Dhaka, Saturday, August 22, 1992

Export or Die

Bangladesh, which has practised more import restrictions than export promotion in the past, seems set for a radical reversal of its worn-out and unsuccessful policy. Finance Minister Saifur Rahman is evidently trying to re-float his old policy which he has termed "Export or Die", by slashing import duties and providing incentives, if not subsidies to exporters. But the success or failure of the minister's industrialisation strategy will be determined by how much the private sector can shed their protected habits and tendency to go for quick-money projects. At a seminar titled "Export Development Fund" held in the city Tuesday, Rahman rightly laid stress on genuine as opposed to cowboy - entrepreneurship and active support from banks to exporters of real goods. He might have added that although the garments stitching business and manpower export have brought in precious foreign exchange. they in themselves do not constitute industrialisation.

The most important thing, however, is the competitiveness of the product we are marketing, rather than the amount of subsidy which may have been provided to make it attractive for the foreign buyer. Competitiveness is what matters in the international free market, and that encompasses price as well as quality. Local industry managers are no doubt aware that productivity and efficiency on the shop floor and imagination and leadership in the boardroom are essential to keep costs low, guarantee quality and promptness of delivery. These are things that will have to be taken care of by the industrial managers themselves and not by the government or banks. At present, despite the availability of cheap labour, Bangladesh is failing to produce exportable manufactured goods in any significant number. We have to understand that the importer, whether in India or in the USA, will have to be able to sell his imports from Bangladesh to home consumer with a good profit. Why should someone buy something from us, if he can buy it from another source at a cheaper price and with better quality? Sound management, efficient labour and high standard of quality control are the prerequisites for a successful export drive, and bank support and subsidies can come later if needed.

Businessmen also need to focus their attention more on regional prospects of trade because of the logistical advantages as well as the availability of a potentially large market for traditional and non-traditional manufactured goods. For instance, India, with its 200 million middle class consumers, alone represents a market of gigantic proportions. In order to exploit that and other regional markets, there have to be greater interactions among the private sectors of the seven countries of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). A conference of representatives of the various chambers of commerce of SAARC countries could be arranged to coincide with the seven-nation summit to be held in Dhaka Dec 12-14. It would be a worthwhile exercise to explore trading opportunities outside the strictly state-to-state affairs which are often

devoid of imagination and drive.

However, one thing that needs to be set up before regional trade can truly fulfil its undoubted potential is an efficient mechanism for exchange and sharing of information. It is important that we have such a mechanism to provide information about products available, preferably at the press of a button. At present, our potential markets may not even be aware of the goods we are producing. The trader in Bombay needs to know. without fuss, the goods we produce, their price etc. just as much as the exporter in Dhaka needs to be aware of the demand the Indian market may have for our products. For instance, this country produces high-quality cables, pipings, electrical switchgear etc. but do our potential buyers in the neighbourhood know about them? Or, to go back to the first point, are we making an effort to produce them at a cost which would make it profitable for importers in the region and beyond? The government and the banks both have important roles to play in promoting exports but, at the end of the day, it is the products produced by our industries that will determine the result. The real danger is that, if our products are of poor quality and highly-priced, then they may become uncompetitive in the home market too, leading to a destruction of local industry. Export or die, indeed

A Computer Wonder

As millions of Russians last month observed the anniversary of the killing of the Tsar Nicholas II and his family 74 years ago, a computer performed a wonder. It rebuilt the face of the slain monarch from a skull discovered by an amateur historian.

According to a report in The Times of London, the skull was found with other human bones in the countryside near Yekaterinburg in 1979, but the discovery was kept a secret for more than a decade. For the past year, the skeletons have been subject of intense scrutiny in various laboratories in Moscow. In one such laboratory, a computer was put to use in reconstructing the faces of victims. The face of the Tsar as produced by the computer comes remarkably close to the last photograph of the monarch available in western archives. So, analysts in Moscow say, the skull is most certainly that of Tsar Nicholas II.

Several other skulls found by the amateur historian belong to members of the Tsar's family The evidence seems to suggest that the Tsar's daughter Anastasia was also killed with the rest. This should end all speculations about the survival of Anastasia and about a number of claims made about her identity, at least one of which produced

a good movie.

The work performed by computer is certainly a wonder, and historians from the West, especially anthropologists, have got together to examine the finding by the computer. But there are sceptics like religious groups which have declined to perform services for the skull and Maria V. Romanova, the heir to the Russian throne. However, Romanova has given her blessing to a plan to build a Church where the killing took place. In another twist of history, it was Boris Yeltsin, then the head of a local politburo who had ordered the site to be bulldozed in 1977. He has since expressed his shame for this "act of barbarism."

