

Economic Momentum

It is good to note from the ESCAP Economic and Social Survey, 1997 and ADB's Asian Development Outlook report, 1997 and 1998 that Bangladesh economy is placed not merely on a road to recovery but also sustainable growth. The ESCAP gazing into the crystal-ball with the help of macro-economic data projections points out that Bangladesh economy is set to grow at an annual rate of seven per cent till the turn of the century. The Asian Development Bank's findings are more focused and less liberal predicting a growth rate of 5.4 per cent in-the-all-but-ended fiscal 1997 and six per cent in 1998. Given the growth rates of 1995 and 1996 at 4.4 and 4.7 per cent respectively of the GDP, the projected increase of between one and two per cent in the growth rates for the next two years presages a clear break-through from the stagnation trap the economy had fallen into during the preceding two years.

At a sustained economic growth rate of between six and seven per cent for the remainder of the current century and with the population growth rate contained to below two per cent, the residual national development would be a substantial help to poverty amelioration among the bottom-most 20 per cent. We face the dual challenge of proving these predictions true on the hand and perfecting on the other our policies to ensure distributive justice on acquiring the increased national wealth.

The message we need to absorb quickly regardless of our political affiliations is this: the largely unruptured political peace following the June, 1996 elections has brightened the country's economic outlook for independent observers to see. The stable conditions will have to be maintained to be able to frog-leap into the 21st century, by our own modest standards. This opportunity we can ill-afford to lose the second time over by subjecting ourselves once again to a self-punishing spell of prolonged political confrontation.

The door to new industrialisation and infrastructure-building should be flung-opened with a much greater dose of Foreign Direct Investment than the paltry US\$125m we had received in 1995. The Philippines which has even less than half the size of our area and population could attract US\$1500 million in the same year. Since we are required to fine-tune our salesmanship abroad to say that many the problems foreign investors face in Bangladesh are awaiting to be removed by their own investments the need for separating party politics from the economy can hardly be overemphasised.

Aid is likely to be in short supply. We shall have to depend largely on FDIs, trade, stock exchange market and removal of the gap between rate of domestic saving and that of domestic investment to turn a corner. For all of these to happen, we urge the political parties to keep the national economy out of the harm's way.

Focus on Slum

Ain-O-Salish Kendra has come up with a draft Housing Rights (Urban and Slum Area) Bill. As the first such initiative — that too by a private organisation — it has sought to protect not only the housing right but also various other rights of the slum dwellers. At this stage we feel that the bill needs to be thoroughly debated before an action plan is taken up in the matter. But we readily endorse the view that slums are people not places — as one of the organisation's speakers has nicely phrased it. This sums up the neglect slum-dwellers are subjected to. Both policy makers and city's inhabitants in general have long been accustomed to considering slum people as a problem rather than an integral ally of urbanisation.

This is where the misconception begins. We at The Daily Star are of the opinion — one that also corresponds to the Ain-O-Salish Kendra's principled position — that the slum dwellers deserve to be recognised as a partner in solution. Because they put in their labour mostly in the informal sector their services go unrecognised. But this is inexcusable. Just imagine the absence of rickshaws that provide for the backbone of Dhaka City's transport, the whole system will fall like nine pins. Several other service systems of the city are similarly dependent on people living in slums. You can ignore planning for these people, constituting about 40 per cent of the city's population, only at your peril.

So, we think that the case for slum dwellers must be brought into focus of the mainstream policy-making, planning and development debates. As yet slumming has been viewed as a problematic aberration rather than a natural phenomenon calling for a positive approach. Informed deliberations on the subject might help formulate the right kind of action programmes for city slums.

Sporting Phenomenon

He is one of the few sporting phenomena in whom talents for demanding disciplines found a ready reservoir. Both in cricket and football he excelled to the point where only the best in the trade can rise and leave the indelible mark of their class. Elegant, handsome and debonair, Denis Compton, who breathed his last on Wednesday, did exactly that. The first English superstar, Compton legitimately was a heart-throb to his fans across the world. His mesmerising skills have unsurprisingly earned him a permanent place in the cricketing hall of fame and almost an equal niche in the English footballing history.

