The Baily Star

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Ferry Dislocations

A terrible prospect of ferry service between Aricha-Nagarbari and Aricha-Daulatdia coming to a halt is now looming large. Already four ferryboats with their usual loads of passengers and vehicles had hit shoals and were stuck up for hours. The main channels have become dangerously narrow for the river-crossing.

Now, the question is, how could the navigability decline so much without our noticing it earlier and doing something about this in good time. Indeed, indications were quite clear that the lean season waters of the Padma and the Jamuna had been flowing at dangerously low levels for a long time. The emergent nature of the problem demanded that a plan was in place for addressing it well before it could pose such a serious challenge.

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. The Jamuna bridge is not going to be constructed in days or months, nor is a regional water agreement going to be reached soon enough. Those are long-term solutions and the issue of navigability cannot wait till they are found. Its immediacy calls for efficient and short-term handling within the limitations we face.

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. The cost of keeping the channels navigable, as far as practicable, is not that much compared with the loss sustained over time due to the frequent dislocations of the ferry service.

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. Other measures to keep the channels open are a matter for the experts to devise within a regional framework. Let them put their heads together to overcome this periodic problem which is hardly intractable.

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. It has been alleged that owing to police torture in custody, Sarwar lost his balance of mind early in his incarceration. As such he was transferred to Pabna Mental Hospital.

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. But this has been contested by Sarwar's mother and his other relations who had visited him in the jail.

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. If he is indeed guilty, he has already suffered more punishment than a court could award. He needs to be set free without a moment's delay either on bail, or better still, through a closure of the case. And if he is indeed innocent how can his lost years, the best part of his life, be made good?

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. And a big share of these again are prisoners who haven't been even legally proceeded against. A totally unacceptable situation rules in the crime and punishment sector of governance. Why so?

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. Unless the backlog is cleared there will be no end to cases like Sarwar's.

The Growing Relevance

It is difficult to say what we would have done if Rabindranath was not so eloquent in his admiration for Lalon 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. He picked up both the baul music and philosophy. reached them to world audience and adopted much of these to enrich his own music and ideas. The result is for all of us to exult in — Lalon strains are now regarded as an important genre in their own merit and occupy a place of honour in the rich Bengali musical tradition.

Revival of Lalon's musical legacy in a big way has, however, been largely a post-liberation phenomenon. A number of exceptional performers and teachers, inspired by the late-lamented Khuda Bakhsh Sain and the unremitting services of the Lalon Academy of Kushtia mainly made this possible. A third and very important factor has been the growing relevance of Lalon's teachings of tolerance and humanism and looking beyond the acquisitive passions of the day in Bangladesh.

The Shilpakala Academy held a two-day festival of Lalon Songs on Tuesday and Wednesday. Artistes come from the Lalon Academy sang to a full house of rapturous audience. Congratula-

tions to them.

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.

URING the 60s and the '70s. Central Inte-Higence 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. On the logic that their own "double" agents were "reliable", the KGB presented this doctored data to the Soviet leaders as hard facts. Needless to say the Politburo. relying on the disinformation "feed", took faulty decisions, mostly overspending in their search for weapons to counter US technological superiority and geographical spread as magnified by the

"feed". 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. The first complete manual of government administration that includes disinformation among its major chapters is the 5000 or so years old "Kautilya Arthashastra", a handbook used in the South-Asian subcontinent by generations of Hindu rulers to perpetrate their rule within the country and in dominating their neighbours. It seems CIA's success was eventually turned against them. As the enquiry against the KGB mole inside CIA, Aldrich Ames, has revealed, the KGB in the early 80s started to reverse the flow of disinformation, particularly about the development of Soviet weapons, both

conventional and high-tech. 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. Today this has become a major scandal in the US as CIA Director Deutch struggles to focus on the faulty procedures as well as the personnel who allowed this disinformation to flow through to the highest reaches of their own decision-making individuals and institution. In successful Indian scam to

skilled hands of seasoned intelligence operatives, disinformation is a tremendous weapon that can be used ruthlessly for character as-

sassination, 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 exploy during World War II to

ercise, an elaborate Allied deceive the Germans about the actual plans for the invasion of Occupied Europe and the timing thereof. The Allies contrived to deliver this information to the Germans in such a way that they would be duped about its authenticity. A floating corpse of a supposedly senior Allied officer was positioned by submarine alongwith detailed plans off the Portuguese coast. The debris suggested an air crash of an Allied transport aircraft, sophisticated effort being put into ensure the authenticity of the corpse, its time of death, etc. The material salvaged by German intelligence operatives was conveyed to Admiral Canaris, the then Head of German Intelligence. who conveyed it to the German General Staff as an authentic "find", thus keeping the Germans double-minded

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. The aircraft was subsequently blown up by the hijackers. Claiming that Pakistan had helped the hijackers, the Indians used that pretext to ban all overflights from West to East Pakistan. It later transpired that the supposed hijackers were actually in the pay of India's RAW and the whole exercise was a

about the actual Allied main

effort.

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 wellknown 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" He then proceeded to lay out security lapses on her part this included "supplying" lists of Sikh separatists to the Indians and her brother Murtaza's "links" with Al-Zulfigar Despite his best efforts, first by badgering the media-persons, later pleading with them, none of the four, three in Islamabad and one in Karachi, accepted his version of "facts" and refused to write articles on these issues against the former PM.

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 subsequent court martial of Esterhazy was again a masterly cover-up with more paper being forged by military intelligence operatives on the instructions of the French military hierarchy to further frame Dreyfus and exonerate Esterhazy, not because the senior French Generals liked Esterhazy (or found him innocent) but they did not want to be proved wrong for having condemned an innocent man on flimsy, concocted ev-

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 labricate evidence to that cliect with a nod from their superiors. Has anyone tried to bring these rascals to account in the same manner as the French generals were brought to justice for framing an innocent

person?

