

Dhaka, Friday, November 29, 1991

Technology — Where Appropriate

During a seminar in the city last Wednesday, organised by the Swiss Development Corporation (SDC), speakers laid a great deal of emphasis on the need to develop technologies suited to our particular environment, technical abilities and needs. This emphasis on what is known as "appropriate technology" is itself an appropriate one, since the current state of our development is not uniform, with certain sectors being quite backward while others are at an intermediate stage.

Given the lack of uniformity, it naturally follows that the level of technology that ought to be applied must not be uniform either. The catchword must be "appropriateness". In other words, while the export-oriented industrial sector will certainly require imported, advanced technology in order to make its products internationally competitive, the same logic will not apply to other sectors.

The vast majority of this country's population are still — and are likely to remain so for some time yet — within the "rural poor" bracket, most of whom lack basic education and technical skill. As such, while the government may rightly create conditions for greater investments in the export sector to reduce our dependence on foreign aid, it is also vital that the overall strategy of development targets the rural poor — that is, small farmers, landless peasants and women — as the engine for genuine, long-term growth.

The popularisation of manual irrigation, by which an individual farmer can have his own water pump and access to water at the time and by the amount needed, was one such piece of appropriate technology the SDC seminar highlighted. Given the widespread fragmentation of farm lands, acute shortage of water at crucial times and availability of manpower in abundance in Bangladesh, the need for low-cost, manually-operated pumps is self-evident. Experts involved in marketing the locally-conceived and produced "dheki" pump estimate that, with 500,000 sold so far, the pump has already made a far greater impact on the economy, in terms of employment and income generation, than the garments export sector.

However, we must not also forget that, in the process of "catching up" with the rest of the region, we will still need to see increasingly greater transfer of technology from developed economies. It is quite crucial that we push ahead with the creation of a firm industrial base, while developing the countryside at the pace it will tolerate. For instance, in the fields of communication and industry, the technology appropriate would naturally be advanced imported ones, because we do not have the resources needed to develop our own from scratch.

A balance, therefore, has to be struck. It would all depend on the timetable we set ourselves for development and, indeed, how we define development in the first place. The use of indigenous technology would involve socio-cultural compatibility and environment-friendliness while advanced technology would accelerate growth; but this is not to suggest that one is an alternative to the other. Advanced and intermediate technologies should be treated as complementary to each other, to be applied where appropriate. It falls on the decision-makers at government and non-government levels to identify the correct areas and devise a broad strategy accordingly.

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Nuclear Threat of a New Kind

The world now faces a new kind of nuclear threat. We have long been used to the doomsday prospect of a nuclear conflagration between the two superpowers, or to a lesser extent — but equally nightmarish — of a nuclear conflict between regional powers. However, now a new kind of threat looms large on the horizon, to prevent which the international community must take up urgent preventive measures. The new nuclear threat stems, not from any maverick country building a bomb in extreme secrecy, but from the possibility of extremists and fanatical groups laying their hands on unprotected and inadequately guarded nuclear arsenals. This has come about as a result of the disintegration of the Soviet Union. According to reliable estimate there are 31,264 nuclear bombs in the Soviet Union. The reassuring fact is that most of these weapons are on Russian soil, where the security forces are under a clear and disciplined command structure and we can feel somewhat secure in the knowledge that those who are guarding these weapons know their job. Not so reassuring is the fact that more than 5,000 of such weapons are spread throughout the disgruntled Republics, who might be tempted to use the control of these mass destruction weapons as symbols of their sovereignty. Their lack of expertise in guarding these weapons raise the prospect of determined terrorists laying their hands on these weapons.

According to a commentary in the Nov 22 issue of *Asiaweek*, "More than 30,000 nuclear warheads, only a third of them deployed, tempt the determined hijackers in the Soviet Union. Each has a football-sized core of plutonium or enriched uranium capable of vaporising a town, sinking a fleet, irradiating a battalion or poisoning a landscape."

Given our knowledge that the Soviet soldiers are not among the most devoted and disciplined in the world — not to speak of being affluent or well satisfied — giving in to irresistible temptation of earning millions just by being slack on the job may not be all that improbable.

