Dhaka, Friday, October 11, 1996

Aid Disbursement

The most tangible proof of dividends reaped from a largely trouble-free atmosphere is provided by the news that aid disbursement in the first quarter of '96-'97 has exceeded the corresponding levels of last four years. Notably, it has even surpassed the aid received in the first three months of 1993-94, a year economically adjudged as the best during the BNP rule.

The other factors attributed to this auspicious uptick in aid disbursement are improved showings in project implementation and the largesse of big fund releases. But are these not germane to political stability itself? So, we regard all this as a vote of confidence of the donor community in the prevailing politically balanced atmosphere of the country. The donors seem to believe also that reform programmes are in good hands.

The World Bank is to be thanked for their marked spontaneity in making large payments under four very important credit programmes. These relate to the 4th population project, Jamuna Bridge project, Second Road Rehabilitation and Maintenance project and Third Inland Water Transport project.

Smaller projects are also receiving a good deal of attention from the multilateral or bilateral aidgivers. This is amply illustrated by the record availability of funds to agriculture projects — at 6.08 per cent of the undisbursed opening balance during the first quarter of 1996-97 outstripping the average 1 to 3 per cent during the preceding four years. Disbursement fared well in the non-farm section of projects as well. All this may be indicative of a certain uncluttering of the project aid disbursement procedures.

Much as the donor community has been critical of our limited aid absorption capacity which created a pipeline bulge, we for our part, have complained of procedural rigidities imposed by them. It seems a middle road has been hit now between the two sides and henceforth things are expected to work out better.

The bottom-line though is that there is no substitute for efficient project implementation.

Flood of Fake Certificates

The seizure of more than six lakh forged certificates, mark sheets etc. of different universities and education boards by the police comes as an alarming news. The report carried in a Bangla daily says that the organised gang involved in the forgery of documents has already made a fortune amounting to crores of takas. Not a small number of recipients of those certificates found employment in different government and private organisations. How long this gang has been in operation is yet to be known and to know the exact number of certificates that have been exchanged for a fabulous sum of money may indeed be difficult.

However, a few measures can be of help. To identify the employees—both in government and private services — who had used fake educational documents for appointment, the authorities can ask everyday under their employ to produce their original certificates once again for verification. From now on a strict system of verification should be introduced at the time of fresh appointment. Thus the certificates procured illegally can be rendered useless. This is a measure meant for repairing as much of the damage, already done, as possible.

As for dealing with the racketeering, the police have done a marvelous job by unearthing a factory and a press so long used for the purpose. Five of the gang members have also been arrested. Now the police must move fast to capture the rest. However, their task does not end there because this may not be the only gang engaged in the malpractice. Let the police carry on a countrywide hunt for other gangs engaged in the abominable trade. Then the culprits should be meted out exemplary punishment so that nobody in the future can try his hand in this devious practice.

Planning Flaws

The Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) had to lift huge concrete slabs weighing at least two tonnes each and leave them tangentially two feet above the level they had originally been on the storm sewerage of the Panthopath. This temporary arrangement was necessitated, according to WASA's own sources, to avoid gas explosion inside the sewerage tunnel. One such explosion is said to have ripped through a part of Panthopath-Green Road intersection two months back.

The problem arises because the engineers responsible for construction of the tunnel did not have any idea that methane and phosphine could be produced inside. This is exactly happening now. WASA men think that drilling holes through the slabs might have helped release the collected gas and thus avoid explosion. Why they did not carry out the experiment during the past two months is an open question.

So, here is a problem of not planning things. When a danger is imminent, the instant reaction is to deal with it by a piece-meal solution, no matter if that turns out to be an invitation for other kinds of danger. In this particular case, the raised slabs now pose a serious threat to both vehicles and pedestrians.

We are now used to pot -holes but when a whole chunk of road gets dented and continues to precariously dangle, we know how the contractors or engineers had compromised with the quality of construction materials or the original design. That the storm sewerage has no provision for emission of gas is a major design flaw. And look how indifferent the concerned people can be even after knowing it! Instead of drilling holes for two months, they are now risking other dangers. Let such thoughtlessness in planning enjoy no reward. Hold the concerned company or agency responsible and things then will come to a right shape.

