

Export Development Strategy

Nearly all the agencies that have to do with export came under scathing criticism at a seminar on the problems and prospects of non-traditional exportable products, held in Dhaka the other day. Organised by the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) the seminar was participated by the top level policy makers, business leaders, exporters and officials. Banks, customs, the airline, jute goods manufacturers, all were held to account for failure to promote exports. Even the host agency, the EPB, had to bear its share of the blame. All in all, the deliberations at the seminar point to a sad state of affairs in the field of export promotion.

Export-led growth is being bandied about as a main policy instrument for carrying the country's economy forward. Overall, exports are performing well too. Apparently, things are moving in the right direction. Yet, signs of a marked lack of awareness of the need for all concerned to promote export actively, continue to surface. Enunciation of export development strategies looks fine in print. However, these have to be broken down into action programmes for each and every component. All concerned agencies have to be assigned well-defined specific tasks to perform under the programme. A sense of commitment has to show itself up through performance.

An action programme for export will not deal with a static situation. Priorities would have to be redefined to cope with changes on the world market place. Innovations will be necessary to suit alterations in the needs and tastes of users of existing products. It is said that non-traditional items have recorded a phenomenal growth and now comprise more than eighty per cent of total exports. This should not mean that the traditional export products are to be consigned to the background. Rather, a more aggressive policy in production, management and marketing should be pursued so that these products could regain the lost ground. A vigorous product diversification programme could also yield new items for export from traditional goods.

The package of trade accords negotiated globally under the Uruguay Round could open up new avenues for export expansion. For instance, the deepest tariff cut would come in the case of tropical products where duties would drop by as much as forty-two per cent. However, export capability would have to be built up if the country is to share the projected increase in world trade.

In the short term, retaining the share of the global market under the changed circumstances could turn out to be even more crucial. As a least developed country, Bangladesh enjoys a degree of privileged access into the markets of advanced economies. Global trade liberalisation would work to erode the advantage from such arrangements of special privileges as the generalised scheme of preferences (GSP).

Non-traditional goods owe their present dominance over the export trade virtually to one item — readymade garments. Export quotas imposed by the rich countries under the multifibre arrangement (MFA) had triggered the growth of the garment industry. The MFA and the quota system it introduced, would now be dismantled gradually over a period of ten years beginning January, 1995. As the trade in textiles is liberalised, buyers abroad will find an option to procure their needs from the most competitive source, rather than being tied to the country which has been awarded an export quota. The most efficient producer would thus prevail. The gradualism adopted for the quota phase-out — fiftyone per cent in three stages in the first five years and the remaining forty-nine per cent in the year 2005 — should provide the garment industry ample opportunity to restructure, grow more efficient and diversify. However, preparations have to start now. The year 1995 is just round the corner.

In this and other areas of export development, the government's supportive mechanism would have to be geared up. All concerned agencies must act in unison to promote export.

Fillip for Fight against Women's Repression

A new annual prize worth Tk 25,000 has been instituted for journalistic writings exposing repression of women in its many aspects and promoting the establishment of rights of women. Delta Life, a leading insurance company, on announcing the prize on Sunday, said that they felt they had a moral responsibility of looking beyond the financial interests of their policyholders alone — they felt committed to securing the human and social rights of the members of the society at large. By instituting the prize they were aiming at bringing the question of women's repression to better social focus. We congratulate Delta Life Insurance Company for their bold and praiseworthy move.

On Sunday was the first anniversary of Nurjahan's death by stoning. A more appropriate day couldn't have been found for the announcement of the prize which is very aptly to be called the Nurjahan Memorial Prize. In a remote Sylhet village, Chhatrakhandra, Nurjahan, a young woman, was condemned by *fatwa* to be stoned a hundred and one times for something unpunishable by law — even moral law of any known and accepted religion or society. She did not die directly as a result of the stoning. The injured woman did not want to carry on with her life after such public humiliation and committed suicide.

Persecution of women is widespread in Bangladesh. And it appears to be spreading further with every passing day. And it comes in very many shades of diabolical cruelty. As if to underline the condition of women here, schoolgirl Shukla Rati Dey of Manikganj succumbed to her burn injuries, received from acid throwing, the same day, January 9, that Nurjahan died. This gross violation of whatever humanity and society stand for has to be fought on the social and moral plane on top of the legal one.

