

# Unrealised Debt: Grief that Remains

by Ahmad Mujtahid

ONE are the days of the Emperors, the Kings the Nawabs, and the Maharajas. Those were the golden days. They were never known to be close-fisted and were happy about merrily spending money from public exchequer as they pleased. They could blow away any amount of public money on extravaganzas. They could spend any amount on trifles or construction of monuments and give away anything to their chosen ones. Yet they were not answerable to anyone. Those were the golden days for them.

But the contemporaneous time is one when national pride is taking precedence over everything else. All our wisdom is proved wrong. Ideology is no longer considered thicker than blood. Nationalism is sweeping away, brooming aside all past beliefs. All the citizens of any one nation can't be fooled for all the time. We notice this scenario today in the world scale. The mighty Japan had to apologize to China for their deeds and war crimes against the Chinese people during the World War-II. The South Korean women angrily demanded apology and compensation from Japan for forcing them to prostitution for the Japanese army. Modern generation is awoken to the brutalities of the Japanese army during the World War-II. No nation forgets or can ever forget about the brutalities committed, the honour tarnished, dignity and pride trampled under foot, ignominy inflicted upon them at a disadvantageous moment of history by the war criminals. Bangladesh is the only unfortunate exception — a unique country — ever forgetful and perennially oblivious about the past happenings, and is always at a fix as to what to do, suffer always from a sense of directionlessness, and crisis of identity?

Twenty years have elapsed since we won a war of liberation over the Pakistani Military junta. The war that really started immediately after the creation of that impossible state was fought at various levels and fronts against the Pakistani military-bureaucratic

clique and came to its logical end when they were defeated both politically and culturally on December 16, 1971 after a lapse of 24 years since 1947. In spite of all these our generation is not aware what actions have so far been taken by the government since 1971 to recover our portion of the assets from Pakistan. We are still not sure if any study had ever been commissioned, or Task Force constituted to determine the quantum of our share of the assets Pakistan owes us and what we owe to Pakistan.

Our children grown up since 1971 are in darkness as to why a part of that "impossible nation" had to wage struggle against the so-called "Centre" — occupied by the other part immediately after the partition of India in 1947. They are in an abyss as to why Bangladesh had to wage struggle on cultural and economic and political fronts since then. They are totally unaware as to how much

very unworthy students in the (Sixties) published a simple article in the then Pakistan Observer, as far as I can remember in 1968, captioned: **WIKO PAYS DEBT TO WHOM.** He was at that time working with the newly founded central university — Islamabad University as the Professor and Chairman of Faculty of Economics. Only years ago he was our teacher in the Dhaka University Economics Department and later left for Yale University.

He wrote for any one to understand and at a time when the Bangladesh had been rallying around Six Point Programme of Shaikh Mujib and for which the Shaikh was being harassed by the Ayub government by constantly implicating him in fake charges which forced him to appear before almost any district court throughout the whole of East Pakistan.

The net value of Rs. 30,000 million in terms of US Dollars in 1968 could easily be found to be equal to (Rs. 30,000 million - 4.5) US \$6666.67 million. The net present value of this 6666.67 million dollars considering an interest rate of 5% would stand at nearly US\$ 20968.70 million dollars. If we estimate in terms of price of gold today it would be around US\$40,000 million. These are very rough conversion estimates.

We are not sure if our government has done any exercise on this debt issue or shall we say willful appropriation of assets of the then East Pakistan by their brothers (!) of West Pakistan. These estimates have not considered the period after 1968, division of assets of Pakistan, payment for the war crimes perpetrated by the West Pakistan Military Junta on

have failed miserably to demand for the division of the assets and liabilities as on 25-3-1971 but also remained totally indifferent to even the estimates made by Professor Anisur Rahman in 1968. This we say because we are yet to hear any demand from the platform of any political party — serious enough to force the successive governments since 1975 to take up the issue of realising the money Pakistan owed to the people of Bangladesh. Successive governments since 1975 also did not care to take up the issue with the Pakistani government on a bilateral basis and on other international forum like OIC, United Nations, SAARC etc. where both the nations are members. The reason for this failure are unknown, the silence smells suspicion.

