

# Non-Governmental Organizations: Need for a National Policy

## Admission Test Scandal

The leakage of question papers for an admission test at the Dhaka University has been a matter of serious concern. Reportedly an organised gang with the help from a few students sold out the question papers at a big sum of money on the eve of the admission test. This incident has shocked and angered teachers, students and their guardians. But that is cold comfort for the candidates who did not take the unfair advantage of the scandalous sale or had no access to the leakage. After all they have been subjected to an unfair competition in which their chances for admission to the university diminished pathetically. So their frustration and anger cannot be matched by anybody else.

The leakage is still shrouded in mystery. But there is no doubt it is a case of internal breach of confidentiality. The controller of examinations, under whose custody all question papers lie before the examinations, is morally responsible for the breach and must explain his position. The university authority should also admit that the incident has dealt yet another blow to the receding reputation of DU.

We do not know what decision the authority is going to take, but we feel the test should be cancelled and a fresh given. We are pleased to hear that a number of student organisations have condemned the incident. We are pained though to note that it was none other than some students who either sold the question papers or were a party to the crime. If they wanted, they could easily help the university authority catch the culprits.

Now the university authority must move fast to determine exactly where things went wrong and who were responsible for the lapse. If the test is not taken afresh, the authority will be blamable on three counts: selecting wrong candidates through a faulty test, compromising the standards of education and throwing to the winds the sanctity of academic tests.

The university authority should do everything in their power to restore confidence in higher education. Among other things, they should perhaps keep an eye on the various methods used by different student wings to win over the admission hopefuls.

## Aid Realities

Finance Minister Saifur Rahman has provided some food for thought on the subject of aid fatigue, looking at it from a developing country's stand-point. We have been routinely hearing of the donor community's 'fatigue' over the recipient countries' inefficiency and rent-seeking in the use of foreign aid. It was time perhaps that we lent our ears to what the developing countries had been raring to say on the issue.

Bangladesh Finance Minister apparently seized the opportunity to speak out the developing countries' mind at a seminar held the other day at the Overseas Development Institute in London on the subject titled "Democracy, Good Governance and Development in the post-Cold War Era". There Saifur Rahman contended to the effect that the donors were politically motivated while pledging and disbursing aid to the developing world. For one thing, they seemed to favour countries in the middle and high income brackets with political credentials acceptable to the aid-givers. For the other, assistance given to the poorer countries has been mostly in the shape of tied aid compelling the recipients to buy goods and services from the donors at non-competitive prices. This is bit of an infraction of the free market principle, may we add!

The donors are answerable to their tax payers who, we believe, must be credited with a degree of altruism blended with a consciousness of what is called enlightened national interest. Then there are lobbies to be satisfied in the donor countries. In this vein, the advanced world's knowledge-sharing with the rest of the globe via the information super-highway notwithstanding, the North has been rather close-fisted in sharing such technologies with the South as would have helped the latter raise its productivity levels. The corporate giants have been possessive in this respect to an extent that stringent intellectual property rights have had to be enforced by their governments.

No doubt we are to blame in part for the 'bulge' in the aid pipeline caused by a bureaucratic under-utilisation of aid. The rest of the flak has to go to the donor community who apply rigid procedures before releasing project aid. If these snags on both sides are removed, aid could still deliver a precious relief to the poor.

## Setback in Sri Lanka

The peace process in Sri Lanka has run into trouble, not of the kind it had got accustomed to by way of alternating suspension and resumption during the last fourteen weeks. The LTTE has withdrawn from the talks and, that again, not by a simple verbal statement but by a dramatic attack on two government gun-boats in northeastern Sri Lanka. Twelve sailors died. In the sequel, Sri Lankan navy bombarded a Tamil guerilla base in Jaffna.

The government's refusal to dismantle a military base that allegedly blocked the passage of the Tamil rebels is ascribed to be the cause for the LTTE to call off the talks. However, the peace process had already yielded some results for them by way of their enjoying the hitherto embargoed fishing and other economic rights.