The man was a natural creator of sporting history. And this is despite the premature retirement from sporting career due to a nasty knee injury. Two achievements — one in football and another in cricket — should be enough to show the man's extraordinary abilities. In a match in Calcutta in 1945, Compton played for the combined Services against the Indian Football Association. Till half time the match was goalless. In the second half, he promoted himself from defence to attack and within minutes scored five goals before once again returning to his defensive position. Then in 1947, Compton scored 3,816 runs, 18 of them centuries. Both the aggregate runs and number of centuries as records stand till-date.

We pay tribute to this great man and sporting personality because a genius of his class has inspired every following generation anywhere in the world to emulate his feats. Our best tribute to Compton would be to make the new generation aware of his great achievements.

Jyoti Basu Had Last Word

Gujral provided the glue to stick the 14 political parties of different states together. His drawback of being alone became his strength. He turned out to be the common factor, a key which opened many locks.

IT had all the suspense and drama of a soap opera. Those who had the privilege of watching action behind the scenes are still amazed how Inder Kumar Gujral came to be elected as the United Front leader — and the Prime Minister.

In a combination of 172, he had not even a single vote since he is not the Lok Sabha member. His own party, the Janata Dal, was lukewarm towards him because its chief, Laloo Prasad Yadav, was dead set against him. The Communists, the propelling force behind the Front, liked him but did not think he had the popular base for the elections it expected to follow soon.

Yet, Gujral provided the glue to stick the 14 political parties of different states together. His drawback of being alone became his strength. He turned out to be the common factor, a key which opened many locks.

Once Congress wrote to the President that it was willing to support the Front, provided Deve Gowda did not head it, the way for a new leader was clear. The letter was a sticking point for the Communists, who had felt humiliated when Gowda was first defeated in confidence vote motion and then forced to step down from the Front's leadership. Once again the Communists, who have only 53 Lok Sabha members, came to force the issue. CPI(M) secretary general Harkishan Singh Surjeet dictated terms. His forte was that he knew the personalities and their personal and political affiliations like the palm of his hand.

There were a dozen candidates in the field. Serious among them in the order of their support were five: C.K. Mooppanar, president of the Tamil Nadu Congress; Mulayam Singh, president of the Samajwadi Party; I.K. Gujral; Laloo Yadav and Ram Vilas Paswan, the only dalit candidate. Andhra Pradesh chief minister Chandrababu Naidu was never a candidate. Had he been one, he would have got elected without much ado.

No amount of pressure or persuasion made him throw his hat in the ring. He was an obvi-

ous choice to bring about the consensus among the Front's constituents. And he went about the job with the zeal of an evangelist.

His first point of call was Banga Bhavan on Halley Road where West Bengal chief minister Jyoti Basu was staying. Naidu, once again, tried what was attempted before Deve Gowda was elected 11 months ago. Basu as the prime minister. He did not take even a second to reject the offer. The CPI (M) politburo was more convinced now than before that it had done the right thing in not having allowed Basu to accept the Front's leadership.

Naidu then moved to Andhra Bhavan, where leaders of different parties met him. Gujral's name was pushed back when

down well with the Front's other parties, vehemently opposed to a mid-term election. The DMK and the Samajwadi Party were particularly hostile.

The Front looked like losing the cohesiveness it had maintained in the last 11 months. The Communists, particularly the CPI (M), did not bother. They believed that if they were to go to the polls on the basis of the Deve Gowda government's performance, the Front would do better. Gowda himself projected the same idea. It was a sabotage. But a preponderant majority of the Front stopped the damage. They wanted to avoid elections at all costs. If that was their desire, they had no choice other than Mulayam Singh, argued Surjeet. Paswar dropped along the wayside

Sabha was to be decided in the north, which commanded more than 300 seats in the 545-member Lok Sabha. Bommai was out.

Now Mulayam Singh and Gujral remained in the field. The Communists were still backing up Mulayam Singh. Ordinarily, the whole exercise would have been over by the 18th. But Biju Patnaik, the Orissa leader, died. The meeting had to be postponed because most Janata Dal leaders went to attend his cremation.

