

Consolidating Bangladesh-Pakistan Relations

Three issues were high on Bangladesh's agenda during Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's just concluded visit to Pakistan. These were getting repatriation process started, reaching an understanding on the assets and liabilities question and promoting trade, commerce and investment between the two countries. Of the three, two related to events of the past and the third with forging ahead towards the future. The challenge to our Prime Minister was to balance the two so that the just and legitimate demands of Bangladesh were sufficiently pushed forward while the prospect of future trade and investment received the necessary focus. The Prime Minister's handling of the three issues was deft and forward looking.

Begum Zia knew that an absence of any clear progress on the repatriation question would be politically embarrassing for her. She was firm in her dealing with it, forcing the Pakistanis to come up with a clear and time-bound plan of action. While we welcome this step forward and commended our prime minister for gaining it, we must at the same time point out that 3,000 out of 2.38 lakhs, and that also after five months, is not exactly what we would call a 'dramatic' development. We understand the political constraints of the Pakistani Premier, but still it has to be remembered that the issue is two decades old and that the more time passes, the more complicated it gets. The plan for constructing 42,000 flats is another positive step but we are afraid that lack of progress in finishing them — for whatever reason — may become an additional excuse for delaying the process. We again understand that repatriation will be phase-wise. But even there a time table — say three thousand every three months, or something similar — would have given the present accord further strength.

Assets and liabilities is an issue which is quite unpalatable to the Pakistani side and they would rather have us forget it. Bangladesh has kept it up, but not as strongly as perhaps was necessary. Hence after more than two decades the issue has lost some of its immediacy and bite. Under these circumstances, it is to the credit of Mrs. Zia's negotiators that some commitment to examine the issue 'expeditiously' has been extracted from the Pakistani side.

It is in the area of future economic relations between the two countries that the visit can be said to have been most productive. Genuine efforts were made by both the parties to expand trade and commerce between the two countries. The proposed special teams to be headed by commerce ministers from the two countries should prove to be useful. It needs to be pointed out here that both sides, by now, know what items can be traded between the two countries. The need is for concrete policy decisions concerning these items. For example, there has been a recent rise in duty on Bangladeshi tea, a large quantity of which Pakistan is also importing from Kenya. Here is an instance where a policy decision would help increase the volume of trade between our two countries. There is also sufficient scope to increase import of jute from us. Here again Pakistan must take the necessary policy decision to promote our export of jute. It is our hope that following the meeting between the two leaders, whatever policy lacunae there was will now be eliminated.

This first official visit of our Prime Minister has definitely improved our already close relations with Pakistan. The trip has helped to bring out the underlying commonalities in our approach to regional and global issues, especially the need to strengthen SAARC and give this regional body a more useful and effective role.

Neither Here nor There

Voluntary sterilisation plummeted to a rock-bottom low of 165,000 in 1990-91 from the spectacular peak of 5.5 lakh it hit in 1983-84. This was revealed the other day after surveys undertaken by three competent organisations. The reports giving such an apparently alarming finding also list a number of factors contributing to the fall. The list includes both a happy growth in stress on use of pills, condoms and injectibles and a disheartening shrinkage in FP extension service. In fine, although after its perusal it doesn't anymore seem to be that alarming, the results of the finding with all the pains and funds that went into it lead to neither here nor there.

Only a dependable check on the number of conceptions or, making it easier — of births both live and otherwise in the year in question — 1990-91 that is — can tell us whether the slide in voluntary sterilisation has been on the whole a good thing or bad. That figure would, of necessity, be worked out through some statistical rigmarole and not basing on actual registration of births. So, back to square number one we go. And this thing in which we are abominably stuck up is literally a matter of life and death for us. The matter of population and keeping it within healthful limits. It had steadily been getting out of hands for decades on end. Now, in spite of the government's persistent claims of going towards a 2 per cent growth per annum, we know it for certain that the compound growth rate, even if falling, does not signify any fall in growth of people in absolute numbers. And the nightmare continues for those who care.

Social researches based mainly on enumerative surveys are designed and undertaken with a view to getting a dependably objective position-paper on the state of the society. This is vitally needed to make all kinds of macro-level decisions addressed to changing the society for better and eliminating factors that stand in the way. The finding in question could have been of immense value only if the supporting figures of those switching over to other modes of contraception were there — and finally the tab on the result of it all, the effect on actual births, was there. In the absence of those — we keep on roaming the wilderness of ignorance.

One important factor has been overlooked by the joint survey report. One is certain that in the '83-84 peak figure of 5.5 lakh a fat percentage of 'volunteers' were no volunteers at all. Doesn't the fall in '90-91 also reflect a happy fall in these false entries? Who knows?

