

Is There Something for Us to Learn?

Fight against Drug

On the eve of a symposium on "Prevention of Drug Abuse Among Youth" for the member countries of the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC), to be held in the capital from October 27 to 29, it is good to know that the government is alive to the growing menace of narcotics. That the government has already worked out a five-year master plan to be launched from next January is indeed heart-warming. Financed by the United Nations Drug Control Programme, the plan involving a total of Taka seven crore should have a realistic chance of being successful. The effort is going to be further complemented by an already reached agreement between Bangladesh and the United States under which Bangladesh will receive from the US assistance, including narcotics control equipment. The initial amount to be provided for procurement of such equipment will be 20,000 dollars.

All these should definitely be considered a good thing. More so because a job done well on the home front will have its beneficial influence on the proposed symposium. Aimed at strengthening the regional co-operation for waging a battle against the drug abuse among the South Asian youths, the symposium is expected to throw lights on various drug-related issues and crimes along with making suggestions to contain them. But without the political will of the governments of the region, all this may prove to be an exercise in futility. Procurement of sophisticated narcotics control equipment, setting up of more drug treatment and rehabilitation centres, etc may help contribute to a declining trend of drug addiction, but little do they stand any chance of eliminating the problem completely.

The Golden Triangle and the Golden Crescent, two of the world's largest narcotics sources and routes, finding themselves in close proximity to the area or in the region proper, will always pose a serious challenge to the countries. But to make the programme successful, it is most essential to stop the drugs at their sources. At this point therefore the question of political will counts so much because individual members producing narcotics or acting as a route for their trafficking must be determined enough to extricate themselves from the link — overt or covert. The SAARC members as a group have the capability to rise up to the occasion better than they separately could muster to do. But considering the might and ingenuity of the drug barons, it is better to admit that they are pitted against a formidable foe. What is therefore most necessary is an international co-operation to fight these mighty adversaries.

However, the co-operation should not necessarily be in the form of policing the borders and the land of drug cultivation, or even dealing with the drug dealers. Social programmes stand a better chance of eradicating both the cultivation and the peddling. People grow drugs, though knowing full well the harm their produces are capable of doing, because of economic necessity. These people will stop cultivating the banned items once they have access to appropriate technology and loans from bank for producing alternative crops fetching them a good profit. The governments of these region must seek international help in introducing such programmes so that the desperation of the people to go for the banned crops' cultivation is removed. If necessary, the farmers of the infamous crops should be provided with subsidies and other facilities until they give up their old ways.

Two cheers for Mr Khan

Two cheers for the Planning Minister. The gutsy Khan, a scion of the most pioneering of the industrial and business houses of Chittagong, has called for the breaking of unholy alliance of traders, bureaucrats and politicians. And as one reads his bill of castigation one is reminded of Martin Luther doing the same against Papacy and nailing that bill on the entrance of his town church. And one has a feeling that his is no mere rhetoric — these seems to be words coming from true realisation.

Mr Zahiruddin Khan is eminently placed to know about those vile three thrivings on a symbolic basis and pushing the nation's economy down the drain and sapping the nation's every will to gather itself up and endeavor to make a try at meaningful survival. Mr Khan doesn't even spare the government. The triumvirate's machinations work through putting up hosts of regulation barriers on the way of industrialisation growth in quality and volume of industrial products and even the marketing of them. The personal and group interests — all of them base and extremely unenlightened myopic — of the three meet here at hindering manufacturing and marketing at as many points as can line their pockets to the utmost. How could things come to such a pass?

The traders buying up the bureaucrats and supplying hefty kickbacks to politicians — there can be no greater example of the dynamics of this macabre anti-national conspiracy than that which went on during the Ershadian decade — are hardly traders. Most of them are indenters and agents of foreign manufacturers, never knowing in as they say in Bengali, their fourteen generations anything of trading, who sell to the bureaucrats and politicians in power ideas of buying things that this nation is hardly in need of. The politicians who are pliable in the matter are no politicians in the strict sense and will not become such ever. They are there in the government to mint some money with the active support and connivance of the bureaucrats who have a permanent hand in the pie.

Why did Mr Khan spare those that flich state money in the name of setting up industry? But he has, in a flash of rare insight seen through the willful blunders of policy planners and the mistakes of World Bank. It remains, however, very debatable if WB ever commits a mistake, something that cannot be determined without knowing what they aim to achieve in truth. Who is the fool who takes WB for a charitable organisation?

