

### DCC Needs to Pull Up its Socks

A pat on the back of Mirza Abbas — the Mayor of Dhaka City Corporation — is perhaps in order, for not imposing any fresh taxes on the already harassed dwellers of this haphazardly growing capital city of ours. However, his promise of maintaining the city's civic amenities at the current level is really nothing much to look forward to, because what we have currently in the name of amenities is nothing much to write home about. What the Mayor should be aiming for is not keeping it at the current level, but of improving the amenities by leaps and bounds. And here we are not talking about the types of improvement that come from spending more money or buying better equipment, but the types that are brought about through efficient management, better supervision and accountability of everyone's jobs and responsibilities.

As to road maintenance we are told we have to wait for the passing of the rainy season. Street lighting, the Mayor said, would be completed by the 15th of the next month. So the area that now requires the immediate attention of the Corporation bosses is garbage collection. Dhaka's garbage has been reaching gigantic proportions as the city experienced unbridled growth in the last decade or so. Shortage of city parks and the up keep of the existing ones is another problem that must get the attention of the DCC. Tk 2.5 crore currently allocated for children's parks is not adequate to meet the need. However, if spent judiciously, it may mitigate some of the immediate needs of the city kids. Some funds have been earmarked for development of community centres and city toilets. More public toilets must be installed in all the busy areas of the city. We must, however, learn to maintain them, which goes as much for the existing ones, as for the ones planned. A good up keep of the existing city toilets should immediately be undertaken by the DCC.

The pattern of functioning of the City Corporation is not clear in the minds of many as it has become a major political platform for all political parties. The presence of the seat of government in Dhaka has also over-shadowed the Corporation structure of the DCC and has contributed to undermining its independent character. An important step in making DCC independent would be to de-politicise it as far as practicable. Such a move would restore the independence of its corporate structure.

Another priority task for Mirza Abbas would be to rid the DCC of its image of corruption, acquired during the Ershad regime through its practice of patronage and favouritism, to which the Mayor alluded during his press conference. We support his call for early settlement of all outstanding bills due to it by the various branches of the government. The government should also consider sympathetically the Mayor's request for additional Tk 70 crore which will enable the DCC to undertake some essential projects leading towards the Corporation becoming self-reliant.

### Of Knowledge and Complicity

Sometimes believing something may amount to acquiescing in that. There are times when the simple act of knowing something may indeed be taken as an act of complicity. How then should we take this piece of news coming from Ishurdi and published in a national vernacular daily? Railway bridges in the western zone, numbering precisely 1415 and including the still-impressive Hardinge or Sara Bridge, are deteriorating fast for want of men to look after them. As soon as we know it and yet do not act to change it to acceptable information — by whatever means we have — we very much stand to be condemned to be taking a part in this incredible story of stupendous callousness. But how can any purveyor or peruser of the news help activate to get the foolish thing right? Helplessness is another name for unfreedom and independence and democracy would not be meaningfully here till the time every citizen will have the power to see his say heard and acted upon in matters that affect him.

There is provision for one bridge engineer heading a team comprising three assistant engineers, six senior sub-assistant engineers and eleven sub-assistant engineers — 21 in all — with the specific responsibility of caring for the 14 hundred-and-odd bridges. At present there is none manning one post of senior sub-assistant engineer and all eleven posts of sub-assistant engineers — reducing the maintenance force to a bare nine-person team. What must be very frustrating to know is the fact that the non-existing 12 were the men-on-the-spot field engineers and the nine that remain are all sedentary-type technical people bounded on all sides by files blocking the view of all real-life bridges.

Two sub-assistant engineers are employed for the job of constantly surveying the bridges. Both of these posts are currently vacant. That can mean many undesirable things happening to the bridges. Let us talk of the biggest of them all and take only one or two examples of what can happen even to this colossus of a bridge breaches which is very hard to miss even for non-technical man.

Fire-fighting arrangements that were from the very day of its commissioning way back in the early decades of the century, have been stolen. In case of any fire, men in charge would only be able to view a rare spectacle — and bite their fingers if they so choose and nothing to stop it.

Painting the girders and trusses of the big thing in time is one of the basic requirements for keeping it in health. Two of its 15 girders were painted after the onset of monsoon which is a crime. But even this is better than what has happened to girders numbered 9 and 15 which were last painted in 1977. The rest of them received a coat of colour at intervals of ten or more years. It doesn't need technical knowledge to get scare from these facts. The bridge is being robbed of all strength and its days have already been numbered.

