

Eating into the Vitals

Much money is spent by the government to persuade our people to go for vegetables. From telefilms to colourful posters to hoardings and bills put up and pasted on every imaginable surface — the merit of the leaves and seeds and fruits and other green items of victual is proclaimed. All aging persons visiting a doctor, come back advised to eat more vegetable. Those and many more persuaders — not the least of which is the forbidding price of fish and meat — have successfully influenced society to consume more and more vegetable. Vegetable, for long the optionless poor man's food, is steadily becoming a dish by choice and preference.

Now, in a lead news story in The Daily Star's Monday issue, experts have warned that most vegetables and fruits now available in the market-place are toxic. This is so very evidently because of excessive use of pesticides in the nurturing of those food items. By a very simple logic, if the government wants people to eat more vegetable, it should ensure that by going for vegetable and fruits, people were not going to take poison. We have our doubts if the government will do anything to make the vegetables wholesome and life-giving again, although we would like to be proved wrong on this.

This opinion of our government has been handcrafted by its own failure to respond to very grave danger signals coming from the food sector and for long. No one in any responsible government position has so far as much as batted an eye lid over the repeating bad news from the food front — the latest produced by The Daily Star dealing specifically and in detail with edible oil and ghee etc. There is a suspicion that government leaders are perhaps not aware of the price of ignoring large-scale contamination of food. But how is that possible with Professor Chowdhury occupying a position of supreme influence there? One cannot help conclude that relevant people in the government simply do not care.

How can the government afford to be so thick and dull and indifferent? Because all of us who take the DDT-infused vegetable and dry fish and carcinogenic edible oil, do not care either. Let us start caring and then we shall be able to make the government care. Plant life is food to all forms of life in the universe. If this is allowed to be unsafe a society has reached its end.

Banking Dilemma

The fast dwindling profitability of public sector banks, as pictured in a BIBM report, has made us sit up, the jarring effect coming from an odd mix of factors being attributed to the tumble in profits. The financial sector reform programme, brought on some five years ago, to combat default culture is said to have boomeranged making the banking business so much less profitable than before.

On the one hand, the outstanding loans remain largely unsettled by the big delinquent recipients while, on the other, the banks' new lending operations have been hemmed in by very rigid procedural requirements and a complete lack of risk-taking. As a result, the balance sheets of the NCBS reflect carry-over figures of incremental dues on outstanding loans and of idle money accumulating in the bank vaults with mounting costs incurred in keeping these.

Furthermore, it has been stated that most of the non-performing loans owe their origin to "direct credit programmes or a lot of social banking services". But to our mind, this is specialized or risk-banking of a type that the public sector banks must of necessity undertake at this stage. What about the public sector corporations' huge indebtedness to the banking system. There is a moral ground to serve the private sector now with a much better chance of loan recovery from it.

The decline in the profitability of the private sector banks has been a paltry 9.95 per cent as compared with 91.18 per cent suffered by the NCBS — over the past five years. Did customer services and diversified investment in ancillary businesses make the difference in the performances of the two categories of banks?

While we would like to be enlightened about this on some good authority and, at some length, in the near future, we urge the Finance Ministry to consider the possibility of re-structuring the interest rates for the banks to attract more deposits and to dispose of their idle money.

In the ultimate analysis, the Financial Sector Reform Programme has to have the legal teeth and reach to bring the big loan defaulters into the dragnet.

Our Condolences

The train accident that took place on Sunday night at Firozabad in India has been one of the worst railway disasters in recent times — by world standards. The toll taken by it has been massive, 275 dead and 400 wounded, according to first reports. Besides, the circumstances in which it occurred make it sound as a poignantly fortuitous mishap. The Kalindi express hitting a cow on the track trundled to a stop with a brake failure. Precariously perched on a wafer-thin edge of an impending disaster as trains rushed in on the same track from both the directions, the Kalindi Express could not seemingly establish communication with anybody to ward off the Purshtottam Express speeding in from behind. Result: a big bang with as big a traumatic impact on the mostly sleeping passengers in the Kalindi Express.

India has a massive railway network and, in many parts of it, perhaps, the rolling stock and the signalling system need to be improved, something which we venture to point out with the feeling of being deeply touched by the accident. This year alone, there were two other major railway mishaps in that country.

Given Indian's technological advancement and the high stake she puts in this mode of transportation system — the Prime Minister himself being in charge of the railway portfolio — one feels convinced that the safety standards would be raised even further and accidents kept at the unavoidable minimum.

Sincere condolences to the Indian government and people at their hour of loss. Our heart goes out in sympathy for the victims of the disaster.

