

Bangladesh and Paris

The Bangladesh delegation to this year's meeting of the aid consortium in Paris left Dhaka yesterday with high hopes of getting additional funding to see the country through the current economic crisis made worse by devastations wrought by the April 29 cyclone. In addition, the delegation will also be seeking financial assistance to help its medium-term post-cyclone rehabilitation programme.

Whether they will get the extra funding or not, we certainly hope the team will be able to impress upon donor countries the exceptional circumstances Bangladesh finds itself in, and that the reasonings offered by the delegation will find receptive ears (not to mention exchequers).

However, the time has now come to give some serious thought to the format under which the meeting is held, as well as the way its agenda is prepared. Although the aid club was set up to help Bangladesh's development efforts with financial and technical assistance, the role of the subject-country has remained marginal at best in the deliberations of the consortium. It is the donor countries and aid agencies which decide on the priorities of our Annual Development Budget, and the government is then asked to follow a set of guidelines prescribed by the World Bank. The Bank itself prepares the agenda for the meeting, while the money to be pledged and designs of projects to be financed are determined in advance by respective exchequers of donor countries. And Bangladesh? The response of our government to the proposals may have an impact on the details and time-frame of some aspects of the agenda, particularly those dealing with Bangladesh's compliance with policy reforms set out by the World Bank. But the overall policy frame-work (of the donors, for Bangladesh) remains unchanged.

It is a situation that needs a thorough overhauling. But the problem is such that simultaneous actions have to be taken at various levels, here in Dhaka as well as in donor capitals and the World Bank headquarters.

As M. Sayeduzzaman pointed out in the Conversation published here yesterday, delegations from donor countries are largely made up of the people below the decision-making echelon of governments. Consequently, they are in no position to make any major amendment to the proposals already decided upon by their respective governments. At the same time, the high-level Bangladeshi delegation ends up talking to people well below their station. This is a problem that should not have existed in the first place, and can be solved by the donors upgrading the meeting and making it the final stage of the decision-making process, rather than a *fait accompli*.

Sayeduzzaman further suggested that the process of working out the agenda takes about six to seven months, during which time World Bank officials visit Dhaka to discuss the following year's plan with concerned ministries. It is this period that presents an opportunity for the government to project its own policy priorities. Unfortunately, we have failed to make the best use of it time and again. In a way, we seem to show a tendency to virtually invite donors to solve our problems for us. It is the responsibility of our government, of whatever political shade, to assert itself during this period, when it has the chance to do so.

The crucial factor remains Bangladesh's woeful lack of role in the formulation of the World Bank's recommendations, as well as the Paris agenda. To begin with, is there any logic why the meeting cannot be held in Dhaka? That would be symbolic, making us at least feel that we were part of the process, rather than mere spectators.

But more important is the point made by Prof Rehman Sobhan, in the same Conversation of yesterday. He said that there should only be one document on the table, the policies and priorities of the government of Bangladesh. The donors should then come forward to have a dialogue over the proposals.

This frame-work would allow the country's ADB to be based on what the government thinks it needs and what. There is an essential justice to this approach that cannot possibly be lost on the decision-makers of donor countries.

Quite apart from the issue of national sovereignty on matters relating to economic policies and priorities, letting Bangladesh's position play the pivotal role at Paris (or anywhere else) is an idea which needs to be addressed on an urgent basis. To bring that about, the government here has to show greater political will. At the same time, we would expect the donors and the World Bank to consider the problems and prospects of Bangladesh on their particular merits, rather than impose an alien package designed in Washington or Geneva.

Long Live the Rebel

Had he lived, Kazi Nazrul Islam would be 92 today. Were he not struck down by a malaise that allowed him to live but quite besides himself when he was hardly past 42, he would still be fighting — against all kinds of establishment and against all kinds of communal, social and cultural narrowness and bigotry, all jingoistic *achalayatanis* or straitjackets. He had an unextinguishable fight in him which quite aptly earned him the epithet 'rebel'. It is a cruel irony that the colonial state of Pakistan used his name — and only the name — to serve them in their divisive game of perfidy — and that even after the emergence of Bangladesh first his inane presence and then his identity was employed to serve establishment in all its varieties — state, social, cultural. This game of abusing Nazrul was pursued pervasively to give him an image of being 'all that he was not' — all that he fought against with his pen, with his songs, with his life. But despite it all, Nazrul stands before us in all his glories that he truly was.