We are spending a lot of money in FP exercises. We are allowing delicate social fabric to take a fatal drubbing all in order to show that we are seriously in the business of using the condom and taking the pill. And we have no way as yet to know where we stand and what we ought to do next.

A giant rival, Star TV, has appeared on the scene to give Doordarshan, the state-owned TV network, a virtual run for its money. At stake is the growing market in India where some 200 million middle-class households and millions more rural viewers could be the easy target of TV stations and consequently advertisers.

For Doordarshan, which broadcasts to about 150 million viewers almost 11 hours a day across the country using some 500 transmitters and some 300 regional stations, Star TV is a direct challenge.

In contrast, Star TV, the Hong Kong-based satellite network, offers as many as five channels around the clock. There are music videos from MTV, news from the British Broadcasting Corporation, family entertainment showing syndicated and American programmes and sports.

The man behind the Star TV is a young Hong Kong businessman, Richard Li. Star TV's signals are beamed across Asia via Asiasat I which is owned by Cable and Wireless and China.

Star TV has a trump card. It has the final authority to say who can beam international broadcasts on Asiasat which covers 38 countries as far as Russia, the Middle East, China, Taiwan, Japan, the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia.

The kind of opposition Doordarshan TV network faces

is obvious from the fact that Star TV was set up only a couple of years ago with a budget of US\$ 300 million. Three big-time organisations, Prime, MTV and BBC, have supplied the software. Some 50 advertisers have given the backup support for two years. Advertising costs are low.

The interesting thing, analysts say, is that some 1.8 million Asian households are already receiving Star TV broadcasts. According to a marketing survey conducted on behalf of Star TV, it will reach more than 3 million households by the end of 1992. And the biggest markets are going to be in India and Taiwan.

Indian cable TV operators have eagerly responded to Star TV. Right now, some quarter million households are receiving Star TV programmes in the urban areas.

And this number is growing every day.

Cable operators believe that one of the best aspects of Star TV is the constant stream of entertainment. "They are flooding the viewers with so many serials, at least three movies in 24 hours, top sports programmes and certainly the BBC which provides round-the-clock news service as well as in-depth programmes. This is a virtual challenge to government television either to improve its programme or, perhaps, vanish from the scene," says one cable operator.

Now media watchers say Star TV may launch subscriber-based services to cable operators, who will also use locally-produced programmes for consumers in a particular market. And a South Asian Hindi channel is to be launched before the end of the year.

Stephen Moss, Star TV Executive Vice-President, is confident that Star TV will win the affection of millions of people in the subcontinent and the Middle East.

Prakash Chandra writes from New Delhi

The sudden arrival of Star TV has caused a culture shock. But others say it is a blessing to viewers living on a steady diet of shoddy government propaganda

to broadcast prime-time programmes. But the sudden arrival of Star TV has caused a culture shock. Millions of Indians are suddenly aware that after all it is a global village they are living in. Instant TV coverage of international events, well-known American programmes dithering Hollywood stars and big slices of American culture plus pop music has shaken the culture pundits.

Hundreds of letters have appeared in newspapers expressing their shock and horror at the prospect of Star TV eliminating Indian cultural values. Letters to newspapers either applaud Star TV or sharply criticize it for importing an alien culture.

The pop-loving generation is rejoicing at the arrival of a music station giving video versions of the latest hit parades. Suddenly, famous pop stars are right in the living rooms of hundreds of thousands of middle-class teenagers.

Letters are appearing in newspapers complaining that students are neglecting their studies and watching video music and adult serials instead.

But indications are that the

Writers bewail that "Americans are corrupting the morals of the youth and destroying Indian culture."

But others have pointed out equally vehemently that millions of people are living on a steady diet of government propaganda which is shoddy and unimaginative.

The government has spent more than 20,000 million rupees (US\$ 714 million) on establishing a TV network. The primary intention was to educate the masses in rural India on agriculture, family planning and give them lessons on primary education.

But this has signally failed. There should have been a separate channel on TV networks for villages only. Right now, it's a curious mix of urban-oriented and village programmes which is neither here nor there. To critics of Doordarshan, the arrival of the foreign network is a blessing.

As one journalist says, "We can now watch international coverage hour by hour. The BBC analysis of events and situations is unique and unparalleled. Finally, Doordarshan is getting some competition."

In a spate of seminars and debates in Parliament, media experts and MPs have called for a drastic change in Doordarshan programmes. Doordarshan must wake up from its long slumber, declared one MP.

But indications are that the

Doordarshan network, plagued by international wranglings, inefficiency and interference by politicians will go on as it has always done.

