

Problem with Fertilizer

Of the 6,150 tons of toxic fertilizer imported by the Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation (BADC) in 1992, 2,850 tons are yet to be disposed of. For about long two years the case has been dragging on without a comprehensive resolution of the problem. But some progress has definitely been made towards an acceptable settlement of the crisis. The erring companies have by the time been fined to the tune of US\$ 600,000 by a US court. That verdict against Gaston Cooper Inc and Staller Inc is a major victory — both legal and moral — for the BADC and, for Bangladesh.

Bolstered by the court order on the suppliers to take back the rest of the toxic fertilizer now lying in 19 BADC godowns in Chittagong and Khulna, the BADC now plans to file a suit for compensatory damage worth Tk 45 crore. Quite a number of parties have become involved — some of them as arbitrators — in the process of resolving the problem. It is good news that a specific plan to that end was adopted in a joint meeting held recently in Washington with representatives from the Bangladesh embassy, the US State Department, the Treasury Department and the Environmental Protection Agency, Gaston Cooper Inc and M/S Horsehead Resource Development.

Clearly the BADC, more particularly Bangladesh, has a strong point and it has already received due recognition in the US in the form of favourable verdicts for Bangladesh. That the plan for taking back the contaminated fertilizer has been submitted is also a positive development. We can definitely hope that this arbitration will have a long-term effect on prospective law-breaking companies that are considering Third World countries a convenient dumping ground for their toxic wastes. If the verdict can act as an effective deterrent, it will have immense value for countries like ours. It is this environmental consideration and the need for being respectful to poor and small nations that must be highlighted through the favourable court order.

This growing concern for our environment and self-esteem has to be seen in the light of a number of recent incidents involving the dumping of industrial toxic wastes in our territorial waters. Reports also have it that the radiation level of some imported milk powder has been detected as much as 95 bq whereas it should not cross the 50 mark. Notably, the 50 bq is four times more than the standard European measure of 12 bq. There is no reason to think that the exporters of foreign lands alone attach little value to our toxic and radiation levels. There are certainly, dishonest and unscrupulous importers who have no remorse in compromising the standard and putting at risk the health and environment of the nation.

In the case of the import of toxic fertilizer, some BADC officials have been found responsible in making the compromising deal and were recommended by a probe committee instituted later on to be penalised for the offence committed. Even a far greater offence was it when the BADC decided to release the contaminated fertilizer without paying heed to newspaper reports that cautioned of the danger well in advance. More than half of the fertilizer was released in the market and farmers used it in different areas of the country. The damage caused is irretrievable. The BADC has sought compensation and hopefully will get it too. But what about the direct victims of the corporation's indiscretion?

It is these farmers who should get the compensation for the loss of their health and environment. But they cannot make out a case for reasons understandable. Is the BADC doing it for them? If not, the corporation is once again neglecting its duty.

Let There be No Looking Back

When a good tidings on repatriation of refugees originates from where they are presently encamped, this has to be given the credence it automatically deserves. A Press Trust of India (PTI) news item quoting official sources in Agartala said Monday that a high-level meeting presided over by the Tripura Governor Romesh Bhandari endorsed a repatriation plan whereby a total of 1,100 refugee families in the South Tripura evacuee camps are being readied to cross over to Bangladesh beginning from July 21. On that date alone about 600 families are to return to the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

This good news seems to have been made essentially possible by a meeting held on June 30 at Ramgarh between the refugee leaders and the Bangladesh parliamentary team. The all-party parliamentary committee from Bangladesh has proved to be the trouble shooter again.

Since the first batch of the refugees trekked back to Bangladesh in February, amidst some fanfare that was expected, there has been a somewhat anti-climatic silence pervading the repatriation process only to be broken lately by a report to the effect that it might have been stalled. The intervening period was marked by what looked like review visits made to Dhaka and the rehabilitation camps in the CHT by the Tripura Governor Romesh Bhandari and the refugee delegation leader Upendra Lal Chakma. The latter even raised some old questions about security and supervision going by some reports in the Indian newspapers. But the Tripura Governor was widely reported to have expressed his satisfaction over the arrangements here for taking back the refugees into the hill districts of Bangladesh.

