# The Baily Star

Founder Editor : Late S. M. Ali

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### Crucial Visit

It is now final that Joyti Basu is coming to Bangladesh next Wednesday, the 27th. By all accounts it is the most important meeting in resolving the water dispute between our two countries. With the appointment, by the Indian Prime Minister, of Joyti Basu as the chief negotiator in this matter, his visit, has now acquired more importance than it would have otherwise. In understanding the importance of Basu's visit we must fully appreciate the tremendous prestige that this veteran of Indian politics enjoys. Not only that he is by far the most senior leader in Indian politics today, he is also perhaps the most important player in the 13-party coalition that Dave Gowda heads.

It should have surprised nobody when the Indian Prime Minister appointed Joyti Basu as the chief negotiator in this matter. West Bengal as the beneficiary of the Farakka barrage will have to be an integral part of any negotiations that the central government enters into with Bangladesh.

All this Bangladesh must seriously consider in judging how it will treat the visit of West Bengal Chief Minister. It is not only water but the fact that all of our western border is with this province and that a huge part of our trade occurs with and through this province. Together they make this particular leader a very important partner in our bilateral relations with our neighbour.

It is our view that we must do everything possible to make Joyti Basu feel welcome. While as a self-respecting country we will never agree to anything that is contrary to our national interest, we will have to take bold and creative initiative at the same time to move forward in an interdependent and inter-connected world. And in that effort we will have to make new friends and strengthen relations with old ones. In the case of those with whom we have differences of views, even serious ones, we will also have to give it a new start. We feel Joyti Basu's visit provides an opportunity to give Bangladesh-India relations a new, positive and historic direction. Let us do everything in our power to make that happen.

## Royal Warmth

The honour done to us by the presence in our midst of an European Royalty of a long lineage is only surpassed by the warmth it has infused the bottom-half of our people with.

Spanish Queen Sophia and her sister Princess Irine melted into and mingled with our rural women and children in such a way that they have carved a permanent niche in the hearts and minds of our people. We thank them profusely for that well beyond any customary recital of pleasantries.

The rapport she has built with our people has not only endeared the government and the people of Spain to us but will also be a constant source of inspiration for the poor everywhere to strive for better things.

A tribute also goes to the magnetism of Grameen Bank that has drawn the Queen and her sister to our remote villages providing our rural folks with a rare insight into the simple charm, warmth and compassion of the Spanish Royalty.

The Queen must have observed in the people she met here that they have not just a flair for survival but also a proven capacity to bring about improvement in the quality of their lives. For our part, we can assure her that we have not failed to notice in her compassionate flourish a certain tinge of admiration for what our people are doing to change their lot.

Our hope now is that she would spread the message to the whole world about the noble struggle going on here to overcome poverty and achieve human dignity undeterred by stunning odds. While she is away that is how she would be transmitting the word of encouragement for the poor in Bangladesh.

#### Frightening

In our country, there is a tendency of playing down the precarious potential of some diseases simply because they are not instant killers. Asthma and similar other bronchial problems are among them. Although the sight of a suffering. struggling asthma patient is good enough to convince anybody about the disease's enormous power to literally make hell out of its victim's life, the casual attitude to it reigns. According to a report in the yesterday's issue of The Daily Star there has been a marked rise for sometime in the number of asthma and chronic bronchitis patients in the. country.

Even though diseases of this type are hereditary, hence, more a matter of being fortunate or unfortunate with one's genes, a general milieu of levity and ignorance seems to have contributed to its present status of being the second disease after diarrhoea in terms of patient population in Bangladesh.

The unabated process of air pollution is another understandable but seemingly unhelpable factor in the high incidence of the malady here. The fact that we cannot make our environs health-friendly overnight goes without saying but we still can do a great deal by making people more conscious about diseases like asthma so that the patients and their close associates know what to do and what not to do. Although chronic bronchitis and asthma are still deemed as incurable diseases in medical science, the health department of the government should get a move on to increase the number of health centres to deal with such complaints.

