

Ferry Dislocations

A terrible prospect of ferry service between Aricha-Nagarbari and Aricha-Daulatdia coming to a halt is now looming large.

Now, the question is, how could the navigability decline so much without our noticing it earlier and doing something about this in good time.

There has been a lot of row over the shifting of ferry ghats at both ends of the river. But that should not have put the immediate problem out of sight.

Numerous bus and coach passengers and at least two thousand trucks cross the rivers everyday. If their movement is hampered or brought to a grinding halt, it cannot but have a telling impact on our economy, social life and the country's overall development prospects.

A ministerial meeting has happily decided to dredge the rivers for navigability in a stepped up fashion. There is no alternative to this and the process should have begun long before the routes had shoaled and turned unsuitable for navigation.

Rotting in Jail

Sarwar of Kukrail, Madaripur was arrested on suspicion of murdering his brother, way back in November 1980. He continues to be in jail without any trial whatsoever.

At long last in May of this year the court was moved for his bail. The Pabna jail authority submitted to the court that Sarwar was unfit to appear before it.

At her wit's end, Sarwar's aging and ailing mother has sought the help of the Madaripur Legal Aid Association. We, as also all readers of the news published on Tuesday in The Daily Star, on our part cannot help wondering about how to reach justice to Sarwar even at this stage.

Sarwar's predicament is far from unique. All of the nation's prison houses are spilling beyond the limit of tolerance. And more than half of the inmates are unconvicted prisoners.

The police enthusiasm for catching people is matched by a lack of it in expediting the process leading to early conviction or acquittal. Then we have the mountainous pile of undisposed-off cases — caused by an absurdly small force of judicial officers.

The Growing Relevance

It is difficult to say what we would have done if Rabindranath was not so eloquent in his admiration for Lalou Shah and his music and poetry. Tagore, in fact, did more than merely put a good word for this mystic poet and singer from a faceless mass of country minstrels.

The Shilpakala Academy held a two-day festival of Lalou Songs on Tuesday and Wednesday. Artists come from the Lalou Academy sang to a full house of rapturous audience. Congratulations to them.

Would the Ministry of Agriculture and the Department of Environment please take stern measures to stop

During the '60s and the '70s, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) developed the special expertise of "feed" in their Cold War against the Soviet Union. Through those agents, they considered as KGB "doubles", they fed the KGB reams of disinformation about everything under the sun.

The CIA subsequently found it does not have a corner on the market on disinformation. This has been used as an intelligence ploy for many, many years since history first started to be recorded.

Despite adequate warnings about the authenticity of the information, successive US presidents were given this doctored information without being warned about its credibility, leading the US to spend billions of US dollars in research and development of new weapons and equipment to counter the perceived Soviet threat.

The "Disinformation" Game

While disinformation is a potent weapon for national security, in the face of the enemy's inherent potential we must exercise some control to stop unscrupulous rascals for misusing this potential with the country for selfish use.

skilled hands of seasoned intelligence operatives, disinformation is a tremendous weapon that can be used ruthlessly for character assassination, to damage the credibility of individuals or entities, to create doubts and sow distrust between individuals and entities, to negatively effect analysis of persons or events, etc.

A movie called The Man Who Never Was, documented an actual disinformation exercise, an elaborate Allied ploy during World War II to deceive the Germans about the actual plans for the invasion of Occupied Europe and the timing thereof.

More recently, the "Ganga" hijack is a classic example of a successful Indian subterfuge! A Fokker-27 aircraft belonging to Air India was hijacked in Feb 1971 to Lahore by supposed Kashmiri Mujahideen. Even the late PM, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, then a private citizen, taken in by their act made a very dramatic public meeting with the hijackers on the Lahore Airport tarmac.

disrupt our physical air communications. A few months after the fall of the first Ms Benazir Government in 1990, the then DGMI called in four well-known columnists writing in the English media and berated them about criticising Ms Benazir's downfall when "evidence" existed as to why Ms Benazir should be considered a major "security risk".

AS I SEE IT
Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

This steadfastness was based on the premise that intelligence agencies do use journalists as willing and unwilling tools to disseminate their doctored "version of facts". Imagine the irony that when the second Ms Benazir regime came around, our "Lt Gen Gehlen" who had moved onto a greener pasture close to the PM's ears, had the cheek to condemn at least three of them as unreliable and unpatriotic, labeling them as "security hazards".

other officer called Major Esterhazy, then working in Military Intelligence. As a Jew Dreyfus was a convenient scapegoat, being sentenced for life and sent in fetters and leg irons to Devil's Island. His family and friends, believing in his innocence, kept on fighting this issue, finally convincing the famous intellectual, Emile Zola, to take up his case.

