

Dhaka, Saturday, July 6, 1991

Illegal Immigrants

The move by the Malaysian authorities to deport hundreds of illegal workers from neighbouring countries at a time when the country's private sector suffers from acute labour shortage, especially in plantations, underlines a serious anomalous situation in the employment market of this resourceful Southeast Asian nation. Any form of deportation, either of individuals or a group of people, causes inevitable human suffering. Unfortunately, judging by agency press reports from Kuala Lumpur, the Malaysian drive against the so-called illegal workers from Indonesia has been stepped up like a police operation, without perhaps due attention being paid to human considerations. For instance, in one recent incident, a boat, carrying 135 unwanted immigrants back to Indonesia, collided with a tanker in the Straits of Malacca, leaving only 10 survivors. On the face of it, one cannot blame the authorities in Kuala Lumpur for this tragedy. However, it is important for Malaysians to ensure that a deportation, when unavoidable, is carried out in an orderly manner, with minimum risks of accidents.

As expected, there are differences of views between the private sector and government officials over the size of the labour shortage in Malaysia as well as on the number of illegal workers who have found jobs in plantations. According to the Malaysian Trade Union Congress, there may be as many as one million illegal immigrants, against the country's own workforce of 7.2 million, mainly from Indonesia but also from the Philippines, Thailand, India, Burma and Bangladesh. However, official estimates put the figure at 350,000. Now, the private sector has made a case for letting in more foreign workers, in addition to the one million illegal ones said to be already inside the country.

It would be nice if Malaysia would open the door wide open to workers from other Asian countries, including Bangladesh, a move that would reduce its own labour shortage and help others in tackling their unemployment problem. But it is easier said than done. For one thing, due to similarities in their physical features, workers from other Southeast Asian countries, or even from Bangladesh, may just merge into the local population, regardless of their terms of employment. Again, paradoxically enough, Malaysia too has its own unemployment, now estimated at 5.8 per cent, which officials attribute to people being choosy about jobs. Hence, Kuala Lumpur must keep a check on immigration of foreign workers.

Similar situation have developed in Japan and Singapore. While the authorities in Japan have, time and again, deported illegal workers from other Asian countries, including Bangladesh, the government of Singapore has threatened to use such a harsh measure as caning against offenders.

To varying degrees, governments of the region, including our own, are concerned over the situation. Whether they have been doing enough to set things right is another matter. It is high time the authorities in Malaysia, Japan and Singapore reviewed the situation carefully and, if necessary, increased the quota of immigrants for their labour markets, with work permits issued for specific periods. In doing so, they should hold detailed consultations not only with governments of countries where the workers may be recruited from but also with their own private sector. However effective may be the system, a proportion of immigrants may still manage to stay on illegally, at the expiry of their work permits. This has happened in many European countries, and can happen in some countries in this region. The alternative to a streamlined realistic system is the continuance of the status quo, which means exploitation of illegal workers by their employers in their low wages and unsatisfactory living conditions, police harassment and occasional accidental deaths of unwanted immigrants in the high seas. This situation tarnishes the image of a civilised country whether it is Japan, Malaysia or Singapore.

Photography as History

An exhibition entitled *After the Storm...* of photographs taken in the aftermath of the devastating cyclone and tidal surge of April 29, is currently on show at the Alliance Francaise. Organised by a number of non-government organisations which played a leading role in post-disaster relief efforts, the exhibition has put on display high-quality photographs vividly depicting the destruction and misery left behind by the wind and the water, and the efforts the people themselves making to rebuild their shattered lives.

The exhibition is yet another reminder of the role photography plays in documenting and saving for posterity the lives and loves, trials and tribulations, smiles and sorrows of a nation as it makes its journey through time. A photograph, particularly if the eye behind the lens is endowed with sufficient imagination, can tell more about man's life and society, his struggles and triumphs at a precise moment of history, than a thousand written words.

