

Birth of ICSTED

The laying of the foundation stone of the International Centre of Science, Technology and Environment for Densely Populated Regions (ICSTED) at Agargaon on Saturday was somewhat overshadowed by the following day's programme of conferment of the honorary Doctor of Science (honoris causa) or popularly known DSc degree on Nobel laureate physicist Professor Abdus Salam. While the Sunday's auspicious occasion at the Curzon Hall, Dhaka University has its value in that the entire nation has, through awarding the recognition to a scientist of such international repute, honoured itself perhaps more than the Nobel Prize winner. For a degree by itself does little to add to a scientist of his calibre. By conferring the degree, we only show respect for the man's achievement and express our commitment to the cause he himself has devoted his whole life to.

The ceremonial value apart, however, such occasions offer little practical benefits unless the follow-up programmes are specially tuned to the need of the nation. A more practical way of carrying on the programme is to translate the ideas and ideals of scientists like Salam into reality in the form of institutes like the ICSTED. The fact that Professor Salam has chosen Bangladesh as a home to the first of 20 such centres of excellence to be set up world-wide outside of Italy is a privilege worth celebrating. Indeed, the leading particle physicist's preoccupation with the development of science and technology in the Third World has prompted him to embark on such an ambitious but no doubt comprehensive programme.

Professor Salam's view on the issue is quite clear and as the prime-mover of this proposed centre he will, we believe, provide the needed impetus for the ICSTED's success. His success both as a scientist and also as an organiser is most enviable. The International Centre for Theoretical Physics (ICTP) at Trieste, Italy bears witness to this. To this Professor Salam has added the International Centre of Science and High Technology which, according to the scientist, will be working as three separate institutes: one concentrating on chemistry, another on new materials and high technology and the third on environment.

The spread of scientific excellence, particularly in the Third World countries as envisioned by this pioneer of such an effort, promises to be a major development in the creation of physical facilities for promotion of science and technology in modern times. All this aims at pushing the quality of life in the developing countries to a level matching the one of the developed world. As president of the Third World Academy of Science (TWAS) and director of the ICTP, he knows better than anyone else how challenging the task is and this is enough reason why we should rest assured of the scientist's unflinching commitment to the scientific and humanitarian cause rolled into one. A tireless champion of the Third World cause, he is highly convinced of the potential of the scientists of this neglected region. He also believes there is a necessity of a meeting place of the researchers of the two worlds. The ICTP has already proved both his points in a most demonstrating manner.

It is also significant that the ICSTED should be based in the most populous country. Professor Salam has his own interpretation to give in that he does not consider the population a drag on national resources. A most practical and alive mind as he is gifted with, he plans to take the benefit of modern science and technology to equip them with knowledge and skill capable of turning them into valued human resources. Professor Salam is quick to detect that women's representation in various centres of research and technology, including the TWAS, is very poor. Therefore he advocates for educating women in greater number and at par with men. Like all great men he takes the liberal but objective view that the return on investing in women's education is far greater than on men's.

Professor Salam's life is a book that leaves a lesson for us to emulate. The ICSTED under his guidance and patronage, hopefully, will equal the excellence expected of such a centre.

Let's Not Canonise the Rebel

If you want to defang a revolutionary, canonise him. That's an old wisdom. Let us not canonise either Nazrul or Tagore. Especially the stormy petrel of our literature Kazi Nazrul Islam. In the interest of our national and social unfolding as also for the richness of our individual being we would need his living presence amongst us for many centuries. One way of eroding that would be to make a meaningless epithet of 'rebel' — the description that accompanies his name unflinching. His uncompromising activism against British colonialism, landing him in jail and compelling him to go on a hunger strike, has made him into our first and best politically committed poet. The gulf separating politics and literature remains till today, as unbridged as ever. What right have we then to pose as if we are eulogizing him by calling him a rebel. Worse still, the forces of status quo and of fispurious tendencies in the society developing out of obscurantism and backwardness also come in a crowded queue to sing in praise of his rebellion, whatever that be.

Nazrul's was a many-faceted rebellion of which the relevant ones in today's context are his rejection of religious bigotry and communalism. If he had composed very moving Islamic songs in the range of a hundred, he also had composed nearly 500 songs about Kali, the goddess, sending her votaries into ecstatic trances of bhakti. His rebellion also earned him that crown of thorn 'kaafir'. And undaunted he went his way, erratic may be but never compromising.

