

Brooks no Delay

We have been assured by Environment and Forest Minister Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury that a tough environment protection law is on the anvil. In the same breath, as if reading her audience's mind, she has hastened to add to the effect that mere formulation of law wouldn't do, this has to be enforced in order to make sense of that paper-work. Enforcement by whom? Obviously by the government.

It is all very good that a no-nonsense bill on environmental protection is going to be tabled in the parliament soon and that the minister has called for 'a social movement' against pollution but all this sounds rather far-fetched to the pressing problem at hand.

Public rebellion against the lethal air they are having to inhale everyday has been heightened so palpably by the government's inaction that a mere talk of law and the exhortative pontification cannot quite wash, far less pacify the public. Specially in the highly topical matter of environmental degradation in the capital city, one hand expected the government to give a more tangible proof of its having risen to the occasion. We cannot help express our disappointment over the diffusion of focus around pollution in Dhaka city, defective references having been made to industrial effluents and tree-felling etc.

Our considered view is that even within the limitations of the prevailing circumstances, some corrective actions can be taken here and now to reduce the levels of air and surface pollution in the city.

Let the Directorate of Environment, BRTA and DMP (Traffic) sit down to an emergency meeting, chalk out an orchestrated action plan and make it public before they plunge into it. This must be a problem-specific time-bound action programme with enforcement as its key element. The BRTA should be immediately equipped with all the modern instruments to be able to gauge automobile pollution and order the defective transports off the streets with the police helping to enforce that. Other forms of environmental degradation should be handled by the environment directorate itself with assistance from specialised squads, if necessary. The transports belching lead and carbon monoxide gases must be phased out within a year at the latest.

We could perhaps make do with many vehicles, were these fitted with the standard exhaust purifier that does not cost prohibitively.

Unbelievable

The Daily Star had a rather curious acquaintance with a female farrago on Sunday afternoon. Girls, some of them with their guardians accompanying, thronged near the gate of our newspaper office to give vent to their demands. The agitating students, understandably comprising those who had failed a qualifying test for the upcoming Higher Secondary Certificate examination demanded the right to be able to appear at the exam anyway. The authorities of one of the two colleges in question, Lalmatia Girls' College to be precise, reportedly buckled under the pressure after the agitating students indulged in vandalism requiring deployment of law enforcers on the campus.

According to those students and their guardians, who apart from the newspaper office chose the National Press Club too as a platform to lodge complaints, the management of the said college have agreed to let the failed ones sit for the exams provided they agreed to pay in few thousands per head. In the event a student sought transfer from the college a high fee was also allegedly attached to such a move. This could very well be a figment made to give teeth to a smear campaign or something smacking of truth but then failure is a very natural side of exams in all places in all times and not everywhere students gather courage to engage in such unusual allegations. The fact that authorities could close the institution for Eid holiday by keeping such a vexatious issue unsolved also hints at a vicious atmosphere. After all, if there is smoke there must be some fire.

Sunday's spillage of student wrath against college management or teachers gives a very sad commentary on our education arena. Over the years it has been subject to so much degeneracy and vitiation that even an enormously unethical and unsound idea does not hesitate to seek moral vindication. We have shown enough of the seamy sides of life to the world. Let us not add any more, at least like this one, to them.

How Terrible

People going on a pilgrimage to Barodi Loknath Brahmachari Ashram at Sonargaon being snuffed out in a man-made micro-bus engine-fire on their return journey, we have recorded another dip in the dastardliness of road accidents.

As if to emphasise the road safety nadir reached in the hands of thoroughly inexperienced drivers, the death toll from the severe burn injuries mounted even after four days of the mishap; from eight dying on the day of accident, the casualty figure rose to 11 as on February 2.

The surviving burn patients imaginably are groaning in pangs, some of them, of burns perhaps keeping a shade below a third-degree severity.

Our heart goes out in sympathy for the victims of this tragedy. Some form of compensation is warranted.

A recap of how all this happened could yield an edifying lesson for group commuters on our highways. When the ill-fated micro-bus reached Naotala on the Dhaka-Ctg highway, it ran out of both petrol and water. Whereupon the driver and his helper fetched some gasoline and while the latter was pouring it into the oil tank to an overheated dried up engine, the former impatiently pressed the ignition key. With that happening the engine and oil tank caught fire in split-seconds as flames engulfed the whole body in no time. Another tragic reminder of inexperienced drivers on the prow to kill.

