

Take the NGOs on Board

Distributing agri-rehab credit worth Tk 3200 crore would have been a Herculean task under normal conditions, to say nothing of the highly time-pressed circumstances we are having to do it in. A break-down of the massive lending figure with an eye to a time-bound distribution by the month of November shows that we have to disburse Tk 65 crore among 162500 farmers on a daily basis in order that 8 million flood-affected peasant households are covered. Thus getting at the brass-tacks, a reputed Daily Star columnist has urged the government to take Grameen Bank, BRAC, Proshika and some other NGOs on board to draw upon their credit management expertise devoted entirely to meeting the working capital needs of the landless poor households.

The government's institutional infrastructure consists of branches of Nationalised Commercial Banks and two specialised banks, local committees formed on adhoc basis with UP chairmen and members and some ADAB representatives, the last-named being only peripherally entrusted with the task of listing out needy farmers. This kind of NGO involvement is a reminder of the elusive government-NGO partnership.

The NGOs we are talking about have the proven capacity to distribute loans and not grants as many of these eventually turn out to be in consequence of corrupt or unprofessional disbursements. The 20 per cent deduction at source as a palm-greasing 'service charge' jacks up the interest rate punitively. Result: 40 per cent of the loans have been overdue. So, the government cannot take a blinkered view of what needs to be done afield.

The government will be well-advised instead to intensely argue with itself as to whether it would persist in a single-handed approach with at best half a chance of success or involve the core NGOs for a nearly hundred per cent success in the lending operation. It is not a question of giving away the credit to 'some others' but sharing in a common achievement with the government gaining both in domestic and international prestige for being pragmatic in bridging the institutional gaps before taking the plunge. Frankly, as we look at it, government's good name will be sullied if it fails to help sustain the micro-credit institutions which face a crunch owing to the repayment of arrears piled by the floods. The plaudits for bailing them out through fund replenishment will be in addition to the credit the government would be given for a big job well done.

Universities Redefined

This has been going on for quite some time but never came under the spotlight. People knew Dhaka university dorms as the citadels of the student front of different political parties where the *bahiragatos* (outsiders) came and went as nobody's business. That they were great places to hide people to extort money also, few knew. The recent abduction of a businessman allegedly by some Dhaka University students following the furor over the rape of female students at Jahangirnagar University has brought this seemingly long nurtured culture to light.

As many as 30 abduction cases according to a Bangla daily, have taken place at various halls of residence of the Dhaka University in the last four years and, would you believe it, nobody ever got punished by the university authorities. In fact in one case, the authorities 'forgave' the criminals at the behest of the gurus of the political party of the student front they belonged to.

Given the association that university students has developed with violence and moral turpitude since independence, this behavioural aberration in varsity students hardly springs any surprise. But what in this thoroughly pathetic tale of degeneracy really appalls one is the inability of the teachers and university administration to even try to stem this rot.

The fact that universities are autonomous bodies and the halls of residence are not easily accessible to the law enforcing agency makes the onus on the university authorities far greater to promote the cause of morality and law and order. It is the lethal combination of the dual failure of the politicians and the teachers in living up to their respective roles which has brought us to the pass.

The rape revelation has given Jahangirnagar University a bad odour. People now view this far-away highest seat of learning in idyllic setting as a sanctuary for rapists. Now this tale of holding up people for ransom right at an institution in the heart of the city comes to give a new dimension to this smear spree: if JU is a sanctuary for rapists, DU is the happy hunting ground for abductors. Really, higher education has lost way in this country.

Nobel: European Predomination

The Swedish Academy has again gone for a little surprise. While no one who knows would find fault with the award of this year's Nobel Prize for literature to Jose Saramago, he was not among those highly speculated to land it. He gatecrashed from outside the short list that was headed by Gunter Grass and included luminaries starting from Arthur Miller to VS Naipaul.

In awarding Saramago the coveted prize the Swedish Academy said in its citation that his fictional work, "with parables sustained by imagination, compassion and irony, continually enables us to comprehend an illusory reality." What such compliments hint at for us subcontinentals is that he must be read to be understood.

