doctors' salaries in USA could

be brought down to the level of

Western Europe. It would save

consumers more than \$70 bil-

lion a year. In fact, if the ques-

tion of efficiency is highlighted

The Daily Star

Founder-Editor : Late S. M. Ali Dhaka, Friday, January 7, 1999

Eid Mubarak to All

OMES again Eid-ul-Fitr with the promise of unal-Lloyed joy and happiness for the Muslims across the globe. We hope the first Eid of the 21st century unites us all with a profound sense of fraternity cutting across socio-cultural and geo-political divides. Let us imbue ourselves with the spirit of sacrifice, self-restraint and fellow-feeling that the holy month of Ramadan embodies, and look forward to a future when every day will have the touch of the Eid day.

With Eid just round the corner, we expect our political leaders to elevate themselves above petty party and personal interest for the greater benefit of the people and lead us to that coveted bright tomorrow. Eid Mubarak to all.

Bumper Crop Management

IN a high-profile press conference last Tuesday, with his top aides flanking him, Finance Minister SAMS Kibria struck a populist note claiming that the rush of buyers in the market pointed to a good health of the economy. That was no sign of recession after all, seemed to be the finance minister's point of satisfaction. In the operative parts he went on to defend government borrowing which stood higher by 20.33 per cent during the six-month period to December, 1999 as compared with the previous level arguing that neither did it fuel inflation nor crowd out the private sector.

So far as the containment of inflationary pressure is concerned, credit must go to the weather-induced record Aman harvest on top of an equally good Boro crop we had reaped earlier on. The government's fiscal policy intervention had but little to do with it, to put it mildly. Government's credit lies in timely helping the farmers with necessary inputs. As far as the private sector's credit share goes, it stood at 10.63 per cent during six months to December, 1999 in comparison with the government sector's 20.33 per cent as

mentioned above. The record Aman harvest and the residual stocks of Boro rice bring to bold relief our limited storage capacity. This goes to handicap any big Aman procurement drive. Price support to the farmers might be lessened to that extent as the rural demand slumped with the attendant possibility of a recessionary trend setting in.

On the other hand, if the government should decide to energetically go for a procurement drive it would have to borrow from the banking system risking an upward push to inflation. This will neutralise the gain in the price index otherwise obtainable from the fall in food prices induced by a higher availability of cereals. The government could have done with less bor-

rowing from the banking sector had the revenue collection picture been satisfactory. But it is not. Chairman of the National Board of Revenue Abdul Muyeed Chowdhury said that revenue earning fell Tk 9.33 billion short of the target during six months to December, 1999 largely because of lower customs duty

ernment borrowing has increased that much more. The government has to strike a balance between intake and offtake of cereals. This is to give the growers a price support together with an incentive for the future while ensuring that the food prices are stabilised at an affordable level for the commonman.

collection. Hence, as we see it, the predilection to gov-

TDEALLY, free trade means allowing cross border ex-Lehange of goods and services including investment with no or little tariff and non-tariff barriers on the basis of reciprocity. It is not compatible with discriminatory or unfair trade practices. It puts manufacturers or service providers to open competition which forces

Economic Arguments

them to be efficient. Fair com-

petition is allowed to play its

natural roles. Economists have

prescribed free trade for most

efficient allocation of resources

inefficient allocation of re-

sources and thereby slow down

the global growth, the argument

globally. Trade barriers lead to

Ignored The GATT was created to reduce / eliminate trade barriers; Ironically, although claims for free trade have been going out for long, no country has ever fully opted for free trade. The talk on free trade gains or loses momentum or changes its dimensions depending on the interests of the countries which dominate the world trading system. Historically, all the rich industrialized countries including the United States initially developed their manufacturing and technological bases under highly protectionist regime. When only they became strong enough to dominate the world trading system did they start insisting on free trade.

