

Tackle the Core Issue

The time for a rude awakening has now arrived. With 5,000 Myanmar refugees arriving in Cox's Bazar on average every day to escape the army's campaign of terror in the province of Rakhaine, pressure on the socio-economic fabric of the region is mounting. With over half the refugees living in unsanitary conditions without proper medical facilities, the threat of diseases is a real one, as is the possibility of a breakdown in whatever law and order we have down there at present.

However, proper care of the refugees, although a crucial issue, has never been the central one. That was always supposed to be a stop-gap measure, a respite while the causes underlying the exodus was tackled, and tackled forcefully.

Regrettably, our government is yet to make any attempt, other than to sign an agreement last November with Yangon, to confront the Myanmar regime over this central issue. Since that agreement was signed, the influx has increased manifold, making the pact look somewhat toothless, if not cosmetic.

In order for the refugees to go back home, they need to be assured that it is indeed "home" they would be going back to, and not into prison. So far, neither the government of Bangladesh nor the international community has done anything like enough to create such a condition, nor extracted an undertaking from the military regime in Yangon to that effect.

What is needed now is an unequivocal diplomatic stance, which would spell out to Yangon that its policy of repression in Rakhaine is posing a serious threat to the sovereignty of Bangladesh. Whatever the degree of friendship that might have existed between Dhaka and Yangon in the past, the current events clearly show that Myanmar does not regard that friendship to be an indispensable one.

Foreign Minister Lt. Col A S M Mustafizur Rahman has certainly felt it very late, but it is still not too late to retrieve a solution out of this crisis. However, there have been enough flag meetings and enough self-congratulations over having "contained the crisis" and other achievements.

It is clear the Myanmar authorities are determined to deprive the Rohingyas of their rights as citizens. Their land has evidently been earmarked for colonisation by non-Rohingya people. It seems Myanmar's tactics is to force Bangladesh to accept hundreds of thousands of foreigners as illegal yet permanent settlers.

These two issues of human rights for the Rohingyas and sovereignty of Bangladesh, are inextricably inter-linked in this crisis, and Dhaka has no choice but to pursue both cases in its bilateral talks with Myanmar, and at international forums. Through the involvement of the UNHCR, attention of the world body is now focussed on the region, providing our government with an ideal opportunity to bring the international community into play and apply maximum pressure on Myanmar to change its nationality policy towards the Rohingyas and accord them full rights as citizens, after putting an end to the reign of terror in Rakhaine.

Bangladesh must also keep in mind that there are countries which are actively engaged in shoring up the Yangon regime through supplies of arms and financial help. These countries need to be persuaded to either stop supplying Myanmar, or use their influence to effect qualitative changes in that country.

Demise of an Intellectual Giant

Dr Sukumar Sen, the doyen of Bengalee scholarship, is dead. He died in Calcutta at the ripe age of 92, outliving his peer Probrodhi Chandra Sen by two years. However, very many people who know him, did not expect him to die at this point, for physically as well as temperamentally, he was cut to match the other Bengalee giant Nirad C. Choudhuri who should by now have passed 95 and keeps on expecting to be around even at 115 — just ten short of what GBS set for himself but could not realise.

Sukumar Sen burst into the Bengali literary and academic realm with his still unmatched three-volume tome—History of the Bengali Literature—which continues to be the best standard text for students of Bengali language and literature for about half a century. Let it be in this context be remembered with due appreciation that he was the very best of the hundreds of disciples of the great Suniti Kumar Chatterjee not only in his achievements in linguistics but also in the matter of versatility and literary merit of his scholarly works.

Sen was inimitable in so many ways. His delving into the crime-thriller genre in mainly English and French — with love and wit — was both sprawling and deep and set an example for what can be called comparative criminology.

No eulogy can hit surfeit in the matter of Dr Sen's depth of knowledge on subjects simply encyclopedic. Take up his pamphlets on the medieval Bengalees or the one called the 'Ramkotha Prak-Kotha' — and you will see he not only knew, he could as well knit a tale so marvellously and hang it so wonderfully.

Sukumar Sen is dead, but we Bengalees of all the world would have him among us for centuries.

GENEVA : Some lament that GATT is dead but this is not true; rather it is a frail and fragile institution whose agendas and ideological guidelines are being battered by tidal waves of crises which are beyond the control of the institution and its 107 member states.

