

The Last Shall Be the First

"We can begin by putting our full weight behind a new model of development that not only generates economic growth, but distributes its benefit equitably, that sustains environmental resources for future production and future generations and that empowers people to participate in the economy and in the decisions that affect their lives."

Boils Down to Police Reform

President Shahabuddin Ahmed's police week speech to law enforcement top-brass on Tuesday at Bangabhaban bore the stamp of his characteristic flair for brass-tacks. For instance, he wanted to know from his audience whether they have been taking follow-up actions on the 'alarming press reports' about law and order incidents in the country. In other words, if there has been any pitfall on this count this must be scrupulously avoided in the future. The police, for purely professional reasons, have to depend on the news media for being fed with essential information topped by a public opinion angle to these. If they didn't do this, they would be doing both themselves and the society a disservice. The police force need to reflect a healthy attitude, or courage of conviction, if you like, to be receptive to media or public criticism and never find themselves in a bunker situation to defend their position at all costs. Sometimes by sweeping things under the carpet.

President Shahabuddin was specific about those newspaper stories that revealed certain tendentious omissions and commissions being made by the police force from time to time. People are being harassed at the thanas when they go to these to lodge complaints, thana hajat inmates are man-handled by outsiders and deaths have occurred in police custody. All these smack of not merely criminal negligence of duty but of criminality as such. The tenor that percolates from the top of the police hierarchy is a cardinal factor in determining the quality of service delivered by the police force at the bottom.

The President strikes a responsive chord in us when he warns against both 'the alleged use of police by the party in power and the allegiance of a section of the police force to certain leaders and workers...'. We want police reform to be carried out sooner than later through a bipartisan parliamentary committee.

Time to Tidy Things Up

A front page report in yesterday's issue of this paper threw light on a perennially neglected aspect of our urban experience: the unabated growth of medical centres and factories and the hazards they pose to public health. Indeed Dhaka in the last few years has seen a mushroom growth of commercial constructions against the norms of scientific town planning and service value. Medical centres and workshops or factories are probably the two worst contributors when it comes to public health hazards. Our correspondent has found out that majority of the medical centres do not have skilled and knowledgeable operators. No revelation all right but an extremely disturbing reminder. Do the authorities have any idea about the extent of damage already done to public health due to radiation from these clinics where people without even the rudimentary knowledge about radiology are allowed to handle a potentially dangerous equipment like the X-Ray machine? Not only that, very little care is taken for proper disposal of medical garbage. Roads around some of the clinic-infested areas would bear testimony to this.

If the centres are guilty of radiation, shops and factories which have combustion in the centre of their operational activity are to be blamed for toxic emissions. The report frighteningly delineates how these emissions spray micro particles like zinc, lead, mercury and cadmium into the air — all great sources of environmental pollution and agents of killer diseases. What worries one most is that there is no sign of change in this pattern. Because trade licences are being issued in the most unscrupulous manner by the DCC authorities. There is a provision for meeting certain requirements on environmental grounds, but almost none, as the report shows, cares for it.

This is untenable. We want a total freeze on any new trade licence unlinked with governmental policy. Besides the government has to do something immediately to zone the areas of these establishments so that tighter governmental monitoring and service are ensured. The law has to be laid down strictly on medical clinics that in their ruthless pursuit of profiteering are causing health and environmental hazards. About the welding workshops and factories, guilty of lethal emissions, we suggest their early relocation in suitable areas.

Sounds Good

Amidst sadly evaluations all around on the mayor's completion of four years in office, it rings as a reassuring break that not all the government agencies are on holiday in matters related to environment and public health. We are indeed heartened by a news published in a leading Bangla daily that authorities are going for a four-phase measure to rid the city streets of black smoke billowing vehicles. We heard it many times before in the past. But it remained a pie in the sky ever since all this talk about penalising the faulting vehicles and clearing the city sky and air was first heard. There is no point in referring to the promises made and forgotten comfortably. We want to look forward to this latest one which seeks to bring some change in the situation through a graded and sequential punitive strategy.

