

Straight Talk at the DCs' Conference

The Deputy Commissioners' conference which ended in the city yesterday was featured by some straight talk. The briefing session chaired by the Cabinet Secretary just prior to the inauguration of the conference by the Prime Minister was marked by a recital of some functional difficulties by a few DCs. This was reportedly in reaction to a reminder that various ministerial targets have remained unfulfilled.

The Prime Minister herself was strikingly straightforward in her inaugural address to the conference. She was even circumspect and self-effacing. She said to the effect that the entire administration would have to answer for any negligence of duties if it were to push the nation backwards. The other point she emphasised related to the enforcement of the anti-terrorism law. She urged the officials to ensure strict and impartial application of the law that gave sweeping powers to the police rendering it harsh, as it is. She called for such a qualified enforcement of the law for the purpose of creating a climate conducive to economic investments.

While welcoming her concern for the judicious application of the law we believe the responsibility of her government does not end by making a call for it. She has to ensure through her own mechanism — and she can rely on a number of agencies — that her directive for an impartial enforcement of the anti-terrorism law is implemented. And if the opposition can cite specific instances of the abuse of the law these must be gone into.

On an overall basis, the allegations being heard from time to time against excessive use of the law make it a fit subject for unrelenting monitoring and periodic reviews. After all the onus lies with the government to prove that the extraordinary law was necessary.

On a functional plane, the DCs pointed out they remained busy with political programmes at the expense of development functioning. They blamed the slow-down of work on political 'hassles' and the paralytic effect of the Prokrichi's conflict with them. As a sign of political interference, they alleged transfers on incurring displeasure of MPs. Two ministers hailing from the same district could give differing advice in a single matter, some of them complained, with candour.

There is no denying the administrative paralysis caused by the Prokrichi — BCS (Admn) cadre warfare. The issue obviously has some time-consuming aspects to its resolution. Does it mean that it will serve as an expedient excuse *ad infinitum* for any administrative malfunctioning? So, the rationale is compelling to bring the crisis to a speedy end with political intervention at the highest level.

So far as the complaints of any undue political interference in administration goes, one can only seek relief in the Prime Minister's repeated assurances to the officials that they need not fear any retribution if they act neutrally. Obviously she has to find out now whether her verbal encouragement to the officials to function freely and fairly is being actually acted upon lower down the hierarchy.

S. Africa's Choice

South Africa is on its way to making history. With the endorsement of a new constitution in the white-dominated parliament on Wednesday — giving blacks and whites equal rights for the first time in history — the country has advanced a step closer to the goal of transition from apartheid to democracy. Earlier, the other notable agreement reached between the government of President F W de Klerk and the African National Congress (ANC) was on the constitution of a committee empowering it to supersede the government on disputed matters relating to election during the transition period. All this augurs well.

However, the key question concerns the holding of the April 27 election peacefully and to that end all these exercises will be of immense help but, unfortunately, not enough. The reason is clearly the failure of the country's contending parties to sink their differences across the table. Apart from the ruling National Party and the ANC, Inkatha Freedom Party and the pro-apartheid Conservative Party are the forces to reckon with and the opposition of the last two parties to the constitution carries in itself a threat of widespread violence. South Africa's record on political murder is hardly rivaled anywhere: no less than 13,000 such murders have taken place since Mandela's release from prison in 1990.

Evidently, the path to S. Africa's first multi-racial election is fraught with danger. The opponents of the deal between the ANC and the government may not reverse the course of history, now in the making, but at least they have, admittedly, enough power to make the process more painful than seems necessary. Had they seen reason, the historic moments for the country could be fittingly redeemed. But the uncompromising attitudes of the white right-wing groups have even led to their preparation for a possible war. The discovery of a huge cache of arms, including mortars and rocket launchers, recently pointed to a chilling prospect.

There is little indication that the Klerk government or the international community has taken the threat seriously and is bracing up to the task. For a country having little experience with election; ground preparation for the occasion is as important as the actual holding of the election. Almost half of the country's workforce cannot read. The campaign, let alone the exercise of franchise, is not expected to be orderly and peaceful if the fear of the backlash from the opponents has not been removed. The UN peace-keepers did the job marvelously well in Cambodia. The challenges of holding a free and fair election in S. Africa is no less — if not more — daunting. Involvement of international monitoring and peace-keeping organisations should be ensured much ahead of the polls.