This country suffers from an acute lack of historical documents, not only of the distant past but even of recent times. Our children learn of the way their fathers and grandfathers lived through stories told by word of mouth, but rarely by reading books or looking at photos. A stroll through the National Museum would be enough to cruelly expose our utter poverty in this department. Where photography was not possible, we have failed to reconstruct. For instance, there are a number of statues representing various avatars of Vishnu, dating back to early years of this millennium, in the National Museum. But there has not been any attempt to recreate, through paintings or model-buildings, the socio-cultural life of the time. Does the Museum not know how to? Or does it not care?

We now have a wealth of talent available to do justice to the present, if only we would shake out of our current apathy and act. A collection of photography called *A Journey Through Bangladesh* by Anwar Hossain has been in circulation for a number of years, and the book represents the cultural, political and economic life of the country in '80s in a most comprehensive manner. For the sake of future generations, such works should not only be preserved as historical documents, but reprinted at regular intervals. At the same time, the government should provide financial support to publishers to bring out new, high-quality collections. An exhibition lasts for days, but an album could serve the nation for decades.

Big Names Fly Around in Battle for UN Top Job

John Gamba and Derek Ingram write respectively from Harare and London

Speculation about who is to succeed Perez de Cuellar of Peru as Secretary-General of the United Nations is hotting up. De Cuellar is expected to retire at the end of the year. Till now the choice has always been made against a background of the Cold War. The problem was always to find a compromise figure acceptable to the two superpowers. This time it is different. The US is likely to have the final nod. And it is said to be lobbying for a higher profile candidate than past holders of the post.

A variety of top names is jostling to succeed Perez de Cuellar as Secretary-General of the United Nations. Africa feels it is its turn and a favourite for the post is 64-year-old Dr Bernard Chidzero, Finance Minister of Zimbabwe. But Africa may not get it.

De Cuellar steps down at the end of this year after two four-year terms. Though some would like him to serve again, he is not in robust health and there is a view in the West that the UN now needs a much more upfront figure at the top.

Since Trygve Lie of Norway became the first Secretary-General in 1946 all but one (Hammarskjold of Sweden) have been low-key diplomats. All have come from small countries, such as Burma (U Thant), Austria (Waldheim) and Peru (Perez de Cuellar) and none from the five permanent members of the Security Council. That, however, has not prevented this time some people from pushing the unlikely name of former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher.

Oddly enough, she could even have warmed Presidents George Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev to the idea. She has close relations with both. On the other hand, it is difficult to see the Third World favouring her, although even there she has several unlikely admirers. Britain would be cool, especially as she increasingly embarrasses her successor John Major on European policies.

The Africans have at least 20 names to play with. In front

with Chidzero are former Nigerian head of state General Olusegun Obasanjo, Ghanaian diplomat Kenneth Dazte, James Jonah of Sierra Leone, who is already in a senior UN post in New York, and Olara Otunnu, former Ugandan Ambassador to the UN and now President of the International Peace Academy. Salim Ahmed Salim of Tanzania, now Secretary-General of the Organisation of African Unity, is also mentioned, but he tried and failed to get the post eight

years ago. It has not been the tradition for a region to put forward a joint candidate and this is not really happening now, since the Africans did not agree on one at the OAU meeting just held in Abuja, Nigeria. An outgoing chairman, President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda formed a committee to draw up a list. It contained five names, but when submitted Otunnu's name had disappeared — it is thought because he had served the government

of former president Milton Obote. Obasanjo would seem a strong candidate, but in Nigeria itself there is opposition, mainly on the grounds of his human rights record when head of state, but also because a soldier does not seem appropriate for the UN job anyway. One-third of the UN member states are African and many Africans feel that, although the continent is poor and heavily indebted, it has

men and women of high academic qualifications and diplomatic skill. Chidzero held several top UN posts before joining Robert Mugabe's cabinet at independence in 1980. He was director of the commodity division of the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) for nine years and then for three years UNCTAD deputy secretary-general. He twice turned down even more senior UN jobs in the Eighties. He is married to a French-

Canadian and speaks fluent English and French — an important qualification since the French are said to be unhappy that none of the African candidates comes from the francophone countries. They would rather, it is reported, see Perez de Cuellar stay for two years, by which time President Abdou Diouf of Senegal would be free to take up the job.

In a world these days with only one superpower the final nod is likely to come from the United States. Washington does not feel Africans are ready for the job. A favourite there is Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, for long head of the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).

