

Will Peace Have a Chance?

Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz is to have talks with the Soviet leadership today. This follows the surprise announcement by Iraq Friday last that it was willing to withdraw from Kuwait if certain conditions were met. This possibility for a negotiated solution to the Gulf crisis followed hectic diplomatic activities by the Soviets and the Iranian government. President Bush has already termed the offer as a "cruel hoax". However many world leaders do not consider it to be so. The offer made by Iraq does not comply with UN resolution 660 which calls for an unconditional withdrawal from Kuwait. However we still consider the Iraqi move to be one in the right direction. It is an opening in peace, that all parties should work together to make real.

In this context the meeting between Tariq Aziz and the Soviets are extremely important. Iraq must have realised by now that by itself this offer is unlikely to make any headway. The conditions will have to be significantly modified, if not withdrawn altogether. The talks are likely to prove useless without flexibility from the Iraqi side.

An element of understanding must also be forthcoming from the side of the allies. For them to remain rigid will only help the hardliners in this war to win the day. The call by President Bush for the overthrow of Saddam further complicates the issue. In this regard President Bush may be well advised to let the Iraqi people decide on the fate of their present leader or of those who are to come in the future.

As the Soviet envoy said, this offer by Iraq should not be brushed aside out of hand. A few points have been made through the few weeks of war we have had. It is now clear that the Allied force under US leadership is willing to go all the way to drive Iraq out of Kuwait. Whatever doubts Saddam may have had about US's resolve should have been removed by now. On the other hand the US must have also realised that Saddam and his Iraqi troops have not been the piece of cake that they had given the world to understand. The Iraqis have fought bravely and had held their own quite remarkably. Finally neither party has any doubt as to tremendous cost, especially in human terms, that the ground offensive will cost on both sides. In other words the logic of a negotiated settlement to the Gulf war is strong and sound. Time must be given to allow it to come to fruition.

The postponement of the Allied ground offensive, at the request of the Soviets, is a very welcome development. Though many suspect that Saddam is likely to use the time so gained to further strengthen his position for an ultimate ground battle. We, however, do not believe so. Baghdad has suffered enormously and its overtone for peace appears to us to be genuine and sincere. However an honourable way must be found so that Iraq can withdraw with some of its crushed dignity mollified. The temptation on the part of Allied may be to punish Saddam. But the wise thing to do would be to make overtures to win the goodwill of the Iraqi people, which may as yet be a while in coming given the sufferings they have undergone due to the relentless bombing by the Allies. Even then the gesture will have a meaning and any move to spare the Iraqis any further agony will make a contribution, however modest, in any post-war reconciliation which is bound to come about.

All eyes are now focussed on Moscow where talks are to be held. We urge the Iraqi Foreign Minister to make realistic proposals and not to turn this into another rhetoric-filled exchange of well-known positions. We hope the Soviets will be able to use their considerable diplomatic skills to act as faithful go-between and help turn this opening into real negotiations for peace.

No More Celluloid Folly

Recently, the Bangla Academy hosted a discussion meeting entitled "Our Mass Movements and Films" as part of its Ekushey programme. The consensus of opinion that emerged suggests a strong public dissatisfaction with the failure of the film industry to play the role expected of a major medium of art and mass communication. Specifically, the industry has failed to portray the people's struggles for their rights and freedom.

Undoubtedly, censorship and a general lack of democratic atmosphere have contributed to this lack-lustre performance. However, the fact remains that our history has been ill-served by the film industry. How many feature films on the country's War of Liberation, or the genocide perpetrated in 1971, can one name? The epoch-making movements of 1952 and 1969 remain conspicuous by their absence on the big screen. All we are left to do, it seems, is to sadly reflect on what might have been had Zahir Raihan lived.

The lack of seriousness in the film industry is also reflected in the type and quality of films currently being produced for general release. The head-long descent into absurdity and fantasism has sought to make Dhaka a parody of Bombay. But what we've got is a very poor imitation with none of the Indian cinema's innovations and advancements in direction, cinematography, and acting skills.

