

A Nation of Drop-outs

About 78 per cent of children of the school-going age are enrolled every year at the primary schools. This is an unbelievably high figure for our country — as we know it. Government figures are at their best little short of suspect — quality statistics is one thing in short supply here. But a minister of the government, specially if it happens to be the eminent physician Badruddoza Chowdhury, is a gentleman and figures quoted by him on the floor of the Jatiya Sangsad must needs be taken seriously. However, this elevating figure which means that every year 1.5 crore children enrol at the primaries was soon to be supplemented by the same honorable personage by an appalling piece of statistics. Of the fresh entrants, 90 lakh — or 66 per cent drop out at that very primary level.

The question that comes irresistibly to mind is — to what purpose the much touted 11 billion plus biggest budgetary chunk for education is then put to? However much we try to be understanding we cannot help a fit of despair when faced with such shockers — the money is then spent for 30 per cent of school-going children and what small fraction of that remains for schooling past the secondary level. No money and other efforts put into education can be deemed to have been well employed if the base of literacy cannot steadily be broadened. And to that end the first need is to cut on the drop-out rate. If 75 per cent enrol — it can be taken to mean that there exist — in whatever condition — all the seats and related necessities to take them. To raise this quantum of facilities by even five per cent making way for an 80 per cent accommodation would be gigantic — and the government would be well advised to forget about the Ershadian fraud of a 100 per cent enrollment without needing to add little materially to the existing facilities and teacher-strength. The first feasible thing for broad based education still remains the stemming and trimming of the drop-out rate at the primary level.

The government is aware of many of the reasons that cause such a bewildering rate of drop-out. And Professor Chowdhury has even catalogued the governmental efforts to plug the holes known to them. But the list is inadequate and at times irrelevant. Renovation, construction and repair of primary schools and improvement in the tubewell and toilet facilities with financial assistance from different donor countries were being made to check the drop-outs — that's a fantastic statement from someone who also knows that the problem is 'socio-political' — perhaps he meant socio-economic — and that 'supervision' in the primaries was bad with many of the teachers caring little to take the classes.

The logic behind dropping out is very simple. Education is not a paying proposition. At the poorest level it is simply squandering precious and unaffordable time — and some money too — when sending a child to school. What should the usual family chores performed by the child — or the little it can bring home — be sacrificed for? For a return in the shape of alienation from the family because of the child's literacy?

Education is hardly paying at even the higher social levels. Social and economic success is more and more derived from extra-educational and even anti-social modes of an adult's ways about life. Forget about self-development as a human being — education as we have it here — is very very insufficient as a tool even for survival.

In our circumstances drop-outs are a logical phenomenon. Please do something to change these circumstances. Right at this moment we are in need of millions of intermediate level technical hands — in order to raise the nation out of its present morass. We need millions of teachers and motivators, guides and leaders, all of whom must be dependably knowledgeable. And we need a host of visionaries who can come only from a very high level culture and education.

Things are just upside down. The government, as the most organised and responsible agency in the country owes it to the society to set it right. That cannot be done with patchwork initiatives in the basic education area.

Farewell, Warsaw Pact

The Warsaw Pact died a quiet death in bed this week while the rest of the world slept soundly, virtually oblivious to the historic significance of the event. Or perhaps it was a non-event, given the whimper that accompanied its death, rather than the almighty bang, in expectation of which the world has stayed awake, alert and on nerve's edge for the greater part of the past four and a half decades. Whatever the case, it is farewell and good riddance, just as the ridding of other military alliances such as SEATO and CENTO were good.

The Warsaw Pact, born on May 15, 1955, in response to the formation six years earlier of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), never quite lived up to its supposed role either to threaten the capitalist West with slavery or worse, or to enhance the security and stability of the communist East. To be fair, the Pact was probably never set up to install trade unions (plus Soviet minders) in power in London, Paris or Bonn, just as NATO never intended to throw its tentacles over the Ural mountains.

