

Finding New Uses for Jute

Industries Minister A M Zahuruddin Khan urged the officials of the Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation the other day to take measures to optimise use of jute in pulp and paper manufacturing. The call comes at a time when raw jute prices continue to fall in the countryside. June buying season is drawing to close and the Minister's move is not going to influence the price level in any way this year. However, it holds a promise for the future.

At present, only about seven per cent of the total available supplies of raw jute are being utilised for purposes other than export and manufacture of traditional products such as hessian, sacking and carpet backing cloth. The versatility of jute as a fibre on the other hand, has come to be recognised globally. Jute lends itself for manufacturing a wide range of new products — ranging from fabrics, furnishings, wall hangings and floor coverings to stylish handy shopping bags, sturdy briefcases and soft luggage.

Diversifying the use of jute for purposes of internal consumption could help evolve a more balanced pattern of marketing by increasing the proportion of demand that is more assured. Product diversification carries the additional advantage of reducing dependence on external demand for traditional jute goods. In the instance case of use of jute for manufacturing pulp and paper, there is yet another benefit. It will help conserve dwindling forest resources. Of late, paper mills in the country have been facing difficulties from time to time in procuring wood and bamboo for maintaining uninterrupted production.

Pulp produced out of jute is said to be suitable for manufacturing all grades of paper. Even currency paper can be produced from jute pulp. Paper mills would have been expected to welcome jute as an alternate raw material. Unfortunately, the reality is otherwise. Even now, the country's lone pulp mill is required to use at least some jute as raw material. Indications are that the mill had been none too enthusiastic about the proposition. Technical problems relating to chemical conversion of jute could arise. However, such difficulties could be overcome too.

There are even talks of setting up a pulp mill based on jute as raw material. In itself, the concept is welcome. However, for the moment, the priority should be to persuade the existing pulp and paper mills in the country to make optimal use of jute as raw material.

It is also reported that the government plans to set up jute waste recycling units, under a product diversification project. The idea is to produce yarn through chemical conversion of jute cuttings and waste. One wonders why the private sector is not coming up with such projects. Elsewhere, initiative for commercial production of diverse new products from jute comes mainly from the private sector. Government decision to prohibit production of polythene shopping bags from mid-January next, has opened up new opportunities for private sector entrepreneurs for coming up with substitutes for the banned item. Improved versions of jute shopping bags could well be the answer. Elegant jute shopping bags are getting popular abroad. Why should not these replace polythene shopping bags in a major jute producing country like ours?

The three-day twentieth session of the International Jute Organisation (IJO) in Dhaka from November 3, helps bring the issue of product diversification to focus. Finding new uses for jute to counter the menace of competition from synthetics, is one of the principal mandates of IJO. The organisation has taken in hand research projects for evolving new items fashioned out of jute and test marketing of the products. However, IJO is said to be getting strapped for funds. Let us hope that fund constraints will not hold up its programme for jute product diversification.

Going to Kenya Sans Frustration

Bangladesh's run up to ICC cricket in Kenya couldn't have been better designed. In Sri Lanka and India, Bangladesh boys were to meet somewhat less than national-level sides and gather experience needed to take on a Zimbabwean near-Test side in Dhaka. The third set of matches was expected to crown the preparations by yielding results that would do supremely as a confidence builder for a Nairobi-bound squad. Things seem to have, in reality, somehow gone awry all the way.

It is frustrating to lose a match by nine runs and another by thirteen — in both cases with things tantalisingly come almost home. It is not unfair to see in both sudden flaring of a suicidal instinct and get angry over such absurd exercise in mosochism. But this is cricket and a more circumspect view is in order here. The frustrations were caused by Bangladesh's coming ever so nearer to victory than in all previous outings against the same adversary. It must be remembered that it was decidedly credible to go as near to a win in consecutive matches against a Test side. The morale damper came more from a Dhakaite predisposition for inflating expectations way beyond realistic proportions.

There can justifiably be other viewpoints. If Bangladesh is not quite the first nation in cricket, it gets the most and best support out of the state — of all cricket playing nations. How much more would it take for Bangladesh's cricket to come of age? The Dhaka stadium performance amply showed that we have still some way to go before we can call ourselves cricketers. Why? The point of the two matches was not the way we almost caught up with the modest Zimbabwean tally both the times but the manner in which we threw it all up — just poor gamesmanship, sheer immaturity and patently very bad handling of the situations.