As the report revealed because most patients come from the low income group or the less privileged members of the society, there has not been per se any sustained initiative to combat the disease. This type of motivational depravity bordering on partiality and irresponsibility on the part of the state is undesirable. Because, suffering does not distinguish between a rich and a poor.

# Economic Policymaking in Bangladesh

# Process and Institutions

As the newly elected government in Bangladesh braces itself to meet the challenge of development and to deliver on its promises to improve on the past performance of the economy, it must ensure that appropriate processes and institutions of economic policymaking are established in right earnest writes Nurul Islam

ous policy options. The government can begin to take a more pro-active position and initiative in policy formulation by strengthening domestic capacity and institutions. The donors should welcome such an initiative, since it would improve the quality of policy dialogue and expedite the process of negotiation with the government. This should also help promote a greater confidence or conviction on the part of the government in the agreed policies and enhance its ability to ensure a greater public understanding of and support for policies.

HE quality and content

of economic policies

and programmes in

Bangladesh, as anywhere else.

are crucially dependent on the

processes by which and

institutions through which

policies are formulated, i.e.

ways in which priority policy

questions are posed, alternative

courses of action or options are

examined explored, and the

institutions should be able to

achieve the following objec-

tives. First, they should attempt

to generate a consensus through

a common understanding of the

policies and the reasons why

The government of the day

needs to articulate the options

and policy choices, and to indi-

cate its preferences or position

with respect to policies, so to

speak, so that a process of con-

sensus binding can start. To

start with the process should

ensure an agreement among the

members of the incumbent po-

litical party, including the

cabinet. In the next stage, views

of the opponents or the opposi-

tion parties including the in-

formed public and various in-

terest groups should be care-

fully considered. What is cru-

cial in this context is to ensure

that consultations and discus-

sions are carried out in such a

way that it should be seen by all

concerned that their views have

been carefully considered. The

dissidents opponents should

not feel so ignored or aggrieved

that they attempt to systemati

cally undo such policies. Con

sensus does to mean unanimity

but it does imply that all views

including of those who oppose

are seen to have been carefully

considered and serious at-

tempts have been made to per

suade the opponents and ac-

the consensus that emerges

from a process of rigorous

analysis, debate, discussions,

and compromises leads to a

conviction and a commitment

on the part of the government of

the day to pursue such polices

and programmes. Without a

firm conviction in policies that

the government undertakes to

pursue, there is unlikely to be

any genuine commitment. It is

debatable whether a set of poli

cies can be effectively imple-

mented even though the gov-

ernment is not convinced of

their need, because external

donor agencies to which a coun-

try is heavily indebted makes

external assistance conditional

upon such policies. There is

likely to be a stop-and-go pro-

cess in implementation marked

by frequent setbacks as well as

less than a serious attempt to

overcome or win over opposi-

tion. The first and second stages

are interrelated. The conviction

on the part of the government

may precede attempts at con-

sensus building among the

government should be able to

command sufficient technical

competence including analyti-

cal, managerial, and adminis-

trative capacity, to efficiently

formulate and effectively im-

As the newly elected gov-

ernment in Bangladesh braces

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priate processes and institu-

tions of economic policymak-

ing are established in right

earnest. With its commitment

to a system of governance based

upon transparency, account-

ability, and participation, it is

necessary that not only all the

members of the cabinet, the

members of the Parliament.

and the administrative ma-

chinery, including experts and

administrators, participate in

policy formulation: it is also

necessary that intelligent

members of the public, non-

governmental experts, and

various interest groups outside

the government in different

ways contribute to the making

tiative in economic policy rec-

ommendations as well as much

of the policy-related relevant

research and analytical work

was undertaken by external

donor agencies with the gov-

ernment reacting to them, fre-

quently without adequate anal-

ysis of its own regarding vari-

Cellular saga

Too often in the past, the ini-

of economic policies.

plement agreed policies.

Last, but not the least, the

broad groups in the society.

Second, it is necessary that

commodate their views.

such policies are advocated

The chosen processes and

final choice is made.

