

## GSP-related Fall-out

Tuesday's interface between garment sector leaders and ministers SAMS Kibria and Tofael Ahmed put us in the perspective about the fate of GSP facility and how the government proposes to ensure a future for the garments sector.

The good tidings with which the Commerce and Industries Minister Tofael Ahmed arrived back from Brussels that the EU have agreed in principle to relax the GSP's origin clause for three years for our knit items and up to 2005 for the sweater and pullover is currently undergoing a reality check. Questions have started figuring. These relate to the fate of local spinning mills which would be a casualty in a two-stage transformation that is in the offing. Under the modified arrangement which is in prospect, yarns would not be required to be produced in the country, only fabrics and garments will have to be. In other words, whatever number and quality of indigenous spinning mills we have might quite well be out of business especially in a context where we do not produce enough cotton ourselves.

The dilemma here is we have to not just retain but also strengthen the spinning industries for the sheer compulsion of falling back on our own when the GSP tax exemption goes after three years and for good after 2005 AD when the preferential quotas themselves will have been gone altogether.

Then again there is an uncertainty pertaining to the basis on which derogation of the rules of origin clause could be effected. It might be on a global 'cumulation' basis which minister Tofael says Bangladesh would be stressing on or on a regional plan which she might have to settle for if the EU did not agree to the former. Local spinners and exporters reportedly contended that acceptance of a regional basis could mean subjecting our neophyte yarn market to an unequal competition from India which is the largest producer and exporter of yarn in the SAARC region.

To clear the air of the if's and but's that have started arising as these were bound to in a state of animated suspense we have to wait till the EU makes the final announcement on our renewed access to the GSP. Thank God, they are scheduled to do so sooner than later — either in March or April.

## Gruesome Murder

Yet another incident of gruesome murder of a small boy and serious injuries to his mother in a well-protected area has not only shocked the city's inhabitants but also shattered their confidence concerning the security of their own lives and properties. Indeed the Residential Model School and College should, with its in-built discipline, minimum number of entry and exit points and guards to watch them over, provide a level of security that most private houses or establishments cannot think of. If a seven-year-old boy and his mother become so vulnerable in the apparently secure home in such a well-protected area, what guarantee is there for others not enjoying any such privilege or facility to feel secure.

An accusing finger has already been pointed at the housemaid, now absconding, who was employed by the family only a month ago. The guard at the school, who hired her for the family has been taken into police custody. If the maid or her permanent address is known to him, she may not escape arrest for long. Only then the why of this murder will fully be known. The police in the meantime suspect involvement of a few persons in this murder. If dacoity was the motive, was it necessary to kill a boy of six? Clearly, attackers wanted to finish his mother off as well. We find no words stormy enough to condemn such mindless ferocity directed against the wife and son of a teacher.

No matter whether the maid herself has committed the murder or she has in any way a connection with the incident, a maid-scare is likely to sweep the city. Basically, we need to give formal recognition to the housemaid's job. Some years ago the police insisted on enlisting the names of maids with photos and some general information about them with the local thana. The system is not only necessary but it has to be improved so that the wage and job rules and conditions are described in detail. The scope for exploiting them as slave has to be eliminated. When that happens, maids will have little cause for nursing grudge against their employers and both can be made accountable for breach of contract.

## Pollution Galore

Just at a moment when the city's air pollution has exceeded all tolerable limits, the noise variety of the problem too is giving the inhabitants a nightmarish time. According to the Department of Environment, the noise level in all areas has crossed the normal standard by 20 to 30 decibels. This poses serious risk to health and the patients or people with weak hearts are particularly vulnerable to excessive noise. The DOE has planned for monitoring both noise pollution and emission of black smoke from vehicles for two weeks a month instead of the three days a month as has been the practice so far.

Well, that surely is an improvement on the monitoring side. Its value lies in making people aware of the problem; especially the threatening level of pollution — both air and noise-related — has to be regularly brought to public notice. What is, however, of utmost significance is to find an effective way to reduce — total elimination is out of the question — the level of noise pollution. Legal measures would be necessary to do the job. Why not ban the manufacture and use of hydraulic horns and the use of loud-speakers particularly during certain hours of day or night? There has to be strict enforcement of such rules. In some cities of the neighbouring country they have succeeded in this matter, why cannot we?