All this could be mere figment of imagination. But, if there is the slightest possibility of it becoming a reality, then we should do something about it, now. In the negotiation that are going on between what is left of the Soviet Union and the emerging Republics, the control of the nuclear arsenal should be given top priority. Some Republics have supported the idea of central control over these weapons. President Bush and President Gorbachev must put their heads together and use all the expertise at their disposal to devise some mechanism to bring this threat of mass destruction under some sort of discipline. European countries should also co-operate in this effort. A role for the United Nations could also be visualised.

Neglecting the issue would be the worst of the mistakes. Making too much of it in public would be another. What is necessary is secret negotiations with Republics to put all the nuclear weapons under some central authority.

We really cannot be too careful, when it comes to security of the nuclear weapons.

Middle East Peace Talks Come Down to Land

by Benjamin Cohen

"LAND for Peace" may have become the catchphrase of the Middle East process, but only hours after the first round of talks ended in Madrid, Israel dedicated a new settlement on the Golan Heights, land seized from Syria in 1967. Two government ministers at the ceremony, Ariel Sharon and Yuval Ne'eman, spoke sharply against conceding territory.

At the same time a statement published in the Israeli press called on the government of Yitzhak Shamir to "fortify settlements and strengthen our hold on the Golan Heights." Among its signatories were 56 members of the Knesset (Israeli parliament) and 15 were from the Labour Party, even though it has expressed a readiness to exchange land for a peace agreement.

In the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, where the Palestinians hope to set up their independent state, Israel continues to build settlements at a frenzied pace. As far as Jewish settler leaders are concerned, talk of an Israeli withdrawal is meaningless.

Interviewed by the Hebrew newspaper *Hadaashot*, Aharon Dom, a prominent figure in the Gush Emunim movement, said: "In the end, what we are talking about is playing for time. I need another three years in order to bring an extra 200,000 people to Judea and Samaria (Israeli parlance for the occupied territories). And then, they can have as many conferences as they want. No power in the world will evacuate that many people."

The first-ever direct talks between Israelis and Palestinian representatives are haunted by one question: have Israeli settlements made the

The historic peace talks in Madrid which brought Arab and Jew round the table for the first time in 40 years are hanging fire until a venue can be agreed for a second round. At the heart of the Middle East problem is land. It has been so ever since Israel was proclaimed in 1948 in Palestine so Jews could have a land of their own. Today, Israeli settlement of Jews in the occupied territories goes unabated, indeed it has been intensified. And Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir says Israel has no intention of giving up the territories.

occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Golan Heights irreversible? Many observers have pointed out that Israel has been laying the foundations for permanent control since 1967, when it seized the occupied territories following its victory in the June war against the Arab states.

The emigration of huge numbers of Soviet Jews to Israel — nearly 400,000 have arrived so far — has provided the impetus for the latest wave of settlement activity. In June 1990, Shamir bluntly declared that "big immigration requires Israel to be big as well." However, the immigration is a boost, rather than an excuse, for settlement.

When Shamir's right-wing Likud came to power in 1977 under Menachem Begin — after 30 years in the political wilderness — only 5,000 Jews were living in the occupied territories. Fired by the ideological goal of "Greater Israel," the Likud grabbed the opportunity to intensify settlement activity. By 1985, 52,000 settlers lived in the occupied territories.

There are now over 200 settlements in the occupied territories, which are home to 120,000 Israelis. A further 130,000 live in East Jerusalem, the Arab half of the city captured and annexed by Israel in 1967, and declared "the capital of the State of Israel" by the Knesset in 1980.

Palestinians want East Jerusalem as the capital of their state.

The government is luring Israelis — both veterans and new immigrants — into the West Bank with promises of cheap land and low or interest-free mortgages.

More than \$2.5 billion has been spent in the last 20 years building and maintaining settlements. Settlers also enjoy a seven per cent reduction in income tax, and Israeli industries operating in the occupied territories receive a government grant which covers 40 per cent of their expenses for purchasing equipment.

Israel has normalised its relationship with the occupied territories and as a result is presenting them to the public as an attractive place to live. The territories are also idea in the mind of Israeli leaders for the absorption of immigrants. A February 1991 report by left-wing Knesset Members Dedi Zucker and Haim Oron concludes that "in 1990, the number of Jews living in the occupied territories increased by 15 per cent. The source of this growth is the new immigrants, mainly from the USSR."

