Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

Dhaka, Friday, February 4, 1994

Good Tiding on Tribal Repatriation

The news that Bangladeshi tribals, encamped in the Indian state of Tripura, will start returning home from February 15, sounds credible this time around. The reason for this optimism lies in the change of heart on the part of Chittagong Hill Tracts Jumma Refugee Welfare Association. This body, led by Upendra Lal Chakma, by a lastminute insistence on a 13-point charter of demands had upset the previously finalised plan for the refugees' return to begin on June 8 last year. Upendra Lal had stuck to his guns even though the conditions for repatriation to the CHT were widely believed, at that point in time, to be basically congenial.

It is this refugee welfare association which has now conveyed its decision for repatriating to Bangladesh to Ramesh Bhandari, the Governor of Tripura. Bhandari, as the ex-Foreign Secretary of India, brings to bear on the issue his understanding of Indo-Bangla relations, an outlook that could be a tremendous value in taking forward the process of the refugees' return to the CHT.

The way the repatriation has been a nonstarter, one may not be too wrong to feel 'once bitten twice shy' and keep one's fingers crossed till it materialised. And this is exactly where the Tripura government could be of help to the process that draws its basic strength from a positive political decision earlier taken by the Narasimha Rao government to get the repatriation started. Thanks are very much due to the politically representative parliamentary committee from the Bangladesh side which carried out successful negotiations — diligently — with all parties concerned including the politically articulate wing of Shantibahini, the Parbattiya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS). Rashed Khan Menon leading the Bangladesh parliamentarians reached an agreement on January 16 with the refugee leaders and Indian officials in a fresh bid to end the deadlock over the refugee question.

There is need even at this advanced stage for constant monitoring on the progress of preparations lest any last-minute hitch sneaks up to spoil the process of repatriation. To draw the chestnut out of the fire, the checklist to follow is to first pinpoint where it had failed during the previous occasions and then do the needful to avert it.

The points of contact between India and Bangladesh - Indian and Bangladesh foreign offices, their complements in the High Commissions, the Tripura state government, Bangladesh all-party parliamentary committee, PCJSS and the CHT authorities - have all to be in continuing touch with each other. And since the spade-work has been done through a tested cooperation among all parties concerned, even if there be any potential eleventh-hour snag, that should not be difficult to head off. Afterall, some established names could be relied on in that eventuality.

The repatriation process seems well-based on two positive factors. An improved security situation exists in the CHT as reflected by the continuation of cease-fires. Secondly, what bodes well for the ultimate political solution of the tribal question is the acceptance of the principle, by the hitherto die-hard tribalists, to carry on negotiations within the ambit of Bangladesh Constitu-tion. After the refugees have returned by February 22, as planned, the political negotiations will have begun in a very conducive atmosphere for the fulfillment of their rights in Bangladesh.

We Refuse to Accept **Toxic Waste**

The raging controversy over the dumping by rich nations of toxic waste in Asia has further been fuelled by the international environmental group, Greenpeace's latest revelation. The Greenpeace is on record that it has "documented schemes" which, it believes, may have been responsible for the disposal of no less than 10.4 million tonnes of harmful waste to Asian countries just over the past four years. This environmental group has directly accused seven rich nations Australia, Canada, Finland, Japan, Germany, Britain and the United States - dubbed by it as the 'sinister seven' - for "the waste invasion of Asia." Australia, Canada, Germany, Britain and the United States should take the blame for shipping more than 5.4 million tonnes of hazardous pollutants to Asia between 1990 and 1993.

The Greenpeace's conclusion is particularly worrisome in that it discloses the rich nations' shift in focus from Africa, South America and the Caribbean to Asia for their waste disposal. Their effort is particularly being expended on keeping for the Asian countries the option open to play host to the dangerous substances. The pretext they are using for the purpose is even more questionable. Recycling of the toxic waste as an excuse for their dumping in the Asian countries, where environmental laws are lax, is an ample proof of the rich governments' mindlessness. Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India and Vietnam are on the list of the toxic waste's disposal destination. To make the matter worse, there have been reports of foreign ships illegally jettisoning their dubious cargoes into the seas off Bangladesh and India. Russia was caught in the act of disposing of radioactive waste in the seas near Japan.