The following day, the parleys began once again. Mulayam Singh lost his most ardent supporter because Surjeet left for Moscow to attend a Communist Congress. Now Jyoti Basu took over. He preferred Gujral to Mulayam Singh. Naidu found support for Mulayam Singh dwindling. Naidu himself liked Gujral. Asom Gana Parishad also tilted towards Gujral, who by the time, had made up with Laloo.

Gujral was now a formidable candidate. Mulayam Singh withdrew but expected the deputy prime ministership. His name was announced unofficially but Laloo was firmly opposed to Mulayam Singh getting any such position. It was expected that Mooppanar would fall in line. The inclusion of P Chidambaram of Mooppanar's party was necessary for the reasons of impact in the field of economy. Manmohan Singh was in Congress and hence could not join.

Congress was happy over Gujral's name. Many of its members recalled the days when he was in Congress. His deportment of amiability and conciliation was considered important for closer relations between Congress and the Front. Some Congressmen had also in mind the day when they might join the government to share power.

This prospect was not to the liking of many in the Front, particularly the Communists. This may be a shaky situation, which the BJP exploited during the vote of confidence motion in favour of Gujral. But he may provide what is required: a firm sense of leadership and a soothing hand on the brow.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

Laloo Yadav asserted that none from his party could be considered without his concurrence. He declared his own candidature and restricted the choice between Basu and himself. But he did not have even his own party behind him, much less other parties. Laloo Yadav's main opponent was Mulayam Singh, another Yadav. He and Laloo claimed the same base: the backward and Muslims. But both crossed each other's name out. One could not face the prospect of the other heading the Front. Gujral's name came to be retrieved in the fray.

Still Mulayam Singh was the forerunner. The Communists supported him. Surjeet went to other parties, particularly the DMK, to canvass support for him. Even Congress leader Sharad Pawar's intervention was in vain because the DMK could not say 'no' to the Communists. Surjeet's argument was that a mid-term poll was inevitable and that they should have a person who would aggressively fight the Bharatiya Janata Party in the north. Gujral did not fill the bill. This reasoning did not go

when even his mentor, VP Singh, did not encourage him.

Mooppanar was sitting pretty, expecting Surjeet and others to rally around him after realising that he alone was a viable candidate. After all, he had nearly got the UP leadership before Deve Gowda was elected. In fact, it was Surjeet who had proposed his name after Basu and VP Singh had declined the offer. But Mooppanar favoured the election of someone else.

Little did he know that the scenario — and political loyalties — had changed since. The Communists were not now happy over his proximity to Sonia Gandhi. They argued that he was still a member of the Congress party, which the Front's constituents were pitted against in their states. That Mooppanar had no administrative experience — the prime ministership would have been his first post — also weighed against him.

H R Bommai was considered a compromise candidate but he was too late a starter. The Communists wanted someone from the north because the battle for supremacy in the Lok

OPINION

Police: The Question of Consciousness

A R Shamsul Islam

THE police are supposed to grab the wrong-doers and protect the innocent persons. But the grim reality of Bangladesh is not likewise. Sometimes it is near the reverse. The presence of the police does not always worry the criminals and the innocent people sometimes nervously avoid coming into their contact.

The police are alleged to abuse power quite frequently. Only a small portion of such incidences comes to the media and is made known to the public. Others are believed being kept hushed up by the sufferers themselves who are aware of the futility of exposing them. Wide public censure of the abuse of power by the police erupts sometimes when it is of grave nature like the cases of Yasmin and Sheemas.

In a true democracy, the police are supposedly a force of the people. But as the government of a country like Bangladesh hardly ceases to be identified with the ruling party the police force virtually turns to be a force of the latter. Believable, the police are found to readily acquiesce in this (unholy) entente as it facilitates achieving their personal gains, a vice (?) which other professional communities are found no less prone to.

Most governments of Bangladesh are alleged to have used the police to suppress the political movements without compunction. Police action can never be a proper answer to political problems. Government's undue and over dependence on police has engendered a firm belief in them that it is they without whom the government cannot carry on, particularly in the face of political movements. This "consciousness of power" has perhaps sowed in their minds seeds of vanity, defiance and desperation. One may recall that prior to the outbreak of the Revolt of 1857, the Indian sepoys were buoyed up with a "consciousness of power" fondly believing that the British rule in India was depending largely on them. Thus the police of Bangladesh are driven to be

haughty, delinquent and even wild. The civil administration is found hesitant to deal with their wanton activities. Rather, it is found, on some occasions, to have blatantly concocted to cover up the crimes of the police as in the case of Yasmin of Dinajpur.

