Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

Dhaka, Wednesday, September 7, 1994

Matter of Broad Vision

Two allied discussion-meets, more perhaps by coincidence than design, were held in the city on Monday lending some fresh focus around the unresolved question of administrative reform in the country. One was a workshop, organised by the Bangladesh Institute of Administration and Management (BIAM) which occasioned a lively discussion among experienced government functionaries. It was marked by some soul-searching but not without an accusative finger pointed at politicisation' of the administrative machinery. The other discussion-session, held by the Centre for Development Research, Bangladesh (CDR,B) was in the nature of a dialogue, attended by 40 Members of Parliament, donor representatives, academicians, and former bureaucrats. The latter provided for interaction between differing, even contending, groups, yielding a verdict on lack of political will to implement a large body of recommendations for service reorganisation gathering fungus in the cold storage since long.

The organisers have done a good job refocusing attention on the need for recasting the services that was being overtaken, if not entirely forgotten, by the snow-balling caretaker issue which obviously occupied the centre-stage of national politics.

The workshop on Foreign Aid Management in Bangladesh can be credited with having generated some self-criticism among the government officials evidently risking a bit of same-side folly. They admitted that lack of coordination and endemic inefficiency slowed down development. Self-admission at the administrative and, even political, levels, when things soured, has been often indulged in, apparently as a gracious gesture of disarming straightforwardness. The thing is such frankness does not cost anything because the system of accountability being absent there is no easy way to put individuals in the dock. Nonetheless, hearing from the horse's mouth has its own value. So much is appreciated.

Not without some valid reasons have the participants in the workshop felt sullen over the corruption of the administration by protracted martial law rule, and the politicisation of the government machinery in the recent years that came to affect 'integrity' of the administration. There is no doubt that a vitiated political ambience had stunted any evolutionary growth of the bureaucracy. Yet, it is a known fact that permanent civil services, in no small measure, allowed themselves to be politicised, their top leaders jumping into the bandwagon of a new regime in an undisguised quest for self-development. The impression among the intelligentsia and the public at large is that we can not expect the services to be reorganised by the very people who are destined to be affected by the structural changes. So, they are ones who need a change of heart in the first place.

All this goes to strongly emphasise the urgent need for a robust political will to be firmly placed behind the task of administrative reorganisation. This is indispensable if we are to de-politicise the bureaucracy so that it can be brought back on the rails it was once obliged to be, by tradition and, law. Our republic's constitution asks for it even more today.

Therefore, we are for a bipartisan political will to transform our archaic administrative system into a responsive one. For without a minimum consensus in broad outlines no solid start can be made on administrative reform, let alone provide for any radical and, no less important, durable, structural changes, in the services of the republic.

Institutional Aberration

What happened on Sunday in the border area of Atpara under Jaipurhat district may remind one, though in a somewhat far-fetched way, about the attempted disrobing of Droupadi in the Hindu epic Mahabharata. She was spared the ultimate shame by virtue of an endless length provided to her saree, as the legend goes.

Some members of an agency in their supreme sense of righteousness got furious when they detected that of the five women passers-by, two were wearing Indian print sarees, so reported a vernacular daily lately. immediately they got into their noble act of taking the sarees off their persons. Fortunately for the girls, they still had their undergarments to safeguard their modesty.

We do not know what really prompted the men of a certain agency to go so wild that not for a moment did they pause to think if they had any legal sanction to do what they did. Not that those two young women were the first to wear Indian print sarces in that entire area or in the country anyhow. Where did they get the idea that members of an agency enjoy the privilege to go to any length if someone is found at fault? It surely is a violation of the code of conduct and also a miscarriage of justice. Apart from the Bangalee sensibilities that were hurt beyond the trauma of just the two women, what became a casualty is the image of the institution of law enforcement smeared irreparably by the excesses of a few. If enforcers and custodians of law should behave in such a way, who are the ordinary people left with to look up to for the protection of their honour?

In another incident — on which a report was carried yesterday — a woman named Rokeya of Sultanpur in Feni also had an outrageous experience with a member of the law enforcing agency. In this case she went up to a sub-inspector to know why actions were not being taken against her oppressors. The police officer reportedly assaulted her before ousting her from his room. What emerges from such incidents is that the instant actions were taken in a highhanded fashion with an over-inflated notion of power. But the fact is, it was none of their business to summarily punish anyone for any offence. They can only bring charges against an offender and must produce the one before the court. Instead, they acted like one in whom a vindictive judge and an oppressive mastan are rolled together. These men must be reformed first if sanity and respectability are to be restored in the system of our governance.

