

Solving Water Issue

Indian External Affairs Minister I K Gujral has been categorical about reaching an accord with Bangladesh on sharing the Ganges water before the next lean season.

What is even more reassuring is the fact that the bilateral efforts for a solution to the water problem have the backing of political will from both sides.

Let us hope that the congenial environment created by the political will demonstrated at a high level on both sides will have a positive bearing on the work at the disposal of the experts now.

Of major significance is the Indian coalition government's attitude towards its neighbours. We notice with pleasure a major shift — obviously for the better — in Indian attitude, particularly in case of Bangladesh.

Sincerity Lacking

The days of universal significance have a way of leaving behind a trail of depressing realisations in Bangladesh. World Literacy Day observed yesterday throughout the country as elsewhere in the world could only serve as a sad reminder of the doldrums our education system is in.

While our economic and socio-political reality does not really offer a fertile pasture for education to expand as quickly as one would like it to, lack of sincerity in every rank has been subverting the process for quite some time.

The target of raising the literacy level should be constantly focused on the idea of helping the innumerable unwashed out from the dark tunnel of prejudice and ignorance so that they no longer remain a burden and fits in automatically in the developmental activities for an overall upliftment of the nation.

The Prime Minister while speaking at a reception accorded to the brilliant students of the six secondary education boards the other day stressed on the necessity of a pragmatic education policy.

Sheer Delight

Sri Lanka have confirmed their status as the world champions of one day cricket at the first available opportunity by inflicting a comprehensive 50-run defeat on old foes Australia in the final of the four-nation Singer Cup tourney last Saturday.

But the secret of the unabated excellence of the Sri Lankan cricket team is far from being a monotonous tale of Aravinda's quality batsmanship. It is a bagful of thrilling offerings. But the one unmistakable colour which tinges all their performances — be it Muralidharan's dash from the deep and a lunge to come up with a pearlier or a ripping throw right on to the top of the balls with a touch of feline ferocity by Upul Chandana of all people — is sheer delight.

More than the concrete and statistic aspect of success, it is the upholding of the intrinsic spirit of the game which is entertainment from the harmony of physical and mental prowess on a ground of fairness that deserves praise at this hour.

Should Bangladesh Further Liberalise Imports?

Dismantling of Tariff Structure in 1992-95 by Kabir U Ahmad

An important seminar was held recently under the aegis of the World Bank on an in-house draft paper, "Trade Policy Reform For Higher Export Growth," with participants mainly from the trade-related government ministries and business community along with some consultants who have interest in the field.

The central question of the seminar was whether or not Bangladesh should further liberalise imports to stimulate exports. Being a provocative subject, an intense and lively debate followed as one expected.

Tariffs and Controls in 1980s

The decade of 1980s was marked by prohibitively high nominal tariffs ranging from somewhere around 40/50 per cent to about 150 per cent in some cases, high quantitative restrictions (like bans on imports of some goods and limited permission of imports of some other goods), tariff anomalies (tariffs on finished goods being lower than those on their inputs), and the use of tariff values which arbitrarily fix tariff rates on some imported items far above their invoice values.

Dismantling of Tariff Structure in 1992-95

Although there were some marginal changes in tariffs in the 1980s, the real drastic change or dismantling of the existing tariff barriers was introduced from 1992 onwards.

By 1995, the tariffs on finished products came down to between 50 and 70 per cent, on intermediate goods to between 15 and 30 per cent, and on raw materials to zero and 15 per cent.

In addition, the Duty Drawback system which was introduced in 1988 was effectively implemented since 1992. Not a single farthing of Duty Drawback was paid to the exporters until March, 1992, but since then exporters were receiving over Tk. 100 crores every year.

Until 1990, there were only 35 items of export on which flat rates of duty drawback were calculated, but by 1993 about 700 items of flat rates were put on the roster for payment of duty drawbacks.

Effects of Tariff Cuts and Others Measures

All these measures brought about a significant change in the export environment in the country which can be seen in a rapid growth of exports from a level of \$1.7 billion in 1990-91 to 3.4 billion dollars in 1994-95 registering an annual average rate of growth of about 25 per cent.

The country should first exploit the full potentials of the existing tariff structure before it launches another major tariff reform. A breathing spell of a few years will give this opportunity. A rush to further reform may cause to the country's fledgling industrial sector a great damage.

