Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali Dhaka, Friday, April 7, 1995

Aid Crunch

and Our Option Some recent statements and observations of Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman have alerted us to the need for mobilising our own resources for development purposes instead of going after the mirage of foreign aid whose prospects look markedly diminished now. However, the decline in the foreign assistance climate, which is making the donor agencies drastically reduce the quantity and shall we say, quality as well - of their assistance, has not come as a bolt from the blue. There were early warning of the inevitable, and we seem to have partly paid heed to these. Otherwise, the contribution of local currency to the ADP would not have surpassed all the previous levels by now. Thus we are not quite caught unprepared by the

latest slide-down in the aid climate. Basically, therefore, we are in the right groove to meet the eventuality of a reduced foreign aid component to the next annual development programme. This does not mean, however, that it. would be a smooth sailing for us to square up with the target of internal resource mobilisation for next year, which the Finance Minister has set at 42 to 43 per cent of the total ADP size. We welcome the Minister's call for self-reliance which. apart from its positive advantages over critical dependency over others saves us the energy sapping, and sometimes humiliating, controversy on stoppage of funding to one sector or another. Yet we would like to know how does the Finance Minister propose to get that much money internally, for the next ADP. Any high taxation in the next budget or the raising of utility rates by ad hoc orders, would have to be ruled out because of their implications of unpopularity for the government.

A buoyant stock market can be of help in mopping up savings which are eluding the grip of banks that offer unattractive interests on deposits these days. But the capital formation would be limited to the size of the issues at the stock market, the bourse to be precise.

Without taking a long shot at the future, we are suggesting two steps that can be taken in the short run to generate savings leading to a muchenlarged local investment. First of all, let's at least protect the purchasing power of the people, if we cannot improve it outright, so that they are enabled to plan savings, and perhaps end up making some. For this to happen, we need an effective price control mechanism. Secondly, some of the earned or unearned money that is being lavishly spent in the political arena should get invested in quick-yielding productive projects through the establishment of accountability as party-and election-related expenses.

Restoring Navigability

The country's rivers are under threat. The threat comes from so many sides; but of more immediate concern is siltation that is increasingly clogging the water arteries, hampering navigation. In a riverine country like Bangladesh, this loss of navigability has a crippling effect on its economy. Quoting a Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) source, a report says that the length of classified navigable river routes has shrunk from 8,433 kilometres in 1984 to 5,984 km in 1994. But this estimate is further upset by an abnormal reduction of the waterways in the summer. Only 3,800km of the route is navigable at this time.

Islets and shoals have increasingly been dotting the river routes throughout the country, putting at risk vessels carrying both passengers and goods, and threatening to reduce the viability of a widely used natural transportation system of

Although the maintenance of our major waterways system is quite challenging, it is 'less capital-intensive than the construction and maintenance of land transport modes'. If this contention is true, there is no justification to neglect the routine maintenance work like dredging the shallow river beds along the routes. The water transport system has traditionally accounted for the major share of carrying the country's passengers and goods. If lower investment there can ensure transportation of more people and freight than through the other modes, why should we not take the fullest advantage of the water transport system?

The fall in the water flows of our river system is certainly the major cause for siltation so that the issue of consequent lack of navigability cannot be seen in isolation from the man-made interferences at the upper reaches with the historical flows downstream. At the same time with the denudation of forests along the mountainous range in the north and down below as well has made the problems worse. This problem can be taken care of through massive tree plantation, the other benefit of which will be in the lost ecological balance. Renowned water experts say that co-riparian countries in the region can benefit immensely in terms of agricultural production, hydel power and navigability through a cooperative management of their common water resources:

Spousal Murder

Of the 94 women murdered in the country in the past three months, 38 met their lives' end at the hands of their husbands. But in the murder of 313 men reported for the same period none of their spouses was involved. Are men more murderous than women? It is the more domineering partner who is likely to commit the crime. Dependent and mostly self-effacing, women mostly keep from homicides.

However, who kills whom in such relations is not as important as the act of killing itself. Because involved in this most intimate of relations is a set of conditions. Definitely there are cases where no love is lost between the spouses and yet the worst happens on the heat of the moment. Then there are calculative murders committed in cool brain. Both greed and hatred may be the compelling motive behind such killings.

