

Deserving a Helping of Beef

In Bangladesh we do not talk much about the 'cow', the animal that is very much at the centre of our critical livestock situation. As a fish-eating nation we perhaps have been taking too much cow flesh—much more than is good for our national economy as well as individual health—as any worthy cardiologist will readily testify. But we have been shying of talking about the good and bad of eating up our bovine wealth expressly for fear of falling foul of some sensitivities. While all sensible people have long been convinced of the necessity of cutting down on large-scale slaughter of cows and a national policy on how to augment its stock to a volume of viability, it continues to be a delicate and difficult subject to broach.

The Daily Star's man-on-the-spot in Dinajpur has been very clever in circumventing the problem and making his point which is the urgent need of stemming the fast dwindling stock of cows in, to begin with, Dinajpur. He starts with the village oilman's or kolu's distress in not finding bullock to run his cottage mill. A profession is being ruined at considerable harm to our village economy. Kulus are becoming day labourers.

Then, comes up the problem of the farmers. About 60 to 70 per cent farming families in greater Dinajpur do not own any bullocks. The meaning is straight and clear—there is simply not enough draught power to till the Dinajpur lands. As a result people are being forced to go back to more primitive techniques of making mother earth yield our daily bread—taking up the hoes and spades and yoke the father and son of the house for harrowing etc. This is not only going back to savagery and inhumanity, the resulting fall in agricultural yield will be specially hurting for the society as a whole. The rare-to-come-by bullock is being used as a goodly money-spinner by hiring it out by their rare and lucky owners.

Without blaming the shortage on a sudden spurt in love for beef, the village cobbler is being held in suspicion for sudden deaths of bullocks and cows. For, very transparently, he has a stake in the hide. While this can be taken as a jocular diversion, the report of shortage of fodder in the wake of the all-enveloping North Bengal floods forcing farmers to sell off cows cannot be taken lightly. Cows going out of a farming family is life going out of it. In fact, the large-scale selling of farming cows is, in overall terms, a part and parcel of the large-scale pauperisation of our farmers, lack of fodder being only one of its many contributing factors.

Only fools can want to tamper with the food habits and preferences of a large population. But we have been perhaps wise in wanting our compatriots to give up smoking. People are taking more and more to meat eating—medical misgivings and economic hazards being largely immaterial to gastronomic considerations. Our growing love for cow flesh is being catered to by a growing smuggling trade of cows from across the border. We see no reason to import them in a regular and above-board manner like other food imports. But this approach cannot be taken to condone the eating up of a vitally important component of the generative sources of our national economy. One must put one's foot down at some point of an approaching doom. If we cannot breed enough cows for our agriculture, which will continue to be plough-bound well into the third millennium,—and industry and trade, on top of our gastronomic demands, we do not deserve to eat a cow.

Trouble in Sindh

The Sindh province of Pakistan is in trouble yet again. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has sent about 18,000 troops to restore law and order into that troubled area. A three-member committee comprising of the Army Corps Commander, the Chief Minister and the provincial police chief is to oversee the action. A six-month long dusk-to-dawn curfew has been imposed. These drastic measures became necessary as banditry, lawlessness and terrorism literally paralysed normal life in the province for the last few months. Kidnapping of rich businessmen and holding them for ransom became almost a way of life, crippling the economy and destroying the investment climate in this southern province of Pakistan.

Extreme measures, as the ones mentioned above, have naturally given rise to a few questions. Why was the normal situation allowed to deteriorate so much to necessitate such actions? Was it deliberately allowed to become worse so that the army could be called in? Handing over the provincial administration to the army—this the government said was not the case—is not a very creditable thing for an elected government. The Leader of the Opposition, Benazir Bhutto, and the MQM Party, both of whom have their base in that province, have expressed fear that this move by the army may be used to harass the opposition.

There is also the claim by the Pakistani Prime Minister that India is behind the law and order situation in order to destabilize Pakistan. Given India's claim of Pakistan's involvement in Kashmir, Pakistan's counter claim does not seem all that improbable. This tit-for-tat game between these two countries is not something new and has done immense harm to the people of both countries.

