

by Dr Saleemul Huq

Holding the Priceline

Just prior to the budget announcement, prices of daily necessities soared in a blanket apprehension that new taxes and tariffs were in the offing.

What is even worse, the upswing of pre-budget prices has not tapered off despite a clear-cut disclosure made in the budget about duty rebates and waivers on a number of consumables.

Going over the duty or tariff structure, contained in the budget proposals for 1994-95, one should expect a gradual but steady fall in prices of a wide range of items.

We are for an effective administrative mechanism for round-the-year price control. Let's begin with the new budget as a test case with the downward revision it has proposed in the duty or tariff structure to bring down the prices.

A change has been noticed lately on the fringes of the consumers' mental make-up. Many middle class buyers these days do not go head over heels in speculative buying during festivals or before the budget.

A Heartening Move

There are often reports in the national press of deaths from cerebral malaria in parts of our interior. One thought that, thanks to the sustained eradication programme in the early fifties, malaria perhaps was a thing of the past.

It is not without ample reason that when congratulating Mohammad Hanif on his impressive win in the mayoral elections of Dhaka City Corporation we had placed high on the list of our expectations of him the task of ridding us of this mosquito menace that brings in tow a trail of death.

On June 5, not a day late and neither a day too early, Hanif let the people have a glimpse of how he proposed to go about the problem: A most likeable thing he did. For the first time in this city's history people got the basic strategy of such an expedition direct from the horse's mouth.

In so complimenting Mohammad Hanif and the DCC for committing themselves to the good work and before even the first stride has been made, we want to bid the expedition godspeed.

BANGLADESH'S international relations need to be redirected and galvanized if the country is to be able to carve out a positive niche for itself in the changing world of the coming century.

Economic Diplomacy

First, I will deal with the economic field and start by praising the government's efforts to entice and support the Bangladeshi missions abroad by giving them targets for exports to achieve.

Here, the example of the explosion in garment exports is instructive as this sector has grown into a multi-billion dollar export sector within the span of less than half a decade almost entirely through the efforts of private sector entrepreneurs with very little intervention by the government.

those orders and who then succeeded in establishing themselves as exporters. To give credit to the government they have assisted this export sector through supporting policies such as allowing back-to-back letters of credit, bonded warehouses etc.

Thus, the main export promotion thrust should come from the exporters associations, different chambers of commerce and industry, different sectoral associations such as garments, jute twine, jute carpets, computing leather etc.

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The government's role should be a supporting one in terms of facilitation, assistance in obtaining work permits abroad for the persons engaged, providing visas promptly to foreign businessmen wanting to come to Bangladesh through these export promotion offices, etc.

Ecological Diplomacy

Ecological diplomacy is a very recent, but rapidly growing field of diplomacy which really started during the late eighties and reached a coming-of-age during the Earth Summit, properly known as the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in June 1992 in Rio de Janeiro.

make a contribution to our export trade promotion. After all, we are quite used to having former civil servants, army personnel, judges and other professionals appointed as ambassadors, so why not leading personalities from the private sector. Indeed, the appointment of the Prime Minister's Special Envoy from the private sector is a step in the right direction and has already paid dividends in the success of the Prime Minister's visit to Japan.

The final point to be made here is that the export promotion drive must not be seen merely as the latest slogan to be taught by rote to our existing foreign service officers and their cousins from the commercial service but as a national goal where all relevant sectors have a role to play including the private sector exporters and traders.

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around the planet. Of the four documents the first two are non-binding statements of support while the latter two are binding treaties with obligations by each of the signatories and requiring ratification by each country's legislature.

Each of the documents were preceded by a series of inter-governmental preparatory meetings held in different countries over a period of several years which involved intensive negotiations between the countries having different interests to look out for. These activities have spawned the new subject of ecological diplomacy which has become a major part of the foreign ministries of many countries including the United States of America which has a major section devoted to this issue within the State Department.

Even countries like India have taken the issue of ecolog-

and West Bengal focusing on all interventions affecting both the quantity as well as the quality of the water as they have as much concern about these issues as we have.

Secondly, on the issue of global climate change, as a low-lying coastal country Bangladesh is likely to be very badly affected by climate change, particularly from sea level rise and increased cyclonic storms which will jeopardise the life and livelihoods of millions of people.

One group of countries who have made the most of ecodiplomacy using the climate change issue are the Association of Small Island States (AOSIS) led by Maldives and Vanuatu who were able to

US Dollars through a new fund called the Global Environment Facility (GEF) based in Washington DC and jointly run by the World Bank, UNDP and UNEP. Unfortunately, Bangladesh has so far not been able to get a single cent from these funds although China has received over 100 million US Dollars and even the tiny Bhutan has received over 10 million Dollars.

What is required is for the Foreign Ministry to designate a senior diplomat at ambassador level to spearhead this area and then to develop a cadre of specialists within its own Ministry on ecological diplomacy who can develop appropriate strategies to promote the country's interests in these important fora.

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The third area of possible advantage to Bangladesh is in the area of biodiversity particularly using the fact that the world's largest mangrove forest, the Sundarbans, lies partly within Bangladesh and is undergoing rapid ecological deterioration, mainly due to upstream water withdrawal and that it is a heritage of all mankind and therefore the international community's responsibility and not just of Bangladesh alone.