Under the hegemony of the industrial powers, GATT framed the "codes of conduct" for regulating international trade. Through different GATI Rounds including the Uruguay Round (UR) trade liberalization has been emphasized: a mandatory and gradual reduction of tariff and dismantling of .nontariff barriers (NTBs) were in focus. Until the UR, the earlier Rounds mostly concentrated on the reduction of tariff barriers to cross border trading of manufactured items. Textile and apparels were made an exception under Multi-Fibre Arrange meni (MFA) which was a derogation to GATT principle of non-discrimination. MFA allowed industrialized countries like USA to use discriminatory measures, viz. quotas, etc. to protect their domestic textile and apparel industries. The MFA provided a privileged status to the least developed countries as far as market access is concerned. This means that the principle of free trade was applied in a restricted sense only. However, under the pressure of the NICs and the developing countries, the Final Acts of UR envisaged the phasing out of MFA by the end of 2004. This is an attempt to remove the discriminatory element in the world trading system. Besides, UR integrated into the GATT or WTO system the trade in agricultural products, trade in services (GATS), trade related aspects of investment measures (TRIMS) and trade related as pects of intellectual proprietary rights (TRIPS).

Through all these, globaliza

WTO: Free Trade or Fair Trade?

by Hafiz G.A. Siddiqi

Most of the benefits of trade liberalization goes to more powerful partners, and not to Bangladesh. In fact, open competition makes a weak partner like Bangladesh vulnerable when it is forced to compete with trading partners like India, Thailand, Malaysia or USA.

tion of trade liberalization policy is emphasized. The basic assumption is that free trade or trade liberalization will benefit all countries, i.e., each country, rich or poor, will get its due share. Unfortunately, the WTO rules related to these, particularly GATS and TRIPS work primarily in favour of the rich and against the interests of the poor countries. This makes GATT/ WTO less than ideal.

In the world trading system, the trading partners can be divided into three groups, namely, (1) developed countries : more than 67 per cent of the world trade occur between these countries; (2) developing countries including NICs: they trade mostly (some 80% of their total trade) with the developed countries; and (3) the least developed countries (LDCs). The LDCs including Bangladesh mostly trade with the developed countries; intra-group trade between the LDCs is insignificantly small. This means that world trade will continue to be dominated by the big multinational corporations (MNCs) of the developed countries, although larger markets are emerging in the developing countries. Given this, logically the incidence of free trade is bound to be different for each of these groups. In other words, the WTO rules for free trade that benefit the developed countries may not benefit, in fact may harm, the least developed countries, if Special

> WTO Bends its Own Rules

Treatment of the latter by the

former is not made effective.

Free trade under the rules of WTO is not really free trade. The decision making process in WTO is not democratic. It is

highly dominated by the industrial powers. Often, the rules are bent to suit the interest of the interest groups in the developed countries. One example is MFA. There are many others. For example, in the recent Seattle meeting an attempt was made to include non-trade aspects like human rights, labour rights, environment, etc. as a condition of trade negotiations.

(There is no provision in the Final Acts of UR which permits such inclusion). Inclusion of such non-trade aspects may create grounds for them for being used as NTBs. Although the LDCs have protested against this proposal, it is not yet clear whether the coalition of 48 least developed countries will eventually be able to stall this attempt of the developed coun-

WTO Protects Monopoly Interests

The WTO provisions on TRIPS, as alleged by the protesters in Seattle are very protectionist (against free trade). The protesters alleged that WTO simply advances the corporate interests of the developed countries when it insists on implementing the copyright and patent protection clauses in the developing and least developed countries. Copyrights and patents are basically rent seeking devices and are enormously costly forms of protec-

A good example is the patented drugs sold by large pharmaceutical companies. Patents often raise the price of such drugs by several hundred or even thousand per cent compared with their free market

price. In many cases, the people of the LDCs cannot afford to use lifesaving drugs because their prices are too high. By contrast, protection in the form of tariffs or quotas will rarely raise the prices of goods by more than 20 per cent after trade liberalization has been in place.

This is a dilemma. The pharmaceutical companies. and similar other corporate capitalists invest lot of money to invent new drugs, etc. Therefore they must get the return through high prices which are guaranteed by copyrights and patents. But under this situation, free trade does not have any role to play; it becomes the monopoly game.

