

Dhaka, Friday, January 10, 1992

## Peace for Afghanistan

As laid down in an agreement signed between Washington and Moscow in September, all military assistance from the United States and the (former) Soviet Union to Afghanistan virtually came to a halt even before Jan 1, the deadline set by the September accord. In theory, therefore, while the Najibullah regime, backed by Moscow, is no longer receiving any arms from Moscow, no such aid for the rebel Mujahideen forces should be coming from the US sources. But herein lies a snag. Last week, Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said that his government was not bound by the Washington-Moscow agreement. At the same time, sources close to fractious Afghan rebel coalition insist that they would continue to seek arms from other sources, such as Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, and, indeed, from the open market.

In the situation where different forces remain active — some for peace and others for continuance of anti-Kabul rebel attacks — the position of President Najibullah remains delicate. If he is committed to the end of the 13-year old hostilities, he is also firmly in favour of the UN plan which envisages a ceasefire and an interim administration leading to election, involving all parties inside and outside the government. In short, the UN plan offers Mr Najibullah a good chance for his political survival.

By now, the Afghan leader has confounded his critics and cynics even within his administration by his ability to stay in power, even after his main backer, the former Soviet Union started its journey down the road of disintegration. His claim for a place in the UN-proposed interim administration remains strong, and his chances of faring well at the national polls are certainly not light. In other words, Mr Najibullah cannot just be written off.

Yet, the prospects of putting Afghanistan on the road to peace, stability and economic progress are overshadowed by new developments, some arising out of the end of the Cold War. For one thing, Islamabad sees a new opportunity of playing a major role in shaping the political destiny of Afghanistan, even in deciding what kind of government should be installed in Kabul. In the pursuit of this strategy, Pakistan may get some financial assistance from Saudi Arabia. The entry of new actors on the scene also adds new complications. Pakistan has already started wooing Muslim republics of former Soviet Union, especially Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Islamabad may well be visualising the formation of a new Islamic bloc, which, if realised, would be a boon for Pakistan politically, as well as a new promising market for its exports. Here, too, Pakistan could play a role in seeking financial assistance for these republics from Saudi Arabia. The position of Iran which has been trying to befriend both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia remains unclear.

Here, again, the situation may not be all that simple or grim for President Najibullah. There is a good possibility that the Muslim republics of the former Soviet Union, still committed to secularism and socialist-style social reforms, would like to go along with the Najibullah regime, instead of embracing Islamic fundamentalism of either Pakistani variety or the Saudi version.

At this stage, nothing is more important than to let the UN plan come into force without undue interference from outside, especially Islamabad. Pakistan is perfectly free to pursue its national interests. But it should certainly give a fair chance to the people of Afghanistan to sort out the differences among themselves. Otherwise, the poor land-locked country may be plunged into an endless civil strife.

## Lessening Risks of Launch Journeys

In a riverine country like Bangladesh, the importance of launch cannot be overemphasised. But for the passengers of launches on different routes, without exception, the experiences are less than happy. The contributing factors are many but some are just more serious than the others. That the vessels continue to violate navigation rules almost with impunity is known, what is less known is the fact that the act goes under the very nose of the people whose primary job it is to ensure that the laws are respected in toto.

A report carried in this newspaper yesterday once again focused on this perennial problem citing in details the nature of rule violation. It ranges from overloading to lack of the most basic facilities; from inept piloting to deliberate ignorance of weather forecast. All this speaks volumes of the mismanagement of affairs on water front in this country. Surprisingly, however, this deplorable state of affairs goes almost unnoticed till another great tragedy involving scores and perhaps hundreds of launch passengers' lives give a rude shock to our collective consciousness. A flurry of activities on the part of concerned government agencies suddenly gives the impression that things will henceforth be put in order. But before long the hullabaloo dies down and everything returns back to square one.

The lesson we ought to learn from the awful situation is that there is no alternative to a round-the-year vigilance and more importantly monitoring the performance of those responsible for the job. Concerned ministers are more busy countering the political threats posed by the spill-overs of the tragic launch accidents than really looking for a reasonable solution to the problems that are man-made and therefore avoidable. The pattern is much too familiar now and the passengers, notwithstanding their exasperation, cannot put up a united resistance. On the contrary, the launch employees and owners, organised as they are, can do a great deal of arm-twisting of the government and also hold the passengers a hostage of their caprice. On various pretexts they go on strike and subsequently make the passengers pay both in cash and kind as if to reimburse their loss.