Saramago's prize happens to be the fourth consecutive for Europeans. Excepting for the sudden intrusion of Kenzaburo, the prize has for long been confined to European languages. Why should it be? A queer apology for not awarding it to Grass this year was that his later works were not available in Swedish translation. So, that perhaps accounts for no one writing in Bengali getting the prize in long 85 years in spite of Bengali being one of the most dynamic literatures of the world.

Death of international exposure, through translations and academic activity, is forcing the Bengali literature of 220 million into the status of one found in the shacks of some poor and backward people.

How can we change this?

ARE we ready for the 21st century? Four major challenges have to be met in good time if humanity wishes to survive the coming century. First challenge: will the 21st century lead to the development of growing inequality and unprecedented poverty while generating unparalleled fortunes hidden behind the bullet-proof glass of social apartheid and urban apartheid? Between 1980 and the 1997-1998 crisis, some 15 or more countries experienced remarkable economic growth and most of their billion and a half inhabitants, representing over a quarter of the world population, have seen their income rise. During the same period, some 100 countries experienced economic decline or stagnation, with a consequent fall in income for 1.6 billion people, representing also more than a quarter of humanity. In Asia, a series of financial crashes has now brought about dramatic recessions in countries whose development was only recently cited as an example.

At the dawn of the 21st century, more than 1.3 billion people live in absolute poverty and their numbers are increasing constantly. Some experts even believe that the figure is closer to 2 billion people. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 'the 20 per cent of poorest people on earth must now share the paltry fraction of 1.1 per cent of global income, as against 1.4 per cent in 1991 and 2.3 per cent in 1960. Today, the net wealth of the 10 largest fortunes amounts to \$ 133 billion, which is equivalent to more than one and a half time the total national income of all the least advanced countries.'

Today, over 800 million individuals are suffering from hunger or malnutrition; more than a billion do not have access to health care, basic education or drinking water. 2 billion are not connected to and electricity supply and 80 per cent of the world population, or more than 4.5 billion people, are deprived of basic telecommunications, that is to say, of access to the new information and communication technology.

gles, which are becoming the keys to distance education.

Much is said today in praise of the Internet. But we will continue to live for a long time in a world of electronic highways and subways. The future itself seems in jeopardy. It is absent, elusive or unpredictable in the North, where most of the rich countries now have a negligible birth rate. It is spoiled and already mouldered in the South, where children and women are the ones who most suffer from poverty: two-thirds of the world population live in absolute poverty; and more than 15 years of age and more than two out of three of them are women.

We can only give a future of freedom at the price of justice, sharing and solidarity. While the old social contract of 1945 — that of the welfare state, which corresponded to an earlier phase in globalization — is crumbling and disintegrating in the face of world market pressures, the new phase of globalization and the third industrial revolution which underlies it have not yet been accepted by the new social contract that they require. It will have to be invented, and life-long education for all should be one of its foundations.

Second major challenge: sustainable development. Are not our modes of development, based on the squandering of non-renewable resources, putting a strain on the development of future generations? Three planet Earths would be necessary if the whole of the world population were to have access to the North American mode of development and consumption. As underlined by Mr Federico Mayor, Director-General of UNESCO, at the international conference on the ethics of the future which we organized in 1997 in Rio, human beings throughout the world today are assuming rights over

the human beings of tomorrow, and we are beginning to realize that we are in the process of jeopardizing the exercise of their human rights by future generations. Humanity now has the capacity to destroy itself as a species. Who will teach us how to master mastery?

Third major challenge: the drunken boat syndrome. Admittedly, as the wisdom of mariners and philosophers has it, there is no favourable wind for he who knows not where he goes. But nor is there a favourable wind for he who has broken his rudder. In other words: have we set ourselves a course for the 21st century? And do we have the instruments to keep ourselves on course? All too many, if not most states give the impression — whether real or illusory — of having lost their instruments of action and navigation as a result of globalization. Politics, sovereignty, democracy itself, which in many areas of the world is still but a fresh coat of paint, seem to have lost their hold on events as if history had fallen into the hands of 'anonymous masters', abstractions such as financial markets, interest rates, exchange rates, commodity prices, indexes and statistical artefacts of all kinds.