WTO must devise rules that end monopoly of the large drug companies and prevent them making exorbitant socially unacceptable profits. However, they must get their "Due Share". Let the benefit be enjoyed EQ-UITABLY by all countries (trading partners). One way may be, as the protesters in Seattle suggested that the developing and the least developed countries be given the same status as was enjoyed by United States during its early stages of industrialization: the US ignored English copyrights and Patents I Until the US reached a certain level of development, it did what it needed to do or it did what was fair for it to do.

There are numerous other examples. This means free trade must be replaced with fair trade. Fair trade will ensure each party involved its due share. Admittedly, it is difficult to determine what is the "due share" for each party. WTO must address this problem.

the free trade in professionals services should be at the top of the agenda. Why should the highest paid professionals like doctors, lawyers, accountants, benefit so much from protec-WTO Prefers Selective tionism when ordinary factory Application of Free workers lose their jobs due to Trade

As a result of implementa-

tion of the WTO rules, the man-

ufacturing workers, including

garment factory workers in the

United States are in direct com-

labour anywhere in the world.

government imposes tariff or

under reference. This is not un-

Why should free trade be

banking and insurance? Why

not free trade in professional

physicians, engineers, accoun-

Bangladesh should have equal

chance to take up jobs in India

has not happened, it will not

happen primarily because it is

against the interest of the

example, insurance companies,

(AMA) and pharmaceutical

companies of USA will not al-

low foreign doctors to be admit-

ted freely based on open world

competition, although this will

benefit the US consumers

enormously. According to an

estimate published in In These

Times, (a Journal published in

Chicago, vol. 24. No.3, January

2000, p-21). If free trade is al-

lowed in the movement of dec-

tors' services, and as a result

that eastern part of India

trade loses its meaning.

relocation of factories from USA to some developing coun-WTO does Not Ensure

Level Playing Field

Trade liberalization empetition with the cheapest phasizes free access to each other's market. But in reality, even They lose their jobs when cheap in case of merchandises, marimports from LDCs force their ket access has been very selecemployers to close down the tive. For example, Malaysia, factories. In response the US Thailand, India and other countries have almost free ponon-tariff barriers on imports cess to the Bangladeshi markets because of its rapid implemenfair and the US is justified in tation of trade liberalization policies. But due to lack of redoing so. But in the process free ciprocity, Bangladesh does not have free access to Indian markets. Therefore most of the benlimited to goods and only some efits of trade liberalization goes selected types of services like to more powerful partners, and not to Bangladesh. In fact, open competition makes a weak services? Under free trade partner like Bangladesh vulnerable when it is forced to tants, professors from compete with trading partners like India, Thailand, Malaysia or USA. It is argued that If or United States. In practice, it Bangladesh is forced to compete openly without any support, it will be efficient in the long run. But it is unlikely to happen if "interest groups" of the more one partner is too large and powerful trading partners. For strong and the other is teo small and weak. Free trade American Medical Association must provide level playing field. This can be provided through the application of Spa-

> WTO rules. All these imply that it is not free trade, rather it is fair trade which should be emphasized by WTO to create an WIN-WIN situation for all countries, rich and poor.

cial Treatment provisions of

The author is Pro Vice Chancellor. North South University.

Minority Communities in South Asia

More Positive Assurance Needed

/// government of BJP-led alliance at the centre in India its minority communities are apprehending their uncertain political and economic future because of inclusion of certain fundamentalist Hindu leaders such as L K Advani, M M Joshi and Arun Jaitley. The role of Advani in the destruction of Babri Mosque has already been revealed. The real motive behind Joshi's throughout India. Arun Jaitlev's wish has been gradually revealed in various mass media programmes. Apart from this. BJP extremists are trying to disturb the communal harmony in West Bengal, Bihar, Guirat, Orissa and Uttar Pradesh. However, we wish that these Hindu fundamentalists cannot be effective in future because after the demolition of Babri Mosque BJP had to forsake its agenda to come to power and the present government is a coalition government which has to accommodate the wishes of the BJP allies.

