

For Poverty Elimination

To alleviate is to make easier to bear, says the respected Oxford Dictionary. Why then are the academics and the bureaucrats and even politicians talking of poverty alleviation instead of the elimination of the curse — the insufferable manifestation of social injustice and economic inefficiency married to produce the most horrid and long-living of the forms of inhumanity? We must first of all reject poverty for what it is patently — anti-society and anti-man — on point of state, personal and societal principle and then unite to work for its elimination. Any talk of alleviation is a compromise with a built-in inclination for co-existence with poverty.

How should we then feel when the very wise and efficient learned body BIDS hosts a policy dialogue between academics and politicians and governmental top-brass including the Finance Minister to talk of poverty alleviation? The Saturday dialogue brought out many edifying and illuminating points on the subject of poverty and the reasons for the failure so far of all 'poverty-management' measures by the government. The comments of the participants testified to their bona fide as well-intentioned observers of the poverty scene. And if the proceedings were taken seriously by the government, as Mr Saifur Rahman said it would, it could very well be the beginning of a new governmental approach to poverty specially on two counts: channelling much more money to the villages and to Bangladesh's only efficient agency of production — agriculture; and cutting down drastically the expenses incurred on the inefficient implementation of projects, very often having little relation to reality, designed to reduce the yawning economic gaps between the classes. The numerous participants of the dialogue were one in emphasizing those two points.

In the history of the subcontinent two great men broached the subject in a manner no one else has. Mahatma Gandhi's work in the matter had a diffuse and vast canvas that anticipated both Schumacher's 'small is beautiful' and the present world aspiration to an environment-friendly human society. Rabindranath's work involved both theoretical understanding of a possible way out of the problem and a practical attempt to test his conclusions. It is sad that our planners and politicians do not heed their knowledge and experience of our society in taking up questions that had occupied the two great minds for the whole of their lives.

Both Gandhi and Tagore would have none of our consumeristic ways and, on top of preaching, set up personal examples of lives spent wholly free from wasteful practices. We Bengalees have a model closer home in Tagore for how to go about the business of eliminating poverty. He believed in the poor people's coming to discover their own power and breaking the poverty shackles all by their own power. And he never believed beneficiaries of poverty could ever work for the liquidation of the source of their unjust well-being.

A democratic state, however, should make things easier by nurturing a people's government coming to intervene on the side of the poor through giving them such breaks as would help them to take off economically — something that Professor Yunus and quite a number of NGOs have been doing with varying degrees of success.

A perpetual motion machine continues to be a chimera patently for the reason that it would require more in input than it would yield as output. Our poverty-management actions, have nearly all been futile experiments in such perpetual machines. Who could we depend on for reaching the starting capital of a meaningfully active life of production and satisfaction to the deprived multitude? Although proven best so far, it is not that the Yunus machine doesn't eat up a hefty part of that capital. What then are the political parties and their grassroots cadres for? To rake in the votes of the unfed and give nothing in return?

Let us, without further delay, graduate to a politics of poverty elimination. It wouldn't be a small or easy job. All the same, this has to be achieved if we are to survive and build a truly civilised and human society.

When Restaurants Refuse to Serve

The confusion created over the 72-hour strike by the owners and employees of hotels and restaurants across the country continues. The version of the National Board of revenue (NBR) and that of the Bangladesh Restaurant Owners Association (BROA) are so contradictory that a meeting point between the two will really be difficult to find out. As the two sides are locked in a no-win bargain for either party, it is the customers who feel that the dislocation hurts them most. But surely, the clientele's sufferings are more immediate than the long-term loss and accompanying pangs to and for the employees, owners of eateries and the government.

If the most contentious issue is the Value Added Tax (VAT), the other three demands of the BROA also deserve careful consideration. The question of prior notice for discontinuation of gas and electricity supply leaves no scope for argument. As for the enhancement of the rate of revenue on the utility services, the dictates of the market forces must be obliged. Part of the second point is a demand for extension of gas connection to Rajshahi, Khulna and Barisal. The third point stresses the need for treating the business as an industry and making available bank loan facilities for hotels and restaurants. The last point is to ensure safety of lives for the employees and owners and security for their business from terrorism.

