

Revenue Earning

When the upping of the government exchequer contribution to the revised ADP at 43 per cent was just about nudging us into wondering how this is going to be made possible, we have a piece of good news to hitch our hopes to. Revenue earning from imports during the first eight months of the current fiscal exceeded the target by more than Tk 400 crore to reach a total of Tk 6365 crore. At this rate, we will have overshot the target by Tk 600 crore at the year-end.

An increase in the volume of imports by 32.40 per cent from the previous level has yielded this higher revenue. Credit for this goes both to the importing businessmen or entrepreneurs and the collectors of import duties. If the imports have been production-oriented well and good; if not, then we have a cause for worry at the continuation of a consumerist trend which is glimpsed through the fact that under the supplementary head of duty applicable to luxury goods the collection soared beyond the target by 147 per cent.

We do see the combined value of an increased revenue earning and the national savings upto 15 per cent of the GDP which reflect a greater local investment. Together we have a scenario where mobilisation of local resources can be easier in the future.

All these are on the plus side. In building our hopes around them we better not fail to remember the uphill task we had faced earlier to meet the shortfall of Tk 900 crore by selling bonds and adopting extra-budgetary measures. A mid-term pay-raise had created that deficit. The unfolding perspective doesn't seem to be shaping any better. One cannot discount subsidy payments for food and fertiliser. Some emergency food imports may be unavoidable. In an election year demands for pay hikes may surge, even though the retrenchment of surplus labour with all the severance benefits paid to them could be delayed.

With these variables in sight, the government would be well-advised to rationalise the public expenditure pattern: both under the revenue and development heads. This, we believe, is well within its power to do. There has been some lowering down of revenue expenditure. But need to put a lid firmly on corruption across the board. The agencies and ministries handling project moneys have to be accountably efficient to meet a larger proportion of the implementation target in the coming months than the 49 per cent they have recorded during the last seven months.

For a Dignified Seat

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia feels very strongly for Bangladesh to have a dignified position in the international sporting arena. She said so when opening the National Sports Conference on Sunday. This is a recognition of the none-too-happy position Bangladesh now occupies on the world sport map. We thank the PM for that.

Khaleda Zia has called for mobilising a sport movement in our society to materialise that state of dignity. If a dignified seat is what we are after — which is quite an objective — the government must have a thorough-bred plan to go about this serious business in right earnest.

What genres we want to make a go for? Games? Team games? Field athletics? Track? Swim items? There has been much more than a movement in the society in the matter of football. The nation is literally mad about this game. What good has been done to footballs standard? The numerous federations that govern the whole range of this nation's sporting activities are very pronouncedly government-controlled set-ups unlike the situation in many other democratic countries. The federations, specially the football one, have been letting the nation down for a long long time without being accountable to anyone. Not even the government. Making the federations accountable and democratic and charging them with the responsibility of socially extending their respective sporting roles and improving the standards on pain of losing fund support would go some way — some basic and important way to bring a turn-around in the situation. But that would only be the initial steps towards attaining world recognition. The federations should be made to stand or fall on this test of producing world level performers. Let the federations work their way towards passing this test.

Why Delay Dredging?

By the dictates of her unique topography Bangladesh has always had a very high stake in river-training. Three mighty rivers cascading down from the mountain ranges with record alluvial contents flow through this exiguous delta with all their networks of branches being discharging into the sea. River-beds go up into sand bars and shoals in the dry season choking up the channels after the flooding season in a preceding catastrophic manifestation had eroded the river-banks. Courses of the rivers have changed many times over in these parts in an alternating game of accretion and destruction.

No doubt the process has been exacerbated by man-made interferences in the upper reaches with the historical flow of the Ganges in particular. This is another cogent reason why dredging of the river-beds has become so important for Bangladesh, faced as it is today with a drastic reduction in the total navigational mileage.

