

WTO's Challenges

The World Trade Organisation's first ministerial conference that began in Singapore yesterday looked forward optimistically to a further opening of international markets. However, the optimism is not shared by all because the shadow of a controversy over the abuse of labour in some developing countries is yet to be dispelled.

Clearly, with the opening of international markets further, the countries with cheaper labour are expected to enjoy a slight edge over others. But their backwardness in terms of technology is likely to blunt that edge.

As for the implementation of the Uruguay Round (UR), this conference has a lot of issues to sort out and a good deal of reviews to do. The creation of the WTO was necessitated by a new set of realities.

No More of This, Please

The newspaper stories on enslavement of students aged below 14 years at the Tasbidul Quran Mohissunnah Madrassah in Chittagong bear a fresh testimony to the abominable things that happen not-so-surprisingly in the name of religion and religious education.

Now, thankfully, the head of the so-called madrassah Maulana Saleh Ahmed and teacher Mohammad Waliullah have been arrested on charges of torture and 21 students have been rescued from the hell-fire.

Rather tell-tale

This is how perhaps sometimes the windmill of truth stirs into revolving by a fortuitous nudge of a breeze. A BSS-circulated news item published in our paper on December 5 revealed that share certificates and cash worth Tk 9,200,000 belonging to one Joynul Abedin, a CID employee, and which were allegedly stolen by Mohammad Jasim (30), have since been recovered by Motijheel police.

Since a case has been registered with the Motijheel police in connection with the recovery of the share certificates and the cash, an extended investigation into the origin of the acquisitions is expected to be carried out.

As for government employees there has been circular from the relevant authorities forbidding kerb-market trading or trading generally by members of their families. Not all the kith and kin of government employees can be dubbed as 'dependents' so that their right to legitimate business cannot be impinged upon.

The Strategy for Privatization

The options for privatization are several. The opportunities are varied and many. Unfortunately, we seem to have remained confined to the policy debate in workshops which are shops only and hardly any work.

A recent world bank report on privatization stated that in case of a government-owned coal mine in Turkey, the Government might be better off to import coal and pay the miners to stay at home.

The dismal story of the Turkish coal mine immediately reminded me of the Barapukuria Coal Mining Project. Through foreign assistance, the work is going on now to eventually develop a huge public sector enterprise where 10,000 miners will be extracting coal — a vital energy resource for the country.

management companies. This is understandable since Government has no capacity to run hotels or better its capacity should be utilized for other much more important purposes.

From the above, the first strategy and the easiest to adopt for privatization will be: do not repeat do not create any new or additional public enterprise with government management. The expansion of the sector corporations must stop forthwith.



Window on Asia

Shafiqul Kabir

more efficient and therefore it would be reasonable to assume that government subsidy will be reduced if private sector could be increasingly associated with management of enterprises.

ample in this respect is provided by a pioneering entrepreneur of Hatya island who has put up two small power generators along with distribution lines, charging at a flat rate from each household for five to six hours of power supply in the evening.

Not all industries owned by the government can be privatized. There are enterprises which are inherently bad business. There is no point in running them for incurring continuous losses.

The second strategy for privatization would be expansion of the scope for private management. The government tried to auction off many public enterprises but attractive offers were not received.

Prime Minister's India Visit and the Water Issue

Going by the age-old dictum, it is always better to be an optimist unless the pessimism is proven. About the water issue too, one may go by the spirit of this proverb, writes Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury.

FINALLY, Bangladesh and India are on the verge of signing an agreement on the vexed issue of sharing the water of the Ganges. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina visits India for three days from Tuesday and is scheduled to have talks with her Indian counterpart H.D. Deve Gowda on Tuesday.

Not surprisingly, any treaty on such a crucial matter like sharing the water of the Ganges will be scrutinized and the national interest within the context of the accord will be assessed. No doubt, the essential parameters of the proposed accord are already not unknown but the entire issue covering the different aspects of the treaty are yet to be learnt.

with the immediate big neighbour is both important and sensitive. The Farakka issue is the catalyst of discord in the bilateral ties and consequently the tenor of the bilateral relations largely depends on this matter.

