

## The Literacy Utopia

Education Minister Jamiruddin Sircar has said on Saturday in Rajshahi that government was firm to eradicate illiteracy from the nation by the year 2000. How, we do not know. We do not know because we are pretty sure the government as well is equally ignorant about how to work this miracle. In a celebrated short story by Manik Bandyopadhyay the protagonist promises a miracle — that he would die, a hail and hearty jolly good fellow, at a certain moment on a certain day. As the promised hour approached how the fellow started praying for and putting all his mind to the impossible task of dying sheerly by wishing to die — and on schedule — something that the mythical Bhishma could not. However, his hyper-cerebration helped him keep his appointment with death. We do not wish Mr Sircar to commit himself so much to working his own miracle. It is very unlikely that he would continue to be our education minister till 2000 AD and would be available for explanations as to why his promise was not kept, or to believe in a contrary scenario, to celebrate him as a national hero. How many times the government, mostly through their ministers, have expressed their firm resolve to attain universal health care and literacy etc. etc. — all by the haloed year 2000? This they do as going through a picked piece of slogan very unwisely set into circulation by this or that UN agency. The ministers should have gone about those with ultimate achievements as the men of the worldly way as they very much are. They should have asked themselves before harping endlessly on this 'by 2000' tune so very unmeaningly were they indeed very badly expected by their constituency to go to such absurd levels of promise making.

The funny side of the question lies in the fact that affirmations of firm government resolve to build a paradise by 2000 are still being made when the government as a whole has already woken up sufficiently to the unachievability of the target. All technically competent people — there are myriads in the government of such — know that as things are moving — relating to the population as well as the literacy figure — this nation would not need six — the time left for reaching 2000 — and not even sixty, but at least three hundred and sixty years to have a universally literate society. When education is Mr Sircar's supreme care at the moment he had no business whatever to talk so irresponsibly about literacy.

Is the outlook so very bleak indeed? Not at all, outside the pale of government's absolutely non-monitored brick-and-mortar-and-wages primary education exertions, the BRAC schools are doing meaningful work on a very great scale and the GSS schools are fast picking up on them — and in some areas of quality and social acceptability factors, the latter is making remarkable strides. Universal literacy in Bangladesh must of necessity be very largely non-formal and participatory of the society and of the nature of social work. The political parties with their reach extending to grassroots were best qualified to work the literacy miracle. But they have yet to show any interest in the matter. The NGOs are bearing the burden that was theirs. And the NGOs are doing something more, something of the utmost importance to the society. They are initiating as best as they can the rural masses into the end-products of literacy and education, namely, confidence and innovativeness and self-reliance.

By the way, how is the government helping the NGOs to wider their literacy net? There is no news yet from the interior of how government is handling burning of BRAC schools. If government mean to spread literacy real fast they should give up their present coolness towards the NGOs and in fact go to them and learn more than a thing or two.

## Despicable Choice for Girls

The world's oldest trade was never quite healthy anywhere. But it has become particularly pitiable in countries like Bangladesh in recent times. According to Manabdhikar Sangstha, the number of prostitutes in the country is about one lakh — 29,000 of them below the age of 16. The total number is ten times more than the government figure. The problem has become all the more complex due to the rise in the number of floating prostitutes in cities and towns. About 21,000 such women and girls are peddling sex in areas not meant for the purpose and thus vitiating the social environment.

That the flesh trade continues unabated shows how sick our society is. But it also reveals the defects in our system. The nature of defect has taken a very serious turn in recent times simply because women and under-aged girls in an increasing number are forced into the oldest of professions. That it has become a profession taken no more by choice makes it clear how much clandestine and organised exercise goes into the process of humiliation of women. The research survey conducted by Manabdhikar Sangstha found that 48 per cent of the under-aged and young girls have been subject to inhuman oppression and cruelty before they submitted themselves to the degradation.

Another important point is that 93 per cent of these young girls have come from villages. This points to two things: first, there are professional pimps who maintain liaison with the brothels for procuring such girls mostly offering baits of lucrative service; second, the girls can be easily swayed to swallow the baits, taking the advantage of their wretched economic and social status. Sometimes the parents sell their daughters. Broken marriages and betrayal by lovers also prove to be a deciding factor for the girls to opt for the worst of professions. They are driven to such desperation that they find no other alternative other than selling their bodies.

