

Vietnam's Turn-around

Just when almost all the ex-Soviet bloc countries have been experiencing economic disaster of unfathomable magnitude, Vietnam miraculously has quietly been weathering the odds with credit.

Since it launched its perestroika programme, foreign firms have invested US\$ 3.5 billion in the country. Its liberal policy to attract foreign investment has largely been successful.

Notwithstanding all such problems, Vietnam has achieved much. Today it boasts to be the third largest rice exporter after the US and Thailand.

A Healer of Soul and Society

A three-day 'national' Baul conference opened on Tuesday at the 'Folk and Crafts Foundation' premises at Sonargaon.

The Bauls and their mystic quest best expressed by their lyrical-musical constructions of ennobling height and haunting beauty have been in the line of great unifiers of conflicting socio-religious fragmentations of the sub-continent.

The Baul phenomenon—the songs particularly and what they teach—sprouts straight from the soil of Bengal or the manab-zamin of the Bengalee psyche.

While we are suffering from untold miseries and fighting desperately to make both ends meet, a certain quarter is busy developing new methods to 'finish us off' for good.

There has of late been a serious misconception centring on what actually is a Baul song. Let it be very clear that Baul is exclusively a creation of the right-bank basin of the Ganges-Padma.

N EPAL faces the prospect of a mid-term poll following a Supreme Court verdict on water accords with India that requires a parliamentary ratification.

In a trend setting 'summary judgement,' the Court has declared that the water accords signed during Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala's official visit to India in December 1991 was indeed a treaty.

Under Nepal's Constitution, such a treaty involving the sharing of natural resources and with a long term implications must be ratified by a two-thirds majority of both houses of parliament.

Reacting jubilantly to the Court verdict, the Communist opponents of Mr Koirala took

out an impressive demonstration in the capital city of Kathmandu, asking him to resign.

Even the ruling Nepali Congress party itself is unsure whether Mr Koirala should resign on 'moral ground' as publicly called by Congress supreme leader Ganesha Man Singh before the verdict was announced.

Going by the impressive Left-dominated demonstrations loudly demanding Mr Koirala's resignation, it is now practically certain that the other communist factions would do likewise.

"The treasonous act of the Prime Minister has been proved," declared Dristi, a mouthpiece of Nepal's main opposition party, the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist-Leninist or the UML). It accused Mr Koirala of "attempting to mislead the Nepali people, refuse to abide by the Constitution and failure to take the parliament into confidence."

Koirala in Trouble: Mid-term Polls Seen over Water Accords

Jan Sharma writes from Kathmandu

If the treaty is tabled in parliament, expected to meet in mid-February for the winter session, such as ratification would certainly be voted down.

general secretary, called upon "all the patriotic and democratic forces to ask for an immediate resignation from Mr Koirala."

It also described the prospects of a mid-term poll, in case the government failed to get two-thirds vote in parliament, as "irrelevant."

Madan Bhandari, the UML

distinct possibility.

In case of such a poll, both the ruling Nepali Congress and the opposition UML are expected to do less better than they did in the 1991 elections.

There is no question that the historic 21-page Supreme Court judgement is a severe blow to Mr Koirala's position not only within his own party but also his prestige in the neighbourhood, specially India.

The Supreme Court verdict is extremely cautious and extremely restrained," said senior advocate Ganesha Raj Sharma, who pleaded on behalf of the petitioner.

"I am not fully satisfied with the verdict," he said, explaining that the court failed to categorically state the treaty

needed ratification by two-thirds majority of both the houses of parliament as required by the Constitution.

The court has not specified if the Tanakpur treaty requires ratification by two-thirds majority of both houses of parliament or by a simple majority in the lower house.

It, however, added that although the treaty concerning the Tanakpur barrage required parliamentary ratification, those relating to Pancheshor, Karnali, Buhdi Gandaki, Sapta Koshi, Bagmati, and Kamala rivers needed no such ratification as the treaty is confined to feasibility studies only.

"It will not be proper for the Court to give directives to the Government to make a decision on the effects of these treaties or agreements before they are ratified, accepted, accepted or approved in accordance with the provisions made in the Constitution," the special bench of the Court headed by Chief Justice Biswonath Prasad Upadhyay said in its verdict.

