

Rural Communication

Planning Minister A M Zahiruddin Khan has drawn our attention to two vital aspects of the country's communication. The first is the water-bodies that have remained for millennia the life-line of this region as a whole. Private sector's participation is what comes next as an essential ingredient in creating a transport network, specially for the rural area. Both areas merit careful and expert analysis simply because of the fact that waterways as yet do have the major share in transportation of both passengers and goods. The Planning Minister's point is that the waterbodies are underutilised and they can be used more efficiently. Whether he elaborated on the point or not is not known because the report on the workshop on rural transport workshop has stopped short of giving further details.

There is however one small hint which is that the non-mechanised boats now responsible for transporting 70 per cent of the country's inland cargoes can be made efficient through turning them mechanised. No doubt, the measure will improve the performance of our traditional mode of water transport. But much more remains to be done. Rivers, almost without exception, are either getting shallower or shrinking with the result of their losing navigability. The continuous process of landmass formation in our major rivers have become a headache not only for the reason that river routes are becoming longer and risky but also because it is posing an environmental hazard of unprecedented order. Indeed, opinions on results of dredging of our highly useful river routes among experts are divided.

Such difference of opinion notwithstanding, all agree that the increasing mass of sedimentation on the river-beds have a direct link with frequent floods. The other less known theory is that roads or highways built mostly east-west across the country have created an unnatural barrier to the normal flow of rivers running north to south. The substance of the argument is that the main roads were constructed at different times in total disregard of geomorphological considerations. Rivers will continue to play havoc with lives and property so long we cannot dispose of the huge quantity of monsoon water and at the same time augment the water flow in the lean season.

It is an established fact that the depletion of forest resources, trees in particular, has contributed to a large extent to the loosening of soil that gets carried away into river. People — both as an individual and organised commercial or industrial entrepreneurs — have indiscriminately destroyed the country's tree covers and hastened the process of soil loss. Logging still remains to be a major problem for the country's environment. The new thrust on tree plantation should be further pressed ahead if its long-term benefit is to be derived. Some NGOs are doing a good job by making tree plantation programme popular among villagers.

However the most compelling motive for the private enterprises to contribute to the rural communication is going to be economic. Given the emerging reality, there is no option other than relocation of investment and productive units across the country. For implementation of such a programme it is most essential that the communication become highly efficient and smooth along with guaranteed social peace and stability. Products and produce cannot fetch the intended benefit without a sound communication system. Private sectors should see to the point and be ready to make generous contribution to the effort of building a communication system — both riverine and road — for in the ultimate analysis they will be the bigger gainer.

We are All for More

An unheard of 'epidemic' of Acute Renal Failure among children causing death by the hundred seems to have stirred the medical profession into probing for the roots of it. This reaction is a most welcome thing to happen in a long time that may help change the unflattering image of the medical practitioners in the land. It is so good to see that they have as if as a community addressed themselves to taking on the incredible outbreak of a killing disease that without being contagious is however taking a massive toll of children's lives.

If it is true that, as very plausibly claimed by three physicians only very recently and since accepted by many of their colleagues, the deaths have been dealt by a paracetamol syrup having among its exipient components something that directly causes a failure of the kidneys and also affects the liver badly, then at least this particular hole in our national health situation seems to have been plugged for all practical purposes. And physicians roundly deserve to be complimented on a very precious performance. While we shall already have paid our debt of gratitude to them we need to request these and other professionals and researchers in related areas to go on looking for other causes of the sudden attack on children by ARF.

A seminar was held the other day on the topic of this spurt in ARF cases which ordinarily is rare among children. Interesting ideas came up in the course of the proceedings. We fully agree with one that prescribed for all medical college hospitals to have each a dialysis machine of its own.

A dialysis machine is not a forbiddingly costly gadget although its operating cost, borne by the patient where there is no socialised national health service, is prohibitive. The suggestion of a machine for each medical college hospital is not only a very useful one but is also capitally feasible. We wonder why the many expensive Dhaka clinics and nursing homes had not gone for it yet.

There is a patent snag to the realisation of this idea — something that plagues everything in Bangladesh. How will the machines be used? And for how long? About two things we can be pretty sure. These would be very badly maintained and would, therefore, be inoperative every now and then before dying a premature death. And what about the quality of the technicians who will handle them? And then there is always the lurking suspicion about the quality of professionalism and of professional competence of the physicians using them. Look at the signboards of our healers and you will agree that there is reason to take care of the profession with professionalism fast approaching the vanishing point, what would a hundred dialysis machines do to our kidney patients?

