

Arms and the Security

Quite understandably the recent Government directive to deposit fire-arms by licence holders has caused serious misgivings in public minds. The Government, aware as it is of this, has also gone at great length in trying to allay this fear.

The point the Government is so intent on emphasising is that arms have fallen in undeserving hands and therefore the move, it thinks, will benefit the genuinely deserving people. This premise of the argument appears to be faulty. Arms possessed by licence-holders may have found their ill use but only in a few cases. The cause of the problem lies elsewhere.

Such directives are expected to come up with desired results if only illegal arms, a sizeable quantity of which lies at large throughout the country, have already been recovered. The free-style use and brandishing of fire-arms in broad daylight at various places, university campuses in particular, conclusively prove that the situation is nowhere near to this. Therefore it appears that the drive is going to end up in disarming the people—who really need protection—and placing them at the mercy of the possessors of illegal arms.

Why compel the licence-holders to surrender their arms going all the way to the Deputy Commissioners' offices and spending endless anxious hours when the same purpose can be served more easily and better by looking up the licence-holder's list and through an on-the-spot inspection? The best guarantee of arms' discreet use will be the simultaneous production of both licences and arms on demand by the proper vigilant team. Otherwise, the time lag between the deposition of arms at the DC's offices and their return to the owners may be a good enough provocation for anti-social elements to make them a target of their ill-motives.

If that happens, who takes the responsibility of any tragedy that may occur. Evidently, the state has already failed to sufficiently give protection to its people and this latest move will only deprive individuals of their right to self-defence. Administrations in other countries so troubled with lawlessness are known to have provided their sober segment of society with means to cope with the growing threat from anti-social elements. Why are the people asked to chart an opposite course here?

The people who are going to respond to the Government's call to surrender the licensed fire-arms are not the ones the Government is looking for. And those who the Government is trying to round up will obviously not respond to this call. Therefore we see very little use of this move, save increasing the risks for those who possess arms for valid reasons, who will be deprived of this protection till the time the arms are returned.

The Wind of Change

The decision by the King Fahd to set up a consultative council to assist the government of Saudi Arabia is seen by many as a move towards a well-defined democratisation of regime. There is little doubt that the move underlines the response of Riyadh to the electoral victory of Islamic radical forces in Algeria as well as to the changed realities in the region after the Gulf War.

While one looks upon the move as a forward-looking step, there remains a danger that the proposed council, with its hand-picked members, could just be an exercise in window-dressing. However, instead of being sceptical of the King's move, it is important to recognise the uniqueness of the political system in Saudi Arabia and to hope that the new measure marks the start of a positive process.

It is noted that similar councils have been set up in a number of other countries in the Gulf, while the ruler of Kuwait has promised the restoration of the defunct parliament in his country by next October.

Much depends on how the proposed councils work and, for that matter, how much power is given to the parliament in Kuwait. For instance, the council in Oman can call debates on draft laws before they are ratified and is entitled to propose changes. It can also question cabinet ministers on domestic matters. For the time being, these provisions may seem adequate, in the context of Oman. But it may appear too little and too late tomorrow.

There are many roads to democracy; no two representative systems are identical. In the final analysis, what is important is to make a regime accountable to the people, based on a system that allows for the right of dissent, a broad-based electoral system and a set of universally recognised human rights. Let us hope that the countries in the Middle East, especially in the Gulf, are, steadily but surely, moving in this direction, even if the pace may be a little slow by international standards.

Vast Water Area : Fishing for Growth

FISHING in the Bay and the fresh water delta of Bangladesh out of which fish Bengal offers the unique opportunity to bring about economic growth within the next two to three years.