Of his creations, his songs definitely bear the promise of immortalising him. His musical genius has perpetuated in one treasure trove the best of northern subcontinental airs extant till the third decade of the century now going out. And to this storehouse of up-country melodies how he added the native Bengalee charm!

There is no denying that many among us find Bengality and the Muslim identity to be exclusive categories and fail to decide on the best combination of the two. The best antidote to this malaise is to take one's cue from Nazrul. There was no better Bengalee among Muslims before him and there will hardly be after.

APRIL 23 to May 1 1993 — eight days which shook Shri Lanka to its foundation. Eight days which shattered the nation and left it reeling with shock, sorrow, anguish and uncertainty.

Two of its most outstanding and charismatic leaders had been felled by assassins. It was the bloodiest month of May, the hallowed month, when Wesak falls, marking the birth, enlightenment and passing away of the Buddha.

The culture of violence which has gripped the country had reached its apogee.

On April 23, Lalith Athulthudali, leader of the Opposition party, the Democratic United National Front, was shot dead by an unknown assassin while he was addressing a meeting. Athulthudali, renegade Cabinet Minister from the ruling United National Party, rising rapidly in the political firmament was a likely contender for the Presidency in 1994.

There is suspicion that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), fighting for a separate state in the north and east, were responsible for the killing. This is unconfirmed.

One week later President Ranasinghe Premadasa, second Executive President of Sri Lanka was assassinated by a suicide bomber, on May Day while he was directing a procession in a busy commercial intersection of the city of Colombo.

Premadasa lived dangerously, ignoring security advisers and mingling freely and fearlessly with the common people. Intelligence agencies had already warned the country that the LTTE had sent down suicide bombers.

Ignoring these reports, the late President stood in sarong and shirt, sandals and peaked cap at Armour Street in Colombo when the bicycle-rider suicide bomber banged into him triggering off the bomb. It killed 10 of his security detail, several others and injured many.

At the moment the LTTE is the prime suspect.

Leader of the

Disadvantaged

Few people would deny that he was the only leader after independence who was genuinely anguished by the sufferings of the disadvantaged poor. He called them 'nathi bari' (the powerless who had nothing). Frantically, he set out to release their potential, support and empower them to improve their quality of life. Driven by unmatched vigour and determination he was succeeding in

One must congratulate the Daily Star, for having published a very timely report (May 20, 1993) about the 'primary impediments to investments in the country', as revealed in a recent despatch by a World Bank affiliate, Washington-based Foreign Investment Advisory Service (FIAS). It has been stated that these impediments include lack of accountability, complex administrative procedures coupled with 'gross abuses' and bureaucratic interference.

A local investor knows through his bitter experience, that nothing could be a truer remark than 'the bureaucracy likes and lives on complicated regulations and far from encouraging investment, the bureaucracy seems to be constraining it'.

In this write-up, the main thrust is on the unendurable plight of on-going industries, caused allegedly by some bureaucrats at the 'customs' level, who seem to nurture an unholy delight in complicating the simple and well meaning rules and regulations formulated by the Finance Ministry and National Board of Revenue. To cite an example, Finance Ministry/NBR has issued well-intentioned regulations and SROs in respect of electronic raw materials which are allowed to be imported on pay-

A Legacy Left behind by the Late Shri Lankan President Will Development Projects Launched by Premadasa Boost Fight against Poverty?

A Star Special

Mailika Wangasundara writes from Colombo

pulling them up by the bootstraps from their misery and squalor.

The key component of his pragmatic ideology was — alleviation of poverty, giving the poor a place in the sun, a shelter, a livelihood and a hearing.

An authoritarian workaholic, few people could keep pace with his 18-hour working day. He galvanised everybody around him with his dynamism, but few could match his reserves of energy, his single-mindedness, his determination and innovative thinking. He put in place imaginative, creative programmes with one target in mind — the poor, the disabled, the forgotten and the powerless.

So it was no wonder that the country, traumatised by a double tragedy, united in national grief and anguish. Virtually millions of weeping, waiting mourners thronged the city, stood for hours in mile-

has been bloodied by the tragic assassination of several leading personalities: Vijaya Kumaramanga, leader of the Sri Lanka Mahajana Pakshaya; Ranjan Wijeratne, State Minister of Defence; Brig General Denzil Kobbekaduwe, Commander of the north, and eight other high-ranking officers, Clancy Fernando, Navy Commander; A Amirthalingam, leader of the Tamil United Liberation Front and Richard de Soysa, journalist whose murder caused an international sensation.