Clearly, not everyone will agree on according recognition of industrial status to eating places. This does not and should not disqualify hotels from getting bank loans. Expansion of the gas connection network to other three divisions is a proposal with tremendous merit — both economically and environmentally. But the most outstanding demand to our mind is the one that seeks to eliminate terrorism from business. The VAT will not be hurting those involved in the business once they are required not to pay illegal toll. VAT after all is a recognised practice by governments in many countries for collection of revenue. The point of discussion may be the rate and making the payment procedure free of bureaucratic tangles and corruption. The owners and employees seem to be more interested in doing away with VAT itself instead of seeing its merit and asking for redress of their more pressing problem of terrorism and extortion.

RECENTLY, early this year, one of the cabinet ministers proclaimed in a meeting organised by a cultural group that president Ziaur Rahman by giving recognition to Islam, the religion of the majority people, in the Constitution of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh had created a unique example of religious harmony in the country. I have nothing to dispute with the contention of the minister. Many of our people, may, practically a large majority of Bangladeshis believe that our country is a land of communal harmony. By saying majority of the people, the intellectuals who mould the public opinion are not also excluded. They too believe that way. Our governments, present and the past, always took real pride in declaring this country as an ideal place of communal harmony. In Bangladesh Buddhists and Christians are the harmless insignificant. Hindus represent the bulk chunk of religious minority population.

If we consider the number of deaths in events of communal violence from 1947 in India, the large neighbouring country, the disturbances in Pakistan and Bangladesh are not worth mentioning. The ones that took place in these two countries are also reactions to the occurrences in India.

From the magnitude, intensity and frequencies of events, one may say that a section of people in India are more communal than the people in Pakistan and Bangladesh. However, it would not be unfair to term the Indian government to be communal in comparison to the government of the other two neighbours.

The constitution of India embodies secularism, meaning that religions have no role to play in public affairs. Secularistic character of a

constitution is a recognition of the thesis that the state does not discriminate between citizens on the basis of their belief.

The constitution of Pakistan declared the country to be an Islamic Republic. How much Islam the leaders of Pakistan practised may be a matter to be debated but there can be no denial of fact that the believers in Islam attained a special status by such characterisation of the constitution. Establishment of a special status of the Muslims in the guide book of governance, the constitution, has automatically given another special status for the people that did not believe in Islam. At least one religion is mentioned in the constitution; others are not worth to be mentioned in the sacred book.

One who does not feel comfortable with the proposition that India should be declared a Hindu state does not however feel that much uneasy when Bangladesh adopts the religion of the majority Muslims as state religion where about 20 per cent of the population do not belong to that religion.

The background, reasons and justifications of giving a religious flavour to the constitution of Pakistan, a country created on the 'two nations theory' is quite understandable. Pakistan became the homeland of the Indian Muslims.

Pakistan, an Islamic Republic, ensured better communal harmony in terms of killing, communal riots and events of disturbances than India which preached secularism. From the facts of life and events it can logically be said that a religious state is better than a secular state for protecting the minority interest, life and property.

Bangladesh emerged as secular country through a bloody war fought primarily between the Muslims. The constitution of Bangladesh did not provide any special status for citizens on the basis of re-

The Role of Constitution in Communal Harmony

Protection or Equality — what Comes First for Minorities?

by Mostafa Ameen

religious belief until the time the late president Ziaur Rahman thought it imperative for ensuring communal harmony in the country, as is now revealed by a minister. Inclusion of Bismillah ar Rahmanur Rahim in the constitution by president Zia and declaration of Islam as the state religion by president Ershad did not invite any communal disturbance in the country.

It is evident at least in the context of the sub-continent that communal harmony has a positive correlation with religious states and the secular one has a negative correlation. Under the given situation, one may feel tempted to suggest that India should also give up its

India, if goes to power replacing the secular Congress shall be able to ensure much more security to the Muslim minority. There shall be less riots, less killing, less violation of the religious rights of the Muslims in India. In the same manner, if Jamaat-e-Islami comes to power in Bangladesh there shall be still less communal disturbances in Bangladesh. In recent days, we have seen that where Jamaat was active, less violence took place.

