

Tasks Ahead

Perhaps the most dramatic description of the outcome of her state visit to India was given by the Prime Minister herself when she said that the "ice has melted" in the bilateral relations between our two countries. There is no denying the fact that over the last several years our relations with India had reached an all time low with virtually no useful negotiations taking place in any form. And in the meantime accusations and counter accusations further complicated the relations between the two countries. It is to the credit of Begum Khaleda Zia and to her senior cabinet colleagues, especially Foreign Minister Mustafizur Rahman, that they decided to deal with the thorny Bangladesh-India relations head-on with a direct bilateral contact at the highest political level instead of hiding behind a maze of official and bureaucratic contacts.

Let us face it. There are serious bilateral problems between ourselves and India. But then let us face it also that these problems cannot be solved unless we indulge in serious dialogue. According to reports, four subjects dominated the talks — water sharing, Chakmas, illegal Bangladeshis in India and insurgency against India. Bangladesh never has, nor it is its policy to support the so-called groups like ULFA, Manipur Front etc fighting for independence from India. As for the illegal Bangladeshis, Bangladesh has no knowledge of it and India, no proof. If there is any truth in this, India can impose its immigration laws on any foreigner. As for the Chakmas, Bangladesh has repeatedly said it will accept every one of them. It has now agreed to set up a "representative political committee" to encourage the refugees' return.

That leaves the issue of water sharing. India must realise that it is on this one single issue that relations between Bangladesh and India will either rise or fall. Given the delta origin of our land and the near total dependence on rivers for our way of life, any tempering with the flow of water is bound to have drastic consequences on our economy and more importantly, on our ecology. Bangladesh on its part must recognise that India is an upper riparian country and as such it has its own right to the water of any river that flows for much of its course through its own territory. Therefore the sensible approach — in reality, the only approach — is one of equity, fairness and one that involves as little tempering with nature as possible. And it is here that we find India's response inadequate. From the very first water agreement up till now it has been a slide downward in our share of it.

We would like to feel that all this is a matter of the past. We would like to take Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's statement on face value that Bangladesh will not be made to suffer. There are hopeful signs of flexibility on the Indian side. But the true test of it will come during the negotiations for the interim agreement for the water sharing during the lean period, which is supposed to start within 90 days. It is our hope that the democratic governments on both sides will have a better understanding of this critical issues, as both represent the will of their respective peoples. The first ever dialogue between the two Prime Ministers seems to have gone off well. Our PM is reported to have argued her case well with the Indian side who have been impressed by her depth of feeling. The Indian PM, on the other hand, made a very positive impression on his Bangladesh counterpart about his sincerity and goodwill. Let us do everything possible to build on our initial — however modest — start.

Bengali for BSS

Various aspects of the operation of Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS), the country's largest, state-controlled and tax-payer-financed news agency came up for some healthy scrutiny at the sixth meeting of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Ministry of Information held Saturday. As far as we know of the meeting from reports supplied by BSS itself, the members of the Committee at length discussed issues affecting the agency's efficiency and level of professionalism including posting of correspondents abroad and computerisation of the service.

However, the Committee could have, and indeed should have, taken a decision on a major point which, for reasons known only to officials of the Ministry of Information past and present, has remained mysteriously untackled. The point is this: in a country where Bengali is the one and only state language, and where over 98 per cent of the population speak Bengali as their mother tongue, BSS, even 20 years after the nation's independence, still does not have a Bengali service. The issue in fact goes much deeper than that, and the practical problems faced by the vast majority of BSS's clients — Bengali-language newspapers — due to the agency's English-only service, are huge.

Not only do deskmen at Bengali papers have to translate copies from English to Bengali, wasting valuable time and energy, they also run the risk of becoming unwitting participants in political crises.

For instance at present, a speech given in Bengali by a political leader is reported in English for transmission, which has then to be translated back to Bengali for publication in vernacular newspapers. There is every chance that the speech or parts of it may get distorted as a result of this double-translation. At best, the original meaning or flavour of the comments may be lost in this process.

With Bengali alphabets now in widespread use in every make of computer and printer, there is no reason why BSS should not begin a Bengali-language transmission, at least of events taking place in this country.

