

Meaning Business

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has peered at the pole star for the benefit of our entrepreneurs. Since the exporters here are far from hitching their wagons to that star, which their counterparts elsewhere are doing, the PM took the opportunity of the export trophy awards ceremony on Sunday to urge them to think and act globally. The framework is right in front of them to put their grist to the mill of competitive international trading in the post-GATT era. It is the survival of the fittest perspective with the preferential umbrellas gradually folding up.

For all we know, we have dithered on the adjustment imperatives, and to be sure, nobody is ploughing a lonely furrow here. We are all in it — the government, the industry and trade circles and the economists and planners requiring to make a concerted bid for catching up with the new global trading practices.

In short, there has to be an enabling environment for our export trade. It is all very good that more EPZs are on the cards and that a World Trade Centre is scheduled to be set up by the next year but it is a far greater input of policy and administrative backing that we are looking forward to. The desired policy and administrative supports include improved law and order, containment of rent-seeking, brake on unwanted bureaucratic regulations, speedy disposal of fiscal incentives and a steady supply of power.

Noteworthy though, we have heard of the government's resolute intent to break the monopoly hold of vested interests linked to any political party whatsoever. This neutral and business-friendly angle of the administration is welcome but its test will be in the pudding. The government stands committed by repeated public pronouncements to accord equal opportunities to all. In keeping economic peace, the opposition BNP seems pledge-bound judging by the cautious attitude lately expressed by its leader Begum Zia to political agitation.

There is one more point we cannot help making about export enthusiasm. We wax eloquent in demanding from countries we have trade deficits with to import more of our goods little realising that if they flooded us with export orders we would not be able to meet them with our stagnating range of products. So let's produce more and diversify to mean business.

President's Suggestion

President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed may have stirred the hornet's nest by suggesting a temporary moratorium on student politics but there is no mistaking his sincere and profound anxiety over campus terrorism, in which he undoubtedly takes the whole nation with him. With a characteristic flair he says students have no 'fundamental right' to do politics; instead they must feel averse to being used as pawns in the game of power politics.

When a man of his sagacity puts forward a remedy for an intractable national problem he automatically creates an impact with it. That's why it should evoke a well-considered response from all concerned, based on an objective analysis of what he has said. His suggestion has three elements: first, it is a temporary suspension of student politics he seeks; secondly, it is the 'so-called student politics' which bred campus violence that he, like the rest of the people, is loathe to and wants a moratorium upon; and thirdly, he is leaving it to the determination and judgment of the political and intellectual leaders of the country. In other words, he wants collective wisdom to be brought to bear upon the question in best national interest.

As for the *modus operandi* of a likely solution the President spoke of a broad-based agreement between the main political parties to delink themselves from their respective student wings.

Student politics may not be a matter of 'fundamental right' but it evidently has been a traditional, historical and moral right of the student community. By this kind of student politics we mean taking interest in national politics and having views on issues of national importance as educated and conscious citizens of the country with voting rights to exercise. Quite true, party-line student politics has conned violent armed bids for territorial supremacy over the campus with an inner psychic blend of students' assertive group behavioural patterns. If this doesn't get the oxygen of support from the political parties it is bound to die its natural death.

Student politics is linked to elections to the DUCSU, and to those of the residential halls and various college unions. Its suspension would mean a suspension of these elections unless we settle for selection.

At any rate, a moratorium is certainly due on armed politics on the campus.

Engulfing Fear

A World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) official recently made a frightening revelation. Almost the whole of Antarctica lies exposed to sun's dangerous ultra-violet ray. The ozone layer in 90 per cent of the sky canopy over the icy continent of southern hemisphere is gone — just eaten away by the CFC and other ozone-hostile gases emitted unremittingly by the comfort-loving, careless, uncompromising people on the earth.

Ozone depletion is a fairly old discovery up in the street of nature's retaliation in the face of unabated onslaught of man's scientific advancement. Every time an observation or a revelation is made on the spotting of newer patches of ozonelessness in the sky in some corner of the world, the fear of the scriptural doomsday looms a little larger. We know the world has moved an inch more towards a future that is enveloped in fear. It is not a case of what religions have to say about the consequence of this sin-doused world of fallen people but a sure case of global warming and opening of the Pandora's box as far as ecological catastrophe is concerned.

The expansion of the ozone hole over Antarctica means absorption of heat, more melting of the snow-caps, and an increase in the sea-levels around the world. It looks like the answer to the question about the design of this world's eventual destruction in one of Robert Frost's poems is written in the sky, in the ozoneless areas of the infinite void.

