

Raising Nutrition

A six-year national nutrition project is going to be undertaken in the country soon. The International Development Association (IDA), a lending arm of the World Bank, is providing about Tk 239 crore (\$60m) out of the Tk 269 crore project. After three years of tug of war over the project, the WB and the government have at last reached an agreement to implement it. For a country where as high as 93 per cent children and 70 per cent women are victims of malnutrition, a programme entirely devoted to fighting this health hazard directly arising out of socio-economic factors, means a lot.

It is indeed encouraging to see that the project aims at realising three objectives. The first concerns achieving a capacity to design and implement an effective nutrition programme for the country. The second relates to empowering the community to respond to the call for action against malnutrition. The third, of course, is a follow-up of the results achieved. All this means gearing up efforts to raise the level of nutrition of the people. One interesting thing about our food habit is that we prefer taste — and even colour or look — to nutrition value. That means not all of our nutritional problems are poverty-related.

It is exactly at this point some changes in our food habit or cooking practice can bring about a dramatic improvement in our nutritional status. For example, cheaper foods with higher nutritional values are often avoided due to lack of knowledge. Similarly food quality is spoiled by overheating, improper washing and peeling. A little care can retain almost the whole of the vitamin for the various dishes. So here is a subject of culinary expertise that has to be attended to in earnest. Then of course people must know how to go for a balanced diet. We hope these aspects will be taken into consideration in the nutrition raising campaign.

Of course the broader issue of poverty alleviation has to receive the main focus. After all, where poverty is endemic, people have little choice for what they eat. The discrimination that women and children are subjected to cannot be wished away. People must know the reason why women cannot be left to live on smaller and inferior share of food. Let the people make the most judicious choice within their economic constraints. Things will certainly improve. If some investment of value can be added to that, the problem of stunted growth and low intelligent quotient can be overcome over time.

A Scandal is a Scandal

It was perhaps not an earth-shaking revelation. But it surely was enough to unsettle the government, the political parties and the mind of our citizens in general. The first blow claimed that 199 legislators of the present Jatiya Sangsad owed Tk 3.5 crore in telephone bill. The vernacular national daily that dug out the scandal continued the expose to say in the second instalment that 163 members of the two Parliaments during the Ershad regime still owe more than taka one crore in arrear phone bill. The third blow fell on government organisations and autonomous bodies whose combined arrear comes to more than Tk 100 crore. And, not to be beaten and left by the wayside, newspapers and news agencies ran up a total of Tk 2.5 crore in unpaid phone bill.

It is a scandal on an unprecedented and truly national scale. The top people of the nation have become so disrespectful of law and the lesser mortals of the nation so inured to monetary obligation that the scandal is not being seen as such or even as something at all very wrong. For 312 MPs to owe Tk 4.5 crore, with 12 of them already dead and most of the living ones also unlikely to be forthcoming about clearing their arrears, does not speak highly of our legislators' idea of a law-abiding citizen. The law they keep and make are as such tainted with the suspicion of being examples of a very ugly kind of double standard.

Legislators, bureaucrats and newspaper owners are a motley lot. By their failings they have become one in making it morally wrong for the T & T authority to penalise any phone subscriber in any manner for defaulting with bill payment. But the defaulters' misdemeanour is limited by the possibility of their paying up. There is no such redeeming chutzpah by which the T & T Board could escape the wrong they have done to the state, to the people, to business practices and administrative norms. The T & T minister's jocular comment as to his fear of the legislators and journalists has made things worse.

This telephone story is bad enough, pray do not make it ugly and injurious to the body-politic by feigning that this is nothing. Such a posture would spell disaster to the state. All this money due to state must come to state — to right the crooked ways of our individual and collective beings.

More College Teachers

The Education Minister has said 1200 more college teachers are soon going to be recruited and pressed into service. This is very gratifying. One doesn't come across such news every so often. But how does this 1200 compare with the total number of posts lying vacant in the nation's college?

The minister has expressed hope that the newly recruited batch would help improve the standard of education now being offered. We fail to see the connection. More manpower is always welcome in undermanned situations but that cannot automatically ensure a spurt in standards. For standards are altogether a different story.

There are facilities and arrangements, however meagre, for uplifting school teaching, both in-service and before induction. But the teachers at the extended college level are called lecturers and professors — and not mere masters — and are not given any teachers' training comparable to B.Ed or M.Ed.

The nation's education suffers because of unwholesome content and horrendous management. But these cannot together do the harm that is being wrought by the awful classroom situation. What do the teachers teach and what do the students imbibe? Not education, to be sure.

War in Bosnia: Who are the Real Hostages?

by M M Rezaul Karim

The policy of a double standard has been a common phenomenon for many. It will remain so in future. But when this becomes evident and glaring, it hits the eye hard.

THE critical point to which the Bosnian episode has now reached presents a scenario and imparts a dimension hitherto unknown during the three-year ordeal of the unfortunate people of that region. The Bosnian war theatre has lately witnessed a qualitative change, with a perceptible tilt in the policy directions of its principal actors.