The above is fact. Our knowledge of it and taking it all in our eternally supine posture makes us all into a party to the crime. And we don't like it. We cry halt and pray that it reaches the right ears having right minds behind them.

# Famine is New "Mother of All Battles" in Iraq

Barbara Nimri Aziz and Francis Mwanza write from Baghdad and Rome respectively

The Gulf war is now only a memory for many, but in Iraq its legacy lingers on in malnutrition, disease and a crippled infrastructure. A new FAO report is predicting severe famine and details the drastic food crisis now gripping the country. Gemini News Service reports on what the new world order has meant for post-war Iraq.

water systems has caused flooding of homes and streets, and raw sewage is pouring into the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers. Contaminated drinking water is prompting serious health fears.

Baghdad, the city that was like a proudly nurtured garden before the war, now seems to be covered in dust with weeds sprouting through sidewalk cracks and pressing against walls.

Tomatoes, a staple of the Iraqi diet, are at times absent from the market. Those that do arrive are usually so tiny shoppers barely recognise them. The reason: there are no spray hoses in the greenhouses.

At least some farms have food. Lettuce and carrots and beans are plentiful. So is cheese.

Oum Mohammed has jars of salted cheese in the storeroom of her farm in Yusufiya. "We have been eating a lot of yoghurt," the farmer said cynically. "Our cows keep giving milk, so far. But without gasoline for more than two months our tractors could not take the milk to market."

The building that once held 8,000 chickens was emptied last October when chicken feed was assigned for human consumption. Iraq's poultry meat and egg sectors have been decimated. Chickens were sold off during the war and had they not, they would surely have starved.

If Iraq were allowed to sell its oil, it would be able to buy the 7.5 million tonnes of food that requires for 1991/92 to feed its people, at an estimated cost of \$2.6 billion, according to FAO.

Most grain, including wheat flour and corn feed for poultry, used to be imported from Canada the US and Australia. Those shipments stopped with the UN embargo. The sanctions remain in place despite protests from UNICEF and the Committee for Iraqi Opposition.

Iraq last year implemented a series of incentives aimed at boosting food production. Producer prices for cereals were nearly doubled. Farmers were provided with liberal supplies of seed diverted from the public rationing system. Cultivation of wheat and barley crops was introduced to new areas.

The outlook for the next cropping season is even more bleak, says the FAO. Seed supplies are extremely short and for vegetables non-existent. Most agricultural machinery is out of service and fertilisers and insecticides are in short supply.

Livestock numbers have been halved due to lack of feeds, vaccines, and a thriving and informal trade across the borders with Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

The FAO warns that unless action is taken by the rest of the world, the situation will only worsen.

BARBARA NIMRI AZIZ is a freelance journalist and anthropologist who specialises in the Middle East. FRANCIS MWANZA worked as a journalist in Zambia and is now with the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation.

THE Iraqi population is on the verge of a severe famine because of war and crop failure, according to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). Spiralling inflation is leading to a "grave food supply situation".

Average retail prices of available food products have skyrocketed and government subsidised food rations cover only one third of a typical family's food needs.

A UN inter-agency mission which recently visited 16 of Iraq's 18 districts reports that nutrition is deteriorating and malnutrition is common. The worst affected are children, pregnant or breastfeeding mothers and households headed by widows.

Sporadic electricity supplies limit what doctors in Iraq's modern hospitals can do for the large numbers who suffer from cholera, typhoid and meningitis. UNICEF is supplying cold storage units that run on kerosene.

"These were things we took for granted before, they were routine so we did not notice them," said Kerbala doctor Karim Al Naffi or the difficulty in running an operating room now or providing basic medical care.

What was once routine is now a major hurdle and the same is true of a once-proud city. Destruction of sewage and



PIRACY is alive and prospering in South China Sea but response from the states bordering the sea has been slow.

A combination of long coastlines and inadequate resources has made the task of patrolling sea lanes like the Malacca Straits, where most of the attacks have taken place, difficult.

Eric Ellen, director of the London-based International Maritime Bureau (IMB), who was on a visit here recently, described some of the more recent attacks as "horrendous".

He cited the case of a Singapore-registered vessel, the 'Hai Hui I', whose crew was manacled for a week before being rescued.

The ship, carrying consumer goods destined for the Cambodian port of Kompong Som, was attacked by Thai-speaking pirates at the Vung Tao pilot station in Vietnam in April.

The pirates, wearing ski masks and carrying automatic weapons, boarded the ship during the night, disarmed a Vietnamese customs officer and two policemen, and handcuffed and locked them up along with the 11-man crew.

The IMB has documented more than 40 such attacks last year, up from just six in 1989.

