The Daily Star

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A Soviet Nuclear Nightmare

With increasing numbers of the Soviet Union's 15 constituent republics declaring independence, and demanding the right to have their own defence forces, one issue is coming to the forefront which could cause sleepless nights in every major capital of the world. That is the question of the USSR's nuclear arsenal. The scenario currently being envisaged is a nightmarish one, particularly if the various forces of nationalism persist with their demand to dismantle the present, centralised military structure and replace it with several, independent, republican ones.

Consider the bare facts first: the USSR currently possesses a total of 2,475 strategic launchers armed with 11,248 nuclear warheads. Of these, 1,392 launchers are land-based Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs), mostly in fixed, hardened silos; there are also, by 1987 count, 155 strategic bombers based on Soviet territory; then there are 928 Submarine Launched Ballistic Missiles, currently at sea or at port.

But that is not all. To that total, add 4,000 short-range missiles and bombs carried by tactical aircraft; then are thousands of nuclear shells, depth charges, demolition mines, deep sea mines, torpedoes and various other types of nuclear charges in the Soviet armed forces' inventory. The ICBMs and strategic bombers alone are said to be based on the territories of no less than four republics — Russia, Byelorussia, the Ukraine and Kazakhstan. Tactical weapons are known to be spread across the 15 republics wherever Soviet forces are garrisoned.

What happens when, and if, five, eight or all Soviet republics decide to become independent, and grab every piece of equipment and installations that are found on their respective territories? The result will be nuclear proliferation on a gigantic scale, with four "new" countries acquiring strategic nuclear capability overnight. The others will not only have tactical warheads and launch vehicles, many of them are also likely to have the technical know-how and equipment to produce bombs as well as missiles.

Given that there is a real chance of a civil war breaking out in the wake of the USSR's disintegration, such a massive nuclear arsenal slipping out of central control could have disastrous effect. Who can guarantee, for instance, that Armenia would not be tempted to fire off a few nuclear-tipped Scuds at Azerbaijan at some stage (or vice-versa)? On an even higher plane, is it really too outlandish to visualise a Kazakhstan, facing defeat at the hands of Yeltsin's Russia, holding the world to ransom by threatening to unleash ICBMs at New York or Tokyo ?

On a more realistic level, the existence of such a high number of weapons in so may hands would inevitably raise the prospect of some missiles and a great deal of technology finding their way to third countries (Iraq? Afghanistan? Iran?).

Given this scenario, Mikhail Gorbachev's call to maintain one, central defence structure stands out as a voice of sanity amid a cacophony of madness. Boris Yeltsin and other nationalist leaders should consider the nuclear issue with a clear, cool head and try to defuse the mega-bomb they are sitting on.

Case of Crumbling Tower

There was a disquieting news in yesterday's issue of this journal concerning the possible disruption of electricity supply due to damages being caused to power transmission towers by thieves stealing various parts and accessories. A disaster lies just round the corner if we do not take effective steps to prevent that which looks rather petty and small but has the potential of becoming a national crisis.

The story, according to a Power Development Board (PDB) press release, is that braces which are placed into each power transmission tower — pylon — to hold it together and make it strong to withstand storms and cyclones, are being stolen by petty thieves or organised gangs. When 30 to 50 braces, out of a total of 250-300 are stolen, the pylons become weak and collapse at the time of storms or high winds. Recently in Jagannathpur, near Bhairab, such an incident occurred prompting the PDB to issue the press release. The release also refers to theft of other equipment and accessories leading to huge losses on the part of the Power Board. The theft of the braces is of particular concern because the crime cannot be detected at once — in fact it can remain undetected for months if no strong wind should hit the area. Once a pylon collapses with high voltage transmission wire going down with it, the disaster can be tremendous in terms of loss of life and property, especially if it should happen near or inside a township.

The question is what effective steps can the PDB take to prevent such pilferage? Is permanent soldering of the braces an answer? Investigation should be launched as to where the thieves are selling the items that they are stealing. As for the braces, they would need to be melted and recast into something else if they are to be used differently. This process is expensive and therefore unlikely. The probable thing is that the braces are sold as it is. In that case it would be quite easy to find out who the potential buyers are. Police can take legal action against both the sellers and the buyers. Is it possible that PDB, unwittingly, is buying the same items back when they are repairing or replacing the stolen equipment? Allegations of the government being let down by its own employees have become so common that a possibility of inside connection in such sordid affairs cannot be ruled out.