With these words of caution we support the call for more dialysis machines in Bangladesh.

A RMS control in the Middle East has become a focus of much attention. The culmination of this was the unveiling of a Middle East arms control initiative on 29 May 1991 by US President George Bush. This initiative, while clear in its aim of trying to remove non-conventional armaments — surface-to-surface missiles and chemical, biological and nuclear weapons — from the region, was less clear and somewhat non-committal vis-a-vis the conventional systems.

President Bush's policy declaration is a manifestation of the wider problem of an incremental and piecemeal approach to arms control, which no matter how well intentioned, might well prove self-defeating in practice. This approach is based on the assumption that conventional and non-conventional arms control measures belong to two separate compartments, with no overlap between them.

The Arab-Israeli conflict and the Iran-Iraq war have probably been the two most important catalysts for the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the region, and in both cases conventional imbalances and numerical inferiority of one of the adversaries have been a major factor. Here an attempt will be made to demonstrate the weakness of the 'piecemeal' approach to arms control in the Middle East by considering the manner in which the Israeli and Arab military doctrines have actually related to each other.

Israeli Defence Planning

Israel's military doctrine and the determination of its military structure vis-a-vis its Arab rivals is formulated, inter-

A Comprehensive Arms Control Strategy Needed for Middle East

by Mohammed Ziarati

An arms control strategy for the Middle East which attempts only to ban non-conventional weapons while ignoring the threats posed by conventional weapons, will not be an effective one.

alia, on the country's perceived inferiority in terms of the conventional balance of military power. The Arabs are regarded as possessing quantitative advantages in terms of manpower, size of armed forces, defence expenditure, volume of military hardware and strategic depth. Hence, for instance, it is argued that Israel's shallow strategic depth places most of its population and industrial centres at the mercy of Arab tank and artillery fire while, given the Arabs' superior strategic depth, retaliation in kind against similar targets in those countries would have to rely on far more sophisticated systems such as surface-to-surface missiles and combat aircraft.

Also, the Arab capability to maintain large standing armies compared to Israel, which cannot due to its small population base, could jeopardise its defence in the early stages of a conflict when the adversary takes the initiative, as happened most prominently in the 1973 war. Or again, the ability of an Arab coalition to commit a higher ratio of combat aircraft, tanks and artillery units to the battlefield could face Israel with the possibility of being conventionally overwhelmed by its enemies.

Maintaining a qualitative technological military edge over the Arabs is regarded as a prerequisite for compensating their quantitative superiority. Obtaining swift military victories, preferably via pre-emptive strikes; annihilating the enemy's forces before they

penetrate its own territory; and preventing counter-attacks on Israel's population and industrial and military installations are some of the main objectives to be achieved through mobile offensive operations by both land and air power.

Within this operational framework, constant quantitative and qualitative modernisation of the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) ground and, especially, aerial capability are viewed as overriding priorities. Hence, in the 1950s the IDF tank corps was dramatically expanded, much in the same way that the Israeli air force is currently implementing a major modernisation programme. The emphasis which Israeli doctrine lays on maintaining a superior air force has been ominous, as will be seen later, for the non-conventional counter-response that it has evoked from the Arabs.

The probabilities of a conventional military defeat on the battlefield, which could lead to the country's annihilation, or of a long conventional war of attrition that could gradually erode its viability, are two possible scenarios that have been recounted as capable of triggering an Israeli nuclear re-

sponse. Here again one can see the relationship between conventional and non-conventional armament.

Arab Defence Planning and Israel

Many components of the Israeli military strategy — in terms of both doctrine and capability — are viewed by the Arabs with apprehension. Israel's emphasis on offensive military operations, pre-emptive strikes, transferring the battle to the enemy's territory once war begins, and so on, are interpreted by the Arabs as components of an 'aggressive' defence policy with clear expansionist territorial ambitions.

The Israeli military establishment is viewed as a qualitatively superior force which not only possesses state-of-the-art weapons technology, but is also capable of conducting highly mobile operations in conjunction with innovative tactics and effective battle management. Furthermore, for Arabs, Israel's possession of weapons of mass destruction is a control component of the Middle East military imbalance which needs to be redressed.