Tumultuous events, not least the Maastricht talks, have overshadowed the current Uruguay Round that began in Punta del Este in 1986. Within the secretariat and among the contracting parties there is a pervasive air of futility. The flash of optimism that surfaced in February 1991 following the Brussels debacle of December 1990, has evaporated.

On the critical issue of farm trade the Round has ground to a halt. The EC offered to slash its domestic supports (internal supports and border protection) by 30 per cent over 10 years. No agreement has surfaced on the base-line from which reductions are to be measured: the US/Cairns Group (CG) insist on 1986-1988, the EC on 1986-1990. The salient controversy continues to be whether the cuts in export subsidies should be in volume or budget terms, or a combination of both. The question turns on whether these objectives are implementable — if at all — and over what interval of time. Behind the legal jargon and esoteric technicalities, a war without respite for bigger world market shares is being fought.

The US/CG demand not only cuts in export subsidies, but also a limit on export tonnage, whereas the EC advocates cuts in budgetary allocations and volume restraint.

Further, the EC seeks to 'rebalance' its reductions in supports by increases in protection against cereal substitutes that enter duty free. Fueling the fire of the debate has been the so-called 'battle of the green and amber boxes'. The US/CG suggest that there should be only one 'box' for both sorts of supports. In contrast, the EC suggests compensatory payments for price reductions to be in the 'green box' of authorised subsidies. In addition, they contend that US deficiency payments should be placed within the 'amber box' subject to limits set upon assistance.

Perceptibly, since February 1991 the negotiating posture of the US/CG has become more belligerent. They are not satisfied merely with negotiated reductions at a given point in time, but are pushing for deeper cuts even after the negotiated reductions have been agreed upon. What became very much clearer in 1991 was that US strategy (markedly so within the USDA) has never abandoned its quest for the liquidation of CAP. Now more than ever, it is seen as the major threat to US farm exporters, now desperately bent on recapturing their lost market shares. To be sure, US farm exports plunged from around 27 per cent of aggregate exports in the first half of the 1970s to less than 10 per cent at present.

As with its predecessors (Dillon, Kennedy and Tokyo) the current Round is characterised by the absence of transparency. A Caribbean delegate encapsulated the spirit of the Round when he asserted that there is no democratic debate at all. Instead of authentic multilateral talks we are being subjected to bilateralism in some of its most flagrant manifestations. Such corporate boardroom procedural methods have always been congenial to the wheeler-dealer manipulations of the protagonists of the TNCs whose presence and power have never been far removed from the negotiating sessions.

The official claim that GATT is the grand promoter of a multilateral trading system is public relations baloney since the policies of transitional capital have annihilated (due in large measure to transfer pricing techniques and intra firm transactions) multilateralism and accountability. After the monetary euphoria of the Gulf War, the gap between rhetoric and reality has become an abyss.

Devoid of transparency and afflicted with bilateralism in the negotiations, the Uruguay Round of GATT appears to be getting nowhere.

By Frederick F Clairmonte

No Democratic Process

As with its predecessors (Dillon, Kennedy and Tokyo) the current Round is characterised by the absence of transparency. A Caribbean delegate encapsulated the spirit of the Round when he asserted that there is no democratic debate at all. Instead of authentic multilateral talks we are being subjected to bilateralism in some of its most flagrant manifestations. Such corporate boardroom procedural methods have always been congenial to the wheeler-dealer manipulations of the protagonists of the TNCs whose presence and power have never been far removed from the negotiating sessions.

The upsurge against the thrust of liberalisation was not confined, however, to France. The tragedy that struck Canada's wheat belt was one that had not been witnessed since the Great Depression. Caught in the crossfire of a transatlantic grain subsidies war between the US and the

EC that plunged the price of wheat from 5 dollar to 1.75 dollar a bushel — the lowest price in 20 years — family farms in Saskatchewan are going bankrupt at the rate of 1,000 a year.

According to a Washington Post report one-sixth of the province's farmers have gone through a bank-debt review process in the last year, invariably the initial move before foreclosure. In Ontario, nearly a third of farmers are failing to meet their debts. Net farm income is down 27 per cent from the peak year of 1987. This is how one farmer puts it in words reminiscent of an Okie farmer in Steinbeck's 'The Grapes of Wrath': 'One week you'll be talking with a neighbour, and you'll think he's doing all right. The next week he's gone. There are rumours here about everything except a guy facing foreclosure.'

