

An Excellent Report

A World Bank study of our marketing arrangements for the farm products has been quite eye-opening. The findings can only be ignored if we should choose to remain where we are—economically. The WB report underlines a multiplicity of weaknesses besetting the marketing channels for a wide variety of commodities: perishable goods, foodgrains, industrial crops like sugarcane, jute, tobacco and cotton and non-traditional items such as horticultural products including the highly exportable cut-flowers.

The snail's pace at which goods move from producers to intermediate contractors and thence to the consumers, escalates costs much too much. This results in the consumer prices going up and the returns to the growers being undercut. Ultimately it is commercialisation of agriculture and diversification of crops which tended to suffer badly.

The marketing operations are flawed across the board—beginning from market information system through gradation of agricultural commodities to movement of goods from place to place, their storage and transshipment. There are no stipulations for covered or cemented market spaces, link-roads, loading-unloading and packaging facilities. Besides, sanitation and preservation are at the lowest ebb.

The basic weakness lies in the bulk storage capacity: even the capacity for bagged storage is low at the ports as well as in the grain-surplus northern region. Cold storage facility is not only inadequate, sixty per cent of what we have is concentrated around Dhaka and is almost entirely given to potatoes.

We regard the World Bank report as one of the most useful recommedatory inputs received to date from that multilateral donor agency. The reasons for valuing it so highly are not far to seek. It is for the first time that international standards have been applied in the evaluation of our markets at work. Secondly, never before has marketing, both internal and external, been so thoroughly probed by the yardsticks of policies, structures, operations and services. Thirdly, the findings have been woven into an integrated recommedatory package almost like a mirror-image of the vital missing links in the marketing anatomy.

The report should thus enable us to provide meat, substance and a pulsating coherence to what must be accepted as a marketing non-system we have had.

Good Wishes to Adhikari

As one of the greatest political anachronisms of our time, a communist government takes oath of office under a constitutional monarchy in Nepal. Manmohan Adhikari, the 74-year-old veteran communist leader who heads the government, has turned the table on the Nepali Congress. His party's victory at a time when the communist citadels the world over have fallen one after another, should be considered most spectacular. The tiny Himalayan nation has evidently gone against the wind.

The people of the land-locked country has not been wrong in reposing their confidence in Adhikari who is known for his simple way of life, steadfast commitment to popular causes and many years in jail. In a few years' time the Nepalese have come a long way. First they rose against monarchy and according to a compromise formula struck with the king, Nepal converted to a constitutional monarchy. Within barely four years of their stint with democracy, the Nepalese have switched their choice from the centrist Congress party to the communists. Whether this will bring about the expected change of fate for the common people, only future can tell.

The Congress rule in Nepal may not have fulfilled all the expectations of the Nepalese but under it some positive changes took place—particularly in the area of press freedom and people's rights. Their main complaints against the Nepali Congress were the rising living costs, widespread poverty and nepotism during its rule. The esteemed communist leadership in Nepal has quite a challenging task ahead. It will be hard pressed to match its ability with the soaring expectations of the Nepalese people.

Our congratulations to Manmohan Adhikari. He brings to bear on SAARC and the neighbouring relations, his maturity as a veteran political leader and reputation as a pragmatist.

Fighting AIDS

The observance of the World Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) Day yesterday marked a whole generation's changing attitude to life—sexual in particular. To keep in line with the changing attitude, the theme for this year's World AIDS Day was appropriately phrased as "AIDS and the Family: Families take care." The stress obviously has been on the responsibilities of a family to guard against this deadly disease. Since no treatment of the disease is available, it is wise to appeal to the family values and focus on the preventive side.

However, the thematic propriety is not all. Unless the message is driven home to the common people, there is hardly any chance that they will take the disease seriously and guard themselves against it. The problem is that family values in the vulnerable parts of the world are yet to slough off the effects of the onslaught of free sex and sexual perversions in the 70's.

