

Grabbers on Prowl

Works Minister Md. Nasim is on record to have demurred publicly over a noticeable tendency among certain people to grab government's khas land in the metropolises.

They have made all this into a profession. And if one were to seriously study their tyrannical hold on the society one would invariably find out that in a sense it is worse than the underworld tales of drug, child and woman traffickers.

The latest case in point is the land-grabbing bid into Osmany Uddyan, one of the few breathing spaces the city is now left with.

Whenever newspapers have flashed stories of land-grabbing setting off a rather simmering reaction and not quite a public outcry the illegal occupiers would beat a strategic retreat only to be at it again as the dusts settled.

Whether it is outright physical occupation of land or any attempted stranglehold on it through fictitious documentation the issue of land-grabbing poses a serious threat to law and order and the very essence of civic life which is crucially reliant on a stout defence of the principle of land or asset ownership.

Healer as Predator

News about violence against the human person and dignity has become all too common in the country's newspapers. But one particular item in a vernacular daily published yesterday cannot but shock even the most stoical of minds.

Setting aside the details of this particular incident, the allegations brought against the doctor raise a whole host of questions. The medical profession — like that of the police — is one of few institutions to which the general public look for guidance and protection.

The incident produces another opportunity to address the larger question of the profession's accountability and redress for the aggrieved. There are far too many allegations of negligence and other unpardonable offences against doctors.

Failed Flight

You can count on Biman doing something not perhaps done by any other airlines, something quite unheard of in aviation history. Some gem of an achievement in reverse. Now that it isn't caring a lot about domestic air communication, one thought that things would improve on its international operations.

Strongly persuasive was the other reason put out by some that Biman failed to find someone competent and qualified to fly its machine to Hong Kong. Two pilots were contacted and both refused. How is that for an explanation?

This is a wholly unacceptable situation. It would be very interesting to know how much time and care and quality service it takes to mend the dent such incidents make on the Biman's image and business.

Why Micro-credit for Poverty Alleviation

Poverty alleviation initiative should be self-reliant. It should be self-financing with minimum dependence on external financial subsidy. Welfare based on charity can neither be long lasting nor extensive.

THERE is enough food, yet people go hungry. Why? The answer came from Professor Amartya Sen in his insightful analysis of famine in Bangladesh and Ethiopia.

The issue ultimately boils down to effective programme delivery for poverty alleviation. Several approaches have been tried with varying degrees of success or failure.

This way in Asian miracle economies so long the miracle was not unmade by the crisis of 1996. Although there were phenomenal expansion of non-farm employment and income.

The case for a separate strategy and programs for poverty alleviation became necessary since growth could not be sustained at the desirable rate everywhere and in spite of rapid growth, poverty persisted in north-east Thailand or outer islands of Indonesia or certain paddy farming communities of peninsular Malaysia.

How do we alleviate poverty? First of all, we now know how we do not alleviate poverty. The

not-so-long ago successful export-led market-oriented growth strategy has proved that it does create the necessary though not the sufficient condition to successfully battle against poverty.

Long before the emergence of export-led manufacturing as the king-pin of economic growth, grandiose schemes for overnight industrialization were tried and they all miserably failed.

The brutal realities of life of available and they constitute significant welfare initiatives — not sustainable poverty alleviation. The objective conditions in the typical rural environment should also be taken into account.

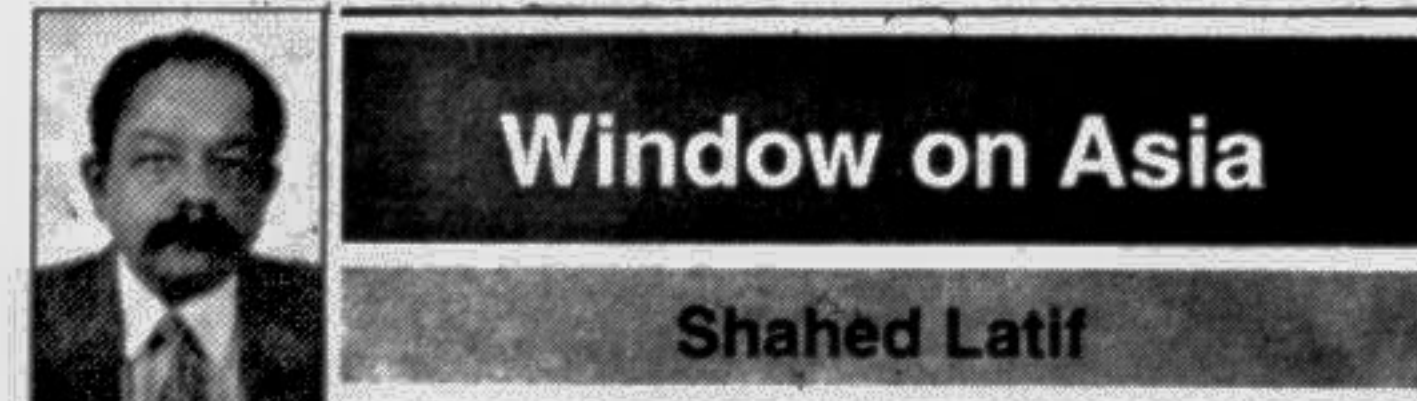
Donor countries and agencies have particular preference for major thrust on education, health and nutrition programmes as the major instruments for poverty alleviation. Children must not work. They should be in schools.