Compounding the financial squeeze is the steady rise in production costs: fuel, machinery, fertiliser, insurance and high interest rates. Deprivations of the farm population in the very heartland of North American capitalism are unknown, however, to the proponents of uninhibited liberalisation such as Cargill, the grain and agri-business colossus (1991 sales: 42 billion dollars) whose fortunes are impervious to the twists and turns of recessionary tempests. According to corporate data its profits rocketed 62 per cent since 1986. Its net worth, just

95 million dollars 25 years ago, is now 3.7 billion dollars, a dazzling compound growth of 15.8 per cent.

Declaration of Economic Growth

The Round's debacle is occurring at a moment when financial markets have never been so wobbly, partnered by tumbling growth rates, seen in the national accounts of six major capitalist countries. The US economy, the world's biggest, is on the ropes. Over the past two years it has grown a minuscule 0.5 per cent. On the budget side the government is running a deficit of 350 billion dollars a year at a time when the fiscal accelerator is already pressed to the floor.

Prospects of a sustained recovery are almost nil because of the absence of buoyancy factors in the international economy. A quasi-permanent depression in the world economy is global debt now hovering around 30 trillion dollars. Industrial excess capacity is omnipresent, hitting around 20 per cent in OECD countries combined with sharp upsurges in inventory, and a precipitous drop in consumer confidence everywhere. For the third consecutive year per capita incomes in Africa and Latin America have not kept pace with population growth. As usual, the unemployed and the marginalised in the Third World have ceased to be counted.

(To be concluded tomorrow)

To understand the quantum of foreign aid that will be available in near future for Bangladesh, we should go through history of foreign aid policies pursued by our biggest aid giving country, United States of America which is also responsible for formulating credit policies of World Bank and IMF. In 1942 American Congress formed 'Institute of International Affairs' for providing technical aid to Latin American countries. But the sole purpose for this technical aid to Latin American countries was to check the sympathy that grew at that time towards Nazism in Latin America. In 1947 President Truman approved a large quantity of Economic and Military aid to Greece and Turkey only when these two countries agreed to allow American Military Bases. In the following year President Truman took a comprehensive economic plan for the reconstruction of Europe that was devastated after Second World War. The plan is popularly known as a 'Marshall Plan' which was a great success in the reconstruction and Economic recovery of Europe. America had to invest 13 billion dollars at that time for the success of this Marshall Plan. The main purpose behind undertaking this large scale investment was to combat the growing influence of communism in Europe. In 1951 American Congress passed mutual security act coordinating military and economic aid to check ever growing communist influence all over the world. In 1961 President Kennedy formed 'Agency for International Development (AID)' for institutionalizing foreign aid and loan with the sole purpose for increasing American global

Foreign Aid and the Reality

by Prof Shahabuddin Khaled Chowdhury

During the Cripps Mission's visit, Gandhi, on 26th April, 1942, remarked, "... We know what American aid means. It amounts in the end to American influence if not American rule." Nehru, in a speech delivered at the US House of Senate on 13th October, 1949, said, "We shall gladly welcome aid and co-operation on terms that are of mutual benefit ... But we do not seek any material advantage in exchange for any part of our hard-won freedom."

influence and to combat communism all over the world. Now let us examine American outlook so far as our subcontinent is concerned. From the time of Second World War, America began to show her interest in the sub-continent. In 1942 President Roosevelt sent Mr. Louis Johnson as his personal envoy to observe the activities of Cripps Mission that visited India at that time to give a constitutional solution among Hindus and Muslims prior to final independence of India. From a remark made by Gandhi on 26th April, 1942 his political sagacity proved beyond doubt; he said "The American troops must go with the British. We know what American aid means. It amounts in the end to American influence if not American rule."

However after the partition in 1947, much importance was given on India in American foreign policy and serious endeavour was made by American administration to win over India. With that end in view President Truman invited Pandit Nehru, the Prime Minister of India to visit America. In that Sojourn of Nehru for long eight days, he was given a Royal red carpet reception every where in

America wherever he visited. President Truman termed Nehru's visit as a "Voyage of Discovery" in one of the speeches he delivered in honour of his guest. But Pandit Nehru clearly said in a speech delivered in the House of Senate on 13th October 1949, "We shall gladly welcome such aid and co-operation on terms that are of mutual benefit. We believe that this may well help in the solution of the larger problems that confront the world. But we do not seek any material advantage in exchange for any part of our hard-won freedom." Though India took full advantage of American unilateral efforts to establish special relationship with Indian but Nehru remained firm in pursuing neutral and non-aligned foreign policy tilting more to Soviet Union than to America.

