

Unutilised ADB Credit

The Asian Development Bank once gave Bangladesh a credit of 30 million dollars specifically to be utilised for funding small-scale industrial enterprises by private persons and parties. The loan had to be disbursed within three years, two of which have already passed. And yet 19 million dollar or about two-thirds of the total loan amount remains to be utilised.

The story has hardly anything new in it. In an inconceivably bizarre show of the irrational, Bangladesh has for years been going round with a begging bowl and getting sizeable parts of the petitioned for doles lined up yearly — with much of such collections remaining unutilised. There can be a thousand explanations of the inability to absorb all kinds of help coming from abroad but those would not obviate one very bad loss — the loss of face to the donors who, very correctly, would want to scale down the doles to the horizon Bangladesh can put to good use. This process, already very much on, would hurt the nation beyond the comprehension of ruling governments by making us credit unworthy at a time when we are truly in the need of all that the whole world can do for us.

The above has been a familiar and standardised exercise in economic degeneration in which our successive governments and the administrative machine of the financial, entrepreneurial and managerial aspects of our public sector was instrumental.

The ADB loan fiasco is very novel and at the same time very enlightening in that its disbursement was channelled entirely through private banks and was targeted to help private entrepreneurial initiatives. Very evidently the banks have failed dismally, as so aptly has been observed by the ADB top official now in town. Was there any other party or parties to this show of failure? On top of the fact that even big branches of the five private banks charged with distributing the loan did not very much know of the funds they were holding and to what purpose, not to speak of lining these out, — it was clear even to someone from abroad that those that were supposed to be needing the loan for the right reasons, were not at all aware of the existence of the waiting money.

The private banks' failure, made the more ludicrous by the apathy of the agencies who could have motivated prospective small entrepreneurs into taking advantage of this loan, — is so much in contrast with the performance of the Grameen Bank. This is hard to believe that both occur side by side in the same socio-economic setting.

We are not one to burden the so-called NGOs with all the cares of the state and society if only because that would rob the two latter institutions of their justification to exist. Still, we cannot help asking ourselves why were the NGOs also indifferent in the matter? The chiefs of Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Association and the Bangladesh Handicraft Association were, among others, present where the ADB official was on Sunday giving vent to his feelings and findings. What were their associations doing when the money was starting to petrify? And doesn't BCSIC have any role to play in the matter? Couldn't they at least launch a publicity campaign?

Expanding Frontier of Knowledge

In an age marked by information explosion, developing nations like ours have their own peculiar problems. Information flow from outside overwhelms the internal generation of formulated data and transmission of information based on them. One consequence of this is that we know quite a number of facts about people's life in the West while we remain ignorant about similar information about our own people. For example, the percentages of the Britons or Americans opting for marriage, single life or live-together are better known than the rate of divorce in the Bangladesh population.

This admittedly is a pathetic situation and without bringing an improvement in it we can neither know our condition correctly nor plan for any remedial measure. Even to donors willing to help us to overcome the difficulties the picture presented is likely to be less convincing. Planning Minister Zahiruddin Khan seems to have identified the problem in its right perspective. At a meeting — the ninth of its kind — of the National Statistical Council (NSC) held at the Planning Commission on Sunday, he revealed the government attempt now underway for establishing a data bank. The move, although belated, should be considered a step in the right direction.

However, mere creation of a data bank cannot, of necessity, be a cause for celebration unless the paraphernalia required for its efficient running are developed. Many of our well-intended efforts get floundered simply because of the lack of vision. Let us hope, this proposed establishment will not run into any such snag once it has started functioning. This is particularly necessary in view of the competitiveness of the task facing it. First of all, the information gathering process has to be geared up and then competent people will be given the responsibility to squeeze them through permutation and combination into easily understandable data, graphs and tables.

So far theories have been applied and even propounded without adequate support from the field-level facts and information. This data bank — happily with government and non-government bodies' access to it — will push the frontier of our researchers' knowledge as well as media people's informative base further beyond.