A public outcry was orchestrated by the French military who packed the court trying Zola for sedition with officers in mufti who shouted him and his lawyers down every time they started to speak. Reams of disinformation were fed to a hungry Press and they skewered Zola and Dreyfus as part of a larger "Jewish conspiracy" on their "anointed" pens.

rampage in the States against CIA employees and escaped to Pakistan, some intelligence operatives saw this as a unique opportunity to settle scores with their local "enemies" and tried their level best to fabricate evidence to that effect with a nod from their superiors.

There is no law in Pakistan that can restrain the spread of disinformation, even making it a culpable offence in respect to character assassination. The classic case is that of the notorious anonymous letter writer. For the past 15 years, this perverted personality has been libelling everyone in sight of whom he is jealous and whomsoever he perceives as an "enemy".

There is strong evidence that he used crones in the intelligence services to help him in this underhand, sleazy practice in which he went after military officers, politicians, religious personalities, etc. Being a rank coward he would write columns under a pseudonym as his attacks on religious personalities were sure to evoke response if the Mullahs came to know that he was a non-Muslim.

How should Government Deal with the Private Sector

The excuse that we are going through the teething problems of a new democracy after nine years of autocratic rule will no longer impress either the private sector (both foreign and domestic) or the providers of official development assistance.

Despite commendable progress in macro-economic management, the growth of the private sector during the last four years has not been impressive in terms of volume of export, industrial production and foreign and domestic investment. It goes without saying that the major constraining factor in this regard was the general "impression" of political instability, manifesting itself in frequent hartals, parliamentary impasse, blackmail by trade unions and a less than desirable law and order situation.

But what is stated above is a fundamental requirement. It crucially hinges on the emerging political configura-

tion and the ability of our political leaders to see beyond their nose. On this account, we can only hope and pray that things will work out the way we wish. In this piece I will, therefore, concentrate on how, in the light of experience of the last four years, the government should deal with the private sector assuming that this fundamental requirement can be fulfilled in the next term of democratic rule in Bangladesh.

First, though government leaders have consulted the captains of trade and industry many times since coming to power in 1991, these consultations tended to be sporadic, instantaneous responses to particular situations with little follow-up. It is high time that these consultations were institutionalised through a small body consisting of the PM, a few select ministers and secretaries and representatives of the private sector. This body should meet at least once a week to discuss and solve policy and implementation problems relating to the private sector.

Insurance Corporation, Board of Investment (BOI), Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority (BEPZA), Securities Exchange Commission, Duty Exemption and Drawback Office (DEDO), Bangladesh Bank, Bangladesh Shilpa Bank (BSSB), Bangladesh Shilpa Rin Sangstha (BSRS), Nationalised Commercial Banks (NCBs), etc. should be objectively reviewed with a view to

Making Government Work

bringing in the best talents. Membership of a particular cadre service is not good enough for being considered for these posts. These are not necessarily post-retirement jobs either, associated as they are with a heavy load of innovative work. On the other hand, filling these posts through promotion of the next senior person, irrespective of his/her ability to deliver, is hardly the proper approach.

bring in the best, one also has to provide the right kind of incentives, beyond the normal government emoluments. In any case, the government should informally consult the representatives of the private sector in selecting persons for these posts.

Third, the privatisation process has been excruciatingly slow during the last four years, particularly due to un-

companies exist; (f) liquidate the SOEs; and (g) permit private companies to enter fields of activities which were formally reserved for the government and discontinue subsidies and other privileges to SOEs in these fields.

So far, the Privatisation Board has restricted itself to only conventional methods, namely (c) and (d). Perhaps (b) could be tried out selectively to break trade union resistance. Selling shares to members of the public may work out very well in case of highly profitable enterprises. Method (g) could perhaps be applied to the power sector. In short, depending on the specificities of a particular enterprise, there should be enough maneuverability to adopt different privatisation methods, as long as these lead to higher production in the enterprise and bring adequate revenue to the government.

