Dhaka, Friday, June 25, 1993

Link with Mongla — **Need for Action**

It could be a gem of an entry in Ripley's Believe It Or Not. Still it has so far failed to surprise a nation which has been at once the most credulous and the least trusting among nations. Mongla is our second entrepot. Developed properly with a developing hinterland and necessary communications laid, it could very well be the first. Because of the natural harbour it has Because of the fact that the whole of Khulna, Barisal and Rajshahi divisions have no other outlet to sea.

And Mongla is not connected with Khulna, the big city, it is a gateway to - by railway. Then what is the port there for in Mongla? What is it doing out there? Can only motorised transport costliest in the world for every kilogram carried serve a full-fledged port ? Logically enough, Mongla's has been a history of stunted growth growth stopped some three decades ago when it had hardly crossed its infancy. Why is that so? Because successive governments have done nothing for those divisions - half of Bangladesh it is - in the last decades that would call for expanded port activity. Neither industrially nor agriculturally. And not anything even by way of fish culture for which the southern shores of Barisal and Khulna divisions were ideal ground.

It is said that the railways had come to the subcontinent before even many European nations built them — a century and a half back during the viceregally of Lord Dalhousie, not for any love the British rulers had for the colonial natives. They laid the widest tracks in the world — 40 thousand miles of them — that carried the biggest wagons in the world. All to serve their own interest plundering India of its immense production of primary commodities. But lo, the selfsame ramifications of the rail tracks are serving as the central point of Indian industrialisation as also its starting point of an agricultural revolution. An instrument of exploitation has been successfully turned to from the nexus of modern India.

Perhaps we can attribute the same designs as the British to the Pakistanis when, as published in The Daily Star of Wednesday, they, after opening up the port at Mongla, went for rail connections with Khulna and thereby to the whole of our western region. And they allotted some 33 crore taka for that piece of railway to Khulna. It is a long way from 1966 to '93 - 27 years and from Pakistan to Bangladesh — some 1500 miles of alien territory. But as for Khulna and Mongla things haven't moved an inch — and because of that stagnation, whatever was built at that time has rotted in the meantime. Even if Pakistan had dreamed of making Mongla a great port and Khulna a great city for perfidious reasons, why could we not, after the Indian pattern, make a beneficial use of that beginning?

It took us a lot of time to build the East-West Interconnector. It is taking us longer to build only one bridge to the other part of Bangladesh. Even if we eventually succeed to throw up a bridge across the Jamuna, at the selected site, there would emerge a third region - the Barisal and Khulna divisions - unconnected to the capital and to the only true entrepot till now — Chittagong. The present interconnector carries only power and not natural gas. When shall we start thinking of pumping gas to those divisions across the Padma?

That these things would still take long to perform cannot be used as an excuse for developmental declaration in that region. As we can at present pump enough power to the western region, if we want to, there is no strong impediment to a selective industrialisation there, specially the Khulna division, which would call for radically higher import and export activity through Mongla.

Let us lay the foundation of this absolutely necessary process by connecting Mongla and Khulna by railway and after that let us also divert more ships to Mongla from Chittagong thus relieving the latter and ridding it of the dangers of holding a monopoly. The Daily Star report has laid all the blame for Mongla-Khulna rail fiasco on the Railway. No, it is the government who must own it up and begin a journey from apathy to action, from marking time to true dynamic progress.

Outrage in Nigeria

Washington is absolutely right in describing the annulment of the Nigerian presidential election as "outrageous" and in threatening to reconsider its relations with Africa's most populous country, including the 22.8 million dollar aid.

The annulment — officially described as suspension - of the polls came on Wednesday under the orders of the country's military ruler Gen. Ibrahim Babangida on the pretext that the judiciary of Nigeria had challenged the result of the election. So, Babangida took the line that by cancelling the polls, he was only protecting the honour of the court. This excuse would deceive no one, either inside the country or outside. It is confirmed by all independent sources, including international watchdog teams, that the election had been won by the opposition candidate, Moshood Abiola, and that the polling had been free, fair and relatively devoid of irregularities. There is little doubt that the military junta which had been hanging on to power for over a decade refuses to accept a democratically-elected civilian

Nigeria which faces manifold problems is plunged into a crisis. It is important that international pressure is stepped up on Babangida either to withdraw his decree or to hand over power to a transitional civilian government which can organise a fresh presidential election. This would be the only peaceful change in a country which has known many conflicts in the past, much bloodshed and, last but not the least, economic mess. A resourceful oil-rich country, Nigeria must bounce back, and it can do so only when it is placed under a democratic rule.