Bangladesh has a vast inland water area suitable for fish farming. Apart from 3.2 million areas covered by rivers, lakes and natural depressions; there are over 1.7 million ponds covering 359,000 acres. A vast tract covering about 7 million acres bordering the northern apex of the Bay of Bengal constitutes the coastal and offshore area where fishing for growth could be a realisable objective in the short-term. In a nutshell, the potential of actual fishing grounds, both freshwater and offshore, is simply enormous whose contribution to the gross domestic product could easily be 50 per cent of crop agriculture. This is the major untapped resource of Bangladesh calling for billions of dollars worth of investment in fishing, fish processing, marketing and other industries like shipyards. The inevitable result would be millions of new jobs and a couple of billion dollars worth of export earnings in the not too distant future. A separate action plan for fisheries development is called for where private sector must play the dominant role and aim within the medium term to venture out for fishing in the international waters, particularly tuna fishing in the Indian Ocean.

Fishes in the water bodies just grow wild. There has been an attempt to stock the fishing grounds with fish seeds and fries. Not only that, according to fisheries resources survey, there are 17 million ponds in Bangladesh out of which fish was being produced in only 24 per cent of the ponds. Regardless of pond size, but properly excavated, stocked with fries and with provision of fish foods, the existing ponds alone can annually produce around 400,000 tons of fish which is half the total fish output today. Similar cultured fisheries could be introduced in the open water areas as well.

Favourite but Scarce

Fresh water fish is the Bengal favourite. But it is beyond the reach of the vast majority. Availability is so little and the demand so great that prices have reached the sky. Not only that, due to excessive demand, fishes are not allowed to grow to their full size. Because of very large number of Bengalis living abroad these days, export of fresh water fishes has become important. But it is perhaps not known to our countrymen in New York, London or elsewhere that the Koi, Magur, Pabda and Rahu that they buy are mostly from Thailand. Our domestic supplies are so much less than demand that export of the favourite fresh water fish could at best be marginal.

But the potential exist, in the culture of fresh water fish, actually growing and harvesting fish just like crop agriculture. Fish is not a bounty of God. Fishermen returning from the Beel at the end of the day, empty handed, is simply considered bad luck. It need not be so. Same as paddy, waterbodies have to be stocked

with fish seeds, nurtured during the growing stage by providing food and care. After certain months or a year, one can harvest the cultured fish. By rotating timing of maturity, year round stable harvest of fish is feasible.

This is a new fish culture which has to be deliberately promoted. Such aquaculture can also be combined with horticulture in case of pond fisheries in particular. The mainstay of agriculture in the deeply flooded low-lands is very low yielding deep water paddy which is again prone to flood loss practically every

wing my previous suggestions of agrarian reform for arable land, government must take over all water bodies which anyway are mostly owned by government or suffer from various stages of dereliction at present so that payment of compensation involved would be very little compared to the arableland brought under public control.

The next stage will be to extend long-term management rights to landless families, fishermen groups and individual entrepreneurs to develop cultured fisheries. Investment loans will be necessary to de-

constitute hardly three per cent of the world trade of 600,000 tons in 1990. Aiming at securing 10 per cent of the world market and exporting more of the jumbo shrimp fetching a higher price, total foreign exchange earnings could be increased to 500 million US dollars, that is Taka 2,000 crores within the next five to six years.

Shrimp culture is a highly labour intensive industry and where marine product export is highly organised, three families dependent on fishing and aquaculture, create one man year of employment in processing and marketing. An important condition for promotion of shrimp culture in Bangladesh is that only salt or brackish water shrimps, mostly in frozen state are relevant for the export market. Freshwater shrimps have very large heads which we relish in Bangladesh but shrimps are exported in headless form. The weight loss in processing therefore makes them uneconomical for export.

Intensive Shrimp Culture

Fisheries for export growth is therefore very much dependent on the promotion of shrimp culture. The single largest constraint to cultured shrimp production is the lack of shrimp fry to stock the ponds. Hatcheries with facilities for induced maturation should enable three crops from the shrimp ponds every year. Induced breeding would augment the supplies of shrimp fries so that intensive system of shrimp culture is feasible with high stocking

rates (100,000 to 200,000 fries per hectare), high water exchange rates and provision of high protein shrimp food. Yields would generally fall in the range of 1.5 to 4.5 tons per hectare every year.

Immediate plans should be formulated to develop 100,000 hectares of coastal land into intensive shrimp farms backed up with the support services and input supplies such as processing, transport, marketing, modern hatcheries and shrimp food production factories. Jobs and income for half a million families, export earnings of half a billion dollars and enough domestic supplies for the famous Bengali coconut milk-shrimp curry can be assured.

