

Peacekeeping Booms, but Money for it is Short

by Stephen Court

The arrival of thousands of United Nations peacekeeping troops in Yugoslavia has been welcomed by its war-weary population. Yugoslavia, Cambodia, Lebanon and Western Sahara are four of 25 peacekeeping operations carried out by the UN since it was founded in 1945 "to maintain international peace and security." Now, the cost of peacekeeping threatens the work at a time when member states already owe the UN millions of dollars.

Proposed JRC Meeting

What was once an engineering wonder, now stands as a constant reminder of our water dispute with India. The Hardinge Bridge, which spanned one of the greatest rivers of the world, now carries our railway line over a sun dried sand stretch through which what flows as a river can better be described as a trickle. The mighty Ganges is all but a shadow of its former grand self, squeezed little by little all along the upstream with what is left for the lower riparian — Bangladesh — is but a mockery of the concept of sharing a natural resource.

With the lowest ever flow of the Ganges at 14,812 cusecs of water, an urgent need has arisen to reopen the efforts to come to an understanding with the upper riparian, India, about sharing its water. Given the immediacy of the situation Bangladesh has called for a meeting of the Joint River Commission (JRC) on April 15, 1992. The acute shortage of water in the area served by the Ganges is not only creating problems with river navigation but has dramatically increased the problem of salinity. It is now more than four years that the agreement on Ganges water sharing lapsed. The last meeting of JRC was held in June 1991. Nothing seems to have happened since then. We therefore welcome the idea of the secretary level meeting being followed by a ministerial level meeting, which in its turn may lead to a summit. The talk of a summit on the water sharing issue has arisen from the fact that a political solution has become necessary.

The problem of sharing water of a river that flows through more than one country is neither new nor unique. What, however, has complicated the situation in our case is unilateral behaviour of India in extracting whatever amount of water it needs at the upper level. India has not denied our suspicion that it is diverting Ganges water at several other points in the upstream, further reducing the flow inside Bangladesh. Cooperation has not been forthcoming from India to the extent it is necessary to find an amicable solution to the existing dispute. But given the acute nature of the problem we cannot lay back and allow the situation to continue.

Given the fact that we were able to work out agreements during the time of both Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Ziaur Rahman, we see no reason why a similar situation cannot be worked out now. Following the establishment of a democratic government in Bangladesh, it was hoped that cooperation between our two countries, especially in the critical and politically sensitive area of water sharing, will increase. But subsequent Indian stand has belied that expectation.

The situation that India is creating for Bangladesh is one that is unjust and cannot be accepted under any circumstances. India is well aware that there are many examples where several countries have been able to reach amicable solution to their common river problem. The most notable example in this regard is the agreement between five South East Asian countries on the use of the water of the Mekong River. They have a permanent body called the Mekong Committee with its headquarters in Thailand, that oversees all water sharing problems between the five user countries. Is there nothing we can learn from them?

Whatever may have been the past reservations, we urge India to come to the JRC meeting with a complete awareness of the impact its policy is having on the economy and ecology of Bangladesh. When the whole world is moving towards greater cooperation in every field, it will indeed be a pity if we cannot find a solution to the sharing of what is definitely one of the greatest gifts of nature to humankind — water.

Victory in South Africa

Sanity has won against rightwing white extremism in South Africa where President Frederik de Klerk has just won an overwhelming mandate to continue with his reform process leading to a new democratic future for his country. There could not have been a more welcome news to come from South Africa at this moment.

The "white only" referendum staged to ascertain whether President de Klerk could pursue the process of reshaping the country's future, started in February 1990, was clearly a gamble. Although political analysts had cautiously predicted a narrow victory, marked by an affirmative vote, the referendum could have produced a disaster, forcing Mr de Klerk to go for another "whites only" general election, with uncertainties casting a shadow over the future of the strife-torn country.

