Dhaka, Sunday, April 25, 1993

Nation must Heed NGO **Experience in Education**

We write this to congratulate the UCEP on the completion of their 20 years of founding. Through these years the organisation has imparted education to at least 60 thousand boys and girls and found jobs for many of them. Theirs is a success story that brings to light many failures of the na-

tional education approach. The organisation has dedicated itself to the welfare of under-privileged children by way of making them educated and self-supporting. Pat comes to mind the question who is not underprivileged among the tens of millions of our children? It is a vast world and UCEP has touched only a very small part of its surface. But their experience is sure to benefit the national management of education, particularly at the basic level. Primary education, as managed and controlled throughout the nation by the government slitters on in its old sluggish way without taking into account that an overwhelmingly big part of its charge is constituted by pupils from families who are miserably poor. And also that the astounding dropout rate that vitiates primary and early secondary levels of education is caused mostly by the fact that the families need their children to do something gainfully which clashes with their school requirements. The initiatives of UCEP, BRAC and others in the field of "basic education to broad masses" have, on the other hand, proved very effective with very small figures of dropout.

Through the experience of organisations like UCEP we should be able to strike a shorter and surer route to literacy- something that would lend to universal application throughout the nation. As the good work done by UCEP is all concentrated in the cities, they have gone for teaching the children industrial skills after they had absorbed their 3Rs. What would the village graduate into after they have lapped up basic language and counting skills if they cannot make it to the end of the 10-year schoo-

We are sure when a monitoring has been done on the work of the UCEP and other organisations, certain conclusions would emerge very clearly. The amount of education that is imparted in the five-year primaries, can be done in much less time. And if we are not going to be falsely highminded about it, we can cut out the frilly things in this first dose of education.

We would request these philanthropic organisations not to cook a different albeit effective kind of educational dish for the underprivileged while the primaries managed by government offer another dish, heavy and rather ineffective, to a bigger group of the same set. The job at hand is to give one sure-fire recipe of education which would in a very short time make a literate society of Bangladesh through a quick imbibing of language and counting skills upto an agreed level by all the children in the land. Education in Bangladesh is fundamentally flawed here and it is most of all at this stage that the problem should be

addressed. We cannot help lamenting the unnecessary death of the Pathshala system of basic education. It was doing just fine till the very fag end of the British times, offering through the GT—guru training- passed non-matric teachers far more effective education than the primaries ever would. The Pathshala student got a far better grounding in both language and counting why and how? We lament the passing of those gurus for it was they who made the difference. The present educational approach, no matter whether governmental or private or some that the NGOs have devised, doesn't seem to emphasize the little man or woman who will do the teaching and is indeed greater than the whole system in so far as it is not the system that teaches. The presence of a true teacher is education enough at whatever

No Logging, Please!

A relatively less known conference on world timber trade ended in Geneva recently without an agreement on a new pact on the issue. Sponsored by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the conference has deferred the contentious subject for taking up at its next but previously scheduled session from June 25. Although the issue has so far been able to draw little attention from people the world over, its importance cannot be overemphasised. It is a subject that has by now generated enough heat in the US and even President Bill Clinton has been dragged into the fray.

Timber merchants, loggers and those dependent on the logging industry find their interests in direct clash with the Greens who are jealously advocating for the need for protection of the world forests. The loggers argue for a planned exploitation of forest resources so that the countries in the business continue to earn foreign exchanges and the large number of people engaged in the industry are not driven out of job. They also make the point that people building new houses must be supplied with wood for building materials and new furniture without which the living standard in a country cannot improve.

All this is true but only upto a point, the Greens promptly put forward counter-arguments. The fact that construction technology has radically changed for the better, has already reduced to a substantial extent the demand for certain types of logs and other furniture wood. The replacement, moreover, is proving to be quite effective. As for the people in the logging profession, the easy solution is to teach them skills in forest conservation or similar other jobs. In parts of America, the technique is working well. So the point made by the Greens for leaving the forests

undisturbed is gaining further ground. This, however, will not be easy for developing countries depending largely on export of timbers. Myanmar illustrates the point better than most other countries. Despite world pressure for trade and economic sanction on that country, its neighbours receiving timber supplies from it has never really showed any readiness to co-operate. Evidently, both political motive and bare necessities of people are responsible for overlooking the slowly-perceived destruction of the global ecosystem. The Greens' campaign in the developed countries is winning the day for them, but not in the poor countries. Yet there is only one world to share by the human race along with other creatures. So there is no time to lose for waging a war against destruction of forests across the continents.