In the first step of the 24-hour drive which is likely to begin from next month under the joint auspices of the Department of Environment, DCC, BRTA and concentrate on one street a day, the lapsing vehicle will be warned with a cautionary seal on its blue book. This will be followed by progressively increasing fines ending in cancellation of the route permit. We think things have gone far too far for such soft measures as fines. We believe one warning is enough before the final measure or annulment of the route permit is ordered. Given the administrative loopholes that we have mere cancellation will not do. The government has to make sure that these faulty vehicles do not creep back into the traffic system.

Now that the government has decided to go for a long term plan to curb pollution, we exhort it to make sure the project does not suffer from financial crunch. In order to facilitate the huge campaign prior to the drive, the state owned government media should play a major role.

THE growing disparity between rural and urban income and living standards is self-evident. Broad-basing development would require enhanced rural employment, skill development and income generation.

The question is: Should we endeavour to mainstream rural men into the development process or should an urban-industrial bias continue to exclude sizeable segments of population from that enchanted circle?

Dispersal of industries and simple processing plants throughout the countryside, close to the supply of raw material, drawing labour from the farming community, increases linkages between agriculture and industry. Such dispersal enables land-poor farm family members to combine employment in industrial activities with agricultural pursuits. This in turn enables a farm family to enhance and diversify its sources of income, reduce risks of income failure, and obtain employment for a larger number of days per year. Skills acquisition increases their social mobility and adaptability.

Employment and educational objectives need to be explicitly integrated into such rural industrialisation strategy. This calls for appropriate policies, technologies physical infrastructure and supporting institutions capable of reaching the village and household levels, and providing rural entrepreneurs with necessary incentives.

A wide range of ethnic and traditional food products are produced in Asian countries from indigenous agricultural raw materials. They constitute as high as 70 per cent of food industries in many countries.

Often family owned, they employ 50 or less workers and are labour-intensive, predominantly staffed by women workers. They suffer from low productivity, lack of quality control and little if any research

and development. Thus, they offer scant competition to modern food processing industries. But there is scope to increase productivity and improve product quality through relevant support services, education and training.

Livestock systems in the countries in South Asia are usually smallerholder crop-livestock farms. Women contribute substantially to such operations. Rural women need special extension and training programmes to acquire skill and knowledge in management and feeding practices, milk hygiene, disease control, storage, use of by-products recording and credit. The expanding poultry-rearing operations in the villages in Bangladesh have received a big boost through NGO programmes for microcredit training support and linkages with larger units for supply of one day chicks and supplementary feed.

The corporate sector could promote contract cultivation of horticultural and other high-value crops on the basis of buy-back arrangements. PRAN, an agri-business enterprise exports processed pineapples, mangoes, lemons, and gherkins to EC.

Despite significant growth in canned fish production during the past decade, 75 per cent of the volume and 64 per cent of the value of fish exported by countries of Asia is still fresh, chilled or frozen. Part is processed within the region and exported, primarily by Fiji, Hong Kong, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. Re-processors outside the region benefit from these low value-added fish exports. The potential for modern fish processing remains to be fully exploited.

There is a growing awareness of the importance of harvesting from the trees rather than harvesting the trees. There is a need for better organisation of collection, processing and marketing of non-wood forest products. Increasing contribution of these products to the income of rural women, to domestic economies and world trade has high potential.

Constraints of declining real rural incomes, policy bias and continuing trade barriers, interlock and raise critical issues in the agro-processing sector and market.

Slow progress in develop-

ment of indigenous technologies poses a major constraint. As long as developing countries continue to depend on imported technology, by way of turn-key factories and imported processes, they will be confined to overcrowded metropolitan centres, conventional products and saturated markets. Indigenous technologies must come to the forefront duly upgraded by the cutting edge of science.

Small-scale, rural-based agro-processing enterprises, are in a relatively weak position in respect of finance when competing with large-scale manufacturing units.

