

## Focus on Orphans

The Social Welfare Ministry has decided to construct six new 'Shishu Paribar Bhabans' (Children's Family Homes for orphans) by the end of next year. This will add to the 17 such homes currently existing. The plan to transform normal orphanages to the so-called 'Family Homes' was taken by the previous government. The idea was to gradually reform all the 73 state-run orphanages. What exactly the government had in mind in instituting this change is not really very clear except some vague notion that these unfortunate children were to have a more family like environment in these homes than they had before. The initiative is definitely laudable and is based on humane and refined consideration.

The question is how far have we succeeded in this regard? In addition to the total number of government-run orphanages, there are 324 others which are government aided but privately run. Then there are 972 totally privately-run — or NGO-run — orphanages, quite often funded by external assistance. Together in all these homes about 50,000 orphans are housed. How does this compare with the actual need? Well in Dhaka alone, it is estimated that there are more than 400,000 street children. It is understood that all street children are not necessarily orphans, but in their destitute condition and need for shelter and care these kids are in no better situation than the actual orphans.

The challenge therefore is far more complex than one which can be solved by a few orphanages here or there. Social scientists are of the view that issues of child care and special facilities for the orphans must be integrated into the overall poverty alleviation strategy of the country. The problem of orphans should not be addressed in isolation because it cannot be solved in isolation. The children who inhabit all these 'homes' are not always the one who have lost their parents. There is a large number of abandoned ones also. First the father abandons his children, being unable to feed and take care of them. After a while the mother, having tried her best, abandons them, the lucky ones among them finding their way into the orphanages.

So where do we go from here? With the population on the rise, poverty on the rise, number of abandoned children on the rise, what can the government and the society at large do to meet this challenge?

According to the plan announced yesterday it will cost the government Tk. 23.20 crore to construct the new 'Shishu Paribar Bhabans' — at Tk. 5 crore each. We all know almost all of this allocation will go for construction of a building and some perhaps for furniture and equipment. Cannot this fund and many other similar funds be better spent? Investing in buildings will line the pockets of the contractors and will be of very limited use to the kids for whom it is meant. A building worth Tk. 5 crore is not really a very cheap one. Depending, of course, on how many kids are planned to be housed. Can we not look into the possibilities of cheaper but adequate constructions, which after providing shelter for the children during the night can be used as skills imparting centres for youth and adults during the day? We really cannot pretend to know all the answers. But this much we are certain about: that the traditional approach is not only too costly but is also time-consuming and cannot keep pace with the rise in the size of the problem itself.

## The Happiest Event in a Long Time

It is not known if Bangladesh has any officially declared bird sanctuary. There was long a talk of setting up sanctuaries in Sylhet and Chittagong. No one seems to know what came of that. It may, of course, be argued that the whole of Bangladesh is a nation-sized bird sanctuary as catching, killing or mistreating migratory birds — the sanctuaries are mainly set up for them — are strictly banned throughout Bangladesh and are punishable by law. But true to that celebrated piece of dialogue that D L Roy set on Alexander's lips — what a strange country is this, Seleucus! Banned things sell better here and fetch a better price.

But there is a somewhat tragic element involved in this sometimes hilarious and unending show of the unlawful and the anti-social. In the golden months of the Bengal winter a particularly cruel and flagrantly unlawful exhibition is made on the busiest thoroughfares of the capital city. Migratory birds, dozens of them are dangled head from the hands of the culprits who keep on waving them at possible buyers. This is being done day in and day out in front of not only law-abiding and environment-conscious streams of people but before the very nose of police who include, as a matter of course, their top brass. The culprits can continue with their banned business perhaps because those that could stop the foul act, start salivating at the sight of the birds and dream of snatching them all to their kitchens.

The moral is, this is decidedly a very bird-unfriendly country. So when news comes of university students trying to be friends with those flying creatures it deserves to be noted and commented upon and the students praised and encouraged. No, the students of the Jahangirnagar University campus did not try to prove their love of winged creatures by caging them up and making pets of them. One day last week they found one from a flock with a hook stuck in its gullet. It would have surely died had not the students taken it to the University medical centre and after a night's treatment and nursing return it to its flock which, getting its lost members back, happily flew out to newer climes.