Top executives of Doordarshan are not bothered about the new competition. They shrug off Star TV. Say one executive: "It is purely an urban phenomenon. Millions of our people in the villages have not even heard of Star TV."

"We will certainly improve our programmes and the Hong Kong people will never be able to win the rural audience. And that's the reason Indian advertisers are putting their money on Doordarshan. Their revenue contribution amounted to some 2,500 million rupees (US\$ 89 million) for Doordarshan by the middle of this year. It is likely to go up to 3,000 million rupees (US\$ 107 million) before the end of 1992."

So, the battle lines are firmly drawn. Experts who are saying Star TV is a threat to the Third World and its broadcasts an invasion of air space are being drowned in an applause of support by the Indian middle class, which refuses to bow down to the cultural policies of the government purveying religion and Hindi puritanism in its Ramayana Mahabharata serials and similar programmes applauding politicians, heroes of yesteryears, gods and goddesses.

— Depthnews Asia.

Frugality the Way Out

by Jerome Sarkar

PERHAPS at the assumed hint of further rises in taxes, which is exactly not the case, the prices in the market shot up but did not come down, and the general public practically remain disappointed. A person like me belonging to the fixed income group is worst hit. There must have been an effective market control mechanism. For budget is considered by majority of the people, both consumers and traders, as obvious abettor of cost of living, albeit its makers say they try for the opposite.

Personal/family budget is solely dependent upon the size of individual's/family's income. The requirements are listed on priority basis essentials topping it. After making up for the bare necessities, if the means permit, better food, clothes etc. are taken into consideration. Needs are numerous. The income is unbearably limited. Many a need is, therefore, forgone with a helpless deep sigh. Thus we follow the adage, 'cut your coat according to your cloth.'

But in case of government, it is different. The Government's chief concern is the welfare of the people and the country. They contemplate of the projects beneficial for overall development of the nation emphasizing greatly on sustainable projects to progressively make up for the undesired rate of population growth. We need continuous economic development and as such we have provision for Annual Development Programme (ADP) in our budgets. So far, we have seen government's concern for people and nation as well as planning and development which undoubtedly call for enormous expenditure.

Now comes the question of raising funds. There are traditional sources of revenues. Besides, considering needs, government goes for other means of internal resource mobilizations such as enhancing taxes and introducing new taxes. And in the long run, as we all know, we thrive on the assistance and aid (?) from other developed countries as well as international monetary and financial institutions giving rise to a subdued national economic as well as international policies.

Disintegration and reforms of all sorts of the erstwhile Soviet Union, Vietnam's entry in the international market as well as competition from other newly democratized countries for foreign aids and assistance have narrowed down the pipe line of foreign grants, aids, soft term loans and assistance towards the traditionally known developing countries such as Bangladesh.

In the wake of such situation as to tough vying for international funds, additional efforts are being made to make up for shortfall. And it is quite understood. The result is that the people already heavily burdened with economic hardships are pushed against the wall. This naturally worries one of possible revolt.

The sacrifices from the people are earnestly expected for better future of the nation. The speeches have already deafened the ears of the people emphasizing the same. Now if the people are allowed to speak, the ministers will be advised more justifiably to do the same.

Cut in Expenditure
As a layman, I see a solitary alternative: cut in expenditure. Perpetual efforts for income

enhancement is one side of the coin, the other is control in expenditures — personal, social, family, national, micro and macro.

The government should take all pragmatic measures to curtail expenditures in unproductive sectors to make up for the short-fall of the fund instead of taxing the people again and again without adequate return for their sacrifices.

While appreciating the government's keen interest in every public matter, we should critically assess their activities. Almost daily in the news on TV or in the newspapers we see our honourable Prime Minister inaugurating ceremonies on various occasions in different parts of the country. These trips of the Prime Minister must be causing heavy expenses including the cost of passage, security measures, the entourage, absence of local government and non-government officials from the offices to pay formal tribute to the PM and lots more. Considering the financial constraints, the government can easily avoid at least some of these unnecessary expenditures.

The above is true when the ministers also go to inaugurate programmes, often petty and irrelevant. Often, a programme falling within jurisdiction of one ministry is inaugurated by the minister of another ministry.

In this connection, inter alia, I have a humble suggestion. If these inaugurations are

attended by the concerned renowned personalities like local University/college professors, doctors, writers, intellectuals, engineers, scientists and other dignitaries, the expenditure can be minimized remarkably and the people could be better educated as the local experts are more aware of the real situation prevailing there. At the same time, we can bring back the days when in our society we honoured the teachers, thinkers and intellectuals. Thus by showing high respect and recognition for these persons, on one hand, we can curtail expenses, on the other.