SICK INDUSTRIES HE much heralded and indeed expected indus-

Practical Steps Needed for Recovery

policy has never come about Nor is there any sign that it will do so in the near future. painful, has nevertheless to be The now-familiar epithet 'sick taken to save the industries industry' has, however, not concerned. Where all measures always been conceived with to salvage an industry appear the clarity it should have been, to be doomed in failure, the sometimes it has been question of any concession misplaced and on other times does not simply arise. Such indeliberately used to create dustries must not exist. As for more confusion over the haze the industries that still stand a that has already been sur chance of revival should how rounding the whole economic ever be given the maximum spectre. It is, therefore, necessary to be clear about what benefits of the new initiative. But, at the same time, it turns an industry into a truly sick one. Sick industries are should be ensured that industries are not declared sick only those that have simply failed to with the aim of tax evasion and achieve their stated or conderiving some other benefits ceived objectives. Now that in in the process. There are fidustries in droves fail to kick nancial institutions who have up sends a very disturbing sigfailed to monitor and give early nal through the length and warning of the debacle in the breadth of the country. It is industrial sector. not that one or two things go-Industrial Policy-'91 vening away can frustrate the industrial aspiration of a country; several, indeed a whole lot of

trial take-off due to

liberalisation of industrial

vital aspects seems to have

been made to work in the re-

sick is mostly our own doing

and should be admitted in the

first place to keep the record

straight. Then the sincere in-

vestigation to look for the vi-

able and non-viable industries

can reveal the true picture of

the industrial sector. That in-

dustries in different sectors

should have different problems

is understandable, but we are

not unfortunately told so. What

we however understand is that

there are indeed some foul

play and pressures and pulls

Board of Reconstruction

ernment is seriously consider-

ing the establishment of an in-

stitution similar to the one

India floated in 1985 under

the name. Board of Industrial

and Financial Reconstruction.

The cases of mismanagement,

embezzlement and other foul

plays have to be dealt with the

severity they deserve, through

the proposed institution. Top-

heavy management and over-

staffing have also stood in the

way of making industries vi-

able. The measure to cure the

malaise, although somewhat

EOPLE'S participa-

For the first time, the gov-

from within and outside.

That industries becoming

verse.

tures to find out the problems of sick industries and also the necessary steps those will be taken to solve the identified problems. With the fixing of the targets government set up a high powered 'Sick Industries Rehabilitating and Reviving Cell' in June-'91. This cell took an 11-point policy to trace out the sick industries. On the basis of which applications were invited from the sick industries for rebate of interest and to solve other problems. From the 10 industrial sectors of public and private enterprises 1,710 applica tions were sent to the authority. Among these the number of government owned indus tries was 28.

Number of Industrial Units

According to statistics of Bangladesh Economic Survey Report, 22,000 small. medium and large, local and foreign industrial units have been approved. Among these, 17,000 were approved during the nine years of Ershad regime. The volume of investment from the banks and financial institutions was also as big as 10 thousand crore Taka against those approved industrial units. From the 7th meeting of Industrial Advisory Committee in May '91, particiby Anu Mahmud

pants have pointed out that, due to various causes, the extent of sick industries in our country has reached to 70 per cent of those approved. According to this statistics the number of sick industries stands up to nearly 15,000. On the basis of a survey conducted by the Board of Finance and Investment, it has been noticed that 45,000 industrial units are traceless among the 70,000 approved from '85 to '90. It means, among the approved units 60 per cent have no existence. If we consider, in the light of this survey report, the state of the later approved 22,000 industrial units. then it will give us a painful picture with 13,000 of the

units having no real existence! In fact there is no real and proper statistics in the concerned department regarding the number of industries those have been approved in document and receiving the credit; how many industrial projects could be able to go into production activities or how many have simply gone out of sight. As a result, problem arose in locating the virtually sick in-

Reasons for Going Sick

Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industries has pointed out that these sick industries have created concern among the banks, financial institutions, industrial entrepreneur, creditors and share holders. Dhaka Chambers has pointed out 16 reasons for these industries going sick.