THE closing paragraph of my last piece was an invitation to my readers to wait for something which I am expected to deliver now: an account of 'how, in what process of gradual decline, the universities have been reduced to this impotency'. Impotency is a strong word, but I have no intention of substituting it by a gentler term. The immediate context was the proposal to raise tuition fees and the adverse reaction it has provoked amongst the students. All these years the universities have desisted from doing this and now, presumably taking heat from the example of our finance minister who has shown his guts in taking unpopular financial measures, they have decided to take a small step toward augmenting their internal revenue. The present moment is somewhat less unpropitious for such a move to be thought of, particularly as students, despite a formal show of protest, may yet see the logic of it.

Now, one thing I might as well make clear while talking about the peculiar weakness of our universities in managing their own affairs. The weakness is confined to matters affecting the (supposed) interest of students, and sometimes of teachers. In committing many irregularities calculated to serve the interest of this or that fellow — mostly teachers, sometimes officers — enjoying the favour of the boss, or of the ruling clique, universities have felt themselves quite free, as becomes an autonomous body. For an account of these irregularities, I refer to the six volumes of the Universities Enquiry Commission (1977/78) chaired by Z Huq. The Chairman was a veteran banker, with the background of central banking.

Clearly enough he was not the right choice for the job, and the 'enquiry commission' was a

The Rot: How it Started and Spread

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nomiser. Still, it must be said to the credit of this rather narrow-spirited banker that, on top of discovering many instances of financial irregularity, he did succeed in identifying nearly as many cases of administrative irregularities. This rather damaging report failed to reduce any impact on the administration of the universities. For one thing, the move itself generated considerable resentment in university circles. For another, as one of the Vice-Chancellors took charge, under Ziaur Rahman, of the Ministry of Education, the reports were safely pushed under the carpet. I should not be surprised if the ministry has lost track of this ill-starred document, which has some value as a historical curiosity.

Shall I let out a secret about the ministry? It manages pretty well without a reference library, without an archive. At least, that was the situation three years ago. When I asked for a copy of the Bangladesh National Education Commission's Report (1988), they could not produce one. A copy was procured for me 'from outside'.

To resume what I am promise-bound to discuss, the erosion of the authority which a university is entitled to and sometimes required to exercise. All I will try to do is to remember a process which will take us back to the post-independence years of Bangladesh, i.e. 1972-75.

The general breakdown of the law and order situation encouraged indiscipline every-

where, in mills and factories, in schools, colleges and universities. For some years, after the fall of Mujib, students kept a low profile. There were no elections, no unions, and political parties went into hibernation.

With the return of politics under Ziaur Rahman, the universities also saw the return of the union activities. Hitherto, students were organised into parties loosely and informally affiliated with political parties but now, for reasons best known to himself, Ziaur Rahman made it mandatory for political parties to name their

Theoretically speaking, all parties were equal but in practice, one of them was more equal than others. This was the party affiliated with the party in power.

For the leaders of this party, their enlarged role was now to act as agents of their superiors outside the university, in the corridors of power. They began to offer their services as brokers of official favour. Some of the leaders had direct access to the head of the state and of government. Within the university they moved with the airs of a satrap. Many teachers learnt to

procedures, with extortion — contractors engaged in development work on the campus being at the receiving end of it — and with crime committed with impunity. The configuration of power politics on the campus did not present a uniform picture. Where the party in favour was not the party in power, it made things difficult for the administration. Vice-Chancellors were now increasingly expected to play the game of the rules which were made by others. Some of them proved adept in playing it, others failed. From 1983 onwards, the disgrace and untimely exit of Vice-Chancellors, mostly for their inability to meet the demands of the militant group, became a regular feature.