There are reasons to believe that a large majority of refugees have developed a fatigue natural to people living away from their homes for half a decade or more. The Tripura government too is playing a catalytic role between the refugees and the members of Bangladesh's all party parliamentary committee. The PCJSS, the political wing of Santibahini, opted for a negotiatory process quite some time ago and amidst series of ceasefire extensions this, has gone on between the Bangladesh representatives and the tribal leaders. The start made on repatriation in February itself bore testimony to the ice-breaking success of the negotiations. So, the second phase of home coming by the refugees in July, especially when it is being bolstered by the sender country and the intent for it has been expressed by refugee leaders including none other than Upendra Lal Chakma himself — should present no problem at all.

Given the intensive nature of the tripartite meetings held over a long period of time and the forward foothold reached in resolving the problem of a manageable number of refugees what we look forward to seeing now is completion of the repatriation process within a specified time-period.

THE reaction to the proposed 1994-95 national budget presented by honourable Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman on June 9 last has been mixed as usual. Some hailed it outright. Some (also on political grounds) rejected it outright. Many wondered whether, given other things, the means proposed are potent enough for realising the end.

Principal End

The principal end of the proposed budget is to achieve a growth rate of six per cent in the next fiscal year without hampering the environment.

According to Mr Rahman, prudent economic management during the last three years has generated the fundamental or necessary conditions in the economy for the would be investors from both home and abroad to make additions to the existing stock of capital. These necessary conditions — e.g., low inflation, reduced budget deficit, hand-some international reserve, reduced current account deficit, lower lending rate, liberalised trade regime, currency convertibility etc. — together with the other measures proposed in the budget speech are expected to embolden the economy enough to materialise the projected 6% growth. Six per cent rate of growth is imperative at this moment because any lower rate of growth will prove critically insufficient to deal with the economy's growing unemployment. A still higher growth rate (7% or more) will be required in the medium run for the economy to proceed towards takeoff. The Finance Minister expressed expectations in the budget speech that such will actually be the

growth path of the economy

Past Performance Records

Unfortunately, our economic performance of the recent years suggest that the projected growth rate for the coming fiscal is over optimistic. We have not experienced 6% growth rate in any year during the last decade. The Finance Minister himself claimed in the budget speech that the estimated growth for the year 1993-94 would be 5%. But, latter, speaking to journalists, he lowered his estimate to 4.8%. It should be noted here that the 'macro fundamentals' or 'necessary conditions' which prevail today were more or less in place also in the last year but investment seems to have not responded perceptibly.

The revision downward of this year's growth estimate implies that the estimated investment figure (14% of GDP) too needs revision. In the speech the Minister said that in order to raise growth to 6% from 5% we need to raise investment from the existing 14% of GDP to 16%. The revision downward of the growth figure even to 4.8% tells us that investment as percentage of GDP for the current year did not exceed 13.5% (the same as last year's); i.e., the 'necessary conditions' failed to break the investors' inertia.

Budgetary Measures

Now we are to see if the new measures in the proposed

Budget '94-'95

What the Percentages Reveal may be Suggestive, but What They Hide are Vital

by Nitai C. Nag

budget will be "sufficient" to raise investment two or three percentage points so that the predicted rate of growth actually takes place.

The budget proposes, among other things, to liberalise trade further, impose no new taxes, give some income tax relief, reduce prices of some agricultural and industrial inputs, reduce prices of some essential consumers' goods like sugar and soybean oil, etc.

Through liberalisation of trade further the budget aims to realise export-led growth. Prices of industrial inputs especially textile inputs like cotton and yarn will become cheaper after existing duties are withdrawn from these items. This will encourage investment in this sector. Since textile is a vital sector of the economy considering both domestic consumption needs as well as the needs of the now flourishing garments industry, the proposed duty reduction from raw cotton, yarn, and other textile machineries is expected to bring tangible benefits to the economy via the textile sector provided other related factors are congenial. However, we will see shortly that the related factors are not as congenial.

