

Policy Connections

Needless to say that the recently-adopted five-year economic plan necessitated the announcement of an export-import policy package for the same time-period. First, the incremental growth rate and employment-generation prescribed in the five-year plan as the recipe for poverty alleviation needed the support and facilitation from an appropriate set of export and import policies. Secondly, to pinpoint the lynch-pin for an economic breakthrough one had to only see if that package of policies was designed to remove the gap between export earnings and import payments or not.

When we aim at export-led growth what we are accepting as a challenge is not merely a reduction in the gap between exports and imports but an outstripping of the import bill by the export income. With that happening we can only claim to have ushered in a truly self-reliant economy. At this point our export earning is paying for 61.79 per cent of our import bill.

A matter of similar importance relates to financing the ADP by our own resources without being over-dependent on foreign aid. Import duty collection plays a significant role in mobilising domestic resource as a strong back-up for ADP implementation. So, a certain level of unfettered importation is an essential precondition to shoring up our sluggish revenue collection pattern. Import is key to export, especially in our conditions. Our productivity levels and the quality of products which have a direct bearing on export performance are crucially dependent on the adequacy and quality of raw materials we import from abroad.

We have to build up an adequate industrial capacity, especially in terms of backward linkages for the RMG sector by the year 2005 when our reserved export quotas in the international market will have been withdrawn.

We think it is liberalization per se that no LC would be required for importing raw materials and capital machinery.

We welcome the vision and business-friendliness that are limned on the export policy document in particular. Quite cheery are the decisions to set up an information technology village for exporting computer softwares and the 'Hortex Foundation' for the development of agro-processing industries.

We note with interest the announcement that there won't be an export ban on petroleum and LNG which will fall in the share of foreign companies under product-sharing contracts.

Heinous Vilification

An orchestrated conspiracy is afoot to show Shamim Reza, the young man who died of brutality in police custody a few days ago, in a dim light. A creepy campaign is on in the city to portray the accused police officer Akram Hossain as one more sinned against than sinning. The public relations department of the police is reportedly engaged in a counter smear campaign. It has released the so-called details of late Shamim's 'involvement' in as many as eight cases. Some unidentified people were seen sticking giant-size posters on walls around the city. These expensive four-colour posters contained a detailed description of Shamim's purported involvement in cases and the picture of Akram Hossain, the main accused in the case. One gentleman claiming as a member of some anti-terrorism forum even had the temerity of telling The Daily Star that he wanted justice for 'the Birsreshtho' (hero of the heroes, obviously meaning Akram) on behalf of the peace-loving members of the society.

Some of the things contained in the poster are extremely insulting for the government as well for the political parties and tend to project the law enforcing agency as an institution singled out for rough, unjust treatment. It is a great campaign of canard which has been launched in a very concerted manner just to bail out one man and it should be stopped immediately for the sake of fair investigation. When the proceedings in a criminal investigation are on, how dare they do it? We draw the attention of the Home Ministry to this evil attempt at influencing the instruments of justice even before the trial.

We express our unstinted support for and solidarity with the judicial process that has got underway.

Baishe Srajon

Well, one can ignore poetry, or music or any or all of the arts — all of which bristle in the vast world of Tagoreana — and still live. And be a success — socially, politically and by the measure of money-power. These are, it appears, not life's essentials. Frills they are at best. This has become a national attitude and the ritualistic jayanti and prayan-tithi only underline the truth.

But the attitude is dangerous and can spawn only unloving unthinking brutes that graze only in herds. An individual or a number of such can prosper without cultivation of the letter and arts. But not a society! Divested of creativity and appreciative creativity, a society simply fades away. As Suban Langer had observed so aptly: Vulgarisation of art is the surest sign of ethnic decline. Here we don't need art to live but, nevertheless, we vulgarise it into entertainment on a mass scale. An ethnic decline is there on the card. And the card must be read in time, on pain of extinction.