Impediments to Further Gains

These are certainly the most impressive gains that the country has made so far by systematically dismantling the trade barriers. But there are also some impediments to realising the full benefits of trade liberalisation.

Should Bangladesh Adopt an Across-the-Board Reform?

The participants in the seminar expressed some reservations about it but not quite effectively. Important voices were more in favour of further reform.

What has to be Done?

In view of the above findings, the TPR comes out with detailed recommendations to remove all the impediments mentioned, but its most general recommendation is the following: The Government should commit to a pre-announced program of across-the-board reform and move away from a made-to-measure approach of special exemptions and compensations (TPR page-28).

agencies. Further, there is no doubt that tariff-cuts will reduce the incentive to take bribes and to under-invoice imports, but it will worsen the present crisis in power, transport and communication sectors. Hence the cost of these inputs to the new export industries will rise and may more than offset the benefits of cheaper imported inputs.

The second consequence is that quite a number of industries in Bangladesh will simply be wiped out with disastrous effects on production, employment and income levels.

OPINION

Sept 5 By-elections

The furore that has erupted over the Sept 5 by-elections is very alarming, and bodes ill for the fragile future of this land of promise and immense potential. The statement demanding the immediate resignation of the CEC falling which there might be widespread agitation, is reminiscent of events that unfurled just a few years ago.

search than for immediate acceptance. One private sector representative raised the question that if the made-to-measure steps in the past could help the phenomenal growth of garments sector, why can't similar steps open up newer sectors of exports now? The point was well taken.

However, one would like to argue against an immediate across-the-board tariff cuts of liberalise imports for the following reasons. In the first place, it is clear that the country has not been able to consolidate the gains from an existing tariff-cuts already in place. Exporters have not been able to take full advantage of the tariff cuts and other export incentives because of lack of infra-structural facilities, difficulties of getting productive loans from the financial institutions and inefficiencies and obstacles in the export administrative

which the AL's Mosharraf Hossain lost to Khaleda Zia on June 12, and the huge margin by which he trounced the BNP candidate, M A Jinnah, on Sept 5, probably indicates that the electorate decided this time to support 'their' man, Mosharraf Hossain, in the absence of a leader of the stature of Khaleda Zia. In Sylhet-4, Imran Ahmed lost to Saifur Rahman by less than 300 votes on June 12, whereas on Sept 5, Imran Ahmed won by a margin of some 6,000 votes over his nearest rival, an Islami Oikya Jote candidate; the BNP did not even figure this time. In the Bogra seats where the BNP has been returned by large margins, local BNP party officials have opined that the voting was very fair! If anyone was the loser this time around, it was the JP with H M Ershad losing two safe seats in Rangpur and it is they more than anyone else who should theoretically cry foul.

In all likelihood, the Sept 5 results, like those of June 12, were a balanced and fair representation of what the electorate wanted. The BNP should and must accept this. If they continue their present tactics of stubborn and unreasonable rejection, they will lose further support in the days ahead. That is the stark reality and a bitter pill to swallow. The BNP is the major opposition party with considerable country-wide support and they stand a real chance of returning to office next time around not only if they rethink their approach and strategy to one of criticism and obstruction on sound and workable foundations.

A friend of democracy

Education vs Budget Provision

The number one problem with education in developing countries like China, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan is diversion of a large proportion of the national budget to military, hence lack of adequate fund for education, secondly, the developing countries normally do not use the allocated fund efficiently. This inaction aggravates the other problem of allocation of insufficient budget to education and its resultant effect — poor infrastructure, poorly equipped science laboratories, poorly equipped computer based facilities etc.

Present literacy rate in Bangladesh is 36.6 per cent whereas the allocation of fund for education is only 16 per cent of the development budget. This allows only per capita availability of Tk 322.00 whereas the national allocation of money for education in USA is Tk 67,074.00. Japan allocates Tk 91,518.00 per capita on education.

Dr A K M Habibullah

Without adequate input nobody gets desired output to match requirement, that is also true in Bangladesh too. If we want rapid progress to remove illiteracy we need money to educate and not Tk 322.00 per capita. This year it could be Tk 1000.00 per head to bring in a tangible impact. Is it not a farcical ethics to allocate only 16 per cent of the development budget to education where 63.4 per cent people are illiterate?