This would save time, energy and a lot of possible embarrassment for BSS as well as newspaper deskmen.

The use of Bengali by the state-owned news agency — often called the "national" agency — is not simply a matter of national pride, but also one of practicality. With the long-overdue computerisation of the service, we hope Bengali will also find its rightful place on the wire.

Why Not Land Reform to Alleviate Poverty?

THE Task Force on Poverty Alleviation set up by the Interim Government, indeed very surprisingly, underlined the declining importance of land reform. According to them, the scope of redistributive land reform as a part of the overall strategy of poverty alleviation through asset redistribution appears to be extremely limited in the present context.

Unless it is a city state or economy like Singapore or Hongkong, no country including those now belonging to the NIC category would have been able to sustain high rates of economic growth without a vibrant agriculture sector induced initially through land reform. Without economic growth poverty alleviation would remain a distant mirage in Bangladesh. The value added from agriculture through switch-over to modern varieties, adoption of other yield increasing technologies, substitution of low by high value crops (e. g. from grains to fruits and vegetables) and growing two to three instead of one or two crops each year, the gross value of output from 21 million acres of fertile lands of Bangladesh could be enormously increased.

No doubt the population of Bangladesh will be 140 million cramped within the land area of only 56,000 square miles. Yet as FAO observed as early as 1972, Bangladesh can feed itself at the nutritionally satisfactory rate up until the foreseeable future. On the other

It is the existing land-ownership patterns and tenurial arrangements which pull the nation down to a continuing state of poverty and destitution. What is technically feasible remains practically unattainable and hunger persists in the fertile land.

hand, the average yield of paddy in China or Korea exceed two tons per acre; we have not been able to achieve even half of that level.

To alleviate poverty, the first precondition to be fulfilled is sustainable high rates of growth of agriculture. There is no inherent technological reason why substantially higher agricultural output could not be realised. It is the existing land-ownership patterns and tenurial arrangements which pull the nation down to a continuing state of poverty and destitution. What is technically feasible remains practically unattainable and hunger persists in the fertile land. Our farmlands are one of the most fertile in the world. The region was once legendary for its wealth and abundance. Yet its rice yields are one of the lowest in the world today.

The single most important barrier to increased crop production is scattered land holdings cultivated by those who do not own the land, that is the *bargadars*. Ten per cent of rural families own 70 per cent of the land and half the rural population is landless. No doubt there is not enough land to resolve the enormous problem of massive landlessness. At the same time, the present landownership pattern and *bargadar* system run counter to

high growth agriculture. The ten per cent landed households are not farmers. In fact the better-off rural gentry would feel offended if they are categorised as farmers. They are the rentier class extracting the surplus from the exploitation of the cheap family labour of *bargadars*. It is not because the landed households are by nature exploiters but given the

by either the *bargadar* or directly employed labourers so that they are not owner-operated farmers and the farms are thoroughly unconsolidated since on the average a farm in Bangladesh is divided into 10 to 15 plots spread over an area of one and a half to two square miles.

We need land reform to create around six million such

additional employment in agriculture and new employment in all other sectors.

Land reform must not be viewed only in terms of asset redistribution. There is too little land for too many claimants. But it is a must to create the right conditions for vibrant agriculture conducive to diversification as well as intensification and high growth. Only then the domestic market will expand and local manufacturing can be sustained. Thereafter, the outward strategy of export-led growth will flourish in spite of the increasing competition of the international market.

Land reform preceded the unprecedented economic growth of South Korea and Taiwan in the 1960s. The same was true in case of Japan immediately after the end of the second world war. The latest have been the Chinese reforms where communes were broken down to bring about contract farming system which is almost duplicating the owner-operated small farming system. Thailand and Malaysia were land surplus countries at the early stages of their development. Hence owner-operated or plantation agriculture, as appropriate could be vigorously promoted. In Indonesia, land shortage almost similar to that of Bangladesh, in the 19-

land of Java was obviated through migration or settlement programmes in the outer islands where farmers not land are in short supply. Only Philippines in East Asia failed to get rid of its feudal land-holding system. Thus we find today that all the above mentioned countries are fast becoming industrialised except the Philippines trailing behind with its lagging agriculture sector. The primary emphasis of all these reform business have been promotion of small owner-operated farming enterprises, millions of them, so that agriculture could grow which induced other sectors to grow even faster.

