

Dhaka, Monday, March 30, 1992

## Welcome to UN Envoy

The scheduled arrival here today of UN Under Secretary-General Jan Eliasson to take a close look at Rohingya refugees on this side of the border, followed by a visit to Yangon for talks with Myanmar authorities, marks a new and, indeed, a welcome stage in the involvement of the world body in one of the most difficult problems faced by Bangladesh.

The visit of Mr Eliasson, a national of Sweden and one of the highest ranking UN officials, is the result of the talks held recently in New York by Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia with Secretary-General Boutros Boutros Ghali. These talks which were aimed at helping the UN officials to gain a comprehensive understanding of many aspects of the refugee problems have, therefore, produced good results. However, much remains to be done by both Bangladesh authorities and the United Nations before one can describe the Eliasson mission a success.

In the first place, it is to be noted that the visiting UN official is in charge of humanitarian activities. His mission to Bangladesh will, therefore, be primarily concerned with an assessment of the human suffering in the crisis and an evaluation of the role played by the world body and its specialised agencies, including the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in assisting the authorities in tackling the situation. It is hoped that in addition to studying the humanitarian aspect of the problem, Mr Eliasson will be getting a complete briefing on the situation that exists today on the Myanmar side of the border, especially within Arakan.

The agreement of the Myanmar authorities to receive the UN envoy to Yangon is said to reflect the willingness of the government at Yangon to discuss the deteriorating refugee issue with the United Nations and other international fora. This interpretation offered by some analysts seems premature, perhaps also over-optimistic. The authorities in Dhaka — indeed the UN official — will be well-advised to take a cautious view of the devious policy pursued by Yangon not only with regard to the refugees from Arakan but also on broad question of the long overdue restoration of a democratic government in Myanmar.

The danger is that Yangon may try to turn the Eliasson mission into an exercise in public relations and tactfully avoid a discussion on substantive issues, such as the repatriation of the Rohingya refugees as full citizens of Myanmar.

While awaiting the outcome of the UN envoy's trip to Yangon, Dhaka should continue with its preparation for bringing the matter before the UN Security Council, with what is now known as the five-point demand. Aware as we are of the efforts of some members of the Council to come up with a watered down non-binding resolution, Dhaka should do everything in its power to get an effective and strong motion approved unanimously by the Council. Meanwhile, the authorities here should study other possibilities. For instance, are we in a position of bringing up the matter, say, the specific question of the denial of citizenship to Rohingyas by Myanmar, before the International Court of Justice at the Hague? Considering the number of wide-ranging cases tried by the Court over the decades, we would like to answer the question in the affirmative, in the hope that the Government of Bangladesh may do something about it.

## Eid Market

There is bad news for the economy from the marketplace. According to a report in this paper last Sunday, prices of consumer durables such as shirts, shoes, sarees etc have registered a sharp rise in the past three months. Perhaps as a response, demand has also gone down at what is the most hectic buying season of the year.

For a start, the Taka has lost over eight per cent in value to the dollar in the past 12 months, making imports costlier. At the same time, the on-going government crackdown on smuggling, while failing to check the flow, has made contrabands more expensive because of the added risk factor involved. That risk is usually "mitigated" by a larger dollop of "goodwill money" at strategic points (and pockets) which allow contrabands to proceed to their destinations.

Normally, people generally prepare themselves for the inevitable price jump by saving or borrowing, but this year, according to shopkeepers quoted by the report, business is definitely down. This is a worrying signal, because it means that the rise in price has outstripped the purchasing power of the consumer, resulting in a decline in demand. This sign of recession is the last thing the economy needs, and it also leaves a question mark hanging over the government's assertion that the economy is picking up.

Whatever might be the case, at the immediate, grass-roots level, it means this year's Eid is not likely to be a particularly happy one for a large number of families in the middle or lower-middle income brackets (it is never a happy one for those too poor to be bracketed into any income group). That prices would climb as a response to the Eid season demand is a fact of economic life; in addition, higher costs of imported raw materials and a sharp drop in investment and production over the past 12 months have also contributed to this extraordinary price hike. There is not much one can do about that at this moment.