With 42 per cent of so called 'system loss', which is a term used to cover up a lot of unsavory things including corruption, the PDB has rather an unenviable reputation. Now comes the story of the 'crumbling tower'. This is likely to erode their reputation further.

A serious effort by the PDB to restore discipline within its own ranks and a determined drive, with the help of the police, to stop the theft of its own property will help to restore part of PDB's lost image. A public awareness campaign about the dangers of stealing power line equipment may not be out of place. Is it possible to organise the people of the villages through which the power lines pass, to protect the pylons? After all there is nothing like the public protecting its own property.

Global Focus 'Has to be on People'

Winthrop P Carthy writes from Washington DC

The chief author of the much discussed Human Development Report 1991, Dr Mahbub ul Haq, outlines his views on environmental priorities

WATER and land, not global warming, are the real issues facing the peoples of developing countries.

So says Dr Mahbub ul Haq, architect of the controversial Human Development Report 1991 released by the United Nations Development Programme last May. "Polluted water contributes to 90 per cent of all Third World diseases, and land degradation is the number one issue for peasant farmers."

The Human Development Report 1991 sought to quantify and rank member nations' economic and social policies in terms of human progress and freedom. The Report touched only lightly on the global environment, perhaps the most widely discussed international issue of the decade.

Dr Haq, in an interview with *Depthnews Asia*, promised "to devote a special chapter on the environment in the next Report". Speaking as the Special Adviser to UNDP Administrator William H Draper III, Dr Haq contended that the global environmental movement, especially in the industrialised world, was losing its focus on people.

"What should sustainable development sustain? It should be human life, not just trees. The environment should be measured in human terms."

Dr Haq says the 1992 Report will carry a critique of the state of the world environment as well as specific suggestions for solutions. He believes, for example, that a simple one-dollar tax on every barrel of oil could be collected at the point of export for a fund to help tackle various environmental problems.

The 1992 Report is expected to develop Dr Haq's thesis that water pollution and land degradation are the great concerns of the developing world while air pollution is the prime concern of rich nations. But only a professional, honest and cooperative effort will solve anybody's problem, he says.

The principal author of the 1991 Report, his words carry great weight. An articulate and distinguished economist, Dr Haq has served variously as Pakistan's Minister for Planning, Finance, Commerce and Economic Affairs. From 1957 to 1970, he was the Chief Economist in Pakistan's Planning Commission, directing five-year development plans.

Dr Haq is currently a member of the UN Committee on Development Planning, and is also on the governing boards of several international think-tanks.

No official United Nations economic document in recent years has created more controversy than the Human Development Report 1991. When first released last year, the Report discarded the traditional measure of per capita income. Instead, to rank nations in order of success, it used a Human Development Index, based on a mix of life expectancy, adult literacy and basic purchasing power.

'Human Freedom Index'

This year, UNDP threw another log on the fire by adding "a number of refinements"; citizen's years of schooling; gender disparity (income, job opportunities, schooling, etc.); national income distribution; and, most contentious of all, a "Human Freedom Index" based on 40 key indicators of freedom.

Dr Haq's insistence on "holding up a mirror" to individual countries challenges the UNDP's traditional reluctance to criticise specific nations and practices.

The Human Freedom Index, for example, ranks nations according to their adherence to basic freedoms that are universally accepted — with a few exceptions.

The Human Development Index offers many country comparisons. Adult literacy in Saudi Arabia, for example, is lower than in Sri Lanka, despite the fact that its per capita income is 15 times higher. The United States is richer than Canada yet its life expectancy and educational attainments are lower.

The authors of the Report faced a daunting task in drafting the Human Freedom Index. They chose as their starting point 40 key indicators of freedom assembled in the 'World Human Rights Guide' (1985) by Charles Humana. These indicators include multiparty elections, press freedoms, the rule of law, the right to travel and assembly, opportunities for gender and ethnic equality and other democratic freedoms.

The Human Freedom Index ranked 88 nations. Sweden and Denmark are assessed as the most free because citizens of these countries enjoy 38 out of the 40 freedoms listed. Because citizens of Iraq could rely on none of those freedoms, that country ranks last.

Of the 29 industrialised countries ranked, 17 enjoyed high freedom while seven in the former socialist block fairly low rankings. Among developing countries, Costa Rica is regarded as enjoying the highest degree of freedom.

