

Does Aid Pressure Really Bring Greater Democracy?

Ken Laidlaw writes from London

PROMOTING multi-party democracy in Africa has become a major objective of Western aid donors in the Nineties. Yet despite promises of increased aid towards that end, aid is now expected to fall or remain stagnant during the decade.

Total multilateral and bilateral aid in 1991 stood at \$75 billion, a figure that has stayed static since mid-1980. World Bank President Lewis Preston said that by letting aid flows fall in real terms "the industrialised world was asking the poor to bear the brunt of adjustment in the rich countries as well as their own."

This adjustment, both economic and political, which has become a prerequisite for aid, is causing increasing concern among African governments. Since the end of communism in Eastern Europe and the break-up of the Soviet Union, Western donors have put increasingly stringent political conditions on aid disbursements.

The new directives are aimed at Africa in particular. The continent accounts for about 40 per cent of total aid. Unlike Latin America, where 15 countries have moved from authoritarian rule to multi-party democracy in recent years, one-party rule remains the dominant form of government on the continent. Economic success stories in Asia have left it relatively free of aid pressure.

Severe budget constraints among donor nations and increasing competition for aid from former communist countries in Eastern Europe has led to marked shifts in conditionality since 1990.

Aid conditionality is nothing new. In the past it referred to how aid should be used as well as political support for the donor. With the ending of superpower rivalry, the West has upped the ante. Major aid donors now expect recipients to move towards democracy and political pluralism. This according to a paper from the London-based Overseas Development Institute (ODI), requires the recipient government to show accountable management, rule of law, active curtailment of corruption and protection of human rights. The catch word now is "good governance".

The World Bank and most other international financial institutions do not have a political mandate and therefore stay clear of broader political issues such as the party system.

Yet the Bank's aid policy is directly linked to good governance which it sees as a means toward economic development. Outlining the Bank's policy Preston says: "Efficient and accountable management by the public sector and a predictable and transparent policy framework are critical to the efficiency of markets and governments, and hence economic development."

In June 1990 Britain's Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, Douglas Hurd, announced that "governments which persist with repressive policies, corrupt management, wasteful and discredited economic systems should not expect us to support their folly with scarce aid resources which could be used better

The deepening recession in the West is affecting overseas aid budgets of major donor countries. Although Britain has just announced that it will maintain the present level of its aid, new figures show there will be cuts in two years' time. In 1994-95 it will be £2,308 million instead of the promised £2,334 — about 0.32 per cent of GNP. Gemini News Service examines current donor attitudes to aid.

elsewhere".

In the same month France's President Francois Mitterrand told a summit of African heads of state that France would be less generous with its aid towards "regimes which conduct themselves in an authoritarian manner without accepting evolution towards democracy."

