

Tough Measures Now

Finance Minister S A M S Kibria has an uphill task before him. He finds the debt servicing a crippling burden on the revenue budget, the inflation rate up and the banking system licking wounds after taking the blows of political interference. He says he has to deal with the fallout "in the years ahead." Our advice is he set about taking the corrective steps on a double-quick basis. He has to complete the process early enough for the new government to reap dividends for itself in terms of fulfilling its writ and for the nation for development and welfare.

In his critique on economic management by the erstwhile government, the finance minister has come particularly hard on the "politically motivated abnormal credit expansion" in the election year. The government had resorted to large scale borrowing from the banking sector with the following results: (a) the interest payment on domestic debt mounted and with the foreign debt considered, the debt servicing in the overall soared beyond the critical threshold; and (b) the local resource component to development financing dwindled.

Actions are called for financial sector reform with restructured boards for the banks; recovery of the loans at any cost; and a professionally sound set of monetary and fiscal measures.

The finance minister on some recent occasions reiterated Awami League's electoral pledges for efficient public sector management to curb national wastes together with a determined removal of fetters on the private sector. Of fundamental import to both these pursuits would be the role of the labour unions. The CBAs have stuck to their guns as far as disinvestment of public sector units goes. Another aspect is how they conduct themselves in the private enterprises. Reforms are due there.

Tough measures ought to be taken at the peak of a government's popularity. The iron has to be struck into shape when it is the hottest. Unfortunately we have seen valuable lead time being mispent during the first few months, even a couple of years of incumbency of a democratic government. Populism led it to put off unpleasant, harsh steps until the very end when things got far too messed up for untangling.

We want the new government to initiate all the tough measures their best judgement tells them to, within their first hundred days, with the forthcoming budget heralding the process and the next year's budget announcement marking a completion of it.

A Great Job at Hand

What is our national problem number one? There are actually quite a few. Possibly the most tragic and at the same time most ludicrous among them all is campus violence.

The council of Vice-Chancellors met Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Saturday to seek her co-operation in ending session-jam and halting brain-drain and other problems of the universities. While promising to be all helpful, the Prime Minister very meaningfully said students should in no way be used as tools of politics. She very categorically said without the eradication of terrorism and vandalism on the university and college campuses standard of education cannot be raised from the low it has hit. She, in her turn, sought the co-operation of the university authorities and all other quarters to stop arms display at the sacred seats of learning. The PM forcefully said terrorists on the campuses would not be tolerated and they are only a bunch of thugs belonging to nothing.

Now how can the PM's strong sentiment and VC's good works can be put together to eradicate terrorism from the campuses? The university administrations have proven less than up to the task in the past, because major political parties promoted student terrorism. Now with the change in the total situation, the nation is expecting Sheikh Hasina to prove true to her words and do her part of the deal which is now greater than the others' taken together.

There is a magic formula to do the miracle — banning parties from having student fronts. As long as students thought and acted independently this nation worked wonders. Now that they have been reduced into hired cadres student power no more leads and is feared and hated. Cutting the party roots is easier said than done. The PM will have really to dare BNP and Shibir into disowning these latter's armed students and outsiders by first going after boys terrorising in her own party's name. As she has promised so many times. This will be a truly great job done.

Fabulous Act by a Child

We have no legends that can compare to the one created around Casablanca. But we do have an ancient parallel to a much later-day tale of a Dutch boy trying to plug a hole in the dyke that saves the Netherlands — literally meaning low lands — from being overrun by the seas — by placing his body against it. So did Uddalak Aruni in this subcontinent some two thousand years ago. He too placed his body to block flood waters from inundating crop fields belonging to his guru.

Now we have one heroic exploit by only a child of nine, that can compare to any of such kind in the world. Abul Khair was out early in the morning hunting for snails on Saturday. His haunt was by the Boalpur Canal near the Hajiganj railway station of Chandpur. Suddenly he sighted a breach in the rail tracks — some part of it had been uprooted. It is incredible how he knew what to do. He sprinted him and managed to tear off some red cloth out of what only he knows. It was five in the morning and his parents weren't possibly awakened that early to help him in his self-imposed mission. Ran he back to the rail breach and by constantly waving his piece of cloth finally succeeded in stopping the rushing Meghna Express Intercity train. Abul Khair's quick and determined action and an uncanny wit leading to it saved at least a thousand passengers on board from coming to all kinds of harm including numerous deaths.