Water-sharing Again: The Issues

by Professor M. Maniruzzaman Miah

Should we go for a permanent Ganges water-sharing treaty with India, or should it be a long-term or a short-term arrangement for apportioning the water are questions which are also very relevant in water-sharing talks.

I K Gujral, the foreign minister of India, in an interview given to *The Daily Star* in February, 1994, while visiting Bangladesh as a private citizen, remarked, "May be India can give some water, but it can also expect some concessions in return." According to his interviewee he is also reported to have hinted that India may be more flexible in accommodating Bangladesh's water needs if Dhaka made more trade concessions and allowed transit facilities and also the use of the Chittagong port." During his last visit to Bangladesh, the distinguished foreign minister did not ask for any *quid-pro-quo*, although, in his interview with *The Daily Star* (Star, September 2, 1996) he repeated his earlier thesis.

Be that as it may, time seems to be most propitious now for a settlement of the thorny issue of water-sharing. It is so, because there is a non-Congress government in New Delhi (Gujral) interview with *The Daily Star* (February 2, 1994) in the first place. And secondly, Indians have not dissimulated their satisfaction that Awami League has come to power in Bangladesh. Even the consummate Indian High Commissioner here in a recent interview (*The Independent*, July 26, 1996) expressed his "confidence" that a water-sharing agreement could be achieved "now". That there is a flurry of activities in regard to settling the long, almost intractable conflict, is obvious. The problem is now being examined in all its ramifications reportedly by expert committees. It is worthwhile at this point, perhaps, to discuss the issues relating to water-sharing, although a lot has already been said or written about it.

The most obvious issue is whether the Ganges water-sharing be delinked from any other issues. This means whether to begin with only the Ganges sharing be discussed leaving out the other 53 shared rivers with India. Secondly, whether all

other issues like augmentation, for instance, be left out of the purview of discussion at this moment. And, more important from India's point of view, whether the water-sharing be discussed in conjunction with transit, opening up of Chittagong port facilities for transit.

We may note that we are claiming a share of water of the international rivers as a matter of right of a riparian. It is amazing therefore to see how matters completely unrelated to water, like transit, which is a facility sought by India, can be put in the same portfolio. As regards the other issues as are linked with water-sharing itself, there is a general feeling among most of those who have been following the trend of water-sharing talks between India and Bangladesh, that the Ganges water-sharing be delinked from any other issue. There are two compelling reasons for such a view. One, everybody is aware how tortuous and protracted a course of discussion on any single issue mentioned above can be. And two, consequent upon an indiscriminately heavy withdrawal of water at or upstream of Farakka, the economy of the Ganges-dependent area (GDA) of south-western Bangladesh, which sustains 40m people, has suffered incalculable loss and any delay in getting water for them will throw millions of people to the status of a destitute. The matter therefore calls for an immediate solution. Hence delinking.

A second issue is whether we should go for a bilateral agreement on Ganges water-sharing or whether Nepal should also be included as a party. In the case

of sharing river-water it is always better that all the co-riparians sign a common treaty. This guarantees its continuation even if two of them sometimes do not agree on certain matters. In the case of the Ganges, Nepal's inclusion is necessary because as early as in 1974 the prime ministers of Bangladesh and India noted that the available water was not adequate to meet the demands of both the countries. Hence comes the question of augmentation. This makes Nepal's inclusion all the more imperative. However, since the expiry of the earlier memorandum of understanding (MoU) in 1988 the Ganges below Farakka has shrunk to a mere trickle, due to heavy withdrawal upstream. A solution of the matter therefore brooks no delay. Nepal's participation in the ongoing bilateral talks, however desirable, may retard the process of negotiation. Therefore it may be convenient at this moment to opt for a bilateral agreement on the model of the 1977 one.

Should we go for a permanent Ganges water-sharing treaty with India, or should it be a long-term or a short-term arrangement for apportioning the water are questions which are also very relevant in water-sharing talks. A permanent water-sharing treaty, most desirable, though it is, is not a feasible proposition at this hour as because Nepal, whose participation is a must for any augmentation of the current volume of water, is now being left out of the bilateral agreement. On the other hand, a short-term agreement does not allow us to plan our development projects related to water. The projected Ganges Barrage scheme or for that matter any plan for opti-

mum use of available water cannot be materialised unless we know that certain quantum of water will be available for a considerable length of time. We feel therefore that the agreement to be signed should have a validity of say 20/25 years with the proviso that Nepal, India and Bangladesh should meanwhile work out a plan for augmentation which will be the basis for a permanent water treaty between the three countries later. The matter should better be discussed threadbare and as widely as possible with the experts of the country before a firm position is taken.