The fact that most of these spousal killings take place at the lower stratum of society is an indication of a mismatch between two people. The man who marries without the ability to raise a family and the father who gave her daughter in marriage to that person are not helping society to advance in the most rudimentary sense.

In the ultimate analysis, this is a failure of the society as a whole. Economic solvency, education and cultural mooring complemented by a modern approach to marriage can eliminate many of the causes that sour relationship between spouses, leading to murders. Neither Othelloean, nor Sipsonian, theirs are just an attempt to get rid of a human burden.

all depends on how you Travails of Sri Lankan President look at it. The four-day visit by Sri Lanka Presi-

> Even if New Delhi wishes to help Colombo, as was clear at the discussions with Chandrika, it does not want to go all the way. There is no question of India sending its forces, although Colombo had again made the request before Chandrika came to power. Even the record of the IPKF is not worth

India-bashing. New Delhi effusive in response went out of the way to strike meaningful economic and cultural ties. Both Prime Minister Narasimha Rao and the Sri Lankan President hit it off well. He will be to Chandrika, what President Johnson was to Indira Gandhi after her first visit to the US.

But if the visit has to be viewed from the point of gains. on the LTTE front, crucial for Colombo, it was a failure. Firstly, New Delhi has no leeway left with the Tigers. Their mauling of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) and involvement in the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi have left a trail of bitterness. The LTTE has tried to make up through the World Federation of Tamils, its international outfit. The Federation has met several Indian diplomats abroad to clear what it believes is "a misunderstanding between the LTTE and the Government of India." India has firmly rejected such over-

dent Chandrika Bandaranaike

Kumaratunga to Delhi was a

success if it was meant to

revive the equation that the

two countries once had. Sri

Lanka is the only neighbouring

country where there is no

Secondly, even if New Delhi wishes to help Colombo, as was clear at the discussions with Chandrika, it does not want to go all the way. There is no question of India sending its forces, although Colombo had again made the request before Chandrika came to power. Even the record of the IPKF is not worth recalling. Named as 'Operation Eagle', it was the most bizarre, ill-thought and overbearing combat the Indian forces ever fought. It was a dis-

A study by P R Chari. a

NE does not have to

son(s) behind the present

political stalemate. If it needs

both hands to clap, then in our

case also both the parties i.e.

the ruling BNP and the

combined parliamentary op-

position should be held re-

sponsible and blamed, though

not equally, for the present

crisis. Undoubtedly the gov-

ernment side is far more re-

sponsible, because it has be-

haved in a most erratic and

unreasonable and intered

unwanted words " tich could

be easily avoided and dubbed

the parliamentary opposition.

without whom the parliament

'disruptionists,' thereby adding

fuel to the fire. The govern-

ment, knowingly or unknow

ingly, has been identifying a

sensible demand for political

reform as an unconstitutional

demand, suffering perhaps

from the phobia of losing

power instantly, as it thinks, if

it concedes to the opposition's

demand and accepts the con-

cept of neutral, interim, care-

may at once fall!

taker government the heavens

tion also does not lag far be-

hind in this queer race. It is

due to the rigid attitude of the

opposition, clamouring for a

care-taker government without

perhaps a clear conception of

what they actually want, that

the stalemate continues. We

may therefore safely put the

ratio of guilt at 70/30 for the

time being. Further — misun-

derstanding, mutual distrust,

egocentric attitudes have all

immensely contributed in dif-

ferent forms at different times

to complicate the situation.

Obviously the way out is to sin-

cerely, effectively and immedi-

ately resume the political dia-

logue from where it was aban-

doned, on the basis of the

commitment of the Prime

Minister made in her speech

at Munshigonj on 29 Decem-

ber 1994, and the invitation

extended to talk directly to

Sheikh Hasina. Everything

should be done with an open

and clear heart. No brokers

and no digging into the past

would help now. And the

summit should be at the high-

est level — one to one affair —

and face to face. Other good

things will follow automatically.

to be that if all goes well, then

when should the elections be

held. As we all know, general

elections in our country are

The next headache seems

Unfortunately, the opposi-

unthinkable. as

think for hours toge-

ther to find out the rea-

scholar, describes how a peace keeping force became a peace imposing force, which became a party in the ethnic conflict between the Sri Lankan government and a Tamil militant group." People in Sri Lanka recall with great regret that there was no difference between the Indian and Sri Lankan armies when it

came to civilians. As a veteran journalist M R Narayan Swamy, has written in his book. Tigers of Lanka, "Indian assertions that civilian casualties were minimal were quite dubious. Indian officers blamed the LTTE, saying the rebels used civilians as buffer and their houses to attack the IPKF. The charge had substance but hardly justified the large-scale civilian losses of life and property nor did it afford any consolation to those who suffered for no fault of theirs..."

