

Fresh Thinking on Export

We need focal-point of an organisation, not a post office-like Export Promotion Bureau (EPB), to be able to achieve export-led economic growth.

The EPB has a long list of functions to perform without the necessary organisational strength to do so. When it was set up in 1978 through an ordinance — and ordinances mostly mean ad hocism — in the wake of a flawed nationalisation era, private sector was still on the sideline of the economy.

Besides, the markets that were once slammed shut overseas have now adopted open-door policies, both in terms of investment and trade, with the result that fierce competition is raging the world over to seize the new opportunities.

Even in its semi-autonomous capacity, as an adjunct of the Commerce Ministry, EPB has done some good work in consultation with the private sector leaders, something that must be an institutional feature now.

So, we are all for the full autonomy of EPB with a guarantee that it has the necessary technical manpower and financial resources to play its due role in broadening our still very narrow export base.

Congestion at our ports is a big snag. What a pity it is that we have at the moment garments worth Tk 300 crore lying in the stack-yard of our national airport. Now the dichotomy in our situation is, whereas we cannot even export what we produce, how are we to cope with a higher productivity that we must have if we are to reduce the trade gaps with so many countries?

A Passion Worth Emulating
To earn as emphatic a title as gachh pagol DC (a deputy commissioner crazily inclined towards trees) may not be a dream of every civil servant of his rank.

In fact, we have seen more publicity than actual work done relating to tree plantation campaigns launched at different times in the country. Despite all the media exposure, none of the self-proclaimed tree-lovers has been able to really take the movement forward.

Ataur Rahman Majumder, as a responsible government officer, is not expected to neglect his principal functions as DC, although he may be pretty much a self-possessed crusader for trees. For 'she who cooks also braids her hair,' the DC, favourably disposed towards trees, might as well mind both his businesses quite seriously.

We badly need a movement like the 'Chika Andolon' organised by illiterate tribal people of a village in India. The way they saved trees in their neighbourhood jungle is a lesson for educated people anywhere in the world.

The important thing about the DC's tree-mindedness is that people have taken note of his interest and even recognised his contribution by following his example.

When tree plantation truly becomes a social movement allowing the mute friends to grow to their maturity, the country will have achieved a lot.

I did not know Chandrika Kumaratunga, Sri Lanka's new prime minister, when she was in Delhi as a guest lecturer at the Jawaharlal Nehru University. But I met her subsequently, less than two years ago, at a small party at the residence of former foreign minister Inder Gujral.

Sri Lanka was at that time a sad spectacle of domestic violence, political disharmony and people's disenchantment. Chandrika had also to reckon with her brother, Anura Bandaranaike, already an MP. While she was at the University of Sorbonne, the Institute of Commonwealth Studies and other places, he had taken a lead in the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), still under the control of her infirm mother, Srimavo Bandaranaike.

Although Chandrika exuded courage, yet none of us expected that she would retrieve not only the party but also make the prime ministership in two years' time. Of course, her star shone brightly on the firmament of Sri Lanka only after the exit of Anura Bandaranaike from the SLFP to become a minister in the last government of United National Party (UNP). The retirement of her mother in her favour also made her the only viable leader in the SLFP.

While in Delhi, she talked mostly on the LTTE threat. Since none of us was an apologist for Indra Gandhi's policy — training, arming and sheltering the 'Tigers' — all of

Article 370 for Jaffna

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was on her side. She was, however, keen to know how much leeway India still had with the LTTE. By then Rajiv Gandhi's assassination had snuffed even tenuous relations some in Tamil Nadu had continued to nurture with the LTTE. Still, she probed the subject at length as if she was trying to assess whether India could be of some use if ever the opportunity for a settlement came her way.

Therefore, her priority to have talks with the LTTE does not come as a surprise. That she can go to the extent of meeting V. Prabhakaran, the LTTE chief, indicates that she is willing to take risks in handling the nettle. She knows that the proposal can land her in trouble.