After all this has been ensured, the elected government, almost sure to be headed by ANC President Nelson Mandela, will be in a position to set about the task of minding the business of governance with confidence. Hopes of the black South Africans have been raised to a dizzying height but the difference between them and their White counterparts is huge in terms of living standard. Economic equality will not be achieved soon, yet the new government must start the process of bridging the yawning gaps.

WHILE their governments are mired in mutual mistrust, South Asian water experts are getting together on their own to study potential areas of cooperation.

In a unique experiment called 'The Patna Initiative', named after the capital of the Indian state of Bihar, non-government water experts from Nepal's Royal Nepal Academy of Science and Technology (RONAST) and Patna University's Centre for Water Resources Study (CWRS) will investigate joint projects, taking eastern Nepal's Kosi River as a test case.

"Water is a critical resource which can bring development to Bihar which is one of India's poorest states," says T Prasad of CWRS. "Proper use of water for irrigation alone promises a ten per cent increase in the state's agricultural yield."

The Bihar-Nepal group plans to take up studies on the different river systems of the Himalaya-Ganges basin to draw up development guidelines based on scientific and economic criteria.

"We will work on publicly available documents based on pure science and with open minds," says Dipak Gyawali of RONAST. "There should be more respect for scientific truth is all we are trying to say."

The Kosi originates in Tibet and cuts through the Himalaya near Mt Everest in a series of stupendous gorges and fans out into the Bihar plains. Because of its furious floods the Kosi has long been known as 'The Sorrow of Bihar'.

The Indian government has built over 3,400 km of embankments in Bihar over the

Waiting for the Next Great Flood

past three decades, but experts say siltation has raised the Kosi's river-bed higher than the surrounding land — making a catastrophe inevitable in the near future.

"Ours is a confidence-building process to start working with people who are directly affected by floods. The real downstream beneficiaries or sufferers are not the people living in national capitals," says Nepali water expert Ajay Dixit.

Nepali and Indian experts say region-wide studies incorporating Bangladesh would be the next step.

If the Ganges River basin encompassing Nepal, eastern India and Bangladesh was a separate country, it would have about 400 million people. It would also be the poorest on earth.

The three countries share literacy levels, infant mortality rates and life expectancies that are inferior even by South Asian standards. But ironically, this is also the richest area of the world in potential hydro-power.

The fast-flowing rivers that drain the Himalaya in Nepal contribute 71 per cent of the dry season flow of the Ganges as it meanders across the Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and into Bangladesh.

But the three countries have not even started talking about sharing the region's water wealth, and existing bilateral projects are bogged down in controversy.

Nepal's problem is that it has too much hydro-power, but cannot afford to build dams on its own. The landlocked country

Impatient with gridlocked governments, South Asian water experts are getting together to plan joint projects. Binod Bhattarai of Inter Press Service reports from Kathmandu



has a feasible potential to generate some 45,000 megawatts of electricity. It has tapped only 250 megawatts. Every monsoon, Nepal's rivers burst out of the mountains and submerge huge tracts of the north Indian plains and

flow into the swollen Ganges to inundate Bangladesh, before emptying into the Bay of Bengal.

India and Bangladesh suffer the same curse: too much water during the monsoon and too little in the dry season.

The ideal solution would be to build storage reservoirs in the mountains that could generate power and regulate flood waters. But lack of regional cooperation, unanswered questions about dams in a seismically active zone and the exorbitant price tag of such projects have blocked progress.

India and Bangladesh have not even been able to agree on how to share the waters of the Ganges at a border barrage at Farakka during the dry season. Its last agreement expired in 1988.

Bangladesh, which suffers the most from annual floods, has called for a regional dialogue ever since the great deluge of 1988 in which three-fourths of the country was submerged and a staggering 33 million people were made temporarily homeless.

The rivers flow through Nepal and India and reach Bangladesh. We have always wanted that development of water resources should be done through dialogues, negotiations and dialogue," Bangladesh premier prime minister Khalesa Zia said during a recent visit here.

