Say 'Why not Me?' and Split!

HERE is a story that during the Non-aligned summit in Algiers in 1973. General Yakubu Gowon of Nigeria had asked Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman if it was really necessary to create Bangladesh.

"Why do you have three countries in India? Why not one?" Gowon had asked Bangabandhu, according to the

have turned the table on Gowon and asked back, "Why do you have 47 countries in Africa? Why not one Africa?"

The Nigerian general, who only a few years back had bloodily put down the liberation movement in Biafra, took the point.

Contrary to current wisdom, the habit of bickering and splitting is not unique to the Indian subcontinent, as the above story illustrates, though the British always thought the Bengalees were particularly susceptible to it. They ascribed this tendency to the "Why not me?" syndrome with which Bengalees were thought to be seriously afflicted.

The British stumbled across a veritable epidemic of "Why not me?" in the late 18th and money early 19th centuries when the British army in India still recruited Bengalees. The descendants of Seraj-ud Dowla and predecessors of Subhas Chandra Bose were found to be pretty poor when it came to taking orders.

instead? A whole nation of expulsions followed permanently in a mood with the same party name. themselves and anybody else who came to boss them about, but never quite managing to say the opposite is true? That become the boss themselves, it is so, because what we have

Bickering is a favourite pastime for a Bengalee. He is wonderful when it comes to damning his nextdoor neighbour, from pouring scorn on his son's chances at the university to setting fire to his property. The Bengalees bickered until the country itself was split into two; then when the Puniabis came and tried to be the boss around here, their stroppiness In reply. Mujib was said to reached a height not seen 1857. With the foreigners gone, the bickering has turned inwards and "Why not me?" has spread like wildfire.

No one and nothing is safe from the syndrome, from neighbourhood sporting clubs to major political parties. Even the army, supposedly bastion of organised and enforced discipline, goes through periodic attacks of the

version of democracy? The real stuff, in fact? Individualism at its most unrefined? Why not me, to be precise.

Every party seems to have more "leaders" than members. But since there can only be one president and one general secretary per party, it becomes necessary to set up your own combo in order to be the leader. Clearly, it is thought much better to be a shark in an aquarium than a minnow in an ocean. Everyone is so sure of his leadership potential and popular appeal, that he finds it well nigh impossible to imagine anybody else being the

"Why not me?" he asks party", the leader said. with a vengeance and splits. But the trouble is that the faction he takes with him may well contain an aspirant shark

Sabir Mustafa

national leaders, sepoys rebel against commissioned officers, colonels suffer from acute envy while major-generals mint proliferate faster than nuclear

But it is in the political arena that Why not me? reigns supreme. Why do political parties split? Why are there so many of them anyway?

Some blame it on the lack of any democratic tradition or culture. Parties, particularly But it wasn't so much that those most vociferous in they minded taking orders demanding democracy, are from the alien Brits; the anything but democratic in Bengalees did not have much affairs, so the arguement runs disliked the idea of orders in by the thousand and one other turn to for an interview!" principle. Certainly not. Its arguements chasing it). just that they would much Bickerings don't lead to rather give the orders, than be votings and acceptance of logic are epoch-making ordered: Why should he give majority decisions, but to the orders? Why not me factional dog-fights and who says the BBC does not aspirant Chiefs, but precious counter-expulsions, with two A people or more factions hanging on to

But how about those who leading to greater bouts of is an undiluted, uncontrolled

plague - junior officers kill or two as well, ready to engage in an ideological dispute whenever the need arises. And aquariums continue o weapons in South and West debacle. Asia put together.

> There was a story doing the rounds during the anti-Ershad mass movement in 1987 that a "leader" had formed a political party for reasons quite explicitly other than any grave. ideological difference.

"When Ershad has thrown general impression was that their handling of internal all the leaders into jail", the leader had reportedly time or patience for orders of (in Bangladesh every explained to baffled any sort, from any quarters. arguement has to run, or it is inquisitors, "I will be the only Again, it's not that they liable to be stamped to death one left whom the BBC can

On such earth-shattering

political decisions taken. And by have any bearing on the politics of this country? But unfortunately, the British Broadcasting Corporation never did get around to interview the man, thus destroying the raison d'etre of him being the leader of a party. Inexplicably, his party split

too. Rather less inexplicably, neither faction managed to win a seat at the February polls.