At a ceremony for the new settlement of Tzur Yigal, Shamir declared that the Green Line, which separates Israel from the occupied territories, "no longer exists as far as I'm concerned." So far, Israel has not undertaken any commitment to freeze settlements for the duration of the negotiations.

Palestinians are rightly fearful that this will destroy the

peace process, because every new settlement pushes their chance of exercising sovereignty further away.

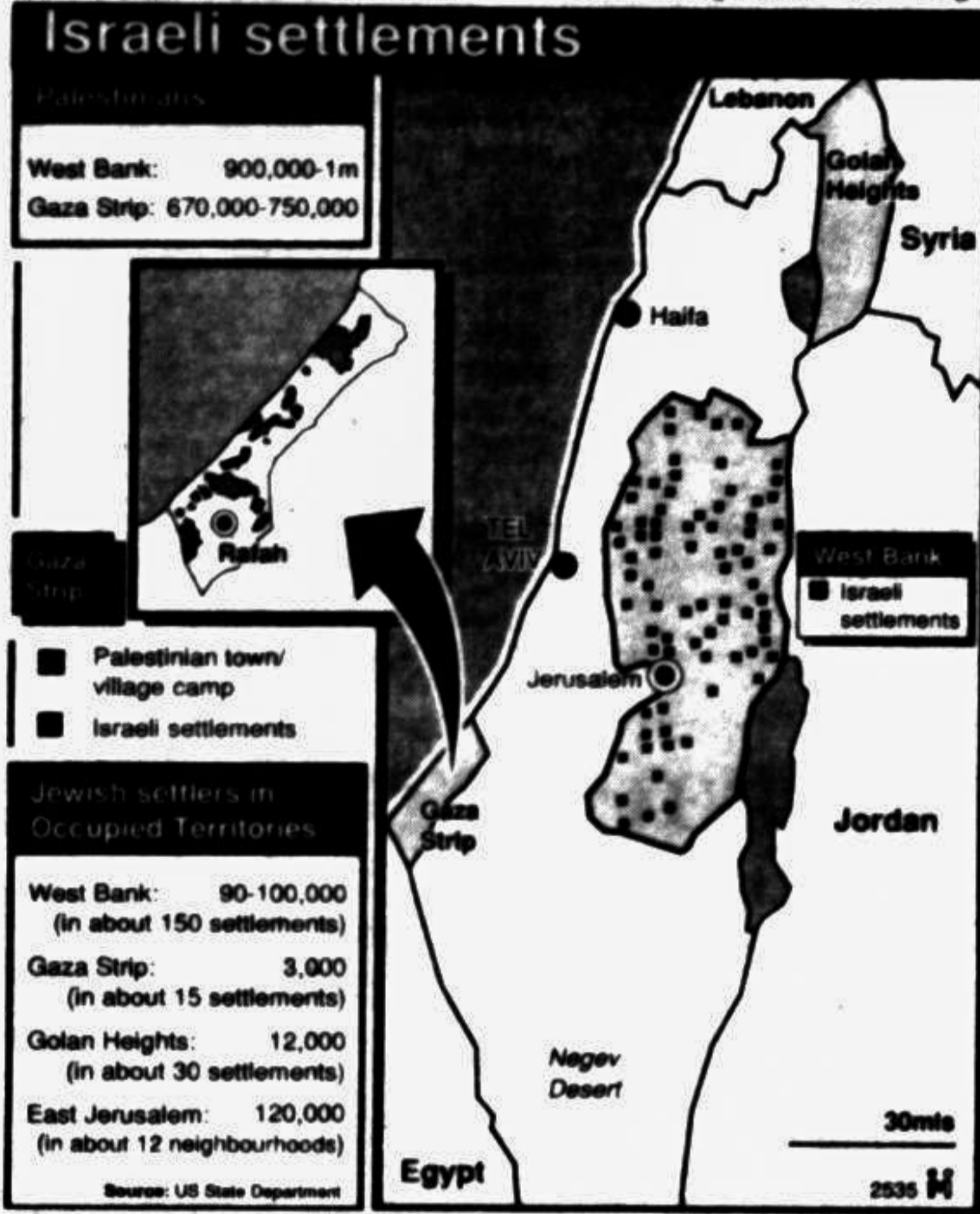
Yet, in spite of the projections of Meron Benvenisti and others, growing numbers of Israelis are expressing reservations about settlements. A recent survey of Likud members is revealing in this regard. Some 48 per cent are willing to concede at least some of the occupied territories, 53 per cent are willing to give up the Golan Heights, on the condition that it become a demilitarised zone.

