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DHAKA MONDAY APRIL 2, 2012

WTO chief's wise counsel

We must be up to the challenge we face

IRECTOR General, World Trade Organisation (WTO), Pascal Lamy in his Dhaka University convocation address on Saturday gave an invaluable assessment of Bangladesh's potential from a multi-lateral trading perspective.

Citing the success of garment sector giving a lie to apprehensions that it may not survive the post-quota phase-out era, it has not only held its ground but even prospered. RMG accounts for 75 percent of the country's export, about 10 percent of its GNP, and employ three million people, most of them women.

From his vantage position, as WTO Chief Lamy has seen, Bangladesh's comparative advantage being brought to bold relief by the removal of quotas. Another impetus was injected into the sector through simplification of rules of origin pertaining to duty and quota free market access to the EU.

The growth of the pharmaceutical industry was 'consolidated' through the waiver under the WTO rules on intellectual property rights.

Both in the garments and pharmaceutical sectors Bangladesh has used the flexibility of the multilateral trading system to its advantage. In this sense it is a 'model' to other LDCs.

The WTO secretary general also pointed out that the 8.5 percent drop in absolute poverty that Bangladesh has recorded is remarkable. Overall, the WTO chief sees Bangladesh 'as a role model in poverty battle.'

So far so good, but the challenge facing Bangladesh is diversifying its export basket. This will help fend off the kind of economic shocks already experienced by many countries that may yet have ripple effects on Bangladesh economy.

Bangladesh needs a great deal of strategic planning keeping in view the country's transformation on to a middle-income status by 2021 when preferential treatment attached to LDCs will be no longer available.

The next decade is going to prove crucial for Bangladesh in a scenario where 'active civil society, vibrant private sector and profound transformation in social sector' notwithstanding political stability is imperative to provide the underpinnings to investment in services, infrastructure, trade facilitation and integration of businesses into global economy. That is the crux of the challenge we face.

Is saying sorry enough?

RAB personnel need psychological counseling

TE have learnt through the media that the Rapid Action Battalion has offered an unqualified apology to the VC of Dhaka University for the unwarranted behaviour of some of its members who recently beat up a teacher of the university and caused him bodily injury. And the reason for the assault on the teacher was reportedly his asking the driver of the RAB vehicle to remove it from where it was parked in front of the latter's house, to clear the traffic congestion that the parked vehicle had created. The question is, is expressing regret enough?

It is an unpleasant truth that there is by and large a general disregard in the law enforcing agencies of the ordinary man's rights. And their overbearing attitude has reached such an intolerable level that one wonders how such an imperious attitude has come to be ingrained in the mind of a state agency whose primary responsibility is to protect and serve the people. It is perhaps because the victim of RAB's highhandedness in this instance was a university teacher that we have come to know of the matter. What if the victim had been an ordinary person? And such incidents of display of RAB's arrogance of power, we dare say, are not exceptions.

We feel that there must be more to it than just saying sorry. The elite force which we understand is manned by personnel selected specially from all the services as well as other law enforcing agencies must be made to understand that they are there not to inculcate fear in the minds of the people but the crooks, villains and felons. Regrettably, it is their demeanour that projects them as being generally overbearing and unfriendly to the public.

The matter involves more than merely punishing an individual. It is a matter of imparting not only appropriate professional training but also proper psychological orientation of the special forces personnel, particularly those that have to deal with the man in the streets on a daily basis. The agencies should be trained to deal with the people not as their masters but as friends otherwise

署 THIS DAY IN HISTORY ●

April 2

Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de León first sights land in what is

World War I: President Woodrow Wilson asks the U.S. Congress for

Russian professors for nuclear 101?

ABDUL MATIN

ANGLADESH has agreed to the first ever nuclear deal with Russia, which is to be built at Rooppur. Several memoranda of understanding have been signed between Bangladesh and Russia over the last three years for building the two VVER-1000 type nuclear reactors, with technical and financial assistance from Russia.

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The state minister for science and technology had given both some good and bad news on the Rooppur Nuclear Power Project after he had returned from Moscow (DS, March 17). Talking to The Daily Star he said that Russia would provide 85% of the fund required to build the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant as state loan on soft terms. He further stated that Bangladeshi students would get scholarships to study nuclear science and technology at a specialised university in Russia.

This is the good news. The bad news is that teachers from Russian University will visit Bangladesh to teach nuclear courses at Dhaka University (DU) and Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET). Foreign academics are welcome if they come for collaboration in research or teaching advanced courses in which we have no expertise, and similarly our scientists and engineers can also go abroad for higher studies or for specialised training programmes. There is nothing wrong in it but why should we need Russian professors to teach basic courses in nuclear science and technology in universities here?

In late 1960s, Bangladeshi engineers built and operated the Karachi Nuclear Power Plant (KANUPP). The project manager, the deputy plant superintendent, several shift supervisors and plant operators of KANUPP were all from Bangladesh. According to a survey by the Times in mid 1970's, Bangladesh, along with few other countries, was considered to possess the potential to develop nuclear weapons.

