

Towards a Politics of Development

In organising the round table with a broad-base group of thinkers The Daily Star wanted to start a public debate on the fundamental issues relating to our development. It was the aim of this journal to bring together ministers, members of the parliament from the ruling and the opposition parties, representatives of the private sector, civil servants, representatives of the donors and multi-lateral aid agencies and, of course, the development economists and provide for them a forum to have a free and informal exchange of views. The fact that a two and half hours discussion spilled over to more than four hours and all the distinguished participants preferred to forego their other pressing engagements is ample testimony as to how valuable the participants found the round table to be. It is our hope that the spirit of the open exchange will continue and ministers, MPs from both the treasury and the opposition benches will make a practice of maintaining an open dialogue not only among themselves but also with all professional and other segments of the society.

What the round table revealed — to the surprise of the major contenders for power — was the extent to which their thoughts actually converged. On the crucial issue of national consensus, on the fundamental questions dealing with national development, the representatives of both the BNP, the AL and the Workers Party showed a near complete agreement. Similarity of views were also expressed on the question of stability, of continuity of policies and on the need for creating an environment which will attract foreign investment. The speakers also seem to have very similar views on wage structure for our labour forces and the need to make them efficient and disciplined. It was really impressive to see how much the politicians, who are usually at logger-head with one another, had in common. This has been the Daily Star belief all along that given a proper environment, our leading politicians can find more commonality of views than divergencies. We are gratified to find ourselves vindicated.

The crucial question now is where do we go from here? The tendency to try to be one up on the other party is much too strong to think that just one or two open discussions, like the one of the day before, will lead to a more co-operative attitude between the leading political parties. But one or two instances, however inadequate the examples may be, of broad based dialogue is enough to prove that there is a lot of scope for consensus building. And it is on that scope that we must build. The most persuasive argument for a consensus is the fact that Bangladesh is among the most underdeveloped countries in the world, with enormous economic and social problems. Our politicians will have to move away from peddling rhetorics and acquire the habit of looking into facts. Yes, dry figures are not what strident and thunderous applause generating speeches are made of. But it is these new types of speeches that the politicians will now have to learn to give. Let the politics of agitation give way to a politics of development. It is possible. The Daily Star Round Table indicates so.

Unnecessary Deaths

Five persons died and fifty were injured on Tuesday in a road tragedy near Demra. We deliberately avoid using the word accident for it was anything but that. But 'tragedy' isn't either an apt word and tends to make us shift our attention from what it really was. It was indeed a case of criminal villainy in which those lives were lost. There's little consolation in the fact that among the dead was also one of the villains — the driver of one of the two buses that turned the busy Demra-Dhaka road into the Indianapolis racing track. In most cases of man-made 'accidents' the drivers and their helpers miraculously melt in the air. This is easy to understand for it is only they who know exactly when to abandon 'ship' — and in the whole bulk of a bus it is only they who can escape without being mobbed in the attempt. The Demra bus-plunge proved that escapes are not always possible for the drivers manufacturing an 'accident'.

There are many reasons for our roads becoming a virtual death trap for all of their thousands of miles of stretch, — and for our vehicles to turn into so many coffins. A list of these could run into miles. Such lists often fail to mention one or two of the most dangerous abuses of road norms that result in the most road deaths — only because they are so plainly rudimentary. The Demra victims were a prey to one such abuse which can easily be turned as road charity or in the local slangs *bus mastani*. Overtaking for almost all of our narrow highways is an act of crime fraught with risk to life. And yet it is possibly the most favourite pastime of our bus and truck drivers who at the slightest chance they get of challenging the vehicle ahead or to block the way of the vehicle behind — they turn the very narrow and bad ditch-lined road into grand prix motor-racing tracks. Passengers, going over *la ilaha illa anta* for countless times in their minds, dare not raise a single voice against this deadly sport. Who cares if one of the vehicles go not only out of the race but also off the road and into a ditch at least 20 feet below — not the drivers.

We have long been pleading for constant police patrolling of the whole stretches of our more important highways. The first duties of such patrols should be to stop overloading, speeding and overtaking. When will our counsel be heeded? On its answer will depend what kind of quality of government we are going to have in this land.

