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Dhaka, Saturday, July 23, 1994

Traffic Tangle Highlighting the city's increasingly deteriorating traffic situation, two reports published in this newspaper on Thursday and Friday, point to the acute shortages of traffic police - one for every five hundred vehicles; the fast rise of vehicular traffic; and finally, of the street vendors who occupy the pavements, and a portion of the roads, causing serious obstruction to smooth flow of traffic. The third report published today, how-

According to the reports, there are more than five lakh vehicles - both motorised and non-motorised — that ply on the 2,231 km of city roads, at an average rate of 246 automobiles per minute, at city centres. All the three above mentioned factors are very important. In fact, independently any one of them is sufficient to cause serious trafthe problems in the city. Collectively, they pose a very difficult challenge, which is growing more difficult by the minute.

ever, deals with some expert suggestions.

We could, no doubt, use some extra hands as traffic police. But what about the ones who are on board now. From the look of it, most traffic police seem to have no clue about how to manage traffic on the streets. If they do receive any training alter recrimment, then they do a very good job of hiding it while on duty. There is an obvious lack of motivation. But on their side, the point must be made that there is too much pressure on the roads for one traffic police to manage. If the total traffic was motorised then the problem could have been better tackled. But given the fact that there are several types of non-motorised vehicles - rickshaws, rickshaw vans, push carts etc. each with varying road speed, it makes the task of traffic control almost impossible.

Growing number of vehicles on the street is a problem that has been created by sheer neglect. The rise in the number of motorised vehicles, especially trucks and buses, is something that we should encourage. Dhaka still does not have a taxi service, which we must introduce without any further delay. But its introduction will further complicate the traffic situation. Where the authority's neglect is really unforgiveable is the allowing of uncontrolled growth of rickshaws in the city. There cannot be any question of removing them from the street as they provide employment to hundreds of thousands of the unemployed. But on the other hand, there cannot be any question either of allowing their limitless growth in a city that has so very limited road space. The single most important factor for traffic clog in the city is the unbridled growth of rickshaws.

The problems of street vendors occupying a sizeable part of our roads is, in our view, the second most important cause of the traffic mess. The worrisome aspect of this problem is that a network of vested interest group has grown up as a beneficiary — local hoodlums, extortionists and the local police. In mutual connivance these groups 'occupy' the sidewalks and then 'rent' out the same to the street vendors. It was first only the pavements, but gradually these groups are inching into the road itself. And they are becoming more and more powerful.

All these have happened primarily because the city authorities either did not want to manage the situation, or benefitted from the chaos, or looked the other way because of political gains. This shortsighted and myopic view of the situation has already brought the present traffic chaos upon us. Frankly, the daily traffic jumble in our city centres acts as a serious threat to foreign companies thorities to waste no further time in taking a serious look at the traffic situation and arrive at both a short term and a long term policy to tackle this growing problem.

Faculty for Free Thinking

Bravo Dr Moin. While speaking at the concluding ceremony of a six-week training course for college teachers at the National University (NU) on Thursday, the State Minister for Planning said something which is simultaneously thrilling and a bit confusing. He suggested that the NU should set up a separate faculty for free thinking. We were under the impression that any university as a whole is a place for free thinking. With a separate faculty for it, will it not imply that the rest of the university does not do any free thinking?

That is the confusing part. But there is an extremely thrilling side to his suggestion. While a section of our society, though extremely small, is demanding blasphemy law to control our thought process, for the minister to call for the establishment of a faculty for free thinking is a matter of courage indeed. Yes, we fully endorse Dr Moin's proposition for such a faculty, and heartily congratulate him for having made such a suggestion. As a nation we seem to have become oblivious of the need for free thinking. We seem to forget the history of other nations who have forged ahead only because they allowed free thinking to have its sway. We seem to have forgotten our own history, which clearly shows that our excellence came, though in some limited fields, only when no restriction on thought was the order of the day, Islam's own rise is linked with its liberalis.n. openness, interaction with other cultures and philosophies of the day, and its tolerance of diverse thoughts. Let us not forget that the Greek philosophical treasures came to Europe during the renaissance via the Islamic civilisation. It was the Arabic translations of Socrates, Plato and other Greek thinkers that formed the bulk of the thought-base, for the Europe's intellectual revolution, following the so-called 'Dark Ages'.