How have we come to this state of affairs? Lack of money? Out of the question. Lack of skilled personnel? Not an insurmountable problem. Lack of good story and screenplay writers? Most unlikely. Lack of initiative and daring? We may have hit the nail on the head!

In defence, the film-makers say they are only responding to market demand. Apparently, sheer escapism is what the cinema-goer of today wants. Is that a fact? Or is it the other round? Isn't the industry forgetting that a large, educated, cinema-loving section of society has been driven out of the movie halls by the sheer banality on display?

It is this thirst for good quality films that has allowed the video market to flourish. The middle-class movie market is potentially a massive one. But so long as the industry makes films that only appeal to the most primitive of man's instincts, with no room for intellectual satisfaction, video will remain a mortal threat to cinema. By not catering to this increasingly affluent and numerous market, the industry is really shooting itself in the foot. We would prefer not to see the day when massive state funding is needed to save film-making in this country, because government money rarely comes without strings. The sooner the industry wakes up to its folly, the better for it and the rest of us.

The historic speech by President F.W. de Klerk on February 11 set in motion the whole delicate exercise of how to use the loosening of sanctions to secure the quickest and most secure route to democracy in South Africa. Resistance to lifting some sanctions will be difficult to maintain for long.

In Britain, the Gulf crisis was pushed out of the main headlines for the first time for weeks by news that the laws enforcing apartheid were to be abolished. Predictably, the British government jumped in first with calls for the end of sanctions, followed quickly by Prime Minister Bob Hawke of Australia, who was anxious to see cricket with South Africa resumed as quickly as possible.

The African National Congress (ANC) pointed out that the political game was only just beginning. The apartheid laws might be going, but blacks from Nelson Mandela downward still had no vote and 2,000-4,000 political detainees no one is sure of the real figure—awaited release.

Nonetheless, sanctions are on their way out. The challenge is to use their removal in a way that will help the blacks and the de Klerk government to manoeuvre their way to a new constitution that secures democracy for South Africa.

Britain, which under Margaret Thatcher put itself in the centre of the sanctions controversy, has set its sights on the next Commonwealth summit meeting, which takes place in Harare in October. Prime Minister John Major does not want to find himself, like Thatcher, at the centre of Commonwealth storms over South Africa.

Ever since the Nassau summit of 1985, Britain has stood apart from the other 49 member countries. When two years later the Commonwealth formed a nine-nation committee of foreign ministers of Southern Africa under the chairmanship of Canadian External Affairs Minister Joe Clark, Britain refused to join.

Coming now to implementation, it is to be recognized that Bangladesh is characterized by a 'soft' and 'negative' state. Softness relates to the fact that the country lacks institutional capacity to implement development programmes effectively. The institutions are often weak or inappropriate. They are deficient in staff strength, trained manpower and managerial capabilities as well as financial resources. Also, the existing capacity is not properly utilized and the bureaucracy often creates impediments instead of performing the assigned tasks — the negative influence. The reasons are bureaucratic procrastination and corruption. These flaws in the institutional apparatus of the government have led to distorted and wasteful public management of resources — in respect of both mobilization and utilization; also, substantial proportions of resources have been siphoned off by corrupt people manning and influencing the institutions at various levels.

The upshot is that serious attention must be given by the forthcoming democratic government to the task of strengthening and cleansing both political and bureaucratic institutions. This is surely easier said than done, particularly in this country where corruption and shirking of responsibility have become virtually institutionalized attributes. But the fact remains that no amount of lament will be of any avail. The government will therefore have to brace itself for serious actions to lift the state apparatus from its present soft and negative to a positive, pivotal force behind all

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.

ADAB proposal

Sir, The Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh (ADAB) recently in a press conference at National Press Club presented a six-point proposal for establishing democracy, human rights and rule of law in Bangladesh. It has been stated by the ADAB president that the objective of this six-point proposal is not only economic development but to make people conscious about their political rights as well.

