

## Crisis in Colombo

As if Sri Lanka has not had its share of problems in the civil strife between the government forces and Tamil rebels, the island is now caught in a potentially volatile crisis involving the political system in the country. The crisis was triggered off last week by the opposition's move to impeach President Ranasinghe Premadasa on a wide variety of charges ranging from misuse of power to corruption. The move has undoubtedly made a headway. This is proved by resignations of a number of ministers from the government, including Lalith Athulathmudali as well as some defections from the ruling United National Party (UNP). All this development has prompted President Premadasa to prorogue parliament for a month. Apparently he hopes to use this time to consolidate his own position to thwart the impeachment move.

At the start of the crisis two weeks ago most political analysts assumed that the impeachment move was touched off by alleged abuse of power and corruption by President Premadasa. While the international community had been waiting for details, it now appears that the move aims at destroying the existing presidential system which is somewhat similar to the French one and replacing it by a parliamentary form. If this is the case, opposition politicians in Colombo have certainly chosen a most aggressive way of bringing about the change-over.

Since the government of Premadasa has made a commitment to the establishment of autonomy for the Tamil-dominated northern state, the island is almost certain to adopt a federal system to replace its existing unitary one. If decentralisation of power is one of the objectives guiding the future course of action in Sri Lanka, the adoption of a parliamentary form of government would certainly be the right move taken at the right time.

However, at this moment just the introduction of a parliamentary form may only serve a limited purpose. Even under a parliamentary form, political divisiveness can continue to play havoc with the national life of the island, thus weakening the forces which stand for integrity, stability and ethnic harmony in the island. We believe that, however serious may be the differences between the ruling party and the opposition, it is imperative that President Premadasa uses the breathing time of one month suspension of parliament to reach out to the opposition and explore prospects for a broad-based national coalition at the centre.

Such a coalition can work if he willingly surrenders some of his presidential powers in favour of the coalition. It is high time all political parties realised that nothing short of a broad-based national unity can tackle the crisis facing the island. Unless a sense of urgency dawns on the democratic forces in Sri Lanka, the island, once regarded as the paradise in South Asia, will continue to go through a long, dark night.

## After Heroin, Comes Cocaine

While heroin addiction continues to eat into the social fabric of the nation, particularly a growing section of its youth, we are now faced with the deadly presence of cocaine, a more expensive but just as lethal a drug produced mainly in Latin America for consumption in the affluent West.

According to a report published in this paper recently, five seizures of cocaine have been made in this country between July, 1990 and August of this year. A total of three kilograms and 345 grams — with a street value in Bangladesh exceeding three and a half crore taka — have so far been recovered.

The Department of Narcotics (DoN) is "alarmed" by the size of the hauls, and also "surprised" because it is not aware of any cocaine usage in this country. With that amount of drug already detected, we can now be sure that a "good" market for cocaine has already been created in Bangladesh. It may seem astounding that such an expensive narcotic can find a market in a country where the majority of the people still do not get enough to eat, but that is the tragic truth. The money, black or white, exists; the demand exists; and the supply is being made.

It is possible that Bangladesh is being used as a transit point, but discovery of small amount of cocaine in Dhaka proves it is also being sold on the local market. Heroin also came here as a "transit drug", before finding a market locally. There is no room for complacency or wishful thinking here anymore.

A lot of work now has to be done if we are to prevent a further acceleration of social degeneration and rise in criminal acts. The DoN should be upgraded to become an effective body, with its men and officers sent abroad for advanced training in drug investigation and detection. A special police force also needs to be formed to assist the DoN, which should be well-equipped with efficient communications systems as well as weapons (we must not lose sight of the fact that drug traffickers and pushers are often desperate people who would not flinch from using lethal weapons). Greater cooperation with police forces of source countries has now become imperative to combat smuggling. At the same time, much more emphasis ought to be placed on rehabilitation of users and addicts, in order to help them move away from the habit. We should treat the addicts as victims and with compassion, but show no mercy to the smugglers and pushers.

## THE FEMINIZATION OF POVERTY

## Economic Progress Eludes Women

A crisis of potentially alarming proportions and far-reaching implications is beginning to emerge: evidence shows that 70 per cent of the world's fast-growing, poverty-stricken population consists of women, closely followed by the elderly.

Even though in global terms the 1980s saw one of the longest periods of economic growth ever recorded, the overall socio-economic condition of an increasing number of women, in rich and poor countries alike, deteriorated dramatically, giving rise to a phenomenon that has been called the "feminization of poverty".