If, however, the US is bent on the grandiose policy enunciated by Secretary of State James Baker in Berlin on June 18 and repeated by Thatcher in her US speeches — namely, the creation of a 'Euro-Atlantic Community that extends east from Vancouver to Vladivostok' — there may be real pressure for a much more political candidate than has ever held the top job at the UN before.

Whoever gets it will take charge of a staff of 14,000, administer a budget of \$1 billion and earn a salary of \$183,000 a year.

—GEMINI NEWS.

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Top men at the UN



The five secretaries-general

TRYGVGE LIE Norwegian 1946-53 (resigned)	DAG HAMMARSKJÖLD Swedish 1953-61 (killed)	U THANT Burmese 1961-71	KURT WALDHEIM Austrian 1972-81	PEREZ DE CUELLAR Peruvian 1982-
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Cyclone Relief Effort : Unique International Cooperation

by A.S.M. Nurunnabi

The Bangladesh cyclone of April 29-30, 1991 was the first major disaster of its kind to occur since the designation by the General Assembly of the 1990s as the "International Decade of Natural Disaster Reduction".

It also coincided with the increasing worries about the impact of global warming on the coastal areas of Bangladesh. So far the effects of this have proved hard to measure, but a handful of forecasters have suggested up to half the country could be under water by 2030.

Besides the most tragic loss of life, the disaster also inflicted billions of US dollars worth of damage to crops and property and seriously undermined Bangladesh's medium-term economic growth prospects.

This cyclone, as the one in 1970, has put Bangladesh's predicament squarely before the global community. When a poor society which Bangladesh certainly is, finds itself unable to hold its own against nature's fury, it is for the rest of the world to come in. The tragedy occurred at a time when the nation's democratic order needed a secure, stable basis. The newly elected government, then only 40 days old, just could not figure out how to face the calamity. It was a big challenge to the government to keep the survivors alive. It is obvious that such an unthinkable crisis is absolutely impossible to manage on the part of any Government single-handedly, particularly in least developed country like ours where hunger stalks and poverty is constant. Prime

Minister Begum Khaleda Zia's appeal to the world community started getting response.

Soon after the cyclone Bangladesh officials said that the country urgently needed \$56 million in emergency supplies. That figure soared far higher in the next few days when further assessments were more possible. In the days following the storm, offers of foreign governments and international relief groups began arriving. The King of Saudi Arabia pledged 400 million Saudi Riyals (about Tk. 37 million). Other help included 20 million dollars from the European community, \$4.3 million from the UK, 5.5 million Canadian dollars from

who visited the country to express their solicitude and concern are Madam Teresa, the Nobel laureate, the Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and the Bhutanese Minister for Social Services deputed by the Bhutanese King. The Indian Prime Minister, Chandra Shekar could also make time to pay a short visit to apprise himself of the situation in spite of his busy campaign schedules for the Indian elections. The UN Secretary-General Perez de Cuellar made an impassioned appeal to the world community urging them to come forward to extend all-out help and assistance to the

building materials, life saving drugs carried on their seven ships embarked on a gigantic relief and rehabilitation programme. They carried about 4000 tonnes of food and relief goods to the distressed island and coastal belts, by helicopters, supercrafts and other means. They also carried heavy machines, power pumps, generators to the remote areas which were otherwise inaccessible by any other means.

The marines of USS St. Louis did a very difficult job of reaching relief goods to the remote and badly hit islands of Kutubdia, Hatiya and Sandwip.

"The Sea Angel was not a catchword phrase, it represented the gift of life out of death and hope out of misery" "What the Task Force leaves behind is hope and life for the people"

Canada, 2.5 million dollars from Japan, 2 million dollars from the USA, about 3 million dollars from Germany and 6 million dollars from UNICEF, India 10 million Indian rupees and Pakistan 20 million Pakistani rupees. As the catastrophes scale became clearer, the industrialised countries offer additional resources to

At the same time, the international community started sending relief materials by air. India sent five helicopters and Pakistan sent two for emergency relief operation. The French State Minister for Humanitarian actions, Bernard Kouchner and Hamed Essafi, Relief Co-ordinator of UN Disaster Relief Organisation (DUSRO) arrived in Bangladesh to make an assessment of the damage. Other personalities

people of Bangladesh.