The horrific spectre of AIDS looms large—globally. Until recently we, as a nation, thought ourselves free from this bane. But no more. No less than 34 cases of Immune Deficiency Virus (HIV) positive have been detected in the country with three of the patients having died. In the neighbouring countries the incidence of AIDS has already reached an alarming proportion. The rapid spread of the disease from one continent or country to the other is a proof of the high pace of its transmission. In a country where healthcare system suffers from so many inadequacies and poverty is endemic, a large-scale attack of AIDS can be devastating.

Against such a backdrop, we have to brace ourselves to meet the AIDS challenge. Can we not think of setting up AIDS screening centres and data banks as essential parts of our preparedness against the malady?

India Factor does Incite the Nepalese

The Nepalese generally believe that India takes undue advantage of them, and rubs them on the wrong shoulder unnecessarily. The communists have exploited the feeling to the hilt and have depicted the Nepali Congress as 'embarrassingly pro-India.'

THE joke in Kathmandu during the election was that Prime Minister Narasimha Rao, also the Congress president, was financing the Nepali Congress and West Bengal chief minister Jyoti Basu, the United (Marxist-Leninist) Communist Party. The point made was not so much about funds—the two parties have reportedly spent Rs 20 crore each—as about the India factor that plays a decisive role in the affairs of Nepal. In fact, the Communists, who have emerged as the largest party, adding nearly 30 members to their previous tally of 60, contested the election on anti-India plank.

"When I assume power, I shall go straight to New Delhi to abrogate the 1950 treaty with India," said Manmohan Adhikary, the communists' chief. After winning the polls, he has used the word review. The treaty's obnoxious part—a military mission in Kathmandu—was dropped years ago. But he wants India's overall responsibility of Nepal's defence to go. But he favours good relations with New Delhi.

He realises that he will have to do business with India, with which Nepal shares an undemarcated border stretching over 2,500 kilometres. But he talks about "a more balanced relationship" with India so as to keep at par New Delhi with Beijing. He knows that Beijing is too distant. The Chinese are said to have told the communists and others that they must come to terms with India because "we are too far to help you."

The new equation between New Delhi and Beijing is yet another factor to dampen the spirits of Adhikary. But he is

going to insist on the revision of trade and transit agreement so as to have access to the markets of Pakistan and Bangladesh. At present, all goods for the land-locked Nepal move through India. Calcutta is the port of entry. Nepal has been trying for another outlet through Kandla, Gujarat. He also wants a larger share in the Tankapur project on the UP border.

The Nepalese generally believe that India takes undue advantage of them, and rubs them on the wrong shoulder unnecessarily. The communists have exploited the feeling to the hilt and have depicted the Nepali Congress as "embarrassingly pro-India." The communists did not have to look hard for examples of India's interference.

In the name of engineering, Papu Yadav of Bihar mafia entered some constituencies in Terai, Nepal's comparatively prosperous area bordering Bihar, and threatened and cajoled voters to support his friends of dubious reputation. Earlier in the year, the armed Indian police forcefully entered Kathmandu on the pretext of searching a criminal absconding from India.

The Nepalese were so incensed that the foreign ministry handed over a protest letter to the Indian embassy in Kathmandu. The Indian prime minister also reportedly expressed his concern to Nepalese prime minister over the phone. It was a cursory response. Several demonstrations in Kathmandu and other

parts of Nepal were organised against the incident.

Indeed, New Delhi has been unmindful of Nepal's sensitivity. From the days of Jawaharlal Nehru, when King Tribhuvan took shelter in India, the government has tended to treat Nepal as *shamat* (common property). Rajiv Gandhi laid siege around Nepal for 14 months, not allowing even the necessities to move into the Himalayan kingdom. He had got annoyed because the king

"fundamentalists and communists have spoilt it in India," the people believe. A group of lawyers, journalists and politicians from Pakistan emphasised the difference, when I met them in Kathmandu. "We feel so comfortable here. Why can't India with 82 per cent of Hindus be likewise?"