By making India a Hindu state and installing religious political parties to power we can attain better communal harmony in this region. Should we do it? I shall be for 'No'. Reasons are very simple. During the earlier part of the

enclave the black, enjoyed full and complete loyalty for years. Slaves enjoyed affection too. They enjoyed affection too. South Africa became turmoil when the black started asking equality.

Inequality cannot fight each other. The outcome of such fighting is known. No one fights for being defeated. A sense of equality, true or false, is a precondition for any quarrel, fighting or war. Only the equals, real or imaginary, fight. May be on strange occasions the inequality may fight. The weak may spar. But for perpetual struggle, there must be a sense of equality. A boy of 10 will never fight a 20-year young man. But a 15-year boy may risk fighting the 20-year-old rival.

The Hindus in Bangladesh do not fight. They live in pro-

tection calmness and peace. They have been migrating to India in the darkness of night. They have been migrating to India from 1947 and the process is yet unhindered. The Hindus are not acquiring assets, developing industries in Bangladesh. They are behaving like that of a stranger in their own land, the land they own for centuries. They constitute 15 per cent of the population, almost 2/3 of the total human resources. Muslims blame them to be non-patriot.

Pakistan was created for the Muslims of India. The division of India was essential as the Muslims in India considered them to be a separate nation. By the creation of Pakistan the Muslims in India lost, to a great extent, the moral strength of living in India. They wanted separate land for them. Hindus in Pakistan did not opt for Pakistan nor did

What is the strength the Indian Muslims have that tells them not to quit India and what are the weaknesses the Hindus in Bangladesh have that induced them to migrate to India? Many may come up with many reasons. Some may quote from the Bible, others from the Gita.

But I would say that the prime determining factor is the provisions of constitution. Indian constitution has guaranteed the equality of the Muslims to the Hindus. Bangladesh constitution has made the Hindus unequal to the Muslims. India, by constitution, is a secular state and Bangladesh is a communal one. President Zia and president Ershad have, in the language of the minister, attributed to communal harmony by inducting religion in the constitution of Bangladesh. The harmony that they have ensured is the harmony of calmness and peace not of equality.

The writer is a practising lawyer.

Japanese Media Management: A Male Preserve No More

Haruko K Watanabe writes from Tokyo

THE United Nations Decade for Women (1976-1985) saw women journalists in Japan get promoted to such positions as editorial writers and editors of women's and family pages.

But the proverbial glass ceiling continues to keep women from the top echelons of Japan's powerful media institutions.

Until recently, that is. Sanket Shimbu, one of Japan's five national dailies which have a combined circulation of 3.1 million, recently named a woman to head its international news division.

Ms Keiko Chino says she thought she finally made it "only when my boss told me so."

The joke is that Sanket must have big trouble like the Social Democratic Party of Japan if they had to promote a woman to the top," she adds. SDPJ made history by electing a woman, Takako Doi, to its chair in 1986.

A survey by the Japan Newspaper Publishers and Editors Association shows that 1,502 women reporters were

hired by newspapers and news agencies in Japan in 1992, up 29 per cent from such hirings the previous year.

However, the percentage of women in the news and editorial departments of the Associations 93 member institutions remained a low 5.64.

For Ms Chino, the climb to the top took 25 years — during which, however, she notched several firsts for women in Japanese media.

Graduating from Waseda University in 1967, she joined Sanket Shimbu as news reporter on general assignment, which is how Japanese journalists usually get trained on the job.

After two years she was transferred to the Sanket group's evening tabloid Yukan Fuji which carried mainly sports and entertainment news and catered to subway and rail commuters. Since the paper depended on street sales rather than on subscriptions, it had to compete fiercely with the other tabloids, exposing Ms Chino to commercial journalism at its toughest.

For the paper, Ms Chino

also wrote a column called "People" which was a welcome variation from the usual news fare of crime and violence. Because of the column, businessmen often brought the paper home for their wives to read.

