

A New Crisis for Cambodia

The assault on the Khmer Rouge leader, Khieu Samphan, by a group of Cambodians in Phnom Penh on Wednesday provided a clear signal, if one is still needed, that people in the ill-fated country cannot forget the genocide carried out by Pol Pot and his gang between 1975 and 1978. During this period when the Khmer Rouge government ran the country, with Mr Samphan serving as a figurehead president, perhaps as many as two million people perished in numerous "killing fields" in the country.

A suggestion has been made that the assault on the Khmer Rouge leader might have been stage-managed by the Hun Sen administration, mainly to discredit the anti-Vietnamese factions, if not to derail the entire peace process. It is hard to prove — or disprove — such a contention beyond saying that it would certainly serve the immediate interest of the Phnom Penh administration to isolate the Khmer Rouge and to ensure that it is kept out of the peace process agreed on in Paris last month.

No matter how one views this probable game plan by the Hun Sen administration, analysts recognise the danger that if the Khmer Rouge delegation is prevented from entering Phnom Penh and then running in the election to the constituent assembly, the Paris agreement may fall by the wayside.

Another danger facing Cambodia is that if the Khmer Rouge is pushed out of the peace process, it will go underground and take up arms against the government in an unending civil war, thus depriving the people of Cambodia of any hope for peace, political stability or economic progress.

Part of the blame for exposing Cambodia to these dangers lies with countries, including China and ASEAN nations, which ought to have tried, more seriously than they did, to force Pol Pot, Khieu Samphan and other front ranking leaders of Khmer Rouge out of the stage. In the process, some moderate leaders of the faction, not openly associated with the genocide, could have stepped forward to join the peace initiative. It is a pity that this has not happened, despite rumours circulating some years ago that Pol Pot either had retired from the leadership or was too ill to play an active role.

People who carried out a near fatal assault on Mr Samphan may now take their anti-Khmer Rouge battle still further. Weeks ago, Prince Norodom Sihanouk himself raised the demand that some of the top-level Khmer Rouge leaders, especially Pol Pot, should be tried for their war crimes, a demand which has gained some international support. If met, the demand may put the entire peace process at risk. However, if a clear distinction is made between crimes committed by a handful of leaders and ideological struggle by the rank and file of the Khmer Rouge, a trial of some known killers could go a long way in removing the psychological scars from the minds of millions of people in Cambodia. In some ways, this may be the only way to help people in this former Indo-China state begin a new life.

A Fetching Winter

It is gratifying that Bangladesh last week participated together with the rest of the world in celebrating Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart — one of supreme musical geniuses of all time — on the bicentennial of his death in 1791. It is undeniable that the participation was rather forced and materialized only because of the keen initiative taken by the local Goethe Institut — and that this certainly has taken much away from what a grateful, sincere and spontaneous recalling the magic casement the great composer had left for all of mankind and for as long as the species lives. This only makes us more thankful to the Institut for it is through their efforts that genuine music connoisseurs although very meagre in number and a rather ponderous volume of young people aspiring to understand all the great music of all the cultures got a glimpse of live Mozart. And numerous such unwitting make-goods of socio-cultural and state lapses somehow make our small backward polity somewhat fit to be a member of the contemporary world.

First there was a series of films shown on the life and works of Mozart over a week and then came the finale — an evening of live Mozart offered by the Cologne Concerto Chamber Orchestra. There was a rush perhaps beyond the expectation of the organisers. But then, sadly enough, there were also too many in the audience social and administrative bigwigs having neither ear nor heart or perhaps missing both — while hundreds pined for outside not knowing how to get into the concert hall. Organisers will be well-advised to charge gate making such rare concerts and performances — great by Dhaka standards — open to whoever is genuinely interested and reserve the back seats for the complementaries that they must willynilly issue for protocol and other practical reasons.

How was the going — asked many a one who couldn't make it. The best answer was 'we were with Mozart for close to two hours — we lived Mozart and at least in one respect our life is fulfilled.' Yes, those hundred and odd minutes not only elevated our souls to newer heights of existence, they also fulfilled us — with delight and enjoyment, wit and surprise, a world of aural riches from velvety and silken undulations of sound to thumps of cascading rhythms.

The very next day, Wednesday, offered the connoisseurs very good glimpse of the heights the subcontinental peoples had negotiated in their long undertaken line of history. While at one venue the poem of the body at its most sublime was being offered by a team from our great neighbouring country, at the other venue, Azizul Islam, the top flautist of our country, recognised as a leading performer all over the subcontinent, gave a memorable concert. In his *Jhinjholi*, although choosing a nine-time highly asymmetric *tala* perhaps to show his command over *laykari*, he touched the hearts with the build-ups of *vistari taans* that employed immaculate *gamaks*. His *Darbari Kanada* will long be remembered for its out-of-the-world glissando into *atkomal dhaivat*.