The golden means is credit without collateral. An initial small loan of 500 takas will enable a poor mother to buy 20 chickens and start selling 15 eggs a day on the average.

a landless poor household create the compelling conditions for undertaking vulnerable group feeding or regular health care programmes. However, in a country where majority are poor, the government is bound to be poor as well.

Poverty alleviation initiative should be self-reliant. It should be self-financing with minimum dependence on external financial subsidy. Welfare based on charity can neither be long lasting nor extensive.

I have termed micro-credit as the golden means for poverty alleviation. However, it must not be interpreted as the only necessary programme to fight against poverty.



Shahed Latif

Amartya Sen: Welfare Economics and Social Choice

by Ali Ahmed Mallick

Economic theory in general and welfare economics in particular cannot take poverty and famine in certain part of the world at certain point in time as a paradigmatic event. On the contrary, one has to accept the fact of poverty and famine as case for illustrating certain significant point in economic theory.

THE Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences has awarded Nobel Prize for the year 1998 to Amartya Sen for his "several key contributions to research on fundamental problems in welfare economics".

Now, social choice theory is an established area of research appearing in D71 classification system in the Journal of Economic Literature of the American Economic Association.

on the part of professional economists to make any policy recommendations which can serve as a basis of public policy.

Sen's work was an attempt to establish social choice theory on a new foundation so that it could help economists understand the theoretical and conceptual aspects of welfare economics that has deluded them since the formulation of the Arrow's Impossibility Theorem back in 1951.

Sen's most fundamental work was "The Impossibility of a Paretian Liberal" that appeared in the Journal of Political Economy (1970), a paper that created wide interest among the economists since this paper was an early attempt to reconstruct much of the foundations of Pareto optimality principle.

blatant much of the traditional welfare economics. Individual choice and liberty have thus come to play a very vital role in making social decision on economic matters.

The second most important and major work done by Sen is Collective Choice and Social Welfare (1970), a masterpiece which I was introduced by Dr Peter Vallentine in 1985 at the University of Western Ontario where I spent much of my time in working on social choice theory and decision analysis.

social choice theory set forth by Arrow.

Sen has definitely established a strong paradigm in the long tradition of economics as a source of the most important social sciences to understand human values and society. In his broad philosophical perspective individual attitudes have been given emphasis vis-a-vis individual rationality as contemplated in the profound thinking of Adam Smith, Arrow, Rawls, and other social choice theorists who have kept themselves busy with the resolution of the paradoxical results found in the application of Pareto principle.

Leaving aside the complex philosophical issues that might arise out of such an attempt one may venture to say that the defunct economists would be disappointed to see that the basis of welfare economics can be secured even when there are logical contradictions in the transition from individual choice to social choice. Judgements concerning individual liberty, values, attitudes can now be accommodated within the genuine branch of economics called welfare economics.

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Sen's work on social choice theory has always been a source of inspiration to professional economists and ivory-tower philosophers here and abroad. Quite a number of academicians and students in philosophy at Jahangirnagar University have devoted their research activities in understanding the significance and the potential application of social choice theory in solving public policy issues.

The philosophical significance of Sen's contribution to economics is thus very far-reaching and wide. But the practical aspect of his works are also not very difficult to appreciate. One of his most frequently cited works is Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation (1981), where he explained some of the important ways in which famine might plague a democratic society in spite of the traditional idea that the mere lack of food is not the only cause of famine rather a lack of purchasing power of the affected people is.

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Proposed rail track

Sir, The railway line of Dhaka city was conveniently shifted from Fulbaria-Tejgaon to Kamalapur-Tejgaon a few decades back. When this change was effected, the lane from Moghbazar to Kamalapur was evidently on the eastern side of the metropolitan city.

