

Appeal for Bosnia

In an unusual move, this newspaper published an appeal yesterday urging our readers to write or call in their support for the move by US Senate majority leader Bob Dole to end the arms embargo against the Bosnian Muslims. Our move is but a small gesture of support for the valiant struggle that is being waged by the people of Bosnia against the brutal Serb forces. In doing so we have been greatly motivated by the memories of the support the international community had extended to our own liberation war. By extending our support to the Bosnian people, we are discharging our own responsibility as a part of the international community, as was discharged by those whose generous support gave us courage and sustenance during our own days of trial.

We in Bangladesh feel outraged by the atrocity that is being perpetrated by the Serbs on the people of Bosnia. We want to be a part of the struggle. Yet there appears very little that we can do. We are proud of the fact that our soldiers are a part of the international force whose presence is supposed to ensure the security of the UN designated 'safe areas'. However, we are dismayed, to say the least, at the impunity with which the Serbs are being allowed to carry out the most heinous of crimes. The UN 'safe zones' are being overrun, one after another, and the most that the international community does is pass resolutions. Yet so far the UN has not passed that one vital resolution which might have made some difference to the Bosnian people. We are obviously referring to the resolution about lifting the arms embargo.

President Clinton himself had on occasions expressed his own impatience with the one-sided embargo. The rationale against lifting the embargo was that it would enlarge the scope of the war. This was never based on a sound analysis of events in the area and, we suspect, was put forward primarily to weaken the Bosnian resistance. President Clinton has requested Senator Dole to postpone the debate with a view to working out some sort of a consensus action by the NATO allies. A conference, in which Bangladesh is also participating, began in London yesterday. We hope that the efforts to find a collective stand succeeds. But in case the effort fails, then we urge the US President to join hands with the Republican leader and pass a bi-partisan resolution on lifting the arms embargo with immediate effect.

The Question Bank

Students went on a rampage in Bogra on Wednesday. They laid siege on important traffic points, brought out processions, held rallies and damaged buses and other vehicles. Why? They want the question bank to come back on the student-friendly trail.

Demanding the re-institution of the question bank in the SSC exams, a half-day hartal was observed in Proppur. The students also demanded withdrawal of the new requirement that to pass SSC a candidate will have to pass both the objective and essay-type papers separately.

The society should be thankful to the students in action for proving beyond doubt that the question bank and the predominance of objective-type questions were there to offer examinations a plain walk-over, without being required to prove that they had learnt anything whatsoever, in their ten-year schooling.

But the agitating students are grossly mistaken in thinking that the return of the question bank and a pass on overall aggregate will be helpful to them. The apparent help has in past few years proved suicidal to all who ventured beyond SSC. First Division boys and girls in their thousands and stars in their hundreds mostly proved so much junk at higher levels. The students should have gone into action against those who thus harmed them for life.

It was indeed a fantastic arrangement. To give walk-over to lakhs at the SSC level and to fail all a niggardly percentage of them at the admission tests at every next level. The real thing — education — was jettisoned by the wayside. The question bank and other devices making questions all too predictable and answers only a matter of ticking off blindly, however, helped the examination modes to tell the schools and their teachers that it was no more necessary for them to teach.

The bank and other wonderful innovations are hopefully going. But aren't the innovators staying? Have the educational authorities ever thought of assessing the damage done by the innovations? Accountability is needed very badly to be established in education too.

Unpardonable

According to a report published on Thursday, toxic waste has polluted the Dhanmandi lake killing its fish population and spreading an unbearable stench in the residential area. The cause of this disastrous pollution was the flood water pushing industrial toxic waste backward through the sewage lines into the lake. While the environmental disaster this time around has been more by natural causes, and less by neglect or inefficiency, yet much needs to be said about our city's sewage lines and the way they have been planned.

We recall an earlier instance when the local sewage was diverted to the lake by contractors charged with making a canal under Panthapath (a major city street), causing tremendous damage to the marine life of the lake and exposing the residents to all sorts of health hazards. It appears that concerned authorities chose to ignore the lessons from that experience. According to independent environmental experts the toxic waste mixing with the lake waters may now be producing poisonous gas which can pose serious threat to the residents of Dhanmandi and its adjoining areas.

A large number of dead fish were seen to float on the lake surface which reportedly were collected by the poor people living nearby. No attempt was made to inform the public as to the dangers of eating such fish. In all probability some of that fish may have found its way to the various city markets, and unsuspecting customers living in other parts of the city may have already consumed them.