The other 58 developing countries included are almost equally divided between medium and low freedom ranking. Romania, Libya and Iraq occupy the last places.

The Human Freedom Index is based on 1985 data and, since then, 18 countries have moved towards greater freedom and democracy by holding multiparty elections. Fourteen of the countries granting greater freedoms — Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, the Soviet Union, Algeria, Bangladesh, Chile, Haiti, Pakistan, Paraguay and the Philippines — in 1985 were among the low-ranked countries with 10 or fewer freedoms granted.

No country that ranks high on human freedom has a low level of human development. But of the 31 developing countries which ranked fairly low in the Human Freedom Index, 17 experienced low — and 11 medium — levels of human development.

In this category, only three countries enjoyed high levels of human development — Chile, Kuwait and Malaysia. In all these three countries, which profited from some exceptional circumstances, a more educated electorate is already demanding and engineering many democratic changes.

Controversy

The Malaysian Ambassador to the United Nations charged that the Human Freedom Index had created "dissension and controversy." At UNDP's Governing Council, Ghana's delegate, speaking for colleagues from less developed nations, challenged the 1991 Report, especially the Human Freedom Index.

Mr Draper, the UNDP Administrator, replied that the agency "listened carefully to the concerns expressed by Ghana .... and will respond constructively to those concerns."

Dr Haq promises, nevertheless, that the system of indexing countries' development progress — both economic and human — will continue. "Rankings", he contends, "create pressure for change."

There is, he feels, a new climate that allows frank appraisals of individual nations' social and economic progress. The Cold War has ended, the "Lost Decade" of the 1980s signalled "the end of economic growth" in many developing countries, while murder, divorce, suicide, drug abuse and homelessness are increasing.

These patterns and trends have raised the question, "What has economic development meant?" Reflecting Dr Haq's views, the 1991 Report notes, "The unravelling social fabric in the industrialised countries shows starkly that higher national incomes are no protection against social tension and human distress."

Dr Haq is sensitive to complaints that UN reports which rank the human and economic development of Third World nations will given an excuse to rich nations to reduce aid and trade opportunities. He contends that, if they wish, rich nations can always find an excuse for not helping developing nations.

However, he says, "the milieu is right for a compact between developed and developing nations" based on honest appraisal and the unifying aspects of world problems like the environment.

"We are trying to capture the minds of reasonable people," Dr Haq explains. "Reasonable people will see things rationally. It is possible to hold a professionally correct dialogue between national representatives."

— Depthnews Asia

Opposition Fears Imelda's Kiss of Death

Abby Tan writes from Manila

The government of the Philippines is still afraid to risk political destabilisation if it lifts the ban on the corpse of former dictator Ferdinand Marcos being returned from exile, yet it is happy to have brought back his widow. Any attempt by her to stand in the 1992 elections could spell disaster for the opposition.

THE decision to allow Imelda Marcos, former First Lady of the Philippines, to return home after five years in exile is a government strategy to confuse the opposition.

Cabinet sources said that the presence of Mrs Marcos in the Philippines will crate disarray in the opposition Nacionalista Party, which is yet to determine which of three candidates will contest the Presidential election in May 1992.

The contenders are Vice-President Salvador Laurel, Senator Juan Ponce Enrile and businessman Eduardo Cojuangco. None has any particular love for the widow of former president Ferdinand Marcos, the man they once served loyally, and certainly they do not want Mrs Marcos to spoil their election plans.

The Government seems confident that Mrs Marcos does not have enough support among her late husband's loyalists to present any risk of destabilisation within the country.

A more compelling reason to sanction her return was the pressure of a deadline imposed by the Swiss Government,

IMELDA MARCOS
Mixed welcome home

stipulating that corruption charges against her must be brought by December 20 and that she must subsequently be convicted before the Philippines government can claim the $350 million in Marcos bank accounts in Switzerland.

Multiple corruption charges will be filed on October 20 in Manila against Mrs Marcos and members of her family. She already faces a total of 29 charges of tax evasion, filed against her in a Manila court on August 1.

The decision to move ahead with the prosecution of Mrs Marcos had been forcefully pushed through in June by the new executive secretary, Franklin Drilon, who was justice secretary at that time.

President Corazon Aquino was known to be hostile to the return of Mrs Marcos. She holds the Marcoses responsible for the murder in 1983 of her husband, Benigno Aquino, and believes they have supported all seven right-wing attempts to overthrow her since she became President.