Against this backdrop, we believe, the Planning Commission has woken up only belatedly to take into consideration a Tk 336-crore dredging programme for improving the navigability of our waterways. So far there has been either some apologetic dredging or none whatsoever. While dredging crafts lay anchored after some work, the local influentials fought among themselves to get the dredged-up earth removed to their plots of land to develop them. Even talk of bribery rent the air.

This state of affairs must be ended and a massive river-training programme started latest by October-November this year. There is now an added reason why this should be done. The current emphasis on multimodal transport system with containerisation can only be ignored at our peril.

Is the Third Force Shaping Up on the Indian Political Scene?

A N Dar writes from New Delhi

The general secretary of the CPM, Harkishen Singh Surjeet, said recently that a secular democratic alternative would have to be found. According to him if the secular democratic left forces did not take up the challenge, the BJP will fill the vacuum if the Congress disintegrates or even weakens further.

THE Congress is in poor shape. The BJP is in the ascendant. With this political scene, it is time to hope that the third force, made up of what used to be called the National Front-Left Front, will have a chance in 1996.

In the past, the National Front and the Left Front have wasted many opportunities, while the spirit has been willing, they have let the grass grow under their feet. At times it almost seemed that they were not conscious of the opportunities that existed for them.

The Janata Dal, despite the good showing in Bihar and Karnataka, has been riven with strife. V P Singh, because of illness or his disinclination to engage himself in active politics, has given poor leadership. But without him, the Janata Dal has found itself leaderless to the extent that it has not shown up someone who will hold the party together. Ramkrishna Hegde, after the fine showing in Karnataka, has gone back into isolation. The formation of the Samata Party has given a shock to the Janata Dal. The results in Bihar have shown that there is not much hope for the splinter group although it had attracted some of the cream of the Janata Dal leadership.

Ordinarily, the Janata Dal, controlling the two important states of Bihar and Karnataka while it lost the once stronghold of Orissa, should have now been in an upbeat mood. But it seems to be incapable of summoning up its supporters who can plan for the future. It has to find a national leader, if V.P. Singh is unable to provide himself in the role and Ramkrishna Hegde despite his ambition to work at the national scene are unable to give a new flip to the party.

It could have had many natural allies. In Andhra Pradesh N T Rama Rao's Telugu Desam party is one of them. At his swearing in he tried to rope in the AIADMK leader, Jayaprakash Narayan, when he invited her to be present at the function and she obligingly made herself available. But it put out the DMK's Karunanidhi who felt that he was being left out since he is without a state to rule. The AIADMK is in a way also being sought after by the Congress Party though no distinct overtures have been made. The Congress thinking is that the alliance with the AIADMK would be of help to it in the 1996 she would be with either of the grouping. But the Congress in disarray cannot provide much hope.

The great hope of the National Front-Left Front are the communist parties. The vague expectation that the two main communist parties will come together is not yet coming to pass, though the invitation to Indrajit Gupta, general secretary of the Communist Party of India, to attend the Congress of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) along with the delegates from other fraternal parties this month in Chandigarh was taken to mean that the CPI and the CPM could still forge unity. Indrajit Gupta is realistic. There is obviously no chance of a merger for the time being, he said after receiving the invitation. "The CPM is dead against the idea."

The general secretary of the CPM, Harkishen Singh Surjeet, said recently that a secular democratic alternative would have to be found. According to him if the secular democratic left forces did not take up the challenge, the BJP will fill the vacuum if the Congress disintegrates or even weakens further.

One cannot at this state say where will this lead the Congress. It is not in a happy shape now. Its fortunes will be decided by the unity it is able to forge within its leadership. The present state should throw open the opportunity for the third force. The prospects are good for it — if only it is able to forge a united front. But it cannot do it on its own. It has also to look for like-minded forces. The chief minister of West Bengal, Jyoti Basu, once said that the left parties would support a front of the Janata Dal, the Samajwadi party and the Telugu Desam Party against the Congress. A question that is now being asked is why in the new context should the front be against the Congress. Those who voted against the Congress in the last state assembly elections found to their consternation that they had only allowed the BJP to strengthen itself, which is not what they had wanted. A debate is also on to ask why should the National Front-Left Front be against the Congress at all times. Can it have alliances with it at places where it suits both sides? The National Front-Left Front is also reconsidering its priorities. Some of its members have started thinking that it cannot in 1996 defeat both the

ward to collecting allies and is ready to make compromises.