The Dream that Failed

Moscow is opulent and relaxed. Religion, opium for masses, is beginning to recast its spell. Why did a mighty country like the Soviet Union break into pieces? There are many reasons why it happened.

LGA, a college student in Moscow, is confused She had Stalin as her hero when she was eight. It was more out of fear than respect. Many years later, she transferred her esteem to Gorbachev. who did not evoke fear and eased the atmosphere by furthering glasnost. Today, she is confused because both have failed her country

Like her, millions in Russia are bewildered. They do not know where they are heading. They have accepted the demise of communism. They cannot accept the demise of their country. "Yeltsin has a heart problem but the entire society is sick at heart," says a leading jour-

nalist. The observation is not wrong, Indeed, Russia gives you the feeling of a country which has lost its vigour and does not know how to regain it. The confidence, which I found in government and people during my last visit in 1977, 19 years ago. has withered away. That confidence grew from the feeling that they were a super power. It also represented a faith that the communist way was a better method to solve the problems of development and disparity.

Suddenly, that dream has crumbled as if it was like building a castle in the air. The ideology, which strung together the various cultures and regions, has snapped beyond repair. It has left people defeated and insecure. They find that the others whom they called dirty masses, is beginning to recast

T is typical of Inder Ku-

mar Gujral, the redoub-

▲ table External Alfairs

Minister of India. He can easily

cast a spell of optimism, as he

did during his recent visit to

Dhaka, in absence of anything

corporeal. A suave and

softspoken Gujral is endowed

with both charm and skill to

disarm the toughest of his

exudes confidence himself and

has the capacity to infuse it

even in a skeptic. He talks with

authority with his roots firmly

struck in his country's soil as a

successful politician who had

his stint in central cabinet even

earlier under Indira Ghandi. As

observed by this writer in sev-

eral academic discourses he can

rescue any heated up discussion

from collapse and prevent it

from exploding into open acri-

or moderator. There are per-

haps a few of his sophistica-

tion outside Nehru-Ghandi clan

in Indian politics today and

had been, with his proven ex-

pertise on foreign policy issues.

the obvious choice for his place

in South block for the second

time. With such credentials Gu-

jral came to Dhaka as the most

distinguished Indian guest after

the installation of a new gov-

ernment in Bangladesh. A

glimpse of his carriage and

conduct both inside and outside

the government provides an in-

teresting profile of the man

who moves about in style often

accompanied by his poetess

wife and invariably a band of

his track-II dialogue experts —

Bhabani Sen Gupta being his

favorite on trips to Bangladesh.

The Indian ministers and of-

ficials have visited Bangladesh

mony as an astute interlocutor

opponents with relative ease.

its spell. Why did a mighty country like the Soviet Union break into pieces? There are many reasons why it happened.

One, it is the military competitiveness which left very little for economic development. Moscow preferred bullet to bread to stay as a super power. But man does not live by bullet alone. Two, it was the ambition the Soviet Union with the break up of Pakistan. His argument was that if Zulfiker Ali Bhutto had accepted the Prime Ministership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman the country would

have remained one. However reflective are these thoughts, they still do not explain fully the abrupt collapse Today the Russians are afraid

well as paucity of inputs. A lady interpreter could not hide her tears when I asked: "Where does Russia go from here?" It is as if they are not confident of tomorrow.

 In such a situation, it is not surprising to find corruption at every level. The customs and the police are the worst. But there is no let up in malpractices in other fields of activity; what has happened is that Marxist leaders of yesterday are generally mafia gangmen of today. They freely wield gun and show no mercy to persons who refuse to pay the 'security fee every month. The mafia gangs have parcelled out Moscow into different areas of

operation and each one extorts

money in its fieldom, and

stamp a card to indicate pay-

165 million tonnes of the erst

while Soviet Union is down to

half. The fall is not so much

due to the loss of acreage but due

to farmers' lack of interest as

This is apart from the money which is embezzled or misappropriated. Official figures are that the Chechnya operation has cost \$ 2 billion. Responsible statements have been made to allege that 90 per cent of the amount has gone into certain pockets'. There is hardly any person at the top bribe or graft against him. In fact, people have accepted corruption as part of today's Russia. They openly say that the communist leaders had a different way of mulcting the state. Only the method has changed.

