Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

Dhaka, Friday, August 25, 1995

## Deeper into Debt-trap

Thanks to a Finance Ministry publication we now have a clear idea as to where the aid crunch really lies. This clarification was necessary because the quantity of aid pledge to Bangladesh on a year-to-year basis has remained more or less unvaried despite all the talk about an adverse aid climate. We figured maybe Bangladesh was receiving some kind of a special treatment, what with the global scarcity of external assistance.

This isn't quite true as the finance ministry's publication now reveals. Much as grants have been declining, loans are proportionately increasing. And, with that, we are drowning up to our neck in debts. Our per capita debt has increased from a paltry 6.59 US dollars in 1973-74 to 133 dollars in 1993-94.

Grants mostly came from the bilateral sources which are obviously drying up now with the multilateral donor agencies increasingly taking charge of things in a changed global context: Camp politics is gone and with that is gone, too, the anxiety to keep countries in line.

Besides, in view of the detente, domestic pressures have mounted on the donors to account for each dollar given away by them as foreign aid.

At home, too our own government has to feel pressured to be transparent and accountable before the public for all the money it is spending. For us, the need to be correct in public spending is even greater because previously if it was the tax-payer's money the government was being called upon to account for, now there is the added obligation to justify each farthing of foreign loan being contracted forcing the people deeper into the debt-trap. Aside from the tax-payer's money it is the debt-payer's money we have to feel for. Public expenditures have increased manifold in recent years and well-informed people say that studies alone take up a chunk of these, followed by expenses on software, paraphernalia and protocol.

The finance ministry now suggests that we should be more selective and quality-conscious about receiving foreign aid in the future. The question is how much of this choice was applied beforehand?

## Save Meghna Bridge

If wilful damage and destruction of state property is sabotage, here is one. But there is a slight difference. Whereas the act of sabotage is usually carried out secretly, here the earthcutting company is posing damage to the Meghna Bridge and the Dhaka-Bakhrabad gas line in broad daylight.

The said company obtained a lease for lifting sand from the river-bed but this was supposed to be nowhere near the bridge or the Titas gas line. But once it has had a permission for cutting the river-bed, the company evidently thought why limit it to a specific area? After all a river is nobody's property! So, it went merrily about excavating, having paid Tk 21 lakh for the lease and then employing 45-50 cargo vessels for the job.

A Bangla daily reports that the eastern approaching side of the bridge — a vulnerable part that witnessed landslides in 1988 and 1990 — has since cost 110 cr for its protection. Now the western side is similarly threatened because of the illegal earth-cutting by the company within a striking distance, say 40 or 50 yards. The gas pipeline has already come up floating as a result of the force of rushing water. The question is: does not the district administration, which is the leasing authority, have some role yet to play there? Its inaction underlines the inherent weakness of our administration. Its duty does not and should not end with the issuance of work order, it must ensure that the company operate within the designated area.

So, the district administration through its lethargic working style has become a party to the attempted sabotage. The company may not have any concern for the value of the property because its aim is profit-making. But when it comes to protection of national property, the district administration cannot shut its eyes to any damage wrought on it. At stake is the existence of the bridge that was built at a cost of Tk 685 crore. Then there is a chance of the gas pipeline exploding — a tragedy of unprecedented magnitude looming on the horizon. Before it is too late, stop the company from approaching the bridge site.

### Teachers' Bedlam

Some Rajshahi University teachers came to blows the other day. It is unthinkable that they could be so violent, particularly when they had gathered to discuss the crists arising out of student clashes some time ago. And what is it that prompted musclemanry on the part of the teachers?

The meeting of the Rajshahi University Teachers' Association (RUTA) had on its agenda issues like the Vice-Chancellor's role and his exercise of excessive authority, if any. Immediately as the VC became a subject of criticism, some teachers, including one who was particularly aggressive, simply could not keep their cool. They attacked the critics.. It only shows that a coterie of teachers are not interested in settling the issue through discussion. It is with their backing that the student front of the Jamaat can continue to vitiate atmosphere in the university.

Obviously, the highly politicised aggressive elements are out to create an environment where progressive teachers and students may find their lives to be miserable. We cannot allow the university atmosphere to get so vicious. Let the offenders be brought to law.