Abul Khair's wit and heroism we should be celebrating appropriately by making the story a must for school texts. Let the child be also handsomely rewarded and his education at least up to the SSC level paid for by the state.

ON Indian Foreign Secretary Salman Haider's return to New Delhi after his trip to Dhaka, India's External Affairs Minister I K Gujral has said to the foreign press corps that India looks forward to a great deal of cooperation with the new government in Bangladesh.

We have our own expectations of the new government in India, too. Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda is a man vastly experienced in water disputes, the economic and ecological rights aspects to these, to be precise. As chief minister of Karnataka he was instrumental in solving the Cauvery water sharing problem between his state and the state of Tamil Nadu by releasing 6000 million cubic metres of water to the latter. Many people had died in the Cauvery water dispute before it could be finally resolved. If he would now extend his experience to the international river water dispute between Bangladesh and India, over the Ganges, the Farakka-related thorn in the normalisation of bilateral relations can be removed with the two countries poised for an era of mutually productive interactions.

He should be able to take the South Block along and perhaps other political parties, the media and the Gangetic basin Indian states, too. With the Awami League government in Bangladesh taking a purely bilateral approach in place of the multilateral one adopted by the erstwhile government, the air should be clear for India now to engage Bangladesh in fruitful negotiations on a pre-determined list of agenda with primacy and centrality accorded to Ganges water sharing.

The vibrations sent by Jamaat's poor showing in our elections, although the party's tally on percentage of votes is not inconsiderable — could be cutting both ways in

Water for Friendship

Bangladesh Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad while sounding quite hopeful of a water sharing deal with India as early as before the onset of the next dry season indicated in reply to a question on the transit issue: "Everything would be discussed. We will do whatever reality permits."

India: BJP taking satisfaction from it but perhaps not without some introspection, and the avowedly secular parties in India just admiring it, as some comments in the Indian press, especially the West Bengal one, suggested in the wake of the publication of our election results.

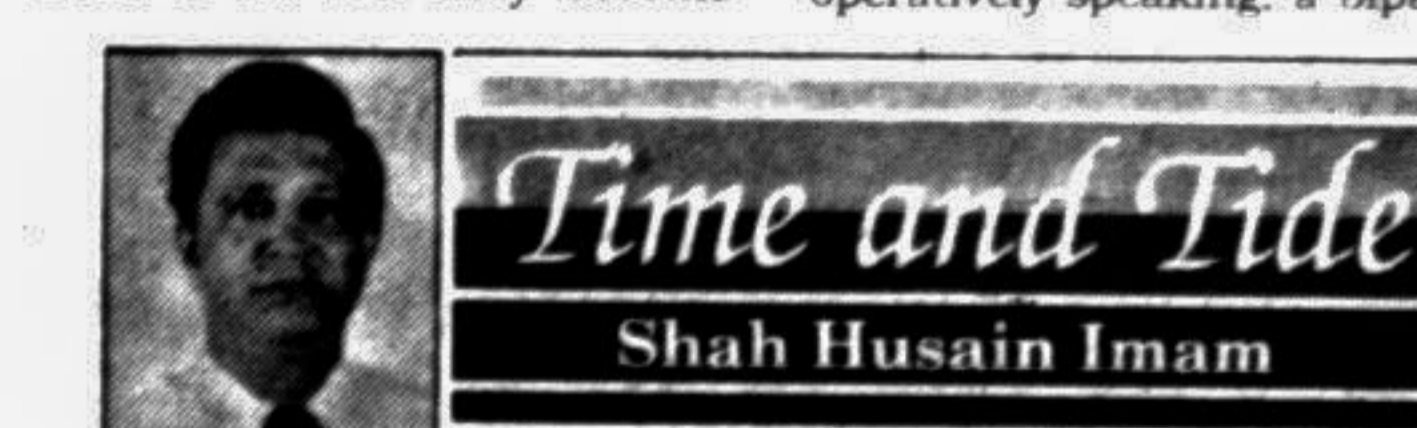
The Congress Party whose support is crucial to the survival of Gowda government may not stand in the way of a rapprochement with Bangladesh in a changed context marked by Awami League's return to power. And Deve Gowda who has sounded quite genial to the region since assuming power will only be living up to the Janata legacy of beneficial bilateralism if he makes friendly overtures to Bangladesh.