However, there is a feeling among consumers, backed by retailers, that many wholesale suppliers have taken advantage of the situation by adding a few Takas extra on the price at their end, forcing the products out of many people's reach. This is not only against the interest of the consumer, but in the long run, it would also be detrimental to the business community. Those who are engaged in artificial price hikes should realise that they are part and parcel of this economy, and its ill-health would also mean their ill-health.

## FOCUS ON PAKISTAN

# Gohar Ayub Joins the Power Struggle, Seeks Presidency of the Country

M J Zahedi writes from Karachi

**The real problem is political. The Speaker, Gohar Ayub Khan, a member of the ruling coalition, some feel, has grown too big for his shoes. He is angling for the country's highest job, they feel, and therefore these days he is trying to cultivate the Opposition more than his own partymen. Recently, he made**

The two Houses of the Pakistan Parliament are virtually at war with each other. The question they are verbally fighting over is: Which of the two bodies is superior? The indirectly-elected Senate or the directly-elected National Assembly?

It all started with a remark made by the NA Speaker Gohar Ayub Khan that the Upper House had no substantial business to transact. The Senators — mostly faithful to the President — "have nothing to do except make speeches," he said when an MNA complained that they had not been given enough time to debate the President's speech to the joint session of the Parliament whereas the Senators had hours at their disposal.

Besides, a few days earlier, NA security officials had stopped a Senator from passing through the precincts of the Parliament House where the Speaker was entertaining the Army Chief of Staff (Pakistan Military Academy batch-mate of the Speaker, Captain (retired) Gohar Ayub Khan, the eldest son of Pakistan's first military dictator Ayub Khan). He had to publicly apologise for the indiscretion of his officials. But the question of superiority is being vigorously debated within and outside the august bodies.

Early this month, the Senate session was exclusively devoted to this question. The angry Senators used epithets such as "a mentally sick person," "a youthful captain" and "the son of a dictator" for the Speaker. They also said that it

was a blunder to elect such a person to such a key post and to continue with him would be even a bigger blunder. One Senator, Malik Faridullah Shah of the ruling party, reminded his colleagues that Gohar Ayub was the main cause of the downfall of his father's government.

The Senators have asked the Prime Minister to personally intervene to resolve the dispute which has taken quite an unparliamentary turn. They also submitted a written protest to the Senate secretary and the acting Chairman, Dr Noorjehan Panzval, has assured that she would personally take up the matter with the Speaker and the Federal Minister for Parliamentary Affairs.

Basically, up to a point, it is a question of ego. Although the immediate cause of the Senators' indignation was the Speaker's uncharitable remark about them, trouble had been brewing between the two Houses — not over any parliamentary procedure. The dispute relates to the ownership of the Parliament House and its adjoining areas. Some time

ago, the Speaker had had road blocked which led to the President House through the precincts or the Parliament building. In retaliation the Senate secretary issued a notification declaring the entire premises of the building, including the car parks, as belonging to the Senate. The notification obviously enraged the members of the NA who saw it as a challenge to the sovereignty of the Lower House.

But the members of both the Houses are forgetting that neither House is really sovereign — by virtue of the controversial Eighth Amendment to the Constitution, both are subject to the whim of the President. He used this provision in 1990 to dismiss the Benazir Bhutto government and to dissolve the Parliament.

Observers say, the questions of superiority of one over the other is merely an academic debate when an indirectly-elected President can dismiss an elected government and dissolve legislatures, including one elected by the direct votes of the people. Observers feel that in the circumstances it would be better for the

legislators to get rid of the Eighth Amendment than to indulge in an internecine war.

The real problem is political. The Speaker, a member of the ruling coalition, some feel, has grown too big for his shoes. He is angling for the country's highest job, they feel, and therefore these days he is trying to cultivate the Opposition more than his own partymen. Recently, he made rather very caustic remarks against the government over the question of allowing Asif Zardari, an MNA and Benazir Bhutto's husband, to attend the sittings of the Assembly. Zardari is detained in Karachi, fighting several cases against him filed by the Sindh government. Last year he attended the session after obtaining special permission from the court. He has again gone to the court but a decision, even if favourable, will be of no avail as the Assembly has been prorogued for Ramadan. The other day the matter was raised in the Assembly and surprisingly the demand for Zardari's return to his seat came more vehemently from the Speaker Gohar Ayub Khan than any one

else. In very strong words, he berated the government for not allowing Zardari to attend the session even before he has been convicted of any crime, and pontificated that power was a passing phenomenon and those on his right today may have to move to the left as well.

