

Boost for Garments

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina opened the three-day Bangladesh Textile and Apparel Exposition-96 and said "we are pledgebound to establish a flourishing competitive economy."

We are familiar with state leaders making best use of all opportunities to utter the best words in the world on the subject of the occasion. It is more important than the good words themselves that these be followed up with such actions as can redeem those words.

We must have a special policy to dovetail all that is needed to flourish garments export. Cut down the procedural bottlenecks, draw in more investment and spread it out into the interior, back it up with all the incentives it needs.

This quite realisable dream will depend much on design and promotion, creativity and business acumen — things that governments are not known to excel in. The PM has already assured us of the all-out help of our foreign missions in creating markets overseas and acquiring orders.

Foreign Policy

Foreign policy of Bangladesh fits the Shakespearean phrase 'airy nothing' like a glove. To avoid the pitfalls of unmeant controversy, it should be observed that the pattern has been so almost from the time of the country's emergence on world map.

Speakers were unanimous on the necessity of pursuing economic diplomacy. History says Bangladesh's international relationship has so far been woefully short of this spirit.

An evaluation of the foreign policy of the larger part of our history would show that apart from taking the initiative to form the SAARC and internationalising the water dispute with India, it has hardly done anything worth its raison d'etre.

One reason behind our foreign policy being not upto our expectations is its tradition of being overtly affected by the whims of the Presidents specially between 1975 and 1990. It explains its failure to adapt itself to a changing world and reflect the positive will and aspiration of the people.

More discussions, debates, in other words, people's participation a la Thursday's one, would help remove this ineffectuality and 'foreignness' in the heart of our foreign policy.

Twilight Triumph

It came at the twilight zone of her career to rob, in her own words, 'her peace and privacy' but it also came to prove once again that quality work, no matter how slim and trim in quantity, has a way of winning recognition.

She has been described as the Mozart of poetry who also combines the fury of Beethoven in her work. Tinged with the rich tradition of worthy predecessors, notably, the three Polish Nobel literature laureates before her, Ms Szyborska could never be in the want of either inspiration or direction.

Besides, Polish literature is, next to Russian, the most important Slavonic literature and has at the same time always formed an integral part of Western literature. Although it started in the middle ages and flowed spontaneously in the atmosphere of Renaissance, the Reformation and the political greatness of the Polish Lithuanian union, the successive ages did mark a steady decline in its standard.

The rebirth of Polish culture and literature took place under the influence of French nationalism. From then on, it has been a history of experiment and exploration. The poets of the Awangarda indulging in unusual metaphors, wrote verses of loose rhythm, for example, Ms Szyborska is a typical product of the poetic tradition that evolved from 1920s onwards.

Transit and Electricity: Politics of "Shibboleths"?

Both of electricity and transit are necessary for our economic survival but could equally jeopardize our political survival if not handled with care. A proper assessment of the politico-economic costs and benefits should immediately start so that people can understand the ramifications of a "to be or not to be" with the issues.

PAUL Samuelson, the widely acclaimed father of modern economics, is said to have once cautioned us against formulating economic policies on "shibboleths."

By "shibboleth" Paul Samuelson wanted to mean, "slogans that take place of hard thinking." The recent politics and political actions of the opposition parties centering around the issues of giving transit to and taking electricity from India seems to suggest that Bangladesh's opposition politics is taking a move towards shibbolethism.

Newspaper reports say that the major opposition party (BNP) is preparing to wage a political war against any act of providing transit to or importing electricity from India. Such a hard-line awaits all of us because, BNP seems to think transit offer or importing electricity tantamounts to surrendering our sovereignty to India.

means "surrendering sovereignty" or importing electricity means selling out Bangladesh, then the sovereignty of Bangladesh has already been committed to be surrendered by the erstwhile regime.

Of course, we would not like to hew on that line of view. We strongly feel that the then government led by BNP threw its utmost sincerity to solve (i) the short-run electricity problem by taking initiatives to buy electricity from India and (ii) to raise revenues by providing transit facilities to India.

