

Question of Timeliness

The government's conceptualisation of the things needed to be done at the humanitarian and agricultural rehabilitation levels in the wake of the floods leaves little to be desired. But it is the implementation of its ideas which now seems caught up in a teething phase.

The government has come forward with the Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) cards to ensure free food supply to 40 lakh families over a period of four months regarded as the hardship spell in the cereal production cycle.

Then comes the agri-credit package of Tk 3200 crore which too lags behind in terms of disbursement as seems evident from the PM's directive to get on with the job immediately.

Unreformable Antagonism

While opening a seminar on 'Civil Society and Democracy in Bangladesh' President Shahabuddin said on Monday it was 'Civil Society' which should watchdog the distribution of official flood relief.

Nobody, not the President to be precise, expected the parties AL and BNP to keep stepping into each other's discarded shoes. Strikes were bad said BNP in power.

In postwar France the artists and intellectuals of that great country started feeling that 'politics has grown too big to be left alone to the politicians' — to believe Simone du Buvoir in her great fiction, 'The Mandarines'.

This Is Not On

How much more toll the state-owned enterprises would take on the nation? The question must have reverberated in the mind of sentient people once again as y

esterday's morning press served a plateful of last Monday's fatal bloody clash between two groups of labour union at the Adamjee Jute Mill.

More than the immediate impact of the terrorism, loss of life and the disruption to production what disturbs one most is the absence of a positive will and a sense of urgency among the powers that be to sever links with this haemorrhagic legacy and right the situation once for all.

And the first step to end a long vitiated situation would be to start and objectively pursue criminal proceedings against those responsible for Monday's trouble. Regardless of their political affiliations, the recalcitrant have to be nabbed and punished according to the law of the land.

But the key to the solution of the problem is political will. We urge the ruling and the opposition parties to address the issue jointly. Delay will be suicidal.

Civil Society and Democracy

by Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed

Relief work has been going on, according to the government, satisfactorily, but according to the Opposition, perfunctorily, and instead of cooperation, they are blaming each other, as if the flood has been brought about by some conspiratorial means.

OURS is a democratic country known as the People's Republic of Bangladesh, and in our Constitution, Democracy has been declared to be one of the State Principles. The Constitution further provides for effective participation by the people through their elected representatives in administration at all levels.

tion, it will no longer be possible. All affairs of the state are to be run by a government, consisting of three organs: Executive, Legislature and Judiciary. But some functions of the state may be assigned to different administrative units to be run by local government.

activities of the public functionaries. A civil society represents the ordinary members of a society. They are either organised professional groups or unorganised people, such as the rural poor.

is in fact a pro-people entity. In recent years the concept of civil society has gained wide currency in the developing countries including Bangladesh. Since 1980s increasing attention has been paid to the role of citizen participation, civil society and political culture for strengthening the democratic process.

tonomy of the then East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, shows that people spontaneously participated therein and achieved the desired result. It is the democratic movement of the people including all sections like the students, labour force, intellectuals, which toppled the unconstitutional regimes including several Martial Law au-

thorities. This shows that our people got the will to see a democratic polity and that they do not tolerate any anti-democratic authority in whichever colour or shape it appears. But it is an irony that we do not find democratic behaviour from our democratically elected leadership. Look at the debates in Parliament and you find exchange of abuses mainly over some events of the long past. One thing is, however, common to all — nobody learns from history. In such circumstances it is all the more necessary that the civil society should become active and play its role assigned by history.

The author is the President of Bangladesh.

The Employment Bank

Must it Perform Like Yet Another Bank?

by Dr Momtaz Uddin Ahmed

To ensure better utilization of the loans and its ultimate repayment, arrangements for training along with credit might perhaps be an economically sound approach. Besides ensuring better loan utilization and high returns from the investments, training facilities will contribute to the process of development of skills and human capital formation.

THE formal inauguration of the Employment Bank by the Prime Minister on 22nd September 1998 marks a timely step in the right direction towards reducing unemployment among the country's educated youth.

