

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.

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.

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.

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 much-enlarged 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.

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.

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 the country.

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.

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.

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.

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.

It depends on how you look at it. The four-day visit by Sri Lanka President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga to Delhi was a success if it was meant to revive the equation that the two countries once had.

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.

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.

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.

A study by P R Charf, a

Travails of Sri Lankan President

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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.

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."

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.

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 guerrilla tactics.

What the two sides probably do not realise that is the next round will be a war to the finish. Chandrika is already under pressure from the armed forces. She may not be able to resist it if and when negotia-

inferred 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 pull-back 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 Pooneryn camp.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

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 time.

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.

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

Chandrika's priority should have been to make the LTTE good a statement by its ideologue, 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.

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.

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.

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.

Under the present conditions, none can ensure an independent Election Commission however 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.

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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.

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 let us forget, that introduction of ID cards will definitely delay elections by at least one year, which is not at all a good idea.

mains is how to curtail expenditure of black money or illegal wealth.

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.

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,

ONE does not have to think for hours together to find out the reason(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 opposition should be held responsible and blamed, though not equally, for the present crisis.

Undoubtedly the government side is far more responsible, because it has behaved in a most erratic and unreasonable manner, uttered unwanted words which could be easily avoided and dubbed the parliamentary opposition, without whom the parliament is unthinkable, as 'disruptionists', thereby adding fuel to the fire. The government, knowingly or unknowingly, 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 concept of neutral, interim, caretaker government the heavens may at once fall!

Unfortunately, the opposition also does not lag far behind in this queer race. It is due to the rigid attitude of the opposition, clamouring for a caretaker 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 — misunderstanding, mutual distrust, egocentric attitudes have all differently contributed in different forms at different times to complicate the situation. Obviously the way out is to sincerely, effectively and immediately resume the political dialogue from where it was abandoned, on the basis of the commitment of the Prime Minister made in her speech at Munshigonj on 29 December 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 highest level — one to one affair — and face to face. Other good things will follow automatically.

The next headache seems 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 ones who have 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.

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.

No one asked questions 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.

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

Even at the risk of denial, I 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?

parts should wake up and suggest something sensible. Emotions would not help us really. Before I conclude let me reiterate 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.

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Bureaucratic Mystique in South Asia

A K M Jalaluddin

ACR-III

Suffocating Sophistication

BUREAUCRATIC language or officialese, is generally dull and colourless. Usually, the pen-pictures drawn by the reporting officer would follow the tradition of inelegant and at 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 of officialese. Syed Quasim Rizvi (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 subordinates, 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 Director of the Academy, he guided its training programme from 1951 till the middle of 1959.

Burgess was a strict disciplinarian, 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 considerable improvement

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

Kazi Fazlur Rahman (CSP, 1956) was such an ideal reporting officer and so impeccable in his manners at the Academy that even Burgess had to concede:

"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 SDOs: "Corrupt to the marrow 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. Salahuddin Ahmed was so able and competent that even Asgar had to rate him A-1 in every column of the ACR (for 1968)

Syed 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 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.

To the Editor...

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?

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 price is roughly Tk 230!

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

do something to arrest the trend — profit motive.

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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 clerics 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 attacked 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 got?

Will the government give the matter a second thought?

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