(1) Faulty evaluation of industrial projects (2) Financial mismanage-

(3) Lack of smooth monitor-

ing of credit by financial insti-(4) Lack of knowledge re-

lated to productive technology (5) Non-utilisation of productive capacity

(6) Unfavourable atmo-

sphere regarding industrial re-

(7) Frequent changes of government policies (8) Higher prices of gas and

(9) Frequent import of foreign goods and pervading blackmerketing

electricity

(10) Increase cost of production due to inflationary pressure

(11) Unfavourable market

(13) Weak infrastructure (14) High rate of bank in-

(12) Bureaucratic complex-

(15) Shortage of essential raw materials (16) Imbalance between demand and supply condition

Increasing Sick Industries

The number of sick industrics are continuously increasing. The re-cycling of invested resources is virtually absent. The established industries have failed to see the face of profit. The efficiency of labour is also decreasing day by day. As a result, an over-all stagnant position has received an upward trend. No atmosphere has developed as congental for speedy and smooth industrial growth. In addition, in the name of speedy privatisation the losing concern industries are handed over to the private entrepreneur and that help to cripple the private sector too.

The real picture of the industrial sector is that from '82 to '90 hundreds of crores of Taka has been drawn in the name of 'industrial revolution'. But this huge amount was neither invested nor any step taken in that direction. To consume the money in the name of industrialisation was the main target of certain influential quarters. They completed all the formalities including the approval of project and disbursement of loan

amount maybe under some un-

derstanding with the authorities. To evade the burden of such huge amount of outstanding loans, those industries were mentioned as sick and remain only in the documents. In the one hand bank loan facility was enjoyed in the name of industrialisation and on the other, those outstanding liabilities were virtually written-off under the shelter of sick industries: The entrepreneurs of these industries, however, now the misfortune. As the government has taken initiatives to solve the problems of sick industries by calculating their accounts, they are not coming

Textile Weaving: A Different Case

forward to submit applications.

The small-scale textile weaving industries have become sick due to circumstances beyond control of entrepreneurs. The mills have become sick due to uneconomic size, lack of working capital, unbalanced machinery loss of local market to smuggled fabric, repeated natural calamities, loss of production due to chronic power trouble and anti-autocracy movement and, last but not the least, failure of the former government to create an environment conducive to growth of local in-

The textile sector as a whole and specialised textile sub-sector in particular have. however, vast potentialities. The whole sector, after meeting our total demand of all types of fabric, has the potentiality to export, through our export-oriented garment industries and also directly, fabrics worth no less than Taka 10 billion in a year. A number of measures to bail out the stuck up entrepreneurs as well as financial institutions may be, as follows:

projects by the banks so that the banks make no further claims on the entrepreneurs. (II) It is not at all an easy

(I) Take-over of the aided

task for any entrepreneur to

repay the principal amount of loans in seven years. So, the aided units should be allowed to pay 25 per cent of the accumulated general interest after calculating the same at 10 per cent rate of interest since establishment of the mill.

(III) The principal amount of credits or loans should be allowed to be repaid in 10 years and the overdue interest amount thus calculated should be kept in separate non-interest bearing accounts.

(IV) The rates of interest on accumulated credits should be within tolerable limits and ar rangements should be made for re-payment of the principal amount and interest thereon, kept in a separate blocked or non-interest bearing accounts within a period of 15 years for the specialised textile mills and power loom industries.

