

Basu's Comments

West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu has made clear that Bangladesh could expect a two-year Ganges water-sharing formula on a test basis and not a permanent agreement "right now", as she has been seeking. Such a disclosure merits a close look come as it does from no less a person than Jyoti Basu just a couple of days before his much-awaited visit to Bangladesh and a month or so prior to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's planned trip to Delhi where she is likely to append her signature to a water accord.

This is the first public position taken by any Indian leader of consequence on the high expectancy profile built almost into a crescendo form by our government leaders making it appear as if a long-term solution to the vexed problem was within our striking range. There will be a disappointment on that score, no doubt. The compulsion that a settlement had to be reached before the onset of the next dry season carried a time constraint alight in hammering out a permanent water-sharing arrangement; but starved of water for so long, Bangladesh has gotten wary of time-bound MOUs only to crave for something longer-lasting. In neighbourly relations high hopes have often to be nursed to highlight a dire need so that it is fulfilled in the essence.

We believe that Jyoti Basu's voicing of 'realism' as seen by India has not materially altered the objective conditions for reaching a mutually satisfactory water accord. The basic points are that the agreement has to come before the onset of the next dry season and the quanta of waters released to Bangladesh will have to be compatible with her requirement within the conceptual framework of a permanent solution.

It is a matter of recent record that major political parties in India, opinion and media leaders and experts have all favoured a permanent settlement of the Ganges water-sharing question with Bangladesh for the sake of productive relations between the two countries. Senior ministers of both countries have on several occasions expressed their resolve to effect a long-term solution to the water issue so that the inherited aridity in the bilateral relationship can be a matter of the past.

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ight decision taken will offend 25 per cent of its share in the market. This is expected to help set right the perpetually jinxed Biman machine substantially, as reported in the Press. But this will at the same time infuse some funds into the ailing business at the DSE. The long road to the need of the hour and the best result works at all — will for the first time make Biman truly accountable unlike the pit it has been for 25 years for taxpayers' money to be thrown out — in hundreds of crores.

The situation at the DSE has made it largely irrelevant and almost unreal. Subscribers coming in droves of thousands from the unluckiest of the social spectrum have all got a very wrong message. They have come believing there is perpetual accretion in share price of all enterprise including the government. While this must be brought to a realistic level of production and trading performances of companies existing their stock prices, this has to be seen that the flood of enthusiasm does not ebb before a minimum.

Reversal in the meantime had hit DSE, as a matter of fact. Too much of demand for too few shares in a free and fast roll upwards does not relate to the companies' performance and hardly adding to their capital in any way. The Biman shares will broaden the base of stocks on offer, loosening the pressure on the prices. This has been a very correct decision.

The Biman shares, however, would not alone be able to bind the enthusiasm. If the government has done to open Biman to market, why wouldn't it go the whole hog? It should forthwith offload large chunks of stocks it holds in the many corporations.

On the other hand, taking the important decision to be taken by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the Biman shares the government is wholly committed to the trading. If this has been done on the principle, we urge upon the government to do the same so that their share can as well

Cheery Tiding

The peace accord signed between the BCL and DU campus under the guidance of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina have started to bear fruit. There are now signs of the universities' leaders of different student unions to defuse any VC informed all concerned assuring him of her fullest support to combat terrorism from the prime minister had promised to put her full weight behind

in the halls to the students. But the cautious attitude of the BCL leaders alleged that the situation has improved but not the situation as it is not to rest on their oars. There are any traces of uneasy peace between the BCL leaders and the BCL leaders alleged that their party is not being able to stay in the BCL. It is his needs to be gone into. There is a mechanism for the peace accord itself to come on top of this problem.

The long-stalled and crucially important DUCSU polls are around the corner. The atmosphere must be congenial for all student parties to participate in them peacefully.

Demand and Protest or Criticism and Engagement?

Demand and protest will continue to be the dominant theme of our sordid politics, in spite of best of intentions of the party in power. This is the inevitable backlash of past events during the quarter century of Bangladesh politics. This must change.

BOTH within the government and outside, politicians are of the view that given the democratic framework of government, not only in Bangladesh but all over South Asia, it is difficult, if not impossible, to promote rapid economic growth so that SAARC countries are in a position to emerge as newly industrialising economies within a short period of ten to fifteen years only. This may also imply "Parliamentary Democracy is anti-growth". We cannot help it and we may continue to whir around our poverty dominated world of counter-development.

The compromise with the opposition thesis, politicians believe, is supported by the fact that in none of the East Asian emerging tiger economies, the framework was that of true parliamentary democracy. All authority is bestowed on the majority party who runs the government. The Opposition will just oppose, if necessary, without any rhyme or reason. By definition, it has got nothing else to do.

