

OIC Summit?

Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), which is known more for its bite-less summits than anything else, will organise another — this time at the behest of Bangladesh.

The OIC Secretary-General was unable to tell us whether or not the two-third membership has endorsed the idea of the emergency summit, without which it cannot be held.

Even if everything falls into place, the summit is a month off. Given the speed with the situation on the ground is developing, after the NATO airstrikes, it appears that the October summit will deal principally with a situation already decided.

Following the dictum "Better late than never" the summit will be of some definite purpose, no doubt. We just hope that it will be more realistic, more practical and more credible than other OIC summits on Bosnia, have so far been.

DU Jubilee

As expected the Dhaka University (DU) platinum jubilee was a truncated affair, with many student (now political) leaders of their time not participating because of the current political situation.

Recently Mohsin Hall students' reunion was held, where also only former student leaders were invited to speak.

For the same thing to occur during the 75th anniversary of the university is indeed extremely regrettable. We seem to honour more the students who do politics than those who bring laurels to the university by securing first places, by being honoured in foreign universities, or by their circulative and creative works.

When such is the nature of commemorative events, and the mind-set of university leadership, is it any wonder that there is more politics in our universities than studies?

An Impending Doom

Last week a very big group of top earth scientists placed a report on the environmental and climatic global outlook for the first century of the new millennium.

The news has nothing new in it. The globe has been steadily warming up during the present century, thanks to billions of internal combustion machines releasing a carbon dioxide at an unprecedented rate.

A contrary news of our seashore region almost popping out of water because of siltation activity of our great rivers, had made us for sometime to look away from the warming process and its inevitable consequences.

The first thing will be to take the matter with due seriousness and instill a sense of concern into our individual and national consciousness. And then Bangladesh must commit itself to fight the causes of global warming by campaigning to compel the developed nations to reform their prodigal ways with energy use.

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Foreign Aid: Where it Comes, Where it Goes

THE critical role of foreign aid in the economic development of Less Developed Countries (LDCs) is well documented in economic literature. As it goes to argue, foreign aid is channelled to help fill the two gaps that LDCs tend to confront at the nascent stage of their development.

There are at least four specific areas where the positive impacts of aid could, possibly, be identified. It can be shown, on an empirical plane, that the Green Revolution that swept many LDCs owes much to foreign aid in terms of funding plant genetics, institutions (national and international) and upgradation of technical manpower in recipient countries.

Aid needs to be reprioritized with special focus on human development. The developed countries which, allegedly, siphon off a large chunk in terms of transfer of resources should see that their aid money is not being spent on military spending...

crucial for the establishment and maintenance of power stations, roads and embankments. Airports, transport and communication system were developed through availability of aid.

While the positive gains from foreign aid were highlighted in the Human Development Report 1994, there were many areas, according to the same report, where foreign aid had either negative impacts on recipient countries or yielded less than expected results.

At the aggregate level, aid is not, seemingly, targeted at the poor. Had it been so, aid inflow should have been an increasing function of the level of poverty or the number of poor persons in a poor country.

the world's poor are living. According to the available documents on foreign aid, richest 40 per cent of the developing world tend to receive twice as much aid per capita as the poorest 40 per cent.

Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes



21 per capita compared with USD-6 per capita in poorer South Asia. The official development assistance (ODA) per poor person in India, where 27 per cent of the world's poor live, is USD-7.

In the distribution of aid, strategic interest of the donors seem to have outweighed the socio-economic needs of the poor countries. Donors appear to

show growing concerns over military spending by poor countries but in the hole by cutting military aid. Even in the most recent years, allegedly, high military spenders received two and a half times as much per capita as the low military spenders.

UN report, El Salvador received 16 times more US aid per poor person than did Bangladesh — a country with one-fifth of El Salvador's GNP per capita. Israel receives 100 times more than Bangladesh although Israel's per capita GNP is USD 12,000.

An ambivalence with regard to donors' attitude to military spending by the recipient countries should be noted. Their wisdom seems to have barred them from interference in internal affairs of the recipients since it is the onus of the aid receiver to justify or direct the avail-

Admission Tests : Points to Ponder

by Shamsad Mortuza

THE recent government decision about the admission tests of the tertiary-level has sparked off mixed feelings. It came as a shock to many and relief to others: shock, because of the very abruptness (if not the arbitrariness) of the decision; relief, because of the welcoming sign of the government's waking up to the procrastination problem which has been plaguing the universities for quite a long time.

A high-powered body, headed by the education secretary and peopled by the vice-chancellors of the universities, reportedly resolved to dissolve the existing entrance examinations in favour of the public examinations namely SSC and HSC. After bulldozing the college admission tests, the government probably finds it timely enough to streamline the gateway to universities. And evidently, at one fell swoop, the government deems to straighten up things!