I once heard a joke which sounded suspiciously like a true story, and went something like this: leader of a new party, during his maiden interview to the press, revealed he was the president, secretary general as well as the treasurer of his

"Is there nobody else in your executive committee?" asked a reporter.

"None at all", the leader emphatically replied. "How about members?" the reporter persisted.

"Oh no, no members in my "Well", sighed disappointed newsman, "at least your party won't split".

"You never know", said the thoughtful leader, "I might end up disagreeing with myself!"

He probably failed to come any seat-sharing arrangement with himself during the elections, leading to a wholly unnecessary

Left-wing parties are, of course, renowned throughout the world for their splitting habit, and also their incredible ability to make every split look the result of some profound ideological dispute. If a communist has never been expelled from the party or a (Marxist-Leninist) faction of it, for revisionism, ultra-left adventurism. Bonapartism, Stalinism, Maoism, middleclass deviationism or any one of a thousand other unspeakable isms, then he has never really been a communist. anymore.

Not surprisingly, a Bengalee finds left-wing politics quite leaders of the National fascinating, since it allows him to split right, left and centre without so much as batting an eyelid. Only the dedicated follower can keep track of all the JSDs and BSDs of this world. But one thing is pretty NDP to split in the first place. clear: they all originally split from the centre, gravitated towards the left and simply

kept on splitting. Why not me? has had a field day, but the syndrome has never been given the credit it deserves. But the right-wing elements

have not done too badly either. The once-mighty Muslim League split into four (or was it three?), then re-united in a wonderful display of brotherly spirit, only to discover nobody was taking them seriously

Recently, the two founder-Democratic Party each claimed that the other had never belonged to his party! Did that mean a split? Difficult to say, since it is not entirely clear if there was any animal called

But where the right hasn't split, it has proliferated. The

standard-bearers of ultranationalism - some call it fascism - are many, but they are really splinters of something which they haven't quite managed to identify yet. When they do, they'd split from it again without a · moment's hesitation.

THE FACELESS PEDDLER: A surreptitious salesman hiding his face from the camera while displaying his prize

merchandise - wild geese - for sale in defiance of law that prohibits trading of wild birds. -Star Photo by Enamul Haque.

Why not me? works very well at the highest level of state machinery as well. manifesting itself in various other ways (it's not possible to split the state, because then you'd really be asking for

are two ways of making sure you too enjoy all the trappings of state power just as the other those foreigners very nearly fellow before you did. After all, while the other fellow was doing it, you were denouncing other fellow, wasn't it? So

it as symptoms of autocracy on why not you too?! the one hand, but on the instead?!"

So, when you get your chance, you simply follow the textbook: TV cameras whirr as you stand regally, while humble citizens hand you cheques that could easily have been deposited in a bank account: you wheel out ministers and dignitaries and get them to line-up at the airport whenever you and your ever-increasing entourage leave on one of your foreign Imitation and duplication trips; then you make sure TV puts out a special programme on your trip which shows how fell off their chairs by your charm. It was all done by the

Then there was the great other, you were secretly cyclone. All the disasterfuming, "Why not me management mechanism were in place, but they were all in_ somebody else's name president's this, president's that. So all of them had to duplicated, relief fund, relief godown, the lot. After all, why should it be him? Why not me? Never mind that precious days, weeks went by before the clones could begin to operate as efficiently as their originals. that was never the point

> But what is the point? The point is simply me - from the captaincy of the neighbourhood cricket team to the leadership of the state. it has to be me. Or I will simply go and split (failing that,

of existing stock. However,

these should be done under

strict and enforceable rules

intensification of existing

housing and new multiple te-

nancy housing should be pro-

vided in the form of interest

rate subsidies for loans taken

from private sector financial

away from providing large

scale loans to private housing

developments, but should en-

courage mixed income housing

developments through other

Government should stay

· Financial incentives for

and regulations.

institutions.