Is the Pace of Liberalisation Appropriate?

There are valid reasons to argue that liberalisation, rather

than being sweeping, should be selective. Although sweeping liberalisation will go some way to check cross border smuggling, and although sweeping liberalisation fits well with the World Bank-IMF ideology, which we are adhering to, yet by going for sweeping liberalisation we run the risk of deindustrialising the country. We will be losing all by trying to grasp all. The would be investors, before coming forward with investment to compete with foreign producers, will at least need an infrastructure network comparable to what the outside world is having. Power failure and load shedding for hours together that we are having for the last couple of months have created irritant disincentive effects even among those who are already in business.

Sweeping liberalisation, moreover, has its revenue effect. If in order to cover short-fall in revenue due to sweeping liberalisation the government has to take recourse to SROs in the middle of the year then competitiveness is likely to fall further and investment follow suit. We can take lesson from India's liberalisation. India is far more selective as well as slow in liberalisation although she has already a developed industrial base built, ironically, under a protection regime.

We mentioned above about

the congeniality of policies to each other. One sector cannot prosper independently of other sectors. So the aim of policy should be to distribute incentives to different sectors in such a manner that each sector finds the state of affairs with the other sectors congenial. Unfortunately, our government has a history of failure on this count. The lack of congeniality of incentive packages is an additional cause for aggregate investment not picking up. For example, the incentive package spelled out in the budget speech for the agricultural sector looks paltry compared to that for textiles or some other sectors.

The Neglected Agriculture

The honourable Finance Minister in his budget speech acknowledged the crucial importance of agriculture in the economy because of its being the single largest contributor to GDP. Moreover, agriculture employs most of our labour force. The policy neglect that agriculture got during the recent past years has already done irreparable damage to the sector. The nation bore the loss accordingly. Recent newspapers quoted Bangladesh Economic Survey to report that estimated food deficit this year will be 1.5 times that of last year, and, also, that food deficit widened on average by five per cent annually during

the last two years. All these happened despite the utmost favourable weather condition that prevailed during the last two years. The budget proposal that Urea price will decrease by 35 paisa per kg and that duty on low lift pumps will decrease to 7.5% from existing 15% is too little too late for salvaging the faltering agriculture, the backbone of the nation. If the government is really serious about salvaging agriculture it should consider reintroducing subsidies to fertilisers and pesticides.

Moreover, the farmers should be protected from the clutches of the private sector distributors of fertilisers and pesticides.

If agriculture continues to falter no amount of incentives accorded to other sectors will be enough to attain the projected growth rate. And, with the proposed paltry incentives agriculture is most likely to continue faltering, in consequence economic inequality between rural and urban sectors will continue to widen, domestic demand will fall, investment will not get any pick and forex reserves will continue to build up due to insufficient import. Foreign capital will bypass us despite all we are doing. A recent event is a pointer at that. The Japanese business delegation that visited our country recently at the invitation of our Prime Minister, instead of committing any private investment, advised us to simplify our bureaucratic culture and also to be the first to invest. This is where lies the root cause of the apprehension expressed above regarding whether 6% projected growth rate will actually materialise.

Myanmar Calls for International Support in Fight against Drugs

by Minn Thu

The ruling SLORC has been accused of neglecting drug control programmes in its attempt to crack down on pro-democracy groups

MYANMAR called for more international cooperation and support in its efforts to combat the drug menace.

This Least Developed Country (LDC), which has been denied foreign aid and loans since 1988, deplored the apparent lack of interest by the outside world in its national campaign to eradicate illicit drugs and to help solve this worldwide problem.

Home Affairs Minister Lt. Gen. Mya Thinn said the fight against narcotic drugs and drug-related AIDS should be carried out by all countries in harmonious cooperation "in the interest of the entire mankind."

Myanmar, Thailand and Laos, that formed the infamous "golden triangle," has called on the international community to extend support and cooperation through technical and/or financial assistance for their national and regional strategies to combat drug abuse and trafficking, and to reduce supply and demand for drugs.