In a city like Dhaka the sound level is quite high in normal circumstances, as it is. People cannot be allowed to compound the situation further through indiscreet practices. Let there be special squads to take care of the faulty vehicles and all kinds of the non-civic practices yielding high-decibel noises.

# The Water-sharing Treaty : Uncertainty Galore

The weakest point of the treaty however is that its duration is 30 years during which period of time need for water on both the sides will increase but it does not provide for any clear-cut ways and means as to how that contingency will be met, writes Professor M Maniruzzaman Miah

**A**FTER a lapse of some eight years, during which period there was no water-sharing arrangement with India in respect of the Ganges, a new deal was struck on 12 December last. This is the 30-year water-sharing treaty of the Ganges at Farakka. Trumpeted as a historic event, the first reaction here was no doubt, one of relief from the disastrous consequences of unilateral withdrawal of waters at Farraka by our neighbour. In an article in a Bengali daily although I held the view that under the newly-signed treaty we would get lesser quantum of water than in the 1977-agreement, I concluded by saying that at least we would now be assured of a prefixed volume of water on the basis of which we could plan its optimum utilization. The more I look at the treaty however the more I am convinced that we have got a very raw deal. The treaty has so many loopholes, that one is hard put to find out what minimum quantity of water we are actually assured of. Let us elaborate.

We may recall that in the 1977-agreement the share of each country was clearly stated in a schedule. 75 per cent availability of water allocated from the recorded flows from 1948 to 1973 being taken as the amount to be shared. This 75 per cent availability means we could expect to get the quantity shown generally in three years out of four. Inclusion of a guarantee clause, both for higher flows (proportionate sharing) and lower flows (80 per cent guaranteed release) was a sure enough guarantee that there won't be much of a fall from the quantity indicated in the schedule. In

contrast, the 1996-treaty gives a formula (Annexure-1) for sharing under different conditions of flow and does not clearly state what quantum of water we will be getting in any 10-day period during the five-month dry season. True, annexure-2 does indicate the available quantum of water, but this is only "indicative" based on the sharing formula and not 'definitive'. It couldn't be otherwise, because the table is based on average flow from 1949 to 1988. Had it been based even on 50 per cent probability one would have known that it would generally occur once in two years. But average flow cannot be given any stamp of certainty of occurrence. Already, as is known, we got lesser volume of water in the second and third ten-day cycles of January than shown in annexure-2. The amount of water released down Farakka based on average availability would have some meaning had there been a guarantee-clause attached to it as in the 1977-agreement. The stipulation that "every effort would be made by the upper riparian to protect flows of water at Farakka as in the 40-years average availability" is at best a statement of pious wish of a particular government which our experiences tell us will not simply work. Such a vague statement in the basic operative clause in any international agreement is hard to come by. And in any case, no one can guarantee maintenance of an average flow for all times to come. More so, because the average has been calculated from 40 years data upto 1988 after which date the flow has been decreasing (*India Today*, January 15, 1997) con-

sequent upon withdrawal of water by not less than 400 lift irrigation pumps along the Ganges upstream of Farakka. The calculation therefore is "based on poor arithmetic" to quote *'India Today'* which quotes an Indian expert.

Why did we then go for a sharing arrangement based on average flow knowing full well that its dependability is practically undefinable and not 75 per cent availability (for which a model exists in 1977-agreement) or even higher percentage of availability which decidedly is much more dependable? Calculations would show that average figures would give higher volume of water on paper than, say, 75 per cent availability and much more than 100 per cent availability (the surest basis). Was it therefore intended to hoodwink the people showing higher amount of water, but something which will not actually obtain in reality? It is hard to believe that conscious effort could have been made to befool the people. What then is the explanation for signing such a flawed treaty? Were we charmed by the Indians into signing it? Was the Prime Minister properly briefed as to the implications of all these jugglery of figures? There are some of the questions which are lurking in the minds of many.