At the moment, when the frustrations of the defeat to Zimbabwe are still fresh in our minds and the Kenyan challenge is in front of us we can do at least two things not to forestall our finely shaping team. One, to heed John Hampshire and go for livelier wickets for all of our senior cricketers; we must at once throw away the dead pitch we engaged the Zimbabweans on. Two, for God's sake do not move cricket to Mirpur, away from the attention of the nation. In fact, it would be good for the health of both the game of football and its loving fans if soccer, instead of cricket, were moved to venues of sparser habitation.

The players' progress was remarkable — their fitness enabled them not to miss a single catch or cause other fielding lapses. But this gain was more than offset by no worthwhile pitch being available for the team's minimum required practice. A lot of uninterrupted practice for the whole team on a standard lively wicket must be ensured forthwith.

REFORMS AT CROSSROADS

Increased Efforts Needed to Ensure Fairness and Transparency

VOICES of discord would continue to rise at the process of economic reform unless the policy makers can secure, at least a willing acquiescence of the people to the programme. In a democratic society, reformers face a daunting task in convincing the public that notwithstanding the pains during the period of transition, the future will bring the desired benefits.

There is no clear evidence to suggest that the people in general are basically opposed to economic reforms. Rather, available indications point to the contrary. For instance, an opinion poll carried out by a national vernacular daily on the eve of presentation of this year's budget, found that 72 per cent of its readers, who responded, opted for market economy.

Everybody wants a better life. However, people doubt if the reforms will really bring a better future. What they see for now is continuing economic hardship. In their effort to persuade the people that the present sufferings are only a passing phases, authorities tell the people of the impressive gains in attaining macro-economic stability. Most people do not find a way to correlate these gains to personal well-being.

Per capita income has grown from \$190 in 1989 to \$220 in 1991. Told about this, people would mostly look around and wonder — whom this incremental income has gone to. Inflation has gone down to a historically low level of 1.3 per cent. So what? Enlightened that it was the decline in rice price that brought inflation rates down, the average city dweller would counter by pointing his finger at the more visible rise in the cost of water, gas, electricity — also a gift of the reform programme, although the service, he would say, is getting worse. Even the fall in rice price does not come as boon to all. Owners of

The government has achieved remarkable success in mobilising higher public resources by way of raising additional revenues. The taxpayers do not know exactly if the additional spending money they made available to the government has been applied to improve the lot of the people.

medium and large farms would see reforms taking away input subsidies and adding to their cash outlay in farming. All the while, they get a lower price for the paddy they grow. True, 70 per cent of the households in rural areas are net purchasers of food. However, low rice price does not come as an unmitigated blessing for them too. Low prices for paddy could constrict employment opportunities or bring the wage level down.

More difficulties lie ahead along the reform path. The 'Understanding for FY 1994', signed at the last Paris Aid Club meet, requires the government to carry the financial sector reform forward by strengthening laws and regulations, by removing legal anomalies in debt recovery and bringing the defaulters to book, and privatising at least one more nationalised commercial bank within the year. The first phase of the jute sector reform programme needs to be initiated and in the labour policy sector, firm arrangements are to be put in place for linking wages with productivity. The combined system losses of the power sector and in water supplies are to be cut back sharply, railway deficits are to be reduced further. Privatisation is to be accelerated and at least 50 per cent of the 42 public sector industrial units are to be divested within the year. The government had also agreed to cut public employment by some 45,000 by the end of FY '94. Donor agencies are already expressing concern at the slow progress made so far in all such areas. The second half of the financial year will perhaps see a flurry of activities in the reform programme.

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mobilising higher public resources by way of raising additional revenues. The taxpayers do not know exactly if the additional spending money they made available to the government has been applied to improve the lot of the people. On the other hand, they know that public investment, by way of the Annual Development Plan (ADP) has again fallen short of the target by 20 per cent last financial year. To be sure, investment as a whole rose to 12.7 per cent of the GDP last fi-

20 per cent. Imports had remained sluggish for nearly two years since 1990. However, last fiscal year, imports also picked up, reaching \$3.9 billion, showing an annual growth rate of about 13 per cent in dollar terms. Despite the rise in imports, balance of payments situation on current account remains a healthy trend. Expanded exports and a 14 per cent increase in remittances from wage earners abroad, are the main contributing factors and the country's foreign exchange re-

hand of the central bank. Then again, import liberalisation has slowed down, apparently in response to calls from the domestic industry for protection. Legitimate interests of the industry need to be protected against unfair competition from abroad. Government is said to have made anti-dumping provisions in the law, permitting imposition of countervailing duties. However, the modalities of applying the law are still to be worked out. Industry would expect the process to be speeded up.

