

Dhaka, Thursday, February 21, 1991

For a Real Tribute to Our Martyrs

Love for our language, the need to establish our cultural identity and the inner urge to live in freedom and dignity merge into one as we pay homage to the martyrs of our language movement. Thirty-nine years ago the sacrifice of a few courageous students set us on the path that culminated in our liberation in 1971. This journal joins the nation in paying our heartfelt tribute to those brave souls but for whose sacrifice the subsequent evolution of our national consciousness becomes hard to imagine.

The observance of Ekushey has been and remains a very emotional affair. On this day we lay wreath, sing songs, recite poems, give speeches eulogizing those who participated in the language movement and talk about things we should do and unfortunately, have not done. All this is necessary. But unfortunately not enough. We have to do more tangible things to give our mother tongue the rightful place that it deserves.

The first and foremost thing we need to do is to make our nation a literate one. With the government claiming a literacy rate of 29 per cent and other sources saying it is much lower, our respect for the martyrs of the language movement rings hollow. We will not need the conspiracy of alien rulers to throttle our cultural development, our massive illiteracy is cause enough. Our love for the language will be nothing more than a mere lip service unless we really do something about teaching our people how to read and write. Imagine for a second the spur our language will get if we all were literate—how many more books would be published, how many more writers we would have had and what a enormous reservoir of intellectual energy we would generate. One cannot overemphasize the importance of mass literacy in strengthening and further developing one's own language.

Considering the importance of mass literacy and basic education let this year's Ekushey resolution be that we will all work together—the government, the new parliament, the political parties, cultural groups, student parties, NGOs, private foundations and business and any other interested party, to promote literacy and basic education in Bangladesh. In this regard we consider the possibility of establishing an "Ekushey Committee on Mass Literacy," consisting of social workers, which will examine the state of literacy each year and make public announcements on what progress, if any, we have made. This committee can act as a pressure group on the government and others and help to keep the issue in public focus. There could also be an "Ekushey Padak" for the best literacy worker.

Within the new Parliament we could have a body of Parliamentarians specially looking after the issue of mass literacy and basic education. This group could help to mobilize the necessary political will behind this urgent national cause and perhaps assist in keeping this issue above party politics.

The point is very simple and clear. The mass appeal of Ekushey will have to be turned into a social crusade for basic education and mass literacy. We will have to build a national movement, similar to the one that toppled Ershad, —one that will cut across all political lines and shades of opinion—behind the objective of eradicating illiteracy and opening the door of knowledge to the vast majority of our people. There can be no better way of paying respects to the martyrs of our "Mahan Bhasha Andolon" (Great Language Movement).

New Opportunities for Women

First the bad news. There is a significant shortage of educated women in the country who are trained or experienced in the field of development work. This is so despite the fact that women consultants are particularly sought after by development agencies. Supply is falling well short of demand, creating a yawning gap in an area crucial to the country's socio-economic development.

Now the good news. The Agricultural Sector Team of the Canadian International Development Agency (AST/CIDA) has taken an initiative that may, with luck, be the forerunner of something greater. The agency has initiated a training programme in Dhaka with four female graduate recruits (out of 12 interviewed and 90 tested) who would receive professional training related to development work.

Development agencies, by the very nature of their work which is heavily involved in women-related issues, naturally expect a high level of interaction with females in rural areas. However, despite wide-spread recognition that women comprehend, and consequently can deal with, women's issues better than men, there has not been any systematic drive by either government or non-government agencies to recruit or train women on a priority basis.

The AST/CIDA initiative is thus a highly significant one. It recognises that the lack of female representation is not due to lack of education—there are plenty of women graduates in the country—but principally due to lack of training and exposure to the professional working environment.

Admittedly, unfavourable social pressures, which compel women to see their role in society principally as housewives, have had an immeasurably detrimental effect on women's progress. The apparent absence of ambition among women is a socially-bred phenomenon, not a self-induced one. Add bureaucratic inertia, and we have all the ingredients of a vicious circle: no job, no experience; no experience, no job.

