

Companies Only in Name

The past few years saw a tremendous spurt in the initiative to bring a qualitative change in the country's rural economy, specially by different private organisations.

In most such cases fraudulent means were resorted to by people with so-called higher education. But a report comes from Manikganj — with a high concentration of different NGOs — about a rare incident of fraudulent gains by none other than one of the poor class.

Nobody really questioned the bonafides of the company because it was apparently true to its words. But it also did not occur to anyone's mind if the money they deposited was being invested in any gainful venture.

It sounds unconvincing that a day labourer's wife alone could play such a trick on so many people of the locality. Maybe, there is a sinister design behind it all and it is a work of some superior but evil brains.

Now the question is: if taking an unusually high interest is illegal, cannot an offer of the same be also held equally blamable? We are also not told if the company had registered with the proper authority.

Illegal manpower business is carried on in a clandestine manner. But that is punishable by law. The operation of a fake company is no less dangerous.

Matter of a Missing Link

Mayor of Dhaka Mohammad Hanif has done some crystal ball gazing at what could be the shape and substance of urban life in Bangladesh at the turn of the century.

This basically negative kind of urban transformation has been portrayed at a greater length by Mohammad Hanif who faces the unenviable task of doing something about this in the metropolis during these closing years of the century.

In stemming the rot which is threatening to choke the wind-pipe of life, we have to go by the old rule: earn your bread in a city if you must but physically do live away from the brick and mortar of the cities.

Will the Railway authorities consider leasing their facilities, at mutually convenient hours, to private operators to introduce commuting trains in this sector on fixed fare basis?

SOME have compared it to a paper factory, others say it is a debating society, and the hot air given off in its conference halls is contributing to global warming.

Even in the best of times, the United Nations has had an image problem. It cannot seem to do anything right, and the world body is now coming under fire to making promises it cannot keep and straying from its mandate.

"Throwing around pieces of paper never solved any real problems," says Richard Butler, Australia's ambassador to the United Nations and president of the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

The criticism is echoed by the Danish Minister for Development Cooperation, Helle Degn, who says the United Nations is being side-tracked by peacekeeping and is only paying lip service to its real mandate: economic development.

Mauri Eggert, Finland's Under-Secretary of State for Development Cooperation, said the 184-member General Assembly has been turned into a 'Resolution Factory'.

As a result, the real work of

A news item recently published in different newspapers on venues for public meetings is encouraging. However, the item said that the Dhaka City Corporation has requested all political parties to hold meeting at five places e.g. (1+2) north and south gates of Baitul Mukarram.

Of course, some meetings are held in different areas which no doubt create traffic jam. But these sites are situated in places which are commercially less important.

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Commencing in the metropolis

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space.

Commencing in the metropolis

Sir, While the issue of traffic jam and commuting problems are discussed in all possible forums, we come across many thoughts some of which are worth trying as those cannot but ease the situation.

Will the Railway authorities consider leasing their facilities, at mutually convenient hours, to private operators to introduce commuting trains in this sector on fixed fare basis?

Fish Fortnight '94

Sir, We congratulate our Ministry of Fisheries for observing the 'Fish Fortnight '94' — a nationwide campaign to boost pisciculture through expansion of modern technology.

Reinventing the United Nations

The United Nations is coming under fire from delegates of member countries for talking too much, and doing little. Thalif Deen of Inter Press service evaluates efforts to reform the world body.

consensus-building had been replaced by 'summit-hopping'. The Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the Human Rights Summit in Vienna last year and the Social Development Summit in Copenhagen next year have largely taken over the role of the UN General Assembly.

