

The Third World and the New World Order

by Kaiser Zaman

COMMUNISM is dying. It died at the ripe old age of seventy-six in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. It reached middle age in Eastern Europe but died a dramatic death after a series of strokes. It died in its infancy in Africa and Latin America. It fared worse in dozens of other countries in what came to be known as the Third World, including some of the dots in the great oceans. Its death is predicted in Cuba, its only bastion in the Americas. In China, North Korea and Vietnam, it has undergone cataclysmic seizures in recent years, but its present robust appearance is perplexing.

world over who suffered from helplessness and frustration, who failed to feed their families for reasons within or beyond their control, communism was the coca leaf to ward off hunger, it was a hallucinogen. Liberation from exploitation was the theology of Godless communism — the new opium of the masses. In reality, it was a toxin which induced mass torpor and robbed the people of industry and enterprise. Communism promised that the poor shall inherit the earth. Always promised, but never delivered.

though not in all, the masses have found their voice and are justly exercising their lungs. Although this new-found ability to do away with totalitarian regimes has not always been replaced by conventions of peaceful coexistence, it is hoped that the current conflicts which exist in some of the new democracies will eventually sort themselves out. However, the credit for the collapse of the communist political system is unabashedly co-opted by the economic sys-

tem called capitalism. To be sure, capitalism has thrived in countries where democracy is also flourishing. But the two should not be confused. There is no automatic correlation. India, widely acknowledged as the world's largest democracy, has had an uneasy relationship with capitalism since the country's independence forty-five years ago. On the other hand, capitalism has prospered in many autocratic countries. The failure of its only challenger makes it difficult to disprove capitalism's claim to validity as the only way for mankind to achieve prosperity and everlasting

happiness. For millions of people in East Europe and elsewhere who felt betrayed by communism, capitalism's achievements are so alluring, the message is clear, embrace capitalism and get on the road to happiness and prosperity. But the grass is not uniformly green in the meadow where the bulls and bears of capitalism freely roam. The enormity of capitalism is so often buried deep under layers upon layers of prosperity, it is not visible from many faraway

countries. Neither the super-sophisticated economists nor the liberation theologians have convinced the masses with concrete results of their conviction. Similarly, the "Middle Path" followers of the Left discovered that their paths lead to nowhere. The failure of Julius Nyerere's "ujamaa" and Ne Win's "Burmese Way to Socialism" dashed the hopes of many. Some of those on the Right can at least claim to have broken the back of abject poverty in their countries. Be that as it may, the search for liberation

New World Order. But what will be its shape, what will be its direction, what will be its contribution in improving human life while preserving the planet in which we live? The disappearance of bipolar world politics makes it more difficult, yet more necessary that all nations participate to ensure that the new world does not degenerate into disorder. Now that non-alignment has lost its meaning (if it ever had any), Third World countries should not feel intimidated or insecure in playing a significant role in drawing up the New World Order. As among people, so among nations — perceptions of exploitation and injustice often differ diametrically between the rich and the poor. The strength of the poor lies not in their numbers but in their dignity — and cold logic. Even the most incorruptible leaders of poor countries must demonstrate that they are worthy of respect — not just condescension or sympathy. And they can do so with confidence only when they can fall comfortably with the path they choose for their own country. At the very least, they could conceivably get somewhere in improving the quality of life even if they fail to reach the elusive goal of material prosperity. It is time for original thinking.

Salvation is not to be found in the corridors of the Karl Marx Institute or Harvard University. It may lie in negotiating the 'shanku' which the economic engineers must cross to get to where most Bangladeshis live.

The efforts to do in communism earnestly resumed in 1980. In Poland, a decade later, the "socialist paradise" was buried in Europe under the debris of the fallen Berlin Wall, the Soviet iron curtain and the East European satellites. At last, the "domino theory" made a volte-face and finally came home to roost. While the valour of Gorbachev and Yeltsin in frustrating the pushers of last August was acclaimed, it was the old soldiers of the Free World who claimed the trophy.

