Dhaka, Saturday, September 14, 1991

Yes

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of tomorrow's referendum. Rhetorics apart, this is first and foremost a constitutional requirement, and as such the public has a moral duty to take part in it, in the same way the president had a legal duty to send the 12th Amendment Bill to the people for assent or rejection. That is why, despite a unanimous vote by elected representatives of the people in the Jatiya Sangsad, the Bill still has to await confirmation by a direct national vote, before receiving presidential assent. Whether one agrees with the idea of referendums or not is a matter for debate in the future. For the present, the president is obliged by the constitution to seek popular approval before effecting any change in the system of government. Let us not be in any doubt: a majority "No" vote will mean that the president will not be able to give assent to the 12th Amendment Bill and the country will remain under the presidential form of government.

The position of this paper is quite straightforward on this issue of national importance: the people ought to go out to vote and vote "Yes".

The presidential system, under which this country has been governed from January, 1975 till now, has proved itself to be wanting in many ways, leaving ground for the rise of despotic rule. Under the existing system, cabinet members act as mere advisers to the president and are accountable to him alone, while top government officers, meaning secretaries, execute presidential decisions and wield enormous power without accountability. Lack of democracy and widespread corruption of the past years are direct consequences of such a system of government, where parliament is no more than a mere rubber stamp for presidential authority.

Whatever might have been the logic behind introduction and sustenance of such a system, that surely no longer exists. The country needs a change because change is imperative for our socio-economic development. The events of last December and the spontaneity of popular participation in February's general elections showed that the people were determined to be a part of, indeed the determining factor in, the country's political process. For their part, the major political parties promised new values — a representative government, accountable to the people through a sovereign parliament. The unanimous vote in the Sangsad on the 12th Amendment Bill was the first step in fulfilling that promise.

But now the people must play their part. If they fail to turn up in large numbers then a question mark will naturally appear over the credibility of the idea of holding referendums at all. But more seriously, if the Amendment Bill is not approved, then promise of accountable government will remain an unfulfilled one. Maintaining the current presidential system will simply mean keeping the chair warm for the next autocrat (even the most well-intentioned person may find himself wielding more power than is good for him, because the constitution allows him to do just that).

A "Yes" vote will ensure that parliament has the ability to hold the executive branch — the prime minister and cabinet - responsible to itself. That will transfer real power to the people since parliament members will have to act according to the will of their constituents or face the consequences. The chief executive will no longer be able to exercise authority without facing parliamentary scrutiny. To make the system successful, politicians themselves have to work with integrity. But before that can happen, the system itself has to be in place first. For that, we need a resounding Yes.

Who's Afraid of Crying?

One of the world's most comely presence is decidedly Diana's who is incidentally the Princess of Wales — the spouse of the heir to the British throne. But Princess Di radiates beauty of both the dainty and the daring types more than through the immediacy of presence. She is at present among the most photographed persons of the world and most of these photographs are published in journals of all kinds winning for her an ever-growing world of admirers.

She now has proven to be as charming with her words as she is in person. And for the latest proof of her keenness of thought and expression she has chosen to berate the traditional British reserve - stoicism transported to modern times. And what she says touches our soul with its profundity as much as with its deep sense of sympathy. She told recent meeting in London of specialists in child and adolescent psychiatry that people should let their emotions out and not be afraid of a good cry. Crying, she says, has yet to kill someone and it doesn't harm others either. There seems to be 'a curious conspiracy' in adults to suppress this emotion, she says and suspects that this may be because of the fear of appearing childish.

Adults should get of this if only because that would help understand their children better and set better examples before them. Emotional outbursts might be less dramatic or violent if a little steam was reasonably vented harmlessly, she says.

Bengalees, we hope, will need no persuading on the point. The message could well be carried to the Japanese although one cannot be too sure about the race of the harakiri and kamikaze fame. Crying comes rather easily to the Bengalee. One reason for so much violence around nowadays may be the Bengalees are weeping and crying less and less under the influence of imported films and canned TV stuff.

