

Food for All

At this moment, with more than two million people facing starvation in Somalia and millions more staring at an uncertain future in other parts of Africa, "Food for All" would sound no more than a catchy slogan—visionary, idealistic but unachievable for years to come.

In observing the World Food Day today, as declared by the United Nations, we must indeed ponder why the battle to provide all human beings on this earth the very basic necessity for survival—just food—has become so hard and long.

The lack of nutrition, the theme chosen by the World Food Programme (WFP) for the observance of the day this year, serves as a companion for starvation throughout the developing world. It has, indeed, reached a staggering proportion, not only in causing hunger on a mass scale, as in Somalia, but also in spreading all kinds of diseases.

The fight against malnutrition goes hand in hand with our crusade to provide food to millions of hungry and near-hungry people in different parts of the developing world. Here, too, we come up against all kinds of man-made failures, ranging from disparities in consumption between the rich affluent industrialised world and the poor nations to the inability of the United Nations to create a just economic order that takes up the production of food and its availability to the poorest of the poor as a key element.

One can distribute all this blame equitably, when we should be sharing our food through a just and fair system. The need today is to take a new look at the whole situation and study all the linkages which, to varying degrees, are halting our progress on the food front, the linkages between environment and agricultural production, between literacy and farming and between liberation of our women from ignorance and the need for higher productivity in our economic field.

It is a good thing that Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, now in Rome is currently having talks with senior-most officials of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and WFP. The Bangladesh leader should provide these two organisations a thorough review of our efforts as well as of our difficulties and handicaps.

Something Gravely Wrong within Us

Violence by bully-boys or the notorious mastans can be traced to socio-political reasons—each case also having a pronounced money connection. Faruq, the young scooter driver from Mirpur was beaten to death allegedly by the local 'muscleman' Moinuddin on Wednesday night.

We do not propose to enumerate exhaustively all cases of deadly violence occurring on Wednesday for that would be quite a formidable, if not altogether impossible, job. Wednesday was just a typical day. But then something else happened on the day that made it special.

Newspaper hawker Zahir went up the stairs on Wednesday morning to deliver his paper to a fourth-floor subscriber. He had an exchange of hot words with the subscriber, over some old bill and the latter, irked, pushed Zahir making him tumble down all the stairs to death.

Politicians may not care, still there is something gravely wrong with our society. No, it has nothing to do with penury—personal or national, or the so-called backwardness of our society. The present situation is nothing compared to what we passed through in 1943 when no less than 50 lakh perished.

THE return of Texas billionaire Ross Perot to the United States 1992 presidential election campaign trail has caused nearly as much surprise as did his withdrawal from the race back in July.

The opinion polls are however showing that a successful re-entry into a presidential poll orbit as a third candidate is a tricky task to accomplish, particularly when that return comes in the last stages of a campaign that is murderously hectic from the word go.

With just 18 days to go before polling on Nov. 3, though, Perot has a lot of work, perhaps too much work, to do in order to generate the kind of bandwagon-type support, bordering on mania, that his unannounced candidature did earlier in the year.

Back in February, the 61-year Perot had announced in a television interview that he would stand for election as an independent candidate if his supporters put his name on the ballot paper in all 50 states.

That announcement started the bandwagon rolling, with volunteers all over the United States going around collecting the required number of signatures of voters to petition for inclusion of Perot's name on the ballot paper. Such a petition is necessary for candidates who are not nominated by parties.

Pundits were predicting an upset result, perhaps not an outright victory for Perot, but at least a three-way tie, in which no single candidate would get the required 270 Electoral College votes, out of 538, needed to win the most coveted political post in the world.

In the United States presidents are not elected directly by popular ballot. Although voters do vote for presidential

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By Sabir Mustafa

and vice-presidential candidates, their votes, in each state, are actually counted in favour of a slate of Electors pledged to those candidates.

The last time such a tie happened was in 1824 when four candidates fought-out an inconclusive battle at the polls. In that year, a not-so-decent Adams elected John Quincy Adams as president, even though it was Andrew Jackson who had received the most popular and electoral votes in the original election.