Tilt towards Pakistan

Being frustrated at Nehru's behaviour and finding no other way, American Administration tilted towards Pakistan for special relationship and formed SEATO and CENTO, two military facts to combat communism in this region and diverted a huge quantity of military and economic aid towards Pakistan. The main

reason for giving such a large scale aid to Pakistan was the reluctance of India for such conditional American aid. An important American diplomat, Mr. Philip Talbot may be quoted in this regard. In spite of his unquestionable skill in diplomatic language he bluntly remarked, "American Military help and political alliance have gone to Pakistan only and not also to India solely because India has declined such help and association."

But present Narashima Rao Government of India had to undertake a fundamental change in Indian economic and foreign policy in the face of gravest economic crisis India is facing at present since its independence in the year 1947. Specially after the dissolution of former Soviet Union, India had to turn to America for help to overcome the impending crisis. At the instruction of World Bank and IMF India has already liberalised its economy to attract foreign investments. Disinvestments have already been started from more than one lac industrial units previously owned by the government. The President of India has called upon all concerned for a moratorium for two years on strikes and lock-out. Being satisfied with the various reforms undertaken for

economic liberalisation by Dr. Manmohan Singh, a world renowned economist and the Finance Minister of India, the World Bank granted an immediate loan for 500 million US dollars for the implementation of those reforms. The Vice President of World Bank Mr. Wood remarked, "Changes would foster a very attractive atmosphere for foreign and domestic investment". The absence of previous reluctance towards American aid by India has encouraged American Administration to stop military and economic aid towards Pakistan in one pretext or other. Recently Pakistan's Commander-in-Chief of the army visited Washington and tried his utmost to convince pentagon for restarting military help but no tangible results came out of the long parley.

Success of US Foreign Policy

The dissolution of former Soviet Union and the creation of fifteen separate independent states, introduction of market economy in all former communist countries of Eastern Europe, frenzied efforts of Russia and other states of former Soviet Union for attracting American companies

for investment, undoubtedly, prove the success of American foreign aid and foreign policy so long pursued by various American administrations. It is easily understood that America and its allies will never allow to fade away the success achieved by them in Russia, Eastern Europe, India and in other parts of the globe after three efforts since 1942 and after an expenditure of billions of dollars. To retain these successes they will divert a large part of foreign aid and loan to those countries. There cannot be any doubt about it.

The commitment of aid already made to former states of Soviet Union by USA and its allies confirm the trend. USA has pledged 4.1 billion dollars mostly in agricultural credits including credit for food stuff. The twelve EC nations in the last December approved 260 million US dollars in emergency food shipment. Total British aid is worth 144 million US dollars. The Italian State Export Credit Insurance Agency approved 1.25 billion US dollars in export credits to Russia. Japan pledged 2.5 billion US dollars in emergency aid, of which 1.8 billion was to ensure export, import and investment.

The above statistics have not included the loan and aid given to Eastern European countries. Under these circumstances the availability of foreign aid and loan for Bangladesh will not be very encouraging and the conditions which will be attached to foreign aid and loan in future may not be acceptable for the sake of our national sovereignty. In that case we need to be austere for our survival.

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To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Positive ways of life

Sir, So many incidents are occurring around us, where in some individual's role deserves praise and recognition, but we are not aware of it! Even if we are, we would not be generous enough to give importance to the matter. Sometimes some incidents do not look so big or important to get enough publicity, but like a stone thrown in a pond creates ripples that too many cause some stir in the minds of people. Some small but unusual, and meaningful, even could create a lasting impact on public mind. Magician Azra Zabin's courageous role (by Kungfu) to stop some miscreants from snatching the bag and ornaments from a lady, I am sure, had some effect on the minds of the citizens of Bangladesh. It has given ideas to other ladies to protect themselves by learning kungfu or karate. People felt that the hijackers should be dealt with courage and one should not depend only on the law enforcing agency for his/her security. Self help is the best help.

I may mention another small incident of another nature which went unnoticed, but if not, could have been exemplary. In WVA Meenabazar, a lady named Motti Quader found a packet of Tk. 35,000/- lying in the crowded field. She immediately announced it on the loud speaking the owner (Lucky she was) found her money back! If Motti Quader would not have told anybody about it nothing would have happened. But she did! Her honesty and conscience had bidden her to return the money to the owner. And I call it courage too. Courage to check the greed of being richer, which is rare nowadays. How many people would have shown the courage? Still a very few people knew and gave her recognition for the honesty. I think this type of positive side of people's character should be more discussed and should get publicity, so that people do not feel frustrated.