The weakest point of the treaty however is that its duration is 30 years during which period of time need for water on both the sides will increase but it does not provide for any clear-cut ways and means as to how that contingency will be met. On the other hand, all studies suggest that there is adequate water in the basin as a whole to meet the needs of all

the riparian countries — Nepal, India and Bangladesh. In the 1977-agreement there was a clear mention in the two side-letters that steps would be taken to augment the Ganges flows including storages in Nepal. In the present treaty not only that Nepal has not been mentioned at all but the provision for augmentation is vague indeed. It reads as follows: "The two Governments recognise the need to co-operate with each other in finding a solution to the long-term problem of augmenting the flows of the Ganges during the dry season." It may be mentioned here that as early as in 1977 King Birendra of Nepal put forward the concept of regional co-operation in exploring the vast untapped water resources of the region. By not mentioning Nepal as a potential co-sharer of any future water development plan which would have benefited us also given the present-day scarcity of water, we have been made to swallow the bitter pill of "bilateralism" so dear to the Indian policy-makers and so doggedly pursued by them.

From the above we are led to the inescapable conclusion that while water availability under the 30-year treaty is uncertain at present, the future does not hold out brightly either. We are in fact caught in a 30-year quagmire from which it would be difficult to extricate ourselves.

All may not be lost however. The situation can still be retrieved. But that will be a lot of hard-work, a good deal of diplomatic ingenuity, transparency in all official dealings and, above all, a desire to take the people into confidence.

# Counter-militancy or Lawlessness

**A person apprehended in Kashmir, Assam, Tripura or Manipur is always 'a dangerous terrorist' and there is always 'a large quantity of arms recovered from him.' The media plays up the official version. People do not know the truth. At times, there are serious doubts whether all that the government disseminates is not a cover-up for lawlessness.**

across the border. It was meant to maintain 'pressure'. Only Prime Minister Morarji Desai stopped it. India's first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru was not above blemish. He allowed some to operate from Calcutta in Nepal because he did not like the kingship.

India has itself been prey to such a proxy war. Kashmir is one example. But so long as New Delhi is guilty of using similar tactics, it cannot take a credible, much less, moral stand. Counter-militancy does not mean encouraging violence or rough action in a neighbouring country because it amounts to interference. In a way, it is hot pursuit, without the use of your own force.

Rajiv Gandhi had different notions about security. He even trained the Bodos for 'self-defence'. The real purpose was to needle a non-Congress government, that of Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) at Guwahati. That was during the earlier stint of AGP. Militant Bodos have started violence on a large scale during its present stint. The recent destruction of a passenger train in Kokrajhar, Assam through remote control detonation was part of the training imparted to the Bodos.

Not long ago, it was the same story in Punjab. Some people went to the government and set against militants. No doubt, it created confusion in the ranks of militants. Police-men also came to operate as militants. But what it did to the Punjab security was beyond measure. True, some members of the security forces managed

to penetrate the inner circle of the hard core. Many insiders were eliminated in the process. But militants took their revenge on family members of policemen and other innocent. It was mayhem.

In fact, Congress was responsible for building up Bhindranwale. It wanted to fight the Akali Dal and selected a person who could win over the community through fundamentalism. Bhindranwale was financed and given all support by Congress and its government.

because they have been harassed. Many innocent have got killed in the process. Some Kashmiris call counter-militants as "third killers". But the policy framers defend them as "indigenous reaction to the militants' highhandedness."

Whatever their role, several counter-militants in Kashmir have got disillusioned. They were promised jobs or rehabilitation grants. But they are still in the cold. Some have even resumed militancy. None in government at the centre or in the

**BETWEEN THE LINES**  
Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

He was able to weaken the Akali Dal. But he became Frankenstein. The Congress government had to storm the Golden Temple to kill him.

Kashmir is witnessing a similar counter-militancy. Not long ago, Mohammed Yousuf Alias Koka Parrey, a folk singer, who had turned a militant, was noticed by the Military Intelligence (MI) to become a counter-militant. He formed an organisation, Ikwanol Muslimoon, and carried militancy into the ear of militants. It created confusion and disorder but cost many lives. Once again, it was mayhem.

The security forces have protected counter-militants, who at one time numbered 700. But people have paid a heavy price

state knows what to do with them. They are going from pillar to post without definite hope.

This happens to those who surrender for gain. The story of some ULFA militants is no different. Former Assam chief minister Hiteswar Saikia bought some of them. They became 'official gunmen' to fight the ULFA. Only the public feared them and recognised as SULFA (S for surrender). But today none bothers about them. They are far from rehabilitated.

