

A Case for Children

The launching of the National Programmes of Action for Children, 1990-1995 is welcome news. With the formation of four working groups, one each for health and nutrition, water and environmental sanitation, education and social welfare — in March 1991, the process actually got underway. Evidently, attention has been given to issues beyond the conventional ones or at least there is an attempt to find the interrelations between areas that directly or indirectly influence the lives of the budding population. It is also heartening to note that the objectives of the programmes are quite consistent with the Fourth Five-Year Plan.

If the elaborate plan of action chalked out to realise the objectives can be carried out unhindered, maybe, children will get a better deal, if not a shot in the arm. That children in our society are the most vulnerable group has been acknowledged universally and the concern shown for their well-being should not go unrecognised. Odds are, however, many and are expected to prove insurmountable at times. When the vulnerability of the child starts, according to a publication of the UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund), from within the womb, the perception of the problem should cover even more areas than the programmes have done.

In fact, the majority of children inherit their disadvantaged social standing from the inferior status of their mother. Disadvantaged, underfed, overworked and living under severe economic and social constraints, women should be provided with support first for ensuring for them an equal position along with men in society. Without this, the stranglehold of the vicious circle of poverty, illness, malnutrition and high mortality cannot be broken. That indeed is a daunting task but considering our stake in the matter, women's position in society has to be reviewed, specially in the light of their part in economic decision.

One success story in the area of child health through the Expanded Programme of Child Immunization (EPI) is however very encouraging. The coverage by this programme from less than five per cent in 1985 to more than 80 per cent in 1991 is, by any standard, a great achievement. Substantial success has also been achieved in providing safe drinking water; although much remains to be done. If an integrated plan of action is in order, the issue of female education and women's role in economic decision should feature in it. In this task, the government must admit that an educated mother is a better guarantor of child and for that matter family health than perhaps a doctor.

As for the economic status of women, society should by now come to recognise that given equal opportunities, women can as well perform quite appreciably in the areas so long thought to be male preserve. With the elevation of women's status, children are also going to get their rightful place in society. At present they are treated odiously and inhumanly. Poverty certainly is to blame for the deplorable situation they have been condemned into. But sometimes in a less affluent society, children receive love and care that are a dream for their counterpart in the more affluent ones.

What counts most is a society's attitudes to the well-being of children. Tradition and social mores apart, there is a need for looking at the issue from a utilitarian point of view. In this context too we have not been very careful in setting our priorities with our young population. This national programme of action, let us hope, will not fail to take into account all the related areas for a comprehensive solution to the problems faced by children. As one of the first signatories of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and also a ratifier of the same on August 3, 1990, Bangladesh should first of all devote itself to the task of doing away with child labour which is demeaning and disgraceful for the nation.

Tribute to Manik Miah

In observing the 23rd death anniversary of the late Tofazzul Hussain, better known as Manik Miah, yesterday, the journalist community here not only recalled the contribution of a great newspaperman to the setting up of a powerful media institution like Ittefaq but also the role of a section of the press to the resurgence of Bengali nationalism against the authoritarian rule imposed on our people by successive regimes in Islamabad, more especially by Ayub Khan.

In more ways than one, Manik Miah was a pioneer in the field of daily journalism of the erstwhile East Pakistan. He appreciated better than most others what a newspaper can do as a political vehicle without downgrading its role as an objective daily, how to be an editorial success without being a commercial failure. Here, Manik Miah's business expertise supplemented his editorial judgement. Again, people will remember the tremendous popularity gained by his column, written under his pen-name "Musafir", a column that combined wit, humour and bitter sarcasm, underlined by the writer's commitment to the political ideals which moved the hearts and minds of the people of what eventually became the independent republic of Bangladesh. In this sense, Ittefaq, under Manik Miah, was anything but an independent non-partisan newspaper. It was a crusading journal fighting for a cause.

While paying tribute to the memories of Manik Miah, we feel compelled to mention that professional bodies such as BFUJ and DUJ should undertake activities to introduce the young and upcoming journalists with the contribution made by such stalwarts as Manik Miah, Abdus Salam, Zahur Hossain Chowdhury, Shamsuddin Ahmed, Abul Mansur Ahmad and others in advancing the cause of journalism in our country. Familiarity with their lives, activities and writings will help to inspire the new generation of journalists. The Press Institute should also think of undertaking such activities.