At age 29 and on her sixth year in journalism, Ms Chino decided to go on leave of absence to study journalism and politics at the University of California using her own savings. In those days, age 29 was the critical point at which a Japanese career woman had to make a final decision about giving up career for marriage.

Still with Sanket, Ms Chino returned to the US in 1978 as a Fulbright scholar at the University of California and Georgetown University in Washington, DC. While there, she authored a few books, including *Crime News in*

America, *Single Women in Washington DC and Breeze from America* which were published in Japanese.

The last book has been designated as a junior high school textbook to introduce Japanese youth to American society and its minority groups.

Ms Chino did not join the international news division of Sanket until 1985. But from there it was a fast and legendary rise.

She was named sub-editor of the division the following year, then became the paper's first woman foreign correspondent 12 months later. Her first assignment was to Manila to cover the administration of the Philippines' first woman president, Corazon C Aquino. *Sarisari, Hole-Halo Report from Manila*, a book for young readers on such diverse sub-

jects as street children, Japcyukis (Filipino women going to Japan as entertainers and sex workers) and the Santo Nino (the Christ Child).

Her next "first" for Japanese women in media was her appointment as Sanket's New York Bureau Chief in 1990. The Gulf War, Asians in New York and the Peruvian presidential elections in which Japanese-Peruvian Alberto Fujimori won were just three of her major story serials.

Ms Chino credits her success to the momentum created by the UN Decade for Women in opening up opportunities for women, and her ceaseless pen-pushing even when she was on leave and free to study. "Keep writing," was her supervisor's advice when she first left for the US, and she had taken this to heart.

From childhood, Ms Chino

had loved reading newspapers and meeting people, and still gets thrilled to get information firsthand. "I am not fit for money-making," she tells *Depthnews*.

She does not see herself making a drastic change in the international news pages. "I will try to add a wood block to the blockhouse which previous editors have built," she says.

Keiko Chino does hope make Sanket strong in news-futures compared with such national dailies as *Asahi* and *Yomiuri* which are regarded as "department stores" of news.

Sanket is generally considered a conservative paper for small business-owners but Mr Chino thinks it has a certain personality that sets it apart from the other major dailies. "Read it and see the difference," she says.

—Depthnews Asia

OPINION

Academic Calendar

Shahabuddin Mahtab

The new Vice-Chancellor of Dhaka University Professor Emajuddin Ahmed deserves the praise (his speech dated 10th May, '93) from all of us, and specially the guardians for spelling out the need for an academic calendar. The second editorial of The Daily Star of 12th May while congratulating Prof Ahmed had expressed some genuine fears in its implementation in view of the volatile situations on the campus from time to time. In the first instance, we may discuss about the issue of a calendar, and thereafter the three sets of hurdles namely the strikes and hartals, violence and armed conflict on the campus, and the postponement of examinations may be examined.

In all the developed countries, and many of the third world countries, detailed calendars are issued for the whole year, and these are strictly adhered to. In view of our closeness to the British system of education, we may refer to the calendars issued by any of the affiliated colleges of the University of London, such as the LSE, Kings College or the SOAS. The whole academic year is composed of three terms, namely the Michaelmas, Lent and the Summer terms, and each one of these is composed of ten weeks (thirty weeks in a year). There is a long vacation in summer (July to September), and two shorter vacations after the Michaelmas and Lent terms. The three vacations in all take about twentythree weeks. There are specific provisions, that the new academic year shall begin on the first Monday of October, and that the examinations will be held on the third Wednesday of May, and the results will be declared on the last Thursday of June.

For each subject or sub-subject the number of teaching hours are clearly laid down. As for example, ten lecture hours are allotted to the Economic History of Japan, twenty lectures for the Political History of Modern Europe, and ten hours for Industrial Psychology and so on. The dates and hours of the tutorial sessions are also indicated in the calendar. The whole exercise and its strict adherence, keeps the students on their toes, and they are also forewarned about the course and the timely examinations. The honours courses including the final publications of the results are done in three years time, and not five to seven years, as is the case with us.

If there is a hartal or a violence on the campus the lost lecture hours may be made up by the teacher concerned by taking extra classes in the day time/evening/Fridays or holidays. The other lecturers should go on as scheduled.

