Dhaka, Saturday, October 16, 1993

## How Realistic is the 'One-stop' Idea?

Industries Minister M Zahiruddin Khan told the Bangladesh Chamber of Industries the other day that he would introduce a one-stop service for the entrepreneurs. The Minister means well. However, given the way the government functions, the idea seems hardly practicable. Perhaps the Minister should lower his sights a bit and aim to facilitate installation of industrial units through vigorous interaction with the other concerned agencies of the government. That in itself would come as a boon for the entrepreneurs.

One-stop service for entrepreneurs has become a catchword, simply because it is unattainable in the present conditions. Let us look at the existing scenario. An entrepreneur would, in all probability, wish first to get his venture registered as a limited company. This falls within the jurisdiction of the Commerce Ministry which runs a separate office to attend to the job. For allotment of land, providing electricity, gas, water and sewerage facilities, for telephones - for all these and other services needed for setting up an industry - separate organisations are functioning. Each of them guard its own turf zealously, brooking no interference from other agencies of the government. Would all of them yield to the bidding of a one-stop service located in the Industries Ministry?

It's not that this country alone has an en trenched bureaucracy. Democratic societies have tried to solve the problem of private citizens' relations with the bureaucracy in different ways, best suited to their own conditions. Spain, for instance, helps its citizens deal with a complex bureaucracy through its institution of gestoria. A gestor needs specialisation in such fields as law, finance and has to pass through qualifying examinations. The institution of gestoria serves as an intermediary between the bureaucracy and the citizen, advising the latter and doing the legwork.

One could say and perhaps rightly so, that such a system, applied in this country, would bring about new forms of corruption. However, effective intermediation is the point at issue. In the Board of Investment (BOI) we do have an organisation which could, through continuous interaction with concerned agencies, ease the process of setting up industrial undertakings in the country. For this purpose, instead of dealing with generalities. BOI would need to adopt a case-by-case approach, helping the entrepreneur along, till a project sees fruition.

BOI, as set up by the Ershad administration. was perhaps conceived as a one-stop service for the entrepreneurs. It has planned to take over all functions related to the establishment of industries in the private sector, from other concerned agencies of the government. Inevitably, this would have led to over-centralisation and concentration of authority in one single organisation. However, changed circumstances should not imply that BOI can no longer assist the entrepreneurs meaningfully.

BOI should now serve as an effective intermediary between the entrepreneur and the state agencies connected with industrialisation. The ongoing process of deregulation also means that it would have to deal with a lesser number of such entities. It should now work more as a promotional agency. If necessary, BOI functionaries should move from door to door to help an entrepreneur- see that the hurdles on the way to setting up an industry get eased quickly. On the other hand, BOI should receive a clear mandate from the government to enable it to act as an effective intermediary between the investor and the state machinery. To be able to function efficiently, BOI should be staffed with the right kind of people and allowed to recruit direct from the private sector, if it deems necessary. In such and other related matters. BOI should be given a free hand.

One-stop service for investors did not work in the past. Rather, it came to be derisively called a deadstop service. Let us hope that government would now adopt a more practical approach and build up a truly effective service for facilitating establishment of industries in the country.

> Message of the White Cane Day

In a country overburdened with massive socioeconomic problems, it is not unusual that issues and concerns of the disabled are sidetracked. There are in-built reasons for that. Not only that the disabled do not form important pressure or lobby groups, they cannot also expect to generate widespread public sympathy behind their demands, because there is so little public knowledge about their plight.

The countrywide observance of the White Cane Day, as a part of an international effort to raise public awareness, will, we hope, make a significant contribution in bringing the concerns of our visually impaired citizens into focus, especially the problems of the young boys and girls who are blind. A staggering 30,000 children annually go blind because of malnutrition and vitamin 'A' deficiency. Just imagine that so many of our children are being deprived of the most vital of the five senses — that of sight — because of the lack of life's basic needs. Problems of our disabled population are not being addressed, due to lack of knowledge and public concern.

