

by Tom Aston

Tough recent arms agreements have been heralded as the end of the Cold War, a dedicated group of peace campaigners in Europe, Australia and the United States is convinced the arms race is continuing unabated and that the quiet economic war waged by the North against the South is intensifying. Some of them have been imprisoned for causing serious damage to nuclear missiles and military jets.

Our Responsibility

Professor Yunus of Gramin Bank fame, in a recent address to the Rotary International in Dhaka, asked his audience as to what they individually and collectively were doing to make the ensuing polls free and fair. The question he asked his Rotary audience needs to be asked of us all. What about our responsibility as citizens, as members of groups, unions and societies, as workers, business leaders, as intellectuals and, most importantly, as members of various political parties?

Before we can actually hold a free and fair election, we must create an environment for it. By this we mean developing the right attitude towards public verdict. The critical factor here is our willingness to accept defeat in the election. The attitude that "you are right as long as you agree with me" gets translated into "the public is right only if they elect me". And of course, we so love the public that we cannot let them make mistakes. It is natural for political parties and candidates to want to win. But the supreme test of our respect for public opinion is to accept those that go against us. It is our incapacity to accept defeat that leads to vitiated polls.

Why are we so afraid of a negative verdict? Is it because public service is not our motive in seeking public positions? Is it because an elected position is a screen that hides our other activities? Or is it because we invest too much in the process of election and losing becomes a financial catastrophe and winning is the only option for its recovery?

There are many factors — such as mass poverty, widespread illiteracy, traditional hold of powerful families, threat of violence, rural debt, etc — that mitigate against the holding of a free and fair election. But none of these problems can be solved before the February polls. But the right attitude — meaning openness to accept public verdict, especially negative — can be developed within the next few weeks. Here lies one of the tasks for all of us that Professor Yunus was referring to.

However the main responsibility in this regard lies with all the political parties, especially upon the leading alliances and more particularly upon the two leading parties within them. They must set the tone. Far more important than winning this election is the task of establishing election as an institution and balloting as a process of selecting our leaders. Once the institution is well entrenched, elections will recur and then one can win, if not this one, then the next.

Remember that a forced victory will be a resented one, and public resentment is the worst legacy that any political party can have. Remember also that preventing opponents from voting, stuffing votes and snatching ballot boxes did not get any regime, at any time, very far. We call upon all political parties, especially the leading ones to concentrate all their energies in building the institution of election and not so much in winning it. By doing so they will have performed the true role of political parties.

A Civic Problem

A letter from "Disgusted" in Friday's Daily Star complained about the dumping of rubbish in two vacant lots in front of a high-rise residential building in Kamal Ataturk Avenue. "Disgusted" is not alone. As Dhaka has grown from a small provincial town into a national capital the infrastructure of the city has failed to keep pace, and planning has collapsed under the weight of the rapidly growing population. Rubbish disposal has been one of the casualties.

Garbage is not as glamorous as the construction of giant bridges, boosting energy, speeding up industrialisation or increasing of agricultural yields. But it cannot be ignored. Heaps of dirt and filth facilitate the spread of disease, impede pedestrians and traffic and lower the quality of life. The last point is no mere matter of cosmetics: public squalor reinforces private selfishness and feelings of lack of communal concern.

For low-lying Bangladesh there is an even greater danger. Rubbish that chokes drains and sewers increases the chances of flooding, turning even a comparatively moderate downpour into a potential hazard.

As with so many problems facing our country, there is no simple solution. It needs to be attacked on several fronts. Existing services need to be improved. There are already many sweepers and inspectors, and the evidence of our eyes — and noses — suggests that their performance could be improved.

Urban authorities should make an effort to identify more appropriate spots for dumps and, where possible, collect garbage regularly. More serious efforts must be made to find out whether there are possibilities for financing rubbish disposal, at least in part, by recycling, land reclamation or incineration.

On a larger level, a realistic plan for improving drains also needs to be drawn up — not a grandiose blueprint that has no chance of implementation but practical, affordable proposals.

The long-term answer, however, cannot be left to government alone. A civic consciousness must be fostered so that people care about their environment, and are confident that when they take trouble to dispose of rubbish in the correct place, their neighbours will not sneak out and carry on with the old practices.

Such issues as garbage do not attract the manifesto-makers of the political parties, yet they affect all our lives. Pride in the nation is more than a debate about "isms", more than flags and symbols. It is about the way we live.