As the media reports indicate, the Bank will provide loans not just to any unemployed educated youth, it will do so on a priority basis under an excess demand and supply shortage situation for such loans to those who demonstrate willingness to stand on their own feet and become self-reliant. Naturally, these young potential borrowers must have the aptitude for taking initiatives and risks as profit-seeking entrepreneurs.

But also provides scope for enjoying power and prestige. But such age-old colonial process of amassing wealth and power must be changed in order to develop a creative and productive entrepreneurial society where every one seeks new opportunities, takes risks, enters into productive pursuits and contributes to the process of development of a vibrant economy and a modern society.

tion that the Bank will encourage mainly the promotion of small-scale agro-based businesses and trades. I would urge that in selecting and promoting the types of activities the Bank should avoid duplication of efforts towards promotion of non-farm activities that are being promoted by GB, BRAC and many other NGOs, because in that case saturating market demand might be a constraint.

A relevant issue that requires some more thinking in this connection is the average loan size. While loans up to Tk 50,000 will be granted without any guarantor, this seems inadequate to start any modern micro-enterprise or the technologically "spin-off" firms such as buying and selling of micro computers which is mentioned as one of the Bank's preferred area of micro-enterprise promotion.

Finally, in selecting the loanees, the authorities should maintain a proper gender balance. Efforts at women entrepreneurship development, especially in industries still remains far too inadequate in Bangladesh. Another important area where the Bank utilization and high returns from the investments, training facilities will contribute to the process of development of skills and human capital formation.

The writer is Professor of Economics, Dhaka University.

To the Editor...

A hazard to health

Sir, Only one single road connects the Airport Road to Banani, Gulshan and Baridhara, over only one bridge across the Gulshan lake. How can a population so big of this area do with one single bridge and road. For this reason only, people have to spend few miserable hours everyday inside their vehicles, wasting not only precious time and energy but also inhaling toxic fumes from innumerable vehicles going at a snail's pace.

Traffic jams pose real hazard to health, especially for children and pregnant women.

strongly than oxygen and has very harmful effects on brain, heart etc., because it prevents haemoglobin from carrying oxygen to different tissues of the body. So traffic jams pose real hazard to health, especially for children and pregnant women. CO if absorbed by a pregnant lady is likely to have sub-lethal harmful effects on the health of the foetus. Therefore one or two more bridges should be constructed across Gulshan and Baridhara lakes to ease the traffic, along with roads parallel to the Kamal Ataurk road. Also traffic congestion must be decreased in every part of the city so that we don't all die slowly by this silent and invisible killer.

Whereas the country which manufactures and exports these to us, doesn't allow these in

their own cities! There these are only used outside the cities. How much they care for their citizens health is really laudable and enviable. Whereas we are being made sick, thanks to the importers and others responsible. Only couple of days back we witnessed a truck load of brand new imported vehicles of this kind, the main polluters and therefore the killers. So what's the use crying yourself hoarse!

Can't they at least fix a gadget to convert carbon monoxide to less harmful gases, as is done to all vehicles in developed countries, and save us from this premature death!

Dr Sabrina Rashid, Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka.

A good concept

Sir, The joint meeting of 'F-BCCI' and 'BDR' is a good concept to pinpoint government about the country's economy, seriously affected by smuggling and corruption.

But the meeting has missed the opportunity to heighten the root of all evils. The increase in smuggling and corruption are due to wrong policy of import and export, the rate of customs duties, the exorbitant tariff values and the frequent change of SRO.

Sadek M Salam, 10/A, Dhanmondi, Dhaka.

Charity begins at home

Sir, This year's flood is reported to be the worst of the century which has created wide spread havoc throughout the country.

What the belated appeal for international help will bring to mitigate the sufferings of the distressed people is yet to be seen. But at home the trend to redress sufferings of the distressed is quiet praiseworthy.

Different organisations and individuals are contributing generously to the Prime Minister's Relief and Welfare Fund for the victims.

In the long list of donor, Proshika, a local NGO has created a unique example of generosity by contributing a handsome amount of Tk. 50 crores in cash to the PM's Relief Fund. I take the opportunity to extend my sincere thanks and gratitude to the management of this organisation.

Would it be too much to expect our big industrialists to follow the suit?