What transpires from all this is a double standard the rich nations are maintaining in setting environmental rules for them and the poor nations to follow. This is a crime they are doing intentionally, knowing full well how vulnerable these less fortunate countries are to the exposure of the toxic waste. Whereas, the rich countries will have to be only too willing to contribute to making this planet pollution-free, they are busy clearing their own houses of the undesirable substances by throwing those into the yard of the poor. The Rio conference on environment was a major stride in the direction of a shared responsibility for getting rid of the garbage that threatens to eliminate the human species along with other ones from this planet. The fact that 103 countries have stood united to call for a total ban on export of hazardous waste to Asia is a very encouraging development. The Geneva convention on toxic waste materials to be held in March is expected to pronounce a verdict on this issue. That the US, the biggest generator of waste, is in favour of such a ban gives a ray of hope for the convention coming hard on the shipment of all toxic wastes to Asia. Let us hope for the best.

The Economy: Time to Gird up the Loin

nancial year 1993-94 which is lower than that in the same period of 1992-93.

short-lived

complacency over the

A overall macro-economic

stability, a ring of uneasiness

appears to have crept in with

the alarming "deflation" (a state

of negative inflation) prevailing

in the economy. At least that is

what seems to have emerged

from some of the remarks made

by the Governor of our central

bank while he reviewed the

economic performance in 1992

93 and for first five months of

the current 1993-94 fiscal year

The non-resilience of the econ

omy is further borne out by

some of the recent observations

made by other policy mentors

including the Hon'ble Finance

The State of the

Economy

of the most valuable and con-

sistent yardsticks of economic

health, showed a further sign of

falling to a negative zone (-

0.4%) in December 1993 from

an already lower level of 1.3% in

months of the current financial

year, the current account of the

country accumulated a surplus

of US\$103 million as compared

to a deficit of US\$ 535 million in

1992-93 and US\$ 932 million

during 1991-92. The surplus is

first of its kind during a decade.

continue to rise monotonically

and bulged to US \$ 2.5 billion

as compared to US\$ 2.1 billion

4. All the banks of the coun-

try targeted an industrial credit

distribution worth Tk 1,795

fourth could be sanctioned and

the disbursement is still lower.

Again, the agricultural banks

could disburse only 14% of the

money could be utilized during

the first five months of the fi-

5. Only 16% of the ADP

RI LANKA'S most famous

one Hollywood. In a re-

markable twist of plot, Anura

Bandaranaike — the only son in

the world with two prime

ministers as parents - has

broken ranks with the party

his father started and his

mother leads, and joined the

move was dissatisfaction with

the way his 77-year-old

mother, Sirimavo, was trying

to shift power in the party

away from him and onto his

against his mother in public.

saving his sharpest strictures

for his radical. French-edu-

cated sister, Chandrika: "She is

in the process of wrecking the

Sri Lanka Freedom Party

an actor-politician who was

murdered - as was Anura's fa-

Chandrika is the widow of

The SLFP, which was

started by his assassinated fa-

Party (UNP) quickly named

Lan be an Asian nation.

than the country's Prime

the charge to make Australians

recognise their country's place

in the Asia-Pacific area and to

be more active in the affairs of

the region, he insists he is not

trying to alter their lifestyle or

the nature of their country in

cism of the Prime Minister's

nection. Concern has been

raised, for instance, that

Australia will lose its own iden-

tity and much of its heritage if

the Keating government con-

tinues with its rush to embrace

Asian cultures and encourage

Asian immigrants at the ex-

pense of newcomers from the

To ease the apprehension,

the Prime Minister stated re-

cently: 'Claims that the gov-

ernment is attempting to turn

Australia into an Asian country

are based on a misunderstand-

ing of my approach and the di-

Australia is not and never can

be an Asian nation any more

than we can — or want to — be

European or North American

We can only be Australian

or African.'

