

Global Gender Gap

Tailor made for the biggest ever UN Conference on Women (its fourth) to be held in Beijing early next month, the UNDP's Human Development Report (HDR) for 1995 makes a very strong case for equality of women. The conclusions of the report, as the UNDP's Administrator James Gustay Speth says, "are a major indictment of the continuing discrimination against women in most countries." The Pakistani chief author of the HDR, Dr. Mahbubul Haq, puts it even more strikingly. "Nations that sit back and ignore the disparities between men and women in their society do so at their own risk. To deny women full participation in economic and social development is to rob future generations of the opportunity to reach their full potential."

What we all had an idea about, and all of us believed to be true and tried to project through our columns, has now been most forcefully articulated in the HDR. The Report most powerfully puts economic argument — an argument that sells best in the era of the market — behind the demand for gender equality. Women, especially the poor in the developing countries, have been found to be far more productive, diligent and dependable workers and managers compared to their male counterparts. Investment on women have many more side benefits, such as better education and health for the family, compared to investment on men. The HDR for the first time, at least to our knowledge, puts a figure of US\$ 11 trillion on the "undervalued, underpaid and unpaid contribution of women in the world economy."

HDR '95 will obviously add a lot of economic teeth to the moral, cultural and social arguments for gender equality. But will it make any difference in the thinking of the political leadership? This is where the real challenge lies. We have to build a national consensus behind the five-point strategy that the Report suggests. The five points are: 1) setting a timetable — say 10 years — to end legal discrimination;

2) taking concrete actions to restructure social and institutional norms; 3) moving towards 30% share of decision making positions for women; 4) implementing programmes for universal female education, improved reproductive health and financial credit for women; 5) work for greater access for women to economic and political opportunities. This five-point strategy will no doubt get further strengthened at the Beijing summit, and we will have to start mobilising nationally to implement it.

Taking Up a Good Job

The Dhaka-Aricha road which connects the capital city with 28 districts is so accident-prone that it is universally dreaded. Not a week passes without several lives being sacrificed to this silly stretch of the highway.

Now there is good news about this vital road link: Work starts seriously on its wholesale reconstruction in October. The Government of Denmark is re-doing the 61-kilometre Savar-Aricha section, broadening it for the most part and rebuilding most of the bridges and the culverts. We congratulate our authorities for addressing this communication challenge on such a scale. At the same time we cannot but censure them for taking up the job too late.

Now that at long last this has been taken up, is it possible for the government or, at their behest for the kind foreign government, to venture beyond re-making the road and set about righting its fundamental flaws, mainly the endless meanders and the too-many hump-back bridges?

One sure-fire good way to relieve pressure on the Dhaka-Aricha highway was to commission the Dhaka-Mawa road which cut the distance to all places served by the Daulatdia point substantially. One is at a loss to understand why government is being half-hearted in making full use of this road for which doing some patchwork here and there would possibly suffice. The Jamuna Bridge would of course take some load off Dhaka-Aricha. But that will take time. In the meantime, a better use of the Bhupur crossing to Sirajganj could come in handy if only ferrying there could be developed beyond present capacity and efficiency.

The two things must go together — improving the Dhaka-Aricha link and taking load off it. At the same time, let Dhaka-Mawa be built as the great reliever it can be. And let Bhupur also take some load off.

The Radiant Minor Season

Sharat has in it certain hidden associations that hardly go with any other season. The dawn, the dew and the morning light taking on a certain tinge are patently sharat things. And how about the very special autumn clouds and the glorious sharat full-moon, the *kojagori*?

How then could we be oblivious of the advent of this herald of light and romance, of fragrance wafting through the air, nightly and each morning? It was the wet spell with sky falling down and water shrouding the city with a metre-thick sheet, that played the dirty trick.

It was Rabindranath who so promoted the image of the *nabakundadhwaldala shushitala atishumirmala* — or the autumn as the paragon of light and cool and purity. His songs celebrating this minor season are couched in morning melodies and paint only a world rising freshly from the hold of night. And it was Tagore again who married sharat eternally with the idea of an abandon or *chhuti* never known to man before. *Megher koley rode heshechhey bado gaechhey tuti* — so? This day is all ours and all frolic.