While the term of the agreement is important, the seasonal duration is no less. Very often 'lean season', 'dry season' or 'fair weather season' are imprecisely talked-about. In the 1977 agreement the apportionment of water was specifically mentioned for each 10-day period from 1st of January to 31st May each year. More data are available now which suggest that supplemental water need in the GDA is there right from November, if not earlier. It would be in the fitness of things therefore if the seasonal duration of the sharing spreads over a 7-month period from 1st November to 31st May each year.

The most vexed question naturally centres round the quantum of water for each. Because on one side, the 'pie' to be divided is small enough and on the other there is mistrust on both sides. To make matters worse, we find that tendentious propaganda is being carried out in this regard. For example, such phrases as 'ground reality', 'available water' and the like are in circulation and seem to be taking on. What many people do not

recognise perhaps is that a river is a geological agent. And major changes of geological events are measured in terms of millions of years. It is preposterous to think therefore that the total volume of water of the Ganges would have been reduced in a few years' time, although there may be fluctuation from one year to the other. However, abrupt phenomena like earthquakes or landslides, for example, may interfere with the flow of a river. These are not known to have occurred. In any case unofficial reports suggest that no reduction of dry season flow has taken place in the Ganges. Even if it has occurred, as suggested by certain quarters, it could have been due only to more withdrawal of water upstream. Such human interference should be taken care of by the Indian government. Bangladesh should not meddle itself in a matter between the Central and the State governments of India. Any attempt at that, however well-meaning, will land us unnecessarily in a quagmire.

It may be of interest to recapitulate here how the quantum of water to be released to Bangladesh down Farakka as incorporated in the 1977 agreement was determined. First, the flow at Farakka was averaged out from agreed recorded data for 25 years (1948 to 1973). Seventy-five per cent of this flow was taken as the dependable flow. Based on this, the amount was divided between Bangladesh and India more or less on a proportion of 60 to 40. Thus 98500 cusec was taken as the dependable flow for the period from January 1 to 10. This was divided between Bangladesh and India as 58500 cusec for Bangladesh and 40000 for India. The dependable

(based on a 75 per cent availability) minimum flow of 55000 cusec for April 21 to 30 was similarly apportioned between the two countries. Bangladesh getting 34500 cusecs and India the rest 20500.

Meanwhile the need since 1977 has increased. Also, environmentalists recommend that a river should always have some amount of flow to keep it ecologically in good condition. In this regard, we may note that the Bhabar is now a paddy field and Gorai, the most important distributary gets its offtake closed in January and it won't be long before it becomes a dead river. All these have got to be kept in mind while working out the share for each.

Finally, there has to be an arrangement for joint monitoring as to the working of all the provisions of the agreement and also arbitration, in case of a conflict between the two parties. India did accept third-party arbitration in the case of the Indus Treaty and also the recently concluded Mahakali Treaty with Nepal.

Shall we conclude by saying that the Ganges water-sharing issue has been discussed at length in this country perhaps because it has been, as it were, a pain in our neck, for the last 45 years? We must remember however that the dry season flow of the Brahmaputra is four times more than (67 per cent) that of the Ganges (16 per cent). It is extremely important therefore to closely examine all the relevant issues of the Ganges sharing because there will be a strong argument to duplicate it in the case of the bigger river later. If we lose here by one unit, the loss in the other case will be 4 times as much. We must remember that in all international dealings each country gives its national interest the topmost priority.

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A Bit about the Press, with Apologies

"The press has a duty to say something courageous and true." — Joseph Pulitzer

Sometimes truth hurts. Sometimes reports are slanted. Sometimes we forget to balance the stories by writing the opinion of people concerned in the report. Although, it is often not easy to reach the people in question, but I believe if it hurts or maligns someone, it is best to wait for a version.

TODAY I have decided to tread on a subject that gives me bread and at the same time sensitive from many angles. But some readers of this column pointed out that there was much to write about the press in Bangladesh. I finally decided to go for it when I was shocked to hear/read comments made against a section of the newspapers by former president Abdur Rahman Biswas, a general appeal for "objective" reporting by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and complaints by main opposition leader Khaleda Zia that the press was "unfriendly" towards her party. Thus, all I can say for now — Bon Courage!

It was by chance I was at the Bangabhaban presidential palace on October 7 trying to find out exactly how the investiture programme of the much-loved new President Shahabuddin Ahmed would be held and decided to stay on once I learned Mr Biswas would be delivering his last official speech soon. Some journalists were invited.

Mr Biswas used the opportunity to defend the charges brought against him during his term in office and promised to speak out once out of Bangabhaban. The two most important comments were about the military and the press. The press was very kind to the ex-President. Both, by my senses, should have got priority in newspapers. The *Inqab* put the press part way down, while others thought best to avoid it. I quote him and leave the judgement to the readers.

