

One of the most important agenda for discussion should be the relative tariff levels prevailing in both countries. The average import duty in Bangladesh is 25 per cent as compared to 50 per cent in India.

BNP's Founding Day

Born only 16 years ago, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has an impressive record, the most stunning of which was its victory in the 1991 election. Born in Cantonment and midwifed by military and other intelligence bodies, the party has done extremely well in making a place for itself in the public mind. Under its founder, President Ziaur Rahman, the party was an amalgam of deserters from right and left fringe, and some prominent 'collaborators'. With military backing and assured prospect of getting a share of the cake, many opportunists also gathered in its wings. For all this, when President Zia was assassinated, the general feeling was that the party would disintegrate. Many of its stalwarts did leave the party for greener pastures offered by the new military dictator, Ershad.

It is at this stage that Begum Zia took over the leadership of the party and gave it the mass appeal that brought it the electoral victory of '91. The integrity, honesty, courage and commitment that Mrs Zia's leadership provided for the organisationally weak and financially starved BNP, gave the party a new lease of life, and made it far more grassroots based than it ever was. Due to her single minded opposition to autocracy, she became the personification of the party.

She remains the personification of the party even today. Thus Begum Zia is the party's biggest strength and by far its greatest weakness. Today, as it was five years ago, and as it was from the very beginning, BNP remains a party without even a semblance of shared decision making process. Ask any leader of BNP about anything under the sun (except perhaps, the time of the day) and he or she will tell that "only the Madam knows, or can decide." This centralization of authority has caused widespread factionalism in the party. This has led to most cabinet ministers, at least the ambitious ones, having their own factions both within the party, and within its powerful student front, and each of them trying their best to poison the Chairperson's mind about the others in an effort to 'win' her confidence. Such is the state of BNP which celebrated its 17th founding day, yesterday. How frankly, and forthrightly it will address the issue of factionalism and democratisation of the workings of the party, will determine, to a large extent, its future.

Literacy Performances

According to a PTI report, literacy rate in West Bengal stands now at 70.39 per cent. Only in 1991 it stood at 52.72 per cent. A gain of close to 18 per cent has been made in only four years' time.

Till half a century back our two societies were politically one and this was so for centuries. When the Bengali speakers of this region parted ways how was the situation, culturally and materially in these two areas of East and West Bengal? And how it stands now half a century later? A study of comparative performances would be very enlightening, to say the least.

Largely agrarian which it is still today, and west more urbanised if only for that behemoth of concrete — Calcutta. The literacy level as such was a notch or two higher in West. But that was more than offset by the numerousness of high-achieving cultural personalities as well as culturally very advanced urban pockets of the East. Population migration triggered by the partition pushed more non-literates into the West than was taken in by the East.

Then, for long two decades of Pakistan literacy stood still in East and member of graduates fell off progressively. One reason for East to become independent was to right this situation. The literacy issue was indeed addressed only after 1971. And in two decades and three years after that we possibly have improved upon the Pakistan-time figure by not more than 12 per cent.

We are now a poor straggler behind West Bengal. But we are independent. If we cannot even come abreast of them in another decade, this independence would be shorn of much of its meaning.

There are, however, signs that things are indeed picking up on the literacy front. The goal is universal literacy within our lifetime. This is not unrealistic. Given the right political will, this will be achieved.

Mushrooming Colleges

Nobody ever knew Dhaka had so many approved and regular colleges — 72 of them offer intermediate and 47 degree courses. How many degree colleges are there in the whole of Rajshahi Division? And how many more colleges are there in city beside those approved ones?

This college spree contrasts sharply with the rate of opening schools on private initiative in the interior. This is what exactly happened during the first years of independence. Although many of the hundreds of colleges subsequently closed down — almost all of them were opened in the districts. Nobody went for schools even then. And the schools crisis continues.

The Dhaka scramble for getting any five-roomed flat and starting a college can seriously pose a challenge to the other mushrooming educational nuisance — the so-called kindergartens. For both need the same kind of accommodation and in both cases you needn't care for regulations and requirements. The coaching centres wanting to convert themselves to colleges will, of course, enter into familiar ground. All of Dhaka's colleges barring a dozen may be, are in fact coaching centres, right from their birth. And these would never become a college. For it is more paying this way.

Education is a diseased sector, throughout. Cannot the authorities embark on a journey towards sanity with their bold decision to abolish the admission tests. Close down the hundred colleges that do not strictly conform to the requirements. And please go for degree colleges in the districts enabling most students to study staying at home and drawing out from the capital's concentration of postgraduate scholars. This will be good for our education's health.