There may be all kinds of explanations as to what prompted the white voters to accept the continuance of the process of reforms. There is likely to be some truth in the contention of Andries Treurnicht, the leader of the pro-apartheid Conservative Party that "the possibility of sanctions, the ghost of unemployment and even violence" in the event of a rejection of reforms scared a majority of whites. However, there is little doubt that a sizable number of whites realise by now that if South Africa has to survive as part of the civilised world, it has no choice but to take the road to democracy and equality of all people, regardless of race, in terms of political rights and economic opportunities.

With a clear mandate obtained for the continuance of the process of reforms, President de Klerk and Nelson Mandela will get down to serious talks on framing a new constitution. No one, the least of all the leaders concerned, can underestimate the challenges which lie ahead. It is accepted by all concerned, including the international community, that the new political system in South Africa must be based on the principle of "one person, one vote" and that all should be equal before the law, enjoying equal socio-economic opportunities. However, the thorny question of providing some constitutional and economic safeguards to the white minority has been raised and, in principle, accepted by Mr Mandela as a valid one. From outside, one can talk in terms of principles. However, both President de Klerk and Mr Mandela are pragmatic individuals who know what's best for their country. Whatever they decide to do together, should have support of the international community in full measure.

THE year 1992 looks set to be the busiest for the blue-helmeted forces of the United Nations since they were first deployed on peacekeeping operations more than 40 years ago.

In late February the first of 14,000 UN troops arrived in Yugoslavia, following the ceasefire between the warring Serbian and Croatian forces. And in the coming weeks the largest peacekeeping force ever assembled by the UN — 16,000 troops and 4,000 police and civilian administrators — is due to start arriving in Cambodia.

Thousands more UN troops are involved in a total of 13 current operations in the Middle East, Africa, Asia and Central America.

The task of the troops in Yugoslavia — known as the UN Protection Force — is to demilitarise three Serb-dominated regions in the former Yugoslav republic of Croatia, where the bulk of the fighting has been, and then to create conditions for a political settlement.

The force is being sent by the UN Security Council for an initial 12 months. Cost: \$633.5 million.

This expense is likely to be far exceeded by the cost of the operation in Cambodia, now put at \$1.9 billion for an initial 16 months. The peace agreement in Paris last October between the Phnom Penh government and the three rebel Cambodian factions meant that the UN peace plan — including setting up a transitional government, disarming troops, and overseeing of elections in 1993 — could begin.

Last November several hundred soldiers and civilians of the United Nations Advanced Mission in Cambodia began their work, including ceasefire monitoring, overseeing communications and mine clearance, in preparation for the arrival of the main force.

UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, has pressed

for the main force to be sent by April, before the rainy season starts to make many roads impassable. He fears that unless the force is sent quickly, the fragile peace agreement will not survive.

This year's huge increases in the cost of peacekeeping come when the UN is already owed millions of dollars by member states for current operations.

Senior officials are reported to be worried that the UN might not be able to run these two major operations because of its overstretched budget.

Another problem — physical danger — often faces peacekeeping forces. In later

February, the Israeli attack on Hizbollah forces in the south Lebanon buffer zone policed by the 6,000-strong UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon) caused casualties among UN soldiers.

Seven UNIFIL troops were injured as they came under attack by both Israeli forces and Hizbollah guerrillas. Since UNIFIL was established in 1978 following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, more than 180 of its soldiers have died (although not all in hostile action) and nearly 300 have been injured.

Since 1948 at least 799 peacekeeping personnel have died, mostly through hostile

action or accidents. ONUC, the United Nations Operation in the Congo in 1960-64, that involved nearly 20,000 troops, was the most violent, costing 234 UN lives.

According to UN peacekeeping principles, the use of force is limited to self-defence, requiring self-restraint by the soldiers.

There are other hardships. A report released in February by the Foreign Affairs Committee of the United States Senate said military observers of MINURSO, the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara, "have been forced to live in unnecessarily harsh — and

sometimes life-threatening — conditions."

Inadequate supplies, says the report, mean the soldiers are living in unhygienic conditions, and a significant number of observers — overseeing a planned referendum on independence in the former Spanish colony annexed by Morocco in 1976 — have contracted dysentery and other diseases.