Some of these killings have been attributed to the LTTE, but rumour implicated Premadasa in the case of others. Whispered words blackened his image and lowered the

He then clawed his way up in Municipal politics, became an MP, a Cabinet Minister, Prime Minister and then President.

He was a past master in the art of survival. Twice, it seemed that his fall was imminent. Once during the terror of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna rebellion when murder and violence reigned supreme and all state and private sector activities came to a dead halt.

Next, when Lalith Athulthudali, along with 40 odd MPs from the ruling UNP joined the Opposition to impeach him. He outmanoeuvred them and emerged extraordinarily strong, and won the local elections creditably.

But the rumours continued.

The late President stood in sarong and shirt, sandals and peaked cap at Armour Street in Colombo when the bicycle-rider suicide bomber banged into him triggering off the bomb.... At the moment the LTTE is the prime suspect.

long queues to pay their last respects to the slain leader. They touched the closed casket containing his much-mutilated body, and worshipped it as is the custom.

Weeping men went down on their knees; howling hysterical women broke down; tearful children saluted him. The old and the sick came on the shoulders of others; the disabled on crutches, wheel chairs or leaning on others. In a heart-breaking show of grief the disabled crawled on hands and knees to the bier and threw flowers under it.

'Our Father is Dead'

Banners in the streets wept: 'Our father is dead. We the poor, who will look after us now?' President Premadasa, it is not you who has died, it is the country which has died; 'May you be born again in this country'; 'May you attain Nibbana'. He was truly the Common Man's President.

The Crime Detection Bureau has released the picture of a severed head, with no known body attached to it. It is believed to be the head of the suicide bomber.

Shri Lanka's recent history

credibility of the UNP, creating immense tension and a sense of insecurity in the country.

Prophetically, in his very last speech the late President said in a voice choking with emotion: 'Assassinate me by whatever means, but please do not assassinate my father — an asset which I have secured from childhood.'

The roots of his political career go back to his childhood. He hails from an unsavoury, underprivileged locality, Keselwate, in Colombo, from a lower middle class family. He did not belong to the ruling elite, hailing from a few affluent aristocratic families which have ruled Sri Lanka since independence.

'Sucharita'

At the age of 14, sitting in a shed with six other boys he started a moral re-orientation movement called 'Sucharita'. Grown big today, the foundation of the 'Sucharita' building contains the stones that were thrown at it. Thugs, drunkards, the dregs of society came from Keselwate and revulsion drove the young reformer to form the movement.

He had many enemies within the party and outside. There were charges of an erosion of democratic rights, interference with the media, subversion of the forces of law and order, unfair elections, disappearances, attempts to intimidate the judiciary, the devaluation of the powers of ministers, corruption in high places etc.

Unfazed, he seemed to relish the battlefield. Most observers agreed that he was the man of the hour for Sri Lanka, to guide her in her unique way to prosperity and the status of a Newly Industrialised Country.

It would take several tomes to record the volume of his work. He believed fiercely in the value of human resources in a poor country. His programmes were designed to release the innate potential in man.

Model in House Building

Eventually, even the hard bargainers of the World Bank agreed with him and started funding them. When in 1978, as Minister of Local Government, Housing and Construction, he proposed launching

a programme to build one lakh of houses, it seemed like a bad joke.

When he started off the country had 28 lakh of housing stock, 11 lakh of which were habitable. As the nation bid farewell to its pioneer house-builder, he had galvanised the country into building 1.5 million houses and a further housing programme to build 1.5 million houses is ongoing.

The state stepped in with minimum intervention and maximum support to the poor house-builder with loans, subsidised materials, advice, guidance and encouragement.

Shri Lanka has become a model in house-building for the whole developing world. On his proposal the UN declared 1987 the Year of Shelter for the Homeless.

He built over 1000 Revival Villages, integrated entities with water, electricity, roads, schools, post offices,

ties to compete abroad etc. Hafling from an ugly slum, he loved beauty. He greened the city, and the villages he set up. A lover of the arts and literature, he wrote novels, lyrics and poetry. He renovated old theatres, built cultural centres and gave artists financial help, pensions, land, houses and every encouragement. He renewed interest in folk arts and exploited their value.

He built roads, bridges, culverts and highways; renovated or embellished places of worship like Kataragama and the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy; raised fallen Buddha statues and carried his religious zeal to India where he built a 100-house scheme near Buddhagaya.

Taking employment to the villages and stalling the migration to the city he set up 300 garment factories in remote villages. On the pipeline are 15,000 small industrial undertakings in the villages — to be chosen by the people, owned and implemented by them with state help.