Thanks to micro enterprise credit by Grameen, BRAC, PROSHIKA and Palli Karma Sahayak Foundation, have different levels of sophistication and scales of operation. Employment-intensive and decentralised rural industries can benefit from non-exploitative linkages with sophisticated state-of-the-art enterprises. Examples are the township enterprises in China. In 1991, the output value of the Rural and Town Ship Enterprises amounted to US \$220 billion accounting for one half of agriculture income and two-fifths of the value of exports. Grameen Bank in Bangladesh accounts for twenty per cent of the handloom cloth used in readymade garments industry. Liberating and mobilising the initiatives of the rural poor, however, will require their ownership of and/or stake in enterprises

they can call their own. This is true for the Grameen handloom weavers.

A skilled and educated workforce is a prerequisite for successful agro-industrialisation. In Asia and the Pacific, there are wide differences in investment in education and training. Japan leads with high rates of enrolment in tertiary education, followed by the Republic of Korea and Singapore. Unlike other regions, however, vocational education, as a percentage of all education, has declined, imposing a potential limiting factor on agro-industrial development. Bangladesh suffers from an inverse pyramid of educational investment where basic education continues to linger at the bottom.

A prerequisite for an agro-industrial strategy that incorporates both employment and equity considerations, is investment in increasing human capabilities, and eliminating barriers to their access to resources, information and technology. Skilled and knowledgeable people are in a better position to respond to incentives and opportunities, to help diversify economies and take up non-agricultural employment. Enlarging people's choices and economic opportunities will pre-suppose a technology and information base upon which they can draw.

Coming back to Bangladesh, I shall plagiarise from a recent World Bank report on the non-farm sector in the countryside. The micro enterprise based credit programmes of NGOs have helped containing poverty. But small and medium scale rural enterprises that can borrow on commercial terms are not being adequately cov-

ered by any credit supplies. The next step should be to create in partnership with the NGOs an enabling environment for private sector-led rural industry and for stronger linkages to agriculture and traditional skills in woven textiles and specialised handicrafts.

A prerequisite is vastly developed rural physical infrastructure and the development of market towns with adequate provision of utilities like electricity or telecommunication facilities. Second, beside access to credit, producer services for small and medium-scale industries must become available more widely. In South-east Asia foreign investors setting up production in Special Economic Zones helped to galvanise rural industries through production linkages, training and technology transfer.

In Bangladesh rural industry represents a potential venture-capital role for NGOs like the Grameen or BRAC. The Grameen check, now diversifying with flannels, is a good example of how the skills of handloom weavers can be linked to the more sophisticated textiles — industry and how appropriate financing and export demand can be put together to start altering high productivity activities into high productivity and quality outputs.

Central to these approaches are the resource-poor people themselves. They need better access to resources, to knowledge, and to better opportunities to make use of the few resources they command. As Gustave Speth puts it, "we can begin by putting our full weight behind a new model of development that not only generates economic growth, but distributes its benefit equitably, that sustains environmental resources for future production and future generations and that empowers people to participate in the economy and in the decisions that affect their lives."



ment of indigenous technologies poses a major constraint. As long as developing countries continue to depend on imported technology, by way of turn-key factories and imported processes, they will be confined to overcrowded metropolitan centres, conventional products and saturated markets. Indigenous technologies must come to the forefront duly upgraded by the cutting edge of science.

Small-scale, rural-based agro-processing enterprises, are in a relatively weak position in respect of finance when competing with large-scale manufacturing units. Thanks to micro enterprise credit by Grameen, BRAC, PROSHIKA and Palli Karma Sahayak Foundation,

have different levels of sophistication and scales of operation. Employment-intensive and decentralised rural industries can benefit from non-exploitative linkages with sophisticated state-of-the-art enterprises. Examples are the township enterprises in China. In 1991, the output value of the Rural and Town Ship Enterprises amounted to US \$220 billion accounting for one half of agriculture income and two-fifths of the value of exports. Grameen Bank in Bangladesh accounts for twenty per cent of the handloom cloth used in readymade garments industry. Liberating and mobilising the initiatives of the rural poor, however, will require their ownership of and/or stake in enterprises

person who were attacked on 21st February 1998 belonged to the elderly generation. And let's also remember that it was part of the younger generation, who attacked them, and it was also part of the younger generation who saved them. The very fact that the BTV programme of 23rd night (February) couldn't put the whole blame outright on the younger generation proves that what I am talking about has some sense. Let's not make the national language — the Bangla Bhasa, the Shahid Minar or the Smriti Soudha... a matter of the state.