HOUSING IN DHAKA

Identifying Land for Low-income Groups

by Dr Mahbubur Rahman

AND is primarily a political issue and not a technical one. Urban Planners are now convinced that the solution of the land problem is a primary condition to the solution of the housing problem. Like many other cities in the newly developing countries. Dhaka is considered as an unfairly structured city where the rich enjoy greater opportunities and public subsidies than the poor. This statement is evident from the fact that while the poor constitute 70% of the city's population, they occupy only 20% of the city's residential

Shortages of land in sufficient quantity and at affordable prices is a major barrier to proper housing development. Availability of suitable land remains the foremost condition of allowing the lower-income groups to bargain in the urban housing market.

Housing versus Other Use

Availability of land for possible housing development is constricted due to three particular reasons. The first reason is an obvious one where housing has to compete for land with other uses viz industrial, commercial etc. The second reason is the general tendency of converting monetary savings into immovable asset, land being the most popular of those. The last reason is the geographical features of Dhaka and its surroundings which restrict the abundant supply of suitable land parcels.

Most desired use of urban land is the one that brings the highest net return in money and amenities to the owner/ user over a period of time. To achieve this, the first phenomenon that occurs is the competition among optional uses. This leads to higher demand for land at advantageous location; simultaneously, the process of urban agglomeration leads to more intensive use. Hence activities which are the most productive and profitable are the ones which can afford to pay higher rent or value in a particular location.

Most of the peri-urban region of Dhaka are of moderate agricultural potentiality. These are deeply flooded lands suitable for cultivation of IRRI

paddy only, provided there exists a good irrigation facility. litgh land, non-liable to inundation and suitable for diversified cro-pping, is not found close to the existing conurbation. High pot-ential land suitable for two crop production can only be found in small amount along the north corridor, which, however, is now advocated for the expansion of the city.

Considering a maximum of two crops in the near-Dhaka agricultural land, yearly per acre income from such land will be Tk 19,800/- only. In addition to that the land will earn an increment of Tk 291,200 in price (inflation). The opportunity cost that this land presents is Tk 2,042,840 only. Average of land price increase rates from different sources shows nearly 30% annual increase in the peri-urban land price. The average per acre land price around the periphery of Dhaka is Tk 7.57 million. Thus one acre of periurban land presently can earn Tk 2.27 million in a year without being used in any productive purpose. This is seven

times the agricultural value. These suggest that it is highly unlikely that the undeveloped peripheral land will continue to be used for agricultural purpose. With the growing demand for land for urban development it will be grasped automitically by the private or put ic sector at faster rate to keep pace with the city's physical growth. In fact, land beyond the eastern and western periphery is already engulfed either by various real-estate entrepreneurs or the city authority. The 18,840 acre DND land at the south-cast periphery of the city was embanked in 1968 primarily for high yielding agricultural use. But encroaching industrial and residential uses have reduced the agricultural land and fuelled the land price to increase at a great

Geographical Features

Dhaka, though strategically well-placed, is water-logged by vast flood plains in all directions except the south which is delineated by the river Buriganga. The bridge over the river has opened up a consid-

crable amount of land on the south which is still waterlogged. In most locations, these lands are low priced and can be made available at affordable prices even after land fill-

The main built-up area of Dhaka and its northern part is high land. To the west and south lie the flood plains of the Turug and Buriganga. These lands are inundated every year. To the east lies the flood plain of the river Balu susceptible to scasonal flooding of short duration. There are several isolated small mounds rising close to high land level inhabited by small clusters of homesteads. Thus, there is only a small proportion of land high enough to be free from regular

This suggests that devel-

opment expanses would be minimum towards the north of the city which is by now almost fully engaged to different urban uses. The flood plain towards east is the next best location where different housing societies are competing with each other and the government to acquire as much land as possible. The situation with the western plain is similar and it would be the most expensive part to develop because of the lowest elevation. Only the southern plain across the river remains mostly unexplored for future expansion of the city. Over the last 30 years, several feasibility studies on reclaiming and developing the land south of the river have been carried out. Some of these include the cost of the bridges-over the river. However, no step following the suggestions made in these reports has yet been taken. Nevertheless, there still exist factors which exert pressure for new development nearer to the old city centre, most important of which is employment opportunities and transport facilities.

