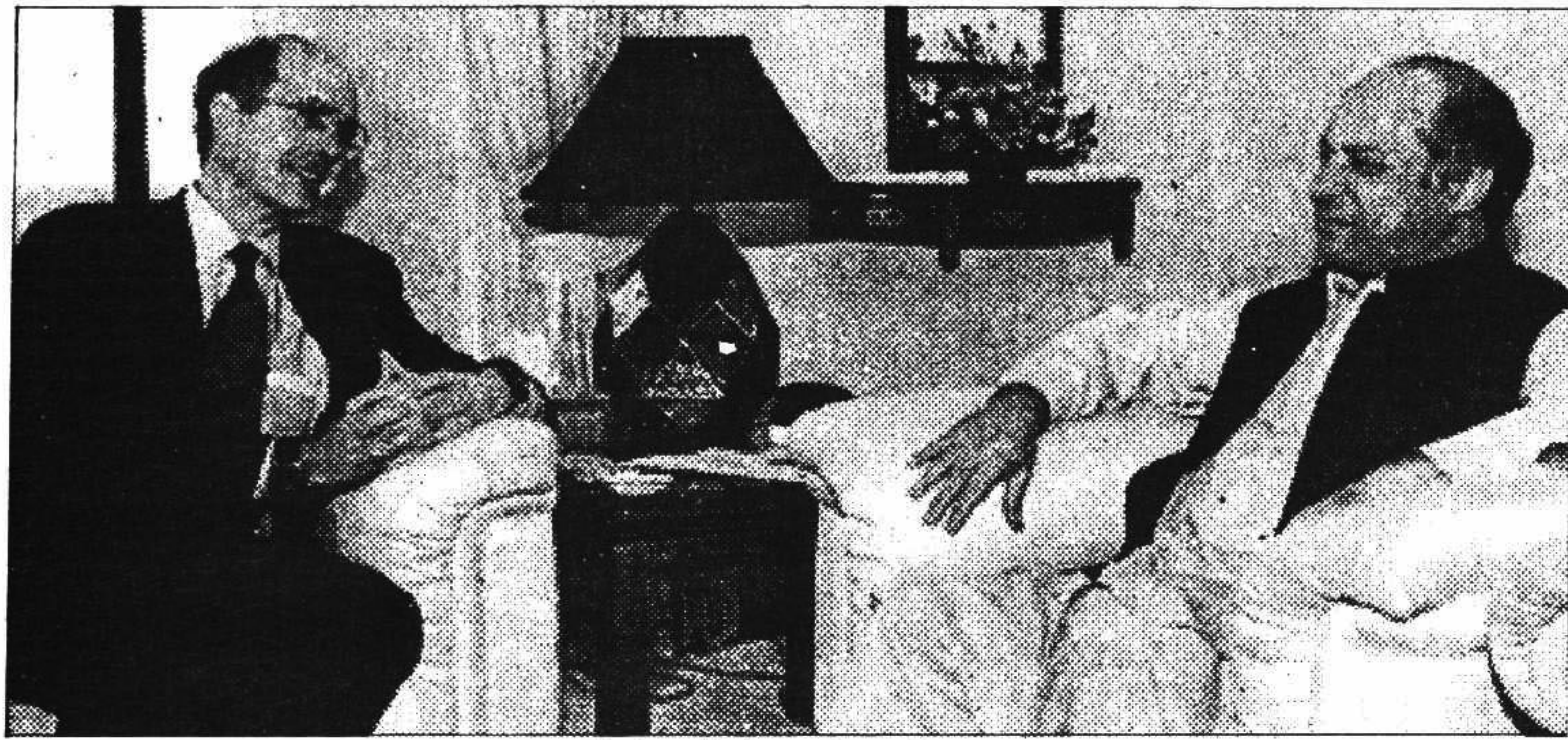


Talbott's Costly Tour

Washington's diplomatic investment in the region and the success of it have a larger context, and it shouldn't be seen only in the immediate terms of how closer India and Pakistan are to meeting the benchmarks.