But India has opposed regional talks, preferring to deal with Nepal and Bangladesh separately.

Zia even took the matter to the United Nations in October when she indirectly accused India of blocking water at the Farakka barrage during the dry season and flooding Bangladesh in the rainy season by releasing excess water. She told the assembly: "They Farakka Barrage has become an issue of life and death for us."

India's efforts to convince Nepal to jointly harness Himalayan rivers have also been hampered by mutual mistrust. The two countries have not had a major river project since the 1960s.

While governments dither, water experts in Kathmandu, Patna and Dhaka are increasingly worried about how the Kosi will behave during the next rainy season. A barrage built on the Nepal border in 1959 is silted up and has no flood control capability left.

The Kosi has been shifting westwards across the Bihar plains at the rate of one kilometre per year for the past 120 years, and a breach on its embankments could wipe out entire cities that have sprung up along old river beds, scientists say.

When the Kosi last overflowed its levees six years ago, 33 of Bihar's 39 districts were engulfed.

Non-governmental experts from Nepal and India say unless politicians stop playing games and look for feasible solutions, the next Bihar flood could be even more devastating.

Says Prasad: "Despite the mutuality of interest to harness water, optimal development has not taken place because of political and other priorities."

low officials are equal and further that such a corrective action elevates government's image rather than mending it. We have been taught a lesson by South Korea. Why not take the cue?

Private Housing Bank

The Financial Express on 19, 1993 stated that a private housing bank was likely to be set up soon with active support from the government. The proposed housing bank is expected to be an answer to the acute housing problem in the metropolitan and other cities.

According to the report, government would have a share of 70% of the proposed paid-up capital while the rest will be subscribed in the private sector. To be run on a commercial basis, the proposed bank is likely to charge an interest rate of 15%.

The disarray in which the House Building Finance Corporation finds itself is as well known as the distress of those seeking housing facilities in the city. In the past, the problems of finance, be it in agriculture, industry or house building, were sought to be faced more by reducing the price of capital whereas supply or availability of credit in time and at lower transaction costs never seemed to occupy the agenda of policymakers. As a result, credit facilities were mostly reaped by those who were adept in the art of manipulation required to avail themselves of such credit. It is hoped that the current idea of a private housing bank, if materialised with appropriate supporting devices, might lessen the burden to a larger extent.

GATT Set Go

All the daily newspapers of the world headlined GATT's last-minute deliverance from an impasse created by the US and the EC. Readers are aware that the baby so reborn was an end-product of some unanticipated and unresolved haggling at the end of 116 nations' participation in 7-year-long parleys. This 8th round of GATT ended breeding more hopes than despair all over the world because, unlike other rounds of talks, the Uruguay Round had in its orbit the most vital sector for many developing countries — agriculture. As is well known, the potential supremacy of agricultural products and merchandise of the developing countries has remained unrealized unfortunately due to heavy subsidisation by the developed and their protectionist measures. After the Geneva trade accord it is expected that agricultural production and trade would take place through relocation of resources as per the theory of comparative costs and not by any artificially created self-stimulus. The manufacturing exports and imports are likely to face further tariff cuts.

The GATT secretariat assumes that the deal would add about US\$750 billion a year to world merchandise trade by the year 2005. If services trade are included, the gain might be even higher than being speculated. The most remarkable achievement appears to be a 'no' to growing protectionism that tended to squeeze the volume of world trade, distort allocation of resources and hinder economic growth.

However, all that glitters may not be gold. The GATT

Pak GDP Nosedives to 3%

The Daily Star of 13 December 1993 reported that Pakistan's GDP nosedived to 3% as compared to the target of a little over 6%. The realized growth rate appeared to match the population growth rate with no change in the per capita index. The growth rate is assumed to be threshed, according to the Central Bank Report, by the poor performance of the agricultural sector that posted a negative growth of 4% induced by a 12% fall in the production of major crops e.g. cotton, rice and sugarcane.

Pakistan is one of the SAARC countries that has been experiencing a higher growth rate than other partners of SAARC and it is thought to have developed a strong industrial base.

Short News, Long Views

by Abdul Bayes

The frustrating news seems only to lend the lesson that any move to induce a higher growth rate without a proper treatment to agricultural sector, either from the standpoint of technology or that of nature, might relegate. Agriculture still is the linchpin of sustainable growth and development in this part of the world.