We seriously protest the callous attitude with which the health and environmental authorities seem to have treated the whole incident and exposed the citizens to possible contamination by toxic pollutants.

Drug Economy: The Debt-driven Drugs

Why is there a drug boom witnessed since the 1980s? Susan George, the author of the book 'The Debt Boomerang — How Third World Debt Harms Us All,' attempted to vividly project as to how the debt burden of some of the Latin American countries like Bolivia, Peru and Colombia led these economies to bank on the production of cocaine

In his first televised speech to the nation on 5 September 1989, the then president of the USA George Bush declared 'war on drugs' and thus instituted a multi-billion project known as National Drug Control Strategy. George Bush further assured his fellow Americans that he would capture the drug war 'deeming it as 'nation's top priority'. This declaration of war against drugs came at a time when, allegedly, 13 million US citizens were dragged by the use of illegal drugs. Complacency, however, loomed large over the fact that a figure of 13 million was less than that of 23 million of 1985. On closer scrutiny, however, the complacency recoiled when it could be observed that the decline in numbers of users occurred due to a fall in 'Casual users' while the number of 'hard-core addicts' has been on the rise.

The abuses of drugs are now widely circulated worldwide. Violence, robbery and murders go closely with drugs. Available evidence shows that 'three-quarters of drug users are white; about 12 per cent are black, most of the rest are hispanic. Most consumers of illegal drugs are upper or middle class, educated people... nearly 20 per cent of high school seniors consume drugs at least once in a month.' In mid-1990, press reports stated that robbery and murder rates are running at record levels and cocaine is being found in the urine of the majority of those arrested in the major cities.

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some of the Latin American countries like Bolivia, Peru and Colombia led these economies to bank on the production of cocaine — the basic input to drugs and also to show how the production, consumption and distribution of cocaine account for employment of the vast mass of unemployed in those countries. From Susan's book one could, possibly, find that drugs might mean death to some but, at the same time, life to others. It does not, however, go to imply that the author overstates the economics of drug production but, on the contrary, tends to argue that only debt crisis forced these economies to cling largely to cocaine production and the whole idea of generating surplus in the economics of Latin America owes to the much publicized, dictated and imposed economic policies of the two sisters, the IMF and the World Bank.

A Case Study

Take the case of Bolivia — the poorest country in Latin America with the lowest life expectancy and the highest child mortality rates. Malnutrition is chronic in Bolivia where 85 per cent of the rural population groan under the poverty line. Bolivia's chief legal export is (or was) tin but the country is also cocaine dependent. One job out of every three or four is provided by drug related activities. Half a million of Bolivia's citizens are engaged in cultivating, processing or transporting coca and its derivatives and this half million people, according to a former Finance Minister,

'generate through their earnings further economic activity creating at least another 300,000 jobs.' The employment multiplier is thus very high and 'if narcotics were to disappear overnight, we would have rampant unemployment. There would be open protest and violence.' The traditional 'Economics' of coca production hinged on satisfying household demands in Bolivia in terms of medicinal and ritual needs. However, over the years, a surge in its demand from the US and other countries of the west, followed by an unprecedented economic crisis of Bolivia,

came Paste (BCP) have become the main source generating foreign currency in Bolivia above the value of all legal exports of the country... Some other estimates posit that coca and cocaine production represents around 30 per cent of the Bolivian GNP — and accounts for roughly one-third of the World's coca. How could Bolivia, as a country, turn into a drug or coca addict?

Since the independence in 1825, Bolivia chalked up more than 180 coups d'état. Succession of military regimes went on to run and loot the country nurturing drug trade. 'It is ironic that

was with jute. Price fluctuations and the bankruptcy of the International Tin Council (ITC) in late 1985 left huge stocks of tin virtually worthless. 'It would easily cost a producer country six times more to mine a ton of tin than the market could pay for it.'

Bolivia's second income earner was natural gas exports to Argentina which was dashed by Argentina's own debt induced cash crunch problems. The government of Bolivia was forced to print pesos to answer the vagaries. That invoked inflation and from August 1984 to August 1985, prices rose by a breathtaking 30,000 per cent. 'During the final months of the hyper inflation, from May 1985 to August 1985, the inflation surged to an annualized rate of 60,000 per cent.'