HIS Conference is a turning point for the allimportant population issue, and the results it achieves will thus have the most far-reaching impact on determining the course taken

in addressing it. If the Conference has the necessary political will, it will generate enormous impetus for a positive course that has the support and backing of the States and peoples of the world. In the absence of such political will, however, it can regrettably only give rise to greater division and estrangement and even to crisis situa-

I am not exaggerating when I say that not only does the future of human society depend on your Conference but also the efficacy of the economic order of the planet on which

Before this distinguished gathering today is a comprehensive and integrated programme of action that presents far-reaching proposals and recommendations in order to address the most serious issues at this juncture: poverty; development; environment the status of women; the conditions in which today's chil dren and the mainstay of the future are growing up; the issue of public health; and other issues linked with the present and future welfare of peoples.

If the Conference succeeds in adopting this programme, it will take a great step forward by generating the necessary impetus not only to determine the course to be taken in addressing the issues but to ensure that that course will continue to be pursued and that its requirements will be met.

This is the real challenge that we must face, and we have before us today a golden opportunity that it is the duty of us all to exploit to the fullest.

In fact, the International Conference is the product of a long and wide-ranging analysis which the United Nations has been engaged in continuously since its establishment. In its preamble, the Charter strongly affirms the will of the international community to "promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom".

Everyone is indeed well aware that the international community's approach to population phenomena must be the subject of a broad debate that mobilizes all Member States at the highest level. This has been the role of the various international conferences held on this subject over the past 20 years or so, from the Bucharest Conference to

the Mexico Conference. The Conference in Cairo marks a new and significant phase in the international community's consideration of population questions, and bears witness to the will to set this consideration in the con-

A Turning Point in Addressing the All-important Population Issue

These are excerpt from the address by the UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali at the opening of the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo on September 5, 1994

text of development.

But I should also like to say that this Conference takes on its full meaning only if it is viewed against the background of all the international conferences the United Nations is currently conducting in the economic and social sphere.

I have more than once had occasion to emphasize the importance of the economic and social activities of the United Nations. Too often, public opinion and the media know the United Nations only through the role it plays in the service of peace and international security. These activities are certainly important, and deserve to be continuously encouraged. The fact remains. though, that they account for only about 30 per cent of the Organization's work. And for the most part, its other tasks are in the economic and social field.

'Human' Consideration

I should also like to emphasize that the consideration of its collective future the international community is thus engaging in is, essentially, a consideration of the destiny of the human being. And this must remain present in our minds throughout the Conference.

It was indeed the human being in his environment that we discussed together in Rio. It was the human being as the possessor of rights that we

reflected on in Vienna. It is the human being in his social development that will be at the centre of our debates in Copenhagen.

And it is the human being through the status and condition of women, that will bring us together next year in

This concern is quite obviously to be found here in Cairo. through the mandate assigned to us by the Conference on Population and Development. And the objectives set for us reflect the following vital questions:

What are the links between population, sustained economic growth and sustainable development? What should our attitude be

to population growth and structure? How can equality of the

sexes and emancipation of momen be ensured? What is the role to be

played by the family? How can child mortality and maternal mortality be re-

duced? How can we protect the dignity and well-being of the

What is the best way of promoting population and fam-

ily-planning policies? How can internal and international migratory movements

be controlled? What should be the role of the non-governmental organizations in addressing these fundamental problems?

Clearly, these are extremely delicate questions, for, let us be guite frank about it, even behind the most technical problems we shall be called upon to discuss, choices by society can implicitly be discerned. And consequently, the fears, hesitations and criticisms that have surrounded the preparations for this Conference are understand

But that is not in my view a reason - far from it - to evade questions that are vital to the future of mankind. And no one would understand it if the United Nations, one of whose main roles is to serve as the major forum for international society, failed to take up these fundamental questions

To be faithful to its vocation and its nature, the United Nations must offer States a free and open framework for discussion, sensitive to the variety of opinions and convic-

I do believe however as Secretary-General of the United Nations, that it is my duty to invite you to approach this International Conference in a constructive and positive

In this connection I should like to suggest not a method of work, but what I should like to call "principles of conduct" These principles, which should set the tone of the Cairo Conference, can, it seems to me, be embodied in three essential words : rigour. tolerance and conscience.

Rigour

The rigour we must respect is both the rigour of the facts and intellectual rigour.