Nowadays however, no one seriously expects the Representatives to show such indifference to popular choice, no matter how incomplete that verdict might have been.

The rise of a third candidate on an independent ticket is not an unprecedented phenomenon, but the kind of impact Perot had upto July was certainly something new. So, what was different this time?

"Independent or third party candidates emerge when there is a high level of dissatisfaction with the way the country is going in general or if a large section of the voting public is dissatisfied with the choice they are being offered by the two parties", explained Thomas P. Neale.

Analyst of history, public affairs and American national government at the Library of Congress in Washington.

This year, Neale said, it is a case of both, and upto July, Perot was "enjoying greater support than any third party candidate that I can recall".

Neale made the comments during a telephone link-up recently between Dhaka and Washington arranged by the United States Information Service (USIS), to shed some light on the Perot phenomenon and peculiarities of the US electoral system.

According to Neale, what made people go for Perot was dissatisfaction with current policy, and an apparent inability of the President and the Congress to get along with each other. The Republican president and Democrat-controlled Congress have been unable to work out their differences and present a coherent programme of legislation, he said.

"One interesting point about Perot is that he draws support from all parts of the political spectrum—he draws from the right and he draws from the left. He holds very liberal views on many issues such as unrestricted right to abortion, but he has managed to get support from what we call Middle America, meaning people who are culturally and politically conservative. He has done an almost impossible thing by drawing people from a broad spectrum", Neale said.

Despite the discontent with 12 years of Republican presidency and battles with

Congress, the question remained as to why Perot had managed to fire the public imagination which other third candidates, such as Governor George Wallace in 1968 and Representative John Anderson in 1980, had failed to do.

"As you know, he is enormously wealthy, but he is a self-made man, having come from a humble origin. And that offers the impression of great vigour, decisiveness, an ability to solve problems", Neale said, "Perot's rise from rags to riches, his seeming ability to control his own, his decisiveness—all of these appeal very strongly to the essential elements of the American character. Perot is an American success story and I think people find that very much attractive".

During the campaign, Perot has tried to rise above parties, by projecting himself as something new, different and someone who is definitely not a politician, Neale explained.

What Perot has done, and continues to do in the last few remaining days of the campaign is to appeal to the worries and sensibilities of the American people, rather than offering them a concrete set of policies. But he has some interesting ideas too.

On the issue of stationing US troops abroad, Perot said if elected president, he would

send both Germany and Japan a US\$100 billion bill every year to meet the cost of basing US soldiers in those countries.

"Perhaps it was not surprising in the light of the discontent that was demonstrated earlier, that someone like Perot could come along and scoop-up the support of this very large number of discontented voters. But whether he will be able to ride this feeling until the election is something that remains to be seen", Neale said as a way of a caution.

Sure enough, Bill Clinton now looks virtually unbeatable in the opinion polls. The Arkansas governor's youthful and handsome presence is looking more reassuring by the day, forcing the Bush camp to engage in dirty tricks like secret probes into Clinton's "patriotism", which may well assume Watergate proportions.

Perot's sudden withdrawal from the race came as a shock to his supporters, and his three-month absence from the campaign trail quite possibly convinced voters that his candidature was not a serious one. Perot's pull-out in July was also a pointer to the sort of challenge a US presidential candidate finds himself against once the media hawks get going. Although Perot recognised the Democrats' new-found sense of purpose, others felt there was a different reason for his sudden about-turn.

Few days before he pulled out of the race, Perot had committed what BBC commentator Alistair Cook called an unsalvageable blunder. Speaking at a conference of

the American Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, a century-old body representing black people, Perot, facing a conservative-type black audience, referred to black-Americans as "your people".

It was a passing remark, but the media did not let it pass by.

The media men suggested that by referring to blacks as "your people", while speaking to a black audience, Perot was implying that they were not his people. As the questions fired by pursuing reporters got more pointed and hostile, he decided the heat was too much, and got out of the kitchen fast.