Our hearts pain every time there are such unnecessary deaths. A responsive government, of course, can greatly inhibit the incidence of such as also reduce the toll.

The Global Arms Trade: Boom or Bust?

Arms specialist Ian Anthony examines the current stage of the international arms trade and warns of the steady and often-ignored trade in smaller and less expensive low-technology weapons.

STOCKHOLM— While there has been a general downward trend in arms trade over recent years, the statistics tend to hide the reality by concentrating on large-scale weaponry and ignoring the booming trade that goes on in smaller arms. The fact remains that the great powers continue to produce arms in numbers that can only be justified by export, that overcapacity of production and arsenals are not being decreased, that no working mechanisms of conflict resolution are in place in many parts of the world and that economic imbalance continue to fuel the fire of regional and subregional conflicts and thus the need for arms.

With the exception of 1987, a peak year, the value of global arms trade has been in general decline since the mid-1980's. The downward trend is visible in both the value of new agreements signed and the value of arms delivered, and it can be seen in both the developing and the industrialised world.

According to figures released by the United States Congressional Research Service in August 1991, the value of new arms agreements with developing countries turned sharply upwards again in 1990, increasing by 18 per cent from US\$ 34 billion to US\$ 41.3 billion.

This increase was largely the consequence of a massive increase in the value of new

orders for U.S. weapons, which more than doubled between 1989 and 1990.

For other major suppliers—the Soviet Union, France, the United Kingdom and Germany—the downward trend in the value of new contracts noted for most of the 1980's continued in 1990.

The shrinking of the global arms market is usually measured in dollars or some other kind of economic indicator. Measuring the arms market in this way means that the debate is dominated by the trade in sophisticated, new weapons.

Many combat aircraft, major warships and submarines are now so expensive that the transfer of even relatively small numbers can have a dramatic impact on the overall value of the arms trade. The fact that fewer countries can afford the latest generation of major weapons does not imply shortage of or reduction in the demand for other types of weapons.

In 1990, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute recorded over 30 major armed conflicts and noted that over 100 smaller conflicts were being waged throughout the world. The majority of these conflicts were not inter-state wars, but were being fought within countries.

One or more parties to the conflict was likely to be receiving external assistance of some kind, often in the form of arms transfers.

The arms transferred were of different kind from those normally recorded by the various statistical agencies around the world. The primary weapons in use are often small, portable infantry weapons: assault rifles, machine guns, rocket-propelled grenades, small-calibre artillery and mortars and so on.

Much of this weaponry has been obtained from the enormous arsenals built during decades of continuous fighting in Afghanistan, Central America, Lebanon, and South-East Asia. At the same time, this kind of low-technology equipment is in production in dozens of countries around the world.

In the 1990's a new potential problem has emerged. In the wake of successful conventional arms control, there is a widespread fear that weapons no longer considered necessary in Europe may now be added to this global stockpile. The danger is particularly acute among members of the former Warsaw Treaty Organisation, where economic difficulties make it even more

tempting to realise financial returns on equipment which otherwise will have to be physically destroyed under the terms of the CFE agreement—a further drain on scarce resources.

It is against this background that the issue of arms transfer control has become a more important element of the arms control debate.

In the 1980's arms control initiatives reflected several developments: growing concern about the links between the illegal arms trade, international drug trafficking and organised crime, pressure for a greater effort to adopt an arms embargo on either or both Iraq and Iran between 1980 and 1988, and finally, in the context of the improving U.S.-Soviet relationship, the U.S. attempts to raise the profile of selected aspects of the arms trade, especially ballistic missiles.

These actions notwithstanding, it was the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait on Aug 2, 1990 which put the issue of the arms trade firmly in the centre of the conventional arms control debate. In addition to national initiatives to modify or, in some cases, adopt for the first time, arms export regulations, there have been a significant number of multilat-

eral arms export control initiatives launched in 1990.

These initiatives include efforts by many countries to establish a register of the arms trade to be maintained by the United Nations, proposals for which will be placed before the U.N. General Assembly this month, and efforts by the European Community to make arms export control an explicit element of a future treaty on European political union.