As a member of SAARC and as a country fully committed to the peaceful solution of all problems between countries, we are naturally concerned about the deteriorating relations between India and Pakistan. We are also concerned about the possible result of this mutual acrimony, which in the past has led to war.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has taken a big gamble in sending troops into Sindh. The relations between the Centre and Sindh province has never been very good, and which in the recent past has deteriorated further. But given the flouting of the civil administration and the rise in crimes and in terrorism, the Pakistani PM hardly had any option. This risky step will go in favour of the PM if he really does not use it to gain a march over the opposition. For if he does, the army action will definitely be discredited and the Sindh situation will become worse. Mr Nawaz Sharif should strictly adhere to a neutral posture in using the troops and try to forge a consensus with the PPP and the MQM on the restoration of the rule of law in the Sindh province. He cannot solve the problem by going at it all by himself.

Slide to Lawlessness Must be Arrested

by Shah A M S Kibria

THEIR is no denying the fact that Bangladesh is in the grip of massive problems. Scholars and experienced analysts have identified them. I will mention some of the most urgent ones for the list is long. Extreme and wide-spread poverty and massive unemployment—and intense pressure of population on a very limited land area—may be at the root of these problems. Terrorism in educational institutions, deteriorating law and order situation, break down of labour discipline, large-scale non-repayment of bank loans and consequent loss of respect in the sanctity of financial transactions and an administration suffering not only from inefficiency and lack of motivation but wide-spread corruption. Corruption in practically all the branches of the Govt is, of course, not a new phenomenon, it has only become worse with the passage of time and today it has engulfed the society. As a matter of fact it has become a part of our daily life. One can get nothing done in any office without gratifying the greed of some official. Indeed society seems to have made a compromise—though perhaps reluctantly—with corruption. A most common refrain I keep on hearing from friends is that you cannot survive in Bangladesh if you are unable to live with the system. The hint is too obvious to miss. A most depressing thought but regrettably true. On top of all this political observers often complain that the nation seems to have failed to find a sense of direction. Twenty one years after gaining independence we are still fighting over the raison d'être of the country. Bangladesh is today torn by dissension and strife and ideological conflicts. Small wonder that we are drifting from one crisis to the next. We do seem to have a very enduring capacity to survive crises and calamities but despite such tenacity we are, as a nation, standing still if not actually falling behind.

It would not be easy to single out any one of the numerous problems facing Bangladesh whose solution should get the highest priority. All of them deserve to be solved urgently. But one has to start somewhere and I myself feel inclined to begin with law and order. There are other issues of perhaps equal importance and I intend to write on them later. Let me begin with law

and order. Maintaining law and order and providing justice has been the basic duty of governments from time immemorial. Governments assumed other tasks in course of time but there never was any doubt that law and order was the first and most important responsibility of a government. Looking at the picture in Bangladesh today I regret to have to say that our survival as a nation depends on our ability to deal with this problem. Most people who have been living through this nightmarish situation may have been desensitized to some extent and may feel that I am taking a rather alarmist view. This is not, however, the case. In fact unless all of us—the Government, the opposition parties, students, workers and indeed the entire society—wake up and come to grips with this biggest of all crises we may be heading for a disaster far beyond our control.

A government must govern. There is no profound wisdom in this rather self-evident remark. In Bangladesh this seems to be often forgotten.

The symptoms of the crisis are too obvious to require detailed elaboration. Loss of public confidence in the law enforcing capacity of the authorities is perhaps the most serious indication of the gravity of the situation. Even worse, a lot of people believe, rightly or wrongly—perhaps wrongly—that the authorities are not even serious about bringing the situation under control. It may sound like an unfair allegation and I would be the last one to question the sincerity of the authorities but the evidence of blind support for party followers are too numerous to be dismissed lightly. Obviously the attempt to bolster party strength seems to have become an over-riding priority for party leaders. Notwithstanding public statements by party leaders to the contrary the safety of the innocent citizens takes a back seat. People fought hard and long for the restoration of democracy but is this what they deserve in return?