HE festive spirit is every inch a homebody. Halloween is never quite as thrilling transplanted to Indonesia, and Durga Puja somehow loses a touch of life when celebrated in Copenhagen. Yet expatriates, far from home and the special joy of shared holidays, persist in re-creating the sounds and smells and soul of their native festivals. The motives of their to prevent yourself from bursting into tears as you imagine your reunited family gathered round the Thanksgiving turkey while you are manning the consulate in Kabul. Another is to retain your identity amid the strains of living in a foreign culture : to leaf through the Gitabitan on the 21st of February because in Canberra you don't speak Bengali the other 364 days of the year. An equally compelling motivation is to instill in your children a sense of where they came from : to bring out the Beautolais and sing La Marseillaise every year on Bastille Day for your 12-year-old Tokyo-

Expatriate Eid

born-and-bred son.

obliged to internalize their lady of the house does not festivals, to confine their cele- work, there may be something brations to the four walls of a little more elaborate on the centres. The day is yet to come generally prohibited in Westwhen figures of Ganesh are carried down the Mall and immersed in the Potomac. For Bengali Muslims abroad, Eidul-Azha is publicly imperceptible, even less celebrated Eidul-Fitr. More often than not, **Qurbani** Eid passes unnoticed among school, work, and the general hectic tempo of life. Or maybe someone will flip through the calendar they brought back from their last home leave and discover the approaching day. Phone calls will emanate from the house. "Did you know the day after tomorrow's Eid?" Office life goes on, and the children go to school as usual. At the most,

nent shelter. About 25% or 1

million people were living in

either slums or on the streets.

Currently, the City is estimated

to be growing at about 6% to

6.5%. Even if we consider a

reduced growth rate of 4.5%

the population of Dhaka would

rise to about 9 million people

by the year 2000 A D.

However, we are hardly build-

ing permanent housing any-

where close to the rate of pop-

ulation growth. In 15 years,

even if we built at the rate of

15000 dwelling units per year

that would account for only

225,000 dwelling units. This

under a household size of 6

people could provide perma-

nent shelter for only

1,350,000 people. However,

the population will have in-

creased by 5 million (from 4

million to 9 million). This

would leave out 3.65 million

people without any permanent

shelters. Added to that will be

the previous one million. By

the year 2000 AD over 4.5 mil-

lion people in Dhaka could be

living without any permanent

shelters or daily migrants. The

availability of open land is de-

creasing rapidly in Dhaka'

proper. Without available open

spaces there would be less

scope for physical expansions

of slum settlements. As a result

growing number and propor-

tion of the population would be

what can be classed as street

dwellers or daily workers from

neighbouring rural or semi-ru-

ral areas. This is because the

sweetmeats will be ready for Expatriates world-wide are the unexpected guest. If the their homes or community table. Since actual slaughter is ern countries. Bengalis turn their attention to other, less bloody aspects of the day. Children are told the story of sacrifice, and about how Eid is celebrated back home. Excitement centres around the unusual frequency of friends dropping in, the chatter, and maybe some music.

Many Bengali Muslims have benefited in surprising ways from their expatriate condition physical and emotional distance has enabled them to critically examine their relationship with Islam. For some, this analysis has brought them closer to their faith, to a more mature understanding of

dwelling residents will have

dropped to less than 50%

from 75% in 1985. A full 50%

of the daily resident population

without any permanent form of

housing. This would be an

alarming situation to say the

least. The situation is not ex-

pected to get any better there-

after as the chart shows. What

will be the nature of urban

character of Dhaka where

more that half the population

will not have any decent place

Roads, Traffic, Mass

Transportation

and Mobility

has been growing geographi-

cally, the network of roads and

the transportation system has

been progressively falling be-

hind. Since the liberation the

increase in the expansion of

road network and public mode

for mass transportation has

been minimal compared to the

increase in total volume of

people and the traffic to be

moved. Further, in the absence

of a well developed mass

transportation and transit sys-

tem private rickshaws have lit-

erally taken over the city

streets. At the same time with

the increase in some amount

of private automobiles, buses,

and commercial and industrial

trucks the streets and the

roads of Dhaka have become

under the above heading?