These arms control initiatives are in an early stage, and many technical problems are associated with effective arms trade regulation. The unsolved problems include defining which technologies should be subject to control, how to verify that arms were delivered to the stated end users, how to monitor company activity and how to track the physical movement of goods.

However, the primary obstacles to arms trade control are not so much technical as political and before any effective export control regime can be brought into operation, some key political problems must be addressed.

The most important of these are the continued use of arms transfers by major powers to support their foreign

and security policy, the failure to establish working mechanisms for regional conflict resolution and security building in many parts of the world and the growth of new arms production capacities and the failure to reduce existing over-capacity.

The complexity of these issues underlines several aspects of the global arms trade. First, there is no single country or single organisation that can address the problems of regulating the arms trade. Rather, there is a global responsibility to take action.

Second, there is little point in viewing arms from the political context in which they are deployed. The absence of effective political mechanisms for peaceful conflict resolution sustains the demand for arms, and failures in economic development act as a powerful obstacle to reducing arms production capacities.

The first two years of the 1990's have seen fundamental changes in the international political environment. These changes create the potential for historic breakthroughs in arms control and disarmament. It is now for all responsible political authorities around the globe to ask themselves what contribution they are prepared to make to effect change for the better. —IPS

Ian Anthony is a researcher on arms trade and arms production at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

Envisaging a Plan for Population Redistribution

by Golam Ashraf

YOUNG English clergyman Thomas Robert Malthus in 1798 forewarned that food grows arithmetically and population at geometric progression. The theme was the proportion of land becoming less with the growth of population. Just after the liberation, the war ravaged Bangladesh was facing multi-dimensional problems. The common sight on the roads was the UN emblem Japanese trucks and mini bulkers in the river ports, engaged in transporting wheat from the sea port of Chittagong to the inland populated areas. Such activities created a horizon of fear leading to contention how would seventyfive million people (then) of Bangladesh would be fed and administered.

The country, however, fell into the socialist orbit and entered into the era of mostly barter standard reversing from hard currency standard, resulting restrictions in emigration of the population with hard to get an international passport and the endorser amount fixed with five sterling pounds. The principles laid in the Constitution was self contradictory. The world was then divided into two formidable blocs of determined ideologies namely, Democracy and Socialism. The foreign policy was more significant with policy of befriending with all and malice to none but despite with such placard of foreign policy, some of the strategi-

cally important countries of the world refrained from recognising our nation. At home, political situation brewed up for shortages of essentials, declinment in living standards and frustrations for what the conscious citizens longed and what they were receiving. The issue of scientific socialism was more complex at that prevailing condition: The ownership of mills and factories throughout Bangladesh will not only be owned by the State but eventually be handed over to the workers ... for emancipation of scientific socialism from the prevalent limping socialism. The great tragedy like famine took place in our region and that was a coincidental incident for any poor socialist country. (Classical economist Karl Marx though he wrote descriptive book Das Kapital, but had no real experience in the diplomatic norms and thorough knowledge on the nation state system. Marx wrote on his observations of the neo-capitalists resulting from the Industrial Revolutions in Germany, France and Great Britain). Now it is, however, interesting to note that Soviet Union lost the credibility of superpower status and Bangladesh was compelled to exit from the socialist orbit due to natural and practical experiences, and of these, the shortage of food for the countrymen was the vital issue.

OIC It was after the oil embargo followed with economic boom

either regionally or internationally.

Measures Under the above circumstances, some measures should be pursued by our government for redistribution of population of our overcrowded nation. First, the Planning Minister may, of course in consultation with the Prime Minister draft a plan for redistributing the population. The Prime Minister may instruct the Cabinet Secretary to adopt an agenda in a Cabinet meeting to send official letters through the office of the President of Bangladesh to Mr. Samir Shiba, the President of the United Nations General Assembly, and the US President George Bush requesting for about co-operation for implementation of a master plan for redistribution of the population of our country to the other suitable member countries of the United Nations. Because in this world, only United Nations Organisation (UNO) can co-ordinate worldwide for human re-settlement and the United States of America can oversee the arrangements of international security affairs. When the permission being sought, the Prime Minister may send our Foreign Minister to Jeddah to discuss with the high officials of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) and Islamic Development Bank (IDB) for granting rights to ev-

ry Bangladesh for citizenship and interest Free Loan (IFL) in all the member countries of the OIC. The people of Bangladesh would travel to any OIC country of their own choice under pay as you earn (PAYE) scheme. Under this Bangladeshis will receive the passport of the country of residence and will have the status of equal citizens and engage in studies, secure employment or carry out business with or without any local sponsor, and will have the right to marry there or in Bangladesh and also would reserve the rights to reunite their relatives from Bangladesh.