It is known that a change in a diet, leading to increased use of leafy vegetables, can lead to reduction of vitamin "A" deficiency. In areas where such vegetables are not available, a special programme of supplying vitamin "A" can be introduced. Unicef has already done laudable work in this area, and its further assistance can be sought to expand it.

For those who have already become blind, special schools and special training programmes are necessary. The most basic implement — the symbol ridden White Cane — is not available to most of our blind citizens, so that they use this basic tool to find their way around.

We have a long way to go before we can have a satisfactory level of services and facilities for the blind. But the critical thing is to start with the full backing and support of a conscious and well-informed citizenry. In this respect the national media can and should play much more activist role than they do now. It is not only on occasions such as yesterday's, but on a regular basis the media should highlight the problems that touch upon the lives of our disabled people. With the coming of

growing economy. Means of making our disabled people play a more active role in society exist. What we lack, perhaps, is the will.

modern technology, there are many useful ways

that disabled people can be employed in our

# The Soaring Yen — the Challenge

post-World War II high of around 100 yen to the US dollar from 127 in August, last knitware and varieties of speyear. The growing appreciation cialised textiles. Recently, The of yen is, however, not a new Daily Star reported about adapphenomenon. Since 1970, the tation of Jamdani designs on Japanese economy through the household textile materials for soaring yen has been contcurtains, cushion covers etc. inually challenging the giant Provided supply constraints are United Sates of America for the overcome, there should be a pre-eminent position as the large market for such fabrics at leading industrial economy of prices attractive to Japanese the world. From 360 yen to the buyers. An important considerdollar, it is now almost at par ation is high quality of goods to with one US cent. be manufactured since Japan is The soaring yen should have an upscale market. Also, new both positive and negative efmarketing ventures are difficult fects for the economy of to organise in Japan; there are Bangladesh in three main arall sorts of restrictions to mareas. First, our exports of ket access which are mainly inshrimps, garments, leather. formal and sometimes illusive earpet-backing etc. to Japan as well. Nevertheless, a distinct should increase since the prices export opportunity has been

HE Japanese currency

in yen of these products and

commodities will now be less

than before by around 25 per

cent. The extent of such de-

mand would, however, depend

upon the price elasticities of

demands for our goods and ser-

vices in Japan. Most likely, de-

mand for frozen shrimps as well

as high quality goat skin leather

ought to be price elastic be-

cause at high Japanese income

levels, they can afford to eat

more shrimps as well as buy an

extra pair of shoes made from

the soft goat skin leather from

The realisation of the posi-

tive gains from trade would de-

pend upon our capacity to ex-

pand production of shrimps in

the coastal districts, particu-

larly Cox's Bazar. In the past

our garment exports did not

perform very well in the

Japanese market. The soaring

yen and, therefore, reduced

prices of garments to Japanese

buyers opens up a new oppor-

tunity to the private sector. The

same is true with regard to

has had to adapt to the

death throes of white rule. Yet

unlike many shuffling relu-

ctantly toward the new era, he

is doing so enthusiastically -

Gerber, a 31-year-old prop-

erty developer, is trying to right

one of the cruellest wrongs per-

petrated on blacks during the

45 years of National Party gov-

ernment. He is giving back land

the authorities expropriated

from "coloureds" because they

"It's a gesture of reconcilia-

lived in neighbourhoods ear-

tion," Gerber said in an inter-

view. "I'm not doing it for politi-

cal reasons or out of guilt. I was a child when these things

(forced removals) were done and

I bought the properties legally

without knowing their histories.