That, according to Cook, was that. It showed Perot had a long, long way to go before he could begin to imagine the sort of discipline one needs to have in order to have a successful campaign in the USA. The down-to-earth Perot was no match for the keen ears of the listening public and media.

Not surprisingly perhaps, his return to the fray last month has been low-keyed and the public response so far has not exactly threatened to overthrow the state.

The spotlight is now firmly on Bush and Clinton. Rather than looking out for blunders from Perot, the media and public seem more interested to watch-out for the other two candidates, and see which of them will make a bigger ass of himself. This is a way of saying to Perot, "This matter, you no longer do".

As Thomas Neale said, voter dissatisfaction with the party candidates on offer largely determines the prospect of a third man. For Perot, that road may have been blocked by the rise of Clinton as a credible alternative to Bush.

provided by WFP, bilateral donors and the Government of Bangladesh. VGD provides food assistance as a development input combined with a training and credit package, aimed at enabling assetless women to improve their economic and social condition. With nationwide coverage, VGD is the largest poverty alleviation programme targeted exclusively at women in Bangladesh.

Both these development projects contribute to nutrition in two ways: in the short term, the income transfer from the food resources contributes to household resources and the food itself provides direct nutritional value. In the long term, the projects are working towards overcoming the roots of poverty by increasing employment and agricultural production, improving marketing systems, improving access to marketing, health care or educational facilities and improving women's access to mainstream development.

Malnutrition in a World of Plenty

by Francis Mwanza

DESPITE huge increases in global food production over the past two decades, many people in the world are still poorly fed. One out of every five people goes hungry every day. At least two out of every five people are affected by nutrient deficiencies, largely because they are too poor to buy vitamin- and mineral-rich foods.

Worse still, more than 20 million people worldwide die from starvation and related illnesses every year; that's the equivalent of 130 jumbo jets each with 420 passengers on board crashing every day, with no survivors. More than half of the malnourished people live in countries where enough food is available for everyone," according to Ms Catherine Bertini, Executive Director of the UN World Food Programme (WFP). "But lack of money, poor diets and eating habits, and inadequate distribution systems keep the food out of reach of millions of people."

Malnutrition—the most severe

symptom of poverty—is growing in numbers. For affected individuals, the situation is grave. In children, survival, growth, health, activity, and cognitive development are seriously threatened by malnutrition. In adults, health and performance are affected. For communities and nations, such losses in human potential translate into high social and economic costs. Moreover, widespread malnutrition has become a major obstacle to development.

Anyone who is poor, or socially or culturally disadvantaged, runs the risk of malnutrition. Most at risk are women and children. About 150 million children are underweight and more than 20 million babies are born underweight each year. Many of the children die within the first few years of life; and those that survive grow up stunted with impaired intelligence. Some

40 million children are estimated to be vitamin-A deficient, 13 million of whom are at risk of going blind and many others will die. Around 500 million women are anaemic because of iron deficiency. The risk is high in poor regions or areas facing economic crisis, even higher for those caught up in social and political turmoil.

Because of its magnitude, its catastrophic impact particularly on the survival and development of women and children, malnutrition is one of the most significant global problems of today. The elimination of hunger and malnutrition, therefore, remains a major goal. Most vital in the fight against hunger and malnutrition is access to food among the poor and malnourished groups. Since its establishment, WFP has played an active

role in ensuring food security amongst poor people in developing countries. The programme provides nutrition to the poor through projects that use food aid for development. WFP projects attract the poorest of the poor—people who are so helpless that they are willing to participate in the development programmes in return for food.

WFP has been a major partner in development in Bangladesh since 1975, committing food aid worth 909 million dollars. Bangladesh was the largest WFP food aid recipient in 1991 and is likely to remain so in 1992. In addition, WFP is able to work in close concert with the food aid donor community, thereby attracting additional resources to support activities accorded a high priority by the Government of Bangladesh.