This winter is promising to be particularly fetching — artistically. The good fare started with the Asian Biennale. Let us hope it would build up into a crescendo in February, the month of all months for the Bangalees all over the world.

RESTRUCTURING LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT

Change Should Aim at Welfare of People

by Dr. Ali Ahmed

There cannot be any national development without developing the rural areas where about 90% of our people live. The structure of the local self governing institutions for the rural areas had been subjected to change from time to time so that they could not be really effective for the rural development and they were, in fact, in continuous crisis.

Changing Structures: During the British rule, for sometime, there were three tiers namely the Union Board in the union, local board in the sub-division and district board in the district. But after sometime the local board was abolished and other two tiers i.e. the Union Board and the District Board, were retained. At the beginning, these bodies were mostly composed of officials and nominated members. The local people had little participation in their activities. After long struggle, however, they were made elective and they remained so upto the end of the colonial rule.

During the Pakistan rule, upto 1958, the British pattern was allowed to continue. Since 1959, the concept of Basic Democracy with four tiers was introduced but after a short period, the highest tier i.e. the Divisional Council, was abolished and three tiers namely Union Council, Thana Council and the District Council were retained.

Of the three tiers, only the Union Council was a fully elective body. The Chairman and half of members of the Thana and District Councils were the officials. It is needless to emphasise how the presence of official Chairman and members who had, of course, no voting right, was not congenial to the democratic character of these institutions.

Members of the Union Council, though locally elected,

having the authority to elect Members of the Provincial and Central legislatures as well as the President of the State, did not care so much for the proper development of the rural areas.

During Bangladesh period, at the beginning proper attention was not given to these bodies as the government was not inclined to decentralizing administration and was busy with other national problems. Later three tiers were maintained with different names such as Union Parishad, Thana Parishad and Zila Parishad though it may be mentioned that an attempt to establish the fourth tier namely the "Gram Sarkar" was made by the government of late President Ziaur Rahman.

Of the three Parishads, the Union Parishad was the only elective body. The Chairman of the Thana Parishad was the Sub-Divisional Officer (SDO) and Circle Officer (CO) used to serve as the Secretary. Thus it was not a Parishad at all by any definition of local self-government though for the development problems there was a committee consisting of the Chairmen of the Union Parishads within the Thana. Election to Zila Parishad was never held. Its administration was run by an Additional Deputy Commissioner under the guidance of the Deputy Commissioner.

In 1983, the Thana was named Upazila and an Upazila Parishad was formed in each upazila. The chairman of an Upazila Parishad is directly elected. Other elected members are the Chairmen of the Union Parishads within the Upazila. Half of the Members are the officials serving within the upazila. They are nominated by the Government. The Upazila Parishad is not, therefore, a fully democratic body.

In 1988, the Zila Parishad was reorganized. It is to consist of Members of the Parliament of the Zila, nominated members, nominated women members and official members. The Chairman who is usually a Member of the Parliament is appointed by the government. The composition of the Zila Parishad also proves that it is far from being a local self-governing institution.

Thus during the Pakistan and Bangladesh rule though changes have been made in the name and structure of the local bodies, the British colonial practice of bringing the officials and nominated members in them at the Thana and Zila level has not been given up.

As per commitment made by the B. N. P. an attempt to establish "Gram Sarkar" may be made again. In that case, there will be four tiers of local self-governing institutions for rural areas. Under the circumstances, it is time for thinkers and practitioners in administration of these local bodies to ponder over and determine an ideal structure for them.

Ideal Structure

In view of the unprecedented growth of population, the reorganisation of Zila and Upazila seems to be justified for better and more effective administration required for the welfare of their people. The Union also should be restructured on the basis of an optimum number of population so that proper care may be taken of their health, education, employment, communication etc.

Now the fundamental question is how many tiers should be retained and how they should be organized and administered for the proper and effective development of

the rural areas. It seems that the maintenance of two tiers, as in almost all countries of the world, will be more suitable in a small and poor country like ours. These should be the Upazila and the Union Parishads. The Zila Parishad should be abolished.

The problem of "Gram Sarkar" which may not be so viable economically and administratively may be happily solved by making the Union smaller in respect of population and thus increasing its number.

