

LDC Conference

Better deal for LDCs in rich nations' interest

IN realistic terms, the week-long UN global conference on poverty, which began yesterday in Brussels, can promise very little for the least developed countries (LDCs). Their plea for more official development aid (ODA), foreign direct investment (FDI), debt relief and market access looks unlikely to draw any significant response from the richer and developed countries. The bleak outlook is premised more on global economic reality than any prejudice induced by failures of the last two editions of the conference in 1981 and 1990. After a spectacular growth last year, the world economy this year has well and truly chilled down.

The United States and Japan, which account for almost half of world output, both appear headed for a recession. Over the past year, nearly ten trillion dollar has been wiped off global share values, equivalent to America's annual output. In such a glum global economic environment, the richer and developed countries would obviously be more interested in getting their own houses in order, rather than extending to the LDCs more opportunities and initiatives for their socio-economic development and thereby poverty alleviation.

They should, however, try to strike a balance between the two and pay more attention to the needs of the LDCs than they have done so far. In an era of increasingly inter-connective global economy, co-existence of the extremely rich and the hardcore poor makes little sense. It is extremely difficult to believe that the 49 LDCs, which actually represent more than ten per cent of the world population, account for less than one per cent, 0.4 per cent to be precise, of global trade. Such discrepancies could be disabling for the developed nations and might well retard their own economic growth.

Lest the perennial poverty in the countries of sub-Saharan Africa, South and Southeast Asia, Caribbean and Pacific island states start eating into world economy, the affluent nations should invest more in the LDCs. More than ODA, FDI and debt relief, what the LDCs need is enhanced access of their products to the markets of the developed countries. The more the export growth, the less dependent these countries would become on aids and grants. The equation may not be as simple as it sounds. However, the rich nations can easily make it simpler.

Encore in West Bengal

Tremors at centre, Congress smiling

THE elections to five state assemblies in India have produced stunning results. These have yielded clear-cut verdicts bearing the stamp of voter maturity and a no-nonsense decisiveness about the choices made. All this is a big gain to the Indian polity, hitherto somewhat destabilised by the knock-on effects of mixed bag results producing hung parliaments and minority governments.

In West Bengal voters have preferred stability to the hyped variety of *Bangla Bachao* (save Bengal) rhetoric, *sans* any concrete programme, spearheaded by a seemingly tireless campaigner of Trinamool Congress leader Mamata Banerjee. Her mercurial antecedents of quitting central ministership twice as NDA partner and aligning with the state Congress, rather late in the day, with Ajit Panja keeping out, could not have presented the visage of a viable alternative to the time-tested Left Front seeking a sixth term in office. The incumbent Chief Minister Buddhadev Bhattachariya with his simple middle class living habits and a newly grown rapport with the business community proved more than a match for Mamata. Besides, the better showing of the CPI (M) and its other left front allies in the crucial Calcutta constituencies has been put down to an underperformance by the Trinamool municipal office-bearers who had made a mess of their new-found civic responsibility to serve people.

What is significant about the post-poll reaction of the vanquished Mamata is her resignation from party leadership accepting the blame for the electoral debacle in good grace. This amounts to bowing down to the verdict of the people that she otherwise considers as the outcome of a massive rigging resorted to by the left front government.

With the Congress and its allies now headed to form governments in Kerala, Assam, the Pondicherry and Tamil Nadu, the BJP-led coalition at the centre is bound to be under pressure from as many as 10 Congress-led state governments in the Indian Union. BJP's fundamentalist card seems to have been overplayed.

End of India's nuclear thunder

Collusion with nuclear offence

PRAFUL BIDWAI
writes from New Delhi

WHAT could be a more sour irony than India's exuberant support for President Bush's "missile defence" and that too on the third anniversary of Pokharan-III?

New Delhi "out-Blaired" even Tony Blair. It rushed to welcome Mr Bush's "Star Wars" before the US's Western allies. What it supports is not some noble peace project, but US pursuit of global domination.

This is abject surrender of Indian sovereignty. Where does it leave the best conceivable argument for the Indian Bomb? Bomb supporters had said nuclearisation would expand India's room for manoeuvre in the international arena, itself marked by great inequalities. Nuclear weapons might extract huge economic and social costs, but Nuclear India, they said, would stand up even to mighty America.