In the developed world, an unprecedented number of women entered the labour force over the last decade and some succeeded in penetrating male provinces to hold top managerial and technical jobs. These breakthroughs, however, have been largely overshadowed by the fact that a far greater number of women and their dependent children became entrenched in a cycle of crushing poverty. In the United States, for example, even though per capita income rose to an all-time high of \$13,120 in 1988, the poverty rate increased to 13.1 per cent from 11.4 per cent a decade ago, and the gap between the rich and the poor reached a record level, according to figures released by the US Federal Census Bureau in 1989. About 53 per cent of the country's poorest families are headed by women and there are twice as many black and Hispanic, as opposed to white, single-parent families headed by women living in abject poverty.

## Effects of Economic Crisis

The picture is even bleaker in most developing countries, where women have suffered heavily as a result of the on-going economic crisis and the ill effects of structural adjustment programmes. A recent study, *Engendering Adjustment for the 1990s*, conducted by a group of experts set up by the

The observance of the tenth anniversary of the entry-into-force of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women takes place today, 3 September 1991. This convention on Women is one of the most important legal instrument for the establishment of true gender equality worldwide.

Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs, underscores that women in developing countries 'have been at the epicentre of the [economic] crisis and have borne the brunt of the adjustment efforts'. In Brazil, evidence shows that poverty has affected a greater number of women than men; families with women heads of household account for 21 per cent of poor families.

Structural adjustment programmes prescribed by international financial institutions have largely failed to integrate women in economic development. Moreover, by imposing drastic cuts in education and health, they have exacerbated existing inequalities and marginalized women even further. A study sponsored by the Population Crisis Committee in Washington, D.C., has concluded that most women in the third world are "poor, powerless and hungry".

Particularly alarming is the fact that for the first time in many years, maternal and infant mortality rates are beginning to rise and girls-school enrolment is starting to fall in parts of Africa and Latin America as a result of the austerity measures.

Under the strain of the debt crisis and structural adjustment policies, unemployment of women has increased and their purchasing power has declined, while inflation and the elimination of subsidies have made the cost of basic foodstuffs prohibitively high. Already overtaxed women have no choice but to work even longer hours — often at the expense of caring for their children — and to deprive themselves of rest and food so as to keep their families afloat. According to a study by the United Nations Children's

Fund (UNICEF), women in developing countries work twice as many hours as men for one tenth the income. In East Africa, women spend up to 16 hours every day growing, processing and preparing food, gathering fuel and water, and performing other household tasks in addition to caring for their children and extended family.

Women farmers, who comprise two thirds of the total female population in developing countries, grow at least half of the world's food and, in some parts of sub-Saharan Africa, produce as much as 90 per cent of the food. Over the last decade, a combination of climatic changes, ill-fated agricultural policies and/or war have devastated agricultural yields. Food consumption is declining rapidly in many African countries, and among the first victims of food shortages and famine are women with young children. In addition, armed conflicts in Africa, Central America and the Middle East, have left thousands of women widowed, displaced and abandoned to a life of permanent emergency. Some landless, unskilled and illiterate women have resorted to begging, prostitution and other illicit activities just to survive.

## Plight of Non-traditional Families

The feminization of poverty follows a similar pattern in developed and developing countries alike, with single women and their dependent children, elderly women (including widows) and divorced women being the most vulnerable.

Socio-economic changes, urbanization and migration have increased the number of

families headed by women world-wide to about one third of all households. In several Latin American cities and rural areas of Africa, the percentage is as high as 50 per cent, although in Asia, families headed by women comprise between 16 and 20 per cent of all households. Figures are comparable in the developed world, with Belgium, France, New Zealand and Switzerland, at between 20 and 25 per cent.

In the United States, 80 per cent of all unmarried women, 68 per cent of married women and 55 per cent of all mothers with children under three years of age were in the labour force in 1987. Today, about 78 per cent of all Americans living below the poverty level are women or children under the age of 18.

Elderly widows, a great proportion of whom outlive their husbands, on average spend eight years of their lives on their own. Pension, social security and employment inequities, among others, often mean that elderly women experience a sharp fall in their standard of living after their husbands die.

Divorced women with young children similarly face bleak futures. In Canada, where four in ten marriages end in divorce, it has been estimated that divorced women witness a 73 per cent drop in their standard of living, while the quality of life of their husbands improves by 42 per cent.

Three quarters of divorced women are unable to collect child support payments. Despite a growing crisis in child-care facilities in developed countries, only Scan-

dinavia and Eastern Europe have come to recognize child-care as a State responsibility.

