

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.

It is this refugee welfare association which has now conveyed its decision for repatriating to Bangladesh to Ramesh Bhandari, the Governor of Tripura.

The way the repatriation has been a non-starter, one may not be too wrong to feel 'once bitten twice shy' and keep one's fingers crossed till it materialised.

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.

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.

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.

We Refuse to Accept Toxic Waste

The raging controversy over the dumping of rich nations of toxic waste in Asia has further been fuelled by the international environmental group, Greenpeace's latest revelation.

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.

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.

After a short-lived complacency over the 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.

The State of the Economy

1. The rate of inflation, one of the most valuable and consistent 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 June 1993.

2. During the first five 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.

3. Foreign exchange reserves continue to rise nominally and bulged to US \$ 2.5 billion as compared to US\$ 2.1 billion in last June.

4. All the banks of the country targeted an industrial credit distribution worth Tk 1,795 crore out of which only one-fourth could be sanctioned and the disbursement is still lower.

5. Only 16% of the ADP money could be utilized during the first five months of the financial year 1993-94 which is lower than that in the same period of 1992-93.

The Economy: Time to Gird up the Loin

by Abdul Bayes

building of socio-economic infrastructures — much needed to crowd-in private investment — is not progressing at a desired pace.

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.

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 bulging foreign exchange reserves could be added 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.

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.

put down to increased 'smuggling' of goods into the country.

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.

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.

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 implementation due to the high-handedness of the toll collectors and vandals; (d) lack of proper monitoring etc.

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.

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Necessary and Sufficient Conditions

The attainment of macro-economic 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.

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 handle 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.

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 receding.

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 chocked 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.

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.

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.'

SRI LANKA'S most famous political family has outdone Hollywood. In a remarkable 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 government.

One of the motives for his 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 sister.

He has said nothing directly against his mother in public, saving his sharpest strictures for his radical, French-educated sister, Chandrika: 'She is in the process of wrecking the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP).'

Chandrika is the widow of an actor-politician who was murdered — as was Anura's father.

The SLFP, which was started by his assassinated father, is now in disarray. Anura was Vice President and one of its main leaders.

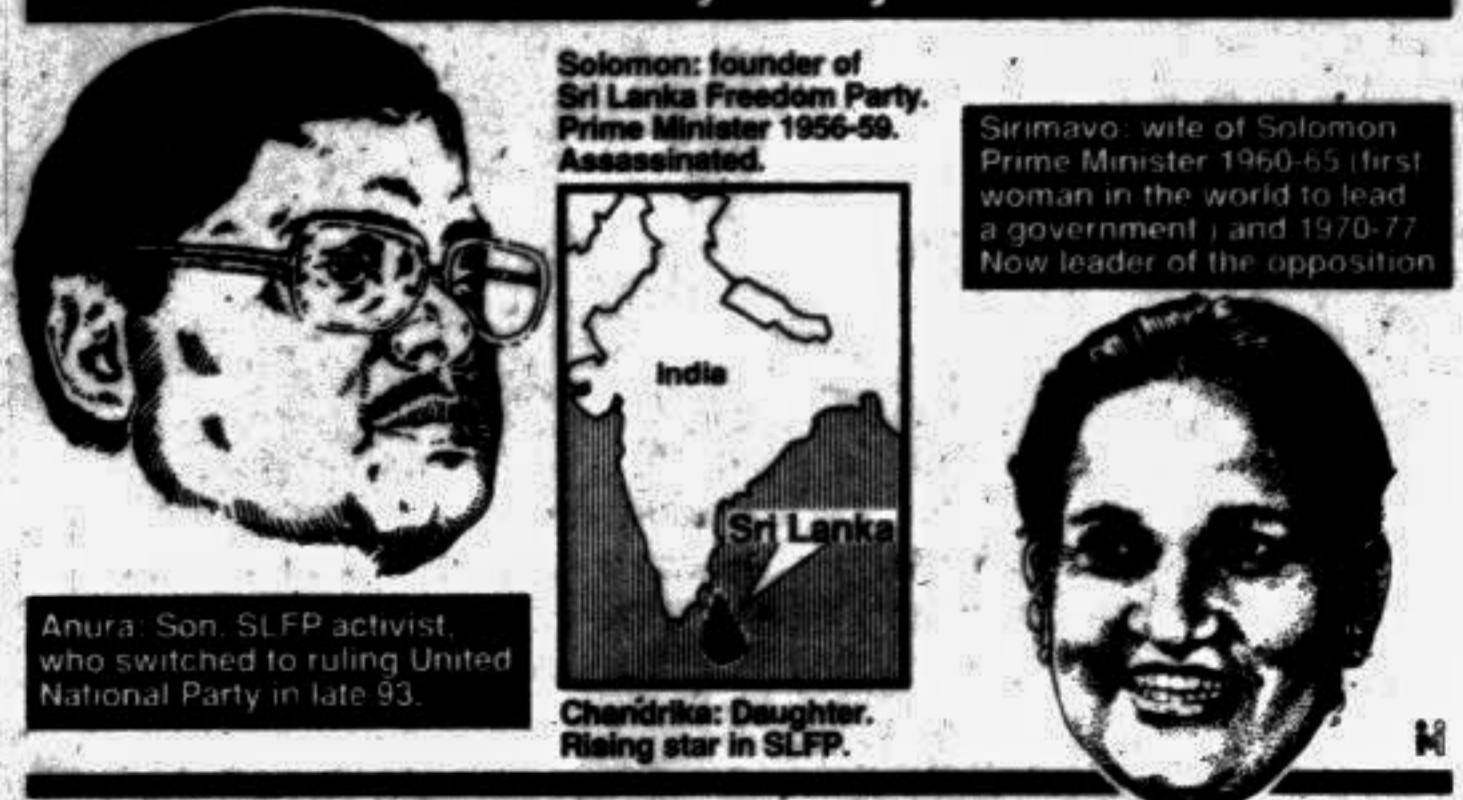
Cashing in on the switch, the ruling United National Party (UNP) quickly named