We very much appreciate the above mentioned development proposals of ADAB. But we expect ADAB to come out with a well-defined and carefully chalked-out programme in support of their develop-

ment plan. We are particularly interested in knowing how ADAB will be contributing in realizing their proposals.

M. Zahidul Haque, Assistant Professor, Bangladesh Agricultural College, Dhaka-1207.

More sports coverage

Sir, I like your newspaper very much. But the sports page needs more life. I mean more international sports news. A better coverage of racket sports, weekend results of Euro soccer and news of not so popular sports (Formula-1 driving, baseball, basketball and ice-hockey news from the US, for example) will add more dimension. If possible make it two-

Sanctions Conundrum Follows Scrapping of Apartheid Laws

by Derek Ingram

In his dramatic speech, President of South Africa F.W. de Klerk announced the repeal of the key apartheid laws, including the Act under which babies are registered at birth by race. The move immediately produced controversy over the lifting of sanctions.

Now the time for healing has arrived. Major will not want to continue the Britain-versus-the-rest stance adopted by Thatcher at Commonwealth meetings. It is not his style. Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary Douglas Hurd will try to make his peace.

In this situation the new Commonwealth Secretary-General Chief Emeka Anyaoku becomes a key mediatory figure.

The de Klerk speech, almost one year from the day Nelson Mandela was released, has set the stage for radical change in South Africa. The laws to be repealed—the Land Acts of 1913 and 1936, the Group Areas Act and, most importantly, the Population Registration Act—are expected to disappear by April. The last Act, under which babies are registered by race, is at the very heart of apartheid.

With these laws gone, real negotiations for a new South Africa could begin. At the moment the paths towards this goal do not meet. The anti-apartheid forces aim to hold a "patriotic conference" on March 21 to discuss strategy. The other black parties will then come into play with the ANC.

The ANC wants an all-party conference soon afterwards. The government is likely to agree to this—Mandela is thought to have the nod from de Klerk—but perceptions of what should be the terms of reference differ widely.

The ANC wants a constituent assembly elected that would draw up the country's new constitution. In the meantime the conference would set up an interim government to oversee the transition until a new parliament was elected and a democratic government formed on the basis of the constitution.

The government opposes elections for a constituent assembly and the Inkatha

Movement led by Chief Gatsha Buthezi wants a federal constitution—an idea totally opposed by the ANC. Despite such fundamental differences the momentum for negotiation exists and the all-party conference could be sitting by July. Optimists predict a new constitution and elections within 18 months.

The immediate problem internationally is how to handle sanctions. The ANC wants them kept in place as a card for their negotiations. Bitter experience has taught them to suspect white motives until words turn into action. They have to be satisfied that the abolition of apartheid is "irreversible."

That point may be near, but the detainees are still held and the vote has still to be given to the blacks. The ANC does not see why if the West really wants to help them it is not prepared to wait a little and help their negotiations.

The British are keen to give de Klerk some reward for his political bravery and are anxious to secure their traditional trading relations against the day when business prospects with South Africa begin to blossom. It has already unilaterally lifted bans agreed with the Commonwealth on new investment, tourist promotion, and cultural and scientific links.

The British argue that sanctions are ineffective anyway and are having little effect on the economy. The reality is

that sanctions, although incomplete, played an important role in the downfall of President Botha, the coming into power of a reforming president, the release of Mandela and negotiations with the ANC. If sanctions are having no impact why is there so much lobbying inside and outside South Africa for their removal?

The ANC has recognised for some time that the time was coming when pressure for the end of sanctions could no longer be resisted. A draft discussion document marked confidential but circulated by the ANC said: "...we cannot continue to call for the maintenance of existing measures without running the risk of placing ourselves in a position in which we will be seen to have suffered a major defeat as the international community in fact acts in a manner which results in the erosion of sanctions."