What is more, most of the problems today extend beyond national borders. Water is becoming an international issue, to such an extent that of 21st century might be that of water. Financial transactions, pollution, epidemics, organized crime and money laundering do not quietly stop at the customs post. They carry no passport, they are nomadic, borderless. Solutions must therefore be found which also extend beyond borders. The conclusion of a number of multilateral agreements and the holding of world conference such as the Earth Summit in Rio, or the Kyoto Summit on

the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, are a first step. Should we not, however, go much further in the next 10 or 20 years?

There are those who reply: sorry, we can't afford it. Yet the Cold War is over, and we still invest massively in insecurity instead of investing preventively in the construction of peace. Defence expenditures worldwide represent \$800 to \$920 billion annually. According to former Secretary General of the Summit on Cities Mr. Wally N'Dow, "resources are now available to provide a roof, drinking water and basic sanitary facilities at a cost of less than \$100 per person, for every man, woman and child on this planet." This effort would amount to \$130 billion for those 1.3 billion poor registered in international statistics.

The key issues of regulation, governance and aptitude for government on an international scale will lie at the centre of the world debate in the next two decades. Given the scale of the three challenges I have referred to, can we not assume that we are moving, towards a planetary democracy? Without going into the vexed issue of world sovereignty, can we imagine a mode of international integration similar to that of European construction or the Mercosur, or is it merely a dream? In the face of the development of a worldwide market economy, do we need to devise, as Jacques Attali suggests, a democracy which, like the market, is not confined to a specific territory, but rather a democracy without frontiers in both space and time?

Fourth major challenge: peace. As Boutros Boutros-Ghali recalled at the 21st Century Talks, which we organize periodically, peace is the precondition for solving the first three challenges. Unfortunately, scores of wars have

taken place since the end of the Cold War, and some 30 conflicts are going on at present, mostly within States. The euphoric illusion according to which the collapse of the Berlin Wall was going to lead instantaneously to perpetual peace and usher in a new era of development has vanished. In several parts of the world, a fourth category of countries has emerged alongside the developed countries, the developing countries and the countries in transition: the countries at war, or recovering from a conflict; we are witnessing an unprecedented phenomenon — the collapse and disappearance of states in bloodshed and tragedy.

Faced with the risk of contagion from policies of ethnic cleansing and genocide, it is vital that we promote, as emphasised by UNESCO, a culture of peace through education, effective implementation of human rights, promotion of tolerance and cultural pluralism and a dialogue between all the components of society. Peace is not merely the absence of war, or order imposed by hegemony. Authentic peace is the positive peace which, according to the philosopher Spinoza, is born out of the strength of the soul, concord and justice. It is based on genuine values and principles and not merely on the policies of *laissez-faire* or on the agreements of *Real-politik*.

The General Assembly of the United Nations subscribed to this vision by proclaiming the year 2000 International Year for the Culture of Peace. If we truly want tomorrow not to be already too late always, anticipation must take precedence over adaptation, the ethics of the future must overcome the tyranny of emergency, and the notion of sharing — in space as regards our contemporaries but also in time as regards future generations — must override the blind selfishness which is the

principle source of new forms of apartheid. It is with this prospect in mind that UNESCO has organised the *Dialogues of the 21st Century* from 16 to 19 September, in order to light up the paths of the future through encounters between leading experts, and that Mr Federico Mayor will publish a White Paper on the 21st Century in 1999.

Is it normal that investment should flow from South to North? Is it fair, as is the case today, that poor countries should finance rich ones through the refunding of their debt? Is it acceptable that the gap between them should widen and that new barriers be erected within each nation as between nations? The issue is clear enough. Ethan Kapstein, member of the Council on Foreign Relations in New York, referred to it in the following terms: "The world may be moving inexorably toward one of those tragic moments that will lead future historians to ask, why were the economic and policy elites unaware of the profound disruptions that economic and technological change were causing? What prevented them from taking the steps necessary to prevent a global social crisis?"