The incontrovertible cardinal points of his life and work were anti-colonialism to the point of courting incarceration, unrelenting fighter for the cause of justice for the downtrodden, the never-tiring minstrel of the oneness of our heritage, the undying romantic pining for love, more love, the musical genius who fashioned more than five thousand charming songs evocative of the best sentiments come down from the ages...

We needed Nazrul for a national renewal at this critical juncture — more than any, — exactly for the above achievements. But not the Nazrul mutilated and motivatedly projected on the electronic media and autocratic establishment inspired meetings and seminars. Long live Dukhu Mia, our dear eternally rebellious Nazrul.

A Secret Agenda for the 'New South Africa'

by Len Clark

South Africa is seeking international financial support as a reward for its much-publicised abolition of apartheid policy. But the policy rests on some very questionable claims. The plans of President de Klerk allow the very cornerstone of apartheid to remain in place.

TEN years ago, the white South African government was engaged in an expensive, worldwide lobbying campaign for investment. The grounds for it were that 'apartheid is dying and dead' and that the funds so received would be used to help black housing, wages and human rights, ensuring peace and prosperity.

But investors who responded to such pleas, later found that every dollar they invested then in South Africa, became worth only 30 cents.

In April this year, capitalising on world acclaim for his release of Nelson Mandela and promises of the early and total abolition of apartheid, South Africa's President F.W. de Klerk visited Britain, Denmark, Denmark and Ireland, with much the same story — investment and a little more patience would indeed see the end of apartheid. And the South African President pointed to his speech of February 1, 1991, which promised just that.

However, the full text of that speech reveals a significant omission. There are promises to repeal apartheid's Group Areas Act, Land Acts and Population Registration Act. But there is no such stated intention to abolish South Africa's black 'homelands'.

These were created under white legislation quite separate from the Land Acts, and they currently ensure, per person, 35 times more land and share of mineral wealth for a white, than for a black.

It is a racial disproportion which President de Klerk himself has made clear will be the basis for the 'new South Africa,' and it is based on historical fallacies.

There has been no hint of this 35:1 bias in his speeches and recent interviews. The fact that South Africa's own archaeologists (Mason, Maggs, Davenport etc) long ago proved the official black 'homelands' to be based on major apartheid myths, and that the true black homelands encompass almost the whole of the Transvaal, Orange Free State and Natal (with most of South Africa's gold and nearly all its coal), President de Klerk also never mentions.

Nor does he mention the

embarrassing fact that for years, his own Information Department has assured the world that 'the land the blacks' forbears settled' remains theirs, 'and its resources are exploited exclusively for the blacks' benefit.' (The Case for Separate Development, Pretoria, page 27).

Apartheid's white-supremacist version of South African realities has even included the extraordinary claim — the very opposite of the truth — that 'more land was taken away from white people and given to black people than the other way around.' Which is exactly what de Klerk's Minister of Education stated on March 12, 1991, in attempting to explain why, in the new, 'non-racial' South

Africa blacks made poor by apartheid would be expected to buy back their own land from whites made rich by apartheid.

Two more hidden facts round out the picture of promises-versus-reality. Pretoria has insisted for years that the black 'homelands' have nothing to do with apartheid, and are instead an example of its abolition. Yet the above official publication and many others (e.g., This is South Africa and South African Quiz) state specifically that the black 'homelands' are the local point of the whole apartheid policy.

And, worrying news for such as the International Olympics Committee — un-abolished white laws such as the Bantu Homelands

Citizenship Act No. 26 of 1970 have stripped millions of South Africans in 'homelands' such as Bophuthatswana of their South African citizenship (without their consent), thus turning them into aliens racially barred from South African sport (cf., Hitler's Reich Citizenship Act which similarly ensured the absence of Jewish Germans from the Berlin 1936 Olympic Games although in that case, all Jew were excluded).