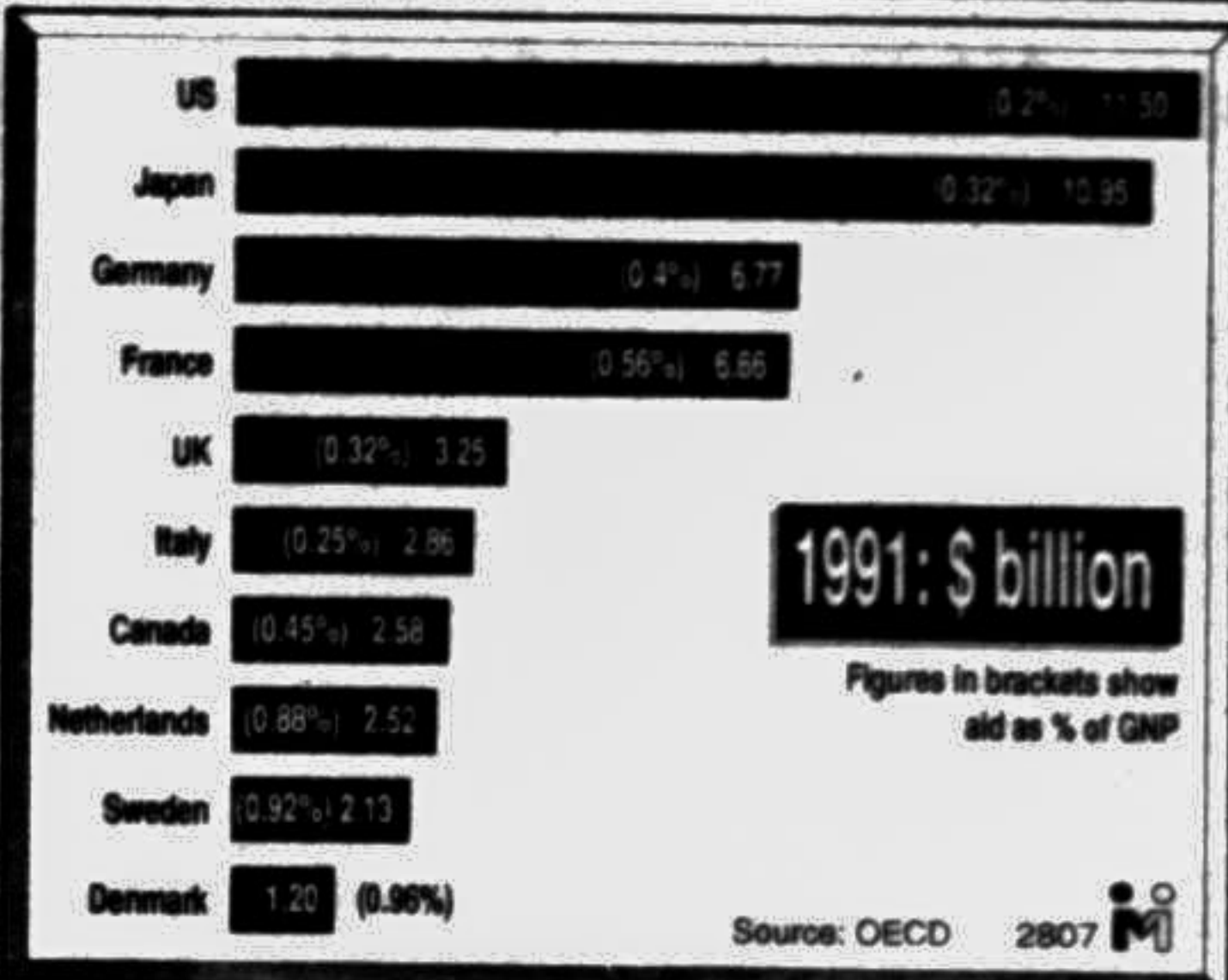
The United States Agency of International Development announced in February 1991 that an increasing amount of its aid would be directed to those countries moving towards economic and political liberalisation.

Last December a meeting of OECD aid ministers and aid agency chiefs agreed that "developing countries committed to market-based economic reform, democratisation and good governance should be given priority in the allocation of development assistance".

Mark Robinson, Research Fellow at ODI, sums up the effect of the new aid approach. "The poor in African countries which are ruled by dictators who ignore Western pressure will lose out."

This demand for political reform also acts in tandem with economic and market-oriented reforms instituted in the 1980s. Indeed, it was the failure of structural adjustment programmes to produce sufficient economic rewards that spurred donors to include

Aid: who gives what



good governance in their aid menu.

Economic failures have been attributed to authoritarian, unaccountable and corrupt regimes, particularly in Africa where "internal political factors are increasingly seen as a major obstacle to economic progress".

Donors argue that their stand is also in response to the momentum for political change throughout Africa where pressure for democratic

reform has been gathering pace since the late-1980s.

Donors have already taken punitive measures. British aid to the Sudan has been cut off due to persistent abuse of human rights. France and Belgium have suspended aid to Zaire following continued violation of human rights and in exasperation at the reluctance of President Sese Sese Mobutu to share power.

In Zambia, donor pressure helped President Kenneth

Kaunda to seek legitimacy through multi-party election. And now Kenya's President Daniel Arap Moi is holding multi-party elections as a result of similar pressures.

According to Robinson, the fact that political conditionality is now being actively discussed by donors has encouraged several African governments to opt for political reform, even if explicit conditions have not been attached to their aid.

