The Baily Star

Dhaka, Tuesday, February 23, 1993

Export Constraints

Implementation of a policy in its totality may not be possible all the time for obvious reasons But implementation of certain specific suggestions should be made mandatory if those do not contradict the policy itself. Export policy is one such area where many of the policy decisions could not be implemented only because of, as alleged by Mahbubur Rahman, President of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), bureaucratic tangles or simple reluctance of the authorities concerned. This is a dangerous charge brought against this government claiming credit for opening the market for genuine entrepreneurs and opting for a true market economy.

As things stand today, the drive cannot succeed unless the whole system has been geared up to match the challenges of the option. Sure enough, the private sector needs to be given the impetus for the purpose. Instead, if it is restricted by several unhelpful policy-lines and procedural bottle-necks, life is made a hell of a thing for them. The areas of complaints are "the withdrawal of Export Promotion Benefit (EPB), non-implementation of the provision for 100 per cent income tax rebate on income from export earnings, deduction of 0.50 per cent advance income tax and demands for permission to sell 60 per cent of the export earnings in the open market."

Clearly, some of these demands may have been extended far enough for creating unfavourable influence on the country's existing facilities, but once the authority has conceded to the demands there is no points backing out. Or, if the step has been considered counterproductive after a review of the matter, the authority could have explained its position in clear terms. After all, the country's interests are what ought to be kept above all other considerations, including any incentives to a particular group or groups. The exporters, let us believe, have not appealed for such favours. Suggestions are approved and reviewed after extensive analysis of the possible impacts they will leave on the sectors concerned as well as the country's economy in general.

A National Committee on Export with the country's Prime Minister as head on top of the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) is soon coming up. Whether this will bring the necessary impetus to the area is a matter of mere conjecture. In this connection, the observation of EPB Vice Chairman may throw some light on the matter. The recommendation of the export policy cannot be implemented soon because of the authorities to do so lies with different ministries. Where this is a lame excuse or a genuine cause for the delay should immediately be looked into. No committee will bring a magic touch to the area unless a sound system can be developed to translate the ideas or theories into reality.

Sure enough the government side has many things to do. It can obviously direct its embassies and high commissions to open trade cells responsible for monitoring demands for Bangladeshi products abroad. The private entrepreneurs can immensely benefit from such information fed back home. But the government alone is not to be held blamable for all the problems in the area of export. The producers at home do not always give enough attention to quality control and standardisation. If they are not competitive- rather inefficient - there is no point rewarding their lack of initiatives. In an ever more competitive world, the most daunting task is to wrest the competitive edge from others. Our producers and exporters must live up to the challenges and only then theirs is a market to take. Like several disadvantages they also enjoy a few deciding advantages in this regard— cheap labour and raw materials for some unconventional items figure prominently. For success in the export area, a coordinating role of the government, however, will be most essential.

Shame on Us All

The most sacred of our national monuments has fallen prey to vandalism. Our revered Shaheed Minar stood desecrated on the very eve of Shaheed Day. Never before, not even during the dark Pakistani days (except for the occasion when the occupation army razed it to the ground in 1971), was there an incident as shameful as that which occurred on Saturday last

We are outraged. Our heads hang in shame, and our hearts bursts in anger. There will obviously be many claims, and many more theories as to who did it and why. In our view the real culprit is the atmosphere of political violence that now exists. We now have a situation when deadly gang fights between student groups are an everyday affair, when some armed groups can lay siege to one university after another, when hundreds of rooms in student halls can be vandalised and ransacked, when regular gun fights can occur between student parties - and this can happen with no fear of police or the law enforcing bodies taking action. In such circumstances it may not be impossible that anti-liberation forces could take advantage of the situation and strike against the most sacred of national monuments on the most revered of occasions.

The story in circulation is that an altercation between two groups - one working on the last minute decoration for Shaheed Day, and another wanting a right of passage through the blocked roads - resulted in the latter going on a rampage. We find it very hard to believe that a group of Dhaka University students, or for that any genuine students, will vent their anger on a monument like the Shaheed Minar, and do so on the eve of an event like that of the Shaheed Day. These so-called students had well laid out plans to do what they did. The question is who they were, and what their motives were.