The world today has 5.630.000.000 inhabitants. Each year, the world's popula tion grows by almost 90 million. And United Nations projections are that in the year 2050, it should be between 7 918,000.000

11.500,000,000 We all know, too, that this

population growth is largely concentrated in the world's poorest countries. Currently, four and a half billion people, or almost 80 per cent of the overall population, are living in the least developed regions of the world. And if nothing is done, this situation is likely to get worse in the years to come.

Hence, a major question confronts us: how can we adhere to the demand for social progress envisaged in the Charter when, every day, 377,000 new human beings are born, mostly in the developing regions and, in many cases, in circumstances of intolerable hardship and poverty?

In the light of these inescapable realities, indifference and inaction are real crimes against the spirit. We must implement, encourage and support national, regional and international population policies, for — to put it in the plainest terms - it is through our intervention and determination that we can ensure harmonious progress for society and safeguard the future for subsequent generations to whom we are accountable from

It would be inadmissible to rely on some kind of law of nature, in other words, to allow wars, disasters, famine or disease to regulate the world's demographic growth. ...

States must be supported in their efforts to control population increase. The purpose of a conference such as ours is not only to measure the progress achieved over a decade, but also to devise better ways of combining population and development, as the very title of our conference urges us to do.

However, we must also consider population and family planning policies from the broadest and most global perspective so as to address not only the immediate problem, but also its underlying causes. Indeed, population policies are inseparable from health, nutrition and education policies.

like to stress the role that such policies must assign to women. Educating and mobilizing women are goals essential to the success of all population and development policies throughout the world. I am well aware that the

In this connection, I should

formulation and implementation of such policies can, in some cases, conflict with atti-

tudes or traditions. That is why wish to emphasize the second principle that should guide us here - the principle of tolerance.

Tolerance requires a conference such as ours to be highly respectful of cultures and beliefs, for, as well all know, a conference on popula tion and development raises both social and ethical ques-

I therefore call upon each and every one of you to be tolerant and respectful of the sensitivities that may be expressed during these discus-

Such tolerance must be moded disputes over words.

Such tolerance must also be mutual, for we cannot allow a given philosophical, moral or spiritual belief to be imposed upon the entire international community or to block the progress of humanity.

of our Conference depends upon our efforts to overcome our apparent divisions, our temporary differences, our ideological and cultural barriers. That is why I designate conscience as the third principle of conduct of our Conference.

Conscience is traditionally

For the knowledge which we must have of ourselves is. first and foremost, knowledge

Tolerance

From a social standpoint, let us never forget that what we term "the population" is not an indiscriminate mass Each member of the population belongs to a culture, a society, a tradition. A population consists of multiple relationships, in which each community deserves our respect, and of which the family is the nucleus.

Above all, a population encompasses diverse and varying lovalties: our discussions should take this into account.

shown in the strongest possible way, for it should not lead to cautious compromises, halfmeasures, vague solutions or, still worse, statements that lull us into complacency. Likewise. we should avoid becoming trapped in absurd and out-

In other words, the success

Conscience

defined as the capacity of the individual to know and judge himself as he really is. And this is indeed what is at stake for

of our freedom of judgement

responsibility, in a family environment of concern for the dignity of the human person and the future of society, will the full development of individuals be possible. which we must have of our

often, we become aware of it only through crisis, force or threat, in the most negative way, as a result of waves of immigration or refugee flows. Our debate here on population and development should give us a better grasp of the

common fate not only of individuals, but of humanity — and make it easier to convince public opinion in our countries

help us - at any rate, this is my hope - to fully shoulder our responsibilities towards future generations.

What we call 'the population" is really only a moment in the long history of humanity's journey. We should never lose sight of this; it sends us back to one of the most basic issues of our forthcoming debate. namely, how to implement population policies which respect the freedoms of all while at the same time ensuring harmonious development and shared social progress for future generations.

Accordingly, the Cairo Conference represents one of those rare and basic moments when the community of nations, by inquiring into its current realities, points the way towards its common future.

The Cairo Conference also represents a decisive stage in the assumption of our collective responsibility towards future generations.

over the world's demographic. economic and social future.