There are too many subtle forms of censorship in Bangladesh. First, and the most threatening, is the one based on what we would like call a very narrow interpretation of our religion. It is very clear that some groups are making crude use of the religious sentiment of our people, to resist thinking. Then, we also face subtle, but definite, political censorship in our day to day thinking. Each political party has its own view of history and of the heros in it. They severely discourage free thinking in their midst in the name of loyalty and party discipline. Then there is of course the so-called official line in our thinking. The whole state media is used to promote the ruling party

view-points and curtail the points of view of others. Under such circumstances, the suggestion of Dr Moin is most welcome. We urge the intellectual community, especially the university teachers, to push forward this idea with total sincerity and devotion. Without the flourishing of interfectual freedom, and the unquestioned right to absolute free thinking and free speech, we will not be able to release the latent creativity of our people, which is a precondition for our overcoming the current moral and ethical bankruptcy.

Sustainable Development: Some Conceptual Issues

TOTWITHSTANDING hazardous definition of sus tainable development (SD), the world seems to have accepted it as a common goal and been driven to that end. SD requires, inter alia, that there should be greater concern for environment through a care for its quality, a protection to its growth and making the use of the stock of natural resources with concern for the future. The need for protection of environment is perhaps more pervasive in developing countries now than ever. Available evidence tends to show that air pollution in many metropolis of developing countries exceed the WHO standards by a respectable margin. The wrecks from water pollution, falling ground water tables, soil erosion salination and water logging are widely reported in many of the developing countries with concerns of astounding heights. Dr Kirit Parikh of the Indira Gandhi Institute de livered a lecture on the above issue during 14-16 July 1994. in Dhaka. The following note to mostly on exception from that lecture.

Environment and Externalities

By and large, as we are aware, environmental problems seem to sound much due mainly to their externalities. For example, the smokes generated by a firm that pollutes environment and make others sick, never shows up in firm's profit and loss account. Again, a farmer might misuse fertilizer that goes to pollute ground water and neighbouring water body but the said farmer does not pay for the loss so incurred. The exports of logs and the use of firewood by cutting trees have immense economic benefits but its environmental costs are hardly accounted for as there is no penalty for this act or no incentive to be different. It is said that environment belongs

to all and therefore it belongs

to none. Many environmental problems emanate from the fact that there is hardly any well defined property rights over environmental resources. Suppose village X has a pasture to support 200 animals. If less than 200 animals graze on that pasture, then a priori, there should not be any stress. However, the growth of priori there should not be any s tress. However, the growth of population or the increased demand for milk might lead to a rise in the number of animals and thus upset the equation of demand for grazing land and the supply of it. To avoid degradation, it would be necessary to allow each family to have the right to keep 200 aninials. But bear in mind, even a well defined property rights may not guarantee environmental protection. For example, farmers who own their lands often follow practices that degrade it due possibly to poverty and ignorance. Again, the monopolistic ownership of resources can also lead to the misuse from society's point of view. In this case what is needed is not just a well-defined but an appropriate propcrty rights with the proviso that such rights are enforceable and secure.

Policy Objectives

The objectives of policies relating to environment should address these externalities and ill defined property fights that lead to environmental problems. Policies should internalize these externalities so that environmental costs of one's actions are borne by one. Tax policies can play a vital role in this respect. Stipulation of acceptable emission standards for industries, allocation of tradeable quota etc. could be other options.

If developing countries were to reduce 1000t of carbon emission, what would that mean? It can be done in alter-

public.

by Abdul Bayes

nate ways with different social consequences. For example, reduction in fuel wood use to reduce 1000t of carbon emissions would mean depriving more than 500 households of their energy to cook their food. Most of the households are poor and hence do not have alternative ways of switching to fuels to reduce Co2. In terms of rice production, reduction of 1000t carbon lequivalent reduction in methane emissions) implies 12000 persons would have to give up eating rice - a staple food for the people of India. Bangladesh and other poor methane reduction could also be achieved by reducing number of cattle by 4000 but that would imply problems for more than 1000 rural poor house-holds whose fuel, energy and food requirements are met by cattle. Reduction in cement use and hence householding activity for 1000t of carbon translates into 1000 to 3000 houses for poor in countries that are already short in houses. Similarly 3200, 4600 and 5500 MWH of electricity production from coal, oil and gas would have to be sacrificed On the other hand, 1000t carbon reduction can also be achieved by reducing 800 cars

on the road in the USA. In short, any discussion of economic policies for SD must be based on an acceptance of the central nature of the problem of environmentally sound

