

Aviation Shocker

Mehbub's pommelled body drops off at the Riyadh airport's landing bay from the wheel carriage of a Biman Airbus he had stealthily ducked into making a complete fool of 860 civil aviation and 260 Biman security staffers at the ZIA. Even the 360-degree visual scanner supposed to have covered two probable points of his entry — Biman hangar and bay no. 4, where the aircraft remained for six and a quarter hours since 10 in the morning — failed to spot him in the unlikely event that he hazarded it at all in day-light.

We are left to deduce that it could have happened at some point along the runway. Such a surmise rings with a high probability rating in view of a Bhorer Kagaj disclosure: the pilot having spotted a mud-smudged squatting figure of a youngman near the take-off point where the aircraft halted for four minutes to allow an approaching aircraft to land, had duly reported the matter to the control tower. There is that blind spot in those four minutes. How could he have clambered on to the overheated wheel zone without dying instantaneously?

With darkness all around underlining the lack of lighting arrangements, one is flabbergasted to learn that the southern Baunia end of the runway accounted for tales of light and cable stealings, cattle-trespassing, and more — a goat actually breeding calves there.

This unheard-of security breach — the Havana teenager in 1969 having flown into Florida hiding in the cargo hole safely enough — has been one time too many on our part and the worst of its kind in the history of civil aviation. Earlier, two of our youngmen made news by cracking the security ring and gaining entry into the boarding area, one was even caught right inside the aircraft while seated nonchalantly. That is our security track-record.

People are least interested in the recriminations between Biman Bangladesh and the civil aviation authority that invariably follow any sensational occurrence of a security breach; for, what is menacingly at stake is our credibility in running an international airport and the security of passengers on board some nine airliners, eight of them foreign, that operate daily at the ZIA.

Taliban Success

The Taliban or students are now in control of almost all of Afghanistan with both President Burhanuddin Rabbani and Uzbek challenger General Abdur Rashid Dostum fleeing the country, the former to Iran and the latter to Turkey, with nothing remaining to give the Taliban any more fight. The latest Taliban successes in the month should mean an end to or at least a goodly pause in the civil war atrocities the Afghan people have been subjected to specially after the Soviets left in 1989.

The Taliban's is a military victory which cannot readily claim that it is the Afghan people who have chosen them to rule. Pakistan has hurried to recognise the new regime in Kabul very predictably. For the other nations, however, it might be difficult to follow Pakistan, not at least right-away.

The Taliban's performance so far has been controversial in terms of the Islamic taboos it has imposed which have been suppressive of some of the basic rights the Afghan citizens have enjoyed despite the turmoil-ridden history of that country. The nations of the world, together with Bangladesh, would do well to wait and hope for an improvement on the situation along stable lines.

As long as the Taliban continues to govern, there will be a moral pressure for the recognition of the de facto government in Kabul. The Taliban have so far been enmeshed in a military confrontation with their adversaries; it is only now that they are faced with the formidable challenge of running a war-torn country. How well they fare in doing so, only time will tell.

Not for Fun's Sake

Minister Matia Chowdhury has added a refreshing dimension to relief work by infusing some local officials with her own sense of commitment to the endeavour. Obviously she believes that public service should be as tireless as an exigency like a devastating cyclone demands.

While trekking to the doorsteps of 120 households at Banskhal union in Chittagong and distributing cash money to the calamity victims in a time-span of five and a half hours on Sunday, officials accompanying her at one point wanted to rest provoking the Minister into saying that she was not there for the 'fun's sake'.

Her portfolio being food and agriculture, she has reasons to be unsparingly serious in the task of mitigating the damages sustained which are estimated to be of the order of at least Tk 500 crore inclusive, of course, of the housing losses.

Her direct and indirect distribution of relief commends itself to other functionaries for more than one reason. First, it is seemingly taking time to prepare the lists of the needy which are supposed to be furnished by the chairmen and members of the union parishes to the local administrations. The only way to overcome this procedural delay where even minutes can't be wasted in reaching succour to the affected, is to go directly to the victims with something in hand to offer them in material terms when they need it the most.

Secondly, the door-to-door approach has the merit of minimising corruption in relief distribution which had often been characterised by either short deliveries of money and material or deliveries to undeserving persons.