In our economic setting, the success of the reform programme will be judged by the extent it has helped alleviate poverty. Getting out of the poverty-trap postulates a GDP growth rate of above 6 per cent annually in the medium term. GDP growth rate was 3.60% in 90-91, 3.96% in '91-92 and 5% in '92-93. GDP growth rate for the current fiscal year was projected in the budget at 6%. So, we still have to touch the threshold of the desired level of GDP growth. Does this mean that economic reforms have not brought in any alleviation of poverty at all? In the sense that reform is an ongoing process, one should perhaps look at eighties first. Besides, by way of an umbrella arrangement for economic reforms, structural adjustment policy came to be adopted in mid-eighties. Reform programme embracing the economy as a whole, commenced in 1986 under the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Structural Adjustment Facility (SAF) arrangement for three years. IMF Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility (ESAF) arrangements for another three years commenced in 1990. ESAF arrangements

ended this year. However, an interim arrangement is said to have been made with the IMF to enable us to remain under its post-ESAF monitoring facility and to carry on with structural adjustment.

To revert to the poverty scenario, the 1985-86 Household Expenditure Survey, published probably in 1989, found people in rural areas better off (by the standard of minimum calorie consumption) while the lot of the urban population had worsened or remained unchanged. No further official data on the poverty situation seem to have been published after the survey. Findings of this survey are not quite relevant to the post-structural-reform scenario anyway. However, a survey report of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) provides useful clues to rural poverty situation during 1990-92. Released earlier this year, the report said, inter alia, that the moderately poor saw some improvement in their condition although the status of the extreme poor remained largely unchanged during the period. The survey also noted that 26 per cent of reported causes of improvement was attributed to natural factors (good harvests, mostly) while another 41 per cent to various structural factors such as better economic opportunities. Reforms did bring them some benefits then!

As mentioned earlier, the agenda for reforms for the second half of the fiscal year presents a daunting task. More voices will probably be raised in protest against reforms. Experts agree that the process of reforms must be fair and transparent. Fairness also postulates a social safety-net for the people temporarily hurt by reforms. And effective communication with the people is a facet of transparency. For economic reforms to succeed, efforts in both these areas would have to be geared up.

ALONG MY WAY

S B Chaudhuri

financial year. However, this meagre improvement came mainly from a marginal rise in private sector investment.

Trade and industrial sector policy reform programme has come quite a way. Permission is no longer needed to set up an industry and private investment is possible in nearly all sectors. The two-year long pause in new private sector investment seems to be over at last. As noted a while ago, new private sector investment appears to be on a fitful, yet upward, track.

Efforts to attract direct foreign investment continue, promising them, among other things, hundred per cent ownership of industrial concerns. Tariff rationalisation is proceeding apace although import liberalisation appears to have hit bit of a snag lately. Meanwhile, exports last financial year exceeded \$2.3 billion, recording a healthy annual growth rate of

services have reached a level of \$2.2 billion, equal to our seven months import requirements.

As for currency reforms, the Taka has officially been declared as convertible on current account. However, exchange control, and with it certain restrictions on current account transactions, remain in place. Besides, the Taka remains on a managed float. All these make the current phase of convertibility somewhat a half-way house. Probably the authorities are being cautious, not only to forestall abnormal outflow of funds, but also to prevent any marked fall in the value of the Taka, which would hurt importers. On the other hand, in a setting of current account convertibility, in the coming months, exporters would naturally look forward to a conversion rate determined by the currency market in open trading — not under the guiding

THE Muslims and Croats who have held out against Serbian intimidation and violence in this once ethnically-mixed northern Bosnia city, now seem almost certain to be driven out — but have nowhere to go.

The Serbian reign of terror has taken its toll over the past 19 months. Now that they are about to give in and leave, however, the city's non-Serbs are finding the doors to sanctuary in European countries being slammed shut in their faces.

The region of Bosnian Krajina, as it is known locally, had a pre-war population of close to 750,000 Muslims and Croats. After almost two years of unrest, there are believed to be just slightly more than 100,000 non-Serbs.

