

ADP Priorities

We are thrown on the mat by a poor ADP project aid utilisation rate which is estimated at 23 per cent for the first five months of the on going financial year. As a result, we are now having to downsize the projected aid volume of Tk 5030 crore to Tk 4460 crore as far as the remainder of the year goes. The fear is that even this lowered target could go unmet, if the political situation deteriorated down the road.

Let's have a clear conception of the political back-pull lying in store. We would like to see it in four possible parameters. First, the opposition agitation, by its own steam can prove to be enormously upsetting. Secondly, a partially-contested election will yield a wobbly, uncertain government fighting for a quiet spell for development work. Thirdly, if by a miracle it turns out to be a wholly participatory electoral process, a government will take time forming. Incidentally, taking this into consideration the donor community has postponed the aid consortium meet for us till the month of July. What is important to note is the fluid context of governance in which the remaining part of the ADB will have to be implemented.

The aid utilisation prospects would not be as bleak as that if we can overcome certain pitfalls we have been vulnerable to but which are avoidable. Project officials in a recent review meeting with the Economic Relations Division pointed out "extraneous influences" in project work, especially in the area of tendering which impeded ADP implementation. We are appalled to see that where the need for acceleration of work was the greatest, interruption happened to be of the worst kind.

For instance, projects under the city corporations relating to road and water development are suffering badly due to fiddling by interested and vested quarters. The list could lengthen on a close scrutiny amounting to political interference in project-work. Now this aspect has to be attended to in dead earnest. It is necessary to remind ourselves that transition is not necessarily a void nor does it need to be directionless. In fact, it is one situation in which the administration should feel free to act with utmost neutrality.

The opposition can keep the project-work outside their agitation without diluting the political message they want to put across to the other side.

Textbook Botch-up

We wrote in this column expressing our concern about the probable delay in printing and subsequent marketing of textbooks for classes IX and VI. We once again feel compelled to comment on the issue as we notice the parties involved in the process are trying to put blame on each other for the delay in supplying books. While the publishers allege that they received the manuscripts late, the text book board stands its ground saying that it does not supply manuscripts but positives (of films) of the textbooks to publishers.

Clearly, nobody is willing to take the blame. As we came to learn from reports published earlier, the textbook board was late in taking up matters concerning the writing and printing of the books. The impression is that the board gave a very short time to a panel of teachers for writing the textbooks. The teachers entrusted with the job of writing books put in the best efforts possible within the time limit but unfortunately, as alleged, the remuneration was very poor.

No one came up to challenge or contradict these reports. Now why will not there be someone somewhere to take the responsibility?

The publishers' way of shirking responsibility looks so naive! They pointed an accusing finger at the delayed receipt of manuscripts but not the availability of paper or any other fault at their end. Now can the public expect to be enlightened about the truth? Contradictory statements only make matters more complicated. Let there be clarifications from authoritative sources. Anyone playing a bluff on the people must be made to pay. After all reaching books to the students of a new academic year well in time is a serious matter and deserves to be treated as such. This bungling should be a lesson for everyone concerned in the future.

Women's Right

Two teenage sisters fell victim to gang-rape in Narayanganj on Monday night. The girls had gone to the town in search of their father who reportedly had married for a second time and was keeping away. The rapists numbering five took full advantage of the two girls helplessness and inflicted savagery on them. The police could arrest three of them.

This is one of many such criminal incidents taking place in the country. The revulsion and shock such incidents produce seldom linger. Nor are the culprits meted out punishment which might act as a deterrent. As a result, the maniacs are growing in number.

The two sisters show how vulnerable girls and women are in our society. Much of this is attributable to the position the women have been relegated to. What we need is to be clear about the equation between man and woman. We talk of equality of women but fail to practise it at all levels of our family and social lives.

It is time we reviewed the status of women in the light of human rights and did our individual and collective best to help women achieve their rightful place in the society.

ASEAN and SAARC : Are They Comparable?

ASEAN now envisions itself as an eventual common market which, given the rate of growth in per capita income, already offers enormous economic opportunities. In case of SAARC, its own compulsions in favour of economic cooperation must be carefully nurtured by the leaders of the cooperating countries.

