

Saving a Dream

When an organisation in the United Nations system gets into a financial mess or is accused of mismanagement, no eyebrows are raised—not any more. However, when the UN body in question happens to be based in Tokyo, the capital of super-rich Japan and the home of super-human efficiency, the news should hit the international press in a big way.

Unfortunately, whatever has been happening to the United Nations University (UNU) in Tokyo has attracted much less attention of the international community than it should. It is a pity. The latest report from the Japanese capital says that the UN Secretary General Butros-Butros Ghali disclosed last week that the UNU which would be \$81 million in the red by the end of this year would be forced to shut down unless it got a major cash bailout.

The dismal situation facing the UNU is a combination of circumstances over which the international community has had little control. The idea of the University was originally advanced by the then UN Secretary General, U Thant, in 1969, with the hope it would serve as a meeting ground of first rate scholars for carrying out research on international issues. The idea evoked immediate response from the Japanese Government which made a grant of \$100 million out of the proposed \$500 million endowment fund and provided the space in a rented building in downtown Tokyo. Now, on a plot of land donated by Japan, a 14-storey structure has been set up in a modern part of the city.

Since the institution depends entirely on interest generated by the endowment fund, in lieu of any grant from the United Nations or contribution from UN members, it is important that the Fund of \$500 million is fully subscribed. Unfortunately, it is not so. By July 30, around the time when Dr Ghali made the grim disclosure about the UNU's future, less than half of the estimated target had been reached, with many nations, including the United States, taking a cool view of their commitments.

The interest of UN members in the University may be rekindled if the objectives of the organisation are redefined in the light of the new realities. Even in its original plan, visualised by the late U Thant, UNU was never meant to be a university in the conventional sense. It was to be a kind of a coordinating centre with links established with research institutions in different parts of the world. The need for such a centre may well be greater today than it was two decades ago. Maybe it is this role that should be expanded.

Again, each UN specialised agency has its own research programme. If the UNU would take over some of these research activities, it would certainly find plenty to do—and enough income to meet its operating expenses.

In the long run, it is all a question of UNU changing its focus, finding a new constituency and identifying new partners, especially among the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). In this context, it is particularly important for scholars in Japan, who had once responded so positively to the idea of U Thant, to give a new boost to a dream instead of seeing it end in a shambles.

Modernising ZIA

Statistics are quite impressive. Our only international airport worth the name — Zia International Airport (ZIA) — handles 164 domestic and 165 international flights a week making for a total passengers of 35 lakhs yearly. But unfortunately, while the statistics are impressive, the service is not — ask any passenger that uses ZIA. Yes, sometimes the luggage comes out on time; yes, occasionally the check-in facilities are not one that makes a passenger go faint; and yes, sometimes the waiting area at the arrival lounge is quite clean. But as we have said — sometimes. For most often passing through ZIA is an experience that one repeats only because one has to.

One wonders why airport tax, or the embarkation fee is not collected by the airline itself while checking-in — as is done in many airports. Instead one is forced to stand in queue twice. There should also be a tax calculation chart publicly exhibited so that a passenger could know what is the basis of the tax that is being demanded of him or her. Charging higher taxes is not too uncommon a phenomenon. There is a lot to be said about our immigration officials. A training programme on how to handle passengers quickly and courteously is long overdue. Somebody could perhaps gently suggest that the relevant visa is all that he/she needs to see, not the whole passport book. About the Customs, the less said, the better. Not knowing what is taxable and what is not the passengers are left totally on the mercy of the Customs officials. Here also a clearly visible list of permissible items under baggage rules should be publicly exhibited.

In view of it all, it was heartening to learn about the modernisation plans of ZIA. Plans have been undertaken to introduce electric boarding bridges, latest model radar and automatic message switching system, and yes, facilities for drinking water, among other measures, to increase passenger safety and comfort. We would also like to commend the Civil Aviation and Tourism Ministry, in charge of running the airport, for some improvements that they have been able to bring about over the last several months.