However, cabinet officials said the decision was taken as a calculated gamble to weaken the opposition.

And while opposition leaders publicly welcomed Mrs Marcos' return, in private they feared the prospect of her laying claim to be political heir to her late husband or to begin tugging at the loyalty of the Nacionalista Party.

With a vast fortune still believed to be at her disposal, Mrs Marcos could throw a very large spanner into the plans of the other presidential aspirants. As one cabinet official commented : "They want her money, not her presence."

Senator Enrile accepts that her presence "will determine if she still has influence over the opposition," while Laurel is the only one of the three contenders to announce that he welcomes the financial support of Mrs Marcos. He told foreign journalists recently he would not question whether it was corrupt money.

Mrs Marcos has said that, if there is enough public clamour, she might run for President. If not, she will endorse the opposition candidate. Government sources said they hope that will be the "kiss of death."

A cabinet official who took part in the talks about the return of Mrs Marcos said : "You can expect the Government to throw all accusations of corruption against the opposition candidate."

The cabinet feels certain that Mrs Marcos cannot muster support to destabilise the Government in the last 10 months of its term of office. "We want to see for ourselves how much she can really stir up," said the cabinet official.

In fact, the Government seems more afraid of the corpse of president Marcos, who died in exile in September 1989. The ban remains against the return of his body, temporarily buried in Hawaii.

There is no guarantee that the widow would not parade the corpse around the Philippines for political ends, in the way loyalists kept his mother Josefa Marcos unburied for two years. Furthermore, as the cabinet official explained, the Government cannot prosecute a corpse.

The business community believes the return of Mrs Marcos will create only temporary nervousness, and Central Bank governor Jose Cuisia predicts there will only be a reaction if the loyalists create disturbances.

Whatever the outcome, the issue of Mrs Marcos had to be faced by the Government sooner or later. As Franklin Drilon said: "The Philippines will be ridding itself finally of the remaining ghosts of the Marcos dictatorship."

— GEMINI NEWS

ABBY TAN, a Singaporean journalist specialising in economic and political affairs, has been based in Manila since 1977.

Eritrea : Birth of a Nation

Leaders of the new nation of Eritrea are faced with the daunting task of getting international recognition for Eritrea's right to exist while setting about rebuilding a devastated economy. Dede-esi Amanor of IPS reports from Addis Ababa.

WITH at least two years to go before a referendum to decide Eritrea's status, the new nation's provisional government is locked in an internal debate on restoring political and economic normalcy.

Not that life has ever been normal for most Eritreans. Colonised by the Italians, administered by the British; then annexed by the Ethiopians after a United Nations-sponsored federation, the Eritreans regard themselves as a colony that has never been free.

Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) secretary-general Issaias Afewerki has said that he considers Eritrea independent.

But getting international recognition for Eritrea's right to exist as a nation remains a top concern.

According to one EPLF official, supporting the "democratisation of power" in Ethiopia is a key part of this process. "Unless there's a democratic system here, it will be a cause for destabilisation in the region," the official said.

Although Asmara, the Eritrean capital, remains closed to normal air traffic, high-powered delegations, including Issaias Afewerki, have been flying in and out of the Ethiopian capital for consultations with EPLF ally, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF).

The EPRDF heads a transitional government here. And the Eritrea question has been the stickiest point in the all-Ethiopia debate here.

Transitional head of state, EPRDF leader Meles Zenawi, has been at pains to persuade fellow Ethiopians that self-determination for Eritrea need not mean social disintegration and economic ruin for Ethiopia.

The EPLF, which split from the original Eritrean movement, the Muslim-based Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) in 1970, helped to train many of the EPRDF's leaders.

An agreement reached between the two transitional governments to open the vital Assab port in Eritrea to Ethiopia has helped to overcome fears that Ethiopia would lose its access to the Red Sea.

Meanwhile, the prospect of political independence in Eritrea (the name in Latin means 'red sea') has brought new pressures in the quest for a viable economy. After 30 years of war with Ethiopia, Assab will figure high in the EPLF's plans to revive a devastated economy.

Shortly after asserting its control in Eritrea, the EPLF issued a statement in support of a market economy.

But how the EPLF plans to square market-led economic growth with its social aspirations, aimed at improving life for Eritrea's 3.5 million people, is not clear.

"We are not for nationalisation, nor for exploitation," Estefanos Afewerki (no relation to the EPLF secretary-general) said. "We as a very small population have paid a lot. The result should not be another horrible situation for our people."