One, the army, which has been fighting the Tamil insurgency for more than a decade, losing some of its top brass, may not be too enthusiastic till the Tigers put the guns down. Two, the seven votes of the Sri Lanka Muslim Party give the People's Alliance (PA) of Chandrika a whisker-thin majority of 113 in the 225-member parliament. The Muslims have been a target of LTTE's violence in the eastern province, where Muslims, Tamils and Sinhalese are 33 per cent each. M Ashraff, who heads the Muslim group, is opposed to linkage of eastern province with the north, the Jaffna, where the Tamils are in a preponderant majority. His response to rapprochement with the LTTE is cool. Yet by trying to woo the

Tamils, Chandrika is making up for the wrong done to them. In a way, she is recompensing the chauvinism that SLFP had injected into the body politic of Sri Lanka when it had given the call for 'Sinhala only' and had swept the polls in 1956. That very year the 'Sinhala only' policy was enacted into a law. From then onward the polarisation on racial and ethnic lines began in a big way.

The Tamils, who have occupied key positions in and

try for establishing an independent state of their own, Eelam.

The LTTE's initial response to Chandrika's offer for talks is positive: it favours further probing. But this is the time when the LTTE must reconsider its goal. No prime minister can be party to his or her country's disintegration. It is not an emotional response; it is practical politics. The Tamils are correct in demanding the best of safeguards for preserving their entity, culture

more constitutional guarantees. There can be, for example, a standing commission of top judges to attend immediately to the state's complaint against the constitutional limits. I do not think that the question of rigging elections in Jaffna arises because the people are tacitly conscious of their rights, as the Kashmiris are today.

As for India, it has said more than once that it seeks the solution of Tamil problem 'within the framework of the unity and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka.' But since we are responsible for the LTTE, we must use all levers of power to ensure that it accepts autonomy within the country. Military assistance rendered in the shape of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) during former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi's rule was a disaster in the sense that the LTTE got the better of us. Had IPKF defeated the Tigers, even if it could not eliminate them, New Delhi's credibility would have been higher and Colombo's problems fewer.

At least we should see that the LTTE does not get any succour from the Indian soil. The fact is that the fruits of daily use — vegetables, fish, poultry and even drinking water — go to Jaffna from our southern coast. (Some arms are also making their way but the LTTE has alternative sources like Singapore and Bangkok).

With Jayalalitha as the Tamil Nadu chief minister, who is dead set against the

LTTE, it should be possible for both the state and central governments to plug the avenues used for carrying goods to Jaffna. M Karunanidhi, the Tamil Nadu opposition leader, is also categorical on this matter. When I met him in Madras last, he spared no words in condemning the LTTE. This should make Jayalalitha's task easier.

Chandrika has rightly said that she does not suffer from anti-India phobia. In fact, she must be said to the credit of Lanka that it has never indulged in India bashing, as some of our neighbouring countries do. But there are influential people in Lankan politics, government and the press, who continue to do their best to spoil relations between Colombo and New Delhi. The UNP used to encourage them. Even former president Jayawardene, when in power, behaved more like a Sinhalese chauvinist than a seasoned politician, who was expected to rise above parochial sentiments.

After Chandrika's advent to power, Jayawardene has said that India should continue to 'keep her hands off.' His accusation that it had already sullied its hands is not misplaced. But as he has himself said, New Delhi has lately adopted the right approach. India's record since it withdrew the IPKF has been fairly clean. Unfortunately, some of our high commissioners have behaved like viceroys and given India a bad name. Mercifully, they have retired from service.

Chandrika does not have to bother about New Delhi's postures. It has burnt its fingers. But unabated armed confrontation in the north can arouse sympathy for Tamils in Tamil Nadu and beyond. Her move for settlement is welcome.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

outside the government, have felt growing discrimination in employment and education since. Even some of their land has been colonised. There came a time — popularly known as the EC pact — when the federal form of government with parity of Tamil language with Sinhala as the official language looked like settling the problem. But the pact could not be implemented because of stiff opposition from the Sinhalese.

