

WASA's Big Water Deal

The Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (WASA), Dhaka, has at last made a point that it is alive to the perennial water problem facing this ever expanding city. Its readiness to solve the water crisis has been demonstrated through the completion of a study report envisaging a long-term plan and starting another survey aimed to introduce a computerised billing system. The fact that WASA has also launched a special drive at the same time to realise its outstanding bills to the tune of Tk 30 crore from the consumers is, let us hope, a further indication of its seriousness to be equal to the task.

By the look of it, it certainly is an ambitious programme. But considering the different phases for its implementation and over as long a period as 28 years, it looks quite pragmatic and achievable. Conducted at a cost of Tk two and a half crore, all of which is French donation, the report however has recommended for increasing the water supply by an additional 35 crore gallons to meet the demand. For a city of seven million, that amount is ideal but the city dwellers have grown to do with much less. At present the need has been estimated at 26 to 28 crore gallons daily but the water supplied amounts to only 14 crore gallons, so the optimum use of water can wait for sometime.

To begin with, the first step involving the second water treatment plant with a 20-crore-gallon capacity is going to be taken soon for completion by the year 1995. Evidently, the urgent need has not been overlooked and the initial production by the proposed plant although will be only five crore gallons, it sounds quite rational. We hope, the target set will be achieved on schedule, i.e. by the year 2020. Such a programme that looks beyond the immediate needs will surely call for co-operation and even some sacrifices from the people which they should be ready to extend and do.

Still, it is not the public who really let the services down. Despite their not-too-rational use of the services and facilities, they can at best be considered a minor partner in the overall contribution to the mess. What is awfully alarming is the rate of system loss that ranges in between 45 to 50 per cent. One per cent system loss, according to WASA Chairman, Group Captain (Retd) Nurul Islam, causes Tk 40 lakh loss to the organisation. This points to the fact that the organisation has to incur, due to the problem, a huge loss that can and ought to be brought down to an insignificant percentage point — if not totally eliminated. Of the system loss, 20 per cent, according to the WASA Chairman, is 'technical loss' and 30 per cent 'non-technical loss.' This is quite revealing because on both the counts, the performances have been deplorable. The century-old water supply facilities are not expected to perform any better. Misuse by consumers and under-billing by a section of the WASA employees are the other serious problems plaguing this utility service.

Not all of these are avoidable but certainly most of them are. That indicates the need for bringing the house in order for a most effective and efficient supply and bill collection system preferably through integration of the two with other related agencies of the government, namely the Dhaka Electric Supply Authority (DESA) and the Dhaka Municipal Corporation. This is essential because its steady and smooth service can be ensured if only those agencies are supportive and complementary. But a greater fear looms large in that we have quite often been a witness to grand projects going up in smoke for no fault of the plans themselves but because of the absence of back-up measures. We sincerely hope, the programmes taken up by WASA this time will prove their worth up to the last through their successful implementation.

Mouthful of Shampoo

When a doctor prescribes mouthfuls of shampoo — no matter what the ailments are — there is every reason to suspect if the medical man is in the right frame of his mind. But if all the prescriptions continue to be similar in nature, it surely transpires that the man in question might be pretending to be what he is not. What is however still more surprising is the fact that a quack — if he is fit to be called so — of such serious mental disorder can continue practising for at least six months in, of all places of the wide world, the British Isle. Muhammad Saeed, remorseless as he is, claims to have a practising record for over as long as 30 years and that too, astonishingly enough, without any medical qualifications whatsoever. It is however not clear where he did the practising. If it is in England, the record is expected to stand for long.

Serious errors in more than 250 prescriptions by Saeed have so far been detected only over a six-month period. If the man is right in his claim, he should have ended up with another record for making such prescriptions over his long 30-year practising time. Such a fabulous achievement apart, he has however not been very particular about the number of patients he cured or killed by his special treatment during his long service as a doctor (!) quack or whatever you would like to call him. Saeed may have advised his patients to rub cough medicine on their skin and to take tablets by the spoonful, he gives the impression that he is, nonetheless, unperturbed by the charges brought against him that he has obtained money by pretences and property by deception.

In the oriental societies where magic, myth, mystery and ignorance combine to create a favourable ground for men like Saeed to enjoy a thriving business, Saeed may have quite a number of his rivals. It will not even be surprising if this man himself has exported the quackery from the East to the West. If it is so, the West, Britain in particular, might be ready to receive some of these oriental vices — notwithstanding their unpleasantness — with the increasing number of migrants from the East, specially the subcontinent. No offence meant.