Corruption has changed the attitude of people, particularly the youth. Mugging is common. Even pistols are whipped up to snatch a purse. There must have been certain set methods for the people to get money because there was full house for Michael Jackson show the other day. The minimum ticket was \$30 and the audience was 45,000 strong.

Fast food joints are popular and there is a strong presence of consumerism. Many people hanker after foreign brands at the expense of Russian goods. made my interpreter happy when I said that I would prefer Russian ice-cream to that of

America's Still, I saw the sunny side of Russia in the superb ballet, thoughtful paintings and the work that indologists are doing without reward. If the tide of history ever turns in Russia it will be because of efforts of such people. Olga and others should

pray that they succeed.

New Delhi can help by offering training facilities in administration, banking and legal work. Although straining their eyes to the west, Russians have good feelings for India. This is the time when a friend

We are not only haunted by

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

of communist leaders in various republics that ripped the country apart. They wanted to be prime ministers and all that went with the office. And there was no feeling for the fatherland. Even now compulsory draft does not get more than 17 per cent youths. Three, it was force, not conviction, that had held the Soviet Union together. Once the relaxation began, there was no way to stop it at some point. Fourth, Gorbachev was thrown out by Yeltsin to become the ruler. The office

mattered, not the country One historian in Moscow of further collapse. That is the reason they are not letting Chechnya to secede. "Once it goes, many other regions will follow," says a political commentator

Gorbachev is the most neglected, if not hated, person. He is held responsible for the plight in which Russians are today. That explains why in the presidential election he secured only 0.01 per cent vote. He does not stay very much in Moscow because too many westerners seek him — only westerners.

How long will this continue ask the Russians themselves

compared the disintegration of The total food production of who is without any scandal of in need can be a friend indeed. Rethinking Indo-Bangla Relations

by Brig (Retd) M Abdul Hafiz

Gujral in his characteristic way made some noble gestures and lofty pronouncements during his visit and touched upon some of the fundamentals of Indo-Bangla relations when he repeatedly told us not to be the 'captive of the past'. Indeed, we must be able to part with the past and face up the challenges of the future

also in the past and they seldom lacked in diplomatic niceties and social pleasantries al though Gujral seems to have scored the full mark. He abun dantly indicated his government's willingness to resolve all outstanding problems with Bangladesh thus bringing about a 'new chapter' in our relationship. He does not set any precondition for anything, does not raise the question of transit facilities to India during his visit and leaves it exclusively to us to arrive at a decision. In fact, even earlier there has never been any dearth of official expressions of warmth and good neighbourliness between these two countries Bangladesh and India. In reality, however our relations with India remain in a shambles for over last two decades. Even the period before that — considered the best time for Indo-Bangla relations during Mujib era — it was not without its problems and misgivings. However, it was in post 1975 Bangladesh that not only the successive governments garnered enough gains in the domestic politics at the expense of this relationship, but India, conveniently placed at a giving end, also adopted an attitude of a benign neglect towards Bangladesh to the grave detriment of its interest in bilateral issues. As a quarter of a century of the emergence of Bangladesh was

capitalists' and 'blood-sucking

imperialists' have won. Not

only that, they are dependent

on them — America and Ger-

many for trade and the World

Bank and the IMF for local cur-

not have got them down if their

standard of living had not dete-

riorated. Nearly 35 per cent of

them live below the poverty

line. Academicians earn mon-

thly 50 dollars, one-fifth of

their original salary. Doctors

and lawyers are a bit better -

only a bit. Publishers are worse

off because the price of rouble

has gone down (5000 roubles

four months. Even soldiers are

not paid regularly. Chief of de-

fence forces has been reported

as having said that he is the last

one to draw pay because he

wants his men to get it first.

The morale of soldiers has been

technicians that nuclear ex-

perts have been found serving

as chauffers and night guards. It

is said that if a vehicle in

Moscow is not government's, it

is available as a taxi. Even the

best of professionals ply their

relaxed. Religion, opium for

Still. Moscow is opulent and

So hard up are scientists and

Salaries are late by three to

make one dollar).

affected adversely.

cars as cabs.