He decentralised government, doing away with the colonial Kachcheri system in the provinces, and replacing it with Divisional Secretariats in each district. This making it more convenient for the villager to transact all his business nearer home in one, one-stop government agency.

SAARC

Chairing SAARC last year he earned the respect of South East Asian leaders who this year approved all the core articles of co-operation proposed at the Colombo summit — such as poverty alleviation, preferential trade, care of children etc.

With the JVP terror behind him, Premadasa was making a vigorous push for NIC status. The economy gained in vigour with a five per cent growth rate; inflation had been halved from 22 per cent in 1990; tourists were returning; there was a commendable influx of foreign investment, and the economy had been widely liberalised.

Only a solution of the north-east problem remained. On the war the expenditure has risen to Rs 23 billion in 1992. Talking often about a political solution by consultation, he took a great deal of flak on the never-ending stalemate war in the north.

Premadasa had long talks with the Tigers once, but they let him down. He has been accused of bending backwards to accommodate the Tigers.

And so they killed him, it seems.

OPINION

Plight of On-going Industries: An Entrepreneur's Experience

ment of Customs duties earmarked for raw materials in different brackets. Under the previous rules, importable raw materials or components were subject to payment of duties fixed on CKD concept for the entire list of components needed for assembling a particular product. Gradually, it was felt that some of the raw materials could be left out of the importable list, as these items were being manufactured within the country. Later, the list of components was divided into several brackets and different rates of duties (charging from 30% to 60%) were fixed for items grouped in each of these brackets. One idea behind this system was to induce local entrepreneurs to make the groups of items, for which higher duties were imposed. These were non-standard electronic items not requiring special or high technology. This system has replaced the earlier formula of fixing one single duty/rate for all the items taken together, for which a consolidated value was mentioned in the invoice on the basis of a negotiated price

agreed between the importer and supplier. Now the invoice contains separate price for separate items of components.

Now, when the goods (raw materials/components) actually arrive at the port of entry, the helpless importer is at the mercy of the Customs officials who, more often than not, arbitrarily fix the total value of the imported raw materials by nearly 50% without any rhyme or reason. For instance, India made 14" B/W TV components imported at US \$ 40.00 to 44.00 per unit is arbitrarily valued at US \$ 57.00. The net result is that the importer is unable to pay the exorbitantly high duty imposed as above and thus the release of the imported goods stands blocked. The honest importer has to go from pillar to post to get the knot removed and, in the process, the goods lie indefinitely at the port, involving heavy demurrage and, what is worst, is that the factory at the industrial site lies idle for days together. But the goods do actually get released ultimately and how it happens is anybody's guess.

The main point is that too much discretion has been given to the officials at the port openly, which obviously is sometimes abused. One can suggest that to remove such bottlenecks created by arbitrary action on the part of relevant branch of the bureaucracy, a tripartite committee can be set up at the nearest district headquarters with representative of importer, local customs authority and a responsible officer of the Deputy Commissioner to look into these disputes quickly with directives to finally dispose of each case within 36 hours at the latest. Only one appeal may lie with the National Board of Revenue. If this solution is not acceptable, the discretion of local customs officials must be trimmed without leaving any option for them to interpret the rule or order concerned unilaterally.

The above is just one example of how an on-going industry can be harassed in course of its day to day operation, leading to serious trouble. But more examples can be cited to demonstrate the

plight of an honest entrepreneur arising out of whimsical and obstinate actions of some customs officials.

We have no doubt that the government is sincere in its efforts to promote industrial growth in the country. But such efforts will be frustrated if fool-proof steps are not taken to curb all impediments, irregularities and abuses in quick implementation of the government policy.

Coming back to the Star report on the urgent need for major administrative reforms in the field of investment in Bangladesh, one must echo the same feeling with more emphasis in regard to fastest possible implementation of the various bold steps taken by the government for rapid industrialisation in the country. Can't we do something to ensure that, under the present liberal import policy, goods imported by our industrial entrepreneurs according to their production plan reach their factory on the same day or, at least, within 24 hours after the consignment arrives at

the port of entry. This is perhaps what happens in the newly industrialised countries (NICs) like Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand, not to speak of South Korea which is now fast approaching Japan's standard. Of course, this sounds like a far cry!

In the Star reports one notices that the FIAS recommended 'Setting up of a permanent administrative reform commission to rationalize existing rules, regulations and procedures and a standing committee to vet all regulations'. Perhaps, this recommendation would cover all regulations and orders issued by the National Board of Revenue and if so, the proposed standing Committee will certainly scrutinize these orders in the light of the provisions contained in the Finance Act passed by Parliament. In this context, more liberalization of import policy, reducing the different rates of import duty to the minimum number, with a view to avoiding divergent interpretation in application of duty structure, is called for. Finally, something like the administrative law tribunal as proposed in FIAS report is also justified to cover industries as well.