Use of Zoning Regulations

used to prevent specific land parcels from being allocated to the highest bidder by imposing limited categories of use and by restricting unit density.

Several sites-and-services projects were developed in Dhaka with an aim of benefiting the lower-income groups. But in the end, these fell in the hands of the high-income ing and providing minimum groups. For example, the Mirpur Rehabilitation Scheme benefited the middle-income

highest income groups. This

was the result of primarily

putting the land price high in

Large areas of land within

Historically, much land was

acquired by the authority

which was later used for com-

munication and institutional

purposes. However, a lot of

this land remained fallow for a

long period. The government

has adopted a policy of offering

the displaced land-owner a

piece of plot in the subse-

quently developed land at a

basic services. group while the target group was the lowest-income households; Rupnagar project carried out by the Housing and Scittlement Directorate was aimed at the middle-income group, but the actual allottees in the project were found to be from the uper-middle-income group. The Uttara Model Town, the largest sites-andservices project completed by the DIT aimed at the middleincome population, ended in the possession of the people inundation. from upper-middle and the

comparison to the affordability of the target group, and secondarily, satisfying the interest of a certain influential sector. Other factors like gentrification, false representation of age and income, bias of the land developing agency were equally responsible. the city, formerly dedicated to institutional uses, were later made available for alternative uses. Housing was considered as a low priority alternative. A small amount of this land was put to residential use at a high space standard. There are other kind of uses within the city area on restricted land which have proved detrimental to the normal growth of the city, particularly to the north and availability of land. An embargo on development over a vast area restricted a proper growth towards the north-east of the city. Price of some the lands has shot up as it is speculated that these would be derequisitioned by the Rajuk.

Zoning could be effectively

price equal to the agency price bypassing the otherwise normal allotment by lottery. Yet this is beyond their affordability and rules them out of the process. Joar Sahara is a glaring example of this. Land for the Poor

The price pattern of Dhaka's land suggests that there is no land suitable for the future low-income settlements other than those available beyond the city conurbation. Activities of the profitmotivated housing societies and the flood protection embankment have instigated the land price to go spiraling high even in the periphery. Now it seems that the land search should be directed towards north-east, north-west, west beyond the Turag river and east on the bank of river Balu. Land on the south across the river hold greater prospect once the second bridge over the river is built.

ments, is sparsely populated and is large enough to accommodate a population more than double the present size of the city itself through proper planning. However, this would require a wise utilization of the fallow land within the built-up area. More than one housing scheme failed to develop at the expected pace because of inadequacy of employment source within casy accessibility, for example, Dattapara, Uttara and Savar, However, dispersed nature of the commercial activities and the prospect of establishing assembling and manufacturing plants in Dhaka's periphery would mean that low-income settle-ments in the peripheral areas would not suffer the

Land, just identified as ideal

for the low-income settle-

above consequence. The lowest-priced city land in worst location is also beyond the buying capabilities of most of the urbaniles. For example, the price of I sq.m. of such land would be equivalent to a month's income by a rickshawpuller. Low-lying land in nearcity areas can be provided at less than a quarter of the above price (60 sq.m. plot at a price equivalent to a year's income) if the land hoarding and speculation can be eradicated. These lands would require a huge amount of earth-filling to raise

their elevation above the known flood level. After adding these extra-expenses, the price still remains reasonably low at Tk 700/sq.m. This is less than half of the lowest price of the within-city land. Addition of basic services and amenities, community infrastructure and management cost will still keep the overall cost below Tk 850/sq.m. which is a 44% saving on the within-urban land price.

Conclusion: There is no easy solution to the problems of housing the low-income groups. The major urban centres of many countries would benefit from an effective land policy: few would benefit as much as Dhaka. After independence, the government declared a bar on the maximum amount of land one can hold and proposed to freeze land price in the city centres. lowever, these were only aimed at gaining cheap popularity and in reality were not imposed rigorously. Rajuk and HSD have the policy of not sciling urban plots to someone who already has one. But it is possible to deceive the authorities by buying plots in several

Through proper legislation,

presently unused and un-

derused land within the city can be brought to more productive utilization. Peripheral land can be developed at a minimum cost through plot reconstitution techniques. Similar proposals for Kallyanpur, Joarsahara and Uttara townships failed in the face of strong oppositions from the vested quarters. The flood plain in the fringe areas can be acquired to meet the future requirement. In situations where public acquisition of land is not feasible, methods of taxation or effictuating the public interest would be followed. The poorly administered and ineffective land tax system reduces the potentially lance volume of funds for public purposes and also tends to in rpetuate the economic and social ills associated with concentrated land ownership among a small

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favoured class.

