

SUNDAY POUCH

JS body moves to save Dhaka *We want to see action*

THE recommendations made by the parliamentary standing committee on forests and environment regarding protecting the capital from further decline should make the powers that be sit up and take notice. That Dhaka has been in a state of gradual regression from an environmental point of view is a dark reality we have lately lived with. Now that the parliamentary committee has decided to act, follow-up action is called for. Basically, the recommendations centre on the need for improvements in the drainage system and a streamlining of road traffic. The imperative, as can be gauged from the concerns expressed by lawmakers, is for the city to have 40 per cent of its total 166 sq. km. area given over to a drainage catchment system.

That is important. But such moves can only be rendered meaningful if and when steps such as a clean water act are taken by the Jatiyo Sangsad. These moves ought to have come earlier when the first indications of the city's drainage system disappearing through a filling in of wetlands and other water bodies in the interest of so-called urban development began to be noticed. By now, considerable damage has been done to the city's environment. A brief spell of rain is enough to inundate major parts of Dhaka. It was not like this in the 1960s and 1970s, even up to the mid-1980s. And, on top of that, consider that other major predicament: as a lawmaker has pointed out, 85 per cent of roads in Dhaka will be impossible to negotiate by 2020. That is only too obvious, given the traffic related difficulties citizens go through currently.

Serious, well-formulated thoughts must now be given to a streamlining of plans to recover a nearly lost city. With too many organisations responsible for guaranteeing a smooth flow of services to citizens, gridlock has naturally been the consequence. Which is why policies should now be geared to an integration of services and their carrying out through a unified structure. Implementation of the JS body's recommendations will depend on the kind of operational mechanism that is put in place.

Rehab Fair revelations

Unauthorised projects plentiful

IT appears that we could never lift ourselves above controversies even on well-meaning occasions. One such event has been the mega fair organized by the Real Estate and Housing Association of Bangladesh (REHAB) that began on Thursday. On display were the profiles of 235 unauthorised projects.

The fair was inaugurated the very day the High Court directed REHAB not to allow companies, having unauthorised housing projects, to participate in its event. The fact that the fair was opened by the concerned state minister in presence of chairman of Rajdhani Unayan Kartipakkha (RAJUK) makes it more perturbing.

The High Court passed an order on a writ petition filed by a number of environmental associations seeking a directive to the government to implement the court's ruling of June 8 that had declared 77 housing projects illegal in and around Dhaka. Interestingly, out of 263 housing projects taking part in the four-day fair only 28 has approval from Rajuk.

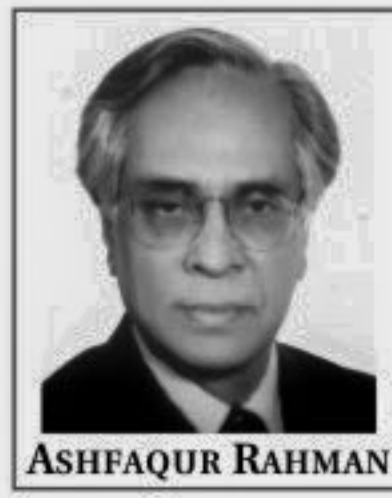
We need more housing for an increasing urban population in our big cities. Realtors are in operation to address the need. Over the last couple of decades real estate business has thrived. Because their business is property-centered this has led corrupt elements to creep into the trade.

Many real estate companies have been accused of resorting to illegal publicity and selling of lands without prior approval of the authorities concerned. Grabbing of khas lands and encroachments on private lands have been going on without let-up. Many projects do not abide by the building codes. Customers are made to suffer due to delay in handing over of flats or in many cases left deceived altogether.

The government has legislations and rules in place for the real estate industry to operate in a disciplined manner. We realise that many unauthorised projects owe their existence to the limited capacity and cumbersome procedure of the approving authorities.

This also breeds corruption. All in all, the fair has basically highlighted an overarching need to streamline the

Is IMF still pertinent?



ASHFAQUR RAHMAN

MORE than sixty-five years back the world created an institution, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), intended among other things

to help countries who needed financial loans to act against cyclical economic downturns.

Today, most countries do not like to use the Fund except as a last resort. It is therefore hardly utilised, even though the world today faces one of the severest economic downturns in history.

So what is the relevance of IMF now? In a few days, world leaders working through the institution, will select a new managing director to replace Mr. Dominique Strauss Kahn, who resigned to face sexual assault charges against him in a New York court. There is much discussion and lobbying around the world as to who will take his place. There is also great interest in making IMF relevant to the needs of the time and the countries around the world.