Then the problem of restructuring the Union and Upazila Parishads has to be solved with a view to making each of them really local self-governing institution which must have the following characteristics in an independent sovereign democratic country: (i) It must be a political system constituted by law duly passed by a Parliament; (ii) It must be organized for a specified local area; (iii) It must be composed of members elected by voters of that area through free and fair election; (iv) It must be vested with substantial power of administration and taxation over the local area.

Union Parishad

The present Union Parishad is an elective body established by an Act passed by the Parliament in 1976 and amended from time to time. Still there is provision of nominating women and peasant members. The element of nomination must not be allowed to continue after a stipulated period during which steps must be taken by the government specially in respect of education and poverty alleviation for improving their position so that they can participate in the free and fair election without de-

pending on nomination which is, after all, a special favour not being free from the doubt of partiality and injustice. The Chairman will be elected in accordance with the principle of electing the President at the national level i.e. either indirectly by elected members or directly by voters. The official period of Union Parishads should be equal to that of the National Assembly.

The Local Government Act contains a long list of compulsory and additional functions to be performed by an Union Parishad. Some of them are unrealistic and decorative. The committee of experts should examine the list and keep only the most essential function e.g. agriculture, health, education, communication, family planning, cottage industry so that these can be administered more effectively and efficiently for the development of the villages.

The list of functions must also be realistic as their proper performance requires a good amount of funds. At present the Union Parishads have little funds to perform such a large number of functions and they have been suffering from chronic shortage of funds. As a result, the performance of most of them is poor. The Union Parishads cannot impose taxes in all the items shown in the Act, again whatever taxes are imposed, these cannot be collected properly for two main reasons: (i) the tax-collecting machinery is too weak; (ii) many villagers are so poor that they have no ability to pay taxes.

After fixing the sources of income and strengthening the tax-collecting machinery, the government should pay the deficit part of the budget, if any, of an Union Parishad.

The administrative machinery is neither adequate nor strong. For many years, the Parishad was assisted by one Secretary only whose pay and status was that of a Lower Division Assistant. Naturally, persons with higher qualifications and calibre were not attracted to this post. The Secretary was generally an SSC holder. Moreover, he had not only to serve as an Assistant but also as an accountant, tax collector, a typist and sometimes as a messenger. He could not, therefore, be expected to render the necessary advice and assistance to the Chairman who might not be an academically qualified person as he comes to the office through election.

It seems that even if power is handed over to civilians, the structures being set up in such a hurry will not be strong enough to provide the sort of leadership Nigeria needs.

In that case, the bet is that Nigeria will once again find itself under army rule in the not-too-distant future.

Gazetted Officer under the Government. In these days, a large number of MA, MCom and MSc degree holders are unemployed. We may, then, have the service of these persons as the Secretaries more easily. Then the Secretary should be assisted by one Lower Division Assistant-cum-Typist, one Accountant, one Tax Collector-cum-Cashier and two fourth class employees. All of them must be trained for their respective jobs and provided with low-cost quarters near the office of the Union Parishad. Electricity has already been provided for several unions and gas will be provided in future. Each union has primary and secondary schools. There are employees of some Ministries/ autonomous bodies serving at the union level. They must work in conjunction with the Union Administration. The Secretary and the Union Parishad employees will form a mini-Secretariat at the headquarters of the Union Parishad. Thus a small township will grow in each union with employment opportunities and the people from villages will not be coming in so large number to the cities and big towns creating painful conditions of living and serious problems for the government.

The mini-secretariat will serve under a mini-political government which will be formed by the Chairman and members. The Chairman will act, as if, as a chief minister and other members as ministers, each one remaining in charge of a ward. Decisions will be made through debates and discussions among members as these are made in the National Assembly and the Cabinet meetings. In these days of economic hardship, Chairman and members cannot be expected to render honest and dedicated service required for the rural development with poor honorarium. They must be paid appropriate salary and allowances as we pay to the Ministers and Members of the Parliament at the national level.

It may be argued that a lot of money will be required to pay the salaries and allowances to the personnel of the Union Parishads, and how that money can be had? The answer is that the simple calculation will show that a very small part of the expenditure incurred in other less important sectors e.g. big buildings and roads in the cities, will be required. Our planners must divert more money for the development of villages through the Union Parishads and our political leaders also must direct them to do so if they really mean that they want rural development without which, as said earlier, national development is not possible.

(To be concluded tomorrow)

Nigeria: A Second Go at Democracy

RARE: As Nigeria's military government enters its final stages of disengaging from government, Nigerians are sceptical that democratic civil rule will take a firm hold in the West African nation.

The prevailing view was expressed by Sam Nwokolo, a Nigerian businessman: "It is unfortunate that the military has tasted power. There is nothing to prevent their coming back after handing over in 1992."