Rubbish disposal is too important to be left to the crows.

Rarely does an unarmed civilian cause over \$400,000 of damage to a US nuclear-capable fighter-bomber. Yet, on March 21 last year a British peace protester, Steve Hancock, 23, and his friend Mike Hutchinson, 35, cut through the perimeter fence of the US Air Force base at Upper Heyford outside Oxford, slipped into hangar, and, armed with household hammers, smashed the dials on the control panel of an F-111E fighter.

Says Hancock: "For us, F-111s are symbolically and militarily at the heart of the war being waged against the Third World. These warplanes were used to murder civilians in the bombing of Libya in 1986; these warplanes are capable of delivering nuclear and chemical bombs and missiles."

"Some F-111s from Upper Heyford are presently stationed near the Gulf. God forbid that they should ever be used in this current madness."

Now serving 15 months imprisonment for criminal damage, Hancock's resolve has only deepened. "The Cold War is not over, it is intensifying. Because the Cold War story we were sold and bought contained only chapters on East-West confrontation, and because we are secretly desperate to glimpse any glimmer of hope, the most deadly chapter and momentum of that war continue."

"Simply, the Third World War of the rich, northern nations against the poorer, southern nations rages on,

largely hidden from our sensitive sight."

On his arrest, Hancock quoted the Old Testament prophet Isaiah: "They shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation nor ever again prepare for war. Instead, everyone will sit underneath their own vine and fig-tree, and none shall make them afraid."

A poet and a committed Christian, he sees the prophet's vision as a crucial message to heal the world's current predicament.

"This biblical vision is not just beautiful poetry, it is a vital imperative if we are to survive on this planet with any humanity. In these two verses, issues of disarmament and economic justice are integrally bound together."

"If you want to control the resources of other lands for your own consumption, then be prepared for war. War truly is the health, the well-guarded and private health, of any nation that desires more than its fair share."

Hancock poured a bottle of his own blood on one of the F-111's bombs "to name these

machines as machines of death, to name war as the bloody business it is and to show how precious and precarious our lives are."

He also left a piece of the Berlin Wall "to celebrate the power of non-violent grassroots action and to affirm that some property, like Berlin Walls and nuclear weapons, gas chambers and concentration camps, has no right to exist."

Hancock was inspired to his protest by a US group called Swords into Ploughshares which in recent years has organised similar attacks on military hardware including inter-continental ballistic nuclear missiles.

Their faith is simple: "We all have the power to disarm". Their actions are aimed at symbolically hammering the swords of the 20th Century into ploughshares.

Says Hancock: "Our action is the 39th that has taken place around the world". The day before his action, three Swedes staged a solidarity protest against Sweden's involvement in the international arms trade by hammering a bazooka inside the Forenade Fabriksverken (FFV) ordnance factory in

Ekilstuna.

The Ploughshares movement began in the US on September 9 1980 when a group of peace activists known as the Ploughshares Eight entered the General Electric plant at King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, and, pouring their blood over two nose cones belonging to Mark 12A nuclear missiles, set about the casting with household hammers.

Since then over 100 people have been involved in similar protests in Australia, Europe and the US-targets have included Pershing II, Cruise and Trident II missiles, B-52 bombers and p-3 Orion anti-submarine aircraft.

Many protests are planned to coincide with Christian festivals such as Good Friday and Epiphany. The protesters do not try to avoid arrest since they believe they must take full responsibility for their actions. Prison sentences have ranged from 30 days to 18 years.

In 1986, 61-year-old housewife Jean Gump was sentenced to six years in prison for hammering on the lid of a Minuteman nuclear missile silo controlled by Whiteman Air

Force base near Holden, Missouri.

A year later her husband Joe asked Judge Howard Sachs "for the harshest sentence that it is your power to give" for hammering another Minuteman silo on August 5, the 42nd anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima in Japan. He received 30 months.

On June 2, 1987, Katya Komisaruk, a San Francisco peace activist, entered Vandenberg US Air Force base, California, and, using a hammer and crowbar, set about a \$1 million NAVSTAR computer satellite control system used for guiding nuclear missiles. She was sentenced to five years in prison for sabotage. The judge ordered her to pay \$500,000 restitution because he had heard a book or a film might be based on her action.

On December 28, 1987, the feast of the Holy Innocents — a day chosen to remember children who die from war and hunger — three protesters boarded the USS Leftwich while it was anchored in Sydney harbour, Australia. They hammered on a Tomahawk Cruise missile

launcher before being escorted off the ship without charge.