So, there is a potential degree of receptivity in India towards Bangladesh's views at the moment which perhaps may be translated into an all India consensus over the lead item of the agenda, namely the equitable sharing of the Ganges water in the lean season as distinguished from closing and opening of the tap at Farakka unilaterally in the absence of an agreement since 1988.

The upper riparian Indian states could not sound discordant in the matter of parting with the due share of Bangladesh as nobody in the right frame of mind can believe that India has deliberately slammed shut all conceivable options to let Dhaka have its quota of water. It must be there. Besides, an international river is a subject for the Indian union government to deal with as per the Constitution of that country.

As for Farakka, BG Verghese refers, in his well-documented book, entitled, "Waters of Hope", to an assessment of the Calcutta Port Trust. "If... the discharge of 40,000 cusecs through the Farakka network into the Bhagirathi-Hooghly can be ensured for seven years, particularly during the lean months, the deterioration in the Calcutta port could be effectively stopped. If this discharge, even at the rate of 32,000 cusecs, was continued for a further period of seven years, it was hoped that the draft of 28 feet may become

available in Calcutta port for a major portion of the year, as was the position in 1938 (page 356)."



Time and Tide
Shah Husain Imam

More than twenty years after the commissioning of Farakka, the prospect for a readjustment in the release of lean season water to Bangladesh evidently looks bright.

The political consensus on the Bangladesh side does not obviously come ready made by virtue of the Awami League victory at the polls. True, the Bangladeshi people have voted Awami League to power thinking, among other things, that the party stood a better chance than the BNP to get them their rightful share of the Ganges water from India. But then it must be realised that the Awami League victory was par-

san consensus, is needed to be forged in Bangladesh over two specific points at issue with India insofar as the water dispute goes. Firstly, there better be a consensus on the minimum and maximum quanta of water we want released to us at the Farakka point during the lean season. The opposition leader Begum Khaleda Zia put it the other day at 38,000 cusecs, very nearly echoing what her husband late President Zia had secured from the Janata government in 1977 — with, of course, a guarantee clause for the bare minimum flow. Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad has, while reacting to this, recalled that Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had secured 44,000 cusecs in 1974 from Indira Gandhi. So,

why not aim at it? When Khaleda Zia had assumed power in 1991 some Indian newspapers commented to the effect that if the Indian government negotiated an outcome on any bilateral issue with the BNP government it ran no risk of being misunderstood for having imposed anything on Bangladesh. Now perhaps the obverse has to be borne in mind by the Indian government so that the Awami League is not embarrassed in any way.

But India had reportedly indicated to the erstwhile BNP government, towards the end of its tenure, that she was agreeable to a release of at best between 30,000 and 20,000 cusecs of water to Bangladesh in view of what India argued, increased water requirements of the upper riparian Indian states during the lean season. Thus there should be a consensual approach to the quanta of water Bangladesh would seek in her negotiations with India for her dry months. If, however, the Awami League government sticks to the benchmark 44,000 cusecs or gets more than, or at least equals, what the BNP government had negotiated in 1977, then there would be no cause for a political protest by the opposition in Bangladesh. At any rate, while settling for our quotas we need to bear in mind the cumulative effect of having gone without adequate water for a number of years. A greater compulsion for us to have a national consensus lies in India's reported preference for a package deal, more precisely, for transit through Bangladesh to her north-eastern states with extended user rights to Chittagong port in

exchange for a satisfactory water deal. It must be made clear though that India has not officially insisted on a quid pro quo.

Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad while sounding quite hopeful of a water sharing deal with India as early as before the onset of the next dry season indicated in reply to a question on the transit issue: "Everything would be discussed. We will do whatever reality permits."

It is in this vein that we refer to his latest observations that he needed the backing of all parties to take up issues with India forcefully. We posit that the water issue or issues are so fundamental to the interests of people that these ought to be taken out of the vicissitudes of politics, both inter-state as well as internally within India and Bangladesh. While the lean season water sharing problem admits of a bilateral resolution no doubt, the questions centring on augmentation of the flow of the Ganges and flood-control need to be addressed regionally to prise open what is now a suppressed bounty of nature — abundant electricity, balanced environment, smooth navigation, massive agricultural harvests, etc. The allusion is not only to the European Union complementing each other on resources but also to the cooperation between the US and Mexico over Colorado and Rio Grande rivers and that among the five co-riparians of the Mekong and those of the river Nile, let alone other water compacts arrived at in much more complicated situations than what India and Bangladesh face today.

The writer is a former Minister (Press) at the Bangladesh High Commissioner in New Delhi.

The UNSG and the US

by Ekram Kabir

Why is a second term so important for Ghalib even after knowing that he'll be going by the rules of a unipolar world; and what went wrong with Ghalib that the US doesn't want him at the top of the world body (previously, no other Secretary-General was denied in such manner as in case of Ghalib)?

may succeed Ghalib's position next year. These are indicators that an important power struggle in the world body is underway.

Reportedly, the Clinton administration has accused Boutros-Ghali of being too slow to reform the world body. It has also threatened to use US veto power at the UN Security Council to oust him. But, according to critics, President Clinton may face a tough time to accomplish what the US wants. Because the African leaders on July 9 at the 32nd summit of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) defied the US and recommended their fellow African be seriously considered for a second term as UN Secretary-General. And an Associated Press report says Ghalib himself went to Cameroon's capital Yaounde on July 7 alongside South African President Nelson Mandela to lobby for support.

Questions bug Why is a second term so important for Ghalib even after knowing that he'll be going by the rules of a unipolar world; and what went wrong with Ghalib that the US doesn't want him at the top of the world body (previously, no other Secretary-General was denied in such manner as in case of Ghalib)?

Although, the UN-related literature implies, he (so far, it's always been a male) command no state machinery, the Secretary-General is an important personality — no matter to what extent "thankless" his efforts may be these days. He cannot exercise much initiative on behalf of the international body, because he is virtually unable to afford antagonising any "one" of the power-

ful members. But he truly is responsible for implementing a policy once it's been agreed upon by the organisation, and he can interpret "his" instructions with some degree of latitude.

The position of the Secretary-General making moves on behalf of the UN as a whole in maintaining international order — even against the national interests of "powerful" members or "their" blocs — is lamentably precarious. He represents such an organisation that has "no power or means" except those which are provided by its member-states. The only consoling element of "power", one can reasonably say, which he can wield is global public opinion as expressed by the UN members. He must always be watchful while assessing what exactly "his" opinion is and — with an eagle-eye attention — he can't avoid clashes. Proof? Well, wasn't the fate of the first Secretary-General Trygve Lie the same, who accepted the American view that the Communists had committed aggression in Korea thereby allowing UN support for US action?

Dag Hammarskjöld, the Swede who headed the UN from 1953 to 1961 was in the same situation that of the Norwegian Trygve Lie, and the second Secretary-General was more cautious than his predecessor. Dag Hammarskjöld, according to available information, pursued an active UN policy in Congo which thwarted the Soviet designs.

Khrushchev's contention that no individual can be neutral was justified in the condi-

tions of today's generation, but his demand that the UN top position should be split into two, a committee of three representatives of the three blocs — Communist, Western and Non-aligned — would have led to a fullstop on the world body. It can be mentioned here: while the blocs would be able to exercise their "veto", the organisation could not have conceivably done much for international order. Anyway, following the successful part played by the Secretary-General in the Cuban missile crisis in '62, the Russians retreated away from what they were asking for.