Both sides seem to have returned on warpath but in reality one sees a silver-lining in the fact that the government is expressly for a very limited offensive at this stage. Besides, President Kumaratunga, her colleagues in the government and the army have reiterated their intentions for a negotiated settlement. The LTTE cannot stretch its militarism too far without spoiling the chances for real autonomy within a united Sri Lanka. They should not throw away the baby with the bath water. At any rate, they cannot blame Kumaratunga's government for any lack of sincerity in ending the 11 year-long war which had already seen a death toll of 35,000. Should any more blood spill in that lovely country?

MRS Hillary Clinton's recent visit to Bangladesh had put the spotlight on the NGOs. The main purpose of her visit, as far as one could learn, was to personally observe the operations of the Grameen Bank and some other NGOs which seem to have made a strong impression in the Western countries. Liberal opinion in these countries is veering to the view that it is the NGOs which can effectively and successfully alleviate poverty. The performance record of the governments in Asia and Africa is, at best, mixed. In some countries the government's record is so dismal that donor countries have chosen the NGOs to lead the fight against poverty, malnutrition, poor housing, environmental pollution and other social ills. The donors believe that the talent, enterprise and spirit of service and goodwill latent in the society must be harnessed for lifting the economically disadvantaged from the depths of their poverty. Since the government in most cases, acting through official agencies, has failed to achieve this, there is no choice but to fall back on the NGOs to act as the catalytic agents for social and economic change.

In Bangladesh the NGOs have emerged as a force to reckon with. Even the conservative rural communities have accepted them as an important factor in their economic and social life. Notwithstanding the fulminations of the Islamic fundamentalists against the NGOs, the common men and women of our country are intelligent enough to recognize a good thing when they see one. Ordinary people of this country

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were, therefore, very happy to welcome Mrs Clinton in their midst. Her visit has no doubt given the NGO activities in Bangladesh a great boost. Strangely enough, the BNP Government seems to have been rather uneasy at the attention paid to the NGOs. Since it does not share Mrs Clinton's interest and enthusiasm about the NGOs, the government tried to divert attention to other matters. In fact they allegedly tried to make political use of the American First Lady's visit but the results, it is reported, were not very happy for the government. Mrs Clinton, it was reported, cancelled the press briefing that she was scheduled to give at the airport prior to her departure. Small wonder that the government preferred to remain silent on these press reports.

It is difficult to understand the reasons behind the recent attack on the NGOs by the Finance Minister, Mr Saifur Rahman. The controversy triggered by his remarks reflects a degree of hostility towards the NGOs which is difficult to understand or explain. He appears to be thinking that NGOs' work is of little value. He is not alone in not sharing the donor countries' enthusiasm for the NGOs. According to Mr Saifur Rahman, the hope that the NGOs will eradicate poverty was "absurd". In order to emphasize the insignificance of the NGO operations compared to the hundreds of crores of the tax payer's money

dished out by him, he said, "Providing Tk 2000 or 3000 to a poor fellow or planting some saplings here and there without even ensuring who will look after them will not remove poverty in the long run."

The Hon'ble Finance Minister's comments reflect a weak grasp of the dynamics of change in a society, about the innate but latent spirit of self-reliance, about the potential of a human being, however poor, to change his economic condition if a helping hand is extended to him or her. The Bangladesh NGOs have

tion must indeed make in this field. To bring into focus an imaginary competitive stance, as the Finance Minister's unduly blunt remarks seek to do, in an area where cooperation must be strengthened, can serve no useful purpose.

The balanced and mature reaction of ADAB compares sharply with the harsh and ungracious comments of the Finance Minister. What is baffling is the somewhat different language and tone of the Prime Minister's speech at the recently held Social Summit at Copenhagen. If her statement

For this reason the progressive and forward-looking forces of the nation, irrespective of party affiliation, must be reassured that the BNP government and the Islamic fundamentalists are not working hand in glove against the NGOs. The fundamentalists do not like that the poor rural women should get access to credit facilities on reasonable terms and become self-reliant. They do not like the planting of mulberry saplings. Mr Saifur Rahman also appears to dislike these activities. It may be recalled here that the poor people's grand rally which the NGOs wanted to hold in Dhaka was not permitted by Begum Zia. She refused permission to the rally because it would have exposed the hollowness of her claims about the so-called "wave of development". The "wave" seems to exist only in her imagination.