So it is indeed clear that until Pretoria totally abolishes its alleged 'homeland' policy, the very keystone of apartheid remains firmly in place. This fact suggests that those nations — especially Britain — which are now engaged in dismantling sanctions against South Africa have jumped the gun.

Yet there are further strong reasons for doubting Pretoria's promises — quite apart from all those enumerated recently by Nelson Mandela.

For instance, President de Klerk has made clear that his plans to abolish apartheid in education will allow white parents to block the admission of black and white schools.

His abolition of 'whites only' residential areas, he has said, will contain a clause for the 'protection of communities' — which is precisely what current legislation ensures for the white minority.

And he has admitted, in his February 1, 1991 speech, that apartheid's Population Registration Act will only be 'abolished' by preserving 'temporary transitional measures' applying to almost all South Africans. Only the newborn will escape racial classification. The rest remain classified.

Equally significant was de Klerk's firm statement, on British television in the mid-1990s, that he would never introduce anti-racism laws — thus still enabling whites, on various pretexts, to continue to exclude blacks from their suburbs, holiday resorts, sports clubs and schools.

And finally, in a major interview given just before he left Britain in late April this year, de Klerk made some quite revealing remarks.

He referred to apartheid throughout by apartheid's own (highly misleading) propaganda term, 'separate development.' He claim that in 1986 this changed to 'power-sharing' with the blacks — which would be news to them. He even stated that 'in essence, there is nothing wrong' with the 'homelands' policy; which allocates to whites, per person, 35 times more land and mineral wealth than to blacks, and is based on huge historical untruths.

In addition, he said that since 1961, his ruling Afrikaner National Party had

'tried to represent values rather than cultures.' What those values might be can be glimpsed in the existence, for at least 14 years after 1961, of the Parts Detective Corps, an official all-Afrikaner child police force of boys as young as 12 carrying ID cards signed by South Africa's Police Commissioner.

They were encouraged to go on police raids against blacks in police cars, arrest adult blacks and be paid for it. All this and more was openly admitted in Patry's, the magazine running the child police force, which was published by Voortrekker Press, official publishing house of the ruling Afrikaner National Party. And for part of that time, de Klerk was actually a member of the government which set up and ran these racist child police.

