

Recognise NGOs as Development Partners

A code of conduct is said to be in the making for the Non-Government Organisations — better known as NGOs. If the draft code is adopted, NGOs would come to be designated as Private Voluntary Development Organisations or PVDOs. Rather a mouthful, perhaps the new acronym will bring out the characteristics of these organisations more clearly than the earlier nomenclature.

A code of conduct that these organisations would adhere to voluntarily and faithfully is, by far, a better option than the government regulating their operations by fiat. In that sense at least, the latest move should be viewed as a welcome development.

As elsewhere, there had always been social voluntary organisations working in this country. However, the real influx of foreign voluntary organisations came in the wake of the war of liberation. These organisations came to provide succour to millions of people uprooted by the war and to help rebuild roads and bridges, schools and hospitals. Subsequent famines, recurring natural disasters such as floods and cyclones, made them prolong their stay in the country. Side by side, locally sponsored social voluntary organisations kept coming up in fairly large numbers, most of them attracting donations from abroad, direct and indirect, in cash and in kind. With active encouragement from the donor community, all these organisations have been involved in the execution of development work in the countryside. These social voluntary organisations now number twenty thousand. They are said to be rendering service to some fifteen million people in over twenty thousand villages.

Since late seventies, government has been trying to regulate the affairs of the NGOs. However, there is a problem of definition here. By and large, all voluntary organisations prefer to be called NGOs, probably because the name carries a status symbol too. Government's preoccupation, on the other hand, seems to have been mainly with those organisations which are directly funded from abroad, through foreign donations or otherwise. Government brought up new laws, rules and regulations. These provided for compulsory registration of the NGOs and prescribed procedures for obtaining donations from abroad. A separate governmental organisation — NGO Affairs Bureau — was set up to monitor and regulate the activities of these organisations.

Government's ongoing exercise in keeping NGO activities under control has been far from smooth. The NGOs have strongly resented what they see as government interferences. They have called the government's actions high-handed and often have turned to the donor agencies for relief. Generally, the donor agencies have championed the NGOs' cause, leading, at times, to acrimonious debates. At one stage, some of the bilateral donors had even threatened to divert all their aid through the NGOs.

Government's anxiety about NGO activities often spring from the fact that the effectiveness of the latter's programmes are far superior. A growing feeling that NGOs are better in implementing development programmes has also led to demands of less and less bureaucratic control. There are areas where the government should be more understanding. For instance, NGOs work with the people and may feel impelled to voice their grievances. Then again, the government should not lay down the exact blueprint for the NGO project as long as they meet the socio-economic needs of the community. The NGOs, on their part, must not use their organisations for self-aggrandisement. Rather, self-regulation should be their motto. It would also serve the government well to explicitly recognise the NGOs as agents for development and treat them accordingly.

Greece Charts a Difficult Course

The Greek people have reposed their confidence in the leadership of socialist Andreas Papandreu who had to face a trial over a financial scandal and then quit in 1989 after an eight-year stint with the top executive job of that country. Assured of a clear majority, Papandreu's Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) party now has the difficult task of proving itself equal to the expectation it has raised among the Greeks subjected to stringent tight-binding under the rule of Premier Constantine Mitsotakis of the New Democratic Party over the past four years.

Clearly, the PASOK has amply exploited the pains caused by strict austerity measures taken by Mitsotakis's government. But the austerity plan also brought about a few benefits for Greece by cutting state expenditure, reducing taxes, narrowing deficits and lowering inflation to only 12.8 per cent, the lowest in more than a decade. The austerity programme has apparently backfired because of higher unemployment and a sharp fall in the standard of living among middle and working class.

No wonder that PASOK's promise of a stronger economy, a generous welfare programme without asking for any sacrifice from the people has made a big appeal to them and they have not hesitated to re-turn the socialists to power. Greece in that sense is going to be a test case of the battle between the concepts of welfare state and the sweeping privatisation favoured by the proponents of the free market economy. With failing health, Papandreu will have to fight against the current. His party has to its credit the unenviable record of shoving Greece's economy into an all time-high deficit during its tenure between 1981-89 through nationalising sick industries and introducing a lavish national health system.