Superficially speaking, the choice of a Vice-Chancellor was left to the Senate, where there was a Senate, but in reality, the government of the day started pulling strings from behind. In elections to the Senate, money flowed from unknown quarters. This new development brought its own distortion in the procedure of the selection of Vice-Chancellors. All honesty and transparency disappeared and aspirants for the post found themselves engaged in a kind of canvassing and campaigning, of making promises and nursing constituencies, which made them wholly incapable of discharging their duties with detachment and impartiality, when in office. I have heard of a Vice-Chancellor publicly vaunting that he will serve the party that brought him into of-

fee. I have known a successful aspirant for the post, calling on and ingratiating himself with junior-most teachers, chasing them in their home addresses in all parts of the city. The system can produce university leaders only of a certain type and the type can only bring disgrace for all and the institution.

The Government has instituted a one-man Enquiry Commission on the recent incident at Jahangirnagar in which student fury was directed against teachers. The incident by itself is only the tip of the iceberg. Taken in isolation, the whole thing may appear to be a fracas, in which some unidentified youngsters, in a fit of madness, laid hands on their teachers. I have not yet seen the terms of reference for the enquiry. If these are not comprehensive and if these do not require an examination of the causes and the forces that led to this unprecedented confrontation, the purpose of the enquiry will be defeated. I have my own reservation about all, or nearly all, enquiries, including judicial enquiries, especially when these are instituted in response to popular demands. In the present case, people are perplexed about two things: silence about the terms of reference, and the time — three months — given to complete the enquiry. That no arrests have so far been made is also a current topic, a talk of the town.

Maybe, some truth will come out, but the chances are that, true to the fate of most such enquiries, the report will never see the light of the day. Government response to the ugly incident has been tardy, and rather late and feeble in articulation. A grievous wrong has been committed and the general feeling is that the chances of redress are remote. Till now, I have found no reason to question that feeling.

There has also been appeals from senior politicians that the two main forces must join hands to 'safeguard nascent democracy'.

'The spark unleashed by the divisions and confrontation between the country's two main political parties will ultimately engulf the entire country into its flame,' warns Ganesh Man Singh, the ruling party's supreme leader.

'My experience tells me that this fire will not only turn into ashes not only democracy but also the political parties, its leaders and the entire country. The disunity among us will push us to a major disaster,' he said.

Mr Singh warned that the ultimate beneficiaries of such a conflict would be the regressive and revivalist forces out to strangle the newly revived democracy.

But for the communists, who have made impressive gains in terms of organisation, what they plan to do in the next few weeks would be crucial for their own — and democracy's — future.

— Depthnews Asia

PASSING CLOUDS

Zillur Rahman Siddiqui

student wings. The political parties obliged. It meant, for the student organisations, a place in the political set up of the country. Simultaneously, it meant that whatever control the universities had so long been exercising over the students was lost and lost to forces external to the university. With one single stroke of pen, the students were taught to regard, as far as Union activities were concerned, the internal authorities as irrelevant for their purposes, and their external mentors as the only people who mattered.

With this strong political affiliation which the student activities now forged, the Union elections were no longer things within the bounds of the university. They became things of national importance.

treat them with deference. Some Vice-Chancellors sought and got their co-operation with a little loss of their dignity. Laws and rules could be a little flexible in their case. Their special interest was in the admission of students and they soon discovered that there were men in the administrative set up, not excluding the executive head, who were willing to accommodate their special requirements.

This is how, in my view, the rot started. During the years of Ershad autocracy, the policy initiated by Ziaur Rahman was pursued with vigour. Not only that. The degeneration of student politics as subordinate to and subservient national politics brought it a bad name. It came to be associated with indiscipline, interference with admission and examination

Nepal's Communists are Alive and Well

Jan Sharma writes from Kathmandu

The Communist Party of Nepal and smaller Left groups have joined hands to oust the government

WHILE communist regimes have collapsed in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe, the communists in Nepal are strong enough to pull down the social democratic government of Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala.

Although the popularity of Mr Koirala's government is at the lowest, his downfall this soon seems unlikely. The ruling Nepal Congress Party has stood solidly behind the embattled prime minister.

The Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist-Leninist), or UML, and smaller Left groups have joined hands to oust Mr Koirala by taking to the streets to protest of government report on a May 16 road mishap that killed two of their top leaders: general secretary Madav Kumar Bhandari and Jivraj Ashrit.

The report says they were killed in an accident. The UML is not satisfied, suspecting a

foul play. It demanded a fresh investigation by a sitting justice of the Supreme Court.

Mr Koirala rejected the demand, sparking off calls from the UML for a general strike June 25 which spread throughout the weekend, marred by violence and arson. The government says 10 people were killed. UML claims the death toll is as high as 25.

Radical communist factions — including Samyukta Jana Morcha, Masal, Unity Centre and Marxist-Leninist-Maoist — pledged 'active cooperation and support' to the UML.

The pro-UML 'All Nepal National Independent Students' Union warned that any interference by the government in the peaceful movement June 25 would invite great turmoil. It

looks as if the country is without a government', the Nepal Jagaran newspaper reported.

A communist weekly, accusing the government of pushing the country towards civil war, said Kathmandu has turned into a war zone following the June 25 strike. But a pro-government weekly said the agitation was not really under the UML's control.

In what was seen as undermining of the Prime Minister's authority, Home Minister Shere Bahadur Deupa proposed in parliament that there was no reason why the Left demand for

new investigation cannot be met.

Emboldened by the public response, the UML called for a nationwide general strike on July 4. It was a dramatic success, and relatively peaceful partly due to the heavy presence of the security forces.

It was partly because of Mr Koirala's important concession: he bowed down to communist demand to institute fresh inquiry into the May 16 road mishap by a sitting justice of the Supreme Court.

Disenchanted by Mr Koirala's timid leadership, and anticipating bloody violence, most Nepalis stayed home. It paralysed life in the Nepali capital; business was slack.

Despite the concessions, the communists are unlikely to drop their demand for the Prime

Minister to resign. Pradip Nepal, an influential UML member, said his party wants Mr Koirala out although we are not at this stage opposed to the Nepali Congress government.

'As we have been bluffed time and again, we have lost all faith and confidence in the Prime Minister,' said Madhav Kumar Nepal, who has been named the new general secretary of the CPN-UML following Mr Bhandari's death.

'The Prime Minister is in no mood to resign,' asserted a close aide to the embattled prime minister who has secured solid backing from his party.

'The CPN-UML, which is dreaming of unseating the government through street violence, is making a historical mistake,' said the ruling party in a statement.

'We are behind Mr Koirala to the hilt', party president and former prime minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai told Depthnews.

To the Editor...

War against corruption

Sir, The article on corruption by Mr S A M S Kibria published in your daily on 4.7.93 deserves deep appreciation as he has rightly pointed out our indifference to the growing social and political corruption and our failure to check this menace. His suggestion to combat this menace and a set of instances of anti-corruption campaign carried out by South Korean President are noteworthy steps which ought to be emulated by our Government if it sincerely desires to put an end to this vice.

There is no denying the fact that corruption is nothing new to us; it has been flourishing unabated since we got our independence or from before. It is rather sad to note that the elected representatives of our country have so often been incriminated for such practice that the people are gradually losing faith in the political institution. But, on the other hand, we are pleased to hear, when recently some MPs raised that voice, against this menace, and eventual formation of a parliament probe committee by the Speaker bears the testimony that the present parliament is at least putting some show of its credibility and viability.

Moreover, the opposition should feel no elation at the thought that only the government should be saddled with the charges of corruption, and solely for the purpose of creating embarrassment in the ruling circle to rock its power base. There aim should be to bring down the practice of corruption once for all rather than bringing down the government every now and then. In fact, allegations against some opposition MPs as well have surfaced recently. Besides financial scandals, some of them have been implicated in murder cases. If both the Government and the Opposition fail to clean their respective houses of this muck, the people would be impressed by the fact that corruption is a common practice amongst the politicians and consequently the trust reposed in them would fizzle out in no time. The credibility of democracy will then be maligned and the dream of sustaining our democratic institution would not reach the fruition in years to come.