Remembering Tagore in one's deepest recess of the soul is one thing. Celebrating him en masse is another. His most ardent behest to the educated middle class was, make them all literate. Democracy is the fulcrum of a possible socio-economic change for us. Bangladesh must build itself into that or perish. But Tagore has warned democracy or the rights of all man as equal and as man cannot be gifted to those that are yet to be accepted as equal. The rights are there to be achieved by them. Through universal literacy they will rise to the full enjoyment of their rights, said Rabindranath. About three score years after his death, going by suspect official figures, there are at least 60 million here who cannot read or write. So much for honouring Tagore.

Sir, Where is conscience? Has it vanished from Bangladesh? Women and innocent citizens are the main prey of the so-called protectors. No

I think it was 19 June, the time seven in the evening. I was just settling down in my favourite rocking chair with a mystery book. An old lady is lying dead in her suburban house. Whoever perpetrated the crime have disconnected the power line. Homicide sleuths are sniffing in the dark with flash lights.

Suddenly the room I was sitting in went dark. I looked out. The street-lights were out and the entire neighbourhood was pitch-dark. I thought, it was the usual load-shedding. The lights would come on after an hour or so. But two hours went by and the power-supply continued to be elusive.

When I rang up friends and relations in other parts of city, they reported that the entire city, in fact the whole of Bangladesh was affected. National grid has failed due to malfunctioning of major production units.

The reason is obvious — cumulative negligence in repair and maintenance of the production units and lack of periodic overhauling. When asked, the explanation of the authorities is as follows:

The current installed power generation capacity is about 2900 Megawatt. The capacity for actual power generation is around 2000 Megawatt, while the current peak demand is 2200 Megawatt. How can the production-units be periodically overhauled or given any respite?

But even the number about actual supply that I have quoted is rather too optimistic. All along the distribution network of 108,000 kilometer, the gross systems loss stands at 33 per cent of gross-generation. Persistent and chronic load-shedding of an estimated 400 MW is inevitable and excessive systems loss has further compounded the problem.

According to experts, "It is estimated that on the current usage pattern, each one per cent

growth of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) require a 2.0 to 2.5 percent rise in power supply. Thus the per cent target rate of GDP growth rate requires a corresponding growth in power generation of at least 14 per cent a year. With current plant factor levels, an additional 1000 MW of generation could meet demand only up to 2000. Generation capacity would have to double every ten years thereafter, until 2020 to keep up with the demands of a rapidly growing economy." (Bangladesh 2010).

A number of power projects, in the public and the private sectors, are in various stages of negotiation and rather rare implementation. The table presents a thumb-nail sketch of the location, type, capacity and expected completion dates of power plants in the future.

The country's indigenous energy sources consist primarily of huge revenues of natural gas, some as yet untapped reserves of coal, rather limited hydro-electric power potential and a large base of traditional fuels in the form of crop residues, animal dung and fuel-wood. "Around 53 per cent of the country's energy supply is based on traditional fuels, 32 per cent by natural gas, 13 per cent by imported oil and coal and remaining 2 per cent by hydro-electricity."

Current estimates suggest Bangladesh can adequately meet its energy needs for the next 25 years and yet leave enough surplus for export. ICA-supported Hydrocarbon study and CIDA-assisted reservoir study estimate that total reserves in place in 20 gasfields is 37.08 TCF of which 25.66 TCF is recoverable. This is much higher than the earlier estimated reserve of around 13.7

Let There Be Light



TCF of which only 1.35 TCF was extracted till 1990. Gas industry sources in knowledge, particularly from abroad, believe that the reserves can be as high as 80 TCF or more.

Hence the outpouring of interest from foreign investors which could bring in large dividends and enormous benefits if prudently managed. Mismanagement, however, could end in disaster.

I would like to draw the attention of the readers to the news analysis in The Daily Star of Thursday, 30 July, 1998. The headline reads, "Blink Bidding: an anatomy of results." A little flow in production-sharing contract terms with a foreign company can cost millions of dollars. We all have to pay for it. Long delays and lack of transparency can discourage the genuinely experienced and technically competent oil and gas companies including our very own BAPEX which unfortunately stands as a poor cousin against giant multinationals.