Cheaper delivery of electricity — an important ingredient of modern production processes — and generation of higher revenues are essential prerequisites in the pursuit of our economic activities. If Bangladesh can buy "pin to plane" from India then what problems lie with importing electricity from that country? Thailand is reported

hard thinking on economies while in power has given place to politics while they are in the opposition. We feel that a sensible approach to the whole issue should be as follows: First, transit facilities and water sharing should constitute two mutually exclusive events. Availability of Bangladesh's rights on water should not be contingent upon its agreement on transit. The former is a right and the latter, a privilege.

Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes



The moment BNP is moving with such utterances our attention is drawn to two of the news headlines recently published in the Bengalee daily 'The Janakantha'. In fact, other newspapers also published the same items but, perhaps, not as elaborately as Janakantha did.

The second news item relates to the process of negotiations undertaken to buy electricity from India. It could be learnt that the process of negotiating import of electricity began during the last tenure of BNP.

From the analysis of the various newspapers it could be gleaned that the whole idea of transit or electricity import is, in fact, not the brain child of the present government. If anything at all, the present government is just making a follow-up on the past courses of actions. Therefore, it appears, if providing transit facilities

to be purchasing electricity from Laos to meet its energy crisis but there does not seem to be any apprehension, whatsoever, hovering around the loss of sovereignty. As Mr. Saifur Rahman, the former Finance Minister of Bangladesh, says — such deals are not endangering the sovereignty of the buyer and seller countries. Yet only mention of such a deal with India, to meet our short-term shortage becomes such a politically charged issue that it is impossible to hold rational discussions on it.

Turning to the issue of making provisions for transit facilities, it appears that such provisions are in existence in different parts of the world. Nepal is reported to have sought transit facility from India to trade merchandise to Bangladesh. Hopefully, Nepal would be given that. There are in existence both official and unofficial transit facilities between Bangladesh and India even now. Then what's wrong with providing it beneficially?

The above mentioned few examples are thrown not to sell the ideas of exporting transit or importing electricity. Rather, the purpose is to argue that the erstwhile government made some positive thinking which led them to agree to those two issues. We would better like to appreciate their endeavour.

But things seem to have moved diametrically in opposite direction. As far as BNP is concerned, it appears that their

electricity from India if economic cost calculations deem it fit. Fourth, the question of to be or not to be with electricity or transit facility, should be discussed threadbare in the parliament. There should be attempts to build up consensus on these vital points.

We, therefore, would like to ask all concerned to look at these issues from the point of view of both politics and economics. Both import of electricity and export of transit are necessary for our economic survival but could equally jeopardize our political survival if it is not handled with care.

We started the article with remarks from one of the greatest economists, Paul Samuelson. Let us conclude the discussion with the remarks from another Paul — Paul Krugman — the famous economist of the MIT, who said "Shibboleths make you feel good. They are an alternative to the pain of hard thinking and because so many people repeat them, they offer a reassuring sense of community. But you must go beyond Shibboleths, however comfortable they make you feel..." Both the issues of importing electricity and providing transit are too serious to be left to slogans only. Let hard thinking take them on.

Anarchy in electric supply

Sir, We have talked, we have discussed, we have read over the years about the curse of load-shedding. Previously a number of MoUs were signed but with no tangible results. It seems there is no political will to solve this outstanding problem.

More discussions, debates, in other words, people's participation a la Thursday's one, would help remove this ineffectuality and 'foreignness' in the heart of our foreign policy. We hope BISS's praiseworthy initiative will be followed more in this vein in future. For development in the real sense, we need to have a foreign policy which will be alive and not foreign to our requirements — in the context of international fraternity.

I hope the government will immediately solve this problem and relieve the people from the curse of darkness.

William D'Rozario, Baptist Mission Road, Chittagong

Frequent power failures

Sir, Abrupt rise in frequency of power failures for the past few weeks at New Eskaton and Bangla Motor areas is causing endless suffering to the public. On 21.9.96 power went off intermittently on more than eight occasions during the day spanning over only 6-7 hours. Similar disruptions occurred the next day. This area remains under regular load-shedding in the evening. The PDB control room (Tel: 605345, 605229) for complaint had been contacted everytime when there was a power failure but they always appeared to be quite indifferent to the situation.