We would like to, however, point out that facilities or the lack of it, has not been the crux of the problem at our only international airport. The problem has been the maintenance of the facilities through proper and an efficient administration. It has been a common sight to see equipments being neglected, facilities abused and costly machinery reduced to malfunctioning literally within days of installation. This requires, in our opinion, a tighter administration especially geared towards maintenance.

There is also an obvious lack of forward planning in installing new systems and going in for expansion of facilities, on an ad-hoc basis.

We also welcome the decision to transform our Chittagong airport into the second international airport of the country. However, we would like to suggest that unlike the Dhaka airport which became inadequate within a few years of its setting up, the Chittagong airport should be planned so as to take not only the present needs into consideration but also the future requirements of a far expanded business centre, which we hope Chittagong will become in not too distant a future.

Suffering the Self-inflicted Trauma of Indecision

POLITICAL activities with the accompaniment of automatic weapons dominate the campuses of our universities. In fact, the entire system of higher education is in a shambles which has started affecting the high schools of the country as well. The solution call for drastic measures in order to forcibly get rid of all the rowdy elements promoting non-education in our country. Regardless of political affiliation, the organised system of education must at all cost be put in place. There is no alternative. We all know it. Government is fully aware of it. Yet there is no positive action so far.

And it is neither the first time nor the present Government alone. Back in 1974, it may be recalled, Bangabandhu announced that he would release the "red horses" to stamp out corruption and mismanagement. People kept on waiting anxiously. The red horses never appeared on the scene.

The agonizing similarity between the inactions of the first and the present Governments of Bangladesh is indeed very striking. Strangely enough, Bangabandhu in the past had suffered and Begum Zia at present is suffering from exactly the same malady: the self-inflicted trauma of indecision.

Lack of Strategy

Post independent Bangladesh — what it would be like, or what development strategy must be followed, very few had any clear idea affecting the vital concerns of the nation. Hardly any preparatory work was undertaken. It is surprising but true that the problems of abandoned industries and shortage of indigenous management capacity in various sectors in view of the dominant role of the Pakistanis could not be anticipated by anyone before 1971. Plain and simple, it was a struggle waged with all the determination and intensity but the preparatory work for the eventual running of the government was inadequate. The overwhelming agitational nature of politics precluded the possibilities of making politics more meaningful with the desired development

the reformist legislations enacted by the Parliament or the programme of action for rejuvenation of the national economy. In fact beyond achieving Parliamentary democracy, the supreme legislative mandate of the Parliament have hardly been used so far to bring about any far reaching development in the vital fields of poverty alleviation, universal education or health for all. In spite of being one of the poorest countries of the world, there is no

WINDOW ON ASIA

Shahed Latif

parliamentary consensus to battle against poverty; neither any concerted initiative is remotely visible to bring about any such national consensus. This is probably because members of the Parliament both from the Position and the Opposition do not by any chance fall into the unfortunate category of the poorest.

Politics of Agitation

Parliamentary democracy is not an end in itself. It is merely the beginning of the process. Only the rules of the

game have been determined. Now the real match must begin without any further delay. The tragedy however is that politicians fail to realise what sort of game should be played. They are used to the politics of agitation. The arduous task of sustaining influence with the party leader and maintaining the local dominance at the level of respective constituency occupy most of their time. Thus legislative politics of the parliament with a profoundly reformist bias have remained relatively unknown. Since ignorance is no bliss, the vacuum becomes the prime source of an intensifying, unmitigated disaster.

There is no point in blaming the leadership alone. After all, they can reflect only the norm and unless they did so, their preminent status could be easily threatened. The extremely unfortunate ignorance is rock-solid all throughout the party system that have evolved in the country. Perhaps a new type of highly innovative "Parliamentary Technical Assistance" is required. But there is no place to get it from. Our parliamentary democracy must grow from within — not without.

Politics must, and I repeat must, have an indigenous, home-grown development bias. The match to be played and

replayed in the parliamentary stadium for days, months and years from now is the game of social and economic development of a country which not only represents the largest conglomeration of the world's poorest, but the utter lack of resources, frequent natural disasters and the demographic time-bomb — all put together make our country the most serious development challenge that making have faced so far.