The question therefore is not why land reform but how. Is it feasible without disturbing the social peace and harmony of the countryside? What are means to make the reform acceptable to the rural elite who in fact are the major determinant of future development of Bangladesh?

It is perhaps not unlikely that he leading development thinkers of the country shudder at any prospect of renewed turmoil after what we have gone through since 1971. However, realities must be faced. We have been suffering from the illusion that the best way to solve the land reform problem is to avoid it. Unfortunately, if we continue to avoid it even after two decades of liberation, we will never be able to get rid of our notoriety as the leading least developed country of the world.

WINDOW ON ASIA

Shahed Latif

social values and the norms, they find no alternative to the existing institutional arrangements for crop cultivation. They are rural based but urban biased. They would tend to prefer a lucrative alternative to land based income.

The world over, even in China and the former Soviet Union, it is now well established that the small though not below a critical minimum size, owner-operated, consolidated farms are the most productive for rice-based monsoon agriculture. Our farms in Bangladesh hardly fulfil any one of the above three criteria. Often they are smaller than the ideal small size of two to five acres. Cultivation is carried out

owner-operated consolidated farms out of the estimated cultivable land area of 21 million acres by the year 2,000. This is essential to create the firm basis for 3.5 per cent rate of growth of agriculture sustained over the next 10 to 15 years. If properly followed up through appropriate policies and programmes, this should result in nine per cent growth of the industrial including manufacturing sectors primarily geared to the domestic market. Add to these the labour intensive manufacturing for export; not garments alone but varieties of goods and services. This should be the basic strategy of not only growth but poverty alleviation through creation of

Why the West is Going for Libya

by T Rajamoorthy

The Libyan government is being targeted for destabilisation not really because it has sponsored terrorism but because it has pursued a policy of political and economic independence which is unacceptable to the US and its allies.

Cannistraro, was forced to protest that it was 'outrageous' to pin the whole thing on Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi.

In an article which appeared in the US magazine *Covert Action* in the summer of 1990, Jeff Jones while noting that the widespread view was that Ahmed Jibril was the person responsible for the bombing, also revealed the role of the CIA in the Lockerbie affair. More recently, *Time* magazine in its issue of 27 April 1992 has reiterated the role of Ahmed Jibril and confirmed, in greater detail, the role of the CIA.

It is only proper to note that Ahmed Jibril has himself denied responsibility for this attack and that the main reason for suspecting him of being involved in the Pan Am bombing is the similarity of the Pan Am bomb with one found by the West German police during a raid in October 1988 in a suspected hideout of a pro-PFLP-GC group in West Germany. However, the point is that, even if one does not accept this alternative version, there are strong grounds for holding the view that the US case against Libya is wholly suspect and is politically motivated.

Coming now to the position in international law, it is important to note that there is no legal basis whatsoever for the US demand that Libya hand over its two nationals for trial in the US or Britain. There is no extradition treaty between Libya and the US or Britain and it is settled law that, in the absence of such a treaty, extradition cannot be demanded as a matter of right.

Libya is however obliged under the 1971 Montreal Convention to apprehend and prosecute any person who is guilty of any act against the safety of civil aviation. This obligation, Libya has fully discharged. When the West made

its allegations against them, Libya arrested the two suspects in question and appointed a magistrate to inquire into the case. It duly notified the US and Britain of this move and asked them to furnish the charges and evidence against the suspects.

Both the Governments of these states, however, refused to furnish such evidence. Libya then invited these nations to send their own judges, with the evidence to Tripoli to participate in a trial there but this proposal was again rejected. Although Libya is not legally obliged to entertain the US demand for extradition, it has proposed a variety of compromises to resolve the issue. It has suggested that the matter be settled by international arbitration, or by reference to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the Hague. It has proposed that the suspects be tried in a neutral, third country and more recently, it even offered to hand them over to the Arab League.

Each and every one of these eminently reasonable proposals has been rejected by the US, which has insisted that the suspects be extradited. The refusal of Libya to accede to this demand for trial in the US or Scotland is founded on the most cogent of all legal grounds: that in the prevailing climate of anti-Libyan (and anti-Gaddafi) hysteria in these countries, it will be impossible for the two suspects to obtain a fair trial.

