

Shall We Mend Our Ways?

Geert Van Der Linden, the visiting Asian Development Bank official, has reconfirmed what we have been harping on in this column for a long time: our record in aid utilisation is highly unsatisfactory and badly needs a spring in the stride.

It has been written time and again that bureaucratic tangle is the main reason for delay in project completion. Say, even the rather simple act of land acquisition is subject to such enormous labyrinthine officialism that the project almost invariably ends up getting shelved due to time constraint.

With political stability holding and the government sticking to its policy of wooing investors sincerely, there is every chance that investment scene would look up but what about aid utilisation? It is a pity that a country like Bangladesh with such a long tradition of aid is yet to develop a system that will ensure optimal utilisation of external assistance.

A Promise of Relief

Invertebrate optimists, we had on earlier two occasions written to welcome the proposed introduction of metered taxi-cabs in Dhaka. We are again writing to congratulate the BRTA on their latest act of promise, the MCTS. This may be premature and genuinely foolish.

Dhaka is possibly the only city in the world not to have a taxi-cab service at all. How could Dhaka pull on for four decades without one — after it had hit a million plus population? Governments are a continuation, the thing that mainly keeps that continuity is the executive bureaucracy.

Introducing taxis on the capital's road doesn't call for any momentous political decision. Just as now BRTA is going about organising it. The executives could do that at least 30 years back.

Taxi-cabs are an expression of developed metropolitan culture. The driver must be a very dependable and knowledgeable fellow, full of discretion, as the Bengalee drivers reportedly are in New York city.

Poetry Festival

The two-day National Poetry Festival ended in the city yesterday. Poetry for peace and harmony was the slogan of the last edition of the annual arrangement by the National Poetry Council.

Poetry Festival may not have been a grand occasion for registering the qualitative improvement of poetry in this country but it has certainly come to serve as a powerful voice against barbarity, philistinism, oppression and obscurantism.

But of late it has been in the centre of unnecessary controversy. A lot of it is due to muddled thinking. It can be useful to remember here that poetry does not set out with any narrow mission confined to a particular place, time and people.

We suggest the organisers go about festival next time in a more planned way. The festival period should definitely be longer than what it has been this time.

Surrender of Arms at Khagrachari

A Drama Enacted with All Trimmings of a Pageantry

The opposition BNP, the Jamaat and one section of the Jatiya Party have declared their stiff opposition to the CHT accord and vowed to make an all out movement to scrap it.

THE pomp and grandeur of the function of surrendering arms at Khagrachari on the 10th February had all the semblance of a show to impress people, both at home and abroad.

Let us first examine the viewpoints of foreigners. Heads of all diplomatic missions were invited and most of them were present. To them, the function witnessed the initial implementation of the first stage of the (controversial) accord on Chittagong Hill Tracts.



Currents and Crosscurrents

by M M Rezaul Karim

This has happened in the CHT accord. The extra-constitutional powers and jurisdiction of authority granted to the proposed Regional Council as well as denial of the right to vote to a section of the so-called Bengali settlers in that region have negated the unitary form of nation's character and violated constitution of the land.

The procedure devised for election to the Regional Council by denying every individual his or her vote has trampled the very essence of democracy. The Bengali settlers being denied title to the lands they live in or cultivate as well as their sole dependence for the issue of this title in future on the tribal dominated body tantamount to the denial of equal rights of a citizen and discriminates against him unfairly.

Farwell to Arms was the title heralded to the Khagrachari ceremony and was published as such by several journals in the country. It is not only unrealistic but ridiculous to assume that surrender of some small arms by some insurgents has really made all the rebels say adieu to all their future plans of action.

The opposition BNP, the Jamaat and one section of the Jatiya Party have declared their stiff opposition to the CHT accord and vowed to make an all out movement to scrap it. They hold the agreement as unfair, unconstitutional, undemocratic and highly detrimental to national interests.

To the Editor...

Justice Badrul Haider Chowdhury

Sir, At noon on Saturday, February 14th, Justice Badrul Haider Chowdhury passed away at the age of 73. His friends, acquaintances and all those who came in contact with him will remember him with great sorrow and respect.

Whenever the time allowed him, he always sat with BILIA workers, and entered into delightful conversations over a cup of tea, to the great benefit of the listeners.

Bringing polluters to book

Sir, This refers to an editorial on the captioned subject which was published in an English daily on 15th January that old automobiles emitting black smoke have been identified as one of the major polluters against which legal steps are being taken.