If India had a Pope, he would have ticked it off for besmirching the face of Hinduism. The Jingoists among them have spoilt our image.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kulip Nayar writes from New Delhi

had invited him for breakfast, while some other VIPs for lunch. It is the same attitude of superiority, that of Big Brother, that guides our foreign office even today.

"We are culturally and otherwise so close to you that we feel that we are part of you," is the common refrain of academics, bureaucrats and journalists. "But why should you make us feel that we have no say or identity of our own?" They are also afraid that communalism and casteism, the two features sullying today's India, may spill over into their country. Being a Hindu state, they are disconcertingly conscious of that.

Hinduism has a benign face in Nepal, tolerant, accommodating and peaceful. This is the real face of Hinduism, the Nepalese argue.

However, there is one difference between India and Nepal. Muslims are not even three per cent in Nepal as compared to 12 per cent in India. There is no history of confrontation between the two communities, a sad fact that litters the pages of history books in the subcontinent.

And there is no Bhartiya Janata Party to play the Hindu card. RSS leader Seshadri visited Kathmandu some time ago and tried to foment religious sentiments by saying that the Muslim population had increased in Nepal through the infiltration of Muslims from Bangladesh and other countries. (Only in Kathmandu has the Muslim population gone up from four to 14 per cent). Seshadri was politely asked to leave.

However vociferous the campaign, the Muslim factor does not incite the Nepalese. But the India factor does because they feel threatened by it. The communists sensed that mood and made "nationalism" as their slogan during the polls. The emphasis of the Nepali Congress was on stability, which is an elusive term, particularly when the term in the country is not threatened.

The king, after the pre-eminence of monarchy was eclipsed nearly four years ago, has not made a single false move. He has acted as a constitutional head and has thus endeared himself. That is apparent from the fact that the royalist, Rashtriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), has emerged a third force, though with 20 members. One gets the feeling that the king may one day pick up the pieces because the Nepali Congress and the communists, locked in perpetual enmity, are bound to cross each other out.

Democracy, bravely wrested from the unwilling hands of the king, has given the people a free society but has not helped them to cast off their poverty. Nowhere the system does, but a country which is among the 10 poorest in the world expected to do better. The Nepali Congress, which has ruled for three and a half years, had promised to improve better their lot. But its non-performance and corruption are proverbial. Not even a modest development is to the credit of the party. And the top-most leaders have been

found making money, directly or through their relations. GP Koirala, who headed the government, has proved to be the biggest disappointment because it was generally believed that he would follow the example of his late brother BP Koirala, Nepal's Nehru. But GP did not have the leadership quality, nor did he adhere to the principles that would have built institutions in Nepal.

His defence is that the Nepali Congress was a divided house. Although he was the prime minister, the party chief, Krishna Prasad Bhattacharya, worked at cross purposes from day one. Ganesh Mansingh, respected party leader, who has now asked both GP and Bhattacharya to resign, had appealed to the people before the elections that they should defeat the Nepali Congress, since its government was found incompetent and corrupt.

True, the infighting has been the undoing of the Nepali Congress. But the negative vote that the Communists have secured cannot be the basis for a complete departure from the past. After all, the Nepali Congress is close second with some 10 members behind. The communists will need to have its support for land reforms. And they cannot afford to adopt an unfriendly posture towards India if they want to make a dent into unemployment. Whether such a consensus will emerge is difficult to say because if it does not, another mid-term poll is on the cards. The key to Nepal's problems is a national government. But when politics is power, as is the case in the subcontinent, such possibility is only a dream or a wishful thinking.

crumble. This is how, in our neighbouring country India, democracy has taken firm roots. At the concluding portion of her write-up, Ms Murshed has observed that "the government (meaning BNP) has shown a clear willingness to be flexible in their approach to compromise. Now it is the Opposition which must restore confidence in its ability to govern, not merely agitate. It would be statesmanship, not merely politics, if they could take the initiative to break the deadlock by returning to the Sangsads, which is the only proper forum for debates on these issues in a working democracy".