What is the solution then? Evidently, there is no any simple recipe. But one thing is sure that the administration has to be tough unlike the previous autocratic one that went soft only to appease the pressure groups. Rules are there alright. But the important thing is to implement them. A democratic dispensation has that daunting task at hand. If it really means business, it must start the ground work much before another mishap rocks the conscience of the people. Violation of law in any form is liable to punishment. Some people cannot go scot-free only because they are organised. That is one answer to the problem but better still it is to make them behave before they have already committed another grievous wrong. To make the launch journeys less hazardous that is the least we should do.

**F**INANCE Minister Saifur Rahman recently has indeed hit at the crux of the problem that has been eating up the national resources for long. To tune with him I shall add that "better management" pre-supposes existence of "better people" who should be adequately trained, be totally dedicated and self-motivated, imbued with genuine spirit of patriotism and on the top of everything, absolute honesty and high moral integrity. Unfortunately however, when we look around for such an ideal person we do not find him. The situation has come to such a pass that asking for a replacement would be mere day-dreaming because, almost every one of us has been madly after the "short cut" to personal enrichment.

Having been in the industrial sector for long I could identify two distinct types of managers. One, the Manager who cherished personal aggrandisement, without "eating up the fence" like that proverbial goat. He would, on the one hand, be very active in organising his workforce for a better production. He would not enervate his personal fortune with the purchases of raw materials etc. rather would have his share from the numerous traders who would be around for allotment of goods produced. If they have the reputation of being in high demand the Manager demands a bigger slice, as if sharing with the traders their profit. This is a type of very cunning but very active Managers whose diplomatic stance and feigned honesty often has been intriguingly misleading. This type of people always enjoy the confidence of the Corporate Head whose main concern is fulfillment of production target, less or no labour problem and of course, sales and distribution. Queerly enough a Manager of this type is capable of meeting all the requirements of the Corporate body. At least he is in the "good books" of the bosses.

Conversely, the other type of Managers — who are the majority, place personal financial mobility above everything. They are "the fence eaters." They thrive on their ingrained notoriety. They can create, not work (good work included) but can create purchases. Some of them do the shopping fulfilling the statutory conditions. Very rarely they check the inventory before deciding to make purchases. Nor do they care to examine the frequency of use of any item. No matter, they have to make purchases — and they do it often in bulks even without following the ground rules. At the end there is huge stockpiling of some items which will not be consumed even in decades!

I do not suppose that the Finance Minister has anything

in the back of his mind which will seek radical changes of the management of Jute and Textile Industries en bloc. By our experience we can say that keeping the present scale of moral integrity in view any attempt at perfectionism will be nothing short of madness. The 2/3 years period for the expected transformation hinted by the Finance Minister is born of a far-sightedness. Nevertheless, the process to such a transformation cannot brook any delay. It should start right now.

### Debate

The proposed exercise will be an exercise in futility if it is not backed up by a pragmatic programme with realistic strategies. The essential alternative to management is management alone, nay, an effective management. The awe-in-

**Retrenchment is the ready answer but will it be the right and judicious answer? I cannot imagine the situation which the addition of such a huge number to the unemployed millions would create... I shudder conjuring up the magnitude of the problem and the insurmountable crisis that such a mass of people in the streets would set in for the government.**

spiring debacle of the present management in the industrial sector can be attributed to: a) Large scale corruption and dishonesty; b) Management falling in a host of untrained, half-educated Managers who have little or no idea about modern/scientific management; c) Total failure of the Managers to motivate people working in the industrial units; d) Communication gap ever-widening due to the artificial barriers raised between the management and workers; e) Lack of the desired sense of belongingness emerging from the deliberate and unimaginative attempt by the management denying the workforce the access to the state of affairs of the mills; f) Quer groupings amongst workers and employees hatched up by vested interest with the suicidal patronage of the management; g) Incoherent manpower planning and also production planning; h) Absence of participative management, proper and attractive incentive schemes for the workers; i) Political polarisation of workers aided by non-working trade unionists from outside.