If the Israeli public votes for territorial compromise when the general election takes place next year, the way to at least a partial withdrawal will be open. Many Israeli leftists were encouraged by a demonstration in Tel Aviv on the eve of the Madrid conference — some estimated that 80,000 were present — calling for land for peace. Nevertheless, negotiating Israel's withdrawal from the occupied territories will remain a daunting task. Crucially, the settlement drive has not yet stopped.

And even if Israel does accept the principle of territorial compromise, the government is unlikely to agree to the Palestine Liberation Organisation's demand for total evacuation of the settlements. Obstacles will also emerge in arguments about Israel's security needs, the status of any Palestinian entity, and the exact border between Israel and Palestine. — GEMINI NEWS

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SANTA FE DE BOGOTA, Colombia: For some time now, the international media has had its eyes on Cuba, predicting the imminent downfall of Fidel Castro, the withdrawal of Soviet troops from the island and radical changes in the Communist Party Congress held in Havana recently.

There has been a feeling that anything could happen. There is one fact, however, that many appear to have overlooked — the existence of two very different Cubas — one on the island itself and one in Miami, 170km away.

The latter is home to 80 per cent of Cuba's exiles, whose clout in Washington as a pressure group is as strong as that of the Jewish lobby today or the nationalist Chinese lobby of years past.

The Miami Cuban lobby is composed of businessmen with ties to the banking and construction sectors whose labour helped place Florida among the first states of the American union.

The future of Cuba hangs between these two poles, so close geographically but separated by barriers as implacable as the wall that divided Berlin.

Cubans on the island run the risk of a bloodbath if changes in government are undertaken as abruptly as those that took place in Eastern Europe, where the changes occurred for the most part peacefully.

Castro is not Gen. Antonio Noriega of Panama, and Latin America will not see one of its

symbols carted off to Miami in the handcuffs and uniform of a common criminal.

This is the reasoning behind the concept of a peaceful transition, a policy outlined on the island by Gustavo Arcos, Fidel's former comrade-in-arms and current representative of Cuba's human rights commission. This idea, rejected at first by the Cuban exile community, is now advocated by such prominent public figures as Maria Cristina Herrera and Artel Hidalgo.

Across the sea, the prevailing view draws upon scenarios from the crisis in Rumania. At first, says the prevailing wisdom in Miami, the dictator will resist tenaciously, backed by his secret police. But soon, the regular army will turn against him and the world will watch as he pays for his crimes, as did Ceausescu in trials on the Nuremberg war criminal model patented by the allies following World War II.

Of course, neither position is shared unanimously by either band, but their respective majorities lean toward one of these two tendencies.

Given this panorama, I venture to advance the hypothesis that future events will not unfold as rapidly or as predictably as maintained by those who hope to see the Rumanian scenario. Cuba is in a desperate situation. But for that very reason — its anguish — voices outside the island are calling for a humanitarian response to Castro's hypothetical collapse.

The Two Cubas

Not everyone is aware that 170kms separate two very different Cubas: the island Cuba and the Cuba of Miami. But Alfonso Lopez Michelsen, the former president of Colombia, says the division is as implacable as the Berlin Wall.

This position was stated at the United Nations General Assembly by Venezuela president Carlos Andres Perez, whose country stepped in to provide Cuba with the petroleum it once received from the Soviet Union.

The truth is that, although the Cuban government is growing less popular by the day, the same is not true of Castro among his masses of supporters on the island. People born under Castro's regime believe the opportunities they have received in education and health are triumphs of the revolution that they now risk losing under a government less than the one that came to power in Panama after the United States invasion.

Another factor, and one that is often underestimated by the friends of the United States is anti-US sentiment in Cuba and throughout Latin America. Fidel Castro is the personification of these feelings. He is the pebble in Uncle Sam's shoes, and many people

who do not count themselves among Castro's friends still hope that this symbol of protest will not too soon disappear.

Public spectacles like the Noriega trial, with the testimony of informers pardoned for their crimes, do not help make the image of the United States a more friendly one.