Sir Ninian Stephen acted strictly as a facilitator in his endeavour to help the political parties to come to a reasonable settlement and offer suggestions for their consideration. To raise any controversy on this question would be to expose the hollowness of the propositions made by any political party who does it. This was confirmed the other day by the Commonwealth Secretary General Chief Emeka himself, when he said that his envoy had not been partisan in mediating an end to Bangladesh's political crisis and further observed that he might go there personally to revive the mission (page 1, cols 2 and 3, The Daily Star, November 25, 1994). Unfortunately, a controversy has already been raised. The sooner it dies, the better.

I hope, the political parties themselves will revive their dialogue and come to a national consensus on this vital matter of taking care of a fair elections during the interim period following the dissolution of the fifth parliament on the expiry of its term. Any talk of taking the matter to the street, and go through a traumatic period of non-stop hartals, aborodh, etc. will lead the country to anarchy and lawlessness. I shudder to think of the consequence if the threatened en masse resignation of the Members of Parliament belonging to Opposition parties ever takes place. How will they resolve the issue except through a frustrating agitational politics—which is, of course, nobody's desire?

Sir Ninian Episode and its Aftermath

by T Hussain

elections in the interim period.

The political advisor of the Leader of the Opposition, Mr SAMS Kibria was interviewed by The Daily Star on November 22, soon after the exit of Sir Ninian. A portion of his observations is reproduced below:

The Opposition have always asked for a government, which would not be headed by any political party, *certainly not the BNP*."

The italicised portion clearly indicate that the Awami League is allergic to anything associated with BNP. BNP is the ruling party and it was voted to power by the people. It has every right to be a participant in any interim governmental system in overseeing the general elections. The interim arrangement proposed by the BNP appears to be very reasonable, when it includes

he deviated from his earmarked role. It is well known that Sir Ninian is not new to this kind of role, he has to his record brilliant success stories in other parts of the world. In this context, to brand him as "partisan" was more than one could imagine. More unfortunate was that the Opposition leader's political advisor, a former, diplomat-turned politician, did not see reason in what Sir Ninian actually proved beyond doubt.

Our aim or objective is clear. We want to ensure that future elections must be held under conditions designed to achieve the end. There is nothing sacrosanct about the phrase "caretaker government". Any other means or formula to achieve the objective should also be welcome to all. Nor has the "caretaker government" issue ever been mandated by the people. But our leaders could not come to an agreement on how to achieve the desired end.

At this point, the Commonwealth Secretary-General appeared on the scene and, as agreed between the ruling party and the Opposition, sent his envoy Sir Ninian Stephen, a jurist-cum-administrator of great eminence, to facilitate the talks between the government and opposition parties. Sir Ninian showed commendable patience and fortitude in carrying through his mission, but did not despair, when, after a prolonged stay of 35 days along with his aides in Dhaka, left Bangladesh, failing to accomplish his assigned task. This was not, of course, a matter of creditable record for our country. In his parting statement, he revealed that at some stage of the talks, he made some suggestions of his own for consideration of the parties to facilitate their dialogue. This was done not in a spirit of arbitration, but to facilitate the success of the dialogue. But success finally evaded the participants in the talks. It was quite right for him to inform the people of Bangladesh that one of the parties was ready to respond to his suggestion favourably, which the other side did not. The people had the right to know the end result of his efforts, and he was true to his conscience.

This enraged the Leader of the Opposition and she did not hesitate to insinuate that Sir Ninian did not speak the whole truth and further that

both the government and the opposition parties in a joint participatory body like the multi-party cabinet to look after the elections process.

The Opposition's original proposal was to form a caretaker government without the main political party—the BNP—participating in it. It was obvious that such a partisan "caretaker government" was designed deliberately to block a fair and free election. Anyone calling it a neutral "caretaker government" could be accused of propounding a most unjust and one-sided formula. This major flaw in the Awami League's "caretaker government" plan was apparently unacceptable.