He says: "Bilateral donors now operate on the twin assumptions that democracy is desirable in itself and that democracy can help bring about economic success."

Past evidence suggests the link between economic success and political liberalisation is weak. "Developing country experience in the 1980s does not give a firm assurance that greater democracy will result in better economic management, effective adjustment policies or faster economic growth," adds Robinson. Third World governments see political conditionality as an "unwarranted interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states".

At the African heads of state summit in July 1990, leaders expressed concern at the "increasing tendency to impose conditionalities of a political nature for assistance to Africa." Similar reservations were expressed by Zimbabwe, India and Malaysia at the Commonwealth summit in Harare in October 1991.

Critics of political conditionality argue that it can be conveniently used as means of cutting aid or redirecting it towards Eastern Europe. For many Third World governments, the question remains how long can they sustain political reform without international aid.

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The Signal from OIC

On the face of it, the time for moderation for stopping the continued massacre of Bosnians by Serbian forces is over. Again, if the international community is to put a halt to the heinous "cleansing process" designed to wipe out or drive away the Muslims and Croats, it must be prepared to use force. This strong message was heard, loud and clear, during the two-day emergency session of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) just concluded in Jeddah.

However, when it came to translating this strong message into a practical course of action, the OIC session was obliged to weigh many conflicting options. Having failed at a meeting in June to win the support of the UN Security Council (SC) for the lifting of the arms embargo on the supply of weapons to Bosnians or for military intervention, the meeting knew, almost right at the start of the deliberation, that it had to settle for much less than what a section of 47-member organisation wanted. The compromise resolution that emerged from the two-day meeting puts the initiative back to where it belongs, the UN Security Council which has been asked to take necessary measures against Serbia and Montenegro, including recourse to force under Article 42 of Chapter Seven of the UN Charter. This means that the call for military intervention by the UN, should it become necessary as a last resort, stands. However, judging by press reports, the demand for lifting the embargo for the supply of arms to Bosnian Muslims by friendly Islamic countries, such as Turkey, has been dropped.

Several factors played their part in influencing the OIC resolution. Despite the hard-hitting opening address delivered by King Fahd of Saudi Arabia in which the monarch repeated the call for the lifting of the arms embargo, his country or other Gulf nations were in no mood either for getting militarily involved in the conflict or for bypassing the United Nations. In taking this position, the moderates had all the help they wanted from the co-chairmen of the Geneva Conference on Yugoslavia, Cyrus Vance and Lord Owen who, in behind-the-scenes diplomacy, had spurned calls for military action in favour of Bosnian Muslims. There were also signals from Washington that having committed its troops to Somalia, the United States was in no position to take military action in another volatile area.

The OIC had, therefore, little choice but to adopt a moderate and what appears to be a sensible course of action. Sceptics may say that, under the influence of Saudi Arabia and other Arab nations, OIC has treated the Bosnian crisis more as an European issue than as a threat facing the Islamic world. Notwithstanding this interpretation, the basic question is simply this: Will the UN, the European Economic Community (EEC) and the United States act fast and firmly to end the conflict? While the flow of humanitarian aid to Bosnia's beleaguered Muslims must be stepped up, the UN must consider some kind of a peace-keeping operation to separate the warring factions, to free the victims of Serbian assault from prisons and, wherever necessary, to provide safe passage to those who want to get out of the area. How the modalities of such an operation are worked out by the SC depends largely on the consensus that is created within the world body by Secretary General Boutros Ghali. Here, we believe that the EEC too must play a forceful role in support of the position taken by the meeting in Jeddah. Having spurned the OIC call for military intervention, it must now pay due attention to the voice of moderation underlining the resolution. If the UN and EEC fail in these tasks, hardliners among OIC members may well act on their own to help the Bosnian Muslims, militarily and otherwise, and the international community will be without any moral right to do anything about it.