## Unequal Pay for Equal Work

Poor women are often illiterate — in fact, two thirds of the world's illiterates are women — and have little professional training. As a result, they are often reduced to low-wage, low-status jobs. In Kenya, 78.9 per cent of the female work-force in the service sector is employed in these jobs, while only 6.1 per cent is employed in high-paying jobs; in Uruguay the ratio is 70.1 to 6 per cent; and in Japan, 37.5 to 11.6 per cent.

In the 1960s and 1970s many Governments of industrialized countries passed laws which made it illegal for employers to pay women less than men for the same job. However, inequalities persist: in North America, a male high school drop-out today earns more than a female community college graduate; women earn 64 cents to each dollar earned by a man; three quarters of all minimum-wage earners are women; and only 7.5 per cent of working women have managerial, professional and administrative occupations.

Part-time employment, a predominantly female phenomenon which grew markedly in the 1980s in developed countries, is often the only alternative available for poor mothers with young children and for older women. In the United Kingdom, 88 per cent of all part-time workers are women, while in Australia they comprise 79.4 per cent. Management jobs, on the other hand, remain out of reach for most women: in Kuwait, only 2 per cent of managerial jobs are staffed by women, in Greece,

the figure is 14 per cent and in Sweden, 21 per cent.

In addition, even though the job market expanded considerably during the 1980s and male unemployment fell from 9.4 per cent in 1984 to 8.3 per cent in 1988 in developed countries, female unemployment increased from 12.9 to 13.4 per cent. A similar trend has been observed in developing countries, where efforts to cope with the debt crisis have often resulted in a drastic decline in wages for the few women who are employed in the formal sector. The vast majority of urban women work in the informal sector where earnings are meagre.

## Remedial Strategies

Even though women's vital role in development has been generally acknowledged, their economic contribution remains largely overlooked, and equitable development strategies have yet to be translated into effective plans of action. Moreover, it is becoming increasingly clear that economic recovery cannot be achieved without tackling the feminization of poverty, which should be viewed as a political, economic and social problem rather than as a purely developmental problem.

Illiterate women are less equipped to fight against poverty and are therefore likely to pass their predicament on to their children. Better educated, better trained and healthy women can contribute to reducing hunger and poverty, promoting family welfare, finding viable solutions to the uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources and sustaining overall economic growth in the developing countries. Pressing, however, is the need for policy-making and legislative reforms to combat discrimination against women world-wide, as well as changes in attitudes and cultural norms that currently present formidable obstacles to women's equality.

— UNICEF Feature

## Children who Bear War's Mental Scars

Mounir B Abboud writes from Beirut

Traumatised youngsters are among the many victims of Lebanon's 15-year civil war

CHILDREN'S dreams seemed to shift from toys and sweets to weapons and battles.

Many children could not stop crying. One five-year-old girl whose brother died lost consciousness and became partially paralysed. Another 12-year-old girl had rashes and convulsions.

These are the children of Lebanon, traumatised by the effects of the country's long-running civil war, now at last ended, and involvement in the politics of the Middle East.

They are some of several children interviewed by Dr Ghassan Halim, a psychology professor at the Lebanese University, who has made the first attempt to study the effects of the 15-year civil war on Beirut children.

"Sometimes, when I'm eating a sandwich, I think I'm eating intestines, and I feel awful and throw the sandwich away," said a nine-year-old girl, Yasmine Murad. For nine years the girl lived with the sound of shelling and the sight of blood and destruction.

"I hate all loud noises," she said. "I'm afraid of explosions and bullets. I used to shake and my heart beat a lot, and I used to wake up in the night and scream. I'm still frightened by loud noises and the sound of airplanes. And I jump when somebody slams the door."

Dr Halim says that "most of the children who lived in battle zones became the victims of fear and terror in varying degrees. The effects of their fear linger. Many of the children still have convulsions and are frightened by loud noises."

"We noted that children born during the war are very nervous. The sound of explosions has apparently impressed itself on their nervous systems, leading to certain re-

flexes. A certain conditioning has occurred."

Dr Halim presented his findings in a Beirut seminar on the effects of the war on children. He visited seven children's hospitals and interviewed both children and doctors.

Among the war-induced psychological problems observed were mental anorexia (loss of appetite), enuresia (involuntary urination, usually at night), insomnia and hysterics.

To get a more accurate picture, Dr Halim also interviewed the children's parents: four urban guerrilla fathers, four fathers who did not fight but nevertheless stayed in the city and two others who were forced to move out when their homes were destroyed.