When this palpably wrong formula was rectified during the process of dialogue, it was named as a modified version of the opposition proposal and Mr Kibria called it as a "concession" offered to the ruling party. It is for the judgement of any reasonable citizen of Bangladesh, if it could be called a "concession" at all. Then, according to Mr Kibria, "the Opposition revised its original blue-print for a caretaker government formula, outlining the resignation of the government in power 75 days before the election, (c) provision for selecting the caretaker Prime Minister by joint recommendation mandatory, and (d) agreeing to a new cabinet proposal to further

strengthen the Election Commission.

Even a cursory look at the above points will clearly show that these are no concessions at all.

To rectify an initially unfair and unjust provision to exclude the majority party in the parliament from participation in the proposed "caretaker government" is no "concession" from any point of view. Secondly, when the Constitution just provides for holding general elections within 90 days of the dissolution of parliament, and does not speak of mandatory resignation of the Prime Minister and his cabinet in power, the opposition suggestion for the entire cabinet to resign 75 days before election and be replaced by a new cabinet without participation of the head of the ruling party is ipso facto unacceptable to the ruling party as a new restrictive provision. The question as to whether the sitting cabinet would resign 90 days or 75 days before the elections is immaterial.

Furthermore, provision for selection of the "caretaker" Prime Minister on joint recommendation of the two leaders is *prima facie* impractical. Where is the guarantee that the two leaders will find it possible to agree to name a common interim Prime Minister? If they don't, a stalemate is inevitable. Mr Kibria thinks

Prime Minister in the proposed "caretaker government", the ten cabinet ministers to be nominated by the two leaders in equal proportions will be of two distinct characters. The nominees are most likely to be sympathetic to the party nominating them, even not being affiliated to any party or not seeking election themselves.

This is a syndrome (very often noticed in the society), which will not be conducive to the harmonious working of the cabinet and would lead to a continuous deadlock, because they will be full-fledged ministers in charge of different portfolios. Such a working deadlock is not at all likely in a cabinet with Ministers without any ministerial portfolio. Their only role is supposed to watch that appropriate conditions are maintained at all stages of the election process to ensure a free and fair election to be conducted by a fully strengthened Election Commission.

Coming again to the question of concessions, BNP claims to have offered many concessions to prove their sincerity in coming to an agreed formula, by which the main objective of ensuring a free and fair election can be achieved. This claim has been supported in an excellent and well-balanced article published in The Daily Star of November 20, 1994, written by Yasmeen Murshed, Director of an NGO. I quote here a few lines from the article: "I have always believed that democracy must be viewed as an infant—it needs to be nurtured as carefully as any human child. It goes through the bangs of childhood and adolescence with all the attendant traumas and travails until it brings about maturity, responsibility and accountability among people and their elected representatives". I entirely agree with this view and firmly believe that our newly earned democracy must be allowed to function normally, without any extra support or prop foreign to true democratic culture and allowed to grow by the process of trial and error, otherwise, once this extra support is removed, the whole edifice will

fall.

No to hartals

Sir I would request to the press not to publish any news item regarding hartals. Hartals cause manifold miseries to the common people. In the name of *janagan* (common people) the opposition parties are really negating the people's will.

I hope that media in this regard would play a more pro-people role for the greater interest of saving the common people from the wrath of hartals.

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an independent state. The economic sanctions has crippled the economy of the Iraq. The general people are suffering. We should not cause any suffering to the general public. Because it is the general public of Iraq who forced the Iraqi government to invade Kuwait. The general public are innocent. The infants and the old people, and women should be shown humanitarian considerations. They should not be trapped within the net of the sanctions.

The world leadership has by now solved many big problems. I think the lifting of sanctions against Iraq should also be considered.

Iraqi government and should consider lifting of all sanctions against her. The Security Council may also send a team of neutral observers to verify whether