was created on a two-nation theory, it may not be too difficult to prove that Pakistan became a reality mainly because of (i) failure of Mohammad Ali Jinnah to fulfil his dream as a Congress leader: (ii) Jawaharlal Nehru's inadequate political foresight; and (iii) British government's wish to divide and rule to maintain economic control on the sub-continent (as long as possible). It was mainly

exploitation of religious sentiment of the common people. majority of whom were poor and illiterate and as such incapable of understanding politi-

cal strategies and intricacies. Ever since the creation of Pakistan its senior politicians and bureaucrats were apprehensive of pressure from the people of its eastern part for a fair share in employment and economic activities with the rise of literacy. Mohammad Ali Hindatva cultural project Jinnah, who used to consider "Bharatya culture" has been re- the eastern wing as an 'outpost' flected in the district education of Pakistan, advised them to programme "Sarva Shiksha make the western wing self-suf-Abhijan" that this programme ficient as quickly as possible so aims at imposing Hindu culture that west Pakistanis needed not to depend for anything on the eastern wing. As such all policies (at least the major ones) were formulated mainly for the benefit of west Pakistanis only. Subsequent developments, particularly during the so-called 'golden era' of Ayub Khan prove the point.

The foundation of Pakistan was based more on sentiment and less on cool logic. A modern state can never flourish on the basis of religion alone. Other than religion east Pakistanis had nothing common with the west Pakistanis. Some twentyfive years back Clarence Mal-Though apparently Pakistan oney in his book Peoples of South Asia (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc New York, 1974) rightly observed:' the disunity within Pakistan was apparent from the start. Religion proved inadequate to hold different peoples together in amity. The west Pakistani tended to look down on Bengali Muslims as second class Muslims, descendants of converts and do not in the same direct line of religious family as those who brought

by ABMS Zahur

Islam to the country. The Punjabi Muslims see themselves as direct heirs to the ruling tradition of the Mughal territory. Thus there was deep seated cultural prejudice current at the birth of Pakistan."

Bangladesh achieved its independence through a ninemonth long liberation war in which more or less all the religious minorities contributed because they hoped that independent Bangladesh would be a secular democratic state where all its people would be free to lead a peaceful life with complete religious freedom and where all will be equal before law. After independence, however, things did not proceed as anticipated. Though the then AL government could adopt secularism as one of the state principles it did not get enough time to nullify the anti-Hindu Acts (such as Enemy Property Act) imposed by the then Pakistan. Far from redressing the problems of the Hindus Zia knocked out the principle of secularism. Both Zia and Ershad were interested in the Islamisation of the constitution and ignored the problems of the minorities. In fact Zia's ill-advised policy in regard to CHT increased the suffering of the tribals there. As CHT was a political problem it was beyond the capability of a military ruler like Ershad to solve it.

Geographically Bangladesh is surrounded on three sides by India and Myanmar. India is a Hindu-majority country and Myanmar is Buddhist dominated. It may further be added

(bordering Bangladesh) is dominated by Buddhist Christians and tribals. It would, therefore, be most pragmatic for Bangladesh not only to tolerate these cultures but also to encourage development of their cultures so that political relations of Bangladesh with its neighbours are developed on a warmer and firmer footing. This will help her much to quicken the pace of development of trade and economic relations. It is indeed surprising that despite long experience of ruling the country for twenty years (11yrs by BNP and 9 yrs by JP) both BNP and JP are trying to raise the issue of religion in the name of so called "nationalist parties". For them it may be useful to raise the religious sentiment of the illiterate and simple voters through publicising that Awami League is a pro-Indian and secular party and as such not enough committed to protect Islam, the religion of the majority people of Bangladesh, but it would certainly be harmful for the country in the long run:

Some may argue that while communal riots frequently occur in India (which is a secular state) why Bangladesh should try to be secular in letter and spirit. There may be good reasons as to why Bangladesh should not follow India in her policy toward the minorities. The following reasons may be identified: i) the constitution of Bangladesh is not based on twonation theory; ii) the exodus of Hindus from Pakistan was because of anti-Hindu polices adopted by the then Pakistan governments; iii) it would be improper for Bangladesh to ignore the moral and material support she received from Hindu dominated India, Buddhist dominated Myanmar and Japan and Christian democracies of UK. France and Australia and communist countries like Russia and the then East Germany; iv) it would be in the interest of Bangladesh to develop better relations with the peoples of the neighbouring states; and v) it cannot be denied that except from the Mughal ruler Akbar Hindus did not receive proper treatment from the Muslim rulers.