In a joint declaration during a recent ministerial conference on cooperation in drug abuse control, the three countries also reaffirmed their "strong determination and solemn commitment" to eradicate jointly the scourge of illicit drugs.

The international community has continuously accused Myanmar's ruling military State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) of neglecting its drug abuse control programmes in its attempt to crack down on pro-democracy opposition forces.

Major donors, including the United Nations Fund for Drug Abuse Control (UNFODAC), suspended all aid and loans after the Sept. 18, 1988 coup because of dissatisfaction over the military's handling of the pro-democracy movement and reports of human rights violations.

The biggest aid suspension was by the United States Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) that had pumped in US \$86.6 million for the supply of five thrush aircraft and chemicals, and the training of Burmese air force pilots for aerial spraying.

Criticism has been mounting especially when Myanmar rejected the US call for the extradition of opium warlord Khunsa. The military explained that capturing the drug lord "was not as easy as catching a cat."

Reacting to criticisms, Myanmar pledged to continue cooperating with other countries "with a heightened momentum" in the drug abuse control drive.

To prove this, it agreed to be a party to several international conventions on drug control, including the 1988 UN convention against the illicit traffic of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.

A new all-embracing anti-drugs law was also promulgated on Jan. 27, 1993, which requires banks and financial institutions to allow authorized investigators probing into drug-related money and property to attach, seize or freeze such.

Pursuant to the resolutions of the February 1990 UN special session on narcotic drugs, Myanmar entered into sub-regional cooperation with Thailand and China on June 12, 1992.

Projects started on Jan. 1,

1993 with a pledge from the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) of some US \$12 million for the Myanmar-China-UNDCP Silu-Pankang project in Mongyang, Kengtung area, and the Myanmar Thai-UNDCP Adee-Sanlu project in Tachilek area.

Negotiations for a Myanmar-Laos-UNDCP cooperation are almost complete with similar arrangements with remaining neighbours — India and Bangladesh — are underway.

Myanmar, Thailand, China, Laos and UNDCP signed last Oct. 26 in New York an agreement to strengthen cooperation in fighting illicit drugs in Southeast Asia.

The agreement will expand existing cooperation among countries of the sub-region along with the UNDCP on problems of illicit drug production, trafficking, abuse and related HIV infection/AIDS.

The UNDCP emerged when the UNFODAC faded away at the end of 1991 after providing US\$22.3 million in three five-year phases.

Gen. Thinn, who is also chair of the Central Committee for Drug Abuse Control (CCDAC), called for more effective controls as more opium derivatives, cocaine and psychotropic substances were found being smuggled into Myanmar.

The general told law enforcement agencies to step up control activities while keeping a constant vigil over tourism-related trafficking that

has been reported after Myanmar opened its doors to tourists.

He deplored the still existing weaknesses in the treatment and rehabilitation of addicts.

Myanmar has spent more than US\$25 million for its drug eradication and control programme since its launching in 1974 as a "national task."

Some 15 special anti-narcotic squads from the police and military intelligence have launched a nationwide crack down.

Over US\$56.56 million worth of opium (5,453.93 kilos), heroin (159.61 kilos), morphine (344.68 kilos), and 15 camps and jungle refineries were seized, destroyed or burned down.

In the 1993 calendar year alone, authorities seized 2,416,171.2 kilos of opium, 278,985.4 kilos of heroin, and 599,084.7 kilos of marijuana from 7,520 peddlers.

Last Nov. 15, 1993, they were able to capture 1,000 gallons of acetic anhydride (a compound derived from another by removal of the elements of water) in the Shan state capital of Taunggyi, heading towards Khunsa's jungle refineries. The seized product was smuggled in from the Chinese border.

A litre of acetic anhydride is used to refine 10 kilos of raw opium to get a kilo of heroin. Thus, Myanmar has literally over prevented in a single day a to-

tal of 4,546.1 kilos of heroin from reaching the international market.

Even nine insurgent groups in this LDC, some of them once involved in the lucrative drug trade, are now helping in the military's double-pronged drug eradication and border development programme. These groups have returned to the fold of the law.