The critical objective should be that we take charge of the process of de-escalation of the sanctions campaign by working out a comprehensive programme of action aimed at attaching such de-escalation to the advancement of the objectives of the process of democratic and non-racial transformation.

The de-escalation began on February 4 with the decision of the European Community to end sanctions when de Klerk's reforms were formally tabled. The British wanted immediate action but went along with the rest of the Community.

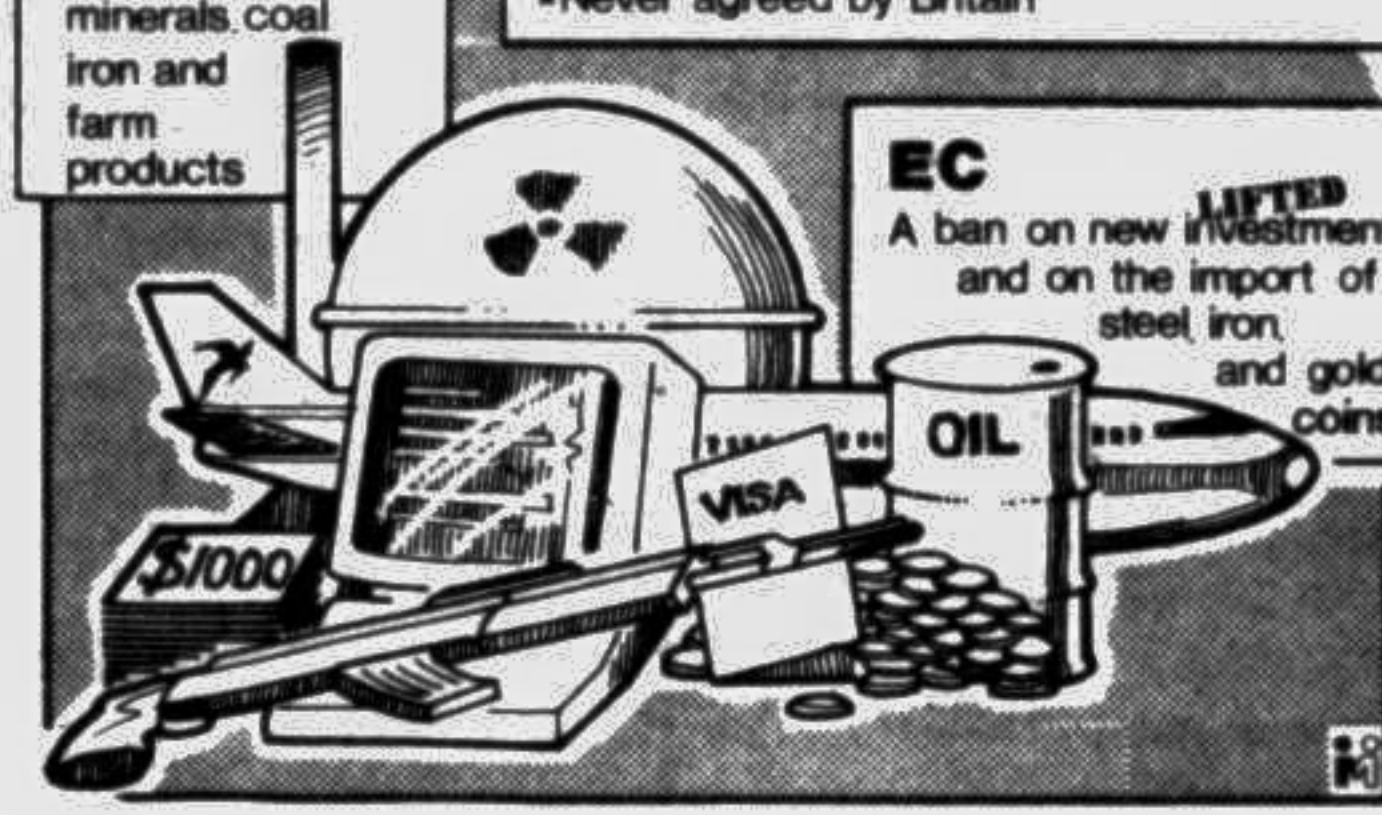
The United States will not rush to end sanctions. President George Bush cannot wait to stir Congress on the issue at the time when he has large numbers of black troops fighting in the Gulf.