It may not be easy to establish absolutely amicable relationship among all the communities in South Asia because of the following constraints: (a) Kashmir conflict between India and Pakistan; (b) Tamil uprising in Sri Lanka; (c) BJP-led DNA rule in India; and (d) Islamic fundamentalist dominated military rule in Pakistan.

As Bangladesh appears to be free from any such constraints as quoted above it may be appropriate for her to initiate a proposal before coming SAARC summit for adopting resolutions aiming at eliminating any existing discriminatory policy (if there be any) and not to adopt any policy discriminating the minorities in future to improve communal relationship in the region. Though we may not get immediate result from such resolutions adoption of such resolutions would increase the confidence of the minorities and will make the SAARC more meaningful and powerful.

The writer is a retired Joint

Friday Mailbox

"Shame"

Sir, If it is possible to detect a criminal by his fingerprint then why not the possible culprits of the picture Shame (DS 2-1-2000) which clearly depicts the face of the culprits assaulting a woman on the 31st night? But the question is whether the authority concerned is ready to put them (the possible culprits) to trial which is their bounden duty.

Secondly, if the identified culprits are put to trial, it (the trial) should not be delayed because the picture itself is a witness to prove the heinous act committed willfully by those culprits. Besides media men who has in the meantime played an active role to trace the said culprits may stand as eye-witness in the trial.

Let us hope that this time there would be an exemplary punishment against the convicted culprits for committing repression on women.

Abdul Majid 13, Rajani Bose Lane Dhaka.

Welcoming the

new millennium Sir. The new millennium has finally arrived. How time

has flown is beyond one's comprehension but we have remained confined to our narrow political thinking and miserably failed to look beyond. I particularly mean the case of Bangladesh. A new nation was born in 1971 with a single language and culture. Our energy that could have been combined to bring economic emancipation for the teeming millions. Regretfully, the golden opportunity was lost by difference in political thoughts, ideology, coups, counter-coups and self-interest above national interest.

The saner section and the silent majority still think that if the political parties put away their differences and reach consensus on economic matters for at least few years. Bangladesh can be turned into a prosperous country. But this would perhaps never happen. The nation

stands divided over petty matters. Let us pray and hope that sanity prevails with the advent of the new millennium and our politicians and bureaucrats would look beyond their myopic outlook. Ziuddin Ahmed

Gulshan, Dhaka

Parking dilemma

Sir, For the last 3 years. I've been parking my car on the street beside my office across from Teachers' Training Institute. Without being left with an alternative, I can't help park on one of the busiest streets of Dhaka, the Mirpur Road. Surely I'll admit, during Eid, my car along with all other cars of the office-goers of the building can do nothing

but make the traffic situation worse than usual. For the past two days, the police have been announcing on the loud speaker that all cars should park in the 'specified parking are.' I went down and asked one of the constables where this 'specified parking area' was and the answer was "I don't know." Yesterday, at about 1:30 pm when I came down to my car, I found that my front wheel was punctured and there was a Tk 100 penalty notice on my windshield. A constable walked up to me laughing and saying. "I didn't do it ... the sergeant did." I asked him, "Where am I supposed to park"? And the reply was, "How am I supposed to know? The irony of the whole situation - that, the sergeant not only gave me a ticket for a parking lation but also punctured my tyre so that I could stay

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there for even longer to change it! It's not merely enough to put a sign stating "Do not park here." Before putting that sign up, a parking area must be created and also the whereabouts of that area available to the people should be made. What's the use of spending the tax payer's money on the rickshaw, the loud speaker and the microphone rent when instead the government should look into making long term investments into building multistoried parking lots around busy areas like Motijheel, Dilkusha, New Market and Kawran Bazar. When will the authorities concerned begin to use some common sense and learn to think about long-term investments? At this rate, I'm afraid it'll take more than a couple

of milleriniums, and the equal amount of money.

My question to the DMP still stands, "Where is the 'specified parking area"?

M R Khan Banani, Dhaka.