When all its efforts came to nought, Libya applied to the ICJ in the Hague for a ruling to

determine the question as to which country had the jurisdiction under the Montreal Convention to try the alleged offenders — a move consonant with Article 14 of the Montreal Convention. Further, in view of moves by the US and its allies to take this matter to the UN Security Council and thereby scuttle these efforts by Libya to have the matter resolved judicially, Libya also applied for interim relief, that is, for an injunction to restrain the US and its allies from proceeding with any such moves pending the decision of the Court. The Court heard arguments from both sides and reserved judgement.

On 14 April 1992, the Court delivered its judgement on Libya's application for interim relief. By a majority decision of 11-5, it rejected Libya's application for an injunction. The reasons advanced by the Court for denying such interim relief are highly dubious but what must be emphasised (in view of the attempts by the US media to distort the implications of this judgement) is that the Court's decision related only to the application for interim relief. The Court has yet to decide on the main question as to which country has the jurisdiction under the Montreal Convention to try the two Libyan suspects.

Even while they were resisting the Libyan moves in the ICJ, the US and its allies had already taken the necessary measures to have the whole issue determined by the UN Security Council. Given their political, economic and military

dominance in the world today, they obviously had little difficulty in mustering the necessary support to have Resolution 748 passed. Third World nations in the Security Council such as China, India and Zimbabwe which expressed serious reservations were simply 'persuaded' by a judicious combination of threats and bribes to abstain rather than vote against the resolution.

It is instructive to examine Resolution 748 as it reveals not only the extent to which the issues have been distorted but the almost infinite capacity of the US and its allies to manipulate them. The original demand by the US and its allies was merely to extradite the two suspects for trial in the US or Britain. But the scope of Resolution 748 has not been limited to only that demand. The resolution also requires Libya to cooperate with French authorities in the investigation into the bombing of a French UTA flight over Niger in September 1989 — a process which will almost certainly entail the handing over to the French authorities for questioning of four Libyans (including a brother-in-law of Gaddafi) suspected of being involved in this particular bombing.

As if this were not bad enough, the resolution goes further and stipulates that Libya must promptly, by concrete action, demonstrate its renunciation of terrorism.

It is now clear that what began as a demand for the extradition for trial of two Libyan nationals has now been turned into a full scale indictment of the Libyan State and Government for terrorism. There is of course no question of proving this charge. Libya has already been found guilty of terrorism

by the Security Council and the onus has been shifted to her to show 'concrete actions' that she has renounced such terrorism.

As Erskine Childers, a retired senior advisor to the UN Secretary General, has pointed out, what 'concrete actions' Libya has to take to demonstrate that she has renounced terrorism 'is not specified' so much as a half sentence. It will thus be open to Western powers to claim, regardless of whatever steps the Libyan Government takes, that such steps are inadequate to prove her renunciation of terrorism. As in the case of the Gulf war resolutions, it will be open to the Western powers to define and re-define what they mean and they will be able to hold the country for ransom as long as they wish.

It should be clear from all this that the real object of the US and the West is not to bring some suspected terrorists to justice, but to topple the Government of Libya. The real target is Colonel Gaddafi, not terrorism. And if the regime of Colonel Gaddafi is being targeted for destabilisation, it is not because it has sponsored terrorism but because it has pursued a policy of political and economic independence which is unacceptable to the US and the West.

It is important to note that since this resolution was passed under Section VII of the UN Charter, it can, like Resolution 678 in the Gulf crisis, be enforced through military action. The danger is that the US and its allies will use this legal device as a pretext to launch a full scale war on the Libyan people. Such a development will be a threat not only to the sovereignty of Libya but to the entire Third World. — *Third World Network Features*

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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.

Counter service

Sir, I would like to air through your column an important matter drawing the attention of the organisations which are offering counter services that the behaviour of most of the counter people are rough and not polite. In some cases, the employees on counter use harsh words and harass the customers. Most counter people are reluctant to perform their duties or, unwilling to offer services to the members of the public for which they are being employed and paid. Often these people would be seen chatting with colleagues or smoking cigarettes. Most countermen would say 'not available' when someone asks for something to buy, although the article, if searched for, would be found 'available' in his box or drawers. There are only a few counter personnel who would provide change or return the coins.