Yugoslavia, Cambodia, Lebanon and Western Sahara are just four of 25 UN peacekeeping operations, established since the organisation was founded in 1945 "to maintain international peace and security."

The operations, which are divided between observer missions and peacekeeping forces, have generally been to supervise and maintain ceasefires, oversee troop withdrawal and provide a buffer between opposing forces.

Almost all the forces have been formed by a decision of the Security Council, with the Secretary-General responsible for choosing the force commander and asking member states to supply troops, personnel and equipment.

The operations, which are under a code of impartiality, must have the consent of all parties involved in a conflict — unlike the two UN military enforcement actions in the Korean war and the Gulf war, which were both under US leadership.

About half the peacekeeping operations have been in the Middle East, and five, including UNIFIL (despite the word "Interim" in its title), are

continuing. Since the Cold War ended in the late 1980s, there has been a "renaissance of peacekeeping", a development recognised with the award of the Nobel Prize to the UN peacekeeping forces in September 1988.

Of the 25 operations, 13 began in the first 40 years of the UN, but the latest dozen have started since April 1988.

The operations have been changing from a more straightforward ceasefire monitoring and "buffer" role, to being part of UN-supervised political transition that includes free elections and multi-party democracy, such as in the Namibian operation of 1989-90 and the planned operation in Cambodia.

While these developments have made a vital contribution to world peace, the suppression of Kurds and Shi'ites in Iraq by Saddam Hussein's regime after the Gulf war showed some defects in the peacekeeping machinery.

The continued existence of trouble-spots around the world, such as Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan, Sri Lanka and Azerbaijan, mean that UN peacekeeping work goes on being needed.

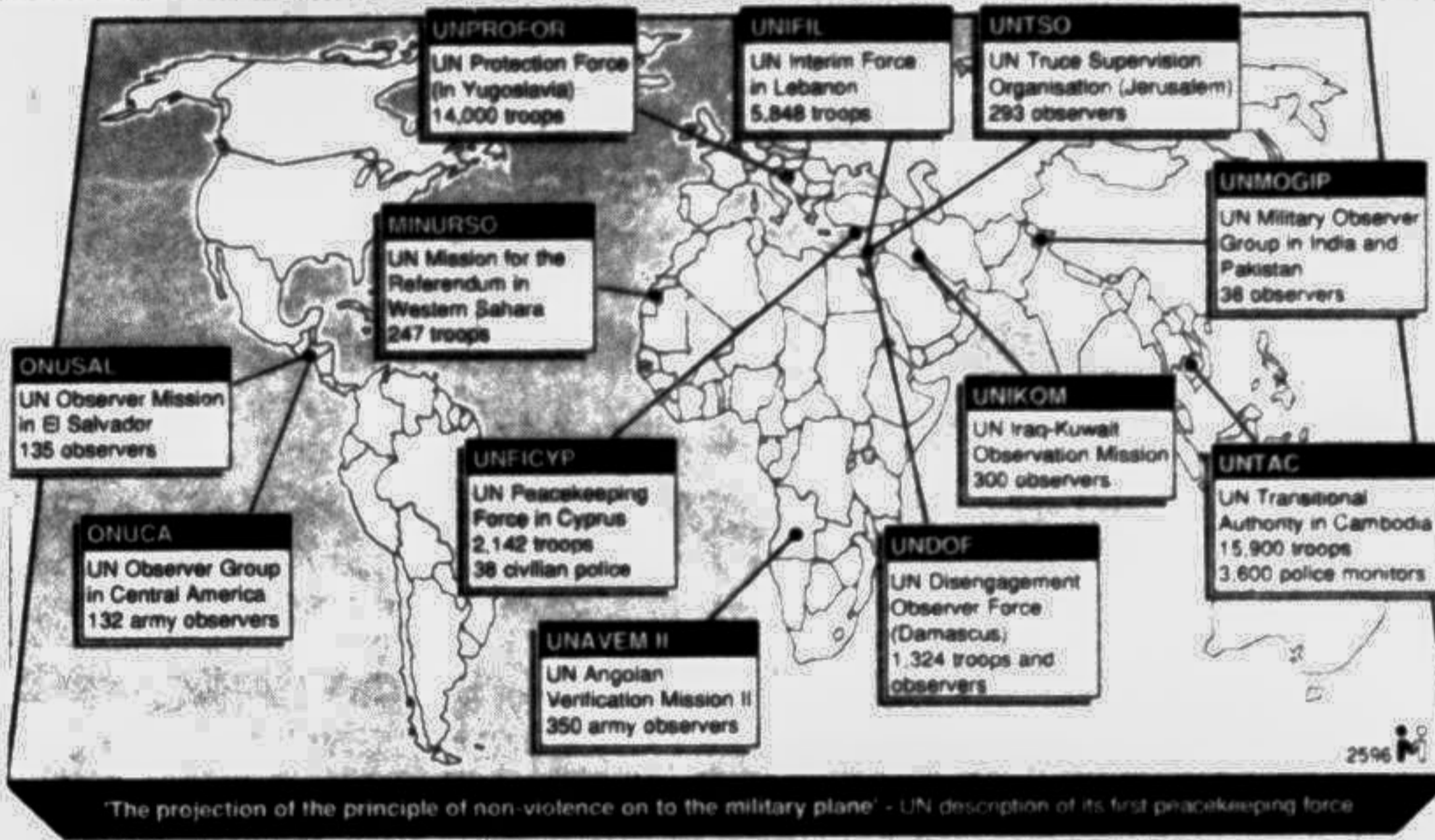
In response to this, the Security Council summit at the end of January asked the Secretary-General to recommend, by July 1, 1992, ways of strengthening and improving UN peacekeeping.