It is a formidable barrier to break. But women have a major role to play in the development of the country. As a clearly-identified social group contributing to socio-economic development, women's potential is enormous. In reality, the AST/CIDA initiative is a drop in the ocean. But this does open up the prospect of other agencies adopting similar programmes to train women in professional work, which will not only enable educated women to fulfil their potential, but also raise awareness among women in general about the greater role they could expect to play in society.

The private sector undoubtedly has a major role to play in this respect. However, in a developing country like Bangladesh, the government will naturally be expected to take the initiative. Perhaps, with women leaders assuming high profile roles in the political arena, the rights and duties of women will receive priority treatment in any future administration.

Gorbachev Shuts off Oxygen to Perestroika

Charles Quist Adade writes from Leningrad



MIKHAIL GORBACHEV
Swinging to the right pleases no one

WHEN President Mikhail Gorbachev embarked on his perestroika reforms six years ago, his favourite catchphrase was: "We need democracy like air." He also denounced force as a means of resolving domestic and international conflicts.

However, Gorbachev has changed his tune with the mid-January Baltic military crackdown, the muzzling of the Press, the resort to rule by ukazy or decrees and the involvement of the state security organs—the KGB and the militia—in regulating political and economic affairs. Now, it seems, Gorbachev believes that perestroika has acquired more than enough oxygen. What is needed for further progress are small doses of force to prevent the collapse of the nation.

Says Professor Pavel Pavlovich of Leningrad University: "The further we move away from the spring of 1985, the more Gorbachev becomes convinced that the oxygen of democracy must be replaced with the gas of force and arm-twisting in order to push perestroika forward."

Many of the Left intelligentsia who share the views of Prof. Pavlovich say the Gorbachev government is in its death throes and that the recent switch in policies is part of a last-ditch stand. But party functionary Alexander Bostin thinks that too much glasnost is "killing" the fledgling democratic reforms. "There are too many anarchists and vulgarisers of democracy around. They block democratic change in the name of glasnost."

He says republican leaders are blackmailing Gorbachev and unless decisive measures are taken "fascist leaders like Landsbergis will sooner or later hijack perestroika."

Bostin argues that the democracy so far achieved is too fragile to survive if it falls into the hands of hot-headed radicals. "Full-blown democracy is still far away. In order to reach the land of civilised democracy there is need for appropriate action, otherwise too much glasnost will kill glasnost," he philosophises.

To pro-reform democrats, the Baltic scenario was written with Gorbachev's right hand.

The Soviet leader has eventually yielded to right-wing pressure. Says Prof. Pavlovich: "After vacillating and double-talking, Gorbachev has finally given in to the dictat of reactionaries in the Communist Party and the military-industrial complex."

He thinks Gorbachev has taken a decisive turn to the right simply to save his own neck—and is normal political practice. "The golden rule of life is that a movement to the right always begins from the left."

Recent changes include blocking the 500-day Shatalin-Yavlinsky economic recovery programme, the reinstatement of mass media censorship by setting up a parliamentary committee to "supervise objectivity in the media" and harsh measures taken to contain the secessionist demands of some republics.

But Gorbachev cannot win, for conservatives

Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev looks more beleaguered than ever. His swing to the right has lost him the support of radical and liberals, but he has not gone far enough for many conservatives. The breakaway republics are more determined than ever to be free of Moscow. The latest blow came with the revelation by Prime Minister Nikolai Ryzhkov that the government had withdrawn 50 and 100 rouble notes on discovering a plan to flood the economy with fake notes and create hyper-inflation. Gorbachev seems to be dangling between the devil and the deep blue sea.

accuse him of betraying them too. Colonel V. Alksnis, an outspoken member of the conservative Soyuz or Union parliamentary group, has accused Gorbachev of "betraying" the Soviet cause by failing to go far enough in crushing Lithuanian independence moves.

While the Soyuz group has backed Gorbachev in replacing liberal-minded champions of perestroika and clamping down on the breakaway republics, in private they want to go much further for they believe there is an urgent need to restore national discipline, respect for the Red Army and to crush all Russo-phobic tendencies. Some say what they really want is a reversion to Stalinism.

Gorbachev appears to have taken on board the argument backing an "iron hand" and his current mood seems uncompromising. Drawing a parallel with the great Depression in the

US in the Thirties, he told the people's congress in the Kremlin in December last year: "The seriousness of the country's socio-economic and political situation demands a strong hand."