Democracy, which seemed to be on the ropes in Asia, Africa and Latin America and practically dead in Eastern Europe less than fifteen years ago, is making a dramatic comeback. Not only in countries under communism but also in dozens of others saddled with the illegitimate product of East-West conflict — the dictatorships of the Left and the Right. The success of the people who defied and ultimately brought down the whole system of communism in many countries encouraged people elsewhere to challenge the power of individual dictators. In country after country,

Third World countries. Despite their economic power, many industrialised countries have not succeeded in eliminating poverty, crime, pollution and social inequities in the midst of plenty. On the contrary, many of the social ills are engendered by the very economic success of (sometimes too) free enterprise. The era of simple answers — of Five Year Plans or "laissez-faire" — is over. For nearly half a century, scores of poor countries have deluded themselves into pursuing one philosophy or the other and referring to themselves as "developing

from the curse of poverty and, at the same time, preserving individual freedom must begin and end at home — in one's own country. Political, economic and social thinkers of a poor country like Bangladesh must devote greater energy to gaining a better understanding of their own country than mastering the philosophy of V. I. Lenin or Malcolm Forbes. Salvation is not to be found in the corridors of the Karl Marx Institute or Harvard University. It may lie in negotiating the Shanku which the economic engineers must cross to get to where most Bangladeshis live. The call has gone out for a

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Highly Dangerous

No sooner have we begun to recover from the shock of the unwarranted and thoroughly unpleasant incidents of December 6 in Dhaka, we are faced with the news of the killings of three men in Hathazari upazila in Chittagong by armed men believed to belong to the Islamic Chattr Shibir, aided by National Democratic Party (NDP) men. Judging by reports in the press, the attack seemed pre-planned and ruthlessly executed. The professional manner and murderous nature of the attack, coupled with the level of weaponry used and the failure of the police to act, pointed to the growth of a highly dangerous genre of political activism.

The extraordinary events at Hathazari however is not an isolated one. In a way, it is a spill-over from the events of Chittagong University situated three miles away from Sunday's killing fields. In other words, the problem is what we have come to term "campus terror".

While events on the Dhaka University campus can command media attention and become the focus of national concern and grand conferences, the gruesome reality of Chittagong gets neatly brushed under the carpet as if we have abandoned it to its fate while armed gangs continually make a mockery of the very concept of law and order. The campus has been in the hands of a handful of fanatical terrorists ever since Dec 22 last, during which time Shibir activists have been waging a relentless, violent, torturous campaign to remove the incumbent Vice-Chancellor.

The crude fact of student violence may seem symptomatic of the general level of ill-health of law and order across the country, but what makes the situation in Chittagong even more dangerous than the rest is its organised, planned and ideologically-driven character. The need for government action to bring an end to the spiral is therefore all the more pressing.

Unfortunately, we have seen or even heard precious little from those responsible for law and order, namely the minister for home affairs and ministry officials, about what they intend to do. This apparent indifference to such a high level of organised violence has never been within the bounds of acceptability, and has now reached the height of irresponsibility.

The leaders of the Jamaat-e-Islami, who never miss a chance to lecture other parties on the niceties of democratic behaviour, should be made to answer a few questions about the activities of their student front too. But the government must live up to its responsibility in Chittagong by treating all armed young men as nothing more than criminals, whichever party they may belong to.

At the same time, the Chancellor may also consider ordering a thorough investigation into how the university came to be such a fortress of one well-organised para-military force during the past 10 years or more. The nation needs to know how successive Vice-Chancellors and administrations allowed such a situation to develop, so that it would act as a warning to other universities not to tread the same path.

Rokeya Day

Yesterday was Begum Rokeya Day. Days commemorating celebrities are quite often observed more as a matter of ritual by coteries of people expecting to reap benefit from the act. In the process the person truly worthy of a truer remembrance, is canonised and a yearly offering of all the fetid clichés in the world is made. Meaning nothing, meant to be nothing. Even Tagore and Nazrul seem not to have been spared by this process of unmistakable degeneration. While we know those two great masters would very easily survive the onslaught of putrefaction, we must with all our might guard against Begum Rokeya's works and ideals, memories and achievements coming to any harm by those effusions of unmeaning hymns. The truly incomparable Rokeya is too precious an heirloom, too living a legacy, to be given up, even by a centimetre, in exchange of the trash that is disgorged ceremonially on memorial observances.