Now one thing that often escapes our attention is that there are demands for such girls and their male clients account for several times the number of girls and women in the trade. As long as the male dominated society is so preoccupied with sex, women will be made their unwilling and unfortunate victims. In a male-biased society it is bound to happen. So what is the way out? The solution perhaps lies in educating women and making them economically strong. This means that they must be gainfully employed for averting the undue exploitation. A tall order no doubt, but it has to be done. The fundamentalists are trying to oppose such empowerment of women for their own reasons. The government has to be strict in dealing with this heinous attempt.

WITH his 1994/95 Budget Mr Saifur Rahman has presented his sixth budget, as he mentions, in his ministerial capacity for about eight and a half years in the two BNP governments and, I am sure, there are many people who would like to congratulate the Finance Minister for this personal triumph of his. I feel that Mr Saifur Rahman also deserves to be credited for a number of other achievements. The tax-GDP ratio has taken a healthy upturn, as is the allocation of expenditure on the education sector. It also appears that he is genuine in his declaration of gradually raising the domestic contribution in the development budget (35.8% of ADP in 1993/94) and, given that since 1990/91 the domestic component of ADP financing has increased four and a half times, the achievement is indeed praiseworthy.

By reading the Budget one feels that Mr Saifur Rahman really likes to be judged by his achievements of macro stability. He has brought down inflation to 2% from 9% in 1990/91 (whether such a tight monetary policy is very good for a developing country like Bangladesh is, of course, another issue). The deficit in the Current Account Balance of Payments (expected to fall to

1.5% of GDP by the end of this year from 4% in 1990/91) is down and there exists healthy foreign exchange reserves (equivalent to over seven-months of import).

The Budget conveys a strong desire on the part of the Finance Minister to take the country out of the vicious circle of poverty or, as he has recently put it elsewhere, 'to make a dent on the poverty.' This he wants to achieve by raising 'the growth rate of GDP to 6-7% in the near term while aiming at a double-digit growth before the turn of the century'. However, there are many people who have already started questioning the pragmatism of the Finance Minister's claim. Does he really hope to obtain an extra 2% growth rate from an increase of investment of only 1.5%, i.e. from 14.5% to 16.0%?

Assuming that the ICOR (incremental capital-output ratio) remains at the present level of 3.2, he will be lucky if he gets even a full 5% growth in GDP during 1994/95. (The exact figure is 4.97%) If he really wants to achieve a growth rate of, say 6.5%, what he needs is an investment of 21% of GDP, which is definitely unrealistic, given the prospect of growth of domestic savings and the objective,

as categorically stated by the Finance Minister, of self-reliance where the domestic efforts will feature 38% of the ADP in 1994/95. By the same token, his aim to achieve 'a double-digit growth rate before the turn of the century' implies an investment rate of 32% of GDP which, to some, is a wishful thinking especially as it will necessitate more than doubling the investment-GDP ratio in a matter of less than six years. We would, of course, like him to succeed, but can he?

It is true that a drastic improvement in the efficiency of investment can help the nation to achieve a double-digit GDP growth rate with less than the investment figure of 32% of GDP. An important requirement, what the Finance Minister prefers to call, is 'good governance' which he admits is 'synonymous with a sound development administration'. He defines it as 'a lean, efficient and effective administration that delivers policies and commitments'.

Borrowing a terminology from the computer people, he would even like the administration to be 'user-friendly' which can 'meet the challenges of the fast-moving

world".

Many people are also sceptical about Mr Saifur Rahman's full trust in the liberalisation strategy for sustained economic development. If the emphasis on the market mechanism is rooted to his thinking that 'bad market' is better than 'bad government', there are many people, who will agree with him. This point needs to be emphasised. It is apparent that, with democracy, the time has come to put the things very clearly to the public. It needs to be told that the type of government role which we have seen in many other developing countries including Bangladesh has led to the enrichment of a few at the cost of the many, thanks largely to government patronage. In the case of Bangladesh, Mr Saifur Rahman is very vocal: 'The ordinary millions of our countrymen who are unheard, unnoticed and unsung; yet, they are the ones whose tax payments fund the good life of the privileged few.' He is, however, hesitant to put it categorically that this is 'bad government'.