A Genius in the Making

Age four is not even the appropriate time for children to go to school. When one goes to university at that age, everybody knows the child is made of special stuff. Nicholas Macmahon has indeed broken all previous records in Britain — or perhaps anywhere in the world — by having his name enrolled with the West London Institute, part of the Brunel University. Such feats are not for ordinary mortals, rather for precocious children. Only a few months back Ganesh Sittapalam took the world by surprise by becoming editor of one of the top-selling British tabloids — albeit for a day. The tabloid wanted to cash in on Sittapalam's reputation as the youngest graduate of Britain. Until now Sittapalam's amazing feat of becoming a university graduate at the age of 11 years seven months stands. If anything, the challenge now comes from none other than little Nicholas.

Now what makes Nicholas special? His speciality lies in his knowledge of violin. The fact that he took to reading by the age of just one and learnt to speak fluently 10 months later is the early sign of his precocity. His bilingual ability — he has learnt French alongside his mother tongue English — only adds to his credit. But the remarkable thing about him is his — as a coincidence perhaps — mention so early of another great genius of all time, Mozart. Not surprisingly, one who has taken to violin should capture in his vocabulary, at the time of his picking words, none other but Mozart's name. Mozart himself has to his credit incredible musical achievements, including his first public appearance at the age of five.

Let us hope the similarity between the German master and the little English violinist will go further apart from the academic record he is well set to establish. Nicholas will do the humanity a great favour if he emulates Mozart as a composer rather than falling in the trap of cheap media publicity. He is capable of doing great things, no doubt about that. Either too much pampering or the media glare can however divert the prodigious boy from his course. It is good to know that the boy has been placed in able hands for his proper education. Gifted children like him are sure to be a misfit in a nursery school. So he became and his parents were not rich enough to afford expensive fees charged by schools. Apparently, his parents' economic constraint has proved to be a boon instead of handicap for the boy. He will be taken well care of and the boy is expected to make the humanity richer through his exceptional contributions.

English Teaching in Our Schools

TEACHING of English in our schools has taken a very miserable shape nowadays. After ten or twelve years with English as a compulsory subject, our school-leavers wonder how to write a single sentence on their own correctly. They, of course, feel easy if they are asked to quote from memory. These students, however, are getting creditable marks in English as well as many other subjects not on the basis of their originality of thinking and expression, but on the basis of their memorized materials. In challenging situations at higher stages of learning where there is no scope for learning by rote that is, learning without understanding, these students prove misfits.

The microscopic few students who learn bit of English after years of study at the school level, learn it without any satisfactory degree of accuracy in native English standard. Some, of course, go to the length of saying that these students learn something greatly other than English. When they are taught pronunciation of English words, they are so taught that, if placed in native English situation they can hardly understand the pronunciation of those words or expect to be understood when they pronounce them. A classroom situation at the intermediate and degree level is horrible. An English professor in his classroom, for all his unthinkably simple construction of sentences in his address to the class, finds most of the students feeling helpless, some murmuring at the continuous English, some even throwing up their hands in horror at the very idea of understanding lecture in English. So the classroom exercise of the teacher and the taught turns out to be meaningless — a sheer wastage of time and energy. Hence ultimately what happens is a quick turn to discussion in Bengali on English writings or a discussion on the basic rules of grammar and translation which is actually the function of the teachers of primary as well as secondary schools.

Apart from scarcity of properly trained teachers, inappropriate methodology of teaching, absence of regularly updated textbooks, what plagues

our English teaching, nay, teaching of any subject at the grassroots level is the unhealthy teacher-student ratio. Unlike the standard 1:20 teacher-student ratio in a classroom of an advanced country where the teacher can take an intimate care of each and every student, our teacher, however skilled in his profession, has to tackle a class consisting of 100 students or more. It is a situation which a man minimum understanding of the art of teaching can hardly think of. As a natural sequel to this horrible situation, tutorial homes in great number have sprung up all over the country specially in the urban areas. In these privately run coaching centres, a teacher deals with 10 or 12 students in a batch undisturbed by any campus turmoil. But what has spoiled these tutorial homes is the fact that far from being teaching centres, these places have become veritable note selling centres. The teachers rake their brain on behalf of the students, make notes and deliver them over to the students there.