'I'm really returning them for

humanitarian reasons. The

properties mean more to the

people they were taken from

of President F W de Klerk's rul-

ing National Party, experienced

first-hand the horrors perpe-

trated under South Africa's

now-abolished Group Areas Act

from a "coloured" (mixed-race)

Anglican priest negotiating on behalf of the church for a piece

of land in the Cape country

He had bought the property

while still a teenager for a pit-

tance of about \$20, The money-

collected because his preacher

father had instilled in him a

deep desire to own property -

came from selling potatoes.

chickens and empty bottles

scavenged from local drinking

plot for the first time in 1990

adopted by whites to mean a

Promotion scandal

tion to the letter under the

above caption published in your

esteemed daily on September

11. I would like to point out

certain anomalies and misrep-

resentation of facts in the said

letter. The writer's reference to

the supposed embarrassment of

the PM for the promotions and

her advice not to go to court is a

hundreds of officials with excel-

officials' service records are con-

the concerned officials them-

known, not to speak of out-

siders to which category the let-

ter writer most probably be-

view conducted by a high pow-

ered committee. As a matter of fact, most of the officials who

were not considered fit for pro-

Secretaries were superseded.

Kalam Bin Sultan

Waztrpur, Bartsal

motion to the post of Deputy

The writer has alleged that

travesty of truth.

Sir, In drawing your atten-

He had, however, visited the

Gerber barely knew the site.

It was then he received a call

Gerber, a longtime supporter

than they do to me."

about a year ago.

town of Calvinia

spots.

marked for white occupation.

and at his own expense.

Pierre-Jeanne Gerber

Bangladesh.

yen shot up to a new

### Opportunity for Traders

created by the soaring yen.

Our participation in the re cently concluded Japan Interna-tional Houseware Show '93 was considered a success. Participants at the show were of the opinion that Bangladesh has a bright prospect for its non-traditional exports side by side traditional ones and can make a breakthrough in the world market including Japan, provided the strict maintenance of quality is ensured. Silk and embroidery goods, other handicrafts, ceramics, leather goods, cane furnitures etc. were displayed and it was felt that a market in Japan for these products could be created within the next few years: the soaring yen opens up the opportunity for our traders.

High value of yen also means that we will import less from Japan. Its beneficial effects on the balance of payments will however, be negated by enhanced debt servicing liabilities

for the accumulated yen credit which have matured for repayments thus far. Also, tied imports already in the pipeline under Japanese assistance programme would cost more. It is necessary to reevaluate our priorities under the yen credit programme. Japanese brandname products are not manufactured in Japan alone, therefore imports of Japanese cars or televisions may not decline. The same Toyota car or Sony TV sets are manufactured at several locations outside Japan. It must also be borne in mind that cost of imported inputs will be less to Japanese manufactur-

vigorously pursued by the private sector. The chances are better now than ever before because at the favoured places for relocation of Japanese sunset industries. Thailand for example, wage costs have increased, environmental factors would add to investment costs and physical infrastructures are already suffering from severe strains. Notable among these constraints are traffic congestions of Bangkok and energy crisis in the Philippines.

#### Attractions to Investors Relatively pollution free,

empty roads, excess capacities

## WINDOW ON ASIA Shahed Latif

ers. Hence, the increase in the export prices from Japan would be less than the extent of appreciation of the yen. In fact, it was possible in the past to absorb cost increases induced by currency appreciation through gains in productivity, reduced cost of energy as well as lowering of the profit margin in order to retain the market share.

This leads to the second consideration relating to major benefits that we can derive from the soaring yen - apart from enhanced export earnings from Japanese markets. The appreciation would force Japanese manufacturers to relocate their industries outside Japan where production costs will be less. Bangladesh as a suitable location for Japanese industries. textiles in particular, should be

in several categories of supplies and services, for example air cargo or electricity supply as well as recently established container terminal to Chittagong port, and, above all, very cheap labour are extremely good attractions to foreign investors. including small to medium scale operators of labour-intensive export manufacturing units in Japan. Such attractions are no longer available in equal abundance at preferred locations for Japanese investments with ASEAN countries except perhaps Indonesia; while new centres for such global manufacturing ventures have recently emerged in China and Vietnam.