Many more items can come on the list but, these are, in my personal opinion, some of the major issues that are to be addressed on priority basis. In this connection, one thing may deserve consideration. Records will show that many of the industrial units sustaining

## BETTER MANAGEMENT VERSUS RETRENCHMENT

# Needed Course of Action that Can Release Much of Charges

by Kazi Alauddin Ahmed

loss over past several years had too their golden days. The managers and the workers used to display excellent sense of harmony and co-operation. They used to share their happiness and miseries together. The workers had their grievances and the managers managed those grievances and production so very well that scarcely they turned their backs.

Corruption and dishonesty was still there but not like the "fence eaters" of today. Without having recourse to despair we can still mend our fences. As a test case, let us take Adamjee Jute Mills Ltd. and induct contractual management system. Such management will be given to those managers who worked their in 70's and 80's showing height of their

union amongst the labour leaders aiming at monopolising their hold. Even the Ministers allowed themselves to be played in such suicidal gambles. Virtually there has not been any contraction in such an awesome activity over the years. The height of the game saw us through yet another ominous side of the whole picture. The overall confusion sustained in the employment field has been used as a camouflage by a handful of labour leaders and their accomplices in various departments, to draw, allegedly, huge bills against fake workers. It is only a part of the tragic story.

The recent revelation that there are about 3,000 excess workers in the jute industries in the public sector, is, to my personal view, a very conserva-

could release much of the charges in outright retrenchment. Such an exercise demands a very careful planning aided by the following steps: a) Identify the unit-wise number of workers in excess of requirement; b) Segregate the units which have the largest and smallest numbers; examine prospect of relocating workers from larger numbers to smaller ones to forge a balance as far as practicable; c) Make trade-wise classification of all the excess workers in order of their respective seniority in employment; d) Explore simultaneously, possibilities of re-employing the surplus workers in as many private industrial units of the like in order of individual seniority and performance records; e) Seek assistance from FIJIC and all the District Chambers to gain over their

out' basis should be optional: m) A plan, both short and long term, will have to be made to establish new industries in public sector on erstwhile EPIDC's model of investment; n) Private entrepreneurs, joint venture projects should be encouraged and all assistance to be given by the government would be in lieu of their individual obligatory commitment to give employment to the surplus workers in the public sector in preference to others; o) Unskilled surplus workers should be given training in specially designed skill development programme in such fields where they would be in great demand; p) Trade diversification programme may also include agro-based industries, cooperative mechanised farming, small industrial sub-contracting projects with the statutory obligation to channelise the produced goods to big industrial projects to meet their requirements of spares.

**Conclusion:** In the overall context, due emphasis should be given on keeping retrenchment of workers at a minimum. The process should be phased out in such a manner, and spreading over at least a two-year period, so that, in the meantime, all efforts may be deployed at arranging alternative employment/vocations instead of throwing the hapless workers into the street. I repeat that unless a tangible solution to such a massive problem is found out the overall national problems will be just compounded beyond any measure of control. Some of the suggestions above may perhaps be given serious thinking right now without biding time. "A stitch in time saves nine" — the universal dictum should be kept in view. Time — the right time, it the great healer. Let us not run out of it.

**Foot Note:** When I concluded I did not anticipate that the govt. would soon be almost compelled to sign an agreement with the Jute Mills workers granting them interim monthly relief of Tk. 500/ each for the month of January 1992 and thereafter at the rate of Tk. 200/ every month until the Wages Commission report was implemented. I do not have to tell the readers how such an interim dispensation (though under severe duress) will compound the already ransacked and emasculated financial resources of BJMC and the private mills. (BJMC loss: 1990-91 Tk. 243 crore; Tk. 91 crore July-Oct 1990-91 and that of private mills: 1990-91 Tk. 96 crore and July-Oct Tk. 24 crore). Well, my philosophical exploration flounders on the rocks of such an arithmetical riddle! Hands up!

capabilities. I believe some of them would even to-day volunteer to take up such a challenge to uphold national interest. If the government condescend to go for such an apparently unusual alternative, there will be no difficulty to work out the operational matrix for it. As we all know ICIC has already patronized such a management philosophy in Dhaka Match Industries with success, there should not be any doubt about its efficacy.