New Delhi will not repeat the mistake of getting involved. Yet, how does it help Chandrika fight the LTTE if hostilities break out again? At present the three-month-old ceasefire is holding firm. But with the deadlock at the conference table, it is only a question of time when the guns will begin booming again. She was quite frank in admitting that her efforts to effect a settlement or even conduct negotiations with the LTTE have come a cropper.

The assessment she has reportedly shared with New Delhi is that the Tigers are using the silencing of guns for

re-equipping themselves for the next round of hostilities. She may prove right because the pause to take breath is part of guerilla tactics. The manner in which the LTTE has conducted the warfare confirms the suspicion that it has sought peace to recover whenever it has lost heavily.

What the two sides probably do not realise that is the next fround will be a war to the finish. Chandrikà is already under pressure from the armed forces. She may not be able to resist it if and when negotiainferred that she does not mean business because the delegation is of no consequence.

Also, the Tigers' demand to wind up the army camp in Pooneryn has not been met Colombo announced the pullback by 500 metres on February 25. But this is not true. Deputy defence minister Anuruddha Ratwatte has said in a press interview that there was no question of winding up the circle Jaffna and carry out a fi-

Pooneryn camp. The LTTE fears the camp is meant to en-

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

BETWEEN THE LINES

tions break down again. Even the people, who are preponderantly on her side, may turn against her if she tries to hold back the armed forces at that

Therefore, the peace efforts must be exploited even to the point of exasperation. True, she has expressed her frustration because the LTTE is setting new conditions. But the question she has to ask herself is whether she is going over a mere exercise or whether she is willing to concede something substantial for arriving at a settlement. The delegation she has appointed for talks does not have any tall person in it. The LTTE, after some meetings, seem to have

nal offensive when the gov ernment at Colombo decides to resume the war. That is the reason why the LTTE is reluctant on opening the Elephant

Chandrika's priority should have been to make the LTTE good a statement by its idealogue, Anton Balasingham. that it was willing to settle for less than a separate state. Her strategy to involve straightaway a foreign intermediary. Francois Michel, a retired French diplomat, was flawed. It meant lack of trust. That is the reason why W Prabhakaran, the LTTE chief, said that foreign mediation should be considered only if the talks failed.

It is New Delhi that will

have to bear the brunt. A war to the finish in Jaffna and other areas in the north will mean great hardships for the Tamils. Thousands of them will re-seek shelter in Tamil Nadu. The nascent sympathy in the state may spread. And there is a danger of India's involvement due to domestic political considerations.

We should be tugged by our conscience because we are the ones who trained, armed and sheltered the LTTE cadre. Few Indians were aware of the kind of military muscle India was providing to Tamil groups to take on the government of a neighbouring country. Most Indian commentators were taken in by New Delhi's repeated assertions that it was not involved in the arming and training of the Tamils.

when Tamil groups with Indian patronage massacred innocent Tamils - although the killings of innocent Tamils by Sri Lankan security forces was always denounced loudly. It would be pertinent for Indians today to look back and see how the average Sri Lankan must have felt over the brazen patronage extended to people dubbed "terrorists" by Colombo. Tamil groups based in Tamil Nadu openly claimed credit for attacks on government and military targets in Sri Lanka, without inviting any criticism from the Indian government.

No one asked questions

Therefore, it is all the more reason that New Delhi should help Sri Lanka because we are

the ones who have made the mess of that country. That Chandrika has not talked about old wounds speaks well of her. New Delhi should find out if it can exert some political pressure through leaders in Tamil Nadu on the LTTE. Many in Colombo believe the such a course is possible.