During the last two decades. appreciation of yen was not an even, continuous movement, It took place through discrete

jumps in value prompted by certain economic factors primarily the announcement of merchandise trade figures leading to accumulation of mounting export surplus as a distinct secular but unsustainable trends, inevitably, the value of yen in terms of other currencies, dollar in particular, must rise. During the last two. years, the exchange rate was hovering at around 139 yen to a dollar; while during the late, 1980s. 150 yen to the dollar used to be the norm. At each such discrete and sharp rise in the value of yen, a large outflow of investment also took place as domestic manufacturing in Japan became unprofitable.

With liberal economic policies and adequate incentives to foreign investments, now is the time to seize the opportunities, opened up once again by the soaring yen. Now it is also the best of times to seek relocation of industries to Bangladesh because cost of production at the favoured locations are not that competitive any more. As a matter of fact, the south-east Asian countries themselves are moving towards manufacture of reiatively more technology as well as capital intensive goods and services. We should try to attract those types of manufacturing enterprises where labour costs are the key determinant of securing a competitive production base for exports.

#### **Debt Service Liabilities**

The third and the negative aspect of yen appreciation is the increased debt service liabilities. The total official development assistance or ODA, received each year by Bangladesh, amounts to slightly over two Japanese contributions in yen amounts to around one-fifth of the total. In such a situation our debt service liabilities with export receipts remaining constant should increase by 5 per cent for a 25 per cent increase in the value of yen. But export receipts cannot

billion dollars out of which

remain constant - it must increase, at least to Japan due to the soaring yen. Against our export earnings of 1,688 million yen in 1991, only 51 million dollars - marginal 4 per cent - was derived from the Japanese market. If all our efforts are made in cooperation with the authorities in Japan. then a ten-fold increase or half a billion dollars worth of exports to Japan should be a distinct possibility by the turn of the

century, if not earlier. On an immediate basis, the problem is to find an extra 20 million dollars to ensure debt repayments to Japan during the current fiscal year. The amount is too small to worry about and it could be secured from our incremental export earnings so that the debt service ratio would not increase within immediate future.

On the whole, we should be highly optimistic of considerable gains that can be derived from appreciation of the yen and such golden opportunities should remain valid for at least the next five years. This is because the yen can be stabilised only when the huge balance of payments surplus of Japan have been substantially regether. For this to happen, Japan must enable its econom to absorb increasing volumes of imports.

And, what is their impor should be our export. Herein lies our golden chance - let us get cracking at it right now.

## Afrikaner Returns Land to Rightful Owners IKE many Afrikaners.

Arlene Getz writes from Wellington, South Africa

Pierre Gerber, an Afrikaner property developer, is giving back land the authorities expropriated from "coloureds" because they lived in neighbourhoods earmarked for whites. However, his philanthropy is unlikely to have any impact on the problem of compensation for the 3.5 million blacks forced by harsh apartheid laws to move from their homes to barren tracts on the outskirts of cities.



PIERRE-JEANNE GERBER 'A gesture of reconciliation

person of inferior intellect or

forced to move in the 1960s

and was uncomfortable about discovering the remains of what white locals insultingly de-He was moved when the scribed as a "hotnots kerk" priest who contacted him ex-("Hottentots church." Once used plained the chapel - destroyed as the name of a particular ethby the government after it paid nic group. Hottentot was about \$5,000 to the owner it

had been a memorial to coloured man killed by the Boers during the 1899-1902 Anglo-Boer war.

The man. Abraham Esau. had spied for the British to protect the limited rights of his community from Afrikaner

A commendation Sir, Mr A S M Hannan Shah the Minister for Jute, deserves commendation when he waded into the domestic synthetic production aspect, seeking to close down the degrading homegrown manufacturing units and to prevent their further expansion. The art of his idea is not only to protect the jute industry, both in its raw and manufactured forms, but also to achieve a pollution-free environment of

our country. lent service records, etc. were unjustly superseded. But the At a time when we were and fidential document, which even still are struggling hard against synthetic materials manufactured abroad, posing threats to selves are not supposed to be the very existence of our jute industry, a number of self-destructive units were allowed to be popped up during the longs. It is also not true that the 1980's. It, however, amounted promotions were given on the basis of "2-3 minutes' inter-view." The promotions were to blowing of hot and cold policy at the same time at the expense given after a thorough examinaof our jute industry and for the stion of 10 years' service records interest of a few. of the candidates including ACR, PDS, etc. and an inter-

The jute minister is a person - shert on words and tall on action, indeed. That is why he could get straight into the heart of the matter and, as we know. he won battle.