On January 1, 1989, Kees Koning, a priest and ex-army chaplain, entered the Woensdrecht airbase in Holland with Co van Melle, a doctor, and began hammering NF-5B fighters they believed were for export to Turkey for use against Kurdish separatists. They were sentenced to eight and seven months in prison respectively for trespass, sabotage and causing \$350,000 damage.

Says a statement by the Ploughshares Eight: "Our hope has been to encourage personal and international disarmament by meeting the spirit of violence, greed and fear with one of trust, vulnerability and love in the tradition of active nonviolence or truth-force."

"The truths we have tried to communicate are that the arms race... is already killing the poor, especially children, and destroying the environment; that the real goal of the arms race is the control of the resources of the Third World."

They are sceptical that recent arms agreements can end the arms race. As the group's Grassroots Disarmament Treaty says: "We put our hope, not in leaders and the military, but in the love and life and non-violent resistance of ordinary people". — GEMINI NEWS

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The Albanian time bomb threatening Europe with the bloodiest explosion yet against totalitarianism may have been diffused by the Marxist-Leninist regime's concessions to protesting students.

But from the moment the Albanian leadership decided to allow a legal opposition party, there were signs the bomb still had potential to explode with a vengeance.

Even then the only true test of the government's commitment to free, multi-party elections by February was thought to be whether Albanian writer Ismail Kadare could return to seek office.

The formation of the Democratic Party for students and intellectuals was in itself a dramatic advance, transforming overnight the miage of Albania as the last Stalinist fortress of Eastern Europe.

President Ramiz Alia could have ordered his army out from its barracks and down the wide, empty boulevard from the university campus, their Chinese-made Kalashnikov rifles blazing. Calling on the army might have spared Alia some inconvenience — or swept him and his regime to an early grave.

The sacking of a few more party dogmatists from the Politburo called for caution. And that is exactly what it got from prominent economist Gramoz Pashko, a man already tipped by some as the country's next leader.

But others maintain that writer Ismail Kadare is the only man who could count on massive popular support, as Albania's version of Veclav Havel. Kadare could be counted on to bring a swift end to one of the cruelest communist regimes, whose methods he has written about in his books.

Down forever would come the black, illuminated statue of Stalin.

"Smile youth, smile. The

Albania — State that Shrivelled Like Its Vegetables

by Petar Hadji-Ristic

The last of the Eastern European dominos is falling. Albania, long notorious for hardline policies that isolated it even from the rest of the Communist world, is in the midst of its own revolution.



primitive conditions; the food is barely edible and power intermittent. Not only do they struggle for survival, but they lack books and resources after decades locked behind borders closed to satisfy some ideology incomprehensible to them.

Children of officials had it better, got better examination marks and saw better futures. Some, like Alia's children, studied abroad.

Alia may have chose not to turn his guns on the students. But as a result he found another gun pointing at his

head with nowhere to turn but the outside world to keep the country from collapsing around him.

With the end of the Cold War, Albania had ceased to be of strategic importance. No country in Europe will now lend support to a regime that represses its citizens. Democracy and human rights are today the price even before the haggling.

A quick glance round its food shops illustrates the country may be on the verge of famine. There is little to buy. Potatoes are the size of ping-pong balls and the vegetables shrivelled.

Drought and falling production on the cooperatives are to blame. Money is being spent on importing grain for bread as cooperatives, like other enterprises, fail to meet targets.

The drought also cut electricity output, causing power cuts that slashed exports as factories were forced to shut down. Foreign currency reserves were drained importing electricity from as far away as Switzerland. One such power cut helped to usher in the Democratic Party by precipitating the student demonstrations.

Industry, mining and agriculture output are creaking on with inefficient equipment left from the times of friendship with the Chinese and the Russians.

Everything is being stifled by decades of lack of investment and the indolence of workers who have for years quietly voted against the

regime by bending to the job in a desultory way.

In 1990 there was a victory over the dogmatists. Incentives were allowed and experiment in economic reforms began. In the new year, all enterprises will be expected to be more autonomous and self-financing.

In 1990 too the misery of the peasants — just over half the Albanians work the land — was lifted slightly when private cottage plots were doubled and more cows and sheep were given out.

Even if reforms bear fruit, Albania will still find its back against the wall. The tiny Balkan country, the poorest in Europe, has the highest population growth and requires 50,000 new jobs a year to keep up.

