

Call from UNCTAD

The routine advice to developing nations, ranging from cuts in defence spending to the adoption of market economy, has marked the opening deliberation at the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) at the Colombian resort town of Cartagena. There is nothing surprising about these lectures delivered by representatives of developed countries, nor do they lack justification. In fact, what has been said so far at the conference attended by some 2,000 delegates from more than 150 countries has been repeated again and again by experts from within the Third World, often in far stronger language than one used at the UNCTAD meeting.

While agreeing with the views of the delegates from the industrialised nations, one cannot help asking if the overall picture is not getting a bit blurred, lacking in both balance and fairness. Poor countries should certainly cut their military spending and their governments should certainly become more democratic and accountable. However, the question that one may well ask is whether the developed countries should not take the initiative in announcing their own targets in aid to the developing countries, which is linked to cuts in their defence budgets. Again, isn't it about time that some of these industrialised countries start talking about introducing embargo on their sale of arms to countries which are being asked to divert their saving from defence to development?

The success of the UNCTAD Conference would largely — indeed, wholly — depend on how the two sides — the developed and developing countries — look at the total picture and adopt measures which are in the best interest of countries of the world at large. Here, the developed countries should know that even after the measures as asked by the international community have been adopted, many developing countries are still unable to cope with the problems which have been inherited from the past, such as the debt burden and the protectionist barriers to exports from developing countries, as mentioned by Bangladesh Commerce Minister M K Anwar at the conference. It is obvious that even after overdue reforms have been successfully introduced, many Third World nations whose economies showed little or no growth between 1989 and 1991 remain in dismal situation. Again, the introduction of market economy and the hurried withdrawal of all subsidies have caused major social disruptions which many governments are unable to handle.

In response to statements made by delegates from developed countries, the Third World representatives have emphasised the need for an increase in aid, the position taken by Kenneth Dadzie, the Secretary General of UNCTAD. There can be no two opinions on this issue among developing countries or, for that matter, among experts in the UN system. However, it is important that, instead of giving aid the highest priority or in seeing it in isolation, the UNCTAD should try to work out a package that covers a wide-ranging field. The first concern of the UNCTAD relates to the position of primary commodities, their price and export, which serve as a life-line of developing countries. Several moves made in the past by UNCTAD to stabilise the commodity market and to help in the opening up of the West to exports from the developing world have either failed or worked only marginally.

While the developing countries should be ready to listen to more and more advice from the West and Japan, it is time the developed countries themselves should be more specific in saying what they would do in return, in such fields as trade, investment and relief in debt burden. The international co-operation should not become a one-way street.

A Tribute to Salam

In paying his tribute to the memory of the late Abdus Salam whose 15th death anniversary was observed here yesterday, the National Professor Shamsul Huq made a valuable suggestion that there should be an authoritative book on the life and times of this great newspaper editor. The suggestion was primarily directed at friends and relatives of the journalist who had turned the then Pakistan Observer into a national institution. However, we believe that the project could well be taken up by an organisation like the Press Institute of Bangladesh which had a role in holding the meeting yesterday.

There are reasons why the project should be treated as important enough to deserve this kind of attention. In the first place, the fight that the late Mr Salam had put up for press freedom is yet to be written about in details, accompanied by documents. The fact that he had once served a prison term for press freedom, as mentioned by the Minister for Law and Parliamentary Affairs, Mirza Golam Hafiz at the meeting yesterday, may not be even known to the new generation of journalists.

A firm believer in liberal humanism who stood up for both press freedom in relation to the state and for editorial independence within his own organisation, the late Mr Salam represented certain ideals which are lacking in our present-day media environment. A book on Salam, expanded to cover the growth of the press in the erstwhile East Pakistan, may well demonstrate that, behind our current despair, there are values and standards which remain part of our heritage, whatever we might do, within the media and outside, to destroy them. It is just possible that books of this kind, dealing partly with our early battles for freedom and partly with our search for identity, would help in our national resurgence, not immediately but one day, in near or distant future.

THINGS have started to pick up pace again in the Kashmir Valley and along the Line of Control (LoC) dividing Kashmiri territories administered by India and Pakistan.

On the face of it, the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) failed to achieve any of its stated objectives. It not only failed to breach the LoC, it also ended up being shot up by Pakistani policemen, rather than by Indian troops as was expected.