Now the distance between Sinhalese, who constitute 76 per cent of Sri Lanka's population, and the Tamils, 13 per cent, who predominate the north, both geographically and emotionally, seems to be unbridgeable. The Tamils have gone to the extent of demanding separation from the coun-

and language. But the secession of Sri Lanka cannot be on the agenda, however liberal and keen Chandrika is.

The LTTE should feel assured if Sri Lanka's constitution is amended to transfer all subjects to the Jaffna state except defence, foreign affairs and communications. This is what our Article 370 spells out for Jammu and Kashmir. We have failed because we have not implemented the article either in letter or in spirit. We have been extending central laws to the state's fields through the Jammu and Kashmir assembly, which did not pose us any problem because we could rig the elections and nominate the chief ministers of our like.

The LTTE can learn from our misdoings. It can ask for

US-Syrian Relations Improve under Clinton Administration

Mounir B Abboud writes from Beirut

Washington seems convinced that Syria indeed plays a key role in attaining peace in the Middle East

in Geneva on Nov. 23, 1990 followed by President Assad and President George Bush. The two leaders agreed to take joint action to force Iraq forces out of Kuwait.

It was followed by American moves to launch the Middle East peace process, which was opened in Madrid in October 1991 and attended by Syria, other Arab countries, Palestine and Israel.

Peace negotiations between Syria and Israel have long been deadlocked over the latter's occupation of South Lebanon and its withdrawal from the Golan Heights.

But US Secretary of State Warren Christopher, who went to the region early this month to help break the impasse in the peace talks, told 'The New York Times' that Syria and Israel have achieved great strides towards this direction.

Mr Christopher was quoted as saying: 'Up to this last trip, there was a psychological barrier. I believe they've broken through, discussing the concrete elements, the nature of peace, withdrawal, security.'

Syria's principal demand has always been for a full and immediate Israeli withdrawal. But Israel insists on a prior bilateral peace agreement and security guarantees before its

withdrawal.

With such a long history of distrust and suspicion, the two sides have found it increasingly difficult to break the stalemate.

The root of the problem lies in Israel's occupation of South Lebanon after the 1982 invasion of Beirut and its establishment of a self-proclaimed security zone.

Syria, with the most powerful Arab army in the region, has 4,000 troops deployed in the Bekka Valley in Eastern Lebanon in accordance with the Saudi-Arabian sponsored Taif Agreement.

Israel has declared it would only withdraw from South

Lebanon once the Lebanese government had redeployed its own troops to disarm the Hezbollah guerrillas.

However, both the Syrians and the Lebanese have agreed that armed resistance in South Lebanon is legal as long as Israeli occupation persists.

Beirut and Damascus insist that withdrawal must come first before any redeployment of Lebanese troops.

Lebanon and Iran are regarded as Syria's closest allies in the region. As the main power broker in Lebanon, Syria has an estimated 35,000 troops deployed in Lebanese territory.

During his stay in Damascus, Iranian Vice President Hassan Habibi conferred with leaders of the 10 Palestinian radical groups opposed to Palestine Liberation

Organization (PLO) leader Yasser Arafat's peace deal with Israel.

Mr Habibi affirmed Iran's continued support for efforts to oppose the deal.

The country offered to increase funding, especially to the Palestinian radical groups. Without such a sponsor, opposition to the PLO-Israeli peace deal would remain mere rhetoric.

Syria and Iran have coordinated their support for the Palestinian radicals. Syria would provide them with freedom of action on the political and information levels, while Iran would provide them with funds.

Another sponsor of the opposition move of Palestinian groups is Libyan leader Col. Moammar Gaddafi.