What is Privatisation and Why

Bangladesh is committed to the creation of a liberal, competitive market economy. We do not need a referendum for it. Privatisation is not an isolated event. It is very much a part of the very same process which will create the desired market economy.

government's role in ensuring fair competition which may require new regulations in certain specific markets (for example, telecom).

The intertwined nature of the three key aspects of economic reform and restructuring may please be noted. If state intervention in domestic markets should be reduced, then such intervention through state owned enterprises should also be minimised through privatisation of such enterprises. On the other hand, given huge size of government owned enterprises, often accounting for the major share of manufacturing capacity (for example, jute, textile or banking), the best way to open markets to competition is through privatisation of existing government owned and operated industries and other enterprises.

Thus without privatisation, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to develop the deregulated, liberal market economy. This is the basic compulsion of privatisation. It is not only to recoup huge losses being currently incurred by Government. Privatisation is part and parcel of economic reform and restructuring where the public sector must cut itself down in areas or sectors where there must be competition and without the involvement of the private sector, there cannot be any competition.

Often, the issue of losses being incurred by public enterprises are highlighted as the only reason for privatisation. It means that loss-ridden public enterprises are sick. Therefore either the sickness should be removed or such enterprises totally eliminated. The controversy is with regard to the

course of treatment to be followed for sick state owned enterprises. Those who belong to the old socialist camp are of the view that such enterprises were not given adequate support in terms of additional investment or balancing and modernisation. Therefore there was no cure. Also, political interference, unusual increase of the wage bill and other overhead costs constituted disease inducing germs which made the enterprises continuously sick. Otherwise, they might have been healthy and doing well. Since governments all over the

factory was not even fully operational. It has been a black ink in the very beginning. Perhaps the design was faulty or costs were high. The point is — it may be better to demolish the factory, salvage whatever is feasible and let the private sector take the responsibility to start a new industrial or other enterprise in the prime land. Therefore if the factory is privatised, the market can easily determine the next course of action.

Any viable enterprise must undergo a process of continual upgrading through new tech-

misconstrued as deindustrialisation. If industry as a sector is growing and contributing an increasing share of GDP, the economy is getting modernised as well. The death of an individual enterprise, public or private, must not worry us too much — except perhaps for the nostalgia of good old public sector ways of doing things. It is unfortunate that economists are suffering from such nostalgia based on a profound misunderstanding which ultimately boils down to equating public sector with socialism. If the latter is dead, the former must be terminally ill — to say the least.

Another important fallout from privatisation is likely to be generation of domestic investment as well as possible increase of the inflow of direct foreign investment. As for example, government has recently announced privatisation of textile mills which were originally started before the partition of 1947. Except the high value of the land, there is hardly anything worthwhile. So if a textile mill owner has closed down his factory somewhere in Europe due to high cost of labour, then he should be able to buy the old run down factory in Bangladesh, scrap all the existing machinery and equipment and bring the factory from Europe, lock, stock and barrel and set it up. It may not be even a textile mill and could be another factory as well. The point is, direct foreign investment will secure a foothold by means of buying such old factories from the government and use the premise for other business purposes. In any way it would mean additional investment, more industrial production and less gov-

ernment loss while the money saved can be utilised for much more growth inducing purposes.

As regards domestic investment, many investors hesitate to undertake the troublesome process of creating a new industry from scratch. Instead, they may prefer to buy some existing running industry, invest additional funds and from a loss-ridden public enterprise, it would be making money for the new buyer. It is widely known that from import trade in particular, many businessmen have earned huge amount of money which is waiting in the banks — both within the country and abroad. If government is serious about privatisation, a great deal of such idle funds would be flowing into coffers of the government. But more important development will be the emergence of a viable as well as competitive industrial sector. It would expand at rates which otherwise would not have been possible without the large scale privatisation process.

Bangladesh is committed to the creation of a liberal, competitive market economy. We do not need a referendum for it. Privatisation is not an isolated event. It is very much a part of the very same process which will create the desired market economy. So why do we need a referendum for enabling the government to sell government enterprises to the private sector? In the most democratic countries of the world, public enterprises like the Railways and Telephone have been privatised. The freely elected parliament should be capable of undertaking the required legislative work for the purpose.

Lastly, was there any referendum in 1972 to bring about the wholesale nationalisation of practically the entire manufacturing sector? We all know what happened thereafter. For God's sake, let us not repeat the backward march to progress.



Window on Asia

Shahed Latif

world face serious handicaps in the management of profitable enterprises in a competitive environment — while undue government interference would always remain inevitable — privatisation is perhaps the best available all purpose antibiotic — best suited to the sick state owned enterprises.