Central Bank's Directives

Under the directive of the

central bank to development finance institutions and commercial banks, waiver of 100 per cent penal interest and 75 per cent general interest amount is to be allowed to "defaulter industrial loances" in case they clear off the whole outstanding amount thus calculated, within 45 days. The waiver of 100 per cent interest and 50 per cent general interest amount is to be allowed if the defaulters clear off the whole outstanding amount within one year. In case of "the defaulter" loanees want to pay in three years then 100 per cent penal interest and 40 per cent of general interest can be waived off. As it seems, if any entrepreneur in this sector wants to avail himself of any of the proposed interest waiver facilities, then he has to pay taka 6.2 million, Tk 7.0 million and Tk 7.3 million in 45 days, one year and three years, respectively. A small entrepreneur in the sector, after incurring losses year after year, is now in no position to pay even a fraction of the above

For the development and smooth expansion of our industrial sector, it is necessary to take practical steps and prompt action to assist the sick industries.

It's a Paper Packed People's Participation

by Rashed Mahmud Titumir

tion" has become a catchword. It was shaping up, first, in obscure discussions among intellectuals to be sold as the standard baggage of development rhetorics and subsequently to the press as the statements of the concerned agencies. The meaning of the phrase

has become fallacious and baffling after its adoption by most unexpected quarters. It is often difficult to conceive how in a Donor-Bureaucrat-NGO-led Bangladesh all the talks about people's participation should hit the right chord or simply be treated as a phrase with magical pro-people incantation.

The idea that people should have a share in decision making which affects the operation of any public undertaking was expressed in some of the social doctrines that emerged in the nineteenth century; but only towards the end of the First World War did it take a broad practical shape (apart from collective bargaining and the growth of co-operative enterprises with the establishment of joint committees, councils).

After a few years the movement for institutional forms of participation, except collective bargaining, lost much of its impetus and the question was relegated into the background for a whole decade.

However, during and after the Second World War the subject of workers' participation in decision-making came to prominence once again with the emergence of new states from colonial oligarchy.

The USSR and other East European countries with planned economies have contributed to the development of participation by workers and their representatives in management and also to the scope of works agreements.

However, in reality, the underdeveloped countries had to follow the orthodox idea — what has come to be termed as 'modernisation approach', stressing the injection of capital inputs from outside which would result in "take off" and external spread of benefits throughout the system.

The objective was that the newly independent nations would be provided with evolutionary ladder that had already been scaled by nations going through the stage of industrialisation. Emphasis was laid on providing the infrastructural facilities and institutional support to facilitate the "take-off".

The fall of so-called socialism and the emergence of unipolar world failed to advance any solution to the problem of bringing people together to work for a common goal.

Following the profound disillusionment with the established development strategies, people's participation along with participatory evaluation, participatory action research, participatory management, participatory form of planning' has become an all pervading cliche in 'development doctrine'.

According to the strategy, a variety of terms such as 'underprivileged, disadvantaged, low-income groups and male bias' are also being used to describe the people of these countries. In the name of people's participation, the prescribers keep themselves busy devising 'poverty-focused' pro-

Of course, the position may vary greatly according to the political-economic setting, with the resulting differences in power base and circumstances. In case of Bangladesh, since

its birth two decades ago, the country has increasingly become dependent on foreign debt and aid, in order to keep pace with the orthodox strategy. The external dependence keeps the country vulnerable to extra-national political manipulations undermining the nation's self respect, which is an important

nomic development. There already exists a large number of economic literatures as how the donors, through the mechanism of foreign aid, attempt to influence the economic policies of the recipient countries. The Seminar on

ingredient in creating a social

milieu conducive to rapid eco-

"Mobilisation, and Co-ordination of Economic Assistance: The Bangladesh Experience, ERD, GOB, 1979," organised by Planning Commission, held in Dhaka was on record to observe, "all are for recipients to decide but in actual practice this principle is not always honoured. Neither is it possible for all donors to know the sectorial priorities of the recipient country. At times, donors try to impose their preference or

In evaluating the role of the donors in influencing the domestic economic policies of Bangladesh, a study conducted for the Planning Commission, concluded: "In Bangladesh donors have tended to freely express their views on the suitability of various policies enacted by the government of the day, the quality of the government of the administration and their political integrity. This attitude originate from the belief that the size and importance of

their contribution Bangladesh's development efforts give them a right to dictate how it should conduct its development affairs."