One obviously does not leave the things completely on the doorsteps of the 'bad market' and I believe that Mr Saifur Rahman is also aware of the

deficiencies of the market mechanism. Indeed, in his 1993/94 Budget speech he was much more categorical as, when explaining the government's industrial policy, he stated that it was aimed at transforming the 'restrictive and anti-export biased trading system to a transparent and open one that would promote efficient industries, both export-oriented and import substituting' (emphasis added). Unfortunately, in his 1994/95 Budget Speech it appears that there is a shift in his commitment. Of course, it is not clear whether he wants to mean that liberal trade policies alone are adequate to achieve economic development or, for that matter, industrialisation.

The blatant liberalisation standpoint, as advocated by the World Bank and the IMF, fails to emphasise (or, according to some, even to recognise) market failures in developing countries. The imperfections in the market system (including trade-relationship with the developed world) experienced by the developing countries like Bangladesh have, for long, been strongly advocated by economists such as prebisch, seers and singer and, I supposed it is natural expectation that a powerful

document such as the Annual Budget of a country like Bangladesh needs to be formulated in that light. This is particularly imperative as all countries which have done well (not only the late industrialisers such as South Korea but also the early industrialisers like Britain, Germany, France and the USA) have clearly recognised the role of the state, I mean a supportive role, as distinguished from an obstructionist role, of the state. Mr Saifur Rahman will indeed get our heartiest congratulations when he comes forward with that viewpoint, clearly stated.

With his long years of experience and his strong commitment to national development, I believe that Mr Saifur Rahman is one of the right persons to mould the public opinion in the right direction, with a very clear message. As to many, including the present author, that clear message is missing in the 1994/95 Budget, so for the time being I am afraid our congratulations to the Finance Minister are going to be qualified.

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"WE have to deal with fighting and shelling... the occasional bodies along the roads we drive: they have, identities for us: we saw them when they were relatively newly dead and we have witnessed their gradual decay."

"One of them was bloated from the rotting process and has gradually day to day lost body parts to the night time scavenging of packs of dogs. It is a waist and one leg now.... If you could stop and bury he corpse it might make our travels easier, but is in no man's land and none of us wishes to join the woman who once occupied the body." These excerpts from an official report from the United Nations in Rwanda capital Kigali indicate the grimness of the situation.

Every day, Rwandans and relief workers in Kigali helplessly watch bodies decay in the 'killing fields' of Rwanda. And almost with total indifference, the international community has watched killings turn into systematic genocidal massacres. As the world wrings its hands, a fragile nation state is crumbling, resulting in immense human suffering.

Previous ethnic wars in Rwanda were largely in the northern provinces but today genocide covers the breadth and width of the tiny central African country.

Relief agencies estimate that up to 500,000 civilians have been butchered since the wind of death started blowing over Rwanda on April 6. Most of the victims were minority Tutsi civilians, along with some majority Hutu politicians and intellectuals who were suspected of sympathising with Tutsis. The final toll may never be known; no one is there to keep the count.

International agencies can account for only 40,000 people in Kigali, once populated by 300,000. The question boggling the minds of relief work-

ers is: where is the rest of the capital's population?

And what relief officials hardly talk about is the plight of foreigners still trapped inside Kigali. While Western countries were quick to evacuate their nationals including pets, some 15,000 people from Uganda, Zaire and India (simply referred to as 'third

country nationals') were abandoned.

The tragedy has spilled over into neighbouring states as thousands of Rwandans flee the blades and guns of their attackers. Nearly 500,000 have fled to seek safe havens in Tanzania, Uganda, Burundi and Zaire.

Images of horror and agony

## Behind the Killing Fields of Rwanda

Francis Mwanza writes from Rusomo, Tanzania

Rwanda has seen some of the worst violence in recent years. Within two weeks in April an estimated half a million people are believed to have died. Many more have been displaced. Thousands are living in refugee camps in neighbouring countries. As the international community dithers, the people are still fleeing. Gemini News Service examines the background to the carnage.

## Fleeing genocide



are tormenting Tanzanians and Ugandans as hacked and bloated bodies of children, women and men are washed down the Akagera river into Lake Victoria.

More than 290,000 refugees are huddled in Benako in Tanzania in what is the world's largest makeshift refugee camp. The daily influx into Tanzania continues at a rate of between 3,000 and 4,000 people. The refugees have ravaged farms of local populations near the camp, and pose an environmental nightmare as they cut trees, shrubs and grass for fuel and shelter.