I would further add that some of these state-owned enterprises cannot be considered sick any longer. They are already dead. It would be best to shut them down, sell all the hardware and start something new on those industrial lands. An appropriate example in this respect is the Machine Tools Factory at Gazipur, near Dhaka. In many respect, the

nology and the cooperating hardware. An industry cannot be conceived as a Zamindari under the defunct Permanent Settlement Act. In an open competitive economy, both entry and exit of firms are not only possible — they are both inevitable. Often we fail to appreciate the exit of firms which is equally valid as entry of new enterprises. Birth and death of enterprises are signs of a dynamic modernising economy. It is therefore possible that an old industrial area, over time, has become prime commercial property, suitable for shops and department stores; while, far away farm lands are being converted into new industrial sites. Such a process should not be

Fifth Five-Year Plan: Involving the People

by Muhammad Quamrul Islam

One appropriate course would be to discuss FFYP issues in the Parliament. Let MPs, irrespective of party, tell on the floor of the House, about the needs and resources of their respective constituencies, which may be taken care of in the planning exercises at the central level.

It was quite a laudable decision of the Government of Sheikh Hasina to frame the country's Fifth Five-Year Plan (FFYP) from 1997-98 to 2001-2002, on November 4, 1996. Following the decision, she addressed the officials of Planning Ministry and Commission, laid down the main objectives of the plan, to get the plan formulated within the first half of May, 1997.

Accordingly, we feel that the plan has been prepared in the stipulated period, based on accurate data and appropriate projections, under macro and sectoral chapters, keeping in view what the Prime Minister had said. She did not aspire for a grandiose plan, but she uttered in plain terms, what the common people and planners often state, that the FFYP to be launched from 1st July, 1997, would be to alleviate poverty, create new jobs, boost production, increase growth rate and establish economy on a firm footing. To what extent these objectives have been contained realistically in the plan documents, providing for actual implementation, are moot points. Because, the Prime Minister reiterated that stories of development had flooded the last 21 years, but in reality the poverty increased and the number of unemployed and landless people multiplied.

It is not known what dent her address could make in the minds of the officials; many of whom more responsible for previous Five-Year plans, in one capacity or the other. Dr MK Alamgir, presently State Minister for Planning is well aware of the past situation, as a civil servant over the preceding years. Presumably he might have ensured that the Fifth Five-Year Plan does not follow the suit. We are to learn and see the departures from the modality of the past regimes so that the PM's objectives can be materialised meaningfully.

So far, we have heard that the State Minister for Planning had said to BCI (Bangladesh Chamber of Industries) that

target for investment of Taka 30,000 crore each year has been set for Fifth Five-Year Plan. Of the total, 40 per cent for the public sector, 60 per cent for the private sector. He further stated to achieve the target of GDP growth at 7 per cent at the end of the FFYP. When these projections are compared with the current fiscal years, it appears that growth rate would be between 5 and 6 per cent, by 30th June 1997, with reduced revised size of ADP of Taka 12,000 crore from the original Taka 12,500 crore. Perhaps, Dr. Alamgir wants to stick to the current revised level of ADP, annually, for the public sector during the next five fiscal years, due to the declining trend of official development assistance. The shift has obviously been on to the private sector, as the above figures indicate.

It is, therefore, necessary to know how the programme expenditure of foreign aided NGOs have been accommodated in the FFYP, to ascertain their impact on the economy and contribution to overall rate of growth, thereby enabling to attain the planned objectives. Are the NGOs under the private sector, or not? In any case, the programmes and projects, under the public sector, the private sector, and the NGOs, are to be calculated by the Planning Ministry and Commission to arrive at the investment total per annum, for requisite provisions in FFYP. Keeping any project/programme outside the five-year plan, as practised in the past, should be done away with, in the interest of planning discipline and coherent development of the country.

It emanates from planning methodology that intense consultations by the Planning Minister and Commission with the people — meaning thereby

their representatives, irrespective of the party in power or in the opposition, and all agencies, whether non-governmental or private associations — are needed. It is, however, learnt that the Planning Commission had asked for Five-Year Plan estimates from the respective ministries/agencies under the government; held discussions before finalisation. It is also learnt that the Ministry of Education had proposed for Taka 10,585 crore under the FFYP. Likewise, the Minister also have furnished estimates which have been compiled by the Planning Commission, as a part of routine procedure. And soon we may see a publication on the FFYP, as usual with a foreword of State Minister for Planning. But, such publication, without prior consultation with people, can hardly bring in qualitative change in planning and development, which is so much expected by the people, with the change of government in June, 1996. Surely, the State Minister for Planning will take steps to enlist support of the people, and elicit public opinion for FFYP, before the expiry of the current financial year.