Said Keating: 'Put simply,

rection of government policy'.

United Kingdom and Europe.

emphasis on the Asian con-

There has been some criti-

an 'Asianisation' process.

Minister Paul Keating.

That is the view of no less

While he admits he has led

USTRALIA is not an

Asian nation and never

He has said nothing directly.

One of the motives for his

political family has outd-

crore out of which only one

Foreign exchange reserves

2. During the first five

June 1993.

in last June.

sanctioned money.

government.

1. The rate of inflation, one

6. The growth rate of GDP in 1992-93 was 4:3% compared with 4.2% of the preceding pe-

7. The investment rate declined from 12.2% in 1991-92 to 12.1% in 1992-93. It may be mentioned here that to achieve a growth rate of 7%, the investment rate should account for 18% of GDP.

8. There has been a fall in the supply of both narrow and broad money during the current financial year.

An Enquiry into the Situation

There remains little doubt that the current deflation is the outcome of overall sluggishness - reflected in a decline for monetary demand and fall in government spending — in the economy. The fall in the prices of foodgrains with a weight of about two-thirds could be a possible factor to account for the falling price levels. This was strengthened by the availability of cheaper imported goods, legal

The bulging foreign exchange reserves could be adduced mainly to two factors: (a) increased remittances that grew at about 13% - about 3% more than the projection — during the first five months of the current financial year (the Taka convertibility might have lured remitters to choose the official channel); (b) There has been almost no growth in imports. The marginal rise in capital goods and machinery imports (about 5%) during the current year was neutralised by a fall in the imports of consumer goods. The fall in consumer goods import could, possibly, be

by Abdul Bayes

put down to increased 'smuggling" of goods into the

country. The items of information serialised at 1-7 unequivocally point to a sordid state of the economy. The economy is suffering from deflationary psychosis and appropriate measures are needed to pull it out of the wreck s The most disconcerting event, however, is that while the macro-economic stability is being loudly proclaimed by our policy-makers and the economy should have been in its front gear, it is in fact in the back gear. But why?

First, the agricultural sector. the main customer of the domestically produced industrial commodities, hardly shows any sign of resilience and thus tends to depress domestic demand. The surge in agricultural production appears to be a gift of the nature and technologically induced as it is not, the forward and backward linkages do not appear to work with the pace needed to dynamize the economy. The stagnancy is furthered by withdrawal of NCBs from rural areas where private banks hardly go.

Second, the somnolence in the industrial sector could be attributed to : (a) import liberalization that puts domestic entrepreneurs to open competition; (b) there is a serious lack of transparency, stability and timely delivery of governmental inputs, including policy prescriptions. The recent instructions to stop polythene production and an assurance of reconsideration - all within a month or so, the hassles regarding the import of diesel etc are cases in points; (c) building of socio-economic

infrastructures - much needed

to crowd-in private investment - is not progressing at a desired pace. This is in evidence from the fact that during the current financial year only 16% of ADP money could be utilized so far and the rate is about lower than the previous ones (d) frequent hartals and strikes followed by labour unrest; (e) bureaucratic hassles; and (f) overall law an order situation. Although there are other factors e.g. tax policy, repatriation of dividend, etc., the relative weight of each to the entrepreneur is very important Experience suggests that factors (a) to (f) seem to carry more wight. While the government appeared to have addressed the other factors satisfactorily, mentionable progress

is yet to come on (a) to (f). Third, the non-utilization of the ADP money could, possibly be explained by the following factors: (a) complications in the decision-making processes: (b) tampering with the tender processes; (c) the delay in imple mentation due to the highhandedness of the toll collectors and vandalists; (d) lack of proper monitoring etc.