Gorbachev has assumed the role of an economic czar of sorts issuing a spate of presidential decrees covering everything from workers control of industry and trade to withdrawal of 50 and 100 rouble notes.

Just as Gorbachev is losing the support of politicians on both the Right and the Left, so are ordinary citizens losing faith in him. Recent opinion polls in Leningrad and Moscow show that nearly 70 per cent of Soviets do not trust their president who, only one-and-a-half years ago was their toast.

Gorbachev's popularity began to wane as early as last November, but took a dramatic slide after the armed showdown in Vilnius. Said a member of the Social Democratic Party in Leningrad: "Mikhail Sergeevich was our hope five years ago, but today when I think of blood-lettings in Tbilisi, Baku and Vilnius, he is my idea of a holocaust. And Lev Svetkov, who has deserted the Communist Party, says: 'Now I can only say with deep sorrow that this great initiator of renewal is fast becoming the gravedigger.'"

Gorbachev's dilemma lies in the inherent tension, some say contradiction, between his drive to create a "law-governed democratic state" and the ideal of a party-led, united socialist state. He wants to wear the garb of a democrat, but has refused, or been unable to shed the communist paradigm.

A product of the communist system, Gorbachev cannot become a democrat overnight. Even if it is his ambition to become one, then he has already realised he must proceed slowly. For the system is unlikely to forgive a failed reformer, as Nikita Khrushchev found to his cost in the Fifties when his economic plans came unstuck.—GEMINI NEWS

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MOST tenancy reform programmes are not sustainable, a Japanese professor says.

Land reform—defined broadly to include both land distribution programmes and tenancy reform—is one of the most commonly mentioned solutions to rural poverty since land is a key asset in rural areas.

Land reform usually involves a turnover of land by a landowner to long-term tenants with whom he has share-cropping agreements. It does not necessarily involve a transfer of land to farm labourers.

When landowners are forced to change radically the terms of share-cropping

agreements in favour of their tenants because of tenancy reform programmes, they often find the new terms unacceptable. So they evict tenants and hire labourers to cultivate the land since it is more profitable than share-cropping, says Professor Keijiro Otsuka of Tokyo Metropolitan University. He is author of "Land Tenure and Rural Poverty in Asia," a paper prepared for the symposium.

The net result can be fewer tenants, and more labourers. Since tenants are usually better off than labourers, tenancy

reform does not really help the poor, he says.

Otsuka says tenancy is not necessarily inefficient and should not be automatically ruled out. Instead, tenancy regulations should be liberalised to allow a wider choice of contractual options.

Furthermore, the hiring of labourers is an inefficient substitute for tenancy-fixed-tenants and owner-farmers tend to make better use of resources than owners who hire

labourers.

An analysis carried out in the Philippines by Professor Otsuka and two colleagues showed yields and residual profits per hectare were significantly lower on farms with labourers than those using another system. Thus, he concluded, restrictions on tenure choice under present land reform regulations in the Philippines have actually adversely affected both efficiency and equity.

The professor also said land reform programmes in the Philippines, and in other Asian developing countries, have loopholes. For example, under Philippine law, landlords are allowed to keep seven hectares of land. During the course of a survey conducted in 1990, Otsuka discovered landowners registered excess holdings in the names of sons, daughters and close relatives, thus evading the law.

Philippine law applies to land worked by tenants and excludes land cultivated by owners—tenants have often been evicted under the guise of a transition to owner cultivation. According to Otsuka's survey of landless labourers in five selected rice-growing villages in the Philippines, nearly half the landless labourers used to be tenants but had been evicted, often illegally, when land reform was implemented.

Former tenants lost their tenancy titles and were reduced to the landless labourer class.

In general, the professor warned, land reform cannot be a panacea for poverty alleviation, aside from the practical difficulty of its implementation.

In a recent conference organised by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in Manila, experts said that traditional methods of helping the rural poor—such as land reform and subsidised credit programmes—do not always work.

The Regional Symposium on Rural Poverty, attended by 40 delegates, was part of the final process of an ADB-financed study on "Priority Issues and Policy Measures to Alleviate Rural Poverty."