Where do you start a section

Ever since the city of Dhaka

issues they had once accepted size the spirit of sacrifice that Eid commemorates, and pay homage to that through some real sacrifice, not of another living being bought specially for that purpose, but by giving up something, anything, dear For those who have a

the underlying symbolisms in

prayers are an eye-opener. Muslims of all races and na tionalities, each in his native dress, crowd the floors. The sight of so many, so varied in language, culture, colour, and traditions, assembled under one roof and bowing to pray in unison, is a breath-taking one. Ethiopians and Americans. Swedes and Thais, Arabs and Bengalis are for that moment of prayer united, a scene to make even the most vehement of skeptics believe in Muslim brotherhood. And perhaps the reassurance and reaffirmation of that bone, in the midst of conflicts around the world, are what spur the expatriate on to celebrate Eid, even in exile.

rickshaw is virtually environ-

mentally non polluting, and

provide for the urban employ-

ment of more than two hun-

dred the thousand people, its

down side can not be ignored.

In the absence of development

of significant new road net-

work, and mass transit; the

rickshaws of Dhaka are practi-

cally checking the major as

well as other roads. The re-

sults are manyfold. While the

rickshaws are providing a basic

transportation to many, the to-

tal traffic is slowed to a crawl.

and moves mostly at speed of

rickshaws in traffic jam. The

whole traffic including the in-

dustrial and public buses and

private buses mostly have to

move at the speed of rick-

shaws in the rush hours and on

major arterial roads. Mobility

both for the public and the in-

dustrial and the service sector

are hostages to inadequate

road network and roads

crowded with rickshaws. It is a

daily effort to move from any

part of the city to another part

some distances away. If this is

the situation today, what kind

situation can we expect when

the population doubles or

triples under twenty years, as

built up and the existing roads

have taken up most of the ur-

ban areas, there is not much

room for new roads in the ex-

isting area without major

surgery. We have to think about

the future. Otherwise, in not

Since the existing urban

it shall?

too distant a future urban mobility will be a major headache. blindly. These Bengalis empha- Let us start to think in some positive direction.

> 1. Regardless of arban growth, development and intensification of the land use, we have to create a network and hierarchy of roads and

2. In the road network sysmosque to go to, the Eid tem, a system of arterial roads in the population growth and and urban highway and corridors should be created that will serve basically mass transit and transportation, like buses, industrial and service transports like trucks and may be public auto carriers like taxis. and auto rickshaws. These could link far flung parts of the city like Savar to Narayanganj, Tongi to Motifheel and Savar to Tongi. There will have to be some urban bypass roads avoiding the heavily built up areas. Slow moving and private vehicles should not be allowed on these roads.

3. A secondary system of ex-

4. The lower rung of major

5. The lowest rung are the neighbourhood roads which should allow only private vehicles, taxis, rickshaws and municipal service vehicles.

Aside from the above which will need to be developed through a comprehensive and detailed planning and development process a most important element in the movement of massive number of people is a fully developed mass transit system unencumbered by the surface traffic. Almost every major western city has one such system or more. I am referring to either an under ground transit, or a surface rail for the fast moving of large volume of people from one end of the city to another. These are usually linked at various intermediate points by surface transportation system. True, an underground system is extremely capital intensive and technically difficult to achieve. But when you consider it benefits to the urban scene there can be little other option for large megalopolises. It is the only system capable of moving extremely large volume of people unencumbered by the surface traffic, and urban build ups. Since it is not going to be cheap, but its requirement essential to the mobility to

Potential Intervention Scenario for the Future

DHAKA

isting and new road network should be created which would allow all motorised vehicles

roads should allow all type of vehicles with the exception of heavy industrial traffic like

people the planning for it should start without delay.

To this stage we have discussed at some length an

emerging scenario on various sectors. The combination of the worst of all scenario is a picture of disaster waiting to happen. The question is, is it possible to change or moderate the scenario ? I believe that with out efforts disaster will happen. However, with maximum efforts the situation can be moderated and made livable until a stability reaches the rural migration is abated. It may take twenty, thirty, or even forty years but things can be made better with coordinated policy, implementation and total efforts. Let us review them sector by sector briefly before an overall prediction is

> Population Growth and Urban Expansion

While urban population growth is related to number of other complex issues, with out

residential uses. Housing and Urban Development · Because urban influx of rural migrants will continue for the forceable future, and because adequate number of low income housing and shelters can not be built, provisions must be made to provide basic services like, clean tap water, power, roads and edu-

intensively in the form

mixed use high density devel-

opments of commercial and

 Allocation of land for single family developments should stop.

cation must be provided to

these unauthorised settle

 All future residential developments whether in the private or public domain should be development as medium to high density developments.