Serbian Sights Set on Ancient Borders

REAMS of rolling back the boundaries of time to create a "Greater Scrbia," containing all Scrbs living in Yugoslavia, seem to have blinded Scrbian President Slobodan Milosevic to the fact that such a future nation, for all its military power, could be frozen out of Europe.

Serbian insurgents, backed by the Yugoslav military, have made such deep incursions into the the republic of Croatia that it is beginning to resemble the size and shape it was in the 16th and 17th Centuries.

It was then that the Serbs, who had fled from the advancing Turks, were organised along a military frontier region as a bulwark against further expansion of the Ottoman Empire into Europe.

The towns around which fighting is now being reported - Senj, Karlovac, Sisak, Slavonski Brod and Osijek were all at the frontier of the ancient Croatian buffer zone.

That frontier remained after withdrawal of the Turks following their defeat at Sisak in 1593, and the Scrbs in the area served as peasant soldiers who were granted exemption from taxation by the Hapsburg monarchy.

But in the current undeclared war for territory, it is Serbs as well as Croats who are fleeing from the self-styled liberators carving up the Croatian republic, the borders of whichwere set when the Communist federation of six republics was established in 1945.

The Yugoslav hardline military are now in control of more than one-third of Croatia, which was once Yugoslavia's second largest republic, and when fighting near the Adriatic port of Split was reported, it indicated that they had clearly set their sights on

the sea. Once at the Adriatic - with the near-certainty that the newly-acclaimed Serbian auby Petar Hadji-Ristic

Four centuries ago, Serbs were in the frontline of a military frontier region established to halt the Ottoman Empire's further advance into Europe. Now, with Yugoslavia being torn apart by internal strife, incursions by army-backed Serbian insurgents into the republic of Croatia have begun to redraw ancient boundaries,

Croatia: ancient battleground Croatie in the 16th-17th Centurie HABSBURG MONARCHY OTTOMAN EMPIRE to stop Turks pushing further into Europe Austria CROATIA Romania SERBIA Adriatic Bulgaria MONTENEGRO' Italy 200km/120mls Greece tonomous regions of Knin and when the army eventually does

Western and Eastern Slavonia eventually split from Croatia to join Serbia - the neo-communist regime of Milosevic would have realised another ancient Serbian dream : a warm-water port.

A massive redeployment of military hardware means that

call a halt to the fighting in Croatia, it will have assembled one of the largest concentrations of weapons anywhere in

Out of the havoc of yesterday's Yugoslavia will be left a regional military power, wielded by Serbian generals

and which only a superpower would dare to confront.

Hundreds of railway wagons and trucks, protected by warplanes, have transported rockets, shells and other ammunition out of Slovenia, which declared its independence on June 25 this year - just after Croatia. Squadrons of warplanes have also been moved

Much of this has been moved into the central republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, where some of the country's secret arms factories are located and which was once among the major arms suppliers to the Third World, including Iraq.

The consequences of the use of military force in an attempt to keep the Yugoslav federation together - or at least to grab the areas where Scrbs have lived in the past and to redraw the boundaries between republies - have been disastrous for the economy.

Jacques Delors, President of the European Commission, puts the cost at a billion dollars a month, but the true figure is almost certainly much higher.

The military must have wanted to bring about the collapse of the Croatian economy - none of its new private enterprises has done any business this year - but the Serbian economy will also take decades to recover.

A hint of the economic catastrophe about to envelop the country is provided by the news that Serbian banks are paying 70 per cent more than the official rate of exchange for

foreign currency. The Yugoslav Chamber of Commerce, based in Belgrade,

has also warned that the economic consequences of what is unfolding could be worse than those caused by the armed clashed which have claimed several hundred lives.