Even this humiliation would

rency loans.

about to elapse it had been vir tually the never never land of Indo-Bangladesh relationship. Can Gujral shore this up? While we have to wait for sometimes to find an answer, he has however been able to generate quite some trusts in Bangladesh which, at the receiving end, would earnestly hope that those

trusts are not misplaced. Alongside a bloated optimism bordering almost on euphoria, the speculations abound in Bangladesh about the outcome of Gujral's visit followed by sudden diplomatic alacrity. If there exists a deadlock in interstate relationship it cannot always be the desired position on either side; nor can it be a permanent phenomenon under all circumstances. Some times the change of guard in a country provides the required way out. An ideal circumstance. has arrived now for Indo-Bangla relationship to extricate itself from its protracted deadlock when new governments with no liability of the past have been installed in both the countries. Moreover while Bangladesh suffered the most because of unresolved bilateral issues whether it was the sharing of the Ganges water or the return of the tribal refugees from India it had not been totally cost effective even for India in both physical and diplomatic term. A complex tangle of tribal groups harbouring sepa-

ratism both in India and Bangladesh did not prove innocuous as it might have appeared initially in both the

countries.

The continuing deprivation of lower Ganges basin from its rightful share of the interna tional water could not be with out its fall out even in India According to environmental ists, even India cannot remain insulated from the resultant degradation of environment because of the shrinking flow of the Ganges water in that country. There are more reasons behind growing Indian urge to come to some understanding with Bangladesh on various issues particularly one with regard to water sharing. Because she knows that it is the single most vital issue the solution of which would possibly provide key to the rest of the areas of mutual concern. India currently under severe pressure from the great powers on comprehensive test ban issue and herself a candidate for a seat in the Security Council is prompted to initiate atleast a modicum of good relationship with her neighbours. The urge is equally strong in Bangladesh where Awami League has come to power after long twentyone years with a wafer thin majority. Much of its credibility and future survival would lie in its ability to extract maximum concessions from India. One of its election plan was to condemn BNP for its inability to get even a litre of lean season water from the Ganges during its five years of rule.

So, most people in Bangladesh presume that there would have to be water agreement, of a sort, if not anything else. However, there is enough of grey ares as to what would be the exact spe of the agreement and the quantum of water to be agreed upon. There are also speculations whether it would be permanent solution with guarantee clause incorporated in it or an interim one as albeit for initiating bargain, on other crucial issues like transit facilities etc in future. Nevertheless, to sustain the confidence of the Bangladeshi, India has already granted tariff con-cession on fifteen items of bilateral trade. Encouraged and emboldened by a buoyant publie mood there are however many enthusiasts who would like to see the frontier of our relations expanded much beyond

these mundane exchanges. Gujral in his characteristic way made some noble gestures and lofty pronouncements during his visit and touched upon some of the fundamentals of Indo-Barrara relations when he repeatedly told us not to be the 'captive of the past'. Indeed, we must be able to part with the past and face up the challenges of the future. South Asia, the home of the largest number of the world's poor, must shake off the hangover for the past and catch up with the rest of the world. But unfortunately we South Asians still seem to be non-starter in this regard. When with the demise of the cold war a myriad conflicts and the paranoia of the past prejudices have given way to an emerging trend of cooperation and conciliation in most parts of the world. South Asia continues to remain mired in the quagmire of the past."

the past memories, the old wounds are frequently opened up with a fresh wave of ethnoreligious conflicts across the region. If a five century old mosque in Ayodhya is desecrated or Kashmiris' aspiration for self determination is held up with half a million security men and their repercussion is felt in Bangladesh or elsewhere it is the past which is overwhelming the present. The rising tide of 'Hindutva' is a grim pointer to how the past is excavated to undo the process of history with vengeance. Even the national policies dictating the inter-state relations are not in pace with time and much coloured with the image of the past. India's security and foreign policy, for example, owes its origin in British imperial policy of treating the neighborhood of India to be lying within its security orbit. The notion still shapes India's policy parameter with regard to her neighbours, although sea changes have occurred in international relations bringing new respectability even to the weak and the small

tal national interests to defend and can have its own perception of security. It was tended to be denied in South Asia where an undeclared Monroe doctrine was in place to ensure India's overlordship of the region since the exit of the British from the sub-continent. In various garbs this policy persists even today with variety of levers of control available in India's hand, Although India's neighbours suffered in different ways whether it was stoppage of Ganges water for Bangladesh or closure of transit routes to Nepal — it must be realized in hindsight that even for India it has been a zerosum game. Because in almost half a century none of her neighbours could permanently be brought in line with India's scheme of things. It is not immediately known how Gujral or Deve Gowda's government would like to address these basic impediments of our relationship before they open up a 'new chapter' in Indo-Bangla relations.