About 900 million people in the region live in poverty. 500 million of them extremely poor, said Dr. M.G. Quibria of the ADB's Economics and Resource Development Centre. Quibria, who served as conference coordinator, defined poverty as an individual's inability to reach a minimum

standard of living.

Another controversial issue, the use of credit to alleviate poverty, was also debated at the symposium.

The provision of credit for rural development by governments, especially that which is subsidised either explicitly or implicitly, is a traditional approach which now has few advocates among economists since it has had "disastrous results," according to Ammar Siamwalla, President of the Thailand Development Research Institute.

Siamwalla said credit should play a supporting role and is helpful only if it helps the poor engage in productive economic activities, producing marketable goods.

To be competitive, these goods must be produced more efficiently. While credit can be useful in adopting new, more efficient technologies, once the technology proves to be viable, there is no reason to provide soft credit to encourage the use of the technology—it sells itself.

The experience of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh proves the poor can conjure up profitable projects, provided they design and implement ventures themselves, according to Siamwalla, but he added, credit programmes depend on a vibrant local economy as a precondition.

Siamwalla suggested that credit is not always the solution. Instead, off setting losses the poor must absorb because of the risks they are forced to take might go further to reduce poverty. For example, public works programmes can provide income during times of crop failure; subsidised health-care provision and, more importantly, increased availability and accessibility of health services could cushion the effect of illness; and targeted food subsidies could tide the poor through times of adversity.

These measures imply giving grants instead of loans, which Siamwalla argues is appropriate when certain conditions are met such as "fairness and compassion" in implementation and the use of appropriate financing.

Gender issues in rural poverty were the focus of Dr. Kalpana Bardhan, of the centre for South Asia Studies at the University of California, Berkeley.

She said disadvantaged females often suffer more than their male counterparts. They tend to work harder and have less access to food, health, education and training. This creates a vicious cycle: over-

worked and undernourished mothers do not send their daughters to school and cannot care for their children.

Studies show significant positive results follow better educational and employment opportunities for females, including the lowering of fertility and infant mortality; direct and indirect gains from shifts to higher-yield work; and gains from adopting equipment and inputs which improve the efficiency of household chores.

Three broad sets of policies which affect the rural poor were described by Professor T.N. Srinivasan of Yale University.

The first set concerns agriculture: policies affecting ownership and access to agricultural land by the poor; technology and extension policies influencing agricultural productivity; and price and tax policies.

The second set concerns the productivity of labour through investments in health and education. The third set concerns economy-wide policies, ranging from macroeconomic, inflation, foreign trade, borrowing, monetary and financial sector policies.

"First, and perhaps the most important," says Srinivasan, "is that the incentive system matters and competition is the most reliable way of ensuring appropriate incentives for an efficient allocation of resources. This involves promoting the operation of competitive markets and responding to signals generated by such markets."

He also said "outward orientation"—defined as a neutral trade regime allowing the forces of comparative advantage to determine production; capacity creation, foreign trade investment—promotes sustained and efficient development. A stable macroeconomic framework is also "absolutely essential" for the incentives provided by competitive markets and outward orientation to be effective.

Finally, the State has a vital role to play in establishing and maintaining a conducive environment for microeconomic incentives.

What is the status of market development, state monopolies and government regulation of a given country and how do these affect macro policies? Should we attempt to influence these characteristics?

What is the right balance between buffering the rural poor from the short-term effects of stabilisation and structural adjustment programmes as well as investment affecting their long-term command over resources? Does the government have a comparative advantage in performing certain activities? —Dephne Asia

Colonial Categories

by B. K. Jahangir

Colonial categories are constant in the construction of a colony's history.

Influenced by the work of Andre Gunder Frank and Immanuel Wallestein anthropologists investigated the manner in which the structural constraints of colonial capitalism shaped indigenous changes in community and class, and at the same time destroyed, preserved and froze traditional relations of power and production, and frequently reinvented and conjured them. In the beginning, anthropologists looked at the impact of colonialism on various domains of indigenous agrarian structure, household economy, kinship organization and community life. Later on, turning away from the determinism that some of that approach implied, they sought to identify the active agency of colonized populations as they engaged and resisted colonial impositions, thereby transforming the terms of that encounter. The contours of these communities and the cultural practices of their inhabitants have appeared double-edged: explainable neither by their functional utility to colonialism nor by their defiance of it, but as the product of historically layered colonial encounter.