Necessary and **Sufficient Conditions**

The attainment of macroeconomic stability in terms of lowering budget deficit, tuning the exchange rate in the right direction, containing the monetary growth, downsizing the public revenue expenditure etc are necessary conditions to be set on a road to higher economic growth. Before one expects positive outcome from stability, the conditions that

must be present adequately. henceforth referred to as 'sufficient conditions' need to be considered, too. These are : (a) raising the supply elasticity in the economy through proper use of investment funds by the government; (b) an assurance of non-reversibility of policies: (c) reducing the total size of the government by digging out an appropriate mechanism to han-

dle things quickly and efficiently; (d) a developed financial market that would take care of monetary demand and supply under the changed scenario (e.g. stabilization and reforms); (e) decentralization of economic decisions, and (f) the existence of a judicial system that can: (i) quickly settle property rights and other issues; (ii) separate the state imperatives from government imperatives and (iii) assure a sense of justice in the society. And the most important of all the conditions is the presence of a vision on the part of

the rulers. It appears that, in Bangladesh, the necessary conditions are more or less fulfilled but conditions that would suffice are yet to develop to take the economy on to the shore. And the longer the time is required to meet these 'sufficient' conditions, the higher would be the adjustment costs and the more fragile could be the economy with reforms recoiling: The fulfilment of sufficient conditions, however, hinges on the commitment, efficiency, vision, and above all, on a strong political base of the government.

The Imperative Now To pull the economy out of the mire requires both short and long run measures. Some of the long run measures were

discussed in relation to

'sufficient conditions' discussed above. However, attention could be drawn to few of the short run measures. These are as follows:

The fact remains that in a country where the revenue growth is 18% while the expenditure growth is only around 8% (as happened in 1992-93). implying that more is choked off than injected, the outcome is recession. The necessary task ahead is to hasten the speed in ADP implementation by providing adequate attention to the aforesaid constraints and thus increase government expenditure on investment. Since most of the ADP projects are likely to generate output, employment and linkages, an earnest endeavour to this might help the wheel move.

Second, the relatively higher prices of diesel and fertilizer in the face of falling output prices tend to reduce the net profits of the agriculturists most of whom are small and marginal farmers. The higher income of farmers contribute to higher demands for industrial and non-farm goods and services. If agricultural subsidy could be withdrawn, there remains an equally strong case to withdraw government's monopolistic diesel pricing. (If the latter exists, a portion might be directed as targeted subsidy).

Third, credit facilities could be extended to new lines of economic activity e.g. construction, housing etc with higher forward and backward linkages.

Epilogue

The ECONOMIST of 22-28 Jan '94, from experience of other countries, suggests that to have success in reforms, "you need a leader with vision, strong political base and, if possible, an advanced degree in economics.

New Twist in Sri Lanka's Family Affair

Mallika Wanigasundara writes from Colombo

Sir Lanka's most famous political dynasty has received a shock from the man who has been competing with his sister to inherit the mantle from his parents, both of whom were prime ministers. The defection of Anura Bandaranaike weakens the party started by his assassinated father.



him Minister for Higher

There is a shadow prime min-

and can only relate to our

friends and neighbours as

sisted that this should not be

interpreted as an expression of

self-satisfaction or an attempt

to project Australia as superior

to any other country. It is

rather an attempt to preserve

all the distinctive strengths of

the country's history and its

contemporary, democratic,

He said this encompassed

the 'rich and ancient culture of

indigenous Australians, the en-

ergy, bravery and resilience of

our early European settlers

and the institutions they cre-

ated, and all the creativity and

drive which comes from the

people of 150 nations who now

make their home in Australia.'

'And we want, in particular, to

draw on the talents and expe-

rience of those immigrants —

now almost half our total in-

take - who come here from

Australians were now coming

to terms with the reality of the

astounding success of Asian na-

two years this progress had

become more rapid and

He noted that in the past

The Prime Minister said

But significantly he added:

The Prime Minister in-

ther, is now in disarray. Anura Education. was Vice President and one of He turned scathingly on his former colleagues, who include its main leaders. his ailing mother, predicting a Cashing in on the switch, the ruling United National hopeless future for them.

Australians.

pluralist culture.

ister, he mocked, who would be in the shadows forever.