So long the war in Bosnia has been viewed from the West generally as a vicious wound inflicted by a prodigal son whom the former could neither control nor punish. Their attention was focussed mainly on how to heal the wound promptly and effectively in order that its malign effect does not spread out in the outlying areas in the body politic of a prosperous civilised Europe. The killing, arson, rape and heinous atrocities committed by the Bosnian Serbs in the so-called operation of ethnic cleansing *a la mode* Nazi Germany indeed made the big powers protest and condemn loud and clear. But so far as the decisive action was concerned, they vacillated, procrastinated and stalled.

The help of the United Nations was invoked and secured immediately. The UNPROFOR

was deployed without much delay. This was a commendable act, worthy of praise. But the persistent violation of the UN Resolutions as well as deliberate and ignominious flaunting of the Security Council directives by the Bosnian Serbs have, of late, escalated the war to a pitch that went beyond the specific mandate and limited capacity of the UN forces to cope with. The peacekeeping force of the United Nations is not geared to peace enforcing task. On the contrary, the protection giving force needs protection itself. The UN Secretary General has called for supplementary forces and even initiated supplanting the present UN troops by a well-equipped multinational force capable of cowing down a well-supplied and well-nourished formidable foe of an impoverished nation bounded by an arms embargo, ironically for its own protection but in fact denying its legitimate right to procure arms and protect itself.

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main so in future. But when this becomes evident and glaring, it hits the eye hard. It should embarrass its perpetrator, but often it does not, thanks to the nicely and well-developed art of articulation, transforming truth into non-truth and vice versa.

This was experienced by us too, not much in the distant past. In early December last, when the small Bangladeshi UN contingent was bottled up in Bihać, the international media, in general, attributed the cause indirectly to the inadequate equipment of the force from a poor country. The 370 UN troops who had been equipped with the sophisticated and most advanced weaponry and still taken hostage are indeed a different ball game.

But I could recall vividly that episode about Bihać, a safe haven declared by the UN. No amount of persuasion and forceful intervention in the caucus of the non-aligned group as well as in the informal group of the Security Council through impassioned pleas by our Permanent Repre-

sentative activated the Security Council to meet again formally and take effective measures to redress the situation. As a delegate I could perceive through my discussions that the era of diplomacy of Harold Nicholson and Clemenceau was now over. A new breed of smooth talkers, causing great fury but signifying nothing, has now emerged, assuring us much to follow. Even with my thirty three years of experience as a diplomat, I momentarily felt deceived but soon came back to reality. However, a consensus statement recording appreciation for good deeds and reprimands for bad ones ensued. After all, these diplomats had to confine themselves within the given directives and their contributions on that occasion were at best marginal.

However, the taking of the 370 hostages, mostly Western, using them as human shields and denying access to them in contemptuous defiance of all norms of civilised behaviour, international law and Geneva Convention have now evoked angry protests and is marshalling a degree of Western

strength so far unseen during this war. The newly elected French President promptly gave vent to his feelings of deep anguish and authorised the French contingent to take independent action, if so needed. The US president having committed the necessary equipment to the UN force, not only deployed an aircraft carrier but even did not rule out committing some ground troops, if required, for a limited purpose. In the process, he took the risk of defying the cacophony of opposition from most Republicans and some fellow Democrats. The British Prime Minister immediately despatched supplementary force to the war zone in possible aid of compatriot soldiers, again to a tumultuous parliamentary opposition to a deeper involvement in ground combat.

Russia, a member of the 5-nation contact group, rose to the occasion much to the delight of many and promised to exercise its influence on appropriate quarters to secure release of the hostages. Some hold this overture to be a by-

product of Russia's newly acquired partnership arrangement with NATO. Similar is the case of the Serbian President, who became instrumental to the release of the 120 hostages and 108 later perhaps in the hope of lifting of the UN embargo on his country as a *quid pro quo* for recognition of Bosnia.

Irrespective of the factors of motivation besides hostage taking and downing of a NATO fighter aircraft, Europe and America appear now united to take some effective action. The present hostage management may give rise even to a peace enforcing mission, with the formation of a 10,000 strong Rapid Reaction Force, should the Bosnian Serbs persist in their intransigence. The two prong efforts, given their sincerity of purpose and adequacy of means, — the persuasion of the Bosnian Serbs by their mentors and the readiness of the superior forces of the West to strike — may ultimately bring recalcitrants back to their senses, make them abandon their fight and agree to a reasonable peace plan. After all, it is not a case of a few hundred troops but the conscience and pride of the great powers who are now held in hostage.

advisers, adverse or otherwise.

Finally, during the fortnightly meetings, the PM should give the advisers enough time to argue their case. There should be lively discussions and debates but not lengthy speech making from either side. The primary aim would be to seek truth from facts and the best method of approaching a problem, rather than trying to impress the boss. All such meetings should be held in camera, and nothing should be leaked to the press. The press should also exercise restraint on its own and refrain from publishing the content of discussions between PM and the advisers even if these come into their possession.