Stabilisation with Cocaine

From 1985, Bolivian Government, fired by the crisis all around, embarked on implementing the toughest IMF style austerity programmes ever attempted in Latin America. The structural adjustment plan took off the ground in the name of New Economic Policy (NEP) heavily loaded with IMF loans and lessons. The NEP ushered a massive lay-offs in the public sector and the closure of the money-losing tin mines. Ironically the NEP encouraged peasants and laid off workers to flock to the coca-growing regions to meet the needs of cocaine industry. For Washington, Bolivia has become a showcase of what other countries in the region could accomplish if free-market principles are allowed to run their economies... Bolivia's fate was thus tagged with the success of

Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes



'unleashed a prodigious expansion of coca production.' For example, in 1972-74, a meagre 9000 tons used to pour in annually almost entirely for internal consumption. In the early 1990s, the quantum leaped to 100,000 to 150,000 tonnes. In the mid 1980's coca cultivators earned more than the value of all the rest of Bolivia's agricultural production. The growing coca related activities also kept children out of schools to boost family income by trampling the coca leaves in pits. According to a Peruvian economist and cited in Susan's book, 'the cultivation of the coca leaf and the preparation of the Basic Co-

that United States reconstructed military establishment during the 1950s and 1960s which, during the 1970s and 1980s, was led by high-level officers, who under a militant anti-communist platform, pursued illegal drug, trafficking to the United States.' The generals who captured power left behind consumption and fraud (and not productive investment) to place Bolivia as the highly indebted country of Latin America. By the mid 1980s, country's GNP dropped by one-fifth, per capita consumption fell by one-third, family income plunged by 28 per cent, unemployment doubled. On the other hand, Bolivian economy was 'buffeted' from external trade environment also. Bolivia's name was associated with tin as Bangladesh

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Telephone connection

Sir, A telephone, when installed at a subscriber's place, is expected to provide the services. The subscriber has a right to demand uninterrupted services, especially when he or she performs his/her obligation, namely by clearing the dues in time.

In a civilized country, a telephone hardly goes out of order. Given our situation, a subscriber may probably wait for a longer period for restoration of its services. But, can this period run into weeks — or even a month? My telephone, a digital connection bearing No. 833786 installed at my residence 169/15, East Rampura has been a silent box for over a month. I made complaints — but in vain. The inevitable answer of fault in the cable is puzzling. I fail to understand how T&T Board, having so many highly qualified professionals can fail to put the line into order once they have detected the fault.

I as a law abiding citizen of the country and sharing the budget of revenue going into the T&T system, probably have a right to be provided with services. Will the T&T Board, the honourable minister and other concerned be kind enough to help restore my telephone connection and thereby establish my right to obtain services.

Sufia Begum
169/15, East Rampura,
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WB aid conditionalities

Sir, Never before any head of government was so bold and outspoken to tell such truth as of apparent unworthiness of World Bank aid, commensurate with the extreme rigidity and complications of the tagged conditions and pre-conditions, as Begum Khaleda Zia did while bidding farewell to the outgoing and welcoming the incoming WB Country Directors when both called on her last month.

Indeed, I feel proud of our PM's explicit version on the WB aid conditionalities which often tell upon our sovereignty making it all the more difficult generally and impossible constitutionally to accept and/or to implement with.

There, of course, have been enough reasons for WB to tighten their grips and tag such disgraceful conditionalities as we, time and again, proved ourselves absolutely unworthy of utilising the aided-fund properly and for the cherished purpose. Thus, we have been swallowing the bitter pills smilingly, though no healing fruited ever.

Though it is believed that the WB have to do so under compelling circumstances, prevalent, but they should not be so tough, as also urged by our PM, to see their benevolent aid-effort effectively implemented which so far and so long hardly yielded any modicum of socio-economic uplift save and except creating some institutional and/or individual success story or hoax.

WB, perhaps, could be reasonably lenient by strengthening its monitoring activity and also by sharing the responsibility of success or failure of their aided projects to some extent (to rest with their Country Directorate) and guiding and overseeing the Local Implementing Authorities.

May, God-Almighty bless us politically, bureaucratically, socially, commercially and in every way to be worthy of fulfilling the PM's desire of becoming self-reliant through effective development endeavour.

Shah Nuruzzaman
Uttara Model Town, Dhaka

Let's rise above small things

Sir, Soon after emergence of Bangladesh the then Prime Minister, late Sheikh Mujibur Rahman enacted a law restricting private visits abroad by the government and semi-government employees in general. The law or the order was imposed by the leader in an individual capacity.