NATIONS belonging to the South Asian Subcontinent on the one hand and the South-east Asian countries on the other, have been drifting apart for atleast last 30 years. In fact, the basic direction of movements are opposite to each other, while South Asia moves downhill, South-east Asia is steadily proceeding upward. This is the reality we often fail to realise. However, let us not pine for what is not. Unlike South-east Asia, there are structural weaknesses which prevent us from emerging as dynamic economies of the subcontinent.

These limitations can best be identified by comparing the two subregional organisations representing these countries. ASEAN or Association of South-east Asian Nations, originally came into being as the bulwark against communism. War was going on in Vietnam and if the American intervention failed there, it was believed, Thailand was the next target. Security remained the prime concern. Economic growth was still a distant mirage.

All that had undergone a fantastic transformation. The history is all too well known. However, the most remarkable statesmanship shown by ASEAN leaders of that time had been their vision of a post-Vietnam South-east Asia. They realized the importance of redesigning the security alliance into a partnership of development with trade as the engine of economic growth. ASEAN is now over a quarter century old. It is now a robust youthful partnership following the path of European Union in the decades following the Second World War.

South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation or SAARC was an initiative of 1980s by President Ziaur Rahman of Bangladesh but conceived in spite of the

burning unresolved issues of the subcontinent, in particular, the Kashmir dispute. It was the end of the Second World War which gave birth to European Union. Peace in Vietnam promoted ASEAN as well as the emergence of dynamic Asian economies. We wished to promote cooperation in the subcontinent in spite of a continuing arms race between the two largest neighbours. Unfortunately, we cannot slaughter the geese and yet crave for the golden eggs.

There is a conspicuous lack of trust within South Asia. The animosities are deep-seated and the most unfortunate aspect of the prevailing scenario is that instead of resolving outstanding problems and disputes, we strive very hard to live with them. Sometimes, we even thrive on them. We care more about dying like heroes instead of learning to live in peace and harmony. Pakistanis were prepared to eat grass and become a nuclear power when India blasted its first atomic bomb and there was joy in the slums of Calcutta.

A common threat to national security would inevitably foster alliance among neighbouring countries. The European Union was born out of the cold war — the threat from East Europe. Initially, the South-east Asian countries converged towards each other because of similar threats originating from the cold war.

In South Asia, we threaten each other. A common external enemy was never there while we never perceived the common internal enemy — poverty. In fact, we followed

the poverty inducing alternative policy: the enemy of my friend. Pakistan promoted military alliance with the United States, while Russian military hardware were stockpiled in India.

ASEAN is not dominated by one single country. No doubt there are big and small countries: Indonesia covers three-time zones while Singapore is smaller than Indonesia's capital city Jakarta. However, Indonesia alone does not represent the majority. In case of SAARC, India alone represents three-fourth of the population and land area of the subcontinent. Practically all the states are bordering India and none of

less, can we cooperate for our mutual benefits, instead of the thoughts from the graveyard continually leading us to confrontation?

It has been possible in case of People's Republic of China and Taiwan. In spite of the complete absence of political recognition of each other, trade volumes are growing and Taiwanese investments are pouring into China. If that is so, then why can't we promote trade as well as other forms of economic cooperation among South Asian neighbours — in spite of the minefields, a river barrage or ethnic violence? It is a belief that must be cherished first by the

time, its composition as well as directions have undergone significant changes. Within South Asia, export of primary commodities such as jute, tea and cotton lost its importance. It is now textile, leather products and processed sea foods — emerging as the basis of trade induced economic growth.

A large part of the international trade of eastern India and Nepal can efficiently pass through Bangladesh ports; while Indian machinery exports can find new markets in Bangladesh. Bangladesh can secure a billion-dollar fertilizer and natural gas market in India. These are opportunities which should lay the foundation of regional economic cooperation.

Similar trade possibilities exist between Pakistan and India on the one hand and Bangladesh and Pakistan on the other. Gas and oil pipelines from Iran to India through Pakistan would substantially augment energy supplies of both India and Pakistan. Later on, those pipelines can be extended to sources in Central Asia. Japanese investors, among others, would find it more attractive to invest in the entire SAARC market instead of a single country's is made available to them. This may lead to geographical sourcing of components and in case of automobile industry, both Sialkot and Ludhiana are bound to prosper from manufacture of car parts. Even in case of manufactures where SAARC countries compete in international markets, product differentiation and market segments offer opportunities for intensification of investment and trade all over

South Asia. Trincomalee (in Sri Lanka) can be developed into a deep water SAARC port as a result of which trade opportunities of all South Asian countries can be substantially expanded. Why not develop Andaman islands as the duty free export processing zone where entrepreneurs from all over the subcontinent would find safe haven and instead of being fugitive labour elsewhere, export manufacturing within South Asia might become the major centre of demand for migrant workers. In Nepal, hydel power generation can meet electricity requirements of three SAARC countries for atleast one hundred years. Like Switzerland, Kashmir has the potential to become the "Playground of Asia" and tourism can contribute several billion dollars to the economy of the "Paradise on Earth".