Behind the facade, however, lies a different set of facts. The JKLF, despite failing to ignite a general uprising in the Valley, succeeded in scoring more "points" in the last few days with its march than the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) managed with its own trek across India last month.

Whereas the BJP's ill-conceived Ekota Jatra did more harm than good to New Delhi's efforts to contain the rebellion in Kashmir, the JKLF successfully breathed life into its flagging campaign for an independent state.

The Front has succeeded, at least in the short run, in enhancing its own stature as an independent force — as distinct from being a Pakistani puppet — and projecting its cause without the massive bloodshed feared by observers.

The BJP's Jatra, on the other hand, did not only expose the Indian government to a great deal of embarrassment — and therefore political vulnerability — it also helped to re-ignite a rebellion that seemed to have got stuck in a limbo in recent months.

It was necessary for the JKLF to make a big fuss because, recently, it has been in grave danger of losing the initiative in the Valley.

Although the Front was primarily responsible for launching the current rebellion back in 1989, it has increasingly found itself being sidelined, as Pakistani military authorities preferred to train and supply fundamentalist groups such as the Hizbollah Mujahideen.

The JKLF likes to project itself as a Kashmiri nationalist group fighting for independence, which is anathema to the Pakistani authorities, who are more interested in a puppet to dance to its own tune.

Fundamentalist groups such as the Hizbollah, associated with the Jamaat-i-Islami, fit the bill better, as their campaign is limited to snatching the territory from New Delhi and surrendering it to Islamabad. In the past year so, it is they who have received

Kashmir Impasse Leaves Threat of War Hanging Dangerously

by Sabir Mustafa

The people of Kashmir seem to have no choice but to learn to live with the spiralling insurgency violence and Indian retaliation. Meanwhile, war will continue to stalk the region.

the bulk of weaponry being sent across the LoC.

For its part, the Pakistani government made a major effort to prevent the march from going through, as a massacre on the LoC would have put it under severe pressure at home to take retaliatory action against India.

And that would be a sure, quick route to a fourth war between these two countries which were part of the same geo-political, socio-economic entity only 45 years back.

Whatever that may happen along the LoC in the next few days or weeks, a real solution to the Kashmiri problem is likely to remain as elusive as ever.

Status of the territory, which used to be referred to as the Switzerland of Asia, but now resembles Lebanon more than anywhere else, remains a matter of dispute, as both India and Pakistan re-affirm their diametrically-opposed positions.

War of Words

The BJP stunt and the JKLF super-stunt both demonstrated the perilous nature of the situation, and the war of words between New Delhi and Islamabad got shriller in perfect harmony with the rising tension along the 1971 cease-fire line.

Talks of nuclear arms "capability" and "preparedness" by the two sides showed that both were psychologically tuned to looking at the worst-case scenario as a plausible, even acceptable one.

It has become increasingly clear, that as long as India and Pakistan stick to their current stances, another war remains a probability, rather than being a mere possibility.

The next war, however, is unlikely to be fought with the explicit aim of solving the problem. A solution can only mean one of two things: either an acceptance by all parties of the existing line of control as permanent borders, or an altering of the status quo.

On current, conventional

strength, neither side looks capable of altering the status quo by sheer force of arms (unless one side displays an exceptional degree of incompetence, which is too remote a possibility to be considered seriously).

Pakistan insists that Kashmir, being a Muslim majority state, should have become part of Pakistan at the time of the partition of India in 1947.

For India, the question became a non-issue after the Maharajah of Kashmir acceded to India, with the agreement of the state's top political leader Sheikh Abdullah, in 1948.

Under the present context, a change in the status quo, leading to an independent or totally Pakistani Kashmir, does not seem to be an option entertained by any serious thinker in New Delhi.

India is no doubt aware that even an independent Kashmir, based on the premise of religion, would sooner or later pass under the control of the Pakistani military, thus bringing New Delhi within artillery range. That is not a prospect any Indian military planner would view with anything but alarm.

Politically too, India cannot agree to the principle of Kashmir self-rule on the basis of religion, as that would hit at the very foundation of the secularist principles on which the Indian Union was built.

That leaves the question of the United Nations resolution, passed in January, 1947, calling for a referendum to determine which state the territory would join. It is this resolution that currently forms the core of the Pakistani claim.