Without jumping into any conclusion, we feel persuaded to suggest that there is much more to it than meets the eye. We urge the government, no demand of it, to use all the intelligence bodies within its fold to get to the bottom of this event. No effort should be spared, and no stone left

unturned to find the culprits and punish them. There are events, memories and monuments in a nation's life that are deemed so sacred that they are held beyond every controversy and above all politics. Shaheed Minar and events and memories of Shaheed Day are such events for us. Once a desecration is allowed to go unpunished, then the door becomes open for a whole range of mischiefs that were unthinkable before. We owe to posterity, and we owe to the future. Most importantly we owe it to ourselves in the present, to find and punish the ones who brought so much shame in such honourable an occasion.

Mahathir's Visit to Dhaka Raises Possibilities and

UALA LUMPUR — Any number of experts here would agree that the visit of Dr Mahathir Mchammad to Bangladesh has given a boost to Dhaka-KL relations, at the right time and on the right note. However, the same analysts would warn that much work remains to be done to give substance to the new promise raised by the

trip, first to Bangladesh and then to Pakistan. Malaysia's interest in promoting diversification of its trade and economic ties with other developing countries, including in such fields as investments and joint ventures, provides the backdrop to this affluent nation's outward-

Just as the stage was set for the Prime Minister's trip to South Asia, Dr Mahathir played host to Prime Minister Ancerwood Jugnauth of Mauritius, discussing a number of projects which Malaysia could set up in the Indian Ocean island. Then, on his return home from Pakistan, he would be seeing another official guest, the Prime Minister of

Hungary. With all its basic indicators, like GNP, GDP growth and exports, in excellent form, but considerably behind those of the Newly Industrialised Countries (NICs), like South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore, Malaysia must indeed embark on an economic expansion, into relatively untapped areas. Add to this the country's philosophical commitment to the South-South co-operation, of which Mahathir is an ardent advocate, as well as of its cultural and religious affinities to countries like

Bangladesh and Pakistan. One awkward fact that cast a shadow over the Prime Minister's visit to Dhaka and Islamabad was that, although prepared long in advance, it came just two months after the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya and that a couple of weeks after Kuala Lumpur signed a defence purchase deal with New Delhi, which Malaysia has rightly dismissed as a military pact with India.

Focuses on Old Challenges An astute politician, Mahathir scts his priorities right, on long-term and short-term perspectives, in domestic and foreign fields,

and goes about tackling them in the way he thinks best. In the process, he rarely plays the religious card. Seen from the Malaysian capital, the visit of

bilateral possibilities and one regional one. On the bilateral front, there appears renewed interest in Bangladesh-Malaysia joint ventures in the Chittagong Export Processing Zone (CEPZ), the employment of surplus Bangladeshi labour in Malaysia's industrial ventures and educational exchanges. On the

Mahathir to Bangladesh has focused on three

Malaysian Foreign Minister Abdullah Badawi has spoken well of the CEPZ, partly because products produced here could move into the export market without facing too many quota restrictions, as a privilege enjoyed by a LDC ltke Bangladesh

Again, in principle, investors can secure all the facilities they can ask for, ranging from tax holidays to one stop control point in setting up a plant. Unfortunately, realities seldom match what is offered in official documents or during talks among officials and trade representatives. While CEPZ remains relatively free from hartals, work stoppages in other parts of the country and volatile political develop-

AT HOME AND ABROAD

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regional plane. Mahathir's offer to provide a link between the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is of immense significance.

At this moment, these are only promises and possibilities. Much - indeed so much remains to be done, more by Bangladesh than by Malaysia, to translate them into realities.

Judging by my talks with unofficial experts, some trade representatives and even sources close to our High Commission, the overall perception of Bangladesh among a cross section of Malaysians still remains hazy, if not unfavourable. For instance, there is really nothing unique about Bangladesh setting aside an export processing zone. Other countries in Asia, especially Vietnam, China and the Philippines, have done the same. However,

ments, such as the by-election in Mirpur which contributed to the postponement of Begum Khaleda Zia's official visit to France. continue to cause dismay in Malaysta.

During such a discussion, the message from my long-time friends in Malaysia is always loud and clear. It is simply this, "We can do without a long tax holiday, but we cannot do without an stable economic climate, an uninterrupted flow of output, a satisfactory level of productivity of labour and more streamlined official procedures. Then, as one concerned individual puts it, "we can also do without totally unknown youngish looking well-dressed persons hanging around the hotel lobby, offering to fix up appointments and other formalities."

According to one potential investor from Malaysia, who spoke on the basis of anonymity, the treatment he received at the Dhaka

international Airport on his first arrival in Bangladesh was just too cumbersome for his understanding, the situation made further complicated by a request for a "commission" for customs clearance. Two days later, he returned to Kuala Lumpur, abandoning his original plan of investing several millions of dollars in a joint ventures.