HALF a century ago A Bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan from US aircraft signalling the advent of the Atomic age. Humanity has been trying ever since to put back the genie inside the bottle if not destroy it. The result so far is less than a partial success. On this Golden Jubilee of the Atomic Age, the world continues to live in fear.

The world has never come to terms with the horror unleashed by the nuclear strike on Japan. The debate goes on if US President Harry Truman was right to order nuclear strike on Japan for a quick end of the war. There is no doubt that the Atom bombs brought a near instantaneous surrender of Japan. Yet it brought to the fore a weapon whose destructive potential is mind-boggling. Indeed both the US and Russia are supposed to have nuclear stockpiles, with which they are capable of destroying mother earth many times over.

In sheer stockpile the US and Russia have an unmatched superiority. Britain, France and China are nuclear powers of smaller size. India, who refuses to officially acknowledge that she too is a tiny nuclear power, by all ac-

counts possesses nuclear capability. Her rival Pakistan is reported to have acquired the necessary technology and the wherewithal for a bomb. There is Israel, who is supposed to possess bombs. And there are also clandestine candidates for manufacturing the bomb.

US and Russia, who have a monopoly, have carried out an energetic campaign to maintain that. This too has had a partial success. France and China are continuing their efforts to improve their nuclear capability. Right now France has announced her intention to carry out new tests in Mururoa Atoll and Australia and New Zealand have taken the lead in mounting a vociferous protest. The reason that the US and Russian efforts have had limited success is because they alone want to keep the monopoly

and are not prepared to destroy the entire stockpile, for which humanity yearns. It is not a celebration in Hiroshima. It is rather commemorating an event, which killed more than 200,000 innocent civilians in one blow and unleashed a monster, which for half a century has defied effective control.

Next month the world will celebrate the golden jubilee of the UN. At the end of the Second World War, this world body was born in San Francisco, with barely 50 member states, with the avowed intention of preserving peace. Among the lofty ideals set forth, the UN has nearly achieved universality of membership and today it is not far from the figure — 200 members. In this process and particularly decolonization, the role of UN is undeniable.

UN to Celebrate Golden Jubilee: Humanity Yet to Overcome Fear and Plight

Arshad-uz Zaman writes from Istanbul

In this half-a-century journey, there have been failures galore, which are placed at the doorstep of the UN. Yet the UN has mirrored not the perfect world of human dream but the real world with all its conflicts and contradictions.

Continent after continent, Asia, Latin America and Africa, have thrown away the shackles of colonialism.

When the delegates from all the corners of the world assemble in the third week of next month for Fiftieth Anniversary Celebrations, the vast halls of the UN will present truly the spectacle of a global village.

In this half-a-century journey, there have been failures galore, which are placed at the doorstep of the UN. Yet the UN has mirrored not the perfect world of human dream but the real world with all its conflicts and contradictions. Since one of the principal reasons for the failure of the predecessor of the UN, the League of Nations, was that it lacked an executive arm. The framers of the Charter of the UN de-

vised the Security Council and equipped its five Permanent Members with veto power. Because of the Cold War, until recently the Security Council remained frequently paralysed. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union nearly four years ago, US is the single Superpower and frequently, when she puts her whole weight behind a decision, we see the Security Council act. We saw it almost five years ago when Iraqi forces were pushed out of Kuwait. On the other hand, for the last three years the world has been numbed by Serbian atrocities in Bosnia in spite of numerous Security Council resolutions. The Secretary General of the UN Boutros Boutros-Ghali has come in for severe criticism on the question of Bosnia. His proposed visit to Turkey was cancelled at the last moment

compromise. For the defence of democratic principles, human rights and territorial integrity some price has to be paid. No patch-up of the sort placed in Bosnia stood any chance of success. That is exactly what has happened. The difference has obviously been made by Croatia. And look how hesitant the Western powers still are in using it to their advantage. But then the US alacrity and readiness to help defend some countries against an Iraqi attack which is more a result of a Western media blitz than a real one, only help form a bad idea about the only superpower. However, it could command respect of all free and democracy-loving people of the world through upholding the lofty ideals of democracy anywhere in the world. History will accuse the US for missing the chance that came its way at the end of the Cold War.

firmly by the Croatian military campaign. The Serbs are no more invincible, their moral is as low as it can be. For weeks now they have not been able to recover from the reversal and launch a fresh assault. To some extent the Croatian triumph has acted as a sobering influence on the Serbs. This the US or the West could do even better. The fact is that the moral guardians of the world did not want to risk their men and material for the protection of a tiny nation that had just emerged on international map. But it was a terrible

opment, the embargo on oil will not be lifted. Granted that Saddam is a villain, that weapons of mass destruction at his hands may pose a threat to neighbouring countries. But does it justify the total ban on oil export? Reports on shortage of baby foods and milk compounded by lack of life-saving drugs have been coming out from Iraq. But the West has not moved a little from its hardened attitude. Of course the US has taken the lead in this regard.