Congress and the BJP, which incidentally will be fighting against each other. On its own the National Front-Left Front cannot expect to win at the centre. It has to look for support, though the Janata Chief, Mr. SR Bommai, says that it could become the alternative in 1996.

The thinking is also related to the future of the expelled Congress party leader Arjun Singh. Some in the third force have also started wondering whether they can have an alliance with Arjun Singh. But they find it disconcerting that he is not cutting himself off from the Congress and is still talking in the same old Congress idiom. They are also apprehensive of Arjun Singh's reported ambition to occupy the top seat. Certainly it will not be possible for, say, V.P. Singh to vacate his position for Arjun Singh. This makes the talk of an alliance with Arjun Singh not much relevant now. But if Narasimha Rao is able to throw out Arjun Singh permanently, he might find it useful to forge an alliance with the leftist forces and natural allies. This will make for a combination of minorities and the poor. But Arjun Singh's supporters consider it foolish enough for him to give up the party that alone can be his vehicle, the Congress. A certain speculation was caused when in the early days Ramvi-

las Paswan, general secretary of the Janata Dal, was reported to have met Arjun Singh. But nothing need have come out of it.

The contradictions will not go away. Just as the communists were not able to have an alliance with Biju Patnaik's Janata Dal in Orissa while in Bihar they were able to get on merely with Laloo Prasad Yadav. Where policies are involved how can one alliance be accepted and not the other?

Surjeet has said that the "people desire a secular alternative." Even this cannot be held out to be true as the results in Maharashtra, Gujarat and to a minor extent in Karnataka have shown. The people in the first two states have gone in for a Hindu rightist formula. But Surjeet is right when he says that "we aren't strong enough to provide the alternative on our own. So, he says, we have to choose from what is available." He is realistic when he explains that "it may not be the alternative we like, but we don't have much choice." He has also said that the Congress is still the biggest party in the country "and it should not be further weakened." Does that give any idea of how the future will shape?

The third force will have to decide whether it wants to fight the BJP alone or also the Congress. On that will depend what kind of alliances will be able to form for 1996. That is has acquired a position of influence is unquestioned. But the question is what use does it make of itself. — Mandira The author is a former Resident Editor, Indian Express.

Nuclear Nexus that Thrives on Hypocrisy

Daya Kishan Thussu writes from London

Delegates from more than 170 countries are meeting in New York to review the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) conference April 17-May 12). In the 25 years since it was set up to check the growth of nuclear weapons, the treaty has more often been violated by the nuclear powers themselves by amassing weapons of mass destruction. Now, argues this Gemini News Service report, they want to strengthen it to extend their control over nuclear arms and fuel.

How the NPT has grown. The nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty was signed in 1968 and became operational in 1970. Includes a table showing the number of countries and key accessions from 1968 to 1995.

Developing country fears are not groundless: in 1993 the IAEA acknowledged receiving US satellite intelligence on North Korea's alleged nuclear weapons programme. This prompted the Agency to demand a special, precedent-setting inspection of North Korea's nuclear facilities, which Pyongyang refused. Despite Western media alarmism, North Korea did not even have one nuclear device and therefore was not threatening world peace. But the US needed a pretext to create a precedent and North Korea, a closed communist country, fitted the bill as a "rogue" nation in the shrinking list of US adversaries.

Such as India, see the NPT as discriminatory, set up to prevent them from acquiring a nuclear capability at the same time as the nuclear states were busy amassing new and more advanced nuclear weapons. Since it came into operation in 1970, most NPT violations have been by the nuclear powers, such as continuing nuclear testing banned under the treaty. The nuclear states are not subject to monitoring and are not obliged to supply information on their nuclear activities. And most of the world's stocks of plutonium and highly enriched uranium (HEU) are not subject to international supervision. Although much noise is made in the media about aspiring nuclear "threshold states," a recent study by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute says the plutonium and HEU in those states amounts "to less than a tonne of either material."