Fishing for growth, through fresh water fish and salt water shrimp culture does not require a long waiting period. Fish or shrimp, like crops can mature in months only. Same as intensification of crop agriculture, triple instead of single cropping is feasible. The inland fish and coastal shrimp culture cannot only be a big money spinner for the private sector, it could bring about rural growth, particularly in areas ravaged either by the recurrence of flood from the north or tides and cyclones of the south. What government must decide is not to go out to catch, process or market the fish. Let it all be done by the private sector. Let government be the catalyst and spark the change for the growth in fishing in the inshore and near-shore areas during the next three years. Later on, it would be the challenge of deep sea fishing.

From LDC to NIC by Shahed Latif

other year. Where water continues to be available in the dry months, Boro paddy cultivation has replaced Aman, but there are many such lowlying areas which suffer alternately from too much and too little water. In Thailand, what they have done is to excavate narrow but long strips of water bodies for intensive fish culture and then use the excavated earth to raise long raised narrow strip of flood free land for fruit and vegetable cultivation round the year along the channels. The entire landscape have been converted to alternative strips of water channels and ridges for fish, fruits and vegetables. Such intensive use of lowlying flood lands can increase farm level income by 10 to 20 times.

Govt to Take Over

How the suggestions made can be brought about? Fol-

low the suggestions made can be brought about? Follow the fishing grounds. At the same time, the government owned fish seed multiplication farms should be privatised so that the demand for fish seeds could be met. Production of fish food must also be promoted, again through private enterprise.

At present, 97 per cent of inland production of freshwater fish stem farm small-scale fishing in floodlands rivers and lakes. Only three per cent is derived from fish culture like carp culture and shrimp culture. The strategy of freshwater fisheries development is to reverse the trend altogether through mostly individual owned culture based fisheries where the land is obtained from government through long term lease arrangements.

Export of frozen shrimp is a significant source of foreign exchange earnings for Bangladesh. Yet our supplies

It sometimes seems in Hungary that not only has "socialist" disappeared from the vocabulary, but also the words "social" and "community".

Under communism, community spirit was like a government department. Cultural Houses were built to function as social and community centres. Over the years due to bureaucracy, rigid ideas or simple neglect they became empty institutions, lacking life.

The fall of communism, however, has left a gap in community life that has raised new enthusiasm among many Hungarians. Architects, church groups and community organisers are learning to take advantage of their new freedom.

A body known as the Association for Community Development, created in 1989, is doing its best to encourage community spirit. But the country rushes headlong into a market economy.

General Secretary Ilona Verecsig outlines its aims: "Everybody has become dependent and thinks they are people who are told what to do. We want to make them feel independent and not wait for solutions from the centre but to create things themselves".

"The ministries are very slow," she says. "At first we

Community Spirit Reviving in Post-communist Hungary

Bob Dent writes from Budapest

The end of communism in Eastern Europe has created confusion, unemployment and food shortage. Signs of positive change are, however, emerging. Some villagers in Hungary, formerly required to conform to communist ideas of culture and community are learning to use their new freedom to create their own community spirit and culture.

thought that the new government would be more helpful than the previous one, but as yet there has been no change in attitude.

The type of activity her association encourages is happening in Bakonyiszentkaly, Bakonyoszlop and Csesznek, a cluster of three small villages in western Hungary.

Here the villagers have produced their own year book of articles, poems, memories and thoughts for the future. Traditional crafts are explained and a skills exchange list published. A group was formed to clean up a pond for fishing and a local newspaper and even cable TV have started.

The association helps with advice, material resources and contacts within and sometimes outside the country.

There is now a twinning and exchange scheme operating with some French villages.

Its own resources come from various national and international foundations which offer cash for projects. Contacts established at a 1987 UNESCO conference in Hungary on rural development are particularly important.

Trends in Hungary today are not favourable for positive community development, says Verecsig. "We thought we had seen the worst under the Soviet system," she says, "but

now maybe we have lost some of its opportunities. I am very much afraid of widespread poverty and unemployment today."