May I request the authorities to look into the above

matters and depute only those who are gentle in manners and polite in behaviour and above all, possess perseverance.

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

Whither patriots?

Sir, We were Pakistanis more than two decades ago. Now we are Bangladeshis. Bengali is our mother language. But now the most easy introduction of ours is that we are inactive, incompetent and to an extent shameless nation. Yet we have achieved our freedom by heroism. We were then active, patriot and had special pride. But immediately after achieving the freedom we have drifted away in corruption.

Now-a-days we see chaos, conflict and unpatriotic act everywhere. We want to enjoy fruits without working.

And now, after achieving democracy, if the ruling party

really wants to do some good to the country, the opposition party opposes it. I do not accuse only present AL. This process has remained from many years ago. And for this we cannot change our lot even after more than two decades of winning freedom. We must have to be real patriots.

Unemployment

Sir, According to census report of last year, the total population of our country is approximately 109 million. A large number of people are directly or indirectly dependant on others. These dependant people are called unemployed. The number of these unemployed people is increasing at an alarming rate. Only the government just cannot arrange for employment of so many people. So we should ourselves come forward to solve the problem.

It is a fact that we are very inactive. We look for only government service. There is a proverb that God helps those who help themselves. We who are unemployed should try to begin our career somehow or other. All of us know that President Abraham Lincoln began his career as a cobbler's son, John Major as a bus-conductor or Nazrul Islam as a

bread-baker. We fight shy of doing petty works. But in Western countries a university student does not feel a little shame in cleaning dishes at a hotel or to shine shoes. We must should follow such instances.

In this context, I want to say that those with ways and means in our society should come forward with some solution. They can set up new schools industries or any other place of work where a large number of unemployed can be engaged. This will solve not only the unemployment problem considerably but also add to the development of our country significantly. In that case, government should also be pragmatic.

Akter Uzzaman
West Dhanmondi, Dhaka.

British Council

Sir, I went to the British Council library during the post-hartal hour on 18th May. To my utter surprise I saw the library closed. I can't imagine how an institution like British Council can also run in such an indiscipline way. It seemed that the library staff converted a half day hartal into a "full day" one by themselves!

Dr Munirul Islam
DMCH

OPINION

Begum Khaleda Zia and a Welfare Budget

Shahabuddin Mahtab

In a couple of weeks or so Mr Saifur Rahman will be presenting the national budget for the year 1992-1993. This occasion will be an acid test for the government, to prove itself; as this budget comes at a period when the Government of Begum Khaleda Zia had a full year to itself, to overview, examine and formulate the economic imperatives of the country. If their is any slip, inaction and a hesitancy to choose the hard options, the hopes of the three fourth of our people, who live amidst squalor, dirt and poverty will simply be dashed. The intelligentsia and the middle class population, who have faith and support for the Government will be disappointed and dispirited.

Begum Sheikh Hasina Wajed has clearly stated, that the Awami League is for the establishment of a market economy. The position brings the two parties closer, in so far as the political philosophy is concerned. But what the two parties do in actual parties, will be closely observed by the rank and file.

Unalloyed capitalism will never succeed in any country of the world now. All people

must have 'Dal Bhat' as our Prime Minister has asserted repeatedly, and also the basic needs. The welfare budget which we visualize, must make a beginning now. The 'people's budget' which was presented to the Indian Parliament by the then Finance Minister of the Interim Government, Nawa-bzada Liaquat Ali Khan was hailed by all excepting a self seeking greedy section of the people.

Before the budget is actually presented let there be a national consensus on the basis of continuous and meaningful dialogues, primarily between the Awami League and the Government, and furthermore with the Chambers and the national level labour leaders.

In the course of only one year Prime Minister Narasimha Rao and his outstanding Finance Minister, Dr Monomohan Singh, have turned the economy of India in a positive way and a minority government at that.

The people have waited and waited, and the Government has now a compulsive duty to rise to the occasion. BNP has the mandate of the people and if needed the Prime Minister can go direct to the people.