Location	Type	Capacity MW	Cost (US \$ million)	Expected Completion Date
Meghnaghat	Comb cyc gas-based	300-450	300-450	2000
Haripur	Comb cyc gas-based	300	300	2001
Baghbari	Gas-based	100	100	2001
Mymensingh	Gas-based	60	60	1999
BMPP	Oil/gas-based	400	500	1998
Barapukuria	Coal based	300	300	Not available

(Source: World Bank, Dhaka office)

consideration. Experiences of such mini-plants in the hilly areas of China abound.

Another as yet untapped resource is solar power. Except for some pilot endeavours of Rural Electrification Board and of Grameen Shakti, the potential is still incipient. Bangladesh is blessed with an abundant solar radiation except for periodic gloomy sky in the monsoon season. Annual direct solar energy available is estimated to 25,610 million tons of coal equivalent. Wind energy is a possibility along the 724 kilometer coast-line of the country where much of the regions have no national grid. Our neighbouring country, India is already producing 732 MW power from the high wind.

Also, as I said earlier, 85 per cent of households in Bangladesh have no access to electric power. Only 5 per cent of rural households is electrified. They depend on fuel-wood and biomass to cook food for their children or keep them warm during cold spells. But the availability of biomass is becoming more and more scarce. So, as the Prime Minister herself has said, fuel-wood plantation in rural households alongside roads and embankments and in village wood-lots has to be increased five-fold.

But as the section on energy of the 2020 document notes, the immediate need is for expansion of both power generation and transmission capacity for commercial use all over the country.

Today power projects have been implemented as public sector infrastructure development projects with an exceptional level of inefficiency and without much attention to direct and short-term return from the projects. Government has ac-

cepted the principle of substantial private sector participation in this sector. Many countries have been successful in alleviating power crisis by exercising Building-Operate-Own and Building-Operate-Transfer options of power generation with private companies. Alongside the initiative of increasing the generation capacity, it would be necessary to install adequate transmission and distribution of power in the country.

Most recently DESC has been formed to privatise the distribution network of Dhaka city. It is a welcome step forward. I hope that other towns and particularly the rural sector would be opened to the private sector as well. In short, and I quote again from the 2020 document, "The public sector could hold some generating station also working as cost-profit centres operating in competition with private operators. In the oil and gas sector, the state's role should similarly be limited to the regulatory function. To the extent that the state is at all involved in energy production and distribution, the agencies concerned should be strictly separated from the regulatory functions. State-owned enterprises should be fully autonomous entities operated on commercial principles. (Also) by 2020 considerable progress should have been made to exploiting solar radiation and wood energy as important renewable resources which would be increasingly used in the future to meet the country's growing energy requirements."

Only thus the hitherto elusive bird of energy will happily radiate in our households and industrial enterprises. I recall the song from Lalou Fakir:

"বাঁচার ভিতর অচিন পাখি
কমলে আসে যায়
আমি ধরলে পারলে মনোবেড়ি
দিখাম তারার পায়...
কমলে আসে যায়।"

To the Editor...

... the Boss!

Sir, Kudos to the home minister for his manifest sincerity, magnanimity and tactfulness under pressure. I refer to the Daily Star news captioned 'Who is the boss?' vied DS of 30/7/98. Apparently, it is a press conference wherein members of the press raised the question as to why photographs of the accused DB police personnel for their medieval killing of BBA student Shamim Reza Rubel of IUB was not given to the media.

Veritably the home minister handed over the mike to the IGP, who was already beside him in the said meeting to answer the questions of the newsmen. As reported, I find the non-challant and arrogant accusations as, labeled against the indolent attitude of the IGP highly repugnant which, should give food for thought to all right thinking persons! For the 'savant' of the people, such arrogance cannot and must not go un-challenged.

Alauddin Jamal
Frozshah, Chittagong-4207

We protest

Sir, The death of Rubel in police custody is a shocking news to everyone. We don't know the reason behind Rubel's arrest and why he was severely tortured to death.