She has seen that even some of the purely financial changes are forcing people to take more responsibility for their lives — for example, the decision about how and when and in what form to repay a bank loan.

The association also stresses that models of development cannot be simply taken from the West. Hungarian village traditions are rich, even if knowledge of them is only just being revived.

Under communism, the country was oriented to its

capital, Budapest, even though most people live in small communities outside the centre.

Imre Makovecz is an architect who has become world famous for his innovative efforts to revive village life. He heads a group designing new cultural centres in villages and small towns based on traditional peasant styles. He teaches members of small communities basic skills in masonry and carpentry so that they can build their own houses.

In the past, he was accused by the authorities of promoting a narrow, nationalist approach which did not fit in with communist ideology. But, he

says, "having studied Hungarian folk art, I have come to the conclusion that it stands not on a nationalistic basis but a universal one".

His focus is on the character of individuals and their communities, rather than their national identity, which communism always emphasised.

Working for the same ideals, a network of formerly underground or unofficial groups of Catholic lay people have been formed. The network is called Halo and it has no leaders, just people with ideas who need a vehicle for expressing them.

Some were people who opposed the compromise between the church hierarchy and the old communist leaders. Others belonged to church choirs and prayer groups, doing things the official church either did not dare or was not allowed to do.

Changes are stirring the church and village life in Hungary. Verecsig admits that if her ideals are to come to fruition, much time will be needed.

"Up to now, we have been told we are nobody. Now we have to create our self-confidence and self-respect again."

— GEMINI NEWS

Japan : Land of the Unfree

For one of the most industrialised and advanced societies in the world, Japan lags behind the rest of the developed world in guaranteeing individual and legal rights, reports Suwendrini Kakuchi of IPS from Tokyo.

Retrials are costly and prisoners are denied the services of lawyers.

Eighty-one-year-old Makoto Sato, who was convicted in 1950 for murder but pleaded innocent till he passed away two years ago, will also be tried posthumously.

Masao Akahori, 59, was the fourth death row prisoner to be acquitted in 1989 after spending 29 years in death row. He was finally acquitted of the crime of raping and murdering a kindergarten student.

Legal, civil liberties and human rights groups have denounced Japanese trial judges' heavy reliance on confessions which are often coerced from suspects using third-degree methods.

Suspects can be detained for as long as six months with only perfunctory legal service, according to Ken Hasegawa, a

prominent campaigner for the abolition of the death penalty.

They are often subjected to beatings and interviews that go on for as long as 10 to 14 hours at a sitting, Hasegawa added.

Akahori confessed to abducting and strangling his child victim while in police custody. Matsuo Matsuo, who was convicted of rape 35 years ago and acquitted in 1989 after his death, said he confessed to the crime because "the police told me they'd release me immediately if I did".

The Japan Federation of Bar

Associations and human rights groups have stepped up calls for reform in the criminal justice system and for the abolition of the death penalty which is often imposed based on coerced confessions.

Their campaign has been buttressed by the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) 1991 report which gave Japan low marks in human rights. Japan ranked 15th in the UNDP's human freedom index (HFI), behind most West European and Scandinavian nations, Canada, the United States and

Australia.

Japan was cited as being deficient in several areas, including "freedom from capital punishment and freedom from torture and coercion".

The IIFI indicators include personal and legal liberties granted by UN conventions and other international treaties and accords.

Among these is an optional UN protocol on the abolition of the death penalty adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989.

"The death penalty deprives criminals of the right to rehabilitate themselves into society which is the principle of criminal justice," Makoto Endo, chief attorney of Hiraawa said.

The justice ministry strongly believes in the death penalty as a deterrent to crime. Capital punishment as-

sures freedom from crime and the sentence is given only after careful consideration, says the ministry.

Japan has a very low serious crime rate and that makes the government wrongly believe that public opinion supports retaining the death penalty," said Hasegawa.

Apart from the death penalty, human rights groups also decry the absence of a law comparable to the US Freedom of Information Act which provides access to data held by public agencies.