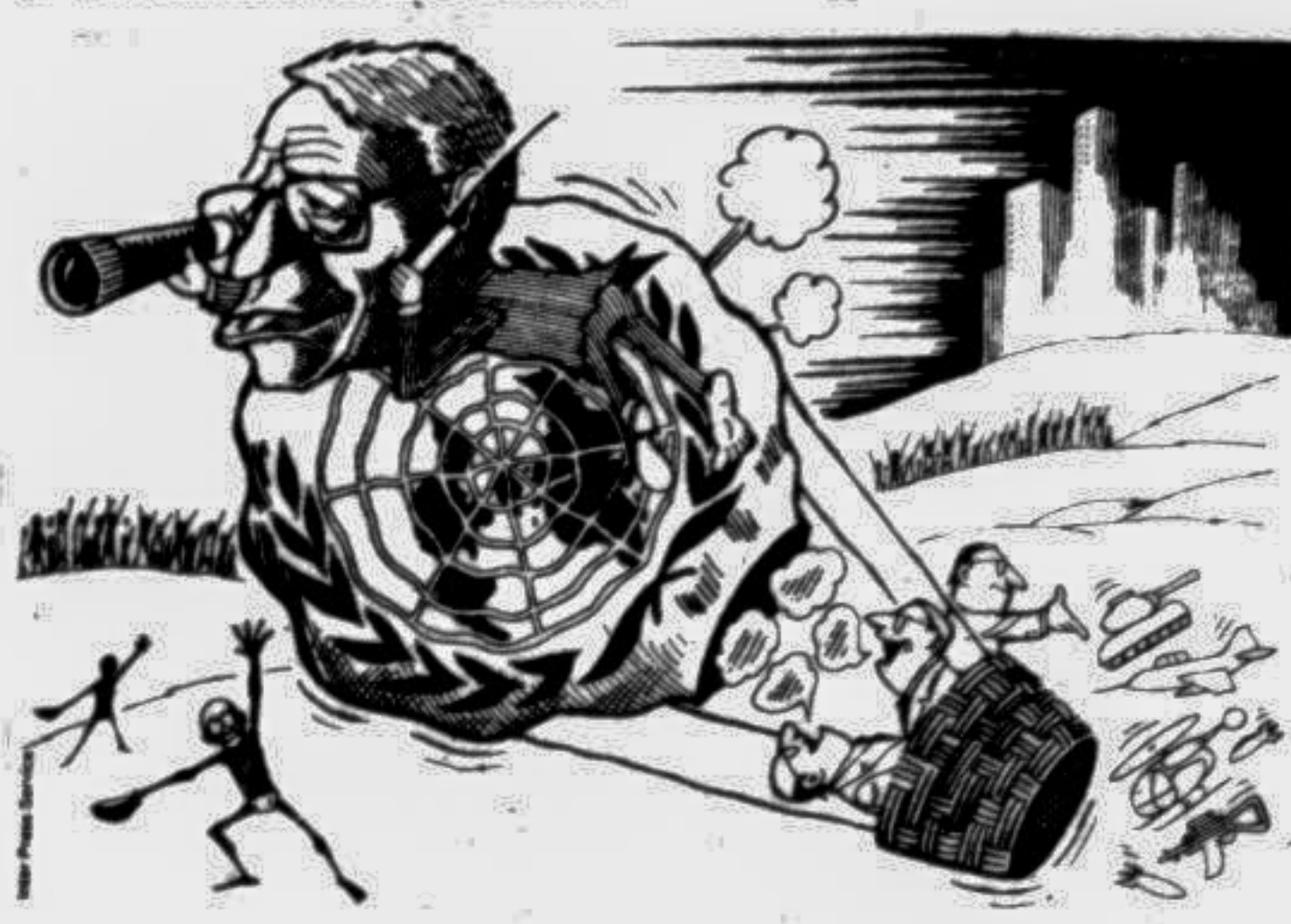
But Third World members of the United Nations say the real fault lies with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) which have usurped the UN's role.

A report released this month by two ex-UN veterans says half-hearted and piecemeal attempts to reform the United Nations are failing to strengthen the clout of the world body.

'Renewing the United Nations System' is written by former senior staff members Erskine Childers and Brian Urquhart. They argue that reforming parts of the UN system which deal with economic and social issues has been incomplete or superficial.

Many independent analysts and UN staff members have complained that under Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the United Nations has been steadily losing its power to effect social and economic change.

Childers and Urquhart partly blame budget-conscious western nations which generally favour the economic advice doled out by the Washington-based Bretton Woods institutions — the World Bank and the IMF. They say any reform of the United Nations should



also include reforms of the World Bank and the IMF.

'No area of UN system reform and reorganisation is as critically important in the 1990s as the economic and social programmes which still account for the bulk of its resources and outlay,' according

to the authors.

The United Nations spends roughly 42 per cent of its US\$5.5 billion annual budget in Third World development.

UN reform has been complete enough to work' despite five major reform exercises in

Childers and Urquhart reject this proposal, noting that the planned purposes and functions of the new body are 'precisely those that were originally supposed to be carried out' by ECOSOC.

They disagree with much of the prescribed medicine for the ailing world body, including calls for greater 'coordination' between and among offices, and more 'decentralisation'.

They argue that consolidating offices is often a better remedy than repeated calls for coordination, and that too much decentralisation has itself created a lack of coordination.

The report attributes much of the loss of stature of the United Nations in social and economic fields to deliberate recommendations by rich countries seeking to weaken the UN system while strengthening the World Bank/IMF

OPINION

Suggesting Venue for Public Meetings

Shafiqul Islam

the street starts around 10 o'clock in the morning. And with it, starts the traffic jam which continues till the audience is dispersed around 7-8 o'clock in the evening.