#### Focal Point of Analysis Coordination of Policy-Related Work

To illustrate the issues stated above, a few suggestions are made below. Many of the suggestions may not be novel and in fact, may have been made in the past. They are reemphasized and elaborated in order to draw renewed attention and to stimulate follow-up action This is also an appropriate time to examine the process of economic policymaking since the introduction of various administrative reforms is under consideration in an effort to improve the system of governance as a whole. Most newly elected installed governments find the first six months or a year as the most appropriate time to make important changes without much organized and strong opposition or obstruction.

point, one may refer to the analysis of foreign trade issues in the context of relevant development in world trade and the follow-up of the Uruguay Round in the WTO forums. In view of the rapidly shrinking volume of foreign aid (as distinguished from foreign direct investment) and of rising importance of external trade, policy-related analytical work as well as negotiating skill in trade matters needs to be greatly upgraded. This work is to be shared between the Ministry of Commerce and the Ministry of Planning and Finance (more specifically, the Policy Analysis Division), while the former will concentrate on details of (a) commodity, country or sectorspecific trade issues, and (b) trade negotiations, bilateral, regional, and multilateral. The latter will focus of trade policy issues in relation to (a) macro/sectoral policies, fiscal, monetary, and exchange rate policies, as well as (b) economywise consequences of trade policies. Further, the scope of both empirical and analytical work will be such that in many instances central Economic Analysis Division will need to draw upon the expertise of the research institutions and universities outside the govern

work. To illustrate the latter

All policy analysis, either sectoral or overall, starts with the formulations of appropriate questions and then proceeds to explore the answers to the questions in terms of relevant

The government can begin to take a more pro-active position and initiative in policy formulation by strengthening domestic capacity and institutions. The donors should welcome such an initiative, since it would improve the quality of policy dialogue and expedite the process of negotiation with the gov-

ernment.

First, since a preeminent role in economic policymaking is played by Finance and Planning Ministries, there is a need for a reexamination of their different functions and responsibilities and the ways in which they can be integrated. The analytical work on major economic policy issues within the government needs to be streamlined. In all governments, developed and developing, with a tradition of effective and efficient economic policymaking, a "focal" point for policy analysis and policy advice in a coordinated fashion, bringing together all interrelated aspects. is identified. The Executive Committee of National Economic Council or the National Economic Council seeks to fulfill this function at the political level. However, there seems to be lacking, even though not in form, but certainly in substance, a focal point at the expert level for integrating and synthesizing in a consistent fashion the views and analyses of different agencies, and ministries as well as for undertaking such additional analytical work as needed to supplement the work done by the sectoral ministries. In addition, the focal point will analyze not only macroeconomic issues such as monetary, fiscal, trade and exchange rate polices, etc., but also the economy-wise or intersectoral implications of sectoral policies. Hence, a central Policy Analysis Division. whatever its exact name, needs to be created.

In order for this function to be effectively performed, it is necessary to strengthen or expand the existing policy or planning cells in the different ministries that will have the responsibility for sectoral policy analysis, providing input to central Policy Analysis Division, and in turn receiving feedback from the latter. Thus, the Policy Analysis Division does not substitute for the planning policy analysis in individual ministries but supplements and strengthens their

policy options. The formula tion of questions by itself requires a considerable amount of preparatory work. It is often said that asking the right question is half the answer. Once the appropriate questions are formulated by the government there is yet another source of analytical and empirical work which can be used by the government. Given the limited availability of trained manpower, as well as absence of suitable incentive structures to attract and use persons of requisite qualifications for such analytical work in the short run, the external agencies (the Bank, the Fund, and the UN agencies) can be asked to undertake necessary time-consuming and expensive analysis to examine and answer the question raised by the government. This is not a long-term solution. In the long run, both the task of formulating questions and undertaking analytical work to examine the answers and relevant policy options have to be performed by the national institutions, both the government agencies and nongovernmental institutions. In any case, the analytical work by external agencies on issues identified by the government and questions formulated by the government. would widen the scope and enrich the process of debate and discussions of policy options. In addition to the wide range