The Commonwealth foreign ministers deciding their position at the London emergency meeting, are scheduled to have a fuller meeting a month or two later in New Delhi in advance of the Harare summit and are unlikely to agree to any major relaxation of sanctions until they have seen the colour of de Klerk's money.

—GEMINI NEWS

The South Africa sanctions list

US Senate	Commonwealth
Ban SAA landing in US	A ban on government loans, procurement, trade missions or contracts with South Africa
Limit entry of white South Africans	Ban imports of gold coins, uranium, coal, iron, steel or farm products*
Freeze South African bank accounts under US control	Ban exports of oil, nuclear technology, computers for security use
Ban imports from South African controlled companies	End double taxation pacts*
Ban imports of some strategic minerals, coal and farm products	Ban imports of South African arms
	Ban military, cultural, scientific and sporting links
	Ban air links, new bank loans*
	new investment, tourist promotion
	Withdrawal of consular facilities*
	*Never agreed by Britain



FUTURE DIRECTIONS OF DEVELOPMENT

'Soft' and 'Negative' State deters Implementation

by Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad

This is the concluding part of the article by the author on Development published on Sunday. Issues discussed need wide debates to generate consensus, he suggests.

national agenda. It is crucially important to implement financial discipline and work ethics in various political and bureaucratic institutions ruthlessly, and to design and undertake and appropriate manpower development plan to improve the institutional capacity to implement the national agenda effectively.

Sustainable Development

In order to alleviate poverty, growth must be accelerated. And development processes pursued should be environmentally sound to be sustainable on a long term basis. Unfortunately the kind of development that is pursued in Bangladesh, as well as elsewhere, which is devoted to the exploitation of natural resources for achieving material progress and the persisting poverty have both been causing serious damages to the fragile environmental base of the country. The technology being used has been causing environmental degradation and the poor exploit environmental

resources just to eke out a living. The problem is very complex. Part of the solution would lie in choosing technologies which are capable of producing fast enough growth without intolerable adverse effects on the environment. But the question is: are such technologies available? Bangladesh naturally cannot develop them. The worldwide heightening of environmental concerns, particularly over the past decade, have led to the development of many green technologies (so-called because they are environmentally benign or cause tolerable damages to environment) and many others may be on the way. In Bangladesh, the

important environmental concerns relate to deforestation (less than 9% of the country's landmass is under forest, while for a sound ecological regime the proportion should be about 25%), soil degradation, urbanisation, extinction and threatened extinction of many species wild life etc. These and other environmental concerns must be taken seriously

into account in planning development in Bangladesh.

In many respects, it may not be technological hardware only, but also the human behaviour pattern that causes considerable damages to the environment. In this case, a knowledge and awareness raising process will be helpful.

In so far as the poor are concerned, no amount of preaching will dissuade them from exploiting natural resources because often their livelihood depends on it. So the solution lies in accelerating growth which is a central concern of development planning in Bangladesh. However, along with efforts to accelerate development, raising awareness about the ill effects of environmental degradation and benefits of smaller families for the families themselves as well as environment can serve useful purposes.

Preponderant Role of Cultural Traits

The types of political and

socio-economic systems that are established or sought to be

established by the people of a country, as opposed to being imposed by a dictatorship, are a reflection of the dominant cultural traits of the people themselves, which determine their lifestyles (their characters, attitudes, behaviour patterns, relationships with fellow human beings) and the values they hold and endeavour to establish.