What it proves is that the very concept of counter-militancy is wrong, morally or otherwise. The state cannot afford to indulge in illegal activities because it fails to get results in

# Dhaka Day by Day

## More than Something for Everyone

by Ayesha Fariha



Few of the "special" Iftar items available in the restaurants in Dhaka city this year could be compared with those of the Sonargoan's. The reason is, the hotel surpassed most other places in the standard it has set in the price, quantity, and quality of its food. Consider this. For Taka 650, which is the set price of the Iftar Dinner Buffet Menu at the Cafe Bazaar, one can savour a mélange of dishes ranging from cold salads to hot biriyani and a variety of desserts from fresh fruits to roshmalai, and off course the traditional iftar — halim, jilapi, plazu — with a touch of the unconventional — a raw vegetable platter, tomatoes stuffed with corn, and Spanish-style peppers.

If the items sound mismatched, one should not be quick to criticise, for the buffet was certainly an Epicurean's delight. With almost 50 dishes, the main courses each boasted several side dishes, and the side dishes each flaunted accompaniments. Besides, there was no cap on the number of glasses of beverages one could consume during the meal, and that itself would amount to well over a few

hundred takas in any other restaurant. For those who preferred to eat dinner at a later hour, there was the option of the iftar — only Buffet for Taka 375, and this included 20-25 items.

One could also not help but notice the organised manner in which the food was laid out — that is, from the basic to the more complex. The jugs were kept on ice to ensure the beverages remained cool, and the halim and the jilapis were each served fresh from separate stalls.

Business is certainly booming at the Cafe Bazaar. It is not unusual to have a full house, even on a weekday, and the patrons, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, are making the most of the value. In fact, it is the stress on 'good value for money' philosophy that has contributed greatly to the success of the Sonargoan's Iftar Dinner Buffet. A quick glance at the display, and one can surmise that there is more than something for every one at a price which would buy only a mere something for everyone elsewhere.

beyond redemption. Already there are demonstrations, protests and hartals against the command. Even AASU, opposed to militancy, has taken up the challenge. The state government was initially opposed to its creation because it meant the imposition of martial law without saying so. But it had to give in to the Centre's pressure. A democratic society is recognised not so much by elected legislatures as by the temper of governance. Steps like joint military commands is not an answer to unrest. Political solutions have to be found to settle demands. If suppression could find a way it would have done so. There are already too many inhuman stringent laws operating in north eastern states and Kashmir. The security forces are also in a too large number, behaving in a too indiscriminating manner. On the top of this is the illegal activity that goes by the name of counter-militancy.

Ordinarily, there should have been voices of criticism. But there is hardly any because the people's minds have been conditioned by misinformation and wrong propaganda. A person apprehended in Kashmir, Assam, Tripura or Manipur is always "a dangerous terrorist" and there is always a large quantity of arms recovered from him." The media plays up the official version. People do not know the truth. At times, there are serious doubts whether all that the government disseminates is not a cover-up for lawlessness.

## OPINION

### Rationalisation of Government Holidays

Hedayat Ahmed

According to government notification all offices of the government remained closed on 6 February on account of Lailatul-Qadr and will remain closed on 9-13 February on account of Eid-ul-Fitr. In other words, all such offices will remain open on three days viz., 8, 12 and 13 February during the 9-day period between 6 and 14 February. What will happen in fact is that most of the employees who will go to their respective villages to celebrate the Eid will remain absent during those three days. This period of absence, if unauthorised, will be ignored by the superiors on humanitarian grounds or such employees will render themselves liable to disciplinary action. News papers will flash pictures of empty offices. This raises the question of some rationalisation of holidays in order to enable government staff and employees to enjoy the holidays without any guilt complex. In this regard, my suggestion will be as follows:

1. There should be at least one long vacation in a year. As Ramadan followed by Eid-ul-Fitr are the two most important and sacred events of the Islamic calendar and majority of the population are Muslim, such long vacation should coincide with these festivals. In the western world, people take long holidays during the Christmas and the New Year. For at least two weeks during the period, all activities in offices come to a halt.

2. Since holidays are guided by specific rules fixing the maximum number of holidays to be available in a year, excess over the maximum, if any, may be adjusted by reducing other non-essential holidays. This I presume, will not be unacceptable to most such employees.

3. The next question is that of manning the offices during this long holiday period. Government activities are expected to be below normal during this period. Hence, a skeleton staff can be mobilised to carry on urgent and the most essential services and activities. Such staff can be compensated through additional incentives. Compensatory package may include financial and other benefits.