And he heaped particular scorn on his mother's failure to introduce democracy in the party, which he said should be open to all and not only to the

Bandaranaike family.

Noting that no elections to the party's central and executive committees have been held since 1986, he commented: "This must surely be a world record. Even Fidel Castro and Kim II Sung who run one-party dictatorships have held elections."

Anura alleges that his mother makes all appointments to party positions with the approval of a mainly family caucus and a handful of obedient followers.

She whittled away his power in party affairs and brought Chandrika into the central committee while he was abroad.

Anura was once suspended from the party for 89 days for criticising the SLFP in public. He accused his sister and a

"gang of conspirators" within the party of trying to oust him.

Lack of internal democracy. he claims, partly explains the SLFP's defeat in every election since 1977. Anura says that he was shorn of all real power and could do little to put the party back on the rails.

Differences were ideological as well as personal. While some SLFP members still talk of nationalisation, Anura wants to speed up economic liberalisation and the free market system launched by the UNP.

His mother and sister refuse to shake off their left leanings, despite the unpopularity of their party's last spell in office which many rememher for controls, shortages, queues and a stifling bureaucracy. They have entered into a so-called Peoples Alliance with the dwindling Communist

Party (CP) and the Trotskyist Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP).

Says Anura: "I never joined the Left mob. I can not adjust myself to the Peoples Alliance speaking in five different tongues. How can the people accept the new economic programme - a moderated free enterprise system - put forward by the SLFP when it is put across from a platform with the CP and the LSSP?"

Anura predicts that the SLFP, which has been attracting about 40 per cent of votes in recent elections, will drop 10-15 per cent. The chubby renegade brings

votes to his new party, and increases the likelihood that it will stay in power, where it has been since the 1977 election. In the 1989 parliamentary

elections he polled 107,000 votes, the third highest count in the country. Such vote-pulling power

could be a great help to the UNP in the presidential and parliamentary elections due in the next two years.

- GEMINI NEWS

MALLIKA WANIGASUNDA-RA is a freelance Sri Lankan journalist.

Australia will never be Asian

Vincent W Stove writes from Sydney

Although the country wants to be part of Asia, loss of identity is feared

traditions.

Australia's activity in the region had become more intense. He said understanding of the opportunities and imperatives is growing among Australians.

Last year, the Prime Minister said Australia would not have to undergo some form of Asianisation to gain greater acceptance in the region. He said Australia would go to Asia as we are. He stated: 'Not with the

ghost of empire about us. Not as a vicar of Europe or as a US deputy. But unambivalently, sure of who we are and what we stand for. If we are to be taken seriously, believed, trusted, that is the only way to

Reacting to suggestions that he was pushing Australia into links with Asia regardless of the cost and heedless of the consequences, he said although Asia was important to Australians, they would not be going there with their 'heads bowed.

Prime Minister Keating

the defeat was not humiliating,

added that dealing with Asia did not mean Australia had to lose its pride or its democratic

But there are many, both in Australia and Asia, who are not overly impressed nor in favour of what they describe as an unseemly push into Asia.

Expatriate Australian George Hicks wrote The Australian newspaper from Singapore 'As a non-resident Australian living in various parts of Asia for the past thirty years, I am amused by Australian attempts to pretend to be part of Asia or even interested in Asia.'

He said 'talk of joining Asia or even being Asian, only lays the country open to ridicule.'

Hicks also expressed concern that 'any serious interest in Asia might corrupt the carefree Australian lifestyle.

Britain's The Economist magazine recently stated that though Australia officially wants to be part of the world's boom continent, not all Asians think that the Australians, most of whom are the descendants of white colonials, qual-

The journal stated: 'But though many Australians now feel remote from Britain, opinion polls show that few regard themselves as Asians.

'Nor are Asians rushing to embrace Australians. An Australian diplomat dealing with South-East Asia says the Thais treat with bemused tolerance Australia's insistence that it is Asian.'

The Economist added: Other countries are more hostile, suspecting Australia of acting as a stalking-horse for Western interests.