Of course, it is an admitted fact that the Police Department is not provided with adequate logistic supports to play due role in curbing crimes and improving law and order situation. The dearth of police personnel, inadequacy and inefficiency of arms, equipment, transports, communication networks, poor pay and benefits of the lower grades of the staff, lack of up-to-date training and modernisation programmes, etc. are factors to be addressed to expect them effective. But given full considerations to these limitations, can the rapping of women in police custody over and over again be defended? What emboldens the police to commit the same crime repeatedly damning the countryside fierce public outbursts they are used to experience now and then?

The top brass of the police is supposed to streamline and rationalise the unit, reward the good performers and retribute the deterrents, prove its (top brass) moral quality to insulate the subordinates from depravity, idealise the profession and elevate the image of the department. But instead of doing that if it remains rotting, the infection is bound to percolate through the whole body enfeebling the limbs and depraving the mind. Discipline, chain of command are the pivots of strength of a force like the police. If these are eaten up, the police force can be of little use to the people except for tormenting them time and again.

All these, however, do not deliver any good to the country and do not have any good man among them. There are undoubtedly some of them who are thoroughly honest, dutiful, efficient and committed to the

welfare of the people. Otherwise, the department would have gone non-existent. They sincerely feel to restore the lost image of the community and remould it as a people's force. They want a healthy climate to fulfil their dream. The alleged political and financial corruptions in the matter of recruitment, posting and promotion of the police personnel are highly derogatory to the creation of such a climate.

In a democracy people's rights are protected by a system of check and balance. The balancing force against the police is found least working, if not missing. Previously the magistracy used to control the police. Thereafter the power of the magistracy over the police was curbed. Still at the top rung of the police administration is seated the civil executives and above them lord over the ministers. But if the government are included as makers and users of the police, they (the government) have to connive at many an undoing of the police which being left unbridled automatically proliferate beyond limits. This tantamounts to the government's appeasing the police even when they do offences. Government should ensure adequate control and supervision over their different organs, in which Police Department constitutes only one of the many. The Police, chiefly being the law-enforcing agency, need to be constantly, carefully and fearlessly policed by the Home Ministry for their conducts and activities as these are related to the security of the people. It is unfortunate that most governments could not prove their mettle and maturity in this test.

What a maximum price the police are found to pay for their misdoings with the people including raping and killing of women? From the public side, it is resentment, outburst, scuffle with the police, condemnation, sometimes the affairs reaching to the parliament floor generating drab debates occasionally punctuated with boisterousness among the law-makers. From

the government side, it is a stale recitation of memorised lessons — a government hand-out on the situation, closing in of some allegedly involved policemen, suspending a few, visiting the place of occurrence by the police authorities, constituting probe committees and to a maximum of holding long-drawn trials in the courts of law on charge-sheets where escape routes for the accused are allegedly kept hidden. Thus the episode awaiting enactment of another similar or more grim saga before any long interval is ensued.

It is the police's "consciousness of power" to save the government battered by political movements, a kind of unwritten immunity from punishment for offences committed by them, government's alleged policy of appeasement lavishly exercised to the police, impairment of the chain of commands and the Police ranks, increasing moral depravity among the policemen, etc., that leave the police almost at liberty to do what they like, no matter how it harms the people. Nothing short of a true democratic government wise enough to refrain from using the police against the people can destroy the police's "consciousness of power", push them amenable to law and discipline, invoke their latent good senses to rise to turn them into a real police force committed to the protection of people's life, property and rights. People, weary of unending frustrations, have voted the Awami League to power desperately hoping the government to be sincere and able to establish a rule of law which can crush, inter-alia, the alleged wanton behaviour of the police. A democratic government enjoys a great advantage of taking people, as friendly partners, with them to perform welfare activities and does not have any need to employ the police to the tasks which their service rules and ethics do not admit of.

The writer is Retired Principal of Govt. Mohila College, Pabna.

To the Editor...