Brethren Concept Some interested quarters would try to raise objections on the basis of their self interests but they were to be taught that one Muslim is a brethren of another Muslim. It is convenient for a Muslim to live in an Islamic country where mosques are located for prayers, teaching and learning of Holy Quran is possible and 'halal' meats are available for eating. There will be follow up pleas from some Bangladeshis for settlement in the countries like USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand or again some may raise further claim for US OP-1 visas but it has to be informed over mass media that the society of those countries do not permit slaughtering of edible birds and animals in the backyards nor do encourage Azan from mosques over loud-

speaker or wearing of scarfs, veils by the girls and women in public gatherings and etc.

The SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) is an essential forum for enhancing trade co-operations for economic reasons but it is not conducive for redistribution of the population of Bangladesh in this region because, the entire area is already densely populated and reached to a saturated point with over one billion people. In the present context, the situation is favourable for redistribution of Bangladeshis citizens to the OIC (Organisation of Islamic Conference) countries, extending from Brunei Darussalam to the Kingdom of Morocco. It will be a milestone of the era to prove that a prudent decision from the world forum, with advancement of scientific technology, can resolve the warning sounded by Thomas Malthus, almost two centuries earlier. Moreover still today, it is true that it is not easy for an Irish or a Dutch national to settle easily in a country like Australia or Canada but the above master plan can be an exemplary model for future generations, for assimilation of a thickly populated country with another sparsely populated country with common social and cultural practices, commencing with joint efforts of the United Nations and the proven leader of the nations of the present era, the United States of America.

Farmer's Son Steering Nepal's Fledgling Economy

Jan Sharma writes from Kathmandu

A farmer's son is at the helm of Nepal's economic blueprint. The enormous challenge of giving direction to the fledgling economy has been given to a brilliant young economist and his team of hard-nosed professionals.

Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala named Dr Ram Sharan Mahat the vice-chairman of the reconstituted National Planning Commission (NPC). He, in effect, heads the Commission although the chairman is Prime Minister Koirala.

Dr Mahat, 41, said his first priority would be to "reinstate the Commission, which is in a dormant state, as a leading development think tank of the country. It must do business. It must advise the government on policy matters."

His team at the NPC is

impressive. It includes Dr Binayak Bhadra, an American-educated economist and engineer specialising on energy, water and environment; Dr Bal Gopal Baidya, rural development specialist and former executive director of the private think tank, New Era; Prithvi Raj Legal, leading economic analyst and advisor to the Finance Ministry; Sri Krishna Upadhyay, former chairman of the Agriculture Development Bank with experience in rural development; and Dr Ram Prakash Yadav, food, agriculture and mountain environment specialist and former deputy director of the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development.

Dr Mahat's last job was for United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), looking after the welfare of Afghan refugees in Pakistan. He was

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UNDP's assistant resident representative in Islamabad.

He left UNDP in 1990 when King Birendra lifted the ban on political parties, replaced the one-party rule with multi-party democracy and a constitutional monarchy.

Mr Mahat himself seemed to be the natural choice as finance minister when he ran under the Nepal Congress Party for a parliamentary seat from his home constituency of Nuwakot. But he was defeated by the former finance minister, University of California-educated Prahas Chandra Lohan. Dr Lohan is one of three

members of the Rashtriya Prajantara Party elected to parliament.

Prime Minister Koirala then appointed Dr Mahat his economic advisor. The job of finance minister went to Mahesh Acharya, a German-trained economist and one of Prime Minister Koirala's closest aides. Mr Acharya is a member of the National Council, the 60-seat upper house of parliament.