Every nation has its own vi-

The BRAC question

Sir, Mr Tajul Islam's response (26 September) to Mr Lutful Quadir's letter is ingenious as well as disingenuous. Some observations:

Self-reliance is an admirable aim but the path thereto must be consistent with the basic ideals of the Committee. Reductio ab absurdum : no one will argue that casinos are profitable and no one will expect BRAC to invest in those. In that vein, one can say that there is an awful lot of rationale for Aarong; but garment factories, printing presses, could storages and milk processing plants?

Mr Islam states that Tk 90m was received as grant for a very specific purpose. One hopes BRAC is not investing any part of that grant in the house-building finance project. Furthermore, one wonders how this support to middle-income urbanites will progress the case of rural advancement.

Donors have showered million of dollars on BRAC to promote the case of rural advancement. BRAC have used a large part of this free money to build profitable enterprises. One wonders what struggling entrepreneurs make of that. They might mutter about levelplaying fields and also argue that the funds diverted to generate profits (and an Ozymandias-style empire) might have been far more effectively and ethically spent, making many thousands of rural poor self-reliant. Mr Islam's much-vaunted arguments in favour of self-reliance for BRAC are distinctly suspect in that context.

It is said that BRAC will only occupy a 'few floors' and earn a fortune by letting out the rest of BRAC Centre. It is also known that the rent is an astronomical Tk 40/sft. In the first place, landlordism hardly goes with the BRAC image and ideals. And in the second : why can't BRAC function out of more modest quarters and accelerate self-reliance by letting the whole building? I must say it will be very nice indeed if a rural client of BRAC happens to walk past BRAC Centre and gets to know how the other half live. So much, he might think, for all the motivating speeches that BRAC's field-workers have to trot out to the rural poor.

BRAC has been doing a great

deal of good and BRAC's founder CEO is among the most plausible and pleasant person one will have the fortune to meet. But really — whither BRAC?

Harun Azim Banani

Right and wrong

Sir, Immediately after winning the general elections under a caretaker government, the Awami League — which returned to power with people's mandate long after 21 years - blamed the then ruling party BNP for all ills in the country for last five

Now that the Awami League government is only 100-dayold, most of its ministers. MPs and some top bureaucrats have started accusing all previous governments of past 21 years for all types of ills in country.

The strategy of blaming the BNP government first for five years and then accusing all previous governments is amazing. We feel it is nothing but a churlish quibbling.

We wonder whether the Awmai League government's statements and claims are the panaceas for all evils in the country or the utterances of some AL leaders would always be answered by panegyrics? In democracy we must distinguish between right and wrong.

O H Kabir 6, Hare street, Wari, Dhaka-1203

Unnecessary changes in administration

Sir, Massive reshuffle is going on in every sector from the day the present government was formed. Education department, banking, medical, police and in many other important sectors, transfers, new appointments, promotions and sackings are going on in a large-scale. Those who are posted abroad are also

experiencing the same fate. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina declared that she is compelled to make these changes because the past government had posted persons of their party in important posi-tions, did not give scopes to other people, she called it as 'Daliya Karan'.

But, my question is, who are these persons whom the Prime Minister is giving appointments? People have no doubt that those are the active members of the Awami League or have given their allegiance to

So, is it not itself an act of 'Daliya Karan'? It is really surprising that

the ruling party.

the government on one hand is severely criticising the alleged actions of BNP, on the other hand doing the same thing it-

Nur Jahan 1390. East Nasirabad. Chit-

Statistics of road accidents

Sir. I like to bring to your notice about the data published in your newspaper on 22nd September (Page 3) regarding rate of fatality stated to be 55 persons per 10,000 vehicle for the year 1995 in Bangladesh as per the study conducted by BRTA which appears to be very

much on the low side. In 1992 the rate of fatality for the following countries was as follows as per report published in many newspapers including The Daily Star: Japan - 2 persons per 10,000 vehicle, Pakistan - 122 persons per 10,000 vehicle, India - 140 persons per 10,000 vehicle, and Bangladesh — 170 persons per

10,000 vehicle. There has not been any drastic reduction in the rate of fatal accidents in Bangladesh, rather it has shown an increasing trend. I would request BRTA authority to clarify the position along with the definition of fatality for the said study report.