We are sorry not to give all the three cheers for the minister. He is very much part and parcel of that jinxed machine that cannot be healed by repeating Mr Khan's laudable fulminations a thousand times. Mr. Khan has said things that are universally known. Still we cheer him very genuinely for no sitting minister has so far dared to call the spade a spade in such a manner. For earning the full three cheers the Planning Minister must do something effective to break the hold of the vicious circle on the government.

LIKE many others in Bangladesh I have also been watching the debate among the American presidential candidates. Thanks to the CNN and the little bit of opening up done by the government, we are able to get a glimpse of the vitality, openness and impartiality of the American democratic system. Admittedly no political system in the world can claim to be perfect but the US constitution has established a system which is largely responsive to the opinion of the electorate. It is certainly a most interesting — almost a thrilling — exercise. The American election, more than the electoral process of any other great power, is able to attract the attention of the entire international community. Television coverage across vast distances has also played a major role in this phenomenon. I do not know if the American people are aware that the whole world is watching them and their leaders as the election campaign moves to its final stage on November 3rd.

American political parties extensively use the news media but especially the audio-visual media in their election campaigns. The fight is lively and colourful and often ruthless and resort to smear campaign is not uncommon. President Bush has been trying, so far it seems unsuccessfully, to cast doubts on the character of Gov. Clinton for having organized demonstrations against the Vietnam war. Of course, rallies and demonstrations were staged in those days by millions of Americans of all ages but what the President is trying to insinuate is that somehow, such demon-

strations in a foreign country are most unpatriotic and therefore reflect poorly on Clinton's character. Clinton's journey to Moscow as a tourist when he was a Rhodes scholar at Oxford is also being presented by the Republican side as some sort of betrayal of America. This kind of tactics is well known to the American voters but surprisingly, these attacks often damage a candidate if he is not able to counter the charges effectively. This time, it appears, President Bush has had no luck and all his efforts to focus on the so-called 'character' issue are not having much impact on the opinion polls.

Having watched the three debates among the Presidential candidates and one between the Vice-presidential candidates, I am impressed by the high quality of the debates. Not only the character and record of the candidates but also the issues of concern to the public are receiving attention. Ross Perot has been most successful in sensitizing the American people about the enormous burden of the national debt. Clinton has emphasized the domestic issues and perhaps this is the secret of his high approval rating in the polls. Health care, for example, is a very important issue in the agenda of all the three candidates. I wish in Bangladesh our candidates and political parties in their election pledges would give even a small fraction of the importance that the American presidential candidates are attaching to this programme. Similarly, the quality of education — especially at the secondary level — was another big issue. Bush prides himself in being an 'education' President

though his record in this field is not particularly inspiring.

All the candidates promised to adopt a variety of measures to revive the economy. This is of course the perennial election pledge but against the background of the longest recession in recent history this has a special importance. Ross Perot speaks mainly about the national debt and is determined to eliminate this burden from the future generations of Americans. His folksy manner and frankness is appealing but he is rather vague about his plans. President Bush has been tireless in reiterating his pledge not to raise taxes.

Bush had any hopes of a dramatic change in the voter's attitude, it has not happened. Clinton maintains the lead. However, I have to add that though Clinton is leading in the polls and probably he will win, there is no certainty about it. The incumbent president always enjoys an advantage in the final stages. For one thing, many voters who take little interest in politics, find it easy to vote for the incumbent president as it appears to be the safe thing to do. The situation is more volatile than in previous presidential elections because of the presence of Ross Perot as a third candi-

party in power will be open to allegations of misuse of these media for promoting partisan interests.

I was particularly struck by the impartiality of the American political system. Since both the print and audio-visual media are in the private sector, there was no possibility of their misuse by either side. The incumbent President did not get any privilege or advantage beyond what the challengers were getting from the media. Of course, money is a big factor and the fact that Ross Perot is a billionaire made a whole lot of difference. However, in order to reduce the difference in the financial strength of the candidates and also to prevent large contributors from exercising undue influence, the United States government has enacted legislation to provide campaign funds to the candidates on the basis of a formula.

In Bangladesh this was the most important issue when the movement to oust Ershad was going on. The key question was: how the incumbent President or the ministers could be prevented from abusing the power and privileges of their office? We may have won the first round in the struggle against tyranny and autocracy but we are yet to travel a long distance in establishing democracy both in letter and spirit. It would be interesting for the people of Bangladesh to know whether the Prime Minister and other ministers who campaigned in the recent bye-elections travelled to the constituencies at their own expense or the expense of the party or at government expense. In order to set a high standard of conduct this in-

formation should be made available in the case of every bye-election and local election. Similarly, it would be a gross misuse of official position if, just on the eve of the election, a minister announces to the constituency in which he is campaigning that a particular grant for school or hospital or road or some other financial benefit would be given to that community or locality. To my mind this is nothing but a form of bribe which is given, not to an individual, but to a group of voters to influence their voting. This is certainly morally wrong and I presume legally wrong also.