"Such a step would be against the norms of the parliamentary system of government and even the parliamentary democratic process," it said. As for the question regarding whether it should be ratified by two-thirds majority or a simple majority is something to be decided by the government and the parliament, it added.

The practice of getting the treaties and agreements ratified, accepted, approved or accepted only after a decision by the court cannot be practical or preferable all the times," the Supreme Court said, adding, however, that the court can look into such matters if and when constitutional defects crop up.

The verdict was not unanimous because Justice Trilokya Pratap Rana made a "separate opinion," arguing that the execution of all works relating to the treaty must stop until the treaty is ratified by parliament.

—Depthnews Asia

INDUSTRIALISATION

Public Sector-Private Sector: No Big Difference

by G M F Abdur Rob

I N Bangladesh, immediately after liberation, the socialistic policy of the government of Awami League had stood for the nationalisation of the means of production and distribution as the most feasible solution for the shattered economy.

The operation of enterprises in Bangladesh should not be viewed or assessed purely on academic ground. The contention made by Professor Rehman Sobhan that public and private enterprises are two sides of the same coin as well as Mr Syed S Kaiser Kabir's idea of fundamental difference between the objectives of public and private, have many points to be debated.

The operation of enterprises in Bangladesh should not be viewed or assessed purely on academic ground. The contention made by Professor Rehman Sobhan that public and private enterprises are two sides of the same coin as well as Mr Syed S Kaiser Kabir's idea of fundamental difference between the objectives of public and private, have many points to be debated.

enterprises. If the object of the private enterprises is to maximise profit then it is also the object of the public enterprises. The difference is that private sector maximises profit by reducing cost while public sector neglects the cost factor of the products that results in shooting up of the price.

We cannot preside over the wholesale liquidation of public enterprises nor we can sit and watch the greedy hands of privatisation squeeze the last remains of their existence.

I subscribe to the view expressed by Professor Rehman Sobhan that appropriate policies would improve the health of the public enterprises. There must be a will to introduce good policies. This is important. The will to introduce good policies and programmes materialises only at the hands of the good organisers.

The development of technique for the measurement of efficiency is important, especially if public enterprises are to run on commercial operation. We have seen that the wastage, inefficiency, corruption, favouritism and misplacement in jobs have stifled initiative, increased administrative cost, increased production cost, and placed technical skill and commercial acumen at

were not affected by social needs.

If the government has willingness to run public enterprises on commercial operation then direct administrative control by government advisory level has to be minimized since operation of the industry by government maximises the possibility of that rigidity of management which we associate with bureaucratic procedures and overindulgence in rent tape.

The absence of the accountability from the decision maker down to the average executive has no less contributed to the appalling present day condition of the public enterprises. Like the executives of the private enterprise who are always accountable to the managing director, the public enterprise executives must be made responsible to the public accounts committee of the parliament.

The development of technique for the measurement of efficiency is important, especially if public enterprises are to run on commercial operation. We have seen that the wastage, inefficiency, corruption, favouritism and misplacement in jobs have stifled initiative, increased administrative cost, increased production cost, and placed technical skill and commercial acumen at

discount that exasperated the consumers. Public enterprises cannot play such a game as has been played and is still being played at the cost of the tax payers. Greater improvement must be made by reorganising problematic industries through placement, cutting wage, reducing cost, increasing technical efficiency and management skill etc.

To run the public enterprise on commercial operation, they must pay for their capital. Those enterprises should receive no privileges in the supply of resources and should buy materials, equipment etc from the market in competition with private enterprises.

The Cost Factor

As a commercial operation, the price of the products of the public enterprises should reflect cost. Such cost could be minimised if the government linked private enterprises to link productivity with wages while bargaining with CBA. But how are the costs to be calculated, should it be "average cost" or "marginal cost"? Average cost pricing is particularly inappropriate for gas, electricity, transport etc. It is a poor way of allocating the heavy overhead cost for the consumers. "Marginal cost", on the other hand, ensures that consumers are not supplied with additional goods at less than the cost of resources needed to produce them.

efficiency and managerial skill of the public enterprises will make them capable of increased productivity and efficient marketing, part of the return of which should be available to improve their financial result.