The hastiness of the decision, however, leads to a notorious hunch — a possibility of a revenge motif. Especially after the recent embarrassment of the government involving twenty 'meritorious' students' admission, one cannot simply waive such thought. These 'high scoring' group of 20 (G-20) preferred attending the award-giving ceremony of the Prime Minister to sitting for the highly competitive admission test of the Dhaka University.

Quite laudably, the conscientious members of the

Dhaka University resisted the vested interest to override the admission rules, provided by the University Act of 1973. The act has clearly given the universities the necessary provision to select their freshmen students. Each department of the university has its prerequisites about this selection.

Pitifully, these demands of the tertiary-level are not addressed at the secondary level. So, right after the Higher Secondary exam, a student rushes for a guide book or for a place in a coaching centre. And the mushrooming coaching centres — which by now has become a phenomenon — step in with the promise of admission, a ticket to heaven.

The coaching centres on the lacunae of the state prescribed syllabus. They keep a very high profile: giving full page colour advertisements in national dailies; distributing computers among successful students, and not to mention alluring the ill-paid university college teachers, albeit a micro-section of them.

Apart from the coaching centres, the student leaders have further complicated the admission process. These Machiavellians, by hook or by crook, squeeze money out of the pocket of the applicants. They black-market admission forms, rob money in the name of admission and what not. In the Jahangirnagar University, a couple of years back, on the last day of admission from merit list, an applicant was held hostage by some student activists to make room for a candidate coming from the waiting list. And there is, of course, the problem of delay in admission. These factors, altogether have propelled a wind

against the admission test. But one should not chop off one's head to remove the headache. Problems in the admission tests should be sorted out. By no means, the present admission tests should totally yield to the public examinations, especially when the SSC and HSC scores are very much vulnerable to corruption. True, there is corruption among the university staff but it is quite insignificant vis-a-vis the corruption, that has well struck its roots in Bangladesh.

In the universities, in particular, there is a check and balance. And that is why we have seen the retaking of an exam after alleged question leakage. But, think of the cadet colleges. Most of their products get high scores in the SSCs and HSCs (which they give sitting at their own schools with familiar atmosphere prevailing). But their performance at the tertiary level is far from satisfactory.

The disparity between urban and rural colleges is another nagging problem which will raise question against the proposed change in the admission process. The rural students hardly have any access to the latest development in the educational arena. They are less equipped than their urban counterparts. On the other hand, the rural students have the blessings of their teachers and influential guardians which effect their results. And that is why, on the eve of SSC or HSC examinations, we notice the exodus of the examinees towards the remote village centres where the proctoring Magistrates have a meek role and the police remain as non-chalant as ever. Consequently, we have thousands of educated manpower who cannot write a single correct Bangla or English application even after receiving the highest degree from the universities.

If the public examinations are to be rated highly in tune with the government's deci-

sion, one should first think of having a centralised exam. Or else, the discrepancy between urban and rural students will remain. The intermediate syllabus should be up-dated in accordance with the requirements of the Honours and Pass Degree courses. Strict measures should be taken against the vested quarters creatures involved in polluting the admission tests.

Besides, the universities can run their own foundation courses to familiarize the students with basic grammar skills, library usage, correspondence, computers, etc. This they can do with the very fund received from selling admission forms. Even if a university fails to start its Honours classes immediately after the publication of intermediate results, the university should arrange admission of the applicants as early as possible, without keeping the admission seekers in uncertainty and unnecessary traumas.

Our government likes to figure out its success in terms of figures. The pass percentage at the SSC and HSC has shot up to nearly 70 per cent in recent years. With the introduction of the question-bank, 800 plus has become an ordinary score for most examinees which some 10 years back was a utopia. The hastily taken decision about the question-bank has backfired and the government is trying to abandon the idea before it is too late.

Same can be predicted about the recent decision about the admission tests. It is indeed a premature decision. The graduate level colleges and universities need the admission tests, with necessary changes and precautions to course. There is, of course, room for amendment. But total ban on admission test might lead to a disaster — an academic plague for which we are not immuned.

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PERISCOPE by Voyager

Our Politicians Should Grow Up

IF Democracy was the proverbial monkey it would be sliding up and down the greasy pole of current events in Bangladesh and losing more than it gained. If politics is "the Art of the Possible" its practitioners in Bangladesh have turned it into — "the Art of the Improbable". If politicians are players in the game of politics they have been sent off the field by their own captains. If..... the list could go on and on but I am sure you get my point.

The ridiculous and quite unnecessary impasse created by all the political parties, and we should apportion blame equally, is reminiscent of children squabbling over a favourite toy. The reality that the toy is Bangladesh and its 120 million people is sobering for those of us who stand back from active politics. In fact were it not painful it would be amusing to stand back and watch as the poet Iqbal said, "Bazecca-e-Atfal hai duniya mere agay. Hota hai shab-o-roz tamasha mere agay".