The Kalang group has launched a six-year plan while

the Wa group a 10-year drug eradication programme.

Meanwhile, a drug trafficker identified as Li Kuan Shing was sentenced to death. According to reports, he refused to be searched and instead shot a member of an official search party, killing an immigration officer on July 9, 1993, in the newly-established town of Chin Shwe Hau on the Chinese border in the Shan states.

— *Depthnews Asia*

OPINION

Caretaker Government

The Daily Star, in an extraordinary bid to effect an amicable settlement to the continuing fracas between the ruling party and its political opponents that has dragged the parliament to a standstill, arranged for a public debate on the issue of a caretaker government for conducting the upcoming election. It is not easy to predict whether this praiseworthy endeavour is instrumental in bringing together the estranged parties or not. Notwithstanding, this has contributed substantially to the enlightenment of the people on the political realities.

We got an access to the arsenal of arguments both the opposition and the ruling party have in their command. However, in the flurry of self-righteous assertions and indignation, they have inadvertently put on the back-burner the quintessential point of people's aspirations for a people-oriented government that will manumit them rather than enslaving them.

Garnering from the arguments put forth by the debaters, one can come to the conclusion that there will be irregularities/malpractices/vote-buying or vote-rigging, even if infinitesimally, whether the election will be held under a caretaker government or the outgoing government. We have been told by the participants of the debate that the people can expect a little accountability from both the existing government and the opposition and also from a caretaker government. Surprisingly enough, in throwing volleys of recriminations, the debaters might have missed some very important points. Although a lot of brouhaha has been raised about the constitutionality and the unconstitutionality of this or that, nothing at all has been said about establishing judicial supremacy over every thing else. It is an indisputable fact that the ruling party and the opposition can be made accountable only by establishing an independent judiciary. We have come to realize that the fair judgement of accountability in all public functions whether it is election or something else, can come only through separating the function of the Executive from that of the Judges.

Our bitter experience tells us that a government established through a free and fair election can be remiss in good governance and can evade accountability in the absence of a self-respecting and self-propelling justice dispensation system. In this respect, I intend to refer to the ruling elites and the opposition stalwarts perchance for indulging in self-perpetuating pursuits. While the perks and benefits of the MPs and the ministers are

having an upward surge, the plight of the people is taking a downswing. Who is being made accountable here?

Here it is not out of place to point out that the present government has come to power through a free and fair election but has failed to keep its promises to outlaw the black laws of the ousted Ershad regime and separate Judiciary from the Executive. On the other hand, the opposition has not come up with any concrete programme to the above effect. Thus both have put their credibility to Suspicion.

When the absolutist government of the ousted President Lt. General Ershad had been running a juggernaut over the people, bypassing the judicial institutions, the political opponents of Ershad made promises to the oppressed people that they would establish an independent judiciary when they would be given power. So far the attempts made by them in separating the Judiciary from the Executive have remained highly-piggledy. All the tomtomming and flipflopping of taking the people to the high heavens have remained as ear-piercing as before.

While a free and fair election will fulfil a political aspirant's dreams of getting a seat inside the Parliament with all the attendant perks and benefits, a free judiciary will help in fulfilling the dreams of the people in all functions, including the holding of a free and fair election, and will strengthen the hands of the people, the 112-million strong populace of Bangladesh. Now, often the allegation thus goes that the judges are acting like the sitting ducks. But, we believe that there are many angry Royal Bengal Tigers among them who are fuming at the massive injustices being done against the people by the black laws (e.g. the draconian Anti-terrorism Ordinance), the politically spawned terrorists and the so-called anti-terrorism committees. The shackles and manacles, though, seem to be unbreakable.

Dismantling the feeble and unassertive judicial set-up that has given the executive the upper hand and replacing it with a formidable institution that will be capable of delivering justice without any hindrance or interference may not be the panacea to all the predicaments of the people; but, it will undoubtedly thin out the smokescreen that overshadows accountability and transparency of all the governing bodies, thus ushering in the ideal milieu of the people, by the people, for the people.

Hubert Francis Sarkar
Singhola, Dhaka.