Transparency Wanted in Handling of Aid for Gaza Strip

NTERNATIONAL aid to au tonomous areas in the Ga-L za Strip and the West Bank town of Jericho would largely depend on the Palestinian's resolve to break traditional ways of political

patronage. A meeting of more than 40 donor countries and representatives of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund has been called by the United States to raise funds to support the autonomy accord between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation

Organization (PLO). But international donors have expressed fears that funds intended to rebuild the autonomous region may not be used for development and instead channelled to promote the political interests of some factions. The donors are insisting on measure to ensure accountability and transparency

in handling aid funds. Their fears are not unfounded. They were triggered by a recent announcement of Palestinian economist, Dr Yousef Sayegh, that he would resign as member of the Economic Council for Development and Construction (ECDC).

The Council was formed by autonomous areas.

Dr Sayegh said he was quitting because the formation of the PLO body was "politically motivated." He noted that the ECDC is composed mainly of politicians and not professional economists.

He said at least two of his colleagues in the 14-member shared his reservation.

that once again. Mr Arafat wants to keep his hands on the purse strings and run everything in a highly centralized. personal way.

ment plan for the occupied territories.

rangement. A recent agreement has

been reached on the mecha-

nism for the management of an

PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat to administer foreign aid for the

ECDC board of governors Political observers have said

They expect the American-

Japan, the European Community, the Scandinavian countries and the oil-rich Arab Gulf states are expected to be main donors and supporters of the interim autonomy ar-

sponsored donor's meeting to raise at least US\$885 million that would cover the cost of the first phase of the develop-

Mounir B Abboud writes from Beirut

International donors fear that funds for the rebuilding of the autonomous region may be used to promote the political interests of some factions

initial US\$2.4 billion of international aid to the Palestinians. It was reached recently in Paris where the steering committee on economic aid to the territories had been

meeting. According to the agreement, the World Bank will serve as the functioning secretariat of the funding mechanism, which will be supervised by a committee composed of the US, Japan, the European Community, Canada, Norway,

Russia and Saudi Arabia. Israel, the PLO Jordan, Egypt and Tunisia, among others, will be associated members of the committee.

The steering committee has welcomed PLO efforts to create an institution to promote economic development. It said the Palestinian agency must have the necessary autonomy to make day-to-day decisions.

Chairman Arafat has created the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) to supervise

the self-rule areas in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

Composed of 24 members.

the PNA has announced its

policy on how it will govern the autonomous areas. The highlights of the PNA's policy statement are: * The PNA's authority is temporary and will be only for

a transition period until gen-

eral parliamentary elections

can be held in the Palestine territory. * It will be in charge of carrying out the interim agenda leading to the implementation of the national programme that would set the stage for the fi-

nal settlement. The body will have full executive and legislative powers until parliamentary elections are held.

* If will work for the final release of all political prisoners and the repatriation of all deportees, and lay down a plan and special programmes for supporting, rehabilitating and training released prisoners. and families of martyrs.

* It will lay down an efficient format and plan for the self-rule structure, including a new hierarchy for municipal, village and local administrative councils.

The economy of the West Bank and Gaza Strip is heavily dependent on Israel, which occupied the territories in the 1967 war. The area has very little infrastructure of its own.

Samir Abdullah, a member of the Palestinian team that will attend the forth-coming donors' meeting, said the World Bank has revised its initial estimates that the territories need only US\$3 billion in 10 years to set up basic infrastructure and services. Its latest estimates range between US\$5 and US\$5.5 billion after the Palestinians submitted a pro-

gramme of their own. The Palestinian plan estimates the needs of the territories at US\$11.7 billion spread over seven years.

Mr Abdullah said the Palestinians and the World Bank positions differed on three key issues:

** The possible return of hundreds of thousands of

** Housing needs of about two million Palestinians under occupation who live in squalid camps. The Palestinian plan allocates US\$5.9 billion to house them in modern dwellings.

setting up of road networks.

He said the Palestinian interests.

economy of the Jewish state. professor of economics at

Najah University in the West Bank, said Palestinians were with Israeli firms.

and re-engage with the economies of the Arab countries." he said.

Swiss scholarship

Sir, An advertisement in Bangla was published in your esteemed daily on 24 August. 1994, in which the Ministry of Education asked for candidature for Swiss Scholarships for the 1995-96 academic year. The advertiser also asked the interested candidates to contact the Swiss Embassy in Dhaka. The last day for the application was mentioned as 25 September 1994.

The next morning (25 Aug) contacted the Embassy. But. to my surprise. I was told that the advertisement was useless as the announcement was made public to the Ministry of Education in the month of February this year and that the candidates had already been selected. I was advised to wait and apply in February next. Considering the situation

my question is what kind of an

advertisement really was this?