A government must govern. There is no profound wisdom in this rather self-evident remark. In Bangladesh this seems to be often forgotten. However strange it may sound—even the Government seems to be unsure of its mandate to govern. Small wonder that respect for the Govt has eroded. Members of the public do not feel confident about the Gov-

ernments willingness or ability to enforce the law. When a special interest group representing a very small number of people threaten to disrupt a public utility involving the welfare and often the vital interests of millions of law abiding citizens there is hardly any response from the guardians of law and order and public welfare. Often one reads disheartening reports in the newspapers that far from dealing with lawlessness firmly the authorities are instead negotiating with such groups! Law is being flouted openly—in broad daylight—but the proverbial long arm of the law is paralysed. For a section of students and young people burning cars, buses and trucks is a pastime which one can indulge in with impunity. How many arsonists have been prosecuted for burning cars impunity. How many arsonists have been prosecuted

not, this is the most wide spread impression. Inevitably the result is resignation and cynicism on the part of the public and lethargy and corruption on the part of the police. Statements are issued by leaders—both in the government and in the opposition condemning terrorism and wrong-doing of all kinds and expressing determination to uphold law and order. Few people take these statements seriously. Some times I wonder if our leaders are aware of the cynicism with which the ordinary men and women greet their statements in the press. Listening to the radio, television and reading the newspapers one gets a strange feeling, a surrealistic feeling, that words being uttered carry a meaning other than what we have been taught and that a kind of shadow play is going on which only those who are in

For it goes without saying that peace and security is an indispensable condition for civilized life. Investors—both domestic and foreign—will invest only when they feel it is safe to invest. Foreign investment is pouring into those countries in vast amounts thereby increasing income and employment. The standard of living in Thailand, for instance, has doubled in a decade. It is an illusion to think that a country will make any progress without investment. Investment in export-oriented manufacturing industries, in agriculture and agro-industries but equally important—in education, health and housing can inject the necessary dynamism to the economy. All this is possible only under conditions of peace and security. Unless we are able to create the right environment all the exhortations of our leaders will be in vain. That environment does not exist in Bangladesh today.

that Bangladesh is fast becoming 'ungovernable'. Opposition politicians should pay heed to these dark predictions. They too will fail to deliver if the basic pre-condition of peace and security is absent in the country.

It is often said that the police force is far too corrupt to take effective action in enforcing the law. I do not believe this to be true. In any case this is a prescription of despair. We can motivate and galvanize the police force to rise to the occasion if the political leadership is determined and committed. In fact the police forces in some countries of our region seem to have made remarkable progress in the last one or two decades. It is no secret that police forces in other countries of our region were also plagued by the curse of corruption. Yet they seem to have slowly but steadily dealt with the problem in order to achieve a noticeable improvement in their law and order situation. I can give the example of Bangkok—the capital of Thailand—where I lived for 11 years. When I went there in 1981 I was warned about snatching and burglary as common. When I left Thailand this year the picture was quite different. Unlike the past no one these days talks about snatching and burglaries. In fact in 11 years of our stay in Bangkok we did not encounter a single instance of theft or burglary or snatching. The point I am trying to make is that it is possible to improve the performance of the police force provided there is national consensus and the society is united and determined.

Let us then be united. The crisis is upon us. The slide to lawlessness must be arrested. Is it too naive to expect common sense if not vision and statesmanship in our leaders? The instinct for survival alone should be a good enough reason for them to rise to the occasion. Obviously the Govt has the primary responsibility and it has to take the initiative but all the political forces in the country must respond positively. No one can escape responsibility for we are all involved. All the pious talks about economic and social progress will remain day dreams unless we can put our house in order.

The author is a former Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh who has just returned to the country after serving as the Executive Secretary of ESCAP for 11 years.