It may be noted here that there seems to have developed a kind of cultural acceptance of poverty and dependence on foreign aid, donor influences and dictates in Bangladesh. There is a widespread accommodation to both. In the prevailing situation, aid conditionalities are formulated by donors from the vantage point (assumed by them with our acquiescence) that since they hold the purse string they know best as to what should be done concerning development in Bangladesh and how. The

conditionalities often create straight jackets allowing little or no flexibility, and non - or deficient performance in relation to the conditionalities brings forth strictures and warnings from the donors, which are swallowed and future good behaviour promised. In the process, national sovereignty is clearly compromised. In order to assert national self-respect and sovereignty in decision making, another culture is therefore needed to be developed that does not allow such compromises.

Thus only when a cultural environment exists such that people cherish the goals of establishing a democratic political system and a people-centred, exploitation-free, self-reliant economic system, that they will endeavour to realize the goals and will resist and fight forces that may seek to establish autocratic and exploitative regimes. Hence, it is crucially important that due emphasis is given to the establishment of an appropriate cultural environment in Bangladesh as the above goals are pursued. Otherwise, the process that has been initiated is liable to degenerate and disintegrate with disastrous consequences.

In concluding, it may be strongly suggested that the issues discussed above should be widely debated toward generating national consensus as to how best to approach them. Political parties should place their views and positions regarding them on the table for the members of the public to know and make their judgments about them.

sports-page a day. Mushfiq-Uss-Salehin, Res. Model College Dhaka.

In protest of war

Sir, Recently there was a news item in the press regarding the instance of death of a 68-year-old lady, in Vienna, in front of the US embassy protesting against the war in the Gulf.

This happening is not a new one. People have ended their lives, as scarring marks of deepest protests against so many things. Mainly it happened in case of war. During the long and seemingly unending Vietnam war, this was quite a common phenomenon.

No human being wants to die. They may belong to any culture or faith, but the basic instincts are same in case of everyone. War brings wrath of death, destroying hundreds and thousands of innocent lives, which no one in one's sane state of mind would want. However, the method of

protest is no less a matter of concern than the war itself. It gives a message that the person thus protesting does not want to continue life on an earth where the price of a valuable life is next to nothing! What more protests the blunt warring 'heroes' need to calm their frenzy! Sikander Ali Gopibagh, Dhaka.

Self-employment

Sir, Unemployment is a major problem in our country, which is already overburdened with problems like overpopulation, food scarcity, poverty etc. Each year thousands of graduates and post-graduates are coming out from various universities. Naturally, when they have studied so hard and completed their education, they hope to get employed soon.

Government has been the single largest employer in the country, but even here recruitment had been stopped for the last few

years. So jobs are now harder to find.

In view of these problems, I think people start thinking more about self-employment as an alternative. There are lots of income-generating projects which require small capital at the initial stage. However, they require a lot of hard work. If such projects can be sustained, the profits, believably, won't be any meagre.

In this type of employment both time and earning is one's own. I think students who come out of the varsities, can give this idea some thought.

S.M. Hasan Pabna.

Dowry deaths

Sir, Although there an anti-dowry law has been passed in our country, the deaths of married girls, or women due to inability to bring dowry is by no means becoming less. Not a single day passes, when we see in the news-

papers a case of suicide or murder, due to dowry related reasons. This is more rampant in the rural side.

There is no end to workshops and seminars, where educated people or experts talk on such subjects. All the time we seem to be discussing about dowry and its ill effects. We, as concerned citizens, feel that something more than just talks is needed in this area.

Some strict and tougher approaches may prevent deaths due to dowry, and also save innocent lives.

If the administration keeps a close watch and catches and punishes the culprits responsible for such tragedies, I am sure it will at least reduce if not eradicate this curse. It is high time some action has been taken. Girls are not responsible for the poverty of their parents! Nor the poor parents either commit a sin by rearing a girl child! Jahangir Bashir, Rangpur.