Now, if the meetings were used to be held in areas which are commercially less important are now to be held at the nominated places, the frequency of meetings there is likely to be increased considerably. If so, this will create more frequent jams and disturbances.

Yes, the disturbances. It's no denying the fact that disturbance is now a-days associated with most of the meetings. Shops and establishments are to keep their shutters half shut on all meeting days in apprehension that disturbances may erupt any moment when the shutters will have to be fully shut. And cases of complete closure of shutters are not less in number.

As a matter of fact, the sooner the venues for meetings are shifted to appropriate places, the better for public safety and convenience.

Everybody wonders, what might be such venues in or around the city. If the venues are proposed at places away from the city, perhaps no political party would agree to such a proposal. And it is really very difficult to get a place for public meetings in or around the city.

But this was not the case earlier. The vast expanse where a million strong audience could easily be accommodated was available. And such huge gathering at a place is a matter of record in the country's history. Yes, I am mentioning the place once

known as the Race Course and now as Suhrawardy Uddyan.

The then authority was perhaps justified to convert it into a beautiful park with systematically lined up trees. Perhaps there was a two-fold idea: recreational facilities and afforestation (?)

The question is: did we achieve the purpose. Leaving the benefits of the trees, what recreational benefits have we actually been enjoying is a point to ponder.

When we think of Suhrawardy Uddyan, there comes three points: (1) value of the trees, (2) environmental benefit derived from the trees, and (3) recreation with free air under the shade of trees.

The trees do have the money-value and we can expect to get it in course of time. Environmental benefit we will continue to derive so long the trees are there.

Here also the question of money-value of the 'trees' can be further questioned. The trees that have been planted in the Suhrawardy Uddyan are such that they would not grow higher after a certain height. As a result, by spreading the branches around, the trees, taken together make bushes. These trees have little timber-value.

Recreational benefits? We may ask: do we get it? At the time of planning for the Uddyan, it was greatly expected that in a congested place like Dhaka city where the population is growing fast, the number of motor vehicles is increasing rapidly polluting the air, and where there are a very few places to breathe fresh air, the ever increasing city dwellers would get some relief when they would be able to spend some time in the open place with the members of the family. But in reality, we find

quite a different picture now. If you suggest one to go to Suhrawardy Uddyan, promptly comes the reply: Is it a place for gentlemen to go? If you ask, why? With similar harshness, the reply comes: it is infested with criminals and antisocial elements. And such comments are common, because such is the experience one obtains from there.

Since morning till afternoon, the place is thronged mostly with couples, seemingly lowers, scatteredly reposing under the shade and at the trunks of many of the trees. And since late afternoon till late in the evening and beyond it is infested with call girls, pimps, intimidators etc. Many incidents have occurred in the Suhrawardy Uddyan, particularly during the second period, when gentlemen with wife and children were harassed and embarrassed. Cases of hijacking are many more.

So, the purpose is not fulfilled, rather gone. Suhrawardy Uddyan is no more a place for recreation for the ordinary city dwellers. And here, I like to offer a proposal: the Suhrawardy Uddyan may be converted into a public park-cum-meeting place for political parties. It's area is so big that four normal public meetings can be accommodated simultaneously.

Let me outline the idea: An area of 200 feet width all along the border (boundary line) of the Uddyan should remain as it is with the trees. Carefully, the trees which give "bush effect" should gradually be replaced by trees which grow tall and do not block the view when fully grown and which have timber-value, in a planned manner. The 200 feet belt as such will constitute an area of about two kms or more. The remaining whole area inside will remain almost open. Trees from this

where the industrialised nations have a much stronger voice.

But rather than try to seize control of economic and social policy in the 1990s, the authors say that Boutros-Ghali has instead rejected a proposed post for a Director-General for Development and International Economic Cooperation.

The Director-General would have been the second most senior UN official after the Secretary-General, in charge of all economic and social capacities of the United Nations.

Vociferous opposition to the post by industrialised countries also led to its elimination, the authors say, citing this as the beginning of the UN decline in the economic field.

They argue the United Nations is not the bloated and profligate organisation frequently depicted in the western press. They note that the world body's regular budget is roughly equal to what US citizens spend each year on cut flowers and potted plants.

Gus Speth, the administrator of UNDP, says the United Nations is investing too much on peacekeeping and too little on development.

If the United Nations was going to be more than a debating forum, it must keep a balance between peacekeeping and activities aimed at promoting human betterment," Speth says.