(a) Only an answer to the widespread poverty and deprivation in the world could provide with needed resources to deal with poverty and environmental problems;

(b) The present global environmental problems are *mainly the result of the unsustainable consumption pattern of the rich:

(c) Continued population growth would jeopardize the efforts to preserve environ-

quired, ipso facto. Objectives and Principles of Environmental Policy Choice

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growth of population is re

The Objectives are well articulated in existing literature These are: reduce the environmental stress, contain emissions and effluent, arrest degradation of resources, improve quality of resources, preserve resources for now and for the future. Policies accepted are to induce change in the behavior of the different economic actors and at the end of the day, change the levels of outputs and/or inputs. In these courses of actions, the policies are likely to benefit some and hurt others. However, the consideration in selecting policies include the following:

(a) BENEFIT/COST: A good policy of environmental protection must necessarily imply policy where benefits outweigh costs of preservation. Suppose the firms prone to emissions are asked to pay extra money. This would raise the cost of the product through a backward shifting of the tax and the consumers would lose ultimately. The benefit is, of course, the clean air or water which could be reaped by the society at large. To be credible a policy, the sum of the social valuations must exceed the sum of the social costs i.e. to be acceptable, the policy should generate a benefit/cost ratio greater than one. It may be noted here that the costs of the emissions are not only borne by those who are out side the firm's emission but if such emission or effluent charges force the firm to close down, in that case, the employees also bear a portion of the costs.

(b) EFFICIENCY: Acceptability of policies are, however,

necessary but not sufficient conditions to usher SD. Equal emphasis should also be given to the efficiency criteria. The highest benefit/cost ratio should be attained. The efficiency criteria should include a dynamic efficiency syndrome i.e. what kind of incentives does the policy provide for innovations, adaptations and development that over time lead

to more efficiency (c) WHO GAINS AND WHO LOSES: Even when social benefit/cost ratio is high, the question of who gains from such policy changes and who loses remains no less paramount. The gains could be diffused over a large number while the costs could be borne by few or vice versa. In the first place, those who are not responsible for creating environmental hazards should be compensated for their

(d) EFFECTIVE ENFORCE-MENT AT REASONABLE COSTS: An ideal policy instrument may have to be given up if it cannot be enforced at reasonable costs. Consider, for example, a situation in which one wants to restrict exhaust from automobiles. Ideally one may want to impose a tax on each car depending on its emission of say sulphur oxides. SOx. Emissions vary from car to car depending on the level of maintenance. It would be too expensive to periodically measure emission from each car. A second best solution would be to impose a flat tax on car depending on the rated mileage of the particular model. This would encourage switch-over to less polluting cars but might discourage better maintenance that an ideal tax would enforce. From enforcement's point of view the former is easier than the latter

Policy Instruments

According to Dr Parikh, two policy instruments could be used to encourage activities

are for example, (a) command and centrol policies and (b) incentive based policies. Under (a). Firms may be asked to remain within the prescribed limits of effluents or they could be given certain standard for their products. On the otherhand, in (b) certain taxes and subsidy policies are suggested. It is assumed that a profit-maximizing firm, if subject to a tax on the quantum or emission, will get incentive to reduce emission i.e. such from will have incentive to reduce its emissions to the level where its marginal cost equals the tax rate. However the tax money thus collected should be spent on the welfare of consumers. Again, taxes can also be imposed on the use of inputs, rather than an actual emission. For example a tax on fertilizer use would reduce its wasteful use and arrest water pollution. Lastly, without imposing taxes (preventive measures) same curative measures such as subsidies could also be used. For example manual weeding may be preferable to weedicides integrated pest management could be mere environment friendly than chemical pesticides. But such attempts could be expensive to

friendly to environment. These

warrant subsidies However, with each of the instruments mentioned above. we could experience a lot of proteins. But we can possibly argue that these are the least cost effective ways of acting environment as a friend. But what if the environment of a particular country is polluted due to actions by another country say, example of Bangladesh due to Farrakka or of LDCs due to OECD activities? The case is more or less same. The actor should compensate the losers and that should be an international imposition.

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In an Unphotogenic War, a Million Victims are Ignored Fons Tuinstra writes from Baku, Azerbaijan

million of Azerbaijan's more than seven million people are on the run as a result of the war with Armenia, but the struggle between the two former Soviet republics has faded from the international headlines.