This type of incidents have occurred in the past. Police have picked up men and tortured them to death like Rubel only out of mere suspicion. At present ordinary people are also suffering as insecurity prevails everywhere. People are living in fear of police harassment and incidents like rape etc. They even have to pay bribe to police and tolls to mastaans. Where is our security? Where will we find justice?

We protest the alleged murder of Rubel and want exemplary punishment of the culprits. The government must be sincere about the trial and assure us that such heinous activities will never be repeated in future.

Moontza Khanam
32, Bjoyanagar
Dhaka-1000

Cleansing the Police

Sir, The witch hunting inside the police has started with DB/CID excesses leaking into the press. The government had to take action as the death of a student was involved, and the image of the ruling regime and the government were being tarnished. Good the campaign has started, but it might peter out quickly, as the police officials may hit back with sensational disclosures of the indiscretions of the mighty who misuse power and position. Many reputations are at stake. There will be efforts to hush up the investigations.

Nothing much will come of these corrective actions without admin and police reforms on an extensive basis. Piecemeal policy decisions will leave us where we are. The political will might ultimately weaken. Ruling indiscipline societies is neither easy nor palatable. We learn through purgings. Anyway, the public is eagerly waiting for the fireworks.

A Zabr
Dhaka

Friends of the people?

Sir, Has it vanished from Bangladesh? Women and innocent citizens are the main prey of the so-called protectors. No

Sir, Thanks to Mr Md Shah Jahan for narrating the plight of the suffering passengers at ZIA afresh and try to knock the conscience of the authority concerned who never care to respect the safety and security of a passenger or hardly care to highlight the respect of our selves as a nation!

The horrifying experience

woman knows when she will be picked up and be raped by a policeman and possibly be awarded unofficial death penalty. And again an innocent young man could be picked up, beaten to death on mere failure to fulfill their lust for bribe.

No mother's wailing can tilt the sadist heart of friends of the people (as claimed), the police.

But how long this reign of terror will go on by the guardians of justice?

Where are the so-called self-declared proponents and voice of nation's conscience? Where are the bunch of intellectuals now? Have they gone into eternal hibernation after 1996 election.

We heard them loud and clear and watched these bunch of mixed gender champions of human rights siding with a major political party when poor Yasmeen of Dinajpur was raped and murdered by police. They (conscience of the nation?) made us believe that the chastity of the whole nation was gone so the government in power has no right to stay in power since it failed to protect Yasmeen from the police. The then government was toppled?

Since this government came to power, the people are horrified by the atrocious act of the police force. What we see that the champions of human rights have fled from their sacred duty to uphold human rights.

My question is a conscious citizen to those champions of human rights that do they not view the gruesome murder of Sharif of Biman, Tuhin of Sabujbagh, Tania, Seema and of late Rubel by the Police as a gross violation of all kinds of human rights?

Faruque Alamgir
Rankin Street
Dhaka-1203

... Would still be unsatisfied

Sir, In the July 27 issue of the DS, Harun Mani from USA has asked the Prime Minister of Bangladesh what she would do if Rubel, who was beaten to death by five DB personnel a few days back, was her son.

To Harun Mani I would like to give an answer. Had he been my son, I would come down on those responsible for the killing so hard that even my death in the process would still leave me unsatisfied.

The PM has all the powers. This is the time she should use the Eagle Force for a good cause. In any civilized country, the ministers/officials concerned would have resigned in shame.

Z A Choudhury
Dhaka.

Rubel's death

Sir, Shamim Reza Rubel, a brilliant student of Independent University lost his life tragically by the merciless beating of some policemen. In the recent past we came to know about quite a number of deaths in police custody. We are staggered to learn that Rubel was subjected to inhuman torture because policemen's demand of

"Harassment at ZIA"

you had with a foreign visitor is no foreign thing to me either. Whenever I get out with my luggage-trolley several (uninformed) people force their helping hand though I repeatedly express that I am capable of handling my carriage. They follow me up to the transport waiting and makes me oblige them with sufficient tips,

preferably with foreign money. To save myself from embarrassment I am to oblige whatever best I can. If perchance you have no transport or a receiving person waiting, you face the worst, as expressed by Mr Shah Jahan.