Gone are the days when the moneyed ones spent sizeably on works of public good. Our whole educational infrastructure is a result of such charities and endowments. For long four decades, endowments and institution of awards and prizes aimed at promoting the cause of a better society have been tapering into almost nothing. The Nurjahan prize should help in changing that. One expects the other business houses to take theirs from Delta Life. The Phillips Prize is already here for years. There is a feeling that houses planning for such prizes should go for other areas of public recognition. Say for unflinching activism on behalf of women's rights and against their expression or acts of courage in resisting violation of women or other weak sections of the society.

North Decreases Aid to Poor Nations

by Judith Randel and Tony German

Since the Earth Summit, promises made by donor countries with regard to overseas aid have been forgotten in the face of domestic economic constraints. With aid budgets in many countries falling, and the shrinking funds being diverted from the South to East Europe, the fear is that the poorest people will be hardest hit. This is the first of a three-part overview of the current aid scene.

THE Earth Summit in Rio in June 1992 took place against a background of gathering recession in industrialised countries and record numbers of people living in absolute poverty.

Donor governments failed to find substantial new aid resources at the Earth Summit. They did, however, find a new, if weak, consensus on the need for poverty reduction and sustainable development.

Governments from North and South recognised, in Agenda 21, the need for national and international strategies to address the conservation of the global environment and the eradication of poverty.

Reality Replaces Rio, Rhetoric

Since Rio, optimistic agreement has been overshadowed by harsh reality in most donor countries, threatening already inadequate levels of overseas aid.

During the two decades preceding the Earth Summit, overall aid as a percentage of donors' GNP (Gross National Product) stagnated. At 0.33% of GNP in 1991, it was less than half of the UN target of 0.7% accepted by every donor except the US and Switzerland.

In Rio, the fiercest arguments were over aid volume, with many rich countries reluctant to put their names to anything but the vaguest commitments on resource flows. But just 12 months after the Earth Summit, non-government organisations (NGOs) are concerned not just that these commitments will prove elusive, but that reductions in public spending will be at the expense of the most needy.

The evidence suggests, that since the Earth Summit, promises made have been forgotten in the face of domestic economic constraints. The fear is that widespread reductions in real aid levels will hit the poorest people hardest.

Aid cuts by Norway, Sweden and the Netherlands have set alarm bells ringing in the NGO community. These countries, along with Denmark, have exceeded the 0.7% target consistently for more than a decade, setting an example on aid

quantity which other donors have failed to follow. If the commitment of these countries to increasing aid is eroded, pressure on other donors to improve their performance is reduced — and the UN target itself may be increasingly questioned.

Increasing Demands on Aid Budgets

Viewed against both the needs of poor countries and the rhetoric of Rio, where reducing poverty was recognised as a critical element in protecting the global environment, the prospect for aid quantity is alarming. Evidence from NGOs, that the share of shrinking aid budgets devoted to poverty reduction is also declining, makes the prospects for the poorest people even worse.

Funding for refugees, emergencies and the global environment, (all deserving of attention in their own right and legitimate ODA [Official Development Assistance] expenditure) is increasingly being foud from within existing, often declining, aid budgets.

The German Government's commitment to triple its funding for the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and to add an Earth Increment to the 10th IDA (International Development Association) replenishment will not be funded from additional resources. It will come from an aid budget expected to decline from 0.41% GNP in 1991 to 0.34% in 1993. Similarly, the growing use of aid budgets by Sweden, Belgium and the Netherlands for assistance to refugees, means a squeeze on funding available for long-term sustainable development programmes.

The hopes of many people that reductions in East-West tension would result in a peace dividend devoted to reducing world poverty have proved unfounded. All major emergency situations in the past two years (Iraq, Cambodia, Angola, Somalia and Yugoslavia) have involved humanitarian and military activity — mainly peace keeping. The new world order is resulting in complex and changing relationships, not least a new and very costly role for the military focused on lo-

gistics and stabilisation. The irony is that ever increasing resources are being spent on the resolution of conflict, often waged with weapons supplied by the would-be peace keepers, not on long-term, sustainable development.