Professor Allan Patience of Australia's Victoria University of Technology says the country faces huge obstacles in its attempt to be accepted in the Asian region.

At a recent conference on Australia and the New World Order in the southern city of Melbourne, he said that in the best scenario Asian nations were puzzled and sceptical of Australia's desire to integrate into the Asian region, and in the worst scenario were contemptuous.

Professor Patience described Australia as a lonely country which had been abandoned by Britain and the United States.

He warned that Australia should not naively expect the Asian region to be an easy substitute for those formerly close friends. He said before Australia could begin to build a relationship with Asian countries, it had to recognise that they were not eager to embrace Australia.

Australian Defence Minister Robert Ray has, however, no doubts, sees no problems, and looks north to strengthen the Asian link.

'Australia's future lies, inevitably, in the diverse Asia-Pacific region', he said in a statement published here in connection with a conference on Australia's maritime bridge into Asia.

This is where we live, this is where we must function strategically and economically, and this is where we must find a place and role if we are to develop our full potential as a

The Australian Defence Minister added: 'The recognition that our security lies with Asia, not against it, provides us with significant opportunities to enhance our national interests by contributing to regional security and enmeshing ourselves in this economically dynamic region.

Depthnews Asia

Unsatisfactory voters' list

Sir, On January 30, the City Corpn polls day, we went to the respective polling stations at the Ideal College, Central Road and Kalandar School, Mitford in Dhaka in order to cast our votes. But to our utter surprise, we failed to find our names in the list of voters.

Interestingly, we voted at the same polling stations in the last parliamentary election.

Also to our surprise, nobody came to our residences during the 1993 census. It is also interesting to note that most of the slum-dwellers around our houses were somehow eligible to cast their votes.

May we request the Election Commission to scrutinise the voters' list and rectify the deficiencies.

New Elephant Road Dr Sohel Ahmed Khan Nalgola, Mitford, Dhaka

Prof Abdullah A Harun

Telecast of ICC Cup cricket

Sir, Bangladesh cricket team played two one-day exhibition matches with Pakistan national cricket team on 23rd and 24th January showing excellent performance. Although Bangladesh was defeated but

rather an honourable one. It was not at all expected from the Bangladesh cricket team to win the matches against the world champion Pakistan team. It was perhaps for the third time for the Bangladesh cricket team to face a full set of Test cricket team and the standard they have shown is very much praiseworthy and their prospect is no doubt glorious.

Now the Bangladesh cricket team is scheduled to play ICC Cup games in Kenya. The exuberant Bangladeshi cricket fans are eagerly awaiting a chance for audience of the games. For which we request the authority concerned to ar-

range for live telecast of the games by BTV through satellite and we expect that some reputed business organizations will come forward to sponsor the satellite telecast, by which the Bangladeshi youths at large will be inspired.

Advocate Md Mujibur Rahman North Bashabo, Dhaka

Disposable syringes and ballpoint pens

Sir. More than two thousand disposable syringes are used alone in the Diabetic Hospital daily for taking blood samples from the patients and more are used in numerous Govt. hospitals, private clinics, pathological

laboratories, and by doctors attached to various chemists and pharmacies etc. And after use, these are mostly disposed of carelessly. The syringes are meant for one time use only. Instances are, however, available, particularly in rural areas. that these are manipulated to be reused.

Like shopping polybags these disposable plastic sy-

ringes pose serious environmental hazard. It is not known how and where these innumer able used syringes along with needles and caps are finally disposed of and dumped and deposited. Might be these are thrown out carelessly over

many unspecified places. Similarly, ball point pens

are used indiscriminately instead of pencils and fountain pens. These ball point pens are also made of plastic material and thus pose an environmental threat. We are not aware where the empty ball points are thrown or scattered. We don't intend that like

which have become a craze now

polybags these disposable syringes and ball point pens should be banned, but we would urge that the persons and bodies concerned for environmental conservation should take note of the matter seriously for scientific disposal of these used plastic materials

Mohammadpur Dhaka

N H Suft