All the water surfaces in and around the city are filled with blackish nasty water due to overflowing of sewerage water into the roadside drains.

A Jalil 372/B Khilgaon Dhaka.

World policeman

Sir, Why is our world shrouded with so much of injustice? One powerful nation becomes the self-appointed 'policeman' to protect his fellow earthlings from injustices and wrongs.

The 'policeman' decides, on his own to protect and save his mischievous partner in the Middle East — whoever he commits or whoever he and territory he grabs and keeps it for good, causing unspeakable sufferings to hundreds and thousands of people to whom that ancient land belonged, bombing whenever and wherever it wants to, firing at unarmed mere boys and teenagers thereby emptying their mother's bosoms.

being committed right under his nose.

When another country other than his partner in the Middle East dares to invade other's territory then the 'policeman' suddenly wakes up and becomes all powerful.

So this is the changing face of the self-appointed 'World Policeman'. Who appointed him anyway? Probably 'might is right' did but it is chooses to do so, he must be fair and just to all — not according to his whims.

Dr. Sabrina Q. Rashid, Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka

Terror and Public Reaction

Sir, Unless otherwise influenced or told by some powerful quarters, the law enforcing agencies do not take any action against any reported crimes, tortures, loot and dacoity, not to speak of thefts and other offences.

Bombing of Iraq: "Dangerous Consequences" for All Involved

Superpower politics vulnerable to domestic political pressure cannot have healthy influence over events abroad let alone promote peace around the world. Such a political and strategic agenda can only provide opportunities to would-be superpower, still communist with some flavour of democracy, waiting in the wing to occupy the lost grounds.

GULF war was launched as Saddam occupied Kuwait, though according to him it was Iraq's 19th province, of course, once upon a time. The cease-fire agreement as usual was unjust as it was an agreement between victor and the vanquished.

The fact, however, remains that the weapons of mass destruction were his own. But as far as Saddam is concerned let his own people react to his bad acts and remove him.



Spotlight on Middle East

Muslehuiddin Ahmad

In any case, if Saddam had those deadly weapons ready for use (he might have something at research or at best early development stage) he would have used them against Israel during Gulf war when he dispatched as many as 39 scud missiles to Israel.

President Clinton is apparently pushing this for domestic reasons. He is in deep trouble practically for no great reason. Adultery is apparently nothing big or important in the US but is something taken very seriously in some other parts of the world.

Saddam has neither occupied Kuwait nor any other country that could call for urgent war action.

small stocks of chemical and biological weapons, bombing would only expose the entire region to this deadly materials. Another danger is that with the onset of bombing Saddam may take the first opportunity this time to dispatch scud missiles with warheads containing active biological and chemical weapons to the neighbouring states which are considered inimical to Iraq.

The better course would be to still go for strong diplomacy backed by military threat as these materials are already in place. But some face saving formula must be offered to Saddam with a view to bringing him round to an acceptable position.

Iran has been subjected to should be unacceptable to any sovereign country, but Iraqi people are unfortunate as they are in the hands of a leader who knows no bounds. Therefore, the matter has to be handled with great care.

The war threat is not only counterproductive but also politically dangerous. The encouraging efforts of the US to establish peace between Palestinians and Israelis will face serious setback. Arafat is already facing considerable pressure from Palestinians to speak out against the US.

Superpower politics vulnerable to domestic political pressure cannot have healthy influence over events abroad let alone promote peace around the world.

OPINION

Does Devaluation Help?

Lt Cdr (Rtd) M Gholam Mostafa

Recently the Taka has been devalued against the US dollar by 85 paisa by the Bangladesh Bank. The rationale of which has been billed as "the adjustment is pursuant to the continuing policy objective of maintaining incentives for exports and for inflows from expatriate Bangladeshis."

The decision to further slash Taka came close on the heels of a meeting of leaders of major chamber bodies with the Finance Minister. It is further reported that garment exporters are not happy at what they term the extent of devaluation as inadequate.

As an ordinary citizen, a tax payer and a voter — I feel I have some right to know the basics of devaluation and the dynamics of how it purports to alleviate lots of common men whose interest should be at the core of all government policies and actions.

have their same logic as we have ours. In this savage competition of slashing each other's currency of struggling nations, it is only the importers of developed countries who probably will have the last laugh.

These figures besides being in consonance with government's avowed policy of accountability and transparency will allow misgiving of an ordinary citizen about the compulsion of successive devaluation and its trumpeted salutary impact.