Ghali's reform came sooner than expected. On February 7 he announced the creation of a new department of peacekeeping operations. With more reforms due by July, the Blue Helmets on duty for the UN are likely to be in greater demand than ever — providing the money is available.

— GEMINI NEWS

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Keepers of the peace: UN forces around the world



Delhi Taking Fresh Look at Southeast Asia

Prakash Chandra writes from New Delhi

For several decades, India's Southeast Asian policy was marked by sudden spates of enthusiasm and then yawning gaps of indifference

THE opportunity has come for India to look further south and east towards Asia.

Southeast Asia beckons, and India has been accepted as a sectoral partner at the ASEAN summit last January in Singapore. ASEAN stands for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations which groups Brunel, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.

Its cooperation will be limited to specific areas like trade, investment science, technology and training. And observers doubt whether this will amount to more than a foot in the door.

For the Japanese already have an overwhelming presence in Southeast Asia. Australia, too, has the status of a full observer in ASEAN and it seems China, too, will have a similar privilege.

It is not surprising that New Delhi has been given a lower status. India is to be blamed for this strange situation. For, no effort seems to have been made in Southeast Asian capitals to lobby for a full observer status.

India has always lacked a comprehensive Asian policy. And from all accounts it does not even have a clear perspective of what its relations with Southeast Asia should be.

For several decades, observers have noted, New Delhi's Southeast Asian policy was marked by sudden spates of enthusiasm and then yawning gaps of indifference.

Many Asian observers have suspected that India is too preoccupied with her policy towards Moscow, Washington and now Tokyo to worry about her small Asian neighbours who, incidentally, happen to be economic giants.

This has generated a wave of resentment in Asian capitals. It was not only calculated indifference but also a clear

lack of appreciation of the new forces which are at work in Southeast Asia.

Indian diplomatic missions in the Asian capitals are only content with building relations with Indian communities there. The aim is to protect Indian interests.

But as Malaysian Indians and Singaporeans are repeatedly telling visitors, "India must pay more attention to Asian countries. You must have a fruitful, political and economic dialogue with Southeast Asia. If you believe that by simply promoting trade with this region you have achieved quite a lot, you are clearly mistaken."

Asian observers who have served in New Delhi in their Embassies have long resented a certain kind of patronising attitude by senior officials of the External Affairs Ministry. The feeling persists among many Asian observers that India considers herself an Asian superpower, particularly in South Asia.