Once General D S Attygalle, who was associated with talks with the Tamil militants in the 1980s, said that DMK chief M Karunanidhi could solve the problem in no time. He also said that he could reach nowhere because the younger lot among the militants was not under the control of their leaders, who even when they agreed to something, found it difficult to implement. Probably, that is the reason of Chandrika's exasperation with the LTTE leaders, who are making newer demands every day.

Even at the risk of denial, want to state that New Delhi did discuss the extradition of Prabhakaran, who is wanted in connection with the inquiry into Rajiv Gandhi's assassination. Sri Lanka cannot be expected to say anything when it was in the midst of negotiations with the LTTE. I recall when I once posed the question of Prabhakaran's extradition to a senior minister in Colombo, his answer was: "Why doesn't India find out where he is and arrest him?" That may well be Chandrika's reply.

I do not think New Delhi will ever repeat the mistake of military assistance to Sri Lanka. But I suspect that India may be sucked into the situation once hostilities resume between Colombo and the LTTE. Thousands of Tamilians will suffer physically in Sri Lanka and emotionally in Tamil Nadu. Will Narasimha Rao sit idle if the issue catches attention in the 1996 parliamentary elections?

perts should wake up and sug-

gest something sensible. Emo-

tions would not help us really.

Before I conclude let me

OVERCOMING THE POLITICAL IMPASSE

A One-to-One Dialogue may Pave the Way by A K Faezul Huq

almost invariably an important, all embracing event in which people enthusiastically participate. Although the voter turnout percentage usually ranges between 40 per cent and 60 per cent, campaign participation is spontaneous and is in larger numbers. Naturally the election timing has a lot to do. if it is viewed from these an-

In my opinion, the BNP deserved initially to be allowed to complete its full term. When they messed up everything, they also forfeited their right to stay in power till February 1996. On the other hand, the parliamentary opposition agitating on the streets, is in no mood to wait and listen. A balance therefore has to be struck, taking into consideration the SSC/HSC examinations and the rainy season when no campaign whatsoever is virtually possible in the rural areas of Bangladesh. Sometimes floods follow the rains and it takes quite sometime may be even the whole of August to dry up.

Therefore I think September 1995 - any time between 07 and 20th September — will be the best time. We must also realise that the Election Commission, in order to hold a credible, free and fair election, needs a reasonable time to set everything in proper motion. The BNP government should definitely resign by the 15th of July 1995 and hand over power to a neutral, caretaker government. The proposed 30 days ahead resignation theory is unacceptable, because, to be very frank, it would serve no useful purpose. To resign one day ahead or thirty days ahead almost amounts to the same.

Under the present conditions, none can ensure an independent Election Commission howsoever sincere he or she may be, because the large "umbrella" of political government leaves no scope for the government officials engaged by the Election Commission to assist it, to act independently. The recently passed EC bill is definitely a significant step forward, but a lot more remains to be done in the near future so that the EC can really function neutrally and independently, without "fear or

borrow a constitutional phrase.

There is also a demand and talk for having a code of conduct. In fact the Code of Conduct which we are talking of here signifies the need to keep the politicians, political parties and those closely connected with that within a reasonable 'track'. Personally I can't recall an instance of a civilised, democratic country which has to be bound by strict codes and special regulations to sustain democracy. In most of the advanced countries, where democracy has deep roots, the traditions, custom, convention and people's vigilance automatically do the job: mainly because of a high rate of literacy. And it is here that we are beaten, with almost 75 per cent people unable to make head or tail of the right person whom they may like to choose. However in our case it is again a very good idea to have a code of conduct for overall guidance, but what needs to be constantly ensured is that we do not, at any time, deviate from it: and whosoever tries to do so or attempts to do so should be taken to task by the