Why do we limit Rokeya by calling her the herald of the emancipation of the Bengalee Muslim womanhood? Instead of eulogising her with so much of well-meant and yet very wrong laudatory phrases, all of us must dive deep into the matchless literature she has left for us and all posterity. Perusal of even a few pages of that supreme example of immaculate Bengali prose would convince anyone that what she was addressing was a general social awakening, with emphases first on the Muslim community and then on the woman of this community came, albeit very forcefully, only incidentally. Her setting up a school for Muslim girls only added to the confusion of her true role as an indomitable fighter against social backward and religious bigotry. And it will rest completely on personal taste whether to value her work more as a campaigner or as an *avant garde* intellectual and a rare literary artist. One is so undistinguishably part of the other in the person and the creations of Begum Rokeya. With the gradual decline of the intellectual life of the Bengalee people as a whole, it is Rokeya the campaigner is remembered and that too as a matter of lifeless routine.

Rokeya's entire life, which was rather short, was devoted to a process of becoming something which she was not born into. A kind of perpetual rejection of unchosen bearings in order to realise chosen goals. That was very very special to Begum Rokeya — something that cannot be said of a lot of our great people. Born a feudal, she endeavoured all her life to become ordinary. Born an outsider to Bengali society as one born and groomed into the practice of Urdu and Persian and into a taboo for Bengali, she became one of the finest writers of the Bengali language.

There's a faint yet very unmistakable footprint of a 'women's lib' campaigner in Rokeya also, who incidentally and yet very importantly, happened to be the first and only writer of the genre — if it can be so called — feminist science fiction.

We salute her memory and we mean to understand her and take her words and acts to our heart.

Will Soviet Break-up Have Domino Effect on India?

D.K. Joshi writes from New Delhi

In a row of by-elections Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao has strengthened his Congress Party's tenuous hold on power. The 70-year-old Rao faces great challenges — economic difficulties coupled with sectarianism and regional chauvinism that threaten the integrity of India. Many Indians fear the political disintegration of the Soviet Union could spur the break-up of their vast country. But, a composite culture and the flexibility of the democratic political system will ensure the unity of India.

Rao - Prime Minister with a huge challenge

Of all India's nine leaders Rao's task looks most difficult

- 1: Jawaharlal Nehru 1947-64 (Congress)
- 2: Lal Bahadur Shastri 1964-66 (C)
- 3: Indira Gandhi 1966-77, 1980-84 (C)
- 4: Morarji Deasai 1977-79 (Janata Party)
- 5: Charan Singh 1979-80 (JP)
- 6: Rajiv Gandhi 1984-89 (C)
- 7: V.P. Singh 1989-90 (Janata Dal)
- 8: Chandra Shekhar 1990-91 (JD Socialist)

States demanding greater autonomy

THE political disintegration of the Soviet Union is causing concern in India, where growing regionalism in the states is already the source of some anxiety.

Secessionist activities are now confined to the border states of Punjab, Kashmir and Assam and some tribal pockets in the country's northeast. But other states have also witnessed an upsurge in regionalism, providing fertile ground for centrifugal forces to gain an upper hand.

Ominous voices against the present federal system now are heard in different parts of India. They are considered warning signals.

The loudest such voice — and most authentic because he is a politician of pre-independence vintage and chief minister of a state — comes from Biju Patnaik, in the eastern region of Orissa.

Patnaik is demanding financial independence for the states and a new constitution which would give New Delhi powers only over defence and currency. Even on foreign policy he wants the states to have the last word.

In the southern state of Tamil Nadu, the former chief minister, Muttuvel Karunanidhi of the regionalist party Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, has resorted to calls to assert the Dravidian identity of southern India.

Karunanidhi's party first came to power in Tamil Nadu in 1967 using the slogan of "Dravidian consciousness," organising demonstrations against the central government's imposition of Hindi as the national language and denouncing what it called rule by "imperialist Delhi".