Who is a VIP?

Entry to the International Airport is the only place which will determine if a particular person is an ordinary human being or a VIP. If you can enter the VIP lounge and enjoy all the facilities during arrival or departure then you are a VIP.



Window on Asia

Shahed Latif

What happens outside? A doctor will be an MOP (most ordinary person) outside the hospital or clinic. The question is who is never an MOP and enjoys VIP status at all times? In Bangladesh, only at the international airports, there are two categories of passengers and very important persons. Therefore entry to the International Airport is the only place which will determine if a particular person is an ordinary human being or a VIP. If you can enter the VIP lounge and enjoy all the facilities during arrival or departure then you are a VIP.

All Government officials and appointees of the rank of Joint Secretary and above are entitled to the use of VIP lounge and therefore on the basis of the only available criterion, they are all VIPs. A famous cardiologist or a banker, a writer or, for that matter, any one, even if internationally recognized in their own professional field, are not VIPs — since they are not holding any Government appointment of the rank of Joint Secretary or above.

But there are too many of these VIPs. So a new enhanced category, called VVIP, has emerged for those of the rank of Minister and above. Very very, as my computer check is indicating while I write, is wrong English. It reminds me of a former Governor of former East Pakistan who used to make exact translation from Bangla and say 'gradually gradually', I

think we may say VIP-category 1 and VIP-category 2 or say MIP and VIP where 'most' is of higher status than 'very'. But this is not likely to be accepted. VIP is so well known like 'Bold and Beautiful' or 'Rich and Famous'.

It is interesting to note that the airport based VIP status is heritable within the life time of the original VIP. All relations, friends and in-laws through a simple telephone call or if accompanied by the original VIP can elevate themselves and become VIPs. They are the ascribed VIPs and overcrowding the VIP lounge. There are already too many VIPs and if ascribed VIPs join the crowd then it becomes the classic case of 'only chiefs and no Indian'. The ascribed VIP status has been extended so far that VVIP category, in spite of the wrong use of the English language, has become an obvious necessity.

Who doesn't want to become a VIP of any type whatsoever? The only way to acquire the status is access to VIP lounge. So we must all strive through friends and relations to get to

that place. The real VIPs are lost in the process. Poet Shamsur Rahman or Dr. Mohammed Yunus will stand in the queue to get across the checking counter at the airport. But it does not matter to them since a real VIP never cares for the show of VIP culture. They have acquired certain status, call it VIP or whatever, because of their solid achievements and it goes very much beyond the show currently in practice.

What happens when a VIP loses his status upon retirement? Obviously he or she faces very difficult times and consequently suffers from it. But I know of a certain High Court Judge from one of the South Asian countries who went away to Australia upon retirement to live with his son. But he suffered all the time, living as an ordinary human being in spite of all the good things of life available there. When he was too old and he knew that his last day was not very far away, he decided to return to his country to die since he was entitled to a state funeral as a former Judge.

Thus even in death, he will remain a VIP. I do not know if he could hear the gun salute from inside the grave.

War or Peace: Who Promotes Weapon Sales in Third World?

by AMM Shahabuddin

Actions always speak louder than words, as the time-honoured adage says. So what the world leaders preach in their 'peace sermon' don't match them with their overt or covert 'gainful practice' of adding fuel to the fire by opening huge arms markets at vantage points.

ON the eve of the advent of the New Year 1997 — the world leaders expressed their full-throated nice and pious wishes for a happy, peaceful and prosperous world. They addressed their respective nations and the peoples of the world at large around the globe, wishing that the year 1997 would be a year of harmony and peace instead of discord, insecurity and conflict. Such expressions from high pedestals have almost become a routine annual ritual ceremony, showing its hollowness more nakedly than its high-tech sound. But wishes sans sincere actions can seldom change the poisonous environment that has been deliberately created by powers-that-be around the world. As they say, if wishes were horses, then the beggars could ride them!