Greece, after all, is not known for a strong economy and its position within the European Community (EC) fold cannot be greatly enhanced if the socialists revert to the old system in defiance of the common line. Greece, notably, is a recipient of a substantial amount of the recently-created EC dole to ameliorate the less developed regions of the member countries. The task will be even more daunting for Papandreu because of Greece's turn to assume the presidency of the EC from January next. Moreover, Yugoslavia's Macedonia, the political hotbed of Europe, may leave some influences on Greek Macedonia — politically. Yet Papandreu's toughest challenge will be the restoration of Greece's economic health and fulfilling the promises his party has made to the people.

'No Gun, No Defence': Life under the Russian Mafia

Michael Urlocker and Frances Misutka writes from St Petersburg

The rulers of the former Soviet Union long declared their country virtually crime-free. Like many Soviet statistical claims, that was an absurd exaggeration. But compared to the level of violence and corruption in Russian cities today, they were right. Gemini News Service reports on a troubling lawlessness that for many has come to represent freedom.

The world's deadliest cities



buy an apartment and a car.

The main source of revenue for the crime groups are extortion rackets that touch virtually every business dealing in cash, including restaurants, stores, car dealerships and newspaper publishers. Says Zabolotny Vadim, a doctor who runs a pavement kiosk selling medicine outside the Gorkovskaya underground railway station in St Petersburg: "The sense is that if you don't pay, they will burn your kiosk." Charred kiosks around town bear witness to the truth of this belief.

A kilometre away in a working-class block, a Finnish-owned hardware store is protected by an armed guard. Alexei, a moonlighting policeman, admits it seems odd to be guarding paint brushes and plumbing fixtures with a weapon, but explains: "If you don't have a gun, you have no defence."

Although the Russian mafia is growing, it is not as powerful or widespread as some citizens believe. Many Russians are still deeply suspicious of capitalism and the complex financial transactions that accompany business. As a result, a person making money through property sales, currency trading or even through a small business selling beer and cigarettes, is often considered a mafioso, de-

spite the absence of evidence.

Also, many are jealous of those who have succeeded in this unfamiliar era of capitalism. Yuri Nikolaevich, a Mercedes-Benz dealer who sells to businessmen, diplomats and

government agencies, often has to point out that just because someone drives a Mercedes does not mean they are a criminal.

Mike considers perestroika, the period of reconstruction ushered in by former president Mikhail Gorbachev, as the real cause of crime. Although employee theft and bribery were not rare under communism, the Soviet Union's much feared prison system kept more people in line.

Today, police are often seen as either ineffective or as intimidating to the criminals. For example, a shopkeeper says he knows a former KGB agent, with guns, available on call for the ultimate protection. "For \$100 a month, all your dealings with the gangsters are taken care of," he says.

The degree of organised crime, coupled with an

astounding level of apparently random, brutal violence, gives the cities here an aura of lawlessness. Mike describes several recent episodes, widely discussed among his work colleagues. A pedestrian leaned unthinkingly against a mafioso's parked car. For this disrespectful act, the man was taken to the countryside, forced to dig a grave and hanged. Explains Mike: "Maybe the guys who did it were drunk or wanted some fun."

In another case, a small-time gangster was attracting too much attention by shooting people for little or no reason. An order came down from the top and he was killed. "There are no special rules," says Mike.

This grab-and-run attitude is not restricted to organised criminals. The country is being overwhelmed by corruption at all levels. Want to keep your job as waiter at a fancy hotel? The

assistant manager wants \$10 monthly from each employee. Have a couple million worthless pre-1993 roubles that need to be converted to Russia's new banknotes? For a fee, a bank teller will overlook the 100,000 rouble maximum. Hoping to get your daughter into a top university? Forget it, unless you're prepared to pay one million roubles to the administrator.

Comments a Moscow businessman: "The business logic is completely different here. You can't move without paying someone a bribe."

Mike compares the current environment to the United States in the 1920s, when organised crime first took hold there. But in acknowledging the barriers to economic reform in Russia, he says he believes the crime wave will outlast his career. "For at least 50 or 60 years, this will exist," he says, breaking into one of his rare smiles.

Exchange rate: \$1=1,016.28 roubles

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Russia Struggles for its 'Soul and Future'

WASHINGTON What is going on in Russia now is "a struggle for the soul and future of the country," says Strobe Talbott, ambassador-at-large and special adviser to Secretary of State Christopher on the new independent states of the former Soviet Union.

"Basically, it is a struggle between the Soviet communist past and a democratic, free-market, modern form of government," Talbott told the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East October 6.