Mind it, all these belong to the people. Let there be no guns on the roads. Nor any statesman or head of a government try to prove they have the right to be among the very first and second to lay floral wreaths from among those who have come to pay homage to the Language martyrs.

Tarana Jamil
Eden Girls' College and University
Dhaka

Speed breaker in front of schools

Sir, The other day a student of Motijheel Govt Primary School was crushed to death run over by a speedy bus while the boy was trying to collect his playing ball from Outer Circular Road which is by the side of that school. In front of schools world over there are cautionary signals, zebra crossing and speed breakers so that students are not subjected to road hazards.

Outer Circular Road is a very busy road where all types of vehicles are seen to ply all day long without any traffic restrictions. In order to avert such tragic incidents may I draw the attention of the city fathers to think for construction of some speed breakers, which will not involve so much money from national exchequer, in front of every educational institution, particularly schools?

M A Jabir
372/B Khilgaon, Dhaka

Stop audio-video piracy!

Sir, Pirated audio cassettes can be seen in almost all the shops of Stadium and New Market. These cassettes are sold at less than half the price of the original ones. The latest English cassettes are sold for Tk 35 whereas the Indian Magnasonic cassettes (they have a copyright) do not cost less than Tk 120.

Does audio piracy help the customers? In a way it does. In a poor country like Bangladesh many people cannot afford to buy the original cassettes. When their favourite music cassettes are sold at relatively lower prices, they do buy it. But this cannot be accepted. Pirated cassettes are sold at a cheap price obviously sell more; but this is a loss to the artist and the recording company because they get less revenue.

Many laser discs that are being counter-fitted in Hong Kong are transported to Bangladesh and many cable operators also show the latest English movies on LDs, but the picture quality is not good which is a proof that the disc is not original. These LCDs naturally sell many copies, but once again there is a loss of revenue for the manufacturers. The government should take actions to prevent duplicated goods from conquering the market.

Arbab Quadri
Dhanmondi, R/A, Dhaka

To the Editor...

What about sanctity before death, Ms Halima?

Sir, Ms Halima Begum feels happy (Sanctity after death, DS, March 6) for the question of appointing women doctors in doing postmortem works was raised in the Parliament. Sounds good news to me for all womankind.

Writes Ms Halima: "Doing postmortem of female dead bodies by male doctors is tantamount to dishonouring the body of the victim and is not allowed in Islam." I must praise your thinking mind Ms Halima, for you really are trying to project another religious hype.

Look around us! What would a woman feel like after being raped (before death, of course)? It simply seems an outrageous idea when "your" Parliament and religion can't even honour us before death. It was so foolish of you to come up praising Mr Haji Selim's proposal in the Parliament.

Do you think male doctors are so much evil-minded that they will touch a female dead body with a mind other than their profession?

Iffat Parveen
Utara, Dhaka

Doing Mr Haque a favour

Sir, Mr M M Haque from Indira Road, Dhaka on March 8 was highly critical of Mr S M Abu Zafar's "inability to understand the plain English of Mr Mizanur Rahman's letter".

Fine, Mr Haque, you are a knowledgeable person — but I am worried about your inability to update the dates. Look at the two dates printed in your letter — 4.3.97 and 28.2.97. I think they should be 4.3.98 and 28.2.98.

Well, am I correct, or I too lack the ability to understand your "plain" dates?

Yousuf Jamil
Mirpur 10, Dhaka 1216

Architecture admission test

Sir, I am going through news and views on Architecture admission test with interest. I cannot but show concern over the state of affairs. If what the three guardians or Mr Zafar have taken the back seat, and mobs rule prevail (Mr Haque). Universities are a place for the intelligentsia, but if they spend so much time in mud-slinging, then when do they find time to teach and do research. I have learnt that students of Architecture have won many international prizes of which we all can be proud. So the system and its custodians must be good. So why after so many years questions have been raised about the standard and the system or is it jealousy (as three guardians sensed by visiting the campus)?