The Election Commission has a most important role in introducing and upholding a code of conduct for the guidance of all concerned including the members of the cabinet. There is a big difference between what I would call 'nursing' a constituency over a period of time by an aspiring candidate and ministerial favours bestowed at election time. I hope the media will probe this issue with reference to the last two bye-elections. Only by being vigilant can we establish and uphold a certain standard of conduct in the nation's political life. The essence of democracy is free choice. Use of official power and privilege as well as the resources of the state to promote individual or party interests is a negation of that free choice. Let more light be thrown on this question to reassure the nation that we are on the right path in upholding democracy in the true sense of the term. It would be tragic indeed if the people have to resort to mass movements once in every four or five years to fulfill their democratic aspirations.

ON THE RECORD

by Shah AMS Kibria

However neither his pledge not to raise taxes nor his plans to reduce the national debt and stimulate the economy inspire much confidence. In 1988 he made a similar pledge but broke it under pressure. Bush claims credit for the victory in the Gulf War and he even claims credit for the collapse of communism but the impact of these successes in American elections is only marginal. Clinton is offering a mixture and perhaps the most carefully worked out and comprehensive package both to revive the economy and reduce the debt burden. He offers change and the American people are perhaps ready for a change in the White House.

Like the two earlier debates, the final one on October 19 does not seem to have changed the ratings in the opinion polls. If President date. This is a most unusual situation. The major parties are realizing that the American people are no longer satisfied with professional politicians whose promise and performance are often at variance. I was wondering, after watching the debates, if we could also have a system of debates among the candidates before the election. We did have TV speeches by the leaders of political parties but a face to face debate takes the process to a new and, in my view, a much higher level of sophistication. Since the TV and Radio are state monopoly in Bangladesh, it is most important to prevent the misuse of these powerful media by establishing proper ground rules for their use. Unless some attention is paid to this matter well in advance it is almost certain that the

World Bank and IMF's Policies Harmful to Third World

Jim Lobe writes from Washington

The macro-economic policies imposed on 80 Third World countries by the World Bank and IMF under the term 'structural adjustment programme' have harmed rather than helped these countries economically and socially, according to 100 citizen groups from 40 countries at a recent Washington meeting.

STRUCTURAL adjustment programmes (SAPs), implemented by dozens of financially troubled developing countries over the past 12 years, may actually be undermining prospects for the recovery of their economies, according to more than 100 non-governmental activists that met in Washington in mid-September.

"If recovery requires a healthy and productive work force, a sustainable natural resource base, and a well-maintained infrastructure, then we can say that these programmes have undermined every one of these factors," said Atherton Martin, Director of the Development Institute in Dominica.

Martin spoke at a public forum held just a stone's throw from the Sheraton Hotel, the venue of the annual meeting of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank taking place at the same time.

Those agencies were the targets of the activists because of their role in designing SAPs which almost 100 developing and Eastern European countries have tried to implement since before the dawn of the debt crisis in the late 1970s.

SAPs, which accounted for 27% of the Bank's \$21-billion 1992 loan portfolio, have generally aimed at improving a country's debt situation by boosting exports, easing import and investment rules, privatising public enterprises, and reducing government deficits through spending cuts.

Moreover, adoption of SAPs by Third World governments has increasingly been required

by Western donors and the Bank itself as a condition for receiving other loans and assistance.

SAPs have been designed to service the debt accumulated by developing countries, said Luis Macas, who represented an Ecuadorian indigenous peoples' group at the September conference.

"It is really a mechanism for shifting the burden of economic mismanagement from the people in the North who caused the crisis to the poorest in the South," added Martin Khor, Director of the Malaysia-based Third World Network (TWN).

But it still has not solved the debt problems, the activists say. The IMF recently said that the debt of all Third World nations had reached a historic high of \$1.5 trillion.

"Adjustment is a policy of continuing the colonial trade and development patterns which the Northern powers want to continue in the post-colonial era," said Khor, who added that developing countries were now more dependent than ever on the North.

Leonor Briones, a Filipino activist, and professor of public administration at the University of the Philippines, charged that SAPs 'hit the poorest hardest'.

