

Aid to Bangladesh

With the stage set for the meeting of the Aid to Bangladesh Club, in Paris later this month, the government, we hope, will not spare any efforts in its preparation for this major event. Here, the new administration of Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia faces a number of crucial tests, including a few unexpected ones.

In the first place, the massive destruction of infrastructure along the coastal belt of Bangladesh by the cyclone that hit the country last week, not to mention of the need for short-term relief and rehabilitation in affected areas, have changed our projection of the total volume of aid and assistance needed by this country. Even before the calamity had ravaged parts of the country, the Minister for Finance and Planning, Saifur Rahman had called for "increased" assistance from donor nations and agencies. To what extent Mr Rahman's target will be further raised remains anybody's guess. However, when it comes to short-term relief and rehabilitation, including construction of houses, roads and bridges, there should be maximum mobilisation of internal resources to meet the cost. Instead of merely offering assurances and pledges in this regard, our delegation to the Paris meeting should be most specific in quantifying the size of our internal mobilisation.

Another test may be just as crucial for the Bangladesh delegation as the first one. Although Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has spoken at length to heads of foreign missions here on her administration's economic priorities, mostly in political terms rather than in the language of development, high level delegations at the Paris meeting would be curious to know more about the socio-economic agenda of the new government. To be more specific, they would be anxious to see how the administration strikes a balance between continuity of policies and a fresh approach, between making politically-motivated concessions, such as the annulment of agricultural loans of certain size, which even the Finance Minister may not fully support and launching a serious austerity drive in public and private spending to raise the level of national saving which has been falling drastically in recent years.

On this and other issues, the delegation to Paris, especially the Minister for Finance and Planning, would be well-advised to organise closed-door meetings with experts from outside the administration, a practice rarely followed by government leaders. On some of these issues, tentative views have been already expressed in the columns of this paper by eminent experts, including two former finance ministers, M. Syeduzzaman and A. M. A. Muhith. The need to strengthen the Planning Commission which had become virtually moribund during the last years of the Ershad rule has been emphasised by Mr Syeduzzaman. If the Planning Commission is given a new lease of life and separated from the Ministry of Finance, something should also be done to raise the level of our data collection.

Among many things which went wrong in the development process during the Ershad regime, by far the most serious mistake was that, more often than not, it was directed by one man, sometimes through a series of ad hoc and instant decisions. The donor nations and agencies in Paris must know that from now on, the development process will be handled through a system and not by any single individual and that even if, at the start, the decision-making process works a bit more slowly than in the past, the end result will be more durable, productive and beneficial than anything we had seen in the past.

A Beacon of Light

The venerable nun is here. Mother Teresa arrived in Bangladesh yesterday bringing message of sympathy and prayers for salvation of the souls of the unknown number of people lost forever to the sea. This is the second time she has come to this flat, but majestic delta created and sustained by the Ganges and the Brahmaputra. For Mother Teresa, the fact that this is also a country visited too often by misfortunes beyond human control, will remain inescapable.

Perhaps the most deserving of all the recipients of the Nobel Peace Prize, Mother Teresa understands tragedy; more than most, she can claim to know, to feel, what it is like to be unfortunate. For her, charity or care is not conducted from the comfortable surroundings of a five-star hotel or a plush drawing room. She goes down to the depths, down where human sufferings are, and shares the sorrow. She has sacrificed her entire life for the welfare of others; she has foregone all the comfort and pleasure life has to offer, just to lessen, even if only a tiny bit, the agony and pain suffered by the less fortunate of this earth.

But what makes her pass her days in the slums, shanties and ghettos of this wretched world? What makes her leave everything just so she could bring some comfort to the sick and distressed? What makes her bear the cross of human misery, just as her lord Jesus Christ did, so that the sins of others would be forgiven? If we are looking for answers, we need not look very far, because the truth is within her; because she is driven by a conscience dedicated to the salvation of the human race.