Therefore, the suggestions

put forward by Mr Kibria for adopting some practical means to check the trend of corruption must not be taken as granted. Time has come for both the government and the opposition to unite once more, as they did few years back against the autocracy, to declare all out war against corruption which is eroding the very essence of our morality.

We would also urge our Prime Minister whose integrity is above reproach, as we still bear in memory her relentless and uncompromising fight against 9-year autocratic rule, to step in boldly this time with her resolute stance against corruption and curb this malady whose evil root is eating into our dream of making happy Bangladesh free from social and political vices.

Md Jalaluddin Iqbal
Mohammedpur, Dhaka

Munawar

Sir, I would like to add a few more important facts to the article 'Maker of Social Documentaries and Soap Operas' by Rashed Nizam published in the 11th July issue of your paper. Munawar Shabbir (later Nizam) grew up in Chittagong, where her parents lived from 1948-1971, and was my class fellow in Chittagong College for several years where she studied English Honours upto 1963. She was a soft spoken but a lively girl who took much interest in social work. After the devastating cyclone of 1960 which hit Chittagong, Munawar was the pioneer amongst the girls from our college who worked with us from door to door to collect donations for the affected people.

In Chittagong she was given in marriage to one Rashed Nizam who hailed from that district. However, what really hurts me and her other friends is that the writer withheld these facts that I have mentioned which otherwise would have made us and many others who knew her much proud. Did the writer thought that insignificant names like Chittagong and Chittagong College would not go well side by side with big names like 'Delhi', 'Loretto', 'Darjeeling', 'Shillong', 'Convent of Jesus and Mary', 'Murree', 'LTC College', 'UK, Pakistan TV, etc. etc?

I was surprised to note that the writer also did not mention

anything about Munawar's family. Her parents and host of close relations settled in Chittagong on migration from India and are known and respected, in both social and business circles.

My heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family. May God bless Munawar with eternal peace.

A bereaved friend
Agrabad Commercial Area
Chittagong

Rescue mission to Bosnia

Sir, US double standard policy and Europe's eye washing negotiations on Bosnia is now fully exposed to the astonished people of the world. Their so-called actions are yet to take place. Meantime, the Muslims in Bosnia are being continuously massacred.

The Muslim countries should immediately despatch their naval ships, hospital ships and supply ships to Bosnia for rescue and evacuation mission. As such Bangladesh may immediately send two naval ships, Indonesia five naval ships and supply vessels, Malaysia two naval ships, Iran five naval ships, Saudi Arabia five naval ships, Pakistan five naval and supply ships and one hospital ship without losing a single day to evacuate the Muslims in Bosnia.

If the United States and other European allies could send their naval ships throughout the world for war, why the Muslim nations could not find courage to send their naval ships for rescue operation. Please rush now and see the reaction of double standard policy makers.

S M Nobi
Uttara, Dhaka.

BTV's 'Bolun Dekhi'

Sir, In the 'Jhat-pat' part of the Bolun Dekhi programme of BTV telecast on August 7 after Bengali news, they said that the biggest barrage in India was 'Farrakka' and the biggest city, 'Calcutta'. So far I know these are 'Bhakra Nangal' and 'Bombay' respectively. Which are correct?

Onlvon
North Maishundi, Dhaka.

Ukraine: Return to Russia?

The independence of ex-Soviet republic Ukraine teeters on shaky foundations. Rajiv Tiwari of Inter Press Service reports from Kiev.

EARLIER this year, Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk proposed a new security zone in central and eastern Europe that would fill the vacuum left by the collapse of the Warsaw Pact. His aim was to end Russian domination of his country.

But Ukraine is now shuddering from the effects of withdrawal from its dependence on Russia and few Ukrainians believe the country will be able to stay away from much longer.