However, in a non-committal statement, the Foreign Office of Germany last month was reported to have praised Boutros-Ghali as a "distinguished statesman who has served with honour in one of the world's most difficult assignments at a very testing period in the UN's history". For France, President Chirac was reported to have stated that he would like Ghalib to serve another term. Britain on the other hand — which was not a supporter of the Egyptian when he was appointed in '90 — is unlikely to oppose the US by supporting him now.

The qualities that President Clinton is likely to seek are easier to discern — he wants a person with a record of organisational skills who'll pledge to transform the UN into something resembling less a "world bureaucracy" and more a "modern corporation". Three personalities who have been mentioned in recent weeks as possible replacements claimed, following Clinton's statement, that they would, in

fact, not be running for the position.

They included: the first woman President of Ireland Mary Robinson, who said she wasn't interested in UN post, but spoke of her views on the future of the organisation and her vision of "globalisation"; the chief of the UNHCR — Japan's Sadako Ogata; and Gro Harlem Brundtland, the youngest-ever Prime Minister of Norway who led the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in '92. The name of Kofi Annan who is the chief of UN peace-keeping a Ghanaian — has also been mentioned. Meanwhile, there's a tradition of geographical rotation within the UN. Ghalib, though Egyptian, is considered to be an African, and in theory, the second term that was to be his should also be given to an African. If no African is forthcoming, then the next Secretary-General continent-wise in line is from Asia.

The world at large — that includes the developing countries — will welcome a female personality to head the UN, but the real problem which is likely to come at the forefront is the line drawn between the developing and developed countries at the Security Council. Theoretically the Council is accountable to the 184-nation UN General Assembly in which developing countries form a "majority", but in practice, as has been observed, the Council frequently bypasses the UN's will. For example, a large number of developing countries made little secret of their contempt at the 50th anniversary of the UN for the role of the US in the organisation — specially when it

owed the UN some 1.5 billion US dollars, roughly half the organisation's debt.

These countries at the 51st UNGA may come up, voicing that "all people deserve a square representation at the Council". A clear look at the heart of the Security Council will reveal where it stands today — four-fifths of it are represented by Europeans or people of European heritage. Here, there's a looming question: mark: is it right or wrong? It definitely will sound as wrong from the developing countries' point of view. They should be heard because they exist and they contribute to the world. This may sound like a pie-in-the-sky solution to the five permanent members.

But pressure for additional permanent seats may boil up, as it focuses on two groups — the economically powerful and the high-population countries, but the latter would still be under-represented and ignored. On the other hand, front-runners in the first group are Japan and Germany. These two were ignored because they were defeated in the last great war, but now both of them have become economic giants. They are also now the second and the third largest contributors to the UN, after the United States. Japan contributes \$168 million a year, and Germany \$98 million. The Japanese Foreign Minister Yukihiko Ikeda told the General Assembly in January this year: "Japan believes it is necessary to expand the Security Council by adding countries... to the permanent membership. Japan is ready to discharge its responsibilities as a permanent member."

At the backdrop of anti-US stance likely to be taken by the whole of Africa, part of Asia and some European countries, Boutros-Ghali might get lucky to serve a second term as the Secretary-General.

countries also require technical assistance and substantial debt relief, and waiving of huge interest accrued on their foreign loans. And the provision for workers' rights and uniform labour standard under WTO should not be linked to trade and applied rigidly in case of least developed countries, for the living and working conditions in the least developed countries will improve with the improvement of their economic well-being through appropriate domestic policies and adequate external support.

Lastly, to narrow the trade gap between India and Bangladesh, I like to reiterate what I suggested in my article, "Unfavourable Trade Balance with India: Narrowing the Gap" appearing in The Daily Star dated 12.12.95 that "India must open its market for Bangladesh exports goods. For this all our exportable goods should be placed freely on the Indian import policy. Besides, Indian tariffs on our exportable goods should be reduced to between zero and 5 per cent. I also suggested that if such measures are not acceptable to India, we should impose 100 per cent punitive tariff on imports from India. It may be noted that before concluding a car trade deal dated 28.10.95, between United States and Japan, the United States planned to impose 100 per cent import tariff on 13 luxury Japanese car models to reduce its \$60 billion trade gap with Japan."