So, a wonder achieved by a computer has produced a chain of events, and we may well hear more on this incredible development in months to come. On this, too, a computer may offer us some predictions.

For a New International Information and Communication Order

by Mohammad Amjad Hossain

news as inaccurate and incomplete. It does not harm the inthe Western countries to the terest of the Third World Third World. countries alone; it affects the Felix Greene's book. Cur-

press describe most of the

ing his tenure of posting and

spends time at an expensive

hotel in the cosmopolitan city

of Dhaka only and see things

in what is certainly not a cor

rect perspective, and forms

his opinions and brushes up

Third World countries

references provided by his of

maintain that the Western

journalists cover the issues of

poverty, illiteracy, population

explosion and so on but they

assess success or failure in

these sectors in Western mar-

ket oriented terms. In

Bangladesh, for example, mass

participation in canal digging

campaign for irrigation, de-

centralisation in the adminis-

tration, rural banking system

for landless peasants or cam-

paign for eradicating poverty

and illiteracy are not ade

quately reported by the West

ern press although, from unbi-

ased news angle, these facts of

life in developing countries

(not comparable with Western

experience) deserve particular

Kenya's Weekly Review has put

it: Third World people realise

their vulnerability to the cul-

tural influences of the Western

World through the mass media.

It is an unrelenting one way

traffic of ideas and values from

As Hilary Ng'weno, editor of

attention.

is injected.

interest of the Western donor tain of ignorance, is worth notcountries because the taxpaying in this context. Greene ers there would get distorted demonstrated how China has facts of the country where aid been presented to American readers in an unfavourable A correspondent, who is based in Delhi/Bangkok visits Dr Mahathir Mohammad Bangladesh once or twice dur-

once pointed out that Malaysia had been subjected to a hostile press when it had differences with the oil companies. Knowing that Malaysia depends on foreign investments to create job opportunities and stimulate economic growth, the press found itself under pressure to be used by the oil companies to obstruct Malaysia's industrialisation programme. Only after the oil companies had secured favourable terms was the press campaign against Malaysia stopped.

PIB Survey

According to the survey conducted by Press Institute of Bangladesh in the recent past, four transnational news agencies - Reuter, UPI, AP and AFP - provide 82% to 90% of international news to Burma, Sri Lanka and Nepal. Bangladesh and Pakistan receive 65 and 55 per cent of news. This statistics show dependence of these countries on transnational news agen-

The press in the socialist countries is no exception. There is no separation between the Press and the Government there. The press has to be loyal to the government and subscribe to the ideology

of the monolithic state system. With the dismemberment of the USSR and establishment of multiparty politics in Eastern Europe, press has become liberal in their treatment to the news emanating from the opposition side. Following the independence of Bangladesh the press of the socialist countries played a prominent role in covering developments in Bangladesh, but the developing relations of Bangladesh with the United States and other Western countries and liberal help received from them were completely ignored by the Socialist press. It had been consistently spotlighting the assistance from socialist countries like the Soviet programme of clearing the Chittagong Port of the wreckages of sunken vessels there.

Against this backdrop, the movement for changing the concept of free flow of inforthem. The matter was folof Foreign Ministers in August, 1975 and at the Tunis symposium on International Information in March, 1976. At the Conference of the Infor mation Ministers of Non-Aligned countries in New Delhi in July, 1981, an agree-

the nuclear threshold test ban

treaty to which China is not a

attack from Washington for

selling nuclear technology to

Third World countries like

North Korea, Iran, Algeria,

Syria and Pakistan, and for

promoting nuclear build-up in

Nuclear Non-Proliferation

Treaty to ward off criticisms

over its weapons sales policic

to Third World countries. US

congressmen were trying to

link the weapons sales with a

renewal of China's trade privi-

the Stockholm International

Peace Research Institute re-

ported that, despite the an-

nouncement, "China has con-

tinued to market nuclear and

missile technology to other

nations, including countries

with nuclear weapons ambi-

worried about China's influ-

ence on North Korea, which it

believes is developing nuclear

bombs. US intelligence reports

suggest a nuclear energy plant

north of Pyongyang produces

enough plutonium each year

Korea's nuclear activities is

thought to be minimal while

Pyongyang still needs more

than plutonium to develop the

bomb. But Washington argues

China is an important inter-

mediary in preventing a major

nuclear build-up in the Korean

peninsula - supposedly the

scaling down their presence in

Asia, with their expected year-

end pull-out from their bases

in the Philippines, diplomats

say concern over the progress

of nuclear technology in the

Now that US forces are

last bastion of the Cold War.