Dhaka has other bilateral disputes with India but they are of minor nature. Once this major irritant is tackled, policy makers in both the countries could have a sigh of relief since the issue casts a big shadow on the whole relationship.

memorandum of understanding (MOU) in 1982 and then another MOU in 1985 for three-year period. All sharing arrangements came to an end in May, 1988. Many meetings between the two countries took place at various levels but the impasse continued.

After the independence, the Indo-Bangladesh Joint Rivers Commission was established in 1972 and its objectives implicitly recognised Farakka as an item of discussion. The joint declaration of the prime ministers of the two countries in May, 1974, recognised that the two countries would find a mutually acceptable settlement in the Farakka problem before the barrage is commissioned.

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companies is another significant development in the field of privatization. However, it does not establish an efficient management of the major telephone operator. The Bangladesh Telephone Board which is entirely owned by the government. Similarly, private bus operators are thriving while public bus company, BRTC is stagnating as usual.

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with seriousness but not without controversy at times. Expectedly, this is a high political issue and major political forces here will obviously give vent to their views on the subject. Even in India and more interestingly, in West Bengal this issue draws varying opinions involving the rival political parties. Incidentally, the West Bengal chief minister, apart from being in a position of enjoying a big clout in the present united front government in India which his Communist Party of India (CPM) supports, has a say on the water issue since his state has also a stake on the matter.

The accord between the two countries on the matter is more than essential for Bangladesh protecting its all possible interest. The progress has been made in good spirit and not cloaked in mistrust. One can only hope that the final signing of the agreement will reflect this spirit and the lower riparian feels that it has been given a good treatment by its host in New Delhi, which is in the upstream.

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.

Ensure justice for all

Sir, The letter published in The Daily Star dated 4.12.96 under the heading 'Ensure justice for all' is baseless and self-motivated. This has also defamed the police to an extent.

Sir, The correspondent (DS), letters, Dec 7 appears to be unduly concerned about the cutting down of the tress in Suhrawardy Uddyan, to make the huge open space more useful for a variety of public uses (no permanent buildings or inhabitation).

Cutting down tress

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Acting on intuition

Sir, This refers to the letter published in The Daily Star on December 5, 1996 under the heading 'Acting on intuition' written by Nur Jahan of East Nasirabad, Chittagong, who is one of the notable and frequent letter writers.

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DCC needs service improvement

Sir, Jack of all trades and master of none, the DCC has been poking its nose in every civic affair of the city like water supply, sewage, gas line, telephone, electricity and even in the polity of the country. DCC is now reportedly planning to run public buses. Unfortunately the Corporation has always been failing in discharging its duties and responsibilities diligently and efficiently.

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Prisoners

Sir, Often we read of overcrowding in different jails of the country, specially in the Dhaka Central Jail. Sometimes back it was heard that due to overcrowding hundreds of prisoners are to be freed soon from different jails. But probably it never came into effect. Negligence by the authority have created an inhuman atmosphere there, prisoners suffering from deadly diseases, etc.

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Wami League has won power

They would certainly bring many good things for the nation and already has brought some. It is an earnest request to the Prime Minister to look into the welfare of the prisoners and immediately introduce a Prisoners' Family Benefit Fund.

SA Mansur/Pappu House-23, Rd. 18, Sector-7, Uttara M/T, Dhaka

VAT on telephone

Sir, I am a telephone subscriber. I like to draw the attention of the minister in charge of T&T Board to the following. Presently all the telephone subscribers are paying VAT of 15 per cent on the total bill. The cost of monthly telephone line rent is Tk 150 only. I do not understand as to why VAT is charged and calculated on the telephone line rent while preparing the bill.

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Commitment!

Sir, When my mother wanted to have our TV repaired, she received an information from the company — someone would come between noon and 5 pm. However when no one arrived by 4 pm, my mother be-

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