Until the mountain fighters of the EPLF drove out the "second revolutionary army" of former President Mengistu Hailé Mariam and seized independence in May this year, there were two Eritreas.

In the Eritrea of the occupied towns, Eritreans could be jailed for listening to battle announcements from the EPLF radio. Yet Eritrean nationalists formed underground cells and fed information back to the front. The other Eritrea could only be reached by desert tracks from Sudan's Red Sea coast.

Behind EPLF lines, visitors entered an extraordinary world. Despite the ravages of war and perennial drought, a highly skilled and disciplined force was building a new society from nine distinct Eritrean nationalities.

At the EPLF's rear base at Orota, a complex network of mini-factories, schools, hospitals and pharmacies — built underground and camouflaged against air attack — provided the infrastructure for Eritrea's social revolution.

Women fought in trenches, and men took turns in kitchens and nurseries.

There was no cash in circulation. And the EPLF's mass associations for peasants, workers, women and the Eritrean Relief Association distributed strictly limited supplies throughout the liberated areas.

But there was also the nightmare — like the orphanage for 8,000 traumatised children.

Travel in the EPLF's Eritrea was always after dark to avoid catching the attention of Ethiopian Mig fighter planes.

And at the Nacfa front, where Eritrean and Ethiopian armies faced each other for nine years until the EPLF began its unstoppable advance in January 1988, rugged hills were littered with the carnage and debris of Africa's longest war.

To the Editor...

Anarchy, violence and students

Sir, The anarchy and violence in Dhaka University is now well-known to all. A few terrorists are tarnishing the name and fame of the institution. They are responsible for the immeasurable sufferings of the general students. The session-jam is so perennial that it is now a mere dream to think of completing the course in time. Most of the students are suffering severely from this incurable disease — incurable in the sense, that, apparently capable persons, especially the heads of political parties who can believably control the terrorists are just behaving like onlookers and it seems they have no headache regarding the matter. If the political leaders urge their respective student groups not to vitiate the academic atmosphere, I believe, the campus will be free from a lot of disturbances. Then why are they not doing anything effective for the improvement of the situation? It is alleged that the kids of many of them are studying outside Bangladesh and are completing their courses in time. But we have to suffer from the situation here.

It is also noticed that many of the solvent families are now trying to send their wards abroad for higher studies. The current situation at all the higher educational institutions has discouraged them largely. But what about those with moderate income? I heard a man telling his son, "It is impossible for me to provide for all your expenses for eight or more years."

However, I do hope against hope that one day the general students would be able to understand everything. Then they will try to find out who are actually responsible for their distress. It seems to me the students alone can solve their problems if they want to. Ours was a great dream to build a happy and prosperous Bangladesh. I believe, this is the right time for the students to realise what they should do and what they should not to materialise the dream.

M Hanif
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Envisaging a greener Dhaka

Sir, Imagine there's no rain, no overcast sky ever and a tropic sun over your head all through from April to October while you are, under compulsion of occupation, out on the road from ten-to-five everyday! You can't continue your routine for the whole length and breadth, I bet, if, again on compulsion, you're a pedestrian — and, mind it, in the city of Dhaka of today, not of the sixties. For it would all be a feel of sub-Saharan heat when you're in the all-concrete and no-tree business district, the Motijheel C/A, of modern Dhaka of the nineties.

Over the decades the capital has been progressively denuded of trees. Albeit some eye-wash grove plantation, or spot greening , is sighted here or there, but there's no birch or cedar along the sidewalks to provide a cool-cover up your head.

Some lament — and obviously they have the right — that Dhaka was much greener and cooler those days. But Dhaka of the sixties and Dhaka of the nineties is not the same city in length and breadth and population. The later has pressed it more to be modern also raising its skyline. But then again the experienced older generation has its point to argue : modernisation or development doesn't mean wholesale occupation of spaces by bricks even in an all-busy city centre.

Dhaka is the capital of Bangladesh, where trees grow effortlessly if only allowed to. We just don't opt for, despite need. But, I'm sorry again that handy sub-Saharan or ME example— there people (or for that matter the authorities) are desperate enough to change their environment with trees, raising and maintaining them by whatever effort required. They put the hard need before any option easier.

Can't we again have a greener Dhaka, of course not replacing the buildings with trees, but accommodating them (the trees) between them (the buildings), just out of needs?

Manik Chowdhury
Wari, Dhaka