Conclusion

In conclusion I would argue that Bangladesh's diplomatic priorities need some new and innovative thinking towards more practical issues of concern to our long term well being and a double dose of ecodiplomacy is a good place to start.

The writer is the Executive Director of the Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies, a non-government research and policy institute.

The Future Architect of New South Africa

by Rumi Noman

WITH a successful completion of the all-race election it is now commonly said that South Africa stands at crossroads. The issue of equity which has tormented them since the introduction of Negro slavery into the colonies, has now become the number one domestic, and perhaps foreign, policy issue they face.

No doubt, the first time African all-race election was the unique one, but it is not the only thing that South Africa needs. Because it is not practically possible for a single system to be applicable to all regions and societies of the world, South Africa rather may need an accommodative system which can adjust itself to the choice of the people and their historically established traditions and cultures.

Letter on the Debate

Caretaker Govt: Inherent defects

Sir, The Daily Star has once again taken the lead in choosing the right subject at right moment for creating public opinion. I have pondered over the issue and come to the opinion that some inherent defects may not allow, the system to be fool proof and mar the very purpose of ensuring impartial election through a caretaker government.

the world. So, the democracy that South Africa starts, may also face the syndrome of unpredictable politics of the new world order.

Towards New Beginning

Nelson Mandela, the South African hero, has to combine the new world order and his country's demands. On the one hand, he has to pay a close attention to the promises that he made to his people. Because it is his people who has suffered the wholesale prejudice of the past. It is the group which has been deprived, and discriminated against. Therefore, it is his people for which, affirmative steps must be taken by seeking out qualified ones for jobs and job advancements.

Hard Time, Hard Job

In a normal course even, to govern a country is really a hard job. And when it is related with the freedom from the yoke of colonial hegemony, it can be called 'toughest ordeal of surviving'. The task waiting for Mandela is no exception from this glow of fire. And no doubt South Africa's economic potentiality and

tries in the world remain as the source of raw materials, markets of goods and places of investment of the developed countries, and the economic relations between some of them are even now of a colonial nature.

Another factor is South Africa's mineral wealth. It contains a major proportion of world's reserves of a few commodities important to US (strategic or economic needs). In future, the United States will probably have to look to Africa for, among other things, its chromite, platinum groups metals, tantalite, gold, long-fibered amosite, natural and industrial diamond stones and phosphate rocks.

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strategic importance has made the country a target of colonial powers for the last three centuries. For example; South Africa has some of the largest naval bases bordering the Indian Ocean, and it has 23 per cent of world's reasonably assured reserves of uranium.

Despite fears, hope still counts. Sometimes we perceive, apart from only politicians, what our age needs most is 'saintly politicians'. Mandela's unamicable stand for his country's need can be compared with Mahatma Gandhi's Satyagraha as a means of his national defence. Nelson Mandela, the time-honoured hero of Africa, dedicated his life for the freedom of his countrymen and maintained a different kind of political tactics and that is surely his philosophy of non-violence. He believed that few whites need not to frighten millions of deprived Africans and moreover, if he went for the revenge (violently) he would have failed to bring about the desired South African unity. He is not a visionary. Rather, a practical idealist. If we look back four years from now we see, Mandela repeatedly refused offers for his conditional release and never wavered from his demand for a multiracial South Africa based on a system of 'one man, one vote'.

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Africa might renew the old policies through some new adjustments. So, a question can be asked here — what is the achievement of a full and free all-race election?

Mandela the African 'Mahatma'

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At last, in 1990 Mandela's unconditional release was widely regarded as the key to implementing the government's promise of reform. It was then believed that if anyone could bridge the vast divide between whites and blacks, and among the blacks themselves, it was only Nelson Mandela. The white government looked on him as a born-again moderate, a man they could negotiate with, as de Klerk himself decided later.

For blacks, Mandela was the one who as the personification of their long suffering, helped them transcend the disagreements over strategy and allegiance that had splintered their strength, and bargain on equal terms with the whites.

Mandela's great victory brings to the fore every black African's life-long dream 'fundamental equal rights'. Nelson Mandela who has sacrificed twentyseven years in prison won the century's long waited greatest victory through non-violent political way. His non-violent policy means conscious suffering; it does not mean meek submission to the will of the evil-doer (racism), but it means the pitting of one's whole soul against the will of the tyrant. Working under this law, it was possible for him being an individual to fight the host of unjust rulers to save his honour and his nation and finally set the met for that ruler's fall. No one but Mandela had done this in exchange of his life-long suffering. His greatness makes us nostalgic and we recall the last words of Mahatma Gandhi. In 1948 Gandhiji was shot dead. But two days before his assassination he spoke at some length on South Africa in his prayer meeting: 'I shall tell the government of South Africa through this meeting that it should mend its ways. I've myself lived in South Africa for twenty years and I can therefore say that it is my country. May be the last wish of Gandhi and of course, his non-stop spirit of struggling also helped spake Mandela the future architect of South Africa.'

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Khairul Anam Khan Paribagh, Dhaka