A new chapter in international co-operation for extending prompt relief to the vast multitudes of the distressed people opened with the arrival of the American Task Force at the directive of the American President George Bush in response to the plea of the Prime Minister Khaleda Zia. Under the leadership of Major General Henry Stackpole, the operation of the Task Force codenamed "Operation Sea Angel" covered the cyclone battered areas of 20 thousand square miles in 12 districts. The Task Force comprising seven thousand marines, pilots, doctors, engineers with logistic supports like dozens of helicopters, amphibian craft, water purification plants, power pumps, motor transports, rehabilitation and

Hundreds of marines, navy and engineers of the ship USS Anchorage, rendered laudable service in the heavily affected places like Banskhal, and Moheshkhali for two weeks continuously without a break. The Task Force Commander, Major General Stackpole spoke of their performance in these terms: "The Sea Angel was not a catchword phrase, it represented the gift of life out of death and hope out of misery". Another Task Force member remarked "what the Task Force leaves behind is hope and life for the people of Bangladesh". The US Task Force, by coming to the assistance of the cyclone hit people of Bangladesh, set a new and pre-eminently laudable challenge before soldiers everywhere to come to the aid of suffering humanity. Given the

enormity of the task and the challenging circumstances under which it had to be accomplished, the Task Force did an efficient and timely job that aided our own relief efforts and greatly helped to reduce the suffering of our people. Their presence gave us the needed extra boost that made the relief operation more effective and fast.

Marilyn Tucker Quale, wife of the US Vice President Dan Quayle came to Bangladesh on a 3-day visit on May 21 at the request of President Bush and in her capacity as the chairperson of the US Agency for International Development's Disaster Advisory Committee.

This visit was a further evidence of the American solicitude for the distressed people. During her stay, she visited the cyclone ravaged regions to review aid for the affected residents, at the same time seeing for herself the relief operations being carried out by the US Task Force. She distributed relief materials among the distressed people in the affected areas, inspected the field hospitals and underlined the need for global support to Bangladesh in her bid to save the country from natural disasters.

In addition to the huge relief operations of the US Task Force, other countries and international organisations came forward with their volunteers, money and relief materials. Fort Grange, a ship of the

British Royal Navy took part in the relief operation in Chittagong and Cox's Bazar. The British marines with four Sea King helicopters engaged themselves in relief operations. Two ships of Thai Royal Navy carrying rice arrived in Chittagong. International Islamic Organisation (IIO) sent a seven-member team here to join the operation. The team comprised four members from Saudi Arabia and three from the United Arab Emirates.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's visits to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and UAE in the later part of May gave a positive impetus to our endeavour to get all possible aid and assistance from the three fraternal countries. Saudi Arabia provided the largest assistance of over 106 million dollars for reconstruction of infra-structure in the cyclone affected areas.

Foreign aid commitments for the cyclone victims so far (as on 4.6.1991) amounted to US \$392.81 million for repair, reconstruction and rehabilitation works in the cyclone battered coastal district and offshore islands. Fortyone foreign countries and eleven international agencies have pledged this amount.

The world-wide prompt and generous response to the appeal of Bangladesh for help in her grave hour of need sets a new example of humanitarian assistance projecting an encouraging dimension in the field of international co-operation.

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To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Democratic values

Sir, I should like to congratulate your correspondent Ms S. Bari, for her excellent report "In the name of democracy" which appeared in your esteemed daily on July 1. Her illustrative and humorous article is worth to be appreciated. I hope to come across such fascinating article in the future.

Incidentally I share the same views as Ms. S. Bari concerning people's freedom in the name of democracy. Although I am a firm believer in democracy but I don't think that anyone should take undue advantage of it. As a matter of fact, one should be more responsible and thoughtful in his belief of democratic values. Democracy is not meant for hurting others' feeling or to cause them discomfort just for achieving one's desire.

I further stress upon our kind-hearted souls for at least taking a serious thought on the unchallenged facts provided by Ms. B. Bari.

Shabbir Yusuf,
Nayapalton, Dhaka.