Despite a lot of criticism I kept quiet, because I wanted to organise general elections so that the Uttarpur (military) could not enter. Without naming anyone, he said there had

workshop concluded that "healthy growth of journalism is adversely affected in the country by frequent violations of professional code of ethics by media professionals." They also underlined the need for putting an end to "yellow" journalism (BSS report).

Except for one university teacher, the rest were journalists. They admitted the widespread existence of yellow journalism. We should now ask why some of our colleagues are not honouring the ethics. Frankly lot of good words are preached, but are not practised.

Workshop concluded that the report might hurt his political idol and he avoids that part or drops the whole matter. Because the editors are thousands miles away and are unaware about daily details on what is happening here. When colleagues visit to cover some major developments here, they are briefed by some re-

We must also ask what the foreign press is reporting. Again, by my observations, problems exist there, too, on the same lines, specially suppression of news by way of self-censorship in some cases.

The reporter concerned feels that the report might hurt his political idol and he avoids that part or drops the whole matter.

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porters/editors along their party lines. "Sometimes these briefs sounded like the words of a party activist," commented on a visiting journalist recently.

Some newspapers often quote foreign radio if the report favours their views on Bangladeshi issues. The service turns into a "Bible" suitably and cursed when not. More importantly, are we not confident of what we are reporting ourselves? Politicians speak great words about journalists, but they too quote foreign radio or newspaper reports suitably. I think these newspapers take away the credibility of their own reporters by quoting foreign radio about a domestic issue.

Evaluation of his statement: yellow journalism is aimed at creating public opinion about

Biases are a part of human nature and the press cannot be an exception, but it has to keep in mind that it does not affect factual side of the report. An aggrieved friend said of his superior "once the BSS was like a Bible to him... it isn't now. I am confused and it is really difficult to work under such situations."

I also fail to understand what is meant by "meeting of samovana" or like-minded journalists. In recent days newspapers reported about such meetings by political leaders. But those of us not considered to be in the category were deprived from doing our basic job — collecting information. This also encourages partisan journalism.

Meeting opponents bring out the harsh reality along with some questions, pointedly made to embarrass leaders without news value. Yet, I believe a seasoned politician should have the courage to face all that, however annoying or unwhorthy of being a news.

At the DRU workshop, Kamaluddin Bhui said, "Millions of people make up their mind on current issues largely on the basis of the news they read or hear. The freedom to write what they chose fit is, of course, a part of fundamental right of a newsman, but at the same time, he has to use that freedom judiciously and responsibly. Freedom does not mean a licence."

Lastly I am quoting a line from an editorial of *The Daily Star* published on October 13, 1992: "As for us in the media, let us never forget reliability and authenticity are our principal safeguards."

an issue right or wrong, and the given freedom, in such cases, are not used judiciously or responsibly.

Of licence, who is there to check the wrongs? Recently *The Financial Express* newspaper published an article by Dutch Professor Gerard A M van den Heuvel. There was not much good words about the Bangladeshi press and he highlighted that seven English dailies reported on the same day about soccer violence, but gave seven different figures about the number of people injured in the incident.

He asked: "What is true? Who to believe?" Because the figure varied between six and 100.

When there is a major storm, such discrepancies in figures are prominent in some foreign press reports with ".... number of fishermen missing and feared dead" the easiest go.

The Bangladeshi press achieved great feats by the might of their pen for decades, like the independence war, the 1990 pro-democracy campaign and issues relating to election. Why can't we work to unite Bangladesh — after all it does not belong to any party or any individual, it is our motherland. The task now should be to help President Shahabuddin in his task to end the political divide and reach a consensus on major national issues.

Lastly I am quoting a line from an editorial of *The Daily Star* published on October 13, 1992: "As for us in the media, let us never forget reliability and authenticity are our principal safeguards."

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To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

An appeal to PSC

Sir, I have gone through a recently published report in a vernacular daily that Bangladesh Public Service Commission (PSC) is contemplating to change the existing BCS Examinations system. A new decision is going to be made over the optional subjects which is expected to be introduced.

It is assumed that the candidates from science discipline always cut a good figure in the optional subjects than the candidates of others. In the wake of such a discrimination, PSC is planning to define some subjects as all the candidates irrespective of their academic disciplines can avail equal opportunity of having the posts of administrative cadre.

I therefore, would like to request PSC authority to introduce such an effective and comprehensive method, as all BCS candidates irrespective of their academic disciplines can avail equal opportunity of having the posts of administrative cadre.

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