Speth doubts whether the United Nations could be a strong force for peace unless it is a strong force for development.

personnel, if any, at present). Third comes the ecological consideration. If the inner area of the Uddyan is half-cleared, certain ecological loss will be there but it is not as big as cannot be compensated. If there is the will, there is the way too. With careful planning and earnest execution, many spots in the city can be utilized for planting saplings. This will not only meet the ecological need, but also ultimately beautify the spots and surroundings. The ecological "loss" at the Suhrawardy Uddyan can thus be well compensated.

area should be partially removed making enough room for the meetings to be held. One may oppose the idea by saying that the trees have been planted, nursed and cared for costing a lot of money. How then these be thrown away causing huge monetary loss? Secondly, a park (with trees) should be considered a must for the city dwellers. Thirdly, these trees in the middle of the city should also be considered necessary ecologically.

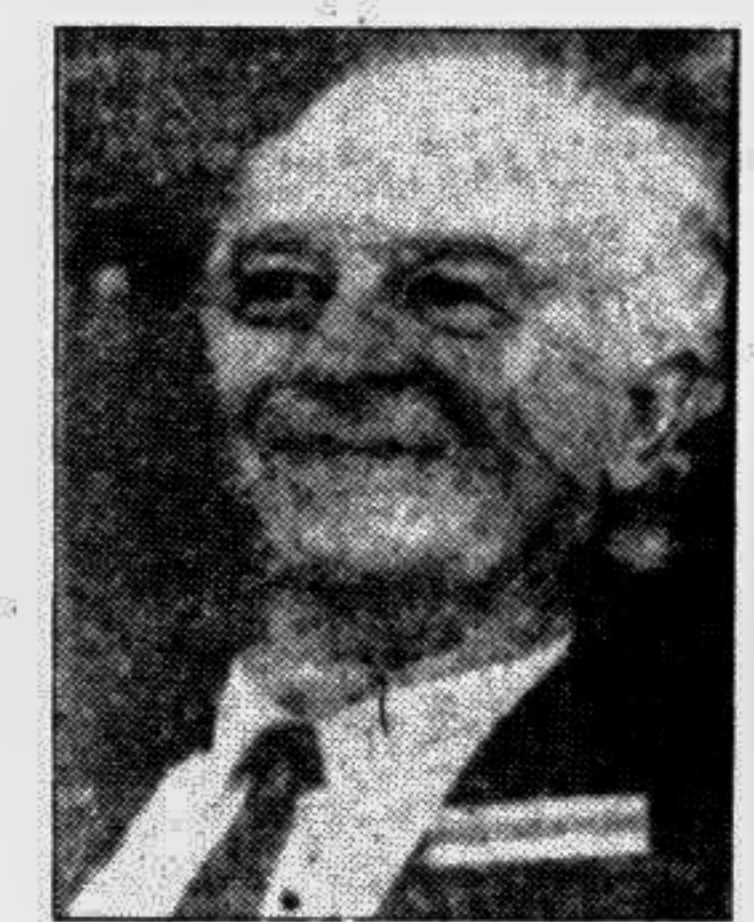
The points deserve considerations. But, for bigger interest, some sacrifices are also considered necessary. The monetary loss in this case will only be nominal because these trees have little timber value. Secondly, the area of Suhrawardy Uddyan is enormous and a 200-feet belt of trees around the Uddyan may not be as big as the whole Uddyan is but should still be considerable enough for the citizens to breath open air and roam about with spouses and kids. Vigilance for maintaining law and order will also be easier in the localised area for recreation (in the existing vast area it is really difficult for a handful of

If we think in the line of the idea as has been outlined above, we can derive the following benefits: 1) A big area will be available for holding public meetings in a centre place of the city, where more than one gatherings can be accommodated simultaneously. It will be convenient both for the organisers and the audience. 2) The city dwellers will get, perhaps a safer place to go for recreation. Control of crimes will be easier because of effective vigilance. 3) Ecological benefits will remain at least as it is, by balancing.

In consideration of the above, why should we not go for converting the Suhrawardy Uddyan into a park-cum-maidan when both the purposes are simultaneously served? What is needed is just a bold step.

A Tribute to Professor Pauling

by Dr MA Hossain



During my doctoral study in France I met personally Professor Pauling in an international congress on Quantum Chemistry. By being encouraged by his ideas and excellence, I feel so obliged and enlightened to write at least a few words about the great man — one of the greatest scientists of twentieth century, who breathed his last on 19 August, 1994.