Seventh SAARC Summit: An Evaluation

T last, after two abortive attempts, the Seven-I th SAARC Summit was held. Given the turmoil in the internal politics of Pakistan and India as well as the current climate of bilateral relations in the region it was no mean achievement to bring the South Asian leaders to Dhaka for the summit meeting. The organizers can take some satisfaction from the smooth and well planned manner in which the programme was implemented. The assembled leaders obviously wanted to put up a good show and so they all said the kind of things that evcrybody wanted to hear. Inspiring, brave and wise words filled the pages of our newspapers for two days. This strife-torn and povertystricken region would have been a much safer and nicer place to live in if even a bit of what they said was really meant. Cooperation, I am afraid, cannot be built on distrust, suspicion and hatred. This basic problem, I regret to note, was not on the summit

Statements made by some of the leaders did refer to the scourge of fanaticism and intolcrance. Nawaz Sharif touched on this issue in his speech at the opening session when he said, "We must counter the menace of religious fanaticism and intolerance and seek to establish the supremacy of the rule of law and the principles of justice. Given Pakistan's record it was a refreshing remark. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom of Maldives put his finger on the core problem when he said. "The recent increase in ethnic and communal violence in our region has become a major cause for concern for many governments. The escalation of communal strife, if unstopped, could lead to the disruption of development programmes and threaten the political stability of the countries concerned. The possible spill-over effects of such acts of violence in one country to neighbouring countries could jeopardize regional stability and security as well."

While calling for the diffusion of ethnic tensions he uttered the most perceptive remark of the summit meeting when he said, "Communal hatred must be defeated." Other leaders, regrettably, skirted the issue. Re-establishment of mutual trust ought to have been the most important item on the regional agenda. Regional cooperation has no future in the sub-continent if the monster of communalism cannot be restrained. I have seen no reference to this basic issue in any document that has emerged from the summit. The Declaration has 63 paragraphs which deal with practically every subject under the sun but there was no mention of the destabilising impact of the communal conflicts vitiating the South Asian environment. This, I am afraid, is the most serious failure of the summit which may continue to haunt the region and the operations of SAARC for years to come.

Poverty Alleviation

Poverty alleviation was given a lot of publicity. This is indeed a priority goal for the SAARC countries in their domestic agenda but it was not explained how regional coopcration could make a contribution to this programme. The Declaration contains statements of intent on the part of the leaders to pursue the poli cies in their respective na tional development programmes. Some excellent ideas on 'poverty cradication have been identified. Apart from the articulation of these policies, no joint action is proposed. Unless implemented at the national level in right carnest these are little more than pious hopes and populist slogans. The decision to endorse, "on an ad hoc basic" the proposal for establishing a South Asian Development Fund is a positive development. The setting up of the inter-governmental group to work on the structure, resources and operational modalities of the Fund is an essential step in a project of this nature. What the member governments will

leads to the mobilization of additional resources. Slicing a share out of the existing cake is not going to contribute much to our development. In my view, therefore, "additionality" should be the key word for those who will work in the ICG. The western donor countries, I am afraid. may be reluctant, at least inftially, to support the setting up of a new fund. Their priority these days is Russia and the East European countries. But we must continue our effort to convince them that South Asia needs and deserves their sup-

SAPTA

The most significant decision of the summit was the agreement on SAARC Preferential Trading

favour of the Least Developed Counties. However the impact of the paragraph has been diminished, to some extent, by the use of the qualifying phrase wherever possible'. Non-reciprocity, in my view, should be the key for trade between economically unequal countrics like India and Bangladesh. Unless this principle is agreed upon at the very outset trade between the LDC and non-LDC countries cannot be organized on a sound basis. While article 10 falls short of the actual needs, I do recognize that the article is essentially an enabling clause which keeps the option open for granting certain spectal concessions, on a non-reciprocal basis, to these specially disadvantaged countries Taking into account the com-