Whether one likes it or not, NGOs are here to stay. Collectively they are a significant player in our development effort. Yet there has been no serious attempt to formulate a clear set of guidelines or a national policy. There is of course an NGO cell in the Economic Relations Division but few people seem to know the policy framework within which it operates.

In my view, there ought to be a national debate in the matter so as to crystallize a set of policies which will have the backing of all shades of opinion. As far as I recall there was never a full debate on this issue in the Parliament. I myself hold a very positive view about the contributions that the NGOs are making but I know of people who have reservations about them. Some of them are certainly managed well and have gained international recognition but others reportedly lack professional management.

The reputation of the Grameen Bank and BRAC should not make us complacent on the question of management. The manner in which the NGOs are funded and managed needs to be looked at. The question of accountability and transparency must also be addressed. Large sums of money are received and spent by these bodies from the donors and presumably they are answerable only to the latter. Is that desirable or really enough? What about the auditing of the accounts? Booklets describing only the good work being done by them do not give the full picture. Of course no one would want the freedom of operation of the NGOs to be curbed or their initiative throttled by bureaucratic obstructions.

Yet who can deny the need to ensure that the NGO activities are in harmony with the nation's overall development strategy? As ADAB in its press release said, NGO's contributions to poverty alleviation can only be 'supportive' of the gigantic effort that the nation must make in this field. This underlines the importance of a broad national consensus about the role that the NGOs are expected to play in our struggle to eradicate poverty and backwardness from our society.

## ON THE RECORD

by Shah A M S Kibria



been hurt by the Finance Minister's comments about their work. The Association of Development Agencies of Bangladesh, ADAB for short, in a press release, expressed surprise at his statement and said, *inter alia*, that "The NGOs are astonished that the Finance Minister has attempted to compare the NGOs work with that of the government. NGO's contribution to poverty alleviation in this country of 120 million people, half of whom live below the poverty line, can only be supportive of the gigantic effort that the na-

really reflected government policy, then the Finance Minister is clearly out of step with the official policy of the government."

It is necessary to get a clear policy statement from the government on the NGOs because these organisations are currently the target of attack by the Islamic fundamentalists. It is common knowledge that these extremists have been brought out of the closet by late Ziaur Rahman and, according to many, nurtured by the BNP assiduously over the last two decades.

TWO years ago, 11 farmers in this rice-growing heartland of Sri Lanka were driven to suicide because they could not repay their debts.

The withdrawal of subsidies, the rising cost of farm inputs and stoppage of all government assistance in marketing produce dictated by the Structural Adjustment Programme of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) had rendered them bankrupt.

Today, farmers in Sri Lanka's ricebowl are organising themselves into cooperatives to gain leverage in the do-or-die battle to live off the land.

Says RHM Abeyaratne, president of the Wannamunukulla Self-help Farmers Association (WSFA): "To get help from the government, we have to organise ourselves. In another two to three years, we should be able to fix the price of our produce with this collective action."

Nearly 300 small farmers' associations with over 2,000 members are now registered with the Janadhaya (Peoples' Awakening), a local non-governmental organisation (NGO) to pool their resources.

"We have had no government assistance so far," says Janadhaya president NSMP Seveviratne. "We got a grant of US\$4,000 from Sweden's SIDA aid agency in 1992 and through investing and marketing activities we have now increased that capital three times."

Janadhaya, in collaboration with the Sri Lankan arm of

## Now it's a 'Suicidal' Farm Policy in Sri Lanka

Community Aid Abroad (CAA) — an Australian grassroots development aid agency — has been actively educating the farmers about the ill-effects of structural adjustment.