The ideals which motivated Manik Miah about the future of Bangladesh are yet to be realised, even in the field of journalism, and most certainly in our economic emancipation. The best tribute we can pay to the memory of this great journalist is to work towards the realisation of these ideals in ways which each newspaper may consider best in its own judgement.

IT was to find out the official line in Chinese thinking, especially in the international affairs, that the Daily Star spoke to the Director of the Asian Department in the Chinese Foreign Ministry **WANG YINGFAN**. Mr Yingfan is a veteran diplomat and is the highest ranking official in charge of policy formulations for the Asian region. He spoke to **MAHFUZ ANAM**, the Executive Editor of the Daily Star, during the latter's recent visit to Beijing.

Daily Star (DS): You are no doubt aware that Bangladesh is facing a severe refugee problem due to the policy of Myanmar towards its ethnic and religious minorities. How does China view the Bangladesh-Myanmar problem?

Wang Yingfan (WY): We understand the problem being faced by Bangladesh due to the influx of refugees. We hope that this problem can be resolved through dialogue and discussion. Both countries are our friends. We do not want to see misunderstanding between these two friendly countries grow. The issue affects bilateral relations and it should be solved bilaterally. From our side China has been doing whatever it can. The government of Bangladesh is fully aware of this.

DS: How do you see the prospect of developing further economic and trade relations with Bangladesh?

WY: China is keen on promoting further economic ties with Bangladesh. We look for-

Interview

China after Collapse of Socialism

With the collapse of the Soviet led socialist bloc, China suddenly finds itself a bit lonely in upholding the cause of socialism, or whatever is left of it. Nothing remains as it was. Dramatic changes within China has led to economic growth. But is it building socialism? The Chinese call it 'socialism with Chinese characteristics'.

ward to strengthening cooperation with your country. Growth of our respective economies will increase the need for greater links and cooperation between our two countries. We have to find new areas of trade and business links. We have been deeply involved in the development efforts of Bangladesh. We have extended assistance and cooperation wherever we could. We hope to do even more in the future. We are looking into possibilities of direct investment and joint ventures which will bring higher level of benefit to both our people.

DS: With the collapse of the Soviet Union, do you see any special role for China to uphold socialism or to protect the socialist bloc, — whatever is left of it?

WY: According to our way of thinking the world is now moving from a bipolar to a multi-polar world.

DS: Well most of us think that the world has moved from a bipolar to a unipolar world.

WY: Well that is not China's view. Unipolar world is a pipe dream of certain countries. We think that the world today is heading towards a situation which will have many centres of power. Japan and Europe are already established as

power centres. The united Germany will no doubt play a pivotal role in the future. The Asian Tigers will also exert considerable influence. We expect ASEAN also to be a source of power. So really we are moving towards a multipolar world. We have moved away from a world where all international relations used to be governed by the rivalry between the two super powers. Now the atmosphere is one of relaxation of tension, but in a limited sense. We have to take this relaxation process much further ahead. China has two major aims. To promote peace and to further development. China supports the transition to a New International Economic and Political Order on the basis of friendship and mutual co-operation with all.

DS: Is China weakened, especially in its ideological battle against capitalism, by the fall of the Soviet Union?

WY: Emergence of socialism was a historical necessity and it came at a time when the world wanted a way out of oppression. But socialism itself has undergone a process of transition. Socialism had its own twists and turns. In China itself we had to experience our own ups and downs in building

socialism. From the experience of the Soviet Union we should draw lessons. Socialism failed in certain countries due to specific conditions but not due to the fault of the system itself. In China socialism is more deeply rooted and people are confident about their faith in the system. This is demonstrated by our policy of reforms and opening up.

DS: Why do you think socialism failed in East Europe?

WY: The choice of a social system is upto the people. If people want reforms and a new way of life than that choice must be respected. People of Soviet Union and East Europe are free to choose the social and political system under which they want to live. These changes are the result of internal dynamics. In China we had our own reforms and we brought about changes that our people needed. Now we are enjoying the result of the reform through widespread development. We are now building socialism with Chinese characteristics.

DS: You do not consider what happened in Soviet Union and East Europe as setbacks for socialism?