The war is not very photogenic," admits Kaiser Zaman, the representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in the capital, Baku. "But how much of their human dignity people have to lose before they are interesting enough for the rest of the world?"

The Azerbaijanis are bothered by the world's lack of interest. Tell the world we exist, we need help of the international community," is the bottom line of almost every one of their stories.

Like the story of the 70year-old man at the railway station of Barda, a little town near the battlefront, who silently clutches a pair of keys in his shaking hands. For a year he has lived in a cargo wagon with his family. The keys are from his home in Agdam, 20 miles away. The Armenians burnt down his house last year.

It is one of countless snapshots from a country which has been at war since 1988. About 20,000 people have been killed.

Armenian troops occupy about 20 per cent of Azerbaijan territory. In the background, according to Azerbaijan, "big brother" Russia is supporting the Armenian army.

"Without the involvement of the Russians we would have won already," says Habil

One of every seven people in Azerbaijan is fleeing war. But Gemini News Service reports that the international community is focussing its attention on the tragedies in Rwanda and Bosnia and has failed to give its attention - or its money - to the conflict in the former Soviet re-



Huseynli, senior assistant to President Haydar Aliev. "The Russians don't want to leave the Caucasus. We and the other Turkish-speaking republics have a lot of oil resources. The

help us exploiting them."
Moscow wants Azerbaijan to accept Russian troops as part

of a peace-keeping force. But Azerbaijan fears Russian troops, because it does not expect them to leave again.

Every time the intermittent peace talks brokered by Russia Western oil companies want to collapse. Armenian troops resume their offensive in Azerbaijan. Another offensive is expected soon.

"We have now about one million refugees or displaced persons but if Armenia starts a new offensive in the northeast, again 200,000 persons will be added to that number," says ·Zaman of UNHCR, which in 1992 was the first international relief organisation to come to Azerbaijan.

The refugees complain rightly about the lack of involvement of the international community, Zaman says. Last year his agency spent \$6 million, or about \$6 per refugee : "Even in a country like Azerbaijan that is close to nothing."

Zaman says Azerbaijanis' ability to take care of many of the refugees themselves has also contributed to the lack of international sympathy. About 80 per cent of the refugees had been re-housed when UNHCR arrived two years ago.

"Despite corruption and mismanagement the Azeris have done a great deal for their people," he says. "They consider the refugees as a national problem. If they would have put all the refugees on one field without food sait would have been much easier to get international sympathy and assistance."

But the physical condition of the seven million displaced is deteriorating. Most cannot afford to eat meat. Schools and hospitals are packed with refugees.

"These people are too modest." Zaman says. "They complain too little. Only at the graveyard do you see some of the emotions, when the women mourn their dead. After that, you have to look very closely to find the war.

Zaman has a few explanations for the lack of help for uprooted Azerbaijanis . "You don't have any big-scale suffering, like in Rwanda. You don't have here an opportunity for the UN to get a fast success like in Cambodia.' Also, he says, Azerbaijan

lacks any allies. "Because this is a Muslim country, the Christian Western world doesn't show so much sympathy. They will never tell you this, but I observe it as an undercurrent." Zaman says he has stopped

asking refugees what they need: "It doesn't make any sense because I won't be able to give it to them. "I'm not Jesus Christ, I

cannot change anything, but it really gets to me".

Potentially, Azerbaijan is a rich country with oil resources comparable to Kuwait. It used to be one of the biggest oil producers within the former Soviet Union. The oil wells are deteriorating fast, although an international consortium of oil companies is preparing to get

Western capital and technology

to the country

producing."

Nadi Nadjabov, chief of the national refugees committee, sees daily the destructive impact of one million uprooted people. Output of wheat and cotton has fallen; fruit production is down one-third from 1985. "Twenty per cent of our country is occupied," Nadjabov says. "One million inhabitants are only consuming and not

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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.

The rise and fall of a political party

Sir. The people have given their verdict on the issue of caretaker government during general election, if the readers' feedback to the newspapers are an indication. It appears that the majority have questioned the wisdom of the abrupt proposal by the Opposition, and the vast majority of the voters desire issues to be sorted out in the parliament.