Sarath Wickremaratne, CAA's programme officer in Sri Lanka, the withdrawal of government subsidies of fertilisers and pesticides and privatisation of local government-owned purchasing centres under the structural adjustment policy in the early 1980s drove most of Sri Lanka's rural cultivators to rapacious money lenders. The result was large unpaid debts with inflated interest rates that drove the 11 unfortunate farmers to suicide.

Indeed, farmers say their major problem is not lack of water that officials normally cite but a host of other factors like the spiralling prices of fertiliser, seeds and pesticides. The farmers were taught to abandon bulls for ploughing their fields and instead depend on tractors, the hiring charges of which have shot up in recent times.

Piyasiri Bulumulla, director of the non-governmental National Development Foundation's (NDF) district development programme here, says the major reason for the disillusionment of farmers has been the withdrawal of government assistance in marketing produce.

WSFA member RH Amathifunda agrees. Ever since the government sold local

Farmers in Sri Lanka come together in a do-or-die battle as structural adjustment literally drives them to suicide. Kalinga Seneviratne of Inter Press Service reports from Galgamuwa, Sri Lanka

purchasing centres to private bidders, the farmers have had to hire trucks to take the produce to town.

The astronomical costs involved make it much cheaper for the farmers to sell to the local trader. Says Amathifunda: "The trader does not charge interest on money loaned to buy farm inputs or for emergencies like a sickness. But he buys our produce dirt cheap and also gets us to work in his field on a volunteer basis."

Bulumulla explains that when they bought seeds from the local traders, the price of rice was 15 rupees (30 cents) per kg. But now when they are reaping their harvest, the price has come down to five rupees, although the government's guaranteed rate is 7.4 rupees.

"We are at the mercy of the local trader," says Bulumulla. "However much we have toiled to produce good rice, he always finds fault with it and bring down the price."

But the farmers are fighting back by organising themselves into *sanwathanas* or farmers' associations. Through these, they collectively hire trucks to take their produce to the marketplace in the town

during the next harvest. They say the actor, is essential to their survival. Aside from structural adjustment, Green revolution-swept Asian countries had put pressure on cultivators in the erstwhile granary of the east. In fact they now want to switch from rice to cash crops like

gerkins, peanuts and tobacco for the export market, which they believe will bring in more profits. Wickremaratne argues that the main purpose of setting up government purchasing cen-

tres in the post-independence era was to give farmers — who form a sizeable 75 per cent of Sri Lanka's population — a guaranteed fair price for their produce and to go to the farmer to purchase it.

But once these outlets were privatised, the companies which bought the storage facilities had no interest in the welfare of the farmers. Some even turned the buildings into garment factories, he says. The farmers are now fencing for themselves, he adds. In Mallyadevapura, a remote farming hamlet about 20 kms from Galgamuwa, the local Janadhaya group has set up a collection centre in the village to gather the produce and take it to the town for sale.

Their example of how to save the farmer from the middleman has encouraged other

farmers in the area to form associations. There are already nine such groups which will very soon grow to 25 or 30, predicts a confident Wickremaratne.

But he says the farmers cannot succeed in the long run without government assistance. "However much the farmers mobilise to store their produce and fetch a better price, the question must arise at some stage as to where it should be sold," observes Wickremaratne. "Without government intervention, I can't see a solution to the farmers' problems. This I think is the reality in the Third World."

He warns that if President Chandrika Kumaratunga's government fails to be more sympathetic toward the movement by taking up cudgels against the IMF, the hitherto peaceful farmers may turn violent in their desperation.

## Bureaucratic Mystique in South Asia

A K M Jalaluddin

### What the CSPs were Taught — III

## The One-eyed Horse

SO we began in right earnest to study the issue of actual residences of power in Pakistan and how far bureaucratic power or talent was available, and necessary for Pakistan. We were a small group, because it was unlikely that all of us would be interested in the same topic. We wanted to know, plainly, where power resided and why it was so.