In both global processes and local practices, the units of analysis have also shifted to the extra village, regional, national and global ties that bind seemingly discrete peasant populations to the world economy and to a rejection of the notion that categories such as nation, tribe and culture and internally homogenous bounded objects. In spite of this innovation, the objects of the study have remained much the same. Where anthropologists have attended to world market forces and examined European images of the other, they have done better to explain the impact of perceptions and policy on people, on a particular community. And even where anthropologists have probed the nature of colonial discourse and the politics of its language, the texts are often

assumed to express a shared European mentality, the sentiments of a unified, conquering elite.

Anthropologists have taken the politically constructed dichotomy of colonizer and colonized as a given, rather than as an historically shifting pair of social categories that needs to be explained. This does not mean that anthropologists have not attended to the ambiguity and manipulation of racial classification. But this interest has rarely been focused on European communities, or on the powerful cultural idioms of domination. As a result, colonizers and their communities are frequently treated as diverse but unproblematic. Finally, the assumption that colonial political agendas are self-evident precludes examination of the cultural politics of the communities in which colonizers lived.

In colonial situations as diverse as India, New Guinea, the Netherlands Indies, Cuba, Mexico, and South Africa, increasing knowledge, contact, and familiarity lead not to a diminution of racial discrimination but to an intensification of it over time, and to a redefining and a regirdifying of boundaries. But colonial racism is more than an aspect of how people classify each other, how they fix and naturalise the differences between We and They. It provides a way of creating the sense of colonial community and context that allows for colonial authority and for a particular set of relations of production and power. Racist ideology, fear of the Other, preoccupation with white prestige, and obsession with protecting European women from sexual assault by Asian and black males were not simply justifications for continued European rule and white supremacy. They were part of a critical class-based logic, statements not only about indigenous subversives, but directives aimed at disorienting European underlings in the colonies—and part of the apparatus that kept potentially subversive white colonials in line.

To the Editor...

Telegraph service

Sir, We all will agree unanimously, that we do not live in the medieval times or the dark ages; when travelling was difficult and time consuming. Things do not move simply manually or are sent on horse-back or mules anymore.

But then why does it take so long for a telegram or a money order to reach a destination? A telegram sent by me from Dhaka to Mymensingh, took just about 20 days to reach there. The address was

correct, the fees were duly paid, then why this delay?

On questioning, both the tele offices of Dhaka as well as Mymensingh could not come up with a satisfactory answer.

It was an important message about some serious illness in the family.

Thank God, nothing untoward happened. But suppose, something would have happened? Who would answer, and take the ultimate responsibility of carelessness?

Sarwar Jahan, Rayer Bazar, Dhaka.

Chins up!

Sir, Reference Irtiza N. Ali's interesting story captioned: "Iraqis are Trying to Keep Their Chins Up" (Daily Star 11.2.91). I.N. Ali's report on life in Baghdad today has brought some home-truths for the 'credulous' people who still believe that Saddam Hussein is fighting a noble cause—a holy war—against all the 'infidels' of the world. It is not surprising to those who know the background of Saddam's upbringing that under his

patronage there have been a mushroom growth of night clubs, bars and other elements in Baghdad which was once a centre of Islamic learning and culture.

May be, the Iraqis are frustrated and bewildered to see the hollowiness of Saddam's whimsical and rash decision to occupy Kuwait and world-wide condemnation for it.

Perhaps, fearing a 'doomsday' the Iraqis now take refuge in the night clubs only to have their last cup of joy! Acute shortage

of food and other essential items does not worry Saddam Hussein!

Postscript: "Iraq will conscript all 17-year-olds into the army" (Baghdad Radio). If these boys are already married then certainly after the Gulf war

man-woman ration in Baghdad night clubs will not be what it is now (it was 1:2 after 8 years of war with Iran). And, maybe after the two wars Iraq will never be the same again.

Abdul Kader, Purana Paltan, Dhaka.

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.