Linus C. Pauling was born in Portland, Oregon, USA on February 28, 1901. He attended Oregon State College and the California Institute of Technology where he received a Ph.D. in 1925. After a year of post doctoral study in Europe, he returned to USA and joined the faculty of the California Institute of Technology. In 1964 he was raised to the position of Research Professor of Physical and Biological Sciences in the Centre for the Study of Democratic Institutions, Santa Barbara, California. He became Professor of Chemistry in Stanford University in 1969. Later on, he established the Linus Pauling Foundation of Physical Chemistry in California where he worked till the end of his life.

Professor Pauling's interests have centered on the nature of chemical bond and the structure of crystals and molecules, but he has made substantial contributions to many other areas in chemistry, biochemistry and medicine. Among these milestones of contributions, his application of quantum mechanics to chemistry is the greatest of all. His successful interpretation of the structure of atoms and molecules on the light of quantum mechanics is the basis of modern chemistry. It is the ideas of Professor Pauling which clarifies the understanding of the reactivity of chemical substances. Other than these, his study of the effective sizes of atoms in molecules and crystals, his work in establishing the existence of helical structure in proteins, his development of a theory of metallic

bounding, his study of molecular abnormality in relation to disease and his study of vitamin C are remarkable contributions.

He has published more than 500 papers, most of which present the results of original investigations. He also published several books that are among the best in their fields. These include 'Introduction to Quantum Mechanics' (with E.B. Wilson Jr.), 'The Nature of the Chemical Bond', 'College Chemistry' and 'General Chemistry'. The value of his contributions is recognised by 17 medals and awards, 30 honorary degrees and honorary membership in 20 scientific societies in 12 countries. His application of quantum mechanics to chemistry brought him the 1954 Nobel Prize in chemistry. The recognition of his light for an international agreement to stop the testing of nuclear weapons brought him the 1962 Nobel Prize for Peace.

Since the inception of Nobel Prize Professor Pauling had been the only person to have won two complete Nobel Prizes on his own.

Professor Pauling died on 19th August at the age of 93 at his residence in California, USA. But he will remain alive forever in the scientific community as the father of modern quantum chemistry.

The writer is Chief, Research and Development Cell, Ministry of Industries.

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.

Development Aid ...

Sir, Possibly, since 1971, Dr Rezaul Haque's economic article (Development Aid: The Alternative within. The Daily Star 11, Aug 1994) seems the most enlightened, accurate and truthful regarding foreign aid utilisation and dependency.

Through years we have been submerged by pessimistic

Development Aid ...

Sir, We are clouded with wrong aid versions. I believe such intellectual weakness of our mainstream economic gurus is one of the causes of our declining economy and growing poverty. The Daily Star should focus more on consistent economic thinking, such as Dr Haque's strictly ignoring others which, in my view, have been responsible for our present economic disarray and the tragic downfall of at least one government since the emergence of Bangladesh.

versions of economic heavy-weights that aid dependency and utilisation is a disguised form of slavery planned and designed by the rich north, forgetful of their past colonial power. Regularly one or another of our economic gurus pump in articles, arrange seminars, write voluminous books, to influence and convince us that our hard-earned sovereignty is at stake because the World Bank and the IMF dictates our fiscal, monetary and development policies. We have constantly heard that aid must be stopped or, that aid must be sufficiently increased to derive or reach the desired objectives. Now, for the first time, we have had a peep into the real workings of the aid business.

Thanks to Dr Haque for correctly saying (1) that the 'problem lies not in itself but, in aid policies, management and utilisation,' (2) that trickle down development strategy must be replaced with the privatisation of the rural development sector where, the NGOs could be in the position to disburse and direct such aid in flows; (3) that today, those who deal with aid are the biggest beneficiaries. Very often they are the politicians diverting projects, where they are most benefited, the bureaucrats coming into partnership with the businessmen eyeing profits and not the merit of the project in the absence of government's interest in transparency, and independent courts and press.

'Peddling or pedalling?'

Sir, The 'Dhaka Day by Day' article of 21-8-94 was titled 'Peddling Miles Away'. I wonder if it is 'peddling' or 'pedalling', since the story is about a lady riding a bicycle as a mode of transport. In dictionary, Pedal as verb means 'move or operate by means of pedals; ride bicycle;' while 'peddle' as verb means 'follow occupation of pedlar; sell as pedlar; and 'pedlar' means 'travelling vendor of small wares; seller of illegal drugs.'

I believe the writer meant travelling and not selling wares door to door. Anyway I enjoyed the article.

Nizam Ahmad, Executive Chairman, MORE, Dhaka

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S A Mansoor, Gulshan, Dhaka

'Peddling' is correct. The error is regretted. - Editor