

## NBR Poses Problems

It's good to see the National Board of Revenue (NBR) getting into a round of dialogue with the trade bodies to discuss with them problems of businessmen with regard to taxes and duties. The process of policy implementation often brings out new issues which also call for urgent attention for ensuring success of the measures introduced. This is even more true where fiscal policy is concerned. Such issues can best be sorted out in consultation with the people who are directly affected by the policy measures.

A dialogue ceases to be meaningful unless it is backed up by prompt follow-up action. NBR's performance in the area of action does not look as commendable as its readiness to talk to the leaders of trade and industry. The problem of tariff anomalies, arising out of measures taken by the NBR, had been acting as an irritant since long before the formulation of this year's budget. NBR had been telling the business community to bring up specific cases so that these could be referred to the Tariff Commission for obtaining its findings. Well, NBR's attitude could not exactly be faulted although one could have asked why should such anomalies arise at all. However, latest information rather suggests that NBR might have been sitting over some of these problems.

Representatives of trade bodies have asserted during their current dialogue with the NBR that they have referred innumerable instances of rampant tariff anomalies but till now very little redress had been given to the affected industries. They are saying that even the cases recommended by the Tariff Commission after due examination, remain pending with the NBR indefinitely. This, indeed, is unfortunate.

Tariff anomalies place domestic industry at a serious disadvantage vis-a-vis competing foreign product, often by making the value of its essential input costlier than the price of the imported finished goods. Delay in the correction of discrepancies in bona fide cases does irreparable harm to the concerned local industry. Trade liberalisation would not work unless tariff anomalies are removed promptly on diction.

Application of tariff value instead of the price shown on the invoice, for the purpose of levying duties on imported goods, is another long standing source of complaint of the business community. In a sense, tariff value is an antithesis of trade liberalisation, discouraging, as it does, procurement of goods from abroad at competitive prices. Perhaps, the realities of a situation where some importers are prone to under-invoice goods to reduce duty burden, have prompted the NBR in recent years to prescribe tariff value for a large variety of items. Nonetheless, tariff value remains a major irritant for the law abiding importers.

Metropolitan Chamber's suggestion to the NBR to do away with tariff value in case of low-duty items, appears to be a sensible one. As they have explained, there is little incentive for under-invoicing where the rate of duty is low. In all fairness, one could argue that low rate and hence low incidence of duty, might also induce over-invoicing of imports for underhand transfer of funds abroad. That, perhaps, is the reason why NBR charges duty on the basis of the tariff value or the invoice value, whichever is higher, albeit a practice which seems quite inconsistent with the precepts of the tariff value theory. However, with convertibility of Taka on current account just around the corner, the inducement for over-invoicing also should fade away soon enough. Thus, the idea of discontinuing fixation of tariff value for low-duty items still remains a sensible one.

The call for a regular dialogue with the leaders of trade and industry should claim the attention of NBR. Trade bodies observe the impact of policy measures at close quarters and can tell NBR what really is happening. Besides, NBR also will find such meetings an occasion to put forward its own ideas. A forum for discussions, meeting at regular intervals, would benefit both NBR and the business community.

## Late Action against Rabies

The City Corporation has taken out a rather splashy advertisement in some of the national dailies to make an important public announcement. The announcement reiterates Section 8 of the Municipal Administration Ordinance of 1960 and makes it clear to the members of the public that it is a statutory requirement of all residents of urban municipal areas to get their pet dogs licensed. And it requests such residents to collect the necessary licences and to keep their dogs in chains within their own houses. Violation of this would be legally proceeded against, it said.

Why such a notice after so many years and almost out of the blue and in such an intimidating manner? Explanation follows very soon, in the very next paragraph in fact. Rabies is a dangerous contagious disease and dogs are its principal carrier. The corporation is going to eliminate all unowned dogs and it has sought co-operation of all in the manner.

Our people in their ancient wisdom have always been extra-cautious of the dogs in heat from the onset of their mating season in Bhadra and continuing through Ashwin. But newspaper reports of the past six months speak of outbreak of rabies in many towns and villages of the country well before this season. Why is then the warning so late?

Louis Pasteur, the anti-rabies hero, was a man essentially of the last century. It is a riddle that rabies should continue to befall our life so many decades after it has elsewhere been possible to eliminate this disease. The municipal action, emboldened by the 1960 ordinance, is going to hopefully root out rabies from the towns; what will happen to the villages? There is round the year the complain of there being a shortage of rabies antitoxins in very many towns and population centres. How about improving that situation?