The spread out of the examinations must be for the minimum number of days (say seven to ten days). Preferably there should be examinations for two papers each day.

The publication of the results is now taking two to seven months. There is absolutely no reason why the results cannot be published in four to six weeks' time.

The campus violence is a complicated issue. This can only be solved if the political parties genuinely desired it to. There seems to be no other way.

During the last two decades, there have been immense suffering and loss to the students, their guardians and the nation as a whole. The present trend has deprived us of the able leaders and scholars of tomorrow.

The publication of calendars by all the Universities is just a small step for us, but a right one.

To the Editor

Not everything is lost

Sir, An experience in Chittagong restores in me the hope that if there is will there must be a way out. That is from the extreme hopelessness that we find ourselves in while looking around all aspects of civic or national life.

The situation in Chittagong city deteriorated in the past and like in any other town normal living became simply difficult. The visible symptoms were traffic jam, cramped footpaths, unruly bus-stands etc. The talk of a beautiful city that Chittagong was at not so distant past became a fairy tale.

A sincere civil servant, the local police chief, has recently started to do his job, something new in our present context, and things have started to happen. Believe it or not, now you can take a walk in busy streets of Chittagong without being impeded by the hawkers or the smell; you can drive a car without fear of being stranded by traffic jam created by the competing and uncaring buses. The beauty of all this is that the vehicle drivers and rickshaw-pullers who are behaving now under threat of severe punishment, themselves appreciate the measures.

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Electronic media

Sir, This refers to the articles by S.M. Ali and Shah ASM Kibria, on the 9th May in page 4 of The Daily Star, both containing important suggestions, among other, that the Leader of the House and the Prime Minister should regularly attend the sessions of the Parliament and take part in its debates on important issues, which will obviate the "actions

of the Opposition parties from taking disruptive tactics of hartals and street rallies". The central issue of the suggestions made in the articles of both Mr. Ali and Mr. Kibria and also which were ventilated a number of times in a large number of the dailies of Dhaka, seem to have fallen on duck's back.

The other important suggestion to free the Government-owned two electronic media from the blatant misuse by flushing the hackneyed activities and harangues of the ministers, and to entrust the managements of the TV and the Radio to autonomous bodies, free from governmental control, in compliance with their pre-election pledges, also seem to fall on deaf ear of the government.

Do they have any strong and cogent argument in their favour to resign their own contractual obligation, except displaying a nonchalant arrogance? Does not these deficiencies and indifferent attitudes on the part of the people's government display a sad lack of respect not only towards the demands of their large number of supporters and the general public but also towards their own pledge, which they voluntarily proffered after weighing the substance of the issue.

Will some body give a satisfactory reply?
Nurun Nabi
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To be a minister

Sir, When a commoner becomes a minister, it is indeed a matter of great honour, privilege and fortune for him. Everything changes with a twinkle of an eye. He gets a gorgeous house to live in, telephone sets are installed, cosy

furniture are furnished, government transports are provided, personal staff and guards are posted.

He presides over meetings and conferences, inaugurates seminars and fairs makes tour of foreign countries one after another. He can also perform, if so desired, Umrah Hajj at the expense of the public exchequer. Life really becomes meaningful and charming for him. Everywhere he goes he is greeted and applauded by all. He gets little time to meet his friends, relatives and poor people. Everybody runs after him but he runs from them all.

Under the circumstances, he may think himself to be indispensable, most efficient and learned. But he may also fall to understand that one day he shall have to quit his position. And then — all the commotion is over.

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World body and human problem

Sir, The Serbs are killing their neighbours, raping their women folks and the world is waiting to implement UN resolution. What a situation!

The Muslims are being denied of basic human right of self-defence. One-sided arms embargo has been imposed upon the weak Muslims while their killers are getting regular supply of heavy arms. Whither justice?

Had their been a fight between the equals, still we would have called for an immediate ceasefire. But what is shocking is that when thousands are being killed in Bosnia and Serb leaders are constantly refusing to sign the peace accord, the world nations have become spectators