However, that resolution only offered a choice between India and Pakistan, and did not address the issue of independence, therefore leaving the question of Kashmir self-determination only partly answered. That third path, represented by the JKLF, has now become a strong force, despite Pakistani efforts to weaken it.

Overtaken by events and new thinking in the valley as

well as across the world, the resolution may have outlived its usefulness. For its part, India may not feel under any compulsion to put any part of its territory up for auction because of a resolution passed 44 years ago.

There is yet another angle to the Kashmir issue that is usually overlooked by Pakistani campaigners for "self-determination".

While the Kashmir Valley is overwhelmingly Muslim (and, presumably, anti-India), Ladakh in the north, on the other hand, is mainly Buddhist, and Hindus form the majority in Jammu in the south-west of the territory.

Assuming the Muslims vote to join Pakistan, in accordance with the choice offered by the UN, should the Hindus of Jammu and the Buddhists of Ladakh be forced to accept Pakistani rule? Or should they too, on the basis of religion, be allowed to choose their state?

The UN resolution called for one referendum, whereas in fact there are three religious groups concentrated in three well-defined geographical areas. Giving the right to self-determination to Muslims may well rob the Hindus and the Buddhists of the same fundamental right to choose.

It is quite clear that the issue needs a fresh approach, rather than one based on a 44-year old half-baked piece of wisdom.

But there is no sign that such an approach is on the menu. The issue would have become a simpler one to deal with had nationalist forces like the JKLF, managed to retain the initiative.

Unfortunately, the fundamentalists, buttressed by Pakistan, have made sure that fanatism of communal hatred was one of the by-products of the rebellion. Hindus who had lived peacefully with their Muslim neighbours in the Valley for decades, have been driven out in their thousands in the past two years or so, thus giving the uprising a

communal colour that was probably never intended by the JKLF.

No Scapegoats

The indigenous nature of the JKLF's rebellion has put India in a frustrating position, as it would have naturally liked to look for scapegoats across the border.

On the other hand, the Pakistani military authorities, in the shape of the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI), have exploited the situation by meddling in Kashmir in a major way.

This has given India two advantages: it can now single-out Pakistani meddling as the cause for the crisis, and also sway Western opinion by pointing to the dubious credentials of the elements being trained and armed by the ISI.

Pakistan, which sees the uprising as a golden opportunity to press ahead with its claim on the whole of Kashmir, feels time is on its side. As far as Pakistan is probably concerned, the guerrillas, well-armed, trained, motivated and supported to the hilt by the Valley's population, can be relied upon to bleed the Indian security forces white, resulting in a corresponding erosion of political will in New Delhi to hang on to the territory.

India, on the other hand, cannot afford to lose any territory, especially not to an arch-enemy, at a time when it is entertaining the idea of projecting itself as a regional superpower.

New Delhi probably feels it can deal with the internal dimensions of the crisis, once the external factors i.e. Pakistani meddling have been taken care of. It evidently thinks it can contain the guerrillas long enough to demoralise them.

These two paths of maximum confrontation and minimum compromise being followed by India and Pakistan, can have one really plausible outcome: war.

While Pakistan is gambling that India will simply sit there and take a beating before get-

ting out, New Delhi may well find it acceptable, even necessary, to expand the conflict in order to end it. Since the guerrillas are supplied from and trained on Pakistani territory, India may decide that a short, sharp war with Islamabad is better than a slow sapping of energy, strength and morale.

Serious Miscalculation
India's current tactics suggest that New Delhi thinks the militants in the Valley can be taken on and defeated militarily. That may be a serious miscalculation of the strength of the rebellion, and could lead to more frustration, and provide greater impetus for a general war with Pakistan.

On the other hand, if the militants were facing annihilation and international pressure on India was insufficient to produce a change of policy in New Delhi, Pakistan may feel compelled to go to war.

But, as is often the case, a continuing rise in tension could escalate into war without either party having any clearly defined goals. It would be a war of such devastation, in terms of men and material, that the development efforts of both countries would be thrown back by decades.

Currently, both sides are looking for stability through military strength, rather than peace through compromise. This policy could well be self-defeating in the long run, as the current level of tension, created by a couple of marches, have amply demonstrated.

The choices are stark: an acceptance of the current lines of actual control in Kashmir, a recognition by India and Pakistan of an independent Kashmiri state, whole of Indian Kashmir joining Pakistan; or three separate referendums in the Valley, Ladakh and Jammu, with three choices (India, Pakistan or independence).