Syed Talat Hussain analyses



Mission with finesse: But will it work?

THE US Deputy Secretary of State, Strobe Talbott, has just concluded in Pakistan the eighth round of his talks with Pakistani Secretary Shamsah Ahmad. Having carried out a similar exercise in India with Jawant Singh, the Indian Minister for External Affairs, Strobe Talbott came to Islamabad amidst low expectations and went back without announcing whether he has had gotten firm commitments from Pakistan on non-proliferation issues or not.

But from Washington's perspective this does not matter. It has to push to deepen its engagement in South Asia even in the face of an extremely difficult diplomatic situation. What has helped Washington's patience so far? One reason is that Strobe Talbott's sweat of brow has not been all that fruitless. The most notable breakthrough the Americans have had has come on one of the four crucial items. Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, on the overall Washington agenda in the region.

Pakistan has agreed to sign the CTBT and the Indians say that they will not block the Treaty from coming into force in September 1999. While this is far short of Washington's effort to make the two countries translate this political commitment into the actual policy step of signing the Treaty, from the US point of view it is far better than both India and Pakistan still toying with the idea of carrying out further nuclear tests. Political commitments to the spirit and letter of the CTBT from both India and Pakistan plug one hole in the badly-damaged non-proliferation regime the US has been attempting to enforce in the region.

India-Pakistan are also talking to each other, which is

another limited success Talbott diplomacy has achieved. In a region where angry statements of politicians can snowball into war-like situations on borders, getting India and Pakistan to get into a similar exercise in India with Jawant Singh, the Indian Minister for External Affairs, Strobe Talbott came to Islamabad amidst low expectations and went back without announcing whether he has had gotten firm commitments from Pakistan on non-proliferation issues or not.

On another critical front, proliferation-through-export-of-nuclear-weapons, the US has made definitive headway. Washington has been able to get firm commitments from Pakistan that it will tighten its export control regime. Although not fully satisfied with progress on the export control front,

Washington has drawn Islamabad into "constructive discussions" on the subject and thus gotten more than a foot in a door which was previously totally shut for it. There has also been progress on some crucial intangibles. By hammering the point repeatedly in his meetings with Pakistani and Indian officials that the security situation in the region is volatile and parlous, Washington's diplomatic effort, spearheaded by Strobe Talbott, has created a favourable policy mood in the policy making circles in the sub-continent.

The euphoric atmosphere in the post-May nuclear tests, the beating of the war-drums, the casual approach in Islamabad and Delhi to issues concerning the possibilities of a total nuclear war, has now changed significantly. Washington has been able to inject its nuclear anxieties and its sense of urgency about it, in the sub-continent's somewhat lax strategic

mindset. Policy makers in India and Pakistan now echo concerns shared by Washington such as nuclear war, need for bilateral peace, nuclear risk reduction, solid command and control systems and the rest. These terms were not in currency a couple of months ago when several high-ranking Pakistani policy makers dismissed the need for creating systems for better management of the nuclear arsenal and the Indians took the line that South Asia's is not any more secure or insecure now than it was before May.

Another important headway on a significant intangible front which the US diplomacy has notched in South Asia is that it has started a public debate about the region's nuclear future, taking a taboo subject out of the exclusive preserve of policy makers into the realm of informed public opinion. This feat has been achieved by the second track of American diplomacy which has followed the first lead by Strobe Talbott.

A stream of American visitors has been flowing into Pakistan: academics, researchers, retired diplomats, all have come here with the same message which Pakistani and Indian officials have been hearing from their American counterparts in official engagements. These informal channels of communication have laid the foundation of a whole network of personal contacts and it would not be an exaggeration to say that Washington is far more effectively plugged in to the important, non-official tier of the Pakistani society than ever before.

This network is helping the US transmit its policy messages at a far wider level and to correctly assess trends in public

opinion. The US has to remain engaged in the sub-continent because without the alternative to this engagement is isolation of its policy from the ground realities in South Asia.