Tasiruddin Ahmed, 41, Kallyanpur, Dhaka-1207.

"Civil servants can do anything"

Sir, I refer to the letter under the heading "Civil Servants can do anything" appearing in the DS, on the 19th Sept. '98. It was about a civil servant of the republic calling a minister "a liar". We cannot comment on the merits of the case unless we know the details. If a civil servant calls anyone "a liar", the aggrieved person may be a minister or any other citizen, has the right to challenge the same in the court of law by filing a defamation suit against the person concerned. Because it is a matter between a minister and a civil servant, therefore it is a matter of public importance and hence it should not go unchallenged. It should be proved beyond any doubt whether the minister had in fact lied.

Let us look at the USA. The president of the most powerful nation of the world is being torn as under for telling a lie. We have a lot to learn from the present episode of the White House.

Another Citizen, Dhaka

OPINION

Politicians vs Professionals

Alif Zabr

How our politicians behave with the professionals? How is the relationship changing with every regime, since, say, 1947, when India was partitioned, and since 1971, when Bangladesh was created?

It has to be kept in mind that artificial politicians were created by vested regimes to suit their own ends, which occurred more than once in contemporary history, as we witnessed several autocratic regimes come and go, and left the lingering malaise and adverse implications, leaving the societies following to cope with the debris.

Revolutions are neither new nor novel. Negative human ingenuity is churned up and imposed on the people by emerging regimes in the different continents. Asia, Africa, Latin America are passing through

phases of emancipation; and, lately, it has been noticed in Central and Eastern Europe, and in the CIS region, where the foreign invaders left their mark for centuries (the Turks; and the Moors in Southern Europe, the traps of socialism in the CIS, and the Vikings in Great Britain in the earlier centuries). Looking further back, the spread of Aryan culture played its role in renaissance or relapse (viz Hitler).

Coming back to the question posed, the first confrontation noticed is between the itinerant regime and the entrenched bureaucracy. Soon it becomes apparent that the latter is difficult to shake or shake up. After the warring period is over, the professionals outside this newly developed coterie find themselves at the receiving end; and their professional pride is hurt. The wound had to be carried, as it was done by their predecessors. This game is still continuing in the Third World, now more refined, after gaining insight from the misadventures. What was ignored is left as a festering sore in the society. Some tried antibiotics; with disastrous results.

Thus a vicious circle is created; and, a any one knows, it is very difficult to get out of a vicious cycle; without upsetting more carts than one. The liabilities and the assets may sometimes be ignored, but the tilt of the balance of power is never in doubt.

The non-professionals start infiltrating the professional domains. There are changes, but these are merely replacements directed by autocratic seats of power under the guise of people's representation. Nepotism takes on the enhanced image of pseudo-professionalism. As the readers themselves can cite many examples, this exercise is aborted here.

What about the future. Theoretically it is the question of building up the escape velocity to get away tangentially from the vicious circle, as a spacecraft gets away from the earth's gravitational force. How to generate or procure this force is a part of the logistics of any revolution: past, present, or future.

The above was an exercise in mental escapism. The actual situation is much more complex than sketched above.

Discipline Must Prevail on JU Campus

A Concerned Citizen

I have been following the reports on recent events at Jahangirnagar University in The Daily Star with interest. It is gratifying to see that in this difficult time of devastating flood and its aftermath DS has given top priority also to the happenings at a university campus, as it deserves. During the last few weeks I had the opportunity to talk to a number of ex- and incumbent Provosts (both of male and female students) and house tutors and also to a cross-section of students. What has emerged from my talks are the following:

a) There is a profound indifference on the part of the University administration, especially on the part of the Hall administrations, towards the state of affairs;

b) There is an insatiable desire and demand by the students to enjoy Western type freedom and liberty without being prepared to shoulder the responsibilities that go with it and without having or attaining the inner moral strength and courage to resist the temptations for the undesirable;

c) Staying in Halls is not compulsory (although it is compulsory to register with a Hall to validate the admission in the University); eating in Halls is not compulsory either and the coming in and going out of the Halls are not regulated by any rules and regulations (although, I am certain there must be some rules at Jahangirnagar University is a residential university and ironically the university transports commute students from campus to Dhaka and back regularly at a cost of about a crore Taka annually.