Some groups say they have to rely on information from the United States on such issues as air safety and carcinogenic substances in food.

Lawyers also argue for a better legal system for foreigners.

Foreigners committing minor offences are more likely to be prosecuted than Japanese and if convicted, likely to receive harsher sentences, said lawyer Kensuke Ohnuki.

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.

'Man of the Year'

Sir, I heartily congratulate you for your most delightful article in the New Year's Day issue of your esteemed journal under the above caption. Absolutely impartially and at the same time with a firm hand he steered the nation from autocracy to democracy and which earned him worldwide acclaim. Having accomplished a most difficult task, he left the highest office of the country as quietly as he came to it. His name deserves to be written in golden letters in our country's history. And yet, not

without a pang, if not shame, did I see this great man on the TV screen, unless as an old man I saw it wrong, finally leaving the Government House almost as an orphan without our Prime Minister or even any members of her cabinet bidding him farewell, if not out of gratitude, at least as a matter of grace, although it was he who administered oaths to them on two successive occasions and which enabled them to hold the high offices which they are holding now. Are we indeed a graceless nation? A. Gajjhum Gulshan, Dhaka.

Burmese design

Sir, The Burmese Army and paramilitary forces unprovoked attack on Riju para BDR outpost leaves little doubt that Burma is implementing part of an overall strategy. Experts on Burma have already expressed suspicion after Burma started massive deployment of troops and sophisticated equipment in Arakan. Large quantities of weapons like rocket launchers, artillery, armoured personal carriers, 37 mm and 25 mm antiaircraft guns, medium and light tanks including amphibious ones and an unspecified numbers of small arms have been unloaded off and on at Akyab port of Arakan. Small patrol vessels, naval gun boats and a number of P7 aircraft are stationed at Akyab. Naval, air and infantry exercises have been going on for last several months. More than 25,000 Burmese troops were deployed within a few miles of Burma-

Bangladesh border. All these clearly indicate that the Burmese forces have objectives other than putting down insurgent activities along its border with Bangladesh.

It is the tradition of the military regimes in Burma to create new issues to divert the attention of the simple masses from the real problems whenever they are faced with the threat of losing their power. Gen. Ne Win engineered anti-Chinese riots in 1967 to avert the rice crisis that triggered widespread agitation against the government. In the face of growing discontent against socialist rule Ne Win launched King Dragon operation against the Rohingyas of Arakan satiating anti-Muslim sentiments of Buddhist majority of the country. At present the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLOIRC) has been facing such serious challenges from within and outside the country by refusing

to hand over power to elected representatives and by continuously detaining and torturing opposition political leaders including noble peace prize winner Ms Aung San Suu Kyt.

The Arakan province which is home to three million Rohingyas Muslims has been a hot bed of anti-government insurgency and government instigated communal rioting since 1948. Attention of the world has been drawn to the plight of these oppressed Muslims since their large scale influx off and on into Bangladesh. The RSO urges Bangladesh government to teach the Burmese regime the dastardly and cowardly act of Burmese forces against Bangladesh. This uncivilised act of the Burmese regime leaves not the slightest doubt that the Rohingyas Muslims have been inhumanly treated and are forced to cause refugee influx off and on into Bangladesh. The RSO would also like to pledge that it shall stand by Bangladesh at all times and shall not hesitate to sacrifice lives for the protection and safety of Bangladesh.

The SLOIRC presumes that by going to war with Bangladesh, which it alleges is

giving armed training to RSO, it could rally the badly needed support of army and general Burmese masses to hold on to power. At the same time it thinks that it could finish RSO. The RSO strongly condemns the dastardly and cowardly act of Burmese forces against Bangladesh. This uncivilised act of the Burmese regime leaves not the slightest doubt that the Rohingyas Muslims have been inhumanly treated and are forced to cause refugee influx off and on into Bangladesh. The RSO would also like to pledge that it shall stand by Bangladesh at all times and shall not hesitate to sacrifice lives for the protection and safety of Bangladesh.

Dr. Mohammod Yunus President of RSO, Arakan.