Foreign investment and joint ventures, possible with new laws, would help. So would a preferential trade agreement with the European Economic Community sought by Alia. There are reports Albania has also signalled it wants to join the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

Foreign-owned hotels would be opened along its virgin beaches, until recently all but sealed off from the world. A highway linking the Greek and Yugoslav borders would also be built.

Just how long Albania remains the "museum of communism," as one expatriate called it, will depend on how quickly it sheds the vestiges of Stalinism, Maoism and the new spirit of Europe. — GEMINI NEWS

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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.

Readywears for women

Sir, I read your news item in Dhaka day by day about the fashion show of traditional Indonesian clothes sponsored by UNWA and organised by Dharma Wanita. It is always heartening to find coverage on women's interest. This is not often done by the news media apart from the district coverage of suicide or rape.

Women throughout the years have remained interested in fashion, hairstyle and make up. It is good to see that their interests have found a highlight in your paper. Women form a large percentage of your readers and their interests should not be ignored.

Referring to clothes and fashion shows, the ready-

made garments for women in the city sell for inflated prices. The boutiques in town sell "shalwar-kameez" and "kurta-pajama" sets at TK.500 and over. Although one admits that tailoring is fairly expensive, yet cheaper prices would have allowed people with modest means to buy ready-made wear to go to work and party with.

In western countries, more often than not, people wear clothes off the rack. To have designer clothes is a luxury. The trend in having fashionable ready-to-wear clothes in convenient shops would ease our problem of having to waste going to tailors.

Shanaz Khan, 30/A Naya Paltan, Dhaka.

Flats on easy terms

Sir, With the introduction of multi-storied apartment buildings by different developers, it was hoped that the problem of housing in the city would be resolved to some extent.

It is true that so many houses have been built under this system, but it fails to meet expectations of the

middle class for whom this scheme was originally envisaged. The reason being that the price quoted and payment schedule stipulated are beyond the means of the people whom it is supposed to provide a relief. Now, if the price at all couldn't be lessened for practical reasons then the flats thus being sold at a lease system, would at least be easier to buy had the term of lease been made for a longer period of time.

For instance, a flat sold by the housing societies these days cost between Taka 10 and 15 lakh, and that also payable within a period of one to two years maximum. Such amounts can only be paid by busi-

nessmen or people belonging to affluent group. Certainly those coming from a limited income group, cannot afford to buy them.

I would like to request both the developers and the authorities concerned through your esteemed columns to ensure an easy system for the greater number of deserving city dwellers.

Latifur Rahman and Shamsunnahar Bogra.

An appreciation

Sir, I was very pleased to see the inaugural issue of "The Daily Star." Its content, get-up and overall presentation carried the impression of an international newspaper. It is expected that "The Daily Star" will ultimately come-out as an impartial and courageous newspaper of this country. And it will contribute effectively in flourishing objective journalism in Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, on this auspicious occasion, I like to congratulate you, Mr. Editor and everyone in your newspaper for making it

possible to bring out "The Daily Star". I sincerely hope you will apply your experience and expertise to keep the standard of this newspaper high and people oriented.

M. Zahidul Haque Assistant Professor, Bangladesh Agricultural College, Dhaka

Admission to schools

Sir, This is the season of admission to schools. It is a very common sight to see a large crowd in front of a particular school in Dhaka, and it can be noticed the anxious parents standing outside for hours.

The point is that Dhaka is full of schools. Hardly do we pass a lane or a road where there is not a signboard telling about a school. Then why is there such a rush whenever it is time for admission tests?

The conclusion which we can draw from such a situation is that the kind of schools which can cater to the need of the middle class, are very few in number. There are quite a few schools which can be considered good in real terms

but they are absolutely out of the reach of the middle class, mainly in terms of fees and other expenses.

Something has to be done to resolve this state of crisis, otherwise very soon a time will come when children of average income group will have to do without any schooling.

Jahanara Begum Dhaka

Price-hike

Sir, The prices of essential commodities have been so hiked that the common people have begun gasping in a vicious circle of imminent poverty. They just can not have enough food, clothes, lodging and even treatment. Transport fare and the price of kerosene oil have also become double. The poor people's survival is at stake.

Much has been written in this regard in many a newspaper. But no remedy has been found as yet. So it is our earnest appeal to the authorities concerned to control prices of useful articles and let the common people live.

Md. Aamir Shamsi, Dhaka.