Containing all the nuisance and harassment is not at all impossible. But the government

Asif Ali
24, Purana Palta
Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh.

"Al-Mahmud's Poetry"

Sir, This refers to the above article of AZM Haider published in "Star Literature" on July 18, 1998. He has characterised poet Al Mahmud as one having "..... unflinching faith in Islam". But he also stated: "Al-Mahmud like Fazal Shahabuddin does not believe

in life hereafter".

The two statements are definitely contradictory and could not be nourished by a Muslim at the same time.

Asif Ali
24, Purana Palta
Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh.

A waste of time

Sir, The police, CID, Detective Branch and Anti-corruption are all the same within under different skins. Therefore letting the CID to investigate the inhuman and barbaric actions by their brethren are nothing but a waste of time and an opportunity to create false move. Death of Shamim Reza in this fashion simply proves the fascist attitude of the law enforcing agencies.

In the West the Department of Internal Affairs investigate cases as such. Every single law enforcing agency has their own Internal Affairs personnel. Though they are under the payroll of the same department, yet they are there to look into matters concerning corruptions, bribes, illegal affairs etc.

Maybe in a hundred years time we too can have departments as such. Until then there will be more examples like these which will remain forever unsolved.

Shagor
Dhaka

Death of Rubel

Sir, IUB final-year student Rubel was reportedly mercilessly beaten to death in Dhaka a few days back by six DB officials. He was beaten indiscriminately in presence of his parents, relatives and onlookers and then taken to the DB office to perform the coup de grace.

Almost all the political parties, various organisations and people from all walks of life have condemned the brutal death of this young student in police custody. But not a word of condolence from the ruling party Awami League, its front organisations and of course, the famous gang of intellectuals numbering 1001, who call themselves the conscience of our society!

I address this letter particularly to these intellectuals and

"Al-Mahmud's Poetry"

two lakh taka was not met. Nowadays policemen are emerging in many forms, murderers — rapists, hijackers, extortionists, dacoites and what not. People have got a feeling that they will be better off if police department was abolished. The other day someone said that the growing incidents of crimes are the result of policemen encouraging known criminals to commit crimes and assuring them that they will not be apprehended if they (policemen) receive a fair share. But if they refuse, they will be arrested on false charges. We can't but wonder, have we created Frankenstein's?

Nur Jahan
East Nasirabad, Chittagong

humbly ask: Where is your conscience now when the rest of the country mourn the death of Rubel? Is it because your conscience has taken leave of you as it does not meet with your agenda?

Please speak up.

AA Choudhury
Dhaka

Go slow!

Sir, Has our Prime Minister in mind to rename some more institutions after the members of her family? If so, then she should think twice before plunging into this hasty process of making herself unpopular. Marcus Aurelius said, "Decisions made in haste are repented at leisure" — and who knows, she might find enough leisure sooner than she expected to brood over her blunders!

Lulu Ahmad
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Japan's economy

Sir, Even if United States support for the yen vouchsafed global stock markets at least a temporary reprieve last month, there does not seem to be excessive pessimism underlying the decision. The plunging shares printed earlier in a local daily last month should be viewed with more alarm than the 'Tequila Crisis' of 1994/1995 in Mexico.

If the Japanese economy contracted by an annual rate of 5.3 per cent in the first quarter of this year, there is every prospect of the real economy eventually being hit there. The most worrying aspects of this crisis are that it is in many ways inevitable and that it feeds on several countries other than Japan.

Rebecca Sultana
Dhaka

An addiction

Sir, Cricket in Bangladesh has been received with a firm appreciation. One can see crickets in mud and sand played with indigenous gears in every nook and corner of the country. Leading cricketers of the country are more popular than any other sports personality. All these reflects our eagerness to seek students. Unlike any other business, the medical education cannot be treated as a profit-making body. These institutions should have their own buildings, and have an attached hospital with at least 200 beds. Government orders need to be strictly followed at every stage.