But the stubbornness of the Opposition to bulldoze the issue headlong into public agitation and street confrontation, against the people's verdict, has to be noted with sadness and, perhaps, condemnation. This dictatorial attitude of the so-called group of opposition parties is not likely to win the confidence and support of the enlightened electorate when the time comes for casting votes. It is a risky gamble with the volatile Bengali mind. If AL wishes to play the game from a position of no-return, it must

be prepared for the consequences. Is the risk worthwhile?

Once upon a time Awami League was a great national party reflecting the hopes and aspirations of the downtrodden people from external exploitation. Circumstantial and historical evidence produced a charismatic leader to lead the way to freedom. But, unfortunately, the glory did not last long, due to some unwise administrative policies, which alienated and provoked a section of the intelligentsia, thus providing a handle to extremist elements at that time to bring about an unnecessary tragedy, deeply to be deplored for the violence involved during a process undergoing change from revolutionary zeal to evolutionary governance.

This same party has been desperately trying to regain, for the last 20 years, the lost glory. History might repeat itself, but circumstances do not coincide, and one has to be in tune with the evolving and fast changing society. The future

cannot, and should not, be planned based wholly on the past. The present is very much here, and now. The new vision has to be based on the current cross-currents, tempered with the wisdom gained from the past lessons.

The 'caretaker' movement might create a rift between political ambition and tired public opinion. It is dangerous to drive the pressurized public to the point of no return. How far truck-mounted leadership can rouse the poverty-stricken nation remains to be seen.

An observer

UN peace-keeping force

Sir. The post-cold war world has been in a state of constant flux resulting in serious security risks, like border disputes, ethno-religious conflicts and many other problems, most of which have potentials to cause irreversible regional and global repercussions and destabilisation. Many countries of the world are being pulled apart from powerful alliances and no single state and group of states have the capacity to counter-balance the power-ratio and therefore the world was looking more to the

United Nations (UN) for estab-

lishing world peace. The UN has, therefore, been forced to take up a new strategic assignment as a watchdog for internal stability, harmony and peace of a warring nation.

Since the role and task of peace-keeping operations have became increasingly demanding and fruitful, there is greater need for improved training standards of UN peace-keepers. The need for improvement of four distinct roles of peace-keeping soldiers professional, technical, quasi-diplomatic and humanitarian. In view of the increasing role of the UN peace efforts, more emphasis must be

laid on standardised training of the UN peace-keeping mis-After the break-up of Soviet Union and the end of the cold war, peace loving people of the world expected a welcome change over to peace and tranquillity. We thought that the booming of cannons and shot of guns will no longer imperil us but the reality has unfortunately been otherwise. Though the possibility of a horrific world war is no more there still remains many trouble-spots in places like Bosnia

Herzegovina where genocide

continues. It is true that the

UN has sometimes been called

upon to prevent a dangerous

situation from escalating into

a war, to persuade the oppos-

ing parties to use the conference table rather than resort to arms, and help restore peace or, at least, halt the fighting when the conflicts oc-

Notwithstanding criticisms and contrary opinions regarding its frustrating experiences and setbacks, the UN remains the only channel of hope for war victims and oppressed people who live in a constant danger of being killed, eliminated, persecuted and intimidated. And there are many in the Third World countries, who are a small nations beside a gigantic neighbouring country that seems to bully, intimidate, inflame insurgency, and employ other destructive methods to destabilise a government despite the former's best efforts to normalise relations. The internecine fights between two groups, leading to civil war, creating mass exodus to neighbouring countries is also a point where UN peacekeeping force has been involved.

The UN has been known for taking various measures for preventing or ending conflicts. In some cases, the UN has acted through its peace-keeping forces, observers and factfinding missions, mediators and special representatives, besides providing a forum for debate and negotiation and a channel of quiet diplomacy.

There are at present peacekeeping forces in Somalia, Zambia, Mozambique, Angola, Cambodia etc.

N H Sufi Mohammadpur, Dhaka

Born to die

Sir. About 1000 pilgrims died during Hajj session in Saudi Arabia this year also, and management may have to share the responsibility of the tragic incident.

The unfortunate demise of His mercy seekers was the wish of the Almighty who decided on their transition.

Such a carnage outnumbering yearly beheading of crimirials in the holy land cannot be graceful at least in this Space Age when life in the oil-rich monarchy has been heading for richer styles by virtue of His blessings with modern west ern appliances

For life's sake, all arrangements need to be reviewed so as to ensure safer Hajl perfor-

Haji rituals may be managed in the manner of country-wise discipline, such as inaugural ceremony of the Olympics.

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