— Depthnews Asia

Constant Vigilance against Corruption Needed by All Governments

EVERY government in the world must maintain constant vigilance, working full time to eliminate graft and corruption, which are wasteful and harmful to meaningful economic development, growth, and progress.

That was the theme of recent Worldnet 'Dialogue' television programme broadcast from Washington to Cotonou, Benin, by the United States Information Agency.

The programme featured Ambassador Herman Cohen, a former assistant secretary of state for African affairs, Peter Eigen of Transparency International, and Mamadou Dia of the World Bank.

Cohen, who is now a senior adviser to the Global Coalition for Africa, told the African audience of judges, academics, and journalists that although corruption is somewhat limited in the United States, corrupt practices between the government and the private sector are still a problem.

'There are a lot of government levels: there is the federal government; there are the 50 governments of the states; there are thousands of municipal governments. So in all of those governments there are people who try to do something to get bribes, and we must work against that. There are also gray areas (unclear areas in the law as to what goods and services can be legally accepted by public officials).'

Cohen stressed that even the United States Congress has become much stricter in an effort to prevent corruption, by enacting laws which increasingly restrict what (complimentary services, meals, transportation, etc.) can and cannot be accepted by members of Congress from private sector lobbyists and businesses.

Additionally, Cohen said, 'within government, there are constant audits, which help to keep things honest and open.'

'Every budget, every expenditure, is public,' he added, noting that on the federal level this is reinforced by the requirement that a full financial disclosure statement be made by each high government official.

'I was a high government official. I had to fill out a form giving all the details of my personal finances, and that was

open [available] to journalists. I did not like that situation because I would have rather kept my privacy,' he admitted, 'but in order to control corruption, I had to make all of that public.'

Cohen added that another way to eliminate government corruption is to streamline and eliminate many of the needless layers of bureaucracy which often are imposed by many governments to regulate and oversee business. Such a setup, he explained, often acts only to promote bribes and payoffs.

Commenting on the increased importance lately of full disclosure by high government officials, Dia said: 'Perhaps transparency in the past was not as important as it is today. Basically, there is freedom of the press today that makes it possible to reveal a number of corrupt practices that may have existed before but were never disclosed.'

Secondly, he added, conditions now — more and more — seem to favor corruption — such as bribe taking or the use of government goods and services for personal gain.

Recalling the mindset which has led to increased bribery in Africa, Dia said: 'We have to look at the deterioration of the standard of living of the population. In the sixties, after independence as [Nigerian] President Obasanjo said, 'Africa greeted independence as being the years of plenty.' There was a lot of hope, thanks to independence.'

'The standard of living [was expected] to increase in a short time. But after 20 years, 30 years of disillusionment many people are now beginning to look for other ways to secure these gains that they never received.'

Picking up on that point, Eigen, of Transparency International, stressed that while expectations have changed, so have attitudes towards corruption. Public 'patience and tolerance of corruption have seriously changed since the end of the Cold War,' he warned.

'Now, people are furious if they see that all of their efforts are frustrated by corruption — which is why a lot of things in the international context are now more open, more transparent. In the past, we accepted a corrupt leader if he was on our side in the ideolog-

ical war.'

'We accepted the [Ferdinand] Marcos, [Manuel] Noriega, and the others, if they were on our side in the ideological war — and I believe that this has changed internationally. This has resulted in more transparency and a greater consensus that something must be done. Very few people today accept corruption as an acceptable phenomenon.'

Another guest who appeared on the programme in a video insert was Vivian Lowery Derryck, president of the African-American Institute, who, like the other guests, stressed that 'corruption has a negative effect on both development and democracy.'

She went on to make a number of succinct points:

— Corruption works against competition, and it is competition that stimulates private business and investment. 'If you are a businessperson and you see that others are getting unfair breaks, then you are likely to opt out, and that is clearly bad for development because it is the private sector which must fuel development in African countries.'