The hallmark of the parliamentary system that has evolved is the demand and protest of the Opposition parties and if it is strong enough, the party in power becomes primarily concerned with the containment of those demand and protest. Consequently, democracy degenerates into "mobocracy" and events in the streets tend to become more significant than what is happening within national administration or on the development front and the economy.

A vivid example of this degeneration is what happened in the Parliament just after the return of our Prime Minister recently from the United States.

There was no serious discussion on the important subject or prospects for investment in the energy sector which got headlines in all leading dailies of Dhaka. Unfortunately, a former Minister and present M.P. was attacked by gangsters on the highway and the sporadic criminal act of violence was considered to be of greater importance than energy sector development.

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judiciary, so much so that a fairly low level judicial functionary can issue injunction in favour of a single applicant and prevent Dhaka WASA in going ahead with its drainage project, as a result of which the most important commercial area of the country gets water bound with only few inches of rainfall on a busy working day. Business comes to a standstill. Yet we are happy, the rights of an individual have been protected!

Demand and protest is an offshoot of the sub-continental psychology of democracy and poverty. In our parliamentary system, one party has the monopoly of the government. All authority is bestowed on the majority party who runs the government. The Opposition will just oppose, if necessary, without any rhyme or reason. By definition, it has got nothing else to do.

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president may have greater visibility; so is the Speaker of the Senate from the other political party. He became the Man of the Year, according to the weekly Time magazine.

The main opposition party of Bangladesh suffers from a deep sense of loss for five years unless demand and protest could be intensified so much that the party in power is forced to call for early election. This has happened in the very recent past, why not again? Therefore the best course of action will be to concentrate on demand and protest out in the streets of Dhaka and other urban areas.

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(ii) retired civil and military officials are crowding out career politicians from politics these days.

The conspicuous lack of any difference among major political parties as well as increasing dominance by the退休者 who should be craving for greater stability in politics, it should be possible to work out definite arrangements through which, instead of continuing reign of demand and protest, emergence of a sustainable period of constructive criticism and productive engagement can be institutionalised.

In the United Kingdom, where the Parliamentary system evolved, the Labour Party has now remained in Opposition for more than 21 years of Awami League.

But it did not mean banishment of the Labour Party from mainstream political management of United Kingdom. It has remained politically vibrant, playing its vital role within the Parliamentary system. Through appropriate institutional arrangements, role of opposition is fully assured.

This is where the Opposition should play its due role. Its initiatives cannot then be frustrated by the government; while such fruitful initiative will establish its claim for winning the majority next time in the year 2001.

The legislative task before the Parliament has never been given the required importance. Our future economic and social development would be considerably hampered unless the legal and related institutional infrastructure are also created and in some instances reformed. Role of the parliament in this respect is of supreme importance. While the party in power remains involved with the executive branch of the government, opposition members may take up that position. This is not enough. First of all, functions and role of those parliamentary committees should be considerably strengthened.

This is easily done in a federal system of constitutional government where the check and balance between the executive and legislative branches of the government lead to power sharing arrangements between the President on one hand and the elected Congress (consisting of the House of Representatives and the Senate) on the other. The recent election clearly showed that people reelected President Clinton of the Democratic Party, while Republicans maintained their control of the Senate. This is the traditional American pattern: if the president is a Democrat, the Congressional majority is held by the Republicans and vice versa. Both the political parties have therefore substantial roles to play in the running of the Government. A situation of winner takes all does not arise. The

where the area around is more regularly used by morning walkers than the Parliamentarians.

As a part of this process, it is considered necessary for the opposition to vigorously cultivate the image of a sufferer so that they are closer to the people who are also suffering at the hands of the government. Walks out from the Parliament is a necessary part of this strategy which will succeed and if power remains involved with the executive branch of the government, opposition members may take up that position. This is not enough. First of all, functions and role of those parliamentary committees should be considerably strengthened.

It is necessary to mention at this stage that if the results of the last election was different, the psychology of other possible main opposition party might not have been very much different. However, two important developments in politics may be noted: (i) after the demise of leftist politics, there is hardly any fundamental political difference between the main political parties of the country; and,

rare that at the stage of formulation, the whole range of consequences or effects of policies or the problems of their implementation can be foreseen.

It is true that currently occasional meetings and exchange of experience do take place between the government and the various interest groups/affected sectors. The institution of Advisory Committees will systematise this as well as enhance the confidence of the public that their view have been considered.

Political and Public Participation in Policymaking

Economic policymaking in a democracy requires that the parliamentarians actively participate in the debate on and discussions of policy issues on the basis of information and analysis provided to them by the executive ministries/departments as well as by outside experts. This has been the singular and most important lacuna in the policymaking process in Bangladesh.