No-one can any longer predict what will happen tomorrow, a senior foreign ministry official here said.

When it broke from Russia in 1991, Ukraine saw itself as the France of eastern Europe — a large, and forceful agro-industrial nation. The population totalled 52 million, the country spanned 603, 700 sq km and, until 1991, Ukraine was responsible for 16.5 percent of the Soviet Union's total net production.

Ukraine produced more steel and coal than Britain and France combined. It had the world's largest missile factory and, even today, Kiev can claim the world's third largest stockpile of nuclear warheads.

Under the Kravchuk plan, a new 'zone of stability and security' would be set up, encompassing Ukraine, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia.

The zone would also be an intermediary between the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and former Soviet republics that have signed the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) collective security treaty.

Kravchuk first outlined his scheme in February and he pursued it when he met Hungarian Prime Minister Jozsef Antall in April in the Ukrainian city of Uzhgorod. Both leaders stressed that the zone would not evolve into a military system or alliance and that Russia was welcome to join.

Kravchuk, who has constantly opposed Western attempts to treat Ukraine as a Russian satellite and refused to sign the CIS security pact.

But despite his efforts, Ukraine has yet to establish a separate identity for itself.

According to political analysts here, the reason for this lies as much in mid-19th century European history as in the cold, strategic calculations being made today by the powers that authored the course of the Soviet Union.

Ukraine is wedged into a belt of instability extending down from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. Diplomats sceptical about Kiev's attempts to emerge as a regional power centre say Ukraine is doomed to be a mere pawn on the European chess board.

The country enjoyed a brief period of independence between 1917 and 1920 before it was taken over by Moscow. But its turbulent history has been marked by devastation and discontinuity and division of its lands among foreign conquerors and more powerful neighbours.

'There is an emerging danger to the very notion of Ukrainian nationhood,' said one diplomat here. 'I foresee instability from the Balkans spilling over to this part of the world, which has claims and counter-claims that have not yet been reconciled.'

Instead of the zone of stability which Kravchuk envisages around Ukraine, the areas lying between the former Yugoslavia, the Transcaucasus and Central Asia is riven by territorial and ethnic conflicts.

Meanwhile, Russia has made it clear Ukraine and Belarus fall within its sphere of influence and a number of Russian politicians view the fragile independence of the two Slavic states as a transitional phenomenon.

Ivan Dratch, former leader of the Ukrainian nationalist party RUKH, has said very few Russians are reconciled to Kiev's freedom. 'They can be counted on one's fingers.'

Soviet republic of Belarus abandoned hopes of cutting ties with Russia when, in May, its parliament overrode President Stanislav Shuskevich's objections and signed the CIS security treaty. Kazakhstan and Tajikistan have already signed bilateral defence cooperation accords with Russia.

According to diplomats and even Ukrainian officials, Moscow has, over recent months, displayed a shrewd ability to tie Kiev in knots.

'Look at it any way you want, Russia is here to stay,' said the diplomat. 'Divisions in the Western camp and the retreat by the Americans from leadership in settling the Yugoslavian crisis has resulted in a vacuum which only Moscow can fill.'

Kravchuk first based his programmes on nationalism and rapid market reform, but sources close to his staff say he is now weaning himself away from these policies and is preparing to form his own centrist party.

After attempting a head-on challenge to Russian dominance, Kravchuk's advisers are now adopting a more cautious approach, realising that they cannot cut such strong ties overnight.

In a recent opinion poll, 62 percent of those questioned in the capital, Kiev, favoured a new union with Russia, albeit on more equal terms than before. In the eastern city of Donetsk, the figure was 80 per cent.

'They live with fairy tales,' said a foreign political observer, commenting on the seeming penchant of Ukrainians to harbour grandiose delusions about saviours rescuing them from harm.

First, he said, the West was going to be the princess who kissed the frog, turning it into a prince. Then that dream died. Now, Ukrainians are returning to the original sin: (believing) that their destiny lies in captivity to Russia.