The fathers who took part in the fight in reported that their children were almost fearless during and after the war. Ni'meh Abdul Hakim said his children "lived the war," split themselves into two groups and staged mock battles and rarely wanted to go down to safe shelters. They always played on the street whenever fighting stopped.

Another combatant, Halim Hassan, said his children "saw many dead people on the streets but he didn't affect them." The children repeated slogans they heard from combatants and, according to Mr Hassan, liked the sound of gunfire and explosions which they considered to be signs of victory.

But one combatant father, Sami Tabari, said his children were frightened. "They screamed when the shelling started. They stopped sleeping peacefully and their appetites were affected. They couldn't enjoy their toys and usual games anymore."

The non-combatant parents

seemed more aware of the effects of the war on children. According to parents, children in families forced to flee their homes were the ones most disturbed. The uprooting was usually accompanied by financial difficulties.

The effects of dislocation on children is best illustrated by Hind Mardini who lost her US\$2,400 yearly income during the war. "My children did not dream of shells and bullets," she said. "They dreamed of fruits and cakes. That broke my heart and theirs."

Dr Halim said the children of combatant fathers themselves suffered from extreme fear and showed many of its symptoms, despite their fathers' refusal to accept the fact. The children themselves contradicted their combatant fathers' impressions that the war had little effect on children.

"The effects of the war can be more clearly seen in children who were over six years old because they were more aware of what was happening."

Dr Halim said that some of the children had a more intimate impression of the war, playing on the streets when the shelling stopped. They identified with the fighters.

"They want to grow up quickly so they can carry machine guns and kill their enemies, thus becoming heroes. These children exhibited signs of enjoying scenes of death, throat-cutting and vengeance. They now talk about revenge when they grow up."

Then there were the

"normal" children who were brought out of the war zone to quiet areas. They, too, according to Dr Halim, seemed to have developed the desire for

vengeance when they grow up — an attitude reinforced by family members. Their games had become war-oriented.

Dr Halim said there was "no way of determining at this stage what effects the terror experience will have on younger children's future behaviour. The children must remain under observation for at least two years, if that ques-

tion is to be answered."

He believed the tendency to violence and vengefulness among some children could be reversed if the political, social and economic climate develops into permanent stability and peace. However, if the instability and fear return, "it is very possible that this trend will grow."

— Depthnews Asia

## OPINION

## J versus Z

Bashir Al Helal

This is about a problem of inappropriate transliteration of specially some proper names into English i.e. Roman at large. One has sure freedom of how he or she spells his or her name. For a style or a pet fancy one can even ignore the international system of transliterating something from one language into another. But style or fancy is an extraordinary behaviour or mannerism. Nevertheless we are to follow the standard international system or code to transliterate something into an alien script and vice versa. Otherwise that freedom may even sound ludicrous specially in the cases of uncorrected violations.

Like Arabic, Persian and Urdu, and unlike Bangla, English has both 'j' and 'z' phoneme, phonetic unit of a sound. That is an extra advantage for the Bangla language in matter of its transliteration into English for, while we have the 'j' equivalent in Bangla alphabet, have no letter equivalent representing the sound of English 'z' as also of similar Perso-Arabic characters. That is why if and when we, Bangalis, pronounce a Bangali proper name in Arabic, for example, Zahur like Jahur, that does not sound ludicrous. Same is the case with non-proper name alien words like 'Julum', 'Ijjat', 'andaj', 'jahaj', 'jebra' etc., all adopted and assimilated in Bangla. On the contrary, if in course of a Bangla conversation one ventures on a correct or accurate pronunciation of these assimilated alien words as they were in their original language and form e.g. 'zulum', 'izzat', 'andaz', 'jahaz', 'zebra', etc., respectively, they may rather sound ridiculous. Even some Bangla protagonists claim that, in Bangla, we should, for example, pronounce 'Jashimuddin', not 'Jasimuddin', 'doshra', not 'dosra' (the second day of a month, etc.) to adhere to the type and tradition of the Bangla pronunciation. But the awful problem that has recently developed in transliterating into English some proper names and other words is of an opposite nature. Some, may be among them are some pres-

people also, are of late indiscriminately using 'z' for a 'j' sound while transliterating a non-English name into English. For instance, Perso-Arabic words having the sound of an English 'j' and used in the names like say Javed Iqbal, Abdul Jalil, Badruddoja, Jannat Ara, Mah Jabben, Jamal Ahmad, etc. are found with wrong replacement of the 'j's by 'z's and spelt like Zaved Iqbal, Abdul Zallil, Badruddoja, Zannat Ara, Mah Zabeen, Zamal Ahmad, respectively. Why should they do this when the sound of 'j' is common in both Bangla and English besides Arabic, Persian and Urdu? Even pure Bangla 'Kajal' (of course derived from a Sanskrit origin) is spelt as 'Kazal'. What a pity. One reason for this might be sheer ignorance.