Yet, instead of judging the situation in Bangladesh in black and white terms, sympathetic Malaysian investors are more than willing to explore the possibilities in our country. But they insist that the authorities in Dhaka must learn from the way China and Vietnam are handling the potentia investors from out-

To do the first thing first, it was suggested by one expert that a counter should be set up at the airport for the exclusive use of potential investors, to be manned by well-trained volunteers who help with the immigration and custom formalities. If these investors have been in contact with Bangladesh missions in their countries, they would be well-briefed as to what to expect in Dhaka, an abridged telephone directory of officials concerned with investment and even some advance appointments. Even a media coverage of a potential investor on his arrival at the airport, especially by television, would boost the moral of "your welcome guest."

One wonders if television in our major hotels in Dhaka and Chittagong ever show movies on investment prospects in Bangladesh, focusing on CEPZ or on industrial

enterprises already set up in the country. The truth is, in the highly competitive field of attracting foreign investments, with Vietnam, China and even Shri Lanka emerging as our strong rivals, Bangladesh is falling behind. Even with a helping hand offered by Mahathir, the country cannot catch up all that easily or quickly.

The second article of the two-part series will appear later this week.

India's Naxalites: Rebels Emerge NDIA'S oldest undercommunist movement has emerged. Twenty-five years after the movement was launched in 1967 from the village of

land and jungle.

But, says one political ob-

server, "The Naxalite move-

ment has finally realised that

violence doesn't pay. It breeds

contempt for the those who

practise it. And sometimes, as

in Malaysia, the communist

movement itself can die

following continued violence

mainstream Communist Party

of India (Marxist-Leninist) -

also know as CPI-ML - it is

clear as daylight that electoral

politics has come. "People have

come to trust the parliamen-

tary system," says Ashim

Chatterji, one of the Naxalite's

theoreticians. "It is not possi-

to the West Bengal Assembly in

1990 but is unfazed. "The peo-

ple brought to power and

ousted the likes of Indira

Gandhi," he says. The electoral

process has emerged as a

to boycott polls now, he says.

tasted some electoral success.

ally ugly.

weapon and it would be wrong .

Already, the Naxalites have

He himself lost an election

ble to ignore that any longer."

Observers say that for the

and underground struggle."

Naxalbari, Bihar state, the Naxalites have decided to enter the political mainstream. Last December 28, Vinod Mishra, who leads the ultraleftist Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), emerged from the underground to address a massive political rally of more than

100,000 activists who had

come in from the states of

West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and

ground

Andhra Pradesh. Mr Mishra did a historic gesture. He publicly admitted the excesses and mistakes in party politics and promised to

make amends. He suggested that underground armies and the annihilation of class enemies had proved useless. And now new tactics were needed to face contemporary political situations.

Still, West Bengal and Bihar states remain the hot seats of the Nazalite movement. And fighting continues in the south, in Andhra Pradesh state where Naxalite extremists have killed scores of policemen and politicians and claim to have "liberated" thousands of square kilometres of farm-

from Bihar's Underground

The signs are that those who are pleading for the gun and others who have opted for the ballot box may have a final battle of their own

Prakash Chandra writes from New Delhi

In the last general election, its clectoral front - the Indian People's Front based in south and central Bihar - elected an MP to the Lower House of Parliament in New Delhi.

The CPI-ML has also managed to win five seats in the Bihar Assembly. Earlier, Santosh Rana, a veteran of the CPI-ML's provisional Central Committee, won a seat in the Assembly while still in jail.

Analysts say the demolition of the mosque at Ayodhya and the victory march of Hindu fundamentalists signal the early end of India's communist movement. Thus, some desperate remedies were required.

The aim now is to enter electoral politics and promote more unity among lestist groups to fight the conservative right. According to some analysts, the Naxalites may

have been nudged to face realities as Ifindu and Muslim fundamentalists begin to dominate politics.

Party analysts also say the Naxalites have chosen the ballot box to fight the rural-based Congress Party at the centre and, to the right, Hindu fundamentalists who are fast gaining ground in north India.

Some ideologues in Bihar are doubtful. They believe it is not going to be a clean break with the past. There could be a parallel movement underground which may not be allowed to dic.