Reduction in the Use of Fertilizer in Dinajpur

The Sangbad on 16 December 1993 reported a decline in the per acre yield of the major paddy crop, Aman, in greater Dinajpur district which is famous for rice production in Bangladesh. Why? The report suspects that a fall in the use of chemical fertilizer by 30-40% might have caused the debacle. And the decline in the use of fertilizer is reported to have emanated from an unfavourable price ratio between paddy and fertilizer, experienced by farmers over the last season or so. What happened to Aman production might also stalk the ensuing boro season with boro and wheat to come, the same report apprehends. The report carries weight for the fact that the revelation is the result of a survey on as many as 5000 farmers by the Agricultural Directorate of Dinajpur.

Policy-makers in our country tend to argue that gross sales of fertilizer has been on an increase over the years and that probably belies the higher price-lower demand theory of economics. However, the observed phenomenon does appear to be in consonance with the principles of micro economics. Total demand for fertilizer might have gone up due to a greater horizontal expansion of the fertilizer-using crops over the years. But the price effect has been correspondingly pronounced with the intensity of fertilizer use which is one of the major determinants of the per acre yield. In a land-scarce country like ours, a decline in the per acre yield is anything but soothing news especially in the face of a falling paddy price. The apparent autarky in food production is more of a nature's gift than the fruit of technological progress in farming. To ensure sustainable growth in agriculture, more care needs to be taken for the proper use of modern inputs like fertilizer. Otherwise, as it happened in Pakistan, the growth rate here could also nosedive, today or to-morrow.

Senior Officials Lose Jobs

The Sangbad on 11 December reported that a total of 94 senior officials had been asked to quit their jobs in South Korea and 140 more were to mend their ways. The crusade against

illegal possession of wealth by the public servants is also against the bureaucratic manoeuvres to wriggle out of it seemed to have made for the resignations, as could be guessed from the report. It may be mentioned here that three ministers along with a batch of senior civil, military and judicial officers were earlier forced out of office following different charges brought against them by the government.

Our own chronicle of crusades against corruption tended to show that vows were taken by successive governments to weed out corruption closely on the heels of their assuming power. And some scratches were made on the hot iron but with the passage of time the iron cooled down — making it harder for any strike really. A further disconcerting thing is that excepting a very few, most of those charged, appeared to be political personalities. But later, the turn-around of politics seemed to acquit them of the charges and sometimes be even rewarded. What more, constant factor in the domain of government has been that highly placed public servants remained untouched despite the fact that charges of rampant corruption against some of them had been aired from time to time. Thus government comes and government goes, but corruption remains. Hats off to the S Korean government which has shown that in the eye of law, ministers, high or

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Do or die?

Sir, It was not the end of the universe, nor was it the death of cricket in Bangladesh, because it was only a test — of prowess at the rockbottom — and a just beginning for the Bangladesh learners who have to bank on what they mastered from the recent study tours nexidoors and special interactions at home with the perfect strangers in the Test community.

Never mind the defeats in India and Sri Lanka that Bangladeshis smarties brought back home from their expedition, for everything happened out in their neighbours' grounds was meant to be of educational sessions for the pundit's pupils on the road to the close encounter of the first kind.

Back on home soil, Test infants Zimbabwe proved to be mature enough for the Test-expectant hosts, no matter what the odds were.

In order for the Bangladeshis Gullivers (back in the Asian Broodingsnags' territory once more) to have what will be needed to get the asking rate ever with to pass out of the upcoming qualifier, more trials at the first class matches will be helping develop aptitude of the do-or-diers eyeing the next World Cup.

Although nobody can tell for sure when and how the

Bangladeshi cricket maniacs will make it to the Test wicket, the domestic cricket watchers will keep their fingers crossed (to witness them in action among the World Cuppers).

M Rahman
Zila School Road, Mymensingh

"... Confused Deshi"

Sir, It has been quite interesting, though at times quite disturbingly so, to listen to the confessions of a self-declared Bangladeshi Born Confused Deshi in The Daily Star Weekend Magazine. One can hardly be blamed for not knowing that such a 'species' can exist (no offense intended!) let alone their predicaments.