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

US First Lady's visit. Sir, It appears that the US First Lady Hillary Clinton has repudiated the old metaphor of Kipling that "East is East and West is West and never the twin shall meet".

We hope that US President Bill Clinton accompanied by Hillary Clinton would soon visit Bangladesh and the existing bond of friendship, cooperation and understanding between the two countries, of the East and the West, would go on strengthening day by day. We are confident that the Dhaka-Washington ties are destined to grow in a state of felicity for centuries to come.

Katmandu office of Bangladesh Biman was denied admission to a Medical College in Nepal. The candidate was academically qualified and was in dire need to stay with his father in Kathmandu. Considering the urgency of the problem the Bangladesh Embassy in Kathmandu made a formal request for this to the highest authority in Nepal. Expatriate Bangladeshis also made earnest request to the relevant University authorities. All requests were turned down and an Indian student was admitted instead for reasons well known.

Normally no such requests for admission are made by the Bangladesh government because Nepal is not a place where students go for higher studies. It has always been the other way round. Nepalese normally go to India for higher studies, but now finding it to be expensive, they have resorted to Bangladesh where they find higher studies relatively inexpensive and on the top of that even take advantage of the government scholarships. So by turning down the request for a single admission of a Bangladeshi, the Nepalese authority has only projected its ungratefulness to a country which had always extended its helping hands during times of need.

tax-payers money of Bangladesh, should be utilized wholly for deserving Bangladeshi students. Why should these scholarships be given to students of a foreign country which does or cannot cooperate with Bangladesh in mutual matter. All diplomatic gestures are reciprocal in nature. May I therefore request the concerned authorities to give a serious thought to this. The interest of Bangladesh should be given top priority and that should be the motto of any policy decision.

Private forestry. Sir, The government has been motivating the people to raise forests for the sake of our survival. Forest helps in maintaining ecological balance and in reducing environmental degradation caused by various environment pollutants. And people have now become very much conscious about the importance of raising forests and planting trees. But very unfortunately, the potential investors who are making investments in the forestry business sector are facing much difficulties in getting economic return from their private forests. Because the cutting and selling of trees involved a lengthy and complicated file process in which a number of

departments are associated with. Under the circumstances stated above, it is strongly felt that the authorities should make the processes easy and speedy so that the private forest owners can get their money back without any unjust delay or harassment.

Asia Cup Cricket. Sir, Cricket is not new in Bangladesh. It is rather unfortunate that we could not as yet win a test status nor achieve an international standard. Although, we have always produced good talents. It is felt that our cricketers should get proper coaching and exposure before going for international competitions. The current tour for the Asia Cup at Sharjah was not really worth it. Bangladesh cricket team have once again cut a sorry figure to the viewers all over. Imagine what embarrassment the Bangladeshi community have gone through at Sharjah. We look forward and steal some of our time to watch our boys put up a good performance or a spirited play but over and again it is the same story.

have again failed to fight back. There is win or loss, but our losses were disastrous. Our batting lacked proper application. Our batsmen seemed to be always in a hurry and go for strokes every ball they face. As if striking every ball would take them through. Some strokes were certainly well executed but that's not enough to win a reputation. We expected better results against Sri Lanka. Athar Ali looked confident and sound to start the innings. His flick to the square leg was appreciated by the commentators as well, but he was soon stupidly run out, after a half hearted push to the middle. What was the hurry? The other batsmen then fell in quick succession mostly to hurried strokes. Fielding too was not up to the mark.

Raqibul Hassan was pretty optimistic when replying to a question. He should have been frank and practical. Our cricket commentators, Afzal Khan and Mahmudur Rahman should have been among our officials, as they both would have made some sensible comments. We hope our players and officials will seriously realise the lapses and put more time to practice and improve to the worth of the remark by the ex-West Indies captain, Clive Lloyd, that "cricket is not new to Bangladesh".