Fourth, so far the government has not been able to send out the proper signals to the society at large, regarding its clear preference for industrialists and exporters over traders, indentors and middlemen. In our definition, industrialists also include owners of nurseries, hatcheries, dairy and poultry farms and those tolling with a lathe machine in Jinjira or Rayer Bazar.

Ninth, special efforts should be made to encourage the small and innovative entrepreneurs such as those of Mirpur, Dholal Khaler Par, Jinjira, Rayerbazar, etc. Not only should bank loans be made available to them but they should also be protected from the oppression of mastans, police, excise department officials, etc. A special cell in the BOI/PM's office should be made responsible for this task.

I am not totally sure that even with these positive measures, the private sector will ultimately respond adequately and bring about productive capitalism in the country, given its lumpy origins and organic weaknesses. However, without these incentives, the private sector will always get away by blaming the government for denying it the right kind of opportunities. The point, therefore, is to provide the private sector of Bangladesh a fair chance to accomplish what it claims it can do.

primary intelligence institution. This great potential was used only for further advancements in this man's own personal ambitions and not the national good. This man did not spare "friend" or "foe" alike, opportunity permitting. He first destroyed his fellow collaborators in late Gen Asif Nawaz's "inner circle" that had orchestrated the 1993 political manipulations after his death and were in his way of becoming "upwardly mobile" till their loyalty was discovered to be suspect with a little help from our friend, by their hitherto unsuspecting and politically innocent boss. He then proceeded to dismantle the reputations of those of his immediate seniors, colleagues or any juniors he perceived as a threat to his career advancement.

A senior officer was labelled to be a "Qadiani", a certain non-starter for top rank. Disinformation became a weapon that was misused with the whole strength of the powerful institution he headed. He did not spare prominent national personalities. He made the mistake of taking on Sardar Abdul Qayyum Khan, the AK PM, and got it in his teeth when Sardar Sahib refused to succumb to his blackmail. He would not hesitate to use subordinates for personal matters. Eminent columnist Ardesahir Cowasjee was summoned to have a Major General visit him, ostensibly to explain the Kashmir situation, but really for "damage control", to distance his boss from the Rs. 14 crore scandal in which Yunus Habib had given a largesse to the COAS Gen Aslam Beg for use by the intelligence services.

While disinformation is a potent weapon for national security, in the face of the enemy's inherent potential we must exercise some control to stop unscrupulous rascals for misusing this potential with the country for selfish use. Some sort of monitoring and accountability thereof has to be initiated at the national level to ensure it is not misused. The "disinformation" game is one in which two can play, unfortunately our major players only play in the "Heads I Win, Tails, You Lose" scenario. In their own personal, and not the national, interest.

Ban DDT

Sir, Unfortunately DDT (dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane), one of the highly hazardous pesticides classified under the "dirty dozens" group is still in wide use in Bangladesh. It has been found that DDT is being used indiscriminately in storing dryfish, pulses and some other food crops. But the use of DDT has been banned all over the world including Bangladesh. It is not known how the people are using this extremely hazardous agro-chemical in our country.

Would the Ministry of Agriculture and the Department of Environment please take stern measures to stop

the use of DDT? M Zahidul Haque Assistant Professor, BAI, Dhaka-1207.

Candid expressions Sir, The supplement on The Daily Star Roundtable on Priority Agenda for 1996 made good reading, in contrast to what we read on the formal addresses by the respective dignitaries defending the policies of their offices.

The lay but enlightened readers get a close view of the interaction of experts from the various sectors. After going through the 4-page transcription, it appears to this citizen that some features of the Roundtable stand

out: — the importance of political consensus at the national level. Mute assent by the opposition is not enough — positive affirmation is necessary at critical moments; — the implementation agencies have also to make their motivation transparent; — the rural self-government set-up is in a mess (during this century); and that there are strong undercurrents of vested interests, like the waxing and waning of the moon. No solution is in sight; — the LRU factor has become critical — the law delays and mismatches; — Bangladesh's teething problems with democratic governance has coincided

with a 45 per cent opposition party calling the tune (or trying to). You can't perform well under constant harassment; and none will agree to a 'national government' for at least one or two terms. Many good development measures turn into exercises in futility; — development creates new areas of experiences. For coordination and quick fixes, the infrastructure is not there (in an under-developed country). Anyway, Bangladesh has started the pilgrimage towards progress. One single factor should be encouraged — understanding and consideration.

A Husnain Dhaka