Each option would bring a torrent of protest from one party or other. The first would involve least effort and expenditure, but it would leave people in the Valley angry, the second is still not on the cards as far as New Delhi and Islamabad are concerned; the third is a non-starter for India; and the fourth is a rather complicated one which may not find any sympathetic ears.

The whole situation, therefore, is a messy one, and the people of Kashmir seem to have no choice but to learn to live with the spiralling insurgency violence and Indian retaliation. Meanwhile, war will continue to stalk the region.

Imelda Throws Filipino Opposition into Disarray

Abby Tan writes from Manila

THE decision by former Philippine First Lady Imelda Marcos to enter the presidential race set for May 11 has strained an already fractured opposition and weakened its chances of capturing power.

Since returning from six years' exile last November, Marcos has been egged on by cheering crowds mobilised by her own supporters. The admiring throngs have given her the impression that she is destined to be president.

More importantly, her friends say Marcos believes that winning the election could allow her to escape a government bid to prosecute her on corruption and embezzlement charges.

These are among the considerations which seem to have motivated her to seek the presidency — apparently against the advice of her own family and friends.

Marcos, 62, announced her decision outside a courtroom on January 7, minutes after pleading not guilty to a second set of corruption charges.

"I have gone all over the country and seen so much suffering and economic chaos," she said, close to tears. "After months of direct consultation with our poor and oppressed citizens, I have decided to run for office."

The government of President Corazon Aquino holds Marcos and her late husband Ferdinand Marcos, whose

Imelda Marcos has been stealing the political limelight since returning from six years' exile last November. President Corazon Aquino's government want to prosecute her on corruption and embezzlement charges. Now the former Philippine First Lady is to enter the presidential race set for May 11. As Gemini News Service reports her candidacy is causing problems for the government and an opposition which is already in disarray.



IMELDA MARCOS Politics is destiny

regime was marked by rampant corruption, responsible for the country's poverty. Reaction from the Filipino media to Marcos's announcement has been hostile. "Don't cry for us, Imelda," said an editorial in the Manila Chronicle. "Yes, we're suffering, thanks to you, your family, and your venomous brood."

Political scientist Alex

Magno wrote in the Chronicle: "Business does not want her. Nor the church. Nor the popular movements. Nor the trade unions. Nor the youth. Nor the women. She will have to make a play for the regional vote and to buy off the urban poor."

The Philippine Daily Inquirer threw its support behind an "Anyone but Imelda" movement. After her announcement, during a visit to Lucena City, south of Manila, Marcos criticised Aquino for poor leadership and offered herself as the alternative.

"If we're united," she said, "I am sure this nation will be great again. Happy days are here again."

Marcos's candidacy is causing anything but happiness in the opposition Nacionalista Party, already in disarray because three candidates have insisted on running as well as its own presidential standard-bearer.

The three — Vice-President Salvador Laurel, Senator Juan Ponce Enrile and businessman Eduardo Cojuangco — fear

Marcos could weaken their chances. Cojuangco, a close crony of late president Marcos, had failed to persuade Imelda not to run at a last-minute meeting. He later brushed aside her bid, saying: "We've made a commitment to seek the presidency and we shall pursue that commitment to final victory."

Analysis believe that Marcos wants to run for president only because a victory will exonerate her of the crimes with which she has been charged.

Her former speech writer, Carmel Nakpil, said: "She follows the saying, 'Vox Populi, Vox Dei' — the voice of the people is the voice of God. If she wins, she thinks she is vindicated."

While in exile in New York, Marcos had been advised by Nakpil not to return home — and to stay out of politics. "She was not happy at all to hear that," Nakpil recalled.

Marcos brushed the advice aside and repeated: "Politics is destiny." That only showed that Marcos had every inten-

tion of running. Her pledge on her return to Manila that she had no political agenda but to recover the body of her late husband was only a convenient statement. Marcos died in Hawaii in September 1989.

J V Cruz, another ex-Marcos adviser, called her decision "terrible." With an overcrowded field of about nine candidates, Marcos could conceivably win the presidency with only 11 per cent of the popular vote, provided support is spread evenly among the contenders.

Never would a presidential race have seemed so easy. Marcos's nephew, Jose Miguel Romualdez, said of her decision to run: "If you have 100,000 people cheering you, what would you do? He admitted that the Marcos children were not in favour of her running."