Central and Eastern Europe

Reductions in aid to the poorest are increasingly hidden as countries lump together aid to developing countries with reconstruction in Eastern and Central Europe, under headings such as Canada's new 'International Assistance Envelope'. But it is hard to sustain the argument that aid to developing countries is not being held back by the needs of Eastern and Central Europe and the former USSR.

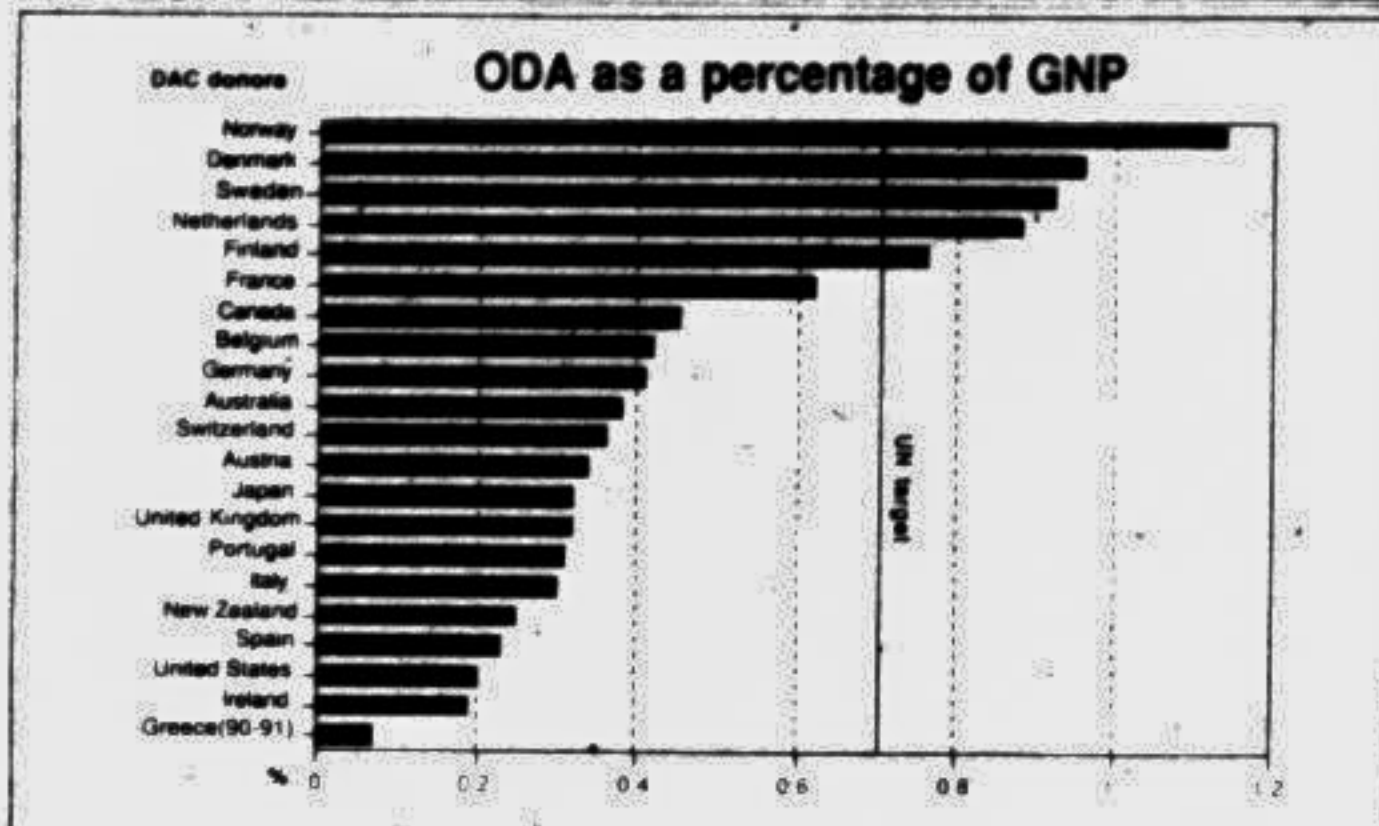
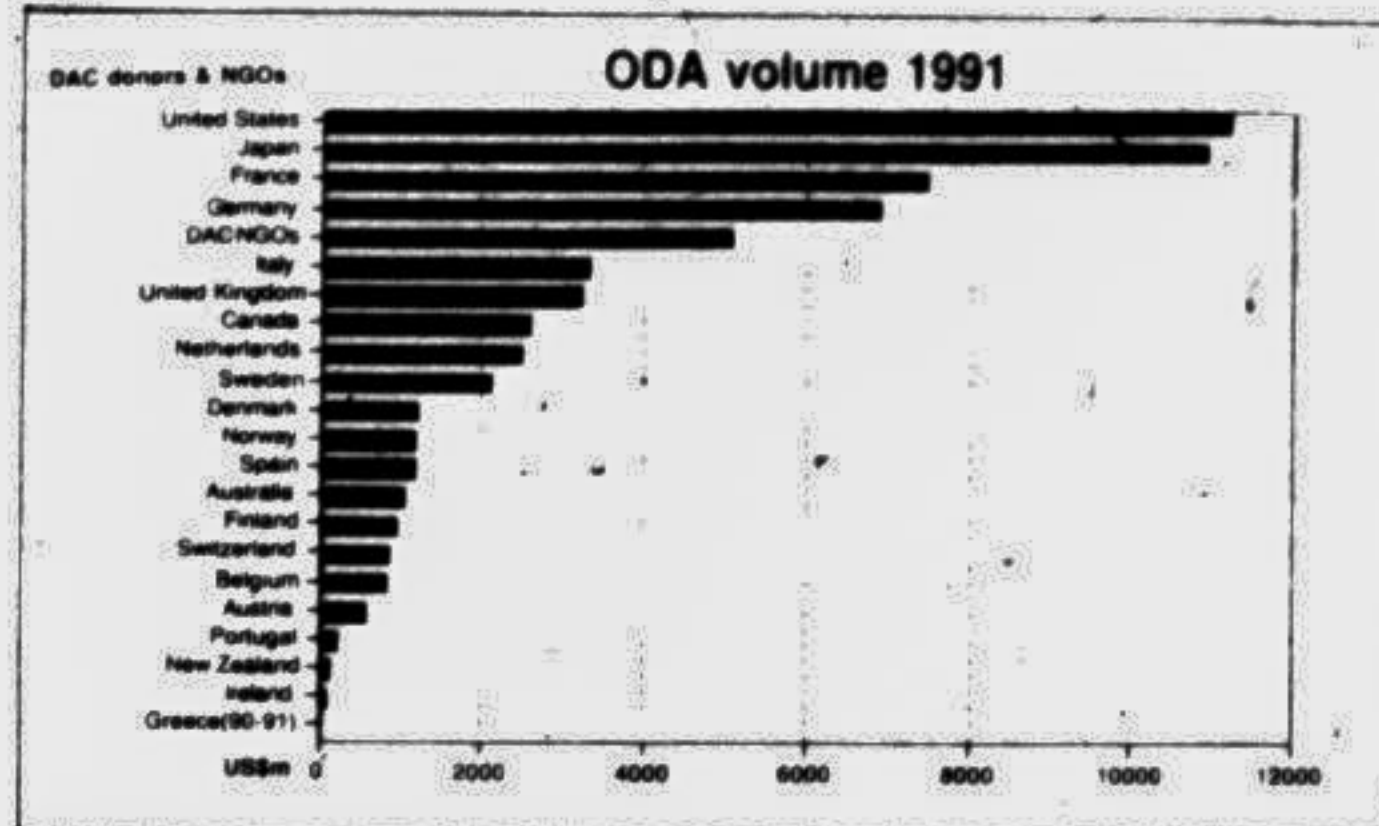
While donors have asserted since 1990 that aid to Eastern and Central Europe will be additional to aid for developing countries, the fact remains that the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) members admit that aid efforts in the former Soviet bloc have already

caused 'limited aid diversion from developing countries'. Britain's decision to raise aid to Eastern Europe by 70% from 1993/4 and 1995/6 while aid to developing countries remains frozen illustrates the trend.