ON THE RECORD

by Shah AMS Kibria

Arrangement (SAPTA). For the first time SAARC is entering into a core area of economic cooperation. Admittedly there are not many binding elements in it. It is essentially an expression of desire of the member governments to exchange concessions. The agreement stipulates that the countries will negotiate, step by step, in order to offer tariff and nontartff concessions to cach other on a product-by-product basis. We have to reserve our judgement on the matter until the time when the list of products will be exchanged and concessions negotiated. Once can take SAPTA as a serious attempt to increase intra-regional trade only when agreements will be reached on actual reduction of tariff and non-tariff barriers on frequently traded items. It is too early to rejoice about it but the agreement is without doubt a positive development. Though a modest beginning it has im-

mense possibilities. Article 10 provides for a plex and sensitive nature of the subject I would say that paragraph 10 is a positive step

in the right direction. The Declaration touched on a wide variety of subjects of interest and concern to the member countries. Issues such as environment, population, shelter, children, youth, disabled persons, women in development, science and technology. Drug trafficking and drug abuse are matters of high priority in the national development plans of all the countries. It is not clear, however, what is the precise purpose of putting these issues in the Declaration because no plan of action on a regional basis has been proposed. Perhaps this was done primarily to emphasize the high priority attached to these questions by the leadcrs. One particular question on which much can be done on a regional basis but was touched on only marginally is the area of inter-regional investment. The Declaration underlined the critical importance of

promoting intra-regional cooperation in the area of manufactures but did not go far enough in stressing the need for free flow of investment funds within the region. Perhaps this is an area which will receive greater attention from SAARC leaders in the years ahead.

Suppression of Terrorism

The paragraph on terrorism deserves special mention. Looking at the text on the surface one can be deceived into believing that the region is making some headway in eurbing this menace. Unfortunately the real situation is just the opposite. The passage of the SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism has not led to any improvement in the situation. We can of course indulge in make-believe and hid our heads, ostrich-like, under eloquent and reassuring speeches. But mutual trust will not be established by sidetracking the basic question of religious discord and hatred that is vittating the atmosphere. After the recent explostons in Bombay there were instant reactions in India by many responsible persons accusing Pakistan of the crime. No one waited for an enquiry. Under these circumstances it can be tackled only if the leaders agree to take a hard and honest look at the root cause of the problem and take con-

cerned action. A paragraph that attracts me most is on the subject of people-to-people' contact. The formation of regional apex bodies will certainly be a step in the right direction but we must widen the scope of the process by making it for NGOs to establish direct contact with each other on the basis of common interest in a particular field. Tourism within the region must be a major thrust area. After all friendship is made at the level of individuals. This can become an important part of the process of confidence — building which is so badly needed in the region. There are a number of other

paragraphs including one on the security of small states. Apart from highlighting the concerns of the small states this type of general remarks do not enhance their security. Creating an environment of genuine goodwill, trust and cooperation is far more important than these words of assuranecs which carry no legal and very little political significance.

Positive Outcome

To sum up, one may say that

the outcome of the 7th summit has been positive. Despite the mood of pessimism generated by the escalation of tension in the region. SAARC has been kept alive by the leaders. It was widely believed that Pakistan was shifting its attention in the direction of central Asia and focussing more on ECO than on SAARC. ECO. it may be mentioned, is the expanded and refurbished version of old RCD. While Pakistan may benefit from cooperation with these newly independent republies, her future is inex tricably linked with that of South Asia. Geography, history culture and heritage will exert more enduring influence than calculations of economic ad vantage. Indian view of SAARC is somewhat different from that of the smaller SAARC countries but inspite of these differences in perception as well as the current mood of distrust, India and Pakistan acted wisely in joining the summit. While the leaders took a number of important decisions in creating opportunities for cooperation in core economic areas, they fatled to address the fundamental question of lack of mutual trust and goodwill. Unresolved bilateral problems together with the growing power and influence of communal forces are all negative factors which will impede progress in regional cooperation. SAARC will not be able to fulfil its potentials and make any significant impact on the economic life of the region. unless it can break the barriers being creeted by fanatics and

Do We Really Have Faith in Our People?

by Dr M Ashraf Ali

Was a student in the LVI United States, one thing which I found manifested in the ideas presented in the books as well as in the behaviour of the Americans was an abiding faith in the power of the people. This faith permeated so deeply in all spheres of civic and political life that it was very common to think that at times of crisis the entire nation would rise as one man, to face the challenges

that may confront the nation. The question is, upon what was founded such a strong faith in the people that they can do no wrong? The answer may be many, such as, it is a free country where fundamental right of an individual citizen is held in high esteem; where the democratic rights of the people are respected by the state: where freedom of the press is supreme and so on

and so forth. These are all true, no doubt, but above all, the most crucial thing that makes all these fundamental rights operational and functional is the awareness of the commonman about his own power which ultimately can make any nation a great one. Where everyone is educated and literacy is nearly 100 per cent, this is possible.