The Arabs have made relentless efforts to counterbalance Israel's perceived military

superiorities. Partly as a response to other threats (the Middle East arms race has many causes) and partly as a means of redressing the military imbalance with Israel, the Arabs have launched massive military modernisation programmes to obtain front-line state-of-the-art combat aircraft, main battle tanks, air-to-air and air-to-surface missiles, long-range surface-to-surface missile systems, chemical weapons and electronic warfare systems theoretically capable of jamming Israeli command and control systems.

Nowhere has the policy of attaining strategic parity with Israel been more evident than in the case of Syria, particularly since the 1982 engagement with Israel in Lebanon. In order to counter the Israeli doctrine of fast-moving military offensives based on the coordinated use of armour and air power, Syria has been augmenting its anti-tank and anti-aircraft capability and boosting its tank and air strength, and has built massive ground fortifications with the intention of slowing down the pace of Israeli offensives on open terrain.

Nonetheless, there seems to be a view amongst the Arab defence planners that Israel is too potent a force to be matched with similar systems across the whole spectrum of military power. Hence, the Arabs have sought to counterbalance Israel's deep penetration air strike strategy since the late 1960s through the employment of surface-to-sur-

face missiles (SSMs). Syria concurrently seems to have concluded that SSMs are the most appropriate response to Israeli aerial capability; hence the attempt not only to increase its missile inventory but also, reportedly, to acquire the means of manufacturing them.

As seen already, conventional military imbalances have made a significant contribution to the possible use of nuclear weapons by Israel. Chemical weapons have been the Arab counter-response and deterrent to this threat, here again demonstrating the linkage between conventional and non-conventional systems.

Here an attempt has been made to demonstrate the interplay between conventional and non-conventional weapons proliferation in the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the fact that in terms of planning and structure the boundaries between them are not clear-cut. Israel has responded to what it considers endemic military imbalances through the employment of qualitatively superior conventional and non-conventional military systems, much in the same way that the counter-response which the latter's force disposition has evoked from the Arabs relies on mixed categories of weaponry.

An arms control strategy for the Middle East which attempts only to ban weapons of mass destruction in the region will founder by ignoring the contribution that conventional military worries have made to the diffusion of such systems in the first place. — Third World Network Features

Mohammed Ziarati wrote the above article for the London-based Middle East International magazine, which has given permission for reprint.

Kathmandu Looks for Alternative Airport

Jan Sharma writes from Kathmandu

Kathmandu has earned the reputation of a 'notoriously difficult airport'

WITH two of the worst international air disasters in a row, Nepal is reviving plans for an alternative airport outside the high mountain valleys.

The move is very tentative as the Himalayan kingdom has no resource to fund the expensive project. Plans are also being discussed to install radar to enhance aviation safety.

"Plans are under consideration", says Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala. "We are looking into the possibilities."

Several alternative airports are being considered. One is in Simra, about a 20-minute flight from Kathmandu. Another is in Bhairehawa, west Nepal, suggested by an expert team from the ICAO. Yet another is Bharatpur, near Simra.

The idea is to get all the international flights in the southern flatland and have a shuttle service between the proposed international airport and Kathmandu, the capital.

"It will help bring another tourist boom in the kingdom with the introduction of big jumbo jets in place of smaller jets at present hauling the European route," says Dip-

endra Purush Dhakal, director general of the Department of Tourism.

In an interview, Prime Minister Koirala also told *Depthnews* that he is depending the installation of radar and other sophisticated equipment.

The approach through the Phuichoki hill, the tallest in the Valley rim at 4,700 ft, is clearly laid down in the Jeppesen charts and manuals which are in standard usage by airline pilots.

Although Kathmandu airport has no radar, aircraft are assisted by airport instruments, including the VOR which provides the sense of direction to pilots and the DME which provides continuous distance readings to the aircraft up to a fraction of a nautical mile.

In addition, the so-called Locator South beacon and the Fan Marker provide additional track guidance capability to approaching planes.

At present, the Kathmandu control tower has to rely solely on the position report provided by the pilot and has no other means to ascertain the

aircraft's position. With the help of a radar, the control tower could continuously track approaching and outgoing aircraft.

In recent months, two major air disasters occurred, involving in both cases the wide-bodied Airbus made by Airbus Industrie, the European aviation consortium based in France.

In September, Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) Airbus A-300 crashed at 8,200 feet, just three minutes from touchdown. It was flying at 7,500 ft when it should have been flying at 9,000 ft.

The plane crashed at Bhatte Danda, about eight miles south of Kathmandu, killing all 167 people on board, including crew members.