Inevitably, it meant meeting people and asking questions. We were divided into various groups and attached to senior officers. Fortunately, we were attached to Syed Quasim Rizavi, the seniormost member of 1950 batch (incidentally, his was the only batch that was supposed to have revolted and the preliminary enquiry recommended that each and every member of the 50 batch should be dismissed. Later, saner counsel prevailed and the angry young men were asked firmly to behave or else...)

Rizavi proved a goldmine of information to us. He was extraordinarily informed, was extremely articulate and, given half a provocation, would speak on an issue at length, with insight, and inside information. It was a treat to be in his company. He will tell us all about an issue with a sure-footedness which could not be matched by anyone else. He had no children and that gave him more time to devote to his duties. He had encyclopaedic knowledge about things bureaucratic and told us many anecdotes of back-stage manoeuvres in the power politics of Pakistan.

At the Academy, Shoab Sultan Khan told us about the tradition of the CSPs. As a successor of a kind, to the ICS, their values had to be evaluated, of course, with necessary modifications in the changed circumstances in Pakistan. Usually the ICS probationer posted in the district would live in the Collector's residence as his house-guest. Now, in Pakistan the officers had houseguests aplenty, so the CSP probationer had to stay in the Circuit House, but the nonetheless remained the personal charge of the Deputy Commissioner and would be

treated as a member of the family. The CSP tradition enjoined upon the seniors to look after their juniors with all their affection and sincerity. None will back-bite against another. There was no question of two CSP officers competing for the same appointment. There was a total feeling of friendships and comradeship that bound the officers together. They were truly brothers to one another. Honesty, competence and hard work was the trademark of the elite cadre.

At the time of our training two members of the cadre were facing difficulties. Mazari (ICS 39 intake) had to file a writ petition against some arbitrary orders of Ayub Khan and Hussain, an East Pakistani officer (55 intake), was facing criminal charges of corruption. "Unfortunately, the charges against Hussain are founded in facts and we surely cannot support a corrupt person. But Mazari's case is different, he was fighting for some principles, and he deserved our full support." Was the consensus according to the CSP tradition. There was no place for a corrupt person in the CSP in 1966.

Mazari was charged, among others, of defying some government (i.e. Ayub Khan's) orders. No order is an order of government or any authority unless it was a lawful order. Khan told us repeatedly.

Our training programme began in October 1966 and the elections of 1965 for the office of the President was very much a live issue in those days. The East Pakistan government was then headed by Abdul Monem Khan and he found it necessary to withdraw all the CSP SDO's excepting one in Chandpur. We were told that the Chandpur SDO remained neutral in the whole thing and Ayub was squarely beaten by Miss Jinnah in Chandpur Sub-division. This was a record we should be proud of, Khan declared.

Other courses of the academy were also going on in full swing. As a journalist, I had already learnt self-tying of a sort which could make do in emergencies. So, I was exempted from attending typing

lessons. Since I already knew how to ride a bi-cycle, a waiver was granted for this as well. Farashuddin and I had majored in economics from the Dhaka University and this was good enough reason for Prof Rashid, the teacher in development economics, to exempt us from attending his lectures.

Farashuddin was surely a brilliant economist but I knew no economics — despite the degree. I pleaded not guilty, with all humility, to the charge of having any knowledge remotely connected with that occult subject called economics. "Dr Mazharul Huq told me all about it," Prof Rashid rejoined affectionately. "Do not bother about economics, concentrate on some thing else that may be difficult for you."

Well, there was something I really needed to concentrate on. Equitation was a kind of martial art in the olden times and none could literally go very far without knowing how to ride a horse. The ICS officers learnt the art of horsemanship because of the difficulties in communications in the country areas at that time. But a horse-ride was progressively becoming less necessary from the practical point of view, I argued.

But the pundits decreed otherwise: equitation helped one to have steelier nerve and made him more decisive. How scientifically true they were I am not sure, but the fact was I was scared of riding.

Every year the Academy would produce a casualty for falling off the horse. Once during the morning session at the ungodly hour of 5 am, in the biting cold of Lahore, in January, Hudaj fell off his horse, right in front of our eyes, and broke his arm. I had no reasons, given my interest and competence in horse-riding, to feel assured that the same calamity will not befall me. So, I had to find a way out.