However, these would never happen until we jointly recognise poverty as our number one enemy. Only then, intra-SAARC trade, investment, technology transfer and development of transport, communication and tourism could take place for our mutual benefits. The haunted fantasies of the past should be supplanted by the great opportunities of tomorrow.

That was what the ASEAN leaders did 25 years ago. There are territorial disputes within ASEAN. Conflicts frequently arise over fishing rights. Yet the principle of constructive engagement is held in high esteem. ASEAN member countries firmly believe that cooperation and not confrontation should be the answer at all times.

Basically, there is a crisis of understanding within South Asia. Unfortunately, it has remained a problem since early part of this century.



Window on Asia

Shahed Latif

the other countries have common frontiers.

ASEAN and SAARC therefore do not belong to the same category. In fact each regional initiative must develop its own unique momentum of growth and expansion. ASEAN now envisions itself as an eventual common market which, given the rate of growth in per capita income, already offers enormous economic opportunities. In case of SAARC, its own compulsions in favour of economic cooperation must be carefully nurtured by the leaders of the cooperating countries. First, it must be recognised that outstanding Kashmir problem or water sharing issues would remain. Nonethe-

less, can we cooperate for our mutual benefits, instead of the thoughts from the graveyard continually leading us to confrontation?

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Why the Talks Failed

Professor M Maniruzzaman Miah replies to SAMS Kibria

In an article under the caption "Why the Talks Failed" published in The Daily Star of February 21 Mr SAMS Kibria accused the BNP of bad faith, of stubbornness, of hypocrisy and of willfully planning to stage a fake election, among others. The Daily Star has invited the BNP-insiders to share their views with its readers. Whether they will take up the gauntlet and establish their case is their business. I do not know how their mind is working. More so, because I have come back home after a 3-year stay abroad and haven't met either the BNP Chairperson or its general secretary since my return three months ago. I have been following however the unfortunate and of events in the political arena like most other Bangladeshis concerned about the people's welfare and their abiding faith in a democratic political order. Here I would give my views as a non-party individual about Mr Kibria's assertions as expressed in the article and also my perception as to why the talks failed.

The former diplomat has very aptly said that however much one would like to hoodwink others, truth finally comes out of its own. And he has invited the foreign envoys here to bear testimony to what he lists as the main points of deliberation during the final round of talks being fully aware that they won't indulge in some such undiplomatic move. We have to inside knowledge of what the negotiators of both

the camps were talking about. But as we gather from newspaper reports the opposition leaders have been demanding inter alia resignation of the Prime Minister, day in and day out, saying that would pave the way for a caretaker /interim/prepoll non-party government. The party in power have been telling that the PM could relinquish her office only after an agreement was reached, otherwise a vacuum would be created that would plunge the country in an uncertain situation. And quit rightly so. Now what Mr Kibria says coincides with the BNP-view. What was the sticking point then and what is the truth, is Mr Kibria cleverly and deliberately trying to give us a view contrary to their avowed stand in the negotiation? This needs clarification from those who know.

One major disagreement between the parties related to the question as to who would head the interim government, one of the so-called neutrals or the President. To justify the opposition case Mr Kibria invokes article 55 (2) of the constitution. Bringing in the constitution to buttress the opposition stand only amuses us, to say the least. Mr Kibria knows it well that article 55 (2) applies only to the formation of a government as per the constitution under normal circumstances. How can you talk

about the constitution when you are going for an abnormal and extra-constitutional measure? Mr Kibria tells us further that BNP negotiators were very stubborn in regard to the date of holding the polls by 22 February and interprets this as the surest way of excluding the opposition from the polls. One wonders why and how a distinguished person of Mr Kibria's stature can blow hot and cold in the same breath referring to the constitution in one case and totally forgetting it in another. Is not the constitutional obligation of holding the elections within 90 days after dissolution of the Parliament explicit and unambiguous? How then the date of election be negotiable? Mr Kibria would like us to believe that the learned Supreme Court would bail us out of a "crisis", created willfully by human beings.