The air disaster raised apprehensions regarding the safety of flying in Nepal's mountainous terrain. Some even wondered whether the

Kathmandu airport is somehow jinxed.

The disasters occurred at the start of Nepal's tourism season when dozens of mountain climbing teams fly into the picturesque land to assault the world's highest peaks.

And it came less than two months after a Thai Airways Airbus A310-300 jet also crashed in July, killing all 113 people, including 14 crew members.

Amid heavy rains, the jet overshoot Kathmandu's Tribhuvan International Airport, and slammed into the rocky slope of a 3,500-metre mountain just north of the airport.

Initial reports suggest the crash was caused by a technical snag that the pilot reported moments before he lost contact with the Kathmandu control tower.

The crashes are under investigation but the manufacturers blame it on pilot error. A Canadian investigating team

said in a brief report in August that the pilot of the Thai Airways struggled with faulty wing flaps minutes before landing. Unlike the Thai Airbus, the PIA aircraft was not on a head-on collision with a hillside.

So far only three air crashes have occurred in Nepal involving commercial jets. In March 1973, a Thai DC-8 overshoot the runway at Tribhuvan, Nepal's only international airport.

Though the DC-8 was a complete wreck, no one on board was killed. The lone casualty was the hapless driver of a dumper truck which happened to be on the runway.

The first airplane landed in Nepal in 1949. The first jet ever to land was a Lufthansa Boeing-707 in 1967. In 1983, French President Francois Mitterrand arrived aboard the supersonic Concorde jet.

Kathmandu's Tribhuvan International Airport is not only open for trans-Himalayan flight to Tibet but to Europe and other Asian destinations. It is doubtful, however, whether it could be used for bigger aircraft like the Boeing 747 because of the hills nearby.

Twenty-five years of smooth and uneventful operation by jet aircraft have suddenly been forgotten and now Kathmandu has earned the reputation of a 'notoriously difficult airport', says Hemant Arjyal, an aviation engineer with the Department of Civil Aviation.

The sparkling glass and brick terminal complex and airport extension was completed in 1989 with multilateral financing. The Manila-based Asian Development Bank provided over US\$30 million for the US\$ 55 million project. The rest of the cost was met by the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) provided technical assistance.

UNDP, through the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), also provided technical aid to strengthen the capabilities of the Department of Civil Aviation.

The project was considered important for the promotion of tourism, the Himalayan kingdom's major foreign-exchange earner. Over 290,000 tourists visit Nepal annually. — *Depthnews Asia*

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.

Father Timm

Sir, The letter entitled "Father Timm" in your 2nd Dec '92 issue and signed "Raymond Howlader" was not written by me. I am the only Raymond Howlader in the Christian community here, as my survey goes.

Many of the statements in the letter are utterly false (that Fr Timm was declared persona non grata and expelled, that he made many conversions, that he is funded by Caritas Bangladesh etc). It can only be concluded that the letter was the work of an enemy who is out to destroy the good name of Father Timm.

Raymond Howlader
Tejgaon, Dhaka

BCS exam

Sir, In this letter I am going to focus attention on a vital problem much talked about in the present days. It is about the inherent injustice in the present system of BCS examination which has been 'justified' for years by PSC.

The BCS examination is the top-flight competitive examination offered by the PSC and it is the only means of sorting out the cream of our national intellectual products for employment in different posts of national importance. Hence the BCS examination goes a long way in determining the future of the nation. But it is generally agreed that fair selection and justice are not possible in the prevailing system of examination.

In the present system there are 800 marks for written tests of which 500 marks are for compulsory subjects and 300 marks for optional subjects.

Now the general observation is that to offer a choice of optional subject in not a justified one. Our contention is that a subject like 'Soil Science' may help a BAU (Bangladesh Agricultural University) student secure more than 90% marks easily while an arts graduate has to work hard to obtain even 55% marks in subjects like English, Philosophy, Political Science, History and so on. So to continue the present system of choice is an injustice in a sense. This kind of discrimination should not exist in the selective mechanism of national level examinations such as BCS. In this respect we may offer several alternatives.

(i) For the compulsory 500 marks subjects should remain the same. But for the other 300 marks, there may be a common syllabus based on common interest and essential knowledge for the civil service posts. Some of the subjects might be General Economics, International Business, General Geography, Sociology, Human Rights and International Law etc. But above all the syllabus should be the same and the subjects accessible to all.