Bangladesh has so far received about 20 billion dollars in foreign aid in the name of the poor people. These people also know that every year in

as for the sacrifices Bangladesh had to make for keeping the money in the safe locker in Pakistan — and has found not how many development projects had to be scrapped for lack of funds, how many social infrastructure projects could not be initiated for the vast multitude of our rural masses and poor children, the jobs that could not be created, the medical, technical and educational institutes that could not be built, safe drinking water that could not be supplied, the essential dredging of the rivers that could not be undertaken, resulting in flash floods damaging crops to the tune of hundreds of crores of Taka, and steps that could not be effectively taken for poverty alleviation — all for lack of funds.

Our government, the party in power, the principal party in the opposition and the smaller parties all seem to be extremely seriously engaged in and outside the Parliament on high-flying issues with lofty idealism, hence hardly left with any time to spare for "smaller" issues.

We would, however, hope that Bangladesh Government, the party in Power, the party in the Opposition and the Parliament will strive to recover our assets back from Pakistan at all cost. If necessary the matter should be taken up to international forum for putting pressure on Pakistan to repay our share of assets which they are illegally withholding. It is a crime on the part of Pakistan equal to the one they committed in 1971. It should not be allowed to gently and slowly pass into permanent oblivion.

This is an attempt to provoke some discussions by our leaders — political and intellectual — for our children who has the right to know the truth about issues that have already touched their life and will continue to touch the life of their children — and to whom we owe an unabashed explanation as to our failures to create a better future for them. In a word it is aimed at all those who still do cherish some love for this country.

## Transport Strike

Transport strikes on genuine or the flimsiest of grounds have so far caused colossal losses to this poor country's economy. The sufferings of travelling people just beggar description. The problem in particular seems to have concentrated in the north of the country in recent times. So nagging is the problem there that prolonged strikes within a couple of months have posed a basic question: what really has gone wrong with the transport system in the region? The need for going deep into the matter is therefore overriding.

That the transport workers have been seeking to establish job regulations is assuredly a positive move. If the transport owners do not like the idea or, worse, stand in the way of implementing the service rules, the responsibilities certainly lie with the defaulters. If, in that case, the government also becomes a party to the stalemate simply by default, the aggrieved transport workers however have no other way open to them but to go on strike. In the earlier such incident, their demands were partially met when many of the workers were issued appointment letters. But more are yet to be granted the facility. As for bringing an end to the illegal toll collection, the crisis appears to be mounting. This is one area where the government has a lot to do.

It is not at all difficult to differentiate the genuine from the unfounded reasons for calling a transport strike. And the law of the land allows or disallows strikes accordingly. There is hardly any scope for mincing words. If the transport workers have a genuine cause, the mediation by the government or whatever measures it can muster to deal with the problem must be prompt. By allowing the crisis to prolong, the government just inflicts injuries to itself and to the public.

Worse still is the fact that when the genuine problem is not properly addressed, things get muddled with the result that the less important issues are also pushed to the fore.

The confusion over the strike issue has continued so persistently that the whole transport system is now in a total mess. The legal and moral aspects that are involved in it fade, more often than not, out of sight. Organised protests by the transport workers, no matter how irrational they are, virtually take a hostage of the government and the public. It is precisely on this count that something has to be done urgently. If the strike is an inalienable right of a particular group or section of people, so inviolable is others' right to move freely. Most of the time, however, the methods of striking people are not just confined to peace and non-violence. Under no circumstances can the transport workers leave their vehicles helter-skelter to obstruct others' passage. But that is exactly what they usually do.

Laws are meaningless if the concerned parties continue to ignore them and even misinterpret them. With democratic rights are directly linked the responsibilities to be avowedly performed. The important thing, specially in our situation, is to strike a balance between the legal and the moral. To come to terms with the situation, the society as a whole has to be responsible enough to do that trick. Yet the government's special role in upholding the rule of law should stand out.