Unlike other courses the doctors have to deal with the life and death of human beings. The Ministry of Health has to set stringent rules and conditions for giving permission to the colleges to advertise or to seek students. Unlike any other business, the medical education cannot be treated as a profit-making body. These institutions should have their own buildings, and have an attached hospital with at least 200 beds. Government orders need to be strictly followed at every stage.

Shahabuddin Mahtab
27, Dhanmondi, Road No. 8
Dhaka-1205

Random strike

Sir, While getting ready to do an urgent piece of business, suddenly I was obstructed by the strike of 30 July. The major opposition in JS, BNP takes up Rubel's demise in police custody as a political issue and along with other alliance, it holds this meaningless strike causing untold sufferings to the country-wide flood-affected people.

The government has already taken judicial steps against those who reportedly beat up Rubel to death. The PM expressed her deep shock and condolence to Rubel's family. The state minister went to Rubel's house and gave assurance of fair judgement of the murder. Meanwhile five policemen including AC Akrum have been sent to the prison. Even the president himself directed the authority to launch a judicial inquiry for fair justice. Hence I feel no justification of the strike in such a crucial time.

Arun Kumar Biswas
329, Jagannath Hall, DU.

Software copyright in Bangladesh

Sir, This has reference to the article by Dr M A Sobhan published in the DS on 24 July. As pointed out in the article, there is no doubt that the existing copyright law should either be to conform to the WTO/TRIPS agreement and include suitable clause(s) for explicit protection of computer software, programmes, databases, files and documentation. In fact, similar proposal has been put forward by the committee formed for the purpose (with which I had the privilege of working) for the government and it is understood that the report is under active consideration of the government.

The article mentions that there is no protection for information technology (IT) materials in the existing copyright law of Bangladesh. Similar opinion has been voiced by many in different gatherings in the past months. However, as mentioned in the previous para, while it is necessary to improve and provide explicit protection, in fact there is no gap, and provision for protection of IT materials is provided implicitly within 'literary work' (Section 3a) in the existing Copyright Ordinance 1962, amended 1978. According to Section 2x of the Ordinance, literary work includes work on humanity, religion, social and physical sciences, table, and compilation.

Since all softwares are essentially tables of computer instructions, they may be described as such and protection may be obtained even under the existing law. The Ordinance provides for penal as well as damage action for infringement or unauthorised reproduction. Even protection against piracy and unauthorised copying by or with the aid of computer is covered in the Ordinance through the definition of 'reproduction' vide Section 2k as follows:

"reproduction in case of literary, dramatic or musical works includes reproduction in the form of a record, or of a cinematographic work, or the sorting of the work in a computer or other devices by means of which it can be read or otherwise perceived....."

Dr Abdus Sattar Syed
Ex Consultant, UNDP/UNIDO/
Bangladesh Computer
Council/Proshika
70 Monipuri Para, Farmgate,
Dhaka-1215.

How to be an MBBS

Sir, Reportedly, there are 22 private medical colleges in Bangladesh. Four private medical colleges have received full government recognition and are functioning well, as these have adequate financial resources and also have generous donors who are providing substantial financial resources.

Medical education is highly expensive, and it is reported that in the government medical colleges, the per capita cost for the education of one MBBS (5-year course) student is Tk. 7.50 lacs. Obviously this is borne by the tax-payers of the country. Seven of the private colleges have started their preliminary work only.

The 11 other private medical colleges are in their embryonic stage.

Unlike other courses the doctors have to deal with the life and death of human beings. The Ministry of Health has to set stringent rules and conditions for giving permission to the colleges to advertise or to seek students. Unlike any other business, the medical education cannot be treated as a profit-making body. These institutions should have their own buildings, and have an attached hospital with at least 200 beds. Government orders need to be strictly followed at every stage.

Shahabuddin Mahtab
27, Dhanmondi, Road No. 8
Dhaka-1205