But do we have any faith in the people of our country? Do the people here matter at all in the crucial decisions that are taken by the state? A look at our recent past would indicate the answer to be in the negative. We do not seem to have any faith in the power of our people. Not that we seem to wilfully neglect the commonman, but the commonman does not have the awareness about the unlimited potentials that he possesses in changing the face of the country. Why

this is so? As an educationist, my answer would be the widespread lack of education among the people is the main

A country which has an illiteracy rate of over 70 per cent, cannot be expected to move very far with such a heavy burden on its shoulder. Where almost 70 million people out of a total of 120 million are, in reality, totally ineffective in terms of making any significant contribution to the nation due to their lack of awareness and nonchalance, it becomes guite difficult fore the country to make a breakthrough in any sector of national development.

It is, therefore, imperative on our part to have an abiding faith in the power of the people to change the face of the country. And this faith must be reflected in the programmes we undertake for the benefit of the commonman. Our authorities seem to be lacking in this faith. Although it deserved top priority, education appeared to be a neglected sector right from the beginning of our first independence in 1947. It needs hardly to be emphasized that if proper importance was given to education and efforts and investments were made to universalize the primary education, simultaneously making adequate provision for adult education, it is obvious that by now there would be no illiterate people in the country and the country would surely be a different one than what we find it today. Allocations from education sector used to be cut as a general practice and used for other sectors, little realizing the adverse effects it could

have on the educational development of the country in the long run. The same practice continues even now after nearly 60 years of groping in the dark which makes the country languish under the curse of poverty caused mainly due to widespread illiteracy and lack of education among the people.

So it is a question of faith in the power of an educated people. When former President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania took over power in his country, he publicly announced, "We have chosen to remain poor for the next 20 years. Why? Because we are going to invest 50 per cent of our national income for the education of our people "This is undoubtedly an expression of faith and conviction that upholds the idea that a nation can be developed only by developing its people and no

doubt education can play a very crucial role in this endeavor. Spoon-feeding approach, such as we find in our programmes, can never lead a country to the road to self-reliance.

It appears that we have already wasted precious time by doing things that did not deliver the goods. Now it is time for serious re-thinking and building-up an abiding and unflinching faith in the power of the people. Needless to mention that such a power can matertalize only when all of our citizens are properly educated. It is upto the authorities now to move in the proper direction and take appropriate measures and make untiring efforts to implement the programmes undertaken in the

The writer is Professor IER. DU

education sector.

EACE has finally come to this tiny Latin American country, but the soldiers and guerrillas who fought in the ten-year civil war may be up against their toughest battle yet.

Now that the war is over, former fighters for both the army and the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) guerrilla group are plagued by a sense of solitude and inaction, or 'peace syndrome'.

These soldiers, who just a short time ago were considered heroes and whose exploits were legend, find themselves in a country struggling to return to normalcy and put behind it the horrors of a war that left over 75,000 dead.

Doctors, psychologists and social workers have been working to investigate and deal with the effects of post-war trauma.

Agustin Fernandez, a Spanish psychologist working out of the University of Central

El Salvador: Shocked by Peace America (UCA) in San Salvador, conducted a study of former FMLN guerrillas who

ranged between eight and 18 years of age. Fernandez found that one of the major obstacles facing the former fighters "is replacing the feeling of camaraderic

created during the war." Some of the former fighters who first laid down their arms to rejoin civilian life have returned to the old war zones, after failing to adapt to the new situation.

For many, who have lived since early youth or adolescence amidst battles and under heavy bombing, guerrilla war is their "natural environment".

In interviews with investigators, former fighters said the years of war "had not affected our mental health". But the reThe return of peace to El Salvador after ten years of brutal civil war leaves both government soldiers and former guerrillas disoriented and unable to adjust. Pablo Cerna of IPS reports, from San Salvador.

sults in blind tests were different, Fernandez told IPS.

During the armed conflict, fighters on both sides were forced to suppress their fear, and only talk about the successes, not the failures. In the case of the FMLN, fighters were also constantly reinforced with the idea they were

"triumphant heroes". The current reality is quite different, and as they sink into anonymity and their exploits no longer thrill eager audiences, the former fighters find themselves fighting a psychological battle that may be their toughest yet.

"An iccology, no matter how strong or justified, cannot cover the traumatic effects of seeing your friends and families, die," Fernandez said.

The psychologist told of cases where rebel fighters and their families, hiding in underground shelters, were forced to asphyxiate newborn babies to prevent them from crying and revealing the group's location.