Until three decades back, in many countries Architecture was regarded as an overall and very prestigious education. But it has become more accessible to the commoners lately. Architects are the most expressive persons, but are their teachers barred from writing in the media? Our environs have really changed with so many good pieces of architectural creations around. I also think most architects are self-employed as contrary to engineering graduates and are gradually becoming the leaders of the construction and development sector. So, this jealousy theory has some weight.

Sir, Numerous guardians are anxiously witnessing the recent tussle regarding admission test of Architecture in BUET. The

Why all of a sudden, spending so much of the tax-payers' money, did the authority need to publish advertisements against a single department when I went through seriously found full of concocted and contradictory remarks (!) as any fool would understand. For example, the result of Architecture students which shows a 24 per cent first class as compared to 50 per cent first class in Engineering departments. Such myopic view by the authority (!) is the root cause of all evils. Architecture is more humanities and art-based, while Engineering is full of scientific and technical aspects. High rate of first class in Architecture? Like can you demand as many first classes in English as in Mathematics? May be the Architecture department is a misfit in BUET. This department should have its own identity and freedom as a separate institute either with BUET or with DU as it originally was planned.

Some of the topics like Perspective, Composition, Drawing of Plan, Section Elevation etc., are taught in Architecture and Engineering courses and a student passing HSC can have no way to learn those other than visiting the coaching homes. The students who cannot afford to attend these because of financial or situational problems are naturally deprived of this added knowledge.

In the test the authority must not set any topic and question that goes beyond the knowledge and experience of an HSC student.

Abu Rashed Noor
House 12, Road 2
Utara Sector-4, Dhaka-1230

Sir, I shall like to ask Mr Mizanur Rahman (DS 1.3.98) and Mr M Haque (DS 8.3.98) whether they are familiar with Article 39 of our Constitution! I am serving in an NGO working on education research. And I would be benefited if Mr Haque could point out the distortions I supposedly had made to Mr Rahman's letter. It seems that both Mr Rahman and Mr Haque have missed the fundamental issue which is not about trading off marks and subjects as clearly explained in my last letter. They also refuse to understand that anybody with very good marks in science subject can easily supersede a more desirable and better prepared student possessing creativity. This is simple mathematics.

If admission test matters are not final, then why the esteemed Academic Council cannot review the controversial rule now?

Yes, Mr Rahman and Mr Haque, it is that important a question for a profession, may be not for a mere service holder. It is this egoistic attitude of the authority who first published a bogus advertisement in the newspapers spending the taxpayers money attacking a single department, which is unprecedented. The bravado may have restored some of the image of an internationally reputed school. Similar incidents have remained as landmarks in the history of architectural education and profession, which Mr Haque's IT doesn't reveal.

Mr Haque wants us to believe that 10 striking teachers are taking the entire student community to the streets. I think the students are mature enough themselves to differentiate black from white.

Universities nurture freedom of speech and self-expression. But the authority here is trying to bind the people who are known for their education and capability of self-expression with the shackles of rules. Talking about tarnishing the so-called image, Mr Haque et al should come down to the street and ask the general public. Or in these days of IT, Mr Rahman et al can check the list of first 50 Asian Universities and compare that with the list of first 5 Asian Architecture schools.

West Zafar
Sayed Kafur, Dhaka

Sir, Numerous guardians are anxiously witnessing the recent tussle regarding admission test of Architecture in BUET. The

admission test in BUET has long been regarded to be ideal and impartial in the country. But as a matter of fact it was and probably is not so, in case of Architecture Department. The question that are set in Architecture test cannot be answered from what a student knows in HSC course or acquires as general knowledge.

Some of the topics like Perspective, Composition, Drawing of Plan, Section Elevation etc., are taught in Architecture and Engineering courses and a student passing HSC can have no way to learn those other than visiting the coaching homes. The students who cannot afford to attend these because of financial or situational problems are naturally deprived of this added knowledge.

In the test the authority must not set any topic and question that goes beyond the knowledge and experience of an HSC student.

Adv Ali Ahmed
243, Bakshi Bazar, Dhaka.