The eastern thirty-five km embankment-cum-by-pass road from Demra to Tongi, when completed, may have a rail line as a part of the proposed Ring Rail Line. But that, perhaps cannot be a substitute for a straight railway track now being proposed from Kamalapur via Khilgaon-East Rampura on the east side of the BTB Building-Badda-Baridhara to Khilgaon-Kamalapur Station.

A less costly embankment-cum-railway may be prepared by shifting the railway from Kamalapur-Khilgaon-Tejgaon to Kamalapur-Khilgaon-East Rampura-Badda-Baridhara-Khilgaon. This project may be

finished before the next monsoon. If the Dhaka Cantonment is not shifted elsewhere, the rail track from Cantonment to Khilket may be kept intact for carrying military personnel and equipments.

However, this proposal if taken up and implemented would have an excess railway track as long as the portion in between Khilgaon to FDC that may be used in Gazipur-Bhupur track. Besides, there will be only one major rail gate (the Khilgaon Rail gate) in the city.

M A S Molla, BAAS, Dhaka

"FAP: What was it for?"

Sir, I have read with interest Mr A Zayed's letter titled "FAP: What was it for?". It appears that Mr Zayed is thoroughly familiar with the Flood Action Plan (FAP) activities during 1990-95. He deserves thanks for precisely summarising all the activities in two or three paragraphs. But I was surprised to find his total ignorance about the global campaign by international/national NGO community against the studies and few pilot projects taken up under FAP.

The critics in their campaign asked for total "moratorium" on the implementation of FAP recommendations i.e. follow up interventions, particularly structural ones (Dhaka Courier, October 6, 1995; Editorial). These campaigns were successful either in persuading donor community to withdraw from these programmes or to go slow. Consequently, the Government of Bangladesh as well

as donor community became very hesitant to proceed with the recommended programmes as a whole, rather preferred to move selectively and review the regional programmes in the context of a National Water Management Plan (NWMP) in a more holistic manner.

Meanwhile, the government has selected 10 projects (non-structural and structural), which were considered urgent as well as less controversial, such as (1) strengthening flood forecasting system (FAP 1), (2) strengthening of Disaster Management Bureau (FAP 11), (3) Environment and GIS System (FAP 16 and FAP 19), (4) enhanced modeling capacity at Surface Water Modeling Centre (FAP 25), (5) River Bank Protection Project to strengthen the existing Brahmaputra Embankment at Sirajganj, Mathurpara and Saraiakandi (FAP 1), (6) Goral Augmentation project (FAP 4), (7) excavation of Kani-khara and others (FAP 6), (8) Coastal Embankment Rehabilitation Project — 21 Polders (FAP 7) (9) Dhaka Integrated Flood Protection (FAP 8B), (10) six town Protection Schemes — Dinajpur, Panchagar, Kurigram, Moulavi bazar, Habiganj and Khulna (FAP 9A).

Given the above situation, what more Mr Zayed was looking for? It is not fully understood what was Mr Zayed's expectation in a short span of three years from 1995 to 1998! Anyway, FAP succeeded at least in providing enough ammunition to criticise its own self forever. What a pity!

Azad Rafiq, Mohammadpur, Dhaka

"Where blindness is it?"

Sir, The picture news in the DS, 10/10/98 with the above title deserve highest degree of appreciation for vision and imagination of social problems that

obtain in Bangladesh. We all condemn people for begging, but it is begging that should be condemned.

It is a pity that we've the best of the system but we are the worst amongst the performers. And so we see the society overrun with endless social and other ills including begging.

To overcome the pathetic situation, concerted efforts of all — the individual, the community and the state might be helpful but what the state can do, is something that can't be done by the individual.

It may be mentioned that of late, the government has undertaken old age pension programme. The amount and coverage may be small, yet it is a breakthrough in the social welfare domain. In line with this, other suitable programmes in general and for the disadvantaged group in particular may be taken up as well. For the semi-learned, unlettered ladies, suitable jobs that can be done at home like handicraft etc. This way and with the wisdom of the people involved in social welfare areas, the problem may be minimised, if not eliminated.

Abu Imran, Dhaka

Quality of imported fertilizers

Sir, Every year Bangladesh needs to import huge quantities of phosphatic and potassic fertilizers. Even sometimes nitrogenous fertilizer is required to be imported to meet emergency requirement although the country is sufficient in urea. Government used to import urea through BCIC but the other two fertilizers are imported by the private sector.

several hundred samples of SSP after collecting from dealers shops. The test reports reveal that the samples hardly contain any nutrient (P2O5). Those reports were published in the press by the Extension Dept. It may be well imagined, how far the production of last annum crop was affected by applying such zero content phosphatic fertilizer. But the Ministry of Agriculture could not take any action against those dishonest traders who cheated the nation. Those are still in the market and most of the farmers who could not afford to buy higher priced TSP are using such low grade fertilizers. For phosphatic fertilizers there are some specific sources like USA, North African countries, South Africa where phosphatic fertilizers of superior quality are produced.