Many high-rise residential buildings, hospital clinics, schools, important government and commercial establishments with lift and pump facili-

ties are situated in this area. Normal life of the dwellers is simply disrupted when there is a power break. Will the authority concerned kindly look into the cause of such frequent and intolerable power breakdown and take remedial step to alleviate the sufferings of the dwellers?

E Ahmed, 54, New Eskaton Road, Dhaka

AL's attitude

Sir, The leaders as well as the activists and supporters of the AL always claim themselves as the pro-independence elements deploring others who do not support the party as the anti-state ones. They pose as the saviour of the nation and blame others as if they are out to destroy the country. It is apparent from their attitude that if you are not a supporter of the party your allegiance to the country is doubtful. If you don't believe in their ideology, you are not a sane person perhaps! I just cannot get the logic behind this attitude. Why one must have to be an AL supporter to

prove one's patriotism? Is this a democratic approach for which the party poses itself as a champion?

Saikat Hossain, Green Road, Dhaka-1205

Election in Kashmir

Sir, At different times New Delhi has adopted different tactics to show the western democratic countries that the people of Jammu and Kashmir support the Indian occupation of Kashmir.

The use of Indian forces to make elections successful in Jammu and Kashmir makes it abundantly clear that forced imposition of democracy on the people of Kashmir, violating human rights and depriving the people of their independence, is never possible and it is nothing but an absurd and fraud show of democracy in Indian occupied Kashmir.

O H Kabir, 6, Hareet, Wari, Dhaka-1203

OPINION

Textile Engineering: The Challenges after 2005

Abu Sadat Md Sayem

Textile is one of the oldest knowledge of human beings. And most probably textile engineering is the first to be practised by man on earth. Nowadays this has become one of the most sophisticated subjects taught in the leading universities all over the world. In this modern era, textile engineering is defined as a nice combination of mechanical, chemical and most sophisticated fibre engineering. Electronics and computer have come forward to add beauty to this field. So, it can be shown in the following equation: Mechanical engg. + Chemical engg./Applied chemistry + Fibre engg.+electronics/computer = Textile engineering.

But general conception of both educated and uneducated people of the most Third World countries about textile engineering and technology still circles around the conventional handloom for making (lunris and saris). But it is gradually changing in a positive sense. And indeed, Netanyahu's government did this only to satisfy its rightist ego. This was truly reflected in the arrogant attitude of Netanyahu when he addressed the press conference and also in other statements he made thereafter. Despite intense pressure from the US — the principal sponsor of the ME peace process — and particularly from President Clinton, Netanyahu refused to close the

ME Peace Process on Fire: US Unable to Extinguish

Though Clinton Administration was privately showing its displeasure over Netanyahu government's mishandling of the situation, it could not officially and publicly criticise Israel because of the US election which is to take place next month. And here lies the fallacy and the contradictions in the US diplomacy in the Middle East.

DEMOCRACY does not seem to be good for all countries at all times. It has its own limitations — low turnout in election, extremely slim win-margin, opposition and non-participants in election often making majority, winners deviate from electoral commitments, winners personal egos, etc. It often produces autocratic and extreme form of governments resulting in sufferings for a good segment or even majority of the population.

This is exactly what has happened in Israel with its Prime Minister elected with a very slim margin of less than one per cent votes. He was "democratically" elected but has been pursuing his own and Likud's extreme policies which are contrary to those of the ME peace process and which also flouted international obligations under peace declaration signed by the Labour government. Netanyahu's negative and indeed arrogant attitude towards Arafat immediately on his taking over of power vitiated the peace atmosphere.

He wasted time in meeting Arafat and when he met he did not show any positive attitude towards the peace process. It was apparently a meeting under pressure from the US. His gloomy faced handshake with Arafat lasted only four seconds. Though some negotiations continued on different issues, nothing really emerged from these talks as Netanyahu's team had

never been closed — never. This means that he wanted his ego to prevail even if it meant the collapse of the peace process. He is probably unable to gauge the political and strategic implications of his actions. — indeed series of wrong actions he has taken so far. May be it is his "inexperience" — as a former Israeli Prime Minister put it but as it seems he is not the one to learn easily and quickly. It is time for the US administration to tell Netanyahu bluntly that he is not only putting Israeli interest in jeopardy but also the entire US policy in the Middle East — the policy to find a comprehensive peace there.