4. Option may be offered to employees to avail themselves of compensatory leave should such employees decide to work during the holiday period. This will be an incentive to those who stay back in the city to work during the holiday period without any additional payment on the part of the government. Such compensatory leave can be availed in accordance with the convenience of the entitled person.

The authorities concerned in the government may look into this proposition and other possibilities for rationalising holidays. This will benefit a large number of employees who go out of Dhaka to celebrate Eid and other festivals.

This was written before the latest announcement of the government declaring 8 February as a public holiday.

## To the Editor...

**Naogaon hospital**

Sir, For more than 22 lakh people of Naogaon, the Government Hospital at the district headquarters has no specialist on Medicine for long one year. Everyday more than 100 serious patients visit the hospital for treatment. But due to the absence of a specialist on Medicine, they are deprived of proper treatment.

So very often they fall prey to the local clinics where there is no real specialists on Medicine. In the recent address to the Parliament by the President, it was mentioned that "one of the main responsibilities of the government is to provide proper healthcare services to the people". But unfortunately, the Naogaon Hospital is unable to do that.

Would the Minister for Health and the Director General of Health do the needful in this regard?

Mujibul Huq  
Naogaon

**KAFCO incident a bad signal to FDI**

Sir, It is disturbing to know that a group of employees forced the management of KAFCO to sign a 5 per cent profit-sharing agreement. Uptill now KAFCO is the only foreign company in the country.

The government is promising to give all facilities to the prospective foreign investors. How will the foreign investors be encouraged to come when they see the unruly behaviour of

the employees? It's for the greater interest of the nation that the government should take stern action against those who are trying to pollute the investment atmosphere.

In the home front too, the employees are also doing the same thing. In all the semi-government organisations, very few of the employees really work in the office, whereas privileged few draw all the benefits.

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**Bangladesh Educational Statistics 1994**

Sir, Recently while preparing a report on agricultural education system, with some reference books, I had also consulted the "Bangladesh Educational Statistics 1994", the year-book published by Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS). When I came across the Table No. 12 : Public Current Expenditure on Agricultural Education (1993-94 to 1995-96) on page 100, I got confused. Because in this table, under the column 'Name of Institute', names of certain agricultural research institutes have been shown in the following serial :

1. Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI), 2. Nuclear Agriculture Institute, Mymensingh (the correct name of this is Bangladesh Institute of Nuclear Agriculture — BINA), 3. Bangladesh Jute Research In-

stitute (BJRI), 4. Agriculture College, Patuakhali 5. Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC), 6. Soil Resources Development Institute, and 7. Agriculture Education.

It is true that the government allocations for the three government agriculture colleges, viz. Bangladesh Agricultural Institute (BAI), Dhaka, Patuakhali Agriculture College (PKC), and Hajee Mohammad Dariesh Agricultural College (HMDAC), Dinaipur are being disbursed by Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI). Because agri-colleges are functioning under the Agriculture Wing, Ministry of Agriculture by BARI. So, there is some logic of enlisting BARI's name as agricultural institute. But what about the other research institutes?

There is no mention about the only post-graduate agri-education institute of the country, i.e. Institute of Post-graduate Studies in Agriculture (IPSA). It is situated at Salna, Gazipur which is an autonomous institute under the Ministry of Agriculture and its expenditure is borne by the government.

The Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU), Mymensingh being a government university receives government grants through the University Grants Commission. There is one private agricultural college in Rajshahi which had also received some grants from the government.

All the above-mentioned agri-institutes are offering un-

dergraduate and post-graduate degree courses.

The 11 Agricultural Training Institutes (ATI) situated in different districts are offering "Diploma in Agriculture" course under the administrative control of the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) and academic supervision of the Bangladesh Technical Education Board.

What I deeply feel is that the government, through BANBEIS, should launch a programme for conducting a fresh educational survey throughout the country for producing a reliable Handbook of Bangladesh Educational Statistics. Such statistical book should contain not only just certain figures but also the graduate placement situation of different institutes plus projection on manpower requirements on various disciplines.

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**Mosquitoes**

Sir, The dwellers of Banani are in a little bit problem. Mosquitoes are increasing in number here. It's really a great torture.

It is a problem for all, particularly for the students and some 'mad readers' like me, who read late at night.

I hope, the DCC will come forward quickly to solve this problem.

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