Some Bangladeshi nuclear engineers, settled in Canada, had the expertise to built and commission nuclear power reactors in Argentina, South Korea and Romania. Many Bangladeshi nuclear scientists and engineers also held vital and renowned positions at the headquarters of the International Atomic Energy in Vienna.

Nuclear scientists and engineers from Bangladesh are also known to have taught nuclear science and technology-based courses at universities in Saudi Arabia and Libya. Several nuclear experts from Bangladesh helped Iran to build its nuclear infrastructures during the initial days of its nuclear power programme.

If this was the situation just decades ago, why should we suddenly need Russian professors to teach basic nuclear courses now? Are we moving

little attention has been paid to their suggestions. What have we achieved during this period except signing several MoUs and sending high level delegations to Moscow?

According to the recent proposal to buildinf the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant on build-own-operate-transfer (BOOT) basis (DS February 20), Russia will "run the power plant in the initial years to enable a local workforce develop its skills and takeover the operations." It shows that BAEC does not have enough confidence in training engineers and technicians in next eight years or so to takeover the responsibility operating the plant after its completion. If this concept is followed, who will operate of the plant and ensure its safety if, God forbids, all the Russian operators suddenly leave Bangladesh due to any civil distur-

If India and Pakistan can build and operate nuclear power plants, there is no reason we should fail to do so. The research reactor and other laboratories at AERE Savar will provide

forward or backward as a nation? What did the Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission (BAEC) achieve during the last forty years if it is unable to train its own scientists and engineers? One of the purposes of building the research reactor at the Atomic Energy Research Establishment (AERE) at Savar was to train local engineers and technicians. Has it served this purpose?

Both India and Pakistan has built inhouse facilities to train their nuclear scientists and engineers. Why haven't we built similar facilities? Why are we incapable of offering basic courses in nuclear science and engineering?

Since the initial stages of negotiations with Russia in 2009, all the senior retired nuclear engineers of BAEC have been stressing the importance of recruitment and training of nuclear engineers and technicians, but very

bances in the country before our team is ready to takeover?

It has been pointed out several times that the BAEC lacks senior engineers with experience of dealing with nuclear power reactor vendors. It also doesn't have sufficient autonomy to take its own decisions independently. It has been operating under full administrative control of the ministry, who takes most of the decisions regarding the Rooppur Nuclear Power Project. It is thus possible that the minister is being wrongly advised on Rooppur.

People in general are worried about the safety of nuclear power plants. Without trained manpower, BAEC cannot ensure the safety of the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant.

If India and Pakistan can build and operate nuclear power plants, there is no reason we should fail to do so. We

can pull our resources, if necessary, to train the new recruits. The research reactor and other laboratories at AERE Savar will provide excellent facilities for practical training.

& EDITORIAL

BAEC should also allow lateral entry of senior engineers with experience of construction and operation of conventional power plants and large industrial complexes. If we were able to build a strong team of nuclear experts during the 1960s, there is no reason why we can't do it now! And it is very possible to do so without the invitation of foreign instructors.

There is one more important issue. Most of the engineers trained during the pre-liberation period left the BAEC during 1970s for better opportunities outside. The BAEC also trained dozens of engineers at its research reactor at Savar but could not retain them for the same reason. Unless there is any improvement in the service conditions of BAEC, it is likely that some of the newly trained engineers will also leave the commission.

It is, therefore, essential to offer attractive and competitive salaries and incentives to the nuclear engineers and scientists of the commission in order to retain them in their jobs. Large scale exodus of trained manpower may cause serious problems in plant operation.

In addition, it is necessary to reorganise and strengthen BAEC with people conversant with nuclear power. BAEC should also be allowed more autonomy. The division of atomic energy should be placed directly under the prime minister like in India and Pakistan. The chairman of BAEC should be made the ex-officio secretary of the division like in India in order to accelerate the implementation of the Rooppur Nuclear Power Project.

These are just some of the measures which can help to develop a firm base for the introduction of nuclear power in Bangladesh.

The writer is a former Chief Engineer of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission.

PRAFUL BIDWAI COLUMN

Sangh Parivar in fighting's grip

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PRAFUL BIDWAI

performance of the Congress party-led United Progressive Alliance government that some observers

has been

the recent

have begun to write it off. Scandals haunt it week after week -the latest being the insidious privatisation of Railway services, underselling of coal blocks, and the Army chief's charge that he was offered Rs.14-crore bribe to approve substan-

The Singh government is courting unpopularity because of its disastrous policies and callousness towards the aam aadmi, in whose name it won the 2009 Lok Sabha.

dard vehicles, with the implication that

the defence ministry didn't act on this.

Dr. Singh has become a liability with his pet horses like nuclear power and public-sector divestment. He's obsessed with killing the food security Bill and denying minimum wages under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, the UPA's biggest achievement.