As it seems the international community, including Britain, expressed dismay over Netanyahu's action which has created a serious crisis in the Middle East. About 55 Palestinians and 15 Israelis were killed and hundreds injured during the last week's violence. "It is a picture of war," Israeli armed forces radio said. Israeli security forces started using live ammunition and rubber bullets against stone-throwing Palestinians when the archaeological tunnel was opened near Al-Aqsa Mosque. The situation quickly went out of control and the Palestinian police forces turned their guns at the Israeli security forces. In many places in the occupied territories and also in the self-rule areas, it was a war-like situation. Violence continued for nearly three

peace process back on track. All except Mubarak agreed to participate — Arafat personally went to meet Mubarak at Alexandria and to persuade him to join the Summit at Washington. Mubarak refused. He, however, counselled Arafat and later said that his non-participation in the summit was intended to protest against Israel's government's refusal to go by its international obligations and implement the commitments made in the peace accord.

Mubarak apparently saw no sense in attending a summit with Netanyahu who was not expected to agree to any of the demands of the Palestinians. Mubarak was proved right as really nothing concrete emerged from the Washington Summit except that they agreed to continue to talk and the next meeting has been fixed in Gaza border. Only one positive thing that came out of the summit was that it provided opportunity for both Arafat and Netanyahu to know each other better. This was reflected in the after-summit hand-shake with Arafat. It was much different from first 4-second hand-shake; this was a longer one — a lot of shaking by Netanyahu himself with some smile, first with right hand and then Netanyahu bringing his left hand over their hand shaking grip that generally reflects one's warmer attitude towards the partner. If this means anything, there could be some



Muslehuddin Ahmad

no clear and positive directive to implement the various provisions of the peace agreement nor to go ahead with the process itself.

Indeed, Israeli government gave permission for expansion of the settlements. The agreement on withdrawal of Israeli forces from Hebron was not implemented nor any negotiation started on final status of Jerusalem. Netanyahu kept West Bank and Gaza borders closed for indefinite period bringing serious economic hardship to Palestinian workers. All these created a climate of serious mistrust. Netanyahu's disproportionate emphasis on security seems to be the pretext now to pursue peace with Palestinians. Egyptian Under-Secretary Abdul Safi correctly said that Netanyahu's "pathological fear" on security issues called for "psychiatric" treatment. Security is no doubt important and this could come about only as a result of peace with Arabs. There could be no security without peace. Israeli leadership of the Labour Government proposed total barbed-wire separation of the two populations for a certain period for the purpose of cooling down of emotions and also for building up confidence. The ideas could be implemented only after completion of the peace process.

However, dragging feet on the peace process was something that angered not only Palestinians but also the international community. Dissatisfaction and anger were building up and disaster was only waiting to happen. It was ignited by unilateral opening by Netanyahu's government of the tunnel near Al-Aqsa Mosque. Muslims' third holiest shrine. Not only Palestinians but many people around the world felt that religious sentiments have been hurt by this. There was no sense in opening up a water-way that was used over 2500 years ago. Indeed, leaving the old water-way in its original form would have made both archaeologists and ecologists happy. And indeed, Netanyahu's government did this only to satisfy its rightist ego. This was truly reflected in the arrogant attitude of Netanyahu when he addressed the press conference and also in other statements he made thereafter. Despite intense pressure from the US — the principal sponsor of the ME peace process — and particularly from President Clinton, Netanyahu refused to close the

days. Netanyahu's government mobilised tanks and helicopter ships into the self-rule areas, which was totally against the Oslo accord. The US and the international community urged both sides to stop hostilities. Yasser Arafat appeared to have very little control over the situation. Initially it was a total uprising against the Israeli onslaught. Later, Arafat managed to prevail and ordered the Palestinian police force to stop firing and also stop Palestinian demonstrators from attacking Israeli forces. It was, however, reported that all the Palestinian police forces did not turn against Israeli forces. Some of them were seen to have carried the injured Israeli armed personnel to safety for treatment and also in Bethlehem they stopped stone throwing angry demonstrators from advancing towards Israeli security posts.