But our private importers have been bringing the material from new sources like India, China, South Korea, Egypt etc. Last year government imported DAP (4000 tons) from South Korea which are still lying unsold due to its varied physical condition. Recently Bangladesh Sugar Corporation imported TSP from China which is a new source. There is much doubt about its quality.

But who cares of these things? M A Jalil, 372/B, Khilgaon Dhaka

Income Tax forms

Sir, It is not understood why Income Tax forms are available only in GPO. Even regional post offices like Mohammadpur, Shantinagar etc., do not offer these forms for sale! If the government can sell savings certificates, stamps, non-judicial stamps etc., worth thousands of taka through sub-post offices, then why these outlets cannot be entrusted with the sale of IT forms as well, is really a mystery!

We hope Ministry of Finance will do something about it. A Sufferer, Dhaka

ment within one year, she can take a bigger loan and expand her poultry stock four times. In the third year, she can add a milking cow and further increase as well as diversify her income base. In the fourth year, her earnings should be sufficient to take a housing loan. By the end of the 5th year she should be able to cross the poverty line through hard work, discipline and of course the credit line always open to her, so long she remains a good borrower.

This is what happened at Grameen Bank, where out of 2.3 million members (borrowers), one-third are no longer poor. However, their access to fresh credit always remains. There are borrowers who starting with Taka 500 only have borrowed Taka 500,000 as their tenth borrowing for buying a small bus. Their children are at school, some of them studying even at the college level. Obviously they have access to health care, clean water and enough nutrition including milk for the children; without calling for any donor's support.

I have termed micro-credit as the golden means for poverty alleviation. However, it must not be interpreted as the only necessary programme to fight against poverty. Bangladesh experience so far suggest that if rapid growth in labour intensive manufacturing, steady expansion of agriculture production and a substantial programme for micro-credit are sustainable for a period of 15 to 20 years, then we should be able to largely eliminate poverty.

In a randomly fluctuating economy in which a majority of the people get themselves involved in an extremely messy condition due to the erratic behaviour of the market mechanism in developing economy Sen's suggestion that values are more fundamental than attitudes can be a good guide to reducing the suffering of the victims (Ethics and Economics, 1987). This is how he had made a wonderful combination of the expertise of a philosopher and an economist.

It would be extremely superficial to think that Poverty and Famines is the only work of Sen by which his contribution to welfare economics should be judged. The event of poverty and famine is an event in a particular domain of space-time, to use a metaphor from Einstein's theory of relativity. Economic theory in general and welfare economics in particular cannot take poverty and famine in certain part of the world at certain point in time as a paradigmatic event. On the contrary, one has to accept the fact of poverty and famine as case for illustrating certain significant point in economic theory.

Sen is now contemplating to finish some very important tasks in the field of economic theory a clear testimony of which has recently been indicated by his refusal to accept the post of finance minister in India. A true academician and a philosopher of economics does not find it at all difficult to decline a committee assignment. The true academic freedom is freedom from all committee assignments. This is the remark once made by Kenneth Arrow whose dream of resolving paradox of social theory has been finally realised by Amartya Sen.

The writer is a professor of Philosophy, Jahangirnagar University.

Shaky Clinton's cracky move

Sir, I get more anxious as Mr Clinton's impeachment draws closer. Not that I care how long Clinton will remain in power or who will be the next US president, but what scares me is the unexpected sudden move Mr Clinton will make.

It has been proved in the past how factually he diverted the world's attention from his failures by attacking Iraq as well as bombing Sudan, Afghanistan etc.

When the Monika Lewinsky affair was just getting interesting the attack of the US Tomahawks began. But still the "Osama Virus" was not wiped out. Then Clinton expected Tehran to attack the Taliban — it resulted in failure. The recent NATO decision on Yugoslavia also backfired. So Mr Clinton is back to square one.

I wonder what deceitful move he has under his sleeve to divert the impeachment scenario in future. Shagor, Dhaka

Elephant in the court

Sir, A Court in southern India has set a unique example for preventing of cruelty on animals by summoning an elephant to appear in the court to verify elephant owner's allegation that the animal was being maltreated by the person to whom the former had leased the animal. The owner alleged that the elephant had weakened considerably due to negligence and being forced to perform hard labour.

Meanwhile, it is sincerely expected that such legal steps will be taken by all the countries to prevent cruelty on animals. M Zahidul Haque, Associate Professor, BAI, Dhaka