Md Aminul Islam 24/3/1 Sukrabad, Dhaka

## Social justice

Str. Those who have retired

from service, whether pensionable or nonpensionable, before July 1, 1991, used to get one or two or three dearness allowances amounting 10 to 30 per cent of basic pay, depending on the time of retirement. But unfortunately, those retired personnel got the benefit of basic pay only while calculating pension or gratuity (for nonpensionable jobs). Thus a person retiring on June '91 with a basic pay of Tk 5700/- per month along with three DA's. got the benefit of Tk 5700/- per month while calculating pension or gratuity, but in the event she or he retired in July '91, she or he got the benefit of Tk 9500/- per month while calculating pension or gratuity. In the context of social justice, as preached by the Govt. in power in fulfilling 19 points of late President Zia, the point No 18 .indicates it clearly. But can we consider the practices in vogue as "social justice"? Let the authority do some exercise through computer scientists so that a programme could be evolved based on our resources and appropriate compensation given in the name of social jus-

Sadiq Alee Maghbazar, Dhaka

domination. When the British refused to give weapons to their black sympathisers. Esau's troops tried to defend their town with stones and clubs.

Esau was captured by Boer commandos in 1901, tortured and beaten to death. The chapei in his memory was built from compensation paid by the British

Once Gerber heard this account, he decided to donate the property back to the church. Shortly afterwards, he also decided to start tracing other owners who had been forced to sell their homes in order to return what he could.

'After my decision to hand it back to the church, a thanksgiving service was held at St George's Cathedral in Cape Town," recalled Gerber. "I was asked to say a few words. The church was packed. I got up to

speak and when I turned to face the congregation they all began to clap. Some were even crytng. "I got cold shivers. I couldn't speak. And that was when it really hit me what was done un der this Act.

Gerber is now trying to trace the previous owners of 13 expropriated properties still in his possession. One site is about to be given back to the son of a colored school principal whose land was taken by the government for about \$1,300 in the 1960s

Gerber also have appealed to other white owners of expropriated property to follow his example and return land. "I'd like to see them doing what I'm doing," he said. "So far, I've had quite a positive e reaction from whites. A couple have accused me of sucking up to blacks, but the other day I even got some

praise from a local supporter of the CP" (the pro-apartheid Conservative Partyl.

His philanthropism is unlikely to have any impact on the political problem of compensation for the 3.5 million blacks forced by harsh apartheid laws to move from pleasant or productive areas to barren tracts on the outskirts of cities. Nor is it likely to eradicate the bitter ness among those who had to watch the demolition of much loved family homes because apartheid strategists felt whites would not live in houses vacated by blacks.

Even Gerber admits he may not have so generous if his properties were worth hundreds of thousands of dollars instead of just thousands. Nevertheless in a land still shrouded in racial distrust, his gesture is a sign that political reforms have caused once unthinkable attitude changes among at least some ordinary citizens

GEMINI NEWS

ARLENE GETZ is the Cape Town-based southern African correspondent for Australia's 'Sydney Morning Herald'.