HERE was neither any iron ore nor any tradition of metallurgy in South Korea. Yet during the very early stage of industrial development, the strategic visionaries of the country led by President Park himself laid the foundation of the Pohang Steel Mill and so began the phenomenal expansion of metal working, engineering, machine tools, ship-building and automobile industries, competing successfully with Japanese manufacturers all over the world. It is on record that the World Bank opposed the steel project. But the vision of an industrialised Korea not only relentlessly pursued the Korean leaders but they were successful in realising their goals through painstaking efforts following the most appropriate path of growth and development.

How did the Korean leaders arrive at the strategic conclusion of promoting the steel based industrial growth strategy? Well, the country is blessed with highly disciplined, industrious workforce practically all literate and willing to learn new things. Defence preparedness was of utmost importance and a domestic armament production base is of considerable priority. Hence steel-making and metal working industries were necessary. Moreover, after Japan Korea was an early starter to find the markets for their steel, machine tools, ships and automobiles elsewhere in Asia in particular. Koreans therefore concluded in favour of the particular strategy since the literate workforce could quickly acquire the knowhow and disciplined hard worked would ensure high levels of productivity to become com-

Needed — the Strategic Vision

petitive. Above all, national security goals must be fulfilled at all cost.

Singapore Technocrats

The Singapore technocrats very early realised the strategic advantage of its location between the middle-east oil producers and Japan, the largest oil importing country of the world. Also to the south (Indonesia) and the north (Malaysia), oil rich nations exist. Petroleum refining, oil drilling and exploration equipment as well as related service industries have therefore been very successfully promoted. Due to location again Singapore has emerged as the leading port of Asia like Rotterdam as the Europort for common market countries.

Unless the country is resource rich when development choices become obvious, the strategic vision of the development scenario that should sequentially unfold is of utmost importance. However, it is not only endowment of natural resources, its skillful use is significantly more important. Brazil is also resource rich, its skillful use is significantly more important. Brazil is also resource rich but its success rating is lower than that of many Asian economies. The strategic vision is still very important.

In 1950 as much as 70 per cent of the land area of Thailand was under forest. Within the next 20 years it was reduced to 20 per cent only. What happened was a massive expansion of agriculture through owner-operated farming. Thailand in no time became leading producer of

sugar, animal feed, pineapple and shrimp.

Similarly in Malaysia, vast tracts of virgin lands were opened up for palm oil plantation, Indonesia very early realised that over-dependency on export of oil alone would not enable it to succeed in development. Hence the strategic choice was made to cleverly utilise the oil revenue to promote small-holders' agri-

vision of the strategic vision for nation's development which crucially determine whether future will consist of everlasting glories or peter down to continuing deprivations. Politically astute leaders of our country in the past propelled the people to fight and secure their independence. In the very recent past, the nation's leader successfully struggled against autocracy and restored

point from which the strategy has to be created off, not by professionals alone but by a combination of technocrats and political leaders of all denominations so that there is a national consensus of what should be the Nation's Strategic Vision.

If we analyse the recent economic success cases of South-east and East Asia, then also we can glean out the vital pointers indicative of the alternative directions on which we can move. Of course, we must take due note of the fact that the ultimate direction must have a solid indigenous basis. No two situations are similar. The Bangladesh case is the most serious challenge to the development planners, anytime anywhere in the world. South-east Asia is resource rich which we are not. Our situation is closely akin to Korea but without the disciplined and literate workforce. Neither do we enjoy the locational advantage of Singapore or Hongkong.

But it is not what we do not have is of primary relevance. It is infinitely more important to envision what advantages we can create and secure for ourselves on a stable, long-run basis so that the goods and services produced by the industrialising economy along with a rapidly expanding agriculture sector could find the ready market. As a result, high rates of growth of the economy could be maintained for at least the next 10 if not 20 years.

Battle on Economic Fields
The political battle hence-

forth in Bangladesh ought to be fought on the economic fields. No doubt the battle started on the political front to remove authoritarianism. This has been well done. However, to restore democracy in its rightful place, the initiatives to resolve the severe economic problems afflicting the Nation must be undertaken without further delay.

Somehow the vital relationship between politics and economics is not well appreciated by the politicians. This is apparent from the proceedings of the Jatiyo Sangsad where the agonizing fact that we are a least developed country and must act with all the urgency that it deserves, hardly found a mention thus far.