Sir, Dhaka's traffic jams are accentuated by bad designing of the road intersections and junctions (3 or 4 roads meeting at a point, which were designed decades ago for light to moderate traffic). A comprehensive road alignment project is surely included in the Dhaka Master Plan,

Road-junction alignment

which will take years of time and tons of money. Meanwhile here are two quick possible interim solutions at two points. The T-junction near the Engineer's Institute may be widened by removing the footpath at the park end, providing additional lanes for the vehicles. There are no structures, and the land belongs to the government. In fact, the left turns should have no red light, to reduce the congestion and maintain continuous flow of traffic. A tiny portion

of the park may be nibbled away At Asad Gate (Avenue), Mohammadpur, there are three thick columns, one in the middle, and two at the sides of the road, partially blocking this busy junction. While the centre column may be retained, the two side columns may be shifted further away on to the footpaths, thereby opening more lanes for the heavy traffic. These alterations or modifications are not costly.

Further along the Asad Gate (Avenue), there is the largest concentration of schools in the area, and haphazard parking on both sides of the road create huge traffic jams. If the cars are not allowed to park on the Avenue, the traffic flow can be maintained. The Town Hall Market area is a jungle-land, thanks to the philosophical attitude of the municipal commissioner, which might be construed to till sometimes towards mercenary tendencies. It is easy to spot the encroachers. Authority misused is rank bad governance, no doubt about it (of course the accusation would be denied!).

Abul M Ahmad Dhaka

Economic sanction on Russia Sir. In 1991, when the former superpower USSR was dissolved and broke asunder by the Russian leaders themselves, Dzokhar Dudayev a Chechen and a former Soviet air force general declared independence of Chechnya.

During 1994-96, Russian forces invaded Chechnya but suffered a massive defeat. Former Russian President Boris Yeltin rushed his special representative Alexander Lebed who signed a peace deal with the Chechens granting them complete control over their own affairs, immediate withdrawal of Russian troops from Chechnya and final constitutional status of Chechnya to be decided in 2001.

Ever since, on one excuse or another the Russian war mongers have been preparing and looking for an opportunity to avenge their defeat and humiliation in Chechnya. In October 1999, Russian Prime Minister (now President) Vladimin Putin said: "Russia will not settle the Chechnya problem by force, we will not settle and we are not counting on settling political question, particularly the status of Chechnya by force".

But what is really happening in Chechnya? Russian army have killed thousands of Chechens, destroyed houses, buildings, roads, highways, mills and factories and carrying out genocide all over Chechnya. Is not Russia defying Universal Declaration of Human

Rights, violating aims, objectives and principle of the United Nations and desecrating world public opinion? What role have the United Nations, European countries played in East Timor? The USA and UN Security Council have from time to time imposed economic sanctions on several countries justifying various causes. But why is the civilised world sitting idle as a silent spectator over the

bloodshed in Chechnya? We strongly demand plebiscite in Chechnya under UN supervision and pending that immediate imposition of UN

economic sanctions on Russia.

O. H. Kabir Wari, Dhaka

OPINION

Indians Constructing Dam in Barak River: Another Farakka in the Offing?

by Mohammad Mujibur Rahman

This refers to a news item published recently in various sections of the press. According to the reports, the Indians are going ahead with the plan to set up a power plant in Tipaimukh the tributaries could be stored the River Barak in Assam. Experts say if the dam is water becomes scares. The constructed (i) the Barak's two major tributaries, the Surma and the Kushiara will lose their flow and consequently onefourth area of our country from Sylhet to Barisal will turn into virtual desert; (ii) Sylhet region and production in Fenchuganj Fertilizer factory will be threatened; (iv) production in 130 tea gardens of the greater Sylhet district will be seriously affected due to the adverse effect of the dam which will eventually prove to be another Farakka!