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.

Laws that Permit Inequality

Sir, I have gone through the article captioned "Laws that Permit Inequality" published in The Daily Star of 26th May, 1994. Kindly advise the writer to please read and study the famous book 'Al-Man-Atul Muslimal' written by the famous Egyptian scholar and thinker Farid Wajdi Afridi. The book was translated by Moulana Abul Kalam Azad, the greatest Muslim scholar, thinker and statesman of this century in this subcontinent.

Again it was translated into Bengali by Hafiz Azizul Islam, under the caption, "Vaygnanik Dhristite Naari".

Abdul Azim
Savar, Dhaka

Ah, Maradona

Sir, I am shocked and hurt to hear that Diego Maradona, the ace footballer of the world, has been suspended from playing in the rest of the World Cup 1994 matches on flimsy ground of drug test failure.

Maradona has a past record of drug abuse which has left a stigma on his career. But it seems anti-Maradona people, organisations and countries are now taking full advantage of it,

through intrigue, to debar him from playing in the World Cup 1994, because they are afraid of him!

To think of World Cup football game sans Maradona is almost an absurdity. We often see mediocre footballers playing, but only in World Cup every four years we have a chance to watch stalwart footballers of the world face each other to show their best. And billions of football lovers of the world burn lot of midnight oil, jeopardize their health but watch these extraordinary football games.

I am a man of 70 years, have heart problem and other ailments, yet I have watched each and every game so far played. Maradona is an idol of football lovers and there is no dearth of them here too. To debar him on a debatable question sheerly by the arbitrary decision of FIFA is like a blow to the head not only of Maradona alone who has so religiously practised for the last few months to be able to bring out his best and thrill the world, but also of Argentina as a whole and last but not the least, billions of Maradona fans.

I am so disappointed and angry with FIFA for the decision that all my interest to watch the World Cup football

1994 has evaporated and I have decided not to watch any more games. I am certain that billions of football lovers like me share my sentiments.

Thomas Gomes
Tejgaon, Dhaka

Football's greatest XI

Sir, The whole world is now completely engrossed in watching the World Cup '94. I take this opportunity to name, in my view, the eleven greatest footballers this world has ever seen. However, I am sure, many will find objections to my selections and to them, I apologise beforehand.

My team will have one sweeper, three defenders, four midfielders and two strikers (and of course, a goalkeeper).

For the position of goalkeeper, I have no doubt in my mind — the English goalkeeper of the sixties, Gordon Banks. And the sweeper will be none other than the 'Kaiser' himself — Franz Beckenbauer.

Of the three defenders, I am sure nobody will disagree with my choice of the right-back — the legendary Brazilian superstar of the sixties and the 1970 captain, Carlos Alberto. The central defender position would go to the inspirational Argentine and former World Cup winning captain Daniel Passarella. The left back position gives me a lot of problems but I think I will settle for the current Italian captain Franco Baresi.

Three of the four midfield positions give me no problems

— the greatest footballer of modern times Diego Maradona (I have no other choice, no alternative in spite of the ban for the man who pioneered the concept of total football), the legendary Dutchman Johan Cruyff, and the inspirational German playmaker and captain with a fierce shot, Lothar Matthaeus. The fourth place gives me a lot of problems.

Should it be the Italian playmaker and striker Roberto Baggio? Former French superstar Michel Platini? Or the Brazilian hero Socrates? For I would prefer Michel Platini, for in my view, he is the best in combating tight man to man marking.

Upfront will be undoubtedly the greatest ever footballer — Pele. With him will be the most lethal striker of modern times — the Dutchman Marco Van Basten.

How is it? Isn't it the greatest ever football team on earth?

Masud Sohal
Mohammadpur, Dhaka

3-yr Sanchayapatra

Sir, This is a most humble request to the Finance Minister to kindly re-introduce the 3-year Sanchayapatra in order to encourage small savers to invest. Mostly for the retired people it was a small boon. It would be a great help even if reintroduced at reduced interest rates, but please don't kill it forever.

M Ahmad
Uttara, Dhaka