And that at once points also to the socio-religious aspects of the problem. But, as I have mentioned, the rampant and unwarranted misuse of 'z' in place of 'j' is more a recent phenomenon cropped up erroneously as if there lies the modern, the vogue. (A living language is neither modern nor archaic, rather like a flowing river always as archaic as modern.) Some even assume a 'z' sound to be more Arabic than a 'j' sound, hence more Islamic and so to say theocratic. But that proposition would be freakish.

Of course, one may here question about the diverse and multifarious dialects of Bangla, the regional speeches. True, people in dialects have and utter the sound of 'z', though not in alphabet. But that is nothing but a corrupt pronunciation of 'j', Bangla's own sound unlike the sound of 'z'. Dialects are neither the standard nor the chaotic forms of a basic language.

However, beside the 'j' and 'z' problem there may be some other points concerning transliteration. For instance, Perso-Arabic has again two 'k' sounds represented, as practice, by English characters 'q' and 'k'. 'k' may be ordinarily not varying much from each other phonetically. Say, while one is Abdul Haque, another

Abdul Malek, and if one is Abul Qasem, another Abul Kazem. As the phonetic difference may not be clear to many non-conversant with Perso-Arabic, we have occasions to find similar lapses as in the case of 'j' and 'z' problem. Again, for example, one may spell his name as Tareque or Qudrat but another has to write Berek or Keramat. Unknowingly again, in this case, the recent indiscriminate but unjust liking is for a 'q' which never stands for the sound of the second 'k' of Perso-Arabic.

In matter of transliteration one should adhere to the standard international system or code formulated for the purpose. In a very few cases, however, we allow ourselves exceptions to follow a rather popular system with slight adjustments with or variations from the standard, such as, while Roman 'c' stands for the Bangla character 'cha', according to the international code, we apply instead a popular 'ch'. To elaborate, for example, Bangla 'chanchal' is 'canchal' according to the standard code but we indulge in taking a slightly popular stance to write the word as in the former spelling while transliterating. But such exceptions should be as rare as only for a local or a native consumption because violation generates violations. As a result of improvising 'ch' for the Bangla character 'cha' we again, for example, had to improvise a popular 'chh' for the Bangla character 'chha', though, according to the international code, only 'ch' stands for 'chha' as 'jh' for 'jha' and 'kh' for 'kha'.

And, to conclude, I must remind here that the standard international code for transliterations is no phonetic but an alphabetic code. Phonetic is IPA, International Phonetic Alphabet, which is only a universal pronunciation code. Transliteration and the methodology of written pronunciation are separate branches of Linguistics having correlations. But we should not mingle the two.

The writer is Director, Language Literature Culture and Journal Division, Bangla Academy.

## An appreciation

Sir, Recently I came across some issues of your newspaper 'The Daily Star'. Like most Bangladeshis living abroad eager to get some information about what's happening back in Bangladesh, I brought home as many issues of the newspaper as I could lay my hands on.

With great enthusiasm, my wife and I went through every paragraph, every page of all the newspapers. It was really a pleasure to read such a newspaper, and we were very happy to get a feeling of the day-to-day happenings of the place we still call home.

Frankly, I don't think I can remember of reading such a good daily newspaper coming out of Dhaka, for a long time. For that, let me congratulate you and your colleagues for bringing out such a wonderful

newspaper under great constraints and with limited resources.

I sincerely hope you and your colleagues can keep up the effort, and not fizzle out, like most projects in Bangladesh.

In the end, if I may as a reader, make few suggestions to make the newspaper more interesting to read:

\* Would like to read more investigative reporting on Government, political parties, and other international powers influencing Bangladesh's socio-economic and geo-political environment;

\* objective analysis of Bangladesh Government's plan and policies vis-a-vis the common people and the country as a whole;

\* more in-depth and detailed news about other parts

of the country; and, from time to time public opinions, on major social and moral issues, and happenings in the country.

Shafigul Islam  
Newark, USA

## TV commercial service

Sir, Can't our Television, the BTv, introduce a 'commercial service' like that of the Radio Bangladesh to less bother its viewers? Dispersal of ads or commercials, most of which are not so pleasing, is not liked by many a viewer.

Introduction of 'commercial service' may serve both the purposes — pleasing the viewers and earning of revenue.

Arman  
Eskaton Gardens, Dhaka.