It seems the wise lady yore, namely Khona, had the last word in everything. It was she who said *Bhadra* should bode well if it is dry and shiny exactly as *Shrawan* is a boon only when it is extra wet. This year *Shrawan* seems to be tarrying too long causing all kinds of premonition in the minds of the vulnerable. But this may change and Rabindranath's sharat take over any day.

The Child Labour Issue: Ethics versus Economics

When economic imperatives are so preponderant, the laid-off children might end up in prostitution or in more dangerous jobs than going into schools and if that continues unabated the cost of ethics and human rights might turn out to be lavish.

The living room are the products of such sufferings and, therefore, their ethics forced them to warn their retailers to contain or block purchase from those countries which pervasively rely on child labour. Thus, Levi Strauss (the famous jeans retailer), according to The Economist was forced to cut off supplies from 5 per cent of its 600 suppliers and exact changes from 25 per cent. It severed links with Myanmar and China. Poor Bangladesh also became a prey. The NBC TV Network is reported to have showed a video tape of children working in a Bangladeshi factory that made Wal-Mart shirt under contract. On the same set of reasoning, the Wal-Mart ceased to sign any contract.

Harkin's Bill

The American department of labour investigated into 19 countries who supply goods to America and where 46m children are reported to be working in those countries' factories. It noticed that in South Asia (including India), "where about half of all these children live, children were working 14-hours days in crowded factories and unsafe conditions." Senator Tom Harkin, since then, intro-

duced a bill to ban American imports from those countries and that bill visibly terrorist American firms who, unnerfed by the future consequences, began to stop supplies of products. Adding grist to the mill, the celebrated Economist argues, "ethical funds such as NPI and Franklin Research now

thrown out of factories because suppliers feared losing their business if they keep the children on." The same report says, "... the majority of these children, because of penury, have been forced to turn to prostitution or other industries like welding where conditions pose far greater risk to them." This is

economic assets for millions of poor families who tend to groan under abject poverty. The pervasive poverty forces these families to be lured by the most urgent need, income — at the expense of educating their children. Families can only afford to be pre-education if, side by side, children could be offered employment opportunities.

Thus, when economic imperatives are so preponderant, the laid-off children might end up in prostitution or in more dangerous jobs than going into schools and if that continues unabated the cost of ethics and human rights might turn out to be lavish. Therefore, one needs to find complimentary routes to the solution of child labour either in Bangladesh or elsewhere.

Way Out

One possible way out could be that consumers in western countries should be ready to pay extra bucks for the enhanced costs following the replacement of child labour by adults. It should be mentioned here that the so called comparative cost advantage emanates from low priced child labour. What many of us do not know perhaps, is that, allegedly, the retailers

tiny fraction of the territory under the Bosnian government control. Who is going to protect the Bosnian civilian men, women and children from the Serbian artillery in 95 per cent of Bosnia the UN and NATO have pledged not to protect?

Events of the last few days should have convinced President Clinton that the best way to shorten the war in the Balkans without using American ground troops was not to veto the Senate and House Bills requiring him to lift the arms embargo, but to ensure that the Bosnians have arms of the same quality as the Croats.

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Only Force Against the Serbs will Solve the Balkan Crisis

Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton

Events of the last few days should have convinced President Clinton that the best way to shorten the war in the Balkans without using American ground troops was not to veto the Senate and House Bills requiring him to lift the arms embargo, but to ensure that the Bosnians have arms of the same quality as the Croats.

CROATIA'S recent successful blitzkrieg in the Krajina region should lay to rest some fallacies perpetuated by Britain and France for inaction in the Balkans.

First, that when the principals fight, the UN peacekeepers will be in mortal danger. In Krajina, the Croats and Serbs carefully pushed the peacekeepers out of the way before squaring off. Second, only negotiations will bring peace to the Balkans. The Croats gave negotiations four years, before recovering most of their lost territory from the Serbs in less than three days, through military means. Third, lifting the arms embargo on Bosnia will escalate the war and result in more killing. The onslaught by well armed Croats have resulted in far less killing than the merciless Serb massacre of the poorly armed Bosnians at Srebrenica and Zepa. Serbs know when to run for their lives and when to bully. And although there has been some sabre rattling from Serbia and Russia, no outside power has entered the war. And it was not UN and NATO's bluster, but military action by Croatia and Bosnia, that finally, after four years relieved the pressure on BiH.