The willingness of G-7 members in April 1993 to pledge an additional US\$3.3 billion as part of a US\$43 billion aid package to Russia contrasts sharply with donors' inability to find more than US\$2.5 billion in new development assistance for all developing countries at Rio. In the Post-Cold War era, the priority given by governments to security considerations and trade opportunities in the East have, if anything, further marginalised regions such as Africa, which are no longer wooed as client states or funded out of superpower rivalry.

— Third World Network Features

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Lest We Forget Justice Murshed

by Prof A F Salahuddin Ahmed



practice at the Dhaka High Court and resolved to identify himself with the hopes and aspirations of the people of this region. Thus during the language movement of 1952 he gave solid support to the demand for making Bengali one of the state languages of Pakistan. At the time of the provincial elections of 1954 Mr Murshed assisted Sher-e-Bangla Fazlul Huq and other United Front leaders in formulating the twenty-one point demands. In 1955 he was appointed a Judge of Dhaka High Court and his career entered a new phase.

He was a fearless champion of the rule of law and an unflinching advocate of equity and fairplay in all aspects of national life. The language movement had aroused Bengali na-

tional consciousness. The Pakistan central government having failed in their move to make Urdu as the only state language launched an attack on the composite and humanistic aspects of Bengali literary and cultural tradition. Realising that Rabindranath Tagore symbolised this great tradition, the Pakistani rulers made a vicious move to inject communal venom into the minds of the people. A handful of Bengali Muslim intellectuals were induced to issue a public statement declaring that since Tagore was not a Muslim, his works could not provide inspiration to the development of a distinct Bengali Muslim literary and cultural consciousness. Against this vicious move there was a widespread protest and a large number of Bengali writers and intellectuals issued counter statement declaring that Tagore despite being non-Muslim truly symbolised the literary and cultural heritage of the Bengali-speaking people. Culture, according to them, included within its domain many other elements besides religion. And that the culture of the Bengali Muslims had been greatly enriched by admixture and assimilation of a variety of indigenous elements. Both Rabindranath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam represented this unique cultural tradition. This

realization in face of the Pakistan government's move to denigrate Tagore aroused a new cultural renaissance amongst the Bengali intellectuals of the then East Pakistan. This was reflected in the unprecedented enthusiasm with which the birth centenary of Tagore was celebrated in the country. Mr Justice Murshed ignoring the displeasure of the Government agreed to be the chairman of the Tagore birth centenary organizing committee.

In 1964 Justice Murshed was appointed Chief Justice of the Dhaka High Court. The dignity which he brought to this exalted office, the extraordinary impartiality profound wisdom, remarkable insight and deep respect for human values reflected in his judgments, won for him universal acclamation.

Justice Murshed was a firm advocate of unfettered democracy. No wonder therefore, that he was not happy with the so called 'basic democracy' introduced by Field Marshal Ayub Khan. Attempts to curb the independence of the judiciary seriously disturbed his mind. He therefore took the momentous decision to resign from the post of Chief Justice in November 1967. Henceforth, he resolved to work for promoting the cause of democracy in the country. Although he did not join any political party, he fully supported the Six-point Programme

which had been put forward by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. When the infamous Agartala Conspiracy Case was instituted by the Government in 1968, Justice Murshed was actively involved in briefing the lawyers who were engaged in defending Sheikh Mujib and others implicated in the case.

In early 1969, Justice Murshed was one of those few independent non-party men who had been invited to participate in the Round Table Conference called by President Ayub Khan for resolving the political crisis. He did not hesitate to point out repeatedly that the demands put forward by Mujib truly represented the collective will of the people of East Pakistan (This was disclosed to this writer by Dr M N Huda who was also a participant at the conference).

The tragic events following the Round Table Conference greatly distressed Justice Murshed. His health had already deteriorated. During the 1971 war of liberation the Pakistan military regime had tried to involve Justice Murshed in the so-called Peace Committee to hoodwink the world that nothing untoward had happened in East Pakistan.

But Justice Murshed, despite possible threat to his security, boldly refused to collaborate with the regime. After suffering from protracted illness Justice Murshed passed away on April 3, 1979.

To the Editor...