"Pirates bring flags of convenience, registration plates and bogus papers. It's simply theft, unsophisticated but it works," said a spokesman of the London-based International Shipping Federation (ISF).

Vessels are given bogus names and descriptions using false registration papers, the ISF spokesman said. These "phantom ships" are then sent to pick up cargo which are then disposed of.

One such ship sailed from Indonesia last year, discharged its cargo outside Singapore waters and headed for Thailand.

### South-east Asia

## Piracy Rises in South China Sea

where it changed its name. There it picked up a cargo of rubber valued at over US \$2.8 million dollars, supposedly for transshipment in Singapore.

But then it went to China where its name was again changed.

Before it could dispose of its cargo, however, the IMB had alerted Chinese shipping authorities who impounded the ship.

International maritime crime investigators claim that stolen cargo is brought to Singapore and "laundered" by being sold to unwary third parties. They also claim that the city state where there are individuals and companies conspiring with the pirates.

The clamour is growing for action against murderous pirate attacks on the waters of South-east Asia but governments are hampered by geographical factors and inadequate resources. Surya Gangadharan of IPS reports from Singapore.

"We have documentary evidence which shows lots of high-valued goods disappearing near Singapore waters," said Ellen.

But Singapore marine police and some local shipping companies say they have no knowledge of such syndicates. "Stolen goods end up anywhere and more probably in backward countries with little

supervision," said Edward Yeo, managing director of a shipping firm.

Investigators have cited eight other Asian countries where pirates operate. They include — besides Singapore — Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Taiwan and China.

The pirate gangs have connections with criminal syndicates operating in Japan, Korea and North America, investigators say.



### To the Editor...

#### Judiciary

Sir, I endorse the view expressed by Mr. M A Muteleb in your posted columns (July 13) on independence of the judiciary.

I want to add a few lines in support of the same. Article 147 of the Constitution in respect to the judges of the Supreme Court may be amended by omitting the Sub-Article 4 (e). An independent judge has to be above any inducement and temptation but Article 147 of the Constitution is a gateway to temptation.

Article 99 was amended and Sub-Article (2) was added by the Second Proclamation (Tenth Amendment) Order 1977. In the original Article 99, there was a total disability for judges after retirement in getting any appointment in the service of the Republic and were not allowed to plead or act before any court or authority. But after the amendment they became eligible to hold judicial or quasi-judicial office and newly added Sub-Article (2) allowed the judges of High Court Division to plead or act before the Appellate Division, after retirement or removal therefrom.

I think old Article 99 be restored and judges of the Supreme Court be given same salary whether they sit in High Court Division or Appellate Division. Judges' retirement age may be enhanced up to 70 years and they be made entitled to full benefit on retirement, and if one resigns after completion of 10 years he should also be entitled to same benefits. This is not a new idea, UK, USA and many other

countries spend substantial amount of money to keep the judicial system above all controversy and vices. By re-introducing the old Articles 99, 115 and 116 judiciary can be made independent.

The control (including the power of posting, promotion and grant of leave) and discipline of the judicial Magistrate shall vest in the Supreme Court, as provided in the old Article 116 of the Constitution.

If the present government wants to do something good for the nation as a whole it must make the judiciary independent by bringing in a separate bill.

M Saleem Ullah, Advocate, Motiheel C/A, Dhaka.

#### Global politics and ME

Sir, Recently we found in news reports, as UN official announced, that Iraq was still having about 4600 pieces of chemical ammunitions and some 300 tons of chemical material which could be used in different types of missiles and weapons. I think it is not the real figure of all that 'devastating' weapons and chemicals.

A question will arise for me

and I think for all conscious people that who converted Iraq or Saddam Hussein into a giant, supplying these 'devastating' weapons? It is far beyond our imagination that Iraq itself produced all these weapons and chemicals.

Why USA and even the world were almost silent when Iraq was using these sophisticated weapons against its own people and also Iranian troops during that eight-year war? Why suddenly USA and its western allies have decided to destroy the chemical and nuclear facilities for which Iraq once paid them billions of dollars?

Now it appears very clear that the mean target of this recent campaign headed by USA is not only Iraq but the strength of Middle East Muslims.

If in true sense America has an honest ambition to make the Middle East free from nuclear weapons, why Israel is not being concerned in the drive? Otherwise, the campaign appears to assume far reaching plan to weaken the strength of Muslims and strengthening the presence of Israel in the region.

S Rahim Ashnakhah, Dhanmond, Dhaka.

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.