The last three of Banja Luka's 16 mosques were destroyed in September. The city's main mosque, blown-up in May, was only partially destroyed the first time nationalists mined it. But the following night, the saboteurs returned to finish the job on the 414 year-old shrine.

In Muslim neighbourhoods, flags of the self-proclaimed Serbian Republic fly from windows and balconies of homes where the original occupants have been expelled and Serb families have moved in. The flags indicate the community's 'Serbification' — and also keep Serb families from being mistaken for Muslims and attacked.

But fleeing non-Serbs are fast running out of nearby safe refuge. In October, Norway, the last European country to accept

Bosnia-Herzegovina

Non-Serbs Have Nowhere to Run

Bosnian refugees without visas, changed its policy so that all Bosnian refugees seeking to enter Scandinavia are now required to be in possession of a visa.

Sweden, which has received around 150,000 asylum-seekers from former Yugoslavia in the past two years, imposed visa requirements in the summer.

The move came amid growing government frustration that other European countries — particularly within the 12-member European Community — were not playing a full role in sharing the refugee burden.

Denmark imposed visa restrictions for similar reasons shortly afterwards and Norway, faced by an influx of Bosnians, followed suit.

But Bosnians, now effectively excluded from the region, will be allowed to enter Sweden in a quota arrangement announced by Stockholm in early October.

Up to 7,000 refugees from the Bosnian war-zone will be allowed in this winter to alleviate humanitarian problems in Bosnia-Herzegovina due to cold weather.

"That's the trap that they're in," says Larry Hollingworth, the head of the local United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). "These people who are having their walls splattered with bullets, have nowhere to go and no where to hide. That is the only thing

that's keeping them here." One Muslim man said a bullet had hit the wall of his living room as he watched television the night before. But while this was worrying to him, he said, it was little more than just another incident. "It was something very small."

"There are two methods (of expulsion)," said a Catholic priest, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

"The first is the Kozarac method, where the Serbs worked for one week and all that was left was level ground," he said, referring to a nearby Muslim community whose 30,000 residents were killed, expelled or interned in camps while their homes were systematically blown-up.

The priest added, "The one at work in Banja Luka is what I call capillary terrorism: it is drop by drop, but the result is just the same."

These days, night-time rampages through Muslim neighbourhoods are the norm. Nearly every night, carloads of often-drunk Serbs drive past Muslim homes, firing into them. Occasionally they throw hand-grenades into living rooms or

break in and beat or rape family members. "They can't sleep," said Hollingworth. "They hide under their beds and every night they pray to God that tonight is not their night."

"When three bearded, boozes-smelling men with weapons break down the door you don't know what they are going to do. Are they going to kill you, rape you, or just threaten you? You don't know," he said.

"Imagine the terror that must go through a family's minds," Hollingworth added. "And what if you live next door? What do you do? Do you try and help your neighbour? Most likely, you go down into your cellar and hide."

Recently, his office forwarded a cable to the UNHCR's head of mission in Zagreb that concluded: "We ask ourselves when Muslim residents will be obliged officially to wear yellow stars (or in this case yellow crescent moons) and we watch nervously for major repairs to rail lines. This is not a joke."

The reign of terror has become so severe many liberal-minded Serbs are fleeing in almost as much fear as their

Muslim and Croat neighbours. Said a Serb mother of two: "I am afraid even to breathe. I am a Serb and it is my state, but there are some stories that some things have been blown up and it's better to keep your

Sarajevo Lives by Bread Alone

Brigitte Duchesne writes from Sarajevo

Sarajevo's only operating bakery is constantly targeted by snipers. It has no more tires for what was one of Europe's largest delivery fleet — because it cots 11,000 loaves to buy one tire

ONE of Europe's largest bakeries stands tall in besieged Sarajevo, 700 metres from an active front line.

The Velepkara Bakery is located next to snipers' alley, but there's a safer route to it — a back road lined with anti-sniper metal boxes. They're all riddled with bullet and sharpnel holes.

Before the war, the bakery, with 320 employees, produced 90 types of bread, pasta and cakes. And, with its 70-truck fleet, it delivered baked goods to 250 bakeries in the region.

Until July, despite the war and destruction, the bakery continued to offer the bare minimum of bread to Sarajevo's 320,000 citizens. Now, though, mainly because of shortages of electricity, and with just 200 employees, it is frequently able to bake enough bread only for hospitals and collective centres.