(ii) There might be a unified examination system like GRE, GMAT etc.

(iii) The optional subjects might be abolished and the syllabus of the compulsory subjects might be expanded.

Our earnest hope is that the PSC authorities consider the issue and undertake reformative measures in regard to the prevailing BCS examination system.

At the end I must add that the newly introduced single-board viva-voce system is a laudable step by PSC. We very much appreciate the idea of single-board which consists of

members from different quarters. In this single-board system, we hope there will be hardly any scope for injustice, prejudice or partiality. We hope that PSC will continue this system.

Suranjit Roy Majumder,
Department of English, DU.

Rice price stabilization

Sir, There has been a bumper crop of rice in the current season. As a result rice price has gone down markedly. There may be further fall and if it happens farmers may lose incentive for production. Storage capacity in the country is also limited. Hence it is suggested that to arrest further fall in rice price the government may think of exporting a few lakh tons of rice. With the sale proceeds wheat may be imported. Annual demand for wheat in the country is roughly 12 lakh tons. In the international market wheat is much cheaper compared to rice. In the process the government and the country may gain a lot and price stability of rice can also be maintained.

Saleh Ahmed Choudhury
Dhaka Cantt.

Terrorism

Sir, Anti-terrorism Act is timely and appropriate in the context of the present situation. But the gap still remains; what 'Act' will apprehend and punish the 'patrons' of the terrorists?

Surely it is the Almighty Allah whose law will apprehend and punish the patrons of all the terrorist activities.

We may convince the people by delivering lengthy and witty speeches but we cannot make Allah accept our untrue and false deliberations, for Allah is the all knowing, nothing can escape His attention; none can avoid the rule of Allah.

M Zahidul Huque
Assistant Professor,
Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka.

OPINION

Flight of Capital

Vincent G Jaydee

In the broader context of economics, it is believed that "capital is one of the most vital elements in the development of an economy". Unfortunately, this vital element is hard to find in a developing economy. In the developing countries, "capital scarcity" is a natural phenomenon and its dearth is so severe that every bit of its impact is directly felt by the toiling masses. Therefore, governments of these countries, in search of the needed capital stretch their hands as far as they can and in doing so, they somehow manage to fill their exchequer to "some extent". But this is hard-earned necessary capital, and if a handful of unscrupulous traders and businessmen manipulate and eat away a large chunk of this capital, the nation has every right to question their integrity and unfold their disguised entrepreneurship. Bangladesh being a least developed country, is not an exception, rather, such illegal and anti-state activities are more rampant here than perhaps in any other third-world country.

Out of so many unscrupulous methods of manipulating the capital, 'flight of capital' is the most sophisticated. It is no less than the art of smuggling because the country's hard-earned capital is passed out of the country right under the nose of the government's regulators and functionaries. Over the course of time, a good number of unpatriotic businessmen in Bangladesh have devised many means and avenues taking advantage of national and international trade regulations. Out of so many malpractices, most commonly practised is the 'over and under-invoicing in import and export'. This way a large amount of foreign exchange is smuggled out of the country. Another method is allowing 'discounts' to an unprecedented proportion. One of the exam-

an evidence of payment of freight to carrier airline. One is 'Master Airway Bill' issued by the carrier airline at the time of booking the freight and the other is 'House Airway Bill' issued by the freight forwarder who books the space on behalf of the shipper. Both the airway bills are legally accepted documents under the rules of IATA. Any freight forwarding agency can take advantage of the existence of two kinds of airway bills system and manipulate them to smuggle foreign exchange out of the country. The methods 'adopted' reportedly are as follows: At the time of shipment of consignment on behalf of the shipper, a freight forwarding agent in Bangladesh may pay the freight in local currency to the carrier airlines and procure the 'Master Airway Bill'. On the other hand, the same freight forwarding agent can make out a 'House Airway Bill' for the same shipment, under 'Freight Collect' (freight payable at destination) basis. This way an unscrupulous freight forwarding agent can drain out millions of dollars worth of foreign exchange from the country. Another painful part of the whole affair is that in accordance with the agreement in Bangladesh, our government is obliged to reimburse them with foreign exchange in the event of their revenue earning in local currency.

In view of the above, it is hoped that the government would gear up its machinery to devise means to check on the huge drainage of foreign exchange from the country and to identify those who are involved in the process and punish them for such unpatriotic activities.

Vincent G Jaydee
East Rajabazar, Tejgaon,
Dhaka