The dog is man's oldest friend. Our ancestors of the Austric stock had struck up this friendship to here in these parts long before history began. This is a prize friendship considering the fact that the wild dog must have taken at least a couple of millions of years to become a domesticated boy-scout of an animal, a never-failing stalker of games for man and guard of his shelter and family. The unequal friendship continues, the injustice of the relationship sometimes mitigated by the unusual love that is heaped on it by some. The municipalities mounting the campaign, specially the DCC, must take care that their operations do not become open exhibitions of sadistic exercises hurting the sensibilities of people, particularly the children.

## An Unhealthy Trend Prevails in the Health Sector for the Last One Year

by Sharier Khan

**S**TARTING from September 19, 1992, nurses in eight medical college hospitals and 38 medicare centres across the country abstained from work at least for 14 days last year, to force the government to accept some of their demands.

During the same period this year, the nurses under the leadership of Bangladesh Diploma Nurses Association (BDNA) resorted to similar work stoppage for at least a week.

The nurses along with the doctors abstained from work for a couple of days in the country's biggest hospital, the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) in late January protesting an attack by some miscreants on the doctors and nurses in the DMCH.

Class four employees launched another work abstention programme at the Orthopaedic Hospital lasting for nearly three weeks following a dispute with the doctors that occurred on March 12 last.

Leaders of the BDNA (Kohinoor group) say that their action was justified because they had no alternative means of creating pressure on the government.

Previously in 1989, the government had issued the same order and received a similar feedback from the nurses.

Sources in the Nursing Directorate informed The Daily

stoppage programmes by doctors and nurses in the Mymensingh Medical College Hospital and Sylhet Medical College Hospital.

Interestingly, the work abstention programmes in the hospitals had nothing to do with the patients. Yet the nurses, and sometimes doctors too, virtually gambled with the lives of patients to realise their demands from time to time.

The reason of the last work abstention programme of the nurses, from August '92 to August 26, was a government order which transferred the Nurses Directorate under the jurisdiction of the Health Directorate.

Does this reason justify the nurses action lasting for a week? Why should nurses launch a movement which made at least 10,000 innocent people admitted to the eight medical college hospitals and 38 medicare centres suffer for a week? What was wrong with the transfer order?

"Nursing services have deteriorated alarmingly," a well placed source in the Health Ministry told The Daily Star. "We have been thinking about large scale reform in this sector for a long time but the nurses are constantly resisting that."

The source added that the Nursing Directorate was not functioning efficiently. "Amazingly, 29 senior level

posts under the Nursing Directorate are vacant because there is no qualified person to do those jobs," he said. "That is why the government tried to transfer it under DG Health."

Regarding the transfer order of the Nursing Directorate, the source said, "While the Nursing Directorate lacks expertise, I agree that the transfer of the Nursing Directorate under the DG Health would not do much good to the nurses."

## BEHIND THE HEADLINES

movement twice for similar causes. The government bowed to the pressure and partially met their demands. The last movement was participated by about 15,000 nurses and student nurses which included 7,500 registered nurses.

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The Health Directorate has a vast working field, it has its own problems which remain to be solved for a long time," he said and added that there also were some indiscipline and corruption in the Health Directorate. "But, to reform the nursing sector, the transfer order was supposed to be the initial step which we had withdrawn."

The Health Directorate is corrupt and inefficient," alleged the general secretary of BDNA, Mofizullah. "It cannot solve the problems of 80,000 doctors of the country, so how can it do anything good or the nurses?"

Under the jurisdiction of the

Nursing Directorate, the nurses enjoy some advantages — probably because, its administration is very weak.

"No one transfers a nurse from one medical college to another for any reason," said Kohinoor Begum, the top leader of BDNA. "But, as soon as the government had issued the transfer order on the Nursing Directorate in 1989 which empowered a civil surgeon to issue transfer order of nurses, the surgeons had started transferring nurses on wholesale basis. The surgeons do not like nurses, she said. "So, nurses will never accept any government order which will make them suffer like that," she added.

The nurses' leaders feel that since most of the nurses are females, a transfer order would greatly disturb their family lives.

Ultimately, the government had to yield to the pressure of the nurses on August 26 last and agreed to set up a committee which would recommend to the ministry the means of reform for the Nursing Directorate.