Both were driven by the same logic — to demarcate and fortify Europe along ideological battle lines. Both served to stabilise their respective patches during the turbulent years following World War II, which brought American and Soviet powers from the peripheries right onto the centre of the European stage. The alliances helped to ensure peace in Europe.

The Warsaw Pact folded first because it lost the war without a single nuclear-tipped cruise missile being fired. With its demise, the military rationale for NATO's existence — the Soviet threat — has diminished if not disappeared altogether. But NATO is not ready to die as yet, rather it is looking for a different role. What that role will eventually be is a matter of debate, and it is not entirely clear if NATO will in fact shed its military character at all. Worse, voices have already been heard in Europe championing the idea of expanding the Organisation's role beyond Europe. But, with any luck, the Warsaw Pact's timely and perfectly natural death will inspire European public opinion to demand NATO's transformation into a strictly political organisation which will eventually integrate itself into existing European Community institutions. After all, the essential good thing about military alliances is that they do not last forever.

INSPITE of tornadoes unleashed by nature or massive tornadoes made by man, life goes on relentlessly in our cramped-up land of poverty stricken millions. Yet it is another unique testimony of our will to survive: come what may — never give up.

The odds that we face in our struggle for existence are indeed enormous. Yet we are oblivious of our abysmal living conditions, precariously perched on the brink of a precipice. Why? It is because we have continued to survive at the margin through good years of bumper crops and external assistance. Not only that, the incorrigible optimist would proclaim that under the existing conditions, we have fallen to the bottom-most point. We cannot fall any further. But move we must and so the only available option must be to move up. Henceforth, by the inexorable law of nature, we will progress and proceed only upward.

The steadfast pessimist, on the other hand would argue that at the very bottom, we move nowhere; we lie stunted — sort of 'etherised on a table'. Therefore once we hit the

rockbottom, Newton's first law of motion comes into full play and unless there is an external impressed force, the stunted state, the inert motionlessness cannot be altered.

Leaving aside the dynamic or the static theories of our existing state of being, one thing is clear: A nation of so many millions cannot be doomed into oblivion. Through trials and tribulations, odds and disasters, time and again it has been proved that we have a tremendous capacity to rearsurface from the turbulent ocean of turmoil and steer ourselves towards the calm reaches of the sea.

But the problem is that we fail to sustain our sojourn in the cool pastures of golden sunshine. Two successive years of bumper crops are followed by a huge loss in the third year. We are back to square one. Lush green fields and tree-covered villages are washed

away by eroding rivers. Years of efforts are lost all of a sudden. Man-made disasters closely follow. Political turmoil leads to collapsed dreams of productive investments, closed factories resulting in an overall inhibition towards economic growth. Inevitably, the nation

tained. Once at the height of the anti-Ershad movement, I asked Dr. Yunus of the Grameen Bank if his activities were affected. "No, not at all," was his reply, because it is village-based and the work proceeds, same as the work for growing the crops or

under situations very similar to Bangladesh led to the overthrow of the dictatorial regime and establishment of democracy. But at the same time, the nation maintained the double digit growth rate of the economy where there was no compromise. Like the Bangladesh movement, the Korean struggle was also led by the students and joined by the masses and the workers at a later stage. Yet neither the students nor the workers lost sight of the first priority before them. As a result, classes were held and examinations conducted at schools and universities; while workers also did not fail to fulfil their production quotas and meet the export obligations.

What is necessary therefore is a firm commitment to the national objective — from poverty to growth within the early part of the 21st century regardless of the political creed or the vested interest of

any particular occupational group. In fact there must not be any question in anybody's mind on this fundamental national objective. In practical terms, the basic issue boils down to hard work, relentless at all times. If it is hard at day time, work must continue at night or the weekend holiday sacrificed to make up for the day lost in production. The same principle should hold good for the students, office-workers, bankers, practically for everybody. The economic activities of all types must be viewed as the emergency ward of a hospital, it is open 24 hours a day. Similarly, schools and factories must also operate to achieve the fundamental national goal of the forced march from poverty to growth in as short a time as possible.