Now, why the talks failed? It failed because it was doomed to failure *ab initio*. It simply foundered at the hard rock of constitutional impossibility if we would be allowed to say so. One has to accept that the opposition demand could not be met within the constitutional bounds. Did not Sir Ninian fail? What stake he had in our internal politics except to see constitutional continuity here. Why did the five distinguished citizens fail? They have not

made it public. I think they should come out and tell the whole nation, why Mr Kibria invited the foreign diplomats to come to his rescue but no appeal to some of our own. Mr. Kibria has decry the rigidity of the BNP in the negotiations. Thank God, they were rigid otherwise the country was being led to the brink of a precipice.

A secondary reason for which the talks could not succeed is the very unclear nature of the demand: a government composed of neutral, non-party people. A non-party individual can be identified. But how can one define the red herring, neutral. Are we looking for a neutral individual or institutions, say the Supreme Court or the Presidency or the office of the speaker. If we look for individuals outside institutions there can be no agreement and we will only land ourselves in an interminable debate albeit, there is no dearth of men of unquestionable integrity in our society. In 1990 the parties and the people ungrudgingly accepted the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court as their president; The choice was by office, not by individual. The line drawn between the two is a fine one but one should appreciate that. We do not know if some people want us to go back 1200 years when the fragmented Bengali nation

due to continuous internal disorder finally chose a ninny (no disrespect meant) called Gopal as their king.

Yet a third reason why the talks could not be fruitful is the impractical nature of the demand. Mr Kibria in his list of three points centering round which the talks were continuing notes that after the formation of an agreed government, talks would have to be held to revise the electoral rolls, depoliticize the government etc. There is an incongruity here. After the installation of a neutral, non-party government why should the parties be involved again in matters of election is not clear to us. Over and above it would be impractical to go for a new electoral roll among others. How long would the country wait in an uncertain situation?

From the above one may draw the conclusion that the talks were not meant to be successful. At least they were not aimed at ensuring free and fair election, which is the expressed stance of the opposition. We feel it more because a non-party government by itself could not and would not ensure free and fair polls. Dr Kamal Hossain has been crying hoarse over the last few years that unless black money and terrorism are eliminated there can be no free and fair election. But this does not seem to have cut much ice simply because

this prescription does not suit many.

Those who believe in democracy cannot but feel pained to see that an election to the parliament is being held without the participation of the major opposition political parties. However for a party in power perhaps there was no option. But politics is a continuous process and all is not lost. It would be advisable on the part of the newly elected government to assess public opinion on pre-electoral non-party government and bring about necessary changes in the constitution. Our constitution unlike that of Norway for example, entitles the Prime Minister to advise the President to dissolve the parliament and arrange to hold mid-term elections. If a national consensus is reached another election can be held at an appropriate moment. Every body has to accept that the country belongs to all the 120m people and not to an individual or a particular party. And no one should therefore try to impose his/her opinion on others. All parties should, however, agree on some basic principles. These are, respect for the constitution, continuation of a democratic political order peaceful transition to power and rights of the individual.

Enough is enough. The people want some peace now. The author is former Vice Chancellor of Dhaka University. He recently returned after his Ambassadorial assignment in Senegal.

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.

"Passing Thoughts Invited by the Impasse"

Sir, Thanks for the thought-provoking article published in your esteemed paper on 10th and 11th January '90. I hope the suggested constitutional changes will get due weight when constitutional experts or honourable members of Parliament sit for amendment.

According to the writer, the politicians, the mastaans (mostly the unemployed youth), and the money-mastaans, in combination, provide the political music and they do not change parties, they basically belong to the Government parties for ever. I do not know why the writer has omitted another class, that is the bureaucratic mastaans. The country has seen, how these intellectually developed mastaans, holding important chairs, have danced to the tune of their masters at the cost of public exchequer. Their numbers were and are many. During Ershad's regime G-10 were identified, but not so prominent were many. These parasites without giving anything sucked the national blood, to please their master and secure benefit for themselves including posting in World

Bank, ADB, UNDP, extension of service, enjoying 3/4 car facility and what not? The nation wants to see them punished.