They are the victims of a conflict which has a long history. Since colonial times, the Tutsi and the Hutu have been locked in ethnic animosity, erupting frequently into terrible violence that has claimed millions of lives.

With a population of 7.5 million, Rwanda is one of Africa's most densely populated countries. The Hutus make up about 85 per cent of the population; the Tutsi 14 per cent; and the Twa, less than one per cent.

A pygmyoid people, the Twa were the first human inhabitants of Rwanda. In the fourth and seventh century, a Bantu people known as the Mutu, mainly agriculturists, settled in Rwanda.

The Tutsi — often taller than the Hutus, with fairer skin and elongated features — swept in from the north several centuries later. Exactly where the Tutsis came from

has been a subject of debate. Traditionally pastoralists, they are said to be related to the Galla people of southern Ethiopia.

Beyond the obvious protagonists — Hutu-dominated army and the militia on one side and the Tutsi-dominated Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) on the other — Rwanda's tragedy also has key foreign players: France, Belgium, Zaire and Uganda.

France, sympathetic to the hardline Hutu clique that dominated the government of assassinated president Juvenal Habyarimana, has been a main arm supplier. Over the past five years it has sold artillery guns, a wide range of armoured cars, personnel carriers and Gazelle helicopters.

It also trained Rwandan troops. France became the major military partner after Belgium cut off all military aid to Kigali in 1990. During the February 1993 military offensive, the RPF came within 30 km of the capital and were halted by French troops.

France's ally Zaire too has supplied arms to the government. Other major suppliers include Egypt and South Africa. Zairean troops have carried out operations against RPF.

Rwanda was first colonised by the Germans. Belgium assumed control of what was then known as Rwanda-Urundi (or Rwanda-Burundi) after the defeat of Germany in the First World War.

He Belgians favoured Tutsis,

giving them education and jobs in the civil service. The Belgian support for Tutsis has apparently continued: the RPF has an office in Brussels.

The Hutu population languished as subsistence farmers. The Hutu rose up against the Tutsi when Belgians gave up power in 1959, massacring thousands and driving up to 500,000 from the country. Most fled into Uganda.

A rebel movement was fostered by Tutsi exiles in Uganda in the 1980s. Guerrilla leader Yoweri Museveni, then head of the National Resistance Army, recruited Tutsi refugees to fight against Milton Obote's dictatorship in Uganda.

After Museveni took power in 1986, he supported the Tutsis in their fight to regain their homeland. A US trained commander Paul Kagame brought together a force of 12,000 men, women and boys.

The invasions from Uganda into Rwanda by Tutsi refugees fuelled the anti-Tutsi 'movement' inside Rwanda. In the new wave of carnage, soldiers from Burundi's Tutsi-dominated army marched into Rwanda to protect fellow tribe people from attack by Hutu-dominated army and militia.

Tanzania mediated in the lengthy negotiations for a way out of the ethnic impasse. Tanzania, whose army helped root out the notorious Idi Amin from Uganda, is however reluctant to send its troops into Rwanda.

Meanwhile, the UN continues to write reports about the ongoing carnage: "... a new body, a woman killed in the fighting a couple of nights ago, has replaced it as the main sight along the road from UNAMIR Headquarters (in Kigali) to the airport. Her body is still fairly whole, but the decay is advancing."

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## To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

## Boycott of Parliament

Sir, All opposition parties led by main opposition party, Awami League, have been boycotting the parliament continuously demanding next election to be held under a caretaker government. It was reported when the Constitution underwent amendment from the presidential to parliamentary form, the question of caretaker government was raised by some smaller parties, but was opposed by both BNP and AL. Therefore, the question was dropped.

We had a caretaker government headed by a Chief Justice in the past under special circumstances and election was held under that caretaker government. But a major political party was not satisfied in the way the caretaker government conducted the election and did not accept the result wholeheartedly. Thus, we fail to understand why the same party is again demanding to install a caretaker government to conduct election.

To enhance their demand, now the main opposition, AL, did not hesitate to collaborate with Jatiya Party and Jammat whose anti-people role in the

past was not unknown to them and the people.

The continuous boycott of parliamentary sessions is quite unprecedented, hardly experienced in the history of any parliamentary democracy. People have elected their representatives to parliament to speak for their demands and their grievances on the floor of the parliament, not to remain outside or boycott the parliamentary proceedings continuously.