Government of abuse

Sir, The government is doing too much politics, instead of taking administrative and punitive action on staff, separating the political propaganda. Here are some examples:

a) Dhaka traffic: The Human side is being soft-pedalled — prosecution of unauthorised drivers and vehicles. Populistsy syndrome is not good administration. Why misplaced kindness?

All ministers should meet the press once a month. We are fed up of one-sided propaganda. Why cabinet cannot be reshuffled? We don't want a government of ABUSE.

A Zabr Dhaka

Daring heroes, indeed!

Sir, Our hearty felicitations and warmest greetings to the skipper Akram Khan who has saved the face and prestige of Bangladesh at the Rubber Research Institute ground in Kuala Lumpur on 4.4.97. He has proved that if anyone has conviction and courage in a horrendous moment, he is a must to be winner. Akram's team is really courageous and made place in the coming World Cup cricket in England in 1999.

We also congratulate the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for her announcement that "each player to get a car if they qualify for the World Cup."

Md Abubakar Siddique Tulshipur, Jamalpur

Resisting cloning

Sir, Recently, a cloned sheep named Dolly has been introduced to the world by Ian Wilmut, a Scottish scientist. Dolly was produced from a cell taken from an adult ewe. As we know that cloning of plants is done by grafting, budding etc., but cloning of a mammal is the first of its kind in the world. Meanwhile, following the introduction of the clone sheep, Dolly, a debate has been sparked off world over on the question whether the embryo cloning experiment should be

allowed to continue or shelved? The main fear is that, if cloning of humans is done then what will be the consequence? Possibly there would be several identical versions of single individual!

Apprehending such danger the Director General of the World Health Organization (WHO), Mr Hiroshi Nakajima has expressed his opposition to possible human cloning. In a statement issued on March 11, 1997, the WHO Chief called for a public debate at national and international levels to establish regulations on the issue. Let Bangladesh also hold such a debate to help establish international regulations on the cloning issue by contributing our national sentiments and suggestions.

M Zahidul Haque Bal, Dhaka-1207

Dhaka Day by Day

Why Beauty isn't Skin-Deep

by Schrezad Joya Monami Latif



In this country when one goes to a beauty parlour, it is literally a beauty parlour, one can get all sorts of "beautifying" services in these places. Sadly, face bleaching is one of the more popular "beautifying" regimens preferred by ladies. I will not go into the dangers of face bleaching or how it causes skin cancer as sure as overeating causes overweight. We've spent too many days by days on our obsession with fair skin, it's our Aryan/colonial past blah, blah. Where was I?

Oh, yes, I was sitting at the beauty parlour, winning my way through an ancient Chinese method (not known in the West, actually) called threading, an extremely painful ancient method where two threads are held close together to pluck off unwanted facial hair; and to get my mind off my pain — it had nothing to do with my insatiable curiosity — naturally, I overheard a few of the conversations buzzing on top of my head. One lady was getting her remarkably long hair dyed, oops, dyed black and was lamenting on the lack of good men as *jama's* (sons-in-law) these days. I perked up naturally, and well, here's how the conversation went:

Lady whose hair is being dyed (Lady): "My God! Who are these poor little girls supposed to marry? No good men around, none at all!"

Beautyician (B): "Tell me about it *apa*, my *shasuri* is going mad trying to find my sister-in-law a husband, she's been sitting at home after finishing her masters, it's been two years!"

Lady: "My God, what seems to be the problem?"

B: Well, the thing is, all my other sisters-in-law have married great men, one is a squadron leader, another is a director type, but one doesn't get everything in a man these days, it's not like the old times, you know."

Lady: "Oh yes, oh yes, but you know you don't get everything, these days one must settle, maybe you could ask around, I mean so many people come to your parlour, why don't you ask these women if they have any prospective *jama's*?"

Beautyician (B): "I know you are right, but what if I remain dark?"

Fair skin: "What do you mean, anything will be an improvement, so you won't become Aishwarya Rai, but it will be head. One lady was getting her remarkably long hair dyed, oops, dyed black and was lamenting on the lack of good men as *jama's* (sons-in-law) these days. I perked up naturally, and well, here's how the conversation went:

Lady: "My God! Who are these poor little girls supposed to marry? No good men around, none at all!"