It may be recalled, in the Joint Indo-Bangladesh Prime Ministerial Declaration of May 16, 1974 it was recognized that the Ganges dry season flow would have to be augmented and Joint Rivers Commission (JRC) was asked to study the best means of such augmentation. But the mission failed because the Bangladesh team suggested one method of increasing the flow and India another. Bangladesh proposed that the dry season flow of the Ganges should be augmented by

construction of storage reservoirs on the Ganges Himalayan tributaries with the cooperation of a third party -Nepal. The monsoon waters of area by constructing a dam in in these reservoirs for release later in the dry season when Indian teams opposed the concept apparently because in that event the control of the Ganges waters would mainly vest in Nepal and the Farakka Barrage would be redundant. The Indian proposal for will experience frequent augmenting the dry season flow earthquake: (iii) power of the Ganges consisted of a generation in Ashuganj plant barrage across the river Brahmaputra at Gagighopa and a canal to take water from that river through the northern area of Bangladesh to Farakka. At a later stage India intended to construct three storage reservoirs by constructing three dams - one on the river Dihang, another on the Subansiri and the last one, the Tipaimukh Dam in the Barak, a tributary of the river Meghna. The Indian scheme was not acceptable to Bangladesh mainly because it would represent a threat to the sovereignty of Bangladesh. "The Farakka Barrage gave India nearly complete control over the dry season flow of one of Bangladesh's two major rivers, the Ganges, the proposed Brahmaputra Barrage could give India control over the other". (Sharing the Ganges by

further substantiated by the fact that India planned to construct a dam in Tipaimukh area on the river Barak which state's responsibility in dealing would certainly not augment the flow of the Brahmaputra. for that matter of the Ganges, but would enable India to control the waters of the Meghna, the third major river of our country and with it to complete the control of almost

the entire river system of .Bangladesh! It is essential to discuss international law and practice in this regard. The Harmon Doctrine of absolute territorial sovereignty over international river, which originated in the US in 1895 has in fact never been followed and practised by any state, not even by the US. Thus while resolving the Rio Grondo dispute, the US did agree to provide Mexico with waters equivalent to that which Mexico had used before the diversion of waters from the Rio Grondo for irrigation purposes in the US took place. The 1933 Montevideo declaration adopted by the Seventh International Conference of American States limits the right of utilization of common waters by the obligation not to infringe the legal right of utilization of other state. Similar views are also expressed by the Inter-American Bar Association, the Institute of International Law

Ben Crow). This contention is and the International Law Association. The 1977 UN water conference at Mar del Plata has also accepted this view of basin with common waters.

> India started constructing the Farakka barrage on or before January 30, 1961. without giving prior notice and information to Pakistan about the project in total disregard to Article 7 of the 1933 Montevideo declaration of American States which. provides that "The works which. a state plans to perform in international waters shall be previously announced to the other riparian states" The 1957 Buenos Aires Resolution of Inter-American Association requires the consent of a co-basin state when that state may suffer damage or injury as a result of a proposed worked. Fakistan opposed the construction as it had a right to the waters of the Ganges on which rested primarily the Ganges Kobadak Project. But India did not suspend the construction and followed from the very beginning the strategy of procrastination by holding a series of fruitless discussions and meetings with Pakistan during the period from 1961 to 1970. Pakistan raised the issue at the United Nations and informed the superpowers of the dispute. The USSR President Kosygin wrote a letter

to Mrs Grandhi urging a settlement along the lines of the Indus Waters Treaty (i.e.

through the mediation of the World Bank). Now the Indians are doing exactly the same thingconstructing a dam in the river Barak (and also in all over 53 common rivers) flouting all national and international laws and practice. It will not be incongruous to state here that as early as 1960 India concluded a water treaty called Indus Basin Water Treaty with Pakistan to share the waters of the Indus and its tributaries on permanent basis. But when it comes to sharing water with Bangladesh India adopts rather 'might is rights' attitude. 'Inspite of its friendly' relations with Bangladesh, India is reportedly constructing dams/barrages insidiously across all the rivers flowing into Bangladesh from Indian side apparently with a view to withdrawing waters unilateral. Far from being friendly, India is in fact snubbing us. Bangladesh should lodge a

strong protest to India, asking it to immediately stop constructing the dam in the Barak and conclude water treaties with us to share waters of all the 54 common rivers on just and equitable basis as per the existing international law and practice in this regard. The writer is a retired

Collector of Customs.

Views expressed in this column are the writers' own. The Editor may or may not subscribe to those views. The Editor reserves the right to decide which letters should be published.