

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 arrears phone bill. The third blow fell on government organisations and autonomous bodies whose combined arrears 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 chute 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 being.

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 troopings the present UN troops by a well-equipped multinational force capable of cowering 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.

The policy of a double standard has been a common phenomenon for many. It will re-

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 nicety 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 Bihac, 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 Bihac, 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 cacophonous opposition from most Republicans and some fellow Democrats. The British Prime Minister immediately dispatched 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.

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.

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 only maintain and extremely low profile but also never insist on having their way. In other words, they would shun publicity, maintain secrecy, avoid conflicts with ministers and MPs and remain uncomplaining even if their recommendations were rejected by the PM. They have to be self-effacing disinterested people imbued with the realisation that not they, but the PM ministers and MPs are ultimately responsible to the people. On the other hand, if their recommendations are accepted by the government, and then in the process of implementation some of these backfire and cause embarrassment, they policy advisers must not be singled out and made into scapegoats. Indeed, if this protection is denied, good experts would shy away from providing independent, honest and disinterested advice in the future. Similarly, the press, the Opposition and Cabinet colleagues must not pass comments on the policy

advisers, adverse or otherwise.

Finally, during the fortnightly meetings, the PM should give the advisers enough time to argue out 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!

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

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

Pakistan's Defence Budget — III

Private Sector Involvement

Americans, British and Japanese pre-World War II. On the other hand we are liable to give colossal funds to units like Military Vehicle Research and Development Establishments (MVRDE) which really cannot give the desired results without generous input from our sources abroad. At the same time, we are visited by hundreds of military salesmen every year peddling their wares; there should be an organisation doing constant research and evaluation on the products being marketed. In some products, one cannot expect transfer of technology, other because of high-tech or economy in numbers but invariably we should ask any foreign company interested in selling its products to us to give out a technology transfer proposal.

From Disadvantage to Advantage

In order to turn the disadvantage of reliance on foreign imports into an advantage, we must ensure that any sales made to us must not only include transfer of technology but also an offset mechanism wherein some of the products being made in Pakistan are repurchased by the foreign principal. In this manner we will not only ensure cost effectiveness and maintenance of quality which are self-explanatory but also create a demand for exports to the Third World countries.

A possible scenario can be

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

Evaluation of Equipment for Induction

When there is no choice but to purchase foreign equipment, there must be a clear-cut evaluation procedure able to see through open chicanery. There is a tendency to award the tender to the lowest bidder but a more correct method is to have an evaluation system that works on a point system.

AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

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.

40% being kept for lowest bidder, 60% for technical evaluation. The normal penchant for unscrupulous manufacturers is to give a low price and then more than make-up in spares. There is a joke that Mercedes is so well established in the Defence Services, instead of being paid for the product they will pay you to take the product and still make a profit — in spares.

Beside technical evaluation, we must also look at amortized costs including depreciation, cost of spares, cost of POL (a vehicle may have more fuel consumption than the other; over 15 years or whatever is thought to be the combat life, the extra price must be added to the tendered price), tech-

nology transfer wherein the intention to make the product here must be taken into account, etc. We must not allow our evaluation process to become a sham or even a make-monkeys of us. It behooves us to go for the best that money can buy — but properly processed for the amortized cost; we cannot afford to have impaired quality for our Armed Forces, shoddy goods will result in shoddy defence.

The Defence Services as a Deterrent

Freedom has a price and nations who have an inbuilt urge not to be enslaved pay that price by sustaining a credible deterrent. The Armed Forces of Pakistan need all the money that they can get to modernize and expand the only credible deterrent to, say, Indian hegemony in the South Asia subcontinent. Apologists would have us accept Indian tutelage as a fait accompli, it is not the first time that liberal intellectuals have given encouragement to an enemy by such a stance. Hitler often quoted Oxford University's famous debate resolution, 'This House will not fight for King and country', or some such to his generals as an example of the decaying of the British will to fight. The fact that respected columnists in some of our major newspapers have taken on a similar refrain is alarming.

The mission of the Armed

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

are as follows:

1) The honourable minister of T&T has already pointed out these defects. But why he is now silent? Is it impossible for him? If so, why he is in charge of this ministry?

2) Mr Johnny should know that the technical feasibility and possibilities are not at all problems for T&T. They will find out the solution and it will be implemented not later than by the end of '95.

3) The T&T should not be blamed alone. This system of anarchy is prevalent everywhere and in every sector.

4) Now the question is, how long this suicidal activities in all sectors of our country will prevail?

M Ali
Rajshahi

To the Editor...

Public meetings

Sir, Some of our public leaders, both in the government and in opposition, feel pleasure and excitement in moving from place to place, near and far, from one corner of the country to another holding big, huge and mammoth public meetings making pompous speeches, long promises and vehemently criticising their opponents throughout the year. They claim that their public meetings are attended by a greater number of supporters than their opponents and so they are ahead in the political race from their rivals.

Most people attend public meetings to see the faces of the public leaders and to hear their speeches with reservations. We find no winner of

loser emerging out from public meetings. We wonder what benefit do the public leaders derive from such public meetings? How many problems have been solved through mammoth public meetings over the past two years?

True we have freedom of speech and we must use it. And we are using it with full freedom. But unfortunately our freedom of speech neither help us solve any problem nor it helps mitigate the manifold sufferings of the people.

After years of trials and tribulations and beset with problems, hardships and sufferings our people are now awoken. They have gained sufficient experience and have become quite intelligent to distinguish between good and

bad, right and wrong and to make a right decision at the right time i.e., general elections. We strongly feel that holding of public meetings one after another and making competition of it by the government and opposition parties and telling the people repeatedly one thing by them is quite boring, wastage of time, energy and money.

We would humbly request our public leaders to kindly hold less public meetings, make less public speeches but to prove their sincerity, efficiency and honesty through practical services rendered to the people.

T & T: Confusing signals

Sir, BT&T Board is sending confusing signals to the public: —dilly-dallying and go-slow tactics on quick entry of the private sector in providing new telephones to half a million applicants.

—marginal privatization is encouraged in peripheral areas, protecting the major cities like Dhaka, Chittagong, Why?

—the latest controversy over the draft plan on information highways (Star editorial May 28)

The Govt is delaying separation of the regulatory and operational role of BTB. One agency should not handle both the jobs. This should be done

before the election. The same indecisiveness is seen in the petroleum and power sectors.

We need not only better governing, but fast action. Blaming the bureaucrats is one of the excuses. Why the cabinet is so slow to react and take decisions? Something wrong at the top tier.

A Husnain
Dhaka

E-mail

Sir, We appreciate Mr Johnny Brakker's valuable 'opinion' published in your daily on 26th May, 1995. We do not know, whether he is a Bengali or not. But as an engineer, he has courage to speak the truth as prevailed in our country. Now the observations