### Campus Violence rociously, with attendant loss of

In his September 20 descrip-

tion of RU events, your reporter

highlighted the Shibir attack on

In your editorial of September 20 on the recent events of student violence at Rajshahi University you said that the situation needed to be looked "deeply into." You then went on to take a fairly shallow look at it. In your editorial the next day. September 21, you blamed the Prime Minister of failing to tackle the problem of student violence and also seemed to lay the blame for the present spate of violence on the Jamaat-Shibir political parties. While much of what you said was right, which any right thinking person in the country could agree to, your editorial had a bias pointing away from what

really needs to be said. What really needs to be said is that student violence, particularly at the universities, is not to be blamed on any one particular party, but upon all our major political parties. agree that the Prime Minister needs to be criticised on this score rather more than the leaders of the other political parties since she heads the government of the country, but the other political parties also must share the blame for the carnage

on our campuses. I say that you did not look deeply enough at the Rajshahi University events because you seemed to indicate that the Shibir "swoop" on RU halls was an unprovoked attack. In actual fact, it was not. The attack was in retaliation for events the previous day on the Rajshahi Medical College premises as well as in the city when a Shibir activist was beaten almost to that it is not the Shibir alone who indulges in violence; alwithin themselves as well. At the moment, most other student parties have come together to fight the Shibir, but if the Shibir were to disappear tomorthey have been known to do in

the past) each other just as fe-

the halls but mentioned the aftermath very sketchily. What happened on the campus on the morning after the attack, which your reporter did not mention in detail, was just as disturbing as the Shibir attack. The next morning members of the political parties who had suffered at the hands of the Shibir, directed their frustration and anger upon teachers, provosts and administrative officers of the university. In the early hours of the morning they attempted to attack the house of the VC (who was away at the time); next, they burst into the house of the Pro-Vice Chancellor. A few hours later the Registrar of the University and the Controller of Examinations, who were on their way through the campus to the

emergency meeting called by the Acting VC, were manhandled by either the same or another group of students. Subsequently several provosts of the Halls were verbally abused; one provost's house was attacked and his family terrorized. All these acts, apparently, were forms of protest at the alleged failure of the university authorities to prevent the Shibir attack. These incidents show that it was not the Shibir alone who indulged in violence that day. I need not mention the events of the next few days in Khulna, Dhaka and Chittagong

death, allegedly by Chhatra Dal in which the Shibir suffered the activists. I do not mean to jus- retaliation, in its turn, of the tify the attack on the Halls but other parties, with further loss only to point out that it was of life. Particularly loathsome provoked, and to point out also among these events, was what your reporter described as the "witch hunt' at Dhaka Univermost all the student parties sity. Even if it were granted that who are active on campus, fight the Shibir is a fascist, sectarian. not only with each other but anti-national organization, do the rest of us have to oppose it with fascist methods? You did well to emphasise, in your second editorial, that if the Jamaat-Shibir have to be row, the parties would fight (as fought, they must be fought politically. The battle must be for the hearts and minds of the

majority of our people, not upon the bodies and lives of our young students. This must be done not because we wish to be kind to Jamaat-Shibir but because we must avoid civil disorder and bloodshed and stand by the rule of law and the constitution.

The point I am trying to make here is that if it is violence on the campus that we wish to stop, then talk of banning the Jamaat-Shibir is irrelevant at present. Why should Shibir be banned for doing what everyone else does? What must be banned, and immediately, is the present system of student "wings" of all political parties who have them. Student politics by itself is no danger to the nation; what is dangerous is the use of students by political parties. It is the political parties who are responsible for the violence on campus and it is the political parties, ultimately, who are responsible for the violent deaths of our students.

Weeks ago, you reported Shahjahan Siraj, MP, as saying that the JS area alone, in the entire country, is free from violence. I found that a significant statement. The JS area is free from violence because the representatives of the various parties who sit in it do not need to fight each other as long as they have their surrogates, their student supporters, to do their fighting for them. The parallel here is with that - in a wider context - of the wars fought by the client states of the superpowers before the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Superpowers had a "cold war" going on between them, but their client states fought actual wars and killed each others' people for the sake of communism or capitalism. Similarly, in the confrontational kind of politics that we have in Bangladesh, the highly paid and empowered MP's of our various parties abuse each other in airconditioned comfort while their student wings kill each other in the heat and dust of our campuses.

> Fatima Abeda Sultana Rajshahi