M Bazlur Rahman Ex Addl. Chief Engineer, RHD House No. 9C, Road 13A, Uttara. Dhaka.

Joint venture

Sir, Publicity is being made for the past several weeks in respect of joint venture projects with China since the Prime Minister came back from an official tour to People's Republic of China. Unfortunately I purchased shares and debentures of Magura Paper Mills Limited. a joint venture with China, during the caretaker government

Justice Shahabuddin. But till today, no interest on debenture as promised in the prospectus

The paper mill is yet to be

streamlined though China has the experience of paper-making even before the birth of Christ. Even the ICB authority, the wizard of capital market, invested Tk 4 crores in Magura Paper Mills debenture in 1991.

has been paid.

but no return on investment for the past six years. Under the above facts, let the new government punish the

culprits according to the law. Ahmedul Alam 14. Eskatan Garden. Dhaka-1000

Japan, not India

Sir, Two Asian countries -Indian and Japan - are trying to become permanent member of UN Security Council. Mr I K Gujral, Indian Foreign Minister has recently returned to his country after a successful visit in Bangladesh. The Prime Minister of Bangladesh has assured him to support to India at UNGA. So to speak, though India is our nearest neighbour yet activities towards Bangladesh are not neigh-

bourly. India has already turned the northern part of our country into desert by building embankments on the upstream of 57 rivers. They have not handed over Tinbigha to us though we handed over Berubari as per the treaty, they occupied Talpatti illegally and they are allegedly assisting Shantibahini by supplying arms.

Moreover Japan is one of the donor countries of the world. We are being benefited by Japan through different means like receiving grants and investments in Bangladesh. Besides there is a possibility to earn a lot of foreign exchange by exporting our manpower to

In this context, Japan deserves our support. So, we are unable to realise why the ruling party is attempting to support India in lieu of Japan. I request to authority concerned to think once more before supporting India considering the interest of our country and public sen-

AM Nazmul Huq 5 1/2 New Khanpur, Narayanganj

Buchwald's COLUMN

Dole-ing Out Taxes

THAT this country (US) needs is a balanced budget, a tax Cut and a chicken in every pot. The one person who can deliver all this is Bob Dole, because he only cares about the people who live outside

Washington. I asked a leading economist, "Can Dole really deliver a balanced budget, a tax cut and a chicken in every pot all at the

same time? "If he can't, he shouldn't be running for president. The two things that Americans dream about are a nation without debt and one without taxes. If you can do this, you can get the chicken-in-the-pot vote. It can't be ignored.

"How does Dole plan to balance the budget?" "He hasn't gone into detail, but it has something to do with cutting the government in half, instituting a flat tax and having the FBI distribute chickens to every house in the land." "Does it make sense to balance the budget and also give a tax

Realistically it doesn't, but politics is not an exact science, and that's why candidates appeal to people's fantasies."

"Do you think that Dole actually believes he can solve the country's problems by cutting taxes?" "Why else is he the Republican candidate? Besides if he can't do it, his Secretary of the Treasury Steve Forbes can." "It sounds like supply-side economics to me. The less taxes

people have to pay, the more money they can spend on goods made in Hong Kong. "Don't be cynical. The major difference between the two candidates is that while Clinton is a big spender, Dole is a teensy-weensy spender. Dole's expertise in financial matters

comes from the fact that he served in World War II and Clinton refused to go to Guadalcannal." "Do you think that Clinton is going to offer the American people a tax cut comparable to the one Dole is promising?"

"He already has done that, but the Republicans say that he has stolen the idea from Dole. "We are doubly blessed to have two candidates who know how to balance the budget and give us back money at the same

"As we used to say when Reagan was in the White House, Happy days are here again.

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