In a report on recent developments in Russia, particularly the eruption of violence in Moscow on October 3, Talbott made it clear that Russian President Boris Yeltsin has the support of the Clinton administration.

"Do we support President Yeltsin unconditionally?" Subcommittee Chairman Lee

Hamilton (Democrat-Indian) asked during a question-and-answer period.

"Absolutely not," said Talbott, "and I am echoing my boss, Secretary of State Christopher in this regard. Our support is conditioned on Yeltsin's continuing to champion values consistent with American values."

In a prepared statement, Talbott said that Bloody Sunday, October 3, was a day of sadness and anxiety "for all of us" — a day that underscored the struggle going on in Russia.

"On the one side were the forces of the past, of the old Soviet Union and the old Soviet system, which relied on terror, on the threat and use of force," he said.

"In exhorting the armed mobs to attack the Kremlin and the television station, [Vice President Alexander] Rutskoi was sowing his true colors and

those of his more fanatical followers.

"On the other side were the forces of the new Russia, personified by President Yeltsin, committed to democracy, reform, respect for human life, and civic peace, which is a necessary condition for the building of a civil society and respect for civil and human rights," Talbott said.

If the rebel forces had won out, Talbott said, "it would have been a catastrophic turn of events for world peace and for the United States."

Talbott said the weekend violence does not alter US plans to assist Russia in its transition from a command economy to democratic capitalism.

"Our slogan is, business as usual," he said. "We feel we should proceed with our assistance programme."

Asked what had happened to Yeltsin's chief rivals — Rutskoi

and Ruslan Khasbulatov, chairman of the Supreme Soviet — in the wake of the parliamentary rebellion, Talbott said:

"Our expectation is that their fate will be compatible with international norms." (Press reports said the two men remained inside Moscow's Lefortovo Prison.)

What is Yeltsin's immediate challenge? Hamilton asked.

"In the next few days and weeks, his principal task is to restore civil order," said Talbott, adding that he had heard estimates of between 70 and 100 deaths due to sniper fire in Moscow.

"Then, he needs to move ahead briskly with elections because they really are the hope of the future."

Talbott said that Yeltsin has set parliamentary elections for December 11 and has agreed to presidential elections six months later.

— UNIS Feature

Of Accountability in Administration and Other Spheres

by A Z M Shamsul Alam

KING can do no wrong. An ancient king used to ascend the throne and assume royal powers by his own authority. As a king is not elected by the people, he is not accountable to them. If he does any wrong, no court could try him and hold him guilty. Judges were appointed by him. Their tenure of service and remuneration depended on his will.

If a court cannot try a criminal and punish him, it is no use telling that he has done any wrong. If anybody is above law or beyond law there is no gain saying of his doing any wrong.

In a developed and civilized country, people behave in a responsible way. They are accountable to one another and to a series of hierarchies. Wrong doers generally cannot get away with their doings.

In the backward and uncivilized societies, wrong doers are numerous. Though, they are not above law, but they are beyond law. And perhaps like ancient kings, they also can do no wrong! The bureaucrats and public representatives are privileged classes in the poor countries. They can get scot-free and

continue (if they like) doing wrong with impunity. Uncivilized people are also tolerable to the wrong doers, because they themselves very frequently do wrong when they get an opportunity.

Non-accountability is synonymous to backwardness — economic, social, political, religious and otherwise. In the religious sense, every individual will have to give account of the way he spends every single moment of his life on the earth.

Bangladesh is traditionally a land of non-accountability. Of late, it is very much on the increase. And non-accountability and indiscipline are twin sisters.

Overall development is impossible in an environment of non-accountability and indiscipline, though individuals can amass fabulous wealth and get rich quicker than in the most developed societies, where one has to go through the system in order to get rich.

In the west (in developed societies), at the end of the day or week, every person has to give an account of what he has done during the period. The accountability is ensured by su-

perisors with full co-operation of the sub-ordinates. It is beneath one's human dignity to take salary without doing any work. Enjoying financial benefits without corresponding service is considered a culture of the beggars and thieves and dues of the handicapped and the crippled.

In the developing countries, it is neither a disgrace nor shame to take benefit without service by either the top management, or mid level officers or the sub-ordinates.