## Quest for a Hundred Hasans

A three-day Hason Raja Festival was held recently at Sunamganj. There is perhaps a justification for holding the Lalon Festival at Kushtia or a possible Radharaman Festival in Rajshahi or Dwijadas Festival in Bhowal, Joydebpur. If because these nativity spots of those great men are replete with associations of them. But then there is also a contrary aspect to such celebration of those truly worthy ones locally at the spots of their origin. This tends to reduce them into local celebrities which is a mean travesty of a long-established fact. All these immortals, specially Lalon and Hason, belong to the whole nation as do Tagore and Nazrul. And if these were dynamic times for the Bengali culture as it had been in the late nineteenth century—Lalon and Hason could well become valued treasures of world culture. We very ardently feel that, without grudging Sunamganj and Kushtia their claim on Hason and Lalon, festivals should be held on a national footing to re-live their music and their mystic experiences and achievements. This would be a sure way of rejuvenating the nation.

We take the occasion of the 163rd anniversary of Hason Raja's birth to point out that these grate creators — last in line of the great medieval saints of the subcontinent such as Kabir, Dadu, Rajab, Rabidas, Nanak etc.— have long been subjected to injustice born more of ignorance and neglect than anything else. They are over the whole length of the present century held to be folk luminaries, making some kind of allowances by the use of that qualification. In point of fact, the works of these musical savants do constitute integral parts of the Bengali high culture. Tagore himself had very forcefully tried to press this point home and his early translation of some of Kabir's first 'doha's bears ample testimony to the importance be attached to the works of savant-artists of the order of Kabir. Hason and Lalon are removed from Kabir only in point of time but very little by way either esthetic and spiritual appeal or intensity and profundity of the message. Hason and Lalon's voluminous creations — the late Khoda Bukhsh Sain could give impromptu performance of any number of songs from a repertoire of 500 Lalon pieces— were all couched in chaste and high Bengali and the melodies they fashioned for them were full of musical innovations and excellence — and not repetitions of older refrains as happens in the pure folk tradition.

Hason and Lalon were contemporaries. It is a fair guess that the two were typical of their time rather than being exceptions and that right up to their period of creativity Bengal was truly golden in her gift of mystic-artistic talents and geniuses. It was till then a land of music and meditation such as has rarely been found in the entire planet over the whole of history. We now carry on with the fable born of that which is no more a fact now. It should be a dear and loving job as well as a bounden duty to discover the hundred other Hasons and Lalons. For like these two, the thousand other men and women of music and poetry through whom the soul of Bengal manifested itself, sang through their profound mysticism of a compassionate humanism that like the sky girdled all creation.

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It was a time when "DON'T DISTURB AYUB" theory was being stubbornly followed by a section of the leftists. Agartala conspiracy case and the historic Student Mass movement were still months away. It was a time when disparity was a very popular topic even with the Ministers of Ayub Khan and they used to make tall promises to do away with disparity under the redoubtable Ayub Khan, who at that time was celebrating his glorious Decade of Development with pomp and grandeur. Everything seemed to be quiet both in the Eastern and the Western fronts.

Professor Anisur Rahman disclosed in his article that West Pakistan owed to East Pakistan a staggering amount of Rs. 30,000 million (when one US dollar was equal to Rs. 4.5) as on 1967. The amount only included what Pakistan Government transferred away from East Pakistan to West Pakistan in the name of development of central government

the unarmed civilian population upto December 16, 1971 and the damages done to a sovereign State starting from March 26, 1971.

Paradoxically enough our democratic government, the defender of our sovereignty and committed to the welfare of our people and the ever vigilant opposition parties always ready to take on the government almost on any issue seem to have a perfect convergence of policies on this issue. This convergence of policies of the government and the opposition in and outside the Parliament or marriage of convenience if you like, at the cost of billions of dollars belonging to Bangladesh, poorest of nations in the world — does not go to show that the sovereignty is properly defended.

What surprises us most as though both our government, the party in power, the opposition in the Parliament and all those representing various brands, trends and shades of politics, all of them, not only

the meeting of the Aid Consortium we beg for pledges to be made for aids and grants and lobby with the World Bank and other donor governments and agencies. But what they do not seem to know is that how much money Pakistan owes to Bangladesh or what steps have been taken by the government. They do not know if the debt Pakistan owes to the poor people of Bangladesh has been written off as Bad Debt by any one in Bangladesh, or if it has been given away to Pakistan for the cause of Islamic Ummah and as a price of friendship with Pakistan when 65% of Bangladeshis live below the poverty line, when their children don't get medicare at birth and cannot even have elementary schooling. Whereas owing mainly to the scarcity of cash resources World Bank and IMF take them for a ride year after year in the name of structural readjustment.