The writer is a retired Collector of Customs.

To the Editor...

Peace on campus

Sir, Now that a new parliament has been constituted with the democratically elected public representatives, we hope that this Parliament will make a history in the development and prosperity of Bangladesh.

Being an academician I would call upon the new Parliament to kindly adopt a policy decision/resolution creating laws for maintaining peace, order and discipline in all the educational institutions of this country. In this regard the relevant Parliamentary Committee may invite opinions/suggestions from VCs, Principals and others academicians. This is an urgent need of the hour.

M. Zahidul Haque
Assistant Professor
Bangladesh Agricultural Institute
Dhaka.

About 'Wise Men'

Sir, I would like to thank Mr Anwarul Kabir for his highly polished and nice opinion and the advice to the letter-writers and editors in his opinion "AL and BNP: Of Major Political Parties" published in the 29th June issue of The Daily Star.

I wish he would have given this type of opinion during the time of en masse resignation of opposition MPs from 5th parliament causing a constitutional crisis. I also wish he

would have given this type of opinion when there was continuous hartals and strikes for months and the country came to a standstill and Chittagong port was closed. Democratic norms were not reflected on the pages of our newspapers at that time. No advice to opposition leaders, no request to the letter writers, no prudent opinion to uphold democratic norms were published in the newspapers. No editor advised the opposition leader Sheikh Hasina not to close the port for the sake of the country's economy.

But this unfortunate country has got too many "Wise Men" to look after whether the BNP is planning to hit the AL "Below the Belt" to "Knock Out" them in an undemocratic way. I am sure the general people of Bangladesh are wise enough to judge whether the opposition parties have played a fair game in the 5th parliament. The answer is obvious when instead of so many unfavourable factors BNP emerged as the single largest opposition party over 116 seats in the 7th Parliament.

I will request these "Wise Men" of Bangladesh to rise to the occasion for the sake of country not for the sake of any party and I hope they will think for the people of this country more than anything else.

Mrs. H A Karim
Malibagh Choudhury Para
Dhaka-1219

OPINION

Open Market Policy

Mohammad Mujibur Rahman

the trade balance of ASEAN in the year 2003, compared to the balance if there were no trade and investment liberalization.

The highly industrialised countries like USA, UK, etc. required 150 to 200 years to develop their economy. During its early period of industrialisation the United Kingdom was a mighty naval power, which prevented entry of foreign goods into its country with swords and with the same swords it cut the fingers of our artisans! When the United States won its independence from England the first thing they did was ban free trade. It was a ferocious protectionism that made possible the power of the United States. The self-sufficiency of Europe and the expansion of Japan (Free Trade for Whom by Eduardo Galeano).

On the other hand, the economic development of the region now comprising Bangladesh was minimal before 1947. Again after 1947, the progress in this regard was so slow that we had to secede from Pakistan in 1971. After 1971, due to autocratic rules, political turmoil, and recently frequent hartals and blockades, the growth of industries has been retarded. Thus our industries are still in their infancy. Happily, the Marrakesh

declaration provides for "special treatments to poorer nations" under World Trade Organisation (WTO). We should invoke this particular provision of WTO and demand protection to our industries (including garment and apparel) for at least 30 years.

During this period, a substantial portion of the profits accruing from 200 billion trade bonanza which is expected to occur due to trade liberalisation under WTO within 10 years should be siphoned back to the least developed countries by giving substantial aid in the form of grant and soft loan so that the least developed countries may develop their industries and infrastructure (including provision for construction of road, generation of electricity, water supply etc.). It will not be out of place to mention here that at the recently concluded conference of European Union and the Mediterranean countries at Barcelona sitting down for the first time with the express aim of turning the region into a free trade zone, the 15 European Union countries promised to put up 12 billion dollars in aid and soft loans to their 12 Mediterranean partners to cushion the shock of opening up their market for the first time.

Besides, the least developed