Unless the scourges of poverty have been removed, democracy can never be truly achieved. Soon we would revert back to authoritarian rule unless the process of deindustrialisation, which inevitably accompanied the earlier regime, has also been reversed onto the growth oriented directions. Voted into power does not mean automatic inflow of dollars and a rising per capita income.

For this purpose, support of the World Bank as well as year-end bumper harvest are necessary but are not sufficient to generate the required pre-conditions. What we need most urgently now is the strategic vision of what the government must do and how to do what must be done. This would bolster the people to act as the united force of the nation on the economic front in the same way the people reacted on the political front during the call of independence of 1971.

WINDOW ON ASIA

Shahed Latif

culture, plantations and labour intensive industries, particularly textile.

Myanmar Instance

Compare at the same time the situation in neighbouring Burma, nowadays called Myanmar. The country is double the size of Thailand with half of their population and loaded with mineral and energy resources including gemstones, rare elsewhere in the world. A Burmese expatriate friend of mine told me that his was the only country in the world where shrimps die a natural death and even the other day, valuable timbers were used as fuelwood.

It is obviously the total lack of strategic vision from which Burma, one of Asia's most resource-rich countries, is badly suffering for the last three decades. As a matter of fact, it is not the natural resource base but the people and how they are led by their leaders through their constant persua-

the Government of the people. But what next?

Once installed at Bangabhaban, the party in power seem to come to the end of the journey, not realizing that it is the beginning of the end until and unless they come up with the strategic vision of development. The opposition also seem to be equally bankrupt. It is extremely distressing but true that the political leaders both in position and in opposition did not give out any evidence of the desired meaningful as well as comprehensive national development programme as the direct manifestation of the strategic vision.

Task Force Report

Given this dismal situation the very substantial Task Force reports prepared through the initiative of the Planning Minister of the Interim Government could usefully fill the void of zero vision. The reports constitute a very good starting

Election Strengthens Tehran's Pragmatism

Michael Jansen writes from Nicosia

In the recent Iranian election president Hashemi Rafsanjani won a comfortable victory, securing 200 of the 270 seats, while the Islamic radicals won only 15. He has shown pragmatism in foreign and domestic policies and rejected Ayatollah Khomeini's "Islamic socialism." But Rafsanjani's reforms could be reversed because of his adherence to the Imam's external policies.



PRESIDENT HASHEMI RAFSANJANI Supports 'Islamic capitalism'

Iran has rejected the "Islamic socialism" of Ayatollah Khomeini, in the first parliamentary election since the Imam's death in 1989. Instead, Iranian people have opted for the "Islamic capitalism" of President Hashemi Rafsanjani.

Although the electorate demonstrated a clear preference for Rafsanjani's candidates in the first round of voting, it was in May's second round that they gave a landslide victory to the president's supporters.

They won 200 of the 270 seats in parliament (the majlis) while strict adherents of the "Imam's line" — led by Khomeini's son Ahmad, former Interior Minister Ali Akbar Mohtashemi and the speaker of the sitting majlis, Mehdi Karrubi — secured only 15.

The dramatic fall from 160 seats to only five surprised even Mohtashemi who, after his elimination in the first round, predicted that his faction would retain 50-55 seats.

In the key Tehran constituency all the seats were won by Rafsanjani supporters, which should ensure Rafsanjani's re-election in 1993.

Although this election, the fourth since the Islamic revolution in 1979, had more candidates, it was still restricted. In Islamic Iran, political parties are said to divide the community (umma), so only independents were permitted to stand. Supporters of the banned parties which participated in the overthrow of the Shah were excluded.

The regime's 12-man Council of Guardians also excluded 1,091 would-be candidates on grounds of incompetence, unsuitability or corruption. Among these were the members of a fundamentalist faction who were permitted to

round and the rest were decided in the run-offs a month later.

Rafsanjani's landslide was, to a certain extent, diminished by the fact that in both stages a large proportion of the electorate abstained, because of apathy or confusion or antipathy to the turbaned mullahs who rule in Tehran.

In this election, as in previous polls, the proportion of clerics elected was reduced and the number of educated laymen and technocrats increased. Clerics now comprise less than one-third of the majlis.

The Islamic radicals were routed because the economic structures established by the Imam failed to give the masses of Iran's poor the just, equitable and moral Islamic society promised by Khomeini when he came to power.