Some five decades ago, when then world leaders came up with the noble idea of creating a world body, named United Nations, they vowed in the UN charter, in the name of 'the peoples of the world',

to save the succeeding generations from the scourge of war; — to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours; and — unite our strength to maintain international peace and security.

But how far these lofty dreams have come true? They have been left in the book as a valuable treasure for future generations to admire and be impressed. Meanwhile, the present-day world leaders, out of sheer hypocrisy, made a mockery of the august body more often by misusing it to serve their strategy, sometimes making it totally ineffective, impotent and immobile. The founding fathers must be turning in their graves when they hear nothing but steady build-up of mass-killing weapons and deadly fire-power around them.

UN: A Silent Spectator

It is true that the world has been saved from the savagery of a Third World War during last half a century and for this many would like to give credit to the UN. That's a fact and it can't be denied. But the slate is not so clean as it appears. There is another side of the coin that shows a more horrible and devastating picture than an all-out Third World War. Today, not one, but hundreds of wars, local and regional, are raging around the world, bringing in its trail death, destruction, and untold human miseries, while the UN is standing on the fence looking helpless.

But who are getting fattened as a result of these wars, never thought of before, particularly in the Third World countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. Whenever there is a 'trouble-spot', UN sends its costly peace-keeping force. It plays more a silent observer's role. It doesn't have the mandate to use fire-power. What a real peace force means has been practically shown by the NATO forces in Bosnia. Nothing less can show any tangible results.

To the Editor...

Terrorism!

Sir, It is very unfortunate that recently at Rajshahi University, some respected teachers were threatened to death by some 'mastans' who belong to a certain political party.

We would not allow terrorism anymore.

Mostafa Sohel  
Aziz Co-operative Apartment  
Shahbag, Dhaka

Hoping high

Sir, All our hopes, are being shattered by many things. Our kings (of present and past) and their men have kept those unresolved. They want us to be humble. We got liberated paying a high price. Since then we have started bickering 'who was what' in the liberation struggle. We are forgetting the past.

We allowed political parties to involve students in politics. That was the first step to spoil the budding leadership to rot. Once in Bengal, students were the last resort to fight against all irregularities done by the

British and Pakistani regimes. The past was golden but-at present students cannot dream high as they are compelled to tie with coterie interests.

Again, electricity has been playing truant with us. It seems that we have no future. In the past, we used kerosene lanterns at night and that had certainty. When doing important work on the computer without UPS, all efforts may go futile if electricity starts playing its usual role.

Our hopes are still high. Our spirit of the Liberation War still remains our last resort to combat against all misdeeds and gives us aspiration to step forward. We will avoid everybody to share this spirit equally, but not unilaterally. We are optimistic to get leadership of high visions to take us in the 21st century.

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Cleanliness

Sir, When I was going from LA airport, in California, to my

destination, the contrast with our country depressed me very much. I am not talking about luxurious buildings or picturesque scene — America is a rich country, it is natural to have all these, the clean surrounding which amazed me most.

May be we are poor, but do we have to be unhygienic? The littered streets, overflowing dustbins, clogged drains are really too much. Even the condition of our hospitals makes me ashamed. Remaining clean does not cost much. I don't understand why our people neglect this aspect of life which will benefit us and our country.

So, I think our government and people will give serious attention to cleanliness and healthy surroundings and don't put up lame excuse of being short of money. We are observing that huge amount of money is wasted on unnecessary projects, which are not helping us in any way.

Nur Jahan,  
California, USA

tries from famine, tribal feuds, civil wars, diseases, death and destruction. Here they play the 'real game' while 'arming to the teeth' one rival leader pump deadly weapons to the other party also.

Besides, the Mid-east is another 'hot-bed' for selling arms and ammunitions through both legal and illegal ways. They all ways spot a 'black-sheep' to cry wolf for seeking assistance and the rest they know how to manipulate. And that's the 'game' going unabated all around. Thus a number of western countries are involved in this 'race' for maximising their world-wide sale of weapons overtly or covertly.

Big Powers Play Double Role

Actions always speak louder than words, as the time-honoured adage says. So what the world leaders preach in their 'peace sermon' don't match them with their overt or covert 'gainful practice' of adding fuel to the fire by opening huge arms markets at vantage points, particularly in the Mid-east, Africa, Latin America and Asia. They seem to blow hot and cold at the same time, playing a double role in their clock and dagger policy. They have practically created 'open markets' for selling huge arms stock and continued production of war weapons of all sorts.