Election Commission itself. And once we have a code of conduct, people tend to think of ID cards and computerisation of the voters' list. Frankly speaking, both are novel ideas, but it remains to be seen how productive it proves itself to be and what is the end result, because a colossal amount of money will be needed to have the ID cards and computerization of voters' name. One good thing however which will come out from this exercise is that the ID cards can be used for other identification purposes also and may prove to be

a useful thing ultimately. *Credible elections are certainly possible without ID cards and computer listing, if the Election Commission can function with its full force and independently. Have we forgotten 1991 so soon? And lest we forget, that introduction of ID cards will definitely delay elections by at least one year, which is not at all a good idea. For the present, we may as well do without them. But the biggest headache connected with election which still re-

mains is how to curtail expenditure of black money or illegal

Black money or white money, both are equally harmful for any fair election to be held. Individuals may use black money and the government ministers may use the white money, doling out millions of takas as grants and donations for schools, colleges, mosques etc. It is all the same. Therefore a strict law should be enacted, so that money may not remain the sole deciding factor in any election. There is no sense in having colour posters worth millions of takas, arches worth another few million during elections, and a fleet of speed boats, Pajeros and other expensive transports and lavish expenditures to woo the voters. Since no one has been convicted in this country till today for spending millions during elections, the offenders have gained strength from day to day. Somewhere a beginning has to be made to curtail this nuisance of spending. A way out is certainly possible.

Finally, if everything goes on smoothly, the question remains as to the form a caretaker government, which has also been accepted by the BNP government. An Advisory Council headed by the President, consisting of say ten senior bureaucrats, the Attorney General, a retired Judge of the Supreme Court (acceptable to all) and the Chief Election Commissioner, may oversee the general election smoothly without having to run with search lights for finding out

neutral persons. Since we do not have a pool consisting of such neutral competent persons, why should we waste time discussing a subject about which we can do very little. I am confident, that the senior bureaucrats will serve the purpose quite well for 90 days, efficiently and to everybody's satisfaction. Taking sides does not arise, because the incoming political government will immediately take to task any person who acts in a partisan manner and takes sides during election, how much powerful he/she may be.

The main problem remains.

however, to find out a way to empower the Honble President to form the Council for 90 days and to exercise the executive powers thereafter. That cannot be done without a constitutional amendment, and of course without the opposition in the parliament. It will do us more harm if we contemplate to do all those things which are not to be found in the constitution, however holy and sincere our intentions may be, and then seek postfacto approval. At least I am against it. And this is exactly where we shall get stuck up if the opposition refuses to go back to the

House, burying its 'ego'. Our great constitutional exreiterate that there ought to be a total understanding between the opposing groups, not some sort of understanding. A face to face talk and a give and take attitude will definitely reduce the gap and pave the way for understanding. And I would say that understanding is possible even now if the 'hawks' on both sides are identified and relegated to the back seats. Understanding is possible between sensible persons, not between irresponsible and obstinates. The next step should be, as I said earlier, a one-to-one dialogue.

A Jorner MP and Minister the retiter is the President of Citizen's Vigilance Council

Bureaucratic Mystique in South Asia) A K M Jalaluddin

ACR-III

Suffocating Sophistication

UREAUCRATIC langu age, or officialese, is generally dull and colourless. Usually, the penpictures drawn by the reporting officer would follow the tradition of inelegant and times, pedestrian, expressions.

And 'officialese' is, explain Fowler, "a pejorative term for a style of writing marked by peculiarities supposed to be characteristic of officials." They find, "Vagueness is safer than precision", and have feeling "that plain words sort ill with the dignity of office.

But surely there were exceptions. Many an officer could rise above the banalities officialese'. Syed Quasim Rizavi (CSP, 1950) Commissioner. Multan Division (1969-71) commented about one of his SDOs: "Breaks too many eggs for a single omelette".

M Azfar, an ICS Officer of 1933 vintage was the Chief Secretary of East Pakistan (1958-60). He wrote about one of his immediate sub-ordinates, i.e., an Additional Chief Secretary

"Urbane, sophisticated and soft-spoken. Extremely polite. I am afraid he is one of the most liked and least effective officers in the Secretariat".

Born in 1906 Geoffrey Burgess, M A (Cantab) O B E was an ICS Officer of 1928 intake belonging to the Central Provinces and Berar cadre. After independence, the Pakistan government hired his services on a contract to head the newly established Civil Service Academy, It was housed in the palatial mansion of the British Resident to the PEPSU (Patiala and East Punjab States Union) on the Upper Mall, Lahore. As the Direction of the Academy, he guided its training programme from 1951 till the middle of 1959.