Two candidates have so far emerged to take on this coveted post. One of them is Ms. Christine Lagarde, who is presently the French finance minister. The other is the Governor of the Central Bank of Mexico, Mr. Augustin Carstens. He is supported by Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS countries). Both are strong candidates and possess different but exceptional qualities. Either one can bring far-reaching changes to this important institution.

The selection of any one of the two candidates would speak volumes about what likely changes the IMF will undergo in the future under his/her stewardship. Lagarde is likely to support the status quo in IMF policies, while Carstens will bring in changes in IMF reflecting the reality that obtains in the world today.

But, strictly speaking, what is wrong with the IMF? We all know that there are matters that need close attention of the policy makers, including addressing the imbalances that plague the institution.

IMF is over sixty years old. The world in the days of the past and the world now are radically different. Countries in Asia and Latin America in those days were poor. But now most of them have developed. So these countries are in a position to challenge Europe and even the US who had once economically

dominated the post-war world.

Another matter which is of critical consideration for the countries that want to draw loans from the IMF is that they must regard the institution as their own. Unless they think it to be so, these countries are unlikely to "go to the IMF" for help.

Therefore, the changes required in IMF in order to make it acceptable, involves what an eminent economist would say is all about "chairs and shares."

"Chairs" refer to seats in the Executive Board of the IMF and "shares" to the percentage of total quotas that determine voting power in the Fund.

At present, both of these reflect the world of the 1940's when Europeans

Moreover, the change in number of seats would then allow a reduction in the size of the Executive Board. It would at the same time increase the size of basic votes, which would benefit small countries like Bangladesh.

The IMF, in order to be effective and legitimate, must therefore at least be seen to be representing the interests of all its 187 member countries. Unlike the United Nations General Assembly, where each country has one vote, decision making in IMF is designed to reflect the position of each member country in the global economy.

Fearing a backlash, the IMF in March of this year started to perfunctorily look into reforms, based on 2008 recommendations on quota and voice changes in

of IMF BRICS countries, in spite of the fact that Europe and the US between them have 50% of the votes in the IMF Board.

The second fundamental reform of the IMF relates to the level of lending by the Fund in times of crisis. There are two types of changes required. First is changing the principle of lending and second the sums available to be lent.

In the first case, lending could be due to two reasons. Some countries wish to borrow from the IMF as a defensive mechanism, because of events elsewhere.

There are others countries that need to borrow because of their own policy inadequacies. Today, countries cannot borrow on their own volition when there is a shortage of foreign exchange, through no fault of their own.

Reform in the IMF should enable countries that have to go to the Fund, because of no fault of their own, to borrow large sums without all the complications and degradations of conditionality.

But look at Greece, Ireland and Portugal today, who need urgent financial bailout. Even before they are given any access to IMF loans they have been burdened with austerity programmes imposed by the IMF. Such conditions are throttling the economies in question. Reforms in the IMF are therefore urgent and necessary.

The post of IMF managing director is undoubtedly important. The person is both the chairperson of IMF Executive Board and also head of the IMF staff. The Board consists of 24 executive directors. Theoretically, they can nominate any national from any of the Fund's 187 member countries to this post. But in reality the directors select the managing director and appoint him by consensus. This time too we should expect the same to happen.

If the practice of appointing only a European as the managing director of the IMF is broken this time, a Bangladeshi can also aspire for this post in the future.

Is anyone thinking about this position in five years time?

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numerically dominated the finances of the world. US was also the only country then under this arrangement that was allowed to yield veto power.

But today, if the IMF undergoes reforms, the European Union (27 countries) would get only a single directorship in the Executive Board. It would also enjoy the same voting power as the US and the latter would also not retain its accompanying veto power.

So once these changes take place, there would be substantial increase in both chairs and shares for Asia. Asian countries are today grossly under-represented. China for example will be able to increase its share of votes from 2.9% to almost 6%.

the institution. This had been an ad-hoc exercise with an increase of quota for a group of dynamic, emerging market countries. Measures were also taken to enhance the voice of low-income countries in the IMF.

But are these changes enough? Many countries do not think so.

For instance, look at the European Union. It represents 24% of the global economy. But Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) together make up 21% of the world GDP. Yet, the Europeans have 32% of the votes in the IMF, while the BRICS countries have 11%.