We are not sure if any study has ever been undertaken by any organization or individual allocating expenditures". "Good governance requires that scarce resources be allocated rationally... excessive military expenditure did not further their development, and resources spent on unproductive or prestigious public investment projects could be put to better use," he said.

But the delegate from Ghana who spoke for the Group of 77 developing nations maintained that it was the "unequal exchange" between the two worlds which was to

Edward Kufour said developing countries had taken up programmes to deal with poverty but their efforts had met with little international support. Commodity prices, which many Third World governments relied on for foreign exchange earnings, had fallen as their external debt burdens mounted. Structural adjustment programmes in the Third World were faltering because of inadequate resource support and their cumulative effect had been to worsen the lot of the poor who had to pay the price for cutbacks in social spending, said Kufour.

## North-South: Why Nations Are Poor

**Developed and Third World countries have differing ideas on the roots of poverty. Rajiv Tiwari of IPS reports from New York.**

It says the struggle against poverty must be the shared responsibility of all and calls for long term support by the developed countries for measures taken by Third World countries to stimulate growth and alleviate poverty.

In a review of poverty reduction during the 1980's, the report finds Africa and Latin America were badly affected by shifts in the global economic environment, and their poverty rates increased.

"The salient features (of the 1980s) were a general slowdown in global economic growth, widening disparities in economic performance among developing countries, an increase in international economic instability, and a reversal of net financial resource flows between developed and developing countries," the report states.

The UN secretary-general's report says new international shocks were felt in the early 1990s due to the Gulf War and the growing problem of servicing foreign debt for some Asian countries, like India, which had gone through the 1980's "largely unscathed".

"Although it is too early gauge the full impact and ramifications of those shocks, the effects of the Gulf War and its

alternation on many of the immigrant workers of the region clearly had significant repercussions both for the workers concerned and for their countries of origin," it adds.

More than one billion people worldwide live in poverty. Of these, 600 million are classified as "extremely poor". Two-thirds of the world's poorest live in Asia and are concentrated in rural areas with high population densities, such as northern India, the delta region of Bangladesh and the island of Java in Indonesia.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, 120 million people are estimated to be extremely poor and are found in rural areas where soils are degraded and farming techniques are underdeveloped.

Severe deprivation grips 50 million Latin Americans and is concentrated in the Andean highlands, urban slums and among rural households which have been rendered landless more because of inequalities than population pressure.

Despite demands by Third World for a fairer world eco-

nomic system, the UN debate showed the chasm between the two poles cannot be easily bridged.

Speaking on behalf of the 12 countries of the European Community, a delegate from the Netherlands, said existing government budgets in developing countries could optimised by "prioritising and re-

All dictators or authoritarian rulers of the world have excuses for their crises. They can easily find or will create to find one scapegoat or another in their own country or from abroad. One popular opposition leader or group can easily become their target while a neighbouring country or a power may be blamed for its hand in their so-called internal affairs.

Adolf Hitler of Germany had dragged his country to war mostly for his power play in 1939. Field Marshall Ayub Khan of Pakistan had fought three successive wars with neighbouring India only to serve his political interests. So also Saddam Hussein of Iraq fought a war by invading neighbouring Kuwait just to solve the internal political and economic crisis. Burmese military junta will be no exception in this case. We have ample proof of such things happening in Burma in the recent past.

In 1967, when Burma was in crisis of food and ration shortage, General Ne Win and his Revolutionary Council staged an anti-Chinese campaign in Rangoon and in central Burma. They condemned Red China and Burma communists as agents who manipulated political and economic crisis inside Burma. China was accused intervening in Burma's internal affairs. They called upon the Burmese patriots to come forward and defend their state sovereignty and national independence of beloved motherland and so on. The consequence was thousands of Chinese and Chinese descendants lost their lives and a large amount of property damaged after the communal riot.