### If Wishes were Horses HAT is clear about the Bharatiya Janata Party is that it wants to come to power. What is not clear is why? Its

The BJP does not realise that the Jammu and Kashmir acceded to India on the condition that it would have internal autonomy and allow New Delhi administer only three subjects — defence, foreign affairs and communications.

northern Indian states and self has yet to clear his name from the charge that he re-The states under its rule ceived money from abroad have been as much dens of the havala racket which came corruption, clamour and calto light through a CBI raid in lousness as under other polit-1991. His statement about ical formations. They at least cleanliness in public life carmake no song and dance ries little conviction till he is about their ethical standards exoherated by the Supreme as is done by the pompous Court, which is still hearing RSS, whose political wing the the matter. There are a few other BJP leaders who are Corruption is not peculiar also involved in the havala to Congress governments.

racket.

inadequacies are more obvi-

ous than its qualities with ev-

ery day that passes. The party

has been tried in most

The BJP administrations have

lest behind them a trial of

graft and guile. When in

power in Himachal Pradesh.

Madhya Pradesh and UP, in

that order, the party was

mired deep in taint and

bribery. Some BJP ministers

made money openly. Now

Rajasthan, where the BJP is

still in power, is rocking with

land scandals. Atal Behari

Vipayee has himself admitted

in public that some party

MPs and MLAs sell railway

travel coupons which they

which began mulcting public

servants by posting or

prompting them to particular

positions. The BJP made a

business out of it in UP and

Madhya Pradesh. Engineers.

doctors, teachers and even

policemen were transferred

for a price to places where

they could make money

through underhand methods.

Former UP chief minister

Mulayam Singh Yadav has al-

leged that the BJP and its ally

Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)

are earning Rs. 5 crore from

BJP chief L K Advani him-

95. we are to look at the

history of water development

and flood control in our

country as well as the region

BVIOUSLY if we want

to say something rea-

sonable about Flood

transfers daily

It was the Congress party

found wanting.

The party, like many other political organisations, is riven with dissensions. Madhya Pradesh is the worst example. The BJP government in the state remained a divided house as long as it lasted. Bickerings and quar rels are still far from settled Now Gujarat has come to the fore. The peace which Advani, himself an MP from Gujarat, enforced in the state party during the assembly polls, is in tatters. The various groups are back to the old differences and divisions The BJP or, for that matter the RSS high command, has brought about a peace of sorts but intrigues continue to make it uneasy.

When it comes to causing harm to the institution, the BJP is no better than those who strike at them knowingly. Its chief minister Kalyan Singh, during his rule in UP, earned the distinction of going back on the undertaking he gave to the Supreme Court that he would protect the Babri Masjid. Instead, he oversaw the destruction, which put the en-

Water

tire nation to shame. True. he underwent one-day sen tence because of the contempt of court but the BJP never uttered a word of regret over Kalyan Singh's fault. Those who claim to speak in the name of high standards should express a word of regret or apology when found guilty.

The fundamentalist group of the RSS has, in fact, a programme to try to polarise the three-point plan - common civil code. Kashmir and foreigners - has been chosen but it reflects the same old prejudice. Take common civil code. The Muslims in India. like any minority community in the world, cling on to all such things as give them an identity. Personal law is one of them. Any tinkering with it is seen by them as dilution of their entity. Changes require a long time and they are also

flag. The BJP fails to appreciate that the Kashmiris want to retain their identity. The special status given through Article 370 is a constitutional guarantee for that purpose. When the BJP gives a call for abolishing it. the party only adds to the fear of the Kashmiris, who already feel threatened

ation, which will not go

merely by flying the national

Moreover, the BJP does not realise that the Jammu and Kashmir acceded to India on the condition that it would have internal autonomy and allow New Delhi administer only three subjects - delence, foreign affairs and communications. And this undertaking was consecrated by Article 370 to limit powers of parliament to make laws for the Jammu and Kashmir. If any change is to be made in Article 370, it is up to the people of Jammu and Kashmir to do so because they joined the Union on that particular understanding The rest of India cannot do

The issue of foreigners is an emotive one. The Assamese have been reduced to a minority in their own state. The BJP is only exploit ing the situation. It is not opposed to Hindus coming from Bangladesh because the party considers them refugees, but it is opposed to Muslims' entry. Assam wants to oust both and in this campaign by All Assam Students Union (AASU), the Assam Muslims are as ardent participants as

so legally or morally.

able when the entrants are Hindus. The comical aspect of of the Dalits. The party members propose to visit their bastis to tie on them the rakhi, a bound of kinship.

the Assamese Hindus.

Infiltration is bad per se and

it does not become accept-

B.JP's campaign is the wooing Congress has staged the farce many a time before. The BJP would be more convincing if it were to do something concrete to relieve their dreary life of segregation and humiliation. Can the party dare to shift the Dalits from their outcaste habitations to localities of the upper castes and

The real contribution to the cause of demolishing walls of discrimination will be it some top members of the RSS and those of its sitellite organisations like the BJP and the Hindu Viashwa Parishad were to marry their daughters to the Dalit boys, or vice versa Neither the RSS chief Rajinder Singh, nor Advani, nor Vajpayee has ever talked of such steps to span the distance with the Dalits.

the elite?