of analytical work mentioned above, the newly created Policy Analysis Division will undertaken periodically a review. analysis, and appraisal of (a) performance of the Bangladesh economy highlighting the salient aspects and (b) policies pursued and their consequences. Major reviews should be done every 2 or 3 years; short reviews should update them every year. In this task of overview, assessment and appraisal, inputs, will be provided by all the relevant ministries and agencies. This document should be considered a definitive statement by the govern-

ment on the state of the econrights everywhere. The territorial integrity, independence

#### Fall of political leaders and rise of warlords

and ousted from the power of

their respective countries and

they are being replaced by the

and ammunition and deadly

weapons from foreign countries

to meet their selfish ends, oc-

cupy territories here and there

in the country and start a reign

among warlords and civil war

in many counties thousands of

people are wounded, maimed,

uprooted and killed, houses

burnt and crops ruined. There is

no law, order and justice - no

safety and security of life and

property and no means of

livelihood for the people. There

are loot, plunder, starvation,

rape and violation of human

In the consequence of war

The warlords procure arms

warlords.

of terror.

Sir, It was indeed a good news that three telephone companies have signed an agreement with the government for Sir. With great dismay we providing cellular phones in observe the gradual and continthe country. It was also a pleasual fall of political leaders and ant surprise to learn that the rise of warlords in some Asian. price of the phones would be Tk African and Latin American 10,000, or even less. The councountries. We are also shocked try, particularly the business at the political leaders' as well community, had been deprived as people's elected representaof this modern communication tives' failure to resolve various devise due to the most unethical political problems peacefully business practices of a business through discussions and negotiations among themselves. As a result the political leaders are getting themselves screened out

Not only the price was beyond the reach of an average businessman — more than Tk one lakh per set — but the house ensured that nobody challenged its monopoly for five long years. During this time money was minted at the cost of progress. This is perhaps one of the most naked examples of total lack of national interest on the part of the government.

Let us all bury the past and hope that no other business house robs the people in the future but will have the good sense to help the people to achieve industrialisation.

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and sovereignty of the country are also jeopardised and endangered. The rule of warlords is hundred times worse than the rule of a military dictator or an

autocrat What the warlords are doing in Afghanistan, Rwanda, Burundi, Zaire, Bosnia and Sri Lanka need no description. The colossal sufferings, hardships, nightmares, hunger and disease of millions of innocent men, women and children are inexplicable. The warlords simply want to quench their thirst for power with the blood of their own kith and kin.

Political leaders and elected representatives of the people in various countries all over the world must take lessons from the catastrophes and grim tragedies of the countries ruled by the warlords. Why should millions of people suffer due to personal whims of a few war-

lords? We would request the United Nations in general and G-7 countries in particular to take positive and effective steps with a view to preventing the warlords from committing any further crime against humanity in the future.

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omy, identifying progress and problems. This should exceed far in quality and content what is currently provided by annual economic surveys and other reviews by planning and finance ministries. It should be debated by the Parliament.

#### The Integration of Planning and Finance **Ministries in One** Ministry

Where would this new Policy Analysis Divi-sion be located in the structure of the government? This division should integrate the research and analytical work of the Ministries of Finance and Planning. For more than one reason, it is nec essary to abolish the two independent ministries of Finance and Planning and to replace them by one ministry comprising such divisions as Finance Division. External Relations Division, Planning Commission, and Banking Division and National Board of Revenue, etc. The Policy Analysis Division should be located in the newly combined Ministry of Finance and Planning. How the various sectoral divisions of the Planning Commission will be related to the sectoral ministries is a subject that needs further examination. The review of progress and projects by the National Economic Council will require inputs from both sectoral divisions of the Planning Commission and the individual ministries. The economic analysis done by the Pol icy Analysis Division would provide the basis for deliberation by the National Economic Council (NEC) on all intersec toral macro and economywide policy issues. Even when sectoral policy issues are discussed by the NEC, on the basis of analysis done by the individual ministries, the views of this division-based on its economy wide and intersectoral analysis should be a very important input in the decision making pro-