So why is the double-standard? It is as simple as the business concern of the West. Here is a big stake. The need for oil and the armament market in the Gulf is too big to be ignored. Bosnia has nothing to offer. It is because of this stake or lack of it that has brought out the bankruptcy of US and the West's policy to the fore.

They have not only turned a blind eye to the happenings in former Yugoslavia but also acquiesced in the crime there. Such condoning does not help establish a better world order. Least of all when the ambivalence is all too glaring. Even a fraction of the readiness the US has demonstrated to defend the three Gulf countries would have been enough to stop the tragedies in Bosnia. That it would have been so is con-

firmly by the Croatian military campaign. The Serbs are no more invincible, their moral is as low as it can be. For weeks now they have not been able to recover from the reversal and launch a fresh assault. To some extent the Croatian triumph has acted as a sobering influence on the Serbs. This the US or the West could do even better. The fact is that the moral guardians of the world did not want to risk their men and material for the protection of a tiny nation that had just emerged on international map. But it was a terrible

Bankruptcy of US Foreign Policy

by Nilratan Halder

How ludicrous! While the Kuwaiti military observers deny any unusual movement of Iraqi forces, the Pentagon goes several steps ahead to call it a war preparation. Such over-zealous concern and unsolicited help stand in stark contrast with the US, and not least the West's, policy in regards to former Yugoslavia.

aircraft carriers in the Gulf. One of the carriers stays anchored at an Israeli port to back up a possible military campaign against Saddam.

How ludicrous! While the Kuwaiti military observers deny any unusual movement of Iraqi forces, the Pentagon goes several steps ahead to call it a war preparation. Such over-zealous concern and unsolicited help stand in stark contrast with the US, and not least the West's, policy in regards to former Yugoslavia. There is not one internationally accepted convention, principle and norm that has not been flouted and violated in Bosnia. But over the past four years the so-called moral vanguards of the world have refused to take any determined and decisive action against the main violators, the Serbs. If it was just a war between two parties, such unconcern could even be pardoned. But the caricature of a UN protection they have put up is indeed outrageous. What has happened in Srebrenica after the UN-declared safe haven's (?) fall simply boggles the mind. But little did the West do to stop the crime. It is not surprising that the head of an international commission responsible for probing into the war atrocities by the Serbs resigned, protesting the international community's hypocrisy.

Then notice how promptly some of the Western governments condemned the Croatian attack on Knin and Krajina. As if by halting the Serb advance on Bihać, the Croatian government has spoiled the party. Now the US is trying to sell the idea that Goradze should be surrendered to the Serbs as part of a territorial exchange deal.

All the time the US administration also has refused to lift the international arms embargo on Bosnia. Neither the UN forces are given the mandate to protect safe areas, nor the Bosnian Muslim forces are allowed to defend themselves through procuring better weapons. The US has all through refused to commit any ground troops to protect UN-declared Bosnian pockets.

In contrast the US forces are already in the Gulf and are ready to fight Iraq to defend Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Jordan. Ironically Jordan was the only country that lent some support to Iraq during the war of the Western allies to free Kuwait. Iraq has been forced to pass through tremendous economic crisis, thanks to the international ban on its oil export. The ban has been tagged with Iraq's clandestine weapon programmes, for mass destruction. Unless it lays bare its plan for such weapon devel-

opment, the embargo on oil will not be lifted. Granted that Saddam is a villain, that weapons of mass destruction at his hands may pose a threat to neighbouring countries. But does it justify the total ban on oil export? Reports on shortage of baby foods and milk compounded by lack of life-saving drugs have been coming out from Iraq. But the West has not moved a little from its hardened attitude. Of course the US has taken the lead in this regard.

So why is the double-standard? It is as simple as the business concern of the West. Here is a big stake. The need for oil and the armament market in the Gulf is too big to be ignored. Bosnia has nothing to offer. It is because of this stake or lack of it that has brought out the bankruptcy of US and the West's policy to the fore.