"We told her to think about it carefully," he said. "I mean, after going through so much, why take on more problems?" At her arraignment, Marcos shook her head and responded

"not guilty" to six charges that she set up dummy foundations in Switzerland to hide \$366 million in Swiss banks.

She was also accused of pressing a government bank to grant a \$25-million loan to an electronics company which she managed.

A separate trial on tax evasion began in December. A total of 80 criminal charges filed against her carry a penalty of over 400 years in jail.

A spokesman for President Aquino dismissed speculation that she might be forced to seek re-election in a "war of the widows" contest. "Nothing has changed the President's plan," said her executive secretary Franklin Drilon.

Indeed, Aquino later confirmed her decision to step down and endorsed the presidential candidacy of former defence secretary Fidel Ramos, who saved her from six coup attempts.

That choice is likely to cause consternation within the ruling Democratic Struggle Party (LDP), which had voted at its convention to support House Speaker Ramon Mitra Jr. Ramos has bolted the LDP to form his own People Power Party.

ABBY TAN is a Singaporean freelance journalist based in Manila.

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.

Crime in Mirpur
Sir, We the residents of Section 2, Mirpur, are suffering due to deterioration in law and order situation. Mastans and criminals in this section (often posing as so-called students) have become so active that the residents (especially of F Block) are afraid to go out of their doors for fear of hijacking and robbery. A few days ago, a house in F Block of Section 2 was looted in day time virtually in presence of Mirpur police, and despite so much hue and cry by the housewife. A few mastans and criminals came to the house in a microbus, broke open the front door and loaded valuable articles on the said microbus, and made good their escape. Incidentally, an AC of DMP is lives very close to the house.

A few months ago, a rickshaw passenger was robbed of her money and ornaments in F Block in day time. Yet in another ghastly incident, a young man was slaughtered on the road. The murderers are allegedly roaming about freely and the police, as it appears, is aware of this. But no action has apparently been taken.

We draw kind attention of

all to our plight and request earnestly for the authorities to act quickly. The police and Ansar squads posted in this area previously, have now been withdrawn.

We also draw the immediate attention of authorities concerned to remove the unauthorised structures, such as cycle repair shops, video shops etc, which appear to be gathering places for the mastans and criminals.

Some residents of Section 2, Mirpur, Dhaka.

Bangla-Thai amity
Sir, Thailand's gestures toward Bangladesh justify "A friend in need is a friend indeed." The relief goods, accompanied by the head of the government, donated to cyclone-battered Bangladesh last year strengthened the friendship.

The recent visit to Bang-

ladesh by Thailand's Crown Prince reinforced bilateral relations that must be diminishing national gaps in the times ahead bridging the geographic distance particularly in southern Asia.

Beyond any doubts, cooperations with Thailand in all fields will mostly benefit Bangladesh economy while warming up Bangla-Thai relations as "smooth as silk."

M. Rahman Zila School Road, Mirpur, Dhaka.

Bottled drinking water
Sir, To drink safe water is very much desirable for every person. Recently, a number of companies have started marketing bottled drinking water. I would like to know the answers of the following questions: Is there any water quality standard in Bangladesh for safe drinking? If not, then we should have one. Does our bot-

tled water satisfy national or any other recognised drinking water quality standard? Is there any authority of the Government to monitor and ensure that bottled water available in the market is safe for human consumption?

Very often we see through national dailies that pharmaceutical products of certain batches of some companies are withdrawn from the market due to their inferior quality. For public health reasons, the Government should ensure that bottled water available in the market is safe and continue to remain safe for a reasonable period of time. It should be made mandatory to write the batch number and composition of the water on the bottle, so that its quality can be checked at random.

M. Nurul Islam Director, Institute of Appropriate Technology, BUET, Dhaka.

Algeria
Sir, We are deeply concerned about the latest events in Algeria. It is gathered through the press that the government is going to take charge of the ten thousand listed mosques and to appoint govt paid imams. This measure has been taken to disintegrate the popular Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) which gained a great victory in the first round of elections in Algeria. We are afraid that the human rights and democratic principles are being violated by the rulers in Algeria.

We would fervently call upon the international communities and the United Nations to take appropriate measures immediately to stop repressors, if any, on the common people in Algeria.

M. Zahidul Haque Assistant Professor, Bangladesh Agricultural College, Dhaka.