While one must feel a measure of sympathy for the Croatian Serb civilians fleeing the Krajina region for Serbia, it has to be stressed that the Croatian army left wide corridors open for those who wanted to leave Krajina safely. The only two exits out of Serb-occupied Srebrenica and Zepa read, " Rape" and " Execution."

It was amusing to hear Carl Bildt, the principal European Union negotiator for the Balkans compare Croatian President Franjo Tudjman, who is merely attempting to recover Croatian territory forcibly taken by the Serbs, with Milan Martic, the Croatian Serb who has been charged by the United Nations international war crimes tribunal in the Hague for crimes against humanity.

Next time Mr Bildt visits

President of Serbia Milosevic in Belgrade, he must insist that Milosevic hand over Bosnian Serb General Ratko Mladic, a frequent visitor to Belgrade, to the international war crimes tribunal where he has been charged with crimes against humanity, before lifting of sanctions against Serbia can be considered.

The Balkan war has been prolonged needlessly by

the attempt of apostles of appeasement, such as Mr Bildt and Lord Owen, to deliver Bosnia to Serbia.

President Clinton makes a colossal mistake as he vetoes the Senate and House Bills urging him to unilaterally lift the illegal arms embargo on the Bosnians. Not only he has bailed out the Europeans and their failed Bosnia policy, the President and his administration, not the Congress, will have to shoulder the entire responsibility should more catastrophes befall the hapless Bosnians, because of lack of arms to defend themselves.

Thus far, the Europeans have played the Clinton administration flawlessly. Every time the US Congress was about to act on the arms embargo issue, they would rush senior officials to Washington to beseech Senators and Congressmen and Congresswomen not to act, arguing that they, the Europeans, had better plans to contain the Serbs. As soon as the Congress deferred, they were happy to sit back and maintain the status quo.

not the Bosnian civilians, who continue to be shelled and maimed mercilessly by heavy Serbian weapons in the so-called "safe havens" of Sarajevo and BiHac, with the UN peacekeepers looking on. Krajina operation makes it clear that cajoling does not work with the Serbs, force does!

The stated reason for the rapid reaction force, created in the aftermath of taking of UN peacekeepers as hostages by the Serbs in May, is only to protect the peacekeepers.

Even if one is to take the

UN and NATO's promise of

protecting the remaining

four "safe havens" seriously,

in spite of such promises not

being kept at Srebrenica and

Zepa, these constitute only a

OPINION

"... A Stitch In Time" : A Motorist's Point of View

Ashraf Matin

As a motorist who has to tackle the streets of Dhaka on a daily basis, I was keenly interested by the article which appeared under the "Opinion" column in The Daily Star on the 19th of July. I couldn't but agree when Mr A R Choudhury, the writer of the piece, says: "...at red signal, vehicles get clustered slowly forming a tangle of heterogeneous mass..." which eventually slows down the flow and chokes the City's arteries. Mr Choudhury has suggested the use of Roundabouts — "Traffic Circle" in American English — which he prefers to call Go-Round-Traffic-islet (GRTI).

The use of Roundabouts in the city's intersections is all very well if some pre-conditions are met: (A) Basic knowledge of traffic rules in particular, understanding of the flow-control mechanism of the roundabout — which I am sorry to say I find absolutely lacking in 99.99% of the drivers on our streets; and (B) adequate size of the roundabout in a particular intersection which is able to cater to its normal traffic flow.

Now, I am no expert on urban planning but, as a victim/user of the system, I will attempt to explain what I have just mentioned, along with a few suggestions of my own.