Observers would put this direct attack on the government of the party to which the Speaker himself belongs, to his grudge against the rule that requires the Chairman of the Senate automatically to occupy the country's presidential seat, once it falls vacant. Ghulam Ishaq Khan did so in 1988 when General Ziaul Huq was killed in the mysterious crash of a military plane and later had himself regularly elected for full term. Gohar Ayub Khan may be feeling that in a contingency it would be the Senate Chairman, Wasim Sajjad, described as a cool and calculated person, who would be the rightful claimant and not him. This he sees as the biggest threat to his undeclared campaign to make it to the top, a position once his father occupied.

Ayub has also been very harsh on the government members, particularly ministers, for not attending the sittings of the House. He took strong note of the fact and reminded them that the Cabinet was answerable to the National Assembly. The biggest defaulter in this respect is the Prime Minister himself. He came to the House on February 10 for the first time after October 26 of last year. He was seen in the House on March 2 but did not utter a word although the subject then under discussion was his family in connection with alleged payment of kick-back from a foreign construction company which has been given a contract worth several billion rupees.

The PM's absence from the House and from functions which the Leader of the Opposition, Ms Bhutto, usually attends, is frustrating Gohar Ayub's attempts to play the self-appointed role of a peacemaker between the Government and the Opposition. The Prime Minister did not also attend the Speaker's luncheon for the Army Chief where Benazir Bhutto was present. Gohar Ayub Khan apparently took that as a rebuff.

The Speaker's ambition and consequential activities apparently suit the Opposition, particularly its leader, whose main object of wrath is the President rather than the Prime Minister, because it was the President who had dismissed her elected government.

# Will US Go the Same Way as the USSR?

by Frederick Clairmonte

*The same factors that to a large measure induced the collapse of the USSR are at work in Bush's USA, says the writer. This is the second and concluding article in the special two-part series.*

THE collapse of the USSR and its implications on the international arms traffic transpires precisely at a moment when the world business cycle is dropping and the resources to buy these arms (even at highly discounted rates) in the Third World and elsewhere have diminished. The Middle East on its own, and that applies no less to Saudi Arabia, the El Dorado of the IDMs, is a lucrative but limited market; and it already shows signs of fizzling out. This deceleration of global capitalism is matched by yet another factor no less potent: the drive to Third World self-sufficiency, of which Iran, India and Pakistan are prime examples; and the shift of many leading Third World countries (that is precisely the big conventional importers of the last two decades) from conventional to non-conventional arms — biological, nuclear and chemical.

In the Third World, real gross domestic product (GDP) plunged from 4.3% (1988) to 2.9% (1989) to 2.2% (1990), slated to plunge to less than 1% in 1991. Undoubtedly, the US and other IDMs will continue, by all conceivable marketing stratagems, to push arms sales. Here one perceives nonetheless an upper limit to their absorptive capacity, a point that appears to have now been reached. A movement aggravated by the catastrophic drop of Third World primary commodity prices (including oil) and its perennial

Himalayan debts, growing at 8-10% yearly.

For most Third World countries, debt servicing and military outlays outstrip 50-70% of central government revenues. Debt service payments are projected to leap from about \$160-170 billion in the late 1980s to well over \$200 billion in 1992. Moreover, there is the escalating costs of arms: since World War II, prices of US high-tech weapons climbed 200-fold as against a seven-fold increase of the general price level. Given the cumulative impact of these factors, the prospects for the Third World being a sustained dumping ground for the IDMs in the 1990s are not so sanguine.

## The United States

Bush's Cold War triumph, of which Desert Storm is one component, cannot be continually recycled. Even in the short run, Bush's market share aggrandisement in the international death trade is a wasting asset. Grabbing the market share of the ex-USSR, and no doubt to some extent that of France and Germany and other lesser fry, important as it is as an export earner for the US, must be analysed in yet

another perspective: the international arms trade is a mere 2.6% of global trade.

