

## To the Interior

What is the population of our dear old Dhaka city right at this moment? We don't think anyone knows. It is one thing to work out a growth rate over a longish time frame, well past — and quite another to know precisely the acceleration of population per day per day in the fashion they express the acceleration of falling bodies in the schools.

This situation accounts for nobody being very interested in knowing anything about this city's — or for that matter nation's — social parameters to any degree of precision. In the absence of that no economy and no technology can be appropriate, no education and no idea of the challenges facing us and of the ways out can be realistic and effective. It is said, by the turn of the century, the city may have a population of one crore. What will that mean to the city?

How much water will have to be supplied and where will that come from and how much electricity? Where will the garbage heaped up by such a population be moved and how? Is the city prepared for that? Or the state and its government? If the crawl-in shanties living the rail tracks entering the city is any indication to go by, most people in the city will have a sub-human life then. And most of the city area will be stinking slums.

This nightmarish urban scenario would become real as the villages will keep on dying. The only way to make a future for Dhaka as a city — which is what a pocket of concentrated human activity leading to protean production of both the material and aesthetic-intellectual kind — is stopping all the blood of the body from racing to the head. Development must be spread wide and thin so that people will be needed to travel only walking miles to their place of work. Let the thana towns grow, and the district towns too. And most important of all, let the villages live again not only enabled by villagers working in nearby mills but also boosted by better agricultural innovations and practices serviced as they must be by village machine and tool shops employing villagers.

Recently a reader in Sherpur made in our Opinion column a very strong plea for stopping the unending procession of rural destitute to the capital city. She laid special emphasis on the dangers of cultural degeneration that the overnight urbanisation of the village poor is setting in motion, harming the whole of our people — both urban and rural — and their whole future. Enable them to stay where they have been for generations by taking the light industries to the interior, she says.

The case specifically made by the correspondent was that of the garments industry which is worked mainly by women — the millennia old preservers of man's culture and the home and family. Don't disturb her, don't drag her to the city slums or push her out into street-walling. Let her earn staying in her traditional family home and everything will be saved.

We support the plea as we believe that only through moving most of our labour-intensive industries — two of our very expensive achievements can be justified. Any point in Bangladesh can now be reached from the capital in less than a day's time — thanks to the development in surface communication. Then again rural electrification has proved one of the rare success stories of the post-independence Bangladesh. Why do we need power in the villages if not for giving the villages the power of turning machines? What for this ramification of metalled roads and network of waterways if not for reaching materials to points of manufacturing strewn all over the land and returning the manufactures to their markets?

Spare Dhaka its cancerous growth and let them live in their village homes a human life. Make the industries go to the interior.

## Safety Measures for Industries

In its desperation for setting up more and more industries, the country — with not enough success in the area to savour — has perhaps been unduly lax to ensure industrial safety. Not that we have industrial accidents agalore, but given the number of factories and industries, the yearly mishaps in the sector are not very few either. Fortunately for us, most of the industrial accidents have not been very serious in nature. Yet sometimes such accidents have taken quite a heavy toll in terms of both human lives, property, the capacity for industrial output and environment.

Fertilizer plants of the country have the worst record of industrial accidents. In recent years, Ghorashal Fertilizer plant has witnessed two major accidents in which several employees, including engineers, of the factory died and production suffered for months on end. One report made public at the time held the unwise enhancement of the production capacity by the Japanese, who took over from the Russian technicians — the original builder of the plant, responsible for the explosion. No other details were known.

Now Fenchugonj Fertilizer plant also joins the list by knocking as many as 34 people unconscious through its leakage of ammonia gas. The report published in a Bengali daily has not given details other than saying that all 34 were taken to hospital for treatment. The gas victims may not have to suffer the worst fate of the Bhopal Ammonia Carbide gas accident, but how potentially dangerous the plant can be has been brought to the fore. One would also like to know under what circumstances the villagers came in contact with the poisonous gas: whether the gas escaped to reach to the villages; or the affected were around the site for some reason or other.

