported to be carrying out on-the-spot gold dust testing, using mercury which is poisonous and therefore a health hazard to people living downstream. The panners are quite aware of the environmental hazards.

They simply say it is a question of survival: "It's better to drown searching for the precious metal than to die of hunger." They do not discriminate in to whom they sell the gold. In most cases they sell it to illegal dealers who in turn sell it outside the country.

To control panning and save the rivers from further degradation, the government has passed regulation setting out how panners should operate. Panners seeking alluvial gold along the public streams and rivers must get a permit from their local council.

Permits cost \$220 a year for each 50-metre stretch of water. Only over-18s and people living in the area can get them. Although they can oper-

ate as individuals or as co-operatives, people must be of good character and sell their gold to the Reserve Bank or its agents.

Alluvial gold operations must be confined to the river bed and diggers must not exceed a depth of 1.5 metres. Operators cannot use mechanical equipment and must backfill areas they have mined as they continue operations.

Records are kept of all permit holders and to the gold obtained and sold by each operator. Anyone flouting the regulations will not be given a permit for five years and can be fined up to \$22,000 or jailed for six months.

The regulations have not been given enough publicity and most people are still operating illegally and come from areas outside where they operate. They are believed to be agents of big business.

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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.

Spoken English

Sir, Our university graduates are weak in written and spoken English, at a time when they are entering the world and embarking on a career.

The use of English at higher and international levels cannot be avoided, as it has become a world language for exchange and communication. Even the Japanese have realised the importance of English, notwithstanding the situation that while they can read and write independently and individually, many are weak in oral English — speaking and listening. Another analogy is our MA students of Arabic and Persian,

who can get first class marks in written examinations, but have difficulty in conversing fluently or comprehending the language while listening.

Therefore the educational authorities may consider whether to have (a) compulsory spoken English classes from a certain stage; (b) at the tertiary level, provide the teachers the option to lecture and teach relevant subjects in the English medium; and, (c) allow the students the option of writing the answers in English during the examinations.

"Option" means both English and Bengali are allowed and available, and it is for the student to decide

whether to go to the "Bengali" classes or to the "English" classes. In fact it might not be necessary to have two separate sections and duplicate classes, because if the lectures are in English, the students could write the answers in Bengali if they so desired. The books may be required written in mixed language for tutorial of the students who are "weak" in English.

In the English-medium schools, English conversation class should be made compulsory; as there is no point in learning English without being able to use it through the mouth and the ears.

A Mawaz
Dhaka

Fruits and vegetables

Sir, Moderate increase in Vitamin C consumption might help reduce the risk of heart disease, pre-mature death and

cancer as pointed out in the news-item "Vitamin C extends life span" as published in the media on May 10. This study suggests that men who consume a few hundred milligrams of Vitamin C every day live about six years longer than men who don't and the vitamin may extend women's lives by about one year. Scientists believe, it is better to consume the higher amount of Vitamin C by eating five daily servings of fresh fruits and vegetables than by taking vitamin pills.

The study is consistent with evidence suggesting moderate amount of Vitamin C counter-act oxidants, chemicals that help cause heart disease. The study also suggested a few hundred milligrams of Vitamin C daily might help protect men and women against cancer. Foods rich in Vitamin C include oranges and other citrus fruits, strawberries, water melons, guava, papaya, pineapple, potatoes, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, cabbage, green leafy vegetables, cauliflower,

peas, broccoli, green and red chillies etc.

Due to the faulty system existing here, people could not understand the real truth. Most of our well-to-do people are consuming imported fruits avoiding local ones, rich in Vitamin C. If growers can get better price for their produce then they will be interested to grow and eat more and more fruits and vegetables which will definitely minimize the diseases and mal-nutrition among our people.

M Alauddin
West Nakal Para, Dhaka

Meetings and works

Sir, In The Daily Star of April 21, Ms Sultana Faizun Nahar in her 'opinion' rightly wondered whether the ghost of Ershad was still there in the BTV. I don't know whether our leaders still feel that by addressing meetings and showing those scenes on Television they would gain popularity.

This is rather a feeble attempt. If they want to be appreciated by general public they must work hard and show results. The leaders who are in government must not waste time by running across the country addressing meetings and making promises which are seldom fulfilled.

The meetings not only waste money but also waste lot of valuable time of many government officers and responsible public. Why don't the leaders stay in office where they can use their time in a much better way by specific discussion and planning to solve the various problems. When people see that genuine and sincere attempts are made to solve their problems then the leaders will surely be loved and respected which will obviously help them to get votes.

People virtually do not bother who is in power. They want peace and progress and whoever can give these shall be voted to power.

A citizen