Another factor which is keeping Washington sustain its diplomatic engagement with the sub-continent is that increasingly this part of the world has become theatre of worrying strategic action. While South Asia's internal security situation, its economic potential and political trends are enough to make Washington keep on digging for deeper diplomatic roots here, around this region the environment is also becoming dangerous from Washington's point of view. US National Security Advisor Samuel R. Berger pointed to these developments around South Asia which are a cause of grave concern for Washington.

He mentioned Iran's July test of the Shahab-3 missile, North Korea's testing of a Taepo-Dong missile and reports that North Koreans are developing a test-site, and expressed fears of Russian nuclear technology landing in Teheran's hands. South Asia sits a critical geographical juncture which connects it with South West Asia and because of its nuclear turmoil also with the Korean Peninsula. Washington's diplomatic investment in the region and the success of this investment therefore has a larger context, and it should not be seen only in the immediate terms of how closer India and Pakistan are to meeting the benchmarks Strobe Talbott keeps coming back to in his meetings with Shamsah Ahmad and Jaswant Singh.

For a Green-product Market

by Naved Ahmed Chowdhury

While making a product greener and therefore cleaner, design is the stage where decisions are made regarding the types of resources and manufacturing processes to be used and these decisions determine the characteristics of waste streams e.g., plastic, electrical goods, paints, papers, aluminum cans, etc.

FOR consumers all around the world two aspects are gaining ground: Green Consumerism and the interest about the final fate of products they use. Therefore an environmental point of view, it is too simplistic to consider the impact of a product in isolation from the production and consumption systems in which it functions.

The better companies get at reducing waste, the clearer it becomes that the problem is not only the process but also the product. The green way is to influence people to buy fewer products or more logically products made with less material that is using resources more efficiently.

Is a computer for instance, a green product? Considered on its own, probably not.

But what happens when you think beyond the process but the product itself?

The manufacture of a computer requires large volumes of hazardous chemicals, solvents and heavy metals used in solder, wiring and display screens which are significant contributors to the heavy metal content of Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) generated in any city.

Is it possible to design products so that they provide service without polluting the environment? One must remember that design is a unique point of leverage from which to address environmental problems. While making a product greener and therefore cleaner, design is the stage where decisions are made regarding the types of resources and manufacturing processes to be used and these decisions determine the characteristics of waste streams e.g., plastic, electrical goods, paints, papers, aluminum cans, etc.

One must remember that products affect the environment at many points in their life cycle. For example, in the best chemical companies, effluent accounts for perhaps 4 per cent of output. It is the final use that create large amount of waste (i.e. the paint itself). So paint factories like DOW and BASF steadily cut effluent per ton of product sold, but their sales increased.

The next obligation on com-

Buying product that can be recycled or reused

Buying products that last longer

Buying less (this may go against the present growth oriented economic thinking which encourages people to consume more therefore increasing the economic growth of country)

But than is it likely that the scenarios mentioned above is necessarily going to happen?

Not likely. More likely people who will go on consuming as ever will look for alternatives to help them consume in a less environmentally harmful way.

For example, let us take the example of the food industry. People know that sugar and fat are bad for their health. Finding this, only some people drop eating sugar all together. But others keep on buying cakes sweets and other food stuff thanks to the recent advances made by the food technologists who have been able to make things sweet and creamy without sugar, milk fat and calories.

Product Use: The Implications

Some of the most serious environmental impacts may occur during the actual use of the product. This is particularly true of products that are consumed and dissipated during their use for example CFC, solvents, fossil fuels and pesticides. Environmental releases from these dissipative products can be much larger than those from the associated industrial processes. These can be minimized by better and greener design.

Then what are aspects of cleaner design?

- Energy requirements...less
- Recyclability...more
- Longevity...longer
- Design-weight...less
- Toxicity...less
- Service life...longer
- Remanufacturing...possible
- Cost...cheap
- Performance...Same or better
- Manufacture...cost effective
- Safety...better
- Consumer Appeal...positive

meant to be used as an alternative e.g. Coke Cola against natural fruit juices.