A mere glance at the global situation, tells us a sad story, a story of greedy 'vultures' hovering around in search of their new victims. It casts a deadly shadow of a ruinous end. Practically, the whole of Africa which was once a lucrative pastures for the European colonialists is on fire, since these countries achieved independence from their colonial rulers. The colonialists had to leave the 'green pastures', but they seem to be taking revenge in a bigger way.

Now the whole African continent seems to be going back to the pre-colonial 'dark days'. According to a recent report in the Wall Street Journal, most of the Sub-Saharan African countries today 'are poorer than they were when they achieved their independence'. Between 1980 and 1989, Sub-Saharan Africa's real gross domestic product (GDP) per capita contracted by 1.2 pc. 'the worst economic performance in the Third World.' But who are responsible for creating such a deplorable and pitiable condition? Who are fomenting troubles there? The inefficiency, incompetence, random corruption and bloody rivalry among the local leaders to capture power have no doubt contributed a lot to the situation. The invisible hands of the colonial powers have a bigger contribution bit because they want to create a 'favourable' situation for them to return their 'old pastures' through the back door on the plea of saving the wretched people of these coun-

A Grand Arms Exhibition to Boost Up Arms Trade

A couple of years back, hundreds of international weapon dealers and sellers assembled in Abu Dhabi, to hold a grand display of their latest stocks of mass-killing weapons for sale in the 'open market' in the Middle-east, following the devastating Gulf-War. The show was a part of the world's largest 'arms bazaar', or officially called the 'International Defence Exhibition (IDEX)-93', first of its kind after the Gulf War. According to western media reports, more than 350 companies, specialising in manufacturing 'killing machines', from 34 countries attended this five-day arms sales promotion show, 'ringing up sales in billions of US dollars.'

To achieve this goal, the international arms dealers adopts different strategies in the Middle-east, to raise a bogey of potential threat to the existence of present rulers by presenting to them Iraq as an 'imperialist' country, headed by a 'little Hitler' and Iran as a hard-nut 'fundamentalist' country which might break their necks any moment. So to save themselves from this 'menace', they hold 'arms exhibitions' or 'fire-works show' as they did one in Abu Dhabi. (It may be recalled here that during the Cold War period, these 'arms barons' under a political umbrella raised the bogey of communism to serve their strategy). So as a result, the frightened Arab states became their easy 'victims' to enter the trap and jumped at buying billions of dollars worth of arms for their 'defence'.

In a report on the Abu Dhabi arms exhibition, a prominent Canadian daily said that the biggest buyers were the Gulf states which had become the most profitable market for arms dealers. The Mid-east countries were lured to buy by this exhibition more than \$100 billion worth of weaponry since the end of the Gulf War. Of this, some \$30 billion came from

When India refused to sign the comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Pakistan followed suit by refusing to sign it. Meanwhile, India has successfully tested its Trishul (Trident) surface-to-air missile and completed research on its Agni (fire) missile. It has again raised protests from Pakistan which apprehend that it would 'lead to a race for

Jumuna Bridge

Sir, The Jumuna is flowing over India and Bangladesh for thousands of years. The name of this river is associated with our culture and daily life. We feel comfortable to use the word Jumuna in our songs, poems and stories. Our villages are familiar with the name Jumuna.

The bridge which is being constructed over this river should not be named after any person other than that of Jumuna. The Jumuna itself is so wide and mighty that it does not require any other name.

We can pay homage to any person by establishing many other things after his/her name. The Lumumba University was named after Patrice Lumumba. The Jumuna bridge is acceptable to all. It should not be associated with any other name.

Mahbubul Haque Chowdhury  
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Dhaka

weapons of man destruction in South Asia'. As a follow up, Pakistan has indicated that it might 'increase its defence budget as a safeguard against threats from its rival India.'

Pakistan already spends about 26 per cent of its \$14.2 billion of defence. This thoughtless madness for arms on the part of the two neighbours of the sub-continent, on one hand, deprives their poor peoples of their due share of possible economic development, on the other, that money 'diverted from the total national budget depriving common man, goes into the pockets of arms dealers.