A strong and competent planning apparatus and its implementation capability are the soul and guiding light of development. But in Bangladesh, plan documents are little more than a collection of oft-repeated pious goals, backed neither by a credible strategy nor adequate resources. If the criteria of poverty alleviation, self-reliance and employment generation are strictly applied, some one can say, majority of current projects would have to be recast, scaled down or completely dropped.

Misuse of development resources for kickbacks and patronage, with collusive consent or knowing acquiescence of concerned officials and donors became quite common in recent years, allegedly. The malise was exacerbate by total lack of public accountability. While paying lip service to delegation of power and decentralisation of administration in the shape of Upazila System (forthcoming Union Parishad), power was virtually centralised to an unprecedented degree. As a result such a system inevitably generated corruption, distribution of illegal favour and misuse of

While field officers remain responsible for implementation, much of their power and autonomy has been taken away and where responsibility was given, the required authority was vested.

There is no indepth review of the government's operation and

firam preparation is about Tk

no accountability system for bureaucrats to the public, who remain static in every regime. People-government inter action is extremely poor. There is a very little prior public consultation, even with intended beneficiaries. Naturally, such dictated development arouses little public enthusiasm and occasionally encounters opposition Public debate is avoided even in case of major projects like the Jamuna Bridge and Flood Action Plan.

The general failure of big government bureaucracies to serve the needs of the rural poor and the donors' advice led the NGOs to assert as development alternatives.

According to a Manchester discussion paper in development studies on NGOs in Bangladesh, 'Caritas has been active in Muksedpur Upazila for over a decade and has invested in addition to high relief and credit, Taka 3,500 per group in administrative costs. Yet, inspite of this, less than 5 per cent of the target group members have been mobilised.

The study further notes that in all the NGOs (Caritas, BRAC, Proshika, Saptagram and GSS) there are no built-in institutional mechanisms to ensure or even allow for the target group to be involved in NGO management and in all cases, programme jurisdiction is also completely outside of target group jurisdiction'.

Target group members are not involved in financial decisions regarding expenditure of NGO funds.

The general picture that emerges from fieldwork of the study is a situation in which a small executive group of the NGO makes all major decisions

and target group participation is relegated to relatively inconsequential and minor decisionmaking. Of course, even in this minor participation, the guiding hand of NGO worker in ever present.

So, it can be said that NGO's would seem to be placing their potential services in penetrating rural civil society to contain structural instability. Given the NGO rhctoric on radical transformation, this would seem counter-productive. But their use of terms reflecting power of the poor cannot be taken as symptomatic of a new grassroots awakening.

As every one rushes to perform (compete) in market, class solidarity is buried deep under the rhetoric of 'people power'. Instead new factions (via NGO's), new line of dependence are created. This would essentially depoliticise the rural poor. Radical transformations could, therefore, effectively be restrained.

If a political party is perccived as a development agent, the philosophy of the party itself will decide the development concept of that given party.

However, the programme and political position of the major parties exhibit a common limitation. Solemn declarations of lofty objective have been made, but a concrete analysis of the specific strategies, steps to be taken to realise the objectives, problems and prospect are absent in all cases and there is hardly any democratic practise inside these parties.

With these brief but substantive views, one gains the ground to ask where the people are! It would not be too harsh to comment that the promoters of 'people's participation' are perhaps following the Goeble's theory that if you repeat a lie for hundred times, people will start believing it.

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.

Treatment of scabies

Sir, A letter by Drs H B Codington and S E Coghlan of Friends of Bangladesh regarding scabies as epidemic (April 12, 1993) in The Daily Star drew my attention as well as interest as they were proposing the use of Lindane at 20:1 dilution for the treatment of children suffering from scabies. Dr M A Chowdhury of Safeway Pest Control in a letter (May 22, 1993, The Daily Star) threw some light on the possible use, abuse and also the possibilities of smuggling of this unregistered drug into Bangladesh.