— 'If Africa is to develop, the private sector has to be involved — the domestic private sector. You cannot attract foreign investment until the private sector is ready to invest in its own country. It is not going to do that if the decks are stacked and there is a corruption factor.'

— Corruption in a country damages that country's credibility with donors.

'Nowadays, citizens in donor countries are demanding that their development dollars are well spent, and if they are not, they want their governments to withdraw their funding.'

Derryck cited Zambia as a positive example of how cleaning up corruption can benefit a country's economy. When the government cleaned up corruption, 'the donors responded positively by increasing, very dramatically, aid levels there.'

Every country must ensure that its military and police elements are purged of corrupt elements, she added, eliminating any chance for extortion or the illicit procurement of goods and services, etc. — USIS.

To the Editor...

Development

Sir, We uphold our much-talked about determination for and also political commitment to the alleviation of poverty through human resource development.

Let us just see the present scenario in the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examination results. Candidates obtaining first division are in abundance securing letter marks in almost all subjects and also 'stars'. So, how such system can be apt for judging or assessing quality of education and talent? If this is the example of making human resource development, if only horizontal expansion of education (and such type of system) is our only motto, we must say, our future is obscure.

This sort of seventy nine to eighty per cent success story will plague the entire higher secondary level education. The total number of Govt. Colleges will not be able to accommodate all first division holders, not to speak of the rest. Higher education, from the point of view of both academic and education administration will be left distorted and disarrayed.

Matters do not end here. A good number of first division and star marks holders after being admitted in the colleges, due to their in-built weakness, they will not probably be able to cope with higher secondary level education. Because no question banks are there, they will take, resort to guide books avoiding the main texts on major subjects. Even a section of college teachers will reap a 'bumper harvest' from private tuition and note-selling business. Mashroom growth of coaching centres already are in

full swing. Can these short-cut methods ensure success in the higher secondary level and provide the nation quality education?

Not only that, following the same trend in the result, of the degree level also, students seek an easy way to be graduates by taking some easy, traditional and non-dynamic subjects which are of little practical use. Such subjects are designed only to bring about changes in the cognitive side. They avoid reading subjects like economics, physics and mathematics. So, the curricula, teaching methods and nature of holding examinations from primary to higher level in general and from secondary to higher secondary levels in particular are not commensurate with our dreams of poverty alleviation through human resource development.

So, on the one hand, education should be production-oriented and income generating one. Youths passing any level of education will then find jobs. That means creation of self-employment is to be ensured. As such, the entire examination process should be designed and arranged accordingly. On the other hand, education administration is to be made prompt, forward looking, dynamic, accountable and free from the bureaucratic attitude, redtapism and corruption. Only horizontal expansion of education and the so-called increasing number of certificate holders cannot make the programme for human resource development a success.

The sooner we realise it, the better for us all.

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'Default culture'

Sir, I wish to draw one very important matter to the attention of The Daily Star readers, the BNP Government, the JS members, trade bodies and the general public. A supplement was brought out in The Daily Star of 24 August 1994 with interviews of the Finance Secretary. From what appeared in the highlight at the front page, I took note of the used term 'default culture'. I believe the word 'culture' normally indicates something good and graceful and should not be preceded by a word 'default' which indicates something degrading and disgraceful.

If there were groups of business people who were identified as indulging in such activities as implied in the word 'default', they ought to undergo the legal process. If they underwent such a process and were found guilty of defaults and fraud, the amounts of money involved from the exchequer must be recovered from them by taking whatever measures needed.

Alternatively, such persons should be bundled together and sent to prisons on appropriate charges. In a country like China, which is a good friend of Bangladesh, such persons are even shot to death. We learn nothing even from our friendly countries. Moreover why not the Islamic laws of punishment are applied to them, as is done in Saudi Arabia, for such anti-social acts? It is undeniable that some of them have done incalculable harm to the nation. What is the sense in putting only H M Ershad into prison?

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