The Finance Division in the newly combined Ministry of Finance and Planning should be responsible for both development and revenue expendi tures. It is important that the annual budgetary exercise relating to the developing and revenue expenditures should be undertaken in an integrated fashion and simultaneously under the auspices of the same division. This will greatly facilitate integration of the two interdependent components of the budget right from the inception to its implementation. The Planning Commission will no doubt prepare the medium term or annual development programme, setting priorities for resource allocation between sections subsectors as well as providing the basis for the

preparation of projects by the individual ministries/dependents.

The professional capacity and the scope and nature of work of the division that is usually called IMED, i.e. Implementation. Monitoring and Evaluation Division, requires examination. Also, its location should be reconsidered, i.e. should it continue to be in the newly created Ministry of Finance and Planning or should it be shifted to the Prime Minister's Office. Various suggestions in this respect are already in the public domain. In defining its functions, what is important is to distinguish between the evaluation of (1) projects and programme in respect of (a) projects and programme in respect

tribution, etc. on the one hand. and (2) on the other hand, the evaluation of the impact of policies, sectoral, and macro policies. The task of analysing the impact and consequences of policies should be the task of the Policy Analysis Division. These two tasks, while they are related, require different categories of skill and expertise. The interaction between the two divisions should be encouraged. The Policy Analysis Division will need to draw upon the work of the Evaluation Division and may need, on occasion, to collect jointly relevant information from the field as

of (a) physical implementation

and financial expenditures and

(b) their impact on the econ-

omy, for example, on output

employment and income dis-

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an input to its policy analysis

work. To be concluded tomorrow

# Buchwald's COLUMN

# A Firm Prediction

UR long nightmare of another presidential campaign is Since I am somebody who knows what the future holds, my phone has been ringing off the hook with calls from readers wanting to know who our next president is going to be.

After studying my polls and checking out what will happen in Idaho, my prediction is that we'll have to stay up until 7 o' clock on election night before any of us can start humming "Hail to the Chief.

Here's where we are right now.

Before they pull lever voters still have to make up their minds whether President Clinton is the head of a Colombian drug cartel or Bob Dole is in cahoots with the nicotine wranglers from Marlboro country

As I see it, the key factor in the election that could turn it around is if Bob Dole would join Ross Perot's campaign and help Perot's third-party chances of winning the White House. Dole has nothing to lose at this stage, and, while the two men don't get along, accommodations to travel on the same bus could be

Bob Dole's only argument for voting for Bob Dole is that he will keep foreign money out of American politics

So far the American people don't seem too bothered by Clinton or Jesse Helms taking money from abroad. As one Democrat fund-raiser said to me. "We give everybody money for their elections. It's about time some of it came back.

One thing rattling Dole is that the liberal press won't write about Clinton's peccadilloes. Clinton's spokesperson responded, "That's nothing but politics."

Dole may possibly have made a big mistake when he asked the American people to wake up and see what was going on in

the country. The voters from my polls resent him asking the question when he was the one who put them to sleep in the first place. But the main question we must ask ourselves is, how many

people will actually vote? People also wonder if Bob Dole had started his hard-hitting below-the-belt politics earlier, would Chelsea Clinton still be ordering new drapes for her room at the White House?

And so as we prepare to say "au revoir" to the last presidential election of this century. I will make my fearless prediction In spite of a liberal press and lying spin doctors on both sides, the election is too close to call.

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## **OPINION**

# Independence of the Electronic Media in Bangladesh

Little did Milton know that his tract on censorship under that rather strange Greek name Areopagitica would become so enduring and so universal. His views on censorship have since become the chief source of inspiration for those who speak in favour of an independent press all over the world. Media's tributes will never be enough for this indomitable spirit who spoke so loudly against the tyranny of authorities in curbing a free play of the human mind. A free play of the human mind is what lies behind the concept of independence of the electronic media.