The economy of the Islamic Republic did not serve the interests of the "dispossessed." Instead the poor grew poorer while the clerics grew rich.

Commenting on the defeat of the adherents of the "Imam's line," the Tehran Times wrote: "This is the fate of those who do not live in their time and century, those who do not meet the needs of the people."

Having failed themselves, the radicals used their 60 per cent majority in the majlis to obstruct and delay Rafsanjani's

legislation, which was designed to deregulate trade and dismantle the state monopoly in the oil industry, to open up channels of communication with the West and to ease social restrictions.

The new majlis, convened on May 28, is expected to speed these reforms, enabling Iran to secure foreign finance for development and joint venture capital and to bring back some of the 200,000 emigres, many of whom are technocrats and businessmen.

However, securing control of the majlis is only the first step towards building "Islamic capitalism" in Iran. Rafsanjani's next task will be to root out obstructive and incompetent clerics from the bureaucracy and establish an efficient administration.

Rafsanjani is under popular pressure to create more jobs, produce more goods at lower prices and provide essential services, demands for which have led to demonstrations during the past two years.

His drive for internal reforms could also run into problems because of his continuing adherence to the fundamentals of the Imam's external policies that antagonise the West.

The president is committed to rebuilding Iran's military power, diminished during the eight-year war with Iraq, and reasserting Iran's influence both in the region and

the Muslim world.

Since the end of the Iran-Iraq war in 1988, Tehran has reportedly invested \$19 billion in its armed forces at a rate of \$2 billion a year in hard currency and the rest in barter or internal purchases.

Now that Iraq has been removed by the Gulf war as the regional counterweight, Iran is once again the major local power. And to ensure future predominance, Tehran is co-operating with Russian and Chinese scientists in the development of missile and nuclear technology.

Excluded from post-Gulf war regional security arrangements by the West, Iran is attempting to exert its local influence by both diplomacy and force.

Tehran has dispatched high-ranking missions to the emirates and used its superior

power to intimidate small Arab neighbours. In April, Iranian forces expelled Arab residents from the island of Abu Musa, which is owned by the United Arab Emirates.

Furthermore, the Rafsanjani regime has adapted — not abandoned — the Imam's policy of exporting Iran's Islamic Revolution, sending Revolutionary Guards to bolster the Islamist junta in Sudan, funding Islamists in Algeria and sustaining the Lebanese Shia Hizbollah movement in its war to liberate Lebanese territory still occupied by Israel.

Recently, Rafsanjani launched a campaign to win hearts and minds in the Muslim republics of Central Asia and Caucasus.

As deeply suspicious of Western intentions as the Imam, Rafsanjani opposes the growth of Western influence in the Gulf and the US-sponsored Middle East peace process.

A pragmatic capitalist internally, Rafsanjani remains committed to the Imam's Islamic revolution.

— GEMINI NEWS
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OPINION

Education and the Nation

Shahabuddin Mahtab

The function of the University is not simply to teach bread winning, or to furnish teachers for the public schools or to be centre of polite society; it is, above all, to be an organ of that fine adjustment between real life and the growing knowledge, an adjustment which forms the secret of civilization". WEB DU BOIS.

The esteemed readers would perhaps excuse me for this rather lengthy quotation. But this one depicts very tersely the role of life, living and education.

What is the education scenario in Bangladesh today? Does it prepare us for life and a living? Does it prepare us to think for ourselves? Or does it all lead us to be a zombie or a blockhead. We leave it to our readers to find the answers.

On May 20th Professor Mohammad Ali in a post-editorial, in an English language daily succinctly indicated some of the important reasons for the collapse of university education in Bangladesh, and his stated reasons can equally be applied to the primary, secondary and higher secondary education. Professor Mohammad Ali said, "Gradual loss of the command of English in the new entrants to the university severely limit their access to the resources of the university". He went on further to say, "I state in unequivocal terms that the status of English as a second language has got to be recognised by our academic establishment, by making necessary reforms of the syllabuses at Secondary, and also at University levels".

In the opinion column of an esteemed Bengali daily, on May 24th, Ms Magnolia Rahman importantly pointed out that we are running our whole educational system with untrained teachers (barring a very few),

who have not learned the very art and science of teaching methodology. The ten teachers' training colleges and the IER do not even touch the top of the iceberg. She has stated some hard facts, regarding the enormous wastage of our very scarce resources.