The abolition of English at the degree level under the Dhaka University is a mortal blow on our English teaching at the school level. Besides, in my opinion what has harmed English teaching in our schools as well as colleges, more than anything else, is the new generation of English teachers who have had some training, local or foreign, in linguistics. Enchanted with the utterly new methods of teaching, they want to bid farewell to the traditional grammar-translation method and drill the rather strange principles of linguistics into the heads that do not have even the basic knowledge of English. So far as I know this new generation of teachers who shudder at the idea of grammar-translation method or at the idea of teaching language through great literary pieces (written by the native masters) appealing to the aesthetic sense of our young and energetic learners, have not yet succeeded in producing a new generation of students well-versed in English. Our school textbook writers have also thought out a

new species of texts dull in theme and style and sometimes, full of incorrect grammar and idiom.

Any method of language teaching however old or new, is justified if it works in the classroom that is, if it succeeds in teaching the students how to use the language correctly. It is the result that justifies the means. A good teacher is well-read and innovative. He knows how much of what method works in the classroom. His innovative talent, therefore, is the best method of teaching. It is in this light that we should think about the modern appropriate methodology of teaching English. So, before we partially or totally banish the conventional grammar-translation method as well as the method of teaching language through absorbing literary pieces of the great native masters, we should not forget that there was a time when the efficient application of such methods produced hundreds and thousands of matriculates, graduates and masters with commendable command of English.

A recent survey on the merit level and language proficiency of the students of 35 countries says that children have the ability to learn 3 to 5 languages. The survey-report also says that the merit level of our children is well above the average merit level of the children of those 35 countries. But it is regrettable that our children cannot even learn two languages i.e., Bengali and English, let alone 3 to 5 languages. From all this it becomes clear that if there is any trouble, it is not in the brain of our students but somewhere else which we should identify and try to remedy as far as possible.

A very painful thing for a teacher of English at the intermediate level is the prescribed English text full of pieces of prose and poetry written by the great masters of English. It is a very painful thing because he has to present the pieces to an audience not having, so to say, the ABC

English Teaching in Our Schools

by Hamidul Islam

of English. It is really a tremendous task — a mammoth task rather — to repair the damages done to our boys and girls over the years at the school level and make them prepared within a short span of time for the examination to be taken on those prescribed pieces written by the native masters. As far as their linguistic incompetence is concerned, it is also an uphill task for our children to master those difficult pieces.

It is most unfortunate that both the teachers and the students of the colleges (or still higher seats of learning) are to pay a heavy price for the unsuccessful teaching of English at the school level. The teachers are to pay because they are to teach the basic things about the language they are not supposed to. The students are to pay because they are to learn things they were supposed to learn much earlier and because they miss local or foreign jobs and scholarships they are not supposed to miss. Can anything be more upsetting than this? Do our students who have already devoted their valuable time and energy to the task of learning English for long 10 or 12 years, have still the time and energy to learn it afresh? Supposing they have still the energy, can the teachers at the intermediate level afford to perform the dual task of offering language courses to them and preparing them on the well-written prescribed pieces within a limited span of two years?

It is a pity that despite being a compulsory subject up to the intermediate level, English has virtually been relegated by incompetent teaching as well as neglect of the government. It is a thousand pities that this miserable state of English has led to a mushroom growth of a number of English medium schools in the metropolises (very shrewdly patronised by a section of our highly privileged people) which will undoubtedly create different classes distinguished by their different intellectual heights — the privileged and the underprivileged in society. We

Scholars (ABCS) who were requested to send their articles for the first ABCS annual journal scheduled to be published at the end of the current year.

Of course, there may be quite a number of members who would say that they missed the newsletter or invitation for articles. Well, at this end, I would like to take the advantage of your esteemed column. I am sure almost all the members of ABCS are your readers as well.

Writing should continue to be a passion with the enlightened ones of course to enlighten others.

M Zahidul Haque
Editor, ABCS Newsletter and Journal, Dhaka

Nitin Roy
Fakirpool, Dhaka.