NGOs

Beside the government, NGOs do undeniably play a very important role in the development work in this country. The government has already established the NGO Bureau to support and assist the NGOs in their developmental activities by resorting to quick processing, minimal formalities and re-vamping effective co-ordination to resolve their day-to-day problems. This is an acknowledgement and recognition of the development activities of the NGOs and their contributions towards development.

In commensurate with government and national aims and objectives, NGOs have to formulate the projects and programmes. As usual the question of budgets arises in their cases too. Usually they raise funds for their proposed pro-

jects for foreign sources. As they do not have their own resources to support the projects and the government too cannot help them financially, they seek assistance from donor agencies and try to cull funds.

In the event of break-down of Soviet Union and vast development work taken up in Vietnam including the major disasters that have taken place in different countries, donor agencies are diverting, if not all but in part, their funds to those countries. Resultantly, regular donors are increasingly cutting down their allocations for us. Some of the on-going projects are already endangered. Consequently NGOs are worried. (NGOs activities mean employment, income, savings, investments and development). In order to have sustained development work, they need constant flow of fund. In the face of unfavourable response from the donors, they may and often they do resort to retrenching the staff or abandoning a project. This is, no doubt, a self-defeating measure. While the purpose is to raise employment, we being to retrench. As is proposed for the government, NGOs may adopt to curtail the expenditures not directly contributing to on-going projects and thus save the project and economy.

Reportedly, some of the NGOs entertain the visitors or donors in exclusive hotels, holds meetings in luxurious and expensive places just to please and honour the guests, in the name of study tours or training programmes also they

spend, sometimes, more than necessary. Visitors and donors can easily be entertained in moderate hotels or guesthouses. Meetings can be held in the office premises or guesthouse to avoid high expenditures. Donors always tell us that they donate money for the poorest of the poor. Their magnanimity is highly appreciated.

We need not entertain them at expensive hotel to convey our gratitude. Surely, they would prefer to see the reality and the country instead of exclusive hotels and motels.

Savings

While revenue side is increasingly betraying our efforts, individuals, institutions, NGOs and government all together should encourage people to increase propensity to save and have strict control on expenditures. As revenue is gradually slipping out of our control, we have no other alternative left to us but control expenses, save and survive.

'Saving' is a word that implies past, present and future. We learn from history. The history tells us that those who saved for the days yet to come, have survived to see today. And today we save so that our future generation may have better living. Savings of our grandparents are now being enjoyed by us and our grandchildren will enjoy what we put aside for them today.

Statesmen, leaders, animators, catalysts are expected to be far-sighted. They are to follow and teach us to sacrifice today's hedonistic inclinations for the betterment of our future generations. They should set their sight to future. May we hope to see those at the helm of affairs to steer the ship in the right direction.

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.

New Medical Colleges

Sir, The Government has started a few more medical colleges in the country in addition to the existing ones to produce more doctors. The idea is no doubt lofty. But since public fund is involved, the matter should be dealt with dispassionately. Apart from the initial cost setting up a medical college which comes to crores of Taka normal revenue expenditure is also quite heavy. It requires roughly Tk ten lakh from public fund to produce a doctor in addition to the expenses incurred by the parents. This could be justified had the existing medical colleges could not cope up with the demand for doctors.

But the position is that even doctors passing out from the existing colleges find it hard to get jobs and are simply joining the army of unemployed. And prospect for jobs outside the country is also very dim. Hence the rationale behind setting up new medical colleges is not understood at all. This may be a popular but not a practical step.

Rate of literacy in the country is very low compared even to our neighbouring countries. Public fund spent on new medical colleges could better be utilised for extension of primary education. It is universally recognised that pri-

mary education has good impact on production, employment and outlook.

Saleh Ahmed Chowdhury
Dhaka Cantt, Dhaka.

Stranded Pakistanis

Sir, After the independence of the country, as per Geneva convention the stranded Pakistanis were stationed in 66 camps scattered all over Bangladesh. We think pen is poor to describe the real conditions of the camps where water, electricity and sanitation problems know no bound. Five to twelve members of a family live in a 6x10 feet squalid and dingy bamboo made hut. Two years ago a delegation from Rabita described the situation of the camps worst and more deplorable than that prevailing in Palestinian camps in West Bank and Gaza Strip. Taking the advantage of the mass amnesty by the then government of Bangladesh, a good number of them took Bangladeshi citizenship and are now enjoying the political and constitutional rights but majority of them rejected the kind gesture of the government and opted for Pakistan.