They have not only turned a blind eye to the happenings in former Yugoslavia but also acquiesced in the crime there. Such condoning does not help establish a better world order. Least of all when the ambivalence is all too glaring. Even a fraction of the readiness the US has demonstrated to defend the three Gulf countries would have been enough to stop the tragedies in Bosnia. That it would have been so is con-

firmly by the Croatian military campaign. The Serbs are no more invincible, their moral is as low as it can be. For weeks now they have not been able to recover from the reversal and launch a fresh assault. To some extent the Croatian triumph has acted as a sobering influence on the Serbs. This the US or the West could do even better. The fact is that the moral guardians of the world did not want to risk their men and material for the protection of a tiny nation that had just emerged on international map. But it was a terrible

ALL nations, according to the UN Charter, are created equal; but in reality some are more equal than others. The United States is one such country and indeed more than that. Apart from the more equal ones, all countries are discriminated against, but some are more discriminated against than the rest. Iraq and obviously Bosnia are countries of the latter category.

These observations in Orwellian terms are, however, not as hyperbolic as the master fiction writer's main theme of his famous anti-utopian novels. In a unipolar world, the US as the only superpower has failed to do justice to its position. Nowhere has this been so nakedly exposed as in the contradictory policies of America on Bosnia and Iraq. The US started fanning a war euphoria in the Gulf immediately after the defection of two top Iraqi insiders in Baghdad's defence establishment to Jordan. The defectors incidentally happen to be sons-in-law of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

Now look at the incoherent charges brought against the Baghdad regime by the US administration. First, it made the allegation that in no time Iraq was going to attack Jordan for its offence of granting asylum to the defectors. Then the protector of a number of Gulf states accuses Iraq of unusual movement of its troops south of Baghdad. Look at the phraseology of the accusation. "Unusual movement of troops". Not even massing of troops along the border. And the great power smells the rat in it. So it promptly deploys US forces and keeps ready within striking distances its

effective. The female voters also can place their grievances through their own elected MPs. All conscientious citizens would be happy to see their female counterparts getting due political power and play a more effective role in politics.

A M Mohsin
Indira Road, Dhaka

Unfortunate Shadina
Sir, Repression of any sort on woman is barbaric and extremely cowardly! Women are to be protected against repression and this vice must be erased from our society once for all. The other day while I was scanning through my copy of The Daily Star, it was really shocking and pathetic to go through the painful story of Shadina. Though she has been rescued, but who would accept her. It's doubtful if her own parents would accept her or have the same feeling for her now.

Unfortunately, cases similar to Shadina's are not unusual. The cruel circumstance is that a young wandering woman is eventually picked up by a woman pimp and then sold to the Tanbazar or any such red light area. The staff reporter of The Daily Star deserves a pat on his shoulder for his efforts to save the girl and make such humanitarian appeal to the government to save other such under-aged unfortunate girls.

I would also like to add that our TV and Radio should immediately air special short plays, depicting the plights of the unfortunate ones like Shadina. Garment factories and other places of work which provide employment to female workers should take special care also for their safety. In the meanwhile, let's wish some kind hearted persons would come forward to set up rehabilitation centres for such victims

of circumstances by providing all facilities for their survival.

K Vizar Moinuddin
Dhaka

Unfair practice of DESA
Sir, For the last several months the electric consumers of Zikatala and Tannery area have been experiencing power cut almost every evening at about 7:00 pm. The supply remains off some days for two hours and some days for one hour. We understand from the various notices issued by DESA and news published in papers that the supply is cut off due to load shedding practised by DESA.

In an electric power grid, load shedding is resorted to by the grid management when the demand for power exceeds the available supply. This occurs mostly during the peak hours of consumption which in the case of DESA falls between 7:00 pm and 10:00 pm. This is also the period when the ordinary consumers need the electric power most — to light their dwellings. To have the supply cut off when the power is needed most is certainly very inconvenient, to say the least. In view of this, the normal practice all over the civilised world when load shedding becomes unavoidable, is to distribute the inconvenience evenly among all the consumers of the grid, and not to restrict it to the consumers of any particular section of the grid.

In the case of DESA we are sorry to find that when power supply to Zikatala and Tannery area is cut off, there is always electricity in the Dhanmandi section of the DESA grid. This practice of DESA to favour the Dhanmandi consumers, is unfair and in fact not civilised.

M Rahman
Zila School Road,
Mymensingh

Deprived of His blessings!
Sir, Bilateral, multilateral, and global endeavours of desperate Bangladesh have yet to have her giant neighbour "melt the ice" over the international waters across this subcontinent.

The extremes of flood and drought afflicting this deltaic state frequently, coupled with tidal surge and cyclone, and aggravated by camouflaged political turmoil only batter the prolonging miseries of this SAARC pioneer.

