Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

Dhaka, Thursday, August 11, 1994

Railway's Bag of Faults

Bangladesh Railway faces a redundancý problem with a large number of metre gauge wagons put out of business by a sharp increase in carriage of goods by road transports. The railway's loss of freight to road transportation stands at more than half the quantum it had handled in 1969-70. From 50 lakh tonnes then it has slumped to 24 lakh tonnes now.

Attempts to sell these off to other countries by international tenders falling through, because of their going broad gauge wholesale, the Bangladesh Railway authorities are reportedly left with no option but scrapping these. This means disposal at a throw-away price. Meanwhile even their scrap value is eroding fast as they are lying idle in the yards, exposed to the vagaries of nature and chipping away by predators.

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. There was simply no mapping of a combined strategy for a well-aligned and connective growth of the railways and road and riverine transportation services. The expensive air services could be set apart in a different category, but not surely the other sub-systems which should have worked in tandem. And having a tremendous potential for connecting inaccessible places and serving as a bulk carrier of both passengers and goods, the railways should practically be the lineh-pin in surface transportation.

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. That the road network would expand and the number of vehicles rise were all foregone conclusions. But the railways' goods section lost its competitive edge as bulk carrier through inordinate delays in booking spaces for consignments, their belated arrivals, callous handling and storage of goods and damages and pilferages on the way and in the yards. All these were topped off by complaints about palm-greasing at every step of the way. No wonder against this litany against the railways, the preference shifted towards the road transporters who emerged in a better light for the relative smoothness, efficiency and quickness of their services. What with their high charges inclusive of the money they have to part with in extortion payment!

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. To make this possible at all, the very first step ought to be for the railway to overcome the martyr complex and the attitude of resignation it displays before the upcoming other modes of transportation. The railways should, of necessity and not as a desperate belaboured effort try to restore their old glory. Their selfesteem can grow from the right sense of perspective. The great need for a dispersal of the highly concentric urban population away in the countryside, the Jamuna bridge interconnection and, above all, the growing profile of the train as the mass transport of the 21st century, all put a premium on developing our own railways.

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. We, the media, are constantly commenting on others, but sometimes we need to turn the spotlight on ourselves. We feel that we should have the moral courage to submit ourselves to public scrutiny, especially when our conduct raises doubt and concern. It all began when a photographer of Bhorer Kagaj — a highly respected Bangla daily — while covering a story, was manhandled by students of Dhaka Medical College (DMC). In retaliation, photo journalists attacked a group of protesting homeopathic medical students, holding a rally in front of the Press Club, mistaking them for students of Dhaka Medical College. Beaten at first, the students regrouped and attacked the photo journalists inside the premises of Press Club. Happily, the incident ended with both sides apologizing for their mistakes. The whole thing happened because we allowed our emotion to get the better of us.

The reason we comment on the incident is to question the fundamental logic of retribution, and especially, by members of our own community. Suppose there was no mistaken identity, and the boys and girls, who were attacked, actually belonged to DMC. Would that have justified the attack? Are we going to hold every student of DMC responsible, and as such deserving retribution, just because a few of them did something that we condemn? If that be our logic, then where is the difference between our action, and gangsterism?

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

ism. 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. Now look at this dangerously perverted logic. How are the trucks in Dhaka responsible? In fact the responsibility lies solely with one truck driver, and that also has to be determined by the law. Yet, our highly educated medical students went on a free for all rampage. No action was taken against the students who broke those trucks. Quite often we read of socalled students breaking up cars or shop windows because they are protesting a harsh behaviour of a teacher, or wanting examination dates postponed, or some such thing. There is absolutely no relation between what triggers the action, and the action itself. Take the recent incident of Sayedabad bus terminal workers blockading the major inter-district highway for more than 12 hours, putting thousands of bus passengers through hell. Why? Because they wanted an illegal structure removed. Very good. But why the road blockade? The most dangerous thing in all this is that no legal action follows when law is so flagrantly violated. What our colleagues did the other day amounted to taking the law in our hands. Such behaviour is suicidal for a profession which is supposed to be the "conscience of the

society."

F development is percei ved as significant improvement in the living

conditions of the overwhelm ing majority of the population in any country, development has yet to take place in Bangladesh. If it is claimed that the development aid provided to Bangladesh in the past has been utilised for the benefit of the poor, this claim is contentious because it is unsubstantiated by facts.

A consensus, however, appears to be gradually emerging among those in the aid business that development has not benefitted the poor as ex pected, but the search for the reasons has led to divergent conclusions. The donors, apparently dissatisfied with the performance of development aid in poverty alleviation, are increasingly expressing aid fatigue and looking for alternative, expressing their disquiet in different ways.