Let us nevertheless lend an ear to what the prophets and poets have to say: "As danger grows, so grows the path to safety," Holderlin wrote. Solutions do exist: the awareness of problems has become more acute; what is really missing today is political will, which is now a prisoner of short-term interests. Globalization cannot be confined to the worldwide expansion of telecommunications, computers, the media-sphere and markets.

It must be founded on greater international democracy and on an anticipatory conception of democracy, the main pillars of which are: a new social contract for the 21st century; sustainable development, that is to say a natural contract; a new international contract encouraging world-wide regulation and integration; a culture of peace and ethics for the future; and life-long education for all.

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Ready for the 21st Century?

by Jérôme Bindé

Is it normal that investment should flow from South to North? Is it fair, as is the case today, that poor countries should finance rich ones through the refunding of their debt? Is it acceptable that the gap between them should widen and that new barriers be erected within each nation as between nations?

Pakistan Scenario

Are the Developments Threatening Democracy?

The need is to strengthen democracy and the task for the politicians — ruling or opposition — is to govern efficiently for the welfare of the people so that they can live up to the expectations of the people and no handle is given to those who may wait in the wings for opportunity.

PAKISTAN is once again very much on the news and not much surprisingly, the army-related issues are dominating the political scene. Pakistan along with its traditional foe neighbouring India was the focus of the international attention for some time since May, this year, as both countries exploded nuclear devices much to the chagrin of the world community.

Then the recent controversy between the ruling circles and the opposition over the introduction of the Islamic laws in the country was also a factor that attracted enough media coverage. But the developments in the last one week have come rather as a surprise to many since there was no likelihood until the last week that Pakistan will be embroiled in a kind of debate involving the armed forces and the pattern of governance. As such, when former Chief of Army Staff General Pervez Musharraf caused a furor by asking for the formation of a National Security Council with the participation of the armed forces for a role in the affairs of the country, it was a kind of bolt from the blue in the sense that the army was considered to be moving well with the present government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, whose party and allied commands an unsurpassable majority in the National Assembly.

As the comments of the former army chief quickly snowballed into major national controversy with some opposition parties and few figures from Prime minister Sharif's own party lending support to the suggestion, clearly the government was embarrassed. Understandably, the Prime Minister summoned the army chief and they are rightly believed to have found no common ground for the proposal of Gen. Keramat. As a logical corollary, the army chief quit although his resignation was not very much anticipated as a development to this situation. Gen. Keramat was to retire within a few months and so far he was known as a professional soldier with no such political ambitions. He is on record of having observed only a few weeks ago that there is no question of army rule in Pakistan and such a development in the country are not the friends of democracy and the nation.

The abrupt resignation of the army chief complicated the situation and the Prime Minister immediately appointed a new chief but General Pervez Musharraf's appointment as a new boss of the large army resulted in the resignations of two senior generals, who felt that they have been superseded. Next in the line after Gen Keramat was Gen Md Ali Kuli Khan and after him was Gen. Khalid Nawaz, and both quit.

Prime Minister Sharif might have anticipated this kind of developments as a sequel to bringing in a new army chief and appeared to somewhat unfruffed by the turn of events. Nonetheless, the whole exercise and that too surrounding the army was something which no government can really wish to experience in its last general elections early last year. Mr Nawaz Sharif is experiencing some problems from time to time contrary to the expectations because his is a solid government enjoying more than two-thirds majority in the National Assembly. Paradoxically, the threats to his rule and the government are not coming from the main opposition or the opposition parties despite the fact that his principal political rival is a charismatic leader Benazir Bhutto, who was twice prime minister and spares no opportunity to take on the government.

Sharif handled with skill and fortunately for him with the support of the army when he faced a serious challenge last year from country's ceremonial president and the Chief Justice — both of whom were up in arms against him causing a deadlock in running of the government. The head of the country — albeit his limited powers and the chief of the judiciary launched a blistering attack on the prime minister and his government on a variety of issues that stemmed from a row over appointment of judges of the supreme court.

As the situation has stalemated, at one stage the intervention of the army looked a distinct possibility but Gen. Keramat and his colleagues said they want constitutional provisions to follow and respected

the supremacy of the parliament. The President and the Chief Justice had to go and the win for Sharif was seen as a victory of the parliament and for a government elected by the people. The role of the armed forces was also praised and liked by the people of Pakistan as their respect for the mandate of the people was vindicated.