On the question of financial planning and decision, the extent to which public enterprises can indulge their activities is limited by their financial obligations. If a corporation, authority or board must operate then it must also ensure that its income shall not be less than required to meet its expenditure. In other words, they are to conduct their business so that their revenues should cover all costs properly, chargeable to revenue account taking one year with another. Then they would know which of their services are justifiable on the ground of direct financial return.

Account may need to be taken of social consideration. The continuation of uneconomic services must either raise the price or increase the loss or reduce the profit. Where the government wishes uneconomic services to be carried on, the additional cost of these should be provided in advance out of public funds. In fact it is quite impossible to discontinue such services abruptly without causing social damage, and perhaps indirect economic damage, quite out of proportion to their termination. But where the corporations are at a perennial loss, the government should examine

if such loss promotes national interest and should decide, in the national interest, whether to continue or stop functioning. If subsidies of this kind are to be paid to the corporation, they should be paid for specific purpose and openly.

They should not be disguised as, for instance, a payment of the tract cost, nor as the writing off of as scrap, nor as the writing off as burden of interest, and they should not be hidden away in the accounts of the corporation or board. It is important in democracy that the principle of public accountability should be complied with in all spheres of public enterprises.

A commercial operation does not imply a short term view. Enterprise means risk. Investment has to be made which often cannot be expected to earn profit for years. State enterprises, like a private enterprise, must take a long view. Often a service must be provided far in advance of the sufficient demand to remunerate it.

The nationalised industries are bound to play a major role in the economic life of the country. They cannot, however, be regarded only as large commercial concerns, may be judged mainly on their commercial result. All have, although in varying degrees, wider obligations than commercial concerns in the private sector. The object is to find for each industry or board, a reasonable balance. A closer definition for the financial and economic obligation of the industries should also reduce the occasions and needs for outside intervention in the affairs of the public enterprises and enable them to make the maximum contribution towards their own development and the well-being of the country as a whole.

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.

TV, VCR licence fees

Sir, What a way to greet a new year!

The annual licence fee for television and VCR used at residential premises have been raised with effect from January 1, along with commercial concerns. At the same time licence fee has also been introduced for video cassette player and satellite television receiver with effect from the same date.

While we are suffering from untold miseries and fighting desperately to make both ends meet, a certain quarter is busy developing new methods to 'finish us off' for good.

Taka 500 has been introduced for a video cassette player, Taka 200 for a black and white TV and Taka 400 for a colour set.

The business community centres will re-adjust their 'fees' accordingly at the cost of their clients, while the concerned authority responsible for this move shall have opportunity enough to raise the 'height' of the already built 'hillcock' made from poor people's earnings.

Earlier the government by raising the price and introducing different taxes, etc., managed to accumulate sufficient moneys at the cost of the poor people.

BTB practically gives us nothing! Even the Bangla local

films, which are shown in black and white and were made some 30 to 20 years ago. No English daily or weekly has the courage or will to write against or for the doings of BTB. Though we are given the option of expecting a 'reduction' in the licence fee we are being thrown into an uncertainty!

Those who are responsible for this new move against the residential owners of the sets mentioned must be saved. In this case I feel sorry to draw the attention of the concerned authorities to explain why, when the Prime Minister of Bangladesh keeps saying about saving the poor, they are trying to bleed them to 'death'?

Realizing that 'entertainment' is a must for survival these people are whimsically going on increasing and introducing licence fees blindly.

We are not members of the parliament, nor belong to any government office. So, let the concerned authority act wisely and stop being unreasonable.

Last but not least, the government would do much better to be practical. There is a limit to how much 'insanity' can be tolerated. Tk 500 + 400 + and that too when children are to get their new admission to schools!

news of the increase in the licence fees and the introduction of 500 Taka for the VCPs.

When the authorities concerned start to go about for inspection I will not be surprised to hear about 'battles' fought to safeguard one's property. In the name of Allah let sense prevail before it's too late.