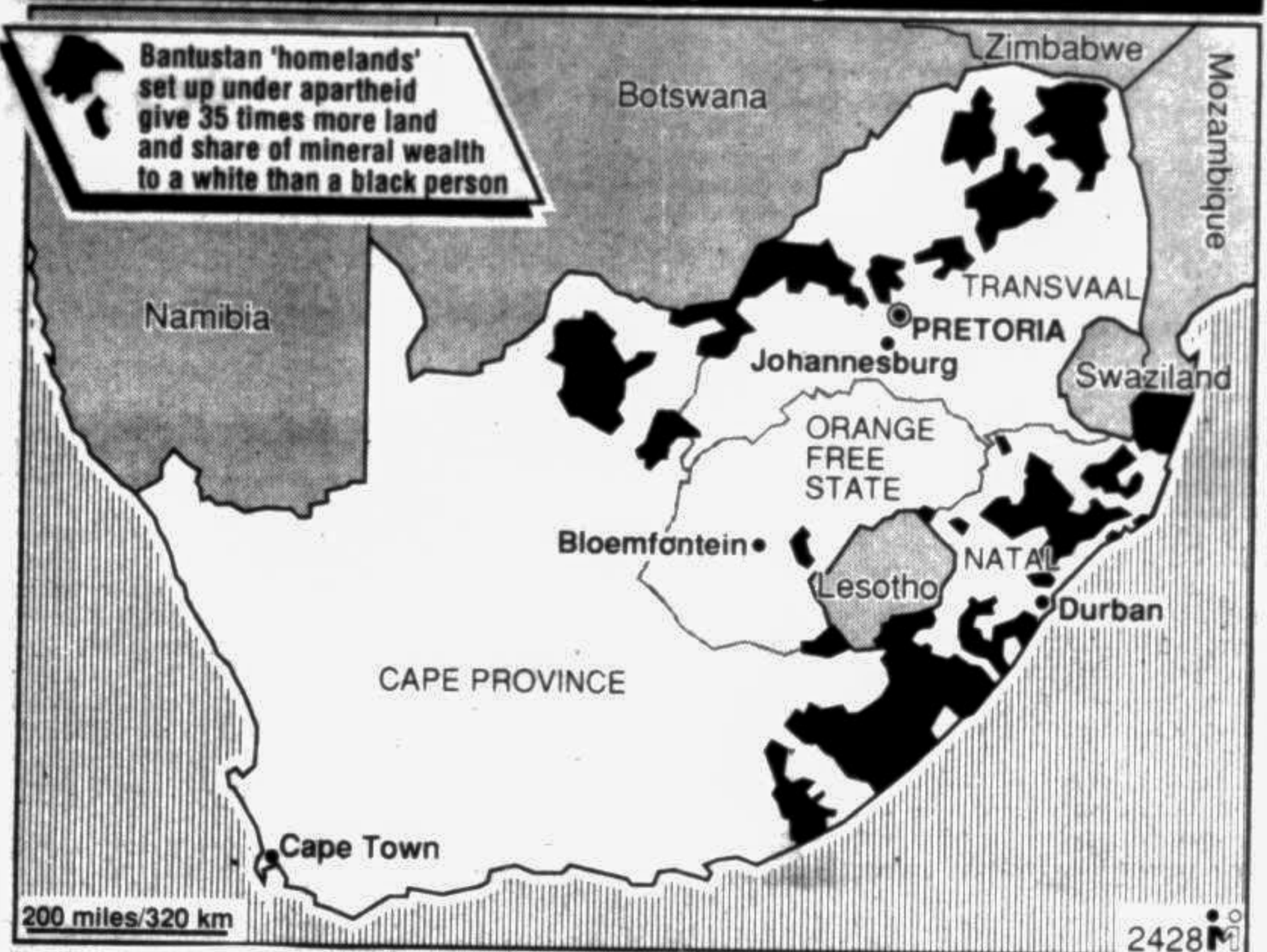
Add such Afrikaner Nationalist sanitising of its behaviour while in power, to its massive falsification of early history to deprive blacks of their land, and its wholesale suppression of the foetus of many of its leaders pro-Nazi high treason, subversion and sabotage in World War II, including armed attempts to overthrow its pro-Allied Smuts government by force.

Then add other, recent facts: in 1965 these same people were enticing foreign investment with claims of a 300 per cent national income increase in only eight years; when the true figure was but 70 per cent. In the mid-1970s they spent millions publicising the claim that blacks were 'sharing in South African prosperity to the full.' Yet on February 21 1975, financial sources showed that while whites shared R3 billion per year from real estate transactions alone, apartheid ensured that black's income from that source was nil.

Yet still, Mr de Klerk's government claims that the cure for apartheid is more investment, and more trust in South Africa's white government. — GEMINI NEWS

LEN CLARK is a writer on human rights issues whose books and articles have been published on both sides of the Atlantic.

South Africa: slippery reforms



Bantustan 'homelands' set up under apartheid give 35 times more land and share of mineral wealth to a white than a black person

THE United Nations is taking an openly critical view of developing countries that keep complaining they are far too poor to finance their human development needs.

Given the choice between food and firepower, says the United Nations, most Third World nations are opting for guns over butter.

At least three New York-based agencies — the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) — are convinced that most developing nations have the necessary resources to give high priority to human concerns in their national budgets.

But what they lack, say the three agencies, is the political commitment to spend more on basic education, primary health care, family planning, child welfare, social security and the environment.

The UNDP, which is taking the lead role in trying to prod developing nations into action, says that one way of resolving the problem is to recast budgetary priorities in favour of human development.

In an interview with IPS, the UNDP's chief of media relations Peter Gall said the concept of human development will be woven into practically all of UNDP programming in the 1990's.

The UNDP will be asking some pointed questions at countries seeking assistance from the world's largest multilateral grant development assistance agency said Gall.

Is your military spending on

United Nations

Skewed Third World Priorities

Thalif Deen writes from New York

the increase? Are you spending more on defense and less on health, education and housing?