One of the most cursed omens to 120 millions people, Farakka Barrage has already wrought havoc on this lower riparian member of the association for regional cooperation physically, economically, politically, and diplomatically.

On the part of the upper riparian state in control of life-and-death situation covering the discharges of the regional rivers and their tributaries and distributaries, the "Blunder" barrage must be a bane to her own domestic econo-political stability and progress.

The dams/barrages built and others still on the blue prints in order to regulate the flow of the multinational rivers cause concern to the affected state(s), which cannot be simply ignored or substituted with what may not be advantageous to either side.

This is not too bad yet, compared to a devastating earthquake subsiding as vast a land as Bangladesh, and who knows exactly what is ahead for this part of South Asian region after this century is completely past.

Bureaucratic Mystique in South Asia
A KM Jalaluddin

What the CSP's were Taught-XIII
Quiet Quetta, Not Quite

QUETTA had the reputation of being the cleanest city in British India — and a quiet one too. We had no real idea about Quetta's beauty when Farasuddin, Huda, Rafiqul Karim and I boarded the Khyber Mail (July 1967) for our dis-trict attachment.

The idea was to introduce probationers of one wing to the people and administrative system of the other. We had opted for Quetta and were lucky to have gotten a posting of our choice — Quetta was well known for its captivating beauty and moderate climate.

We were billeted in the Baldia House, a circuit house-cum-hotel managed by the Quetta Municipality. Its manager, Mrs. Jennier Musa, an Irish by birth, had married a local politician (Quazi Muhammad Musa, brother of Pakistan Muslim League's one-time general secretary Quazi Isal). Quazi Musa's son Ashraf Quazi was in the PFS, a batch senior to us. Mrs. Musa became our "Aunt Jenny" and looked after us really well.

Jamshed Burki (CSP 1961) was the deputy commissioner and we, "the gang of four," were under his charge. He was truly very affectionate towards us and took every possible step to ensure our safety and welfare. One day we found that there was a sizable number of new guests in the hotel: Sardar Ataulah Khan Mungal moved into the hotel with a large number of supporters and family members and took up residence in the ground floor (same as ours).

We had been told about the regulation and non-regulation areas in Pakistan, but never had the opportunity to see operation of the system in the field. The reality soon dawned on us.

About 7 pm one evening, the room-bearer of the Baldia House, advised us to stay indoors and put out our lights IMMEDIATELY. "Why?" we asked, "no time to argue, please put out your lights. Your life may be in danger. We are expecting an attack by the Jakranis."

We were not the bravest of the brave under the circumstances. We felt worried about our security. The Jakranis had reportedly shaved off their heads and beard (they were well known for sporting long hair) and were planning to attack Sardar Mungal.

This was the outcome of a long standing blood-feud between these two tribes and they were out to take revenge

in face of mounting protest. Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammed has demanded his removal from office. The latest onslaught by Croatians against Bosnian Serbs in Krajina, appears to have deflected temporarily world's attention from the plight of Bosnian Muslims, yet the overall situation in former Yugoslavia is so volatile that there is real fear of another Balkan War. The paralysis of the UN faced with the human tragedy in Bosnia will no doubt take much shine away from the Golden Jubilee celebrations.

From a bipolar world we now have entered a unipolar one as the Golden Jubilee celebrations roll by. The collapse of the Soviet Union has brought about a totally new situation to which the world is unable to adjust. As it prepares to enter the Twenty-first Century, it is an uncertain and perilous world.

The world has so far escaped a major holocaust, yet the nuclear threat, even by miscalculation, hangs over humanity. Human ingenuity and hard-headed commonsense will be needed so that humanity may continue its onward march on the path of progress.

compromise. For the defence of democratic principles, human rights and territorial integrity some price has to be paid. No patch-up of the sort placed in Bosnia stood any chance of success. That is exactly what has happened. The difference has obviously been made by Croatia. And look how hesitant the Western powers still are in using it to their advantage. But then the US alacrity and readiness to help defend some countries against an Iraqi attack which is more a result of a Western media blitz than a real one, only help form a bad idea about the only superpower. However, it could command respect of all free and democracy-loving people of the world through upholding the lofty ideals of democracy anywhere in the world. History will accuse the US for missing the chance that came its way at the end of the Cold War.

And it also opened our eyes to the vast differences that existed in various fields within West Pakistan itself.

The Baluchistan system, introduced by the British rulers, said that satisfaction of the aggrieved was more important than punishment of the offender, whatever may be the offence. Experience had shown that death penalty given to some members of the tribe tended to set off a chain of murders — to settle the "blood debt" as it was known among the Baluchis.