AA. The safe use of roundabouts pre-supposes the acknowledgement of the right-of-way of the vehicle on the roundabout by the vehicle coming in to join the roundabout. I'll try to make it clear with an example: Suppose at a four-street intersection with a roundabout, a vehicle coming from the East road wants to go to the North road, it will have to slow down/stop at the end of the East road and check to see that there isn't any oncoming traffic on its right on the roundabout, and only then can this vehicle proceed towards the roundabout. Once this vehicle starts following the curvature of the roundabout, the right-of-way belongs to this vehicle over others trying to join in from the South and West roads. At the exit to the North road the vehicle will show indication (left indicator lights) and move on to the North road without hindrance. At the same time the vehicle waiting to join in from the North

will give a good idea as to what is the involvement and feasibility. Let us think big and move our capital city Dhaka into the 21st century.

An aerial view of the route will give a good idea as to what is the involvement and feasibility. Let us think big and move our capital city Dhaka into the 21st century.

1. The traffic policemen manning the busy inter-

To the Editor...

Punishment for parents!

Sir, A news item published in your esteemed daily on 7.8.95 under the above caption reported that a law in Singapore is going to be enacted to make parents failing to discipline their school-going children liable to court action. The Education Ministry and schools would be allowed to take action against parents who refuse to carry out their duties as disciplinarians for children at home.

We think such law should be enacted in our country too. In our days we used to go to school at 10 am or so. After school hours we went to playground and returned home before evening. And then got ready on the table for studies. We could not go out from home after evening for the control of parents/guardians.

Nowadays most of the school-going children remain busy in gossiping instead of playing. They enjoy VCR at night and some of them even involve in anti-social activities. They hardly care their guardians and elderly people. The parents/guardians also do not or cannot take care of their children. Often, reportedly, parents allow the children who can earn money at any cost to do and undo whatever they like. Sometimes some guardians overlook their anti-social activities.

But it should be noted that character is built up stronger in school days and it must. This will enable them not to be deviated from the just path. The parents should be more careful to look into the activities of their school-going children. So enactment of such law is necessary nowadays and it should be enacted without further delay.

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Health Complex

Sir, Saturia Health Complex is the only one hospital in this thana. But it is beset with manifold problems causing untold suffering to the patients.

Patients from far-flung areas of the thana come to the hospital in the hope of better treatment but they have to go back disappointed as, in the first place, they find no scope of admission to the hospital because of the shortage of beds.

The hospital has only 31 beds — 16 for males and the rest for the females. But it is found from the hospital register that every day 40 to 45 patients are treated there on an average. The excess patients, out of seat capacity, are found lying on the floor or verandah and the space between the beds.

Toilets are not cleaned regularly and these emit bad smell vitiating the whole atmosphere of the hospital. Bed sheets, pillow covers and mosquito nets that are supposed to the allottees of the beds are found dirty.

Besides, the foods supplied to the patients are below standard; moreover the drinking water supplied contains high proportion of iron often causing intestinal trouble among the patients.

Here only outdoor patients get some medicines, but the patients admitted to do not get any medicine from the hospital. They have to purchase the medicines from the market often at an exorbitant price.

Most of the patients seeking operation are refused even the labour patients, and are advised to take admission elsewhere — the district hospital or clinics.

The hospital campus is not so peaceful either. There is a minibus terminal just off the main gate of the hospital. It remains always crowded and noisy. Cows and goats move into the hospital compound in the day time. At night dogs

The streets of Dhaka

Sir, As a layman and long time resident of Dhaka, I have read with much interest the recommendations of a panel of enlightened technocrats on the streets of Dhaka published in your paper on 4th August 1995.

The suggestions are all praiseworthy especially ideas to construct new roads, mass transit system, flyovers etc. but what strikes me as odd is that the panel has taken for granted the existing railway line going from Khilkhet to Kamalapur station having no less than twelve railway crossings inside the city which create immense traffic jams and also delay to passengers who need to catch flights at ZIA.

In my view, a new railway track should be laid from near Khilkhet going east of Joar Shahara, Baridhara, Bhataria, Badda etc on to Kamalapur. This will involve a detour of about 10-12 KM. This track can be laid running parallel to the proposed Tongi, Jatrabari, Dhaka Bypass Road. Where there are large water masses and marshy lands, we can have the tracks laid on concrete pillars.

An aerial view of the route will give a good idea as to what is the involvement and feasibility. Let us think big and move our capital city Dhaka into the 21st century.

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