If you are already focusing on human needs, are you spending more on primary education? Or does a high percentage of your budget go to university education which favours the rich and the upper

aid go to education and health — or into arms, corruption and subsidies for the wealthy.

Discussing goals and strategies for the 1990's, Dr Nafis Sadik, executive director of the UNFPA, says she would like to emphasize the need to give utmost priority to the

children the world over in the 1990's would cost about US\$20 billion a year.

Some of the money, he says, could come from the restructuring of present spending not only in favour of the social sector but also within the social sector.

Unicef's annual state of the Children report for 1991 says that developing nations as a whole are spending more on the military than on education and health combined.

Over 25 per cent of all present government expenditures in developing countries are devoted to three sectors: the military, inefficient, state-con-

trolled companies and government subsidies, the report says.

Even within the social sector, the report says, there are hospitals in developing countries which reach at most 15 per cent to 20 per cent of the population but claim 80 per cent of the country's health budget.

In education, more than half of the government spending is often earmarked to secondary and higher education for the minority — and the beneficiaries are usually from higher-income families. — IPS

The United Nations says developing countries would be capable of meeting human development needs if they stopped channeling their resources to arms, corruption and subsidies for the wealthy.

middle classes at the expense of children at the lower end of the economic scale?

In its first annual Human Development Report released last year, UNDP pointed out the among the developing countries with the highest share of military expenditures were some of the world's poorest and least developed.

The eight countries singled out for criticism were Angola, Burundi, Sudan, China, Burma, Uganda, Yemen and Zaire.

The UNDP's second Human Development report, due to be released May 22, will take an even more critical view of countries that continue to give less priority to human development.

The report is expected to stress that political will, not finance, determines whether national budgets and foreign

human side of development.

"We need a common and integrated approach based on the interdependence of sectors and nations. Such an approach must argue strongly for equal attention to both social and economic aspects of the development equation," she says.

A total of nine billion dollars a year would be needed for core population activities by the end of this century, says Sadik.

But this is insignificant, she points out, in comparison with other expenditures, such as global military spending, which the United Nations estimates at over US\$1.3 trillion annually.

Unicef Executive director James P. Grant says that meeting the goals set out for protecting the lives and growth of

OPINION

WB Conditions — Self-Contradictory

The World Bank's 'Proposed ISC-2 Action Plan and Tranche Condition' which includes removal of import restrictions ruins the government's desperate attempt to recover past industrial loans in order to increase and recycle the local money supply. In fact with the removal of import restrictions more industrial units will close down and add heavily to the defaulters list, leading to no possibility of the loan recovery.

Following accumulation of defaulters will even lead to closure of banks, create acute shortage of money supply, hamper production of even the self-financed industries as the entire economic cycle will be left dry of capital, leading to mass unemployment within the present working force as most of our industries will totally shut-down sparing Bangladesh forever of the possibility to be self-reliant. A scenario horrifying in the face of an agricultural sector prone to frequent natural calamities like cyclone, flood and drought.

The removal of import restrictions will even make the Aided projects un-feasible. In the Energy sector for example, the World Bank confirms that the Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB) has a system loss of about 100 million dollar per annum, where a brief study shows that out of about 608,050 pieces of Single Phase Electric Meters imported by the PDB from 1972 till 1988, 469,050 pieces are lying defective. A KOPEC Korea — Power Engineering Company field survey report concluded on 11th January, 1988 under the sponsorship of Department of Technical Cooperation for Development, UN confirms in Bangladesh instance of 80% imported Single Phase Electric Meters as defective. The report further confirms "so many types of meters hamper meter engineers and technicians in familiarizing themselves with them. This

desperate situation is one of the most important and direct causes for high energy losses." Due to lack of spare-parts the KOPEC report adds, "It is common practice to use two, three and sometimes more meters to produce a single serviceable meter". While the above reports are available with the World Bank Resident Mission in Bangladesh and while the above problems are being resolved satisfactorily by the supply of locally produced single phase meters available in huge quantity and of good quality with performance guaranteed, it is not understood why the World Bank who has advised BPDB to reduce their system-loss on the one hand has specified on the other to remove the import restriction on Electric Meter.