The report, though, has one necessary information to supply in that it said the situation was under control. This is good, yet one cannot but be worried if the gas has escaped to travel to villages to attack unsuspecting villagers. Investigation now underway, if ever made public, may come up with the cause of the leakage of ammonia. Only then will the experts at the plant be able to suggest remedial measures against future gas leakage.

At this stage of our industrial development it will be easier rather than the reverse to adopt and implement stricter industrial safety regulations. Industries already with a poor record of safety and unsafe disposal of industrial effluents and wastes should be allowed a minimum time for improving their performance in the area. The sooner this is done, the better. Last but not the least, there has to be mandatory provisions for generous compensation for the victims of industrial accidents.

NEW YORK — Czechoslovakia sub-divided, Canada's ability to "contain" French-speaking Quebec remained uncertain, Crimean leaders searched for "conditional independence" from the Ukraine in another sequel to the dissolution of the Soviet system.

In Scotland, those who didn't vote for the Scottish nationalists in the July election were wondering if they should have. There were distinct signs of ethnic Mongolian unrest in the autonomous Inner Mongolian region of China. And over 10 million Quechuans were increasingly demanding more valid expression of their ancient pre-Hispanic culture than as "minorities" inside several Andean states.

Even on the eve of the 25th Olympiad the "Autonomous Government of Catalonia" took out a full-page advertisement in the New York Times, proclaiming itself "a country in Spain with its own culture, language and identity".

These are only a few of all the active indications that the whole world of "nation states" is now in great flux. This has plainly surprised and worried many political leaders.

United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali repeatedly says that "if every ethnic, religious or linguistic group claimed statehood there would be no limit to fragmentation." In the West there is much lofty talk of "outmoded

## Nations Rise within Nations

Countries are breaking up all over the world. But, as former United Nations official Erskine Childers writes, nationalist aspirations are but natural. Perhaps, what we need is to see beyond the traditional concepts of state, country or nation.

nationalism". But that leaders should be surprised is the surprising thing. The reality is that ever since the rise of the empires of Western Europe and communism, the "nation state" map of most of the world has been a caricature.

The empires placed most of humankind in political strait-jackets, with ancient societies prevented from a normal evolution of endogenous political ideas, institutions, and boundaries.

This vast unreality was protracted again after World War II. Communism imposed the premise that ancient ethnic differences within its sphere of influence should be replaced by "cultural diversity".

In much of the Third World, because decolonisation was chronologically haphazard and the powers wished to retain subtle forms of influence, the artificial frontiers they had uncaringly imposed were largely perpetuated. The new independencies still separated or suppressed whole kinships and ethnic groups, with other distortions in last-minute par-

titutions. Ironically, membership in the United Nations then made these frontiers sacrosanct. The dream of an endogenously evolved United States of Africa was postponed. The equivalent search in the Arab world was opposed tooth and nail by Western powers. The indigenous survivors of European genocide in the Americas remained remote, sundered, and ignored.

All over the world, the UN Bill of Human Rights and the power of transnational media are now reviving old aspira-

tions. A vast minefield of frustrated cultural and ethnic identities has emerged from under the ice ages of imperialism and the cold war. The dangers must be addressed, with justice.

First, officious minds must open beyond the rigid limitations of the central nation-state, and the narrow notion that there is only sovereign independence or traditional "minority" status.

For some of the clamant peoples nothing less than sovereign statehood will suffice. For others (perhaps in Africa), amalgamations out of the distortive maps of empire may be their desired solution, the very converse of "unlimited fragmentation".

For many, if those now dominant will seriously accept their aspirations the preference will be some form of autonomy, but with imaginative architecture, not mere patronising tokenism.

Secondly, we urgently need to create trusted machinery at the United Nations where collective human rights claims

can be better addressed, and where both recognized and clamant identities can speak a new language together, not limited to the traditional concepts of state, country, or nation.

It must become a matter of pride for governments to seek out new and innovative formulae for equitable representation — a transformation of our structures, from the community to the planetary level. The great hall of the UN Trusteeship Council, seldom used any more, would be the perfect place for a new council on cultural identity and representation.

