

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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 unhelpful 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.

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.

THE 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.

The chosen processes and institutions should be able to achieve the following objectives. First, they should attempt to generate a consensus through a common understanding of the policies and the reasons why such policies are advocated.

The government of the day needs to articulate the options and policy choices, and to indicate its preferences or position with respect to policies, so to speak, so that a process of consensus building can start to start with the process should ensure an agreement among the members of the incumbent political party, including the cabinet.

Second, it is necessary that 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 policies and programmes.

Last, but not the least, the government should be able to command sufficient technical competence including analytical, managerial, and administrative capacity to efficiently formulate and effectively implement agreed policies.

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.

Too often in the past, the initiative in economic policy recommendations as well as much of the policy-related relevant research and analytical work was undertaken by external donor agencies with the government reacting to them, frequently without adequate analysis of its own regarding various

To the Editor...

Cellular saga Sir, It was indeed a good news that three telephone companies have signed an agreement with the government for providing cellular phones in the country.

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.

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.

Economic Policymaking in Bangladesh Process and Institutions

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work. To illustrate the latter 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Fall of political leaders and rise of warlords

Sir, With great dismay we observe the gradual and continual fall of political leaders and rise of warlords in some Asian, African and Latin American countries. We are also shocked at the political leaders as well as people's elected representatives failure to resolve various political problems peacefully through discussions and negotiations among themselves.

The warlords procure arms and ammunition and deadly weapons from foreign countries to meet their selfish ends, occupy territories here and there in the country and start a reign of terror.

As 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.

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 policy options. The formulation of questions by itself requires a considerable amount of preparatory work.

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.

There are generally five patterns of controlling or putting restrictions on electronic media. 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.

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.

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

Where would this new Policy Analysis Division 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 necessary 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 Finance Division in the newly combined Ministry of Finance and Planning should be responsible for both development and revenue expenditures. 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.

Unfortunately, every government 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 television.

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of (a) physical implementation and financial expenditures and (b) their impact on the economy, for example, on output employment and income distribution, 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.

The author is an internationally renowned economist. He was the first Vice-Chairman of the Planning Commission of Bangladesh and later worked as Assistant Director General of FAO. Presently he is attached with the Washington based IFPRI.

OUR long nightmare of another presidential campaign is almost over. 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.

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?

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Art Buchwald's COLUMN A Firm Prediction

OPINION Independence of the Electronic Media in Bangladesh

Deen Mohammad 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.