WY: Socialism comes through a long historical process. It takes several genera-

tions to build — say about ten generations. So what you see happening is a part of an evolutionary process but our principle position in this regard is to respect the wishes of the people in choosing their own social and political system.

DS: Do you think the end of the cold war will adversely affect the future of the Non-aligned Movement (NAM)?

WY: NAM played a tremendous role in maintaining peace and stability in the world over the last three decades. China always supported the aim of NAM. China has applied for observer status in NAM. This itself indicates the importance China attaches to NAM. We still believe in its ideal and think that in the emerging multipolar world NAM can and must play a central role in future international affairs: in the new world order.

DS: We have been hearing a lot about this new world order from the US President George Bush. What is China's view of the new world order?

WY: China's view of the new world order is based on the principles of partnership, equality, mutual respect and non interference in internal affairs. According to our vision of the new world order all differences and disputes are to be

solved by peaceful means. Ours is a diverse world with diverse systems and values. No country should therefore try to impose its values on others.

DS: How do you see China's role in Asia-Pacific region?
WY: Asia is now enjoying steady growth in a turbulent world. Asia enjoys stability, which provides an excellent opportunity for development. China is ready to join all other countries in this region to promote peace and development.

DS: What is the current state of China-India relations?
WY: The recent visit by Premier Li Peng to India was extremely important. This was a return visit of the late Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1988. Both these countries are big and highly populated. Improvement in Sino-Indian relations will not only help the two countries but also promote peace in the whole region. Enhanced mutual understanding in bilateral cooperation has been attained. However I would like to stress that improved relations with India will, not affect our bilateral relations with any other country. The new trend in Sino-India relations is conducive to peace, greater stability and furtherance of development. China's Premier's visit was of great significance.

DS: How was Sino-Indian problems overcome?
WY: Our major problem is the border issue. After lengthy efforts both sides agreed to accelerate the process of reaching understanding on border issues. However for that we need time. Pending border agreement, both sides agreed to push forward bilateral relations in trade, investment, mutual exchanges etc.

Rio Gears up to Host the Earth Summit

Patrick Knight writes from Rio de Janeiro

More than 100 heads of state and governments are expected to attend the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, June 3-14.

With the Earth Summit set to begin in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil is being made-over for the occasion. Beggars are being fenced out of parks and air-conditioned buses are ready to roll throughout the newly-cleaned city. But as Gemini News Service reports, tidying up Rio has not prevented Brazil's environmental 'dirty laundry' from being scrutinized.



Logo of the Earth Summit

With huge tracts of land in central Brazil completely decimated by the charcoal burners and now threatened with desertification, the pig iron industry turned its attention to Amazonia.

There were plans to set up 20 pig iron mills alongside the railway linking the Carajas iron ore mines with the coast. Only four are actually operating, since it soon became clear how much forest each mill would consume in a year.

In theory the pig iron industry must now use wood from its own plantations, but like so much else in Brazil, this requirement is not respected. Some smelters have switched to using imported coke, as they say to use wood from plantations would make them uneconomic.

Although saving the livelihood of the Amazon rubber tappers has gained the imagination of ecologists, in fact more rubber now come from new plantations in Mato Grosso, Bahia and Sao Paulo states. Because of dry weather, they are immune to the disease which makes growing rubber of plantations in the Amazon an unviable proposition, so gathering rubber from trees in the jungle will soon be a thing of the past. So will collecting Brazil nuts from the trees in the forest, since an increasing proportion of nuts comes from the trees on plantations.

For the environment to be protected most effectively, Brazil must plant enough new forest, so that the pressure on the Amazon and the remaining trees in the northeast is reduced.

PATRICK KNIGHT is a freelance journalist based in Sao Paulo.

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.

"Using one's own conduits"

Sir, This refers to your editorial entitled "Using one's own conduits", May 23rd. Since I have not researched the particular topic, I cannot pronounce on the merits of the case. I can, however, point to some lapses in economic logic in the case you make for protecting the NTL.