That's one of the happiest things to happen in a long time. And it is no isolated event. That campus as a whole has for years been a very bird-friendly zone, thanks to the mysterious co-operation on this one point among all students and teachers and other people in authority. This happy fact has made the campus into a naturally growing bird sanctuary where from the very beginning they had promulgated strict orders banning molestation of birds, that alone could hardly have sufficed. What did the miracle is a mystery by itself — birds found natural friends in all of the residents of the campus. And once that got to the community of the transcontinental fliers, they started coming, resting, even mating and laying eggs and hatching and breeding young ones.

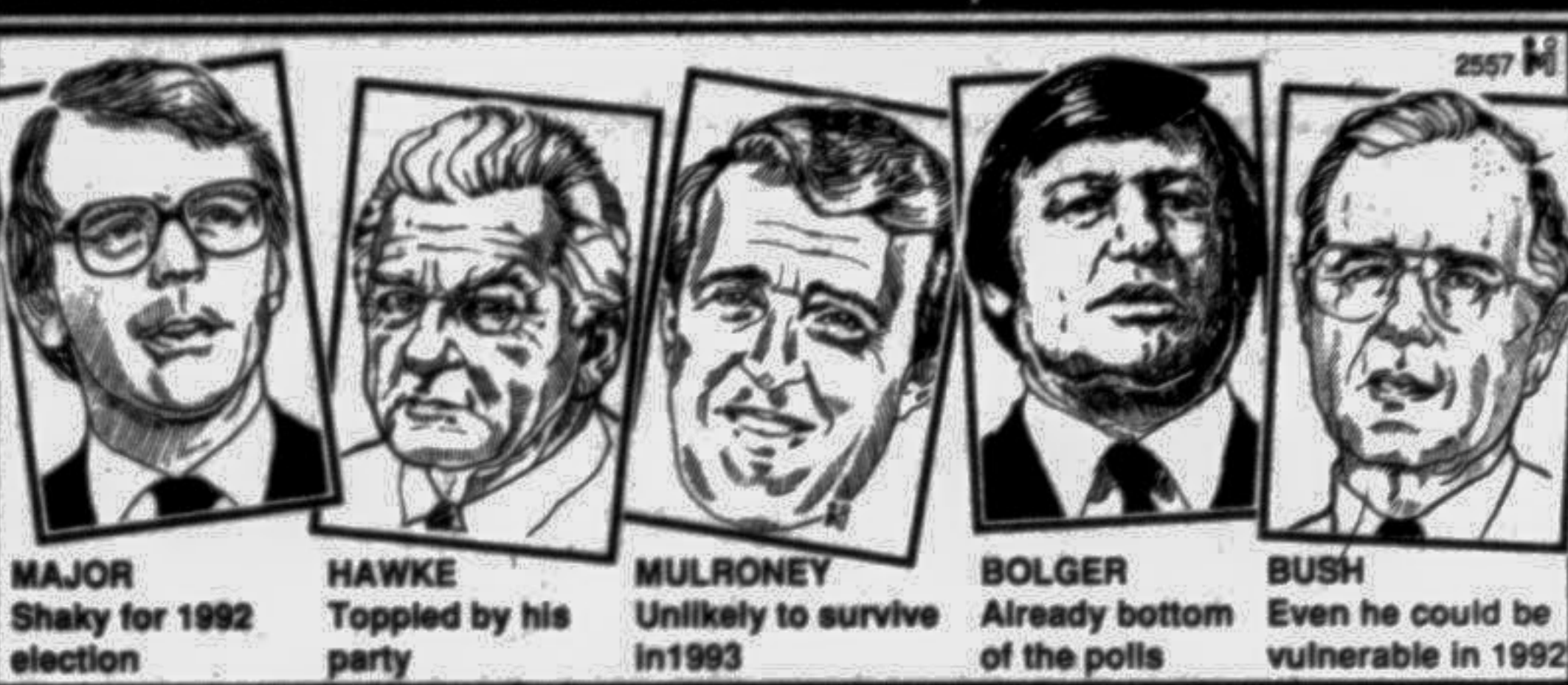
In the winter a visit to the Jahangirnagar campus is a must for the knowing people. Five to ten thousand birds swarm the waters of that wonderfully humane place.