Justice to everyone

Sir, I had an occasion to visit the chamber of an eminent barrister-at-law some time back. In front of his small but well furnished chamber, there is a waiting room for visitors. While sitting on a sofa, I noticed a large looking-glass hung up at the corridor with the words "Lawyer helps you to get justice" written atop it. I pondered over the question — getting justice or seeking justice, comes in when injustice has been meted out to some person.

It is true that an aggrieved person will go to a lawyer/court for seeking remedy to any injustice, as a sick person will go to a doctor/clinic/hospital for recovery from illness.

Until and unless one is aggrieved he does not need to undertake the exercise of running to a lawyer or a court for remedy. To my mind, the necessity of running to seek remedy will not arise at all if and when justice is ensured for all. It is perhaps impossible for the au-

thorities to create such a condition where justice will be ensured in every sphere of life. Can we really create such an atmosphere which, if not in all cases, ensures justice in most or good many cases?

It is true that a large number of executive orders are challenged in the judicial courts, where the relevant orders undergo an acid test and when the judiciary is convinced of excesses or injustices, proper relief is admissible under rules is granted.

Let us take the case of a businessman who engaged a number of people for his business concern. Because he is the master and supreme authority in his company, he has the duty to ensure benefit and facility to those in his pay roll according to their jobs status. But if he chooses to adopt various standard for different persons of the same class or category, he creates a sense of dissatisfaction amongst his staff. Such an action is likely to offend some staff, who may lose interest in

discharging their duties, and efficiency of the company may be hampered. An aggrieved staff may even go to the Labour Court for a remedy. And in that case the company owner will have to fight the case at the cost of his time and money, which he could have otherwise utilised for further development of his company.

Now-a-days there is a wide range of talk on separation of judiciary from the executive. My question is — is the action sufficient to ensure justice at all levels? Justice is a very broad term and the responsibility of dispensing justice more or less lies with every department, organisation and even an individual.

The people's expectation of a fair treatment will remain a dream if the different organs of the executive do not act fairly and squarely and with the best and honest intentions in dealing with public affairs. And in that case, the functions of the judiciary will simply multiply. Say, if the common man gets fair treatment in matters where

government departments are expected to deal with the public, there will be less occasions for demanding justice from elsewhere. For instance, an Asst Officer of a Municipal Corporation, who is surely not a man attached to judiciary, has a moral role to play while preparing his tax reports. If he chooses to adopt a double standard and fixes different rates of municipal taxes for different houses of the same size, he invariably creates conditions for which the aggrieved person will have to go to an appellate authority or court to get justice.

A seminar on moral education for those in the service of the government in this regard would, perhaps, be a welcome step. The system of awarding prize for good work and punishing those who resort to malpractices in their area of work, might bring good results. It is said that prevention is better than cure. The act of ensuring justice to the aggrieved is a secondary one. Steps to remove the loopholes, where there are scopes for malpractice and in-

justice, seem to be most essential.

An axiom says, 'Justice delayed is justice denied.' Indeed every government at times showed some amount of keenness so that litigant public do get justice at a reasonable expense and within a reasonable time. Sometimes Law Commissions were set up with this end in view. Problems were examined (thereafter at various levels and every Commission gave its report suggesting various measures. But the hard fact is that little tangible step was taken, and people's sufferings did not end or minimise.

Now that a democratically elected government is in power, it is their primary duty to ensure justice to everyone, as well as to see that the individuals in the government service do their work with perfect zeal and honesty. Government assurance of bringing dynamism and accountability should no longer remain a slogan, the process should start from somewhere.

M H Shaikh
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PROKRICHI-BCS

Sir, Following the partial acceptance of some of the genuine demands of PROKRICHI plus BCS 26 cadres personnel by the government, the professionals under the PROKRICHI-BCS Central Action Committee have decided to take a respite, deferring their action programme until April 7.

The Central Action Committee has, however, announced that a renewed action programme would be declared at a grand conference of the professionals on April 8 next.

The Bangladesh Agricultural Institute Teachers' Association extends its total support to the demands of the professionals and hopes that the government will take urgent measures for solving all the professional problems of the non-administrative professionals.

M Zahidul Haque
General Secretary
Bangladesh Agricultural Institute Teachers' Association