Scabies is a contagious skin infestation caused by a mite sarcoptes scablei. The primary lesions of scabies is a thread like burrow in the skin caused by the female mite to lay eggs.

Secondary lesions like papules and pruritus are however caused by cell-mediated hypersensitivity reaction to the mite or its products. Pruritus or itching develops typically two to three weeks after initial infestation, tends to be most pronounced at night and may persist for two weeks after successful treatment, until the mite antigens have been removed. As reported, severe scratching may lead to secondary bacterial infection. The classic distribution of scabies is limited to the finger webs. the wrists and the genitalia. Treatment consists of local

application of an appropriate parasiticidal preparation. Administration of oral antihistamine or topical antipruritie preparation or both may be of value. Secondary infection, if develops, would need appropriate antibacterial therapy.

Now, according to the

British National Formulary, Lindane and Malathion are the treatments of choice for scabies but Lindane should be avoided in children, during pregnancy or breast feeding, and in patients with low body weight or history of epilepsy. Benzyl benzoate should be avoided in children. According to Martindale's the Extra Pharmacopoeia, monosulfiram is considered to be suitable for children. After observing its role against mite in as early as 1936, ICI undertook research to develop the pharmaceutical forms as a remedy for scabies. Its use has been well sustained in recent years in spite of the introduction of Lindane.

Clinical studies using monosulfiram (such as Tetmosol of ICI) and benzyl benzoate were carried out in Brazil, where monosulfiram was found to be superior to benzyl benzoate and with apparently no side effect except some isolated instance of acctaldehyde syndrome in patients who have consumed alcohol during monosulfiram therapy.

The cost of 30ml monosul

25 which (as marketed) should be diluted to 2 to 3 parts of water before use. The cost of 120 ml (as marketed) benzyl benzoate is about Tk 19.00 which doesn't need any dilution. Considering cure rate the total cost of therapy of monosulfiram is comparable with that of benzyl benzoate.

Accordingly to some Brazilian authors, low costs, absence of severe side-effects, proven parasiticidal, antipruritic properties and the speed of action elect monosulfiram as the treatment of choice. Moreover, this preparation is also effective in clearing pediculosis, which can complicate a scabies infestation.

In conclusion, Lindane, although safe if used as advised, is one of the most intrinsically toxic compounds of the commonly used scabicides which precludes its use in neonates, infants, nursing mothers, etc. Benzyl benzoate should be avoided in children. Commercially monosulfiram is the least toxic and can be used by all the latter classes. This feature is particularly important for a highly contagious disease such as scabies where all close contacts of all the infected patients should also be treated.

Kohinoor Begum, M Pharm

Anonymous letters

Sir. I fully endorse the views of the learned writer Ms Nahtasha Kamal when she says Anonymous letters or telephone have saved the lives of thousands of people all over the world. They have also saved millions of state and public properties from ruination..... An anonymous letter writer or a telephone caller is in no way a coward" in her letter entitled "Anonymous letters" published in your esteemed daily of June 5, 1993.

In my humble opinion each and every letter whether anonymous or with name and address of the writer needs to be duly attended, considered and necessary action taken by the authorities concerned in the interest of the public ser

In the recent years Readers Forum/Letters Column in the newspapers has become a very popular, interesting, important and useful platform for the members of the public to express their individual opinion,

grievance, complaint, to disseminate information and to exchange ideas and views on

different subjects. The ministers and the public leaders make public speeches and issue press re-

leases, the bureaucrats address seminars and conferences and the affluent hold press conferences but the members of the public can only afford to write letters to the editors of news Unfortunately, the authori-

ties concerned seldom pay any attention to the letters written by the members of the public. I appreciate the efforts of Mr Zahidul Huq for establishment of a special cell to attend

innumerable letters of readers' forum/letters column of different dailies and weeklies. We would request our public leaders and bureaucrats to kindly make time to take nec-

essary action on the letters written in the newspapers by the members of the public in stead of wasting time, energy and public money on ostentatious and gaudy display of activities and performances and thus ensure and gua rantee peace, progress and prosperity for the 120 million people of Bangladesh.

O H Kabir Dhaka-1203