INDO-BANGLADESH trade has, since independence, been a perennial source of discord as far as trade relations between these two neighbouring countries of unequal geo-economic size is concerned. It is alleged that Bangladesh has long been a net importer of goods from India and India has been a net exporter to Bangladesh with trade imbalance growingly resting against Bangladesh. Such trade imbalance, at the initial phase, has been fraught with misgivings and, possibly, fanned by misnomers. The anti-Indian lobby always seem to have construed the flood of Indian goods as the product of a lean towards India by the then government, Awami League and to them, only a protectionist policy towards India and growing trade relations with other countries could heal the wounds. Unfortunately, the successive governments of Bangladesh continued to use the above two instruments with the result that the mutual benefits of Indo-Bangladesh trade continues to unevenly land in favour of India.

Facts from Figures

Available statistics tend to show that Bangladesh's import from India in 1993/94 was thirty times higher than it used to be in 1973/74. In 1973/74, about one fifth of Bangladesh's import payments to India is reported to have been financed through her exports to India while in 1993/94, the share was only five per cent. Further, during the period under consideration, exports to India grew at 9 per cent per annum while imports from India heaved at double pace (18 per cent). During the period 1990/91-1993/94 (when substantial doses of trade liberalization were enunciated), imports

from India grew at 37 per cent per annum whereas exports to India recorded a net deceleration over the same period implying, perhaps, that import liberalization contributed to the surge of imports from India.

During the last two decades (1973/74-1993/94), Bangladesh's total exports is reported to have grown at 20 per cent per annum while her exports to India registered a growth rate of 9 per cent per annum. At the flag end of the decades (1990/91-1993/94), total exports recorded a growth rate of 16 per cent per annum but that of exports to India posited a net decline. "During this era of open market economy, our total imports grew at an annual rate of about 10 per cent whereas our imports from India recorded a staggering growth of 37 per cent per annum."

Dr A K Azad of Chittagong University attempted to highlight the features of Indo-Bangladesh trade structure and patterns in a seminar paper recently presented in BEA Conference. Besides the above trends, the researcher also attempted to examine the trade intensity prevailing between these two countries. Trade intensity, to remind the readers, measures the extent to which one country's exports/imports is larger or smaller in relation to the former country's share in the world trade. Taking trade intensity index into consideration one can observe that export intensity of Bangladesh with India had been low all through and unfortunately,

has been depicting a down turn (2.15 in 1973/74 vs 1.4) in 1993/94. This implies, that Bangladesh has little access to Indian market, vis a vis the world market. On the other hand, the import intensity of Bangladesh with India was five times greater than in 1975 and this intensity has been increasing over the years so much so that in 1993/94, it reached 17 — more than 10 times of our export intensity with India. Noticeably, between 1990/91-1993/94, according to Dr

argue that Bangladesh is gradually becoming more and more dependent on imports as a source of resource supply. For example, in 1990/91, more than 86 per cent of our total expenditure demand used to be met from our domestic production whereas in 1993/94 the share declined by two percentage points to 94 per cent. Again, in 1990/91, domestic production accounted for 40 per cent of the total supply of industrial goods which fell to 38 per cent in 1993/94. Share of imports is reported

mentary but in fact competitive. By and large, the study by Dr Azad tends to conclude that (i) imported goods are taking over Bangladeshi goods; (ii) Indian imported goods are having access to Bangladeshi market than Bangladeshi products are having into Indian market and (iii) the policy of open market associated with massive trade liberalization during the last phase of the decades of comparison, in fact, contributed to the inundation either by Indian or other countries' goods. As policy options, the researcher seems to place two suggestions. First, even with open market philosophy, a country should proceed with selective interventions at strategic points. For Bangladesh, this would mean protecting the industries of complimentary goods. This is, perhaps, more pervasively needed given the industrial base of the two countries. Second, SAPTA should emerge as the focal point where the accesses should be sorted out. Bangladesh should strive hard to get SAPTA in operation. And third, some trade is better than no trade as far as Indo-Bangladesh trade is concerned.

Concluding Views

It is true that with imports liberalization in place, imports of Bangladesh, especially from India, have been picking up at a rapid pace. It is however, imperative to analyze the commodity composition of imports, rather than mere aggregate volumes, to arrive at any conclusive remarks. If for example, the import basket com-

Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes



Azad, our import intensity with India nearly doubled implying, perhaps, that Indian goods took the fullest advantage of our open market policy. En passant, it could be mentioned that India stood to be the largest supplier of goods to Bangladesh in 1993/94 accounting for 15 per cent of total imports of Bangladesh. "But this is only the tip of the iceberg. The actual inundation of our market by Indian goods could be known only if we had statistics on the scale of smuggling between the two countries."