Nothing must forestall economic growth. Politics must be there to sustain freedom and democracy. At the same time, the struggle for our daily bread in increasing quantities must also be maintained by non-stop turning of the wheels of production.

Only then we will achieve the primacy of economic stability: our first task.

The Primacy of Economic Stability: Our First Task

From LDC to NIC by Shahed Latif

languish in miserable poverty and utter destitution. We are a least developed country and continue to remain so.

The crisis of stability is of highest national concern today. Unless there are stable expectations that factories run, businesses are carried out, banks operate, telephone works, trains ply and the planes fly, regardless of the politics of the day, it would be utterly naive to assume that a high growth rate of the economy could be sus-

tending the cattle. Political movements, being urban-based primarily affect the modern and the dynamic sector of the economy.

I am however not making a plea against political agitation without which the vital democratisation process of today would never have been achieved. But what I am pleading for is depoliticizing development. It is possible. It happened in Republic of Korea where political movements

services and capital within and outside Europe. This, as the Board points out, could make States which have generally not yet experienced major drug-related problems more vulnerable to abuse and illicit traffic. The Report says, for example, that traffickers in the Soviet Union are becoming more organized. Therefore, the Board welcomes the newly established participation of several States from Central and Eastern Europe in the International Criminal Police Organization (ICPO) — INTERPOL, their co-operation with the

their co-operation with the pompidou groups as well as their activities on the basis of bilateral arrangements.

The Board warns that the implementation of legislation in countries of the Americas restricting the availability of precursors may well result in the establishment in Europe of more clandestine laboratories for the conversion of coca paste. Another development in this respect is the change in trafficking routes in Europe as a result of successful enforcement activities in European airports, traffickers increasingly choose road transportation. Particularly, with stepped up East-West trade, traffic via the "Balkan Route" has considerably increased its share.

Internal political turmoil in some countries of Asia hinders the establishment and effective functioning of control systems. This, the Board notes, is clearly the case in countries such as Afghanistan, Lebanon and Myanmar. Based on most recent data, the Board estimates that illicit opium production in the region, especially in the South-East, has remained around the same high levels as in the previous growing season. Apart from continued activity in "traditional" trafficking routes and areas, the Board points to an increase in the movement of heroin from South-East Asian countries across China's southern borders to Macao and Hong Kong for both local consumption and onward transit. In fact, as the Board notes, the scale of trafficking in the area implies the involvement of major financiers. As positive developments, the Board states that two of its missions, one of Pakistan and the other to Iran (the latter being the first in many years), may contribute to better co-operation in the sub-region.

In the case of Africa, the Board notes that "all countries of the continent are now confronted, to one degree or another, with drug trafficking and abuse". The situation in respect of cocaine trafficking has worsened. One contributing reason for this was the recent establishment of commercial air links with some African countries. In general, the continent's drug-related problems stem from prevailing economic and social conditions and attendant lack of health care systems which not only help to facilitate diversions but also lead to uncontrolled distribution of drugs, including the wide availability of psychotropic substances. That is why the Board substantive and timely reporting on drug-related statistical data.

The current political and economic changes in several Central and Eastern European countries are resulting in a substantial increase in the movement of people, goods,

Drugs are Direct Threat to Political Institutions and Economies

No region is able to isolate itself from the plague of drug-related problems. Traffickers are able to pursue their goals by shifting their operations and activities to new geographic areas. More forceful, comprehensive and innovative actions are therefore essential to contain the problem.

that demand is the most critical and intractable of the components of the problem since it involves influencing and modifying human behaviour.