It is a mark of the strength of these aspirations that all the major "isms" of this century have been proven wrong about peoples who feel a deep and distinct cultural identity.

Communists said their political demands would wither away. Capitalists said a global economy would make them irrelevant. Many socialists said nationalism was "retrograde", and engulfed everyone in that sweeping judgement.

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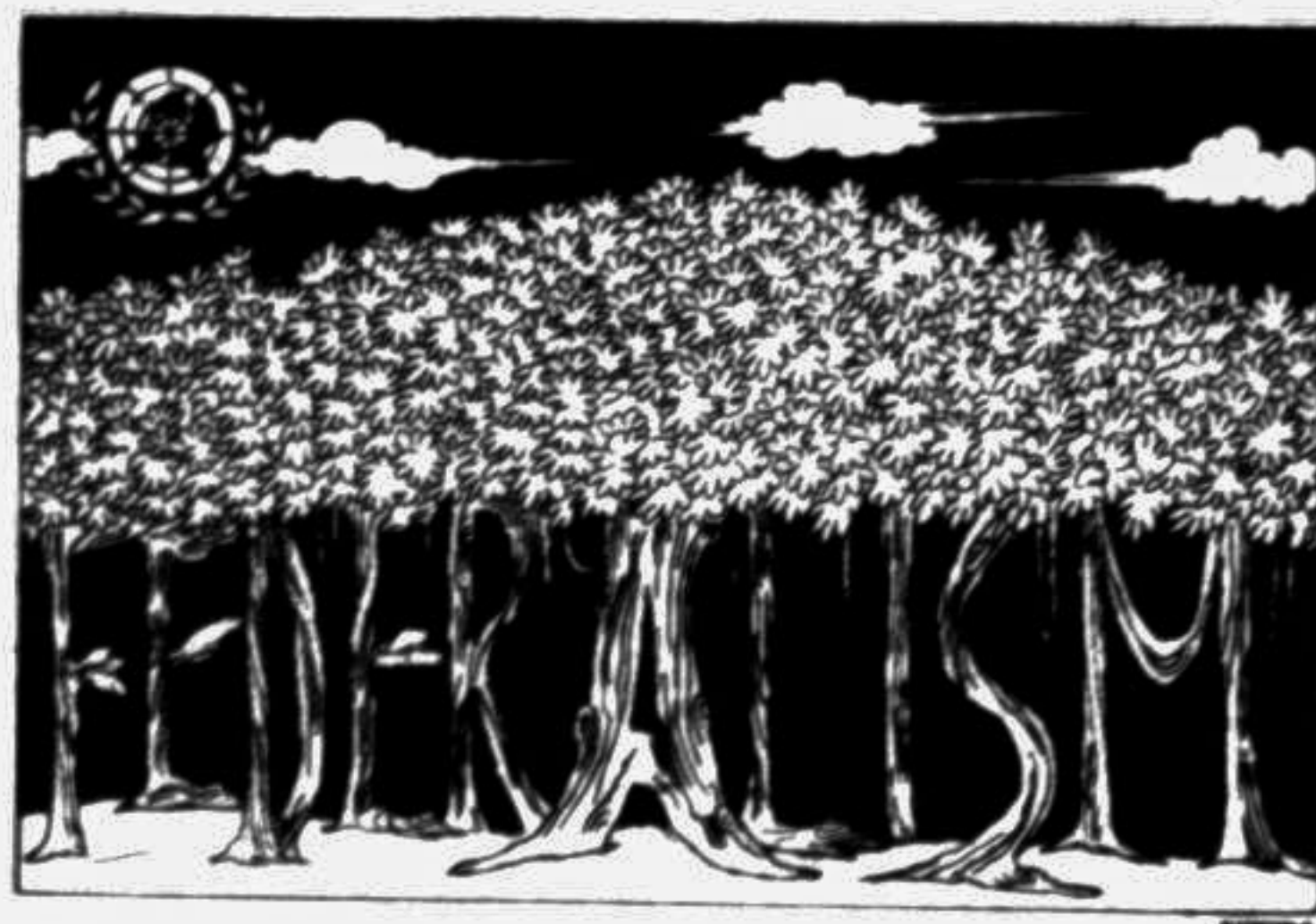
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Erskine Childers is a retired senior advisor to the United Nations Secretary-General.