administration: A common complaint of the hall administration is that the students do not listen to the Provosts and house tutors. Even there were occasions when the female students were irregular or stayed overnight without informing the hall authorities. When the Provost of the hall sent for the student concerned and she refused to see the Provost, the poor provost had to ignore it. This is simply because it so happened, once in the past, some guardians/parents were called by the University authorities to report to them about the irregular/inappropriate behaviour of their wards/children, and one of the guardians thought that it was outrageous on the part of the University to try to restrict the freedom of movement of his adult (in his opinion) daughter. There is a fear that the students may raise slogans and bring out processions against a Provost who is trying to bring in some discipline in the chaotic student Halls.

All these are very real, but the question is: should the University as well as the hall administrations give up or they try to implement whatever rules and regulations they have and also try to improve the situation by introducing new laws, if necessary? In our opinion the parents and legal guardians who think like the one mentioned earlier should be asked by authorities to withdraw their daughters/wards from the University. University is not a place to enjoy freedom without any responsibility.

If the university authorities do not have necessary tools to possess them through Senate or Syndicate whichever is the ap-

propriate body for it. The authorities must ensure that in a crisis situation or in the case of a serious indiscipline by the students they should be able to notify the parents or legal guardians, not the so-called local guardians (who are usually described as cousins or distant cousins and are usually pretenders). In the case of female students it should be made binding that they will be permitted to leave the campus and stay out of campus only on the strength of the written permission or personal presence of the parents or legal guardians.

At present the Provosts and the house tutors live in quarters far away from the Halls and some house tutors even live in Dhaka. This practice should be discontinued. The residential quarters of Provosts and house tutors and wards must be located adjacent to the halls to make the hall administration more responsive to the need of the time.

The stay and eating in the halls must be made compulsory. The coming in and going out from the halls must be strictly regulated. The present system of allowing students to organize mess to prepare their own foods should be discontinued because it introduces many dubious elements in the hall premises which obviously compromise the security and safety of the students and it also makes the tasks of the hall administration unnecessarily difficult.

It must be borne in mind that it is a residential university and at that primarily an undergraduate university with a very few post graduate students and then most of this tiny group of postgraduate students are non-resident.



Art

Buchwald's COLUMN

First In, Last Out

THERE is a rule that every vacationer wants to be the last person to discover a new place and doesn't want anyone to come after him. Once ensconced, summer visitors are full of resentment for newcomers who they suspect will never appreciate the place.

What is not talked about is that people's pets also do not like newcomers. You see it every day when dogs bark at new canine arrivals getting off planes at the airport. It is said the dogs who came first refer to them as "nouveaux bitches".

Charlie, a Wheaton terrier, came to our island in 1997. He found it quite delightful and was happy with his owners. He decided to come back this year. When he returned, he felt accepted by the dogs he met last year, and he considered himself a veteran of the place. Then, on Main Street, Charlie spied a French poodle riding in the back of a station wagon filled with suitcases and children. When they stopped to ask directions of Joel, his owner, Charlie knew immediately that they were first-timers and he started to growl. The poodle growled back and tried to get out of the wagon to have a go at Charlie. Charlie's owner pulled him away and scolded him.

You can't get mad at dogs just because they came to this heavenly place after we did. You can get mad at new people, but not dogs.

Charlie seemed upset. Walking down by the dock he saw five or six dogs arriving on the ferry. It was more than he could bear. His owner said, "I know what you're thinking Charlie, but these dogs are entitled to vacations too. Perhaps they will behave better than they look."

You could tell Charlie's vacation was spoiled. The island can hold just so many dogs, and he had been assured that he would be the last one permitted to run on the beach.

I saw Charlie at his house the other day. He was stretched out on the porch and didn't seem to want to move. "What's wrong?" I asked Joel.

He replied, "He hasn't moved all summer. He feels the island is ruined and the nouveaux bitches have taken over. Now everyone in the family is having a lousy vacation."

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