Dr Mahat is fit for the job. Born in a farmer's family in Kabilas village, at 13 he was already a high school graduate. He was jailed the following

year on charges of taking part in demonstrations for the revival of multi-party democracy.

He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree with distinction and a gold medal at the age of 17. He then topped the Master's degree in economics at Tribhuvan University, again with a gold medal. He taught briefly at the Bhakti Secondary School and, at the age of 19, became head master of Bir Bhakti High School.

Dr Mahat was given a fellowship at the American University in Washington DC, where he lectured and did research. He returned home to teach for about a year at the Tribhuvan University, then joined the UNDP.

At the top of the National Planning Commission's agenda now is the Eighth Development Plan (1992-97). "We have no choice but to take some

hard, painful decisions. This is because we believe that in the long run they have to work, even if they may not be politically acceptable," Dr Mahat says.

"We need a right balance between political expediency and economic needs," he says.

The government is now discussing with the UNDP future projects for the UN agency's fifth country programme for Nepal. The UNDP has pledged US\$78 million for the five year period ending in 1996. "It is a big programme by our standards," says Jerrold Berke, UNDP resident representative in Kathmandu.

The UNDP has invested in Nepal more than US\$500 million in technical assistance grants since 1963. It has been involved in 123 projects, with another 46 projects in the pipeline. — *Depthnews Asia*

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.

Pension and gratuity

Sir, It is a stipulation in government service that every time national pay-scales are revised upwards, the upper limit of pension is commensurately and simultaneously raised for those government servants retiring after the new pay-scales are made effective. It is already over four months the National Pay Scales 1991, were made effective from 1st July '91, but sadly enough, the routine orders as above have

not yet been issued by the concerned Ministry, with the result that fixation and payment of retirement benefits of those who retired after 1st July '91, have been held up. This unjustifiable delay has caused severe suffering to all those persons, who, under normal superannuation rules, have retired, after giving the best 30/35 years of their life in the service of the country. The pension-processing authorities, when approached, merely say that, due to non-issue of

orders by the Ministry of Finance as regards the new/revised upper limit of pension, they are unable to work out the pension and consequently also the gratuity payable on the 50% compulsory surrender value of pension.

Needless to say, all those who retire at the old age of 58, feel utterly helpless and anxiously look forward to their retirement benefit money for planning their own livelihood as well as that of their dependants. Uncertainty and undue delay in receipt of their legitimate retirement benefits only add to multiply the suffering of retired life. Only those in this category know the kind of suffering it is!

May I, on behalf of the sufferers, very humbly request the Ministry of Finance, to kindly appreciate the urgency

of the matter and immediately issue the necessary orders with regard to the new/revised upper limit of pension and the rate of gratuity and thus help their erstwhile colleagues in the government receive their legitimate retirement benefits without further delay.

Shakil Ashraf
Dhaka.

Campus Violence

Sir, Without going into all the nitty gritty of campus violence, I would offer a suggestion. The general students should now play an effective role. They should form a non-political organisation with one item on the agenda: Eradicate campus violence. They should formulate and publish a list of insiders and outsiders who

hold arms, and expose those student leaders and organisations by name who shelter armed miscreants in their organisation. They should also stand against those political parties whose student wings are instrumental in campus violence. They should design appropriate programmes in support of their movement against campus violence. During campus elections they should reward those student organisations who are not related to campus violence in any way. Later, as they grow in shape and stature, they should adopt programmes for achievement academic excellence. They should show that a university should be a place for sustained development in scholarly pursuits. If they can do this, they will earn the respect and admiration of all the people who really care about the future of

this country. May Allah help them.

It is now a common knowledge that BCL and JCD are mainly responsible for all the ills on the campus. But in the student elections in the colleges or universities, it is either JCD or BCL who sweep the elections. In other words general students are rewarding campus violence. My appeal to general students: Do not reward those who do not hesitate to play violent politics at your expense. It is unfortunate that a small organisation of general students which came into being during the last unscheduled closure of Dhaka University has disintegrated. Please join hands before it becomes too late.

Faruk Rahman,
East Bashabo, Dhaka.