Because of the gravity of the situation, the Security Council met at an emergency session. All members (except US) including Britain were very critical of Netanyahu's government. Though Clinton Administration was privately showing its displeasure over Netanyahu's government's mishandling of the situation, it could not officially and publicly criticise Israel because of the US election which is to take place next month. And here lies the fallacy and the contradictions of the US diplomacy in the Middle East. Because of Jewish influence — indeed an overbearing influence on the US domestic politics — over its economy and media, which unfortunately smelt like the situation that prevailed in Germany before World War II, no US leader could take any open stand against the Jewish state of Israel. This has indeed led to this precarious situation in the Middle East and just for Israel the US has been bearing the brunt of terrorism.

Defying the international opinion and also the Security Council's call to close the tunnel, Netanyahu's government opened it again after Sabbath. The situation could go out of control again but Arafat and his Palestinian self-rule authority remained in control of the situation. The US Administration continued to counsel both parties and ultimately invited Chairman Arafat, Prime Minister Netanyahu, President Mubarak and King Hussein to Washington with a view to finding a solution to the present crisis and also putting the

progress in subsequent talks. Though no details have yet come out on what happened in the two-day summit in which President Clinton participated, it was quite clear that Netanyahu was not prepared to make any concession. He probably went by his American Jewish leaders' advice not to make any concession. He knew that this is election time and President Clinton was not in a position to impose his will on Netanyahu. Arafat has done well by agreeing to talk again on next Sunday in Gaza. It would be a better strategy to buy time and wait for the results of the US election, though the failure of Washington summit might reflect somewhat adversely on Bill Clinton's lead in the poll he is almost sure to win.

Though the Palestinians and particularly Hamas and other radical groups are making preparations for a new Intefada for confronting Israel, Arafat should continue to pursue the path of negotiations. If anyone thinks that Egypt has now turned hostile to Israel, Syria is almost ready to go for another round to recover Golan Height by force and other Arab and Muslim countries would also support an active engagement with Israel, he is absolutely wrong; it would be a hundred per cent suicidal action. Israel is the super power in the Middle East built over the years by the parent super power. And come what may, it would continue to receive support from the parent super power.

However, when there will absolutely be no hope at all, the Palestinians might one day choose suicidal path and anything may happen. At that time Israel may not escape the disaster. Therefore the US must continue to exert its influence and pressure. The newly elected President of the US must go for bold steps and tell Israel it is time to vacate all occupied territories and decide to live in co-existence. With arrogant and radical leadership that exists in Israel, peace may not come at all unless the US makes all out efforts for peace. Oslo accord may buy time and establish a facade of peace for a while but Jerusalem question may undo everything.

(The author apologises to the distinguished readers for not being able to write in the column for about two months as he was away to the USA on an official-cum-private visit.)

This figure will multiply by two or three times by the year 2005, the crucial time for international textiles. In the case of diploma engineers, the figure is five times higher than the number of BSc engineers. From 2005, the quota system of international textiles business will go away and Bangladesh will have to compete against the strong opponents. For its survival in the textile arena, Bangladesh has to set up the indicated number of textile industries within the indicated time.

The lack of textile engineers will collapse the country's textile sector. Because a mechanical or chemical engineer (both graduate and diploma) and sometimes chemist or applied chemist can be the assistant of

a textile engineer but a textile industry cannot run without textile engineers. As a result, Bangladesh cannot fight against its opponents like Vietnam etc., without the perfect men in the perfect place. And the dream of Bangladesh making textile the economical backbone will remain a dream indeed.

So, immediate measures should be taken by the government to make sufficient textile experts within this time, though it is impossible to make indicated number of textile engineers within this short period of time. But the government and other concerns in this sector do not seem to realise the matter.

The writer is a student of Bangladesh College of Textile Engineering and Technology