The FFW Project consists of rural infrastructure works and its main objectives are developmental. It aims to increase agricultural production including inland fisheries and tree plantation; and to mitigate loss of life and property. The main activities cover four sectors: water, roads, fisheries and forestry. The project also addresses post-disaster rehabilitation needs. WFP, bilateral donors and the Government of Bangladesh will provide close to 571,000 MT of wheat and generate 72 million workdays during 1992.

The VGD Project annually provides food aid to nearly 500,000 women from among the poorest of the poor. Each woman receives a monthly income transfer of 31.25 kgs of wheat for a duration of two years. On a yearly basis is the VGD programme distributes over 180,000 MT of wheat

Burma's New Icing : Martial Law Lifted

Minn Thu writes from Yangon

But mass gatherings are still outlawed and an elected legislature is yet to be convened

MYANMAR (Burma) has lifted martial law in another piecemeal move to restore democracy by bits and pieces.

It follows the lifting of curfew in early September. But mass gatherings are still outlawed and the lady who was awarded the Nobel Prize for her opposition to the ruling junta remains under strict house arrest.

The lifting of martial law in three of 10 military regions—including Yangon (Rangoon)—means the military no longer have judicial and administrative powers. Military tribunals with summary powers will be abolished.

Still, the military junta which rules the country refuses to convene an elected legislature and does not recognise the overwhelming victory of Nobel laureate Aung

San Suu Kyi's party. But the junta has promised to hold a constitutional convention by January.

Since April when Gen Than Shwe took over the junta, more than 500 political prisoners were released. Observers say as many as 1,500 dissidents remain in jail.

No matter. Nightlife has returned to Yangon, spurred by the curfew lifting. It has been absent since a five-hour curfew was imposed in October 1990.

Authorities expect the curfew lifting to facilitate movement and transportation and help perk up the economy. If followed other minor policy shifts and relaxations which the ruling State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) implemented since April when the council "retired" chairman Senior General Saw Maung,

whose health was "severely impaired", and appointed Gen Than Shwe to replace him.

Some 18 days before the lifting of the curfew, the government reopened universities and colleges which were closed on Dec 21, 1991 after two days of campus protests by students. The students called for the release of Ms Suu Kyi and other political detainees, the speedy transfer of power, and formation of student unions.

While Ms Suu Kyi still has to be released, some political detainees and even convicted prisoners have been freed.

The council has also met with political parties and in-

dependent candidates to prepare for a constitutional convention, hopefully by January. The government has, at the same time, suspended unilaterally all military offensives against insurgents.

While generally welcome, there are some reservations about the lifting of the curfew. Observers point out that, probably because of ever-rising prices, the incidence of theft in the country has gone up even with the curfew. They fear theft incidence would further increase with the curfew lifting.

A recent pronouncement by a high-ranking SLORC official appears to give them good rea-

son to worry. It seems the improved peace and order situation, which led to the lifting of the curfew, might have had little to do with the local police.

Home Affairs Minister Lt Gen Phone Myint, a member of the SLORC, said people perceive the police more as burden. He confirmed that graft and corruption, malpractices and abuse of power and position were rampant in the police force.

He said some members of the police were not only bullying people but also extorting money from them. Police posted at entrances to cities and towns reportedly charge fees from people who want to enter.

Others have turned a blind eye on brothels, unofficial guest and rest houses, and drug traffickers who regularly

paid them small sums for their "tolerance". Gen Myint said it was bad enough that an officer would be engaged in malpractice but his subordinates would be ten or even a hundred times worse.

The general said police offences have been reported by the National Intelligence Bureau (NIB). He directed police officers to study the reports so they would put a stop to the malpractices and abuses. He said any member found guilty should be retired. Officers responsible for subordinates will be taken to task and pensioned off, if necessary.

Myanmar's police force has 61,517 officers and men posted in 1,106 stations in 317 townships. The country has eight police training schools that have trained 803 officers and 12,326 recruits. —Diphneus Asia

To the Editor...