Packaging: The Bangladesh Scenario

If taken from design perspective the most efficient and the simplest way to reduce municipal waste (which is one of the most pressing problem in Dhaka at present) is to reduce the weight of packaging material. Though in lots of countries it was thought the best way to do this is to replace cardboard or paper packaging with plastic, in recent times more and more studies are showing that it may not be the best possible way—it just moves waste generation from one source to another. Another option could be to use bio-degradable packaging material like Jute, as it does not have any negative environmental impact.

In the future more and more governments all across the world (more so in Western Europe and North America) will put pressure on the producers to make their products more recyclable. It has already happened in Germany where government regulation stipulates that a certain percentage of packaging material must be sourced from recyclable materials. (Implication for Garments Manufacturers from Bangladesh: the packaging they use for exporting to the European and the North American market might come under this regulation in the future)

The Time Might be Running Out

In Bangladesh the corporate sector need to work on building cleaner products or start thinking on this line in their own pace for more environmentally-friendly products before it becomes compulsory under any regulation.

What are the implications for Bangladesh?

In the future consumers will demand greener products. Bangladesh need to be aware of this to sustain or in some case save its export market. The industry most vulnerable

to these type of policy regulations (coming from the importing countries) is leather industries, tinned food industry, etc.

Policies to encourage green design should be flexible enough to accommodate the rapid pace of technological change and the broad array of design choices and trade-offs.

Eco-labeling could be come mandatory in the future. (Eco-labels are products that are judged to be environmentally preferred compared with alternatives products. Germany, Canada, Japan, the Nordic countries and the European Community all have Eco-labeling schemes.) The government need to give credible information for consumers abroad and at home to illustrate environmental characteristics of products that could be promoted for differentiate them from other products and provide competitive edge. In this respect Jute can be an example.

The Cleaner Product

The flow of materials and products through the world economy has a critical influence on both economic growth and the environment. These flows are determined closely by design decisions along with the process. Therefore corporate managers as well as industrial and government policy makers need to make green product design an integral part of strategies to improve competitiveness and environmental quality.

Green product design offers a new way of addressing environmental problems. By reorganizing pollution concerns as product design challenges and particularly by encouraging designers to think more broadly about products and its associated environmental problems during and after its consumption, newer constraints are being identified in ways that would not have been apparent from a narrow focus on pollution end effluent being released from the waste streams alone.

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WHATEVER may be the rationalisation of the government's subsequent modification of the latest bout of administered price increases (announced on January 28 and January 31 the modification being effected on February 2), there is little doubt that its image has been adversely affected by the entire episode. In fact, what has made the situation even worse for the government is that the Finance Minister, Mr. Yashwant Sinha, already carries the appellation "Roll-back Sinha", which has become even more pronounced because of the latest instance of dithering and surrendering to a section of politicians who have missed the "big picture" because of their intense preoccupation with micro-level issues.