This is the usual tacties of a defeated party. They want to have it both ways. Now their biggest need is to paper the cracks within their own party and other left wing organisations. The aim is to bring together the various constituents

of the communist movement which remains fragmented," says a former Naxalite.

There are various players. For instance, the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) in Bihar, which has been active in the underground, is at odds with the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) leaders in Patna. The MCC has been alleged to wage anti-upper caste violence. But the MCC is inspired by guerilla warfare and guns are easily available in Bihar. This is one maverick group which the

tend with. There are signs that those who are pleading for the gun and others who have opted for the ballot box may have a final battle of their own.

Naxalite movement has to con-

One of the champions of the armed struggle, Manzul Haq. is. a veteran who was involved in the Naxalite movement in West Bengal in 1969. He still believes in class war.

From his one-room apartment in a narrow street of a heavily populated Calcutta suburb, he says: You have a revolution ad no one dies. That is impossible." Mr Haq was crippled by police torture after a couple of decades in jail.

It is interesting to note that Mr Siddharth Shanker Ray, newly-appointed Indian Ambassador to Washington, was the man who almost destroyed the Naxalite movement when he was the Chief Minister in West Bengal.

The police were so organised that many Naxalite leaders were killed in encounters. Dead were hundreds of young intellectuals who deserted their homes, studies and bright careers to participate in an armed struggle to "liberate" India.

The young men and women came from all over India. But Mr Ray and his men fought the Naxalite movement using every means. For, Calcutta then was a described city. Factories were deserted, struck by armed Naxalites. Capital was fleeing from one of the biggest industrial centres of the country.

It was only when the Naxaffic movement was contained that Calcutta became a vibrant city again. As governor, Mr Ray tried some of his tactics in Punjab State, torn by gun-toting Sikh separatists, but failed.

- Depthnews Asia

The Network for Peace

Mountie Officers Go to the Rescue in South Africa

by Derek Ingram

The Commonwealth observers of the violence in South Africa are a mix of policemen,

soldiers, lawyers, and diplomats. They have attended meetings, marches, demonstrations

and funerals in a bid to reduce tension. And they have mediated in quarrels between

crowds and the police. Gemini News Service describes the so far unreported work of the

THEN the idea of foreign observers coming into South Africa to monitor the violence was first suggested to President F W de Klerk he did not like it at all. Now that they have been in place for several weeks he has seen their value and wants them to say.

In this short time the team of Commonwealth observers has aiready chalked up a number of small but significant successes on the ground.

The group includes two top men from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police-former deputy commissioner Henry Jensen and former commissioner Robert Simmonds. They have personally helped sort out several incidents.

In one a community leader got into a fight with police at a funeral. The man was arrested and the crowd became angry. Jensen, together with another observer, Senator Frederick Mitchell, from the Bahamas, and David Storey, the chairman of the local dispute regional committee (LDRC), stepped in, mediated between the police and the crowd, and saved the situation turning re-

Another day, Jensen and Chief Superintendent Peter Stevens, of Britain, were attending a political rally at Ketlehone when a man was found to have drugs and arrested. The two intervened help us."

helped to placate the crowd. The Mounties have had frank exchanges with the South African police about their behaviour and usually get a good response. They have helped to relay to the authoritics police complaints about bad pay and they have discussed with South African police chiefs ways in which they can train their men and women in community rela-

Commonwealth peace mission.

The exchanges with the police have been revealing. The

with the police and again

frequent response to the Mounties has been along these lines: "We understand what you are saying. We want to change, but you have to understand we have long been working in a difficult environment. You can

The Commonwealth group does not itself have any resources to train the police, but it can help to point them in the right direction. As a first step it worked hard to establish confidence with the South African Defence Force and the South African Police.

incidents over the past weeks have proved the value of the observer operation and shown that improved policing and enlightened diplomacy can do much to defuse potential violence.

The Commonwealth group

notched up a considerable success in the area worst hit by political violence in the whole of South Africa -Umbumbulu, Natal. In one settlement in the area called Mpuahini, 22 people were massacred on October 24.

For a long time attempts to bring together the warring factions from the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and the Alrican National Congress (ANC) failed. Then Moses Anafu, a Ghanaian diplomat on the staff of the Commonwealth Secretariat working with the observer group, started days of shuttle diplomacy.

Finally, he got together a meeting in the local magistrates court, chaired by the magistrate and attended by representatives of the IFP, ANC, the regional authority,

Regional Dispute Resolution Committee, business, churches, South African police and the KwaZulu homeland police.