Madhyapara hard rock

Sir, More than two decades ago huge deposit of hard rock found in Benipur Madhyapara area of Dinajpur district. The feasibility of the field and extraction of rock/stone was examined thredbare and it was found economically viable. Accordingly, administrative office building, staff quarters and rest houses were constructed. Preliminary extraction was also made. The quality of stone was found to be superior. Foreign donors reportedly evinced keen interest to provide finance for the project. But unfortunately more than twenty years have elapsed, the stone/hard rock is yet to be extracted.

We are going to construct a huge, costly bridge on the river Jamuna. Considerable quantities of boulders and stones will be required for the purpose. Again Chandpur and Sirajganj towns are facing erosion. These rocks can be used in the work of embankments to stop that also.

We may approach foreign donors and financial agencies for their help in extracting the Madhyapara stones. But unfortunately we are yet not making any sincere effort for such projects.

Whereas some staff are already sitting there idle and the rest house and other buildings lying unutilised, the newly elected government should look into the matter on a priority basis.

Mahbubul Haque Chowdhury
Sonali Bank, Bartsal.

Limited company affairs

Sir, The Bata Shoe Company Limited started dividend warrant distribution among shareholders on 19th June '91 while the dividend was declared in the AGM held only on 1st June '91. On the other hand Eastern Cables of Bangladesh Steel and Engineering Corporation declared dividend several months ago but the dividend is yet to be disbursed. Similarly Magura Paper Mills of Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation collected money in the name of shares and debenture in December '90-January '91 period but till date no allotment has been made.

Under the above, let the JS enact and modify Company Act

involving allotment, refund, share certificate issue, dividend warrant, annual report despatch, AGM timing etc. etc. which Bangladeshis can manage!

Sadik Alee
Moghbar, Dhaka.

Librarianship

Sir, I was invited to attend a lecture delivered by an esteemed Professor of Dhaka University on characteristics of American libraries at the USIS, Dhaka on the 6th of June. Being a professional Librarian I was very much interested to know about the characteristics of American libraries and their achievements. But after the lecture I came back with a heavy heart knowing only about our pathetic condition in respect of libraries, librarians and library education. He also criticised the role of the Library Association of Bangladesh. Was it necessary?

When he was given a particular topic he should concentrate on that topic and narrate whatever he gained there. Many of us will not have an opportunity to visit USA. We wanted to share his experiences. But alas!

He mentioned only about OCLC. What about RLO, RLIN, ALA net, CLASS, DIALCOM, CONSER, LOCIS (Library of Congress Information System) and numerous others? It

seemed that only OCLC is doing the net working activities. If any body wants to help us please do it in a proper way, not just by passing remarks and under estimating our own librarianship. We have so many limitations.

M Reza
Librarian, Dhaka.

Contain road accidents

Sir, This is an obituary note. Before drawing the obituary reference, I would, however, like to raise a question — whom should we hold responsible for frequent road accidents occurring in our country — the vehicle driver? the traffic administration? or the general public?

Recently the rate of road accidents has increased alarmingly. Everyday the newspapers carry several reports on road accidents, most of which are classified as serious and terrible ones. Everyday road accidents claiming many precious lives. If we cannot take serious measures to contain road accidents, I am afraid, the day is not far away when road accident will come out as the single major cause of death in Bangladesh!

Meanwhile, I record here

with great pain and sorrow the sudden and premature death of one of our students, Md Belal Masud (Helal) who died on June 29, 1991 in a serious road accident in Gazipur. Belal Masud along with two students of Bangladesh Agricultural University, Nazrul Islam and Julhasuddin, was going to visit an agricultural project at Kishoreganj by a jeep of a voluntary organization to which they were employed. All of them died on the spot when their jeep collided head-on with a truck near Bhabanipur under Gazipur district (Innalillaha wa inna Ellaihe Rajean).

Belal was a promising boy and at present our country needs people like him. His tragic death has not only caused loss to his family but to the nation as well. I pray to Almighty Allah to keep his soul in peace may He give his parents, brothers, sisters, relatives and friends courage to endure the pain of losing him so young.

M Zahidul Haque,
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