### OPINION

## Government Shares in Multinationals

Abdul Karim

The Finance Minister recently stated at a meeting with the representatives of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industries (MCCI) that all public holdings i.e. Government shares would be divested in phases. He further stated that the forthcoming divestment operation would be programmed for strengthening the capital market through mutual funds, unit certificates and shares and other securities. But he had not stated on the recent decision of the Government to sell the multinational shares owned by the Government to the general public.

Government's shares in the multinational companies need to be floated in the public shares market. History shows that shares of foreign and national companies at the initial stage played a vital role in the development of the stock market in undivided Bengal and Assam. Shares of a few public limited tea gardens, cotton, spinning and jute industries, and some banks with foreign participation in the equity of those companies also helped a great deal.

Not only in this sub-continent but the world's first stock market, the Amsterdam Stock Market was started with shares of the existing multinationals i.e. United East India Company and West India Company which were formed to trade with India. The view that in the absence of local company shares those of multinational companies will not be traded on the Stock Exchange is not correct. In 1980 the government invited a mission of International Finance Corporation to prepare a report on the share market in Bangladesh. In the report, professor Sidney M Rabinson emphasized on the role of shares of multinational companies in the development of the stock market in the country. To make such shares available in the hands of public Professor Rabinson even suggested a reduction of the present percentage of shareholding of foreign investors in the equity of the multinational companies. He prescribed the mechanism on how to reduce the percentage of the shareholding of foreign estates. This is already adopted in many neighbouring countries.

We are now in an advantageous position since the shares

of multinational companies are already available with the Government. If the stock market is formed there will automatically be trading of shares of multinational and national companies on the Stock Exchange. In view of the disinvestment of industries the prospect is now bright. There is also a suggestion to float shares of public sector enterprises in the public share market.

The portfolios of Unit Funds and Mutual Funds of ICB do not at all make the public owners of the shares of multinational companies. Since ICB is the holder of the share certificates of multinational companies, the share certificates are in the name of ICB. To protect the national interest widely, the floatation of Unit Funds, Mutual funds, etc. of ICB with multinational shares need to be stopped henceforth. It needs to be so because the public issue of shares of multinational companies will not be made within 10 to 15 years because of their incorporation after independence, lack of expansion in the near future, and the like. So the monopolistic holding of multinational shares earmarked for general public by ICB or any financial institution needs to be stopped for the greater interest towards the growth of stock market. In socialist countries like USSR, China etc at present they are thinking to create and develop the stock market and it is so without any monopolistic character rather broad based it. Historically our economy is capitalistic in nature. Disposal of multinational shares to the public will deprive the Government of a fixed income; this attitude of Government officials needs to be given up. Unless it is done so, the growth of stock market will be a dream. Growth of stock market ensures the private investment and ultimately it attracts the foreign investment.

So, to facilitate rolling of the share certificates in the hands of the public, the marketable lot of 5 shares is fixed not only in our country, but in many countries, including neighbouring ones. To protect investment of the shareholders from loss and to keep private investment alive and profitable, there are many financial institutions in many countries to buy shares

that have become risky, due to the fall in their value. It is true that ICB has not so far achieved this stage.

One of the reasons for this is that a very substantial amount of "bridging loan" is due from the companies financed by ICB and in operation. Due to the lack of adequate profitability shares of such companies are not reported to be issued. Before financing the companies, a detailed feasibility study was made by ICB for those companies which, as reported, are not capable of repaying the loans. How can the companies be thought to be profitable?

The rate of dividends so far declared by ICB is not satisfactory. In view of the "bridge loan" and poor financial performance, people legitimately doubt that ICB is not willing to float shares of multinational companies in the public share market.

The share market is extremely shy in our country but our people are willing enough to buy profitable shares. In recent time the over subscription of a few public issues of multinationals bear testimony to this fact. These over-subscriptions had been by 300% to 500%. Just after independence the overnight nationalisation of a few industries, trade and commerce caused indescribable loss to the nation. Like-wise if we fail to sustain the present enthusiasm of small investors, it will be extremely difficult to create it in future.

Trade, commerce, industries etc are meant for the welfare of the common people since they are the actual buyers of industrial products. Their participation in the equity of economy is encouraged all over the world in public issue of shares. The main objective of this has been to train the general public to make investments in terms of shares of a company and to switch over, as far as possible, the burden of bankers and the financial institutions onto the shoulders of public to provide the companies with funds.

To train the public and develop the stock market, ICB's shares in multinational companies need to be sold without any premium directly to the people instead of any via media. To develop the stock market, besides the ICB, the Government has a role to play in this regard.