Recent Bank statistics

showing a resumption in per capita growth in many developing nations masked a process of the rich getting richer and the poor poorer, she said. They can't yet demonstrate that this growth will actually trickle down," according to Peggy Antrobus, head of the Women and Development Institute of the University of the West Indies in Barbados.

It was agreed here that budget-cutting has come at the expense of social services, while boosting agricultural exports has often meant forcing small farmers off their lands and into marginal or forested areas where they wreak major environmental damage.

Government cuts and higher interest rates urged by the IMF and the Bank have also sent unemployment rates soaring in many countries, swelling the ranks of the poor, the activists said.

In Jamaica, which has implemented SAPs almost continuously for 12 years, said Antrobus, one-third of the population live below the poverty line.

In Honduras, the comparable figure is 73%, while 54% lack jobs, said Narda Melendez, coordinator of a private development group in Tegucigalpa, Honduras.

Cuts in social services and education diminish the quality of the work force, while a rise in unemployment increases social tension and polarisation, said Antrobus. Investors don't want to invest where there are problems of crime, violence, and polarisation of rich and poor, she said.

Recent efforts by the Bank to include social programmes in SAPs have been a case of 'too little, too late,' one activist said. Melendez said these packages are a mechanism for

political, social and ideological control.

As to Bank arguments that the adjustment process has positioned many developing countries to take maximum advantage of renewed growth in the industrialised world, the activists were not impressed. Too much has already been lost by the poorest, said Antrobus. There may be whole sectors of the population that can never recover.

In addition, many of the most skilled workers in Third

World nations emigrated to the West as wages at home dropped and living conditions deteriorated, Martin insisted. The adjustment model is inefficiently dismantling the minimum needs for recovery.

"And when you tell and developing countries to expand exports ... there will be an over-supply on world markets, leading to the collapse of prices," as has already taken place this year for many commodities whose world prices have fallen to 100-year, Khor said. The more they produce, the less they earn.

— Third World Network Features/IPS

Jim Lobe is a correspondent for Inter Press Service, with whose permission this article is reproduced.

OPINION

Power and Development

A Z M Shamsul Alam

Power and authority act like invigorating tonics in human body. Deputy Commissioners are perhaps the busiest officers in Bangladesh. But they hardly get tired. They find pleasure in their work, because, they wield considerable power and authority.

Police in this country work harder, when required, than Government employees in most other departments. Here also the same theory applies: They wield power which gives incentive to work. Many Government officers fall sick after retirement. Generally retired officers die earlier than those who are in active service, even though they belong to the same age group.

In the underdeveloped countries, power has its own majesty and image. Who ever comes to power, is not only feared but also respected, if he is not dishonest, corrupt and basically bad.

It is entirely a different matter whether the values should be changed and the awful majesty of power weakened. So long it is there, it is rather pragmatic to utilise power for our economic growth and development. Until mass illiteracy is removed, power will continue to act as a factor of development. And, as such, if it is not utilised, development will suffer to some extent, at least.

Power has its vices. But this should not induce us to deprive the bureaucrats of the power and authority. The development process in Bangladesh is suffering because of the restriction and reduction of the power of, say, District Administration.

The institutions of District Magistrate or Deputy Commissioner has developed over centuries, but only a month is enough to destroy an institution by wrong decisions.

The power, status and position of the District Magistrates excited envy of not only the high officials like District Judges and Civil Surgeons, to being with, but also of other District level officers of the developmental departments like Agriculture, Livestock, Education, Fishery,

Co-operative, PWD and so on. Politicians also often did not feel very comfortable with the power and position of the Deputy Commissioners.

Since partition of India, the tendency to disintegration of the power and position of the Deputy Commissioner was a continuous process. Pakistan did not have farsighted political philosophers like Nehru, Raja Gopal Acharya, Abul Kalam Azad, Radha Krishnan, who could realise the importance and significance of the need of strong administrative set-up at the District and Sub-Divisional levels.

In India, powers and position of District and Sub-Divisional Magistrates did not shrink in any way as in Pakistan and Bangladesh. The contribution of the District and Sub-Divisional Administration in making India self-sufficient in food is recognised.

Though the power of the bureaucracy in India was not curtailed in any way, yet the politicians were strong enough to control the bureaucracy. No bureaucrat could ever become a Minister in India without resigning from the service first and getting elected as public representative.