Specially when under the 'Open Market System' consumers are directly purchasing the local meter tested, certified and sealed by the Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution, while the country's foreign exchange is being saved, the unprecedented system-loss of BPDB is also being checked. The 'Open Market System' along with local mobilisation of fund has established in Bangladesh that industrialisation can effectively help reach self-reliance and that only by proper utilisation of all our local resources our domestic problems can be resolved, all the efforts of which will be throttled if the ban on the import of electric meter is removed as specified unfortunately by the World Bank.

Similarly while our Garment Industry provides the required incentive for our fabric, clothing and yarn industry to grow, while our Agricultural sector demands our pumps, pipe, sugar and salt industry to be established, the World Bank has ironically also specified these items' import restriction to be removed along with other general items'. Significantly the so-called tariff protection to

be provided to local industry is not workable as in imports under Project Aid through International Competitive Bidding (ICB) only 15% price benefit is given to local participants, where foreign bidders are frequently found to have dumped their price by 30-50%.

The Open Market economy being preached by the World Bank to Bangladesh is a myth as exporter of garments, terry-towels etc. face quota restrictions when they are to export. The New York Times in its article on 15th October, 1990 'Stop Funding The World Bank and IMF Now' points out, "the fault lies with the operating attitudes of the bankers. They follow models of Western modes of development that having nothing to do with local realities or the wishes of the people on land".

It concludes by saying, "The bank itself becomes a colonial power dictating what is produced, what is built and how governments should behave towards their people. When a country accepts a loan from these 'altruistic' bankers, it gives up most of its sovereignty."

While all the industrial units in the Public and Private sectors have vehemently opposed the World Bank's conditions particularly on decontrolling import restrictions, the newly elected people's party in the Government giving due respect to democracy and our economic independence should look for loans from international money markets. After all the World Bank project aid loan at the rate of 7.65% interest per annum to Bangladesh and at the cost of losing our economic independence is not a small premium compared to international loans recently availed at 6.5% interest.

Md. Najmul Islam

The author is an industrialist and a local manufacturer of electrical meters

To the Editor...

Labour for the Gulf

Sir, Congratulations on the excellent editorial you published on 'Labour for the Gulf,' which appeared in the May 7 issue of The Daily Star.

You know, I am sure, that the plight of migrant workers in the Gulf has aroused international concern. Like you, the American Federation of Labour and Congress of Industrial Organizations believe that their problems can not be handled bilaterally (between Kuwait and Bangladesh, for example) but must be handled multilaterally as a top agenda item for the International Labour Organization.

In fact, this March AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland wrote the Director General of the ILO saying that the problem demands an 'extraordinary initiative,' one that cannot be handled on a bilateral basis. Your editorial confirms a point that President Kirkland made in his letter:

"Though anxious for a resumption of remittances from workers in the Gulf, countries such as Bangladesh and the Philippines, which have be-

come more democratic, may now also be more concerned about getting minimal protection for their migrant workers."

The letter went on to suggest that one solution would be to "insert better guarantees into the individual and group contracts signed with Middle East contractors."

I will be a member of the U.S. delegation to the International Labour Conference in June, as deputy worker delegate, with Jim Baker as worker delegate. While in Geneva Mr. Baker and I will be glad to consult with the Bangladesh delegation and other Asian delegations on this subject. We will also stand ready to help in any way possible to put an end to the discrimination that you described so well when you wrote: "Many of our nationals in the Gulf have had to put up with treatment that would not have been acceptable to people from economically more advanced countries."

Charles D. Gray
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Gold smuggling case

Sir, It is understood that the new government has decided to re-open the last year's sensational gold smuggling case. According to a press report, the higher authorities have directed the Additional Inspector General of Police (CID) to re-investigate into the gold case in which two foreign nationals were arrested on the spot on July 17, 1989 from Zia International Airport with one maund of gold. Some local officials and VIPs were also involved in this case. The previous government had hushed up the sensational gold haul case.

We sincerely hope that facts will be revealed and real culprits will be apprehended through the re-investigation. We would suggest the government to award capital punishment to those who will be found guilty in the smuggling case.

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