Citizens are hard pressed to make up the shortfall. Humanitarian agencies provide them with four kilos of flour a month, and sometimes less. One loaf of bread requires at least one kilo. That makes, roughly, one loaf a week.

An adjacent mill burned down after a heavy attack in October. So the bakery, the only one still operating in Sarajevo, has to rely on humanitarian agencies for flour, as well as yeast and salt. It's a lucky day when fats, milk powder and sugar are available.

The other basic needs are water and electricity, diesel for the production and petrol for the trucks. When water lines are down, water has to be collected in cisterns and trucked to the bakery.

"If the automated machines cannot work because of the lack of electricity, we operate manually — at least to offer bread to the public kitchens, collective centres and hospitals," says Enver Kazazic, the manager.

The bakery received its heaviest shelling in early February, when it was hit by 19 mortar shells. "We were lucky," says Mr Kazazic. "We had no diesel nor any electricity for a few days, so we shut down operations at the beginning of February. Therefore, very few people were hurt during this particular attack. Fifty per cent of the roof was damaged."

When the shelling and sniper activity intensifies, employees work in three-to-four-

mouth closed." The priest meanwhile said his home and church has been dynamited and shot at more than ten times, adding his case was hardly unusual. Surviving Catholic churches are prohibited from ringing their bells.

"I no longer give interviews," he said. "The price of a head is very cheap, here — five cigarettes — but to me, it is my only one."

To the Editor...

Margarine factory

Sir, In this age of health consciousness adults all over the world are trying to reduce cholesterol as far as possible. Hence consumption of butter is declining among the adults. As an alternative, use of margarine is going up day by day. Production cost of margarine is also very low compared to butter. Even our neighbouring countries such as India, Pakistan etc have set up margarine factories which are producing cheap margarine.

But it is not understood why there is no initiative in this regard in Bangladesh. A limited quantity of margarine is imported into the country. But its price is exorbitant. Despite this there is a tendency to go for import. Reason behind is obvious. I therefore request the Ministry of Industries to take appropriate steps for setting up of a margarine factory in the country. This will not entail heavy capital investment because raw materials can be available locally. Raw materials for margarine are grass, sunflower etc. Technology is also simple. Only thing required is a little interest and initiative.

Suleh Ahmed Chowdhury Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka

A matter of life and death

Sir, At last the Farakka problem has been revealed to stir the world's conscience by our Prime Minister at the UNGA

She must change this outlook.

In this pretext, our country can no longer afford to sustain such adversity due to Farakka and out of sheer disappointment and distrust Bangladesh has been left with no choice but to draw the world attention so that India could be persuaded to heed our demand for the just share of Ganges water. The speech of our Prime Minister, for which she deserves our deep appreciation and accolade, has reflected the grim reality that must be realized by the member states and India as well.

For goodness' sake, India must also understand the catastrophe that nature could cause to environment and economy for she has endured many natural calamities as our country has been doing, mostly due to man's folly.

Let us hope that India takes note of the Farakka problem being raised at an international forum with prudence, not as an affront, and come up with an obligation and sincerity in this respect to resolve the protracted problem once for all, thereby winning the hearts of the people of Bangladesh and dispelling misgivings among two nations.

Md Jalaluddin Iqbal Mohammedpur, Dhaka

'I'm denied fundamental right'

Sir, The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh declares education as one of the fundamental rights of its citizens.

That means if one wants to study and the scope is available he must be given the opportunity to exercise his constitutional right. But Dhaka University, the highest seat of learning, has a different rule contrary to this principle.

I was a student of Mass Communication and Journalism Department, Dhaka University. I completed my BA Hons in 1989. Instead of doing my masters in the same discipline I switched to Institute of Business Administration. I have completed my MBA this year.

The other day I talked to the present Chairman of Journalism Department for completion of my masters. He referred me to the Deputy Registrar (Education). I approached the Deputy Registrar. He declined me the scope on the ground that in the same university I cannot have two masters degrees. Even he refused to accept any application for special consideration. This rule is, as he opined, to avoid the "session jam". I quoted examples of my friends having ordinary masters and then MBA. He justified that after masters in any other discipline one can opt for MBA but after MBA one cannot opt for masters in other discipline. What a rule!

After completing my honours in the subject I am unable to complete my masters for this apparent mistake I had to console myself ironically, I had to have all these explanations from one holding the portfolio.

M Fakhruzzaman Ciba, Bangladesh