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. From the point-of-view of both donors and recipients, aid itself, or, more precisely, the amount of aid, has been an important item on the agenda.

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 aid altogether. What has led to failure is the aid policy and the management and utilisation of development aid. The agenda. therefore, should be set to look for an alternative aid policy, to devise a new management system, and to create alternative institutions and programmes for better utilisation

by Dr Rezaul Haque

tribute most to this process continues to be deprived of the importance it deserves. Instead of encouraging the self-reliance and the productive use of available assets that must be the basis of sustainable economic development, prevailing policies have too often encouraged welfare-dependency of the people on the Government and of the

The Trickle-down

Development Fallacy

two decades, it appears that

the struggle against poverty

could not make much headway

because of the inherent weak-

nesses in the macro-economic

policy. The theory that the

benefits of an increasingly

larger economic cake would

trickle-down to the poorest

sections has now been largely

The sectoral policy con-

cerning improvements in agri-

culture, health and education

lacked specific direction and

has left little trace of benefit to

the poor. An important issue of

macro-economic policies re-

lated to enlarging the eco-

nomic cake is the pursuance of

export or industry-led strate-

gies, which imply significant

development aid but neglect

the agricultural sector. How

the resulting benefits from

these strategies have trickled

down to the poor is yet to be

is that the vast majority of the

poor depend, directly or indi-

rectly, on agriculture for sur

vival. Unfortunately, this im-

portant sector was ignored

during most of the 1980s. In

spite of the fact that the agri-

cultural sector provides the

most direct opportunities for

the rural poor to participate in

the development process, it

has not received the highest

tance, in terms of sector-wise

disbursement. In 1990, the

agriculture, forestry and fish-

eries sector received 18% of

aid, whereas the energy sector

Promotion of self-reliance

to reduce dependence on ex-

ternal assistance has been

identified as one of the broad

goals of the poverty alleviation

sector. However, the sector

(agriculture) which can con-

received 20%.

share of development assis-

The reality for Bangladesh

discredited.

Looking back over the past

Government on foreign donors. Aid Fatigue?

The continuing debate on whether or not development aid can reduce poverty in Bangladesh has not much affected the regular flow of aid. The on-going analyses of the socio-economic implications of development aid, on the contrary, have no bearing on the flow of aid because they have not yet led to any definite conclusion. However, the poor performance of development aid to alleviate poverty in Bangladesh has given rise to aid fatigue among the donor community

Why fatigue? Is the fatigue and concern genuine? Or is it a way to cover the failure of the aid officials and institutions in donor countries to formulate appropriate aid policies and programmes that should have benefitted the poor people of Bangladesh, but do not? Or is it a technique to camouflage the benefits derived from development aid by the vested interests in donor countries? Genuine fatigue would bear the risk of reduction or cancellation of development aid to Bangladesh, which is not in the interests of the vested

Aid fatigue is further aggravated if the question of influencing the aid policy and programmes of the recipient country in the interests of the poor, is ever raised. However, there are many examples of how the donors, both multilateral and bilateral, have suc-

ceeded in influencing the policies of the Bangladesh Government through the structural adjustment programme and other programmes using aid as an instrument. To what extent this influence has benefitted the poor has yet to be demonstrated.

The primary consideration here, perhaps, is not the situa tion of the poor, nor the policy of the recipient Government. but the donors' own perceptions and policies about the use of development aid.

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. A free economy and free enterprise systems are now the official goals of economic development in Bangladesh. There is increasing recognition that, given the prevailing global political-economic conditions and internal development constraints, a free economy is perhaps the best option for development, although the question of long-term impact of liberalisation and privatisation policy on poverty in Bangladesh has not been fully

Aid development generally refers to social development. although this itself has a strong relationship with the informal sector. What is generally understood by development of the poor people in Bangladesh is generally undertaken by the Government, in such areas as health, education, social welfare, credit institutions. Development of these sectors is substantially financed by development aid but, while progress has been slow, a welfare-dependency syndrome has

military protection for their

operations. And there is evi-

dence that, out of sight of the

French troops, the Interna-

mwe are continuing to hunt

down Tutsi civilians deep

French intervention has

turned to ashes in their hands.

The RPF and the moderate

Hutu politicians are busy build-

ing a new government, wholly

independent of French diplo-

macy. They are refusing to ne-

gotiate with any politicians

from the former regime under

French protection, arguing

that they are genocidal crimi-

ernment are now turning on

the French, accusing them of

betrayal — the same soldiers

who were heralded as saviours

are now despised as traitors.

and the French troops are

probably at greater risk from

undisciplined extremists from

this side, rather than the RPF

forces, who are under orders

not to confront the French.

European journalists in gov-

ernment-controlled areas talk

nervously of being mistaken for

The whole episode is also

turning to be deeply embar-

rassing for the United Nations.