Impact of Openness

Using the National Production Accounts between 1990/91 and 1993/94 (the period of massive liberalization) the author attempted to

Complimentary or Competitive?

Are the two economies complimentary or competitive? If the former is true the mutual dependence should go up (i.e. both the countries should have high tendency to export and import from each other). Using relevant information, it could be observed that the two economies are not compli-

What Sort of Secretary-General UN Needs?

Boutros Boutros-Ghali: In Hot Soup of His Own Making

by A M M Shahabuddin

ALTHOUGH Boutros Boutros-Ghali is still to cover about one and half years of his first five-year term, beginning on 1st November 1992, the air is already heavy with the rather unexpected touchy question about his 'transparency' as a Secretary-General of the UN. He happens to be the sixth Secretary-General to hold this 'prize' post of the world body, his illustrious predecessors being — Perez de Cuellar of Peru (1982-1991); Kurt Waldheim of Austria (1972-81); U Thant of Burma (now Myanmar), (1961-1971); Dag Hammarskjold of Sweden (1953-1961), when he died in a plane crash; and Trygve Lie of Norway (1945-1953).

Gathering Storm

Mr Ghali, a former Foreign Minister of Egypt, a Coptic by faith, an aristocrat by style, and an 'autocrat' by temperament, has already become, to some extent, a controversial figure because of his dealing with some of the most burning problems — particularly in Bosnia, Somalia and post-Gulf War Iraq. In fact, Ghali has been caught in a whirlwind of his own making due to his dubious role and diplomatic statements. Either he tried to be too smart to ignore a situation that threatened peace in a whole region, or he was too novice to evaluate things in their proper perspective. Thus he started his UN assignment on a wrong foot. He failed to realise the magnitude and gravity of the storm that was gathering momentum against him. He couldn't locate the 'eye' of the storm. So it came from front and behind, right and left. The most outspoken South Asian leader, Mahathir Mohammed, Prime Minister of Malaysia, had recently declared that he would motivate the Muslim and other devel-

oping countries to launch a campaign to oust Ghali from UN's Secretary-Generalship for his mishandling of the situation in Bosnia. In Cairo, the opposition labour party has urged the Egyptian government "to revoke" Ghali's citizenship because of his role in Bosnia. In Iran, some 300 journalists, in a joint statement, have recently blasted "the impotent" UN and its "lax" Secretary-General, saying, Ghali's "hands are smeared with blood of innocent Bosnians". Meanwhile, on the eve of his proposed visit to Turkey, a huge demonstration was held against Ghali in Ankara for which he had to cancel his visit. (A similar situation arose, when Somalia was in deep crisis and Ghali, on a visit there, had to face a hostile demonstration against him). But these are the latest developments that show which way the up-coming 'thunder-storm' against Ghali is blowing. The 'rot' began much earlier.

Unfortunately, it is for the first time in UN's history of 50 years, that a 'reigning' Secretary-General had to face much hard music and draw fire from his critics all around. But this is all due to his own folly or miscalculations. He couldn't prove wiser than what he is.

Dedication of Hammarskjold

It may, however, be recalled here, (I think, the diversion won't be out of context), that UN's legendary Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjold faced a similar hard situation when he drew wrath from the then other super power — Soviet Union which didn't agree with the UN sending peace mission in 1960 in the troubled Congo (now Zaire), where the Secretary-General

was involved deeply. But there was no public demonstration or criticism against him. Soviet Union, even refused to share the cost of UN operation in the Congo and wanted to "dismiss" Hammarskjold from his post. But they didn't succeed. Because it was only Soviet Union that was against him, not the rest of the world. Hammarskjold, however, was later killed in a mysterious plane crash while on a peace-mission in the Congo in 1961. I have particularly mentioned this incident just to show Hammarskjold's sense of dedications and devotion to his commitment to peace.

Dark Side

This is one bright side of the picture. Now look at the other side. It is dark, blurred and devastating. In fact, from the very beginning, willingly or unwillingly, Ghali tried to minimise the exclusiveness of the Bosnian crisis. To him, it was a "rich man's war". What a bold declaration by a UN Secretary-General about a volatile situation that has brought unprecedented havoc in that region! But he didn't stop there. He had the guts to write an "unusually sharp" letter to the Security Council against its decision to send more UN peace keeping forces to Bosnia. He was annoyed because the security council decided without consulting him. Had the Security Council asked him for a 'situation report' before their decision-making, what sort of report the Security Council would have expected from a person who had earlier dubbed the whole affair as a "rich man's war"?