Beautyician (B): "Tell me about it *apa*, my *shasuri* is going mad trying to find my sister-in-law a husband, she's been sitting at home after finishing her masters, it's been two years!"

Lady: "My God, what seems to be the problem?"

B: Well, the thing is, all my other sisters-in-law have married great men, one is a squadron leader, another is a director type, but one doesn't get everything in a man these days, it's not like the old times, you know."

Lady: "Oh yes, oh yes, but you know you don't get everything, these days one must settle, maybe you could ask around, I mean so many people come to your parlour, why don't you ask these women if they have any prospective *jama's*?"

Beautyician (B): "I know you are right, but what if I remain dark?"

Fair skin: "What do you mean, anything will be an improvement, so you won't become Aishwarya Rai, but it will be head. One lady was getting her remarkably long hair dyed, oops, dyed black and was lamenting on the lack of good men as *jama's* (sons-in-law) these days. I perked up naturally, and well, here's how the conversation went:

Lady: "My God! Who are these poor little girls supposed to marry? No good men around, none at all!"

Beautyician (B): "Tell me about it *apa*, my *shasuri* is going mad trying to find my sister-in-law a husband, she's been sitting at home after finishing her masters, it's been two years!"

Lady: "My God, what seems to be the problem?"

B: Well, the thing is, all my other sisters-in-law have married great men, one is a squadron leader, another is a director type, but one doesn't get everything in a man these days, it's not like the old times, you know."

Lady: "Oh yes, oh yes, but you know you don't get everything, these days one must settle, maybe you could ask around, I mean so many people come to your parlour, why don't you ask these women if they have any prospective *jama's*?"

Beautyician (B): "I know you are right, but what if I remain dark?"

Fair skin: "What do you mean, anything will be an improvement, so you won't become Aishwarya Rai, but it will be head. One lady was getting her remarkably long hair dyed, oops, dyed black and was lamenting on the lack of good men as *jama's* (sons-in-law) these days. I perked up naturally, and well, here's how the conversation went:

Lady: "My God! Who are these poor little girls supposed to marry? No good men around, none at all!"

Beautyician (B): "Tell me about it *apa*, my *shasuri* is going mad trying to find my sister-in-law a husband, she's been sitting at home after finishing her masters, it's been two years!"

Lady: "My God, what seems to be the problem?"

By arrangement with UNB and Los Angeles Times Syndicate

Art Buchwald's COLUMN

Oh, the Pain of It

THE saddest sight in Washington is seeing the Democratic National Committee returning money to suspicious donors. The truth is that the party is flat broke and millions of dollars in debt. Every nickel they have to return to a Manchurian candidate hurts.

But for the moment, the DNC is withholding its refunds. Even the guy manning the DNC toll booth in front of the White House is reluctant to give suspicious donors their money back.

He told one, "We know you are with the Peruvian storm troopers, but we can't return your donation at this time. Why don't you come back on Thursday?"

The next person was from an Asian country and was wearing a Sun Moon jogging suit.

"I understand I am entitled to a US\$ 200,000 refund."

The guy in the booth said, "I'm prepared to give it to you, but first you must return the photograph taken with you and President Clinton."

"He took the picture with me. It's been in all the papers in South Korea. Why should I return it?"

"Because you are an illegal giver and we are in violation of the law for accepting your money. And we cannot have a photograph of you with our president circulated in a foreign country."

"If I give you back the photo, will you return the US\$ 200,000?"

"Yes, unless you would like to go on a tour of China with Vice President Gore."

"I don't think that is worth US\$ 200,000. As you know, my original reason for giving the donation is that I was promised Moon workshop would become the official religion of Arkansas."

"OK, we'll get back to you."

The next man was pretty beaten up and wore torn trousers and a dirty T-shirt.

"I suppose you have come for a rebate."

"That's correct. My name is Michael Diggins, and I wouldn't have given money if I knew it was going to be soft."

"I don't see your name on the list."

"I'm with the homeless in the park across the street. You probably didn't have time to put me in the computer."

"We're sorry, but we can't give your money back if we don't know who you are."

"That's OK, but would you have a spare bedroom in the White House to put me up for a while?"

By arrangement with UNB and Los Angeles Times Syndicate