## Measures are Yet to be there to Discourage Child Labour

by Akhtar Hamid Mansur

we also denounced in unequivocal terms all forms of slavery. But the background of 'The Roots' dates back to several hundred years. And in today's civilised society, the conditions of Anis, Ali Akbar and Laila are nothing above slavery.

The above incidents are a kind of deprivation of basic human rights. According to United Nations Charter, every child can claim all the rights guaranteed by the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights." Their rights are further guaranteed by the declaration of the UN General Assembly on 20 November, 1959.

The United Nations categorically denounces all forms of child labour. The member states of the world body have also unanimously adopted the declaration of the rights of the children ensuring their right to adequate nutrition, medical care, education, housing and right to learn to be useful member of the society.

Under the declaration of the rights of a child adopted in 1959, all members of the United Nations declared that a child, because of his/her physical and mental immaturity needs social safeguards and care both before and after birth, and that individual and groups should strive to achieve children's rights by legislation and other means. But reality is far from the avowed declaration.

In today's world, violations of the rights of the children have become most widespread. Slavery-type practices involv-

ing children is widespread throughout the world. Bond service for debt, sale of children, child prostitution, exploitation of child labour etc. have plagued the so-called civilised world.

Millions of children are used and abused in labour forces around the world. They toil long hours, work in hazardous conditions and receive paltry wages. Their childhood slips away as they risk both physical and mental well-being so that they and their family can survive. Few realise that they are entitled to something better.

According to a report of the International Labour Organisation, more than 75 million children between the age of 8 and 13 years work in the labour forces of the developing world. A UN report, however, estimates almost double that number work throughout the world.

Both ILO and UN give a gloomy and rapidly increasing picture of child labour throughout the world saying "there are no grounds for optimism that the condition and the plight of the children would improve". In India, an investigation entitled "A sub-proletariat in short-trousers" discloses that despite legislative regulations, the exploitation of child labour is a common practice. In Bombay, almost half of the entire labour force come from children aging below 14 years.

Let us look at a developed country Italy, where in 1989 about 9 per cent of victims of industrial accidents were children or adolescents. In Italy, it is estimated that some 150,000 children are working illegally in construction work, about 100,000 in industries and 200,000 in agriculture.

In Columbia, the picture is even more gloomy. A UNICEF report shows that more than 3 million children are working there, many of them 280 metres underground in mines. They must fill 30 sacks of coal a day to earn less than quarter of a dollar.

According to an estimate compiled by the International Labour Organisation the number of children aged under 15 in the labour force by regions are: Africa 9.6 million (i.e. 17.5% of the estimate child labour force of the world), East Asia 9.9 million (18.12%), South Asia 30.5 million (55%) and Europe and North America 1.3 million (2.4%).

South Asia, which comprises Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Pakistan engages the highest percentage of child labour (55%). This is indeed a terrifying figure.

Another ILO report shows that Mali has the highest number of child labour (45%) followed by Bhutan (44%), Upper Volta (43%), Ivory Coast (37%), Bangladesh (32%), Haiti (29%), India (20%), Brazil (11%), Mexico (6%), Sri

Lanka (4%), Japan and USA 2% each and Sweden only 0.4%.

The position becomes even more unbelievable when one considers that most of these countries are signatories to the ILO conventions, particularly the convention number 138 on minimum age and agreed to prohibit the employment of children below that age limit. The convention states "each member for which this convention is in force undertakes to pursue a national policy designed to ensure the effective abolition of child labour and to raise progressively the minimum age for admission to employment or work to a level consistent with the fullest physical and mental development of young persons. The minimum age shall not be less than 15 years."