Even in the western state of Gujarat, a chief minister whose government depends on backing from New Delhi for its political survival, now speaks openly of increasing state powers. Chief Minister Chimanabhai Patel has called for "just and equitable distribution" of funds for development projects and has assailed New Delhi for "throttling the legitimate rights and aspirations of the state".

Noting that "despite strict discipline and an iron grip over the states, the Soviet Union is disintegrating," he has also advised the central government to meet demands by the states so as to avoid a confrontation.

Further disconcerting evidence of subnationalist chauvinism came recently in the south where the neighbouring

states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka squabbled over how to share the waters of the Cauvery River.

Moreover, the Tamil Nadu state legislature recently passed a resolution demanding re-transfer to India of a tiny islet in Palk Bay, ceded to Sri Lanka in 1974. But this was the Tamil emotions getting the better of India's national policy.

India is a multi-linguistic, multi-religious, multi-cultural and multi-ethnic nation whose diversities cannot be painted with the same brush of multinational character as in the Soviet Union.

Broadly, there are four areas of possible conflict:

* Economically less developed areas have spurred sub-nationalist sentiments. For example, many tribal peoples in the eastern states of Bihar, West Bengal and Orissa have supported the demand for a separate tribal state known as Jharkhand.

And economically neglected hill districts of Uttar Pradesh in north India are campaigning for a separate Uttarakhnad state. Complaints of discrimination and economic exploitation of eastern Assam state have assumed separatist overtones.

* Areas with distinct ethnic identity and minimal influence of the mainstream Indian culture such as remote north-eastern states.

* Some political leaders in Tamil Nadu seek to assert Dravidian identity and Tamil language.

* Kashmir and Punjab where religious fundamentalism has provided momentum to separatism.

Critics of the ruling Congress Party and many opinion-makers want India to take a lesson from developments in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. They want states to be granted greater autonomy before it is too late. They point out that the

ern states and in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu. Many of these parties came to power partly by exploiting regional inequalities.

The mood immediately after the independence was of consolidation. Even in Kashmir the popular sentiments represented by charismatic state leader, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah and his National Conference party favoured complete integration with India.

Secessionist elements in India's northeast were suppressed. The legendary tribal leader Phizo was exiled to Britain. In neighbouring Mizoram state separatist leader Laldenga surrendered arms and sought compromise with New Delhi. Goa was decolonised from the Portuguese in 1961 and Sikkim, a protectorate, was annexed to the Indian union in 1975.

But centrifugal forces have begun to surface in the last decade. Besides political shifts, major socio-economic changes in the 44 years since independence have profoundly changed India.

The modernisation of a traditional society has created tensions which have been exacerbated by the economic problems facing the country. New Delhi's mishandling of secessionist challenges in Kashmir and Punjab has given impetus to centrifugal forces.

In an attempt to pre-empt a more concerted bid for greater autonomy by the states, New Delhi recently convened a meeting of chief ministers and agreed to put "centre-state relations on an even keel" at the earliest opportunity through "mutual consultations and co-operation" with the states.

The Central government agreed to consider more than 200 recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission appointed by Indira Gandhi government in 1983 and forgotten after it submitted its report on centre-state relations. It was also agreed to create a mechanism to coordinate the actions and policies of the centre and the state governments.

The question that many ob-

ervers are now asking is: "will India follow the Soviet Union's example?"

The Indian situation, however, has some basic divergent features from that of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia where the federating units are in revolt and for independence.

India's natural boundaries marked by mountains and seas serve to identify it as a separate geographical entity. This insularity, over the years, led to the evolution of a composite cultural unity, a feeling of common heritage and pervasive undercurrent of oneness. Besides, India has assimilated many challenges to its identity in the past.

The Soviet Union came into existence as a result of conquests and annexations and there is no bond of common culture. Its territories had been brought together by the October revolution whereas India's national unity was forged through the anti-colonial movement.

Indian federation is not the result of an agreement by the units and component units have no freedom to secede, unlike in the Soviet Union where the constitution gave federating republics the right to secede.