One appropriate course would be to discuss FFYP issues in the Parliament. Let MPs, irrespective of party tell on the floor of the House, about the needs and resources of their respective constituencies, which may be taken care of in the planning exercises at the central level. Such grassroots information and aspirations of the people, as expressed through their representatives, in terms of concrete advice/projects, to mitigate the sufferings at the local level, would immensely facilitate the policy planning and development process, conferring benefits far and wide.

Added to it, the lawmakers can give opinions on issues like — mode of privatisation, downsizing of bureaucracy, loan and default, micro-credit, politicisation of administration and trade unions, corrupt practices, system loss in power/gas/water sectors, and so on, if these issues are discussed in the Parliament, then some agreed points may come up, which may eventually lead to a consensus. It would facilitate providing inputs, to draw up macro and sectoral chapters properly by the Planning Commission.

The reference to Parliament is also necessary since a strong Local Government as provided under Articles 59 and 60 the Constitution, has not yet been established, with which the Planning Commission and Minister could communicate. True, to reflect people's aspirations in the planning documents, elected local governments are needed, which is the essence of bottom-up planning. Unfortunately, in the absence of strong local government, the local MP becomes the only contact point. With all intents and purposes, Planning Minister has to consider this loophole, while exchanging views with his colleagues in the Parliament, to ensure participation of MPs in local matters for the present. Otherwise, the whole planning exercise will be reduced to bureaucratic parlance, as had been in the past, with no participation of people forthcoming.

It appears there is a tendency in vested quarters to behold planning as the work of high level costly consultants and officials, and keep the people away. Which it is not. If we look at the models of Indian state of West Bengal and Malaysia, we find the extent of involvement

of people in their planning and implementation cycle. Quite a few consultants and officials worked with Dr. A Moeen Khan, former State Minister for Planning, on his fanciful perspective plan (1995-2010), the draft of which could not be accepted even by ECNEC of his time. It resulted in such a situation that the budget for 1995-96 was prepared by the then BNP government, without having any development plan in force. No plan was available for reference in budget 1996-97, as finally presented by the AL government. So, two years have passed without any long-term objectives in vision, in a planned sequence. This vacuum would not have arisen, had there been a tradition to involve people and parliament in the planning process, suitably supported by local government.

Till date, the successive regimes of Bangladesh have not discussed any development

plan in the Parliament. It was deemed to be a matter of consultants, bureaucrats and minister only. Time has come to break this negative trend of practice and take the plan to Parliament for meaningful discussion, formulation and implementation.

Nobody can deny that political commitment to a plan is necessary, if it is really intended to improve the economy and attain the objectives written down and talked about. It can evolve only when the ruling party as well as the opposition at council, central committee and parliamentary levels discuss the development issues elaborately, with participation of all concerned. AL president, and Leader of the House, BNP chairperson and Leader of the Opposition may like to hold such discussions in their respective party hierarchies to involve them in planning and development, which is a continuous process. Obviously, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is to set the precedence, for other parties to follow, inside and outside the Parliament.

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OPINION Share Market, SEC and Foreign Investors

S MAH

Ignorance is a curse. This ignorance on the part of the Board of Investment (BOI) and the Securities & Exchange Commission (SEC) and similar other offices of the government causing loss of Bangladesh's wealth by allowing foreign investors to come into Bangladesh bringing second-hand reconditioned heavy machinery at over-invoiced price in collaboration with corrupt customs officials, and then, taking away the price so shown in the invoice as capital money. It is a fact that in Europe and the United States and even in Korea, Taiwan and Japan, heavy machinery used for two years or more are thrown away at scrap prices to anybody who dislocate/separate the different parts of the heavy machines installed and used in any factory skillfully and carry these away in proper way without causing any damage and dislocation to the premises wherein such machinery had been installed and operated.