Madame, your name itself can be quite a considerable source of confusion, though I am sure you were not properly consulted, when the decision to that effect was taken. None of us were, for that matter. One, however, wonders whether such a practice could have compounded or resolved confusions relating to appellations. In fact it so happened (to be quite honest), that as I was glancing the paper casually, I first thought the piece have been composed by two persons. I take the entire blame, if there is any, but come to think of it, my good lady, you have at least been able to confuse someone,

without taking any responsibility for it!

If one simply chooses to juxtapose your oriental back ground against your occidental exposure, one cannot, I am afraid, fully comprehend the intricacies of your confusions. After all there have been many, even among the average enlightened *selbsteins*, not to speak of sublime personalities, of recent and immediate past, for whom the western enlightenment did not come as a source of confusion. What happened presumably in your case, madame, is that you perhaps had a sort of premature exposure — it had happened at a time when what you term as your roots were not defined. Note that in many cases the sequence really does not or rather did not matter — the most notable of them are perhaps today's Indian English writers. But most of them, again, are writing about India. I suppose you are right, madame, one cannot at the end of the day deny one's roots.

Seeing from this perspective, madame, you certainly show considerable promises. After all, identifying the sources of confusion is the first — and, some say foremost — step to remove it. And one must admit that you have done a pretty good job at that. Even I would go to the extent of saying that your confusions really did not sound like those of a confused person (though I must point out I am not a professional confessional listener — there are people with adequate and often intimidating expertise for that job).

When one listens to the duet of Ravi Shankar and Yehudi Menuhin, one cannot simply consider oneself to be a believer

of the old precept 'East is east and west is west, the twins will never meet'. You people with your challenging and chequered background can show it is indeed not the case — they can meet and they do meet.

You suggested an organisation of some sort involving BBBCDS. What about a broad based body of those of us who believe in the union of east and west?

Q M Munzur-U-Murshed
117 Azimpur Road, Dhaka

Baridhara 'J' Block

Sir, While appreciating and congratulating Mr Asiuazzaman on his report on Baridhara 'J' Block in your esteemed daily on October 23, 1993, I wish to add further information in this regard.

Eight years after allotment, the allottees still remain deprived of the plots. Without knowing the actual position of the land (which was allotted to others much earlier) how could a ruling MP, or RAJUK or the government can pledge to the original people for deregquisition depriving the genuine allottees?

The mischief created by RAJUK during Ershad regime should not be repeated now, maybe to satisfy a single local MP, depriving 360 allottees.

Without taking possession of the land in 'J' Block, how could RAJUK invite applications for the plots of lands, and enter in so many formalities with the allottees, and allot the so called plots in a single instalment (in case of four instalments with added interests)? In other areas of the city, RAJUK handed over

plots after receiving the first instalment. Now they say they have no land in Baridhara 'J' Block. RAJUK supplied maps with names and numbers of roads and plots. For the mischief or mistake done by RAJUK, only RAJUK should be penalised, not the allottees.

The original owners (peasants) sold their lands long ago. These were virtually sold and resold a few times. Therefore the original owners would not be available.

Some lands in that area, it is hard, were bought by RAJUK people under assumed names. May be anticipating dirty play by RAJUK, some allottees sold their papers of plots at 15 lac Taka for 5-katha plots.

Now it is assumed that the two groups (RAJUK people and who purchased the allotment papers) along with the local MP are trying to grab 'J' Block totally.

Was it an election pledge? Even if so, should the government move according to an election pledge given to people by an MP depriving 359 allottees, it would not be an act of a good governance.

To solve this problem is not so hard. There are 50 acres of land besides 32 acres intended to be deregquisitioned by the local MP. There are 359 allottees needing 2961.75 decimals out of 4941.75 decimals (less than 50 acres) at an average of 5 kathas or 8.25 decimals per allottee. The excess 1980 decimals may be utilised for roads, supermarkets and public utility works. If 1980 decimals of land is not sufficient for these purposes, then necessary land should be released from that 32 acres intended to be deregquisitioned. A give and take formula can easily bring good results.

Mahbubul Haque Chowdhury
Kalabagan, Dhaka