Thus, the BRICS deplore Europe's lock on the top job of managing director

UGC chairman with technology forte

LUTFOR RAHMAN

AFTER a long time, a UGC chairman with science background has been appointed. Congratulations to the new Chairman, Professor Dr. A.K. Azad Chowdhury, who is not only an academic scientist but was also vice-chancellor of Dhaka University. Moreover, he was associated with the department of his discipline in one of the big and well-reputed private universities in Dhaka. As such, he is well aware of the state of science education in public as well as private universities.

The number of universities in the country is around 100 -- including public, private, national, international, and women's universities. Most of the universities have science-technology and engineering faculties that are mainly composed of modern and attractive subjects like Information and Communication Technology (ICT); Information and Technology Network (ITN); Electronics and Telecommunication Engineering (ETE); Electrical and Electronic Engineering (EEE); Computer Science and Engineering (CSE); Biotechnology; Pharmacy; Mechanical, Civil, Textile Engineering; and Architecture.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) is the apex body for the universities and almost all activities are carried out on the guidelines or instructions of UGC. Previously, the subjects mentioned were taught in the higher technical institutes like BUET or BITs. Science-based technology was not given priority in

selection of the UGC chairman and members.

Every university faces some internal, local, regional and external problems. The post of vice-chancellor is a very responsible and challenging one. The appointment letter of VC is therefore issued by order of the president of the country on certain terms and conditions -- such as monthly salaries, accommodation, transport facilities etc. -- that the VC is supposed to enjoy during his tenure of four years. But the reality is something else. VCs of some private universities don't get salaries for months.

The universities having science and technology faculties must have scientifically literate VC or pro-VC. Or the science-technology and engineering faculties should be shifted to science-based technology universities.

Sometimes partial or fraction of the due is paid. The UGC chairman is expected to look into the matter seriously.

There is also a bright example in front of us that was created due to inspection by the high-powered committee formed for the private universities in 2004. On the basis of the committee report, affiliation of eight private universities was cancelled. Among them, four are located far from the capital, two run under women supervision, and the VCs or chairmen of the governing body of four universities are scientists or engineers.

BGC Trust University is located in a rural area in Chittagong and its founder-chairman is a senior engineer. The founder of the Comilla University is an eminent academic scientist and former chairman of the UGC. The founder and vice-chancellor of Amban University is a highly qualified senior engineer. The founder-VC of Pundra University of Science and Technology (PUST), located in a village of North Bengal, is a globally accepted academic scientist.

The most interesting point to note is that none of the members of the inspection team, at least in the case of PUST, is

scientifically literate nor technologically qualified enough to understand the scientific and technological gaps created due to remoteness.

The concept of establishing an ICT-based university in a remote area came from Ms. Judy Johnson, the then Secretary of the Commonwealth Science Council (CSC) of Commonwealth Secretariat, London. She visited the area in connection with empowering the women scientists, technologists and researchers of Bangladesh. She helped to empower 112 women scientist profes-

sionals of Bangladesh with ICT under auspices of CSC as Bangladesh is a member of the Commonwealth.

The present UGC chairman is highly qualified and experienced in academic, industrial and research fields at home and abroad. He is capable of raising the success stories of technology in Bangladesh. He can also raise the immediate requirements of Bangladesh in Unesco, Commonwealth, IDRC, ICSU, TWAS etc., to fill the gap between the technologically developed countries and developing countries like Bangladesh.

Those should be one of the main jobs of the UGC chairman, along with attending international scientific events organised by related donor agencies. Through participation in such events he can create a prestigious position of Bangladesh in the international arena.

Bangladesh is rich in natural and mineral resources but the people are poor. The reasons for the poverty have been identified as lack of awareness among common people, and the lack of coordination among scientists, technologists, researchers, academics and policy makers. The ministry of higher education and UGC should utilise their potential to give shape to the universities, and the UGC must have 50% scientists/technologists as members.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

June 19

1807 Admiral Dmitry Senyavin destroys the Ottoman fleet in the Battle of Athos.

1821 Decisive defeat of the Philikí Etaireía by the Ottomans at Drága^{ani} (in Wallachia).

1910 The first Father's Day is celebrated in Spokane, Washington.

1943 Race riots occur in Beaumont, Texas.

1944 World War II: First day of the Battle of the Philippine Sea.

1961 Kuwait declares independence from the United Kingdom.

1966 Shiv Sena a political party in India is founded in Mumbai.

1978 Garfield appears in his first comic strip.

1982 In one of the first militant attacks by Hezbollah, David S. Dodge, president of the American University in Beirut, is kidnapped.