During the nuclear explosion with India in May, this year, the army and the government seemed worked in close concert and it appeared that the army under Gen Keramat referred to lie low and play a constitutional role designed for it. The government of Nawaz Sharif some time ago somewhat unexpectedly announced that it was moving to introduce Islamic laws strictly and it appeared that the army has a support for this although the move

slips out of the democratic practice, it may take a long time to restore it. The military as such as a whole may not be for a political role in the affairs of the country. The need is to strengthen democracy and the task for the politicians — ruling or opposition — is to govern efficiently for the welfare of the people so that they can live up to the expectations of the people and no handle is given to those who may wait in the wings for opportunity.

benazir Bhutto is also faced with similar charges and both are visibly somewhat handicapped by the allegations notwithstanding denials from their sides. The former army chief's reference to the problems that the nation is facing and the subsequent developments have only have come as a bigger headache for him. Pakistan's independent history is characterised by army rule half of this period. Democracy has often been interrupted. Not that all

been seen how he tackles the situation. The opposition parties are not in opposition permanently and they may be in the seat of power again. Hence, it is well advised that they care more for the system and not individuals like, Nawaz Sharif. Once the pattern of governance

No Place to Hide...

A Concerned Citizen

Much has been written and discussed in the national media, except of course the election media, about the affairs of Jahangirnagar University. But like every thing else in this unfortunate country of ours, it has also ultimately fallen into predictable apathy and inaction. Before the last fateful meeting of the syndicate, there was a strong rumor in the campus that the PM had telephoned the VC and told him that he could take any action against the culprits who have committed the most heinous crime of all in the sacred precinct of the university. It was then interpreted that if stern action were taken, the government would back the university authorities. The question now is why then the university authorities — i.e. the VC and the syndicate — shrifted away from taking the appropriate action — for example expulsion for life with withdrawal of degrees, for all of them including the culprits deserve and the syndicate has the power for? Is it because they belong to a particular student organization and that the majority members of the syndicate including the VC and its supporters of the ruling party?

It now seems that some discussions had taken place among the syndicate members in order to justify the lenient action taken by the syndicate by citing the previous government's failure to punish the JCD members. It is unacceptable on two counts: firstly, the crime committed in the present case is the most heinous one; secondly, the previous government's failure to act against their terrorists is certainly a

discredit to them and certainly things like this contributed to their down fall in the last general election. And this was in the democratic tradition. Present government came to power with the promise to perform better, not to fall into the traps of repeating the follies of their predecessor.

However, by handing out the appropriate punishment the VC could have exonerated himself — enhance the image of the syndicate via a vis the university — taking away some blemishes from the tarnished image of the BCL and it could have also helped the image building of the PM. But that did not happen, because the VC wanted to be the VC of the student community and the ruling party, although the university belongs to the whole community. If he could have risen above the narrow parochialism of party politics, have courage and far sightedness and a sense of history, he could have gone down in the history of Jahangirnagar University and for that matter in the troubled history of the universities of this country as the most courageous and most able VC of all time. Alas because of his partisan attitude and lack of farsightedness he has allowed the greatness to slip away — the greatness which could have been rightfully his.

He has reduced himself to one of those ordinary VCs who routinely come and go and no body remembers them after a while.

Cry my poor unfortunate motherland — for your worthy sons and daughters have let you down! You have — we have — no place to hide, your our — shame.



Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury

MATTERS AROUND US

was criticised by the opposition and several human rights groups for the reasons they pointed out Pakistan was very much an Islamic country and stricter laws will only confuse matters.

But Sharif went ahead and the national parliament with overwhelming majority has just approved the new bill which will now go to the Senate where the approval of the bill is not very sure since the ruling party and its allies do not enjoy two-thirds majority there. The constitutional amendment will become a law after the National Assembly and the Senate pass it and approved finally by President Rafiq Tarar, who is certain to do it as he has been chosen for the post by Sharif's party.