Gas — a rude awakening



Sir, "City dwellers heaved a sigh of relief as normal gas supply resumed early yesterday" (DS, March 8). Isn't it the right time for many of us to realise how much gas we have wasted over the past years?

This tragic incident should serve as a rude awakening and also a reminder for the future.

Tanzia Choudhury
15 GG Hills, Comilla Cantonment, Comilla

Update your database, please...

Sir, This is in appreciation of large-scale river dredging proposal by Mr MAS Molla published on 21/2/98. But I shall request Mr Molla to update his database of the channel morphology of the Jamuna. If the required minimum width of the Jamuna is 2 km, why then the Jamuna Bridge has been built over a length of 4.8 km?

Mr Molla should also assess his dream of trained 2 km wide Jamuna river and the remaining land built up for agricultural land against cost of river training works in the Jamuna Bridge Project. To keep the Jamuna flowing through the 4.8 km wide channel, the river training works needed Taka 1107.6 cr ie. 48 per cent of the total cost of the Jamuna Bridge for a river reach of only 2.14 km! Now think of the cost of river training of about 260 km of the Jamuna in Bangladesh. Also think of not only of water but also of the huge sediment that the river has to carry.

It is not understood how Mr Molla wants to protect the riverine ecosystem by large-scale dredging and flood control. These are exactly the hu-

man interventions that will disturb the riverine ecosystem. These human interventions apart from the astronomical cost involved may also trigger violent river response causing more distress to the people.

M A Matin
403, West Kafur
Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207.

Vexing telephones

Sir, Oh, these telephones! How often they vex you and spoil your good mood and spirits. They are notorious in upsetting you, here in Bangladesh! Can you ever succeed in getting a line in the first attempt? Hardly ever. Many times you have to dial again and again and yet again to finally get through! During the working hours it is near-impossible to get your number, are the lines few or is something really wrong with some of us, because the moment they reach their office and get their hands on a telephone, they start dialing to various friends and relatives to have a little chat just for nothing.

And this chat happens to run into hours together. Even many housewives have this particular hobby of starting their day with a telephone chat, as their favourites. Not to mention teenagers and school kids, who also find this hobby as the most stimulating one! Sometimes they are so hooked to the phones that they waste hours together of their valuable study time. In the meantime getting their parents all vexed up! So all these useless long gossips keep all the lines so busy that if one wants to use the telephone for some emergency or to convey an important message, he or she is in for a rude shock. For all his or her repeated attempts to reach the person, as soon as possible, we go in vain for quite a long time, until finally the line gets free of the long gossips. Also there are all sorts of trouble which creep into our telephone system, every now and then — sudden dead phone, no-dial tone, getting disconnected while still conversing, cross-connections, wrong number calls, noise disturbances and what not.

Getting your telephone fixed if it goes berserk is another tough job, which can get you really vexed, for days or weeks on end. But, nothing to do, we have to live with it. It is just one of those awful services that you get in our country. The only solution is to accept it, for all complainants that the poor ordinary citizens vent every now and then, fall on deaf ears. Nobody bothers about these important complaints, let alone take any action, to decrease the public sufferings. So let's just keep our fingers crossed that the future will be kinder to us in this particular problem of ours.

Masroor Ahmed Deepak
Dhaka

Mendicancy

Sir, Mendicancy is a severe problem in our society. At present it is increasing seriously. It is an occupation without any capital. So, many inactive persons accept the occupation zealously.

As a result, beggars are all over in the country — bus stops, rail stations, bazars, adoration places, educational institutions. Sometimes, many foreigners become victims of nuisance. It is very disgraceful for our country.

We should prevent the problem.

Shohel Rana
Department of Law,
Dhaka University

Much ado about nothing?

Sir, It is impossible to believe that no past government, nor the present one, seems to show any respect or have any respect for the student community — the younger generation. Would the elderly generation kindly express their true feelings as to what persons should be the first and the second to lay the floral wreath at the Shahid Minar? And where did this Language Movement start from and where was the first Bangladesh flag hoisted? How is it that the Shahid Minar on the occasion of Ekushey February always turns into a state affair?

And the governments must remember that respect begets respect. No wonder that two