Nigerian president Ibrahim Babangida is said to have a good programme for transition, but junior military officers who see themselves as potential military governors, ministers and heads of state may want to seize power.

Olisa Agbakoka, chairperson of the Civil Liberty Organisation (CLO) in Lagos, echoed Nwokolo's fear that the military might wait quietly in the wings to seize power in the event of civilian rule not working out.

"Babangida has come up with what he calls a 'custodian theory', that places responsibility on the army to intervene in the event of a threat to national security," Agbakoka noted.

In a recent BBC interview Babangida warned that while he had no objection to democracy, the military might intervene if a threat emerged to the country's "sovereignty and integrity".

Agbakoka argues that this means if the transition programme does not run well, and even if the army leaves and finds that the civilians are unable to carry on the political programme, they just might intervene.

Since independence from Britain in October 1960,

Nigerians are getting ready to give democracy one more try, but as Toye Olori of IPS reports, they are sceptical that the military will completely disengage from politics.

Nigeria has had 23 years of military rule and eight civilian governments.

The military first came to power in January 1966 to correct widespread political grievances and the alleged political imbalance between the north and south of the country.

This problem persists. At least 300 people are believed to have been recently killed in communal riots in the northern city of Kano.

During the first republic, minority tribes were relegated to the background, leaders of the opposition were arrested and imprisoned for an alleged plot to overthrow the government and there was total anarchy in the country, according to Akin Aderibigbe, a Nigerian working here.

"These actions and corruption of the civilians paved the way for the soldiers to strike in 1966," he said.

The 1966 coup entrenched a military government headed by Gen Aguiyi Ironsi, an Ibo from eastern Nigeria — one of the three major ethnic groups.

Ironsi's advisers came mainly from his ethnic group. The northern soldiers and people viewed the coup as an Ibo one since most of those killed were northern leaders. A few westerners also died, but there were no Ibo casualties.

This brought about a counter-coup led by northern soldiers during which Ironsi was killed and replaced by Gen Yakubu Gowon, a Christian from central Nigeria, who

ruled between 1966 and 1975. Gowon was overthrown in July 1975 by Gen Murtala Muhammad, who was assassinated and succeeded by Gen Olusegun Obasanjo, who handed over power to the civilian government of Ihehu Shagari in October, 1979.

But, by then, the economy had worsened and the civilian government was unable to cope with the problems.

Economic deterioration and corruption were the principal causes of the military coup of December 1983 led by Major-Gen Muhammadu Buhari.

Buhari was overthrown in August 1985 by Gen Ibrahim Babangida, who immediately revoked the censorship decree and freed many detainees.

Babangida introduced a number of radical changes, among them the structural adjustment programme in 1986 to revive the economy, and in 1987, a timetable for the transition to civilian rule.

"The Babangida regime came to power with a set of programmes to revive the economy, but I am not very sure if he has succeeded in making life better for the people... life is still very difficult for Nigerians," Aderibigbe said.

Ordinary Nigerians do not have much faith in the military's ability to improve their lives. According to Okudero "There is no freedom of speech. If we complain and tell the truth, they can imprison us or even kill us."

To the Editor...

DESA active in Savar!

Sir, Some officers and employees of commercial department of Electric Supply visited Dilkusha-bag, Sonalibag, Dagarmora areas of Savar on November 20, and launched a house to house inspection of electrical connection. In the course they reportedly threatened the illegal connection holders of fines and disconnection. But on their way back they simply disconnected the main supply line and asked the dwellers indiscriminately to "meet them at office."

The whole areas is plunged into darkness, at this time when children are facing their annual examinations. The dwellers are inflicted more of miseries including that of being robbed or hijacked.

It may be noted that since long the concerned Electricity staff did not feel the need to visit the holdings having illegal connections, not to speak of a drive for disciplinary action, the reason known to them and assumed by many. And now all of a sudden they have disclosed the genuine consumers too of their rightful access to

the essential utility. However, I along with my neighbour went to "their office" and met "one of them" and described about our genuineness. But the reply simply was "you will have to suffer with the 'illegal' others."

How long this gross irregularity should continue? How long this darkness?

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Travel by ship for Haj'

Sir, We fully endorse the views expressed in the letter under the above caption published in your paper on Nov 15, urging upon the Govt. to arrange chartered ships during the ensuing Haj'. For travel by air from Dhaka to Jeddha and back a Bangladesh Hajj needs to pay around Tk. 43 thousand excluding tax, duty etc. But if the journey is arranged by ship, it will undoubtedly reduce the cost by 40% to 50%. Thus it becomes within the reach of a commonman. During

Shaheed Ziaur Rahman's tenure journey by a ship for Haj' for the first time was arranged. If genuine attempt is made, chartered ship can be arranged for Hajjs. But, I suspect, due to some vested interest of any group, no attempt has been made so long to charter a ship for Hajj. Our neighbouring countries like India, Pakistan and also Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia etc arrange journey by ship for Hajjs.