She has not brought any plane-load of goods with her, nor any promises of material aid. But what she has brought are those unquantifiable and invaluable commodities — inspiration and hope. In our hour of need, we desperately seek something that will give us courage to hold on, to fight back and to survive. To the millions of our suffering, hungry people on the islands and along the coast, struggling to stay alive for another 24 hours, Mother Teresa's presence, we hope, will be like a beacon of light in an all-pervading darkness. In return, all we can offer her is our gratitude, the deepest gratitude we can muster as a nation. For, Mother Teresa represents everything that is good about the human spirit. Her presence amongst us gives us courage for the present and hope for the future.

The Million Forgotten Victims of a Silent War

David Robie writes from Bocolod City, Negros Island

Since 1986 about one million civilians have fled their homes to escape the fighting in the Philippines between government troops and the left-wing New People's Army. The plight of these "internal refugees" is still not fully acknowledged by the Corazon Aquino government.



"I pleaded, 'I cannot tell you...I don't know'."

The soldiers stripped the villagers of their rice supplies, cooking utensils and bolos (cane knives). Torres was pushed into a cave along with several other men. A fire was lit in the entrance and one man suffocated to death before other villagers rescued them.

In another incident, Remedios de la Torre, was shot dead by soldiers and her one-year-old baby, Nene,

drowned in a water buffalo mudhole. Three other daughters — Linda, 17, Lorna, 15, and Niza, 13 — were abducted by the military and have not been seen since.

A relative said: "The three girls were walking to a town when the soldiers arrived. Frightened, they ran home. Their mother came out to see what the fuss was about."

"She was immediately shot by the soldiers. Her husband, Carlito, jumped out of the

house and escaped while the soldiers also fired at him. The baby was drowned and the three daughters were taken away by the soldiers."

The 61st Battalion — one of nine military and paramilitary battalions on highly militarised Negros — was accused of the atrocities in both incidents, and in many other cases. The only prosecution case has been brought against a lieutenant accused of killing the mother.

The issue of internal refugees is highly sensitive for the Aquino government. It is difficult for the government to acknowledge the scale of the problem. To do so would force it to admit serious excesses in the counter-insurgency strategy. And the rebels would press the propaganda advantage.

About 60 per cent of the refugees are children, according to NGOs. Many, particularly on the southern island of Mindanao and in the mountainous northern Cordillera region, are minorities.

The Citizens Disaster Rehabilitation Centre, a Manila-based umbrella secretariat for a network of 17 non-

governmental organisations (NGOs) helping refugees, blames the crisis on the Aquino government's "total war policy." In 1989, almost 36,000 people were displaced in the military's notorious Operation Thunderbolt on Negros.

Although the strategy was officially shelved for a while, it is clear the operations were used as a trial for similar mass operations against civilians elsewhere in the country. Militarisation on Mindanao led to far more refugees — 126,000 by the end of 1989 alone.

A major operations has been under way since last October in the Marag Valley, in the northern province of Cagayan.

In Negros Occidental province, Governor Lacson, who has a prawn farm and major landholdings, praised the counter-insurgency strategy and played down the refugee problem.

"I don't believe in violence. I believe in democracy. I have started land reform in this province and I pay minimum wages. But (the rebels) burnt down my farm."

Why touch my farm when



Marcello Torres and his family

"I'm just trying to do something for my province and my country?"

Lacson believes the war is being won and says conditions in his province are better than in 1985, the year before Corazon Aquino came to power. He warns: "Unless we develop the province there is no hope for Manila."

"It is going to become the garbage can of the Philippines, the squatter camp of the nation. More than 250,000 Filipinos migrate there every year."

For many refugees it is a struggle to survive. In remote towns such as Mulanay and Recto in Quezon province refugees live in decaying schools where their only food is one bowl of pigaw, rice porridge a day.

Most people who die or fall ill in evacuation camps are either children or elderly refugees exhausted by the trekking and who more easily contract diseases in the unsanitary conditions.

CDRC executive director Zenaida Delica says: "Statistics don't tell the full story. Evacuees usually have to leave in a hurry. Many — perhaps as much as 60 per cent — are terrified children or old people, while able-bodied adults must carry what ever food or possessions they're able to carry."

"Heavy laden, frightened, hungry, tired, they often have to walk long distances — sometimes several hundred kilometres over rough terrain to find a safe place."