In the past, the officers in charge of Law and Administration used to be the source of power and they used to live in the best Govt. bungalows in the district or sub-divisional towns. Now, as development is the more important consideration and objective of the Govt., than law and order, the senior most officer of the Agricultural cadre, or an Engineer or a Doctor may be appointed as Deputy Commissioner. He may be declared ex-officio district Magistrate and before that, he may undergo at least three to six months training on magistracy. The Deputy Commissioner should be from any of the Development Departments. Now-a-days it is resented that one having degree in Political Science or

History or Geography or English is appointed as Deputy Commissioner. It is said that these generalists, educated in humanities, don't technically understand problem of the community well.

What are the problems in a rural community? These are obviously of agriculture, irrigation; civil works, health, medicine, education, fishery, livestock etc. A student studying humanities does not understand any of the developmental problems from technical point of view. A graduate in livestock may be more suitable as Deputy Commissioner than a Master's degree holder in Political Science; at least the former will understand the livestock problem of the district better. If a doctor is appointed as Deputy Commissioner, he will understand at least the health and family planning problems better.

What is needed is not leveling down and curtailing the powers of the Deputy Commissioner, compared to the powers of the development departmental heads; but we need the appointment of the development departmental officers as Deputy Commissioners with all the powers, majesty, glory of the old District Magistrates.

Through a combined and competitive interview of the eligible departmental officers including those in the revenue side and Magistracy and Police, a fit-list of officers may be prepared for appointment as Additional Deputy Commissioners or Deputy Commissioners. When any one from this panel is appointed in the Upazila/District, he may be posted as Upazila Nirbahi Officer /Additional Deputy Commissioner/Deputy Commissioner and be vested with all the powers that used to go with those coveted posts. We must not reduce the authority and grandeur of the centuries-old institution of District Magistrate and Deputy Commissioner, but change the background of the incumbents and utilise this office and institution for our socio-economic growth and development.

To the Editor...

'BCCI: Time to Act'

Sir, I am one of the thousands who have suffered untold mental agony and lost substantial part of life's savings due to chicanery of BCCI management. I commend you on your very timely editorial 'BCCI: Time to Act' published on Oct 5.

As the US Senate subcommittee report demonstrates, it was by buying off and luring into collaborators various government functionaries, in Third World countries in particular, that the BCCI management could perpetrate all the irregularities including illegal transfer of funds. Among them included are ministers and politicians, government officials and officials of regulatory agencies. And Bangladesh certainly was no exception.

You are absolutely right in calling upon the Finance Minister to make public all relevant information. This should include a full list of all ministers, secretaries, ambassadors and lesser officials including those in Bangladesh Bank whose kins and relations were provided highly paid sinecure jobs by BCCI at stations like Hong Kong, London and others. Further, it will be relevant to know if any of those functionaries are still in positions of authority and thus capable of suppressing evidence of criminal acts referred to in

your editorial.

One also wonders how the alleged irregularities could escape detection by the auditors. Was this due to inefficiency or collusion or even both? Liquidators of BCCI in London have sued the auditors, Price Waterhouse, for professional malpractice and claimed a damage of US\$ 9 billions. It will be in public interest to know what actions, if necessary, the Finance Minister and Bangladesh Bank governor propose against Bangladeshi auditors of BCCI.

A H Chowdhury
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Misnomer

Sir, The use of the two terms 'Shanti Bahini' and 'Push Back' irks me. The so-called 'shanti bahinis' may have reasons to do what they are doing, but their activities are by no stretch of imagination 'shanti purno' or peaceful. The Indians use this term. We don't have to.

The term 'push back', again, is a misnomer. The Bengali speaking Indians are being pushed into Bangladesh. Using the term 'push back' implies that we are accepting the Indian contention that the people being pushed into Bangladesh are Bangladeshis. The Indians use the term. We don't have to.

which we, aping the West, call 'Middle-East' is referred to by Indians as West Asia. This is geographically correct also for us.

Other examples can be found. But what I am trying to say here is that the journalists have a duty to think before using terms which may cause misinformation and wrong perceptions.

Javed Haldal
Mohammadpur, Dhaka

Operation 'push-back'

Sir, We have a long friendly relation with big neighbour India. We wish India's welfare as well as other SAARC countries as they are our friends. But the recent 'operation push-back programme' taken by the Indian government that has already pushed hundreds of Bangla-speaking citizens of India into Bangladesh, is not at all a good task and totally contrary to the SAARC spirit and resolution. We don't expect such senseless activities from an ethnically diverse and democratically great country like India.

We urge the Indian government to stop such wanton unfriendly actions immediately.

Fayezur Rahman
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