. To avoid ghettoisation of

incentives · For publically developed multiple housing, long term rent to purchase schemes should be introduced · Various forms of cooperative housing should be developed, one in which members of housing cooperatives would jointly own a project. Other innovative forms of housing and financing for low and moderate income housing should be continually explored.

Roads, Traffic, Transportation and Mobility · While the cycle rickshaw

is a major part of transportation and traffic in Dhaka at present, in the future in a city two, three times larger there has to be alternate and better methods of moving goods and

Long term planning and development of an urban mass rapid transit system preferably underground is a must for the survival of the city.

· To move goods and services as well as surface masses, creation of major arterial roads that would restrict slower moving vehicles should also be a priority.

· A minimum standard should be set, narrower than which roads should never be built. Right now many neighbourhood roads are only 12 feet wide. This kinds of planning and construction should never be allowed.

The understanding of the need to preserve Ecology (the balance in nature) and to reduce environmental pollution is much a matter of public education. In any future planning and policy developments, a set of questions should always asked. How much and in what ways the new plans and policies effect the urban environment and can there be a better plan and policies to protect the environment and the peo-

presented at a Seminar organised by Canada Bangladesh Forum, at the Carleton University, Canada, recently. The author who is currently a resident of Ottawa and is working as a Senior Architect with a major firm was Deputy Chief of Physical Planning and Housing, Planning Commission, Bangladesh.)

(Abridged from a paper

PROJECTED POPULATION & HOUSING QUALITY HISTORICAL PROJECTED TTTT PERMIEN STREET particular social or economic

going in to details, efforts should continue to · First reduce the rate of

> and incentives to reduce family Secondly, diversify employments and industries to other parts of the country so that there may be better options elsewhere as well perception of available employ-

urban growth through popula-

tion control through education

ment in Dhaka is minimised. Needless urban expansion in to surrounding rural areas is totally discouraged as official policy.

 Existing urban land should used in much more

class these developments should always be of mixed tenancy. These should be part of zoning regulation regarding the development of the land. Public housing policy must shift to provide large

scale low to medium income

housing mixed in with private upper income projects to avoid ghettoisation. Proper guidelines must be developed for the private

sector high density developments. Intensification of existing

housing and land use should continue as a policy, encouraging extensions and rebuilding

DHAKA: 2000 AND BEYOND (From preceding page) practically checked shelters available would be Dhaka was estimated to be about 4 million. Of this total By some estimates at this woefully inadequate for the inhousing begin to coexist more time there are over one huncrease in the projected popuapproximately 75% or about 3 dred thousand rickshaws in lation. By then (2000 A D) the million people were thought the city of Dhaka. While, the to have some form of permaproportion of permanent type

Question can be raised as to what will be the impact of this urban land expansion on the overall urban environment and how to moderate its growth. What are its implications on the dwindling surrounding rural land and the land values. There is a lot of work that is to be done in these areas. But we need a complete change in planning and development attitude from the current ones.

and more.

Housing and Urban Development

After the liberation of Bangladesh (1971) there was a large influx of rural migrants to the Dhaka city. At the time, in the Planning Commission where I had recently joined, we estimated that approximately 250,000 people were urban squatters and slum dwellers of the City's total population of 1.7 million approximately (15% of the total population). Chart-4 shows, annualized growth rate of 4.5%. It charts an 1.5% birth rate and a 3.0% rural immigration. It also shows three broad category of habitational conditions, i.e permanent type of housing, slum dwellers and shelterless street dwellers (and daily migrant workers which is not indicated). While the ratio of slum dwellers to the shelterless street dwellers projected may be debatable, the magnitude of changes in the ratio of permanent type housing to the other two kinds is interesting to note.

In 1985 the population of