As we have stressed, there is an upper limit to the amount of laser and television guided bombs, computerised radars and patriot missiles, etc. that the Third World and the Middle East can absorb. There is, of course, another palpable element at work, and that is the mounting hostility of world opinion against militarisation in all its ugly manifestations. A force that is gathering momentum and which cannot be ignored by Israel, the petro-auctorities and their lesser facsimiles in the Third World.

Bush's foreign policy obsession has deviated public opinion from the abysmal failings of the US economy, but the public mood judged by the latest polls has drastically shifted, a fact which has not escaped his electoral handlers. Essentially, this means that the foundations of US economic health are predicated on holding and acquiring international markets. But this is not happening; nearly all of the growth over the past year was in the Third World as against exports to the advanced capitalist countries that are stagnant. Subsidising arms sales and manipulating the dollar exchange rate sim-

ple will not do the trick.

The crux of the scourge that continues to bedevil the US power oligarchy is its insistence on retaining an anachronistic war machine. Even a paltry and ludicrous 5% cut of defence spending, as propounded by senator Lloyd Bentsen, would still leave a sum of \$1.4 trillion over the next five years, or 94% of what it was over the last five years.

No doubt the Voltairian logic on God applies no less so for the now defunct Evil Empire: if it did not exist it would have to be invented. Precisely, however, the same disintegrative processes at work in the ex-Evil Empire and the Third World are also discernible in Bush's America with its bleeding deficit exceeding \$2 trillion and a social fabric that is painfully being torn apart. Indeed, precisely the same causal but unsynchronised factors that to a large measure induced the collapse of the USSR are at work in Bush's USA.

The continued pathology of a senile US arms spending can only further intensify the breakup of America. As the Gorbachev-Yeltsin duo are dis-covering, the critical device in raising living standards is by boosting output per worker,

i.e. productivity. Not only did US productivity decelerate in the 1970s and 1980s, but real hourly wages as well with little or no prospects of rising, and, ineluctably, the crescendo of poverty has already attained deafening proportions.

This is the entrenched affliction that President Eisenhower bravely sought to address — unsuccessfully.

Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired, signifies in a final sense a theft from those who are cold and are not fed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its workers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children.

This was his central thesis that went into his warning against the menace of the frantic proliferation of what he branded as the military-industrial complex. A Frankenstein monstrosity whose growth Eisenhower could only have dimly conceived in the decades to come. The actual numbers themselves, as revealed in the appalling findings of Seymour Melman of Columbia University, are indicative. From 1949 to 1989, budgetary allocation on arms (in 1989) was \$8.2 trillion: a

sum greater than the value of civilian industry's plant and equipment of \$7.2 trillion, further, in every year from 1951 to 1991, military outlays exceeded the combined net profits of all US corporations.

Such manifestations of military Keynesianism have not stopped the rot in US manufacturing industry; rather, it has speeded it up. From 1977 to 1987, 50% of production workers were liquidated from the machine tool industry; 60% from the farm-machinery industry; 68% from the oil and gas equipment industry; 60% from the mining equipment industry and 43% from the textile equipment industry. The inventory is, of course, incomplete, and that in a fissured country that still ignorantly perceives itself as the single superpower in international affairs.

**Concluding Reflections:** There is ample reason to celebrate the exit of the 'Evil Empire' from the first circle of the IDMs, but distressingly the lessons to be drawn from the tragedy of the US military-industrial complex and its connections with the Third World have yet to be assimilated by the US political caste. But even in Bush's America the populist anti-militarist and other pressures are inexorably climbing, a movement that is slated to gather momentum in the months and years ahead.

— Third World Network Features.

# The Dark Side of Japan's Work Ethic

*The rise of cases of deaths from overwork has brought into question Japan's corporate culture that drives Japanese to literally work themselves to death for their companies. Suvendrini Kakuchi of IPS reports from Tokyo.*

late Japanese management methods, but that is because most countries don't know the awful truth," cried a young widow interviewed on television.

Lawyers dealing with work related deaths, called "karoshi", in the auto industry, Japan's leading exporter, say low-paying, long-hour jobs have supported Japan's international competitiveness. A "karoshi" report released last year said that employees in the auto industry work around 2,400 hours, 250 days annually and most often are on irregular work patterns. There is also a "service overtime" system where workers donate to the company by not recording it on their time cards.

The survey also showed over 60 per cent of the workers polled said they were chronically fatigued throughout

the year.