While the mandate of the

existing UN troops in Kigali

was severly restricted, the

French were allowed under

Chapter 7 of the UN Charter to

use "all necessary force" to

achieve their aims - in effect

the United Nations was

blessing a unilateral action by

one member state with

the French forces, and a public

inquiry into the UN's handling

of Rwanda, can begin to re-

Only a rapid departure of

virtually unfettered power.

Frenchmen.

Members of the ousted gov-

Within a fortnight, the

inside the "safe haven".

Development Aid: The Alternative Within appeared among the poor

The problem now appearing is how to free rural development from regimentation. The poverty alleviation programmes of the Government need to be denationalised and decentralised and the concept of the free market should be extended to rural development. Non-profit making private institutions and agencies financially supported by the Government and with proper accountability to it, could take on the responsibility of those programmes which can con tribute directly to poverty alleviation.

Under such a free development system the Government's role would be to feed the private development agencies with macro economic and social policy guidelines to help them achieve national development goals. The Government should also assume the responsibility of central coordination of activities of different agencies without interfering in internal management and operational procedures.

NGOs and Development

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. Responsibility for this has to be accepted by the major re cipient, the public sector. which administers and utilises about 90% of development aid money within the country.

If these trends could be reversed, there would be no need to look for alternatives to development aid. Efforts directed towards a reversal would require intervention in two major directions: firstly, in preparing the poor to take the responsibility for development into their own hands; and secondly, ensuring that devel opment aid is better utilised towards this end. Private Voluntary Develop-

ment 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 and their success in utilising development aid. An evaluation of poverty alleviation programmes in Bangladesh by BIDS suggests that, "the eighties is the decade when the NGOs, by virtue of their performance in respect of reaching the poor and with the help of financial contributions from international aid organisations, could establish themselves as alternative agents for popular mobilisation, poverty allevia-

tion and social change in rural In spite of plurality of approaches, strategies and interventions, development NGOs have a common understanding of the dynamics of rural poverty and have been able to identify some common areas of intervention in addressing the poverty issue. The most important of these areas are: building people's organisations based on effective democracy at the grassroots; education; consciousness raising; women's rights; employment generation; primary health care and family planning; environment;

and, agriculture extension. While the development partners have appreciated the impact made so far by NGOs in these areas, the amount of development aid channelled through NGOs as alternative agents for this intervention has been meager. In fact, the share of NGOs in the total development aid that flows to Bangladesh is less than 10 per cent, a crucial consideration in the formulation of changes re-

quired in the aid industry. Sustainable Development

Large development pro grammes in the public sector financed by development aid

have made little impact on

work of grassroots planning and implementation within a sound and democratic organi-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 Development strategies adopted hitherto have either undermined the gender issue or have kept it confined to mere rhetoric. Attempts have been made by NGOs to address the gender dimensions of poverty from different perspectives. In their programme interventions, most NGOs have addressed women's issues in two broad sectors - sociocultural and economic. In the socio-cultural arena, emphasis has been given to enhancing women's consciousness and

self-confidence through edu-

cation and consciousness rais-

ing. The issue of legal rights

has been promoted to ensure

equal rights for women in all

spheres. In the economic sec-

tor, priority has been given to

income-generation to create

greater economic security for

women and their families.

poor people's lives. Sustainable

development is now being

seen as the alternative to such

large-scale development pro-

jects and nearer to real devel-

opment. It is also an important

and positive alternative to de-

gate-way to sustainable devel-

opment. The socio-economic

progress of the country, in

general, and success of the

poverty alleviation pro-

grammes, in particular, will

significantly depend on the

widespread and effective par-

ticipation of the poor in the

development process. Working

towards this end. NGOs in-

creasingly encourage people's

initiatives to produce a frame-

People's participation is the

velopment aid.

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? It is important that NGOs draw a line in their relationship with the beneficiaries, beyond which they should withdraw from direct involvement. The sooner the NGOs define their withdrawal strategy and implement it, the better the chances of success of their programmes and higher the effectiveness of development

Conclusion

The preceding discussion on the issues and alternatives relevant to the aid business today can be summarised as fol-

- 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. The problem lies not in aid itself, but in aid policies, management and utilisa-
- Development programmes based on the trickle-down development strategy has not benefitted the poor but has benefitted instead those who deal with aid. Therefore, such strategy should be abandoned.
- Aid fatigue is expressed to disguise the real issue, that of loopholes in aid policy and management of the donor agencies. The criticism that only recipients are responsible for misuse of development aid is a partial truth.
- The level of privatisation in the rural development sector has not flourished as much as in the formal economic sector. Nonprofit private development agencies should be entrusted with the responsibility for implementing effective programmes for poverty alleviation.