The party made Mayawati. a Dalit, the UP chief minister not to effect social reforms but to occupy a position that will help them to reap dividends in the Lok Sabha elections. But what they do not realise is that over the years the electorate has grown mature enough to see through

Still Advani sees a majority for his party in the next polls in the 546-member Lok Sabha. And Vajpavee says that time is ripe for the BJP to come to power. If the party had the courage to make a decisive break with its past Hindutva, it would have had a future. Now it is saying: If wishes were horses

and encouragement is also

### BETWEEN THE LINES

### Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

society a few weeks before the election. The plan is to use sadhus and saints to lead ekatmata yatra in the country to propagate that the Hindus alone treated India as one mother. The mandir question has been deliberately put on the backburner. This is part of strategy, not the realisation that the demolition of centuries-old mosque, whether at Ayodhya, Mathura or Varanasi, is wrong or immoral. The new strategy of not touching temples is the result of the feedback that the Babri Masjid destruction was not liked even by the Hindus, much less the

The BJP's bias against Muslims has not in any way diminished. It takes different shapes at different times. For the Lok Sabha election,

Muslims.

There are age-old cus-

dependent on education, so-

cial reforms and economic

toms, which a uniform civil code may not be able to end. The Hindus in Andhra Prodesh and Tamil Nadu have a practice whereby a maternal uncle marries his niece. Marriages between first cousins among Hindus are banned. But Muslims and Christians have been following the practice for centuries. How will this fit into common civil code? The BJP's understanding

of the Kashmir problem has been clear from the day the then chief Murali Manohar Joshi hoisted the national flag at Lal Chowk in Srinagar with the help of security forces. The problem in the valley is the people's alien-

# Flood '95: In Retrospect and Future

by Muhammad Quamrul Islam

Flood Action Plan (FAP) is the talk of the day. Various reports about FAP projects, and their shortcomings, are appearing almost everyday in the newspapers. It is learnt that FAP is the biggest programme ever undertaken in the field of flood control in the sub-continent. But at the initial stage of implementation, its projects failed to produce the desired result.

at large. Superficial observations, mostly of political propaganda type, will take us no where near the solution; instead that may even aggravate the situation. Undirect responsibility is of fortunately that has been Ministry of Water Resources. happening, whether in se-Bangladesh minars or in the street, Development Board, River virtually with no serious Research Institute and other efforts beside, over the last agencies. Flood Action Plan two decades to help the (FAP) is the talk of the day teeming millions who are Various reports about FAP adversely affected by reprojects, and their shortcomcurring floods. We see artiings, are appearing almost cles and views published in everyday in the newspapers. the press, some by intellec-It is learnt that FAP is the tuals and politicians, who biggest programme ever uneven find only Indian machidertaken in the field of flood nation responsible for the control in the sub-continent spate. One, of late, called for But at the initial stage of imimplementation of Zia's 19plementation, its projects point programme, particufailed to produce the desired larly the digging of rivers. result. To cite two recent canals and ponds etc. on volinstances. First, serious ir untary labour basis. It is regularities have been restrange why they could not ported in the construction of do so, although the BNP is in groyne of FAP in Gaibandha, power for about four and a the Chief Engineers. Flood half years. Why he worries Control Co-ordination organiabout opposition is not unsation, of course, did not derstandable. Government deny that FAP Project machinery is there to dis-Structures have fallen to charge the responsibilities pieces. Second. FAP-20. and save people from the Tangail compartment, clushavoc of flood. We will have to terwise programme of interbe very clear about it; so that ventions, is under severe there is no confusion, atcriticism by the local people tempt to evade responsibility and NGOs. The people living and shift it to others! He outside the project area asked his political colleagues complained of increasing into take up plan to control antensity of flood in their areas nual flood for the welfare of for FAP 20. And within the project area fisheries and Today, we have huge adnavigability have been hamministrative infrastructure pered due to construction of for flood control, water restructures and regulators. In

most taken the shape of movement against FAP. At one place the people have cut the FAP groyne. It is not understood how this project costing one hundred crore Taka, have been undertaken without the consent of the people, whom it is to serve.

