

Railway's Bag of Faults

Bangladesh Railway faces a redundancy problem with a large number of metre gauge wagons put out of business by a sharp increase in carriage of goods by road transports.

Attempts to sell these off to other countries by international tenders falling through, because of their going broad gauge wholesale.

The wagons could not have been a pain in the neck of the Railway authorities had they planned an integrated development of the transportation sector as a whole in place of what has been a truncated or disjointed picture of one sub-sector growing in isolation from and at the expense of another.

The railway authorities cannot pass the redundancy off as a lean-time misfortune striking them because of the booming freight business done by the road transporters in a natural course of events.

There is no overemphasising the fact that the railway system — or the lack of it — as a whole needs overhauling because it has gone thoroughly decrepit and decadent.

Let us not React so Emotionally

Recently an incident between our photo-journalists and medical students has raised serious doubts about the sense of propriety of a section of our media professionals.

The reason we comment on the incident is to question the fundamental logic of retribution, and especially, by members of our own community.

No. We cannot go in that direction. It is anti-social, anti-legal, against civilized values, and most importantly, against the ethics of journalism.

Several weeks back the students of DMC attacked and damaged a whole lot of trucks in the vicinity of their institution. Why? Because one of their fellow students got killed by a truck in some part of Bangladesh.

Development is perceived as significant improvement in the living conditions of the overwhelming majority of the population in any country.

A consensus, however, appears to be gradually emerging among those in the aid business that development has not benefitted the poor as expected.

An oft-expressed easy way out is a reduction in the amount of development aid.

The major recipient, successive Bangladeshi Governments, have sought to argue instead that an increase in the amount of aid would achieve the objectives of development aid.

There is, however, nothing wrong with development aid in itself, nor is the amount of aid the principal issue here: the reason that development aid could not fully achieve its purpose in Bangladesh should not be an excuse to discard it altogether.

DESIGNED to rescue French prestige in Africa, Operation Turquoise in Rwanda is turning into a debacle — with the greatest embarrassments yet to come.

The motive for the sudden despatch of paratroopers to Rwanda was a cynical desire to snatch favourable headlines about humanitarian concern at home and rescue old friends faced with military oblivion.

In 1957, the then-Minister for the French overseas territories, Francois Mitterrand, wrote that "without Africa, there will be no history of France in the 21st Century".

Hence it stepped in to hold the 'Francophone' line against the advance of the rebel Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF), whose Ugandan-educated leaders speak English.

The French connection to the former Belgian colony is recent but deep. Journalists invited to see President Habyarimana's palace, now under RPF control, noted the Christmas card from President Mitterrand on the mantelpiece.

More significantly, it was French paratroopers who twice — in 1990 and 1993 — turned the tide of battle by halting the advance of the RPF.

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.

Islam & European Union

Sir, I was really amused to observe the uncalled for 'concern' expressed in some of the European countries for a Bangladeshi woman who has shown her indulgence in uttering derogatory remarks against Islam and the Holy Quranul Karim.

Development Aid: The Alternative Within

by Dr Rezaul Haque

The trickle-down Development Fallacy Looking back over the past two decades, it appears that the struggle against poverty could not make much headway because of the inherent weaknesses in the macro-economic policy.

The sectoral policy concerning improvements in agriculture, health and education lacked specific direction and has left little trace of benefit to the poor.

The reality for Bangladesh is that the vast majority of the poor depend, directly or indirectly, on agriculture for survival. Unfortunately, this important sector was ignored during most of the 1980s.

Promotion of self-reliance to reduce dependence on external assistance has been identified as one of the broad goals of the poverty alleviation sector.

Free Development The economic liberalisation and privatisation which began in the latter part of the 1980s and which is continuing at a faster rate, have somehow been able to free the formal sector of the Bangladeshi economy from stagnation.

The quest for alternatives to development aid in Bangladesh is the result of two trends: a) that development aid has not been very successful to achieve its objectives; b) that aid dependency in Bangladesh continues to increase.

Private Voluntary Development Organisations (PVDOs), popularly known as NGOs, have been contributing to meet this end. Although an in-depth and comprehensive evaluation of the performance of NGOs has yet to be done, there is a general consensus about the positive contribution of NGOs to poverty alleviation.

Members of the ousted government are now turning on the French, accusing them of betrayal — the same soldiers who were heralded as saviours and now despised as traitors.

The Rwandan Quagmire

The French mission to Rwanda is motivated largely by its desire to hold the line of Francophone Africa and increase its profile as a world power.

Not only was France the chief arms supplier for the former Government, but the government-owned bank, Credit Lyonnais, gave credit guarantees for Egyptian weapons supplies.

The rapturous welcome that machete-wielding militias extended to French troops when they came to evacuate Westerners in the early days of April underscores the intimate links between the French government and the killers in Rwanda.

Freezing the battle lines was clearly the hidden agenda. But, anticipating this, the RPF redoubled its efforts and launched an all-out onslaught against Kigali.

Meanwhile, international aid agencies, including French groups, have shunned the French army's 'humanitarian coordination office', saying

poor people's lives. Sustainable development is now being seen as the alternative to such large-scale development projects and nearer to real development.

People's participation is the gate-way to sustainable development. The socio-economic progress of the country, in general, and success of the poverty alleviation programmes, in particular, will significantly depend on the widespread and effective participation of the poor in the development process.

A crucial issue in poverty alleviation efforts through the participatory development strategy is the direct involvement of women at all stages of the development process.

Despite the success stories, the use of 'sustainable development' by NGOs for their beneficiaries has raised some questions. Probably the most important of these are whether a new patron-client relationship between NGOs and their beneficiaries has replaced the traditional one, and whether development aid is accelerating this change?

Conclusion The preceding discussion on the issues and alternatives relevant to the aid business today can be summarised as follows: 1. The reason that development aid has not achieved its goal in Bangladesh should not be taken as a reason for discarding aid as a means of redistributing resources from the rich to the poor.

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To the Editor...

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Jamuna Surcharge

Sir, Although the Jamuna Surcharge has been officially withdrawn with effect from July 1, 1994 still certain government organisations including T & T Board are realising the levy.

We draw the attention of the authority to the matter and urge to adjust the amount which has been realised as Jamuna Surcharge after 1st July in the next bills.

ity are in distress in Bosnia where civilians are murdered en-masse, women are raped, homesteads are burnt and systematic process of annihilation of Muslims is going on?

So, may I once again humbly advise the European Union to understand the real situation and mind their own business which is already in a shambles rather than interfering in another country's affairs by harbouring the law breakers and fugitives.

Md Ataul Hoque Mohammadpur, Dhaka

Taslima and Western media

Sir, The drama around Taslima Nasreen, that has cost so much in damage of prestige and overall image of Bangladesh, could have been avoided if only sense prevailed all over.

never tolerate any heinous attack from any quarter on our religion.

We have proper law to save women from occurrences that women in the west suffer from, and the law breakers are being dealt with accordingly.

In our country, a woman has become the prime minister and another woman is the leader of the opposition. How many country in Europe can boast of such a situation.

My other question to European community is what you all are doing when human-