Sub-Saharan Africa may be equally poor but the dimension of the problem in terms of population involved is simply marginal to the massive scale of destitution in Bangladesh. Are the members of our sovereign Parliament which incidentally occupy the most expensive piece of real estate of the country adequately aware of the immensity of the problem of poverty and hunger that we all jointly face in our country? They must first of all realise that just by setting up a school or health centre or securing an extra allocation for rural road in their own constituency might not assure them of the dividend during the next round of election. The way we are proceeding on the path of disastrous indecision, most likely the politicians as well as the non-politicians like us will be eaten raw by the hungry mobs.

countries of the region," Jaber said. "These factors have exacerbated the already compounded problems bearing on the fight against poverty."

Jaber also said "another negative impact" of the war was the high proportion of disabled persons in relation to the total population. He said its impact on Iraq's infrastructure has been compounded by the effect of sanctions on its external trade, placing a heavy burden on its economy and population.

But Jaber added that some countries in the region were making progress towards countering the damage caused by the crisis. "One notes the speed with which the oil fires were put out in Kuwait and exports resumed," he said.

"Moreover," Jaber continued, "it is gratifying to see the vigour of the Saudi economy, reflecting the increased business confidence and investment in the countries of the GCC, in the hope it will offer a new opportunity for regional cooperation in which other

Esacwa describes the debt situation in Egypt, Jordan, Yemen and Syria as "critical". Despite the debt forgiveness of 1991, debt service continues to deprive Egypt and Syria of "badly needed foreign exchange," it says.

Esacwa also points out that the region's international monetary reserves dropped in 1990 — from US\$35.6 billion to US\$31.4 billion, with indications of a further drop in 1991.

Jaber told Esococ that over two million persons were forced to leave the Gulf as a result of the crisis.

The thinning out of aid flows and the massive return migration have served to accentuate the wide disparities in income that exist among

— Depthneus Asia

WHEN the UN-authorized Gulf War ended in February 1991, the United States described the outcome as one of the most significant diplomatic triumphs for the world body.

But nearly 16 months after the controversial war, a UN regional commission has concluded that the "positive" political effects of the US-led attack on Iraq have been outweighed by the negative economic fallout for the entire Middle East.

Cataloguing the post-war economic woes that continue to plague the region, the executive secretary of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (Esacwa) said in July: "The problems we are left to confront dwarf the positive features that the eager observer might wish to discern."

Addressing the UN Economic and Social Council (Esococ), Tayseer Abdel Jaber said although a year had passed since the Gulf War, the Arab Peninsula continues to "feel the after-shocks of the crisis and war that tore through our region."

West Asia: A Shell-Shocked Economy

The war against Iraq — blessed by the Security Council and manipulated by Washington — was at the time hailed as a success, primarily because it deprived the territorial gains of aggression to a country that invaded a militarily weak neighbour.

In a report to Esococ, Esacwa says: "Development prospects have been severely set back by the resulting massive destruction of economic and social infrastructure in Iraq and Kuwait, and by the need to divert huge resources to finance the war and strengthen defence capabilities in several countries, and by the disruption of intra-regional trade, capital and labour flows."

The United States alone spent over US\$61 billion on the war, with the rest of the money coming from Japan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and other Gulf nations.

The report adds that the economic outlook for the re-

More than a year after the Gulf War, the Arab peninsula is still reeling from its massive economic effects, which have set back development efforts. *Thalif Deen of IPS reports from New York.*

gion will continue to be influenced strongly — in 1992 and for several years to come — by the conflict and its aftermath.

"Owing to the Persian Gulf conflict, social conditions in the Esacwa region have undergone significant changes with negative and far-reaching implications for all countries that are expected to last for a long time," the report adds.

The post-war economic statistics of the Middle East presented to Esococ early July paint a gloomy picture of the region.

According to Esacwa estimates, the region's gross domestic product (GDP) contracted by 3.8 per cent in

1990 and by a further 4.9 per cent in 1991. In overall terms, the GDP went from US\$292 billion in 1989 to US\$267 billion in 1991. In per capita terms, the drop was from US\$2,405 in 1989 to US\$2,063 in 1991.

Within the 1991 percentage, the GDP for the six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) — Oman, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates — is estimated to have declined by 0.6 per cent.