"Without land to till they have no source of livelihood. With no property to sell, they are unable to buy food. They are forced to depend on badly paid casual work and charity."

And hope that their children will survive.

— GEMINI NEWS

DAVID ROBIE is a New Zealand Journalist specialising in Pacific and development issues. He has been editor or held senior editorial positions in newspapers in Australia, Africa and France, and is a former editor of Insight Magazine in New Zealand.

Controversy Freezes White-Collar Parole

Derek Round writes from Wellington

A parole system under which prisoners can leave New Zealand jails to go to work and spend weekends with their families is being reviewed following protests over the release of "white-collar" criminals.

Parole privileges for some of the prisoners have been withdrawn while the review is taking place.

The protests followed news that a businessman jailed for two years for a widely-publicised million-dollar fraud had been freed on work parole less than eight weeks after being sentenced in Wellington's High Court.

Less than 15 weeks into his prison term he was spending the weekend relaxing with his family.

The businessman, Robert Philpott, had been described by chief Justice Sir Thomas Eichelbaum as a liar and a cheat responsible for an "elaborate web of deceit."

Chief Justice Eichelbaum, who rarely comments publicly on individual cases, said he was surprised at the early work parole granted and had not envisaged it when he passed

sentence on Mr. Philpott.

Under his parole conditions, Mr. Philpott caught a 7:45 am bus to work from prison, worked from 8:30 am to 6 pm and was returned to jail by his employer. He was not allowed to leave work without his employer's permission, could not drink alcohol, and could not incur debts.

He was freed again at 7 pm on Friday nights and required

to report back to prison at 7:30 pm on Sundays. But a newspaper reported Mr. Philpott had taken a three-hour lunch break, been seen leaving work at 4:30 pm and picking up his child from school.

The prison superintendent said he approved Mr. Philpott's early work parole because he was a non-violent offender and in a position to contribute to his prison expenses. Thirty per cent of his wages had to be paid in "rent" to the prison.

But the *Dominion* newspaper said in an editorial that

many ordinary New Zealanders had seen their life savings disappear through the hands of crooked businessmen in the 1987 sharemarket crash and there was a feeling that white-collar criminals remained beyond the grasp of justice.

"The Philpott case was one of the few to reassure a sceptical public that such

home-leave privileges, he said they had been given too early in the sentence.

"For somebody who has been convicted of a serious crime of fraud, I think two months is too early," he said.

The justice minister said he was already considering changes to the parole system

weekend parole to Mr. Philpott. "This sort of system has been running for quite a number of years and it's unfortunate a high-profile offender has led to criticism of it," he said.

"Work release is very, very successful in a great number of cases and it stops a lot of reoffending, which is what the objective is."

The main purpose of pris-

inmate, lawyer Clive Kerr, serving term for theft and fraud crimes involving NZ\$300, (US\$198,000), had been seen attending a party with his wife at a hotel in another city while on weekend parole. Like Mr. Philpott, he has also been on work parole.

Victoria University criminologist Dr. Warren Young said these cases raised questions about the direction the parole scheme was taking.

Initially intended to allow inmates near the end of their sentences to get work skills and ease their transition into the community, the scheme had later been extended.

"I must say that I have some concerns about the scheme if it effectively means that somebody two months into a two-year sentence is only spending five nights a week in prison," Dr. Young said.

"It seems to me that this is verging on making a nonsense of what a prison sentence means."

— Depthnews Asia

It seems the scheme is verging on making a nonsense of what a prison sentence means

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.

Kurdish tragedy

Sir, For the last few weeks we have been observing almost daily on BTv and on pages of different local newspapers one of the saddest tragedies in recent years; thousands of Kurdish refugees suffering hundreds of calamities all due to their voice — against the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein who completely violated all norms of human rights.

The saddest part of this tragedy is the indifference of Muslim leaders to the need of these people who nowadays are badly treated and insulted even by some foreign soldiers.

For instance throwing breads, biscuits etc. to them in a very odd manner could be controlled and things could be distributed in better ways.