A few suggestions for constitutional and other changes are given below:

1. No civilian or military officer after his retirement/resignation can become MP or Minister within the next five years.

Such ambitious people, apart from maintaining unwanted close liaison with political parties of their choice while holding government post, subsequently remain an undesirable link between the administration and politics, polluting both.

for all types of post, the same should be followed at least on greater district basis while appointing Minister, Dy Minister or State Minister.

Too much concentration of Ministers from same area creates rivalry amongst themselves and the Cabinet loses its representative character.

4. The post of Chief Secretary be revived. Many a Secretary boasts that he has nothing to lose, as he has reached the ceiling. Some of them often show defiance and even tend to indulge in corruption. If a bait is in the sky, they may tend to keep their record straight.

Khairul Anam Khan, Paribagh, Dhaka-1000.

Impediments to foreign investment

Sir, The present government on taking office in 1991 had announced a number of liberal economic programmes.

Nevertheless, we have not seen any major upturn in the volume of our foreign investment in the industrial or agricultural sector. The industrial policy in our country, revised by the government from time to time provides a great deal of incentives for foreign investors. But, in reality, the inflow of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) has been very insignificant compared even to some problem-ridden countries around us like India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam and Pakistan. The major impediments to the flow of Foreign Direct

Investment reported on occasions in the press may be outlined as below:

- 1) Poor image of our country abroad.
- 2) Lack of infrastructural facilities.
- 3) Lack of one-stop services for investors.
- 4) Lack of implementation of declared policy and coordination amongst government agencies.
- 5) Labour indiscipline and trade union militancy.
- 6) Frequent strikes and political agitation.
- 7) Comparative disadvantages in regard to incentives and infrastructural facilities enjoyed by other competing countries.
- 8) Procedure and problems of customs clearance.
- 9) Lack of trained human resources.
- 10) Lack of industrial information and data for policy making.
- 11) Bureaucratic tangles and corruption in government and semi-government agencies.
- 12) Rapid import and trade liberalization and their negative effects on the local manufacturing industries.
- 13) Banking system and high interest rate for industrial credit.
- 14) Lack of funds for the publicity and promotional campaign to compete with other countries.
- 15) Dearth of competent management force fully conversant with an international language like English.

Remedial measures, not too hard if there's a will, should be taken now, without wasting time any more.

Milin Roy, North Bashabo, Dhaka

Interference

Sir, Your newspaper has reported that the US Ambassador in Dhaka was trying to "engineer" a negotiated solution of the current political impasse in our country by involving leaders of the major political parties. He is however most respectfully reminded that this is our domestic issue which does not warrant a "Third Party" interference from outside. One wonders how the great American people would react if the Bangladesh Ambassador in Washington invited all the President Clinton's men and the Republican leaders in the Congress at his residence to reach an agreement on the current budgetary crisis in the USA in the name of smooth working of democracy? In inter-state relations the principle of equal sovereignty implies that what is sauce for the gander is sauce for the goose.

ASM Islam, 42/5, South Badda, Dhaka

Amendment in Constitution

Sir, True there is no provision in our Constitution for holding a general election under a caretaker government. It is crystal clear vide Article 142 of our Constitution how we can amend our Constitution. Our Constitution, however, does not tell us whether we would make a 'post facto' or 'de facto' amendment therein. We may therefore can make both 'de facto' and

'post facto' amendment, in our Constitution.

In an independent, sovereign and democratic country we can solve all our political and constitutional problems by people's votes.

Let us therefore hold a free, fair, meaningful, peaceful and credible general election under a caretaker government headed either by Chief Justice of Bangladesh M Afzal or former Acting President Shahabuddin Ahmed and make 'post facto' amendment in our Constitution. It may be mentioned here that the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh is itself a 'post facto' Constitution. We made our Constitution on 4th November 1972 and it was given effect from 26th March 1971, the day of proclamation of our independence.

O H Kabir, Dhaka-1203

Madrasha education

Sir, I find no justification for keeping the Madrasha education under a different system. Madrasha students are also studying all subjects of science including additional papers on Islamic subjects. So in this era of science and technology madrasha education system should be reformed and modernized and integrated with the mainstream.

M Zahidul Haque, Bangladesh Agricultural Institute, Dhaka-1207.