Today, that argument stands demolished. India isn't standing up, but downbefore the Power most responsible for skewing the world order.

Support for "Star Wars" is far, far worse than virtually anything New Delhi has done in the international arena, including signing the unequal World Trade Organisation agreement in 1995. History will judge

India harshly for reversing its role as a nuclear disarmament advocate.

Why is "missile defence" (MD) bad for globaland Indiansecurity? MD is America's strategy to acquire decisive superiority over its adversaries by shooting down their nuclear missiles. This super-sophisticated technologywith capabilities in space, land, air and seawill need highly accurate radars, satellites and hundreds of "kill" "madcap" missile defence.

What is demanded of MD is "highly effective" 360-degree 24-hour protection. This is like being asked to stay bone-dry under a tropical thundershower with a leaky umbrella.

Unlike in conventional conflict, the advantage in MD lies overwhelmingly with the attacker. He can act any time, any place, from any angle. He can "fool" with decoysballoons that "look" like warheads. He can make real war-heads undetectable, or take other "counter-measures."

To make MD work will need a Manhattan Project-II. What makes it positively *dangerous* is the adversary's response: make more and more missiles so that some will penetrate the defender's "shield". Thus, MD will provoke a *runaway arms race*.

Worse, it could make nuclear war likelier. It will destabilise "security" based on balance of terror and produce *nuclear anarchy*. That's precisely why the US and the former USSR, exhausted in the Cold War, signed the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Mis-

Reagan wanted "Star Wars" to make nuclear weapons "impotent and obsolete". Mr Bush wants thousands of nukes.

Mr Bush isn't proposing a "new security order" based on freedom from mass destruction. Rather, he will rely on nuclear arms *backed* by missile "defences". He isn't about to jettison the NPT or CTBT for better, more equal, treaties. Rather, he wants to widen strategic asymmetries, especially between America and China.

India's MD apologists advance numerous rationalisations. Some can be dismissed as frivolouse.g. there has been no shift in India's stand, or that Mr Bush has replaced

missiles which intercept the adversary's weapons.

The technology isn't in place yet. Many American scientists believe MD is a techno-fantasy, not "inevitability". The satellites and sensors are still undeveloped.

The technology of intercepting "enemy" missiles is at a primitive stage of evolution. It involves hitting a bullet travelling at 25,000 kmph with another bullet travelling at the same speed, with high chances of a miss.

Nineteen interceptor tests are planned. Just three have taken place. Two failed and the third's results were "cooked".

That's why MD has been called

mistaken. India *risks losing credibility* by retreating from disarmament and supporting MD. It will be seen by most countries of the world as a dangerous plan's "collaborator".

For another, India will court the hostility of China which rightly sees itself as MD's principal target.

India's benefits will be meagre or intangible. Most sanctions have already been lifted. Even if India is recognised as a nuclear power, this will only undo the damage from Pokharan-II. India will have run a lot to remain in the same place. This is no "benefit".

As for Kashmir, the US won't go beyond general, vague principles such as non-violation of the LoC,

halt to cross-border militancy, etc. It won't give up insisting on a mediated solution involving Pakistan. Washington won't wantonly lose Pakistan as a friendly power.

Alliance with the US is no guarantee of strong support for the ally's concerns. The US bullies its own allies. Nor is America terribly popular or respected, as its loss of the UN Human Rights Commission seat shows.

India cannot technologically benefit from MD because it has no place in "theatre missile defence". The US plans TMDs in East Asia, Europe and the Middle East, but not South Asia. Its present demonology doesn't merit it.

Support for MD won't make India a world "player". India will remain a "card". But we will have courted China's enmity and provoked an arms race we can ill-afford, and also spoiled relations with Iran, Iraq and North Korea.

India's MD collaboration will generate terrible suspicions of joint India-US domination of the neighbourhood. Above all, it will damage the cause of global disarmamentin which India's true security lies.

A fundamental right to cheat?



ALMAS ZAKIUDDIN

IN Japan, students kill themselves. In Bangladesh, they try to kill others.