The result was the forma-

tion for the first time of a joint committee - an interim local dispute resolution committee. Anafu said he was "overjoyed," adding: "The prospects for peace are excellent. The participants are very committed."

It is this type of local activity, carried out with the ordinary people that the Common wealth group has proved can be of enormous value if it could be repeated around the country. The group has been working with two other teams of observers from the UN and the European Community, but it has evolved its own style of operation along guidelines laid

down by the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Chief Emeka Anyaoku. While the UN team com-

prises bureaucrats from its staff in New York and the EC team is of 15 police, the Commonwealth team is much more varied in its composition. Its members include the Director of the Australian Institute of Criminology, a retired Nigerian general, a former Supreme Court judge from Ghana and the Assistant Commissioner of Police of New Zealand.

Its brief is to help the agencies and mechanisms set up under the Peace Accord to prevent and combat violence; liaise with the authorities, police and magistrates; strengthen confidence between the law enforcement agencies and communities; ease communications between groups concerned with violence; and give all concerned the benefit of

their experience and insights. At the outset the group met de Klerk socially and all the political parties, except the Afrikaner Resistance Movement (AWB), then went on to talk with business, trade union and church leaders

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.

Public Rally

Sir, If the number of people who attend public rally is the indicator of our political development, then we have reached the height, for, our political rallies are often projected with attributives like 'mammoth', 'historic', unprecedented' etc. Of course, size in terms of space occupied does not matter since we have the most famished look and sickly constitution on account of penury. Nevertheless, no people can match our ability to rant and bluster. Cynics say it

is our forte and pursuit.

We wonder what Adam was like. There is no clue as to his address to a crowd, for, we know only that he sought solace from eve during his dire straits. Edmund Burke is said to have been most impressive speaker for which he won for him applause and approval. We know not if he had addressed any public rally. I wish he did not. For, I am afraid, if he did, he could not have notched up such an enviable place for his eloquence. Fuhrer of the Third Reich is found thanks to the celluloid screen, to be one of

the great ranters of the world. Few can match his rumblings and fulminations. His awesome gesticulations are phenomenal. It is dubious whether he too spoke to the people from the podium except to his army.

Though the latter was a paranoid, the former was certainly not. Satan, crest fallen and accursed, grieved for the loss of beatitude. He too, did it with style and dignity. His much maligned speech in the Pandemonium - which many not quite not unjustly say an aspersion on him - was also marked by poise and grace. His rallying address to the fallen angels almost enthused them to the point of the retrieval of the heaven. His thoughts and ideas were forward looking. He could instil sense of hope and nearly resurrect their lost spirit. Evidence is conspicuously absent as to whether he went to the extent of address-

ing the rabble. He was elitist in his attitude, we learn.

Public rally, in our milieu, is sine dubio an indispensable condition. In an otherwise inane country, public rally serves the purpose of division and stirring of motion. While the crowds gambol, the leaders quibble. Yet it sounds symphony sonorous. After all, we require a conjurer wondrous though bereft of charisma gen-

Golam Nabi Nasirabad, Chittagong.

Attitude

Sir, One serious obstruction in the way of smooth enforcement of law is that: a person who commits a crime in most cases is not treated as a criminal as his political or other platforms move out to colour his criminal act as a part of po-

litical/union activities and thereby provide shelter and other assistance to protect him against law. Taking advantage of this trend, some people in the society as well as in the authority are becoming more and more corrupted. It would be evident that the present trend of political activities is rather encouraging people to violate the law of the land and social order and discipline e.g. hartal, protest processions etc.

No matter what may be the action, ethical or unethical, legal or illegal, we have to achieve our ends, establish us in authority and also get wealthy - this is the motto of the powerful and the wouldbe-powerful in our society!

The attitude must change. M Zahidul Hague Assistant Professor

Institute, Dhaka.

Bangladesh Agricultural

Soft drinks

Sir, Now-a-days, soft drinks

are available in every nook and corner of the country. Sometimes, the bottle of drinks remain unsold at the retailer shops for months, even years together. We are not aware of the validity of these drinks, as no expiry date is written on the body of the bottle. The drink certainly cannot remain pure inside the bottle for an unlimited time. It is likely to get contaminated as well as develop fungus due to long storage. Such drinks may cause health hazard when taken.

the concerned authority to give clear instructions publicly about the drinks.

would, therefore, request

Mahbubul Haque Chowdhury Sonali Bank, HO, Dhaka.