

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

THE 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.

In early 70's some third world countries voiced concern over the so-called free flow of information what is actually one way flow of information. It was argued that information was in fact a vehicle to impose cultural and political influence of the West on the third world countries.

Apart from publishing grossly inadequate news about what has been happening in the Non-Aligned and developing countries, there has been distortion of news and misrepresentation of view points of these countries.

Dr. Mahathir Mohammad, 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.

The critics, of the Western

For a New International Information and Communication Order

by Mohammad Amjad Hossain

press describe most of the news as inaccurate and incomplete. It does not harm the interest of the Third World countries alone; it affects the interest of the Western donor countries because the taxpayers there would get distorted facts of the country where aid is injected.

A correspondent, who is based in Delhi/Bangkok visits Bangladesh once or twice during 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 correct perspective.

Third World countries 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 market oriented terms.

As Hilary Ng'weno, editor of Kenya's Weekly Review has put it: Third World people realise their vulnerability to the cultural influences of the Western World through the mass media.

the Western countries to the Third World.

Felix Greene's book, Curtain of Ignorance, is worth noting in this context. Greene demonstrated how China has been presented to American readers in an unfavourable light.

Dr Mahathir Mohammad 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.

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.

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.

Against this backdrop, the movement for changing the concept of free flow of information 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 them.

1975 and at the Tunis symposium on International Information in March, 1976. At the Conference of the Information Ministers of Non-Aligned countries in New Delhi in July, 1981, an agree-

ment was reached on the composition of a pool of the press agencies of the Non-Aligned countries and this decision was endorsed by the Colombo Summit.

COMINAC

The Conference of Information Ministers of Non-Aligned countries (COMINAC) which ended in Jakarta on January 30, 1984 adopted two separate documents called Jakarta appeal and the COMINAC Declaration. The conference particularly stressed the 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 countries.

It also pointed out that the Non-Aligned and the other developing countries are badly placed in respect of flow of information because mass communication media globally are dominated by the transnational news agencies. This situation has caused quantitative imbalance in the flow of news between developed and developing countries.

I take the liberty to quote from Mr. Edmond Wickremesinghe, 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 even plain news of my own statement as the Chairman of the Non-Aligned Group at UNESCO then as the demand 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. 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.

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.

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

conference as Bangladesh delegate. The conference suggested efforts to speed up the building of communication infrastructure in order to increase information flow in their own countries as well to facilitate such flow between the countries within and outside the region. It stressed the urgency to acquire and develop technology that is appropriate to the needs and capabilities of the countries in the region. Some of the important suggestions were designed to set up an Asian News Network (ANN) which would ensure that there was greater flow of news directly between the countries of the region. It is heartening to note that such network was opened with Kuala Lumpur as the redistribution centre.

Hammarskjold 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 ignorance.

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 funds and 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. 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 frontiers.

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

DESPITE 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.

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 co-operation 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.