Currently, the UCA psychological clinic is attending to

128 former fighters suffering from some form of post-war trauma, according to social worker Carmen Martinez, who works in the programme.

Martinez said insomnia, anxiety, nightmares, flashbacks and feelings of extreme loneliness and persecution are all symptoms affecting the former fighters.

A doctor from the Pan-American Health Organisation visiting a camp for former FMLN fighters discovered 38 cases of severe mental problems. One of the former guerrillas committed suicide and two others were on the verge of doing so.

Alcoholism and drug abuse have also begun affecting the demobilised fighters. Antonio Argueta, a 30-year-old FMLN guerrilla who lost his left arm during the war, left the agricultural training courses at a

camp for demobilized guerrillas an emigrated to the capital to finish his primary education. Instead, he became an alcoholic and spends most of his time on the street.

During the war, the FMLN maintained strict prohibitions against alcohol and drug consumption. Said Martinez: "The fighters see this as a vice, while the leaders view it as an ideological breech. But it is an escape from the current situa-

But Fernandez said many of the former fighters, especially the wounded, are facing the future with relative optimism.

"During the war they learned to live collectively, to cooperate with the community, and from this point of view these values are the hope for their future," he said, adding that the former fighters can use such experiences to better their lives.

· Nevertheless, they distrust the promises because "they have always been lied to".

Roadside plantation

Sir, The roadside tree plantation programme needs to be highly appreciated. If we can gradually cover both the road sides in the whole of our country within a decade or two, we shall certainly be naturally richer and ecologically more balanced. Needless to mention here that indiscriminate felling of trees has already denuded the country of forest re-

Being a tea planter I would like to raise two points which I feel the concerned authority would pay due importance to. First, plantation of a few variety like Acacia Moniliformis should preserably be discontinued on roadsides because they usually cannot with stand strong wind are often fall broken which hampers smooth plying of transports. Secondly,

plantation programme should tially. But more often than Govt, Semi-Govt and Corpotween May and July. It has been observed that plantation programmes are continued even in the months of September and October which feel is too late. Untimely plantation ultimately results in less survival percentage.

I hope the concerned authority will kindly attach due importance to the matter.

Assistant Manager, Phultola Tea Estate, Sylhet

Motius Samad Chowdhury

Viva voce

Sir, It is a common practice to hold viva voce for selection, promotion and recruitment in Bangladesh. Apparently, there is nothing wrong in it if it is conducted fairly and impar-

prescrably be carried out be- not, it is misused allegedly, in ration offices as well as for economy, science and tech- investment, partnership and a cool and calculated manner and simply used as a coverage. As a result, viva voce in Bangladesh has to an extent, become a synonym of nepotism, favouritism etc. Allegations are always there that selection committees, simply select their own or the recommended candidates of higherups and other influential people.

> This is allegedly happening in the case of admission into Medical Colleges or recruitment in Govt, Semi-Govt and Corporation offices except of course Public Service Commission where there has not been any major allegation of

string pulling so far. Hence in the interest of justice and fairplay, viva voce should be abolished for recruitment and promotion in

admission to Medical Colleges.

There should only be a written test and to ensure fairness in that too, method and system practised by BUET should be followed because that has been found to be fool proof so far. Otherwise, injustice as well as corruption will continue to pervade our national life. Will the Parliamentary Committee on service matters look into it?

Saleh Ahmed Chowdhury Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka

Let us rebuild

Sir, Our centuries-old good earth has totally changed. Today we are living in a new world of human rights, freedom, democracy and market booming. They ask for foreign nology, cooperation and co-existence.

While we look at and envy the way of life, standard of living, peace and prosperity of people of many countries on this planet, we wonder why are we lagging so far behind them? "The reason why birds can fly and we can't is simply that they have perfect faith, for to have faith is to have wings," says J M Barrie.

The communist world has collapsed, its economy disintegrated, public sector trade, commerce, agriculture and industry, mills and factories

have become bankrupt. China's, Russia's, former East Germany's, Hungary's, Poland's and Czechoslovakia's

private sector thrives, individ-

ual and private enterprises are

cooperation. They are all engaged in nation building works, economic development and welfare of the people.

Why don't we take lesson from them? Can't we move with the time and can't we rebuild Bangladesh in the light of new socio-economic and political situation of the world? Can't we work and work more and give up hartal and strike? If we don't work who would give us food? Given our multifarious problems and growth of population, we must take care of ourselves, seriously.

Let our public leaders, government servants and public sector corporation employees kindly take note of it.

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