## Recession Begins to Take Toll of the Political Leaders

by Derek Ingram

Bob Hawke, who has just been ousted as prime minister of Australia, may be the first of several political casualties of the economic recession. Britain's John Major could be next and Brian Mulroney of Canada is in a desperate position. Even President George Bush is seen as vulnerable. Ironically the capitalist system is showing its weaknesses at the very time communism has been seen to fail.

## Victims of recession



**MAJOR**  
Shaky for 1992 election

**HAWKE**  
Topped by his party

**MULRONEY**  
Unlikely to survive in 1993

**BOLGER**  
Already bottom of the polls

**BUSH**  
Even he could be vulnerable in 1992

lost in mid-December by his former Treasurer, Paul Keating. He leaves the country with 10.5 per cent unemployment — the highest since World War Two — and his fall was at least also in part due to an accumulation of financial scandals.

Nor may Keating have much chance of surviving the next election, due by May 1993 at the latest. That will mean Australia swinging back to the right after its longest ever term of Labour Party government.

Next year Thatcher's suc-

cessor in Britain, John Major, could become the second victim of economic woe. The British economy shows almost no sign of recovery and he must go to the polls by next July. His government seems to be floundering, despite his personal popularity, and if he

loses out Britain will move in the opposite direction from Australia — to the left.

In even worse plight is Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney. As leader of the Conservative Party he recently fell to an all-time low of nine points in the public opinion polls. The Canadian economy too is on its back.

Mulroney has a little more time to recover than Major — he does not have to hold an election until 1993 — but few give him any chance of winning. The alternative is as uncertain as it is in Britain.

The opposition Liberal Party is weak and support has increased for the left wing National Democratic Party and the recently-formed right wing Reform Party. Canada could fall right or left next time and, like Britain, it could have a hung parliament.

New Zealand is in a similar mess. Left gave way to right at the last election, after a year in which the country had three

prime ministers. Now, within a year of winning power, the current incumbent, James Bolger, is the most unpopular leader the country has ever had. He has fallen even below Mulroney's opinion poll rating.

High inflation and high unemployment have led New Zealand to drastic cutbacks in social welfare and swinging budgetary measures that could see yet another prime minister jacking over soon.

The recession has also set people thinking the unthinkable in the United States — the possibility that George Bush might not be re-elected President next November. He being blamed for paying too little attention to the domestic economy while riding high in international diplomacy. Economics, in any case, was never his prime interest.

Nor is the recession hitting only the leaders of the English-speaking members of the Group of Seven. President Francois Mitterrand is now as unpopular as he has ever been, although as a great survivor he seems sure to run his full seven-year term, which ends in 1995.

Only Chancellor Helmut Kohl of Germany is in no political danger, although his popularity, too, has slumped, again mainly because of the economy. But it is barely a year since he was re-elected.

The Western world is thus entering a period of great political uncertainty because its economic structure is faltering at a time when it could be expected to be sounder than ever before.

If communism has brought economic ruin to its founding country and its allies, the alternative capitalist system is showing that it has huge weaknesses.

Historically, it has moved forward in fits and starts and seems incapable of producing steady growth — and when it does grow it does so in a way that does not spread the benefits widely enough to reach the underprivileged.

Lack of control leads to increasing greed and selfishness. In recent years we have seen the uncovering of massive financial scandals in the US, Britain and Australia as well as on an inter-continental scale. Australia has seen some of the most spectacular, featuring industrialists like Alan Bond, and suspicion of government complicity in some of them.

The US is notorious for major financial scandals, but lately Britain has not been far behind. The spider's web of fraud spun by publisher Robert Maxwell involving breathtaking sums of money is only now being unravelled.

In other this and other cases respected firms of accountants and auditors, the very institutions of the City of London, with its history of integrity, have all come under a cloud. Even the banks have presided over some extraordinary deals and have never been held lower in public esteem.

The collapse of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International did nothing to help confidence in Western banking. Among the institutions that came out of that affair badly was the Bank of England.

There must, of course, be much better and fairer ways of running the world's economy, but no one has come forward with the blueprint. We are desperately in need of new men or women of the intellectual stature of John Maynard Keynes or Karl Marx. Neither got it anywhere right, but they were giants of their kind.

Where are their successors?

Or is capitalism to remain the only system of international economic order? The prospect is not exactly bright.