ROAD TO RIO—II

Global Warming Poses a Threat to Coastal Areas of Many Developing Countries, including Bangladesh

A M A Mubith writes from New York



This is the second article of the three-part series on the Earth Summit by The Daily Star guest columnist, a former Finance Minister of Bangladesh

A major area of dispute in the environmental front in the past has been the links between population dynamics and global environment. We are all aware of Malthus's dire predictions and also of the achievements of technology thereafter. Today despite the debate on share of the blame which is not dormant or dead, it is admitted that the growth of population coupled with that of production are placing increasingly severe strains on the life-supporting capacities of the planet. Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research in Delhi has recently completed a study that shows that 24 per cent of the world's population belonging to the well-to-do nations consume between 50 per cent and 90 per cent of the world's products, 92 per cent of all cars, 85 per cent of all chemicals, 80 per cent of all iron and steel, 60 per cent of all fertilizers and 75 per cent of all energy. Even in consumption of food of various kinds, the share of the poor three fourths of humankind is between 28 per cent and 52 per cent. The message is clear: consumption growth in the countries with virtually stable populations must be frozen more than arresting the growth of population in the developing world.

Yet there is no denying that the population growth rate in the third world is excessive, in some countries it is as high as 4 per cent per year. While industrial revolution took place in Europe opening up employment opportunities and providing availability of goods and services in a big way, population growth never crossed 2 per cent annual rate. This was because the death rate did not decline so dramatically as it did in the post-war period. In industrially advanced countries faced problems of poverty and unemployment but never in the scale in which it is present in the developing world today. Developing countries are also at a disadvantage in as much as there are very few land areas where they can migrate and settle in droves as did the European settlers in the new world. Further, 60 per cent of the world's population live in coastal areas, much of which may go under sea-level as a result of global warming in not too distant a future. Indeed many countries do not have the carrying capacity for its growing population. Population planning is the all important plank of the Rio Declaration. In another fifty years even with the best of efforts the world can expect a population of 10 billion. An overall zero growth rate (each child bearing female giving birth to two children) is not easy for the world by the year 2040. At current consumption levels for 10 billion people agricultural production must quadruple, energy production multiply six-fold and incomes must rise eight-fold. This is not an easily achievable target despite the

magnificent performance of the global economy in the post-war era. Such is the magnitude of the human predicament.

Cost of Cleaning up and Conservation

More recognition of the problem issues is not enough, more will have to be done to meet the challenges. However, not a great deal of progress towards a comprehensive planetary bargain is expected in Rio. It is not easy to stem the tide of consumption growth when you are used to present comforts and aware of your command over means for that end. Technological fixes for conservation and upgrading of the environment are not cheap. In the mid 1970's Professor Leontief estimated that pollution control measures to clean up degradation and ensure environmentally sustainable development in the industrialised countries would need about 17 per cent of gross investment. The cost in cleaning up obviously is more than the cost in introducing new environment-friendly measures.

For the developing countries the real sacrifice is not only the cost of new technology, it is also the foregone earnings and the delay in catching up with the developed world.

If CFC levels are to be frozen, how are people in the developing countries going to use refrigerators or air-conditioners at all? If forests are to be preserved and rejuvenated, where would developing countries get their much needed earnings from timber export or how would they secure growth in their energy consumption? There is no denying the fact that environment-friendly technologies are expensive. Refinery costs are higher for production of lead free gasoline, or a fluidised bed for burning coal for electricity generation is certainly more expensive.

The Build-up to Rio

The World Commission on Environment and Development chaired by Gro Brundtland (Prime Minister of Norway) in its report entitled "Our Common Future" (1987) popu-

larised the concept of sustainable development. "Meeting the needs of the present generations without compromising the needs of future generations" is the only way for sustaining the planet earth. The Report demanded that profitable use of the earth's resources must be stopped. This report can rightfully be credited with the sponsorship of the Rio Conference.