When the educational system is riddled with inefficiency, corruption, apathy and indifference, what good can the nation expect from it? We need people with the required qualifications at the appropriate places, and not the inappropriate persons at the top places, whose chief qualifications, as alleged and also experienced, are unsurpassed sympathy and canvassing.

Our educational institutions should be the abode of peace and tranquility, where the mind will open up to great heights, to lead the nation to its right destination. We still have hopes, because without hope life has no meaning.

We all just close here by taking the example of Japan. It has reached a stage where it has the capacity to translate into the Japanese language almost all the knowledge and treasures of the world (and are actually doing so). In our case we have not translated into Bengali perhaps even one per cent (a hazardous guess though) of the world's knowledge.

Our mother tongue is one of the finest in the world and our treasures of knowledge have been translated in many parts of the world. The Bengali language is a part of our life and living, and it will flourish on its own. But let us not close our doors and windows to the world's treasure house of knowledge, at a time when science and technology is the life blood of a nation, and these are progressing in an almost lightning speed.

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.

Dhaka-Delhi joint communique

Sir, The much publicised Khaleda-Rao meet in New Delhi has not virtually produced any tangible result. The joint communique issued at the end of the three-day state visit of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia to India is nothing very positive.

Assurances, and more verbal assurances since 1975 but not a drop of water. Over last twenty thousand years the Ganges has been flowing peacefully and gently quenching the thirst of millions and providing the people with their means of livelihood — cultivation of crops and employment. The Aryans came and drove the Dravidians to the south, the Greeks invaded and withdrew, King Ashoka reigned in 3rd century BC, Chandra Gupta in 4th century AD, then the Arabs, the Turks, the Afghans, the Moguls and the British came but none changed the course of the Ganges. But Indra Gandhi did it unilaterally.

All the major rivers of the sub-continent — the Indus, the Ganges, and the Brahmaputra — originate from the plateau of Tibet and the Himalayas. The Ganges does not belong to India alone. The Bangladesh-India Ganges water dispute cannot be solved bilaterally due to dilly-dallying of Delhi at the cost of millions of Bangladeshis. India and Pakistan could not solve their Indus river water dispute bilaterally. They could solve the dispute through the good offices of the World Bank.

The supply of water in the Bangladesh side of the Ganges river was 100,000 cusecs. After operation of the Farakka Barrage in India it was 44,000 cusecs. In 1977 it was reduced to 34,000 cusecs. It was further reduced to 27,000 cusecs in 1983 and now, in 1992, India is supplying only 13,000 cusecs of water in violation of all international norms, rules and laws. We can no longer wait and rely on the quibbling of the Indian leaders. We have tried again and again persistently for the solution bilaterally but due to reasons best known to Indian leaders they have deprived us of our legitimate right to the Ganges water.

As a free and sovereign state, we must now raise the issue in the different international forums and mobilize the world public opinion for our survival before it is too late.

O H Kabir
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'Arms and our future'

Sir, I have gone through Mr M A Haq's thought-evoking letter 'Arms and our future' Dt 26.5.92 in response to my letter captioned 'Commonmen with guns' in your daily on 13th May. I extend my sincere thanks and honour to him.

Doubtlessly, the disapproval of this gentleman to arm commonman is carried well by both examples and logic. I fully share his points of view. I, too, believe by heart that violence can only enkindle violence. In the face of ever-growing lawlessness and re-emergence of barbaric medieval cruelty, the proposition to arm the commonman by me, is a ventilation of helplessness, grievances and a protest against those who are to vanguard commonmen's interests.

Despite my awareness of

horrendous happenings in the western world at liberalism in arming commonmen in the name of self-defence, having seen and experienced the ignorance of people's request to disarm the criminals, I commented just in reverse what I believe in heart. And I feel honoured that at least one gentleman has positively thought about it and given a prudent response.

As to Mr M A Haq's suggestion for alternative political leadership, I would rather say that something monstrously devastating has entered into our social value system. Presently we have an elected democratic government, but without efforts one can see that there is no basic difference between the preceding autocratic government and the present one. The same is true for the opposition too. These people are busy accumulating their share, examples need not be mentioned, known to all.

I register my fond greetings and humble thanks to Mr M A Haq and you for pursuing my letter 'Commonmen with guns'.

Hope my grievances and the opinion of Mr M A Haq will receive due attention from the appropriate authorities revising their usual habit of pretentious unawareness and wilful overlooking.

Vox populi