The same is true of the economic adjustment policies imposed by the International Monetary Fund, but attributed by most people to policies emanating from Washington.

One of the arguments raised against Castro's future is his near-complete isolation. This argument overlooks the examples of China, Angola, Vietnam and other Asian countries in

the same situation.

Another argument, evoked above all other considerations, is the end of socialism, the death of ideology, the end of the history.

A pertinent question here is the destiny of US capitalism. How long will it take for the curtain to close on the crisis underway in the country that pioneered the implementation of economic neo-liberalism? Recession is back with new intensity, bankruptcies occur on a monthly basis, the US dollar is losing its importance as a world standard and gross economic growth for this year will be under one per cent.

Is this an inspiring model for countries that want to develop their economies?

What Cuba really needs is not a new regime that will fight for its life without taking into account social considerations. Cuba needs to be free from any pre-determined system (that is, from socialism or absolute capitalism) but open to all the options of global economic integration and the return to a state of law where freedom is respected and economic openness is introduced gradually in areas where the experiments of the last 35 years have failed.

On the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the death of Gen Omar Torrijos of Panama, I recalled his tentative return to democracy there. Torrijos himself termed these efforts a "retreat" that distinguished between the head of state and the head of the government and led to his retreat from center stage to exercise a still relatively leading role in spheres of action separate from the daily government routine.

It is not possible to conceive of a "retreat" by Castro, to borrow the same phrase, that would not mean the bloody revolution feared by so many?

Until a few months ago, this solution still seemed possible.

Now, with the withdrawal of Soviet troops, the most obstinate believe themselves to be at Havana's gates, privatising its public enterprises.

The Friends of Cuba, meanwhile, still hold out the hope that the inevitable changes now facing the nation can be carried out without violence. — JPS

Alfonso Lopez Michelsen, former president (1974-78) and foreign minister of Colombia, is the head of the governing Liberal Party.

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.

Daughters of darkness

Sir, For the last few weeks much has appeared in sections of the press in regard to the above subject. Unfortunately, in all the articles I have seen, I did not notice anywhere that any sort of plan or programme, had been outlined to improve the plight of the unfortunate inmates of Tanbazar and other such places.

It is so easy for us "Children of the Light" to sit back in our comfortable environments and have very noble thoughts as to what should be done to "rehabilitate" these unfortunate and their offspring in a "society" which, we know very well, will never accept them as fellow human beings.

Although I do not support women earning their living by prostitution, I do support their right to earn a living by the best way possible to them. Not all the inmates choose this way of earning. Many of them were forced into it by sheer poverty, ignorance and the lack of better employment elsewhere. On the other hand, many of course are there by choice. It is not up to us look into the circumstances which led to their being there, rather it is the moral duty of all concerned citizens and even the government to accept them for what they are — fellow humans — and try to improve their lot in the very surroundings they

live in.

Has no one ever thought to set up health care centre in Tanbazar, a school, a clinic, a handicraft centre, a community centre or other such programmes which would encourage the women to think of better ways to earn their living? Or are we all concerned with rosy dreams of marrying them off to "good men" so that they can make "honest women" of themselves? How can we guarantee that they will be happy?

Has anyone ever bothered to go there and talk to the ladies and ask them what their hopes and aspirations are? What they really needed, besides, clients? To them clients only mean money, money which they can buy the essentials they need, educate and cloth their children and themselves and secure a roof over their heads.

In spite of our noble thoughts, prostitution will never be eradicated from the face of the earth. Besides, all "prostitutes" do not live in miserable conditions such as Tanbazar; it is common knowledge that there are many such ladies carrying out the same profession albeit at a higher cost who are sheltered by "society" because the only difference is that they do what they have to do in the name of "love" or are considered by some as "socialites".

It is something we

"Children of the Light" have to learn to live with. The best we can do for the prostitutes and for our own safety as well is to try to improve their living conditions, try to enlighten them an assist them in whatever way possible to lead as normal a life as possible.