The Board once again emphatically rejects the idea of legalization of even some types of drugs, as such an approach would send "a signal in the wrong direction". In this respect, the Board recommends caution in assessing prophylactic measures, such as the controlled distribution of hypodermic needles and syringes aimed at reducing the spread of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), warning that this should neither promote nor facilitate drug abuse, even though, as the Report notes, AIDS cases related to intravenous drug abuse are becoming even more numerous.

As concerns the other end of the drug chain, the supply side, the Board calls on States to continue to accord priority to control and reduction, stressing that "illicit cultivation should not be permitted to expand further". The Board notes that States concerned should have better access to modern technology to permit the location and environmentally safe destruction of illicit narcotic crops. The Board welcomes the convening in 1989, under United Nations auspices, of two expert groups dealing with these questions. The first group concluded that it would be feasible to develop a system for space-borne remote sensing of illicit drug crops cultivation. The other group considered environmentally safe methods for eradicating illicit narcotic plants and recommended a programme of continued research on the subject. The Board, stressing that both groups dealt with "sensitive areas of technical activity uniquely suitable for pursuit under international aegis",

recommends that the international community provide the resources to continue those United Nations programmes.

Also as regards the supply side, the Board calls for provision of large-scale integrated rural development assistance to enable cultivators of illicit crops to make their living through licit agricultural or other enterprises and also for establishing fair export prices for these alternate economic activities.

The Board in its priority list accords increasing importance to the exchange of information to facilitate the apprehension, arrest and extradition of traffickers and to bring them to justice, to denying traffickers opportunities to launder their ill-gotten gains, and to preventing traffickers from acquiring precursors, arms, sophisticated weaponry, aircraft, ships and the like. The Board also calls on the international community to provide, in response to States under attack by traffickers, full assistance, including security devices, weapons, aircraft, ships and training.

These priorities further underscore the need for enhanced and comprehensive international co-operation and joint efforts. The framework for such action already exists in the form of the various drug conventions. The Board notes that, generally speaking, the international control system elaborated in the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs continues to operate satisfactorily. As for the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances, the Board believes the time may be ripe for Parties to consider initiating an amendment to extend mandatory export/import authorization to more substances to prevent diversion from licit trade to illicit channels.

Along with a number of regional initiatives — such as the co-operation of Nordic countries, or the Cartagena and Cochabamba Declarations — the Board welcomes the entry into force of the 1988 United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances as further evidence of international determination.

Although the international framework for co-operation and control exists and is, in fact, further strengthened by the new initiatives, the Board regrets that some countries continue to stay outside of this framework while others are not making full use of its possibilities. All States are therefore urged to adhere to the international Treaties. The Board also calls on those already parties to the Conventions to be more persistent and forceful in implementing their provisions.

In this respect, the Report calls for more timely and comprehensive submission of statistical data, as well as the strengthening of national monitoring and control mechanisms to prevent diversion attempts and money laundering. As the Board points out, "some countries are especially targeted by traffickers, partly because control systems are known to be weak."

In its region-by-region analysis, the Report's findings clearly indicate that no region was able to isolate itself from the plague of drug-related problems. Unfortunately, in spite of effective measures taken in some areas, traffickers are able to pursue their goals by flexibly shifting their operations, spreading their activities to new geographic areas.

This is clearly the case in Central and South America where cocaine production increased steadily, and coca

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.

Charge and service

Sir, I thank you for your leader "Let the consumer know", published in the June 20 issue.

Ours is the only country where taxes are levied indiscriminately and even by Executive order in violation of Article 83 of the Constitution. The Article says "No tax shall be levied or collected except by or under the authority of an act of Parliament."

Some times charges are increased in the name of relaxation of it, not a single service charge had ever been reduced by commissioning the latest technology.

Service oriented organisations like Municipality, PDB, WASA, Gas, authorities, T&T, BADCO etc, may change their name and may have modern multistory buildings to house their offices and their employees may get bonuses, but these organisations neither render proper service nor will try to minimise the charges.