Writing

Sir, It seems that we are gradually losing interest in the art of writing features, poems, stories etc. I had to reach to such a conclusion having been found a very poor response from the members of the Association of the British Council

can't let this unhealthy discriminatory social condition grow in this dear land of ours. The scope to learn English and enjoy the bliss of learning it must be open to all.

There is no denying the fact that nowadays the demand for English as a means of access to the wider world of modern thought, science and technology, law, medicine and diplomacy, trade and commerce has become much stronger than ever before. The loss will be ours if we replace English on these important disciplines by our vernacular at this develop-

OPINION

Calendars and Diaries

Quazi Arifur Rahman

Hundreds of public and private establishments as well as publishers in the country bring out calendars and diaries every year, spending a colossal sum of money, and it may so be that some are already in the process of being printed for the next year. But because of governmental delay in announcing the list of public holidays for the following year, most of the calendars and diaries do not indicate such holidays.

As certain religious festivals of Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists are dependent on the sighting of the moon, calendars and diaries which indicate holidays often do so on presumptive calculations and are occasionally off the mark by a day or so.

One does not also always remember the list of non-religious national holidays, which are followed in our country in accordance with the Gregorian calendar, for which the dates do not vary — except Pahela Baishakh, which is observed in consonance with the Bangla year. As such, calendars and diaries having such holidays clearly indicated make those more useful than those which do not at all show such holidays or those which indicate incorrect days as holidays.

In view of the convenience of the public at large, may I, therefore, request the Ministry of Establishment to have next year's lunar months studied, as those may be deliberated upon by mathematical calculation, to prepare a list of holidays, to have such list approved by the Council of Ministers and to have it gazetted as early as possible, so that calendars and diaries of 1993 of public and private establishments as have not yet gone for final print may incorporate the government-declared public holidays, and, in addition, also indicate the days which may be observed as optional holidays by governmental employees of various religious faiths.

The list of optional holidays for Hindus may also be elaborated to include Sivaratri, Doljatra, Chaitra Shankranti, Jamal Shasthi, Bhat Fota, Rathajatra, Punajatra, Viswakarma Puja, Mahalaya, and the like. Similarly, for the list of optional holidays for Buddhists may be widened by including

ing stage of our national life. Without English, I am afraid, we will simply run the risk of being intellectually isolated from the rest of the world. We can no longer afford to teach it incompetently at the primary and the secondary level where the base is constructed. We must remember that the teachers at the higher seats of learning cannot make a superstructure on a shaky base. It is time for us to give a serious thought to the matter of teaching English in our schools and stem the rot before it goes beyond repair.

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Push Parban and Magh Bihu, Charak and Bahag Bihu, Guru Purnima, Rakhi Purnima and the like. For the Christians, Good Friday (even though it coincides with a normal weekly holiday) and New Year's Eve may be included, and the 24th and the 26th December may be re-ordered as Christmas Eve and Boxing Day respectively.

Last, but perhaps not without reason, the Government should issue a guideline for a symmetry to be observed as regards the commencing day of the week. At present governmental calendars show Friday as the commencing day, whereas many others, including certain government-owned organisations, show Saturday as the commencing day, while yet few others still show, seven years after introduction of Friday as the weekly holiday in Bangladesh, Sunday as the commencing day. A uniform system in our calendars would give a perception that we are a disciplined nation.

Last, but not the least important, almost two years after the ouster of the previous autocratic regime, are we still going to stick to the Ershad-introduced Bangla calendar, or are we going to switch back to the standard Bangla calendar that has been in vogue since perennial times? In case we decide to alter the setting of the age-old Bangla calendar to make it more rational and practical, we may consider switching over to a calendar as suggested by late Dr Muhammad Shahidullah, one of the most learned and illustrious linguists and scholars of Bangladesh of recent times.

To conclude, for reason stated earlier, as well as because calendars and diaries are meant not only for finding dates but also for ascertaining holidays, whether public or optional, I suggest that in all forthcoming years the Government should announce the holidays for the following year by October every year, so that all calendars and diaries printed in the country are able to indicate all national holidays observed in Bangladesh and also all optional holidays that may be availed of by governmental employees of various religious faiths.