Don't get me wrong. I am not condoning suicide. Although the number of cases of students killing themselves in Japan is miniscule compared to the number of students who go violent in Bangladesh, in both instances over the issue of examinations, I do believe that suicide is a terrible act and not to be recommended under any circumstances.

What I wonder, however, is why there is such a difference. I mean, it cannot be denied that the Japanese way, though no less tragic than the mode adopted in Bangladesh, is less dangerous by miles. In a strange sort of way, it is also somewhat noble. If you fail, you have only yourself to blame.

True, the Japanese social system is severe. Students who kill themselves must be driven to it by a culture that does not accept failure easily. Young people are pushed into doing better and better, into achieving the impossible, exclaiming until there is no place left to go. Most students bear the pressure quite well, but some, obviously the more vulnerable, cave in. Such unrelenting social standards are frightening, to say the least.

But what kind of standards push young people into adopting unfair means in examinations *en masse*? I mean, literally in the thousands. What kind of standards push young people into resisting attempts to be caught, penalised or even rebuked?

This week's events in the hundreds of HSC examination centres across the country are known to all. There have been scenes reminiscent of the West Bank and Gaza right here in the towns and cities of Bangladesh. Students have fought pitched battles with police and other law enforcement heavyweights, injuring administrators, holding principals and teachers hostage, trashing

IF YOU ASK ME

It isn't difficult to predict what will happen if we accept cheating as a by product of reality. The numbers of cheaters will continue to increase. The level of violence will also increase. More police, more arms, more resistance, more violence. The demand to be allowed to cheat in peace will become more and more entrenched.

property, even setting up road blocks to disrupt traffic on highways.

What have they been fighting for? The answer to this question should make us all hang our heads in shame.

Yes, of course, cheating in examinations is not a new or even original phenomenon. Nor, for that matter, is it confined to Bangladesh. Did you know, for instance, that Senator Edward Kennedy was once caught cheating during an examination at Harvard? The matter, which was duly hushed up no doubt because of his family connections, came to light when he began running for office, way back in the 1960s, if I recall correctly. He apparently did not deny it, and that, together with the Kennedy name and charm, won the day.

Other well-known people, like Winston Churchill, for instance, failed examinations in their time but (not being Japanese or Bangladeshi), they fortunately were not motivated to use violence as a resort.

Jokes aside, where does the deep-rooted conviction that cheating is a right, emerge from? Even if one could appreciate the pressure on students to cheat, what would one offer as a justifiable reason for the fact that so many thousands of adults are part of the shameful act as well?

It is public knowledge that guardians encourage and often actively take part in the planning and strategies of cheating. Then, on the examination days these guardians are to be found engaged in a wide range of dubious activities, all aimed at enabling their offspring to adopt unfair and unethical tactics in order to get through their exams. There are also other adults, 'suppliers' as they are called, who exploit cheating as a business, providing contraband material that can be easily concealed. Some business houses depend entirely on the 'seasonal' cheating business, dreaming up new ways of copying that prospective examinees lap up, at a price.

No one seems to worry about

what people will say. Correct me if I am wrong, but was there a time when cheating was a shameful thing to do?

I was once caught with a piece of contraband, a geometry theorem, in my possession during a class test at Vigarunnisa Noon School, way back in the mid 1950s. It was such a serious offence to have had it on my person, that even the fact that the test was over and I had not used that particular theorem in my answers, did not count. The rest of that week was a nightmare for me. My classmates shunned me. My parents gated me. The principal and board of governors had me in before them and lectured me. I was in fear of being expelled, I kid you not.

Nowadays, my tale of woe would be sure to evoke hoots of laughter. Do you call that cheating, is what students of today would tell me. A young colleague at The Daily Star, who has just taken her Masters examination, for instance, tells me how difficult it was for her to concentrate during her exams because of the ingenious ways in which others around her proceeded to cheat.

"It was almost too interesting to miss!" she exclaims, her voice shaking in horror. Unfortunately, most people are far from being horrified. Many are becoming blasé about it. They see it as a direct reflection of our times and hence not their problem.

So what if students cheat in exams? Look at the rest of the country, they say. Look at all the corruption, the deceit, the cheating, the stealing, the looting. How can we blame young people, when adults are doing not just the same thing, but worse?