After some labourous enquiries I found that all the horses were not the same; they had different track records. Of course, a horse is full of horse sense, and would size up his rider in a split second. But Hayanaya was different. She was old in age and somehow lost one of her eyes. The one-eyed horse was the least troublesome and most popular among those who were less than proficient in riding. So Hayanaya became my favourite and I would not mind sacrificing half an hour's sleep early in the morning and be the first in the queue for the saddle of my darling Hayanaya.

## To the Editor

### "Spousal Murder"

Sir, I am referring to your editorial of April 7, 1995, "Spousal Murder" in which you have stated that in our country in the last three months, 38 wives out of 94 were killed by their husbands and 313 men were murdered but none of them by their wives. I don't know if any one of the killing was done by a woman, may be all the 407 murders were committed by men. Is not it a proof without question that males are basically cruel? What do we see when we look across the world — most of the heinous crimes are committed by men.

In our country economic problem is considered to be one of the causes behind killing spouses but why should it be so? If men were not so greedy and heartless many lives would have been saved.

In advanced countries where also this sort of killings happen, these must not be due to poor economic condition but because of the inherent cruelty of males, so no cause is a cause perhaps.

Nur Jahan  
East Nastrabad, Chittagong

### NPT and UNSC permanent members

Sir, People all over the world can never wipe out the remains of scars from their hearts caused due to nuclear attacks by the USA on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 when tens of thousands of people were killed and the two cities of Japan were burnt to ashes.

After the end of the World War II there was a mad rush for atom bombs. Soon the UK, the Soviet Union, France and China, more for the sake of 'might is right' and prestige

than for security, became nuclear powers.

In 1968 one hundred and seventy-five countries signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty but of no avail. India exploded her nuclear device in 1974, reportedly Israel possesses 200 nuclear bombs, Pakistan has acquired technical know-how and resources to make atom bomb, North Korea and Iran are also trying to manufacture nuclear bombs.

Delegates of 175 countries which signed the NPT years ago have again assembled in New York to discuss (from April 17 to May 12, 1995) and debate, the pros and cons of the nuclear weapons.

Led by the USA all the five permanent members of the UNSC who possess nuclear bombs want indefinite, unconditional renewal of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) designed to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons.

We feel that only signing of the NPT for indefinite period is not enough. All the nuclear weapons owned by the USA, the UK, Russia, France and China need to be destroyed. If the nuclear weapons of the former Soviet Union's republics Ukraine, Belarusia and Kazakhstan could be destroyed at the initiative of the USA why should not the nuclear weapons of the USA, UK, Russia, France and China?

We strongly demand that the United Nations General Assembly should pass a resolution demanding complete destruction of all nuclear weapons and ban production thereof without any discrimination by any country in the world whether in Europe, Asia, America or Africa for the sake of saving the human race from self-annihilation.

stress on destroying the nuclear weapons' stock than merely signing and renewing the NPT?

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### Biman fare for domestic flights

Sir, Biman which is the only air communication system here has a very limited network of internal routes. Previously the government was subsidising the fares. Now, in order to minimise the loss, the government has reduced the quantum of subsidy resulting in sharp increase of Biman fare in internal routes. But even then the tickets are not always available. Even one O.K. ticket few hours before your journey. But on board the aircraft, you will obviously find a number of seats remaining vacant. It is not understood why the seats remain vacant when the tickets are not available at the counter. We know there is provision to keep some 'reserve' seats for the use of VIPs. But why the seats should remain vacant when the VIPs are not making any visits? This sort of mismanagement is understandably forcing Biman to incur loss and charge more from the domestic passengers.

It was heard that private STOL service would be started very soon. But it is being delayed for reasons best known to the authorities. Meanwhile Ishurdi airport has been opened and is being used by Biman. I think Biman can also open Thakurgaon and Lalmonirhat airports to reduce the rush of passengers at Saidpur airport.

Mahbubul Haque Choudhury  
Kalabagan, Dhaka