The committee, headed by Joint Secretary of Health Dr Khalilullah included DG Health, Director of Nursing, related representatives from different bodies including some BDNA leaders.

Interestingly, there are four

other rival groups of Kohinoor led BDNA making the scene more dirty than vibrant. The four other groups criticised the Kohinoor group following the agreement with the government to withdraw the work abstention (strike is an illegal word in nursing).

One incident will portray their dirty politics. During the BDNA led work abstention programme last year, the Kohinoor group kidnapped a leader of the rival group, Marium, from the PG Hospital and held her in a room of the DMCH for a couple of days.

The Kohinoor group alleged that Marium was designing a conspiracy with the government to foil the nurses' movement. Marium was tortured and her head was shaved. The news was published in national dailies in early October last year.

Some doctors of the PG Hospital, DMCH and SSMCH told The Daily Star while the services of the nurses were very poor, some nurses were allegedly involved in business-like illegally selling hospital medicines.

The nurses are far away from the noble objective of the profession," the doctors maintained. They must realise that cooperation with the government in its effort of reform would make the profession better. They must stop these work abstentions from now on."

## Services Accord may Further Media Imperialism

by Chakravarthi Raghavan

*The Uruguay Round's proposed General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) could be used by the North to enable its media companies to expand their market in the countries of the South. Countries which desire to preserve their cultural and political sovereignty should therefore ensure that they do not make any commitment in GATS to 'liberalise' their audio-visual services.*

disappeared but still remain valid and need to be tackled.

Several of these articles also bring out how the competencies and more democratic decision-making efforts in several of the international organisations have been side-tracked by the United States in its drive to secure and create international regimes through the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and its Uruguay Round negotiations.

Mosco, in his chapter in *Beyond National Sovereignty*, points out how the theory of free trade in communications that the US has been pushing for free trade in communications and using it as an instrument to further what Vincent Mosco, Professor of Journalism at Carleton University in Canada, has described as 'Building a World Business Order'.

### Old Order

Two recent publications which deal with some of these questions in the overall political context of the US attempts to bring in the old order of transnational *laissez faire* capitalism under the garb of a New World Order are *Transnational Communications*, (1991) ed. by Gerald Sussman and John A. Lent (Sage Publications) and *Beyond National Sovereignty* (1993) ed. Karle Nordenstreng and Herbert I. Schiller (Ablex Publishing Corporation) — with a number of individual essays and contributions by many authors involved in the New World Information and Communication Order issues and debates of the 1960s and 1970s, who have taken a fresh look at the issues in the light of the subsequent developments.

A common theme (against the background of overviews in both books on the nature of the new world order and its inherent crises) has been that many of the issues of culture and development raised by thoughtful communicators of the 1960s, and which got mixed up with the Marxist-Soviet ideologists at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and elsewhere, have not

so far, most of the countries that have put in initial offers' have not scheduled audio-visual services among the list of services they would liberalise, and even fewer of them for delivery by transborder means. Those that have placed no limitations on transborder delivery, including Japan, Korea and the Nordics, are also those where the common language is not English or other dominant ones and, given the smallness of their markets, would need both local expertise and more money for broadcasts in local languages.

### To the Editor...

#### Third View

Sir, It was delightful reading the Third View by Mahfuz Anam. It seems he is the only one at this moment talking sense. Because everybody else seems to have taken leave of their senses. As is evident by the wonderful act of the Mayor and DMC renting out the city roads for public meetings. Has the Mayor consulted the poor tax payer before his arbitrary decision or has he also been affected by the power disease syndrome? It seems infectious, this disease. For whosoever comes to power, seems to take leave of all coherent thoughts. History repeats itself till it is blue in the face, and yet no one ever seems to take a lesson from it. Its the Mahfuz Anams of the land, who still manage to keep our spirits up. The only thing which bothers the like of us is, do the authorities ever bother to read the sensible things a solitary Anam bravely writes or are they so busy with their roads and its renting, that they do not have the time? Not that that should stop Mahfuz Anam carrying on his somewhat

lonely crusade. I would have Mahfuz Anam know, that his brilliant piece was read and vastly appreciated by a majority who have some good sense left yet.