China's role in North

for a single bomb.

Washington is particularly

tions.'

But the 1992 yearbook of

China this year ratified the

Asia and the Middle East.

China has also been under

signatory

mation acquired significance in September, 1973 at Algiers Non-Aligned Summit. It was pointed out that developing countries should take concerted action to 'reorganise existing communication channels which are a legacy of the colonial past and have hampered free, direct and fast communication between lowed up at the Lima meeting

I take the liberty to quote from Mr. Esmond Wickremestinghe, Head of the Delegation of Sri Lanka to the Non-Aligned Information Ministers Meeting at Jakarta (26-30 January, 1984), who is reported to have said "I was horrified to see the vast misrepresentation of views of the Non-Aligned and developing countries at the 20th Conference of UNESCO including

Colombo Summit.

COMINAC

documents called Jakarta ap-

peal and the COMINAC Decia-

importance of Non-Aligned

News Agencies Pool and the

Broadcasting Organisation of

Non-Aligned countries as a

means to promote spirit of

cooperation and solidarity and

provide technical and financial

assistance to the news

agencies of Non-Aligned

Non-Aligned and the other de-

veloping countries are badly

placed in respect of flow of in-

formation because mass com-

munication media globally are

dominated by the transnational

news agencies. This situation

has caused quantitative imbal-

ance in the flow of news be-

tween developed and develop-

ing countries. An action pro-

gramme in the declaration

recommended that members

of the movement encourage

their media to step up and

widen news coverage of and

about member countries.

It also pointed out that the

countries.

for a NWICO was raised by us." From this conference members of the Non-Aligned countries felt badly the need for developing powerful international media of their own.

even plain news of my own

statement as the Chairman of

the Non-Aligned Group at

UNESCO then as the demand

The 33rd session of the General Assembly of the 20th Conference of UNESCO adopted the resolution unanimously for the creation of an International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) under the auspices of UNESCO. This was seconded by USA on behalf of the Western countries and the former USSR on behalf of the Socialist countries of Eastern Europe. The UNESCO had set up an International Commission for the study of communication problems in 1977 under the Chairmanship of Sean Macbride, an Irish diplomat, who has been awarded both the Nobel and the Lenin Peace

The Western countries expressed scepticism about the independent character of the commission. In one of his hard hit articles, Mr S M Ali, who was UNESCO Regional Communication Adviser for Asia and the Pacific and presently editing an English daily in Dhaka, gave a reply to the Western media criticism levelled against UNESCO, which was instrumental in bringing about qualitative changes in the existing news agencies and broadcast media in Asia. Pointing out some of the projects initiated by UNESCO, Mr. S M Ali said 'it is hard to think that any of these projects could be seen by any section of the US media as an attempt to muzzle the

Asian market'. The inter-governmental conference on communication policies in Asia and Oceania sponsored by UNESCO and held in Kuala Lumpur between 5 and 14 February, 1979 aimed at preparing a plan for harnessing the media to further social progress and development on the national plan. This writer participated in the

free press or to deny access of

western news agencies to the

frastructure in order to increase information flow in their own countries as well to ment was reached on the facilitate such flow between composition of a pool of the the countries within and outpress agencies of the Nonside the region. It stressed the Aligned countries and this deurgency to acquire and decision was endorsed by the velop technology that is appropriate to the needs and capabilities of the countries in the region. Some of the im-The Conference of Informaportant suggestions were detion Ministers of Non-Aligned signed to set up an Asian countries (COMINAC) which News Network (ANN) which ended in Jakarta on January would ensure that there was 30, 1984 adopted two separate greater flow of news directly

between the countries of the

region. It is heartening to note

conference as Bangladesh del-

egate. The conference sug-

gested efforts to speed up the

building of communication in-

ration. The conference that such network was opened particularly stressed the with Kuala Lumpur as the re-

distribution centre.

Hammarskjoeld Report At the non-governmental level the 1975 Dag Hammarskjold report is noteworthy. It said, under present conditions, information and education are only too often monopolised by the power structure, which manipulates public opinion to serve its own ends and tends to perpetuate superstition, prejudice and ig-

Although a number of coordinating news networks have been established like Non-Aligned News Agencies Pool, Asian News Network, OANA and IPS (Inter Press Service) as information bridge between Latin America and Europe, not much improvement has taken place in the flow of information. This may be ascribed to the fact that most of the Third World countries lack hardware, expertise and technology. The work of the IPDC is, however, severely limited because of the shortage of fundsand the Communication Division of UNESCO is facing financial constraint as the United States resigned as a member of UNESCO at the end of 1984.