As there is still ample time to negotiate and charter foreign passenger ships, it is hoped that the Govt will do the needful in this regard and our Embassies in the countries concerned may be used for necessary negotiation for chartering passenger ships. It is reported that chartered passenger ships may be available in India and Pakistan.

Since the ensuing Haj' period is not very far off, to charter ships no time should be left henceforth.

Abdur Rahman,
Dinajpur.

OPINION

Of Sparks and Fires

I would like to congratulate The Daily Star for organising a 'Round Table' towards solving the economic problems of this country. An effort like this reminds one of a spark in the darkness that can start an all enlightening fire for which we all are eagerly waiting for. It also reassures us that there is still hope for this country and all is not lost. It also revitalises our faith in the awesome power that can rest with a single individual, a single organisation or for that matter a single newspaper that can shape the destiny of a nation.

This power has been used for negative purposes in the past and now we most sincerely hope that the tide has turned. What has been achieved in the meeting of the minds can only be understood and recognised in the future and to be sure it has many beneficial aspects that may never be fathomed ever. There is no point in criticising or finding faults with the expositions of such great personalities at such an early stage of the debate but certain points do deserve to be recognised as inequities and irrelevancies in our cultural system that always seem to interfere with everything that we do.

To begin with let me go back to 'The Round Table'. The entire quorum of participants to the Table consisted of members who may be considered as 'highly successful' in their fields. Not belittling their wisdom and their capacity for beneficial contributions to the deliberations of the meeting let it be heard that there was not a single participant in the Table who may be considered a representative of the people for whom this is all about. When we become successful we all tend to forget the trepidations and perils of the past. And we should remember that for every successful person in this country there are many more for whom the route to the mountain shall never be known. It is this group of peo-

ple and they may be common farmers, industrialists, businessmen, entrepreneurs or others who must be heard and addressed. We have to know their problems first before any effort can be made to shed light on the general picture. We are fully aware that general light may only be shed by persons like who participated in 'The Round Table'. We are however not aware that for there to be light you have to let in the darkness first.

The editorial in The Daily Star appearing on 21 Nov on the subject of 'The Round Table' suggests that nationwide discussions are needed to reach consensus on many national issues. Before we do any 'consensus building' please let us remember that the issues to build consensus upon have to be known first and which sometimes are best known to the common citizen who is the primary claimer of benefits from society. Our big problem is our small problems and our small problems are our big problem.

The Prime Minister's announcement and efforts in meeting the general people to know on a face to face basis the problems confronting the commonman, every Thursday, is a heart-felt welcome first step. However, judging from how things are going on it might only be a matter of time when that step is taken backwards. The lines in front of the PM's office on Thursday reminds one more and more of an employment office. We just hope that the assumed primary intention of this programme of knowing the common man's problem will not be defeated and nothing comes out from this magnanimous attempt. What may become administratively more appropriate and reformative with relevance to our economic and political realities is to evolve a system whereby the entire administrative machinery is made to interface with all citizens desirous of drawing benefits from the country's government

draw the PM has done is to draw the first bucket of water from the river which in itself is worth very little but a million buckets of water drawn by the entire hierarchic bureaucracy can irrigate the entire land.

But how do you do this? Every functionary of the government from the Assistant Secretary and upwards could be tagged to a neutral functionary of the government like academicians, lawyers and others who would sit down every Thursday for a few hours and let citizens be heard on their particular area of jurisdiction. A system could be devised whereby bigger problems are referred to the higher rungs and smaller problems to lower ones. The inevitable lines for employment and other social needs could be directed to the Social Welfare Ministry and related officials and be handled as best as within means. But the solvable problems and issues would definitely come to the limelight.

Accountability would be established, corruption fully curtailed and confidence on the rulers of the land be established like never before in its history. The government need not fear the rising alter ego of the masses when their aspirations do not flower overnight because it is a representative government and some help will be on the way. Rather it will do well to heed the already emerging view point that a 'do nothing' attitude instead of meaning patience actually points toward an undercurrent of inefficiency. We just hope that this is not true.

Shining examples of the genius and age old originality of this people like The Daily Star's 'Round Table' or the Prime Minister's gesture of magnanimity one day in a week cannot be allowed to go in vain and we have to make every attempt to light our fire from these sparks.

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