Apparently we are all suffering from frustration from the negativity of our society. We see or hear more bad news than good news. On 18th February, in a Bengali daily's front page I read news about robbery, uprooting eyes of a young man by fork, fishing trawlers lock out call, strike call by Rikshawpullers, acid thrown on a school girl,

teacher's hunger strike, students' procession, terrorist activities and some criticisms against the Government. I did not come across a single item by reading which I could feel inspired or at least I won't get frustrated. I don't believe that nothing good happened in Bangladesh on 17th February worth publication on the front page of a newspaper. May be the journalists of our country have different idea of measuring importance of a news. But as an ordinary middle-aged citizen of Bangladesh who loves the country, I would like to see other citizens of my motherland not in despair. Like me, thousands of mothers dream about their children's future to be prosper and meaningful, and not in any other country, but here in Bangladesh. And for that we have to think in positive way, act in positive way.

Munira Khan Dhaka.

Harun-ur-Rashid's MIS

Sir, History tells us that, in order to get first hand information on the problems afflicting his people, the legendary ruler Harun-ur-Rashid used to disguise himself and mingle with common people. We know from the many tales that have come down to us, how effective this method was in alleviating the miseries of the general populace and keeping them happy.

Many of us would consider Harun-ur-Rashid's

'Management Information System' (MIS) quaint and outmoded in today's world of electronic telecommunication. I beg to disagree. Even today, despite the television and the radio and the newspaper, is there a better way for our leaders to get a feel for the pulse of the nation?

For obvious reasons, it is not possible for our modern leaders to disguise themselves and walk the streets of Dhaka. Our honourable leaders have, of course, taken some steps to understand the common man's woes. Over the past few years, a number of them have made it a practice to personally meet and listen to the grievances of the public.

Although an admirable undertaking, no doubt, it is not desirable for the entire electorate to voice their feelings on a one-on-one basis. If only our elected representatives would take the time to regularly read the newspaper columns, 'Letters to the Editor', they would at least have a better idea of the problems being faced by the electorate.

The function of the above mentioned column is not simply to give vent to one's anger and frustration, but to attract the attention of the concerned authorities with a view to improving the standard of living of the public.

If you think again, you may well come to the conclusion, as I have, that Harun-ur-Rashid was a lot smarter than many of our so-called statesmen. His MIS may have been primitive,

but it worked. Would that our modern leaders take a leaf out of his book! Farah Inrana Hussain, Dhanmondi, Dhaka.

No more chaos and confusion

Sir, In Bangladesh about 17.5 million people are unemployed but the fortunate one after getting a job starts doing 'politics' first then doing the work he is employed for. In mill and factory workers, teachers, students everyone is busy with 'politics of demand'. Specially, as it seems, when there is any democratic government in power, everyone wants to pull its leg.

First Awami league now the major opposition party, participated in 1986 election with Jamat-e-Islami. Then, AL- Presidential candidate also sought blessings of Goolam Azam. How come AL becomes the champion of so-called also pro-liberation forces and instigate people rather to create chaos and confusion in the country in the name of 'trial by the so-called people's court'? When there is an established system of judiciary in the country, the contemplation of the so-call people's court is lowering the prestige of the existing court of law.

Secondly, after 1975 changeover, AL participated in subsequent all national elections. Even in 1986 they participated in the election under Ershad but at no point of time there was any demand for Repeal of Indemnity

Ordinance. But when they lost in the 1991 election, they lost all the issues and now they have started playing with cheap sentiment to create only more trouble in the country.

In 1971, at the age of 20 years (of many like me) we supported the liberation struggle in the hope of a bright future. We waited for another three years for a brighter and safer future but reality belied our hopes and aspirations. Thereafter, changeover came in 1975 and people again started hoping against hope for a brighter and safer future, but in void. Then came the Ershadian era. He promised a corruption free country and a better future. The result is known to all — he has destroyed everything. The average age of a Bengali is only 50 years, and I am now 41 again, like many other; if I am lucky enough to live up to 50 years, then I have only nine years left to enjoy! But what?

I would like to appeal to all concerned to work for a better future of the country and not to make any chaos and confusion in the name of anything. Our life is short, but we have gigantic tasks to accomplish to improve health, sanitation, standard of education and to contain population and poverty we have to do so much but, of course, in so less a time. So that the problems do not outgrow beyond our all capacity to effect any solution.

M Saleem Ullah, Advocate Motiheel, Dhaka.