Against the backdrop of the end of cold war era and the emergence of unipolar World, the Non-Aligned Movement may not have the glamour and relevance that it had in 60's and 70's. But because of the emergence of unipolar world, Non-Aligned Movement could maintain a balance in the present day world provided they stand unitedly and pull their resources to have effective communication media.

The concept of objective, accurate and truthful reporting of news is vitiated by a perverted outlook in most of the Third World countries because

of their colonial legacy, datas M In theory, every nation subscribes to the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations in 1943 which provides: Every one has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinion without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of fron-

Unless the quality of news presentation is improved and access to information, good or bad, by the Third World countries is acknowledged and transmission tariff reduced, the motto of New International Information Order

will not be achieved. Wide gap exists in the technical facilities available to the national news agencies and broadcast media in the region. Some of the news agencies and broadcast media are well equipped to receive news from many parts of the world and transmit these to other cooperating agencies. Other agencies lack appropriate equipment to establish link with neighbouring news agencies. Most national news agencies in Asia have bilateral agreements among themselves but they hardly can exchange news satisfactorily because of lack of hardware facilities. The priority in such circumstances should be placed on the training of journalists for higher professional standards. Sophisticated hardware may be procured through UNESCO's assistance. With professionalism and competition, credibility could be established in the dissemination of news.

US Blocks Nuclear Dump Deal

ESPITE the bitter enmity between them, China and Taiwan got together last year to forge a deal that would have the mainland receiving tonnes of nuclear waste from Taiwan.

HE concept for a New

World Information and

Communication Order

(NWICO) has been floated first

at the summit of the Non-

Aligned countries in Colombo

in August, 1976. Thereafter

the demand was raised in

October, 1976 at the 19th

conference of UNESCO at

Natrobi. It is true that he

driving force for a NWICO has

been the Non-Aligned

countries. The demand was a

result of virtual monopoly of all

communication by a few

transnationals of the industri-

world countries voiced con-

cern over the so-called free

flow of information what is ac-

tually one way flow of informa-

tion. It was argued that infor-

mation was in fact a vehicle to

impose cultural and political

influence of the West on the

third world countries. Free

flow of information could be

compared with concepts like

free market or free enterprise.

grossly inadequate news about

what has been happening in

the Non-Aligned and develop-

ing countries, there has been

distortion of news and misrep-

resentation of view points of

these countries. Western press

takes a prejudicial view of the

third world countries and con-

centrates on poverty, calami-

ties and political upheavals:

they completely ignore devel-

opment and progress made in

Prime Minister of Malaysia, has

put it this way: Most of the

time reporters work in sleazy

bar drinking huge quantities of

alcohol and talk to people of

their own choice. But the

amount of news they spew out

is phenomenal. A one-day visit

to a nation of millions can re-

sult in powerful earth-shaking

The critics, of the Western

Dr. Mahathir Mohammad,

different fields.

Apart from publishing

In early 70's some third

altsed West.

sectors

But those plans now seem to have run aground because the United States is effectively blocking the deal. According to the head of the state-run Taiwan Power Company, the United States fears China would extract plutonium from the highly-radioactive wastes.

Chang Sze-Min, general manager of the Taiwan Power Company, explained the United States thinks Beijing would then use it to develop nuclear weapons for sale to Third World countries in volatile parts of Asia and the Middle East.

Some observers say Washington seems to believe Asia has the potential to become the world's nuclear flashpoint.

The recent attempt at cooperation between the 'two China's came about because the crowded island to Taiwan fears its own nuclear dumps are reaching capacity while China hopes to earn foreign exchange and benefit from Taiwanese expertise on nuclear safety in running its own nuclear power plants.

China and Taiwan have gone as far as identifying possible disposal sites on the mainland, officials confirmed.

"As long as the mainland agrees," Chang said, "we can dispose of our low radioactive nuclear waste on an uninhabited island off Zhejiang province (in south-east

China)." "As for highly-radioactive waste," he added, "it may be disposed of in north-western Xinjiang province."

Recently, Tseng Te-Lin, chairman of Taiwan's Radiation Protection Society, a non-state organisation representing the State Atomic Energy Council. said China had basically agreed with the plan but believed caution was necessary given the political sensitivity over negotiations with Taiwan.

The Radiation Protection Society had been holding talks

Washington has blocked efforts of feuding China and Taiwan to forge a nuclear waste deal, fearing Beijing may extract plutonium from the radioactive trash. Yojana Sharma of IPS reports from Hong Kong.



to override a ban on official contacts across the strait of Taiwan.

But after initial positive interests from Beijing, Taipei has noticed China has retreated somewhat in recent months.