It is also interesting to hear that abstaining parliament members are regularly drawing the emoluments without discharging their functions in the parliament. This appears to be very much an opportunistic attitude.

As far we understand, government is not responsible for conducting election. Election Commission conducts the election. So, every effort should be directed to make the EC more effective and independent in every manner to ensure a fair and impartial electoral process.

The main opposition party should act with more caution and responsibility. They should not be swayed with cheap slogans and demands. They also

should not try to make a non-issue into an issue, because they will have to face similar situations when they are voted to power.

In this connection the statement of Dr Kamal Hossain appeared in the dailies on 25.6.94 seems timely, correct and sensible.

As a member of the neutral public, we are only interested to see healthy growth of a sound democratic practice on which the image of the country and economic progress are largely depended.

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## Caretaker Govt issue

Sir, The present demand for holding next general elections under the supervision of a caretaker government, has obliged the learned citizens to pass their opinions on the issue through the print media.

But my question is — who will be benefited if the election is held under a caretaker government? Would the members of the general public receive any benefit if a new government comes to power after winning elections under a caretaker government? I am really doubtful about this.

As a common citizen, I would sincerely suggest those arguing for election under a caretaker government to make commitments pertaining to their future activities for ensuring welfare of the common people as well as of the coun-

try. For instance, what sort of budget would they present to the nation? How would they reorganize the administration and contain corruption and remove the tradition of enjoying duty-free luxury cars by the ministers and MPs of a country like Bangladesh where majority people cannot even enjoy one balanced meal?

I am afraid, perhaps we are taking more time in determining who is to govern this poor country and what would be the modus operandi for governance etc. But till then we would be exhausted of our meagre resources and external enemies might take chance to destroy our hard earned independence.

What is badly needed is the development of moral standard in every one of ourselves!

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## Sports or Sportsman: Who is bigger?

Sir, The news that has penetrated even the most unlikely mind around the world is Diego Maradona's banishment from the greatest show on earth, 'The World Cup '94'. The man hailed by many as the greatest player since Pele has once again faltered if not willingly and entangled himself in the most vile controversy of all, 'doping'. By virtue of modern communication facilities like the Satellite TV every one seems to know the alleged circumstances, details that are surrounding the controversy. The newspaper industry of

Bangladesh is not also too far behind with front page stories splashing on all leading dailies of the country. However, the thing that has really struck most of the neutral observers is an attempt by some of our sportswriters in the country, to find a very careful if not motivated conspiracy by FIFA who is headed by a Brazilian, the eternal rival of Argentine supremacy in the football world. I am of course referring to a piece published in a vernacular daily where the writer while describing the anguish and frustration of Argentine fans in Bangladesh goes a long way to find a sinister Brazilian motive to shun Maradona out of the World Cup. The writer quite surprisingly fails to dwell on the man in question himself which would have put some facts, painful but simple as they are, into the readers' eyes. For instance, Maradona as a sportsman, never commanded a clean sheet against his activities whatsoever. After all, isn't he the player who faked a goal against England by calling the incident as 'Hand of God' in the 1986 World Cup? Didn't he repeat the same tactic while saving a possible goal against the then USSR in the 1990 World Cup? Drug abuse too is not a very alien thing to Maradona who only a year ago completed a 15 months ban for using and possessing Cocaine. This is the man who shot at the journalists hovering around his house with an airgun. Any one who had followed these incidents would have written him off as a spoiled hero who caused his

own destruction. The fact that he managed to make a comeback at the USA is quite an achievement itself. Maradona should have realized that he was already a target man for the authorities because of his recent misdeeds and one more false and careless step would be suicidal. He was walking a tightrope and nobody knew it better than him. Yet he did the inevitable and paid the price. This is simply a case where a sportsman thought of himself greater than the game. He just followed the undistinguished line of Ben Johnson and Catherina Krabbe and many others.

Unfortunately we do not seem to realize these facts and join the bandwagon of driving a wedge and witch hunting. Maradona's case has not only taken the gloss away from the World Cup but has put the entire future of all soccer players into a quandary. Argentina for instance, may never recover from this shock and nor will their millions of fans all over the world while concocting misleading stories is not the solution either. The writer in question will be better advised to dwell on how the shell-shocked team and its fans should handle the crisis, if there is any of course, rather than spending his time gathering theories which not only distort the truth but create confusion among people for whom the game is still greater than any of its exponents.

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