But some Indian officials have also felt that Southeast Asian countries are too busy building bridges with China to bother about India.

Observers believe that the time has come for an honest appraisal of these suspicions and misgivings. Tours by Ministers, who often indulge in rhetoric about past cultural relations, are not enough to generate better understanding with Southeast Asian countries.

A senior Western diplomat, who has worked in Asian countries, is surprised at the low representation given to New Delhi in ASEAN. "This just shows the near failure of Indian diplomacy. Either you do not realise the importance of Southeast Asia or successive minority governments have failed to take policy decisions. The time has come now for New Delhi to be closely associated with Asian development," he says.

Some analysts have desparately believed that the great clarion call given from time to time for greater economic cooperation between countries of the South and those of the non-aligned movement would be enough to generate economic cooperation between India and ASEAN countries.

But clearly this has been a misplaced hope. As one observer says, "We must face the unpleasant fact that there is no such thing as South-South cooperation. It all sounds well on paper. But look at any Southeast Asian country. They will sooner have a technical assistance agreement with Japan, Germany, the UK or France than with India or China even if you have the same technology to offer. Also, now the Asian countries have an edge over India in terms of high technology."

Several teams of businessmen have visited Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand. But the government has done nothing more than encourage the Chambers of Commerce and private-sector companies.

There has been no clear-cut economic cooperation policy, although Commerce Minister P Chidambaram and Finance Minister Dr Manmohan Singh have held seminars in Singapore and called for greater economic cooperation with the region.

There has been very little follow-up action. The reason is official indifference and a clear lack of competence in the Ministry of External Affairs to deal with economic issues. In fact, this is too serious a matter to be left to the depart-

mental babus, of the Indian Foreign Office. Some analysts suspect that New Delhi's preoccupation with SAARC (South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation) has generated as well a degree of indifference towards Asian economic questions. Yet, the fact must be faced that SAARC is a little better than a still-born baby. Whatever official pronouncements, so-called declarations, these are no more than hot air. The region is dominated by India and Pakistan and clearly the bristling differences between them have led to the slow progress and even decline of this regional grouping.

not satisfactory. The incidences of street robbery, hijacking, murder and other crimes have increased alarmingly. Common people are afraid of moving freely in the streets. Moreover, bus and coach accidents have become a regular feature. Criminals are committing crimes in broad daylight. Often it seems as if there exist no law and order.

Public resistance against the criminals is almost absent, because they are frightened of the consequences. Although the personnel of the law enforcing agencies are apparently vigilant, still the occurrence of criminal acts is quite frequent. If this lawless situation continues for long, the entire security system of our society may break down.

Would the relevant authorities please do the needful to combat crimes by apprehending the criminals.

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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.

Dhaka University

Sir, I wince terribly when I come across in the print media the reference of Dhaka University as the Oxford of the East. At this point of time the university could be dubbed as the most disgraced in the world. And why not. One of its outstanding produce is Hussain Mohammad Ershad — once the CMLA, later President of Bangladesh and now in Dhaka Central Jail, because he possessed illegal arms and lots of illegal hard cash.

What I want to impress here is that the scenario around the DU isn't any better.

Naked display of hand guns and assorted arms is within sight of the law enforcing agency but there is no attempt to apprehend the culprits. Therefore, it is further proof that anyone with arms is apparently above the law — and rather authorised to kill and maim. Please, therefore, let's not refer to 'Oxford'.

Mushtaque Ahmad
Utara, Dhaka.

Crime and law & order

Sir, The present law and order situation in the country especially in the metropolis is

stumbling block between the two countries is disputed Kashmir. Unless this problem is resolved, nothing much will happen.

Meanwhile, ASEAN is preparing itself for a further march on the road to a free trade area. A 15-year period has been chalked out in which intra-ASEAN trade will be free of Customs duties. This, of course, is a long period and inspire confidence among its small neighbours, who, for their own reasons of survival, often gang up against the larger power behind closed doors.