New Twist in Sri Lanka's Family Affair

Mallika Wanigasundara writes from Colombo

Sri 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.

The Bandaranaike dynasty



him Minister for Higher Education. He turned scathingly on his former colleagues, who include his ailing mother, predicting a hopeless future for them. There is a shadow prime minister, he mocked, who would be in the shadows forever.

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 Il 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 short 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 remember 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 WANIGASUNDARA is a freelance Sri Lankan journalist.

AUSTRALIA is not an Asian nation and never can be an Asian nation.

That is the view of no less than the country's Prime Minister Paul Keating.

While he admits he has led 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 an 'Asianisation' process.

There has been some criticism of the Prime Minister's emphasis on the Asian connection. Concern has been raised, for instance, that Australia will lose its own identity and much of its heritage if the Keating government continues with its rush to embrace Asian cultures and encourage Asian immigrants at the expense of newcomers from the United Kingdom and Europe.

To ease the apprehension, the Prime Minister stated recently: 'Claims that the government is attempting to turn Australia into an Asian country are based on a misunderstanding of my approach and the direction of government policy.'

Said Keating: 'Put simply, Australia is not and never can be an Asian nation any more than we can — or want to — be European or North American or African.'

'We can only be Australian

and can only relate to our friends and neighbours as Australians.'

The Prime Minister insisted 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, pluralist culture.

He said this encompassed the 'rich and ancient culture of indigenous Australians, the energy, bravery and resilience of our early European settlers and the institutions they created, and all the creativity and drive which comes from the people of 150 nations who now make their home in Australia.'

But significantly he added: 'And we want, in particular, to draw on the talents and experience of those immigrants — now almost half our total intake — who come here from Asia.'

The Prime Minister said Australians were now coming to terms with the reality of the astounding success of Asian nations.

He noted that in the past two years this progress had become more rapid and

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

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 go.'

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

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

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 care-free 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 descen-

dants of white colonials, qualify.'

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 aban-

doned 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 nation.'

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 Corp'n polls day, we went to the respective polling stations at the Ideal College, Central Road and Kalanda 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.

Prof Abdullah A Harun New Elephant Road and Dr Sohel Ahmed Khan Nalgota, Mitford, Dhaka

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

the defeat was not humiliating, 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 syringes pose serious environmental hazard. It is not known how and where these innumerable 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

which have become a craze now 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 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

NH Sigal Mohammadpur, Dhaka