More than 80 per cent of our development expenditure comes from abroad, either as loan or grants. Senior bureaucrats and public representatives play big role in arranging these loans and grants. As they have already put in their labour in order to arrange these loans and grants, some of them may not have qualms of conscience to enjoy a share of it without further investment of energy and effort. And they may well be imitated by their sub-ordinates. Thus the spirit can percolate down to the bottom and pollute the whole system of bureau-

cracy and democracy.

The rich people take loans from the banks perhaps with the expectation that they may not have to pay whole of it or at least the interest. Some are not made accountable to return the loans or interest. The banks collect small deposits from millions of people. Number of bank accounts in Bangladesh were Tk 25,064 crore 49 lakh on 31.12.91.

If big borrowers are not accountable for their loan conduct and do not repay their loan, depositors suffer. Many rich and private borrowers make wrong investment and default. Besides them, big government owned and autonomous corporations are bigger defaulters. If government corporations with all their resources default and are not accountable for their loan conduct, why the individual borrowers be made accountable, even if they are rich, they can well argue.

Government officers are so well placed and so secure in their jobs that no government can make them accountable for wrong investment they made and that also in compliance with the decisions of the policy makers who are generally public representatives.

We are now-a-days talking about accountability at many levels and spheres. Most of our educated people are not very sure what we mean by it. It is a new concept being imposed on us by the donors of financial aids and grants.

In our administrative heritage, we have words like responsibility, integrity — dutifulness, devotion to duty etc. In the annual confidential reports of the officers, there are evaluation criteria from the point of view of the responsibility, dutifulness etc. But, as we have not developed a tradition of accountability, there is no column of accountability

in the annual confidential forms of officers and employees.

We understand accountability in a way we want to understand. Responsibility, dutifulness are subjective ideas. Accountability is the modern expression of traditional concept like responsibility and dutifulness. Responsibility, dutifulness and accountability have meanings closer to each other with the difference that in accountability, the sense of responsibility and duty are reflected through facts and figures. We may understand what is meant by responsibility and devotion to duty but find it difficult to measure. Accountability can be measured and compared more conveniently, as it is the quantification of devotion to duty and sense of responsibility.

Let there really usher in an age of accountability. That alone can relieve us of many pains.

OPINION

'Taka Convertibility: Bane or Boon'

I greatly appreciate The Daily Star's pioneering effort to highlight economic liberalisation issues and concepts through various write-ups by experts, their long interviews and, very recently, The Daily Star Round Table discussion on Taka convertibility — however conservative in outlook the participants seemed to be.

It is my conviction that, our prosperity, individual sovereignty and individual liberty, are directly linked to massive deregulation of the government-controlled economy. Financial deregulation should mean complete 'Free flow of capital' in all accounts — trade, services or in capital accounts. Money earned by the citizens (export or others) cannot be kept by the government authorities other than the deduction of taxes which also cannot be more than the proportion of services rendered to the citizens e. g. law and order, fair judicial system, flood protection, roads etc.

It is the market mechanism and not the bureaucracy which can generate 'inflow of capital' or halt 'capital outflows' and, it is sooner the better that, the government moves away from meddling into the free inflow and outflow of capital, other than the control of inflation — the sole work of the Central Bank, independent of political control such as the Finance Ministry.

An open market based economy is simple to understand and, complexities are the byproduct of government bureaucracies and their stubborn system of control and regulations. The lengthy details of

convertibility, the confusion, the multi-interpretations of regulations etc, as we understand by The Daily Star's marvellous coverage of the round table party, proves a fact that, bureaucracy is hardly the institution to reform the economy. Moreover, all The Daily Star readers are not the government friendly entrepreneurs having easy access to powerful government functionaries to sort out day to day regulator complexities. As the general people, we want The Daily Star to champion the cause of individual liberty and a liberal payment system which the process of liberalisation and deregulation is supposed to attain.

If the general people and not just some of them like the students, patients or traders, are better off with deregulation only then, it is possible that an economic climate can usher in for sustained inflows of foreign capital and for capital accumulation within the country. With full convertibility and abolition of the foreign exchange regulatory act, patients unable to fly abroad could avail the service of foreign medical experts in Bangladesh brought in by entrepreneurs — as payment in foreign currency to those experts, will not be a regulatory problem. With liberal payment system, students, traders, consumers and the whole economy would be much benefited; it would be better, cheaper and efficient for ready investments and accumulation of national wealth.