Being one of the poorest Asian countries with lowest per capita income, we are forced and pressurised to pay higher rate of taxes and licence fees by law!

N Kamal, Dhaka

Child labour

Sir, Due to poverty many of our children resort to begging and selling of labour, at a cheap rate. Many of the children are forced by their poor parents to go for hard work beyond their capacity.

There is no time limit of work for these children. The ingredient of biri is injurious to health. The children who are engaged there are inhaling the intoxicating air which is telling upon their health. Again, these children are developing the habit of smoking from these factories very quickly.

We are talking about compulsory education for all children up to class V. I am afraid how these boys can be brought to the premise of education, leaving their job! I propose there should be restriction of age for employment of children in any factory. The owners of factories should arrange

for educations in their premises if they continue to engage children in their factories. There should also be some arrangement of entertainment for the children at the factory premises. And the factories should provide medicare to the children.

The children are our future hope, we should protect them right now.

Mahbubul Haque Chowdhury, Sonali Bank, Dhaka

Let us shun violence

Sir, Needless to say that stability and peace are prerequisites for progress. The world at large is making great stride while we remain stagnant and unchanging. Even though our country is saddled with multifarious problems, the real task for emancipation of the people could not be undertaken on account of our bickering and political polarisation. For real headway, consensus among the political spectrum as a whole is necessary. Unfortunately we are engaged in fissiparous activities. Amelioration of the lot of the people and, for that matter, human resource development are the urgent tasks before the nation. But, instead of this, we are cultivating the habit of confrontation and conflict. The cult of violence is not showing any sign of abatement. We are afraid, if violence as a political means is not abjured, the chasm in national life will lead us to unpredictable result.

The nation has been subjected to unending fusillade in the form of martial, siege and confrontation by both the obstructionist and the regressive forces. The nation has been

made a hostage by the votaries of the furies. If it is not retrieved with a master stroke of statesmanship, God forbid, our country will drift towards nihilistic direction. The political macabre dance is increasingly threatening the ethos of the body politic. While other nations, including the ones in our periphery, are engaged in activities for uplift, we are engaged in proliferating hatred.

Such an attitude give the lie to our commitment. Despite such a frightening prognosis, we do not believe that there is no love lost between our political parties that they cannot deliver the nation from the imbrolio. It makes no sense to fight the political battle on the street. On the contrary, it makes bad blood among persons and saps off the energies of the people. A jaded nation which dissipates itself cannot move ahead much less make any substantive progress.

Political brinkmanship is clouding the future of this nation. In such a pass, the existence of the polity becomes at a stake let alone make any progress. In such a context it is nearly impossible for any government to combat the problems confronting the country. Even a very small group, espousing the cause of violence, can paralyze the state machinery by subverting the peace. The rendition for revenge needs to be stopped; the present situation needs to be changed. Those who have a stake in the country view the situation with consternation.

Given the wisdom and statesmanship the political spectrum as a whole is in a position, we strongly believe, to take the wind out of the sails

of those frenetic people. Otherwise, we shall give a cause for a mischievous smile to our enemies who are lurking amongst us.

Gulam Nabi, Nasirabad, Chittagong

For a healthy atmosphere

Sir, We would like to bring the following matters to the notice of the City Corporation and the members of the public in the interest of protecting our environment against pollution and thereby ensuring a clean and healthy atmosphere:

(i) Every house inmate should take proper care so that the daily domestic refuse/dirts are thrown to or dumped inside the dustbins or the place fixed for dumping garbage. (ii) The City Corporation or municipal authority should provide sufficient number of dustbins for dumping garbage and proper arrangement should be made to keep dustbins under some sort of cover/lids. Garbage should be collected late in the night or early in the morning and transported by means of covered vans. (iii) It is seen that when the Corporation sweeps clean the drains they usually dump the dirt just on the edges of the drains. As a result, the dirt soon drop into the drains causing the drains to fill up again. Perhaps it would be better if these dirt are carried away by the garbage van immediately after cleaning of the drains.

M Zahidul Haque, Press and Publicity Secretary, Bangladesh Society for Conservation of Environment, Dhaka.