The employees of the National Airlines also are subjected to the above order, though they are entitled to concessional travel facilities on domestic as well as international routes on sub-load basis like all other Airlines employees in other countries. The order permits only one private visit abroad in a calendar year and once in two years on religious grounds. No provision has been reserved for consideration of further visits on emergency or on humane grounds in the said order.

The so-called law in a democratic society has rather encroached upon an individual's basic rights of movement. There is always an un-called-for interference as well as whimsical interpretation of the order by the Administrative clerks of the Airline. One even cannot visit another country or places on the route to the destination unless the places are specified in the approval.

But the irony is more in the application of the said statutory order (if at all it is so). It is not equally applied to all employees. A group of privileged employees of the said organisation are said to be privately visiting foreign

countries a number of times in one calendar year without any hindrance from the Administration.

There are tragic and painful instances where the violators were taken to tasks and even made jobless for undertaking a second visit out of bare necessity or for visiting a second country other than the approved one. Employees were even penalised for breaking the journey at unspecified points down the route or for changing the route to the destination. No doubt, the Administration is spending a good number of man hours and stationeries only to control this unproductive business.

These days most families have relatives abroad. Everyone feels the urge and necessity of seeing a near and dear one. On an emergency even one is not allowed to visit a sick relative abroad if it turns out to be a second visit by the incumbent during the calendar year. An employee is also unable to accompany his family members during such foreign trips and he has to leave them on their own fate as well as under the mercy of others as the incumbent's travel is always subject to availability of seats at the last minute.

An employee remains under the strict control of his parent department and management has the upper hand to reject/approve or even cancel an approved leave as and when it so, desires. Shouldn't the leave once approved by the authority be regarded as a permission for the employee to enjoy his earned leave in whatever manner that suits him? It should rather be a matter of his basic right to best plan and avail his leave; he should be free to visit a place of his choice. The so-called restriction only frustrates his feeling of independence and freedom.

Perhaps there is no precedent of such regulation in any other democratic society or country. Like many other countries our government also has allocated a fixed annual quota of foreign exchange amounting to more than two thousand US dollars for an individual citizen primarily for undertaking such private visits. So, isn't this a violation of basic human rights and individual freedom of movement? Shouldn't the Airline Management concentrate elsewhere to bring progress and prosperity to the National Airline while there is so much to be done?

I, therefore, appeal and draw the kind attention of our Honourable Prime Minister to look into this undemocratic regulation which is seriously affecting an individual's basic freedom.

Today we are living in the space age. Let us rise above small things and behave more sensibly for the advancement of the society. We must not be made to indulge in unproductive activities, and let there be some respect for basic human rights too.

An aggrieved housewife

OPINION

"Save Dhaka Roundtable"

Shamsuzzoha

The 'Save Dhaka Roundtable' — organised by The Daily Star held in BUET on the 8th of June, 1995 — is a reflection of how important the issue for the citizen of this capital city is and I would like to convey my thanks to Daily Star for arranging a lively seminar on 'Save Dhaka'.

Seminars, slogans, etc are definitely very effective means to highlight the problems in the mind of general public and the authorities concerned. In the 'Roundtable', various personalities from different disciplines have expressed their views and made recommendations in order to find out some solutions of the issue. These recommendations deserve proper evaluation by the authorities concerned. The 'Roundtable' has made ten recommendations and the number one recommendation is to form a broad-based single authority to run the metropolitan city affairs. This concept is not something new. This idea was also put forth during the Pakistan regime. It was recommended that the broad-based authority would be named as Dhaka Metropolitan Development Authority (DMDA) and would be headed by a person with the rank and the status of a minister. An organogram for the proposed DMDA was also prepared but ultimately the plan was shelved for good.

However, even after the creation of Bangladesh no serious attempt was made in this respect. If some serious thought would have been given then the number one recommendation would be to shift the metro Dhaka to further north of Tongi Bridge. If this could be materialized the present congestion in respect of land, traffic, drainage, shortage of water, etc. could never become an issue for the metropolis. A major portion of the downtown is located in a low-lying area and one can easily understand by the fact that how many 'khals' (natural drainage of the city) have been flowing through the city. Most of these natural drainage channels have been blocked either by vested interest group or in the name of development of the city. One of your esteemed reader has mentioned in the letter column that if the loose soil

of the recently filled ditch of Motijheel can support a 30-storeyed building, then why not in other areas. In many parts of the city soil conditions are so poor that the load bearing capacity of the soil is no more than half a tonne per square foot. Whereas in the north it exceeds two tonnes and obviously the cost of foundation-construction is much less. We can evaluate how much money could have been saved in the foundation component