True, of course. Adults have made cheating into an art form, a profitable business, a reality. One does not have to be a World Bank expert to be able to discern the level of corruption in this society, the not-so-hidden networks of power and money, greed and fraud. From the moment one lands at ZIA airport, it is obvious. The touts gaping, the policemen slinking, the taxi drivers

grimacing. If one is not fortunate enough to possess a private car, one is at the mercy of any number of sharks who will proceed to waylay and obstruct one's passage in every possible way, until they have extracted a price.

And the rest of the country is not all that different. Everywhere one looks, the rot is spreading. The politicians, bureaucrats, business, the private sector, autonomous bodies, gangsters, criminals, RAJUK, DESA, DCC, the ministry of Environment and Forests, the textbook defrauders, the bank defaulters, the toll collectors the

petty policeman on the corner, the mastaan, the pimp and encroachers on the river Buriganga. The list could go on.

I could bore you to tears with a litany of corruption and extortion in Bangladesh, backing it up with a narrative of decaying social standards, the exploitation of the weak and vulnerable, the absence of old world values, the erosion of the great moral backbone, the dearth of teachers, the shortage of role models, and so on.

The allegation that cheating in examinations is linked to a decaying political, moral and social order

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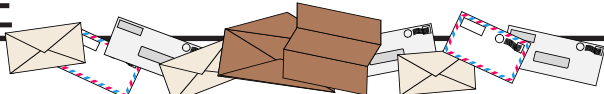
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Dump yard!

A dead cow floating on the river Buriganga, reveals how the lifeline of Dhaka is being choked and turned into a veritable dump yard. People use this polluted water for personal and household purposes. No wonder diseases like diarrhoea, cholera, dysentery are rampant in the country. It also seems that we have taken up a mission to destroy this major waterway in every possible way and it's no use trying to attract the attention of the authority and the civil body to try and save it. We always wait till disaster has struck.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE



Ram Rajya

This is in reference to the letter written by "A True Indian" (April 23). At first glance, I wasn't sure whether this letter should be taken seriously or as a joke, the idea that Bangladesh might also be in occupation of Indian lands is a notion too ridiculous to entertain! We are not being able to assert our rights over the lands which are legally ours, let alone someone else's.

The so-called 'brutality' shown by the Bangladeshi villagers and the BDR is known as 'self-defense' in layman's terms. It is the accumulation of a grievance of being trampled upon by the BSF for 30 years, of having near and dear ones killed, of not being able to see the dead relatives' faces, not to observe their last rites, of having their crops cut and taken away, of having their cattle carried away, the list goes on. The fact that the villagers assisted the BDR in repulsing the BSF attack provide us enough reasons to believe that there is more than that

meets the eye here.

The allegation of Bangladeshis infiltrating into India is a myth surpassed only by that of the plebiscite that will take place in Kashmir. Because despite repeated attempts, the Indian government has not been able to isolate a single Bangladeshi illegally residing in that country. As for changing Bangladesh's name to East Afghanistan or East Taliban, we can do that too, once India has changed its name from the so-called 'secular India' to 'Ram Rajya'.

Maksum Sattar
Dhaka

Naimur's captaincy

Although you are absolutely right in pointing out that it is far too early to call for Naimur Rahman's head as captain of the Bangladesh cricket team, it is vital that the BCB reconsiders its policy vis-à-vis captaincy.

Including a player in the team just because he is the captain, is a rather weak argument in favour of Naimur Rahman's inclusion. His one-day

performance was appalling to say the least, and Trevor Chappell or the BCB should now evaluate whether he adds any value to the team in light of the recently concluded Zimbabwe tour.

Naimur Rahman's batting did not strengthen our extremely inconsistent batting line-up, and his bowling certainly did not give our attack any edge over Zimbabwe. His six wicket haul in the Test against India should be seen for what it was: a very sweet stroke of luck coupled with friendly Indian batting.

At this stage of infancy, Bangladesh cricket cannot afford to hold on to players on the merit of one Test. If his subsequent performances have been poor, then his inclusion should definitely be debated. Naimur Rahman is not so good a player, that he cannot be dropped from the side.