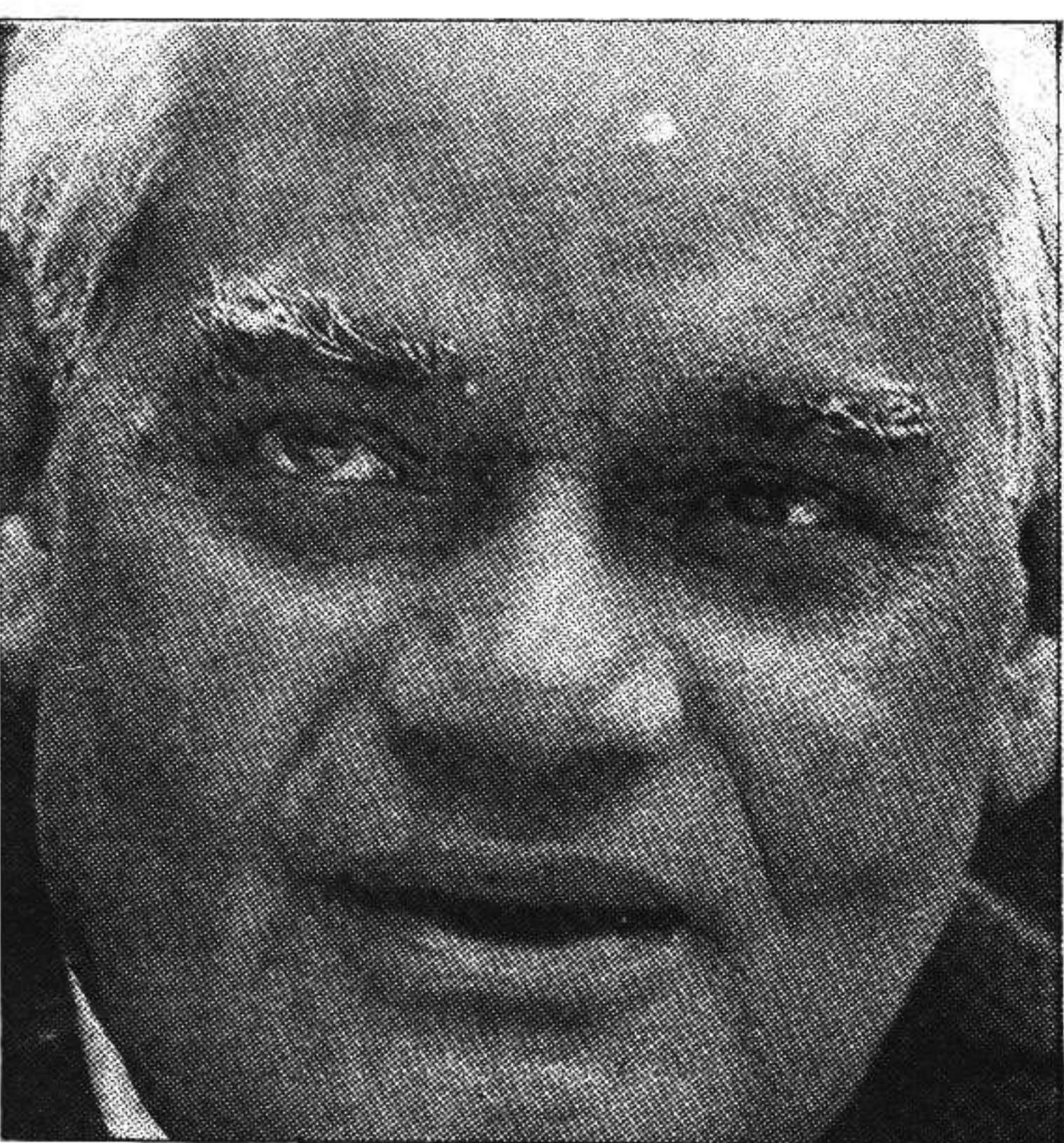
This cannot help the electoral prospects of either the BJP or its various allies who are responsible for the present government. Admittedly, strenuous efforts are already being made to project the move to help the population below the poverty line (the target group of the price modification regarding PDS rice and wheat), the main focus of the argument being that the government is out to help the poor. But the poor, particularly of this country, should not be taken for fools (witness their electoral behaviour in 1977), and it is more than likely that, the differences between the BJP and its allies, on the one hand, and the rift within the Sangh Parivar on the other have already created a poor image of the present Government which, bluntly put, has only helped to strengthen the power prospects of the Congress(I).

It is in this context that the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee's February 3 plaintive remark that "I do not think that I am helpless as a Prime Minister" should be seen. Curiously, by merely harping on the subject, Mr. Vajpayee has underscored its very relevance, which cannot help the image of his Prime Ministership in any way. Indeed, at the same press conference where he tried to throw some light on whether he was helpless or not, he issued yet another appeal to his allies in the government, the thrust of which was that salvation lay only through consensus and that, without forging one, the outlook could only be bleak.

In a written statement, Mr. Vajpayee said: "I urge all political parties to look at the economic perspective with a view to evolving a consensus." First, this is an admission that there is no consensus among the partners in government on

Does the Bell Toll for Vajpayee?