The economy continues to show growth and development in spite of the reluctance of the political parties to accede to good sense and realize that the long term future of Democracy in the country may be jeopardized by their course of action. This is in itself an indication of the boom we could enjoy given even a modicum of stability and order. So many schemes, plans and initiatives have been stalled or put off because of the political

more committed as far as human development is concerned and this could be in evidence from the fact that Denmark targets one-fourth of its bilateral aid to those areas followed by Norway (18 per cent) and Netherlands (15 per cent). However, suffice it to say here that these small amount available through aid also constrains the spending capacity in social sectors. Again, whatever amount finds ways to recipient countries, the priority, allegedly, as urban-bias leaving the rural areas bypassed. In the coming years, aid needs to be reprioritized with special focus on human development. The developed countries which, allegedly, siphon off a large chunk in terms of transfer of resources should see that their aid money is not being spent on military spending but instead, devoted to socio-economic uplift of the common people. If donors can force their aid receivers to orchestrate policy changes with respect to subsidy, devaluation, privatization and above all, to free market economy, there is no reason why they cannot do the same to see that their money is being spent on the purchase of butter and not guns. And at home, a rise in the amount of total aid disbursement and a reprioritization can cause aid to aid humanity.

stranglehold that has had us in its grip for the last year or so. Can we continue to afford the luxury of personal quests for power and blatant self interest at the cost of national development? Should we as responsible citizens allow street agitation to hold us hostage for ends which are relevant only to the political party leadership?

In the final analysis what does it matter which party is in power — all we want or need is law and order and minimum interference from the government to allow us to get on with the serious business of survival. The international imperatives which dictate the flow of aid and the regional realities which affect our economic destiny can really not be changed by any government — democratically elected or not. So why are we allowing this disruption of life to continue?

As the voters who will ultimately decide the fate of the political parties if and when an election is held let us appeal to them to show some good sense. They must agree to at least meet to discuss their differences and search seriously for a formula to resolve the situation. This extreme and inflexible position that all sides have adopted cannot be called politics. The concerns expressed by both points of view have some justification. What cannot be justified is to bring the country to a halt for gains which will not materially affect the common man. It is time for our politicians to grow up!

To the Editor...

Scar on Society

Sir, It is one thing when mastaans, criminals and other such known crooks commit some offence and quite another when the people on whom we depend for our safety and security are the perpetrators of the crime themselves. Yes indeed, I am referring to the brutal, obdurate and arrogant manner in which the poor housemaid from Dhanmondi was raped and later killed by none other than some wayward policemen in Dinajpur. We feel like a child whose parents instead of protecting him actually torture him. To whom should the child go? Probably to some other sensible member of the family. But when members of the law enforcing agency commit a crime, we can expect the government to take care of the matter. But instead of doing so, the people at the helm of affairs attempted to malign the poor girl so that the whole issue would be forgotten. The way the general people of Dinajpur flared up bears testimony to the fact

that indeed criminals, in the unusual form of policemen, had resorted to not only killing young Yasmeen but also tried to conceal the facts. It is not surprising that an offender, be a civilian or a policeman, would try to prove innocent by concocting a story packed with lies. What is, however, disappointing is that the government press releases in most unexpected and shameless manner tried to defend the offenders. This hurts us endlessly. This is neither a political nor a feminist issue. What harm is there for the authority to come up with the true story, as the fault of a few policemen cannot be the entire government's shortcoming? Admitting the truth and mete out exemplary punishment according to the law of the land would only raise the credibility of the administration.

on the first day of hartal (I commend The Daily Star for their picture and story and for not making the picture identifiable). It is impossible to believe that this is anything else other than the sickness of an otherwise healthy group of youngsters. What most youngsters do not understand is that these employees are under pressure to go to their offices. No one likes to come to office walking several miles unless he is bound to. Yet I realize that picketers are not supposed to understand these reasons and allow someone to go to work during the hartal hours. But does that entail the punishment that he was meted out?

gentleman in newspapers? Is Yasmeen's family going to accept the tragedy because they are very poor and the offenders are policemen? Does this mean we are living in a lawless society? Once again these are not political issues but moral ones. Where are we heading to? What is next? Forgive me for not knowing the answers to these questions.

never have dreamt of. For a certain group of people, snatching the very basic rights of a human being falls within their practise, and therefore, such sights mean nothing to them.

In healthy and normal circumstances, disrobing people is indeed an act of madness, disgrace and vulgarity ever committed to a person. Have the leaders of the opposition political parties gone bizzare? Will they be accountable for the intolerable insult inflicted to the gentleman for the sake of greed for power?