Is the Ministry of Education

aware of their deed? This farce

cost money for printing in the

newspaper and caused ha-

rassment to the members of the public. Does the honourable Assistant Secretary (Scholarship) know what his job is and if he has done it rightly? Because, if this is the service we get, do we at all need it? Is there anything called accountability in this country? When can we expect a de-

cent treatment for the people

Leadership crisis?

of the 'democratic' country?

Naheed M Ahmed Flat 602, House 5/1 Road 1. Shyamoli, Dhaka 1207

Sir, Reading many an observation on the present political crisis in the country one is likely to be thoroughly disheartened. Have our leaders thought even for a while as to what a mess they have cre ated? But who are the worst affected? Certainly not the political leaders who are rather enjoying life at the tax payers' money! What a pity!

What were the party programmes before the election or promises made during many a mammoth gathering by these political leaders? What are they delivering day in and day out even now? The nation's requirement

boils down to one point - economic emancipation. Of course, we have economic goal within our reach as spelled out in different party programmes and now in day in and day out speeches of almost all political leaders. Bengalees are though reputed to be garrulous - that we have proved umpteen times. But, leaders must learn to earn self-respect both for themselves and their fellow countrymen! Without this character quality we would just be like shuttle cocks.

Look at Malaysia - there the leaders dare point fingers to world leaders but on point of right cause. Our leaders may not go to that extent but must not be tutored even in internal

Of late, this symptom has

pained us because it then proves the hollowness of our politics as a whole. Leaders must save themselves and us as a whole from such situation of humiliation.

There are bound to be differences of opinions, on policy matters, methodology but there cannot be any two opinions on national interest and nation's well being. Hopefully our leaders would rise above all these and usher in a period of rational understanding towards achieving national objectives without dictate from outside.

Dhaka Women in society

New DOHS, Dhaka Cantt. .

M A M

Sir. Women in Bangladesh do not work less than men but they fare worse on almost every front. As a whole women get less food, education, health care and all other social facili ties. The female literacy rate is only 23 per cent as compared

with 30 per cent for male Medical expenditure in the typical household is 45 per cent on women and 55 per cent on men. They get less food, consuming on average 20 per cent lesser calories than men.

Bangladesh is rated among

one of the few countries in the world where women on aver age die younger than men. Discrimination starts at birth against women. A boy is con sidered a future breadwinner while a girl, only a temporary guest who will leave home after marriage. Boys get preferential treatment while girls are taught to be self-sacrificing. Girls usually take their meals last, and least, and they are twice as malnourished as boys. Parents take girls to health centres less often than boys and as a result, the child death rate for males is 14 per cent, but it is 24 per cent for females.

Poor nutritional status of women mark 40 per cent of pregnancies to high risk. Around 15 per cent of all female deaths are related to pregnancy - 30,000 a year. Poor nutrition, inadequate health care and large number

of closely spaced pregnancies,

all steadily take their toll and give Bangladeshi women one of the highest maternal mortality ratios in the world — 490 per 100,000 live births in rural ar A Labour Force Survey revealed that 29 pc of urban women were economically active and far rural women the

figure stood at 70 pc. Women

in rural areas work longer than

men Even in male-headed households, women's earnings contribute between 25 and 50 pc of family income Bangladesh cannot afford to ignore the potential half of its population, and if women contribute more the benefit for

N H Sufi Mohammadpur. Dhaka

them as well as the whole society would be enormous.

the world must have not only the right but also the means to choose their individual future and that of their families. Such freedom of decision is

a basic right which must be protected and encouraged Otherwise, it is the world's poorest people - and here am thinking specifically of the status of women - who would suffer the direct consequences. However, such freedom can be genuine only if it is experi-

and of the right of all women

and men to lead and run their

lives as they see fit, with re-

spect for the freedom of

others and the rules of society.

Men and women throughout

enced and put into practice in a setting which encourages women and men to be respon-Therefore, only through the combination of freedom and

However, the knowledge selves includes awareness of our interdependence. All too

Our Conference should also

Lastly, the Cairo Conference constitutes the strongest possible evidence of our determination to achieve joint control

Palestinian refugees.

** Airport construction, re pair of the Gaza seaport and

team will insist on its right to have the final say in the development plans to protect the country's strategic economic The senior Palestinian eco-

nomic planner said one of the top priorities of Palestinians under Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip is to disengage themselves from the Mr Abdullah, an associate

discouraging Arab businessmen in the occupied territories from setting up joint ventures "One of our priorities is to distance ourselves as much as possible from Israel economy

Depthnews Asia