The UN General Assembly in 1989 established an independent secretariat general to organise the Conference and appointed as its Secretary General the same person who organised the Stockholm Environment Conference twenty years ago. This modality for preparing and organising the Conference is somewhat different from the usual practice of the last two decades. UN TCDC Conference in 1978 was organised by UNDP and two UNLDC Conference in 1981 and 1990 were organised by UNCTAD. Although these conferences dealt with multifaceted issues, the organisation of the conferences was assigned to the UN agencies most concerned with the respective subjects, when the Jomtien Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) was organised in 1990, the responsibility was entrusted to a joint secretariat constituted by four UN agencies which were most active in the field viz. UNESCO, UNDP, UNICEF and World Bank. For UNCTAD, such a joint secretariat could be formed by UNEP, UNDP, World Bank and, possibly, UN Habitat. But in consideration of the vastness of the mandate and its crucial importance, the UN General Assembly established the independent secretariat-general. Whether this expedient will yield better results will depend not so much on the Final Act of the Conference but on the implementation of the Rio Declaration and its supportive action programme. Besides the national governments, the international public sector must also put its act together.

As the preparatory work proceeded, global relationships witnessed rapid and momentous changes. The end of the cold war made the dream of a civil society very real and within grasp. Security perceptions changed dramatically. Territorial security no

longer appeared justified in claiming a trillion dollar investment each year. The talk of a new world order is on everyone's lips. Restructuring of the UN is at the top of the agenda of world leaders. The unfolding situation of grave environmental degradation in Eurasia, the vast flow of economic refugees from poor and populated areas, and growing civil disorder including ethnic strife all across the globe essentially emanating from deprivation and injustice, aroused the conscience of the world and the concerns of the stable and well to do societies. But events are moving so fast that a blueprint for action becomes obsolete before the ink is dried on it. In such an environment, UNCED's targets expanded and expectations escalated. Agenda 21, in fact, has developed into a blueprint for a new world order for economy and ecology. How to provide for the economic welfare of humankind and how to ensure the survival of the planet are issues no less important than questions like how to ensure peace in the world and how to ensure the security of nations.

The private sector, i.e. the non-governmental organisations, have played a major role in the build-up to Rio. In the Jomtien Conference NGO's maintained a high profile but it is nothing compared with the profile of NGOs in UNCED. The environment movement globally has attracted more NGO attention than any other movement. In fact, the green movement all over the world has been pioneered and led by the NGOs. It is expected that in the Global Forum in Rio there will be over 10,000 participants from more than 2200 NGOs. It is also likely that they will form an Earth Council, whether or not an international monitor or regulator for environment and development is agreed to in the public sector.

On the whole the build-up to Rio is remarkable in both its breadth of interest and its depth of issues for consideration. A matter of grave concern is whether the escalation of expectation may prove to be self-defeating. The principles of the consensus Declaration are indeed very lofty, but the consensus on Agenda 21 has so far been very insignificant.

To the Editor...

Students and politics
Sir, It is sad, tragic and at the same time relieving to note that the extremely unfortunate premature death of three BUET students brought insight to the students of that institution. Office bearers of one particular student organization have criticized the politicians for their indifference.

As a guardian I can assure all the students that no political party or politician places the interest of the students for education, in general above the interest of the party. Some cynic may even say that their self-interest is above everything else. Students and educational institutions are only

means for achieving goals. Students are the most conscious segment of the population. They have brought about many glorious changes in the society time and again. They must be politically alive and analytical. But not become the vehicle for someone to come to power or to drag down someone.

Student politics in a democratic and independent country will confine to bringing their problems and at times the problem of the whole society to the forefront so that politicians, both in power and in opposition, can tackle it. And to make general public aware of the same. A partisan student organization is of no

use to the society. Lastly I join your million readers to express sympathy to the student community and pray for the salvation of the departed souls.

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Standard of English

Sir, It gives me a lot of pain to admit that—"Our university graduates are 'weak' (weak) in written and spoken English". The error is overlooked, but either way it shows the weakness or carelessness of our university graduates.

However, I fully support Mr A Mawaz's idea (letter 'Spoken English', May, 24.) that steps

should be taken by the university authorities—the standard of English of the students must be improved. But two separate mediums for each and every subject is both costly and time consuming, and cannot be materialised in the case of students studying on subjects like Arabic, French Sanscrit etc. So I think that the suggestion of a brief but adequate course on vocabulary and spoken English is reasonable and just.

I hope that the concerned authorities will take the matter under consideration and bring back the uniformity between the students of our universities and those of abroad.

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