Then again when George Bush bombed Baghdad in 1993 to teach another lesson to Saddam Hussein for

"violation" of the "no-fly zone," declared by the USA, and not UN, for the protection of the Kurds in northern Iraq, Ghali, in reply to a question by pressmen in Paris, said bluntly that "the raid was carried out according to a mandate from the Security Council under resolution 687." But this was a down-right wrong interpretation given by the chief executive of the world body in support of Bush's action, as if echoing "his master's voice." He not only proved his ignorance, but showed something else. "Where ignorance is bliss, it is folly to be wise," as the adage says. But when Ghali realised his mistake, it was too late and the damage was already done. Later, his spokesman, explaining Secretary-General's position, rather apologetically told the newsmen in New York that "it is not the function of the Secretary General to tell the Member States how they should define a resolution." Commenting on this, former Canadian ambassador to the UN, Stephen Lewis, was reported to have said that Mr Ghali "should have dissociated the UN with the American, British and French enforcement measures." But he hastened to add: "He (Ghali) is very anxious about not offending the Americans because he needs them desperately." So the cat came out of the bag.

Diplomats not Happy

Even within the UN Secretariat, Ghali "is not a popular Secretary-General" because of his "intimidating" behaviour, which has led to several abrupt resignations by his senior most colleagues. A diplomat was quoted as commenting on this that Ghali "seems intent on picking fights with the people he needs."

The diplomats at the UN are also not very happy with him. Some of them had to taste themselves the "sting" of Ghali's tongue. One instance is sufficient to show how he dealt with some of them. Ghali had drawn fire particularly from the African Ambassadors for telling them at a meeting "to stop moaning" and "get on with practical work." He forgot that the Ambassadors are not on his pay-roll. So they have not forgiven Ghali for his 'undiplomatic' and 'insulting' behaviour.

Responsibilities of Secretary-General

Let us now examine the "ground-rules," laid down in the UN Charter, which the Secretary-General should follow in order to fulfil the "mission" for which he is appointed by the UN General Assembly on the recommendation of the Security Council, under Article 97 of the Charter.

The Secretary-General is appointed for a five-year term, but can be re-appointed for a second five-year term also. Although the Charter describes him as the "Chief Administrative Officer" of the organization, he is much more than that. He stands before the international community as "the very emblem" of the UN. He serves as the ears and eyes of the world body. He runs the UN Secretariat with the help of an international staff, appointed by him, under regulations prescribed by the General Assembly. The SG's task demands a high degree of vigour, sincerity, imagination and diplomacy.

The Article 99 of the Charter "empowers" him "to bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter, which in his opinion, may threaten the mainte-

prises mostly of raw materials and capital goods instead of final consumer goods, then one can possibly say that import liberalization turned out to be a boon rather than a bane. Second, the trade imbalance exists with other countries also and hence any annoyance over trade imbalance with India should not be over played. Third, the fact that imports from India has been growing over time clearly points to the basic economic premises and has little relevance to politics.

That is, whether a government adopts a pro or anti-Indian policy, Bangladesh economy would be subjected to suffer from the onslaught of Indian products. It is therefore, suggestive to take the routes through SAPTA and other dialogue processes. Forth, a departure from the philosophy of open market might not help healing the wounds. In fact, as we observed, restricted policy could also encourage Indian imports through illegal channels. It is ripe time for Bangladesh to take up the trade issue seriously and sit with the counterpart to eke out a possible solution. One of the most important agenda for discussion should be the relative tariff levels prevailing in both countries. The average import duty in Bangladesh is 25 per cent as compared to 50 per cent in India. This invariably pushes Indian products into Bangladesh and pushes Bangladeshi products out from India. And lastly, political commitment on the part of both the sides of the fence is urgently required. That political commitment should spring from mutual understandings and feelings. After all, some trade is better than trade but free trade is also better than no restricted trade.

nance of international peace and security." Hence he must have the grasp of catching the troubles spots by their neck before they burst out in conflagration. (Ghali miserably failed to comply with this Article when he dubbed the Bosnian crisis as the "rich-man's war".

The Secretary-General, and for that matter his staff, under Article 100 of the Charter, is forbidden "not to seek or receive instructions from any government or from any other authority external to the organisation." Similarly, each Member of the UN "undertakes to respect the exclusively international responsibilities of the Secretary-General... and not to seek influence them (SG and his staff) in the discharge of their responsibilities." Now, doesn't Ghali lose his international character when he rushes to support the US bombing of Baghdad in 1991, saying the raid is justified under the mandate of the Resolution 687? Subsequently he had to withdraw his comments saying that "it is not the function of the Secretary-General to tell the Member States how they should define a resolution." He had to swallow the bitter pill.