It is a matter of regret that still many of the Muslim countries are not taking any effective step to

help solve their brothers' and sisters' miseries. Hundreds of helpless Kurds are dying everyday due to starvation, epidemic and other sorts of suffering.

In this context I would like to request all Muslim leaders to come forward with all their means which have been given by the Almighty Allah to help their needy brothers and sisters, finally ending their sub-human conditions.

S. Rahim Ashnakhah, Dhanmondi, Dhaka

"Shaheed"

Sir, My attention has been drawn to a letter of Al-Haj S.M. Khalid Chowdhury which appeared in your paper on April 20, 1991 under the heading "Applicability of Shaheed."

Referring to the pronouncement made by the leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina about the applicability of the term 'Shaheed' to communists

other than Muslims, the letter writer sought expert opinion on the issue.

Well, I am not a doctor of religion but with my limited knowledge, I can safely say that Sheikh Hasina's remark was correct in the light of Islamic theology.

Let us see whom can we call 'Shaheed'? Allah says in the Holy Quran — "And do not speak of those who are slain in Allah's way as dead; nay, (they are) alive, but you do not perceive" (Al-Quran : 2:154). So, these are the people whom we call Shaheed. We can of course get some more explanation of this term from the sayings of the Holy Prophet (SM) — "Whoever fights in defence of his person and is killed, is a martyr, whoever fights in defence of his family and is killed, is a martyr, whoever fights in defence of his property and is killed, for the cause of Allah is a martyr."

In Islam, Allah has given a special status to the Muslims who will sacrifice their lives in the way of Allah. The way of Allah on this earth for a Muslim starts from his/her birth and ends at death. A Muslim performs all his

acts in the name of Allah. A true Muslim is a true servant of Allah, he performs what Allah has prescribed and avoids what Allah has forbidden. Hence, a Muslim is supposed to do everything on the will of Allah.

And Allah has clearly mentioned in his Holy Book and through the Holy Prophet (SM), how a Muslim should live on this earth. For instance, the term 'Jihad' refers to using one's utmost power to resist evil for establishing truth over falsehood. And one who dies in Jihad, receives the status of Shaheed. And Shaheed is a special status given by Allah the Almighty to those Muslims who would embrace martyrdom while fighting against oppression, falsehood, injustice etc. in the way of Allah.

For example, we can surely call those Muslim brothers of ours who sacrificed their lives during our language movement as Shaheeds because they fought for justice and in the order of Allah because Allah has given the right to speech in one's native language. As such, those who sacrificed their lives during our war of liberation are also Shaheeds as well as those during the last mass

movement against autocracy.

In conclusion, I would like to say that the term 'Shaheed' is applicable only to Muslims because Muslims do what Allah asked them to do keeping absolute faith in the Almighty Allah and His Holy Prophet (SM).

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

Kuwait's crude outlook

Sir, Kuwait has been liberated after seven months of Iraqi occupation through an all-out war of 41 days between US-led coalition forces and Iraqi forces. The outcome of this crisis is a gainful triumph for UNO that authorised states "to use all necessary means" against Iraq unless it withdrew from Kuwait or before January 15, 1991 (Resolution 678).

The 15-member UN Security Council adopted 12 resolutions on Kuwait issue ever since Iraq's invasion of this oil-rich state on the Persian Gulf and subsequent annexation as a province. But, right or wrong, Iraq's version of

"might is right" has eventually been overrun by UNO's.

However, the bimodal diplomatic manoeuvres of USSR as well as global conscience substantially contributed to averting the apprehended World War III, so did the reasonably flexible diplomatic positions of Muslim countries that safeguarded holy areas with their troops.

Now that the aspired reality has been achieved at a considerable cost, the whole affair will have been an excellent lesson for all the virtually defenseless nations having such vulnerability to external threats, no matter what their locations are.

Likewise, the gravity of this crisis must be an outstanding education for UNO as far as enforcement of its resolutions are concerned, and the facts of the matter should set the record straight in the added history of modern civilization when born-again Kuwait faces the inflicted do-it-all-over-again condition for herself providing an impetus to the survival struggles of less fortunate nations. M. Rahman, Zila School Road, Mymensingh 2200.