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The Rwandan Quagmire that they do not need French

ESIGNED 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. But French pride was also at

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". France knows that its status as a world power depends crucially on its permanent seat on the UN Security Council, and the persistence of French as a world language.

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, and to display to the world that it stands by its friends even when those friends are genocidal maniacs.

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 mantel-

The private jet in which the Rwandese President died was a French Mystere Falcon, a personal gift of Jean-Christophe Mitterrand, son of the President and special adviser to the Presidency.

More significantly, it was French paratroopers who twice - in 1990 and 1993 turned the tide of battle by halting the advance of the RPF. Belying their status as "advisors" several French troops were decorated for bravery.

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 write Rakiya Omaar and Alex de Waal, in this column for Inter Press Service, from London

Not only was France the chief arms supplier for the former Government, but the government-owned bank, Credit Lyonnaise, gave credit guarantees for Egyptian weapons supplies. The last shipment of French arms was delivered by the secret service in May, six weeks after the genocide was mounted.

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.

Ulterior motives were evident in the French intervention from day one. The ostensible reason for the operation was lack of transport to deploy UN troops committed by African countries.

Ethiopian, Ghanaian and Zimbabwean soldiers were ready but rather than solve the logistical bottleneck by putting its aircraft at their disposal, the French decided to fly straight in.

Again, their welcome was enthusiastic. Interahamwe, the militia responsible for hundreds of thousands of deaths, jubilantly garlanded the paratroopers. The extremists' radio station broadcast that "the French Hutus were coming to fight the RPF and save their Rwandese Hutu brothers". Rwandese

army jeeps mounted tricolours. But the French politicians miscalculated. Within a day of their arrival, it must have been plain to every French soldier

that the Interhamwe were not only responsible for the genocide, but determined to continue the slaughter. A few thousand Tutsi were rescued, but the graves of hundreds of thousands more were evident. Second, the reality was evi-

dent to the journalists too. who were largely immune to the extremists' claim that the Tutsi victims were guilty of the genocide — by provoking the

Third, the French underestimated the RPF. Though the stated intention of Operation Turquoise was merely to secure the border area and protect refugees. French military patrols rapidly penetrated deep into the interior and came close to the RPF vanguard.

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. It also sent troops to Rwanda's second city, Butare. Both cities were captured, and the Rwandese army fled in complete disarray.

If the RPF advance is to be halted, the French are going to have to join the war themselves. But while they have a formidable arsenal in Rwanda and neighbouring Zaire, including Jaguar attack aircraft and helicopters, the experience of Somalia shows that these may be no match for guerrilla fighters on the ground.

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

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deem its reputation.

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.

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.

This woman, who does not have adequate education or knowledge to read or interpret the Holy Quran, dared to choose to hurt the sentiments of the whole Muslim world.

No country can support such heinous act. How the so called advocates of this woman from Europe would react if

some one criticises or tries to defame Christian religion or the Holy Bible? The answer is obvious. We in Bangladesh fail to understand the reason of shedding crocodile tears by our friends in Europe for a case which should have been totally left for the law of the country to deal with. Perhaps anything anti-Islamic becomes a topic for them to propagate for obvious reasons, as we can see from their attitude. They should remember, there is nothing what is called 'fundamentalism' in Islam. Islam is a complete code of conduct which withstood test of time; the image of which cannot be turnished by any interested quarter. We are proud of being Muslims and can and shall

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. May I quote a recent news item which appeared in a European newspaper stating that during the world cup period the beating up of wife in Europe declined sharply as the husbands remained busy before the TV sets most of the time which brought a sigh of relief for the women there. This itself reveals about the condition of women in those countries. So please keep your house in order first before poking your

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

nose in another's.

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. Like making a mountain out of a mole hill, not so rated writer like Ms Nasreen was put on a podium through a

systematic propaganda by the Western media for what pur pose I would not like to delve in. The damage has been done, unfortunately at the cost of millions of innocent secular hardworking, freedom loving independence minded and individualistic Bangalees.

The ultra liberal and so called "independent" media in the West should look at their own backyard and see who why and how the fundamentalists are being funded? They should also see what is the status of women in their own countries? They should also see the activities of racists and fundamentalists in their own countries. We may be poor and under-developed but we have a rich tradition of being humble, hardworking, secular and open-minded — and definitely not 'fundamentalist'

The stain we have been through due to some ignorant comments by one Ms Nasreen and calculatively used and exposed by the fundamentalists

and Western media alike is going to remain with us for a long time. We are a resilient and persistent people, who have faced many natural and man-made disasters and will surely survive this tempest in a tea pot albeit at an unnecessar ily high price.

Akku Chowdhury Tejgaon, Dhaka

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.

M Zahidul Haque Asset Prof. BAI, Dhaka