The machine which has lost its efficacy and production capacity to the tune of 25 per cent is discarded in the above manner in developed foreign countries, as because it is a loss to continue with such machine for production purpose with expensive manpower. As such, it is replaced by new machines. The cost of such new machines is compensated by its huge production and efficiency. Such old and second-hand machines cannot cope up with this demand of modern times for heavy production, particularly for export-oriented business. This is the way how our Bangladeshi entrepreneurs are being fooled by the foreign investors. No second-hand machinery should be allowed to be imported and used by any export-oriented concerns in the device of 'joint-venture public enterprise' and allow the foreign investors to take away Bangladesh foreign currency in the guise of capital money and in this underground hundi method through corrupt practices.

The present practice for such

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To the Editor...

One-stop test reports for consumers

Sir, in view of the widespread adulteration of foodstuffs and edibles sold in the market (40 per cent contaminated, according to an official test agency), the government may mount a high-pressure publicity campaign on awareness in the three sectors, namely, the manufacturers/sellers, the regulators and the testing agencies, and the buyers or consumers (as it is doing for tree plantation and protection, child and mother care, etc).

The inspecting and testing agencies may be brought together in a series of seminars and workshops, and TV debates, and exposed to the public (the press, consumers and outside professionals and experts). Similarly, the manufacturers and sellers may face the public through proper meeting points (the Chambers could coordinate). Then bring them all together for free-style wrestling contest (without the use of force) — the public would love it. Later, the prosecutions, following the market samples, should be generous, to say the least. No mercy for those who do not believe in QC (quality control) and the quality of life, regardless of the economic level.

The test and evaluation results are not secret, but difficult to obtain readily by the non-professionals. Copies may be available for sale through popular trade channels, and a one-

stop centre may be opened in BSTI, BCSIR, or similar points. Are these kept in the public libraries? Place the data on-line for remote computer access through LAN. These may also be notified in the CAB magazine (if there is any). The people's representatives in the government are rather quiet about the various malpractices in the bazaar. Deterrent action is missing — the politicians appear to be too busy with politics all the time. Let us hear of their dissatisfaction publicly (as the Ministers for Telecoms and Energy are making their presence felt with surprise visits and talking to the general staff at the bottom of the apex — no VIP receptions please). The problem with us is that we cannot bring repetitive jobs down to routine level.

Why the PM has to take notice of everything before things get done?

A Zabr Dhaka

DCC, DESA and WASA

Sir, The first and foremost duty of DCC is to engage workers in sweeping roads and streets, keep the city neat and clean and to make Dhaka city mosquito-free. The second-to-none trade of DESA is to provide electricity and the supreme responsibility of WASA is to supply water to eight million people of Dhaka metropolitan city.

But unfortunately these three organisations, for one pretext or other, have not been able to write any success story. They are more interested in spending more and more public money on ostentatious plans and projects and incurring systems losses.

Previously, under BNP regime and caretaker government there were huge loadshedding but since Awami League came to power there is continuous loadshedding and the services of DESA/PDB have come down to its lowest ebb. There is now loadshedding without any break, especially at night when the street lights and the residential houses are plunged into total darkness simultaneously causing untold sufferings to the city-dwellers and raising the number of theft and hijacking cases. It is also very strange that DCC has recently removed the fluorescent tube lights of many roads and streets and replaced those with costly sodium lights when there is short supply of electricity in Dhaka. Is it not a wastage of public money?

There is also acute shortage of water supply in Dhaka. WASA is simply working out plans and programmes and incurring systems loss. No matter whether we have a people's elected Mayor in DCC or a government appointed Chairman or Managing Director in PDB, DESA or WASA the performance of duties and functions of these three organisations al-

ways remains the same and below the standard and the sufferings of the people know no bounds.

O H Kabir Wari, Dhaka-1203

Ignorance or callousness?

Sir, I don't know, which word is eligible for this; ignorance or callousness? If this is ignorance, left this ignorance of the writer and the editors of this book be mode of the students of class eight. Or if this is callousness, I dedicate all of my huffs and datations for National Text Book Board, Dhaka. On the cover page of mathematical text-book of class eight, two formulas (one of algebra and one of statistics) are given in two opposite boxes. Although the formula of algebra is given right, the formula of statistics is totally wrong.

There are more wrong questions and answers inside the book. I know this is the first edition. So, the book may contain some printing mistakes. But can all the mistakes be printing mistakes? And did the wrong formula on the cover page also pass over the eyes of the proof readers and the editors? Have the students of class eight to start their education with a downright lie?

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