Besides, the two Asian giants — China and India, are also always on alert, casting suspicion on each other, although there has been lots of 'hand-shakes' and exchange of goodwishes recently. India always looks on China suspiciously for arming Pakistan in both sophisticated weapons and nuclear fields; although China had refused. These allegations as untrue. So a potential threat to peace and security, hangs around the sub-continent, hangs like the sword of Damocles, giving a golden opportunity to the Western arms merchants 'to reap the rich harvests.'

In further south, 'hot-spots' are being fomented by the Western vested interests to create and sustain a perpetual hatred and distrust between North Korea and South Korea, on one

South Asia: Another 'Hot-bed' for Arms Dealers

In Asia, however, it is a different picture. The big powers always pose for peace and harmony, but always with an eye on their trade expansion throughout the region. For this, they follow a policy, which in Bengali is popularly known as, 'Kissing the snake and the frog at the same time'. That's why they want to keep up the fray.

The two most important countries in the region — India and Pakistan — are practically at loggerheads with one another, since the achieved independence in 1947 from British rule. During the last five decades, these two countries, though most unequal in resources and manpower, have fought three wars, perhaps keeping more possible outings in future. For this they go on expanding their defence budget and acquisition of arms, still being on war-pat. So there is a constant race for purchasing arms and weapons. When India purchases new mass-killing weapons from Russia or any other sources, or beefs up its missile programmes, Pakistan instantly expresses its concern over it, and announces its own expanded defence plan. Both countries are believed to be in possession of technology for producing atom bomb, if not they are already in possession of this mass-killing device. And India is much ahead of Pakistan in nuclear field.

Hundreds of NGOs are flourishing in Bangladesh, thanks to the foreign donor agencies for locating some of their country projects in Bangladesh. Most of them are doing good work, and the transparency of the efforts are visibly apparent. But unfortunately, there are several grey areas, where public attention needs to be focussed for better utilisation of the dollars for building up the infrastructure for poverty alleviation. A bit of meaningful regulatory monitoring will increase the efficiency and decrease the human 'systems loss'.

In quite a number of cases, it will not be difficult to find that the disbursement of the donor money is based on confidence, personal acquaintance and contacts rather than on working ability in the field. Such nepotism in the local decision-making process can make or break many local NGOs and private entrepreneurs. The situation is not unique in Bangladesh, but widely prevalent in the DCs and LDCs. Some sort of controlling mechanism should be visible to the public.

The objective of foreign development grants and projects in Bangladesh, as per official understanding and coordination, is to spend the maximum allocated funds within the country using the local resources, both human and natural, as much as possible. Recently, an agency from the neighbouring country was contracted several million dollars to produce media and communication material on Oral Dehydration Therapy (ORT) programme.

With a little more effort and interest by the local administration, perhaps it could have been possible to get the job done in Bangladesh. Without some encouragement, big contracts may go out of the country in this case, the monitoring and number of foreign trips abroad — the total bill was more than 10 million dollars.

The importance of providing the local professionals with opportunities for gaining experience should not be overlooked

OPINION

Grey Areas in the NGO Sector

Zara Azra

Alternatively, the controlling authorities could have brought in foreign experts to oversee the work of the local contractors (transfer of technology and know-how), rather than sending out individuals or small teams overseas for training. Orientation course for international exposure can always be ensured by the agencies themselves at a later date once the incumbent is familiar with the basic learning. It would be both productive and cost-effective.

The extension of Trikiya/Grey in Dhaka appears to have been locally inspired; although the management of this company in Bangladesh is entirely in foreign hands, excluding the local non-professional staff. Are we lacking young executives who can be trained with an integrated course of on-the-job-training?

It is understood that a big new multi-purpose vocational training centre is coming up, the percentage of literacy would have definitely gone up faster. There exist local NGOs and private organisations equipped with the latest audio-visual and video documentary equipment, yet the operators using them lack formal orientation and training on operation and maintenance. The age-old trial-and-error on the job training is still in vogue. The donor agencies will have to stress and include training programmes when new or latest equipment form part of a project, keeping a watch on the local facilities available for orientation and updating courses.