Official newspapers in China also indicated last year that "US manipulation" was jcopardising the plan, with an official of China's National Nuclear Corporation pointing to pressure from Washington.

Now both sides are saying the deal may only cover very low level nuclear waste if it pushes through.

Pressure from the United

States has built up in recent months as Washington begins to become concerned about nuclear weapons in Asia and the Middle East now that Russian and the United States are well on the way to disman-

tling their nuclear arsenals. Washington has also expressed dismay over China's massive underground nuclear test in the remote Xinjiang desert in late May.

Although China did not reveal the exact nature of the test, the device was said to be six times more powerful than those conducted by the nuclear nations. It also exceeded the 150,000-tonne limit set by

region has put pressure on US allies there like Taiwan. Washington is seeking signs

from Beijing that it is sincere in its adherence to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. This includes technology transfers in a field where, as an Asiabased US diplomat puts it, "the line between military and civilian use is a thin one."

Telephone Directory

Sir, Three years back, in 1989, the Telephone Direc tory, currently under use, was printed and distributed amongst the subscribers. Soon after the compilation of this Directory, Digital and Fax phones were introduced and as such the present Directory has impliedly undergone large scale changes.

The Telegraph and Telephone Department took pains to compile and publish Telephone Directory for distribution amongst the Telephone subscribers free of cost, but they did not seem to have taken adequate care for compilation of the book which contains many defects and irregularities. The printing of the Directory in two volumes is rather disadvantageous. If a better quality paper is used, the complete Telephone Directory may come within the size and height of present Vol-

In 1983, an English Directory was compiled, which contained a good for which number of mistakes and certain major defects, the directory was ultimately not distributed amongst the telephone subscribers.

in the past, Chittagong region was also included in the Telephone Directory, which has certain advantages and the authorities may kindly consider about including the same in the Directory.

In Vol. II of the Current Telephone Directory, under alphabet 'KA' Kazi has been printed in instalments vide pages 229-234 and Pages 239-240 and then again at pages 243-246. A little bit of care in compilation could have saved this irregularity.

The compilation is essentially according to alphabetic order. But one would find gross irregularity as the said order has not always been maintained.

It is a matter of utter misfortune that a Government organisation of considerable importance viz. T&T Department should do things in a perfunctory manner to bring out a publication which will be used for a considerable time by people of all classes. Apart from national orbit, it would also be used in international sphere and such a publication demands careful attention.

The word Triple beginning with 'Tl' ought to have been put under 'TA' and not as has been done at page 409.

It is, accordingly, most humbly suggested maximum care should be taken while reprinting such an important Directory and, if not yearly, at least the Directory should be compiled and supplied to subscribers every two years so that they may make effective use of it.

Shahidul Islam. South Jatrabari, Dhaka.

Paper mill in

Rangpur Sir, The late of a jute-based paper and pulp mill proposed to be set up in Rangpur seems to have become uncertain, The reason is, however, not known to us. Only what we know is that Arel Engineering, a French firm, which conducted a feasibility study in the year 1990, selected the site for the project at Kaunia in Rangpur. In this connection, a fact finding team of the Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund (OECF) visited the site in May this year and recommended that the government should formally request Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to provide necessary technical assistance in the project which may involve a cost amounting to Tk 568.37 crore with a foreign exchange component of Tk 324.66

crore. It may be noted that the proposed industry aims at

producing about 45,000 metric tons of industrial papers including craft liner, fluting medium, sack and wrapping papers which we usually import from abroad. Such production will save our valuable foreign currency to the tune of

Tk 85 crore per annum. May we, therefore, humbly request our honourable Prime Minister to personally look into the matter and kindly issue the necessary directives to implement the project.

Nitin Roy. Faktrerpool, Dhaka

Wage Earners' Development Bonds

Sir, As you know, there are a good number of Bangladesh nationals working for foreign organisations in Bangladesh and receiving their salaries in foreign currencies through convertible accounts maintained by such foreign organisations. It is a matter of regret

that such Bangladesh nationals who are earning foreign exchange cannot buy Wage Earners' Development Bonds because they are not physically present in a foreign country. As such they are being deprived of their rightful benefit, of earning foreign currencies.

Our benign government is desperately anxious to build up foreign exchange reserves, but by depriving the foreign exchange earners, the opportunity the government is losing a huge amount of foreign exchange which could be mobilised through sale of Wage Earners' Development Bends.

Will the Ministry of Finance look into this matter and give special consideration to this aspect at the earliest? To mobilise more and more internal savings, sale of WEDB is a good way in itself which can easily build up a foreign exchange reserve.

M A Awal Shewrapara, Mirpur, Dhaka