The importance of providing specialised staff and research support and facilities to the Parliamentarians has been much discussed in Bangladesh but little has been done. The different Standing Committees of the Parliament should deal with (a) important economic issues/subjects, as well as (b) broad sectors/ministries as agriculture, and industry, etc.; they should also be able to constitute ad hoc Committees on new issues that may be identified from time to time. The Committee debates on economic issues, if open to the public and media, can contribute to a wider public awareness. The ministries/departments should be prepared short policy briefs for consideration by the committees, not only the ministers and civil servants should attend the committee meetings and explain the policy issues but also outside experts from universities and research institutions, various interest groups as well as non-governmental organisations, etc. It should be led by those with expertise in the field and manned by personnel with specialisation in various branches of national statistics. The leadership of the organisation should not be subject to frequent changes, like in other ministries, thus

creating not only instability in leadership but also jeopardising the role of experience and expertise in the organisation.

The control and supervision of the banking system in neutral or nonpolitical hands is highly desirable

in order to insulate their operations from heavy political pressures.

Board of the Bangladesh Bank to oversee its operations, including the representative of the Ministry of Finance and Planning but no dominant role assigned to it in the Board. In the last analysis, the annual reports of the Bank explaining its supervisory activities should be subject to security not only by the Board and the Ministry of Finance and Planning but also by the relevant committee of the parliament. The relationship between the Bangladesh Bank and the current Banking Division of the Ministry of Finance, as well as the specific functions of the latter require reexamination.

Improved Statistical Information and Policymaking

Adequate, high-quality, and reliable information and statistical data constitute the

foundation stone of goods economic analysis and policymaking. The lack of adequate data is frequently lamented by all concerned, including policymakers. Not much is done, partly because action for improving the quality and expanding the quantity of statistical information does not have a great political visibility. By now, it is widely known what kind of data are needed for purposes of economic analysis and policymaking. There is no shortage of expertise in the country in this regard, greatly dispersed, though they are among various institutions including private organisations.

The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), currently under the Ministry of Planning, should be converted into an au-

tonomous organisation with a considerable degree of flexibility and freedom of action with a governing board of its own that will represent various users of statistical data in the government, including ministries collecting data of their own — sometimes duplicating rather than supplementing — as well as independent experts and researchers. The BBS is a servicing organisation; but it needs emphasis that it should service not only the government ministries but also the private sector, universities, research organisations, independent scholars, and non-governmental organisations, etc. It should be able to constitute ad hoc Committees on new issues that may be identified from time to time. The Committee debates on economic issues, if open to the public and media, can contribute to a wider public awareness. The ministries/departments should be prepared short policy briefs for consideration by the committees, not only the ministers and civil servants should attend the committee meetings and explain the policy issues but also outside experts from universities and research institutions, various interest groups as well as non-governmental organisations, etc. It should be led by those with expertise in the field and manned by personnel with specialisation in various branches of national statistics. The leadership of the organisation should not be subject to frequent changes, like in other ministries, thus

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S. Ali Mousud Gulshan, Dhaka

proof in support of these utterances? Such biased writings can never bring any good to our country.

James Novak

A Tribute to James Novak

Sir, Passing away of James J. Novak a couple of weeks ago in the USA, Bangladesh has lost a true friend. His wonderful book on Bangladesh, "Bangladesh: Reflections on Water", should be made compulsory reading for English students at the BA level and the government should consider him for the *Ekushey Padak*.

If anybody deserves the highest award the country can offer, it is James Novak. His love for the people and the land was genuine and without any ulterior motives. May God rest his soul in peace. Bangladesh will miss you, Mr Novak. There are not too many like you.

P. Haque

Lahore, Pakistan

huge sums of money to the banks — the certificate cases may take as long as ten years. In fact our legal system is not geared to take care of the legal requirements of a modern economy where technology and information are the king pins of management.

The unfinished legislative task will constrain our development even in the short run.

The present bull run of the stock market should lead to legislation for the protection of small investors and this one out of at least 1000 such issues which deserve the steadfast attention of our parliamentarians, and this is the task which belongs to both government and opposition parties. If there is a useful legislative proposal from any party whatsoever, government should not only take it over but pursue it for ultimate conclusion of an act by the Parliament. And, at least 1000 such acts are necessary.

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The legislative task before the Parliament has never been given the required importance.

Our future economic and social development would be considerably hampered unless the legal and related institutional infrastructure are also created and in some instances reformed.

Role of the parliament in this respect is of supreme importance. While the party in power remains involved with the executive branch of the government, opposition members may take up that position. This is not enough. First of all, functions and role of those parliamentary committees should be considerably strengthened.

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