Nizam Ahmad Bara Maghbazar, Dhaka

'A Thespian Not Meant for ...'

Sir, On reading Mr G A Momin's excellent piece on late Bashant Guhathakurta (DS Weekend Magazine, October 08) I felt so moved that I drafted a full page letter to express my appreciation and gratitude. Then I remembered Tagore's words (You said so much without saying a word" — my poor translation) and decided upon the following lines. I request you, Sir, to kindly print them.

Thank you Mr Momin. Your remark for Bashant Guhathakurta was superb, illuminating and humane. It is nice of you to share your noble feelings with us.

I thank The Daily Star also for carrying such a beautiful piece.

M Imdadul Haque Associate Prof., Dept of Sociology, Dhaka University

Divisional headquarters

Sir, This refers to the letter of Mr Md Abdus Sattar Molla, SME, IER, DU published on the above subject in your esteemed daily of 26th September. The learned correspondent may kindly admit that after the end of autocratic rule and establishment of democracy in our country, a great awareness-conscience-awakening is slowly and gradually emerging among our people irrespective of rich or poor, illiterate or literate and upper class or middle class with regard to need for improving their standard of living, alleviation of poverty, es-

tablishment of rule of law, smooth and efficient administration, accountability and transparency in the government and human rights.

Fulfillment of all the wishes of the people at a time is not possible single handedly. At the same time neither the feelings of the people be hurt nor they may be discouraged for their legitimate demands.

We are, therefore, collectively required to identify their demands and wishes and try to fulfill those on priority basis one by one.

The imperative need of the hour is to implement a 'meaningful, workable and concrete administrative reform' in our country. This is because the people are fed up with the old and existing system of administration which is indeed outdated, inefficient and even corrupted and entails wastage of public money having no use to the people. Under the existing administrative system and procedure and services in various government offices and public sector corporations it is only the officers and the employees who are benefited and the woes and sufferings of the people simply know no bounds.

As regards the question whether the MPs and Ministers are more honest than the secretaries, DCs, government employees etc, the answer is 'No'. So we need an administrative reform in the country first on top priority basis wherein all the public leaders and the public servants should be made accountable and responsible for all their deeds and performances. Regarding creation of

new divisions I once again oppose it pending implementation of the much needed reform.

O H Kabir Dhaka-1203

Farakka Barrage

Sir, I congratulate the honourable Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia for taking up the issue of Farakka Barrage, in her address, at the UN General Assembly on 1st October 1993. This is the first time the issue has been officially raised in an international forum. The Prime Minister has rightly spelled out that the sharing of water of the Ganges has become a life and death question for the people of Bangladesh. Due to creation of obstruction on free flow of water a vast area of northern Bangladesh is experiencing adverse environmental condition causing various problems to the people, animals and vegetation. We appeal to the world bodies to send team of experts during the lean period to see, on the spot, the worst condition of the river.

The people of Bangladesh rightly claim the due share of their water. They do not claim any mercy. I hope all the participating members of the UNGA who have listened to the address of our Prime Minister will really appreciate the problem and will convince our neighbouring country to give us the right share of water at the earliest. Bangladesh has tried its best to solve the issue bilaterally but she could not get the right share of water although that had been assured several times at the discussion table.

The Prime Minister, finding no other alternative, had to raise the issue at the right forum. We thank again the Prime Minister for her bold step.

Mahbubul Haque Chowdhury Sonali Bank, Dhaka

"Carrying gas to Lungla"

Sir, I have been an enthusiastic reader of The Daily Star ever since it was launched. Its news coverage and editorial comments are bold and straight forward and at times critical of the affairs that go wrong in the state craft. The government in power will do better and will surely win the confidence of the nation by taking cues from the editorial comments that this paper has been pouring out day in and day out.

Your editorial dated 3.1.93 on "Carrying Gas to Lungla" was very timely and would definitely give a sense of direction to the authorities handling gas. However, while going through the editorial I got baffled to see the use of the preposition "on" after the word "persist" and I wonder if this conforms to the rules of English grammar.

Let us hope that The Daily Star with its uncompromising style of flashing the national news, regardless of government reaction, and illuminating editorials will be able to kindle hopes in people and generate a spate of activities in the government in power.

A U Khan Engg University, Dhaka

The preposition after 'persist' should be 'in'. The inadvertence is regretted.

— Editor