I visited Sri Lanka in 1978 when I found 55 per cent of the employees of their government offices were women. This was possible because of their literacy rate being close to 80 per cent.

I feel strongly to advocate for dialogue/roundtable — as The Daily Star does occasionally — to discuss on what sort of education with what sort of budget is now necessary to address the issues facing the country in the beginning of twenty-first century; identify constraints to rapid removal of illiteracy and introduction of quality technical education to suit the needs in the beginning of the next century.

To be included

Repeal Indemnity Ordinance

Sir, We are so happy to hear that the infamous Indemnity Ordinance that blocks the trial of killers of the founding father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman can be repealed by Jatiya Sangsad by a simple majority. The indemnity ordinance is a criminal law, a black law. This law is totally against the spirit of our Constitution, democracy and human rights.

The leading legal experts of our country suggest that the Indemnity Ordinance is not a part of our Constitution. It is one of the laws and ordinances passed during the martial law period which can always be amended or repealed. It does not require two-thirds majority in the Parliament to repeal it. An absolute majority is adequate for the purpose. The ruling AL which, at the moment, enjoys the absolute majority in the Jatiya Sangsad can repeal the Indemnity Ordinance without the help of BNP. Therefore, it is now clear that the Indemnity Ordinance is no longer an obstacle for the AL to try the killers of Bangabandhu.

Let the common people would also like the Indemnity Ordinance to be repealed. We want the trial of all killings irrespective of party affiliation. We want that criminals be brought to justice and the rule of law be established. We firmly believe that criminals of any kind should not be spared of punishment. To spare a criminal is to fuel terrorism, the killers of father of the nation go unpunished, the life of the commonman is bound to be jeopardised. So I call upon AL government to repeal Indemnity Ordinance as soon as possible to allow law to take its own course.

Md Khalilul Jabbar Fatik Khasabir, Sylhet.

A request to the readers

Sir, If any reader of The Daily Star can kindly provide me with the following two novels entitled 'In Honour Bound' by Gerald Seymour and 'Stalking Point' by Duncan Kyle, I will in exchange, with pleasure, let him/her have the Indemnity Ordinance by Frederick Forsyth and 'Wild Justice' by Wilher Smith as a token of my gratitude.

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Law and order problem

Sir, The prime minister's initiative to hold a workshop on the 'Law and Order Problem of the Nation' was welcomed by many, ignored by some, while none was neutral on opposed to it. In my opinion such a workshop is not unimportant, given the seriousness of the problem, if and when a cross-section of the nation is represented in such a workshop. But, unfortunately, the prime minister's effort was rather narrow and effortless almost looked like a DUCSU-sponsored seminar in a national auditorium in the name of national consensus.

It is heartening to note that there were some people, one of whom drew up professionally right in the heart of the problem and traversed the root through one of the law enforcing agencies and held important offices of the republic finally holding the rank of a secretary. He was one of the right persons to discuss the matter either with deep frankness or concealed hypocrisy to create smoke-screen for the ruling class. Unfortunately for the ruling circle, this person chose to be righteous and fearless. He initiated the discussion on a very sensitive matter, i.e. the making of the ruling machinery. He pointed out to the misuse of funds by all those who call themselves the law makers of the country, the custodians, the guardian angels, who have achieved the right to sit in the most beautiful building (a white elephant) of the nation. He referred to the dishonesty while they were submitting the accounts to the Election Commission showing that he or she did not spend beyond Tk 3 lakh, the ceiling set for individual expenditure in general election in the country. The justness of the criterion inspired him to call the entire body of the guardian angels as national liars' parliament. To my mind, he deserves the thanks not only from me, but also from the entire nation.

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Dog squad

Sir, Police dog squads are used in many countries especially in developed countries in respect of detecting crimes and criminals. These dogs are trained in specified fields such as narcotics, criminals and so on. Even police dogs are being utilised in West Bengal for the past two decades or more in the context of containing terrorism, smuggling, narcotics traffic, human trade etc, as often preached by all the governments in power. I am tempted to request the present government to raise several squads of police dogs for the purpose.

There is no harm to seek assistance of West Bengal government in this field while Bengal was used in commanding those dogs. Let us eliminate terrorism, narcotics and women trafficking for good with dogs.

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