I want to take this opportunity to draw the attentions of the authorities concerned, to

the fact that ours is the only country where you will find no public carrier to have "fare meter" with it. When auto rickshaws were introduced in this country they had "fare meters" but after independence gradually the "fare meters" disappeared. Even the public service buses now don't issue tickets for the fare they realize from the passengers.

I, think, we must start from somewhere, and to my mind, it is the best time to start with the implementation of laws.

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BUET

Sir, It's a real pity that so good an academic infrastructure established much before, through a process, during and after the British rule, in the capital city of what is now our Bangladesh is allegedly 'drifting' towards 'breakdown'.

General people think that the cause is 'political over-sen-

sitivity' of students. But the question also is: don't the teachers owe anything for this situation?

A comparative glimpse on the technical education in India and Bangladesh shows that the academic schedule is strictly followed in India (except in a few universities) — the students know the date of their becoming engineers or doctors even before they come to attend the first day of their final year classes. But here, it's just the opposite. If a final year student calculates that he/she will be a professional say in next four months, again after the four months he/she still will have to count another four months achieving nothing special — except a lot of early night 'michils' and a good 'accid'.

Those 'mighty-lags' and 'severe session-jams' are the results of smaller undertakings. A small example is one week auto vacation before Eid. Students bring out 'michils' for "auto". They close the main gates in the morning stopping students to appear in classes. Actually, they shouldn't have done that. But they are just 'learning the way of life'. On the other hand teachers seem to encourage the students to attend classes in such situation. Some teachers who do never take roll-call look more interested to take classes. They hardly feel any concern at the thin attendance of stu-

dents. This is a penalty to the absent mass. By doing so, are the teachers doing really good to the student community? 'Students' means a mass; so, if a handful of students enter the classes when the rest are staying (or have to stay) outside, shouldn't the learned teachers think of the masses?

This university still can be regarded as 'politically least active'. If teachers do not think of these aspects now, this may lead to much strengthened politically-motivate polarisation not to the benefit of any.

A student,
BUET.

OP-I

Sir, Under the OP-I scheme of the US government, a large number of Bangladeshis have been granted immigration to America. We greatly appreciate the US government's generosity. But we come to know that the OP-I Bangladeshi immigrants are facing some problems which include unemployment. It is sincerely hoped that the US government generously help the Bangladeshis to settle in their new homeland.

Meanwhile, I would like to draw the attention of the US authorities over the matter of OP-I clearance. I heard from

some OP-I recipients that they are not regularly receiving their immigration documents from the US Embassy in Dhaka. In one particular case, it is understood that the Embassy sent the first two document packets under registered cover and the third one under ordinary post. The incumbent never received the third packet which caused long delay in his clearance and departure.

I request the US Embassy to send all documents under registered post and at the same time I urge our postal authority to take strict measures so that important documents like OP-I letter be safely and timely delivered to the addressee.

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Higher education threatened

Sir, The sphere of higher education is being stalked by the spectre of campus violence with an ever increasing trend.

If this trend goes on unabated prospects of higher education in the country would incur an irredeemable loss. That will surely take the nation one step

back from its cherished goal of attaining development. It has been observed that political parties also some times engage themselves in recriminations following clashes between students' wings. This helps worsen the situation rather than make any headway towards peace. Without mutual trust and cooperation the escalating situation on the campus can hardly be brought under control.

Campus violence is not a handiwork of students alone. It is time and again said that students are being manipulated by different political parties to satisfy their own ends. In doing so such political parties seem quite oblivious of a great harm they are meting out to the nation. To sustain democratic transition education is a prerequisite. But this very education is now being threatened. Students themselves will agree that the image they earned by playing a heroic role during the last autocratic regime is now bruised.

Therefore, they have to launch another fresh drive to retrieve their lost image. To save the nation they have to choose between two things — either violence-free politics or be stripped of the right to do politics.

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