Scholarship certificate

Sir, There is system of scholarship examination at the stages ending with Class V and Class VIII and the beneficiaries of the system, no doubt, enjoy certain monetary benefit apart from carrying on studies at the upper stages free of school-fees. But these scholarship-holder students fail to show their achievements in time of need, in as much as they have no records to show that in their early stages of education they had won such scholarship in recognition of their merit.

While praying for a job, or taking attempts for higher studies abroad, they fail to show any conclusive proof as they do not get any certificate to show the award of scholarship. Only a small section of such students might possess advertisement with photo if published in national dailies; otherwise they have nothing to substantiate their claim of having won such distinction. My humble submission is

that the pupils who succeed in winning such scholarship, may be given a certificate as is given by the Board for SSC or HSC examinations. Mere publication of their names in the Part VIII of Education Gazette is not enough since it is not always referred to.

Md Robul Islam Hero Mahish Bathan, Rajshahi

Young people

Sir, I would like to respond to the letter written by Mr HR Chowdhury, concerning an article called 'No one can forbid us the future' published in your daily on August 31st.

Mr Chowdhury in his letter objects to the fact that Naheed Kamal's article would be harmful to the normal mental growth of small children and youths, and it is certainly true that 'Rising Stars' encompasses age groups from preadolescents to young people in their late teens. But it is hardly reasonable to suppose that such an article would be of any interest to small children

should they be able to comprehend it at all. However, teenagers are a different matter. In this respect I would like to mention that with the exception of 'Rising Stars' I find similar pages for young people in other newspapers monotonous and bland. The monotony arises from the fact that the pages are full of what is considered 'proper' for young people to write, they do not reflect what young people actually think because such pages are not considered appropriate forums for such subjects. I find such practices present a sterilized view of young people which is far from the reality of today.

Young people talking about love and sex on the pages of a daily newspaper in Bangladesh is not going to be everyone's cup of tea, so, perhaps, it would be better to write about the effects of social change in our society. Whether change will come for better or worse is something only time and future generations will find. It is true that so far change, has not

come at the dizzying pace of western societies but anybody who thinks that the course of our family and social life will continue to proceed in a normal and placid manner, without any ripples, need only to compare our present life, with one that our grandfathers and grandmothers lived, only thirty years ago and see the enormous gulf of difference that lies in between.

Mr Chowdhury makes the point that the light of education has opened many avenues for women in our country. Such a statement can only be made in a very relative sense, that is if one compares the present situation with the time of Begum Rokeya. I know this is particularly hard to accept for many people since we pride ourselves on putting women in our country on a haloed and sacred pedestal but all too often this becomes a pedestal inside a guilded cage.

Mr Chowdhury fears that Naheed Kamal's views will promote social unrest. I would like to remind him that we are

already passing through time of great social unrest, but I doubt that such unrest is caused by young people like Naheed Kamal whom I find, after reading her article, as eloquent with a clarity of vision that other young people would do well to cultivate. I am not necessarily subscribing to her specific views, but to the fact that many young people today seem to spend their time in passive enjoyment rather than loving something constructive like contributing articles to newspapers.

I think that we have to come to terms with our younger generation. It is no use pretending that they will be like us when we were younger—a generation to be seen and not to be heard with decisions on marriage, careers and just about everything else made without our participation.

I think the voices of young people in this country need to be heard whatever the forum. Uniformity of views between generations is never possible nor desirable. But that is no

reason why we cannot talk to one another. The younger generation cannot deny us the present and yes it is true that ultimately we cannot forbid them the future. After all, it belongs to them.

Kamel Haque Gulshan, Dhaka.

DU residential halls

Sir, Most of the violence at Dhaka University are reportedly caused by 'outsiders'. So called student wings of political parties give them shelter in their 'respective' halls for their own sake and to use them to obtain their 'political' interest. The culprits thus residing in the halls have made the campus a cockpit. Allegedly, 'popular' political leaders even use their influence in providing them shelter in the residential halls in lieu of allotting the seats to meritorious students. As a result the genuine students suffer due to lack of accommodation.

Md Kamal Hossain, Zahurul Haque Hall, DU