### Retrenchment: No Right Answer

It is true that almost all the industrial units in the Jute and Textile sectors have been overcrowded. It did not happen overnight, rather it has been a legacy being carried forward right from 1972. Readily, it reflects the management debacle born of uncanny manpower planning. But behind the present crisis there is yet another vicious tale to tell. The "so called" labour leaders and their political godfathers in power could be identified as the main architects of such a tragic episode today. There has been indeed a perpetual and inconsequential dumping of people by the "Power Centre" all these years. In the process not only the industrial units but also the corporate offices have had such erratic metamorphosis at the cost of the national exchequer. There has been, at times, wild competi-

tive estimate. I cannot resist here the temptation to allude such estimation to that of the total number of rickshaws in the metropolis on DCC records and the actual number. I would not, however, rake my brains over the number but I would certainly express my sympathies with the managements of the units who, I can see, are gasping for breath under the dead weight of such a perpetual liability.

### Probable Way Out

Obviously the opinion of the Finance Minister in this colossal problem will coincide with anyone's thinking. Retrenchment is the ready answer but will it be the right and judicious answer? I ask myself. I do it because I cannot help being mercilessly haunted by the almost predatory spectre seizing the employment field. I cannot imagine the situation which the addition of such a huge number of the unemployed millions would create. Besides, I shudder conjuring up the magnitude of the problem and the insurmountable crisis that such a mass of people in the streets would set in for the government to handle. On the other hand, something has got to be done to offset the present alarming situation.

In the fitness of things therefore, we should put our heads together to search for the course of action which

members in favour of giving the government whole-hearted co-operation. f) Set up a high powered National Council for salvation of retrenched workers which will be responsible to liaise, co-ordinate and fill up vacancies in all the industrial unit in the country. This may have a number of zonal bodies; g) Undertake crash programme to set up a number of new industrial units both in public and private sector in a maximum of two years time. Include a long term plan as well; h) Pending possible re-employment, the excess workers listed for eventual retrenchment should be harnessed and deployed in the mainstream of the national development programme as temporary measures; i) Draw up massive programme for self-employment for the excess workers compulsorily in their respective villages with special emphasis on co-operatives. Short-term motivational training programme will have to be undertaken simultaneously; j) Extend credit facilities on easier terms to all those willing to embrace the above programme; k) Develop a strong network for marketing, sales and distribution of the products so that it can ensure an effective mechanism to recover the dues of the banks/financial institutions; l) Re-employment/self-employment of workers facing retrenchment on "last in first

# Tech-starved Cambodia finally gets UN assist

Ian Steele writes from United Nations

**For the first time in 15 years, a United Nations organisation will provide financial support for the training of Cambodians**

agency relief for 200,000 internally displaced people. In the past, humanitarian assistance from more than 50 non-governmental organisations and international agencies was distributed on an informal and voluntary basis.

As the United Nations peace process advances, donors are expected to

increase their commitments and the number of refugees in need of repatriation and resettlement from neighbouring countries is likely to increase. If aid is to be used effectively, the coordinating mechanisms for distribution will have to be strengthened.

To meet the anticipated rise in the supply of aid and

local demand for help, a special unit is to be set up within UNDP's Liaison Office in Phnom Penh. The unit will gather data on humanitarian needs and coordinate the work of local authorities and bilateral as well as multi-lateral donors. The unit will also be responsible for monitoring the distribution of donor inputs.

The project will also provide emergency rehabilitation assistance to help communities absorb and reintegrate returnees. These will include refugees from the Thai border, the estimated 200,000 internally displaced people and

thousands of soldiers who will be demobilised by the various factions.

The second project will tackle the need to rebuild a force of skilled personnel within Cambodia. Prolonged civil strife and the resulting international isolation of the country have taken a heavy toll on the nation's administrative and technical capacity. UNDP grants will cover local and international training costs for Cambodians in the fields of agriculture, health and the provision of basic infrastructure.

—Depthnews Asia

## 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.

### World Bank: A clarification

Sir, Please permit me to comment on your article "World Bank wants Dhaka to change Population Policy," in January 7 issue of your esteemed newspaper, and your Editorial on the same subject on January 8th.

The article you printed is misleading. It is damaging to the good relationship which has been developed over the years between the World Bank and the Government of Bangladesh and its policy makers.

There is no difference of opinion between the World Bank and the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare as to the family planning policy being followed by the Government. A full cafeteria approach to family planning methods is endorsed and the last multi-donor Supervision Mission in November 1991 stated that "the increasing acceptance of the Pill is a healthy trend."

There is some concern on both sides that the number of people (male and female) using permanent methods is declin-

ing, and there is agreement that improved quality of services is important.

The World Bank led Consortium of donors supporting the Government is in constant policy dialogue with the Government and is supportive of the Government's policies on family planning.