Burgess was a strict disci plinarian, but had no opportunity to understand and appreciate the life-process of the people of East Bengal. One could discern racist prejudices of a king in his pen-pictures. Two samples

"he is another of the so-called self-made men from our

Eastern Wing".

pretty average. But a con-

siderable improvement

upon his cousin who preceded him last year from the Eastern Wing"

Kazi Fazlur Rahman (CSP 1956) was such an ideal probation or and so impeccable in his manners at the Academy that even Burgess had to con-

"Kazi Fazlur Rahman belongs to the rare breed of Youth who can sacrifice every thing for their idealism".

ASHK Sadique (CSP, 1956) had his own way of drawing the pen-pictures. He wrote as Deputy Commissioner, Comilla (1966-67) about one of his SDO's: "Corrupt to the marrows of his bones".

Ali Asgar (an ICS of 1938 batch) was a conservative person by instinct. As the Chief Secretary of East Pakistan (1963-69), he generally downgraded others, assessments by one step. But in the case of Salahuddin Ahmed (CSP 1956), Asgar did the unthinkable. Salauddin Ahmed was so able and competent that even Asgar had to rate him A-1 in every column of the ACR (for

Sved Fida Hassan (ICS 1933) was the Additional Chief Secretary of West-Pakistan. In 1958, Sultanuzzaman Khan (CSP, '55) was an under-secretary in the Services and General Administration Department. His comments on the young officers were: "I have not seen much of his work. But whatever I have seen shows the stamps of a hard-working and competent officer".

There are reports and reports; pen-pictures and pen pictures A plenty of them in the official archives of South Asia, full of well-known cliches and officialese. But there were people who could write not only brilliantly, but perhaps can also make up for the officialese of his other colleagues.

A pen-picture was like this "ABC is a person of vast erudition and suffocating sophistication".

The question arises: Is it a complimentary assessment? Compliment, it surely was; but one has to decide whether it was left handed or right handed. The reader may form his own judgment

Fertilizer crisis

Sir, It was March 24 I fixed my eyes on a picture printed on the front page of "The Daily Star". Tara Mia, a farmer frantically looking forward grasping a paddy plant. May be, he was looking for some miracle to happen. May be Tara Mia was also mutely asking for fertilizer - for his crop. It's the dream and the only need of many a farmer in the country. An ominous caution disturbed my mind as I was taking my meal at that time. It was noon and perhaps, like me, many people were taking their meals then. But if these Tara Mia's hundreds of thousands of them cannot be provided with their basic input, fertilizer, can we able to have

our in the long run? Perhaps the rich would withstand; for they have means. But what would be the condition of the poor? would they be able to buy rice, say at Tk 25-30 a kg?

favour, affection or ill will"; to

As now farmers are sacrificing their lives for fertilizer, fighting the police, how desperate they are can simply be guessed. But fertilizer scarcity is a sudden crisis, may be created by some dishonest businessmen. Proper investigation should be made by the government and criminals must be punished and above all remove the disparity in price. Farmers have to buy fertilizer at Tk 500 a bag in the black market, whereas the government-fixed

Below the picture of Tara Mia, the caption was 'Irony of fate". Is it really an irony, or somebody else's creation? Surely so. And before this fertilizer crisis hits up a real rice crisis, the government must

price is roughly Tk 230!

do something to arrest the trend — profit motive. Emdadur Rahman Rumon

Department of English

Chittagong University

Taslima in exile Sir, I observed the concluding part of BBC Television's Late Night Show broadcast on Taslima Nasreen on 12th March 1995. This prompted me to write this letter to

ventilate my feelings. The lady doctor Taslima took up the pen and started writing about the dismal plight of the women community in Bangladesh. Who can deny that our women live in conditions

of abject bondage? A particular professional group who prosper at the cost of the society's backwardness, keep women in shackles. In

the name of religious sanctions, some so-called clergies had created a society here where women were shut out from social, economic and educational freedom. She wrote about the shameless injustices perpetrated on women, perverse atrocities committed on them. She taunted and at tacked such self-styled custodians of religion who give a damn for women's rights. Maybe Taslima was indiscreet or too brave for a backward society like ours. But, honestly, did she deserve all that she Will the government give

the matter a second thought? M F Islam Ahmadbagh, Dhaka