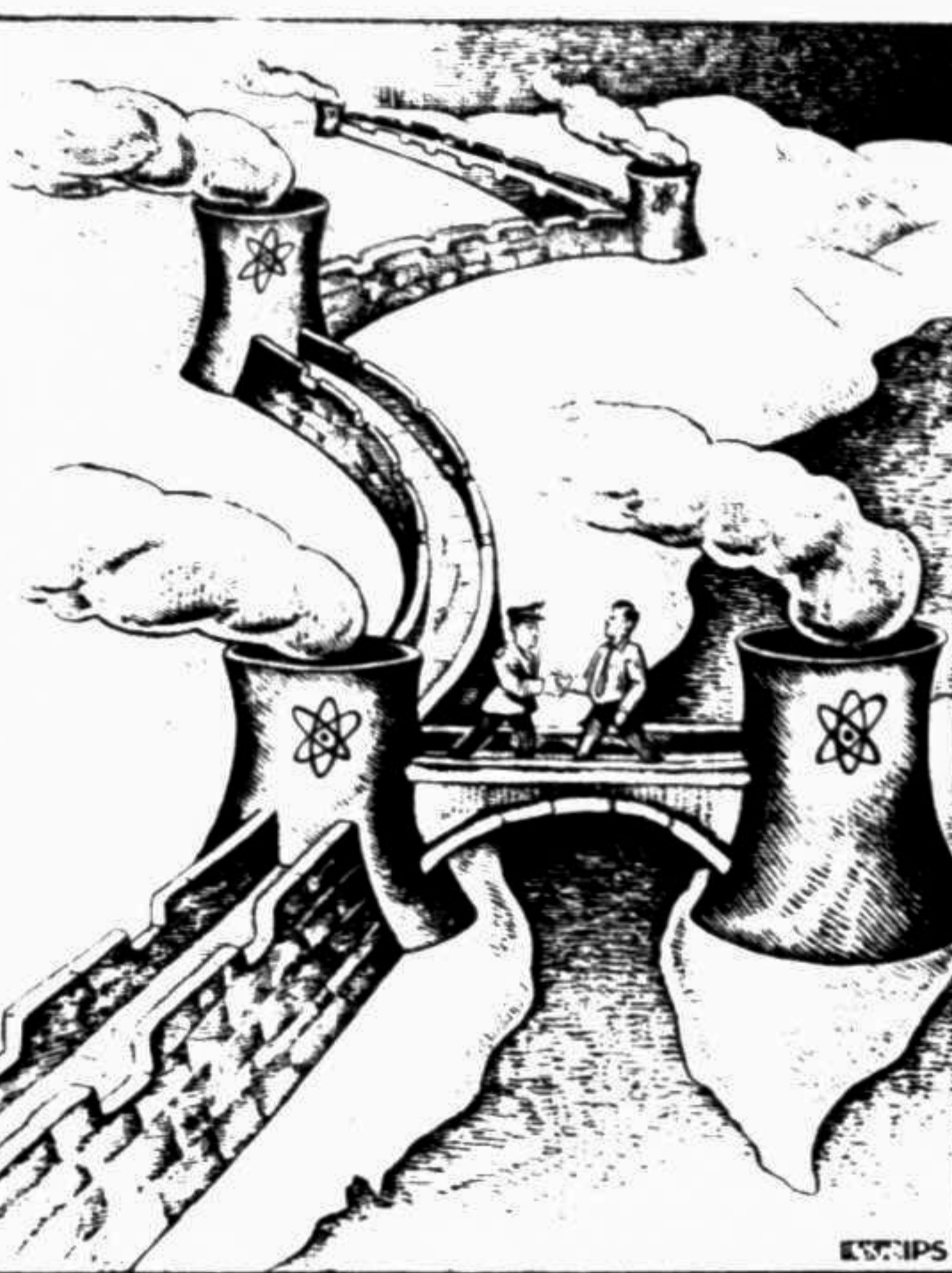
"As long as the mainland agrees," Chang said, "we can dispose of our low radioactive nuclear waste on an uninhabited island off Zhejiang province (in south-east China)."

"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 jeopardising 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 Russia and the United States are well on the way to dismantling 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

the nuclear threshold test ban treaty to which China is not a signatory.

China has also been under 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 Asia and the Middle East.

China this year ratified the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to ward off criticisms over its weapons sales policies to Third World countries. US congressmen were trying to link the weapons sales with a renewal of China's trade privileges.

But the 1992 yearbook of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute reported that, despite the announcement, "China has continued to market nuclear and missile technology to other nations, including countries with nuclear weapons ambitions."

Washington is particularly worried about China's influence 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 for a single bomb.

China's role in North 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 intermediary in preventing a major nuclear build-up in the Korean peninsula - supposedly the last bastion of the Cold War.

Now that US forces are 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 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 Asia-based US diplomat puts it, "the line between military and civilian use is a thin one."

To the Editor...

Telephone Directory

Sir, Three years back, in 1989, the Telephone Directory, currently under use, was printed and distributed amongst the subscribers. Soon after the completion of this Directory, Digital and Fax phones were introduced and as such the present Directory has implicitly 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 Volume II.

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 'TI' ought to have been put under 'TA' and not as has been done at page 409.

It is, accordingly, most humbly suggested that 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 fate 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, Fakirerpoal, 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 Bonds.

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 WEDEB is a good way in itself which can easily build up a foreign exchange reserve.

M A Ahsul Shewarpara, Mirpur, Dhaka