— GEMINI NEWS  
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## OPINION

## Further Thoughts on Structural Advancement

R. H. Khandker

ment, programmes in the Third World have come into being only in the 1980s, such conditionalities were there even earlier in the 1950s, 1960s and even 1970s when important industrialized countries resorted to IMF financing to overcome balance of payments crises. The two Bretton Wood institutions — International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) of World Bank were created in the aftermath of the Second World War to help resolve problems of balance of payments and economic development. The basic objective of the IMF was to resolve balance of payments constraints. The industrialized countries maintained convertibility of their currencies at officially fixed exchange rates which were at or near the equilibrium rates determined by the market demands and supplies of the national currencies. Pressures for short-term movements away from the fixed rates were counteracted by central bank's operations to buy or sell foreign currencies. However, occasionally an industrialized country encountered a longer-term structural disequilibrium in its balance of payments. Such situations called for borrowing from the IMF and a structural adjustment programme. The IMF often insisted on a devaluation of the currency and a host of other conditions, notably restrictions on public spending to demands for imports. Such conditionalities were not always popular in the borrowing country including among the leaders. I recall the outburst of President de Gaulle in the Sixties refusing to devalue the French franc which he proclaimed was equivalent to devaluing France. After the fixed exchange rate system gave way to the system of floating exchange rates in the Seventies the conditionality of devaluation became unnecessary in the industrialized countries. However it remained for those

countries including all in the Third World which maintained fixed exchange rates of non-convertible currencies.

I have dwelt in this historical discussion to buttress the point, that, although the debate on structural adjustment started in the Third World only in the 1980s, it was much older in the industrialized countries. In that era IMF's operation in the Third World was limited, as those countries managed their balance of payments at fixed exchange rates by applying strict exchange control and various import restrictions, licensing and potential duties. Commonly the national currencies were highly overvalued at the official exchange rates, which caused widespread economic distortions. However, so long as they could avoid the doors of the IMF, they could also avoid conditionalities. The World Bank left the exchange rates and balance of payments issues to the IMF, and determined its lending strategies to the Third World countries mainly on development considerations. This situation changed in the 1980s when the major donors urged the World Bank to compel the developing countries to relax controls and to align their economies to free market forces. Thus the World Bank joined forces with the IMF, at times surpassing the latter, to lay down policy conditions. Realistic exchange rate and structural adjustment became major tools of Bank policy and operation.

We may now turn to Bangladesh. To start with, it should be asserted that Bangladesh must accept structural adjustment as a necessary programme policy for its economic progress. Success in the field of external trade will determine our economic development. Whatever gains that so far have been achieved emanated from the external

sector, especially the human and garments exports, apart from large foreign aid and substantial grants and grants-in-kind. For future progress, Bangladesh must achieve a much greater competitiveness in external trade for which structural adjustment policies and programmes are essential.

I do not believe that the World Bank is against Bangladesh, or is prepared to subordinate Bangladesh's development interest to the business interests of the donor countries, which is often implied in the criticisms of the Bank. This I say despite my personal witnessing during my days in the Bank in the Sixties of reviews of certain large Bank projects by some Executive Directors from the angle of contract business of the countries they represented. I believe that in articulating the Bank's policy advice to developing countries including Bangladesh the members of the Board and staff are motivated by the development interests of the borrowing country. I have observed this when I analysed the Bank Programme in Bangladesh last year as the convener of the Task Force on Aid Utilization. Why then is the misunderstanding among certain critics about Bank advice on the structural adjustment of the Bangladesh economy? Below is my view on the possible answer.

I think that the main reason is that the Bangladesh Govt. does not make its own analysis of the structural adjustment policies and programmes which it considers necessary for a viable and sustainable development of the national economy. In the absence of such policy analysis, the Govt. is left only to react to Bank advice. The Govt. may have genuine restrictions to certain Bank advice but it locks convincing and analytic arguments. This situation and the heavy weight of the Bank as the most important donor for Bangladesh make the

Government to accept willy nilly Bank prescriptions with attached conditions. However, the reservations persist in the Govt. mind and the Bank knows it, which creates some veiled distrusts between the two parties. Consequently, the Bank tends to put more conditions to bind the hands and feet of the Government. The Government is in no position to say, no since it needs Bank financing desperately. Sometimes the Government accepts conditions knowing that it cannot honour them. Some conditions are beyond the reach of the signatory as they lay in other areas over which he has no control.