Just after the return of normalcy in relationship between Pakistan and Bangladesh the government raised this is-

sue whenever it got any chance. This endeavour produced something good and Pakistan agreed to take back its stranded citizens and the process of repatriation also began and a good number were repatriated, but it suddenly stopped with the collapse of Bhutto regime. In the meantime many government came in power in both the countries but the problem remained stagnant only increasing their hardship, making their size of population larger. Rate of literacy among them is not more than five per cent which undoubtedly made their economic condition more sluggish. Most of them are merely rickshaw pullers or vehicle drivers, or day labourers.

To translate their demand into reality, they themselves constituted a Stranded Pakistanis General Repatriation Committee with Md Nasim Khan as its chief patron who at the age of 70 is desperately trying his best to recover this unfortunate community from the brink of destruction. They have on a number of occasions stormed the streets of the capital demanding an end to their suffering through repatriation.

However, after fifteen years the ray of hope was again seen with the formation of Rabita Trustee Board with the kind initiative of President Zia-ul-Haq but the ray did not take a long time to disappear as he died in a plane crash. He was the chairman of the board and after his demise the then foreign minister of Pakistan was made acting chairman as Mrs. Bhutto declined to be its chairman and during her tenure no progress was made

as she seemed to be a bit reluctant in solving this humanitarian problem. As the present Prime Minister of Pakistan, on various occasions, expressed his willingness and determination to solve this man-made problem, we are again optimistic of its positive outcome. So far and if the question of fund crisis arises, we like to say that this is not a problem rather an excuse to delay the repatriation process further. Repatriation by air undoubtedly needs a good amount of money but expenses may be minimized if it is done by sea or by train. For financial assistance, appeal may be made to wealthy Muslim Arab states and individuals and to internationally reputed NGOs like CIDA and CARE. Involvement of UNO may also prove helpful and last but not the least, what very much needed to solve any problem is sincerity and determination.

We strongly feel that it is the moral responsibility of Pakistan to take back its stranded citizens both on humanitarian and religious grounds, because Pakistan was born on the basis of religion and these Muslims let their ancestral homes in India on the assurance of Mr. Jinnah that all Muslims would enjoy full religious and constitutional rights in Pakistan whatsoever their place of birth might be. Moreover these Muslims played very important role in creation of Pakistan.

Md Reyazuddin
Mohammadpur, Dhaka.

cadres of BCS through competitive exams conducted by Public Service Commission. This is done in the interest of justice and fairplay. But the Council Committee set up by the government, seemingly has become so expert that it can select people for promotion to very high ranking government posts like Deputy Secretary and Joint Secretary etc. through, say, a couple of minutes interview. If they can display their expertise on top promotions, they can show if on recruitment also. In the process, time, effort and expenses, incurred by the candidates and Public Service Commission can be easily saved if recruitment in different cadres of BCS is entrusted to the Council Committee. Will the Government ponder over this?

Mrs Rowshan Jahan
Block 'C'
Lalmatia, Dhaka.

Post Office at North Shajahanpur

Sir, North Shajahanpur is a densely populated area with a number of localities such as, Bagicha, Shahidbagh, Khilgaon. But it is a matter of great regret that there is no post office at North Shajahanpur. For want of a post office residents of North Shajahanpur have to go to Shantinagar. Post Office to mail a letter send a money order etc. It has been observed that during peak hours the pressure of work at Shantinagar Post Office becomes so much that the employees just cannot cope with.

Presidents of North Shajahanpur have been facing

a lot of difficulties for long, in the absence of a post office of the difficulties, settling up of a post office at North Shajahanpur is the crying need of the dwellers. Any suitable place adjacent to Shahjahanpur Jame Mosque may be selected for setting up the post office.

We urge the concerned authorities to look into the matter on a priority basis.

Md Delwar Hossain
North Shajahanpur, Dhaka.

Govt. public relations

Sir, Some good Govt news have to be picked up by reading the Tender Notices, as the same are not announced either by the Ministers who appear daily on the TV screen, or through press handouts.

For example, Tender Notices have appeared in the press for providing a couple of lakh of digital telephones through the BSS, on BLT/BOT (Bring, lease, and Transfer; or Bring, Operate, and Transfer) basis. In Pakistan, for example, the waiting period for a new telephone connection has been reduced from two years to a week.

I have been waiting for my new digital phone for more than two years. The above news is heartening, and makes further waiting bearable.

RAJUK should also release some similar good news regarding quick availability of low-cost flats. The TV Mukho Mukh' programme of 22nd July sounds hopeful, but one-hour programmes are not adequate for the verbose Bengalees.

A Moxazz
Dhaka.

BCS Cadres

Sir, It is customary to recruit officers in different