All those interested in good governance, in general, and in improving the quality of policy decisions at the highest level of government, in particular, might find this proposal worth considering. If this assumption is correct, then I would also be expecting a large number of pro-good governance individuals and organisations lobbying for its implementation when the next democratic government comes to power following the impending general election!

Forces of Pakistan is to defend the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Pakistan at all costs, in the fulfilment of which the prime requisite is to prepare for war'. Over the past year, the political climate has become more conducive for the Armed Forces, particularly the Pakistan Army, and today a popular, much beloved institution is much better psychologically equipped to accomplish its mission. Free of bad vibes from the masses, the Defence Services have relished going back to their primary and only role.

Summary

An apology must be made because of the generalities made and the sketchiness of the treatment of an important subject necessitated by reasons of maintaining security. Air Marshal (Retd) Nur Khan, a respected former PAF Chief, stated that a 20% budget reduction is possible just by cost cutting without equipment manpower-deletions and he was supported in this by another respected military figure, Lt. Gen. (Retd) K M Shaikh who had used a figure for saving of over Rs 4 billion (US\$250 million). This is quite a substantial sum and given the credibility and expertise of these two profound military minds, can be deemed to be more or less correct. Why not incorporate such men of known stature and make a committee including known honest military minds?

It behoves us to draw up all our efforts in making our war machine strong within the resources available and this means ruthlessly ensuring that every penny counts.

Policy Unit in the Prime Minister's Office

There is no harm in seeking a fresh and disinterested second opinion from outside particularly when this is in no way binding on the PM.

IN the UK, a policy unit consisting of seven professional members, drawn from both the private sector and the government, has been institutionalised in the PM's Office. The PM meets this group regularly, and the group enjoys a high prestige in all important circles. The group is, therefore, effective in formulating policy and giving it a concrete shape.

The UK is the oldest parliamentary democracy in the world. Here the Cabinet of Ministers, headed by the PM, constitutes the core policy makers in the government. The obvious question, therefore, is, why is it necessary to have a separate policy unit in the PM, constitutes the core of the policy makers in the government. The obvious question, therefore, is, why is it necessary to have a separate policy unit in the PM's office? Two arguments may be put forward in defence of this innovation. Firstly, in the complex, high-tech world of today, it is always profitable to consult the very best experts. Since they may not always be available in the Cabinet of Ministers or the civil service, it becomes necessary to hire them from outside. Secondly, there is no

harm in seeking a fresh and disinterested second opinion from outside particularly when this is in no way binding on the PM. In a new democracy like Bangladesh, this is all the more justified. Since political institutions have been traditionally weak and segmented here owing mainly to colonial rule and the autocracy that followed, they could not attract the best minds to them. This situation is not likely to change dramatically just because democracy has been ushered in. Even under the best of conditions, it will take decades before a qualitative change takes place in this regard.

Meanwhile, a suitable combination of professionals with elected people's representatives in the decision-making process seems to be the best alternative under the existing circumstances. On the other hand, it may also be argued that in a nascent democracy like Bangladesh Cabinet ministers with high expectations of their role may feel frustrated and discouraged if the PM appears to lean on a group of professionals who do not enjoy the confidence of the electorate. This idea of a policy unit was, I am told, floated in 1991, and it was perhaps because of the latter consideration that it could not be realized during Begum

various fields, but they need not sit in the PM's office as full-time advisers. A senior officer in the PM's office could liaise with the group, and the PM could sit with the group once in a fortnight where he/she could informally seek their views on pressing issues. In addition, these advisers

could also speak their minds on matters which they consider important, and make written suggestions and recommendations. A summary could then be prepared for the PM on the basis of these discussions and suggestions. Finally, the PM could independently, or in consultation with Cabinet colleagues, decide what to do next.

If this arrangement is to work effectively, the policy advisers would be required to not

Making Government Work

by Analyst

Khaleda Zia's present term as Prime Minister.

One can appreciate this, but there can be no excuse for not having a Policy Unit once a new government comes to power following the general elections. However, it is neither necessary nor desirable to copy the British model to the letter. It seems that in our context, an informal arrangement would be in order, to begin with. The PM could select the policy makers from

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say for the purchase of armoured personnel carriers. The General Staff selects an armoured personnel carrier for the next decade or so and gives out the number to be produced. An agreement is then made about possible price, with realistic escalation clause. The foreign principal then sets up a joint venture project or gives only technical knowhow to the project with a

company formed by Fauji Foundation or Army Welfare Trust, who turn for their local funds from their own investment bank for their project as well as look for private sector partners. The foreign principal will also have to buy back part of the production for sales through their own sales network. At the same time, with the help of the foreign principal or otherwise, we can expect to sell some of the items produced to Third World countries. This scenario incorporates transfer of technology, employment opportunities, quality control, financial inputs, private sector enterprise, cost control and effectiveness, foreign exchange earned through buy-backs, etc.

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AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

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