Ranabir Ray Choudhury explains why the BJP government shouldn't take the Indian poor for fools



Vajpayee: Why so thoughtful?

the subsidies subject, which is to be expected given the high degree of populism among the smaller parties, which in fact survive on their opposition to (among other things) sensible economic policies which entail some adjustment on the part of the people at large. Second, in the public's mind, the lack of consensus on the "subsidies issue" can very easily be extended to the need to remain in power by any means. This gives rise to an image of a fractious coalition which even the poor know is not something good for the nation's interests.

In fact, in recent days the airing of differences both within the coalition and in the Sangh Parivar has increased to an extent which cannot but tarnish the image of the Vajpayee

government even further. At the February 2 coordination committee meeting of the ruling alliance, the joint statement read in part: "Since the BJP is the core of our alliance, it shall make every effort to ensure that the prestige and cohesiveness of the coalition are not diluted by organisations belonging to its ideological fraternity." If anything this must be one of the severest indictments by the BJP's coalition partners of the Sangh Parivar itself, the strong inference being that the "prestige and cohesiveness" of the coalition had been smeared by the activities of some organisations belonging to the Parivar.

The BJP president, Mr. Kushabhau Thakre, the Prime Minister himself and the Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani,

signed the statement thus investing it with as much authority as possible from the BJP's point of view. But consider the response from some of the other Parivar constituents who, by the tenor of their utterances, have made light of the BJP Big Three's resolve, which certainly will not escape the notice of the people as one more bit of evidence that the Prime Minister's voice on important issues is not that of the Sangh Parivar. On February 3 the Vishwa Hindu Parishad president, Mr. Vishnu Hari Dalimiyi, commented that on the BJP leaders' support for the joint statement: "It shows their helplessness, poor fellows. They are being attacked on all sides. I pity them."

Among the coalition itself, rancour and dissatisfaction at the way Big Brother (the BJP) is behaving seems to have reached a peak—again something which is being noticed by the electorate and which cannot be a favourable input for the popular mandate in the next elections. Ms. Jayalalitha has said (February 3) she is "unhappy" with the functioning of the government and will "take an appropriate decision at an appropriate time" on the issue of withdrawal of support. Characteristically, Ms. Mamata Banerjee (January 31) has been more forthright: "We cannot be expected to sit idle and watch while it (the Centre) plays havoc with the family budget. We have no option but to consider withdrawing support." That the TDP has utter contempt for the Vajpayee government is indicated by what the party spokesman Umareddy Venkateswarlu said in Hyderabad on February 3: "The issue is not the TDP's withdrawal! It is what comes after the fall of the BJP government. If it means another Congress government, the TDP is not game for it."

Even if things within the coalition and in the Sangh Parivar were to return to "normal" in a couple of weeks' time, the sentiments which led to statements such as the above will not die easily. True, politics is full of surprises, but it is also a fact that to every participant in the political game the barometer of popularity among the electorate (a rough indication of performance at the hustings) is the supreme determinant of all political action. Going by that barometer, continued association with the Vajpayee government could spell disaster for most parties like the AIADMK, the Trinamul Congress and the TDP, among others.

Courtesy: The Businessline of India



The Beginning: Green products bear hope

panies will be to consider the impact on the environment of their products all through their lives. That means thinking not only about the extraction of raw materials and the production process, but also about the way in which a product is packaged and transported. That means thinking about what will happen to the product when the consumer no longer wants it!

Consumer: Lord of the Market

How can the consumer influence product so that the action reduces waste?

The consumer can do it by: Buying products that use less raw material to serve their function

Composting...possible

But one must also be careful about the effectiveness of technology in this respect. Technology creates convenience no doubt but it can also increase waste. Look at all the packaging waste of associated with any food and other consumer goods.

For example, More and more products are becoming smaller and lighter-pocket calculators, cellular phones etc thus moving waste from one source to the other. But lighter products are often produced on the assumption that if they break down they will be replaced rather than repaired, another example of substitution of environmental resources for human labour. Moreover many small products are used in addition through

TOM & JERRY
By Hanna-Barbera