A more meaningful arrangement and regional economic bargaining cannot take place unless New Delhi and Islamabad sort out their political differences. And this, of course, is asking for the moon.

The Pakistanis have repeatedly asserted that the main

— Depthnews Asia

OPINION

"Cold is Gold" — Alleviation of Poverty

As a regular reader of your paper, I did not fail, even though in sick-bed, to note the piece under the headline "Season for Sure Crops: Cold is Gold", in the useful series "From LDC to NIC" by Mr Shahed Latif. I am glad that this topic has at last been broached by him.

For the information of Mr Shahed Latif and of the vast readership of your outstanding paper, may I say that in my Bangla Book, Rahugrasta Bangladesh: Rahumuktir Ruprekha, published in February, 1990, and acclaimed by economists, planners, intellectuals and the press, I had devoted one full chapter on this very topic. I had gone to the extent of saying that the traditional monsoons should yield place to the dry season of nearly 7 months, as the principal season for agriculture in Bangladesh. I have insisted that in spite of the advantages of rainfed irrigation the monsoons should be relegated to the position of secondary season for agriculture due to the dangers and pitfalls that are associated with it.

Since Mr Shahed Latif has come close to my proposition, which envisages a total change of outlook of the farmers and of the government as an important step towards changing the fortune of the nation, he may find in my book material and logic in support of his valuable series, "LDC to NIC". I shall always be available for discussion about the despicable poverty which has by now overshadowed all other problems of the nation. I reiterate that it is impossible to solve any problem of the people of Bangladesh without simultaneously tackling the problem of poverty. At the same time, it is impossible to solve the problem of poverty without simultane-

aneously tackling all other problems — economic, social, political and also administrative.

Poverty is surely the Number One problem of Bangladesh. It is gratifying that in the last few months it has been receiving some attention at least in academic discussions. But I dare say, no appropriate strategy for alleviation of poverty has yet been formulated. Based on my experience of over half a century on poverty situation across the world, I have been experimenting on the appropriate strategy for poverty alleviation for a number of years. I am now satisfied beyond doubt that the appropriate strategy is neither very difficult nor very expensive. It is a strategy which will surely be welcomed by the people at large. The poorer the people, the more keen will they be to accept the strategy to improve their own lot through hard work in income generating activities, along with mass education, environment, sanitation, family planning and every activity associated with alleviation of poverty.

The strategy for alleviation of poverty developed by me is based on every family as a unit for uplift from poverty. I call every such family a "social patient" with every member of that family being a limb. Every limb of that "social patient" has to be taken care of simultaneously; has to be cured of physical and mental diseases and deficiencies; has to be involved in educative and income generating activities simultaneously. Thus from the very first day of start of work under the project of poverty alleviation, no member of that family will be lying idle or uncared for. Every female will have plenty of work to do in and around the homestead and every male

will be busy working in the homestead or out in the fields or in commercial or industrial pursuits. No member of the family, physically capable of doing at least some work, will remain unemployed.

The strategy indicated above takes care of even the totally landless people, clustered in shanties in and around the urban areas. It will not be very difficult to implement the strategy. What is more important is that the total investment required for alleviation of poverty under this strategy will not exceed the average GDP of just one year multiplied by the number of members of the family. Thus if a family has six members, the total investment required for that family would be not more than Tk. 40,000/-, once for all. This investment is recoverable in 5 to 10 years' time, starting from the second year of investment. The fund will thus revolve and will be available for other poor families. This scheme will not only alleviate poverty, but will also simultaneously take care of unemployment, environment, sanitation, health, family planning, education, housing, etc., and above all create inspiration and ambition for self-advancement among the poor people, who can now think of nothing more than mere survival.

In order to demonstrate the result of the strategy, we have formed a new NGO called Direct Action for Alleviation of Poverty (DAFAP), and we are just starting implementation of a small pilot project in one of the poorest villages within one-and-a-half hours drive from Dhaka. We hope, in a few months' time we shall invite interested persons to inspect the progress.

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