India is a democracy and disagreements tend to be resolved by adjustments, a parliamentary system and constitutional guarantees of fundamental rights act as safety valves. The Indian constitution has a clear-cut division of power between New Delhi and the states. It is not rigid and can be amended to suit new situations. Already it has been amended 73 times in the four decades of its existence.

As a police states the Soviet Union did not provide an outlet for protest against authoritarianism of its communist rulers.

India has multi-party democracy whereas the Soviet Union was governed by a single party.

While the possibilities of some sort of domino effect of the developments in the Soviet Union cannot be ruled out, India's Achilles heel is economic and not so much ethnic rivalry, regionalism and sectarianism.

Centrifugal forces will get the better of centripetal forces only when India's economy falls apart. — GEMINI NEWS

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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.

Disinvestment

Sir, The government plans to disinvest sugar mills in North Bengal and leave them to private sector. Besides surplus and idle labour, sugar mills are reported to be running at loss. But so far production of sugar is concerned, the whole country is dependant on North Bengal. During British reign the first few mills were installed, owned and managed by non Bengali Indians. In Pakistan days, erstwhile EPIDC set up few new mills.

In North Bengal the industrial growth is extremely poor primarily due to keeping the region just as hinterland for

Calcutta, in the past, and at present, for Dhaka. To arrest the rot there so far accumulated and causing poor industrial, economical, commercial growth, the sugar mills need to be sold only to the genuine entrepreneurs of the region. Profits earned by the new owners need to be mandatorily invested in the region with tax benefits only at least for first 15 to 20 years and should never be transferred outside the region. Such conditions for disinvestment of industries there will help remarkably to develop the neglected region, industrially, commercially, agriculturally within a short time.

Sycophants

Sir, Of the many varying nature of human instinct sycophancy is a peculiar phenomenon. It is servility not obedience, and should not be fused with the art of pleasing. It entails and involves a nature of perpetual toying the line of the masters — irrespective of right or wrong — where the actions are devoid of moral scruples. For sycophancy is nothing except in relation to desire, it is not complete except in relation to a purpose in a specific situation and time. Sycophants are one of the many sub-species in every walk of our life and loom large in our decaying society where

they live a brushed-up life of symbiosis with their masters. Their masters can be in professional or political realm where they flourish most requiring an endless effort to sing to the master's tune. The question of the good of the organisation, society or nation at large becomes secondary. To cite an example, a large financial institution that has collapsed recently is widely seen as a nemesis of the wrong-doings of a section of people working there. This institution had bred some sycophants. They deemed proper to keep their masters alive and well with the perpetuation of their own gains. Unfortunately, their haven of sycophancy caved in with the collapse of the institution. The vision of our political leaders are sometimes blurred by the simmering problems of the country because of these sycophants. Therefore, the leaders of financial and political institutions should resolve to shear

themselves off these sycophants to get a clear perspective of the practicalities that necessitates decisive action to solve the pitiless crisis of this nation.

Mahmood Hasan
Montpurpara, Dhaka.

Goods under Customs custody

Sir, It is apparent that goods worth crores of taka are lying unearned for under the custody of Customs authority. For instance, as reported, there lie goods worth about Tk five crore in different Custom House godowns in Dhaka, goods worth about Tk five crore in Biman Corporation complex, goods worth about Tk one crore at ICD, Kamalapur, and goods worth about Tk one crore at Foreign Post Office — waiting decision of the authorities. Similarly there lies a vessel worth about Tk three crore unearned for at Fatulla Ghat. All this careles-

ness or inertia to take decision is causing a huge material loss, obviously affecting the revenue and exchequer.

Therefore it is advised (and expected of the authorities) that the goods may be auctioned as early as possible and the revenue earned for the sake of national economy.

Zaman Choudhury
Panthapat, Dhaka.

Snakes

Sir, In the column Dhaka Day by Day you wrote (Snaring Slimy Snakes) something that made me very mad. First of all snakes are helpful animals because they control the amount of rats and mice. Also they are smooth and dry. And if you take their poison you can make medicine. Plus my class has a python and a sand boa. And we've touched them.

Julie A. Linstead
Class 2, American International School, Dhaka