In Bangladesh, children below 10 years of age constitutes about 38% of the total labour force of the country. A number of factors are contributing to the increased child labour. First almost half of the country's total population is below 16 years. As a result, it has become inevitable to engage labour force of that age or below. Secondly poverty. It is the single important factor, which unless solved, will never pave the way for decreasing child labour. Bangladesh being the second poorest country of the world having per capita income of 110 dollars annually needs second and even third line of income for bare survival of a family. Thirdly, wealth of the country is not distributed in a balanced way among all segments of the population.

As a result, majority of the people live much below the subsistence level which forces

the children of this age group to go to work even at the tender age of five to earn an extra morsel of rice or extra money for their family. Fourthly, lack of basic education. It can be evident from the child labour statistics of Sri Lanka (only 4%) that education in that country (about 85% are literate) helped immensely decrease child labour.

In Bangladesh, rate of literacy is about 20%. As a result, the poor who constitute the vast majority of the country's population prefer sending their children to work at a tender age instead of sending them to educational institutions. Because, to them child labour pays instant dividend. On the other hand, the poor who can hardly afford meals twice a day think that educational expenses is nothing but luxury. It should also be taken into account that the number of educational institution in the country is pathetically low in comparison to the need.

Another important factor regarding the spread of child labour in the country is that children between 8 and 15 sell their labour at a very cheap rate. A UNICEF report says, in Bangladesh, most children work only because they must work. The hard fact is that children between the ages of 8 and 15 must earn if their family is to survive. Child labour in Bangladesh accounts for about 30 per cent of the total family income. The work the children undertake seriously impairs their physical health. The effects of exertion, fatigue and over-work on the developing body are bound to hinder, counteract, retard or even halt growth apart from the matter of industrial diseases and accidents. The combined effects of anaemia, malnutrition and over work often are irreversible.

But how long this state of child labour will continue? We all know the fact that with the increase of child labour we are virtually developing a future generation of unproductive workers with bleak national prospect.

## 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.

## Loan to dairy farms

Sir, A report published in the press says that the honourable Finance Minister has directed the commercial banks to grant loans to entrepreneurs interested in setting up dairy farms in the country. He also assured that Government would subsidise setting up of dairy farms. This is no doubt a heartening news because Government has to spend Tk four hundred crore in foreign exchange every year in importing milk. But it is felt that loans should be granted cautiously, so that the prospective dairy farms can find markets within easy reach. From this angle a large number of dairy farms should be set up in and around Dhaka and Chittagong cities and other big towns where there are ready markets for dairy products as baby food and casein sweetmeats.

In far flung rural areas, purchasing power of people in general is very low and hence it will be difficult to sell a big quantity of milk by the milk producers. Careful selection of entrepreneurs is also important to prevent misuse and misappropriation of loans which happens quite often in our country. These and other relevant factors should be kept in view while sanctioning loans to prospective dairy farms.

Saleh Ahmed Chowdhury  
Dhaka Cantonment

## No one-taka coin

Sir, We do not still have a one Taka coin. Perhaps the paper currency is water, rain and cyclone-proof, and lasts longer, and costs cheaper in the long run (repeated withdrawal of overused notes and regular reprinting!).

We can apply for another world record!

Cottless citizen  
Dhaka

## Toxic fertilizer

Sir, The item '1113 tonnes of toxic fertilizer distributed' by S Y Bakht in your 23rd Sept issue continues in the fine tradition of investigative journalism one associates with The Daily Star.

The subject of the report and the subsequent happenings reek of conspiracy, callousness and cover-up that are now all too pervasive in Bangladesh officialdom. As Mr Bakht has observed the Agriculture Ministry is silent probably at the behest of the powerful beneficiaries of this transaction.

The questions are simple: 1. In spite of being inspected how did the contamination escape detection prior to shipment? 2. Why were BARI officials so eager to certify poison fit for human consumption? 3. Why did BADC distribute the fertilizer despite of warnings from the EPA?