There has also been a breakdown in trading between republics. The politicians have destroyed the banking system.

Economic boycotts and seizure of representative offices of firms based in other republics are daily news, and there is a freeze or postponement of all credits from international bodies.

Nor does the end seem to be in sight. The Serbian insurgents,

backed by the military, have yet to secure everything they want. When another ceasefire between Croatia and the Yugoslav army was agreed at the end of August, fierce fighting broke out again within hours.

Then Milosevic rejected a European Community truce plan. The US called for an immediate ceasefire lest the Serbs freeze themselves out of Europe by continuing to attack the Croats.

In places like the Croatian town of Vukovar, on the border with Serbia, the Yugoslav army has been accused of openly fighting alongside the Serbian rebels against Croatia, instead of acting as a buffer zone.

The republics of Macedonia and Bosnia have both announced that they will hold referenda on the future of Yugoslavia, and both are likely to opt for independence.

This could mean yet more lighting — at least in Bosnia where Muslims account for 44 per cent of the population, Serbs for 31 and the rest are Croats, some of whom are fighting in Croatia against fedcral-backed forces.

As in Croatia, Serbs might boycott the referendum and form local governments in the two regions in which they are the majority. They are already organising themselves there and the regions are bristling with weapons.

The same scenario as in the Croatian region of Knin would be played out, with fighters coming in from Serbia and the army providing them with weapons and the backing of military firepower.

"It's a miracle there has been no fighting so far in Bosnia," said one Serbian intellectual, who blames Milosevic for the breakup of Yugoslavia and for the rise of the highly nationalistic government of Franjo Tudjman in Croatia.

However, the prospect of trouble in Bosnia is a chilling one - even, it seems, for Milosevic.

In an effort to head it off, he made his "historic initiative" to Bosnia and the faithful Montenegro republic to join Serbia in forming a mini-Yugoslavia. The problem for him is that Alia Izetbegovic. the Bosnian President, wants none of it.

Never in its history has Scrbia been so isolated. Faced by the prospect of an impoverished future and isolation in Europe — especially in the Balkans — it may be that the Serbs will come to their senses. — GEMINI NEWS

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Corridor of friendship

Sir, Bangladeshi Foreign Minister's visit to India has brought in a "concrete outcome" including Tin Bigha Corridor, as "all decks are being cleared for fransfer of the corridor to Bangladesh" by

yearend. Conquering that long-disputed link land from India's possession is indeed a super success for Bangladeshi diplomacy, although the (originally) allocated periphery of East Bengal (erstwhile East

Pakistan), present Bangladesh, has been a controversy ever since designing India-Pakistan territories.

No matter the size, trading this land fragment will undoubtedly be a knot in the loose ties between these two peoples that may also be warming up bilateral relations from now on and does carry a strategic significance for disaster-prone Bangladesh.

in spite of a number of pending issues of mutual concern yet to be cleared up, steps toward amicable solu-

tions to the problems like Tin Bigha will ease tension in their traditional relationship and will widen the corridors of Indo-Bangla interactions to "promote neighbourliness" in materializing SAARC objec-

How much impact this merged patch of land will cause to this LDC is debateworthy, because the new voters as well as citizens of that portion of the country will be eligible for national rights and privileges. Bangladesh is already faced with as many shortcom-

ings as her population size that have essentially compelled her to be extra-dependent for subsistence. Some of the prospects of alleviating her distress are inherent in the reclamation of lands from estuaries, offshore, wastelands, etc., for instance.

While the Theory of Malthus can be based as an indicator for the premises of national projects targeting the mushrooming landless citizens, economic re-settlement of the floating populace will yield profits for the nation. So will Tin Bagha of Bangladesh, since something is better than nothing.

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Gulf war and Christian-Muslim relationship

Str. Hundreds of thousands of American Christian brothers and sisters met many more Arab and non-Arab Muslims in the Gulf areas during Iraq's

unique experience of interfaith contact and will definitely help in achieving greater Christian-Muslim social, cultural and spiritual understanding for years to come. We shall be grateful to hear

occupation of Kuwait. This is a

print, from all brothers and sisters having their such firsthand experience or from their friends and relations. A B M Shamsud Doulah

in details, with permission to

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