P Haque  
77-D, Uttara Model Town, Dhaka

#### Investment climate

Sir, If we examine the global economic scenario, we will find recession prevailing all over the world. In order to activate the economy the government has taken a good number of measures. But even then the investors are not coming forward as expected. The main reasons behind such state of affairs may be the following. There is no market at home; most of the people do not have any purchasing power. Many seldom wear new cloth and shoes. The only market is outside world. But it is very difficult to get in the world market facing the stiff competition. Besides, production cost in Bangladesh is also very high compared to many other countries. The only thing available is cheap labour. But this cheap labour is not skilled

Bangladesh can explore its viability in export oriented industries as its own home market is very small. Again we can also explore the possibilities in those sectors where we are importing more. We should not go for setting up of industries only for industry's sake. It is rather wise to remain on imported goods if that is less expensive.

Mahbubul Haque Chowdhury  
Kalabagan, Dhaka

a world of advertising illusions, the "New" New Order presents little that is actually new. Rather it deepens and extends the pattern of the Old Information Order for an electronic age...

However, the US and others having an interest could push countries to make such commitments in the negotiations ahead before the Round is concluded or even, if they don't do it now, take it up in bilateral or further rounds of multilateral negotiations.

Any country seeking to preserve its cultural and political sovereignty would thus need to ensure that in the services commitments, audio-visual services, or at least their transborder mode of delivery, are excepted and perhaps even reserved in their schedules the right to impose quotas on imported films and programmes and licensing for distribution or display by state or private sector channels and broadcasters, trade experts say.

Interestingly, Hong Kong has not bound itself to allow transborder delivery of audio-visual programmes.

While GATS would provide a framework of legal rights and obligations, there are some rules of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) relating to broadcasting, particularly TV broadcasting into other countries without their permission, though under the present leadership the ITU is trying to promote both private business interests in telecommunications and acting to promote GATT.

Mosco has brought out how the US-Canada free trade agreement, which is also the model for the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), is being used and pushed as a model in GATT and the Uruguay Round. If the Third World effort in international communications has been a NWCIO, the FTA is among a number of steps towards creation of a Western version of a New World Order," he says, adding: "But like many 'new and improved' products in

University of Southern California, deals with US violations of international law in this TV broadcast invasion of Cuba.

He points out that the US actions clearly violated the ITU regulations and was also counter to several of the UN General Assembly resolutions and declarations including those on inadmissibility of intervention and interference in the internal affairs of other states and the Declaration on the Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation Among States. Though these declarations are not treaties and don't have the same force, in areas where there is no treaty, UN Assembly declarations are one of the sources of international law.

In the same book, in the chapter on 'Television Marti': Open Skies over the South' (Television Marti is the TV programme beamed by the US into Cuba, cross-border delivery, though not using satellites), Laurent Alexandre, Dean of Academic Affairs of the Antioch

University of Southern California, deals with US violations of international law in this TV broadcast invasion of Cuba.

In contrast to the FTA, Moscow says, the EC has taken a different approach, albeit within a market model and its charter provides for some protection of public institutions, including public education, social welfare, occupational health and safety and national culture.

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Media analysts also point out that while the BBC is reducing its coverage of the Third World for viewers and listeners in Britain, it is expanding its news networks in the developing world.

Last year, the World Service launched a 24-hour news and information service across Asia to challenge the global dominance of the US-based Cable News Network (CNN). The service, transmitted by Hong Kong's Star TV satellite, is already available in some 11 million homes in Asia.

The First World perspective of much of this coverage worries development experts and Third World media figures, who say the news bias influences those in developing countries and shapes their view of the world. This view has been strengthened by the purchase of Star TV in July by Australian-born media mogul Rupert Murdoch.

Some media experts say the World Service has been a positive force in many countries struggling to establish multi-party democracies, enabling listeners in those countries to circumvent rigid censorship laws.

"For some of these countries, the BBC has been extraordinarily liberating as it has given them a lot of news they could not have otherwise got," said Jenny Richards of the Television Trust for the Environment.

The BBC denies establishing a cultural oligarchy and says most of the services it broadcasts to the developing world are staffed by Third World journalists.

Says a spokesperson for the network: "It's a complete misnomer to say that it's dominated by the West when in a quarter or even half of our programmes, we employ specialist staff from countries in the South."

Along with other development analysts, he fears this one-sided perspective will give people in the North a skewed and unduly pessimistic impression of the Third World.

"Part of the BBC's task is to provide a well-rounded view of