In later part of 70s, there occurred a political crisis and power struggle inside the ruling party and government in Burma. The evidence was an unsuccessful coup attempt with political assassination by a group of army captains in Rangoon; a so-called high treason plot of political sabotage

conspired by a group of young party officials in 1977, one Col Amin of Bangladesh Mission was accused of having a hand in connection with the plot and expelled. So, there came again Ne Win and his BSSP government with a new trick named "Operation King Dragon" reasoning routine immigration check-up all over the country, but their concentration was only in Arakan. It was again clear that they wanted to divert people's attention from prevailing political crisis to racial and religious turmoil. Bitter experience of 1978 refugee influx was well known to all of us.

At present, three years after mass upheaval and democratic movement, political tension in Rangoon and all over Burma as well as along the border region of ethnic areas have been mounted. In 1989 State Law and Order Restoration Committee (SLORC) put Aung San Suu Kyi, a popular opposition leader of National League for Democracy (NLD) in house arrest without trial; in 1990 they failed to hand over power to the elected body after the election as they promised earlier; contrarily they arrested and suppressed the NLD leaders, elected MPs and supporters en masse; brutal killing of Buddhist monks in Mandalay made the situation worse.

Regarding Human Rights violation, international pressures including the UN, its Human Rights agency and Nobel Peace Prize Committee made SLORC more furious but more encouraging for the people. Political tension became higher in recent months. Muslim refugee influx along the Burma-Bangladesh border in 1991 and a secret armed manoeuvre in the western theatre fueled in Burma combined to complicate the situation.

Anyway they are smart enough to adopt the old but effective tactics of "Divide and Rule" policy to divert the mounted crisis in any suitable area where Buddhists and

Muslim communities have some tensions created and reared by successive ruling class since British time onward and utilised the defect whenever it is necessary for their own benefit.

Generally for SLORC there will be not so many alternatives for it to get out of the existing crisis, but hand over the power to the winner of the last election without condition. But the option is not for the power monger dictator or authoritarian ruler by any reason. They are on their own way like their predecessors and other military dictators of the world. It is diverting the mounted political crisis to a national problem only to serve their own interest i.e. to be in power.

In its calculation, out of four neighbouring countries China and Thailand are their accomplice and India, in our opinion, is going to follow suit. Therefore, Bangladesh border is, logically, left as their target spot, but a wrong choice.

It is most probable and I presumed that they raised Bangladesh BDR outpost on December 21, 1991 intentionally and with well-planned dithering from centre. Now the tension along the border was temporarily and officially relaxed. But there left a curious question like what will be the next happening if that border intrusion and raid was a mere prologue of a grand drama to be followed and staged later on. A foul play of blind adventurism or shortsightedness will lead to unnecessary risk and sacrifice for all of us, especially in such a transitional period when both countries are struggling for a higher political stage of peace and development through democracy.

We, the people of Bangladesh and Burma whether Buddhists or Muslims, therefore should be very careful and cautious to handle this outstanding problem and its related issues not to be caught in SLORC's trap.

A dissident from Burma

## 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.

### A felicitation

Sir, Three hundred sixty five days have elapsed in the time cycle and The Daily Star steps in its second year. Within this short span of time this daily has succeeded in carving its own brilliant image in the realm of English journalism in the country and make a special room in our hearts as well as that of many others at home and abroad. We felicitate it on its winning journey to popularity against many an odd.

As apparent The Daily Star is pursuing the path of true journalism apprising people of facts and also ventilating their woes and grievances. We hope the journal will remain unique in its way of a free press without fear or favour.

Press is still a very influential mass medium. And here we wish The Daily Star a wider circulation, catering to the need of the masses. We hope The Daily Star will also help us in keeping our morale high in this time of falling social values and provide us with such

bits of pleasure as many others do not.

We wish your journal (or we should say our) Godspeed.

Md. Shahadat Hossain  
Fakirbazar, Burichong  
Comilla.

### Shifting of polling centre

Sir, Some inconveniences may arise for the voters due to unsuitable location of Nijfulhuri Govt. Primary School polling centre. Instead Fakirbari Govt. Primary School in Ward No. 2 of No. 2 Dhanisafa Union may be chosen under the following grounds.

a) It is found that out of the total 2,300 voters approximately 1,700 voters live near the Fakirbari Govt. Primary School and the remaining voters also live within a radius of a mile. Transport and security facilities would be much easier compared to that for Nijfulhuri Govt. Primary School.

Md. Rafiqul Islam  
Puljhuri, Perajpur.