Unfortunately, every gov ernment in Bangladesh since its inception has maintained restrictions of that freedom Even in the early nineties when a democratically elected government began to rule the country, its actions undermined the process of granting independence to betar and tele-

There are generally five patterns of controlling or putting restrictions on electronic me dia. These are:

a) Direct control through state monopoly; b) Control by licensing and self-censorship: c) Emergency regulations and national security legislation; d) Means of pressure on the media without control; and e)Violence against Betar-TV journalists. Bangladesh touches some-

thing of every category. Advocates of controlled media often call up the need for stability, unity, national integration and development as a reason to prohibit open public discussion and investigation Indeed, there may be serious cases; particularly when sensationalist or chauvinist media aggravate ethnic or religious conflicts.

However, examination of the cases where the electronic media has been suppressed in this part of the world do not support the view that governments mainly aim at suppressing anti-social or disruptive expression. On the contrary, limitation on those working in electronic media often have more to do with covering of the misdeeds of the government leaders, violations of human rights and despoliation of the environment.

There is, however, a belated recognition on the part of the

Deen Mohammad government to improve the quality of betar and television programmes and increase the credibility of news. As a result the party in power in

Bangladesh, the Awami League

has been talking about freeing

the electronic media from gov-

ernment control as promised in

its election manifesto. The hurdles which the ruling party is facing in the way of freeing the media from government control are as follows.

1) The greatest hurdle is the invisible government. The government is extremely conservative and crude and will not easily accept such a sophisticated idea as a free flow of information.

2) The second great hurdle is the officers and employees and their redoubtable unions. The employees are less likely to destabilise their own future by casting their all ancillary bene-

3) The third great hurdle would be the lack of unanimity of political will. There may even be difference of opinion within the ruling party itself as to the real meaning and scope of autonomy.

Now what would happen if the government was able to grant autonomy for the electronic media crossing all the hurdles lying before it? The autonomy will be a misnomer if it is practised the way other sector corporations and universities are handled. That means if the indirect control of the government is there, the ministry can deny the required finance and facilities on the plea that betar and television are trying to be more bold and courageous than necessary'. Then we will fail to achieve the goal which will un-

dermine autonomy. If the aim of autonomy is to securing the free flow of information, the government can ensure it in a far more effective way than merely granting autonomy to the media. The licensing of private channels and frequencies, if permitted, would be considered a milestone in the history of information.

But advocates of development before the privatisation of the media argue that hungry people do not care about free betar or television. But suppression of facts about deaths in cyclone or police activities in

countries like Bangladesh has provided an example of how it can ultimately facilitate inhuman suffering and mass starvation.

Now the question arises: what should we do once we are out of this situation? It would be worthwhile to practice with certain basic steps towards achieving an independent status for our electronic media. They may be as follows:

which an independent and wellrepresented parliamentary standing committee should come into being to take over the entire management and control of the national electronic me-

1) A legislative cover under

2) The committee would make its annual report to the Parliament and have it approved along with fresh directives, if any.

3) The appointment, remu neration, termination and regulation of the entire gamut of service rules should be monitored by that committee regard ing the activities of the electronic media

4) Side by side, the Parliament should promulgate the act to allow the private enterprise in this sector under certain rules and regulations for keeping it off from the usage for the propaganda purposes set by the lawmakers

5) The Ministry of Information can not interrupt the free flow of information in these days of the CNN, BBC, VOA etc. So the government has to think seriously for abolishing the burden-some Ministry

The purpose of the proposals is to totally let the media action its own without the inter ference of the government and to vest it to the people without agitating the employees and of-ficers concerned. It is only in this way that an independent electronic media can emerge in this country.

There is nothing so heavenly as the free flow of information. If you try to put hurdles before truth, you will fail, because truth breaks through all barriers like a flowing river. A free play of the mind is far less harmful than a controlled dosage of information. The sooner this is understood the

better The writer is an MSc student of the Department of Statistics.

JU. Savar.