A Citizen

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.

Lady politicians

Sir, A rare seminar was organized jointly by the Jatiya Mohila Sangstha and the Ministry of Social Welfare and Women's Affairs to celebrate the Bangla Year 1400. It was a big occasion. The President was the chief guest while Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia inspired everybody by her unannounced presence.

But one thing, in my humble opinion, disappointed some ladies. While publishing a brochure, Jatiya Mahila Sangstha focused on some prominent ladies and printed their photographs it did not do justice to some of the pioneer politicians of our country who deserve mention. As for example, Begum Anwara Khatun, Begum Khatun was the first Muslim lady politician of this part of the subcontinent who was elected member to the Bengal Assembly in 1946 from

Dhaka and again in 1954 to the then East Pakistan Assembly. She was a member of the first Language Movement Action Committee and resigned from the membership of East Pakistan Assembly in 1952 in protest of the firing and killing of the students and gave strong statement in the Assembly against the autocratic Government of Pakistan. She represented our country at the United Nation and in many other countries of the world. She was a great social worker who fought for the women, establish many schools.

Then again Amina Begum who held Awami League together by holding the post of secretary of the party when all the big leaders were in jail. She was a courageous lady who fought all her life against autocracy.

We would have been very

Munira Khan
23 Green Road, Dhaka

Flood or FAP?

Sir, I extend my sincere thanks to you and R M Titumir for his article entitled 'No Further Flap on FAP, Please,' published on 17 May.

I think the in-depth studies have given some useful insights into this on-going flood protection project in Bangladesh. To my surprise, I was shocked to learn that the FAP documentation have clearly stated about the rich diversity of experiments being practised through these projects. Titumir is very correct in his own rights when he says that 'Bangladesh is being treated as guinea-pigs'. The would-be economic rate of return according to the evaluations re-

port is also said to be negative. This would surely increase the misery of the people of this land alongside pressing down with more debt yokes on our shoulders.

If truly, according to experts, Flood Control and Drainage or Irrigation structures in Bangladesh cause disastrous consequences to millions of our people, would we be able to assess the value for huge money involved in this project in positive terms? How our next generations will respond while repaying the accumulating millions of debts. Due to adverse media coverage and intense pressure on the politicians in the Lok Sabha, the Indian Government had at last agreed to stop the Sardar Sarovar Project in western India which could possibly lead to hundreds of thousands of people being displaced.

Can't we think in similar terms or at least do something to remove the unwanted pbbles from the whole scheme? Is there any way for making the members of the elite in Bangladesh to voice their concerns? I wonder whether the donors and implementing agencies are willing to give this matter a serious thought

in the current Third Conference on FAP. Which one is better for us — Flood or FAP?

Harold D. Biswas
24/2 Plessey Barrack
Dhaka - 1205

Economic miracles!

Sir, Since the emergence of Bangladesh, every successive Government has been claiming to be moving the mountains and conquering the stars. The first Government of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman claimed to have achieved an economic growth rate of 12% in the first year of their power whereas growth rate in Pakistan period could never exceed 6%. When Sheikh was killed and Khandekar Mustaq headed the Government, they also claimed to be doing much better than Sheikh Government. But Mustaq Govt was very shortlived and it was soon succeeded by Ziaur Rahman's Government. Zia Govt also claimed tremendous success, and claimed to have achieved not only self-sufficiency in food, but even exported one lakh tons of rice to an African country although later in that year rice had to be imported.

After the killing of Ziaur Rahman Justice Satter came to power but his Government was also very shortlived and was soon overthrown by Gen. Ershad. After three months of coming to power Ershad claimed that he had already exceeded the records of previous thirty years in the field of development. Accordingly, in his eight years of rule, the country was moving forward by leaps and bounds, and milk and honey was flowing all over.

When Ershad was forced out of power by a mass upsurge the present Government came to power. They too have been claiming that their macro economic management is so well that the fruits of development have already started reaching the people.

But the question is, if every Government had been doing so well, why the country is in the grip of grinding poverty, malnutrition, insecurity, and illiteracy? This reminds one of the saying of Alexander-the-great about India, 'What a peculiar country is this, Selu-kaas?'

Mrs Montaz Jahan
Fulbari, Sylhet