Incidentally, Sharif's hand has been juggling with too many fire bands at the moment like the controversy with the opposition over the Islamic laws, an uneasiness in the foreign policy matters on issues relating to covert support the Tal-

the army bosses looked at the democratic practice with same attitude. Elected governments have their failures also, but people will judge them. Besides, constitutional rule has to be ensured for smooth functioning of the democratic institutions.

Unfortunately, most democracies in South Asia are still struggling to build up firm foundations. Seeking a permanent rule for the army in the running of the country is potentially dangerous to impair the path of true democracy. The edifice of democracy has to be solidified. When the son of former military dictator late Gen. Ziaul Huq, a leader in Sharif's Muslim party Mr. Ezaul Huq or some others support the suggestion for a role for the army in the governance of the nation as proposed by the former army chief of Pakistan, this can be seen as not a reflection of the views of politicians.

The Pakistan Prime minister is evidently fighting a serious problem and it remains to

To the Editor...

DCC's objectionable activities

Sir, We fail to understand as to why has DCC wasted crores of taka on making of military tank-like steel garbage tanks and placed those lame and useless tanks on public roads and streets for display. Those garbage tanks obstruct and hinder the movement of traffic. The members of the public find it difficult and inconvenient to throw garbage inside the big belly of the huge tank. As a result the whole area is littered with garbage, it is filthy, dirty, unhygienic and polluted. Moreover the DCC does not remove the garbage and clean the area for weeks together. We also find that during peak hours the DCC garbage trucks block the public roads and streets and remove the garbage which makes the situation worse due to bad smell and traffic jam.

Recently the DCC has launched a cleanliness campaign in the city. Excepting seeing a few ministers and DCC officials attending the functions on the TV we find all roads and streets filled with filth and dirt and garbage. We have always found DCC's campaign for garbage cleaning, rehabilitation of hawkers and vendors, bringing the unauthorised rickshawpullers to book, removing the traffic jam and eradication of mosquitoes are nothing but publicity stunts.

Where are the accountability and transparency of DCC's duties and responsibilities? Would our prime minister kindly look into the relevant matters and take necessary action.

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Taslima and the fundamentalists

Sir, Here we go again. Taslima Nasreen and a group of religious fanatics are at it again. Taslima is back after a long sojourn abroad, rightly so, as it is her own country. She and some elements in our society are unhappy with her being here. They have a difference of opinion on her writing. That is understandable and can protest about it but why should they be allowed to ransack public property and make a nuisance in the streets, not understandable. The whole situation must be addressed democratically and we all must practice the tolerance as preached in Democracy.

What is most interestingly that this group has added a new agenda in their vendetta

against Taslima. Somehow they have demanded that no statues be built anywhere in Bangladesh. This is undemocratic and unheard of and should be protested by all since some of the statues that are existing are dedicated to the brave sons and daughters of the soil who fought for the independence of this nation. In fact their should be more built for those brave Freedom Fighters so that our future generation understands the great sacrifice and bravery of the Freedom Fighters in our Liberation Struggle.

Akku Chowdhury
Banani, Dhaka

Effects of Farakka on Floods

Shaheedul Islam

There is a general opinion that due to Farakka Barrage, Bangladesh suffers from more floods. As all the gates of the Barrage remain fully open during the monsoon, a very heavy and quick discharge takes place downstream of it. Some contest it, citing example of 1910 floods.

An information gathering reveals that a large number of water control structures including Farakka Barrage on the Ganga (Ganges), in India have been built. Now with these structures in place, the waters of the catchment have been confined to flow within banks. So, the bankfull stage of flood flow attains heights between high banks built along the river, much higher than it would have attained without embank-

ments. This flow then passes the structures through the gates fully open. This suggests more flow towards lower reaches of the river.

So, some experts are right in their view that apart from flow being much less in dry season is much more in wet season in the event of Farakka Barrage than is expected without it.

West Bengal also suffers due to upstream structural barrier to the extent Bangladesh suffers. They have the advantage of a barrage at Farakka to offset the effects.

The 1910 flood may be a case in isolation. Increased frequency of disastrous floods of recent times is a pointer that just cannot rule out the possible effects of Farakka.