In evidence of this you should note that the Fourth Population and Health Project was designed jointly by Government and the programme's financial supporters, in line with the Fourth Five-Year Plan. This was done using a series of workshops bringing together all the policy makers involved in the Government and representatives of the donors.

Philip RS Gowers  
Chief, Population and Health Unit  
The World Bank, Resident Mission, Bangladesh.

**Editor's Note:** The report published in this paper on Jan 7 was based on briefings by well-placed dependable sources. However, we are now pleased to know that there are no differences of views between the World Bank and the relevant Ministry of the Government.

—Editor

### Tribute to the brave

Sir, Thank you for your editorial of January 7 concerning the young lecturer from Munirunnessa Girls' College, Mr. Qazi Nurul Islam, who braved wrath of a group of hoodlums in order to prevent them from molesting a girl. Good samaritans like him who actually have the courage to protest instead of cowering in fear are so rare these days that any news about them comes as a welcome relief. We hope Mr Qazi Nurul Islam recovers soon and carries on his good work. We are in great need of knights in shining armour like him.

The code of chivalry, it seems, is dead and forgotten these days. One hears of too many incidents where people are attacked in broad daylight, right in front of large crowds who are only too glad to look the other way or at best, assume the role of silent spectators. The 'goodies' take advantage of their cowardice and lethargy and carry on their antisocial activities without fear. What is worse is that the same people suddenly come to life after the crime has been committed and the perpetrators have fled, and start rebuking the victim about what he/she should and should not have done.

Let us hope that the example of Mr. Qazi Nurul Islam will shame all into reacting quickly to others' cry of distress. We must remember that one who

stands by and allows a crime to be committed is a guilty as one who commits the crime. The brave feats of heroes like the young lecturer should not only be given wide coverage in the media but also be recognised by the Government with awards or prizes so that others might be inspired to emulate them.

Farah Imrana Hussain  
Dhanmondi R. A., Dhaka.

### House rent

Sir, This is to bring to your notice that it has become almost impossible to continue to live in any suitable area for a Dhakate. What I am endeavoring to tell you is that rents are astronomically high everywhere in the city as compared to that a decade before.

I understand that there is inflation, and the Bangladeshi Taka is constantly being devalued. But I also believe that the owners of the houses are sometimes selfish and overbearing.

I live in Mohammadpur with my widowed and ailing mother and my younger brothers — most of whom are students. Our landlord has threatened to send us legal notice to vacate if we do not increase the rent.

As a school teacher, and with a brother who is a clerk in a bank as only earning members, I find it difficult to handle the escalating rents.

I realise that people live on the income of the houses they have built in places such as Wari, Dhanmondi, not to mention Gulshan, Banani, Baridhara. I do not refute the fact that they have a right to demand a price for the use of their carefully constructed houses.

Yet, how does the average individual pay the necessary rent with a hum drum job?

G. H. Mohammed Ali  
Mohammadpur, Dhaka.

### Lonely in a city

Sir, I find it extremely difficult to maintain friendship in the city of Dhaka.

I am a working woman and have my schedules of 9 to 6 to follow. I find my friends recalling me only when they require something. But should I simply wish to be tolerated for 15 minutes, I find them get distracted and disinclined to converse with me.

Having been brought up in a convent till age 21, and now residing and working in Dhaka, you can envisage the situation if I dare to even speak on the telephone to a male friend — let alone meet him. The hide-and-seek game by teenagers does not become me.

Human beings remain gregarious. I live alone with my

mother and a part-time maid. How does one thrive on soli loquies? How long can one endeavour to read and listen to music instead of having human friends to converse with?

I had a dog but it died. I brought another one but it was unfortunately stolen. How I wish I had a pet canary to whistle to and teach it "Lots of chocolates for me to eat!"

Anyway, when modern Dhaka is going to become really cosmopolitan? That may at least give a new lease of life to some suffering souls.

Ayesha  
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

### Environment and villagers

Sir, It is clear from all the environmental studies that Bangladesh will be one of the major victims of the Greenhouse Effect. There has been much campaign for the city dwellers to keep the environment from pollution. On the other side, the villagers, are kept almost ignorant about this inevitable disaster. It, therefore, is an immediate necessity to sort out some ways to educate the people of the country-side about baneful effect of the environmental pollution.

Ekratul Kabir  
Mirpur, Dhaka.