L. Lesturgeon
Lalmatia H.E. Dhaka.

Open space in city

Sir, It was decided by the past undemocratic government that the land vacated after removal of Dhaka Central Jail would be utilised for shopping and housing complexes. This was a most unwise planning and the sole purpose was to make money by selling land for construction. Old part of the city is without any open space worth the name. The only hope for healthy survival of the city and citizens of Dhaka is to keep the vast land occupied now by the Central Jail as open for garden, park, sports grounds, open air theatre, aviary for birds etc. Local residents, sometime back formed a resistance committee to fight against the design to convert the space into shopping and housing complex. The committee should activate itself and urge the present people's government to abandon the sinister plan of the autocratic past government and municipal corporation to look forward to the next century and beyond and not to miss this opportunity to present the future citizens a gift of open space in the shape of grocery by judicious use of the land to be available after shifting of Dhaka Central Jail.

Abu Ahmed
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OPINION

Exodus, Influx, Misery

A photograph captioned "Sound of footsteps nearing" appearing on the 26th October issue of *The Daily Star* showing specifically a group of distressed people from some northern districts disembarking at Kamalapur Railway Station, conveys with it serious implications and is quite thought-provoking. The exodus of the people from the northern districts to the capital city speaks of a hopeless situation prevailing there.

For years, we have been told of the spectre of poverty and starvation haunting the broader section of the people living in Rangpur, Dinajpur and other northern districts. People who go there to discharge official duties and obligations, narrate invariably of a depressing situation. As there exists always a dearth of employment, people migrate to the capital city, nurturing a hope of getting rid of starvation and death.

The hope they bear when they come to Dhaka, never consummates with reality. As they have a low degree of literacy and little money to start a business, they can hardly make use of the scanty opportunities available here for them to keep their body and soul together. They rather become victims of circumstances — in strict terms they often yield to the beckoning of the dark forces.

Of course, the already overpopulated Dhaka gives a more depressing appearance at this addition to her population like other occasions of silent migration from other districts. Dhaka has now become a highly dense habitat of countless homo sapiens. The environment has become polluted and unhealthful. One feels off-balance and confused when he finds, to utter horror, every nook and corner of the city overcrowded, not a breathing space remaining.

Traffic jam is one of a few logical consequences of this large inflow of people into the capital city. Begging is gradually becoming the only means of survival for a big stream of Dhaka city residents. Joblessness has mounted tremendously among the youth. The tendency among a broader section of the rising youth to resort to gangster activities has contributed to the worsening of the whole scenario. Crime rates have increased keeping pace with the increase in the population of Dhaka city. This is the most distressing fact about the migration of helpless country-siders in abnormally high proportions. There are valid reasons to believe that this growing migration will, in the end, plunge the society into a darkness, inevitably. A recent statistical survey reveals that almost forty per cent of the city residents dwell in slums. These slums are simply ghettos and are breeding grounds of crimes and immoral activities and also shelters for hardened criminals. This gives a very unpromising projection for a metropolitan city which for years has been earmarked to become a "Tolotoma" city by our visionary rulers.

The government officials and the economists attribute to many reasons for the widespread poverty and starvation. Unfortunately, the people entrusted with the job, never fulfil the responsibility of thrashing out the curse of poverty and starvation. It has been, however, observed that morley and materials pumped into the economy of Bangladesh are yet to deliver lasting and permanent development and prosperity. Just the immediate needs are met and the leaders go on a begging afresh each new year. This is an unfortunate thing that while the aristocratic and rich class, be it in Europe, America or

India, take part in philanthropy and generosity by their monumental contribution to the society, we find a great void in this regard in our country. Those people in other countries on one hand contribute to the economy by setting up big industrial projects, and on the other hand, they show a large heart when they turn to establish charitable organisations. Tradeshmanship is the main profession of the rich and aristocratic class here. While they are allegedly pummeling a lot of black money into foreign banks, they make a farse of philanthropy arranging much-publicised seminars on poverty management in say, a five-star hotel (where, believeably, sumptuous dinner devours up most of the agenda). It is a sad thing then that the people of the Dhaka city should be the silent spectators of the decadence of society in every sense.

It is true that if enough attention is not paid to the uprising of the rural economy, nobody will be able to resist the aggravation of the situation due to the influx, those unlucky people in the village must get assured that they can manage at least two square meals a day at their own home. Expanding the amenities and enhancing the economic importance of the existing cities in other districts will divert the desperate villagers. This, however, needs gathering of a thorough knowledge about the economic and socio-political condition of the whole country. These are the simple facts about stopping this one-way migration. We, however, will have to leave to the banal economists the burden of solving various complex mathematical of economic emancipation.

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