Last Laugh!

Sometime back Boutros-Ghali, speaking on the importance of the world body, said: "The world needs the UN, but the world is not sure what sort of UN it needs." Prompt came the rebuff from some diplomats who were reported as saying that "the UN needs a Secretary-General, but UN is not sure what sort of Secretary-General it needs." It may appear as a cruel joke on Ghali. But it is true. The question now stares at Ghali with all its sharp spikes!

The writer is a retired UN official.

To the Editor...

Manna Dey's visit

Sir, The recent unceremonious cancellation of Manna Dey's visit (your editorial, August 26) is perhaps a small thing. It has not adversely affected the welfare of the masses of our population. As such, it would be tempting to shrug it off as another unedifying example of bureaucratic bungling and lease it at that.

But in fact much more is at stake, diplomatic considerations, yes, sheer elementary good manners, yes. But over and beyond all this, what is at stake is the delimitation of appropriate spheres of government interference in the life of the citizenry. What is at stake, in other words, is liberty itself.

Whose liberty am I talking about? The liberty of the private citizens of Bangladesh, in free association, to invite for their cultural enrichment an artist of their choice.

It is understood, of course, that the person invited must (a) have a valid travel document from his or her own government, and (b) must be eligible for a visa, i.e. must not figure on a "black list". Both these aspects are routinely checked at the time a visa is issued. No further clearance should be necessary.

Another area for legitimate government action would be the question of financing, in particular foreign exchange costs. Travel costs and any payment to the artist must be cleared with Bangladesh Bank, since this amounts to an import of a service. The liberalisation of the current account should make this a relatively simple matter.

Beyond this, any interference, any requirements for permission (and that from three different ministries) is an intolerable infringement of the civil rights of free citi-

zens of a free country.

I will perhaps be told that liberty is an archaic, right-wing value which means little to the masses of the poor. My response would be twofold. First, this kind of abrogation of liberty may directly affect only a small minority, but this minority is a vital element in the cultural process. Secondly, this kind of disrespect for liberty is not restricted to the cultural sphere, but is symptomatic of a general system of arbitrary, non-accountable interventions which are also endemic in the economic sphere, and which are probably at the root of our development impasse.

Abu Abdullah BIDS, Dhaka

Experience in Calcutta

Sir, Very recently I had visited India in connection

with All India Public Administration Conference held in Mysore on 5-6 August 1995. Though I came back with sweet memories of Mysore, I had a very sad experience of Calcutta. I had crossed the border through Benapole checkpoint and reached Sealdah at 4 pm on first August 1995 and took a taxi for Gariahat (south Calcutta) in search of an accommodation. First I looked into ICSSR (Indian Council of Social Sciences Research) guest house whom I had written for accommodation but they refused showing their advanced booking. Then I started searching accommodation in different hotels and guest houses. I inquired in about a dozen of them. Half of them refused me by saying that they had no accommodation and another half clearly stated that they have no permission to allow Bangladeshis to stay in although they had accommodation. Then I turned to-

wards Sealdah hotels which traditionally had been the staying places for the people from Bangladesh. They also refused on the same plea.

After long search for nearly two hours at last I found a hotel to stay in. On my coming back from Mysore on 10th August I had faced similar problems. After a continuous search for three hours I could manage a hotel near Ballygunj station where I was allowed to stay for a night only. I felt very much insulted when they said that there was no permission for the Bangladeshis. I do not know whether it is a policy of the state government of West Bengal or an agreed decision of hotel owners. Whatever the case, it is humiliating to the citizens of Bangladesh going to India for various reasons. I wonder whether such a policy exists in any other country of the world. I would not blame India as a whole, be-

cause, while I was looking for a hotel in Bangalore I did not face this sort of embarrassing question.

Bangladesh has become the largest market of Indian products. Besides, hundreds of people are going to India for medical treatment. India, being the greatest beneficiary in this regard, why the West Bengal hoteliers are adopting such disgraceful policy towards Bangladeshis in Calcutta? Moreover, Bangladesh is a pioneer member of the SAARC Club. One of the mottoes of SAARC countries is to build cordial relationship between the peoples instead of confining it at government level. Hotel policy as adopted in Calcutta will obviously limit a better relation to grow between the peoples of the two countries.

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