The Congress performed badly in the recent Assembly elections and byelections. In Uttar Pradesh, it got only six more seats than the 22 it held in the 403-strong Assembly despite antiincumbency against Ms. Mayawati and the Gandhi family's energetic campaigning.

Mr. Rahul Gandhi isn't the Congress's "trump card." The party has neither core-base nor strategy in India's most important state. And Mr. Gandhi lacks vote-pulling power.

The Congress has just lost all seven Assembly by-elections in Andhra Pradesh because it dithers on separate statehood for Telangana. Andhra is vitally important: the Congress won 33 of 42 seats there, its highest number from any state.

Nationally, the Congress's political strategy is in tatters, its organisation demoralised, and its leadership confused. It's again in decline, perhaps like in the quarter-century-long post-1987 phase. Ms. Sonia Gandhi is behaving as if she has abdicated responsibility. Unless she takes drastic steps to rejuvenate the Congress and restore its relevance, it will probably lose the 2014 elections. However, the Congress's plight is no

consolation for the Bharatiya Janata Party. It's itself in bad shape. It performed poorly in all the Assembly elections barring Goa. In UP and Punjab, it lost both votes and seats. In the Udupi-Chikmagalur Lok

election, the BJP suffered a rout in its own bastion. It lost the seat vacated by Chief Minister Sadananda Gowda by 45,000plus votes. It also badly lost Gujarat's Mansa Assembly byelection.

Sabha by-

The BJP declared Karnataka its "gateway" to the

South, whose states together have 130 Lok Sabha seats. In 2009, it won 19 of Gadkari then messed with the party's Karnataka's 28 Lok Sabha seats, because it expanded its base outside the Lingayat caste. However, with his sectarian politics,

disgraced Chief Minister BS Yeddyurappa has reduced the BJP to a Lingayat party, and alienated other castes. His monumental corruption, and collusion in illegal iron-ore mining, documented by the state ombudsman, is only exceeded by his family's greed.

The Karnataka High Court recently granted him some relief on procedural grounds. He has used that to blackmail the party into reinstating him as CM,

using despicable methods like spiriting away his supporters to a luxury resort, and parading them before party president Nitin Gadkari.

This mockery of political decency has repulsed many BJP middle-class voters, and probably closed the party's Southern "gateway." The BJP may now be in terminal decline in Karnataka.

In today's BJP, regional satraps call the shots. Much of the blame for this lies with Mr. Gadkari, the least respected ever of all BJP presidents, and one nominated by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. Mr. Gadkari has never shed his provincial outlook.

UP was his biggest test. He entrusted

the choice of candidates and election micromanageme nt to RSS pracharak Suresh Joshi while inducting health scam-tainted minister Babu Singh Kushwaha.

Mr. Joshi's appointment antagonised Narendra Modi, his old adversary, who refused to campaign in any

state elections. Having lost in UP, Mr. Rajya Sabha tickets, handing one to a Nagpur-based businessman and another (in Jharkhand) to Londonbased NRI Anshuman Mishra.

The second move provoked a vitriolic attack from former Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha. Mr. Gadkari beat a retreat and lost face.

BJP "second generation" leaders like Arun Jaitley and Sushma Swaraj, besides Mr. Modi, despise Mr. Gadkari But they in turn, especially the first two, have no love lost for each other.

The BJP's central leadership is divided as well as rudderless. Mr. LK Advani hasn't tempered his ambitions despite his age and had to be forced out as the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha by the RSS. He cannot be the final arbiter in the BJP's totally

The BJP is unable to "moderate" itself by cutting its umbilical cord with the RSS. It remains wedded to the Hindutva ideology. It has no strategy to overcome recent setbacks and expand its social and electoral support.

unresolved leadership crisis.

It merely hopes that popular disenchantment with the UPA, combined with pure luck, might somehow help it emerge stronger than its present 116 Lok Sabha seats.

The BJP's fallback option is to woo regional parties like the Trinamool Congress, AIADMK, Janata Dal (United) and Biju Janata Dal to rebuild the National Democratic Alliance. After all, they have all allied with the BJP in the past against the Congress. But their support cannot be taken for granted. It depends on the 'M' (Modi) factor.

The RSS has systematically tightened its hold on the BJP party machine and appointed its loyalists as state organisational secretaries, but failed to rein in defiant leaders like Narendra Modi. If Mr. Modi wins the Gujarat elec-

tions later this year, he will want to become the national party president and project himself as the NDA's Prime Ministerial candidate.

This bid could become viable in the unlikely event of the BJP winning 150-170 seats. That will confront the regional parties with a wrenchingly cruel choice. Will they legitimise a leader whose name is synonymous with the state-sponsored mass murder of India's Muslim citizens?

That would be shameful, but it can't be ruled out. Regrettably, Indian democracy's fate could depend on that hideous, if unlikely, outcome.

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The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

a declaration of war on Germany. 1945 Diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and Brazil are

Rama IV is crowned King of Thailand.

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established. 1980

President Jimmy Carter signs the Crude Oil Windfall Profits Tax Act in an effort to help the U.S. economy rebound.