Shubha Rahman Khan
London, UK, on e-mail

"Terrific BTV news"

I endorse the views expressed in the

letter "Terrific BTV News" (May 1). Occasionally, I too tune into the news on BTV out of curiosity and I must express my shock at the utter falsehoods and outright propaganda dished out by the state-run TV media.

The government is lily-white while the opposition are blackguards—that is how the scenario is depicted.

What surprises me more is that some well-educated persons, besides their regular professions, also opt to act as newscasters of the BTV. These people have almost become the shade and shadow of Joseph Paul Goebbels, the infamous Nazi minister for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda. The latter mastered the art of telling lies 'with such conviction, vehemence and fanaticism' that they appeared to be true. He emphatically stated that a lie repeated a hundred times turns into a truth.

It appears that our programmers and newscasters have swallowed the 'Goebbelsian' concept hook, line and sinker.

Robert Kader
Mehdibagh, Chittagong

Ramna Park

Ramna Park is situated in the heart of the capital city. Everyday, people in the thousands come here to breathe fresh air. It is, therefore, very essential to maintain the park properly.

Unfortunately, the park authority is neglecting their duty. Often garbage remains strewn all over the park and is not cleared regularly. During this year's Pahela Baisakh, a large number of shops were allowed to set up in the park premises. These shops did a roaring business throughout the day by selling food-stuffs, green coconuts, banana, chat, muri, rice, fish and other items. These shops also accumulated a huge quantity of 'garbage' all over the park and the park authorities were not able to clear the rubbish for days. Even after ten days, I found garbage scattered in many areas of the park. These shops have also destroyed many "flower beds"

including some branches of large/small trees.

The park authority should take necessary steps to keep the park clean. The supervisors should ensure that all the staff do their job properly otherwise disciplinary action should be taken against the defaulters. In future no shop should be allowed to be set up within the park premises during Pahela Baisakh or any other occasions. The authorities should install public toilets within the park area and keep them hygienic.

H Rahmana
Dhaka

Access denied

I am a resident of New DOHS (Defence Officers Housing Society), Mahakhali, Dhaka. This area happens to be owned by the retired defence officers who have built multi-storied flats, rented out to civilians at quite high rates. The assumed housing society can be termed as a perfect commercial area because if not all, every alter-

nate flat has one or more offices in them. These offices are of different categories, with foreign buying houses getting the priority.

There are NGOs, offices of multinational companies, computer centres, consulting firms, boutiques, tailors, courier services and others. There are flats, which even enjoys the opportunity and audacity of carrying on antisocial activities. I have no objection to all these or rather my objection would perhaps be my audacity to interfere in the matter of those who are identified as people of distinction in society.

However in recent days, a road has been constructed connecting New DOHS with Old DOHS through cantonment and the road is restricted to civilians, even for the residents of DOHS. I would like to ask the officers of the cantonment board whether they had bought the land and constructed this road from their own pockets. Even if so, doesn't that money come from the revenue paid by us, the citizens of the

country?

What gives them the right to restrict use of a road or a facility? If the officers can have the right to enjoy the benefit of renting their flats to the civilians then they should definitely allow the dwellers to enjoy the minimum facility available. What disaster would occur if this road was opened to DOHS residents when there is no such restriction even in using the main roads passing through the cantonment? We have to pay for the security services and all other maintenance services of DOHS, then why are we deprived of its facilities?

If it is a question of security, I hope the officers of the cantonment board will admit that our lives are no less valuable than theirs and there shouldn't be any distinction between anyone.

One of the tenants
New DOHS, Dhaka

cannot be dismissed. I am not trying to do so. But so what if it is? Shall we all pretend that it is not our fault? And that it will go away one day?

It isn't difficult to predict what will happen if we accept cheating as a by product of reality. The numbers of cheaters will continue to increase. The level of violence will also increase. More police, more arms, more resistance, more violence. The demand to be allowed to cheat in peace will become more and more entrenched. Cheating is a right: Until the rest of the country cleans up its act, we, the students, will continue to use whatever means we can adopt, to get ourselves that piece of paper that says we are qualified.

Are we prepared for a day when cheating becomes a fundamental right?