The GDP of non-Gulf nations such as Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria declined by 13 per cent in 1990 and 12.4 per cent in 1991.

Malaysian Editors Take Second Look at Green Recruits

A DEGREE in communication apparently does not a media practitioner make, at least as far as Malaysian editors are concerned.

A recent study conducted in Malaysia showed that graduates of communication courses do not always get top priority in the recruitment plans of media organisations in the country.

The survey found that executives have reservations about the graduates' ability and skills to handle a media job and doubts about the young people's intention to stay the course. In fact, majority of those surveyed claimed they have great difficulty finding communication graduates who could satisfactorily meet their requirements.

Half of those who responded to the survey admitted that they recruited only one to three communication graduates a year. Almost half of the editorial staff of the respondents, about 40 per cent, only have high school diplomas. Communication graduates accounted for less than 20 per cent of the editorial workforce while holders of degrees from other disciplines made up the rest.

This situation stemmed from the media executives' impression that most communication graduates are not

adequately prepared for the job.

Of those surveyed, 87.5 per cent cited poor command of English as the major shortcoming of the degree holders while 75 per cent complained about the lack of breadth and depth of the graduates' general knowledge.

Half of the respondents criticised the young media persons' lack of motivation and commitment to journalism as a profession. They believe many graduates are only using the mass media as a stepping stone to greener pastures such as corporate public relations work, the civil service or politics.

The media executives said the weaknesses they have identified are interrelated.

For instance, poor command of English constraints the graduates during coverages of international events. It also affects the quality of features especially those that require research from sources in English.

The media executives identified certain areas of study that they felt communication students should cover. Ranked in order of importance, the areas are economics, political science and world affairs, sociology, law and business and management.

A number of respondents also stressed the need to give

Harmony Francisca Cabie writes from Kuala Lumpur

The perception — among media executives — is that most communication graduates are not adequately prepared for the job.

communication students "a sound grounding in the ethics of the (media) profession."

The study, which was made for the Institute Teknologi Mara (ITM) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), covered training and education in the various branches of communication — journalism, broadcasting, public relations and advertising.

Conducted by Datin Sharifah Mariam Ghazali, principal lecturer of the ITM's School of Mass Communication, it received responses from eight media executives representing the publication *Utusan*, *Star*, *Sunday Star*, *Malay Mail*, *Berita Harian*, *Daily Express*, *Sabah*, and *Bernama*, the national news agency. Respondents all held senior editorial positions.

The study found that while all the media executives felt that a period of attachment to a news organisation would help communication trainees, not every one was eager to have the young people running

around their establishments.

Only 62.5 per cent would offer practical training in their organisations every semester. One-fourth of the respondents would prefer to have the young people only during semester breaks while one would like to do so only once in a while.

Moreover, the decision to accept students for attachment would depend not only on whether or not they could be physically accommodated in the organisation but also on their predecessors' performance.

Many of the respondents said the performance of students during practical training is a reflection of the adequacy of the education given to them at school.

When asked to identify personality and character traits they felt communication graduates should have, the media executives ranked highest motivation and thoroughness.

On a scale of one to ten, the media executives rated graduates quite low not only in terms of motivation and thorough-

ness but also with regard to traits like aptitude and fair, time consciousness, cooperation, creativity, etc. Graduates did not get any ratings higher than five from the respondents for each of the traits listed.

The executives also proved very sparing when asked to comment on the overall performance of communication graduates. Majority — 62.5 per cent — grudgingly described the performance as "fair" and only 35 per cent gave a "satisfactory" rating. None would go so far as to say "excellent."

Most of the media executives — 75 per cent — would require communication graduates to undergo further training — in the media organisation itself and at the national press institute — upgrade the young people's technical and language skills.

Bernama, Malaysia's national news agency which has a consultant to conduct English courses for its reporters, requires communication graduates to attend the classes, too.

When asked for recommendations on how to improve communication training, the media executives made the following suggestions.