A suit that was widely publicised recently concerned the death of a 37-year-old engineer at Hino Motors, a large company producing trucks, who died from a brain haemorrhage after collapsing at work.

His widow said her husband used to leave home at 6:50 in the morning to avoid the rush-hour traffic and returned only to sleep after midnight. In a year he clocked around 1000 hours of overtime.

When he died, his 10-year-old son said: "You were stupid,

The government stipulates that overwork can be considered the cause of death only if the victim worked "continuously for 24 hours preceding death" or "worked at least 16 hours a day for seven consecutive days leading up to death."

But as the number of men and women dying from stress and overwork keep increasing, the fight for better work conditions has gathered steam.

In May, the Tokyo high court ruled that a 24-hour shift was responsible for the 1977 death of a Dai Nippon Printing Co. worker and ordered that compensation be paid to the victim's family.

Teizo Miyazaki, 58, was found dead from a cerebral haemorrhage in a company locker room where he worked as an attendant on 24-hour shifts.

He had no regular holidays except a few days off following the 24-hour shifts, a typical pattern in the many "karoshi" cases reported.

At least 10 cases of "karoshi" are being fought in the courts and lawyers have started hot lines all over Japan and in two foreign offices to answer calls from victims of overwork.

"If we want to win, we have to monitor the victims lives carefully," said lawyer Hiroshi Kawahito. Almost 2,000 calls have been received in the past two years.

The labour ministry is pushing a campaign to reduce working hours closer to Western standards of up to 1,600 hours annually.

Critics remain skeptical, however. "The Japanese corporations demand long working hours as a prerequisite for advancement," said Kawahito. "Unless this changes, the Japanese will continue to be poor in a rich Japan," he said.

## To the Editor...

### "Overbridges"

Sir, Thanks to Mr. M. H. Shaikh for his "overbridges" in your issue of March 8. He has dwelt on an important and significant subject. The reasons which stood very much urgent, requiring to shift the Dhaka Railway Station from Fulbaria to Kamalapur, are very much present now. The people who have the occasion to travel from the eastern side of the railway line to the western side only know what is the extent of their trouble and suffering. And it's a regular occasion for them.

It is equally next to impos-

sible to think of a further shifting of the railway station from its present site which obviously require a huge expense. The only alternative, therefore, is to construct a good number of overbridges and subways as pointed out by Mr. Shaikh. It is a misfortune for the general public that successive governments did not give this important aspect the desired attention. The utter failure is still market in some political parties' reckless using of public roads as public meeting venues at important points — diverting the traffic and thus causing inevitable road jams to the ultimate suf-

fering of the public.

People who have experience of visiting other countries would agree that such scenes do not occur there even occasionally. Our Sangsad members perhaps are more busy to do things prompted by the thought that they came elected after spending a lot of money and how can they recoup their loss by increasing allowances etc. But the fact is that they are public representatives and it is alleviation of public suffering that only can ensure their stay.

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### Sweetener

Sir, A Pakistani enterprise will help Bangladesh manufacture engineering goods and spares which indicates the present level of bilateral relations between these two south Asian states. According to an agreement, that (built with Chinese assistance) will supply its industrial machineries including sugar plants to Bangladesh as a part of many Pak-Bangla joint ventures.

The ventures will undoubtedly sweeten the sour relations they experienced during their coexistence for about a quarter century followed by the nine-

month bloody liberation war in 1971 imposed on 75 million Bangalees in East Pakistan that left almost nothing for today's Bangladeshis, not to mention the malpractices in the governments of pre-and post-liberation periods.

The reluctance of (West) Pakistani powerlovers in delegating state authority to the elected majority in the national assembly triggered the struggle for a separate state in the eastern part of the country with majority Bangalees having nationalistic sentiment.

However, the collaboration of these former "wings" of erstwhile Pakistan, now two

independent states, has been formulated to expedite Bangladesh's industrialization and will simultaneously save her foreign exchange. Pakistan's "unique assistance" is also designed to facilitate transfer of technology to a SAARC member.

But LDC Bangladesh must not forget to ascertain that lucky aids do not buy brand new "junks" to increase her miseries, although their mutuality has been minimizing the gap brought about over two decades ago.

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