First, you seem to think that while "protection" is bad, cutting down import duties and sales tax on imported raw materials is all right. In fact, increasing import duties on the output and cutting them on imported inputs are both ways of giving protection. They both generate the same distortions and disincentives to efficiency. The main difference is that an import duty on output taxes the users and benefits the producers (higher prices) and the government (tariff revenues), while cutting duties on inputs benefits the users and the producers at the cost

of government. Which is preferable (if either) would depend mainly on the importance of the using sectors in the national economy.

Secondly, you harp on the fact that the imports are low-quality. Now surely it is for the users to decide what quality is appropriate for their purpose and their budget. I know, for instance, the Mercedes-Benz is a higher quality car than, say, a Suzuki, but does that mean that the government has the right to force me to buy the former — or the obligation to make it affordable for me? If the NTL is unable to compete with lower-quality imports, I would deduce that it was designed for a quality inappropriately high for local needs.

Finally, if, as you say, the NTL could export 80% of its output, why can't it, with a little extra effort, export 100%?

Abu Abdullah
Research Director
Bangladesh Institute of
Development Studies

Suggestions

Sir, Apart from various national and international news, with various informative articles I find The Daily Star, though new in market, as one of the leading English dailies. I like your various columns of Stock Exchange, Market Price, Foreign Currency rates, Shipping Intelligence, Weather Forecasts etc. I like to suggest a few points for favour of inclusion in future publications, if you consider the suggestions worthwhile.

1. Under Stock Exchange your informations are quite elaborate. But the share holders are interested in Dividend declared by each company. I think, you may include this in Saturday's issue the last date of AGM with Dividend, if any.
2. Under Weather Forecast if rainfalls can be added against important cities/towns, it will be more informative.
3. Under Market Price you include price of local potato instead of White Potato [which constitutes over 90% of the potato in market]. Another request: It will be appreciated if you publish a feature article on the miseries of honest and regular electric bill payers. The customers are harassed by the Meter Rea-

ders. They normally never go to the houses. Rather they cook the meter readings, intentionally making it very deviated from the average. They prefer to bring the customers under their clutches to dictate according to their sweet will.

Md. S. Haq
Mohammadpur, Dhaka

Incentive for saving

Sir, Ministers' speeches and newspaper articles often plead people for more savings as such savings can be reinvested for development projects so essential for national growth.

A recent survey which came in the paper disclosed that personal saving is lowest in Bangladesh among the SAARC countries.

One need not search much for the reason. There are all sorts of discouragements from government departments against savings as can be seen from the statement I insert below. From a dividend of Tk 149.33 the following deductions are made so that the investor receives only Tk 112.72.

Jamuna MP Bridge	4%
Surcharge	
Dev Levy	6%
Income Tax	10%
Development Levy	6%
on Interim Div	
Total Deduction	26%

It seems that the government is keen to kill the proverbial goose to get all the golden eggs together.

M A Haq
Green Road, Dhaka

Evils and their remedies

Sir, At the present height of human civilization, still the people tell lie, cheat with fellowmen, members of a community kill the members of another community, and a nation exploits another nation by different means. In one part of our planet earth some people starve to death while in the other, some live in enormous abundance.

These destructive realities exist, to an extent, due to the prevalence of conflicting ideologies and subjective perception of life and the world. Capitalism was at the loggerheads with socialism. Only trying to substantiate the superiority of one over the other, civil wars broke out, states were occupied, hundreds of thousands of people had been killed.

I strongly feel that the advocates of ideologies should be tolerant of others keeping in mind the limitations associated with each of such ideologies. Welfare of the people is

the ultimate goal of all ideologies. Whichever can maximize welfare for the people that should be taken for granted. Some people irrationally remain adhered to a particular ideology. This is due to improper education. They can not think independently and thereby they become dogmatic.

Another dimension of the roots of evils is the subjective perception of life and the world. What is life? Why was I born and whither would I go? Why is this universe? Regarding all these questions, we do not have any objective perception of our own. We tend to be influenced by propaganda and thus create chaos in the society.

The remedies are liberalism and humanism. We should be liberal to others' views and opinions.

Objectively perceiving the life and the world, none can tell a lie, cheat with others, or can exploit, subjugate and kill others. Because, here a man's mental faculties develop in such a manner that he, in all his actions tries to leave some good in the world. He strives to make the planet a better habitat for the progenies. These are the needs of the day.

Md Abdur Rouf
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Relations, DU