We have good record of achievements in the water sector: but it is on decline over the last two decades. although budget and expenditure are showing an increasing trend. Against the budget head, water resources, a sum of Tk 1000.20 crore was spent during 1994-95. What we got out of it? At present flood has affected 1 crore 50 lakh people in 197 thanas of 35 districts, causing damage to crops, dwelling houses, educational institutions and civil engineering structures. The loss in rice production is estimated to be more than 2.5 lakh metric tons. It is estimated that for rehabilitation of agriculture

Tk 350 crore is needed Meanwhile, electronic mass media, particularly TV, have shown the relief distribution pictures! The opposition parties, however, are concerned about the cost involvement in flying the helicopters over the flood affected areas! What is the sum total of all these

activities? Now, the flood is

receding and fresh flood is also anticipated. So, more damage, more relief, more propaganda; but no determined effort in the sight to fight the calamity effectively.

If we go back to the '50's we find a different scenario. During the severe flood damage in 1954, 1955 and 1956. the assistance from the United Nations was sought. In compliance with the requests, a team of experts, headed by J A Krug, former Secretary of Interior of the USA, arrived in East Pakistan in late 1956. This was commonly known as Krug Mission, who submitted its report, after about six months of study on water and power development in our country. To put into effect the recommendations of the mission. Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) was established in 1959. At the very beginning. the Authority realised its tremendous and difficult task. As such, the need to formulate long term programmes was emphasised. for which Data Collection and Research were carried on. After several years of field investigations, the masterplan was prepared; and adopted in 1965. An orderly development was outlined up to 1985. The main features of

protection plan was: flood embankments, channel improvement, river training, protection of important cities and towns, estuary works, investigations and training. As some one working with WAPDA in the '60s, I distinctly remember the constant endeavour to watch the water sector and up-date the plan and programme.

After liberation instead of strengthening the edifice of WAPDA and going all out to rehabilitate the water structures, damaged during liberation war, the authorities bifurcated WAPDA onto two parts in 1972 and created two boards, namely — Bangladesh Water Development Board and Bangladesh Power Development Board. I am told, WAPDA personnel lost the zeal and vigour they had in 1960's. During the last two decades personnel control (?) snatched more working hours than development issues.

Surely, one can not expect good work from the officers and staff working in the water sector, whether under Water Resources Ministry or Planning Commission, etc. if there is no congenial atmosphere and eagerness to uphold moral values. Mere provision for money is not enough! Proper utilization necessary. In the budget 1995-96, a sum of Tk 1056.24 crore has been alloagainst water resources. What benefits the country and the people. living below poverty line. will reap from this allocation? If we want to come out of the vicious circle of what they allege as 'Flood-relief-vote,' we will have to keep water issue above power politics. It is fraud to use anti-Indian bogey, to beguile the poor, illiterate voters and get their support. Let us call a spade a spade. Even if we do not consider 'SAARC', for which the Bangladesh Government is so proud; we are confident that co-operation of Indian people will be forthcoming, if regional co-operation is sincerely sought for water resources development; because it is in the mutual interest of both the countries.

It is estimated that extent of damage will be more than one thousand crore taka on account of flood this time. Current generation of public officers and civic leaders, to utilize the accumulated rich experience of the past in controlling flood and developing water resources, for building the future of our country in the right direction, is very much sought after. We are hopeful that they are aware that their country is at the bottom of global economy, even if per capita income is taken to be 235 dollar. In that case, those who are at the helm of political affairs will have to respond or amend them-

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### "Grapes are sour"

sources and irrigation. The

the country!.

Sir. This refers to the interview with Mr Amir-ul-Islam, Bar-At-Law, Chairman, EC. Bangladesh Bar Council. Dhaka published under the caption "In search of a way out" in The Daily Star, on 25th July.

The opinion of the learned Senior Advocate surprises the right-thinking people of the country. It is universal that the Constitution is sacred which guarantees fundamental rights. The reference to a commitment from the ruling party and the opposition as a prerequisite to solve the constitutional crisis created by opposition members in Parliament for election under a caretaker government is similar to an expression "grapes are sour". always existed of the parliament in the past. It is same at present and will be tomorrow on the points of issue amongst the members of the Parliament of various political parties and the difference should not be the basis of resignation from the Parliament.