At the Bank side, there is a tendency to prescribe standard policy and programmes of structural adjustment, not specifically tuned to the objective conditions in the borrowing country. As the High Commissioner has emphatically stated, the structural adjustment policy and programme should be designed and carried out, not according to some pre-set equation but in the high of the country's own, individual circumstances. The Bank carries out investigations on the conditions in Bangladesh, but in the absence of internal comprehensive analysis and articulation of a national position, the Bank focuses its studies with ideas which are external and standard.

If the above analysis is substantially valid, the obvious conclusion should be that, the Govt. should have a firm political will and develop professional capacity to carry out, dispassionate, comprehensive analysis of structural adjustment policy requirements, and with the policy so formulated, it should lead the negotiations with the Bank, not be led. The outside professional economists and other specialists should be involved in such analyses bringing them from the role of critics to that of partnership in policy formulation. That should reduce the misunderstanding now prevailing about structural adjustment.

The author had held senior positions in the Planning Commissions of erstwhile Pakistan and later in Bangladesh. He also served as Adviser in Kuwait, World Bank and UNDP. Retiring from the latter he resides alternately in New York and Dhaka.

## 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.

## South Africa

Sir, A couple of months back our government announced its decision to restore connections with South Africa in view of the signs of changes in the attitude of the white rulers in that country. The passports issued since then stopped excluding that country.

South Africa is a very resourceful country having a high per capita income. Even the black and Asian population have a per capita income much higher than what we have in Bangladesh. Various professional groups have good opportunity to obtain job in that country. There is scope for

marketing various labor intensive industrial products from our country.

Recently an European lady who is normally resident in South Africa visited Bangladesh as a tourist. From discussion with the lady it was realized that an understanding about our country will generate a goodwill and a feeling of cooperation there which along with opportunity of business can be of help for our country.

It may be of some relevance to mention here that the lady while in Dhaka tried to contact someone in Johannesburg to know about market of some embroidered materials she liked very much. She came to

know that it was not possible to book a call to SA from Bangladesh. She could communicate a message through a friend in Bombay. If we do not change this policy very soon we will become dependent on Indian middlemen for business with SA.

It was also gathered that there was no suitable or reasonably priced air travel facility with that part of the globe.

Md. Anwarul Haq  
West Raja Bazar,  
Dhaka.

## Domestic servants

Sir, I find it so difficult to keep my servants and run my house.

I am a house-wife with a job at a school. The job remains a part-time one, yet I do not manage to control my servants, or provide an ideal home for my husband and two children.

As soon as a servant appears, I ask him for his credentials, recommendations etc. More often than not they are fabricated.

There is then the problem of the poor women, let loose from 'bazaars', who seek food and shelter, but are out to grab what they can. You medicate and tranquilize them but they have their eyes on the male members of the extended family. I do not mean to caste stones, but one has to be so careful when choosing a servant, that one is often beside oneself.

You teach servants of all shapes and sizes and of both sexes. But once they have learnt the art of cooking, cleaning or gardening, they leave for better prospects in Gulshan, Banani, Dhanmondi and even overseas.

I am weary of having my home converted into a training centre for the past 20 years. I have little other alternative. I

wish in your columns, which I read avidly, I could find a solution to this Quixotic situation.

Ismat Ara,  
Bailey Road, Dhaka.

## Environment

Sir, Protection of environment against all sorts of pollution is now a global issue. So many institutions have been formed in different countries of the world to generate people's consciousness for conservation of the environment. A pollution-free clean environment is essential for our healthy survival. Everyday our environment is getting polluted by various means, such as, vehicle fume, radiation, toxic-wastes released by the mills and factories, noise etc. To keep our atmosphere clean, we have to take some effective measures urgently. We have to make our citizens aware of the pollution hazards and organize them to undertake group actions for protecting our environment against pollution.

With a view to realizing the aforesaid objectives, a society called 'Bangladesh Society for Conservation of Environment' (BSCE) has been formed recently under the convenerhip of Prof Dr Abdullah A Haroon who actually took the initiative for setting up such forum. Engineer Emdadul Islam has been made the member-secretary of the eleven-member convening committee. This letter-writer is also a member of the committee. Very soon we will hold our first convention and start practical work initially on national basis in the field of conservation of environment.

We sincerely hope that all the quarters would extend their fullest cooperation in realizing the objectives of BSCE. Let us conserve the environment.

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