The nation demands an answer. Will The Daily Star and Mr S Y Bakht continue the good work and expose the institutions and persons responsible for this crime against humanity so that exemplary punishment can be handed out.

Mustafa Kamal  
Motijheel C/A, Dhaka

## War a determinism?

Sir, War has always been terrible. It causes immeasurable and irreparable losses to the people. Perhaps none in the world would refer war as a means to achieve some thing. But, sadly enough, people get involved in war, kill fellow beings, destroy properties and above all bring holocaust of disaster to the mankind.

There has been a school of international relations concerned with peace-research. A voluminous body of literature has been written by the scholars subjecting the ways to being peace internationally. But all those still could not constitute a viable theory to interpret the hostile relations of nations causing war. It is said that since international relations as a subject falls under social science discipline, whose variables are unmanageable, it has become rather difficult to theorize. And thus the ideas constitute a paradox.

In such a paradoxical situation, would peace remain elusive? Perhaps, the answer lies in the justness of the world order. In the just existing order, wars will occur, people will die...

The paradox should better be referred to determinism. We do not still have enough institutions to combat the vices individually, regionally, nationally and internationally.

The perpetrators of crime amounting to wars enjoy the chance to evade the pangs.

However, with the development of civilization, institutions would develop to contain this possibility of evasion. But, should wars and other devastating phenomena destabilizing world peace and security be allowed to continue till a complex network of institutions is developed?

Md Abdur Rouf  
Sergeant Zahurul Haque Hall, DU

## Deforestation

Sir, Forest resources of Bangladesh are very scanty compared to our need. Hence all out efforts should be made not only to protect and preserve the existing forests but also for expansion of the forest area. While there is a dearth of publicity and propaganda in this regard, in practice large scale cutting of trees in government forests, specially in Chittagong area, is defeating the objective.

Even an autocrat like Ershad banned cutting trees from the government forests of Chittagong. But after fall of Ershad the timber merchants somehow managed to cancel that order and as a result the main forest areas of Chittagong are fast losing trees with all its dangerous consequences. While the policy-makers and bureaucrats of Forest Ministry and Forest Department and the timber merchants are perhaps having a nice time, the country will surely be facing a bad time unless the policy is reversed in time.

Will the higher ups in the government look into it?

Zaidi Ahmed Jafir  
Fullbart, Sylhet

## OPINION

## Administration and Inspections

Shahabuddin Mahtab

There are several factors, complementing each other, regarding the deterioration in the functioning of the various organisations in the country. The present dimension of the problem is so extensive, that we need to tackle each of the problems separately.

One such area of neglect is the regular and periodical inspections of the offices in all branches of the Government. The collection of inspection questions clearly lays down what information is to be collected, what guidance and instructions are to be imparted, and what lapses are there, which need correction.

The inspection forms a part of the management process. The system of inspections is a legacy from the British days, and this worked well in the past. To ensure transparency and accountability in any department/organisation, the statutory requirements of the inspections have to be ensured.

Several months back some reports had appeared in the press, stating that the inspections of the primary schools were not being done by the Asst Thana (formerly Upazila) Education Officers. In fact we have one Thana Education Officer and five or more Asst Thana Education Officers in each Thana. The primary, if not the only, function of the Asst Thana Education Officers is to

visit about twenty primary schools each month. The objective of these inspections is to guide and assist the teachers in their jobs, for enabling them to impart satisfactory lessons to the students. The inspections can be effective in improving our primary education system, to which the government is committed.

Similar to the above are the inspection of the different post offices, by different grades of officers. These inspections tone up the officers, with the resultant output of quicker delivery of mails. The post office has now to compete with the specialised services offered by the Courier Service in the private sector, and its success is dependent on providing competitive and quality service to the consumers.

The tax administration and the customs authorities can greatly improve the collection of revenues, if guidance, supervision and direction are imparted by the senior administrators.

The health agriculture, industries and all other sectors can achieve many of their objectives, if the required inspections are rigidly undertaken.

One of the management principles of the day states, "Walk around and improve," and this can ensure our productivity and well-being.