if the same building would have been constructed in the north and this evaluation is applicable to all other structures belonged to Govt, non-Govt or private organizations. An enormous amount of additional fund has been spent in the Govt and in the private level for construction of different structures located in the khals and other low-lying areas of down-town for the past 23 years, which could be avoided if the city was shifted north of Tongi Bridge. Apart from solving the present congestion described earlier there would be enormous saving in terms of money and time for travel from the existing down-town area to Airport and North Bengal via Jamuna Bridge. The issue of protecting Metro Dhaka from flood would have never arisen because north of Tongi is not a flood-prone area and hundreds of crores of taka spent on existing flood prone Dhaka for flood protection could be utilized for construction of Metro Dhaka in the north. I would say that during the post-liberation period it was a great blunder in the planning that Metro Dhaka was not shifted to the north and now we are paying heavily and trying to find out the solution of some unsolvable problems by holding seminars and chanting slogans.

I am not discouraging the 'Save Dhaka Roundtable' in the implementation of the ten recommendations, but I would like to cite some examples of the past projects in respect of the utilities and other infrastructure of the city with the hope that the facts may help us to overcome some intricate problems that lay ahead of us.

During the British rule a survey report recommended Sitalakha river as the source of best quality raw surface water, because it would need only conventional treatment for conversion to potable water. The first feasibility study to bring water from Sitalakha was done during 1957-58, but unfortunately we have failed to bring water from Sitalakha since the feasibility study was done 37 years ago, though we have heard from those who have come to power one after another that a surface water treatment plant would be ready within such and such time. However, though DWASA has taken up the matter in right earnest again, we will be lucky if we get Sitalakha river water by 1999. It takes between 5-7 years' time to construct such plant from the date the feasibility study is completed. Since the study was made the raw water quality has deteriorated drastically by uncontrolled discharge of waste ef-

luent from different industrial units located upstream, indicating uncontrolled environmental degradation.

Last Word

There is no doubt that since the start of the reform programme in 1985, Bolivia made substantial progress in combating financial imbalance and economic distortions. Economic activity expanded and inflation was brought to heel. In the meantime, the government arranged all sorts of rules and regulations for a safe landing of drug-money in Bolivia. Bolivia was rewarded with another ESAF — Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility loan. After all, in a free market, all that matters is output and growth, employment and pay rolls — be it from drugs or be it from prostitutions. Mr Bush's war on drugs seem to have failed both on demand and on supply side. Bolivia has to repay the debt outstanding and the only way is to produce drugs for which a vast and effective international demand is there. Seemingly, in the short run, drug is life for Bolivian economy and death for those who consume it. But in the long run, all are dead with drugs.

The project named 'Support for Urban Management and Municipal Services Programme', was funded by WB/UNDP, and the feasibility study and design was prepared by an expatriate consultant in collaboration with local consultants some time in the year 1987-1988. The design provided improvement of solid waste management (SWM) programme for the old city, but until now no noticeable improvements have taken place in the SWM, excepting some refuse collection vehicle (RCV) equipped with demountable containers (DC) have been introduced both in the old and new city about a year ago in order to improve the secondary collection and transportation of solid wastes, but the wrong operation of the equipment is costing heavily on SWM budget of DCC. The RCV should never move alone, but one must have noticed that some time the RCV is moving without any DC. The RCV must have always of DC 'piggy-back' either empty or filled, because these RCVs are designed to handle several DCs during its eight-hour shift and the operation needs proper planning (known as RCV scheduling) for economic operation. It seems there is no one to look after this affair though there is a full-time design/management consultants consisting of both expatriate and local working for Dhaka Integrated Flood Protection, FAP-8B apart from Conservancy and Engineering Department of DCC. Further, at present the waste of the city is disposed of in open dumps, though land has been acquired for disposal of the waste in an environmentally accepted method, that is, controlled tipping or Sanitary Land Fill (SLF). If implemented by DCC this would be the first SLF project in Bangladesh.

The objective of narrating all these stories is to explain that for the development of a city and subsequent operation and maintenance of the utilities requires the services of specialist/experts from different disciplines with dedicated attitude. There can be no room for any complacency in respect of the institutional capability. It must be ensured that the right person (technical capability in association with integrity) with the right assignment has been entrusted particularly at the upper level of the hierarchy. It does not matter whether the umbrella is a big one or a small one. It matters whether the organization (small or big) is capable to execute the responsibility by employing the principles of 'fair deal'.