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". His modus operandi is to send letters under various names to the English newspapers, who for many years did not check on the veracity of the name and address. When they became wise to this subterfuge, he started to draw on real names from a stable of "friends", some of whom could not even spell their own names with any confidence, what to talk about writing a full sentence of English, sent letters to the editors of various newspapers in excellent English.

There is strong evidence that he used cronies 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. Because of his connections and misguided loyalty of his friends, he still manages to evade accountability. To allow such people to get on with disseminating disinformation

tion. 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.

primary intelligence institu-

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 Ardeshir Cowasjee was stunned 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 Asiam 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 mtheir own personal, and not

against projects developed by

the trainees themselves.

Sixth, since the size of the

nationalised sector will be

greatly reduced through pri-

tation with the private sec-

tor, the government should

further identify and imple-

ment decontrol/deregulatory

measures across the board.

The idea is not to opt for

laissez faire but concentrate

on a few key regulatory mea-

sures in a manner that will

make a significant impact on

private sector development.

Eighth, the government

should intensify efforts to re-

cover outstanding loans given

by DFIs and NCBs and redi-

rect these to genuine en-

trepreneurs. Where neces-

sary, the bank leadership

should be changed and bank

board membership should be

reconstituted with this objec-

tive in view. Ideas such as

partnership banking, reduc-

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"! Another of history's classic examples of disinformation was the famous "Captain Dreyfus" case in France at the end of the last century. Having suffered defeat at the hands of Germany leading to the ceding of the Sedan, the French military hierarchy found an excuse for the debacle in an alleged spy, Captain Dreyfus, who worked in the General Staff. A surreptitious note to the German military attache was taken to be written by Captain Dreyfus though in fact it was written by an-

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. Ultimately one of the forgers. Col Henry. broke down and made complete confession before committing suicide, opening up the truth for everyone to see. It was Zola who had said at the beginning of the ordeal. "Truth is on the march and nothing will stop it". Almost the whole of the French military hierarchy that conspired to condemn an innocent man had to resign and Dreyfus was reinstated with honour, back cell in a is akin to accepting sedition. from a condemned cell in a distant island.

Very recently, whell Alman expendence of methornation Kansi went on a murderous has recently said goodbyr to a the national, interest.

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.

ESPITE commendable progress in macroeconomic 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. Obviously, we cannot afford this sort of things even for a day in the next term. whichever political party forms the government after the forthcoming general elections. 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. They will simply bypass and ignore us, and the signs all around are unmistakable. Therefore, a national consensus has to be reached by the major political parties about the basic rules of the game, particularly since there is no disagreement among them on the necessity of market-led economic de-

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

velopment in Bangladesh.

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. The importance of these regular meetings should be next only to those of cabinet meetings. Second. the performance of the top leadership of key organisations relating to private sector development such as the Export Promotion Bureau

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

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.

bring in the best, one also

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

Making Government Work

y Analyst

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. One should indeed keep an open mind and select the best from wherever he/she may be. One should even consider the appointment of Bangladeshi private sector executives located abroad. But obviously, in order to

healthy trade union pressure. Therefore, not only should the transfer of state-owned enterprises (SOEs), for which winning bids have already been announced, be finalised without any further delay, but the government should also proceed with the privatisation of other SOEs. In the latter respect, in consultation with the private sector, the Privatisation Board should try out methods beyond the beaten track. There are seven ways in which a government can privatise the SOEs : (a) sell shares to the public; (b) sell to the employees; (c) sell to domestic buyers; (d) sell to

foreign buyers; (e) lease out

to leasing companies if such

to SOEs in these fields. 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 toiling with a lathe machine in Jinjira or Rayer Bazar. During the term of the next elected government, this preference must be made loud and clear not only in tariff, duty, taxes. bank loans, state awards, etc. But also in apparently "mundane" matters like the selection of CIPs, composition of the entourage of the PM for foreign visits, invitation to state functions and coverage on TV. Fifth, we have not so far paid any at-

velopment in the country.

tion of debt-equity ratio, creation of venture capital, etc. should be tried out by the NCBs on a pilot scale in order to find out their efficacies in real life situations. Similarly. monitoring of substantial loans by banks need to be strengthened. Ninth, special efforts should be made to encourage the small and innovative entrepreneurs such as those of Mirpur, Dholai Khaler Par. Jinjiria, Rayerbazar, etc. Not only should bank loans be made available to them but they should also be protected from the oppression of mastaans, 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 lumpen 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 is claims it can do.

Ban DDT

Sir, Unfortunately DDT (dichloro-diphenyltrichloroethane), 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

(EPB), Privatisation Board,

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 4page transcription, it appears to this citizen that some features of the Roundtable stand

— 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 LRJ 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 consid eration.

A Husnain Dhaka

companies exist; (f) liquidate vatisation, the Ministry of Inthe SOEs; and (g) permit pridustries should be amalgamated with the Ministries of vate companies to enter fields of activities which were Jute. Textiles and Trade and Commerce. This should facilformally reserved for the government and discontinue itate private sector contact with the government in adsubsidies and other privileges dition to reducing costs. Seventh, through consul-

So far, the Privatisation

tention to entrepreneur de-

It is not true that an entrepreneur is only born and cannot be shaped up through training and motivation. The BMDC should be asked to conduct round-the-year courses in this field for carefully selected trainees. Perhaps the experience of the Ahmedabad-based Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India should be made use of in this regard. Such training should be followed by special bank loans