Impose more stringent entry qualifications for incoming students. Expose lecturers to current media trends and

areas. This is a good news for 98 per cent of the people of this country. The Land Commission constituted by the Ershad regime submitted a recommendation for fixing a ceiling of five katha for any one person in any municipal area for residential purposes. I think that was an impracticable suggestion and that is why the then government could not implement it. In Pakistan days DIT/CDA allotted residential plots in Dhaka and Chittagong measuring up to one bigha of land to many persons. A good number of the allottees have constructed house in the middle of their land keeping small strips vacant on the sides. Keeping this in view and the fact that if five katha is fixed as ceiling in any municipal area, then a person can have several such plots in several municipalities, it is suggested that a ceiling of one bigha in aggregate may be fixed for a person in one or more number of municipalities. In other words, a person may not possess more than one bigha of

land for residential purposes in the municipal areas of Bangladesh. If he has, say, one bigha in Dhaka, one bigha in Chittagong and five katha in Comilla then he may retain one bigha in total either in one or two or three places.

Implementation of such a law may not be difficult if, before the law is promulgated, all the municipalities are compelled to prepare list of land holdings including vacant land within their areas. Municipal corporations may then computerise this list. Even if there are some cheating, such a legislation will make a halt on acquiring municipal land beyond one bigha. Exceptions may, however, be provided for property-developers, if they sell their flats instead of hiring out, and for private companies, if they acquire land for constructing residential accommodation for their employees following the practice with the government, semi-government and municipal bodies.

Ghulam Kabir Juarshahara Bazar, Dhaka.

Land ceiling

Sir, It appears from a news item of 20th July of your esteemed paper that the government is actively considering a proposal for fixing landownership ceiling in urban

To the Editor...

DU's sessions-jam

Sir, The principal educational seat of Bangladesh, the Dhaka University, has been in the grip of manifold problems — the sessions-jam being one of the major problems. Many factors cause sessions-jam: mismanagements and irregularities of the authorities could be cited as main contributing factors. By "mismanagement and irregularities" I mean unnecessary delay in examining the answer-scripts, publishing the results and commencing the new-year classes. The Economics Department of Dhaka University published the results of the Honours Final examinations of 1989 held in October 1991 within four weeks after the completion of the examinations, whereas the English Department took more than six months to publish the results of the same examinations. This anomaly very well indicates the extent of the authorities' indifference to the problem of sessions-jam.

Law and Science faculties examinations are conducted concurrently. As a result, while from certain departments where courses are not completed, the demand for deferment of examinations arises, and simultaneously examinations of all those above faculties are deferred. This arrangement unnecessarily pushes some academically advanced departments backward.

In the Commerce faculty, examinations are conducted by the respective departments. This has greatly contributed to the present advancement in resolving sessions-jam in the departments under Commerce faculty.

At present a debate has been rife in DU as to whether to allow the other departments to conduct their examinations independently or not. It is learnt that the authorities are hesitant to allow this for the fear that some backward departments would be pushed too far by this measure.

As a student of an advanced department I feel that if the

departments are allowed to conduct their examinations independently, the controllers of the examinations would get more time to try to retrieve those backward departments from their present state of affairs. In fact, this has been the demand of the silent majority of the DU students.

Repatriation

Sir, On 15th June, BBC in its morning Hindi programme referred to the ensuing visit of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia to Pakistan on 9th to 11th July for discussion of long standing issues including that of two-and-half lakh non-locals' repatriation to Pakistan. This has sparked a silver lining in the dark horizon of the these non-locals' fate who are leading an inhuman life in different camps since long 20 years.

The solution of this humanitarian problem, in fact, should be an earmark in the history of this country, particularly of

Bangladesh Nationalist Party. Of course solution of this issue is a hard nut to crack as the other government may endeavour its best to sidetrack this issue on different pleas as usual, though the Prime Minister of Pakistan Nawaz Sharif promised that repatriation of these non-locals would take place in the fiscal year of 1992, i.e. in June-July '92.

Department of International Relations, DU

I hope the Prime Minister of Bangladesh will take a courageous stand to solve this humanitarian problem of these stranded Pakistanis and get rid of the burden telling heavily on its poor economy. This will also save the generation of these non-locals from further de-generation.

Md Yousuf Ferozshah, Chittagong.