It is the freedom of MPs to stage a walkout from Parliament on protest but to tender resignation en masse tends to be a breach of trust and mandate of the people by whom they have been elected. According to the constitutional provisions. these MPs are expected to serve for a fixed term. By resigning they demonstrate

disrespect for the will of the

people. The present constitu-

tional crisis created by the minority members Parliament is an attempt to force the party in power out of Government for premature election. Such actions normally create disturbance and hindrance to the welfare of the country and prevent allround progress. The present constitutional crisis is created by the minority members in Parliament with a view to force the will of the minority over the majority which is itself unconstitutional, and against the concept of democracy.

the project area, it has al-

The argument for general election under a caretaker government is also unconstitutional in as much as it will serve the purpose of minority over the rule of majority in the name of democracy. Limitless advocacy for a commitment with the ruling party and the opposition as suggested by the learned Senior advocate can only serve the interest of the minority and not of the nation where some are waiting to take the advantage of the situation as windfall, and this kind of activity will push the country towards destruction. The question of holding

general election under a caretaker Govt: is superfluous and unconstitutional. It is a mere whim of some politicians trying to put their personal benefits before the nation in the name of the democracy. If the politicians are benevolent and fight for the cause of the people and it is the desire of political parties that a general election is

essential to be conducted by an impartial caretaker govt. then this proposal requires to be included into party manifestoes of political parties prior to any general election to ascertain whether this view is supported by the people and this is not a

proper time to ask for it. The question remains why these politicians always remained silent since 1971 inspite of getting many opportunities? The reason is very clear as the political parties always hoped that their party would procure mandate from the people to form the Govt. and their party will conduct next general election while in power would be an advantage. All the constitutional lawyers of the country forgot to focus this aspect to the nation and many are claiming now as champions for this

After the fall of President H M Ershad political situation in the country was different than today and the concept of caretaker govt. was appropriate and essential at that time. The present scenario is different. Merely agitating common people by unlawful means, threat and intimidation, a peaceful solution can never be achieved and such demands will invite chaos and confusion in the country.

It requires political education in general to educate people by political parties through peaceful means i.e. party propagandas, programs and manifestations. There is omission in this respect by

some political parties as a result of which common people are more confused than over and some politicians want to catch fish in troubled water in a crisis created by opposi-

comprehensive flood

tion politicians. At present parliament is not in a position to bring an amendment and there is no provision for a caretaker government embodied in the constitution. At present the parliament is in short of its full strength and amendment requires support of two-third members of the Parliament. The present crisis is pushing the country towards destruction of its economy and ruin the hard earned democracy so far achieved. Democracy is not a toy and it should not be used by the politicians as such. Apparently it seems that the will of minority members in the Parliament is being imposed over the ma jority in the name of democracy which is unconstitutional and as such no code is necessary as opined by the learned Senior advocate appears against the concept of adult franchise.

Let the political parties include the concept of caretaker government in party manifestations to mount support from the common people in next general election to solve this problem once for all and the suggestion of the Senior Advocate for an understanding with the ruling and opposition parties to fill up 147 seats uncontested

is itself unethical, immoral in

as much as unconstitutional

and against the norms of

democracy in true sense. It is true that the present crisis is political rather than constitutional and common people should never be mis-

led under the banner of

constitutional crisis. The confidence and mandate of the people can only be achieved through political educations, party programs through political manifestations, these have to be presented to the people in a cordial manner without resorting unlawful means threats, duress and intimidation. The hopes and aspirations of the people should be honoured by the politicians in order to gain the confidence and the politicians should feel the problems of people by heart and try to solve them.

Abdul Hamid Advocate. 218. Elephant Road. Dhaka-1205

### '93 pc driving licences fake!" Sir. I have read with pro-

found interest the news under the above caption published in your daily on August 1. 1995.

The commissioner of DMP revealed that only 7 per cent of the vehicles (bus, trucks, private car etc.) have the legal driving licences. Besides, BRTA (Bangladesh Road Transport Authority) has enlisted all the licences without informing DMP. This proves that there is no coordination between these two depart

ments. For this the number of vehicles are increasing in Dhaka. As a result traffic jam has become a common phe-

nomenon in Dhaka city. But the traffic police are doing nothing against it either. I don't know why the chief of DMP is not making them to follow "law and order on the roads!

If the DMP (traffic) is not capable enough to enforce law on the road, is it fruitful to maintain this department in Dhaka? May I, as a citizen, expect a suitable reply from the DMP?

1 K M Moniruzzaman Rajshahi Cadet College Sardah, Rajshahi

### Dhaka Traffic Congestion

Sir. I am very impressed

to know that you have organ sied a seminar on Dhaka Traffic Congestion. I myself suggest that traf-

fic congestion can also be partly improved by minimising the width of the road di vider built in some areas of Dhaka. Presently some road dividers take about 4 0 (four feet) of the road which can be replaced by only 0-9" (nine inches). Undoubtedly this will help improve the flow of traffic

This may be noted that this type of divider is used in many developed countries of the world

Engr Syed Mosharrat Hossain Banani, Dhaka